

Images based on Adansons plant class
in Senegal

colour image
no background

Man seated above everything else in
People waving, taking pictures

Man wearing religious clothes

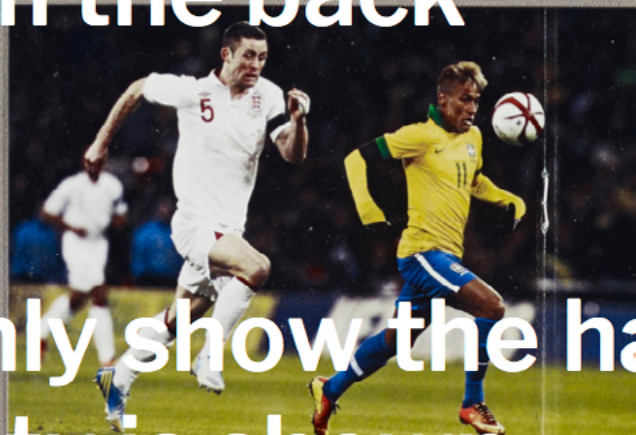
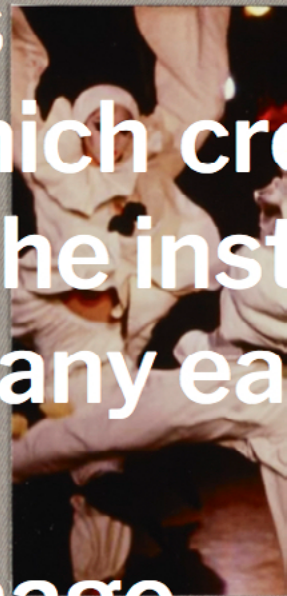
Rings are worn by people (which create
a specific impression). Here the inst
religion and marriage accompany each

subject in the centre of the image

All other figures apart from this cent

can only be seen from the back

image is cropped to only show the ha
person. No head, identity is shown



Cover – Crop from a Plate Found in the Installation *European Civilisation,* *Peter the Great and the Order of Things* (2014)

Fari Shams

To cite this contribution:

Shams, Fari. 'Crop from a Plate Found in the Installation *European Civilisation, Peter the Great and the Order of Things* (2014).' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): cover, <http://www.oarplatform.com/cover-crop-plate-found-installation-european-civilisation-peter-great-order-things-2014/>.

Statement

Before a trip to Russia, a lecture by John Merriman on Peter the Great prompted me to select keywords from its transcript, and to look into the three archives of the Library of Congress, The New York Public Library and the 2012 editions of TIME magazine to bring together a selection of 145 images that describe Peter's character in accordance with these sources. The images are arranged in different configurations according to three systems of classification, on a board with a stretched grey fabric, and photographed from above. The three systems represent distinct approaches to classification, and generate a continuous reconfiguration of images on the plate, each time as legitimate as the previous and the next.

The crop here is from a plate titled 'background out of focus'. This category came about when I applied the same system to my images that Adanson has applied in order to classify plants in Senegal in 1763.¹ By comparing each image to the next and only documenting the differences between each, a list of characteristics result that in turn define which images come together on a plate. The two other methods group the images firstly alphabetically using the name of the image, and secondly by defining each image as belonging to one of Diderot's three branches of Knowledge of 'Memory', 'Reason' and 'Imagination'.² A total of 212 plates arise through these arrangements, and the installation presents them within a four-volume book, a noticeboard and a projection that continuously loops a selection of 40 plates.

A violation of purpose results in the boundlessness of configurations of images which have come about as a result of multiple parameters that are controlled by the artist, from the selection of finite keywords in the lecture, to the sourcing, and then defining of each image through language and positioning and arrangement on each plate. Peter liked 'Fancy dances', so this keyword gives rise to the image below titled 'Trapeze', which in turn finds itself on the plate 'T' alphabetically, and under 'Imagination' within Diderot's method. In looking at the 'Map of the System of human Knowledge',³ we see dance is not explicitly classified but instead, the dramatic, the poetic, the comic and allegory are defined under his category of 'Imagination'. It may, however be argued that this image has a lot to do with memory. The costumes, makeup and poses seem to belong to a history, but Diderot's Map does not have room for this relationship.

1 Michel Andanson, *Familles des plantes* (Paris: Vincent, 1763).

2 Denis Diderot, 'Système Figuré des Connaissances Humaines,' in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, et al. (Paris: Briasson, David l'aîné, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–57).

3 Ibidem.



Trapeze, 2012 (image courtesy of TIME magazine).



Fari Shams, *Imagination plate no.1*, 2014, (from *European Civilisation, Peter the Great and the order of things*), Inkjet print.

Fari Shams is an Iranian born British/German artist living and working in Düsseldorf and London. Her multidisciplinary work engages with the maintenance and performance of identity arising through social and cultural parameters including language, knowledge, productivity, and technology. Her installations have been shown recently in Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, Italy, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Kunstraum München, Maschinenhaus, Essen, and Museum Glaskasten, Marl, Germany.



OXFORD
ARTISTIC AND PRACTICE BASED
RESEARCH PLATFORM

Issue Two, Dec. 2017

Validity

Editors Jessyca Hutchens, Anita Paz, Naomi Vogt, and Nina Wakeford

Assistant Editor Frances Whorrall-Campbell

Contributors Fari Shams, Derrick Cartwright, Clive Scott, Gregory Buchakjian, Cath Keay, Max Bowens, Fiona Curran, Kat Austen, Sheila Gaffney, Nathan Cohen, Pierre Von-Ow, Alyssa Grossman, Alicia Fuentes-Calle, Ola Johansson, Clair Le Couteur, Henryetta Duerschlag, Adriana Salazar Eiko Soga, John Seth, Simon Pope, and Patti Lather

Design Julien Mercier
Assistant Alexis Charrière

Advisory Board Kathryn Eccles, Clare Hills-Nova, Laura Molloy, and David Zeitlyn

ISSN 2399-5092

OAR is published twice yearly by OAR: The Oxford Artistic & Practice Based Research Platform.

E-mail info@oarplatform.com
Website www.oarplatform.com

Author generated content

OAR Platform attempts to provide a range of views from the academic and research community, and only publishes material submitted in accordance with our submission policy.

The views expressed are the personal opinions of the authors named. They may not represent the views of OAR Platform or any other organisation unless specifically stated. We accept no liability in respect of any material submitted by users and published by us. We are not responsible for its content and accuracy.

Republishing

All contributions published by OAR Platform are done so under a Creative Commons – Attribution/Non Commercial/No Derivatives – License (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). This means that material published on OAR Platform is free to re-publish provided the following criteria are met:

1. The work is not altered, transformed, or built upon, and is published in full.
2. The work is attributed to the author and OAR Platform.
3. The work is not used for any commercial purposes.

Further information can be accessed here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.

Submissions

Abstracts for submissions (approx. 300 words) should be sent to editors@oarplatform.com and may propose either a response to this issue or a contribution for future issues. A more detailed call for responses and submissions can be found on the final page of this issue, and at <http://www.oarplatform.com/contribute/>.

This PDF document contains audio files and is optimised for Acrobat Reader and Flash Player.

Contents

	<i>Cover – Crop from a Plate Found in the ‘Installation European Civilisation, Peter the Great and the Order of Things’ (2014)</i>	Fari Shams
6	<i>Introduction – Is This Enough?</i>	The Editors
10	<i>Acquired Tastes: Experiments in Campus-Based Art Museums</i>	Derrick Cartwright
18	<i>Movement, Intuition, and the Validity of Literary Translation</i>	Clive Scott
30	<i>The Lives and Deaths of Inhabitants in Abandoned Houses</i>	Gregory Buchakjian
47, 79, 125, 165, 193, 204	<i>Truth to Visions</i>	Cath Keay
50	<i>Forms and Transgressions Regarding ‘Music Visualization’</i>	Max Bowens
58	<i>A Geography Without an Author: Unreliable Facts, Fantastical Fictions</i>	Fiona Curran
69	<i>Mediating for Climate Change: Falling Up to Hyperignorance, Diving Down to Deep Waters,</i>	Kat Austen

	<i>Touch Other(s) (and Ourselves)</i>	
83	<i>The Sickness of Being Disallowed: Premonition and Insight in the 'Artist's Sketchbook'</i>	Sheila Gaffney
99	<i>De Pictura: Journeys through Painting</i>	Nathan Cohen
106	<i>The Burden of Names</i>	Pierre Von-Ow
126	<i>Counter-factual Provocations in the Ethnographic Archive</i>	Alyssa Grossman
139	<i>Poetic Effects of Language Theories</i>	Alícia Fuentes-Calle
153	<i>Democratization as Validation of Applied Theatre and Vice Versa</i>	Ola Johansson
168	<i>Two Slide Cases</i>	Clair Le Couteur
176	<i>The Double Bind of Artistic Research: A Thought Experiment of a Witness</i>	Henryetta Duerschlag
189	<i>A Guided Tour Through the Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco</i>	Adriana Salazar
194	<i>Autumn Salmon</i>	Eiko Soga
195	<i>A fleck. A piece of dust. A smudge. Stain, spot, blur. (Listening for the outside: angels, messages and ...)</i>	John Seth
206	<i>You Asked About Validity</i>	Simon Pope
212	<i>The Field Is Our Best Friend</i>	Patti Lather
213	<i>Call for Responses</i>	

Is This Enough?

Jessyca Hutchens, Anita Paz, Naomi Vogt & Nina Wakeford

To cite this contribution:

Hutchens, Jessyca, Anita Paz, Naomi Vogt, and Nina Wakeford. 'Is This Enough?' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 6-9, <http://www.oarplatform.com/introduction-enough/>.

Researchers are routinely asked to legitimate their claims to knowing, knowing *more*, or knowing *differently*, and this demand is particularly acute in the current climate of research audits.¹ How do artistic and practice based researchers address themselves to this injunction, and what material and conceptual resources do they mobilize? Is it enough to follow the maxim that “‘getting smarter about theory/practice issues valorizes practice’”?²

It seems to us that such questions are of pressing importance, and that practice based research projects can and *do* offer new ways of conceptualising legitimacy, sufficiency and adequacy. However, for a student beginning a doctoral practice based research project, there is no clear body of work which deals with validity in interesting and inventive ways, with the consequence that researchers may feel answerable to criteria developed to serve other disciplines. In some fields, criteria to ensure robustness of research are translated into seemingly straightforward anxieties about quantity. For example, ‘have I done enough interviews?’ has long been a question asked by qualitative social researchers unsure of the adequacy of their claims in terms of their fieldwork encounters. In this case, the way in which a researcher tackles the question of sample size reveals the extent to which their epistemological and methodological concerns are entwined, and how their project can be assessed on these grounds according to the norms of the discipline. Issues of quantity cast a shadow over research in the humanities, too. Although not expressed in the language of sampling, the robustness of research is hardly indifferent to, for example, the number of cases/artworks/archival records which have been engaged in a project. Another form of validation which has permeated many fields in both the humanities and the social sciences is that offered by the foregrounding of forms of reflexivity. The question in this case might be ‘how reflexive must my research be?’, or ‘when and how should I acknowledge my position relative to my subject matter?’. This has been partially taken up as reflective practice in some research fields, such as anthropology. With this in mind, we ask how are artistic and practice based researchers forging their own claims to legitimacy, to whom, and with what (possibly transformed) outcomes? Can practice based research offer inventive possibilities for broader debates or new terminologies, protocols, and methods?

In thematising this issue around the term ‘validity’, we intend to launch a discussion around these issues, rather than promoting any specific formula which would provide a comprehensive response to the justificatory culture within which much research is now embedded. Readers seeking anything approaching guidance on the equivalent of sample size will be disappointed. Rather, following the title of the article by Patti Lather which stimulated our first editorial discussion and the call for papers, we wish to pose the term validity as a ‘fertile obsession’

which acts as an ‘incitement to discourse’.³ In this sense, validity is one of a whole set of terms around which theories, opinions and affects of legitimacy may productively gather and be compared. Lather herself suggests an active redirection of the word validity, seeking to prise it from the grip of ‘doing the police in different voices’ by coming up with a schema which is not itself given total authority. Thus, her ‘Transgressive Validity Check List’ is qualified by the subtitle ‘A Simulacrum’.⁴ It includes ‘ironic validity’, ‘paralogical validity’, ‘rhizomatic validity’, and ‘voluptuous validity’ – with the last of these characterising research which ‘goes too far towards disruptive excess, leaky, runaway, risky practice’.⁵

As they wrangle with how and why to speak about their own claims of knowing and feeling through research, many of the contributors here take up Lather’s proposals. However what emerges from this set of textual, visual and multimedia offerings is the sheer complexity of the task of finding the correct terms (and, indeed, people and places) to validate a wide range of undertakings, as well as the temporal contingencies of justification (i.e. when can and/or must legitimization take place?). The cover itself has been designed by an artist who tackles the validation mechanisms of historical classification systems through artistic practice. The contributions which follow have been grouped very broadly along the following lines.

In our first grouping (1–4), we gather a set of pieces which address *who* may be granted a voice or agency to validate, and the non-standard actors who might exist – or, indeed, be imagined – to challenge the norms of this validation. We begin, therefore, with an article which reflects on the role of students who are given the responsibility for art acquisitions in two university museums. Next, the translator is offered as a persona with the agency to transform the validation of the conventional encounter with a text, followed by an encounter with the multiple voices which may (or may not) be claiming authority as a photographer attempts to construct autobiography from scraps of contradictory evidence found in abandoned buildings in Beirut. A contribution presented as the response to an exchange between a group of Expressionist architects begins here (4), with its crystalline manifestation scattered in between the remaining articles in this issue (and in this way, perhaps, also questions our editorial authority to impose systematic order).

Attempts to forge interdisciplinary encounters and to use them as a way of making claims for research frame our second set of contributions (5–7), beginning with a proposal which involves bringing together engineering and artistic practice in the service of music visualization. Topology and fiction in the work of Pierre Huyghe is explored in the next contribution, which asks to what extent speculative renditions of knowledge help resist disciplinary conventions, and to what extent they signify a reluctance to synthesize information. Lastly, we are presented with a project which seeks to produce empathy between human and non-human forms, resulting in an artwork whose legitimacy is presented here as grounded in its interdisciplinary engagements.

The third group (8–13) of contributors all confront, in one way or another, the status of knowledge including the repercussions of being caught up in various affective atmospheres of knowing. How can old sketchbooks, which far precede current research problems, and are replete with attunements, and which are more about feeling than thinking, be granted an epistemologically credible status? Can bricolage be used as a way of unsettling colonial ways of knowing and their translations in ethnographic displays? What makes a painting a valid means of public expression? Questions of how we are embodied by knowledge, or embody

it, are addressed in various modes by contributors. These articles also consider how knowledge can be undone, communicated and shared with others – beyond individual bodies, for example, through entanglements with the discipline of linguistics. Another article thinks through naming as a way of knowing and omitting, using the work of artist Fari Shams as a resource for thinking through the adequacy of description. The section ends with a case for new criteria by which a form of practice – community theatre – might be evaluated, recognising the value of intervening in protocols for assessing the benefits of research.

Many of our contributors work within institutional contexts which have a major impact on the work produced. We can think immediately of those working in the university sector where validity of research may be mediated by publication in peer reviewed journals, and the debates about the adequacy of this form for practice based work. However, for the next set of contributions (14–16) organizational constraints or opportunities are crucial to understanding the way in which research has unfolded. This might be a relationship to an educational framework or university, or a gallery which enables connections to be forged in new systems of classification, or a fictional museum which yields itself up for a sonic investigation to be experienced aurally, as an audio guide.

One of the conventions of art education is to invoke the idea (whether devotedly, critically, ambivalently) of ‘truth to materials’. Our final section (17–19) returns to the idea of the affordances of materials in making claims to knowing and specifically a connection with the time of making/researching/legitimizing. First, we are offered an experience which unfolds over time and space in a moving image work that reflects on the learning process of making shoes with salmon skin. The steady unfolding of time also plays a part in a contribution which addresses vagueness and indeterminacy by presenting a set of fragments of text and image, which will be augmented by other videos to be posted to the platform between this issue and the launch of Issue 3. Material fragments are matched by textual episodes in another contribution in the form of a letter. This was written to one of the editors as a continuation of a doctoral project on dialogue, but it further asks how validity criteria might be forged of materials (for instance that of cider) within which we might have ‘microbial kin’.

To close, in an audio recording in which she narrates her professional and intellectual journey, Patti Lather herself offers some thoughts on how ‘validity has been very very good to me’ over her career. ‘Our best friend is the field’, she conjectures, because faced with a responsibility to respondents, as she was in her project on women and AIDS, she had to move from ‘stumbling and bumbling’ to figuring out ways of making their stories and experiences count. The recording begins with a manifesto like formulation which Lather proposes as a jumping off point for current investigations of validity.

We wish to displace any assumption that investigating claims to validity, and legitimization practices more generally, should render anything we might do in artistic and practice based research as closed forms of ‘information’. Rather, we notice the ways in which indeterminacy, unpredictability and contingency have so often been generative to the projects and outputs published here. Beyond these qualities, many of the contributions published in this issue of OAR both formulate and rigorously defend new forms of knowing, doing, and arguing, such that the aforementioned doctoral student embarking on a research project might be able to find in these very pages the beginning of that body of work, one that deals with validity in inventive ways consistent with practice based research.

- 1 Marilyn Strathern, *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 2 Patti Lather, 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism' *The Sociological Quarterly*. 34: 4 (1993): 674
- 3 Idem, 673.
- 4 Idem, 686.
- 5 Idem, 685-6.

Acquired Tastes: Experiments in Campus-Based Art Museums

Derrick R. Cartwright

To cite this contribution:

Cartwright, Derrick R. 'Acquired Tastes: Experiments in Campus-Based Art Museums.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* Issue 1 (2017): 10–17, <http://www.oarplatform.com/acquired-tastes-experiments-campus-based-art-museums/>.

We have to accept the fact that basic research, whether in the sciences or arts and humanities, is inherently risk-taking; its outcome cannot be determined in advance if its methods are to be valid.

– James Cuno¹

Appreciation for museum labor and its attendant pleasures is elusive. My own first experience working in an art museum came while still an undergraduate. For a few hours each week, I was stationed behind a large desk within the main entry of what was then known as the University Art Museum, a Mario Ciampi-designed, Brutalist building that bordered one edge of the UC Berkeley campus.² Essentially, my role was to inform those who walked into the vast, concrete facility where they could safely store their backpacks, explain where the café, bookstore, auditorium, and restrooms were located, and sell tickets to the non-student, non-faculty visitors, of which there were typically few. I did not last long in that function. That impatience can be attributed more to my own still-evolving sense of what might actually make for satisfying work than to any fault of the museum. Still, the volunteer job provided me with a lasting empathy for the discomfort that the public often feels while waiting for such places to reveal themselves. Standing at the periphery, even an enthusiastic art history student might strain to imagine what could ever fill a museum career with wonder, much less a sense of purpose.

In fact, most museums conceal their basic decision-making and research missions from outsiders. While it has, in recent years, become commonplace for museums to offer glimpses into conservation practices, to provide more than one interpretation of an object on accompanying labels, or to encourage selfie-taking in their galleries, few of these laudatory efforts to promote 'participation' reach the level of real demystification. Visitors may still ask: 'What do the curators do all day?'; 'Can it really be a full-time job to move an object six inches to the right, or left, so it gets seen to greater advantage?'; 'Are things in the basement ever going to see the light of day?'; or, 'What happens here when the public is not?'. In spite, or perhaps because of the opacity surrounding my own initiation to the business of museums, when given opportunities to lead museums myself, I have pursued more or less direct efforts to act against these, and other, false impressions. As a director of two campus-based museums, I have been interested in ways to examine the decision-making of museum professionals for the students with whom I am privileged to work, and to engage them in these non-profits' most compelling practical and ethical issues. Once day-to-day matters are exposed and made essential, new scholars become more curious about the ways that work gets conducted in and through these complex institutions.

Exhibition practice can be used as a chance to increase understanding of what is at stake in such validating situations. At Dartmouth College, a museum has been part of campus life since 1772. The Hood Museum of Art, where I was director from 2000 to 2003, began a serious expansion of its teaching objectives when it invited undergraduates to develop ownership of a curatorial series. A prominent space within Charles Moore's postmodern lobby space had been unloved by the curators on staff almost since the day the building opened in 1985. A quirky conjunction of walls on either side of an elevator cried out for attention. Starting in 2001, undergraduate interns were asked to curate this space as part of their museum experience. Few instructions accompanied the basic assignment: displays were to be selected from the Hood's permanent collection of more than 60,000 objects, each intern had to participate by working alongside the professional staff charged with the installation duties, and the works ought to mean something to the student, both personally and as part of a larger community of scholars on campus. Thanks to generous alumni, each intern was also given the chance to publish their ideas in an accompanying brochure. They were further encouraged to discuss their choices publicly as part of regular museum programming. From the outset, *A Space for Dialogue* earned a status as something paradigmatic among teaching museums and has been suggested as a model program.³ The fact that the series continues to be seen as an effective strategy for engaging students in the Hood's practice and that it has been widely emulated beyond Dartmouth suggests at least this much.

While it might be gratifying to reflect on a single, successful innovation, especially in contrast to my own early introduction to museum work at Berkeley, it is worth recalling how risky *Space for Dialogue* experiments seemed to many when first proposed. They required a certain leap of faith on the part of stakeholders who wondered aloud whether it was right to expect students to rise uniformly to the challenge of re-interpreting these historic collections. Others feared that the decisions these scholars would make might somehow reflect badly on the institution as a whole. These ended up being short-lived concerns. Few, if any, student curators chose to point their projects toward narrowly self-serving themes, and most observers quickly grasped that the student perspectives, while distinct from those of the professional staff, were thoughtful, well researched, and aspired to be taken as seriously as anything else that took place in the Hood. If failing to live up to the high standards of a model college art museum was a worry at the outset, the steady audience of visitors who came to hear the curators speak about what they had done represented at least one measure of their collective success. The early projects I witnessed in the series uniformly engaged with professional concerns of curation with solemnity. Collectively, these projects validated the initial experiment and showed skeptics how much new knowledge could be generated by taking seriously the idea of 'fresh perspectives' as an innovative tool. Now moving steadily toward its 100th iteration, the students routinely bring the full force of their highly individual approaches to bear on the *Space for Dialogue* series and, in turn, shape the museum's reputation for thoughtful interpretive work. (Figure 1) The debates inaugurated in this modest space seem vital and inspire campus debates beyond the museum itself. For example, during a period of building renovation, students otherwise deprived of physical space turned to virtual displays to catalyze discussion of sculpture displays throughout the campus.⁴ Most importantly, this precedent of exhibitions successfully curated by students catalyzed still bolder risk-taking within the museum community at large.

Collecting art on college campuses is a privileged process, determined by each institution's unique competencies and by the prerogatives of its credentialed staff.⁵ Students are by and



A Space for Dialogue # 86. Emblem: Figuring the Abstract in Social Commentary. Bay Lauris ByrneSim '15, Mellon Special Project Intern. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College. Photograph by Jeffery Nintzel.

large excluded from making decisions about acquisitions because it is assumed that their relative inexperience disqualifies them from the responsibility to spend museum money wisely, or because they have yet to connect the various forms of knowledge – history, conservation, ethics, markets, and connoisseurship, etc. – required of those who steward the growth of museum collections. Add to this the fact that most institutions struggle to find the resources needed to finance an ambitious acquisitions program, and it is easy to justify the professional inclination to exclude students from this solemn, costly endeavor. With few exceptions, this has meant that teaching collections seldom bother to ‘teach’ collecting in a ‘hands-on’ way.⁶

Against elitist protocols, I would argue that many students possess their own useful skepticism about the ways that art museums confer status on objects. I’ve found that the undergraduates I teach are blissfully unimpressed by names taken from canonical texts or from the pages of contemporary art journals. As emerging scholars, they are sometimes perhaps more apt to be influenced by specific narratives that relate to their own lives than they are by the writings of mainstream art historians, but whether or not this is the case, it need not be considered a shortcoming. Even the most risk-averse students tend to know what they like and value about visual culture. Steeped in cultural studies and immersed in visual culture through hours spent observing on-line, the predominantly twenty-somethings that form the largest part of these undergraduate bodies are well-informed about contemporary representational methods and politics. While this is also an inherently diverse community of scholars, they share the tendency

to consume fresh images with confidence, and circulate them as a matter of routine. They critique, cherish and discard representations with equal relish. This is just to say that they tend to look at art quite differently than I do and bring different criteria to its validation as a result.

Starting in 2003, the Hood's talented Curator of Academic Programming, Katherine Hart, and I began teaching a course to Dartmouth undergraduates on 'How Museums Collect Art'.⁷ The culminating experience of that after-hours, non-credit course was the group acquisition of a photograph for the museum's permanent collection.⁸ Staff and students met weekly during the term to debate the mission of a campus museum, study gaps in its collection, ponder the ethics of acquisitions, and research the current market for photography. Freed from the responsibility of raising funds for the acquisition of objects at a campus-based museum, would they choose differently than credentialed professionals? That is the question asked in that academic context, and once since, and that I would like to turn to now in the space of this contribution to OAR's discussion of validity.

Asking students to participate directly in acquisitions selection, rather than passively as viewers of what others had acquired on their behalf, does something more than merely flip the usual, unspoken power dynamics of museum spectatorship. It also offers up the possibility of opening an entirely new vein of collections history. In campus-based museums (as well as at many larger civic institutions), works of art typically arrive as gifts of contemporary supporters (often alumni), as part of bequests, or as the result of individual curatorial drive. In the 21st century, only in the most privileged situations are major acquisitions made as part of something like a pre-defined strategy for a collection's use and study. By carving out space for student acquisitions as a subset of the overall permanent collection, the Hood created the chance for something like a longitudinal study of 'undergraduate collecting preferences' within a specific institutional framework, the first analysis of which will be sketched briefly here.

Sixteen photographs, so far, have entered the permanent collections at Dartmouth through this particular experimental mechanism. The museum describes the fruits of this student collecting in highly positive terms: "The result has been the addition an array of phenomenal photographs, including Daniela Rosell's *Untitled (Janita Harem Room, Villa Arabesque, Acapulco, Mexico)* . . . , (Figure 2) Loretta Lux's *The Drummer* . . . , Ogle Winston Link's *Hawiksbill Creek Swimming Hole*. . . , Nobuyoshi Araki's *Untitled, "Bondage (Kinbaku)"*, Sebasatião Salgado's *Brasil (Hand, Serra Pelada)*, and Mario Cravo Neto's *Christian with Bird*."⁹ But, beyond this praise, what might be said about the photographs as a self-defined group of works, or the ways that they might be seen to validate a museum's inclusion of a community of predominantly young people, admittedly advantaged, but positioned outside of professional museum culture?

Before responding to that question directly, let me submit a second, demographically distinct sample for consideration. I began a similar experiment in collecting with undergraduates at the University of San Diego in 2012. A quick glance at a map will illustrate that San Diego, California is nearly as far away from Hanover, Hampshire as one can travel in the United States. Located less than a half hour from a busy international border with Mexico, the surrounding culture is diverse and urban. San Diego is the eighth largest city in the United States; Hanover has a population of just over 11,000 residents. In terms of their respective campus cultures, USD and Dartmouth College, differ in equally significant ways as well. USD



Daniela Rosell, *Untitled (Janita Harem Room, Villa Arabesque, Acapulco, Mexico)* from *Ricas y Famosas*, 2001, Chromogenic Print. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Purchased through gifts from Charles W. Gailard, Class of 1963, Kenneth I. Reich, Class of 1960, James and Susan Wright, Lee and Marguerite Berlin, Karen Berlin, Class of 1989. Elizabeth Craig, Class of 1944W, Jan Seidler Ramirez, Class of 1973, and the Class of 1952. Selected by participants in the seminar "Museum Collecting 101": Sarah Bohlman, Class of 2004, Jeffrey Cooperman, Class of 2006, Joan Kim, Class of 2005, Amy Kurtz, Class of 2006, Sarah Murray, Class of 2004, Rolaine Ossman, Class of 2004, Arielle Ring, Class of 2007, Catherine Robert, Class of 2005, Emily Salas, Class of 2006, Liz Seru, Class of 2004, Eleanor Smith, Class of 2004, Miell Y. Yi, Class of 2002; PH.2004.18. © Daniela Rosell.

is a young-ish, (chartered in 1949), private, Roman Catholic institution, and Dartmouth (founded in 1769), is based in Calvinist/Congregationalist theology, but for more than a century has operated as a wholly secularized institution. Both schools pride themselves on the quality of academic instruction they provide to a fairly shallow pool of students. Dartmouth's centuries-old reputation and high selectivity (4300 undergraduates as opposed to 5700 at USD), and its enviable financial resources, leads to its higher ranking among national universities in the U.S.¹⁰

Another differentiating factor between USD and Dartmouth is the absence of an 'encyclopedic' museum on the campus in San Diego. Instead of a stand-alone, landmark piece of architecture, such as the Hood, USD has six small galleries scattered throughout its 180-acre campus, together with a well-equipped study/storage facility that doubles as a library, called the Hoehn Print Study Room. That small space houses a growing collection of original prints. When I arrived in 2012, I convinced a local foundation to fund an endowment, the proceeds from which would enable undergraduates to purchase prints for the University. The Legler Benbough

Student Acquisitions Endowment currently yields several thousand dollars per year for student purchases that are themselves a product of class assignments, integrated into several undergraduate art history courses in the Department of Art, Architecture + Art History, where I now teach.

This second student collecting experiment has been adapted to the different circumstances of the academic environment at USD. Original prints, not photographs, better match the mission of the program at this relatively new institution that lacks adequate space for storing large-scale painting or sculpture. Additionally, because this project grows out of syllabi from a limited number of for-credit course offerings, in the course I teach most often called 'Collections, Collecting, Collectors: History, Theory, Madness', the participants are not necessarily art history majors. Indeed, a significant number of the undergraduates who gain a fleeting appreciation for curatorship, and its attendant concerns, come from outside of the College of Arts and Sciences entirely. They include majors in Business Administration, Education, or Peace Studies programs, and they bring with them the perspectives they have learned in those disciplines outside of the Humanities. Finally, the fact that this selection assignment is given to groups who present their choices for a grade, as opposed to the voluntary/consensus model pursued in the Hood's Museum Collecting 101 course, shapes the selection process as a form of competition.

It needs to be stressed that students today already possess a vocabulary drawn from museology. Many speak casually of 'curating' their lifestyles through musical playlists and other media preferences.¹¹ While many profess a preference for uncluttered minimalism in their own personal environments, when asked to work in small groups as part of a curatorial team, they utilize certain maximalist presumptions about their age group's preferences and preoccupations. Large scale, colorful work is an attractor and 'in-your-face' political ideology is quite often admired above aesthetic restraint, or conceptual coolness. Reviewing eight acquisitions acquired through the courses utilizing a student acquisition assignment since 2013, one is struck by the strong, if diverse, political and philosophical commitments of the imagery and the artists who produced it: Shahzia Sikander, *Orbit II* (2012) (Figure 3); Gary Simmons, *Starlite Theatre* (2012); Liset Castillo, *Rice* (2000); Corita Kent, *news of the week* (1969); Robert Rauschenberg, *Support* (1973); Mel Bochner, *Blah, Blah, Blah* (2014); Helen Zughaib, *Changing Perceptions, Abaya 1-3* (2009); and June Wayne, *The Bride* (1951).¹²

I am, it hardly needs to be said, always a fan of these students' choices, though not all of them would have been my own. The fact that these scholars tend to identify work by women and artists who have been historically underrepresented in American museum collections could be viewed, perhaps negatively, as evidence of political correctness. However, my students' deliberateness about adding the first works by Muslim women artists to USD collections has been a source of inspiration to me. Most of their choices tend to be contemporary, as opposed to 'Old Master' selections. I prefer to consider these as indexes of the students' fearless embrace of the changing intellectual stakes in campus-based museums. At both Dartmouth and USD, students know that their names will be associated with the works they select as part of credit lines that appear in object records and labels. In this way, their temporary experiment in curating is guaranteed a permanent place in the institutional history of these collections. In contrast to ephemeral curatorial practices – the pop up exhibition housed in an alternative space comes to mind – these objects are destined to remain on site for use, re-use, and future scrutiny. Their very status as 'student selected' identifies these works as categorically different,



Shahzia Sikander, *Orbit*, 2012, color direct gravure, 27 x 21 ¼ inches, Print Collection, University of San Diego, Purchased through the Legler Benbough Student Acquisition Fund by Katherine Ayd, Jerome Bwire, Cesar Chavez, Virginia da Rosa, Hannah Day, Ross Ehren, Brittany Ford, Anthony Graham, Dominique Kourie, Morgan Likens, Monika Marambio, Liam Richards, Sean Rivera, Joseph Seiler and Jake Zawlacki. Courtesy of Crown Point Press, San Francisco, CA.

and suggests that they be meaningfully compared to the larger institutional collections that surround them. I am interested in the contrasts that might emerge from such comparison and their potential validity as case studies within a changing museological frame. At this point, the sample of works seems statistically too slight to come up with a clear picture of what this difference may ultimately mean. Still, a few generalizations might be suggested both as a summary of what has been observed and as a way to conclude this brief essay.

When arguing for the acquisition of a particular work, students are often passionate and resort to claims based in value judgments of the sort not likely to be heard in museum boardrooms: 'This print by Barbara Kruger is awesome and we think it would be really cool to add it to our collection', for example, was something I heard in the course of a recent student presentation. The statement is not necessarily naïve. Such unconcealed presentism might alarm some professional curators but is nonetheless instructive for museum professionals to consider this perspective as grounded in an intellectual concern for preserving representations of current import. From the student's vantage, the world of collections has

never been free of subjective judgment and ought to be more fully charged with their enlivened, contemporary sensibility – with an appreciation for what makes a thing 'awesome' to the everyday viewer. It also needs to be said that in classes made up of a broad spectrum of majors, there have been diverse responses to the task of convincing others to pay attention to a particular work by a particular artist that might have more obvious value to one discipline or another. When an undergraduate argues that they are moved by an image and think it could become an enduringly useful teaching object, they provide more than just their own limited evaluation; they also represent a class of users who will foreseeably address this same work of art with similar commitments and enthusiasm. Those of us charged with stewarding collections on behalf of those users would do well to listen.

'Our bias against the validity of subjective responses to art may be based on the assumption that relevant statements concerning any discipline must share the capability of being publicly verifiable', argues N. Blaine Kauffman.¹³ That verification needn't wait long. The growing collections of student-selected work at both Dartmouth College and at USD represent an experimental body of evidence that is opening now to this secondary evaluation. Works selected through these experimental research methods will soon appear more nuanced, I predict, and, in time, those of us charged with stewarding those collections will better recognize the separate risk-taking commitments they reflect. In this regard, these

acquisitions will come to resemble so many others studied in our museums, even as they can't help but reveal their separate origins to those who study their history. Works of art proposed by undergraduates as valid for teaching purposes end up standing significantly apart, permanently demystifying the process of acquisition for all interested enough to take notice and empowering those who strive to engage in these spaces with deep purpose and inclusivity.

- 1 James Cuno, 'Defining the Mission of the Academic Art Museum,' *Occasional Papers: Harvard University Art Museums* (1994): 17.
- 2 The University Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive opened in 1970, but was deemed 'seismically unsafe' in 1997, at which time plans to re-build the institution at a new location were announced. The Diller Scofidio + Renfro-designed Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMFA) opened to the public in January 2016 in downtown Berkeley, approximately ten blocks away from the former building's site.
- 3 For a critical discussion of this program in the context of campus museums in the United States, see: Janet Marstine, 'What A Mess!: Claiming a Space for Undergraduate Student Experimentation in the University Museum,' *Museum Management and Curatorship* 22 (2007): 303–15. *The Space for Dialogue* experiment now in its 92nd iteration continues at the Hood to the present moment, although facility expansion has temporarily interrupted the series.
- 4 See: 'Hood Interns Make Virtual Exhibitions,' *Dartmouth News* (11 May 2017), accessed 7 October, 2017, at <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2017/05/hood-interns-make-virtual-exhibitions>.
- 5 As an example of an articulate dialogue surrounding the difference in campus-based acquisition strategies, see: 'To Serve the Common Good: The Grinnell College Art Collection,' *Art in Print* 7 (2017): 18–23.
- 6 One early, notable exception might be the so-called 'Museum Course' taught by Paul J. Sachs, Associate Director of the Fogg Art Museum, at Harvard University during, roughly, 1921–47. This legendary course was among the first to integrate museum practice and theory so that the students who took Sachs's course also learned how objects became part of the permanent collections at the Fogg, participating to a limited degree in the selection process. Student notes detailing the course's premises are today included in the Paul J. Sachs Papers located in the Harvard Art Museum Archives, Cambridge, MA. For a guide to their contents, see: <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~art00010>. Other schools have, after Dartmouth, adopted this model. Stanford University, for example, offers a course called 'Collecting for the Cantor', as part of its curriculum: <https://art.stanford.edu/courses/2016-2017-arthist-216>.
- 7 For a description of the current course offering, see: <http://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/learn/dartmouth-students/museum-collecting-101>.
- 8 Photography was chosen for two reasons: (1) the Hood did not have a curator charged with responsibility for this medium (and therefore no one on staff could argue that their professional responsibilities were being abridged by students), and (2) the otherwise sprawling collections at Dartmouth was weak when it came to photography. Hart is now Senior Curator of Collections, as well as the Barbara C. and Harvey P. Hood Curator of Academic Programming for the museum. I thank her for sharing with me her subsequent experiences in 'Museum Collecting 101', as the course is now more popularly known.
- 9 E. S. Burke, 'Photographs,' in *Modern and Contemporary Art at Dartmouth: Highlights from the Hood Museum of Art*, ed. Brian Kennedy and Emily Shubert Burke (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009), 194. In addition to the six works mentioned within the quote, the following photographs were also purchased by classes of students since 2009: Daniel Beltra, *Alter Do Chan, Para (Brasil)* (2005); Atta Kim, *Museum Project #004*, from the *Field Series* (1996); J. Henry Fair, *Arsenic and Water* (2009); Ian Teh, *Kuye River, Yulin, Shaanxi* from the series *Traces* (2010/12); Tierney Gearon, *Untitled* from the series *The Mother Project* (2001); James Karales, *Selma to Montgomery March* (1965); Maria Macilau, *Untitled (Living on the Edge Series)* (2014); Mishka Henner, *Staphorst Ammunition Depot, Overijssel* from the *Dutch Landscape Series* (2011); Jerome Liebling, *May Day, Union Square Park, New York City* (1948); and, Doug Rickard, *#40.805716, Bronx New York* (2007). Additionally, eight 'second choice' photographs have been purchased as a result of additional funds, and one etching, Jules de Bruycker, *Fetes Populaires, Bruxelles* (1928), was acquired when the Museum Collecting 101 course was taught by a curator other than Hart.
- 10 According to the *US News and World Report*'s 2017 ranking system, Dartmouth is judged #11 among National Universities while USD is assessed the rank of #86 in the same category. See: https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-liberal-arts-colleges?_mode=list.
- 11 A superficial scan of internet sources suggests that 'curating' one's personal life had risen to common parlance sometime before 2012. Since that time, critical writing in the United States has vacillated between treating this broadening usage as a symptom of mindless cultural appropriation or, alternatively, viewing it as evidence that digital media empowered individualism. See: Miya Tokumitsu, 'The Politics of the Curation Craze,' *New Republic* (15 August 2015), accessed 7 October, 2017, at <https://newrepublic.com/article/122589/when-did-we-become-curators>. Multiple layers of the 'curated self' are identified and discussed in David Michael Kasch, 'Social Media Selves: Curation of the Self and Others through Facebook,' Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 2013, esp. 90–147. For a summary of academic writing on the topic, see 'Everyone Is a Curator,' *JSTOR Daily* (29 March 2016): <https://daily.jstor.org/everyones-a-curator-jstor-daily-reads-the-news/>.
- 12 Additionally, as revealed at Dartmouth, student passion served to generate unexpected support for the acquisition of other works they proposed. In the case of USD, the following prints were acquired as more or less direct results of student research and interest: Fred Wilson, *Arise!* (2004); Ana María Hernández, *El Corazon Innocente* (2010); Tiago Gualberto, *Pay Per Doll I* (2012); Enrique Chagoya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters from Recurrent Goya* (2012); and Corita Kent, *let the sun shine* (1968).
- 13 See N. Blaine Kauffman, 'The Validity of Personal Response,' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 12 (1978): 100.

Derrick R. Cartwright is Associate Professor of Art History and Director of University Galleries at the University of San Diego. Previously, he served as Director of the Musée d'Art Américain, Giverny (France), Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, San Diego Museum of Art, and Seattle Art Museum. He has lectured throughout the world and published articles, books, and catalogues about American art history and trans-Atlantic cultural exchange.

Movement, Intuition and the Validity of Literary Translation

Clive Scott

To cite this contribution:

Scott, Clive. 'Movement, Intuition and the Validity of Literary Translation.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 18–29, <http://www.oarplatform.com/movement-intuition-validity-literary-translation/>.

This article pursues the argument that literary translation, in the version envisaged here, provides a way out of a linguistic quandary, and can re-establish the existential values of language. Every use of language, we might suppose, involves a double loss: (i) every term becomes, willy-nilly, a class term, subject to abstraction and conceptualisation, in the interests of easy transferability;¹ one might argue that translation has a natural tendency to occupy this 'average' ground, easing the way to swift and confident comprehension; (ii) nobody's understanding and use of a term corresponds exactly with anyone else's; if translation accepted the full implications of this proposition, what kind of strategy would it envisage? So, this pair of statements confronts us with a contradiction: words become class terms in the interests of stability, in order that abstractions like 'integrity', 'validity', 'joy' carry their true moral weight, and in order that fine distinctions can be made, between 'vice' and 'evil', for instance, or between 'trustworthiness' and 'reliability'. Yet, in becoming class terms, they lose that particularity which gives them experiential value and which might guarantee a semantic immediacy. How we make contact, through language, with the experiential as against the conceptual, how we resist the constant recasting of the experiential as the conceptual, remain nagging, unsolved challenges to institutional responses to text. It suggests that we should shift the emphasis from research-based practice – which converts experimental data into a body of knowledge and a methodology – to practice-based research – which pursues research as a mode of experiential becoming. It suggests, too, that we should find ways of making Bergsonian intuition a more essential part of critical attitudes, although we would need to revise Bergson's views on both language and translation. More fundamentally, it encourages us to distrust validity as a critical criterion.

My own translational 'solution' to this predicament is to move the translational objective away from text towards the readerly experience of text, towards the activities of consciousness and perception in the reader, and this involves my shifting allegiance from a monoglot reader (a reader who cannot read the source text) to a polyglot reader (a reader who *can* read the source text), a shift that bilingual editions themselves encourage. Translation for the monoglot reader is a question of (invisible) transfer and equivalence, while for the polyglot reader, it is about relationship, variation, creative transformation. I do not wish to do away with translation as a service to those not familiar with the language of the source text; but I do want to suggest that it militates against the discovery and exercise of experiential contingencies in language, and I do want to lay alongside that version of translation another, one which does not derive a 'validity' from fidelity to the source text, and in particular to the meaning of the source text, or from its use of methods, or theory, accredited by the profession/discipline, that is to say, one which applies to the act of translation procedures already tried

and tested. I am in pursuit of a translation which explores the source text's invisible, its virtualities and unrealised possibilities, as part of a reading process which naturally re-configures the text to maximize its experiential fruitfulness for the reader.

What is the reading experience? I want to pick out two aspects, while recognizing that there are many others. But the two I select are peculiarly significant for translation. The first is that reading is a form of self-coordination, in which text is the instrument whereby we regain our capacity for perceptual/sensory cross-wiring – I mean the capacity to relate, to integrate, various aspects of our consciousness and feeling, various propensities, various behavioural characteristics. Reading is an inter-sensory complicity in the text which will not take place if we surrender to interpretation. Translation is like an improvisation of ourselves through a given text, and thus an improvisation of that text. When we talk about reading as a process of self-coordination, we also mean that we are revealed to ourselves. Reading invites us to return to ourselves, to our entirety, without that, however, constituting a completeness; it is this incompleteness which necessitates a writing; this incompleteness is an inevitable concomitant of our being in movement, in duration, in a state of continuous becoming.

Second, reading is a dynamic experience. Speech, however little phonated, introduces the paralinguistic and prosodic into the linguistic, that is, all those durational elements of voice – tone, intonation, tempo, loudness, pausing – which the printed text may from time to time imply, but gives no explicit indication of. We respond to text by vocalising it, by performing it, by tracing a body in it, rhythm in its paralinguistic or vocal multi-dimensionality. Just as choreography turns the movement of music into one's own dance, into the participation of one's own body, so translation turns source text (reading) into target text (writing) by making reading a lived and living movement, which demands to be expressed, to be embodied, to initiate an activity that further develops. In short, we turn the movement of the reading eye that activates a text into a mobile text which activates the readerly body. Expressing it another way, we might say: a textual environment, set in dynamic motion by the act of reading, generates an action within us which we participate in, by ourselves acting (writing, drawing, doodling), an acting which takes us in new directions.

This is a translational practice which espouses Bergsonian vitalism in several senses. Translation is not seen as a succession of finished states, of detached texts, but as an incessant variation which passes through different versions in the unfolding of its duration. These versions make no sense other than as a forward-rolling, expanding, interactive body of inputs: 'Duration is the continuous progress of the past which eats into the future and swells as it advances'.² The source text is not so much a completed event that needs to be retrieved, returned to; it is, in its very forward momentum, a metamorphic entity which is never the same, as self-differentiating as it is self-conserving.³ But let us be quite clear. I am not speaking here of that 'passive' change that is built into the very process of historicity: a new moment inevitably begets a new reader, a new reading, a new interpretation. I am speaking, rather, of the responsibility translation takes upon itself, whether it is intralingual or interlingual, continually to explore, across language(s), what the source text contains of the virtual, the invisible, the unfulfilled, which are not products of historicity, but elements in its own becoming, its own duration. Duration is as irreversible as it is unpredictable; a work has no destiny to fulfil other than to be in the middle of organic mutation, even if, in retrospect, it looks as if it has moved along a predictable path; that is to say that translation projects the source text into the future as an unforeseen possibility, and without any knowledge of its own consequences.

That is also to say that duration is significant by virtue of being inhabited time, of being the very motions of experience and consciousness, not by what detaches itself from it, as product; the problem is that such a view leaves us deprived of the quantifiable and demonstrable. Can we bear to be deprived of the evaluative and judgemental capacity, the procedures of the intelligence, the instruments of validation, do we know how to cope with a non-immobilized subject of scrutiny, a subject which demands participation and practice instead?

The intelligence, in Bergson's eyes, puts us outside experience, and because its contacts with lived experience are always mediated by its own tools of analysis, those contacts are meta-discursive, at one remove, in the world of the signified rather than the signifier. The intelligence immobilizes and separates; it is the spirit that drives literary criticism, and that kind of translation which pursues an interpretative strategy. The procedures of the intelligence are also characterized by their adherence to 'mechanism' on the one hand, and 'finalism' on the other; where 'mechanism' concerns itself with structure, with positions and dispositions, networks and groundplans, the rationale of constitution, 'finalism' concerns itself with sequence, order, the direction of structure, with teleology. In order to capture a body lifting its hand from A to B, the procedures just described address, from the outside, the curve AB, analysing it into a series of positions, an order:

But mechanism and finalism would both pass movement by, movement which is reality itself. In a certain way, movement is *more* than a set of positions and their order, because it is enough to produce it, in its indivisible simplicity, for the infinite number of its successive positions and their order to be produced at the same time, with, additionally, something which is neither order nor position but the essential factor: mobility.⁴

The indivisibility of movement as movement, so central to all Bergson's thinking, relates crucially, too, to our attitudes to translation. It is part of the reason why we promote the notion of metamorphosis at the expense of choice, and why we insist on the variational *development* of sense *across* items of language rather than the grouping of competing items around a targeted meaning. The problem for the 'designer' of translations is precisely how to capture the 'living' momentum of reading, how to capture the interwoven dynamic of the pre-reflective and the reflective, how to regenerate in the reader of the translation the constant activity of consciousness, how to avoid any suggestion that the target text is a post hoc interpretation of the source text, how to maximize the sense of something in mutational process. And this in turn entails a re-orientation of our notion of rhythm, now understood more as a mode of apprehension of the object than as a property belonging to the object, the rhythm of reading rather than of what is being read. What I envisage here is a notion of rhythm which is not accusative in nature, an it, a fact of text, but nominative/vocative, an instrument of reader/text dialogue, address, interlocution. The translator listens and speaks one text into another, not by automatic equivalence (alexandrine into iambic pentameter, sonnet into sonnet), but by experimental response and re-disposition.

If I emphasize rhythm as a mode of perception, of processing by consciousness, it is for three reasons. First, it is perhaps a perfect exemplar of Bergsonian movement. If I make that claim, it is because I distinguish fundamentally between the rhythmic and the metric,⁵ in a way, perhaps, not shared by other commentators who look upon rhythm as a freedom within, or a variation on, metre, to be described in essentially metrical terms (stress/accent, syllable).

For me, rhythm is non-recurrent (irreversible), continuous, heterogeneous and qualitative; it is a variational weave of duration; one may speak of the duration that inhabits rhythm, but one should also say that rhythm is the very rhythm of duration. Metre, on the other hand, is a separable pattern ('mechanism', abstract); it is discontinuous (unitised), homogeneous (repeated units), and quantitative (measurable). Metre is a standardized sequence of units which parcel up/are parcelled up by chronometric time (rather than duration).

It is the multi-dimensionality of rhythm – deriving, as we have said, from the investment of the linguistic by the paralinguistic (intonation, tempo, amplitude, pausing, respiration, etc.) – which, second, ensures that it is physically incorporative of the reader, that it is, kinaesthetically, a whole-body experience. This is not to deny that metre will also produce kinaesthetic experience, but of a much more restricted kind; and while rhythm is that medium/energy/force by which the reader is absorbed into the world generated by textual dynamics, as an agentive participant, metre is an analytical instrument which informs the hearing of the text and its modes of linear distribution, but does not pretend to embody the experiential making of, and responding to, the text.

Finally and third, and consequential upon the points already made, rhythm is a natural expression of the intuitive, while metre gravitates towards the mental habits of the intelligence. Intuition, that 'divining sympathy',⁶ has powers of empathetic penetration, which establish the contact of one's own duration with that of another.⁷ What, then, is involved when the focus of the translator shifts from comprehension of the text to intuition of the text? What distinguishes an intuitive translation from an analytical or interpretative one? An intuitional translation grapples with rather more than the words of the text themselves, whose translation might turn out to be little or no different from a version supplied by the interpretative intelligence. What intuitional translation grapples with is the 'theatre' of consciousness as it processes text, the durational experience of a body in the thick of contingent, indeterminate, textual eventfulness, keeping track of its own flux.

In 'Introduction to Metaphysics', Bergson uses translation as an illustration of any analytical (empirical, rational), as opposed to intuitional,⁸ mode of apprehending a phenomenon:

analysis is the operation which draws the object back to familiar constituents, that is to say, constituents common to this object and to others...Every analysis is thus a translation, a development in symbols, a representation from successive points of view from which one identifies just so many shared features between the new object being studied and other objects which one already reckons to have knowledge of. In its eternally unsatisfied desire to embrace the object around which it is condemned to turn, analysis endlessly multiplies points of view, to complete the never completed representation, tirelessly varies the symbols to perfect an ever-imperfect translation.⁹

This account leaves us with the difficult task of reconciling our view of translation which is fundamentally Bergsonian in spirit with the views of Bergson himself, which tend to denigrate translation. It is easy to say that Bergson, like us, is implicitly attacking a view of translation which has surrendered the intuitional to the analytical, or, in my terms, which has surrendered durational reading experience to the immobilizations of interpretation, or the multi-dimensional and qualitative rhythms of the reading consciousness to the recuperation of mono-dimensional and quantitative textual rhythms.

But this large agreement conceals details of terminology and attitude that are more difficult to negotiate, largely because Bergson's view of intuition seems to preclude any possibility of translational success;¹⁰ for Bergson, in fact, intuition is the apprehension of the untranslatable, the inexpressible, and translation, however self-multiplying, will always be second best.¹¹ In presenting a new version of translation, a translation seeking to espouse the text-intuitional, how would we wish to take issue with Bergson?

Translation is not, as Bergson supposes, a quest for an ever-more proximate fidelity. Translation journeys away from the source text in an indefatigable exploration of the reading experiences it allows/begets, which are bound to be different with each reader and with each reading. We might disagree with Bergson and propose that these variations do render 'the inner meaning of the original',¹² but one would need to interpret 'inner meaning' precisely as that which, in the source text, does not find an exteriority, that is to say, its invisible, its expressive exploitability, its *translatability*.¹³ Nor would we wish to think of the source text as the original. Thus, this kind of translation is *not* a representation of the original and does not trade in 'symbols', if these are to be understood as a metadiscursive treatment. And this version of translation does not operate in the world of the already known, translating the given with a given, a world that is circumscriptive; on the contrary, as we have said, translation is an 'invalid' practice-based research, a constant re-invention of what might be created out of intralinguistic and interlinguistic, intertextual and extratextual, cross-sensory and inter-medial activity.

But there are further qualifications to be added. If Bergson wishes to describe intuition as 'the disinterested knowledge of an object one aims...to grasp in itself',¹⁴ then there are three senses in which I would wish to hesitate or demur. Intuition is an existential sympathy which does not bring knowledge in the sense of cognitive information or identification of stable characteristics; it is, so to speak, shared experience, in all its vivid immediacy. It is 'disinterested' in its espousal of otherness, but it is a wedding, it has interests of its own, a mutuality of input into the momentums that the wedding itself blends. This then disqualifies '[which] one aims...to grasp in itself', not because of the wedding alone, but also because there is no 'itself': there is a multiplicity of experiential encounters, all in the mode of becoming, so that an 'itself' is never more than an ever-changing virtuality. Finally, and in the light of these remarks, one should insist that translational language, as an intuitional language, is no longer the metadiscursive language of 'symbols' that Bergson imagines it to be and which it naturally is in 'standard' interpretative translation; it is no longer a representation or re-presentation or interpretation of the source text, nor the signified of the source text's signifier; it is itself a signifier cohabiting, and collaborating in, the source text's sense-generating duration; the target text draws its language from the same perceptual and psycho-physiological source as the source text.

But here, too, we need to be quite clear. Our preference, in 'sense-generating', for the word 'sense' over the word 'meaning' is guided by the need to speak of a signifying process itself caught in movement, in becoming. Meaning is altogether too much an objective, something arrived at, a conceptual substance, while sense allows a glancing, elusive, changing, kaleidoscopic semantic. To read and write in the spirit of duration is to treat the semantic not as a goal but as a passage, not as a combination or interplay of semantemes generated by language and presented for our inspection and consumption, but as the indivisible, un-decomposable foam of senses deriving from our own immersion in language as readers, reading into and

across language rather than out of and away from language, towards the dictionary, towards a valid account.

But our disagreement with Bergson does not pertain to the concept of translation alone; it pertains, too, to the processing of linguistic sequence. Bergson concludes that '*the mechanism of our day-to-day knowledge is of a cinematographic kind*';¹⁵ it restores movement to immobilized states, yes, but from the outside and in a form that is abstract and uniform. Bergson also suggests that we use language cinematographically.¹⁶ Reading seems to set words in motion rather as a projector sets images in motion; but this, suggests Bergson, merely repeats the illusion which underlies the cinematographic. Reading is not so much a triggering of motion in words as the eye's passage through them, which leaves words as separate entities (dictionary entries) and allows them, as 'imaginary stases',¹⁷ to perpetuate illogicalities. We should not be led to believe that the movement of the projected spools of film have actually introduced movement into the frames of the film, that the scenes depicted in those frames have entered their own duration. They have not. They have been given succession but are themselves still immobile. But this seems to me a misrepresentation. In reading, we draw the sequence of language into our own duration, partly because we activate processes of anticipation and memory, partly because we harness the rhythms of language to our own rhythms of apprehension/perception, and partly because our cognitive faculties are constantly busied with the multiplications and reconfigurations of sense (rather than with the procession of meaning). These attributes of the reading consciousness are all fully Bergsonian in spirit; it is just that his attachment to the model of a duplicitous cinematography, and his wish to increase its detrimental effects, prevents him from allowing them.

The same cinematographic truth, Bergson would argue, governs strings of words introduced into speech-flow by the reading voice. But he would be wrong. And he would be wrong for the simple reason that the voice fundamentally changes our perception of printed language, even if it is only reading printed language silently. There is, that is to say, a duration linguistically *sui generis* in speech that there is not in printed language. We might pick out, among others, four ways in which voiced language is a durational transformation of the written language. First, the values of apparently identical phonemes are paralinguistically/vocally differentiated where an IPA transcription would make no distinctions; as Edward Sapir points out: 'Probably not one English speaker out of a hundred has the remotest idea that the *t* of a word like *sting* is not at all the same sound as the *t* of *teem*, the latter *t* having a fullness of 'breath release' that is inhibited in the former case by the preceding *s*; that the *ea* of *meat* is of perceptibly shorter duration than the *ea* of *mead* [because the latter is followed by a *voiced* consonant]; or that the final *s* of a word like *heads* is not the full buzzing sound of the *s* in such a word as *please*'.¹⁸ Second, the voice distributes the sounds of phonemes, to maintain speech-flow, where the printed language segregates them. Stephen Handel points out, for example, that 'The spelling of the word *cat* is "c" followed by "a" followed by "t". If, however, we try to cut out the "c" part from a tape recording, no unique section can be found. The "c" permeates the entire word acoustically, albeit not perceptually',¹⁹ and further generalises: 'The production system must cheat in order to get all the sounds out rapidly: movements appropriate to several successive sounds must be made simultaneously, and movements necessary to produce future sounds must be started early enough to ensure that the vocal tract will be in the correct position to make those sounds when they are required'.²⁰ Third, speech, as we have seen, introduces the paralinguistic and prosodic into the linguistic; where the printed text is only a segmented language, vocal realization supplies a durational

momentum expressed in so-called supra-segmental features (tone, intonation, dynamics (in the musical sense), tempo, pausing, etc.). Fourth, and finally, this suffusion of the verbal network by the paralinguistic indicates the informing of the text by rhythm, such that metre, the pre-vocal identification of the syllabic and accentual constitution of the verse is absorbed into the rhythmic as a raw material, as a particular and malleable dimension of its multi-dimensionality. Rhythm, then, is not just one feature alongside the multiple other features of the spoken text; it is the animating and shaping force that inhabits and drives all those features, the operating principle of the whole text in the reading mind.

In order to capture the elusive prey that duration is, in order to do it some justice in our translational practice, what options are open to us? We might, quite simply, accept that, by definition, we shall never be able properly to express duration or the activity of intuition, and accept, too, that we are bound to adopt analytical means as a way of building our 'knowledge' of the reading of verse. Bergson, after all, perfectly well accepts that analysis is a proper and valid use of the human intelligence, its 'natural' mode for apprehending reality, however artificial it is. We must merely be sure to acknowledge that it is only half the story, and be conscious of the ways in which it falls short. But we can also attempt to coax the analytical into deviating into the durational, principally by page-design, by a page-design which puts the known of language in doubt, which makes the voice constantly re-assess its modes of delivery, its segmentative habits, its phrasal groupings, its acoustic distribution. Page-design might become the instrument whereby what was text becomes a scenario, becomes a pre-textual scansion, or projection of vocalized text, inviting, by its very nature, multiple other scansions, because it embodies the truly possible, not a possible that retrospection identifies as a highly probable. So, the text is a pre-performance script. But it is at the same time itself a performance or a performativity, summoning other kinds of textual performance, other page-designs. In this way, the page outwits the trap of space and the spatialized; instead it acts as an invitation into time, it activates time. Where previously the scansion of a poetic text was a way of evidentially validating one kind of metrical reading, the text-as-scansion is designed to invite a 'programme' of (self-)investigative experimentations, or explorations, which supersede any notion of validity, but are not themselves self-superseding.

This, then, is now a language which we are encouraged to listen to differently, not simply in order to pick out, recognize, those acoustic elements already identified in the written text – alliteration, assonance, rhyme, iambic pentameter, the alexandrine, etc. – but, rather, to steep ourselves in the polymorphous meanderings of rhythm, and what it lives on in the way of phonetic modulations, accords and discords, crisp and drawled enunciations, the whispering and declamatory; these are not the incidentals of individual voices, which do nothing to change the underlying meaning of the text; these are investments of the text with voice, rather than vice versa, which actively constitutes the very substance of verbal duration. What agent, other than the speaking voice, can change language from a sequence or succession of separate lexical entities into a fused flowing, a flowing which incorporates pausing, and silence itself, into duration, into textual becoming, into the discourse of a speaking subject, into the integrated multi-dimensionality of rhythmic unfolding. Voice changes the very nature of printed language, acoustically, rhythmically, in the way it distributes sense rather than gathers meaning, in its paralinguistic animation. The prejudice against voice in the world of metrical analysis is firm and of long standing, and reflects a deep distrust of an uncontrollable, unquantifiable, unpredictable energy, which runs directly against the desire to establish linguistic fact in the printed text, which itself undergoes no change.

Let us then be clear. Bergson looks upon language as an impediment to our getting close to intuitional experience, to duration. Language has a natural tendency to serve analysis, to turn percept into concept, to make abstract and to generalize, and thus to travel away from immediacy of contact and from exactitude. Language converts all experience into versions of the already known, of available knowledge, and, as we have just seen, it suffers from the same delusions as cinematography: it supposes that words enter duration by virtue of being spoken, but it is actually only the voice that enters duration, using words – which themselves continue to exist as separable units – as its instrument. Our view is that Bergson's thinking is unnecessarily pessimistic. But there are mitigating circumstances.

Bergson gives one of his fullest accounts of the capturing of duration in language towards the end of the second part of the introduction to his 1934 *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (*La Pensée et le mouvant*).²¹ Reading is the key: it is not to do with comprehension so much as with thinking one's way into text by adopting the procedure of the author, and reading aloud is the best way to achieve this self-assimilation. Perception of the movement of discourse, direct communication with the author's thought, derives from a vocal/dictional inhabitation of the text's rhythm and punctuation:

To mark punctuation and rhythm as is proper, to take account of the temporal relations between different sentences of the paragraph and different phrases of the sentence, to follow, uninterruptedly, the *crescendo* of feeling and thought to the point musically noted as culminating, that is what the art of diction is first and foremost all about.²²

The art of reading, in short, is the intuitional art of espousing the creative evolution of text. Elsewhere, in a lecture on 'L'âme et le corps' delivered in 1912, and collected with other essays and lectures in the 1919 *Mind-Energy* (*L'Énergie spirituelle*), Bergson fleshes out a little what his notion of rhythm entails. Rhythm is the indivisible movement that thought is and the words that emerge from this flux are like snapshots or film-frames. But words by themselves are generalised, abstract, unindividuated, impersonal: it is only rhythm and punctuation and 'the whole choreography of discourse'²³ that can animate them with a will, a direction, an individual nuance, a singular coloration. But rhythm itself is, to all intents and purposes, pre-verbal ('and what can the rhythm of thought be but that of the hardly conscious, emerging movements which accompany it?');²⁴ rhythm does not derive from words, it is rather the reverse.²⁵

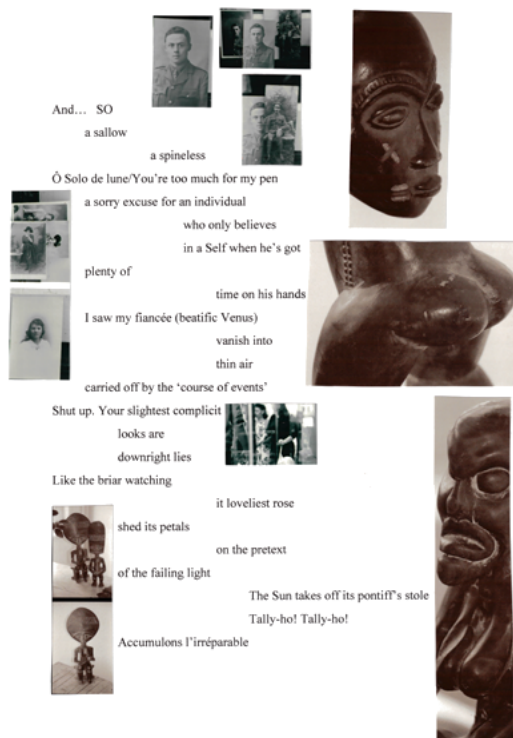
This is a view of rhythm with which we have a great deal of sympathy, but with which our own view does not entirely tally. Rhythm is a mode of expression, but also a mode of apprehension: perception is an active faculty. Diction/reading aloud, in other words, is not a purely assimilative process; it is also an exploration of, and experimentation with, what the reader wishes for the words-of-the-text and what they seem to wish for themselves in this particular variational sequence. Thus, while Bergson's case draws much on the assumption that words entail the substitution of concepts for things and promote 'the socialization of truth',²⁶ our view is that words are things and that they look to the reading voice to achieve their potential complexity. Rhythm is not pre-verbal, a force passing through words and upon which words are invited to cast their light; rhythm is awakened by words, and, as a result, constantly animates and inflects sense, in such a way that words never fall back into default positions, that is, positions of 'average' meaning, of standard function, of generalised and abstract status.

The translational ambitions I have described are an abjuration of the notion of validity, in the belief that it is politically tendentious and untrustworthy. Validity assumes that compliance with certain predetermined conditions gives a document, an action, or an activity, legitimacy, justification, a warrant. In this sense, validation is a sifting process, a *triage*, which supposes that some things are state-condoned and licit, while others are not, or, further, that these things are only state-condoned if they fulfil demands expressly laid down by the state, where 'state' is to be understood as any organ which, among other means, exerts power through a body of concepts/lexical terms used as yardsticks of behaviour or licences for actions. In intellectual matters, the state is to be understood as the academic institution. To be validated, research (research-based practice) must be assimilated into state procedures. Translation, as we imagine it, falls outside the given pattern of validation: the authoritative establishment of the original text (source text), which must be preserved; the justness of the translation (judged by one's peers); the translator's own accredited status (special dispensations are made for poet-translators whose status is reckoned to be validation enough). My version of translation undoes these validations: translation is designed to destabilize the source text, to discompose it, by searching out multiple texts within it, the 'invisible', the expressive (re) configurations it makes possible; the translation is not preserving the source text in another language, but projecting it into a metamorphic becoming, into a future of continuous variation; and the translator is in no sense 'qualified', but is, rather, the common reader, whose translations are records of the experience of reading. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, this version of translation is rhizomatic in its unfolding, minoritarian and de-territorializing.

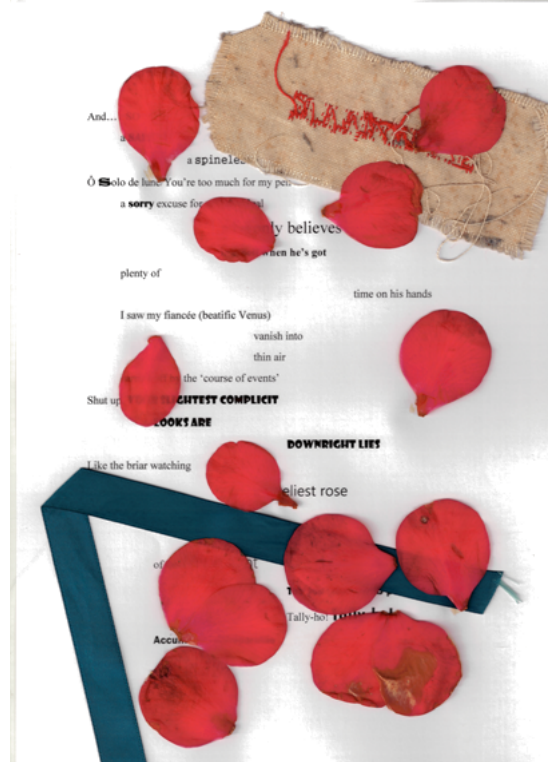
As a final, brief piece of supporting evidence for this anti-validity argument, I would like to present four 'renderings' (Figs. 1–4) of some lines from Jules Laforgue's 1890 'Dimanches (I)' (*Derniers Vers*):

Ainsi donc, pauvre, pâle et piètre individu
 Qui ne croit à son Moi qu'à ses moments perdus,
 Je vis s'effacer ma fiancée
 Emportée par le cours des choses,
 Telle l'épine voit s'effeuiller,
 Sous prétexte de soir sa meilleure rose.

Even as I produce the translation, the senses of the words, the utterances, are inflected by my associated consciousness of other lines and collocations from the *Derniers Vers*, which are feathered into the text. This process is orchestrated against, and made more complex by, the textual re-dispositions and the heteroglossia of different typefaces. And the larger, passing preoccupations of this particular reader – photographs, painted figures, collaged materials – become an added layer of perspectives on these lines, which translation absorbs into the text in such a way that the play of both sense and the physical senses is further reconfigured. Both the reader and the text are being constantly re-woven by new inputs, new associations, new memories, in a process which converts collage (inserted fragments) into metamorphosis, into continuous variation. And these versions can be read in any order, the principle of variation will work just as well. In Fig. 1, I think the lines photographically, drawing on a collection of WWI portraits, African art, the odd contemporary street scene; in Fig. 2, I visit relics: not rose-petals but camellia-petals with their added literary/operatic overtones, a name ('Fidelle') sewn on coarse cloth, but on the reverse, so that it is both illegible and as if unravelling, a discarded piece of ribbon; in Fig. 3, which, with its mention of 'Novels for the quaysides, elegiac photos' (from Laforgue's 'Lament of the Barrel Organ', in Graham Dunstan



1. Clive Scott, 2017, print, photographic fragments, 21.0cm x 29.7cm.



2. Clive Scott, 2017, print, camellia petals, ribbon, piece of rough cloth, 21.0cm x 29.7cm.



3. Clive Scott, 2017, print, ink, enamel paint, 21.0cm x 29.7cm.



4. Clive Scott, 2017, print, enamel paint, collaged hand-coloured textual fragments, 21.0cm x 29.7cm.

Martin's translation from 1998), relates to Figs. 2 and 1, handwriting and a tracery of enamel paint enact a directly gestural response, opening up the text to kinaesthetic drives and the imprinting of the graphological; and, in Fig. 4, while the red enamel paint picks up the camellia petals of Fig. 2, the blue, collaged extracts from my translation of Apollinaire's 'The Windows', a poem dedicated to the work of Robert Delaunay, provide a construction of skylights in the text, opening on to a mobile world of relentlessly changing sensation, which makes dramas of the heart seem peculiarly outmoded.

Practice-based research allows one to make claims for a version of translation that research-based practice occludes. In fact, practice-based research reverses the assumptions on which research-based practice is based. For research-based practice, research establishes the facts, and the discipline develops the appropriate methodologies for interpreting and applying them; the scholar becomes the agent of the discipline's outworking. But what if reading does not primarily serve the development of an institutional book-culture based on literary categories, hierarchies, history? What if the value of reading is reckoned to lie in existential objectives of the kind we have outlined, including self-coordination, self-improvisation, an intuitional activity in which reading, as a mutual undertaking between author and reader, constantly expands the field of energies released by a text? In this latter world, there are no facts, no methodologies or recognized procedures, only an accumulating body of evidence, marshalled by practice-based research, the promise of an inexhaustible inner duration, of a becoming, driven by the rhythms of creative consciousness. Practice-based research offers itself, then, as the repository both of countless contacts between the existential energies and horizons of different languages and the kaleidoscopic and inexhaustibly heterogeneous experience of reading subjects.

- 1 As Henri Bergson puts it: 'However, language designates states with the same words for everyone; thus it has only been able to fix the objective and impersonal aspect of love, of hatred, and of the countless feelings which stir the soul', and see: Henri Bergson, *Œuvres*, ed. André Robinet, intro. Henri Gouhier (Paris: PUF, 1984), 108–09. I give all quotations from Bergson in my own English translation; page references indicate the locations of the French originals.
- 2 Idem, 498.
- 3 Translation is an activity that *necessarily* takes place in a reality in which nothing repeats itself; as Bergson puts it: 'If every thing is in time, everything changes internally and the same concrete reality never repeats itself', and see: Idem, 533.
- 4 Idem, 572–73.
- 5 Clive Scott, *Translating the Perception of Text: Literary Translation and Phenomenology* (London: Legenda, 2012), 111–32.
- 6 Bergson, *Œuvres*, 644.
- 7 Idem, 645.
- 8 Just to remind ourselves of one of Bergson's succinct definitions of intuition: "'Intuition" here is the *sympathy* through which one penetrates the interior of an object, to coincide with what is unique and consequently inexpressible about it', and see: Idem, 1395.
- 9 Idem, 1395–96.
- 10 'All translations of a poem into all possible languages can add shades of meaning to shades of meaning as much as they like and, by a kind of mutual retouching, with reciprocal correction, provide an ever more faithful image of the poem being translated, but they will never render the inner meaning of the original', and see: Idem, 1395.
- 11 'A representation from a certain point of view, a translation made with certain symbols, remain obstinately imperfect when compared with the object which is the subject of the point of view or which the symbols seek to express', and see: Ibidem.
- 12 Ibidem.
- 13 'Translatability' here has a meaning akin to the meaning it has in Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'. A text's translatability is its desire to be translated, so that its life can attain 'its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding'. In this sense, a translation has the ability to take a text beyond its own limits. But in order for that to be so, the text must already possess a translatability, must have the inherent capacity to re-discover itself in another language. See: Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Selected Writings I: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 253–63, quote on 255.
- 14 Bergson, *Œuvres*, 1410.
- 15 Idem, 753.
- 16 Idem, 759.

- 17 Ibidem.
- 18 Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* [1921] (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), 43.
- 19 Stephen Handel, *Listening: An Introduction to the Perception of Auditory Events* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 2.
- 20 Idem, 134.
- 21 Bergson, *Œuvres*, 1326–28.
- 22 Idem, 1327.
- 23 Idem, 849.
- 24 Idem, 850.
- 25 Idem, 849–50.
- 26 Idem, 1327.

Clive Scott is Professor Emeritus of European Literature at the University of East Anglia and a Fellow of the British Academy. His principal research interests lie in comparative poetics; in literary translation, and in particular the experimental translation of poetry; and in photography's relationship with writing. Translation and photography combine in his most recent book, *Translating Apollinaire* (2014). A new book, *The Work of Literary Translation*, will be published by CUP in 2018.

The Lives and Deaths of Inhabitants in Abandoned Houses

Gregory Buchakjian

To cite this contribution:

Gregory Buchakjian. 'The Lives and Deaths of Inhabitants in Abandoned Houses.' OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal Issue 1 (2017): 30–46, <http://www.oarplatform.com/>.



Gregory Buchakjian, *Maya Akiki in the central hall of Victoria K.'s former apartment*, 2015, digital photograph.

The truth is somewhere between the documentary and the fictional, and that is what I try to show. What is real one moment has become imaginary in the next.

- Robert Frank

Preamble: Fiction and Truth in Post-War Lebanon Art Practices

In July 1998, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige displayed a series of burnt postcards then titled *Beirut, Urban Fictions*, known later as *Wonder Beirut, the Story of the Pyromaniac Photographer*.¹ According to their statement, the Lebanese Tourism Agency had in 1968 commissioned the so-called 'Studio Wahed' to shoot postcards of Beirut. When war spread in 1975, Studio Wahed was destroyed. One of its members, Abdallah Farah,

succeeded in rescuing some material – a fraction of his negatives, including those of the postcards...Three years after the start of the war, he began to damage his postcards, burning them little by little – an intentional process of deterioration – as if seeking a way to have their states conform to his present. He imitated the destruction of the buildings, which were progressively disappearing before his eyes.²

In 2001, after Jalal Toufic asked Hadjithomas and Joreige for clarifications, they conducted an interview with a journalist named Pierre Menard. Menard proclaimed that 'by photographing these images you invented a new path, that of deliberate anachronism and wrong techniques'.³ Meanwhile, also in 2001, Hadjithomas and Joreige stumbled across the belongings of Alfred Kettaneh, Khalil's uncle who was kidnapped in 1985 and was reported missing. Among the things found was a Super-8 'latent' film, undeveloped. After much hesitation, they sent it to the lab.

The film came out veiled and white, with a barely noticeable presence that vanished immediately from the screen. We searched within the layers of the film itself, attempting to create the reappearance of a presence, of lasting images.⁴

In 2004, Hal Foster proposed the idea of an 'archival impulse' in modern and contemporary art, where 'in the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present'.⁵ This idea had particular resonances in Lebanon, where the absence of a collective narrative led to an unofficial 'memory culture', one 'generated by civil society, political groups, and nongovernmental agents including artists, novelists, investigative journalists, academics and filmmakers'.⁶ In 1997, the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) was established with the mission 'to collect, preserve and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora'.⁷ In July 1999, speaking at a colloquium,⁸ Walid Raad revealed the existence of the Atlas Group, an institution seeking to 'locate, preserve, study, and produce audio, visual literary and other artifacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon'.⁹ These proposals empowered intersections between artistic practice and the research of historians, archaeologists and archivists. For instance, AIF cofounder Akram Zaatari began in 1999 a long-term collaboration with Hashem el-Madani, a portrait photographer from Saida.¹⁰ He produced a body of work composed of books, exhibitions and videos that undoubtedly generated invaluable knowledge, on Madani in particular, and on studio photography in general. The project was done under the auspices of the AIF, which guaranteed its seriousness and legitimacy. However, Zaatari affirmed – and this applies to his entire oeuvre – that 'I see my motivation for research not as that of the historian but an artist interested in history'.¹¹ Disclaiming himself from being a scholar, Zaatari was implying that the artist could work in parallel – or even in competition – with the scholar.

The ambiguities surrounding these artists' attitudes towards their disciplinary affiliations were present in their work. Were we being led to view photographs by Madani and Farah as historical documents, or their reinvention by Zaatari and Hadjithomas and Joreige as contemporary artworks, where, as Zaatari writes 'photography is a subject, before it is a medium'?¹² Furthermore, it came into sight that the 'postwar generation has come to be known for a more archival approach that enacts disciplinary border crossings between fictional and historical narration'.¹³ While Madani is as real as his studio, much has been said about the contradictions concerning the contents of the Atlas Group and its existence. In the early 2000s, Raad admitted:

In different places and at different times I have called the Atlas Group an imaginary foundation, a foundation I established in 1976, and a foundation established in 1976 by Maha Traboulsi. In Lebanon in 1999, I stated, 'The Atlas Group is a nonprofit foundation established in Beirut in 1967'. In New York in 2000 and in Beirut in 2002, I stated, 'The Atlas Group is an imaginary foundation that I established in 1999'.¹⁴

No less intriguing were Hadjithomas and Joreige's positions. In *Wonder Beirut* (1997–2006), they attributed existing touristic postcards to a fictional photographer, and simulated an interview with a fictional journalist whose name was notably borrowed from 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, where the character expressed the intention to rewrite Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece, neither through transcription nor copying, but in producing pages that would coincide word by word with the original. Then, in *Lasting Images* (2003), Hadjithomas and Joreige developed the film of Kettaneh who effectively disappeared while driving a Red Cross ambulance. In Foster's estimation of archival art generally, he writes how 'the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private'.¹⁵ Such border-crossings between reality and the imaginary were what Carrie Lambert-Beatty termed 'parafiction'. Citing, among other examples, Walid Raad's *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and 31)_English Version*, presented as a testimonial by former hostage Souheil Bachar who allegedly, after his release 'collaborated with the Atlas Group to produce 53 videotapes about his captivity',¹⁶ Lambert-Beatty explains:

Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact.¹⁷

Coming under Michel Foucault's *historical a priori*, as 'not a condition of validity for judgements, but a condition of reality for statements',¹⁸ these practices were defying Lebanon's politics of amnesia. *Lasting Images*, for example, was materializing the resurgence of one of the thousands of disappeared. As Waled Sadek says, 'It is in producing the disappeared as an excess object in absentia, as here rather than elsewhere, that awaiters step out from the margins and begin the labor of conversing with the disappeared that charges absence with uncanniness'.¹⁹ This may explain the abundance of ghosts and vampires in Lebanese art,

literature and cinema, notably the films of Ghassan Salhab and the writings of Jalal Toufic. *We decided to let them say, 'we are convinced' twice*, a series of photographs shot during the 1982 Siege of Beirut, as part of the Atlas Group, strangely contains scratches and stains. In a mail conversation, the artist questioned what led to this phenomenon:

Did I place them there to emphasize the distance that separates me from these events in 1982, 24 years earlier? No. Are they meant to represent the present but non-imaged traces of fire that littered the sky and city that summer? Do they represent my inability to see the event fully, the result of some psychic shock or physical scotoma? No. Are they meant to emphasize the medium itself, the mediating qualities of the photographic surface? No. I have always felt that the scratches, thumbprints, and color stains actually belonged to the world, and not to my prints nor negatives. In other words, it is the world itself that was scratched and stained, and I recorded it as I saw it. As a classically trained photographer, I take very good care of my negatives and prints. My negatives are intact. They did not decay with the passage of time. The scratches are not on my prints, and negatives but in my images... As such, I wonder whether in the summer of 1982, I was actually photographing reality as photographic.²⁰

The traumas and ghosts rooted underneath these artworks have equally nourished my practice that also comprises an imbrication of traces, documents, testimonies and autobiographical memories, whose validity may equally be questionable. One story sheds light on the drifting between real account and fable. It took place during the summer of 1975, when fighting was sporadic and talked about as 'the events' rather than 'war': My father, Sarkis Buchakjian, and I – I was four years old – were driving on the airport road. Palestinian warriors intercepted the car and abducted us. We were taken to the camp of Chatila, and held for approximately six hours before being released. In 2015, my father confessed the airport road incident didn't happen as we were told for forty years. According to his new version, a military vehicle slightly hit our car on a ride back from the airport. My father, who was still accustomed to living in a 'normal' country, required reparations. The militiamen answered that we should see their chiefs. They lead us inside the camp. Upon our arrival, a parade was taking place, and all were busy. It took hours for my father to meet someone. He received apologies, but no financial compensation. On his way home, my father, in an act of conscience over the recklessness of the gesture which may have jeopardized our lives, improvised the 'official' abduction narrative, which corresponded to events many experienced at the time, and therefore was more convincing than the 'real' events.

The facts explored in this paper are extracted from a project on abandoned dwellings. The subject is rooted in autobiographical memories, as my family was expelled from their home twice, in 1982 and 1986, and had to find refuge elsewhere. It started in 2009 as a photographic series, and grew like a rhizome of storytelling, following the 'principles of connection and heterogeneity' and the 'principle of multiplicity'²¹ fed by intersecting documents, archaeological findings and testimonies that frequently provided conflicting results, as is the case in the present story. The work also took shape in a PhD dissertation in Art History defended on June 20, 2016.²² It was questioned whether Art History was a good disciplinary fit. The PhD was undertaken under the supervision of Jean-Yves Andrieux, a specialist of architectural heritage and its identity. In the course of its progression, it integrated artistic, literary and

cinematographic representations of Beirut produced during the so-called war (1975–1990) and post-war (after 1990) periods, so that ‘Art Histories’ would have been a more appropriate label. With the dissertation being almost as dispersed as its subject, one could have seriously wondered if it were ‘a disciplinary text according to academic disciplines?’ ‘No’, affirmed jury member Catherine David. In her remarks, David perceived the piece as ‘not a discourse of authority, it is porous and open to doubts and questions’, while acknowledging a proximity of approach with Jacques Rancière’s descriptions of modes of connexions and forms of intelligibility.²³ In a country where historical narrative is a subject of conflict – the publication of a history schoolbook has been debated for decades – and at times when global politics evolve into seemingly unexplainable directions, art and research might provide something of a methodology for coping with contradiction, retrieving Rancière’s argument that ‘writing history and writing stories come under the same regime of truth’.²⁴ Ultimately, what matters is neither the initial subject – or how wars and crises affected Beirut’s residential buildings – nor the will to write a history of contemporary art in Lebanon or a history of Lebanon. What matters is how abandoned dwellings and the stories they generate could be an instrument to re-appropriate cities that are confronted by various forms of violence, ethnic segregation, authoritarian surveillance and control, and neoliberal policies.

A House, Opposite the Library

One day, in the reading room of the ‘Bibliothèque Orientale’, a librarian asked what my study was about:

- *Abandoned houses*, I answered.
- *I must show you something*, she said.

As we walked to a window, she pointed towards an elegant neoclassical façade crowned with Roman style sculpted garlands and lions. She asked if I knew about it.

- *Everybody knows*.

Owned by the H., a Syrian family who settled in Switzerland, the graceful construction was notorious because Pierre Gemayel (1905–84) inhabited its third floor. Nicknamed ‘Sheikh Pierre’, this pharmacist was the founder of the ‘Kataeb’, a right-wing Christian party, and father of Bachir and Amine Gemayel, who were successively elected at the Presidency of the Republic.²⁵ In 1975, a demarcation line divided the city within two belligerent sectors: ‘West Beirut’, controlled by Palestinian and leftist movements, and ‘East Beirut’, dominated by Christian parties, including the ‘Kataeb’. The H. building and the ‘Bibliothèque Orientale’ were on the eastern side, a few yards away from the front. The ‘Kataeb’ fortified the area, henceforth-designated ‘As-Sakhra’ (the rock), which was Pierre Gemayel’s nom de guerre. Despite its uncanny location, the H. building was not on a gunfire axis and persisted. As war went on, Gemayel terminated his rent agreement and moved to the clan’s estate in Bickfaya, in the heart of the ‘Christian stronghold’.

Nowadays, an external single passenger elevator, assembled for the politicians’ use, evokes his past presence. It is out of order, as the whole construction is in a state of dereliction, with the exception of one flat on the second floor, where tenants who live abroad come sporadically.

One reason for which the H. building haunted the librarian was the fact that, from time to time, she suddenly saw traces of human presence, such as lights on or carpets on the balcony.

- *There is a mystery.*
- *Indeed. But, it's neither Gemayel nor the people who turn the lights on. It's Victoria.*

Meet Victoria

In order to explain who Victoria is, I must first introduce Valerie, and more broadly, my photographic practice. When shooting inside abandoned dwellings, I asked people to 'inhabit' the deteriorated spaces. This was a repeated re-enactment from a sequence of Maroun Bagdadi's *Hamasat* (Whispers), a 1980 film documenting lives and thoughts of the Lebanese during the war. In the opening scenes, the camera follows poet Nadia Tueni wandering in the ruins of Beirut's centre, lamenting on its annihilation. Tueni appears as an epitome of elegance and dignity in the middle of disaster. Tueni died three years after the film was made and the movie was not released until the 2000s. As a consequence, her fragile presence in the filmed images and her recorded voice is something of a post-mortem apparition.

Disappearance, death and living remains are among the themes Rebecca Schneider explored in 'Performance Remains', where she argues that performance can be engaged as what remains, rather than what disappears.²⁶ Though it is inevitably promised to disappearance, the body can become 'an archive and host to a collective memory'.²⁷ Moreover, Schneider insists on the fact that 'performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive reappearance, challenging, via the performative trace, any neat antinomy between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence'.²⁸ This is particularly relevant with Tueni's appearance in *Hamasat* that haunted me for years. Though, when I decided to re-enact her action in abandoned houses, there was no question of reproduction or imitation. Each person behaved in accordance to her body, her sensibility, and her interaction with the space.

Another source of inspiration for these living presences came from Aby Warburg's reading of Renaissance painting. Warburg evokes *Ninfa*, the auratic heroin. The ephemeral movements of her hair and draperies are seen as displaced indications of the pathos of images.²⁹ In our case, pathos relates to catastrophes that happened and catastrophes to come. In the early 2000s, the Arab world was already the 'part of the planet where man has the least chances for self-fulfilment. And a fortiori, woman'.³⁰ A year or so after the beginning of the photo series, the region fell into a cataclysmic spiral that devastated countries and displaced millions of civilians. In the wake of these unfolding events, while inside spaces that were damaged during a previous conflict, and eventually served for military command, snipers, bunkers and torture, the human presence injected a dialectic between life, death and survival.

On November 28, 2010, writer and theatre director Valerie Cachard came for a photo session inside a modernist edifice designed in the 1950s by Polish architect Karol Schayer. A man was guarding the building. Neighbourhood rumours suggested he was 'Syrian intelligence'. We told him we were gathering evidence for the international probe of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri that took place in the vicinity. Our argument was not very credible, as Valerie was wearing a costume she fabricated for *Matriochka*, a performance she staged two weeks earlier about femininity and memory, but he let us in. In the aftermath,

Valerie expressed a wish to write an essay about the photographs. She organized interviews aiming to establish links between my personal history and abandoned houses. Afterwards, she accompanied me on the ground. Unexpectedly, Valerie's uncle inhabited the first building I randomly selected, before he immigrated to Brazil. She searched for belongings of his household, but found only traces of others, mainly police records. This visit paved the way to one year of informal archaeological missions. Many buildings were filled with objects, furniture, and papers. We established a protocol according to which we would retrieve official documents and personal artefacts (letters, photographs, diaries, artworks) that could provide evidence on the lives of the former inhabitants and eventual illegal occupants (squatters, warriors...). We recovered, cleaned and archived approximately 700 relics with the aim of either returning them to their heirs or transferring them to a public institution.



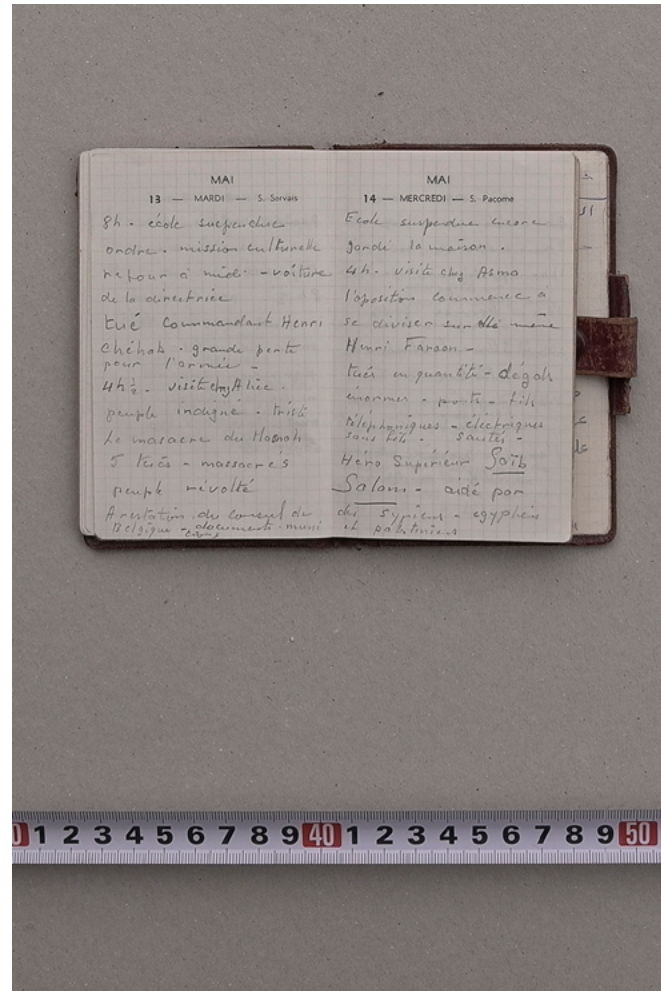
Gregory Buchakjian, *Valerie Cachard exploring Victoria K.'s former apartment*, 2011, digital photograph.

On September 7, 2011, at 8PM, we came to the H. building. On the first floor, we found a closed door pierced on the bottom by a hole. We crawled through the opening and entered a central hall apartment. It was dark and one could barely see anything except three-arched windows and filthy curtains. Valerie lit a flashlight and moved from one room to the other, illuminating the ground covered with papers, clothes and fashion accessories. She evolved very fast, as if she didn't want to miss anything. Her displacements made the flashlight irradiate abruptly. This optical phenomenon made me anxious. Visiting abandoned spaces is already illegal and thrilling; doing it after dawn was another thing. I was standing, incapable of doing anything but begging her to leave. While she ignored my requests and kept on examining the belongings, my anguish worsened. Ultimately, I managed to convince her to leave, but not without promising a forthcoming visit.

Two weeks later, we accomplished a proper inspection. From the archive Valerie collected surfaced the character of Victoria K. Victoria was born on January 6, 1910.³¹ She never married, and devoted her life to the 'Collège Protestant Français' as a teacher and supervisor. Very meticulous, she kept her notebooks and correspondence with children's parents, colleagues, administration, and two successive principals, Louise Wegmann and Françoise Bordreuil, who both hailed her dedication to her work. One of the most precious pieces we rescued is her certificate of the Academic Palms, granted by France's Minister of Education on January

28, 1957. As my mother Annie was a 'Collège Protestant' alumna, I asked her about Victoria and showed her some pictures. Annie immediately recognized her former tutor:

- *Such a straightforward and authoritarian figure!*



Victoria K.'s agenda for the year 1958, opened on May 13-14, rescued from Victoria K.'s former apartment.

Victoria's wars

Victoria witnessed the crisis that shook Beirut in the spring of 1958, and was somehow premonitory of the bigger one to come. Her agenda of that year shows her thoughts and political views.

Sunday, May 11

(...) Strange sensation:

Lebanese Phalangists ['Kataeb'] discover preparation for demonstration (coup d'état) of the Syrians-Egyptians.

Monday, May 12

8 AM – class and normal life in Beirut

8:30AM, worried parents withdraw their children.

Noon: empty classes

2:30PM. External personnel evacuated.

Tormented night. Fire.

Curfew

Tuesday, May 13

8AM – school suspended (...)

Killed, commandant Henri Chehab. Great loss for the army.

People outraged – sad

Massacre of the Masnah

5 killed – massacred

People revolted

Arrest of the Belgian consul – documents – ammunitions

Wednesday, May 14

School suspended still (...)

The opposition starts to divide itself

Numerous killed – enormous damage – bridges – telephone and electricity cable destroyed.

Superior hero: Saïb Salam, helped by the Syrians, Egyptians and Palestinians.³⁴

In 1975, Victoria spent some time in the mountains before returning home, after the deployment of the Arab Deterrent Force, created by the Arab League, in October 1976, to supervise the truce. In 1977, her friend Marie, the widow of a prominent Lebanese painter, wrote from her retirement in Alsace:

During the past two years, not a single day passed without thinking and praying for you. As I knew who inhabits your house [Gemayel], I was sure you had nothing to fear from guns and artillery, and that food and water would be supplied to you without fault.³⁵



Personal belongings rescued from Victoria K.'s former apartment.

Victoria's Disputed Death

Gathered papers corroborate the life of Victoria until the 1990s. Subsequently, there is a 770 USD invoice the Elie Saab funeral service company issued on December 12, 1997, 'for the inhumation of the late Victoria K.', who was less than a month from her 87th birthday. The bill comprised formalin injection, clothing, coffin, hearse, and fees for undertakers (all for 650 USD), and flowers (for 120 USD). The account was settled three days later. But, there is a complication to this seemingly conclusive trail of evidence pointing to her death. Medical prescriptions and bills processed with her name, dated years later, appear to directly contest this assumed proof:

- September 13, 2001: Prescription for Caltrate 600 (1 pill/day), and Maltofer (3 pills/day, after meals), Dr. Emile F., M.D.
- January 31, 2002: Radiology (Thorax, facial), Haddad Hospital.
- January 31, 2002: Blood test (Complete blood count, Erythrocyte sedimentation rate, Urea, Creatinine, Blood sugar, electrolytes, T3, T4, Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone), Haddad Hospital.

At this point, Valerie Cachard and myself were confronted by unearthed items of hypothetically indisputable authenticity that provided contradictory knowledge. In order to find an explanation, we constructed plausible scenarios based on the established facts or suppositions.

Explanation 1: 'There must be a writing / typing error'.

Everyone can make a mistake, except that it is incongruous to write or type 1997 in 2001 (or 2002), and vice versa.

Explanation 2: 'There must be more than one Victoria K'.

Victoria didn't have children, nor did her brother Antoine who passed away in 1977. Yet, Antoine's wife was named Victorine. According to Marie O.'s above-mentioned letter, the two sisters in law were like 'real sisters'.³⁶ But while their names were alike, they were not identical and it is highly improbable that a mix-up would have occurred. No family would accept the name of a deceased person being replaced by a living member, and no patient would tolerate being assimilated with the dead.

Explanation 3: 'Someone stole Victoria's identity after her death'.

Who, why and how? An illegal immigrant? Someone who wanted to benefit from her medical insurance? How did this person manage to cheat the authorities and the insurance companies?

Theoretically, each of the hypotheses to explain the contradiction in Victoria's death might have happened. In reality, all are very unlikely, such that the contradiction seems irresolvable. Archives and histories are riddled with contradictions caused by disputable evidence and competing interpretations. The case of Victoria's death is in this way exemplary rather than anomalous. Foucault identified two levels of contradictions: 'that of appearances, which is resolved in the profound unity of discourse; and that of foundations, which gives rise to discourse itself'.³⁷ The contents of the funerary bill and the medical prescriptions are not discourses that could have been contradictory in the epistemological or theoretical sense, but are pieces of evidence whose outcomes contradict in such a way that they contest the validity of the overall research – as one or both must be false, the research lacks coherence.

What if our investigation was a criminal probe? Would the court adopt *Nolle prosequi*? Or, would they pick up one of the three stories; elevating it into reality, and dismissing the others two as less likely hypotheses and probable fictions? These explanations appearing accurate but not plausible, the situation positioned itself as the precise reverse of parafiction, as ‘parafictioneers produce and manage plausibility’, as the opposite of accuracy.³⁸ Instead of rooting Victoria’s story in reality, archeology was transmuting it into fiction.

Post-Mortem: Self-Proclaimed Guardians of Beirut’s Abandoned Houses (and Their Dead Dwellers)

The conclusions of our investigation were very annoying at first hand. Contradictions contested the archive as a reference of validity and the story itself wasn’t even relevant to be told as a fable, being deprived of a consistent and satisfying ending. However, in the long run, Victoria’s death is a symptom produced by the city, among innumerable others. Whatever the qualities of each of these symptoms or fragments, the validity of the whole research relies on the gathering into a rhizome of these symptoms that, as Jacques Le Goff has advocated, must arise from a multiplicity of provenances:

But just as the twentieth century has criticized the notion of historical fact... today it criticizes the notion of document. The document is not innocent, raw material...the document is what remains. At the same time, the range of documents has been broadened. Traditional history reduced it to texts and to the discoveries of an archeology too often separated from history. Today documents include spoken word, the image, and gestures.³⁹

Most artists, writers and academics concerned by the histories of Beirut and its inhabitants were simultaneously researchers, observers and also objects of their own research, being themselves residents of the city. This kind of reciprocity is noticeable in Lamia Joreige’s *Objects of War* (2000), an installation comprising videos in which interviewees were asked by the artist to talk about an object that had some significance for them during the war.⁴⁰

Each person chooses an object, ordinary or unusual, which serves as a starting point for his / her story. These testimonials while helping to create a collective memory, also show the impossibility of telling a single History of this war. Only fragments of this History are recounted here, held as truth by those expressing them. In *Objects of War*, the aim is not to reveal a truth but rather to gather and confront many diverse versions and discourses on the subject.⁴¹

In addition to the filmed interviews, *Objects of War* discloses the objects. The repetition between the original artifacts and the filmed testimonies describing them gives the piece, according to Jalal Toufic, the value of a war memorial, and serves to strengthen its authority.⁴² As Susan Little writes,

treating recorded verbatim testimony as a ‘guarantee of reality’, which may be inserted into a production to frame it with documentary authority, appears tantamount to retroactively securing value in ontology. This configures testimony as proof of experience that was once present, rather than as something that can still transmit remains.⁴³

While most people interviewed in *Objects of War* are acquaintances of the artist, in *Here and perhaps elsewhere*, Joreige travels through Beirut, asking people in the street, one question: 'Do you know anyone who was kidnapped here during the war?'⁴⁴ Taking as a departure point the above-mentioned disappearance of her uncle (Lamia and Khalil Joreige are siblings), she tries to recover a hidden reality through encounters. During the progression of the enquiry around abandoned houses, I integrated representations of positions belonging to various social sectors: media, scholars, artists (including filmmakers, writers) and neighborhood (dwellers, passers-by, beggars, janitors, refugees, partisans). In this last category, encounters were not scheduled, but sudden and unpredictable, thus affecting their trajectories. While walking in the street or taking photographs, someone would come and suggest going in a specific direction, 'where more spectacular ruins are visible', or eventually order 'not to take pictures of that buildings'. These interferences correspond to Guy Debord's 'possible rendezvous': 'the element of exploration is minimal in comparison with that of behavioral disorientation'.⁴⁵ Instead of clarifying the narration, they break its linearity into a multiplicity of possible paths.⁴⁶ A part of their multiplicity, these encounters, while rooted in the city's reality, produce stories that seem unreal. This happens with Lamia Joreige, as the answers to her questions were 'stories that were both visceral and vague, and off the point. They slip between fact and fiction, between what seems to be a straightforward recollection of past events and what is clearly an interpretation of memories performed at the present'.⁴⁷ In the case of Victoria, throughout the efforts to stitch together her story, emerged three 'possible rendezvous' with men claiming to be guardians of deserted edifices and protectors for their (dead) (former) inhabitants.



Gregory Buchakjian, *Abandoned mansion in Zokak el-Blat, Beirut, central hall with a mural depicting 'Hajj' Zouheir Shehadeh*, 2013, digital photograph.

Guardian 1: The 'Sheikh' and the 'Hajj'

Victoria used to spend summer vacations in Bickfaya (the same town as Gemayel), leasing the property of a certain Mr Kl. Mr Kl. was the grandfather of Karen Kl., another person who played a role in my project. In November 2009, a friend, Philippe, told me about the house of his grandparents that was looted and heavily damaged during the strife. Philippe wanted me to see the property before its expected demolition. The space was compelling for its lost grandeur, and unsupportable, with the scent of dirt, accumulations of shoes and the skeleton of an unidentified animal. Wondering what could be done in this wreck, I ran into Karen Kl. Karen was an illustrator who moved to Barcelona. For a period of time, she lived there without a residency permit, and squatted in informal dwellings. Her story made her the perfect candidate to be the first person to inhabit my pictures. The house was located around Zokak el-Blat, on the western edge of Beirut city centre, in the opposite side of the front line during the war. After the session with Karen, that had more to do with performance than photography, I searched for other locations in the same vicinity. My walks led me to a nineteenth century mansion crumbling under a Ficus tree. An old man, resting in an armchair, prevented me

from entering. Very politely, he announced himself as the sentinel of the area, outlining his religion (Shia Muslim), his origin (South Lebanon), and his profession (pharmacist).

- *I was the assistant of the ‘Sheikh’!*
- *Which ‘Sheikh’?*
- *‘Sheikh Pierre’ [Gemayel]!*

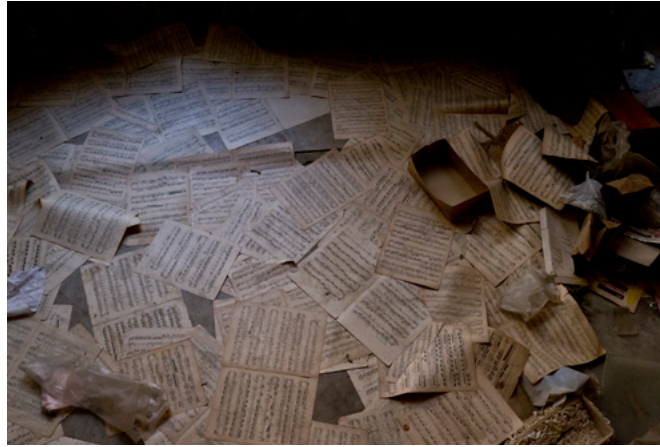
Three years later, I came back and managed to step inside. The once sumptuous central hall with a stucco ceiling had been transformed into a sanctuary devoted to ‘Hajj’ Zouheir Shehadeh, commander in the ‘Islamic Resistance’, a paramilitary group fighting the Israelis in South Lebanon. On a wall, over a fresco imitating marble, militants painted a mural depicting Shehadeh as a martyr (he was killed on February 21, 1986, while undertaking an operation), a landscape depicting a prisoner’s camp with an observation tower, a warplane (reminiscent from WWI), flames and a red sun. At the end of the day, the same man was a self-proclaimed custodian for both the (Christian) ‘Sheikh’ and the (Muslim) ‘Hajj’.



Gregory Buchakjian, *Man trying to smash a door*, 2013, digital photograph.

Guardian 2: The Bodyguard

In March 2013, Valerie Cachard bumped into a man in his sixties. Claiming that he ‘grew up with “Sheikh Bashir” and was a bodyguard of “Sheikh Pierre”’, he promised to introduce us inside Gemayel’s former apartment, which had remained inaccessible. Though, instead of going towards the upper floor, which Gemayel inhabited, he intruded through a window, inside the kitchen of Victoria’s home. A locked door separated the kitchen from the rest of the habitation (which meant that someone who had the keys came and closed doors). The former bodyguard unleashed all his strength against the door, trying to destroy it by any means. The situation was incongruous: what was behind was reachable from the main entrance. Our bodyguard didn’t know where the entrance of this apartment was. He also ignored the floor Gemayel had inhabited. Or, perhaps, knowing that there was no access, he tried to fool us. In any case, his violent attempt to crush the door was unbearable for Valerie, who felt he was killing Victoria for the second (or first? Or third?) time. She begged him to stop.



Gregory Buchakjian, *Dismantled musical scores in the central hall of Victoria K.'s former apartment*, 2012, digital photograph.

Guardian 3: The Sleeper

The third and last encounter with a self-proclaimed guardian took place on Sunday October 4, 2015, at noon, inside Victoria's place. I went there with Maya Akiki, whose mother was another former pupil of Victoria. When we arrived, the door was open and the central hall empty. Previously, in 2012, an astonishing spectacle had occurred: hundreds of dismantled musical scores covered the ground. An unidentified person took the time, for unclear reasons, to unstitch pages from Victoria's repertoire, disseminating Chopin's *Nocturnes* and Beethoven's sonatas. While this anonymous and ephemeral installation had vanished, another surprise greeted us: a young man was sleeping; lying on a mattress placed in the middle of a bedroom, with, next to him, a pair of shoes, a bottle of mineral water, and other belongings. Our presence woke him up. He said hello and explained he was here to look after the place:

- *This is the residence of 'Sheikh Pierre'!*

He ignored that Gemayel had been the tenant, not the landlord of the residency. As for the bodyguard, he also ignored the fact that Gemayel didn't inhabit this apartment. The lack of knowledge shared by the two partisans is representative of the approximate way people engage and read the city. When giving an address, most people don't mention street names and numbers but provide a path based on informal landmarks that can be public or religious monuments, banks, supermarkets, or even 'the old dog sleeping on the sidewalk'. In the case of Gemayel's residence, imprecision may be due to the absence of physical indication, like doctor's signs. Though signs can be misleading. For instance, the door adjacent to my studio in a mixed-use building bears a sign for Dr Mounzer S., endocrinologist. I have never seen Dr S. in person, sometimes his secretary. Dr S.'s door is closed most of the time, so that for nine years, his patients have been ringing to my door searching for him. When Walid Raad came to visit, he recognized the sign of Dr S.: It appears in *Livre d'or, Notebook volume 57*. Allegedly attributed to a certain Dr Fakhuri who, between 1976 and 1978 'exposed a frame of film every time he came across the sign for a doctor's or dentist's office';⁴⁸ *Livre d'or* is a component of Raad's *Atlas Group*. Consequently, I couldn't conclude if my neighbour's clinic really existed.

Back to the young man sleeping in Victoria's house: what was even more surprising than his spatial confusion, was his relation to time. He seemed unaware that the 'Sheikh', about whom he was speaking as if he would come back after five minutes, died thirty years ago, which was much before his own birth. The young man also précised he was defending the edifice from burglars, thugs, drug dealers and people coming to do 'unclean things'. As he pursued his exposé, I shot Maya moving between the curtain and the three-arched window. He indicated that he gathered the books that were in acceptable condition and brought them to a religious charity. Then, he described how he intended to repair the whole structure whilst he didn't know who the proprietors were. Before we left, he said we were lucky that we had managed to enter: before going to sleep, he had forgot to padlock the door. I warned him it might be dangerous to sleep in an accessible deserted site. He answered:

- *Don't worry; the house protects me!*

- 1 *Juillet, mois de la photographie au Liban* (Beirut: 1998), 168.
- 2 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 'Latency,' in *Home Works. A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region. Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, April 2-7 2002* (Beirut: Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts Ashkal Alwan, 2003), 40-49.
- 3 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 'Tayyib Rah Farjik Shighli (Fine, I Will Will Show You My Work),' *Al Adab* 49:1-2 (2001): 36.
- 4 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 'Lasting Images,' in *Home Works II. A Forum on Cultural Practices, October 31-November 6, 2003*, ed. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie et al. (Beirut: Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts Ashkal Alwan, 2005), 142-43.
- 5 Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse,' *October* 110 (2004): 3-22, accessed 12 December, 2015, at <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic837293.files/FosterArchivalImpulse.pdf>.
- 6 T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013), 182.
- 7 Arab Image Foundation, Mission Statement, accessed 23 June, 2017, at <http://www.fai.org.lb/Template.aspx?id=1>.
- 8 'Building City and Nation: Space, History, Memory and Identity,' organized by Samir Khalaf, American University of Beirut and Order of Architects and Engineers of Lebanon, 1-3 July, 1999.
- 9 Walid Raad, 'The Atlas Group Archives,' accessed 27 February, 2017, at <http://theatlasgroup.org>.
- 10 Also known as Sidon, city in South Lebanon, from which both Madani and Zaatari are native.
- 11 Akram Zaatari, 'Photographic Documents/Excavation as Art,' in *The Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 181-84.
- 12 Ibidem.
- 13 Sarah Rogers, 'Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut,' *Art Journal* 66:2 (2007): 9-20, accessed 22 June, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2007.10791250>.
- 14 'Interview: Walid Ra'ad by Alan Gilbert,' *Bomb Magazine* 81 (2002), accessed 28 June, 2017, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2504/>.
- 15 Foster, 'Archival Impulse.'
- 16 Walid Raad, 'Files Type A,' *The Atlas Group Archive*, 2002, accessed 4 July, 2017, at <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeA.html>.
- 17 Carrie Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,' *October* 129 (2009): 51-84, doi:10.1162/octo.2009.129.1.51.
- 18 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 127.
- 19 Walid Sadek, 'Collecting the Uncanny and the Labor of Missing,' in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 211-24.
- 20 Walid Raad, email to the author, April 7, 2017.
- 21 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7-8.
- 22 Gregory Buchakjian, 'Abandoned Dwellings in Beirut: Wars and Transformations of the Urban Space, 1860-2015' (Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016).
- 23 Catherine David, comments during the PhD defense of Gregory Buchakjian, Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 16 June 2016.
- 24 Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible : esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000), 61.
- 25 Bachir Gemayel was elected on 23 August 1982, during the siege of Beirut by the Israeli army. He was assassinated on 14 September 1982, and was succeeded by his brother Amine, who remained in office till the end of his mandate, 22 September 1988.
- 26 Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains,' *Performance Research* 6:2 (2001): 100-108, doi:10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792.
- 27 Ibidem.
- 28 Ibidem.
- 29 Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Aby Warburg et l'archive des intensités,' in 'La ressemblance du visible/Mémoire de l'art,' special issue, *Études Photographiques* 10 (2001): 144-68, accessed 17 February, 2017, at <http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/268>.

- 30 Samir Kassir, *Considérations sur le malheur arabe* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2004), 9.
- 31 'Collège Protestant Français de Jeunes Filles', *Inspection Bulletin*, May 19, 1965. Document collected by Valerie Cachard from Victoria K.'s former apartment.
- 32 I also studied at the 'Collège Protestant', after Victoria's retirement, but during the mandate of Mrs Bordreuil. I immediately recognized her signature that used to be on each of our monthly grade bulletins.
- 33 The 1958 Lebanon crisis was a social, confessional and political conflict and a proxy war opposing Muslim and Leftist rebellion supported by the United Arab Republic and pro-western government of President Camille Chamoun. This latter requested a U.S. military intervention to topple the opposition.
- 34 Victoria K., 'Agenda 1958,' 1958. Document collected by Valerie Cachard from Victoria K.'s former apartment. Translated from French by the author.
- 35 Marie O., 'Letter to Victoria K.,' November 15, 1977. Document collected by Valerie Cachard from Victoria K.'s former apartment. Translated from French by the author.
- 36 Ibidem.
- 37 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 151.
- 38 Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe,' 72.
- 39 Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.
- 40 Lamia Joreige, *Objects of War No.1*, 2000, Tate, accessed 31 March, 2017, at <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/joreige-objects-of-war-no-1-t13247>.
- 41 Lamia Joreige, 'Objects of War', accessed 30 June, 2017, at <http://www.lamiajoreige.com/installationsDetails.php?OBJECTS-OF-WAR-9>.
- 42 Ghada Sayegh, 'Images d'après: L'espace-Temps de la Guerre dans le Cinéma au Liban, du «Nouveau Cinéma Libanais» (1975) aux Pratiques Artistiques Contemporaines (de 1990 à nos jours)' (PhD Dissertation, Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense, 2013), 238–41.
- 43 Susan Little, 'Repeating Repetition,' *Performance Research* 20:5 (2015): 44–50, doi:10.1080/13528165.2015.1095923.
- 44 Lamia Joreige, 'Here and Perhaps Elsewhere,' accessed 2 July, 2017, at <http://www.lamiajoreige.com/filmsDetails.php?HOUNA-WA-ROUBBAMA-HOUNAK-13>.
- 45 Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive,' *Les Lèvres Nues* 9 (1956), trans. Ken Knabb, accessed 9 March, 2017, at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>.
- 46 Ibidem.
- 47 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, 'Contemporary Art Practices in Post-War Lebanon: An Introduction,' in *Out of Beirut* (Oxford: JRP|Ringier/Modern Art Oxford, 2007), 81–89.
- 48 Raad, 'Files Type A.'

Gregory Buchakjian (b. 1971) is an art historian and photographer, assistant professor at Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA). His research evolves around Beirut and its recent history. He is a PhD graduate at Université Paris IV Sorbonne for a dissertation entitled: 'Abandoned Dwellings in Beirut. Wars and Transformation of the Urban Space. 1860-2015'.

Truth to Visions

Cath Keay

To cite this contribution:

Keay, Cath. 'Truth to Visions.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 47, 79, 127, 167, 195, 206, <http://www.oarplatform.com/truth-visions/>.

Introduction – Seed Crystal

In 1919, the Expressionist *Gläserne Kette* (glass or crystal chain) of architects and artists exchanged visions for advanced utopian societies living harmoniously in crystalline cities. They were led by the prolific architect activist Bruno Taut, who was convinced of the redemptive effects of architecture upon society. His iridescent *Glashaus* (1914) at the 'Werkbund' exhibition in Cologne was a celebrated synthesis of a vision shared with poet Paul Scheerbart, whose novel *Glasarchitektur* was published the same year. Each dedicated their work to the other.¹

World War I convinced Taut of the necessity of an ideal for the future that was led by the arts, with architecture as the leading plastic art, capable of elevating mankind from further war, revolution, and chaos. Taut's *Alpine Architektur* (1919) portfolio presented luminous drawings of coruscant cathedrals and bridges of glistening glass to provoke a collective vision so awe-inspiring that people would no longer fight. Following critical acclaim for his 'Exhibition for Unknown Architects',² Taut asked fourteen like-minded exhibitors to exchange letters and designs for a better society. His first letter to the group proclaims: 'Let us consciously be 'imaginary architects!' We believe that only a total revolution can guide us in our task'.³

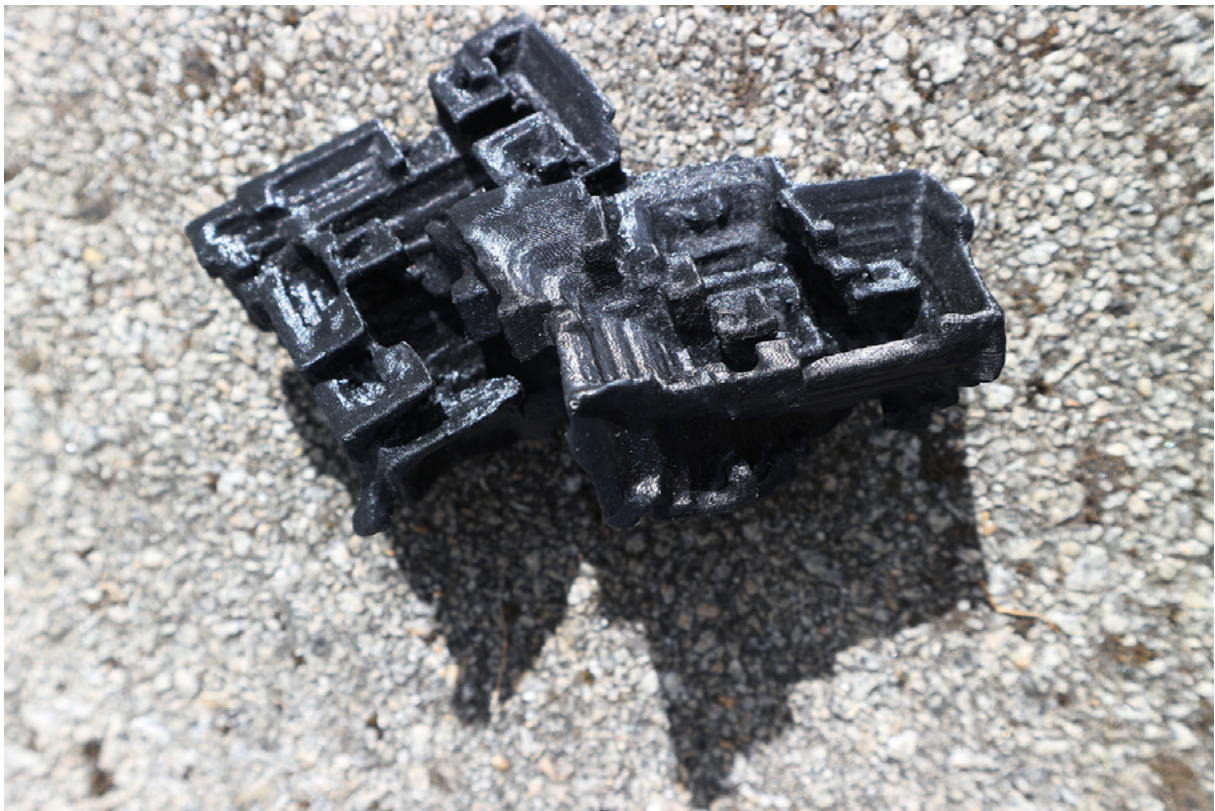
Crystalline Growth

Throughout the sixty or so letters between the *Gläserne Kette* correspondents are myriad references to spontaneous growth and their aspiration to autogenetic materials. Taut asks: 'Are you looking for the absolute, the building that grows organically?'.⁴

Between them, opinions diverged between those who urged for spontaneous intuitive design, and those inspired by natural growth patterns and the orderly logic of lattices.

Was their architecture buildable? In 1919, the materials and technology for Hermann Finsterlin's biomorphic edifices or Wenzel Hablik's angular accretions were unattainable. Yet, today's spiritual descendants of these 'crystalist' architects create biomimetic explorations in synthetic biology to enable biominerals resembling limestone to be farmed from calcifying bacteria.⁵ Could such base morphologies be elevated to Bataille's definition of architecture as *society's ideal nature*?⁶

I have on my table a 3D printout of a bismuth crystal. Its irregular organic form is countered by its plasticky stratified sheen. Removed from the laboratory it becomes an alien object, a meteor from the near future collaged against shabby surroundings. Yet what if it were found in a flea market in 2119, its laminated layers matted with grime or crazed by sunlight? How can we reveal the truth of materials which are so new?



Cath Keay, *bismuth print*, 2016, 10 x 6 cm, 3D print.

Crystal Core of the Avalanche

These architects sought to transcend the chaos and privations of Germany's defeated, post-revolutionary flux.

The *Gläserne Kette* were named for their reverence for crystalline materials and forms. Their drawings are infused with sparkling, faceted constructions straddling mountains or bursting from the earth; while their writings propound transcendent visions: 'Light bestrides the universe and comes to life in the crystal'.⁷

Crystals encompassed clarity and transparency; natural order and sublime beauty. The Luckhardt brothers' architectural drawings resemble cut gemstones or quartz starbursts, while Wenzel Hablik explored the cubic forms of rocksalt and bismuth's stepped ziggurats. In one letter, Wassily Luckhardt contemplates a crystal in his studio:

In front of me lies a crystal geode that has broken away from the earth's crust...Doesn't one already have the impression here of architectonic creation – don't these structures seem to demand the creating hand of man to shape a meaningful entity out of the chaos of these elemental forms?⁸

While crystals symbolised the ideal, glass offered a tangible solution enabling architects to render sublime crystalline forms as glassy cubic structures associated with the Modernist movement that followed.

'Form is initially an anchoring element, and then becomes the all-embracing crystal, the 'world-building'.⁹



Cath Keay, *bismuth detail*, 2016, 10 x 6 cm, detail of 3D print.

Forms and Transgressions Regarding 'Music Visualization'

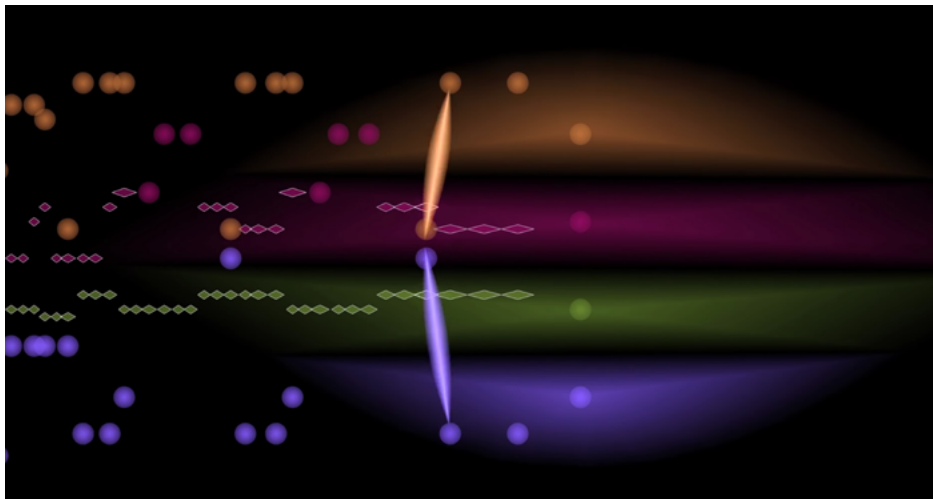
Max Bowens

To cite this contribution:

Bowens, Max. 'Forms and Transgressions Regarding "Music Visualization".' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 50–57, <http://www.oarplatform.com/forms-transgressions-regarding-music-visualization/>.

I.

In 1993, Patti Lather sent out a call for an expanded definition of what constitutes 'research'. In 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism', she outlines her 'post-epistemic' intention as one which seeks to upend discourses of validity, particularly those in relation to spaces of research and 'masks of methodology',¹ in favor of a new method which 'recognizes... the "temporary contract" of any consensus. Its goal is something not entirely subordinated to a system's goals, yet not so abruptly destabilizing of a system that it is ignored or repressed'.² Among the areas to be included in Lather's expanded notion of research are the arts: an area in which her dictum of 'research as praxis' has evident meaning.³ Here, I will explore the possibilities raised by the phenomenon of, and ambiguities within, the art and research praxis of music visualization (Fig. 1).



1. Still from Stephen Malinowski, *Große Fuge in B-flat Major*, opus 133 by Ludwig van Beethoven, 2017, MIDI computer animation. View online <http://www.oarplatform.com/forms-transgressions-regarding-music-visualization/>.

As a form of academic and intellectual research that is also deeply artistic, music visualization interrogates the boundaries that generally justify academic research, troubling many of the defining features we accept as necessary for valid research, even as fulfilling them in other ways. The reason music visualization's criteria for validity are highly ambiguous is its questionably dual-presence in the domains of both musical, and visual composition. But

while it seems ideal for its content to advance the epistemologies of both mediums, whether it is able to accomplish this goal is, at the present, unclear. One analogous field of research can be found in data visualization, the concepts and practices of which might help to specify the aims of music visualization. Edward Tufte begins his 1990 monograph, *Envisioning Information*, by examining the ways in which increasing ‘the number of dimensions that can be represented on plane surfaces and...data density’ can liberate data from the two-dimensional page, an intrinsically insufficient mode to express what he calls our ‘daily...perceptual world of three spatial dimensions’.⁴ In relation to data visualization, music visualization’s two-dimensional page, or ‘flatland’, can be viewed similarly: the written score. Certain music visualization practitioners view the score as being inadequate for expressing a variety of musical forms, including those outside of the Western canon, and others which rely heavily on improvisation. Music visualization is also, however, a practice with a complex status as art that is the current endpoint of a long and complex history of artistic investigation: one that showcases precisely how amorphous the object of analysis can be when considering two mediums in simultaneity. Where music visualization resonates outside of projects such as data visualization is in this duality: Tufte’s elucidation of these often abstract forms of representing data is pedagogical, beginning from data and concluding with animation, whereas music visualization, in addition to acting as a form of musical pedagogy, is also itself an art practice. The ambiguity in the project of music visualization lends itself to a revised concept of what such a mode of inquiry might look like, and how the notion of validity might be expanded to include such a manifold area of thought and work. An area which, akin to Lather’s own aims, reexamines research itself, making inquiry into whether its goals are aesthetic or practical.

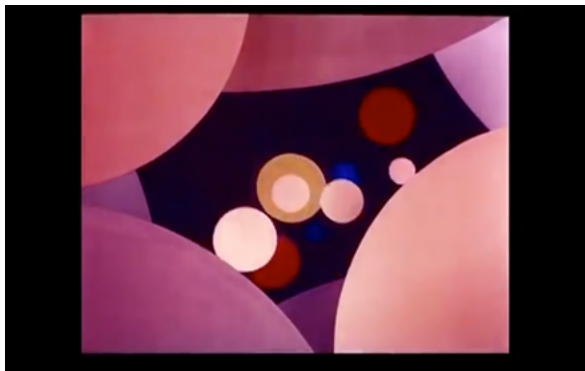
The question arises whether it is even possible to talk about music without mention of the visual. Since the inception of written music – visual directions for sonic production – the two have always existed in an ongoing and mutually imbricated mode of encounter.⁵ This intersection indicates how certain art forms are, indeed, not closed, and do not offer themselves as prescriptions of methodology so much as, via Lather and Giles Deleuze, “‘curves of visibility and enunciation’”.⁶ These are, in Lather’s words, ‘provisional space[s]’ for new forms of science to occur, in avoidance of such neat, closed, medium-specific distinctions.⁷ The question of import is not whether the two have a relationship to each other, but rather what the most productive avenue is for the mutual negotiation of the two to take. Music visualizations are only the most recent example of this enquiry, coming after nearly a century of audiovisual experimentation in the hybrid medium of visual music.

II.

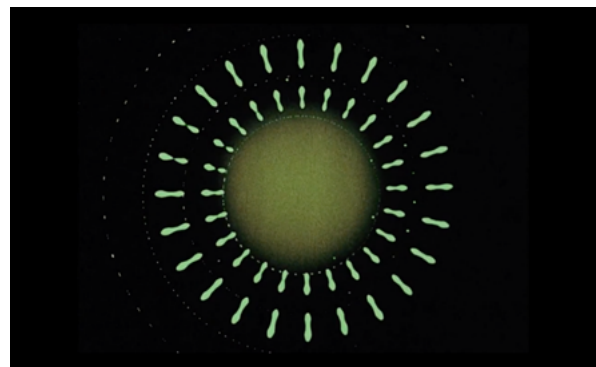
Pairing sounds with moving images has been a polarizing practice since the commercial inception of the talkie in the late 1920s, resisted by principal Soviet filmmakers – Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov – as being antithetical to the ‘perfection of the cinematographic art’.⁸ For Eisenstein and his colleagues, the only artistically viable route for the synchronized sound-film to take was in a contrapuntal use of the two mediums, utilizing sound for its ‘*pronounced non-coincidence with the visual images*’.⁹ Stan Brakhage held a similar ideal half a century later, which he expressed in a letter to Ronna Page in 1978 as a deep dissatisfaction with sound becoming ‘mere referendum to image in movies’, becoming a supplement rather than a companion art to be interrogated.¹⁰ In making the majority of his films silent, Brakhage took up a seemingly paradoxical challenge: to create ‘visual music’.¹¹

Precisely what this particular cross-medium is has been defined, and redefined, by artists and theorists alike since its conception in the early twentieth century. Brian Evans, a prominent theorist in the field of visual music, published his 'Foundations of a Visual Music' in 2005, defining this medium as 'time-based visual imagery that establishes a temporal architecture in a way similar to absolute music. It is typically non-narrative and non-representational (although it need not be either)'.¹² In referring to visual music's 'similarity' to absolute music, Evans is citing Igor Stravinsky's definition of absolute music, being a music which 'means nothing outside itself', in other words Evans envisions visual music as being non-representational, at least in its impetus.¹³ In Evans' article, he draws upon the works of an eclectic group of early- to mid-twentieth century artists, including Oskar Fischinger (Fig. 2), Jordan Belson (Fig. 3), and Stan Brakhage (Fig. 4).¹⁴

Belson and Fischinger's works exemplify a similar ethic, being a visual music which uses both mediums to complement each other – its visual component amplifying its aural information, and vice versa. This contrasts with Brakhage, who uses the visual not as a means of supplementation but rather to create a visual language that operates autonomously, as is the case in music. In other words, Brakhage was a composer of images rather than sounds.



2. Still from Oskar Fischinger, *An Optical Poem*, 1938, 35mm film.

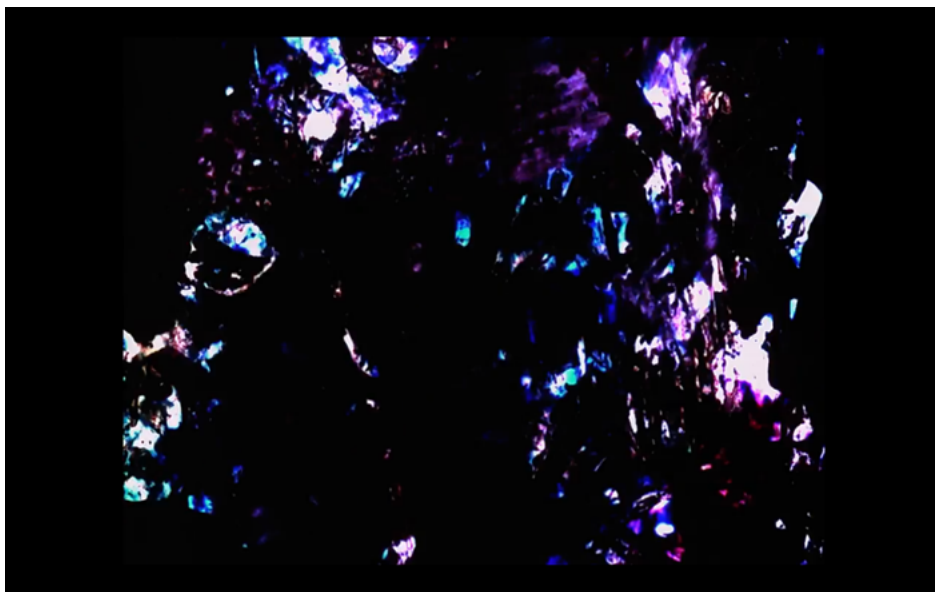


3. Still from Jordan Belson, *World* (excerpt), 1970, 16mm film.

The visual music theorist William Moritz has set out a historical trajectory for visual music, claiming that the medium's evolution 'parallels that of cinema itself' in its lateral development alongside the burgeoning studio system in Los Angeles through the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵ Moritz attributes this correlation to two phenomena: an increased availability of the necessary 'industry supplies' for the creation of visual music made possible via large studios such as Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and the influx of European immigration into the United States during World War II, particularly those of German descent who bore a certain relation to a visual and musical aesthetic (Fischinger being his primary exemplar).¹⁶ Visual music has also been said to belong to a varied tradition of artists who have sought to bridge the fabrics of the optical and the aural. Moritz traces a fairly abstract lineage for the medium, calling upon the abstract musical experimentations of Louis Bertrand Castel's *Ocular Harpsichord* in 1730,

and later instruments which produced colored light, e.g. Zoetropes, Phenakisticopes and Praxinoscopes, as well as the painterly in Paul Klee's re-imaginings of Johann Sebastian Bach's music. And, certain musicians who approached this question from the other side, such as in Alexander Scriabin's 'synaesthetic symphony', *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire*, wherein he indicated for 'precise colors in the score' to be projected across the performance hall with a Color Organ.¹⁷ What these seemingly disparate examples have in common is a shared intention in using one medium to experiment with the other. Visual music, specifically, enacts a form of research into the aesthetic question, now via technological means.

Whether the medium, as an artistic enterprise, stems primarily from the visual or the musical seems unclear. For artists such as Brakhage, the output is often purely visual, but his intention is musical in nature, as shown in *Black Ice* (Fig. 4), an example of Brakhage's attempt to 'compose' images without the aid of sound. Whereas for Fischinger, the visual and the musical



4. Still from Stan Brakhage, *Black Ice*, 1994, oil paint on 16mm film.

are both being used to create something which combines the two into what is an ambiguous result. In Fischinger's *Optical Poem* (Fig. 2), visual and musical qualities are completely intertwined – when the music changes in character, or reaches a distinct point of consonance or dissonance, the visual follows (e.g. 3:47–3:54). This also means that Fischinger's visual material is largely determined by the artist in advance, and always in accordance to the musical text on which the film is based. Brakhage's intentions seem to be such a radical departure from the earlier form that for them to be viewed as products of the same practice seems reductive. If Brakhage's silent films are to be considered alongside the works of such overtly aural filmmakers as Fischinger, and Jordan Belson, all under the aegis of visual music, the medium's criteria for validity seem ambiguous, if not tenuous.

What separates music visualization and visual music is elusive. They do not appear to be identical, nor entirely separate, or in a coherent artistic dialogue with each other. Music

visualization stands in an indefinite, highly dynamic, critical situation. As a form of research that attempts to answer the questions posed by this history through a new means, its contents can be seen by some as art (e.g. Brian Evans), some as novelty, and others as pedagogy. I propose that we think of three distinct constituent types. The first is as an analogous form of visual music. These are pieces which are designed to visually represent sound/music in a classically cinematic mode. They seek to make music visual. The second is in more prevalent, commercial, automated forms of music visualization such as in the iTunes visualizer, and software such as Adobe After Effects, both of which have the capacity to create, algorithmically, abstract visuals in adherence to the wav-forms of a particular sound. The third occurs in the musical domain, being those forms which seek to visually transcend the limitations of Western notation.

The first type of music visualization, here referred to as visual music, is examined from the perspective of visual art by Brian Evans. It is in this territory that Brian Evans seeks to create a 'groundwork for a practical theory of visual music composition'.¹⁸ In an attempt to codify visual music's parts, Evans' 'Foundations of a Visual Music' begins by adopting two foundational musical traits in assignment to image-making: consonance and dissonance. Evans' notion of 'visual consonance', also referred to as 'visual rightness', is formulated through a primarily compositional approach, along with constituent bases in color theory, and montage.¹⁹ To Evans, apt composition is a binary metric:

If rightness is codified and understood, wrongness is easily defined by not being right. The might call this wrongness visual dissonance, that is, visually active moments of tension in a temporal design. Progressing from visually wrong to visually right moves us from dissonance to consonance or tension to release, just as in music.²⁰

To substantiate his criteria, Evans explores the qualities of certain artworks according to dimensions such as proportion, symmetry, and ratio, specifically the phi/golden ratio. Color and camera movement are also posited as methods of either creating and/or resolving tension. And, while Evans concedes that none of these are 'panacea' for visual rightness, he insists that they are still 'undoubtedly useful and often used'.²¹ In this, I find echoes of Lather's call for standards of validity that stem from assessments that are unable to be measured through foundational methods – standards of validity that stem from a desire for what is 'at play in our practices of constructing a science "after truth"'.²² Evans alternates between filmic and musical vocabularies with fluidity, using terms such as 'phrasing' and 'cadence' in address to filmic phenomena, and consequently his criteria become open-ended, though perhaps overly dependent upon a shared, assumed comprehension of 'tension and resolution'.²³ This dichotomy underpins each of his criteria – 'tension/release' – to varying degrees of specificity.²⁴ It would seem that, according to Evans, a work's validity depends more on how well it can be judged from a musical perspective, or at minimum one that is based more in a musical vocabulary than one which is distinctly visual.

The divisive lines between the latter two categories of music visualization appear at a different point in the process of production, being: intention. While commercial endeavors attempt to amuse, to entice a vague interest in the connection between music and imaging from a casual observer, other more far-reaching projects begin to interrogate the nature of that connection. The ultimate goal of these endeavors is the creation of an alternative to the

traditional Western style of musical notation. One of the most substantive endeavors in the realm of this type of music visualization began in 2011 through the combined efforts of Ingrid Monson and Alexander Rehding, and one of the medium's most prolific pioneers, Stephen Malinowski.

III.

Malinowski is a formative figure in the domain of musical visualization. Malinowski's animation of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (Fig. 1) is one of over 600 videos that Malinowski produced for public use, all of which follow a similar audiovisual template. Malinowski's work received what is, thus far, its most significant commercial following by being shown during Björk's live performances since the two started collaborating on her Biophilia music-application in 2011.²⁵ However, his current formal practice is a product of decades of experimentation. His first attempts, not surprisingly, resemble those of Klee and Fischinger, the latter directly cited by Malinowski as an inspiration for his efforts.²⁶ Malinowski's work facilitates an optical experience in adherence to the aural, linking visual (often geometric) data to individual notes and larger musical patterns in real-time, thus creating a language which is able to communicate visually and sonically simultaneously.

Monson and Rehding saw Malinowski's work in music and animation as a means of surpassing the capacities of Western musical notation. The trio set out to explore 'the sensory experience of listening, [viewing] it as a kind of knowledge that's not necessarily text-based'.²⁷ The traditional Western system, to Monson and Rehding, seems not only to be biased towards expressing Western music alone, but also antithetical to the oral traditions of musical communication, and other musical phenomena that are more difficult, if not impossible, to codify into the Western system (e.g. improvisation, other musical styles and techniques composed in performance). His work with Monson and Rehding developed into a more substantive venture – similar in intention – helmed by Malinowski, Etienne Abelin, and Lushen Wu, titled *Music:Eyes*. In its current form, *Music:Eyes* is an interactive computer program which enables music students to create animations similar to those of Malinowski's – in its impetus, 'A new art form. And a powerful music education tool'.²⁸ *Music:Eyes* is still in a relatively early stage, but even in accounting for Malinowski's prior decades of experience, music visualization's competency to address the finite scope of Western musical notation seems, at least at the present, to be supplemental rather than restorative.

Malinowski's work is, by design, a form of research. Funded and supported by universities and musical ensembles since the early 1980s, Malinowski continues to focus on concretizing images and sounds in innovative ways for visual artists, musicians, and software engineers alike. His role in the history heretofore traced is most explicitly that of researcher, as he holds the status of composer, musician, educator, engineer, and inventor. Malinowski's hybrid status as both scientist and inventor makes what he does most obviously research, based in the domains of engineering and technology. His work has always been experimental in character, and ongoing, having not yet arrived at a singular solution to these dilemmas of intermingling the visual and the musical.²⁹ But his aims have remained the same, as a culmination of this history of music visualization: to identify the nature of the connection between image and music, and to manipulate it to discover more about the intricacies of that connection. Malinowski's experiments attempt to answer, through technological means, the ongoing questions of his discipline. In this, his work resounds the call to research in both a classical mode and in Lather's mode of an expanded mode of validity that would include the arts.

The ways in which Malinowski and his collaborators intercross the musical and the visual in such elemental ways forces a confrontation between music visualization as a discrete art practice and as a vehicle for pedagogy. The new breed of music visualization proposed by Malinowski is self-consciously undertaken within the experiment, recalling Lather's call for an expanded model of research: one that involves enhanced understanding of the subject through practice. However, if Malinowski's work did develop itself into a more standardized, accessible practice, how exactly it would circumvent the process of becoming another purely semiotic format – teachable, by some – is uncertain. While technological innovations in the audiovisual sphere have been so intertwined with new forms of experimentation, beginning with the Hollywood studios of the 1920s, spanning to the evolving software of Malinowski, there is also the possibility of this form of research to depend less on the technological and more on the anthropomorphic, for example, positing Busby Berkeley's 'semi-abstract' dance numbers as a less orthodox form of visual music.³⁰ In films such as *Footlight Parade* (1933), Berkeley would arrange dancers into complex patterns, shot from a variety of more distant angles which created similar types of optical illusions and synchronous audiovisual interplay to the films of Oskar Fischinger and Jordan Belson. Though outside of the realm of dance, the human has not played an integral role in any of the visual content produced by artists in this cross-discipline. Is this because integrating the human into the production of works of visual music instigates a third, unavoidable question: can the work advance our understanding of musical, visual, and humanistic 'notation'? Such an enquiry begs questions of relevance to the province of ethnography, wherein works coexist as both artworks and forms of empirical anthropological research. Such a medium can perhaps help to reconceptualize the dual-praxis of visual music, as, according to anthropologist-filmmaker David MacDougall, visual anthropology itself continues to struggle with its dual nature, continually in the process of liberating itself 'from expectations imposed upon it by anthropologists whose intellectual goals had been formed in another medium, the medium of words'.³¹

Whether the heretofore works 'succeed' in either field of research is representative of the questions which continue to face the domain itself: can music visualizations exist as a medium which answers questions of both visual and musical pertinence? Such binary designations also run counter to the possibility of a 'validity of transgression', which is particularly pertinent to the audiovisual inquiry as it is itself a product of a persistent defiance of adhering to a sole medium's supposed functionality.³² These new lines of research clearly evoke old questions raised by artists and theorists such as Brakhage and Eisenstein, as the nature of the relationship between sound and image continues to be explored through such new paradigms. And, due to the work of artists such as Malinowski, I propose a new form of research is recognized– one based in both engineering and artistic practice. The audiovisual hybrid is perhaps an ideal intersection through which Lather's proposed 'counter discourse/ practices of legitimation' can be developed – one medium constantly 'unjamming' the other, and vice versa.³³

1 Patti Lather, 'Fertile Obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993): 675.

2 Idem, 679.

3 Patti Lather, 'Research as Praxis,' *Harvard Educational Review* 56:3 (1986): 257–77.

4 Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (Cheshire: Graphics Press, 1990), 12.

5 Christopher Gibbs and Richard Taruskin cite a 'Babylonian cuneiform tablet' from ca. 1200 B.C.E. as being the first known example of transcribed music; see: Christopher Gibbs, Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

- 6 Giles Deleuze, 'What is a Dispositif?', in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, trans. Timothy Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1991), quoted in Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 687.
- 7 Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 673.
- 8 Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, 'The Sound Film: A Statement from U.S.S.R.,' *Close-Up* 3:4 (1928): 10.
- 9 Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov, 'The Sound Film,' 12 (italics in original text).
- 10 Stan Brakhage, 'Letter to Ronna Page (On Music),' *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, no. 3, ed., P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 134.
- 11 Robert A. Haller, *First Light* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1998), 81.
- 12 Brian Evans, 'Foundations of a Visual Music,' *Computer Music Journal* 29:4 (2005): 11.
- 13 Igor Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* (London: Harvard University Press, 1947), 76.
- 14 Evans, 'Foundations of a Visual Music,' 11–12.
- 15 William Moritz, 'Visual Music and Film-As-An-Art Before 1950,' in *On The Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 224.
- 16 Moritz, 'Visual Music and Film-As-An-Art Before 1950,' 224.
- 17 Moritz, 'The Dream of Color Music, And Machines That Made it Possible,' *Animation World Magazine* 2:1 (1997), par. 5, accessed 22 May, 2017, at <https://www.awn.com/mag/issue2.1/articles/moritz2.1.html>.
- 18 Evans, 'Foundations of a Visual Music,' 11.
- 19 Idem, 13.
- 20 Ibidem.
- 21 Idem, 14.
- 22 Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 687.
- 23 Evans, 'Foundations of a Visual Music,' 16.
- 24 Idem, 11.
- 25 Nicola Dibben, 'Visualizing the App Album with Björk's Biophilia,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, eds. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2013), 691.
- 26 Ibidem.
- 27 'Animating Musical Analysis, part 2,' YouTube video, 2:51, posted by DARTH Crimson, 29 August, 2014, accessed 19 May, 2016, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO7QW_L8kdQ.
- 28 'About Music:Eyes,' *Music:Eyes*, accessed 31 January, 2017, at <http://www.musiceyes.org/#about-musiceyes>.
- 29 They began as literal experiments of a pseudo-scientific nature, having begun his first music animations in the early 1970s in reaction to a drug-induced hallucination he had while listening to Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Unaccompanied Violin*, and see: '1996 Music Animation Machine (documentary),' YouTube video, 0:26, posted by musanim (Stephen Malinowski), 13 July, 2010, accessed 20 May, 2016, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQfzNJGnqnw>.
- 30 Moritz, 'Visual Music and Film-As-An-Art Before 1950,' 224.
- 31 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and The Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 267.
- 32 Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 676.
- 33 Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (London: Routledge Press, 1990), 277, quoted in Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 676.

Max Bowens is a filmmaker and scholar, having most recently completed a MSt in Film Aesthetics at the University of Oxford. His work focuses primarily on avant-garde ethnography, Western musicology and composition, and new materialisms. He is currently editing the next feature film by Australian filmmaker, Amiel Courtin-Wilson.

A Geography Without an Author: Unreliable Facts, Fantastical Fictions

Fiona Curran

To cite this contribution:

Curran, Fiona. 'A Geography Without an Author: Unreliable Facts, Fantastical Fictions.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 1 (2017): 58–68, <http://www.oarplatform.com/geography-without-author-unreliable-facts-fantastical-fictions/>.

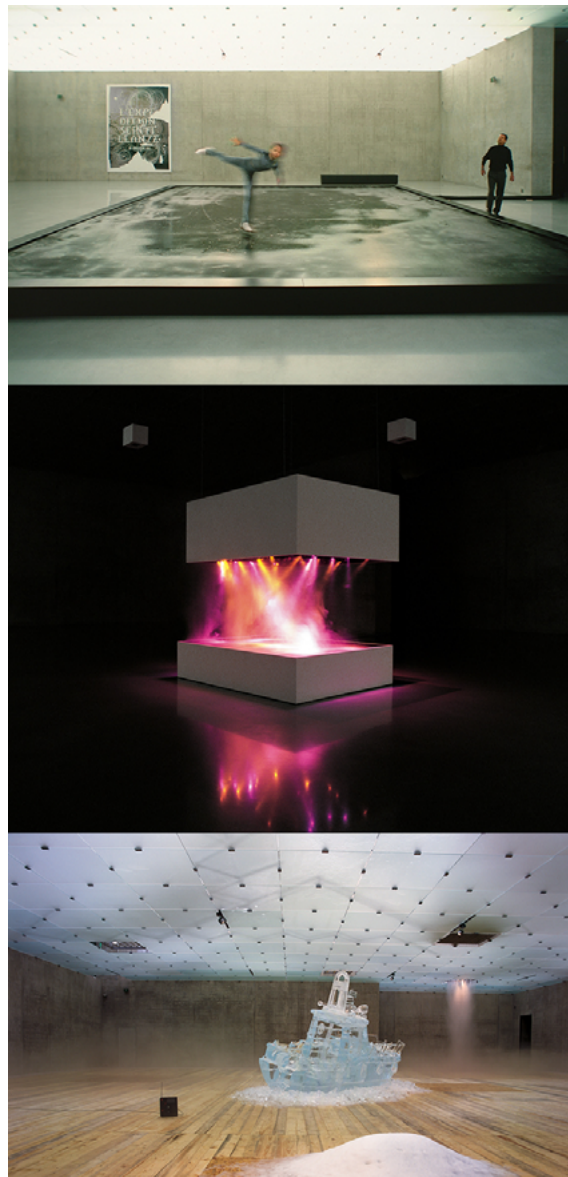
*Everyone trusts the narrator but the narrator can be wrong.*¹

– Pierre Huyghe

Pierre Huyghe's 2002 exhibition *L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical* at the Kunsthhaus Bregenz in Austria presented a scenario for a future expedition. Each floor of the museum space staged a moment of an imaginary journey with each level corresponding to one act of a musical tale. The exhibition blended fact with fiction incorporating real-time events with static objects and documentation taken from a range of historical references. This paper takes Huyghe's exhibition as a starting point to reflect on a broader network of correspondences between this work, Edgar Allan Poe's 1838 novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and the work of the French philosopher Michel Serres. It is Serres's 'general theory of relations' and 'philosophy of prepositions'² that acts as an errant guide to the connections being drawn between these different historical works. It is also Serres's questioning of science as the traditional and dominant discourse of reason that informs my response to the theme of validity. Serres's philosophy is dense with metaphor, which is liberally used in order to disrupt disciplinary boundaries and conventional epistemological frameworks. As readers, we are called upon to follow his prepositional mode, and to keep moving within and between different configurations of knowledge, forming new connections as we travel. These approaches to dispersed, relational, aleatory, and speculative forms of knowledge production can be seen to circle and contest notions of validity as a means to ground or substantiate knowledge. This approach to the formation and reformation of thought follows a topological method that is spatial in extent – a device that Huyghe also deploys in his practice.

This paper will involve lengthy descriptive passages that seek to restage/recall the visual and textual events/objects under discussion at the same time as calling further references into the frame. Faithful description, reproducibility, and replicability are empirical conventions linked to traditional methods of validation in the natural and social sciences. However, when description leads away from 'authentic' and exhaustive transcription towards speculation, association, and allusion – methods more frequently present in literary and artistic forms of practice – these validity tools are exposed as necessarily partial and fragmentary, always subject to excess.³ Huyghe frequently sets up 'laboratories' for human and non-human actors to play out scenarios that resist resolution. He can be seen to tarry with aesthetic forms of validation through, for example, his use of the hypothesis, documentation, and testimony, but to simultaneously undermine any notion of truth or authenticity

that these aesthetic forms might seek to establish or reinforce. The emphasis on open-ended relations can act as a provocation to engage with material in new ways at different historical moments and to challenge accepted forms of interpretation. Rather than seeking the closure of representation and the foreclosure of knowledge, adopting more speculative and open-ended approaches to the formation and the reformation of knowledge might resist notions of validity as established by specific disciplinary conventions and frameworks of practice. Equally however, the emphasis on open-ended relations can leave us, as readers and viewers, having to do extensive work in order to resituate histories and to activate them for the present. From this perspective, Huyghe's seemingly disruptive tactics might signify 'a reluctance to synthesize and organize' information resulting in a position that 'forsakes interpretation'.⁴



Pierre Huyghe, *L'Expédition scintillante: A musical*, 2002, mixed media, installation view at Kunsthau Bregen, Austria, image courtesy of Markus Tretter, Pierre Huyghe and Kunsthau Bregen.

Act 1 on the first floor of *L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical* presented the viewer with a life-sized boat intricately carved from ice that would gradually melt throughout the duration of the show. This boat presented both the means of travel as well as a material embodiment of the destination for the proposed expedition, the frozen continent of Antarctica. A radio emitted sounds from John Cage's *Radio Music* score, as well as broadcasts from the two offshore pirate radio stations from the 1960s, Radio Caroline and Radio Veronique, stations that circumvented broadcasting licencing laws by situating themselves in international waters beyond any individual state jurisdiction. This indeterminate political geography mirrors that of Antarctica itself, which is currently held under the terms of the Antarctic Treaty System (1959). The treaty legally suspended any territorial claims to the land by any individual nation state in favour of a collective custodial approach by a number of states, many of which were, and continue to be, in dispute with one another over the validity of prior claims to the territory.

The last continent on Earth to be formally charted and framed into organised systems of knowledge, the Antarctic stood for thousands of years as an imaginary place on the maps of ancient civilisations, the mythical *terra australis incognita* or unknown southern land. Climate conditions prevented its full mapping by satellite images until as recently as 1997, indicating the uniqueness of the continent's extreme meteorological conditions and its resistance to formal capture in codified systems of knowledge and visual representation.⁵ Ancient astronomers believed in the existence of a great southern land as a necessary counter-balance to the northern continents. The great *terra incognita* of the planet held out its mysteries until the late eighteenth century circumnavigations of the globe. However, even the circumpolar expeditions at the end of this 'great' age of exploration could not provide any certainty of the existence of the southern landmass, which remained elusive as conflicting reports of sightings of land emerged, and facts were difficult to verify. Voyagers to the Antarctic were challenged by extreme weather conditions and the presence of sea ice that could prevent further travel entirely. Natural forces disrupted attempts to impose systems of verification based on empirical measurement.

A final element of the opening act of *L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical* was a dramatic series of changing weather conditions that emerged from controlled vents in the ceiling. Real snow, rain and fog appeared sequentially in the gallery space. These meteorological effects were derived from Edgar Allan Poe's 1838 book *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, which provides a series of further clues to the exhibition's content and to Huyghe's overall method. Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* presents an account of a fantastical journey to the Antarctic continent. The novel is famous for its experimental structure in which the author/character 'Pym' introduces the story in the first person claiming, in a letter written as a preface, that it is a factual account of events that took place and that he has persuaded the author, Mr. Poe, to write up the truth 'under the garb of fiction'.⁶ After an abrupt ending to the narrative that leaves the story unfinished (and therefore open to future interpretation and speculation by other writers, such as Jules Verne in his 1897 *Le sphinx des glaces*) the book then closes with a note by Poe where he recounts the sudden and distressing death of Pym following his miraculous return to America. From the outset, the narrative is beset by uncertainty over authorship and over its veracity. The story follows the twists and turns of a journey south by Arthur Gordon Pym, beginning with his stowing away on a whaling ship belonging to his best friend's father, and moving through a mutiny and violent killing of members of the ship's crew, extreme weather conditions, his best friend's death, canni-

balism, rescue, encounters with lands and peoples depicted as ‘strange’, more violent deaths and the witnessing of a transcendental white figure. The original subtitle of the novel helps to frame its many acts:

Comprising the Details of Mutiny and Atrocious Butchery on Board the American Brig Grampus, on Her Way to the South Seas, in the Month of June, 1827. With an Account of the Recapture of the Vessel by the Survivors; Their Shipwreck and Subsequent Horrible Sufferings from Famine; Their Deliverance by Means of the British Schooner Jane Guy; the Brief Cruise of this Latter Vessel in the Atlantic Ocean; Her Capture, and the Massacre of Her Crew Among a Group of Islands in the Eighty-Fourth Parallel of Southern Latitude; Together with the Incredible Adventures and Discoveries Still Farther South to Which that Distressing Calamity Gave Rise.

The book was written in the mid nineteenth century, when the Antarctic continent was still officially undiscovered but on the cusp of The United States Exploring Expedition to the region to be led by Captain Charles Wilkes, who would controversially claim to have sighted Antarctic land. Wilkes was later accused of ‘immoral mapping’ and of fabricating his records based on the ‘assumption of land’ rather than any actual sighting.⁷ Poe’s tale is therefore a curious blend of fact and fiction drawing from historic myths and speculation that circulated about the White Continent, and included popular theories of a hollow earth proposed by authors such as John Cleves Symmes and explorers such as Jeremiah Reynolds. The novel was also influenced by factual accounts of arctic expeditions, including William Scoresby’s 1822 *Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery; Including Researches and Discoveries on the Eastern Coast of Greenland*. Scoresby’s report documented in elaborate detail the weather conditions at the Pole and the disorientating impact of the polar environment on the senses.

Writing against this backdrop of exploration and discovery, the interesting thing about Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is that instead of journeying to unknown lands in order to acquire knowledge and bring it back to the centre, Pym finds himself spiralling into an ever-greater web of uncertainty and unknowability. Thus, the tale consistently calls into question our ability to read reality empirically through the senses or through language, both of which are challenged to the point they break down as reliable sources of knowledge acquisition. The novel can be seen to explore and contest the perceived differences between fact and fiction, illusion and truth, reason and imagination, appearance and reality, blurring the distinctions between these binaries and exposing the provisional nature of language as a tool of communication. J. Gerald Kennedy notes that what distinguishes *Pym* from the traditional adventure novel

Is the author’s subordination of sensational events to an implicit analysis of the process by which human beings construct rational interpretations to protect themselves from unsettling ambiguities. Arthur Gordon Pym himself performs interpretative acts throughout the narrative, making inferences and drawing conclusions which his experiences repeatedly overturn. His inability to decipher problematic texts...parallels his failure to comprehend physical phenomena on which his fate seems to depend.⁸

With the later 'heroic' age of exploration in the nineteenth century, when humans finally set foot on Antarctic land and became physically acquainted with it rather than viewing it from the ocean, the mysteries of the continent were still in place and its myths, far from dissipating, only began to grow and expand in the imagination of those who encountered its vastness and impenetrability. As environmental historian Stephen J. Pyne notes,

The problem was not solely the formidable physical geography of the ice terranes: the Ice also challenged the philosophical precepts, artistic genres, and scientific systems by which the era had understood the metaphysics (and metahistory) of nature. The abundance of the observed world was stripped away...The Promethean desire to embrace everything lost its meaning in a landscape of nothingness. In place of increasing information, there was less. In place of abundant objects, there was only ice; and in place of tangible landmarks, such as mountains and lakes, there were only abstract concepts, such as the poles of rotation, magnetism, or inaccessibility, all invisible to the senses.⁹

Huyghe took up the themes from Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Bregenz as both framing device and source material. Apart from the symbolic presence of the melting boat, the weather conditions in Act 1 were taken from a careful transcription of Poe's descriptions of weather events in the tale. These meteorological episodes were translated into data, which then controlled the actual weather conditions in the gallery. In French, *le temps* refers to both weather and time, and the opening act of the exhibition seems to play with these entangled meanings. A small textual chart of the weather patterns was also included in the gallery space. Fiction became phenomenon and fact in a reverse order of transcription. Huyghe notes: 'I took the weather report and I set it in motion as you would a musical score. From the ceiling of the museum, I created an authentic climate: real falling rain, snow, and fog. But all the while it's fictional weather. A romantic time capsule'.¹⁰ Beyond the poetics however, these comments are unsettling. Huyghe's gestures of appropriation and (re)creation hint at forms of mastery and control that frequently manifest in his practice as the delimiting of spaces for carefully orchestrated actions or events to 'play' out. Specific sets of actors (human and non-human) inhabit a set of conditions akin to a living laboratory whilst he appears to step back in order to observe and record what unfolds. We might question the validity of this approach in a practice that gives the appearance of critiquing traditional epistemological frameworks yet, at times, seems to uncritically replicate traditions of knowledge production that subscribe to a belief in an external point of objectivity. As numerous philosophers of science and feminist, queer and critical race theorists have shown, however, such positions occlude the presence or situated particularities of the observer under the cloak of a perceived sense of impartiality.¹¹ In the context of a work referencing historical exploration, Huyghe's positioning might be additionally troublesome in this respect as, particularly when read in relation to his later voyage to Antarctica in the work *A Journey That Wasn't* (2006), it replicates colonial exploratory practices of 'discovery' and observation.¹²

In Act II, on the second floor of *L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical*, the visitor encountered a music box in a darkened room playing out 'a concert for penguins'. Two boxes mirrored one another above and below with coloured lights inside that shifted in response to the sounds of Erik Satie's 1888 composition *Gymnopédies*. A thick fog of dry ice permeated the space and, at the end of each musical sequence, the lights in the gallery were brought up

to bathe the space in a warm pink glow mimicking a sunrise or sunset. The music machine also referenced a 'psychedelic experience' suggesting a further space to confound the senses and disrupt perceptual frameworks and linear flows of time via drugs, colour, music, and excessive sensory stimulation. In Act III, the final stage of the journey in the museum, the visitor arrived in a room with a large black ice rink and a solitary ice skater looping in rhythmic circles around the ice. Several books were distributed around the gallery space on this level with an image of penguins on their covers. The books contained further images and text arranged to reflect the journey just undertaken through the museum space and future journeys to come. The book's preface began with the following text, set against an image of Giotto's fresco of *St Francis' Sermon to the Birds* (1297–99): 'The invention of a no-knowledge zone. The real means to discover it. The call of birds to Saint Francis. The Poetic Expedition'.¹³ This dense overload of visual and textual references came with no interpretive panel or guide. The poetic text in the bound volumes served only to further obscure the references on display through the introduction of new ones. Claire Bishop has critiqued what she refers to as the 'transhistorical' use of objects and information within contemporary art practices, arguing that the 'oneiric mélange of data...keep[s] things opaque' and 'labors to keep meaning withheld from the viewer'. For Bishop, this approach fails to 'mobilize history as a powerful cultural weapon from which we might draw inspiration for present-day battles' and instead reduces the poetics of the past to 'information as ornament'.¹⁴ These concerns question the validity of Huyghe's methods to instigate open-ended spaces of emergence as, once again, he continues to place himself in a position of mastery over the information selected and presented without offering us any explicit critique, historical interpretation or associative connection between the multiple references on display.

Huyghe's later, related work, *A Journey That Wasn't* (2006), presents an artwork that evolved over a considerable temporal duration, across multiple platforms of presentation. The project combined a journey to Antarctica that was undertaken by Huyghe, a small crew and a group of six invited artists on board a specialist research vessel. The journey was filmed by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti, one of the artists on board, and the footage was later combined with that of a second film shot in Central Park, New York, where Huyghe subsequently staged a recreation/translation of the journey as a spectacular musical event for a live audience. The combined footage from these two events was then released as a video installation for gallery display. A written text ascribed to 'The Association of Freed Time' that documented the journey was also published in *Artforum International* in 2005, between the Antarctic trip and the event in Central Park. In this essay, the narrative begins in a style that seems to mimic Poe's authorial tricks calling into question the true nature of the account. At the same time, the opening of this text reflects on the mechanisms and the formal procedures by which information is communicated as a means to dispel doubt. In problematising the foundations on which 'validity' rests as a concept – is the story believable? Is the argument convincing, well grounded? Can the conclusion be logically deduced from the premise? – Huyghe's doubling of Poe's narrative style could be seen to reveal the fragile bases of any truth claim:

The extraordinary events and unlikely phenomena to which sailors bear witness are not easy to record. The narrative must be precise, or it runs the risk of being taken for a fabrication. For the maritime storyteller this would be unthinkable, as he and his story are inseparable. The truth, therefore, must be made believable. One way is to understate the story by weeding out

exceptional details, however factual. Another option is to dress the truth in the costume of fiction by using those same details to elaborate the story.¹⁵

The frontispieces from Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Verne's *Le sphinx des glaces* also appear as images in the books of Act III of *L'Expédition scintillante*, as well as photographs of the Radio Caroline boat; Caspar David Friedrich's 1824 painting *The Sea of Ice*; film stills from Steven Spielberg's 1978 film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; a text in the style of a script for the three acts of the exhibition; and a glossary outlining the geographical features and principles of place naming.¹⁶ *L'Expédition scintillante* exists as an exhibition in the present but also as a script for a future scenario, a future journey, a future work. Huyghe presents these disparate historical and geographical reference points leaving us to draw multiple inferences from their (sometimes unfathomable) juxtapositions. Any appeal to taxonomic certainty or rational ordering that might function to structure cultural formations is disrupted by the presence of imaginative, romantic, libidinal, and 'irrational' counter forces. There is, perhaps, an implicit refusal to accept the order of things in Huyghe's work being valuable as a method of practice seeking to explore the spaces and movements between objects, subjects, and epistemologies that are usually kept distinct from one another. His uses of the poetic and of spectacle, and his mobilisation of the affective encounter, whilst opening his work to some of the questions concerning mastery raised earlier, equally offer us multiple sensible experiences that bring the human into contact with non-human forces and, therefore, displace the human at the centre of things. Huyghe himself has described the exhibition as 'a living entity', referring to the show as 'a kind of organism. *L'Expédition scintillante* can be translated as "The Blinking Expedition"...One situation can be transformed into another without losing something in the translation. It can be different but also equivalent. Something may appear then reappear somewhere else. So it is a blinking organism'.¹⁷

This exhibition-event, therefore, embodies a form of restlessness in its construction, in the range of human, material and immaterial forces that play their part across its staging. Everything is in a state of flux and is undergoing change or movement from one state to another: ice melts, weather conditions come and go, music plays as coloured lights seem to dance in response. Even when the music ends, the gallery is bathed in a moment of simulated sunshine before the show returns; the ice-skater moves rhythmically around the ice rink in and out of time to more music. In the later work, *A Journey that Wasn't* (if we are to believe the 'traveller's tale' as recounted via the journal entry in *Artforum* and film footage of the trip), the passengers and crew also encountered events beyond their control. Extreme storm conditions on board the boat affected their radio communication and navigation systems sending them off course into unknown waters and disrupting their planned destination and journey times. These experiences of the weather and time are described in terms of perceptual and sensory disruptions that echo Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and the spectacular, sometimes hallucinatory scenes encountered on Pym's voyage, where the presence of Antarctic light and atmosphere play tricks with his ability to read reality through the senses. Empirical methods of verification and validation are questioned, different forms of meaning and systems of epistemological certainty are sought. In this uncertain space 'no-knowledge zones' emerge:

[R]eality is not what it used to be; it has become relative. As always, it has to be invented. As geography toyed with their senses, chemical elements and

natural phenomena would conduct their movements. Perhaps they would need to invent a chemical language or ingest a drug that would alter the real rather than its perception. The journey would encounter islands and then make them disappear, producing no-knowledge zones that would emerge whenever the capacity for language to seize reality would end. The elsewhere remains a story, and the rest is exoticism. If language fails to recount the experience, an equivalence, topologically identical to the occurrence, has to be invented.¹⁸

Herein lies the heart of Huyghe's practice – an exploration of the politics of knowledge production and a desire to translate the experience that transcends language and resists representation into a topologically equivalent event. Such events, as suggested, might be seen to function as examples of the excessive, libidinal, sensory and 'transcendent' realm beyond the contained and ordered domains of the rational, the logical. Perhaps the point of suggesting translation as a method is precisely because something is always going to be 'lost' in the process. Rather than seeking to continually ground knowledge through orthodox validity practices such as those of reproduction and replication, translation adds a further layer of complexity to the movements of thought.

In repeated interviews with the artist and texts written about him, this reference to topology as a method of practice has surfaced as a profoundly significant element of his overall project. Topology is a method of mathematical geometry that is not concerned with exact dimensions or measurement of Euclidean qualities such as angles, lines, perspective and surfaces, but with spatial *relations*. A connection can be traced here to the work of philosopher Michel Serres, where topology is used as a method of practice to generate new thought. Serres initially trained in Mathematics, and his interest in topology as a philosophical method dates from this period. As a philosopher of science, he is committed to questioning its status as the dominant discourse of reason, preferring to assemble a range of disparate, and often competing discourses that defy ideas of progress in terms of any linear notion of time. For Serres, 'time doesn't flow, it percolates',¹⁹ and he takes great delight in presenting a series of visual and material metaphors that help his reader to understand this notion, from references to rivers, pleats, folded handkerchiefs, and a baker kneading bread.²⁰ Time is seen to fold in on itself, points that initially seem distant in time and space are crumpled together (as when two points are drawn at a distance on a handkerchief and it is scrunched into a ball resulting in the points occupying the same physical space). As with Huyghe's practice, in mapping disparate discourses together within the same space of the text, Serres seeks to reveal equivalent structures in them that allow the unexpected to emerge and a transformation in knowledge to take place. At root in these speculations, therefore, is an attempt to theorise new forms of spatiality that allow new forms of thinking to take shape. Serres's interest is to avoid any notion of fixed identities – of disciplines or ideas, of any totalising discourse or method of validation – and to attend to the possible, to the mutable relations between disparate fields of knowledge across the sciences, arts and humanities. Paul Harris comments on this approach and on Serres's use of fiction in his work:

In the greater ecology of Serres's work, literary texts do indeed function as 'formal turbulences' or 'energy pathways'. They are embedded in a transdisciplinary setting where they serve as what Serres calls 'operators', nodes that establish links across scales and levels of life and between domains of experience and knowledge.²¹

It is in this shaping of thought via a non-Euclidean mapping or folding of space and time that it is possible to trace a connection with Huyghe's work and his use of topology as method. For Huyghe, as well as the spatial relations afforded through thinking topologically, there is also the possibility for new forms of temporality or multiple temporalities to emerge. The question of time for Huyghe is also tied to systems of thought and the conditions under which knowledge is able to emerge and to grow. The use of an explicitly organic and ecological metaphor here is clear. The appeal to 'natural' forces opens thought towards the non-human and therefore questions any model of validation as intrinsically anthropocentric. This has become increasingly evident in the artist's more recent work, such as *Untilled* (2012), the garden ecosystem he produced for documenta 13, and *In.Border.Deep* (2014), a multi-layered and multi-object work that includes living aquariums, a film depicting insects frozen in amber, and a further, deeply unsettling film that presents a monkey wearing a human face mask who has been trained to work as a waitress in a Japanese café. These works, and the most recent project *After ALife Ahead* (2017), which presented a bio-technical system at Skulptur Projekte Münster, build on the earlier projects under discussion from Huyghe's practice in attempting to establish sites of correspondence across human and non-human timeframes and across multiple platforms and spaces of (re)presentation.

L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical existed as a script or scenario for a possible future journey, which then became an actual event with a voyage to Antarctica in search of an unknown island and a mysterious white penguin. These events recalled prior historical expeditions to the unknown southern land and the history of the continent as a shifting and contested physical and political geographical space. The entanglements of both works with Poe's extraordinary tale and further literary, musical, film, and visual art references situate Huyghe's works in an extended network of narrative relations that offer a 'vibrating temporality'.²² A question however, still hovers over whether the journey to Antarctica ever *actually* took place. The title of the piece, *A Journey that Wasn't*, already introduces a moment of doubt in relation to the event. Huyghe himself has, over time, been deliberately evasive when questioned about the trip, and has often provocatively played into his questioner's uncertainties: 'We don't even know if I even went there – if I saw this island or the albino penguin. Maybe I did. Maybe it's a special effect. I don't care'.²³ Fact and fiction, inside and outside, subject and object, figure and ground, here and elsewhere, Huyghe's work, according to Amelia Barikin,

strives to keep structures open to potential: to maintain ambiguity by manufacturing moments of elegant irresolution. The individual's ability to get a handle on the present – to experience duration, to resist the codification of time as product – has been a continued and ongoing concern of his practice.²⁴

At other times, however, Huyghe suggests in relation to the expedition that the event did take place, although he downplays the significance of the destination itself, preferring to focus on the social aspects of the collective experience of the journey. In an interview with Mark Godfrey at Tate Modern in 2006, Huyghe talks about building up a fiction in order to 'to give yourself the means to verify it', thus opening up a disrupted field of truth and fiction and the role of verification.²⁵ He repeatedly notes that he is not interested in documentary, in any process that faithfully captures the event or the experience but rather prefers to work with notions of re-scripting, re-defining, inventing and re-inventing reality.

Within this framework the production of the artwork as both event and encounter offers an alternative chronological platform and a non-linear mode of history that folds, pleats, percolates, and vibrates.

Huyghe's works present a constantly shifting set of coordinates without resolution. He uses fiction as a device for speculation and a departure point for the imagination stating: 'What interested me was how a fiction, how a story, could in fact produce a certain kind of reality. An *additif* of reality'.²⁶ His interest in the idea of the script or scenario is not about the finished object or the validation of an idea but the space of the hypothetical and the movement towards it. The journey proverbially becomes more significant than the destination and, as with the shifting geography of Antarctica, the map can never be a faithful reproduction of the territory. Serres and Huyghe 'trace out the unpredictable, even vagrant itineraries through landscapes not given in advance'.²⁷ The use of the 'scenario' might offer a counterpoint to the traditional 'hypothesis' of academic research in the natural and the social sciences, a form of practicing knowledge rather than seeking to reveal, disclose, or acquire it. In this form, practice is not to be confused with any linear sense of improvement or 'making perfect'. Rather, this is a practice without a teleology and one that resists any impulse to be validated. Huyghe explores the time of potentiality, within which we can continue to speculate rather than seek to validate. This opens a space for practice based research that seeks to challenge dominant epistemological frameworks in order to allow no-knowledge zones to emerge. The topological mode, with its *unfaithful* approach to replicability, resists the fulfilment and validation of the possible and instead seeks a displacement and contestation of 'fact':

There are facts and constructions that have been part of history for a long time, which have become linked through language and a dominant sense of the imaginary. These facts are shaped by language. It's important that the present remains speculative. That's the idea of zones of non-knowledge, understood as something that cannot be exhausted by discourse – that can remain a reality, not in the sense of something occult, but in the sense of something that opens up the realm of possibility, even if chaotically. I'm interested in un-telling...I pursue a kind of incongruence and, as a result, tend more toward vitality, toward what grows.²⁸

1 Cheryl Kaplan, 'The legend of Two Islands: A Conversation Between Pierre Huyghe and Cheryl Kaplan,' *Db Artmag* (2005), accessed 6 October, 2017, at <http://db-artmag.de/archiv/2005/e/7/1/385.html>.

2 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* [1990], trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1995), 127.

3 For a further discussion on the role of excess in representational practice and the use of ekphrasis in art history see Volume 6 of OAR on the theme of Response.

4 Claire Bishop, 'History Depletes Itself,' *Artforum International* 54:1 (2015): 324–29.

5 Kathryn Yusoff, 'Visualizing Antarctica as a Place in Time,' *Space & Culture* 8:4 (2005): 381–98.

6 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* [1838], ed. Harold Beaver (London: Penguin Books, 1975).

7 Kathryn Yusoff, *Arresting Vision: A Geographical Theory of Antarctic Light* (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2005), 10–11.

8 J. Gerald Kennedy, 'Introduction,' in Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Related Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), xi.

9 Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 84.

10 Doug Aitken, 'Pierre Huyghe by Doug Aitken (Artists in Conversation Series),' *Bomb Magazine* 89 (2004), accessed 6 October, 2017, at <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2669/pierre-huyghe>.

11 In the context of this discussion see, for example: Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* [1987] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); and, Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988): 575–99.

- 12 In relation to the site of Antarctica and colonial practices see: Klaus J. Dodds, 'Post-Colonial Antarctica: An Emerging Engagement,' *Polar Record* 42:1 (2006): 59–70. For a further discussion of Huyghe's work in relation to these themes see Fiona Curran, 'Losing Ground in a No Knowledge Zone: Pierre Huyghe's Antarctic Journey that Wasn't,' in '(Post)Nature / Natur(T)Räume,' special issue, *Kritische Berichte* 2 (2017): 28–35. Huyghe's choice of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* should also be highlighted in the context of this discussion as the novel continues to be the subject of controversy due to the racial narratives contained in the text. Poe has been accused of both promoting and critiquing white supremacy and proslavery through his use of black/white symbolism and the racial stereotyping of the black characters within the novel. For more discussion of these themes see, for example: Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- 13 The reference to Saint Francis also recurs in Huyghe's later work, *A Journey that Wasn't* (2006), where the artist staged a real expedition to Antarctica in search of an albino penguin. *A Journey that Wasn't* helps us retrospectively to decipher the meaning of the earlier work as a 'concert for penguins'. Reference is made to the strange device set up on an Antarctic island in order to communicate with the albino penguin, the device is described as something 'not unlike a luminous, musical variation of Morse code or the vocal and visual displays animals use to communicate about their territories. Pierre called it Saint Francis of Assisi'. See: 'El Diario del Fin del Mundo,' *Artforum International* 43:10 (2005): 300.
- 14 Bishop's discussion centres on Danh Vo's installations 'Mothers Tongue' and 'Slip of the Tongue' at the fifty-sixth Venice Biennale. Her critique, whilst not addressing Huyghe directly, does broaden out to other artists using historical visual and textual references in their work, and see: Bishop, 'History Depletes Itself,' 324–29.
- 15 'El Diario del Fin del Mundo,' 297.
- 16 This was a feature that would also return in *A Journey that Wasn't* when Huyghe documented the coordinates of an unknown island discovered in the Pitt Islands Peninsula and named it *Isla Iciosidad* (*Island of Idleness*).
- 17 Huyghe in Aitken, 'Pierre Huyghe.'
- 18 'El Diario del Fin del Mundo,' 299.
- 19 Serres and Latour, *Conversations*, 44.
- 20 Serres and Latour, *Conversations*, 58–60, 65.
- 21 Paul A. Harris, 'The Itinerant Theorist: Nature and Knowledge / Ecology and Topology in Michel Serres,' *Substance* 83 26:2 (1997): 46.
- 22 Pierre Huyghe in George Baker, 'An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,' *October* 110 (2004): 88.
- 23 Art21, 'A Journey that Wasn't' (2005), accessed 6 October, 2017, at <http://www.pbs.org/art21/images/pierre-huyghe/a-journey-that-wasn't-2005-0>.
- 24 Amelia Barikin, *Parallel Presents: The Art of Pierre Huyghe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 1.
- 25 Pierre Huyghe, 'Artist's Talk: A Discussion with Mark Godfrey,' (5 July, 2006), accessed 6 October, 2017, at <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/pierre-huyghe-artists-talk>
- 26 Huyghe in Baker, 'An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,' 84.
- 27 Steven Connor, 'Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought,' *Anglistik* 15 (2004): 105–07.
- 28 Pierre Huyghe in Marie-France Rafael, *Pierre Huyghe: On Site* (Köln: Walter König, 2013), 44–45.

Fiona Curran is an artist and Senior Tutor at the Royal College of Art, London. She completed a PhD at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in 2016. Her work explores the poetics, politics and materialities of landscape space in relation to non-anthropocentric and speculative ecologies.

Mediating for Climate Change: Falling Up to Hyperignorance, Diving Down to Deep Waters, to Touch Other(s) (and Ourselves)

Kat Austen

To cite this contribution:

Austen, Kat. 'Mediating for Climate Change: Falling Up to Hyperignorance, Diving Down to Deep Waters, to Touch Other(s) (and Ourselves).' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 69–78, <http://www.oarplatform.com/mediating-climate-change-falling-hyperignorance-diving-deep-waters-touch-others-ourselves/>.

For almost my entire life, I have been perplexed at my/our inaction towards climate change. Inundated with scientific data, reportage, an overwhelming scientific consensus of not only the phenomenon, but also our part in it, I wonder about why we are not only reluctant to act, but incapable of it. There is an extensive literature exploring such questions, from behavioural sciences, to feminist theory, to economics and global systems science.¹ However, while this literature helps to explain various facets of the problem, there are still few examples of work synthesising multiple approaches or using these to inform production of an intervention or action.²

I am particularly interested in the role of emotion in our relationship to climate change. A recent study by Smith and Leiserowitz found that acceptance of public policy for climate change depended on whether respondents felt 'worry' or 'disgust' when confronted with the problem.³ The response to these emotions is explored by Sally Weintrobe who discusses the various psychological responses that explain why we repress or disavow climate change data and the scientific consensus: 'While we can be incapacitated by anxiety when thinking about climate change, we are, in a realistic sense, not nearly anxious enough... Anxiety is, I suggest, the biggest psychic barrier to facing the reality of anthropocentric global warming'.⁴ Weintrobe suggests that we should find ways to support each other in overcoming this anxiety.

For me, the question has more facets. It relates to our world-view, our perception of how we know and what we know, and the consequence for our own feelings of agency. In my artistic practice, I synthesise learning and knowledge-making practices from multiple disciplines, including chemistry, critical philosophy and aesthetics, to interrogate various aspects of creating new knowledge, and giving authority and agency to it. This paper focusses on an attempt to move beyond anxiety and disgust as primary emotional responses to climate change by working with empathic responses.⁵ I elaborate here upon a framework of knowing – and acceptance of unknowing – and outline my attempt to address emotional response to climate change by engendering empathy with a fragile, alien species affected by anthropogenic effects on the environment in the form of an artwork: the *Coral Empathy Device* (2016). This work explores the possibility of creating a legitimate form of conveying embodied knowledge between the human species and non-humans. It allows the creation of an analogue of social interactions and empathy with other species as a first step towards engendering empathy with regions and ecosystems.

The crucial choice of the other(s) with which to empathise was made by considering a synthesis of perspectives from previous studies of first, social cognition, where the other is a distinct entity thereafter incorporated into the self, and the resulting emotional connectedness;⁶ second, environmental psychology, where the other is considered in terms of environmental connectedness;⁷ and third, the corporeal other – the other that we touch.⁸ It was important to choose a species with which humans are not overly familiar, to move beyond ‘companion species’ – in Donna Haraway’s terms – who share our lives, our timescale and resonances of our physiology, and rather emotionally commune with a species at the front line of environmental shifts.⁹ In so doing, it is my contention that it may be possible to intervene with art that leverages the body to mobilise emotional knowledge and therefore intervene in environmental action, and create motivations for change that arise from care and empathy for other(s). In the language of philosophy and the environmental humanities, this is also an experiment in facilitating the realisation of ‘becoming-with’¹⁰ an-other(s) to overcome what Kate Wright terms ‘delusions of separation – the erroneous belief that it is somehow possible to exempt ourselves from Earth’s ecological community’.¹¹ In this way, we may feel our connectedness to the systems and species of the Earth. Drawing on environmental and social psychological research, the inclusion of the other(s) in one’s perception of self increases the value of the other(s), thus increasing motivation for addressing environmental concerns.¹² In contrast to most studies that explore empathy for nature,¹³ the *Coral Empathy Device* moves beyond visual stimuli to engender empathy, working through sound and haptic stimuli in an attempt to create a stronger and more lasting emotional response.

To Know Another

The *Coral Empathy Device* is both a synthesis of multiple knowledges, and an effort to codify in a tangible, physical interface, embodied knowledge as a route to the emotional self. In other words, it is an attempt to interrogate the boundaries between the self and other(s). Prompted by my interest in the aquatic environment and our relationship to its alien nature, the *Coral Empathy Device* is a wearable multi-sensory experience that fosters empathy and embodiment as forms of knowledge, exploring them as a technologically mediated means for connecting with the marine environment. The premise is to translate coral’s experience of anthropogenic effects in its native environment of water into human-perceivable signals in the native environment of humans.

Perry’s work on empathy suggests that when we live close to the land we experience empathy with it.¹⁴ It also claims that our present mode of life has led to the ‘death of empathy’.¹⁵ Digital life, comfort and protection from the elements have combined to weaken our connection to what we consider the ‘natural’ world.

The *Coral Empathy Device* is a step towards exploring ways to engender this empathy, and this paper claims its significance is in terms of our relationship to the self, other(s) and the environment.¹⁶ Karen Barad asks, ‘What if it is only in the encounter with the inhuman – the liminality of no/thingness – in all its liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we can truly confront our inhumanity, that is, our actions lacking compassion?’¹⁷ The aim of the *Coral Empathy Device* is to create an encounter with the non-human (rather than the inhuman), and thereby to touch this liminality, the border between the self and other(s). Through making this artwork, I propose that bridging this boundary, and incorporating the other into the

self-creating empathy and social cognition through an embodied mediation with a non-human entity, is a strategy to motivate individual action to overcome anthropogenic environmental damage.¹⁸



Kat Austen, *Coral Empathy Device*, sound and mixed media installation, 2016 (pictured at Kühlhaus, Berlin, 2017). View video documentation of the *Coral Empathy Device* online: <http://www.oarplatform.com/mediating-climate-change-falling-hyperignorance-diving-deep-waters-touch-others-ourselves/>.

On Knowing and The Unknown

The *Coral Empathy Device* is a response to the ‘wicked problem’ of climate change.¹⁹ Climate change, like other ‘wicked’ problems, is so interconnected with other systemic factors that it is difficult to find a solution.

Emotional response is a key factor in many of the choices we make and in particular in relation to environmental issues as discussed above.²⁰ Timothy Morton conceptualises climate change as a ‘hyperobject’ which occurs at a length-scale and timescale greater than that which we are used to internalising.²¹ In terms of climate change, we often lack personal experience of the cycle of cause and effect between our actions and global changes, which affects our decisions over how to act and counteract.²² Yet these effects are felt more keenly by fragile ecosystems and species such as coral. Using the *Coral Empathy Device*, I question whether it is possible to convey a coral’s experience of environmental damage through an artwork to create a mediated, emotive feedback between humans and other(s).

I propose that the concept of hyperignorance can help explain our experience of and response to hyperobjects. In the early 500s AD, Damascius, the last chair-holder of the Platonic succession of the Athenian Academy, coined the term 'hyperignorance'.²³ Hyperignorance is described by Raoul Mortley thus:

referring to Plato's analogy about seeing the sun (Rep. 532A), Damascius notes that at first one sees it from afar. The closer one approaches, the less one sees of it, and in the end one sees neither it nor the other things outside it. The eye being flooded with light becomes the light itself.²⁴

What would be the consequences to our response to climate change of embracing hyperignorance? And how should we do so? Damascius's hyperignorance is related to the Neoplatonic concept of 'the One' – the single principle that in Neoplatonism is considered the source of all things.²⁵ Mortley describes Damascius' hyperignorance as a higher principle that goes beyond the One:

This higher principle obscures the One by its proximity. What does this mean? Seemingly that as we approach it, it floods our whole seeing apparatus with its own presence, to the extent that all else is obliterated from view. The hyperunknowable principle floods the mind's eye, so that even the One becomes an other, which disappears from view.²⁶

Commentators have claimed that here Damascius was discussing theology, and that the One transcends being.²⁷ But there is something else that transcends even the One: hyperignorance – that which is unknowable.

To understand this in non-theological terms we can look to a more modern conception of this same idea that emerged in the shadow of the Second World War in the writing of Günther Anders.²⁸ In the 1950s, at the time when the human race seemed on the brink of self-destruction due to the atom bomb, Anders argued that humans make systems that are too complex for themselves to understand.²⁹ Indeed, Damascius's hyperignorance, viewed through Anders's lens and in a contemporary light, could as easily be applied to complex systems containing emergence as to a transcendent 'One'. This modern reconfiguration is particularly pertinent to addressing those feelings of anxiety that have been identified as key paralysing factors when addressing human action on climate change.³⁰ If we accept the direct unknowability of our complex systems and their emergent wicked problems, perhaps we can find a way to act within the realm of what we do or can know. While Damascius didn't indicate how to embrace hyperignorance, his ideas were taken up in theology that talks about God only in terms of negation. This apophatic theology is rooted in direct experience, and argues that God cannot be known without the help of experience,³¹ which allows the divine to be understood by the way it acts on the world, a kind of knowing through a filter.

As an artist, I am stimulated by Robert Smithson's approach to knowing the complex essence of what we commonly term nature by looking through filters. Smithson explored the dialectic between mirrors and reflections, site and nonsite. Johannes Stuekelburger writes that by focusing on the nonsite work such as Smithson's *The Sandbox Monument / The Desert* (a photograph of a sandbox bounded by solid wooden walls and surrounded by savanna) brings into focus the real essence of the site – 'nature' – in this case, the wild and entropic land around the sandbox construction.³²

In order to make *Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan*, a performative intervention for which the only record is written afterwards by the artist for Artforum,³³ Smithson visited nine sites, and at each he temporarily inserted around a dozen mirrors into the landscape. Stuekelburger argues that by using multiple mirrors, Smithson was embracing a polyperspectival view on nature: 'Smithson was interested not only in a traditional view, focused on the centre, on the site in the sense of the real places visible in his photographs; he was also interested in expanding the focus to the edges of the site to which the mirrors refer'.³⁴ Thus, Smithson, by viewing the site through the filter of multiple mirrors, and by experiencing and playing with that experience, reveals an expanded understanding of the enormity of nature contained in these accessible, human-scale bites of landscape.

If, like Smithson, we focus on what we can experience, albeit through a filter, we get closer to knowing what is unknowable and what is not known. By expanding the realm of what we can experience – in the case of the *Coral Empathy Device* through a focus on direct experience with the body schema of other creatures or environments – we can draw closer to the wicked problem of climate change.

The Limitations of Verbal and Visual Representation

I suggest that this focus on experience could be the key to moving beyond ourselves and embracing hyperignorance, by incorporating more than codifiable knowledge in our lexicon of communicating between the self and other(s), and thereby creating an empathic connection.

Barad explains that when exploring matter on a sub-atomic level, the quantum nature of matter gives rise to an infinite number of possibilities of 'self-touching' – ways in which particles and fields can interact with themselves.³⁵ This questions the very identity of the particles/fields that are touching, leaning towards a fluidity of states of being that gives rise to temporally relevant truths, and a sense of the unknown, perhaps even the unknowable. Here Barad comes to the same conclusion as Damascius, but from a different disciplinary starting point: 'the unknown, the insensible, new realms of in/determinacy, which have incalculable effects on mattering, need to be acknowledged, or, even better, taken into account'.³⁶

Marcel Viau, writing from a theological standpoint, also argues for knowing through experience. He makes the argument that the experience of the divine, anchored in an environment, pushes the individual consciousness to create a social context, to create a shared understanding, a commonality.³⁷ As Viau argues, it is not enough to talk, or write, about the principles of faith in God. He uses this argument as a basis for what is regularly termed 'practical theology' – theology rooted in experience of the world, whether that be experience of or with people or non-humans. Practical theology builds on phenomenological arguments about moving beyond speech into silence,³⁸ the argument that the corporeal experience of the world is what gives rise to meaning, and creates a situation in which language can arise.

This moving beyond language is an important modality in realising hyperignorance by creating the interconnection between the self and other(s). S. N. Ganguly also argues that language is not enough for us to connect to each other.³⁹ Indeed, for Ganguly, our reliance on this codification of experience leads to an underlying angst of constantly being

misunderstood. Thus, he continues, we reside in an ‘existential vacuum’ that arises because of a mismatch between our desire to be understood and the limitations of language oriented culture. For Ganguly, this tension is expressed not only as a mismatch between the navigation of the individual in society, but also in terms of our inability to express and be understood when we are limited by the primary channel of verbal communication, which itself has an inherent vagueness in the naming of things. He argues further that the resulting separation of the individual from society itself results in insecurity. But Ganguly has hope that we can overcome the limitations of codified language.

we should not be understood to mean that communication is just impossible; we are merely asserting that there is only an essential vagueness in the meaning of such terms to the result that we are always aware of a possibility of misunderstanding.⁴⁰

Ganguly predates the proliferation of screen-mediated social interactions,⁴¹ which have collapsed communication channels to visual, and often verbal communications. We aim with language to root our idea of truth in the public realm, to know ourselves and know the other, yet our efforts are constantly undermined by the uncertainty of interpretation. By augmenting our modes of communication between the self and other(s), it could be possible to find the compassion for other entities that allows us to not just seek for solutions to problems, but to overcome ourselves in order to change our interaction with the world, to become as part of it rather than to be isolated as an individual afraid of our loneliness in the world.

Experiencing Through the Body – Conveying Embodied Knowledge

My artistic practice draws on the sciences, the humanities, technology design, aesthetics and arts to investigate ways to create an adequate lexicon in hitherto un-codified (tacit) knowledges, and to place these knowledges alongside others upon which we rely. Important to this task is the claim from classic phenomenology which contends that the experience of the world is through the body-schema and its response to the affordances of the world. As phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, whose work underpins much of my artistic approach, writes about the grandfather of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty: ‘That belonging of the I think “to the flesh” is not a metaphor for Merleau-Ponty... Flesh then, as objective body is thus constituted for consciousness out of “powers” that are already tributary to this body. Consciousness turns out to have already called upon what it is only just supposed to be constituting’.⁴² In making the artwork, my question was how can the body-schema interact to create an emotional connection with other creatures – or other environments – that exist in modes or environments that are either difficult to touch, or dangerous to do so?

For the *Coral Empathy Device*, I also drew on the work of contemporary phenomenologist Shogo Tanaka. Tanaka has written extensively on intercorporeality in the human sphere; the idea that the body is a vehicle for our social cognition. Tanaka writes ‘Through these embodied interactions, intersubjective meanings are created and directly shared between the self and the other, without being mediated by mental representations’.⁴³ In this framework one could directly affect someone’s bodily experience, and therefore intentionally transmit embodied knowledge. Such claims build on the idea of embodiment being ‘doing without representing’ and personal space as an extension of the body schema, where: ‘the body schema is the converting system of perception and action’.⁴⁴ We exist bodily within a set of opportunities

to which we are invited to respond, and often do so without conscious framing of our responses. Rather we must consider that we are our bodies – our body-schema – and the interaction of the body-schema with other(s) creates knowledge of the otherness, and of interaction, within the body-schema.

In Tanaka's view, not only is there no duality between mind and body, but also none between that which is considered traditionally to be internal and external to the body. Indeed, this is true physically as well as philosophically. Membranes are permeable, skin is porous, our physical boundaries are in fact far more diffuse than we believe them to be, and the substance of our being is in constant flux. This suggests that what we consider to be our bodies is in fact a flux and flow of matter and energy with multiple grades which we perceive on different scales, giving us the perception of boundaries.

The *Coral Empathy Device* was created during a residency at NYU Shanghai Gallery and the NYU Shanghai Program for Creativity and Innovation. It is worn over the head, and deploys affordances of speaker technologies and sound conveyance, as well as touch and smell, to create a vibrating immersion that aims to bypass perception and disrupts usual modes of cognitive engagement. My initial research was into sound and microplastics.⁴⁵ I gathered audio recordings of the underwater environment in Bergen, Norway, some DIY Chemistry assessment of the prevalence of marine microplastics and researched their effect on corals. This initial research fits into a framework of knowledge hierarchies that explore the multi-scale interplay between humans and their environment. In other words, I began to think about how not to divorce humans from 'the environment' or 'nature', nor to imply that there is such a thing as humans having evolved beyond nature, but rather to explore the interplay along the continuum of human bodies and environments. With the *Coral Empathy Device*, I attempt to codify the knowledge that, following Tanaka, is imprinted in the body. I think of the knowing subject as the minded-body or embodied-mind.

How can one validate this engendering of interspecies empathy using embodied knowledge? And furthermore, how can one ascertain the effect of experiencing empathy for the other on feelings of agency in relation to climate change?

The next step for the *Coral Empathy Device* in would be to empirically capture reactions to it, and in this way to determine the success of this method of codification. Yet to validate such an approach, one encounters many of the issues that arise from attempting to validate subjective experience. The normative modes by which the experience can be codified involves standard measurement and data collection, which in its conventional form cannot capture the uncodifiable knowledge I attempt to convey with the device.

To test the efficacy and validity of the *Coral Empathy Device* would require an additional device that can measure rather than deliver at the embodied interface. Perhaps the best approximation that is imminently achievable, but that neglects longitudinal analysis, would be to combine arousal sensors (such as galvanic skin response sensors) with a body map,⁴⁶ or to ask visitors to create their own response to the work using a medium in which they feel most comfortable to express it.

Preliminary feedback from visitors to installations of the *Coral Empathy Device* show promise in terms of creating empathy for a non-human species, and in moving beyond

the anxiety or disgust dichotomy as our primary emotional responses to complicated environmental problems like climate change. The point of the *Coral Empathy Device* is to suggest that perhaps the best ‘measure’ of the validity of this approach is to accept that feelings and emotions themselves are not measurable, not codifiable, yet are nevertheless valid. Feelings such as empathy, or indeed the emotional response to an artwork like the *Coral Empathy Device*, are subjective. They are nevertheless materially consequential, because they affect our interactions between what is internal and external to the self. They mediate our touching of the world and our becoming-with in the world. With problems so wicked as climate change or widespread microplastic pollution, how can we afford to neglect such a large part of our lived experience? Thus, with a work devised as an intervention in our relationship to the other(s), perhaps it is best considered as one among many of the cohort of interventions with this aim – be they philosophical, artistic, scientific, governmental, regulatory, or otherwise – and to employ the best and only measure of its validity: to watch ourselves.

The ultimate direction that we will take as a species will be emergent from the cumulative responses to all of these interventions and those to come. My new artwork, *The Matter of the Soul*,⁴⁷ explores how far this approach can be expanded to the Arctic region, an ecosystem at the edge of climate changes. As with the *Coral Empathy Device*, my evaluation of its validity will begin with my own, subjective experience of the artwork, and whether it touches me in the way I hope it will touch others. However, when an individual’s empathy for nature is dispositional,⁴⁸ it is likely that what allows me to touch other(s) may not have the same result for other people. Further investigation will be needed to investigate how mediating through art the direct empathic experience of otherness might enable us to create an alternative emotional relationship to the hyperobject of climate change and environmental damage. By this process of viewing through a filter of otherness, it may be that we can catch sight of, and accept, hyperignorance, and finally feel facilitated in our ability to step forward and address anthropogenic perturbations in the complexity of our existence within and participation in the creation of the world.

- 1 For example: Robert Gifford, Christine Kormos and Amanda McIntyre, ‘Behavioral Dimensions of Climate Change: Drivers, Responses, Barriers, and Interventions,’ *WIREs Climate Change* 2 (2011): 801–27; Karen Barad, ‘On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am,’ *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 25:3 (2012): 206–23; and William D. Nordhaus, ‘Economic Aspects of Global Warming in a Post-Copenhagen Environment,’ *PNAS* 107:26 (2010): 11721–26. The work of the Global Systems Science cluster of DG Connect at the European Commission includes a number of projects researching models that will predict the effect of policy decisions on climate change futures. For more information, readers are referred to a short report by the author at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/news/report-meeting-projects-funded-global-systems-science-gss>, accessed 31 October, 2017.
- 2 The Aerocene project (<http://aerocene.org/>) and works curated by TBA21 (<https://www.tba21.org>), along with my own Vital (<http://vital-food.org>) all provide good examples of artistic interventions based on interdisciplinary synthesis of knowledge.
- 3 Nicholas Smith and Anthony Leiserowitz, ‘The Role of Emotion in Global Warming Policy Support and Opposition,’ *Risk Analysis* 34:5 (2014): 937–48.
- 4 Sally Weintrobe ‘The Difficult Problem of Anxiety in Thinking About Climate Change,’ in *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Sally Weintrobe (New York: Routledge, 2013), 46
- 5 Invoked Empathic Response has been shown to motivate decision-making to preserve the environment by Jamie Berenguer in ‘The Effect of Empathy in Proenvironmental Attitudes and Behaviors,’ *Environment and Behavior* 39:2 (2007): 269–83. This research used visual stimuli to induce an empathic response, and questionnaires are used to record decisions made by participants on how money should be allocated to pro-environmental endeavours. Images used focussed on environmental problems that had a visible chain of consequence, such as a bird covered in oil. In comparison, the *Coral Empathy Device* aims to address environmental wicked problems that have a less directly perceptible chain of consequence, and to affect the audience using sound and haptic stimuli.
- 6 For example Arthur Aron and Barbara Fraley, ‘Relationship Closeness as Including Other in the Self: Cognitive Underpinnings and Measures,’ *Social Cognition* 17:2 (1999): 140–60.

- 7 P. Wesley Schultz, 'The Structure of Environmental Concern: Concern for Self, Other People and the Biosphere,' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21:4 (2001): 327-39.
- 8 Barad, 'On Touching,' 206-23.
- 9 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
- 10 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 314.
- 11 Kate Wright, 'Becoming-With,' *Environmental Humanities* 5:1 (2014): 278.
- 12 Schultz, 'Environmental Concern', 327-339.
- 13 See, for instance, Berenguer, 'Empathy,' 269-83, and Kim-Pong Tam, 'Dispositional Empathy with Nature,' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 35 (2013): 92-104.
- 14 Bruce D. Perry, 'The Death of Empathy?,' in *Evolution, Early Experience and Human Development*, ed. Darcia Narváez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199-201.
- 15 Perry, 'The Death of Empathy?,' 201.
- 16 I have chosen engender specifically as the word for the action of the coral empathy device because of its archaic additional meaning of begetting something. It is the conception of an emotion within us that should give birth to action.
- 17 Barad, 'On Touching,' 216.
- 18 In writing of anthropogenic environmental damage, it is to be understood that this linguistic formulation is a shorthand for a more complex understanding of a continuum between agentic, interconnected nodes in a system in which the individual self and other(s) can be considered as discrete or constituting a whole, depending on the scale at which the system is interrogated.
- 19 Wicked problems, often referred to in the field of design thinking, is a term first formulated to encompass those ill-defined problems of our time that are so interconnected that they might be considered overwhelmingly complex and difficult to solve through one intervention alone. (See C. W. Churchman, 'Wicked Problems,' *Management Science*, 14: 4 (1967): B-141 - B-142 and H.W.J. Rittel and M.M. Webber, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,' *Policy Sciences*, 4 (1973): 155-169.)
- 20 Antoine Bechara, Hannah Damasio, A. Damasio, 'Emotion, Decision Making and the Orbitofrontal Cortex,' *Cerebral Cortex*, 10: 3 (March 2000): 295-307.
- 21 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)
- 22 Nathaniel Geiger, Brianna Middlewood, and Janet Swim, *Psychological, Social, and Cultural Barriers to Communicating about Climate Change*, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science (2017). Retrieved 22 Oct. 2017, from <http://climatescience.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-377>.
- 23 Many thanks to Mike Powell for first alerting me to Damascius and Hyperignorance by sharing with me his manuscript 'Challenges of Ignorance Draft 2' retrieved from https://ikmewiki.host3.webarch.net/files/1612-Challenging_Ignorance_Pt1_V2.pdf on 16th July 2017
- 24 Raoul Mortley, 'Chapter VII. Damascius and Hyperignorance' in *From Word to Silence 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek*. Paper 8. (1986):122 http://epublications.bond.edu.au/word_to_silence_II/8
- 25 E. R. Dodds, 'The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic 'One',' *The Classical Quarterly*, 22: 3/4 (Jul - Oct, 1928): 129-142
- 26 Mortley, 'From Word to Silence', 123
- 27 See for example Androniki Kalogiratos 'Theology in Philosophy: The Case of the Late Antique Neoplatonist Damascius,' *Skepsis*, XVIII, i-ii (2007): 58-79 and William Franke, 'Apophysis and the turn of philosophy to religion: From Neoplatonic negative theology to postmodern negation of theology,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 60:1-3 (2006): 61-76
- 28 Many thanks to Dunja Christochowitz for alerting me to Anders' work.
- 29 Pieter E. Vermaas, Peter Kroes, Andrew Light, and Steven Moore, *Philosophy and Design: From Engineering to Architecture* (Dordrecht: Springer Science Business and Media, 2007)
- 30 Weintrobe, 'Anxiety.'
- 31 Marcel Viau, 'La théologie pratique peut-elle être apophasique?,' *Laval théologique et philosophique* 60: 2 (2004): 283-99.
- 32 Johannes Stuekelburger, 'Mirror Reflections: Robert Smithson's Dialectical Concept of Space,' *Canadian Art Review* 31:1-2 (2006): 90-99.
- 33 Robert Smithson, 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,' *Artforum* (1969): 1-9.
- 34 Steukelburger, 'Mirror Reflections,' 90-99.
- 35 Barad, 'On Touching', 206-23.
- 36 Idem, 214,
- 37 Marcel Viau, *Practical Theology: A New Approach*, trans. Robert Hurley and Chantal Tanguay (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
- 38 See for example: Ana Cristina Zimmermann and W. John Morgan, 'A Time for Silence? Its Possibilities for Dialogue and for Reflective Learning,' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 35 (2016): 399.
- 39 S. N. Ganguly, 'Culture, Communication and Silence,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 29:2 (1968): 182-200.
- 40 Ganguly, 'Silence,' 188.
- 41 Borae Jin and Namkee Park, 'In-Person Contact Begets Calling and Texting: Interpersonal Motives for Cell Phone Use, Face-to-Face Interaction, and Loneliness,' *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 13:6 (2010): 611-18. 42 Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty,' in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B Smith (London: Continuum, 1993), 75.
- 43 Shogo Tanaka, 'Intercorporeality as a Theory of Social Cognition,' *Theory & Psychology* 25:4 (2015): 455.
- 44 Shogo Tanaka, 'The notion of Embodied Knowledge,' in *Theoretical psychology: Global Transformations and Challenges*, eds. P. Steiner, et al (Concord, Canada: Captus Press, 2011), 164.
- 45 Audio recordings of the fjords in Bergen, Norway were made using hydrophones during a stay in Bergen, Norway as part of the Pikslo_Deep Dive workshop at Piksel 2015. Microplastics are small particles of plastic that have most often formed due to the breakdown of larger plastic pieces in the environment. These fragments, less than 5mm in diameter, have been found to be ingested by marine life, including corals, causing physical blockages and releasing harmful molecules in their bodies.

- 46 Many thanks to Clare Martynski for our productive conversations exploring the possibilities of assessing the effects of the *Coral Empathy Device*.
- 47 See: <https://katausten.wordpress.com/the-matter-of-the-soul/>.
- 48 Tam, 'Dispositional empathy,' 92–104.

Kat Austen makes artworks. She is 2017 Friends of SPRI Artist in Residence (Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge), Artist-in-Residence at University College London's Faculty of Maths and Physical Science, and Cultural Fellow at the Cultural Institute, University of Leeds. She lectures a course on art and DIY science at University College London's Bachelor's in Arts and Sciences (BASc), and consults on art and science, art and technology, technology in society, futures and scenarios, multiple knowledges, inter-disciplinarity, community and participatory research and design, system resilience, and infrastructure design. She has held artist residencies at NYU Shanghai, ArtOxygen Mumbai, and LASTheatre among others, and has a PhD in Chemistry from the Royal Institution / UCL. She is an alumna of the London Creative Network.

Not Crazy Caprice

Taut stated: ‘Whenever I can I will always defend the objectivity of building, as embodied for me in the concept of glass architecture’.¹⁰

Scheerbart’s extraordinary book *Glass Architecture* (1914) presciently proclaims every aspect of the transformative and aesthetic advantages of glass. Critic Adolph Behne wrote ‘it is not the crazy caprice of a poet that glass architecture will bring a new culture. It is a fact!’.¹¹

Scheerbart’s influence was literally written all over Taut’s *Glass Pavilion* (1914) at the ‘Werkbund’ exhibition, where the architect sought to ‘introduce the effects and possibilities of glass in the world of architecture’. Fourteen rhyming aphorisms were inscribed around its exterior, and inside the pavilion their shared ‘cosmic colour love’ was realised.

‘The Glass House has no purpose other than to be beautiful’, Taut wrote in the catalogue. He then describes a tantalising list including: a tiered waterfall over lemon-coloured and luminescent red glass, silver *smalti* mosaics, mother-of-pearl and precious beads all illuminated by ‘kaleidoscopic images composed by artists’.

A ‘total work of art’, Taut’s Glass House was sacrificed as target practice for cadets rehearsing methods of indiscriminate destruction for the impending war.

Then as ever ‘An attack on architecture is an attack on man’.¹²



Cath Keay, *amber glass detail*, 2016, 30 × 20 cm, detail of cast glass.

Building of a Glass House

The Wenzel Hablik Museum illuminates the town of Itzehoe in Germany's 'god-forsaken icy, conservative North'. It contains paintings of the galaxy, brass planets that once held sweets, starburst lights and collected crystals that Hablik carved with doors and windows into extraordinary architectures:

I was a six-year-old boy when I first picked up a rock crystal druse from the earth and faithfully looked after it for the single reason that I saw 'magic castles in the mountains' in it such as I wanted to build myself one day as a grown up.¹³

Hablik's film scenario *Building of a Glass House Beside the Sea* (1920) imagines advanced technologies that spontaneously generate glass architecture from sand on a shore: 'Magnificent structures are already appearing, giant iridescent glass domes drawn out into spikes and points – globes and tongues, spheres and flowery tubes – glittering and shining – showering out sparks'.¹⁴

New additive manufacturing techniques bring us closer to generating architecture from raw materials in situ. Indeed, habitable houses have been printed in Russia, and a white bridge in Barcelona is reminiscent of Taut's Alpine Architecture; but a speculative colonisation of Mars by printing towers from mycelium spores now *evokes* Hablik's cosmic utopias.¹⁵

BlueprintsstnirpeulB

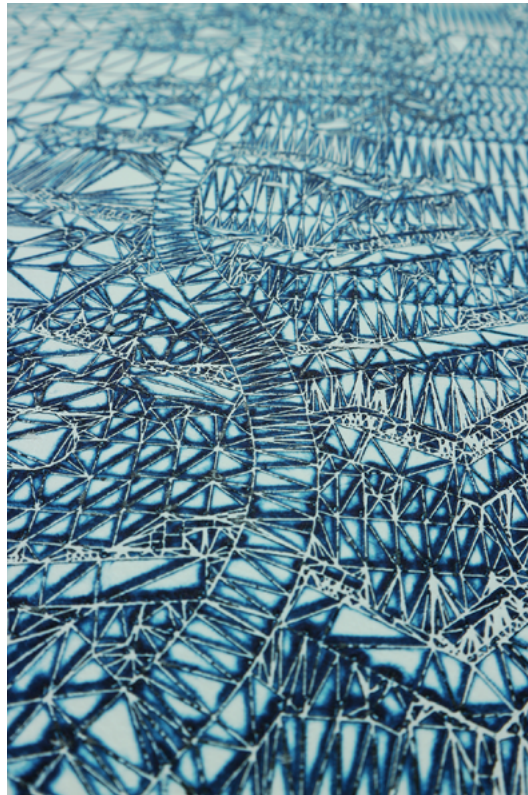
Mondfleck and myself collaborated on two print editions from his architectural scheme for row housing on a cold, remote island.

The *Gläserne Kette* architects used gelatin plates to duplicate their ideas for distribution round the group. Hablik's *Flower Greetings from the New World* (1920) exists both as ink drawing on brown paper, and as blueprint negatives: crystalline flowers transmuted to absent white lines crazing the sky.

One cross-section from Mondfleck's CAD drawing was selected from many viewpoints then lasercut onto acrylic. We produced both relief prints and etchings from this plate, and chose Prussian blue ink as the same colour as the photosensitive compounds that give blueprints their name.

Triangulated vectors lace across the relief print and cluster round buildings to form a cat's cradle of digital information that could denote anything. The process creates texture, thin washes or fathomless velvety blue, with occasional white misprints like gulls.

As an intaglio print, blue ink builds up against the cinctured lines as a snowdrift shadows a wall. This lends the print a deep, textured appearance round the edges of each inkless crevice created by the lasercutter. The result is like icy tracks recording the activities between houses on a snowy morning.



Cath Keay and Mondfleck Paredes Maldonado, *Remote Island*, 76 x 50 cm, etching.

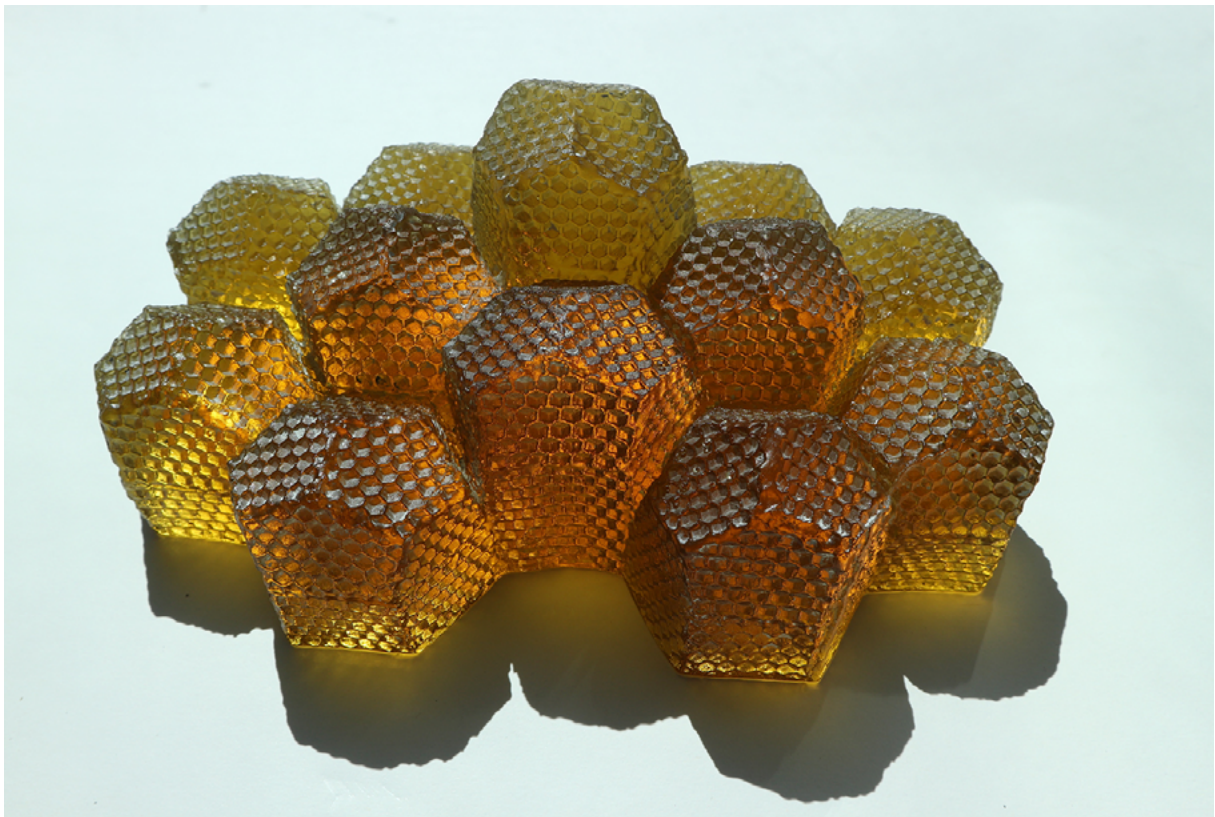
Finsterlin's Temple

I have here on my table a thick piece of yellow glass. Heavy as a building brick, constantly changing in appearance. Certainly its prismatic form is constant, but there is an ever-changing life in it...The vessel of the new spirit that we are preparing will be like this.¹⁶

In the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Finsterlin archives contain hundreds of his drawings; mostly his fantastical organic polyp architecture, but one last box contained a symmetrical building on a honeycomb plan, reminiscent of beeswax sculptures I produced in earlier work with bee colonies.

I ordered glass – thick slabs of honey-coloured bullseye .

I modeled his drawing in foundation beeswax – wax sheets embossed with hexagons that a beekeeper places into her hive. This model was cast in plaster and flint to produce a refractory mold, one that will withstand huge temperatures. The wax is melted out, the volume of the void is calculated and a corresponding amount of glass is stacked in. This brittle case is propped and levelled in the kiln to prevent molten glass breaching the mold. After firing for five days, the mold is removed and the amber glass is polished. Its prismatic form now glows on my desk.



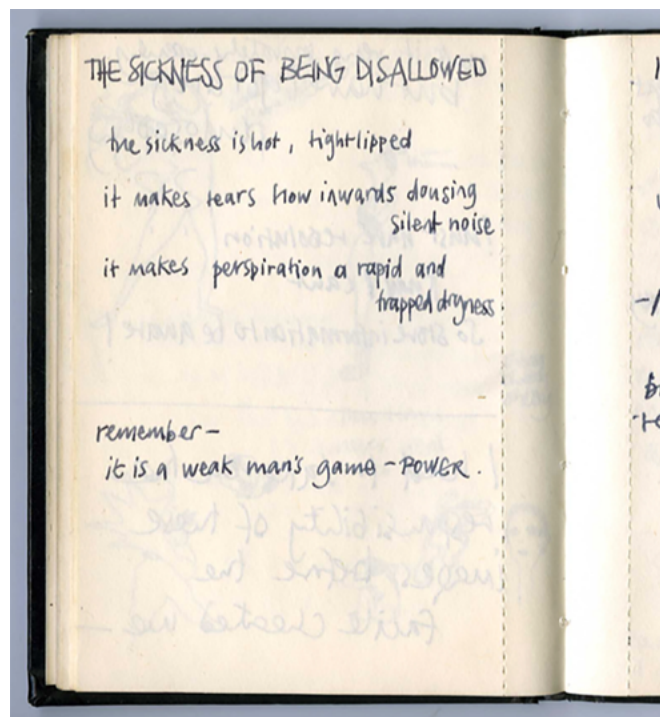
Cath Keay, *Finsterlin's temple*, 2016.

The Sickness of Being Disallowed: Premonition and Insight in the 'Artist's Sketchbook'

Sheila Gaffney

To cite this contribution:

Gaffney, Sheila. 'The Sickness of Being Disallowed: Premonition and Insight in the "Artist's Sketchbook"'. *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 83-99, <http://www.oarplatform.com/sickness-disallowed-premonition-insight-artists-sketchbook/>.



Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1983, ink on paper, 10 cm x 15 cm.

How can insights from 1983 count as part of the research process for work made and exhibited much later? *The sickness of being disallowed* offers an example – a page constituting an emotional register made in 1983, saved at that time as an attempt to hold on to a feeling. I would now, in 2017, argue that it evidences a very important *knowing in the moment*, which is an essential part of the sculpture I make as a more experienced artist today.

Then

I remember a day in 1979. It was the end of my first year studying sculpture, and I had been away for the weekend. I had no anxieties about the world at large, only about art and wanting to make art, and had hitchhiked with a friend from London to Herne Bay and back. On the return journey, two backpacked, partied-out young women were tipped out of a long

car ride into the noisy, dirty, post Sunday morning market space formed by the junction of Commercial Street, Commercial Road, Whitechapel Road, and Lehman Street in East London. This area is described by a current travel guide as ‘full of noise, colour and life...a palimpsest of culture’.¹ However, then, on a Sunday afternoon, this location was hot, dry, tired, worn, closed down and unpeopled. We stood on roads and pavements littered in post carnival condition and somatised the vehicular noise. Food packaging, plastic, random abandoned fruit, vegetables and used clothing formed a native tumbleweed. We needed to find fresh and flushing water to restore our bodies, and eventually spotted one discreet but open public doorway, that of the Whitechapel Art Gallery. This immediately became our oasis and curiously (although I didn’t know it then) it addressed my nascent wonder about sculpture and my ambition to be a sculptor.

So I first set eyes on the sculpture and drawings of Eva Hesse, an American artist whose work I had never come across, as I stumbled in from an inner city road intersection to use a public convenience.² At that time, Hesse’s works were not the ageing, petrified conserved pieces that arrived in the Tate in 2002.³ They were the fresh, fragile, hypnotic, disruptive, audience-grabbing presences we can now only know partially through iconic photographs.⁴ They were delicate, lightweight, twinkly, tactile, hard, soft, fleshy, shiny, and sometimes see-through. They did not follow the line of logic of British sculpture that I was learning at college, with its heavy lexicon of object, gravity, space, carved, constructed or modelled.⁵ The works on show possessed, within their material forms, an embodiment of emotion, and were free from the visual interference of interpretive panels. I was with the works in a space in which viewers moved slowly, stopping when and if, to simply gaze and take in each phenomenal form. Every piece of work was redolent of bodily presence, and I immediately sensed that this exhibition experience was special. It has continued to have a great impact on me.

The exhibition occurred after Hesse’s death, yet the artist’s voice was present – not only emerging from the materiality of the works, but also in the accompanying publication. The forward to the catalogue, written by Nicholas Serota, states ‘it is through sculpture that a rare and fine sensibility continues to communicate with us’.⁶ This claim, although true in many instances, slightly misrepresents what sensibility means in the case of this artist. The statement privileges the sculptural object, and separates it from the woman creating it.⁷

Fourteen of the fifty-six pages that formed the publication were filled with selections from the artist’s personal diaries and notebooks revealing her writings on work and ideas about art. The reproduced pages were designed to replicate the authentic layout, spelling and punctuation of the originals. Sensing her voice through reading the catalogue, statements written by Hesse such as ‘It just seems to me that the “personal” in art if really trusted is the most valued quality and what I want to find so much in and for myself’, followed by the underlined cry ‘only knowledge of the self is possible’ resonated within my moment of aesthetic encounter, and framed this happenstance.⁸ I still remember viewing the tangle of latex rope and wire which makes up *Untitled 1969–70* and the priapic group of standing fiberglass and polythene forms that constitute *Untitled 1970*.

It was a body-to-body engagement. Both works hung before me and around me on transparent strings, defying any truth to materials held dear in the UK condition of sculpture.⁹

Hesse's work introduced a paradoxical challenge where her *non-truth* to materials presented a new idea, a truth to emotional honesty.

Eva Hesse wrote:

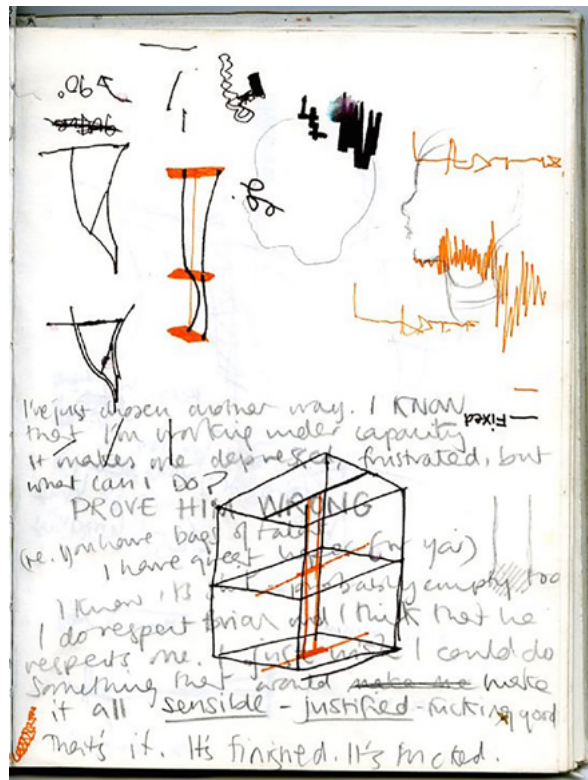
In my inner soul art and life are inseparable...[I] am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life...in fact my idea now is to counteract everything I've ever learned or been taught about those things – to find something that is inevitable that is my life, my feeling, my thoughts.¹⁰

To me these words signal issues of gender, aspiration, seriousness, vulnerability and, continuing Hesse's own style of expression using 'opposites',¹¹ certainty about all that was *uncertain*. I propose that in this encounter there is a synergy of exhibition and archive of antagonism, where the archive is Hesse's written papers expressing her contention with the depersonalization of art in the examples she knew. This is an exemplar of the seamlessness between material making and psychic life.

Personally written accounts of creative practice often include time-based approaches that appear diaristic. Marion Milner's early work, *A Life of One's Own* (1934) published under her pseudonym Joanna Field, is an analysis of her own moments of everyday life, a genuine experiment to record feelings and her actions to explore her own psyche.¹² This work was the precursor to her ruminations on painting in which she used the creative act of that medium to research and deepen her understanding of psychoanalysis.¹³ Anne Truitt's *Daybook: The Journal of an Artist* (1982) recounts her contemplations 'reconciling the call of creative work with the demands of daily life'.¹⁴ Truitt's account is different in tone from Milner's, employing a more gentle, considered reportage, recording her domestic responsibilities alongside the production of minimal art. Truitt embeds questions about her artistic self within a narrative of recognizable life routines, and her prose interrupts the biographical myths of the male artist.¹⁵ Both of these authors reflect extensively on, yet their writing partly removes them from, the artistic process in play. Hesse's writing, in the form which I engaged with it in 1979, exhibited a more urgent voice. The sentences, paragraphs, phrases and lists do not flow together as a carefully crafted single narrative. They read rather as a collection of exclamations, and therefore, crucially, gave me permission to generate my own utterances in a written form. To this day when I am making sculpture in my studio I always have a book in which I am saving what I would perhaps call 'scraps' of my unconscious.

Now

I think of these scrap entries as 'emotional registers' or 'feelings', and they have become part of my art practice, although not when my work is exhibited. From the moment of encounter with Hesse at the Whitechapel, and afterwards in my acts of writing-out-alongside-making, I have felt it is acceptable to gesture, and to converse with myself, with the art I am making and with the art of the wider world. Citing these utterances as relevant in my practice might appear illogical as they were not initially generated to be any deliberate part of my process, but in this contribution to OAR I am proposing that, in fact, they are crucial to art making. To put this in other terms, after Hesse's writings had signalled to me that psychic life played an important part of an artistic practice, I understood that in my practice the way thoughts ran through my mind could be as important as my hands and eyes when making

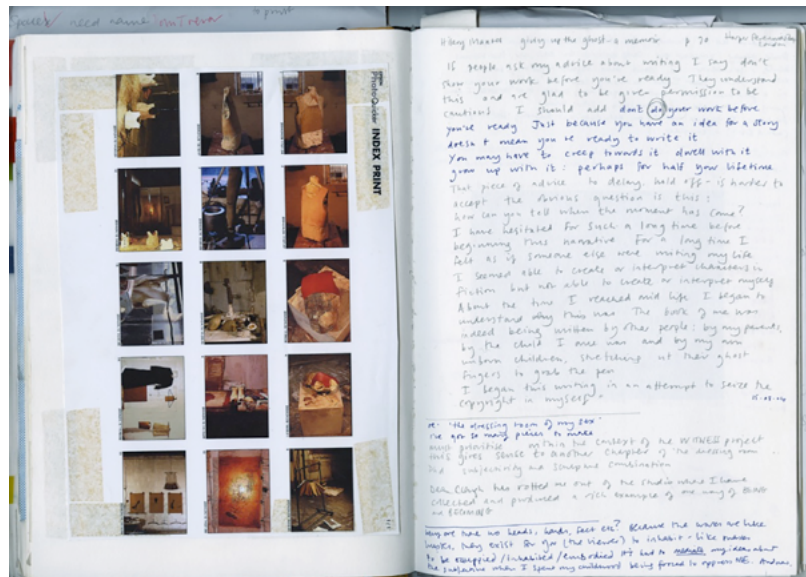


Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1980, pencil, felt tip on paper, 18.5 cm x 34 cm.

sculpture. The pages I present in this contribution are taken from one of what could be recognised as my artist's sketchbooks, compiled as part of my sculptural practice. There are numerous models of seamless relationships between artists and their sketchbooks. J.M.W. Turner's sketchbooks are still available in monograph form claiming to be reproduced 'as close to...actual size as possible...in four-color offset lithography, so that they are extraordinarily faithful to the original work'.¹⁶ Pablo Picasso's sketchbooks toured six countries in an exhibition titled *Je suis le cahier: the Sketchbooks of Picasso* which presented 'the legacy by which we may decipher the process of Picasso's creativity and understand the cohesive totality of his lifework'. As viewers of it we are told 'the sequence of drawings within a given notebook is important to an understanding of the creative process'.¹⁷ However, these should be seen for their contemporary relevance, and not a necessary template for future cultures. Current examples include the collection *Donald Rodney's Sketchbooks* (1983–90), in which the artist 'made a conscious decision to treat his sketchbooks as ongoing works of art', and the notebooks of Helen Chadwick, which survey her everyday social world, as well as show her idea development, plans, diagrams and measurements for her many well known works.¹⁸

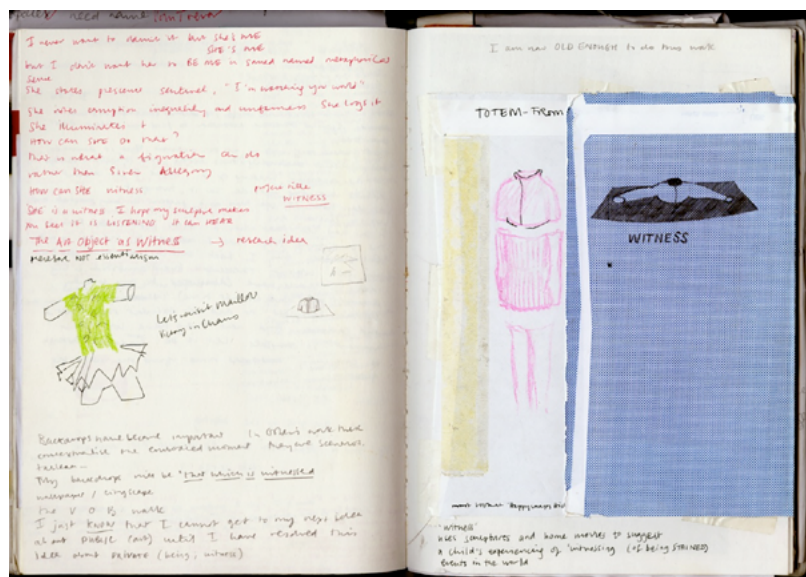
My own books do not fit into these models and have properties more in common with 'commonplace books', compilations which became popular in early modern Europe between the late 15th–18th Centuries. Commonplace books are:

A way to compile knowledge usually by writing information into books. Such books are essentially scrapbooks filled with items of every kind: recipes, quotes, letters, poems, tables of weights and measures, proverbs, prayers, legal formulas.¹⁹



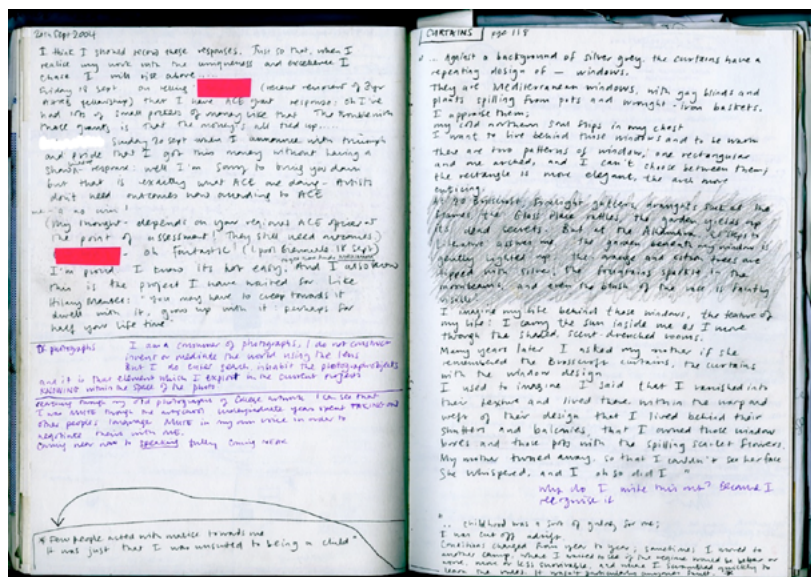
Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook double page saving words from Giving Up The Ghost by Hilary Mantel (2003), 2004, ink, digital print on paper, 42 cm x 29 cm.*

Newton's Papers contain examples of commonplace books,²⁰ and in Elena Ferrante's recent *Neapolitan Novels* readers followed the 'very ordinary, dirty notebooks' of the central character Lila. The author names them to be *zibaldone*, Italian vernacular commonplace books dating from the fourteenth century.²¹ In a similar way, I think of my books as a non-professionalized, unfettered repository, formed as a self-reflexive rehearsal space for becoming a woman artist, an identity I have maintained since 1977. However, I am not the first to adopt this way of working. The early notebooks of the artist, choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer have been cited as an example of the way in which 'sketchbooks operate as performative manifestations towards becoming an artistic self'.²²



Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook double page, 2004, ink biro, crayon on paper, 42 cm x 29 cm.*

Typically, as in the first sketchbook page pictured above, entries sit on pages simply stored and waiting to be employed in future work: a swatch of colour, a brushstroke or a cartoon. The pages are packed within the leaves of books, which hold fragments of material textures, thumbnail sketches, visual representations of sculpture I may never make, many to do lists, and, most significantly for my contribution to this issue, written personal insights. As with commonplace books these were never made for public inspection or publication. I have consolidated them as an outcome of the process of learning to become a sculptor. They now form a record made within the 1980s feminist framework, a framework that emphasized the concept of woman as 'other'.²³



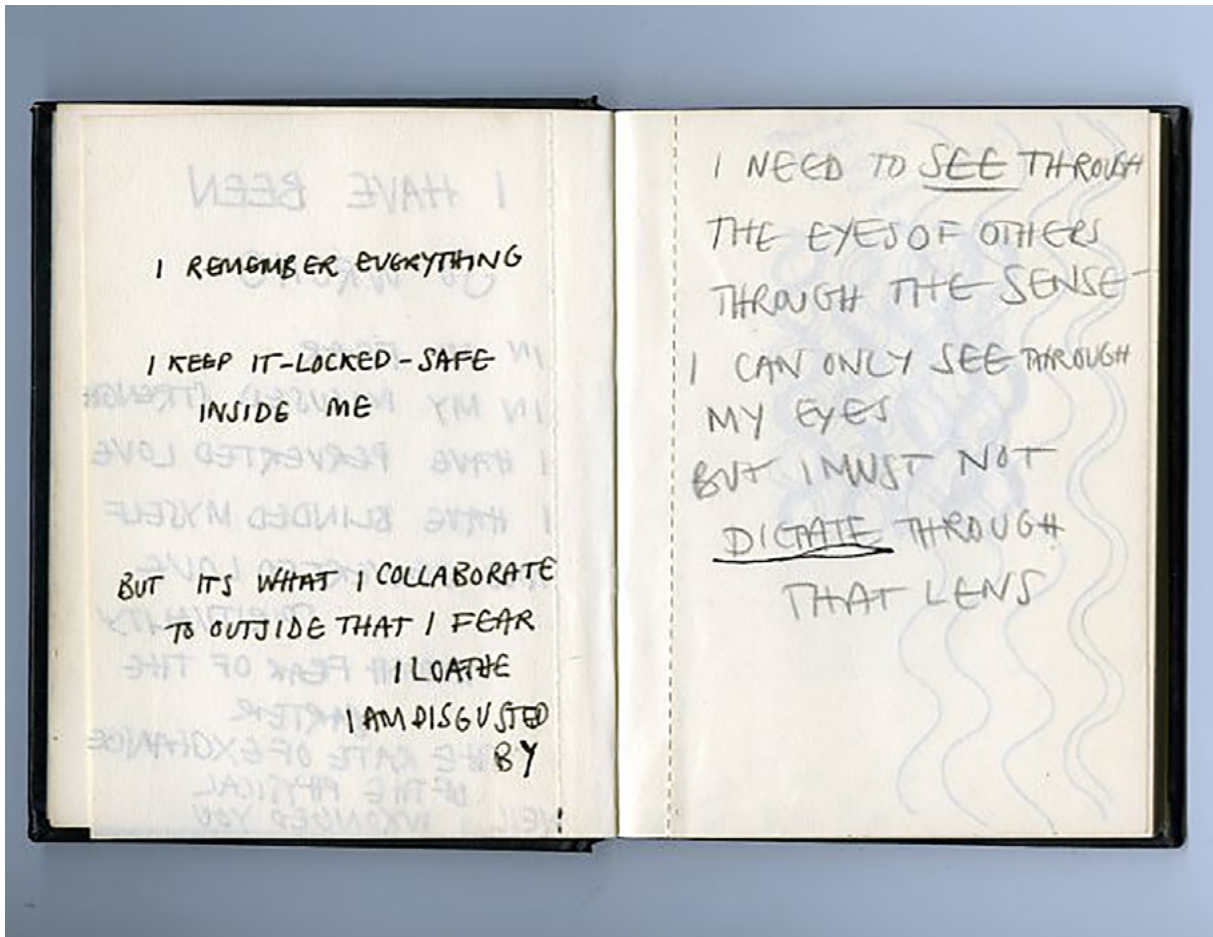
Sheila Gaffney, sketchbook double page saving words from *Giving Up The Ghost* by Hilary Mantel (2003), 2004, ink, graphite on paper, 42 cm x 29 cm.

My personal, feminist, project of social and cultural emancipation can be traced back precisely to my sketchbook-based repository. Confronted with research conditions set by university culture, which Patti Lather characterises as 'a dinosaur culture of master narratives', I want to challenge the temporal limitations set by institutional culture in the UK, and their insistence on objective and measurable criteria, and claim the subjective registers as constitutive of validity in my own artistic research.²⁴ With this attitude, how can the way of working I describe and undertake in my studio be recognized as part of today's 'systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources to establish facts, reaching new conclusions'?²⁵ How can this way of working (and these pages) evidence what would now be called artistic research? Can I qualify these subjective registers, across time, just described, to measure the progress of learning to be an artist? This is the scene of my own antagonism towards the difference I observe between the reception of artists' insights in the public realm and the conditions set to justify such in academia.²⁶ This is carried forward from my encounter with Hesse to the present day, and it is resonant with the words of the feminist educationalist Penny Jane Burke who states:

Knowledge that is legitimized by universities is often constructed as large scale, attached to quantitative methods, objective and value free. It is often characterized as detached from the personal and political, although

feminist theorists have argued that 'Knowledge is always situated and tied to wider power relations that are classed, gendered and racialized'.²⁷

Therefore I look to Lather's aspiration 'toward opening up our privileged spaces in the production of a politics of difference that recognizes paradox, complicity and complexity'.²⁸ I believe her work to free validity from being a fixed dominant 'limit question' is useful to artistic practice, including mine, in which the subject engages reflexively in a search for meaning constructed both by others and her selves.²⁹



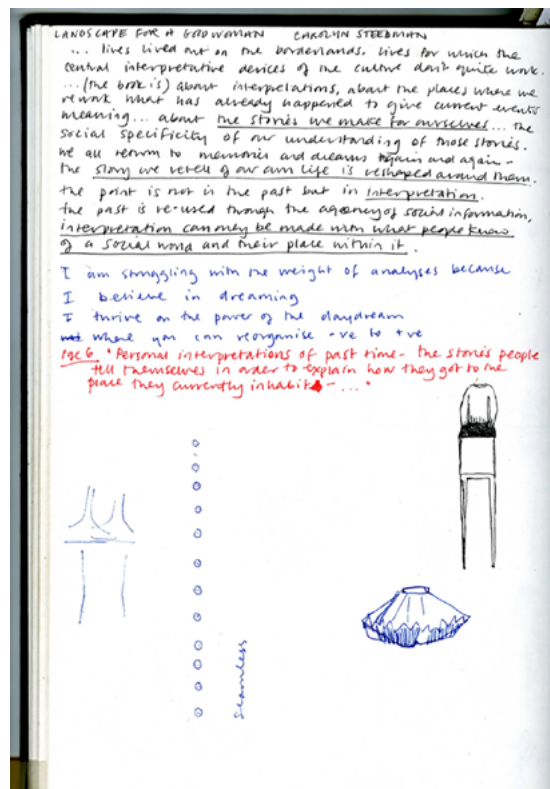
Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook double page*, 1982–84, ink, pencil on paper, 15 cm x 20 cm.

Lather believes 'strongly that in our action is our knowing'.³⁰ I came of age artistically within a culture now historicized as 'British sculpture' in which there was a collective desire to redefine what sculpture was and could be in the late twentieth century.³¹ In essence being part of this encouraged sculptors to create their own criteria for success. If, as Lather says, 'our invested positionality shapes our rhetoric and practice',³² then it is crucial to explore ways in which these registers are still active and have value now as I work as a sculptor, acknowledging their formation within British sculpture and its post practices,³³ where the question of gendered subjectivity is not a condition.



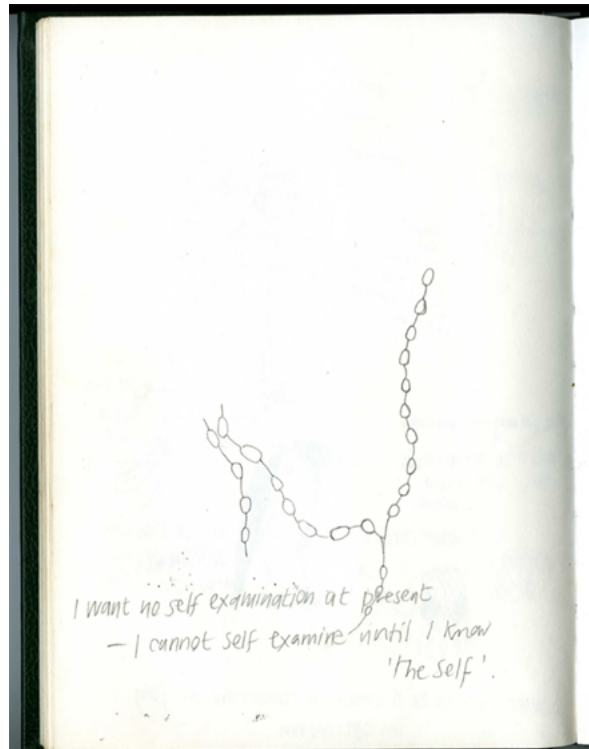
Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1991, ink on paper, 25 cm x 9 cm.

On reflection when looking at the pages of my books, I now see that my saved emotional registers are of two different types.



Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1991, ink on paper, 25cm x 9cm.

The first type of emotional register can be thought of as a collection of scaffold pieces, piled up to help me reach a sort of respectability. Respectability is 'usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it', as the sociologist Beverley Skeggs concludes.³⁴ Skeggs' research is about attaining respectability in terms of the norms of social class. My own frame of respectability is the canon of British sculpture. The saved scaffolds assemble and I hoard them to help me make strategy to intervene in territories, find form for expressing anger, assert my demand for recognition and the acceptance of a different voice within this canon.



Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1984, pencil on paper, 15.5 cm x 21.5 cm.

The second type of emotional register is that which I call 'knowing in the moment', and records premonition, insight, emotion and feeling. This knowing in the moment to which I refer is a fleetingly glimpsed mental image or thought that I would like to express through sculpture, but can neither configure nor facilitate at the time. This differs from other formulations on knowing in art, such as Rebecca Fortnum's recent propositions.³⁵ Fortnum acknowledges 'not knowing' as a much used term by artists and she researches 'from primary sources, using the words of artists to examine moments in an art practice when artists negotiate their own knowledge'.³⁶ She focuses upon descriptions of artists' processes to create and contrive states of 'not knowing'. My interest in her idea is related to the history of art school teaching in Britain. Models such as 'Basic Design' are still used as contemporary reference points in studio practice teaching, predominantly at elementary diagnostic stages.³⁷ Fortnum finds commonality amongst artists who 'want to encounter, in their final work, something that does not *feel* known to them' and presents this as an outcome each has sought through a strategy.³⁸ Such strategies may involve changing medium in order to suspend conscious deliberations, or ways to displace the artist from the centre

of events. Such an argument relies on a 'Eureka moment' that reinforces the idea of finding knowledge as the result of process.³⁹ My state of knowing in the moment is only legible as part of process by viewing it retrospectively. When I first write down a scrap (an emotional register), it has more to do with what I am certain of at that time, and should be thought of as a form of knowing before-I-can-do, or thinking-in-front-of-making. I only begin to claim relevance for these entries now, in 2017 (or in future moments), after a long personal practice of searching through the books to retrieve remembered items whilst engaging in making sculpture. Therefore, the material to which I am referring can be thought of using the term 'pre-process'.⁴⁰

Psychoanalytic concepts have allowed feminists to rethink the art practices which we, even now, are continually working to reshape, and are an integral part of my personal 'perspective'.⁴¹ In order to express in this way, I am drawing on the idea of artistic research as 'a context-aware and historical process that works 'inside-in', beginning and ending with acts committed within an artistic practice'.⁴² Central to this ideal for artistic research, done inside practice, is the issue of the researcher's perspective which can be put simply as 'who is the one doing things', to acknowledge that this stance 'alternates and changes positioning of articulation within the given practice'.⁴³ As a feminist, I now overtly claim the self as the subject of the sculpture I make, an approach I struggled to make have universal interest as a young sculptor. This self as subject is not some sort of uncontrollable oozing of expression through art materials. In my current 'photoworks', I employ a strategy to ensure this does not occur, and begin making the sculpture using analytical drawing and measuring methods to interrogate a family photograph of myself as a child. The photograph provides me with a register of classed and gendered subjectivity, situation, place and an internalized knowledge, which I source as I use the data extracted from the image, to model in wax and distill the form of the child I remember being in that moment of time. This is how, bringing forward an analysis of myself within the sculpture, I use my own agency and lived experience alongside and within my material manipulations.



Family photograph, Phoenix Park, 30th August 1966, 9 cm x 11.5 cm
(Sheila Gaffney second from left).



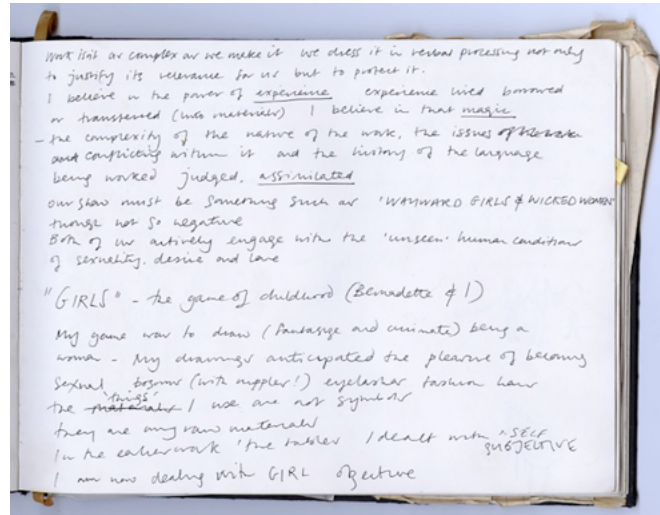
Sheila Gaffney, *These at least were things she could remember*, 2015, bronze,
3 cm x 3 cm x 12 cm.

Alongside this, I life-write through my process of making to give insight to my own form of what I propose is an ‘inside-in’ methodology.⁴⁴ When writing through my work, I attempt to both articulate and extrapolate my ‘thought position’ in sculpture.⁴⁵ To do this, I have looked to Object Relations Theory as developed by Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott.⁴⁶ I suggest this framework helps us to understand how to model the internalized and mental complexity of the maker in the moment of making that had no place in the teaching of sculpture, from which I learnt as a young student.

The framework of Object Relations Theory ‘places the human being in a dual world of external and internal relationship’, where the inner world of the person is ‘a changing dynamic process’.⁴⁷ Christopher Bollas expands this strand of ‘the illusion that is psychoanalysis’ by proposing the idea of the transformational object, which defines the psychoanalytical idea of the early experience of the Mother not as an object but as a process: one that continues into adult life, altering self experience.⁴⁸ When I first read this book, which is a theory of psychoanalysis, I experienced it as a description of my own knowledge of creative making and the culture in which I learned. I saw a parallel between my experience of becoming a sculptor and Bollas’ descriptions of how we move from wordless transformational experiences to finding language to articulate experience. The usefulness for the creative artist lies within the *written* depiction of the inner relationships and processes we call the psyche. Bollas’ ideas can be applied directly to the emotional registers on the pages of my sketchbooks. Bollas writes ‘It is an ordinary feature of our mental life to engage in sub-vocal conversations with oneself’, telling us that ‘much of psychoanalysis is about the nature of intrasubjective relations to the self as object’, and ‘this constant objectification of the self for purposes of thinking is commonplace’.⁴⁹ I recognise my ‘scrap’ habits in these descriptions, and liken my emotional register to an ‘intrasubjective utterance’. Furthermore, the concept of ‘the unthought known’ as an idea, ‘to stand for that which is known but has not yet been thought, if by thought it is understood that we mean that which has been mentally processed accurately’ is helpful to further understand the pre-process relationship of the emotional registers to the sculpture I make now.⁵⁰ Bollas describes his *own* notebook culture as an act where:

I enter the idea in my notebook without straining to push myself beyond what I know exactly at that moment...[A]lthough I am working on an idea without knowing exactly what I think, I am engaged in thinking an idea struggling to have me think it.⁵¹

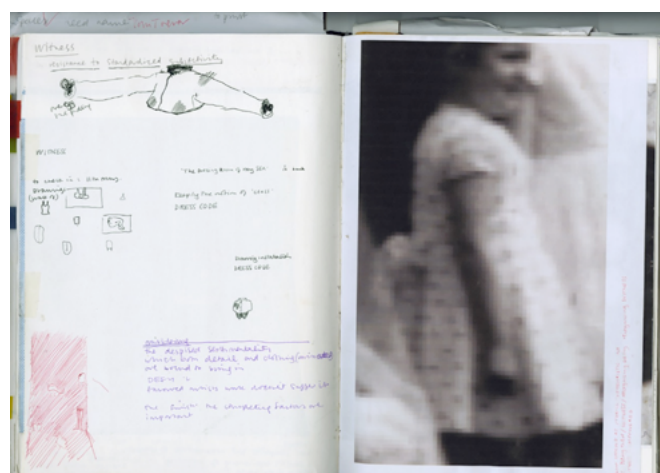
In this context my journal pages evidence my lived experience as 'unthought knowns' captured on the page. My own utterances, and the words of the writers I have read and saved, articulate together something like Bollas' unthought known. I believe my own words and images in the pages of the books are the result of an impulsive grab to capture such in



Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1992, ink on paper, 25cm x 9cm.

scripto-visual form, and when sourced or used become that which is known. With every touch of the wax surfaces I form in the modelling process to create my sculpture, I am processing these registers both mentally and somatically to become thought.

Through the ideas of Christopher Bollas, I have found a way to articulate the relationship between the sculptural work I exhibit in the public realm and the pre-process emotional registers generated in my commonplacing. Currently, I use the idea of the intrasubjective utterance to map through and within the culture that was teaching sculpture in Britain in the late twentieth century, and demonstrate the psychic frame at play as an integral element of the sculptural imaginary.⁵²

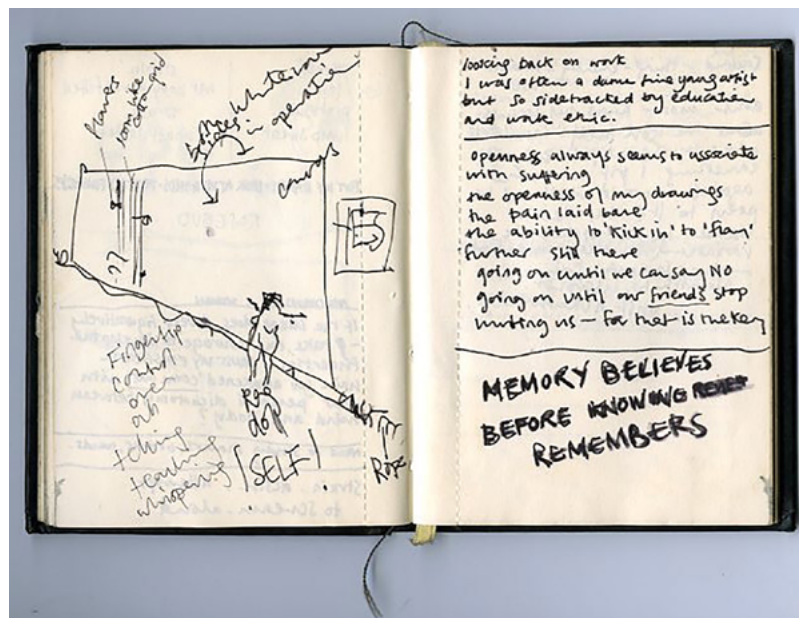


Sheila Gaffney, *sketchbook page*, 1992, ink on paper, 25 cm x 9 cm.

Drawing on these theorists is itself an attempt to qualify my post-Hesse practice in sculpture, as well as a way to raise questions about the human relationship with making and thinking through psychoanalytical terms as a process. In effect, I'm proposing my archive of commonplace books contributes to a paradigm-after-Bollas, and as such it mirrors the problematic at the core of Lather's demand for 'a site that "gives to be seen" the unthought in our thought'.⁵³ I am conscious that I am coupling the Foucauldian thinking of Lather with psychoanalytical thought of Bollas, which in an academic context may seem incongruous. It is not uncommon for artists to bring seemingly incompatible ideas together in the material practice of making, and therefore the 'inside-in' artistic researcher may not perform a straightforward logic in what they call their process.⁵⁴

The 'scandalous categories' of validity that Lather proposes are essential for allowing such a feminist project to move further into speakability.⁵⁵ The emotional registers I have saved in sketchbook mode are now an addition to the artistic vocabulary, ready to be articulated. Furthermore, they can be treated as information in this watchful, reflective, self-aware generating of knowledge which is a crucial part of my identity as a sculptor. As Lather says 'There is much in my performance as a researcher I cannot reach, much that eludes the logic of the self-present subject'.⁵⁶

In my 'inside-in' research project, which draws upon and sources inner states of mind, I am anticipating a problem to demonstrate some criteria for validity other than self reflection and comparisons with relevant and significant examples found in other artists' work. Using Lather's imagined checklist for *Ironic Validity*, my emotional registers foreground what she calls the insufficiencies of language. The emotional registers resist, due to their relation with a moment in time (Lather's) 'the hold of the real', and gesture 'towards the problematics of representation'. The accumulated book contents are now 'the generation



Sheila Gaffney, sketchbook page saving words from *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner (1930), 1982–84, ink on paper, 15 cm x 20 cm.

of research practices that take the crisis of representation into account'.⁵⁷ Encouraged by Lather's work, I propose the psychoanalytical framework outlined to position these scraps as part of what we call thinking and being. What I am doing in this is creating an objective relationship between myself as maker, inquirer, and subject 'to make the familiar strange and see things through critical eyes'.⁵⁸

Lather's *Ironic Validity* is a gift to the problem for creative work such as mine in an institutionalized research project, but the work itself is also a gift to *Ironic Validity*. My journal entries perform similar theoretical moves if they were made, for example, into a research training video, resembling Pixar's recent animated feature *Inside Out* (2015), inspired by Robert Plutchik's *Psychoevolutionary Theory of Basic Emotions*.⁵⁹ In my imagined video the characters on the pages could model and perform the ironic parts of Lather's transgressive checklist, acting out the insufficiencies of language, the production of meaning effects, producing truth as a problem and resisting the hold of the real.

Lather's own 'seeming obsession with the topic of validity' from her position as a feminist offers a space in which I can valorize these essential scraps of me.⁶⁰ I would like to see the feminist project in which I have participated and shared here become a normative model for the future of art as research, and receive recognition as such. Certainly, my sketchbooks contain premonitions rather than knowledge, and these insights pre-empt a future stage in the process of making, rather than perform a past knowledge that is already known by others. In my current, 'mature' practice I work with Lather's welcome intervention for the feminist into artistic research. Her aim of 'developing inquiry-approaches...that move us toward ways of knowing which interrupt relations of dominance and subordination' enables the inclusion of emotional registers in my research practice.⁶¹

Many years later, all the registers of Hesse, such as written utterances, drawings and sculpture, are now recognised as one opus. Feelings are now facts in any ongoing examinations of Hesse.⁶² However, it is still difficult for feminist artistic researchers to present an art practice in its entirety, which may include private and personal disclosure,⁶³ when making original contributions to knowledge.⁶⁴ Artistic researchers require opportunities in which to claim voice-positions while they are alive, and not wait for posthumous archival discovery. New tools are needed to do this. Lather's work offers a necessary and appropriate apparatus, which will work within an 'inside-in' methodology, to meet the contemporary lust for scrutiny, audit and legitimization which can be read off current institutional conditions in the UK higher educational sector. In addition, her work offers a release from what I once, a long time ago, imagined myself to be suffering from – the sickness of being disallowed.

1 'Brick lane,' in *Lonely Planet*, accessed 21 May, 2017 at <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/england/london/attractions/brick-lane/a/poi-sig/372035/358914>.

2 *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 4 May–17 June 1979.

3 *Eva Hesse*, Tate Modern, 13 November 2002–9 March 2003.

4 The deterioration of Hesse's work due to her use of experimental materials is well documented. The iconic photographs to which I refer originate in her New York studio and exhibitions. See: Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

5 See: William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), and William Tucker, *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975). Phyllida Barlow writes of learning UK sculpture in Mark Godfrey and Jon Wood, *Objects for...and Other Things: Phyllida Barlow* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004).

6 Nicholas Serota, ed., *Eva Hesse: Sculpture; 1936–1970* (London: Trustees of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1979), 3.

7 However, Anne Wagner states her mistrust of how such writings may have had a reductive and detrimental effect on the way in which Hesse's work can be understood within the history of art. Anne M. Wagner, 'Another Hesse,' in *Eva Hesse*, ed.

- Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 97, and Griselda Pollock and Vanessa Corby, *Encountering Eva Hesse* (Munich: Prestel, 2006).
- 8 Serota, *Eva Hesse*, 12, 18.
 - 9 Truth to materials is a phrase describing a school of thought which believes the innate quality of the material used is a determining value in the making of the sculpture, so that 'the artist must be true to his materials: [s]he must respect intrinsic qualities of the medium so that the viewer will be aware of the appropriateness of the image to the substance that has given it form'. Albert E. Elsen, *Origins of Modern Sculpture: Pioneers and Premises* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1974), 120. Elsen attributes this influence in sculpture in Europe and USA to Aristide Maillol, Constantin Brancusi, and Jacob Epstein. This value in British Sculpture is often attributed to Henry Moore, and has remained a discussed tenet in the art school teaching I experienced. See also Phyllida Barlow's recollections in Phyllida Barlow, 'Heresay, Rumours, Bed-sit Dreamers and Art Begins Today,' in Godfrey and Wood, *Objects for...*, 211).
 - 10 Serota, *Eva Hesse*, 23.
 - 11 Ibidem.
 - 12 Joanna Field, *A Life Of One's Own* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1934).
 - 13 Marion Milner, *On Not Being Able to Paint* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1950).
 - 14 Anne Truitt, *Day Book: The Journal of an Artist* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
 - 15 Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Histiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
 - 16 Gerald Wilkinson, *Turner's Early Sketchbooks: Drawings in England, Wales and Scotland from 1789 to 1802* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1972).
 - 17 Arnold Glimcher and Marc Glimcher, *Je suis le cahier: The Sketchbooks of Picasso* (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1986), 2, 3.
 - 18 'Donald Rodney's Sketchbooks,' at Tate, accessed 14 July, 2017, at <http://www2.tate.org.uk/donaldrodney/sketchbooks.htm>;
 - 19 'Turning The Pages – Helen Chadwick's Notebooks,' at Henry Moore Foundation, accessed 18 June, 2017, at <https://www.henry-moore.org/archives-and-library/sculptors-papers-archive/turning-the-pages---helen-chadwicks-notebooks>.
 - 20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonplace_book, accessed 30 June, 2017.
 - 21 'Newton Papers,' accessed 30 June, 2017, at <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-03996/9>.
 - 22 Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* (New York: Europa Editions, 2012); Elena Ferrante, *The Story of a New Name* (New York: Europa Editions, 2013); Elena Ferrante, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (New York: Europa Editions, 2014); Elena Ferrante, *The Story of the Lost Child* (New York: Europa Editions, 2015), 310.
 - 23 Felicity Allen, 'CREATIVITY v EDUCATION', *Art Monthly* 366 (2013): 12.
 - 24 For example, see: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949] (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 17.
 - 25 Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991), xvi.
 - 26 Oxford English Living Dictionary, accessed 10 April, 2017, at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/research>.
 - 27 Whilst developing my thoughts for this essay, I heard a national radio broadcast that crystallized what I am calling here my antagonism. A celebrity punk star, once perceived publicly as a *bête noir*, when being interviewed about his creative process stated without being challenged: 'Nature gave me the gift to be able to look at myself from the outside in'. John Lydon, 'Simon Mayo Drivetime,' BBC, London, Radio 2, 27 Mar, 2017.
 - 28 Penny Jane Burke, 'Writing, Power and Voice: Access to and Participation in Higher Education,' *Changing English* 15:2 (2008): 204. The final section is a quotation from Patti Lather.
 - 29 Patti Lather, 'Against Proper Objects: Toward the Diversely Qualitative', paper presented at Summer Institute in Qualitative Research: Putting Theory to Work, Manchester Metropolitan University, Education and Social Research Institute, 6–10 July, 2015, accessed 2 August, 2017, at <http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/siqr/archive15.php>.
 - 30 Patti Lather, 'FERTILE OBSESSION: Validity After Poststructuralism,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993): 674.
 - 31 Lather, *Getting Smart*, xv.
 - 32 The BBC archive attributes its inception of British sculpture to the work of Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, see BBC, 'British Sculptors: Artists in Stone, Metal and Wood,' accessed 21 August 2017, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/sculptors/>. In 1977, art critic William Packer wrote: 'It...is now accepted by many people, sculptors among them, that the last twenty-five years or so have seen a remarkable renaissance of sculpture in this country and the establishment of a national school second to none in the world', and see: GLC London Celebrations Committee for The Queens Silver Jubilee, *A Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Contemporary British Sculpture 1977*, (London: Mathews, Miller Dunbar: 1977), 2. In recent research the term 'sculpture in Britain' is used, see: Lisa Le Feuvre, *United Enemies: the Problem of Sculpture in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s* (Leeds: Henry Moore Foundation, 2011), 4.
 - 33 Lather, *Getting Smart*, xv.
 - 34 A useful description of the relationship between British sculpture and English art colleges can be found in Lynne Cooke, 'Between Image and Object: the "New British Sculpture"', in *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965*, ed. Terry A. Neff (USA: Thames and Hudson, 1987). This essay mentions the work of twenty-five sculptors to present a scene of 'New British Sculpture' but only two of these are women.
 - 35 Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997), 1.
 - 36 Rebecca Fortnum, 'Creative Accounting: Not Knowing in Talking and Making,' in *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, ed. Elizabeth Fisher et al. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), 70–86.
 - 37 Idem, 70.
 - 38 Basic Design was considered a new and radical approach to training in British Art Schools in the 1950s and 1960s, and is believed to have been influential in the character of art college teaching in Britain since. The curriculum was delivered teaching through a series of tutor led exercises and tasks that addressed what were believed to be the fundamentals of all art and design, e.g. line, shape, colour, tone, texture. The Basic Design approach aimed to shatter students' expectations and preconceptions previously learnt and dispel divisions between Fine and Applied Arts. Although retrospectively criticized for lacking to recognize students as human beings in social relationships, the approach can still be found to underpin the preliminary year to studying art at BA (Hons) level in the UK (known as a Foundation course). Leeds Arts University (formerly

- Leeds College of Art) is one such institution that still aligns its Foundation year curriculum to Basic Design. See: 'Leeds Arts University Foundation Diploma in Art & Design,' accessed 26 August, 2017, at <http://www.leeds-art.ac.uk/study/further-education-courses/foundation-diploma-in-art-design/>
- 38 Fortnum, 'Creative Accounting,' 70.
- 39 Idem, 72.
- 40 This is a description I have used myself. I have found it used in a similar way to describe 'an emerging creative splurge' in Sujat Maharaj, 'What the Thunder Said: Toward a Scouting Report on "Art as a Thinking Process",' in Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese, *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 155.
- 41 The relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism in this period is well articulated, see: Sonya Andermahr, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz, *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (London: Arnold, 2000), and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing The Canon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999).
- 42 Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén, 'Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public' in *The Critical Qualitative Research Series*, ed. Shirley R. Steinberg and Gaile S. Canella, vol. 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), ix.
- 43 Idem, 4. This text acknowledges its debt to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work on indigeneous research methodology. See: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
- 44 Life writing is autobiographical writing which engages with matters greater than the personal. Sheila Gaffney, 'A Story Within a Story Within a Story Within a Story: British Art School Experience Retrieved Through Archive, Anecdote and Life Writing,' *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* 40 (2017): 80.
- 45 Rowan Bailey, University of Huddersfield, 'Thought Positions in Sculpture,' accessed 21 August, 2017, at <https://research.hud.ac.uk/institutes-centres/st/thoughtpositionsin-sculpture/rowanbailey/#/rowan-bailey-iii>.
- 46 Object Relations Theory was a British development of Freudian psychoanalytical theory during the 1940s and 1950s. See: Lavinia Gomez, *An Introduction to Object Relations* (London: Free Association Books, 1997).
- 47 Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (London: Free Association Books, 1987), 2.
- 48 Ibidem.
- 49 Idem, 42.
- 50 Idem, 280.
- 51 Idem, 10.
- 52 I am thinking of Alex Potts' statement that 'a distinctively modern sculptural imaginary began to define itself as a result of developments in the eighteenth-century art world' in his introduction to *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.
- 53 Lather, 'FERTILE OBSESSION', 676.
- 54 This is my own observation after many years of working in higher education with students in art colleges, and mentoring emergent artists for small arts organisations, before the art they make becomes part of public knowledge. The art we experience, and particularly that which is deemed significant, is always mediated, prior to our encounters with it. Curatorial practice is an example of a constitutive agenda within the production of the cultural phenomena of exhibition, that takes place to enable comprehensive public facing presentation of creative practices. See: Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007).
- 55 Lather, 'FERTILE OBSESSION', 687.
- 56 Idem, 685.
- 57 Ibidem.
- 58 This quotation attributed to Derrida (1997) is frequently quoted to explain *Ironic Validity*.
- 59 Pete Docter, dir., *Inside Out*, 3D computer animated film (USA: Pixar Animation Studios, 2015).
- 60 Lather, 'FERTILE OBSESSION', 673.
- 61 Lather, *Getting Smart*, xvii.
- 62 The development of theoretical resources since the 1970s now enable Hesse's work to be read differently. See: Gioia Timpanelli, 'Woodstock Paintings,' in ed. Elisabeth Sussman, *Eva Hesse 1936–1970 – Exhibitions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).
- 63 In my early engagement with second-wave feminism, reading feminist work on language was *de rigueur*. The phrase 'If it is indeed true that our feelings about the world color our expression of our thoughts, then we can use our linguistic behavior as a diagnostic of our hidden feelings about things' still resonates with me today. See: Robin Lakoff, 'Language and Woman's Place,' *Language in Society* 2:1 (1973): 45.
- 64 In the UK, 'Doctoral degrees are awarded for the creation and interpretation, construction and/or exposition of knowledge which extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research.' QAA, 'The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies. UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards. October 2014,' 30, accessed 25 August, 2017, at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2843#WaBY74Qykt>.

Sheila Gaffney is a sculptor with a long commitment to crafts and the material object. Her research encounters psychoanalysis, life writing and making sculpture. It investigates their relationship through sculpture, drawing and scholarly writing. She holds the role of Professor at Leeds College of Art where she is the Director of Art & Performance. Website: www.sheilagaffney.com.

De Pictura: Journeys through Painting

Nathan Cohen

To cite this contribution:

Cohen, Nathan. 'De Pictura: Journeys through Painting.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* Issue 1 (2017): 99–106, <http://www.oarplatform.com/de-pictura-journeys-painting/>.

I am an artist, and one of the ways I express ideas is through the medium of paint. I grew up in a family of artists, and so the experience of living with and looking at art has been with me from the start. As I have sought to discover what it is that I wish to explore, so I have come to realise that painting is a way of communicating that has been relevant for many, over a long time. At least, that is, perhaps until now. For in an ever increasingly digital age, we cannot make the same assumptions as in past generations, that people will continue to perceive the relevance of interacting directly with painting as a distinct form and as a means of expression.

In looking at the work of other artists, it seems to me that the act of making art offers a means to invent that can also leave traces of our journeys for others to learn from and enjoy. But a painting is a very particular construction that can be challenging to interpret.

I speak to you now through a different medium, that of words via a digital interface, and in addressing the question of validity as a subject, and in particular the validity of painting as an effective means of communication at this time, the thoughts I impart here are my own. They are born from time spent observing and reflecting on what I have seen and personally experienced, complemented by knowledge gained over the years through discourse with and contemplation of the views of others who have looked at paintings.

When I was invited to write this, I was intrigued by the challenge of addressing what is meant by *validity* in the context of what I do as an artist. One of the considerations it occurs to me is relevant is questioning the way in which we encounter paintings in a digital context, when compared with the experience of looking at paintings themselves. The digital is quite different to the physical tangibility of a painting. Yet this difference is now increasingly misperceived by the ready accessibility the internet offers, the pervasive nature of digital content in our lives, and with the ever-developing capabilities of virtual reality (VR) and haptic technologies.

I have taught in art schools for some time, and have seen many changes to the way in which artists explore different media to creatively advance ideas. I have also worked with digital media, including the use of computers in creating novel projection techniques in the making of interactive art installations, but always because these afforded me the ability to create artworks that could not have been created in any other way. Inventing with images in a digital context is a process I have found to be constructive. Where issues arise, it seems to me, is when digital platforms appear to change viewers' behaviour more subliminally.

Choice and convenience are not the same things, and the seductive ability to reach for a

tablet or smart phone to navigate through the world at large runs the risk of desensitizing us to the need to discover through personal experience and interaction with real objects and spaces. When I talk to an artist and the question arises if they have seen this or that artwork, and the response is that they have, but only on the web, I am left doubting if what we are talking to each other about can really be similar in terms of experience. A painting is more than just its visual form, and the experience of looking at paintings is different to that of interacting with a monitor or VR headset.

By taking the time to actually look at a painting we are, in some ways, validating the very purpose for which it was created, and in particular its comprehension is arrived at by encountering the form in which it is constructed (this can, of course, range from the miniature through to the architectonic in scale). Encouraging us to see the world differently through the creation of painting is an enabling act, one that requires of us time and patience in its interpretation – an experience that can establish a dynamic link with the architecture of our real-world space within which we interact with painting.

So, by way of a starting point, in addressing the question of why I feel painting is relevant in a digital age, I chose to look briefly at four paintings from earlier periods, that place the human being at the centre of our gaze. All of the paintings I refer to can be seen by visiting the National Gallery in London, a place I have been to many times in search of inspiration and reflection, and a home to many more paintings that offer all who take the time to visit the enjoyment of the experience of looking.

In my view, each artwork captures a moment in time and speaks of humanity through the intimacy of their subject matter and form – a validation of the human spirit in a dynamic world of change. When encountering the reality of these paintings I find that their existence as tangible forms are defined and reshaped in my imagination and in my memory of them. If as a result of reading this you may wish to question what is written and look closer at paintings to form your own opinion, then I hope that these thoughts may have served some purpose in encouraging this.

There is a space that we know of that we can imagine, and that also exists, but we can never see. It resides within each of us, and yet we need to apply our mind to comprehend it, and is a constant as we navigate our journey through the world around us.

*

In Antonello da Messina's painting, St. Jerome sits contemplating a text he is reading, set within a mind like architecture. I look in, but always from the outside. His space is within. In searching this small painting, my eyes wander as the lion does through corridors that recede into different perspectives of the window framed landscapes beyond, as if looking through the eyes of the building. Above, birds alight silhouetted by the blue of the sky, their movements of flight and repose caught as saccade like moments in time.

The keys hang silently from a nail behind him supported by a structure that is encapsulated by the architecture that surrounds it. I am intrigued by the strange assemblage of objects, animals and birds, and wonder at their significance as they seem to impart a narrative that invites interpretation. There is a hidden geometry that places each form within its given



Antonello da Messina, *St Jerome in His Study*, c. 1475. © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2017.

space enabling the story to unfold. The painting is a construction by an artist who, despite the passing of centuries, has been able to create a form that leads me to ponder today what it is that is being depicted here, for without curiosity there would be no questioning, and without questioning there would be no intellectual pursuit.

The structure of this painting has intrigued me for many years, with its play between symmetry and asymmetry of space. Light is depicted in different ways, brightly illuminating the entrance, reflected within from the buildings surfaces, and framed as sky beyond. And all of this in a two-dimensional world that is an invention.

To create this illusion of space requires knowledge of these forms observed in reality, and as I have found, much experimentation with physical materials and the mastering of appropriate tools to enable this to be made. For a painter, these are prerequisites to create what we do and they form an important part of how we evolve our understanding of what we see and our ability to translate this into paintings where others can share in this experience.

While we live now in a different age, and the historical and cultural context that informed the creation of this artwork may have changed, it still speaks of ideas that we relate to today. The painting offers a virtual yet tangible space within which to wonder and to reflect, and it rewards our patience in contemplating what we see by discovering new dimensions within its intimate form.

*

The more I see, the more I question what I am looking at, and what relevance this may hold for others. Both the lens and the mirror refract and reflect light, as does a painting whose construction may consist of layers of colour upon a reflective background. The couple in the *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) hold hands before the painter Jan van Eyck, and his reflection is to be found in the illusion of the mirror behind them. This plays with my understanding of where the paintings surface resides for while I know this to be an illusion, it is still possible to be convinced by the seeming reality of its construction.



Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434. © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2017.



Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, detail of mirror and rosary, 1434. © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2017.

Artists have explored different practical means to both comprehend and extend their observation including optical, mechanical and graphic instruments and the use of mathematics, geometry, and proportion to construct images. Painting is essentially abstract, whether seeking to represent a likeness of things seen or imagined. I am intrigued by the play with spatial expectation to be found in many works of art that explore the encounter between the second and third dimensions, and I also make paintings which explore the inventive possibilities of constructions that are ambiguous in their spatial interpretation.

In questioning what I see when looking at this painting, I am also reaffirming my comprehension of the reality of the space I actually exist within. I sense that I am looking at an illusion, and

where this meets the reality of my physical world I derive pleasure from the experience, a reward for the intellectual engagement of seeking to ‘resolve’ this intriguing spatial conundrum.

*

Light filters through the window illuminating a room and its contents. References to a world outside can be seen in the landscape painted on the instrument lid that mirrors the window at the left of the painting, and in the picture that hangs high on the wall behind – a reminder that this interior is part of a larger world. A chair awaits and she looks toward you, her hands resting on the keyboard of the virginal.

I stand in front of the painting in a space that has been created for it, but that is quite different to the space in which it was conceived, or for which it may have been intended. And yet the painting is sufficiently self-contained to be readable in a variety of spaces and contexts.



Johannes Vermeer, *A Young Woman standing at a Virginal*, c. 1670–72. © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2017.

A painting is an immersive experience, where at its best the image draws us in and allows us, if momentarily, to become one with the space within the image. When I later recall this painting in my mind, I am not particularly conscious of the specific place in which it is currently located, yet my memory is formed in relation to the experience of having seen the painting as an extension of the space in which I observed it, a process that enables me to comprehend that image in the way I imagine the painter intended, and its reality as an object forms an integral part of this experience. There is a real surface onto which paint has been applied, and I can relate to this in a way that is quite different to ‘seeing’ it on the computer screen.

In contrast to my experience of witnessing St. Jerome, I am invited to be a part of this scene and the painting's composition suggests I am present as a participant. The three-dimensional properties of the space are depicted in the geometries of this painting, a dialogue between the architecture and furniture and the viewer and the viewed. In this moment of encounter I feel as if welcomed into the painting both by its subject and its construction.

Where there is detail so there is also questioning of what I really see, the surfaces dissolving into flecks and dots of colour as I approach to inspect more closely. This is most clear in the depiction of the human form, the face and hands appearing almost out of focus in comparison with the other surfaces in the painting, as if in an early photograph where movement blurs the image during a long exposure.

The question of where to locate focus is significant in the composition of an image, for in the choice the painter articulates intention. There may be one or many foci, and they offer a means to comprehend what is depicted and how the space within the painting can be interpreted.

I bring my own perspective, both literally and in terms of experience. I project my own thoughts upon what I see in a painting, and seek to compare and relate the visual sensation to memories of other things seen and felt. This is a multi-layered process, which can stimulate associations across time and place, the painting providing a catalyst for the imagination.

*

The sitter's eyes meet mine in Rembrandt's self portrait of 1669 – the year of his death – in which I experience a direct encounter with the artist himself. Except, he would have been examining his reflection in a mirror to make this painting, and I am seeing him as he would be seen by himself.

The light that pervades the canvas suggests an internal space, the shadows capturing the luminosity that bathes the head of the artist rendering the rest of his form as if slipping quietly into the embrace of an encroaching darkness. The intense blackness of the eyes invites me to contemplate an inner space, one which we all may be aware of but must spend our lives to fully comprehend. To me this appears as a moment of self awareness and doubt.

I find this to be a very personal and revealing painting, a work of art that is disarmingly honest in its apparent intention. Paint on canvas is visceral. The very nature of the medium is fluid and yet the slow 'drying' of oil paint suggests that this painting would probably have been painted over a period of time. Thick impasto paint gradually flattens with the years, cracks appear, and the painting reveals Rembrandt's way of building it as the paint becomes increasingly transparent. When I stand in front of the painting, I am aware of how its physical condition reflects the aging process of its creator, and that I am now able to gaze upon it in this moment of its existence, as the painting itself changes subtly with time.

The artist as subject offers insight into the creators' mind but also presents me with the challenge of truly comprehending what I see. At one level, it is a painting of another person and, yet, the intimacy invited by the immediacy of contact invites a more personal emotional



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self Portrait at the Age of 63*, 1669. © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2017.

response. I begin to wonder what it is that he sees as he looks upon himself, what he wishes to impart by creating this painting, and this encourages me to look closer, and reflect more deeply on the experience of what I have seen.

For an artist, there is always the next painting to be painted that continues the journey and there is the sense that there is never enough time, but in the act of pushing the boulder each time to the top of the mountain there are the moments of completion that validate the effort made. In this painting, we are offered a rare moment of communion with one who has lived that experience and who, still now, can share this with us as we live ours.

Nathan Cohen is a painter, artist and writer. He exhibits widely and will be next showing in London in 2018 when he will be exhibiting recent work together with his father, the painter Bernard Cohen. For more information on his work and research:
www.arts.ac.uk/research/ual-staff-researchers/a-z/nathan-cohen/

The Burden of Names

Pierre Von-Ow

To cite this contribution:

Von-Ow, Pierre. 'The Burden of Names.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform Issue* 2 (2017): 106–124, <http://www.oarplatform.com/burden-names/>.

Between 1951 and 1954, French historian Jacques Hillairet released his three-volume *Évocation du Vieux Paris*, a book in which he delves into the names of each and every Parisian street in order to, as the title implies, *evoke* its origins, to bring to life the evolution of its route, and, more generally, the history of urban planning in Paris since the Middle Ages. These books met with a great editorial success, and were commissioned by Jérôme Lindon, the recently-appointed director of Les Éditions de Minuit, a publishing house whose founders were involved in the French Resistance. The actual and potential destructions of the Second World War had raised a great concern and these books somehow enabled readers, by way of an archaeology of the map, to regain possession of a space lost during the Occupation. Dictionaries of street names have flourished ever since, including even the names of metro stations.

In this respect, a recent controversy in France testifies to the symbolic weight associated with the naming of places. The story takes place in Corbeil-Essonnes, a working-class suburb of Paris, whose mayor decided to rename the main street, *rue Léon Blum*, after the former mayor, the billionaire industrialist and politician Serge Dassault, whose firm also happens to manufacture fighter jets. Citizens loudly protested against this decision, collecting signatures for a petition, noting the fact that Dassault had been sentenced for money laundering and cronyism. A hospital and a high school are located along the street in question, and the residents deemed it unacceptable that places of birth and youth come to be associated with Dassault and disconnected from Blum, who symbolized the hope for freedom that let him to found the French socialist party.¹ What this unresolved baptismal conflict reveals is that the question is not solely who we revere in our maps, but rather how we consider and depend on the symbols attached to our own daily movements. Moreover, what is at stake here is the way we read maps in general, not only from a bird's-eye view but also from the inside, digging into the depth of words, lines and unmodulated areas of pastel colours.

In a recent installation titled *Paradise in a square* (2016), artist Fari Shams examines systems of representation, and the cartography of knowledge. Her work consists of four interdependent elements, detached from a chronology, presented in a square room (Figs. 1 and 2). The first element is a short film composed of predominantly found footage from various visual sources and archives, juxtaposing Persian gardens with exploration, gaming and virtual reality, over the top of which the artist's voice reads a narrative that is at times historical, at times theoretical, at times poetical. Other parts of the installation include: a double projection where the countless images and footage taken by the artist Nora Hansen of herself in a pursuit of fame, ultimately lead to her commodification as an animation figure using 3D modelling;

a three-volume book generated in Wikipedia, consolidates Shams' research notes; a recurrent neural network (RNN), that allows anyone to get more of virtually anything – in this case, more of the narratives found in the journal of explorer David Livingstone. This installation is a reaction to Shams' trip to the Cologne Zoo, but the history of exploration and collecting leads her to make a connection between the categorisation of objects and the representation of the self in digital environments, suggesting that both are elements of a taxonomic system that is incomplete. As a way of tackling the aesthetic of montage, atlas-like systems of representation as well as the very act of reading, this article will draw on this specific work while extending its corpus of references.

On a LCD screen, standing on the far right wall after entering the space of the installation, shown for the first time at Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, 2016, a recurrent neural network can be seen in the process of learning. Two books are presented on the wall. The viewer can pick up and read the first volume of the journal of David Livingstone (1813–73), the famous Scottish explorer, doctor, and missionary, 'discoverer' of Zambezi, alongside the newly generated journal presented in an identical (book) form (Fig. 3a). Ironically enough, Livingstone is today mostly remembered thanks to the words of his own discoverer, Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904). A journalist at the time, Stanley accepted the mission entrusted to him by the director of the *New York Herald* to find Dr Livingstone, who was thought to be lost somewhere in Central Africa, and of whom no one had heard for some years. The subsequent book Stanley published in 1871, *How I Found Livingstone*, resulted in overshadowing the travel of David Livingstone himself.

The genre of travel accounts can be described as tales of adventure, driven by multiple ambitions that include the discovery, navigation, mapping, and documentation of the world, and scientific projects that often served as a backdrop for colonial interests. Despite these scientific, economic, geographical, and religious aims, in these texts the literary approach predominated over the strict documentation of data. These tales satisfied a widespread and desperate need for adventures one preferred to live out vicariously. By using an artificial intelligence algorithm, Shams generates this product in her installation, thereby problematising its foundation. The neural network in question, developed by a PhD student in computer science and available online, copies the style of any given 'text' and, thanks to an algorithm based on probability distributions, it generates more text: when you feed it with a Bach score, it produces a – surprisingly good – new Bach sonata. And, in our case, the outcome is a fictitious volume of the journal in the style of Livingstone. This automated process of narrative building questions the validity of the tales that have inspired our imaginations over time. Nevertheless, the viewer notices on a single page of the new journal that the text doesn't make any sense, due to the fact that this neural network doesn't know any grammar (Fig. 3b). This resulting text reveals the statistically dominant interests and rhetorical tools adopted by Livingstone because the algorithm identifies and repeats them in the generated text. In this extract, one reads the word 'sepoy' several times, as well as 'slaves' hyphenated with 'trade' or another 'slave' – 'slave-slave'. Most of the sentences are comprised of words relating to descriptions of people and lands, exposing Livingstone's main concerns. Yet compared to the original journal, punctuation is sparse, and capital letters appear at random. In a way, this syntax conveys a sense of excitement, an impossibility to restrain, an enthusiasm in nonsensical descriptions and anecdotes that can only come about in the course of an impossible reading. Meaning is to be found in redundancies, and grasped with floating attention. Although the algorithm is unable to provide an endless sort of 'exotic' discovery for the reader, it

nevertheless makes apparent the genuineness of experience that is inevitably filtered by language. Fari Shams' installation highlights the weaknesses and subjectivity of descriptions that are taken for granted, the bias of textual and visual transmission, and the caution with which any sort of re-presentation should be treated.

In the main film, *Paradise in a square*, projected on the main wall, about five minutes from the start, an excerpt of a video game shows a stereotypical action hero in military outfit jumping out of a moving plane, and trying desperately to catch a wooden crate, now in free fall, containing a parachute that would save his life (Fig. 4). Simultaneously, we hear the following:

The emphasis on surprise, struggle and determination in travel accounts, and the heroic tale that deliberately left out many real incidents and adventures because they might shake the probability of the narrative in the public estimation lead to a curious combination of empirical evidence, deductive theory, scholarship, emotional attachment, storytelling, and personal authority.

An account similar to Livingstone's can be found in another journal, that of Dr Jean-Baptiste Charcot (1867–1936). The French explorer is best remembered for his expeditions in the Antarctic at the dawn of the twentieth century. On the 15th of August 1903, Charcot left Le Havre accompanied by 21 men on a boat he called *Le Français*, to embark on a trip of more than a year in the unpredictable seas of the South Pole. The book he published in 1906 is a genuine tale of adventure, recounting the discoveries and ordeals experienced by the crew day after day. Charcot had two role models: Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe. His diary mirrors these conflicting influences that characterise more generally any kind of travel account: the scientific narrative and the metaphysical novel.² It is clear that Charcot wrote and reworked his text so that readers would identify with him in his quest, staging the *épopée* as a continuous struggle against elements for the sake of science and France. He presents himself as a leader, omitting his own weaknesses, and disclosing only scraps of detailed encounters with his sailors. Of course, writing necessarily requires a selection as well as an omission of existing facts. The process of identity building in Charcot's journal mirrors Shams' *Paradise in a square*, through the presentation of the life and work of Nora Hansen. This is done through a double projection on one side, showing the numerous selfies and videos taken by Hansen, while simultaneously on the other side a slow 3D modelling of her in the programme Maya takes shape simultaneously, using all this data to transform her into an avatar, an approximation based on her own documentation. This process of documentation and reproduction of everyday life, similar in spirit to the writing of Charcot's diary, is intentionally disclosed, its privacy made transparent, in anticipating a continuation through the imagination of its audience. It is therefore produced in the context of this *Erwartungshorizont*. A piecemeal description leaves room for interpretative reading. As Wolfgang Iser has argued, vagueness is the essence of literature, quoting in this regard what William Thackeray once pointed out, that is, the unwritten part of books is always the most interesting.³ As we will see with atlases, the space between images or words, which 'may be looked upon', according to Henry Fielding, 'as an Inn or a Resting-Place',⁴ is a bet made by the author on the capacity of his audience to fill in the blanks and complete the narrative.



1. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. Courtesy of the artist.



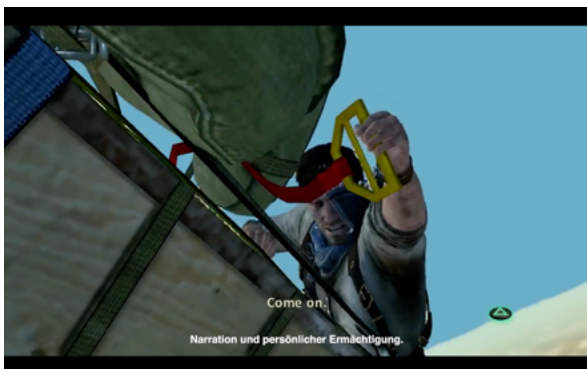
2. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. Courtesy of the artist.



3a. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. Courtesy of the artist.



3b. LCD screen showing the recurrent neural network and the journal of David Livingstone together with the one generated by the algorithm. Courtesy of the artist.



4. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception (2011). Courtesy of the artist.



5. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. Courtesy of the artist.

Charcot sailed in the wake of Jules Dumont d'Urville, who led an Antarctic expedition in 1837–40. While sailing, he often read some pages of his illustrious predecessor's accounts, whose descriptions he compared to the passing reality he was witnessing. Somehow, descriptions can become a form of appropriation to such an extent that the interaction with something new always references a pre-existing account. Shams is also dealing with this question in the film *Paradise in a square*. One of the images she includes is a print taken from Thomas Herbert's 1677 *Some Years Travels into Diverse Parts of Africa and Asia the Great*. It shows a 'Pen-gwin' found in 'the Pole Antartique' (Fig. 6). Herbert's original description was as follows:

we saw abundance of *Pen-gwins*, in Welch *White-heads*, agreeable to their colour; a Bird that of all other goes most erect in its motion, the wings or fins hanging down like sleeves, covered with down instead of Feathers, their legs serving them better than their wings; they feede [*sic*] on fish at Sea and grass ashore, and have holes to live in like Conies; a degenerate Duck, for using both sea and shore, it feeds in the one, breeds in the other; is very fat and oily, and some adventure to eat them.⁵

The exotic animal is systematically compared to a common, ordinary species, whether a cony, a duck or even a man – the thought that wings look like sleeves for example – all of which culminates in the very act of its consumption. Dr Charcot devoted several pages of his journal to penguins as well, and ended up playing them music on his phonograph (Fig. 7). He starts his description by comparing their community to a village and praising their 'communist' aspect; then he compares their mode of communication to the 'couin-couin' of ducks and notices that these 'phonetic signs [are] almost equivalent to speech'. But the most striking part of this description is when he states that they look like 'little girls with their white apron, Dominican fathers, short women in black coats'.⁶ If description is appropriation, its most efficient tool is then metaphor, the use of 'as if', which helps minimize, if not utterly negate, exoticism. In this regard, German philosopher Hans Blumenberg has observed: 'The metaphor is projection, anthropomorphic domestication of nature serving the subject reflecting himself through it'.⁷

These accounts of discoveries ultimately aimed to validate a wider conquest of territories. As Morton Stanley did with the blank zones on the map of Africa, Charcot intended to document the immaculate ice floes of the South Pole. Yet quite apart from the national pride of putting a French name on a map, Jean-Baptiste Charcot also had to make a name for himself. He was indeed the son of the famous Dr Jean-Martin Charcot, who taught the basics of psychiatry to young Sigmund Freud at *Hôpital de la Salpêtrière* in Paris. The explorer explicitly mentions the burden of his own surname: 'I felt on my shoulders such a heavy responsibility to bear this name that I swore to myself I would bear it with dignity'.⁸

In a sense, it is striking to realize that father and son had two opposite but not entirely conflicting ambitions. Both *invented* new fields, in the sense that they were the first to describe and name them. Pierre Escudé states that 'mapping the unknown means discovering the alienated part of the world',⁹ alienation being used in both senses of otherness, namely the unknown lands of the world and of the self. In *Invention of Hysteria*, Georges Didi-Huberman studied the perverse method of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot so as to mark out this illusory mental

illness. ‘He named [it] hysteria. He distinguished it, notably from epilepsy and from all other mental disorders. In short, he *isolated hysteria as a pure nosological subject*’.¹⁰ In the preceding pages, Didi-Huberman quoted Nietzsche in a reflection that can be applied to any form of exploration: ‘Even in the midst of the strangest experiences we still do the same: we make up the major part of the experience and can scarcely be forced *not* to contemplate some event as its “inventors”’.¹¹ Dr Charcot’s father spent his lifetime locking up women with contradictory symptoms, so as to domesticate madness. Dr Charcot’s son sought out to encounter the vast Antarctic continent in order to domesticate wilderness. Yet, whereas the former was mapping pains on the body of his patients with the aid of photographs and drawings – a clinical aesthetic – the latter marked out and labelled the lands and biotope of the South Pole.

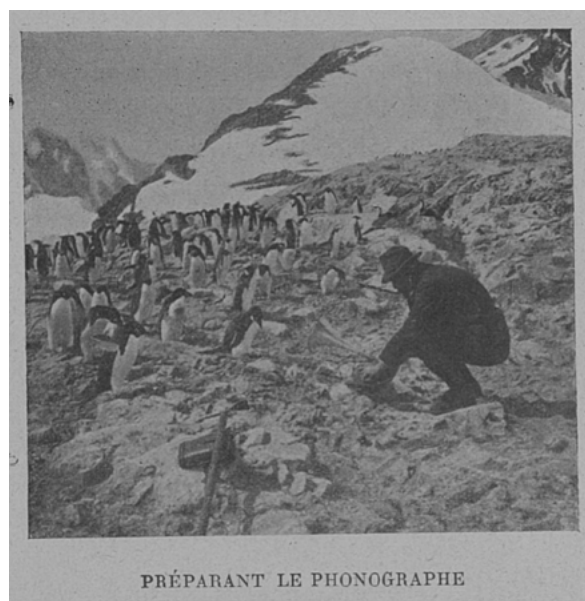
Jean-Baptiste Charcot’s vision was focused on taking possession of some lands in order to compete with the overseas exploration undertaken by Sweden and England. At this time, the *Terra Incognita Australis* was one of the last regions of the globe left undiscovered and as such one of the most sought-after. In laying claim to one’s property the only thing left after putting up a flag was to name it. Captain Foster of the British navy decided quite promptly to baptize the headland of Hoseason Island ‘Cape Possession’ in 1829, mistakenly believing that it was part of a vast piece of land (Fig. 8). As for Charcot, he personally decided to name the harbour in which his crew spent winter ‘*Port Charcot*’, and located it not too far from the ‘*baie de la Salpêtrière*’, that he baptized in a tribute to the asylum ran by his father (Fig. 9).¹² He then named a small mountain after his wife, Jeanne. An islet was named Sögen, after the crew’s dog who just passed away, and buried in its ice. The Duke of the Abruzzi, an illustrious explorer, lent his name to another large mound. And the pathway they dug in the snow between their ship and their storage was named ‘*Avenue Victor Hugo*’ (Fig. 10), after the grand-father of his wife and national hero. But their most remarkable seizure was probably the ‘*Sommet du Français*’ right in the midst of Anvers Islands (Fig. 8).

However this process of naming extended beyond geography. Numerous plants, particularly seaweeds species, brought by the expedition and bequeathed to the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle in Paris bear names ending in ‘*chacotii*’ (Fig. 11). Collecting and naming are alike, just as are drawing a map and creating a Wunderkammer, in the sense that both expose a desire to organize reality by reducing it to categories and strict outlines. Travel accounts can be viewed as expeditions into our systems of representation, a probing of language and a confrontation with previous attempts to name places, items or people. Orientation in space is also an orientation in time: the archaeology of maps and herbariums are better read as palimpsests than read in a horizontal fashion.

Regarding the process leading to the appropriation of environments, Shams film in *Paradise* is also composed of extracts of a documentary on the New York Museum of Natural History showing scientists at work on the fur of a bear within a diorama (Fig. 12). Armed with paint and varnish pistols, the scientists are busy perfecting the fine details of its appearance. The extreme methods they employ, and the toxicity of the products they use, all aim to create the perfect illusion of wild life. These images remind us of the series of photographs by Richard Barnes titled *Animal Logic*. These photos focus on the mechanisms of display used in museums of natural history around the world (Fig. 13). These images capture a sense of the violence that is applied to nature in the very act of its replication for the purpose of exhibition. A recent project by German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans also resonates here: the juxtaposition of images taken in two world trade fairs, the Fespa Digital, devoted to digital printing,



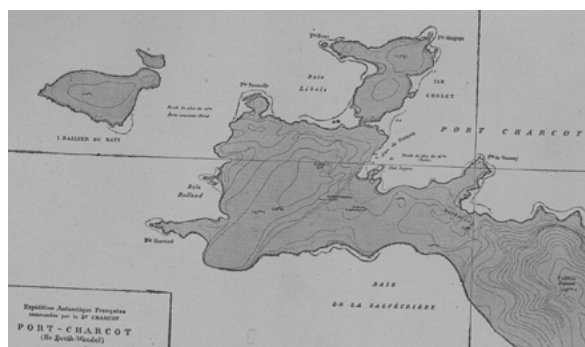
6. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa and Asia the Great*, 1677. Courtesy of the artist.



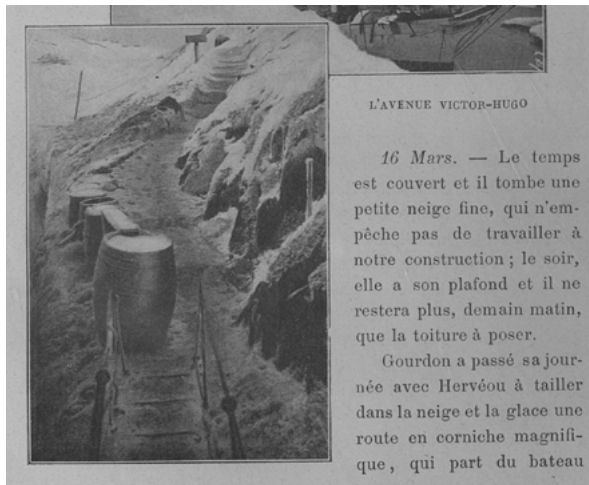
7. Paul Pléneau, *Preparing the Phonograph*, circa 1904, in Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Le 'Français' au Pôle Sud*, 1906. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



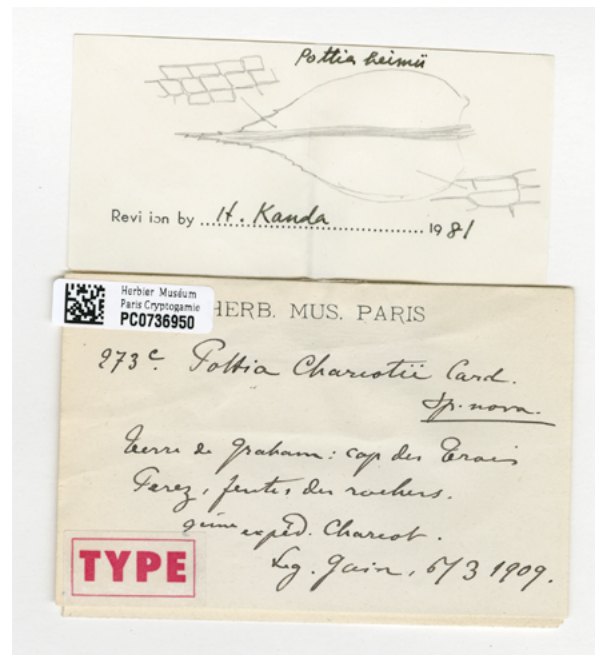
8. Detail from the general map of shores explored by the *Expédition Antarctique Française* led by Dr Charcot (1903-1905), in Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Le 'Français' au Pôle Sud*, 1906. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



9. Detail from the map of 'Port Charcot', in Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Le 'Français' au Pôle Sud*, 1906. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



10. The Avenue Victor-Hugo dugged into snow, in Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Le 'Français' au Pôle Sud*, 1906. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



11. 'Pottia Charcotii' Card (1909) in the herbarium of the Musée d'histoire naturelle, Paris. Copyright reserved.



12. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, courtesy of the artist.



13. Richard Barnes, *Giraffe*, *Academy of Sciences*, 2005, part of the series *Animal Logic*. © Richard Barnes.

and Fruit Logistica, the international trade fair in Berlin for fresh industry products. Images of printing machines and inkjet prints adjacent to booths staging fruits, produce a striking montage that evoke a sense of confusion and embarrassment about the commercial and cultural appropriation of nature. What is at stake in all these projects is the dramatization of nature, in other words the very notion of artificiality, and moreover how in time, we come to regard that artificiality as the 'real' instance in comparison to its less impressive physical counterpart.

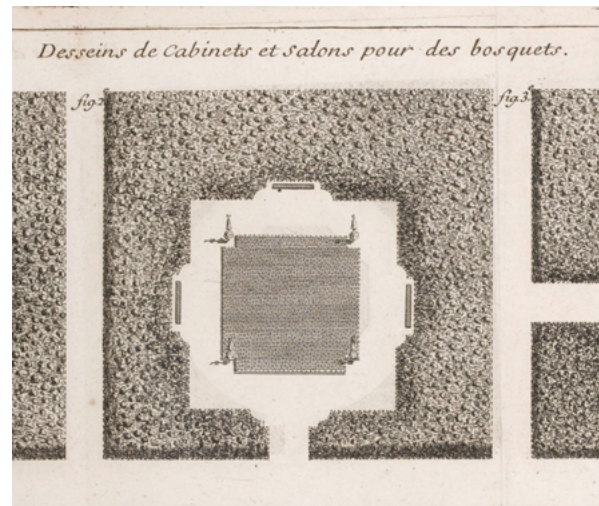
To think of gardening in these terms, one could argue that it is, in fact, the management of nature. If one takes on a historical perspective, Versailles was definitely the symbol of artificiality and replication, a theatre conceived as a succession of visual effects – labyrinths, *Galerie des glaces*, a plethora of hidden doors and corridors. The subject of countless studies, the gardens of Louis XIV embody the application of possession and the mastering of nature, which is most obvious from a bird's-eye perspective. The aptly named Sun King wrote the ideal path of a walk through his gardens, whose starting point was on the patio at the top of the stairs leading to the *parterre de Latone*. The courtiers could thus embrace the whole garden in which they would then follow the path of their nonchalant guide. As such, *jardins à la française* have been regarded mostly as a celebration of sight and order. The remaining documents from that time that show bird's-eye views of French gardens convey this careful sense of restraint framing the random course of conversations, such as this image of Château du Raincy, included in Shams' video, whose gardens were designed by Le Nôtre in the 17th century (Fig. 14).

The square referred to by Fari Shams was a recurrent shape in their maps, satisfying the aspiration for algebraic harmony. In his 1709 *Theory and Practice of Gardening*, Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville described a method to design *jardins de propreté* (gardens of uprightness), outlining every detail, from the choice of position to the species of plants to grow with various defined shapes. The book itself is arranged in a thoughtful and rigorous manner, demonstrated by a notice addressed to the bookbinders for the proper placing of ornamental prints. He provides the gardener's apprentice with models of square-shape cabinets and copses whose drawing is strictly symmetrical (Figs. 15 and 16). These prints bear a close resemblance to the schema of the Chahar Bagh, the Persian garden that is the starting sequence of Shams' film (Fig. 17), and assign a shape to the concept of heterotopia. Michel Foucault, in his well-known conference *Of Other Spaces*,¹³ took the example of traditional Persian gardens to state that heterotopias – meaning the utopia realized in physical space, whether it is a brothel or a colony – juxtapose discrete sites in a single sacred space. In this case, the garden – *pari-daiza* in Farsi – gathers together in its four corners the four parts of the world, forming a shape that can also be found in Oriental rugs regarded as reproductions of those artificial microcosms:

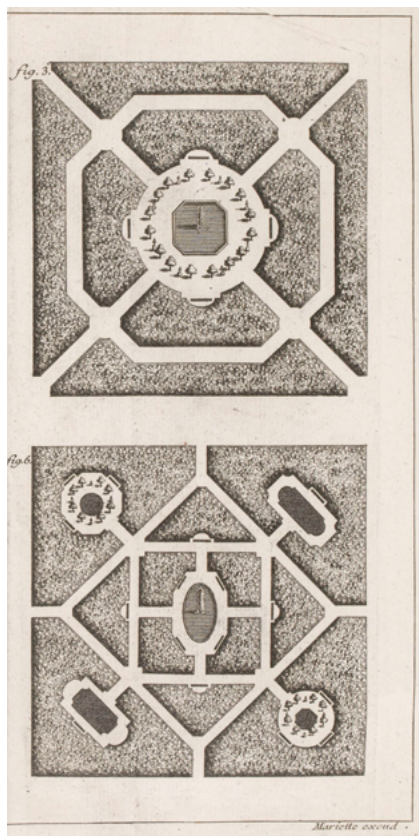
The garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space. The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).¹⁴



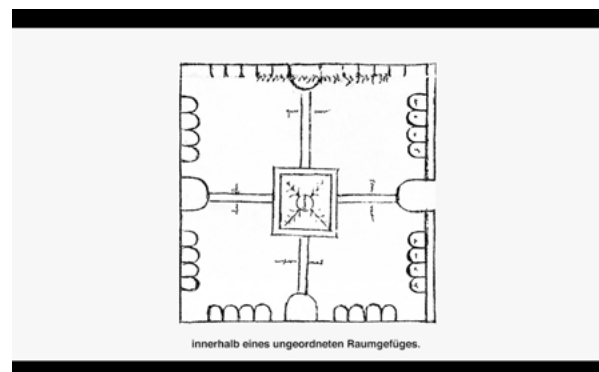
14. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, Perelle, *View of the Château du Raincy*, 1685, engraving, 28,5 × 37 cm, courtesy of the artist.



15. Detail from the plate 5 *Desseins de cabinets et salons pour les bosquets*, in Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Théorie et la pratique du jardinage, où l'on traite à fond des beaux jardins, appelés communément jardins de propreté*, Paris, J. Mariette, 1709, n. p., source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



16. Detail from the plate 3 *Desseins de Bois de haute futaie*, in Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Théorie et la pratique du jardinage, où l'on traite à fond des beaux jardins, appelés communément jardins de propreté*, Paris, J. Mariette, 1709, n. p., source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



17. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, Chahar Bagh, courtesy of the artist.

In pointing out the relationship of zoological gardens with planted havens, Foucault is suggesting a common ambition applied to flora and fauna, which is this consistent desire to restrain wilderness within strict borders. According to Saint-Simon, the tireless chronicler of court, Louis XIV 'enjoyed to tyrannise nature'.¹⁵ Domestication of nature was indeed realised in at least three different ways. The first way was the control of emotions and behaviours, the so-called 'civilizing process'. Individuals had to refine their body and speech expression by struggling against their natural tendencies. The second one was the strictly geometrical drawing of Le Nôtre's gardens, confusing parterres and tapestries. Marquis de Girardin, the designer of Ermenonville, the famous *parc à fabriques* inspired by English-style gardens, acrimoniously considered that Le Nôtre 'completed the massacre of Nature in subjecting everything to the Architect's compass...plantations immediately followed the guiding line of symmetry'.¹⁶ In his words, one may read the latter term as *cemetery*, the point where nature is pushed back and prevented from expanding above and beyond a predetermined fixed shape. This is particularly striking if one reads the method for sticking lawns outlined by Dezallier d'Argenville. Although the outcome was to be velvet-like, the description was eloquent in terms of the brutality applied to nature. The idea was to transplant square parcels of pastureland into lavish gardens and literally crucify them with dowels onto prepared soils. But the main problem was maintenance because the gardener was to prevent turf from growing, from overflowing the sharp outline of its design:

one reaps the lawn every fortnight. The more grass is clipped, the more it thickens and embellish...One must also trim from time to time and mark out the edge of lawn pieces according to the guiding line; this is what makes uprightness [*propreté*], because otherwise grass would move away and go around into the path, what would interrupt shape and design of compartments.¹⁷

This method reminds us that Louis XIV was also – with the help of Vauban – the inventor of fortified borders with Low Countries that one used to call the *pré carré* (the square meadow),¹⁸ in other words another perception of a paradise in a square. This is a reminder of Bertolt Brecht's words: '*Der Sturm, der die Birken biegt / Gilt für gewalttätig / Aber wie ist es mit dem Sturm / Der die Rücken der Straßenarbeiter biegt?*'¹⁹ One considers as violent the river that takes everything away in its trail, while never pointing out the violence inherent in the edges surrounding it. The restrictive structures, namely our symbolic as well as physical fences, have to be questioned first. Finally the third conspicuous example of domestication is the zoo. As perfectly summed up by Nikola Jankovic, Louis XIV is a transitional figure in the lengthy history of animal parking. He is responsible for transforming *seraglios* from the Renaissance into *ménageries*; in a word he exchanged the open park where exotic animals could frolic in an unfamiliar environment and amuse owners with entertaining fights, with narrow fenced parcels of land in which species were separated from each other for a purely visual delight.²⁰ This movement of enclosure was followed by the parallel development of natural sciences and the beginnings of taxonomy. In her commentary, Fari Shams dwells particularly on this shifting of paradigm (Fig. 18):

naturalists actively directed the perspectives that the artist took when carrying out studies of nature. They focused on the essential characteristics of what they were depicting in order to highlight specific traits that justified their choices of classification. Selecting, comparing, judging and analysing

what was to be communicated was the task of the experienced observer guiding this process. Accidents, deviations and impurities needed to make way for the common and the general...

The omission of errors, uncertainty, variation and exception in favour of idealized examples of nature results in our shared understanding of it. Yet this is just one of a number of equally exchangeable ways to organize the world. The spaces we occupy embody a sense of organization. Each in its own particular way is shaped by the will to give it meaning.

As discussed above in the case of Charcot, description is appropriation by the means of language; it is reducing diversity to a few traits, thereby enabling us to create virtual categories. The gaze of natural scientists oriented towards this aim couldn't be but selective; the information left out permits the production of images and not merely copies. A caricature of French artist Honoré Daumier brilliantly parodies this alleged power of the gaze. At his time, the 19th century, menageries had been transformed to botanic gardens, more concerned with the well being of animals. This period coincided with the French Revolution and a broader liberating move, which can also be noticed in psychiatry. Buffon (1707–88) first used the term 'acclimatization', a less brutal and radical method than the mere alienating isolation.²¹ Since then, due particularly to the burgeoning of World Fairs, zoological gardens became zoos, namely popular amusement intended for Sunday strollers – referred to by Walter Benjamin as the flâneur. In Daumier's cartoon (Fig. 19), entitled *Emotion at Botanical Garden* and part of the series *Strangers in Paris*, we might wonder who, of the elephant and dressed up provincials, is the actual stranger. The dialog in the caption is as follows:

- Please darling, help me... help... I'm being devoured!...
- Don't be scared... intimate him with your gaze!... what an idea of coming face to face with an elephant!...

It distance, therefore, facilitated by the gaze and language, that facilitates the establishment of categories and the drawing of maps, the gaze of Louis XIV, of natural sciences, of strollers. It is distance that straightens distinctive features in order to contain them within bold outlines, distance which sometimes has to be confronted with reality. It 'is indeed from behind their own grids that human beings can look at caged animals.'²² The established representation of the world is presented through the scientific method, which defines the framework of our apparent perception as 'the antidote of the vast variation present in the unmediated encounter with nature'.²³ (Fig. 20).

Paradise in a square is about zoos. Yet, as with the methods adopted in the Haiku, is it never explicitly mentioned. The three volume book placed on a square table in the middle of the installation (Figs. 21a and b) directly addresses the problem of too much data. In generating this encyclopedia of the history of zoological gardens using a service offered by Wikipedia, Shams decided not to consider the inclusion or omission of topics but instead collected all of her research notes. Her solution to the superfluosness offered by this mechanism was to create bookmarks relating topics across the three volumes, thereby insisting that there is always a deliberate path through this maze. And ultimately Shams' installation as a whole, as well as in its parts, formally feels like a rejection of abbreviation.

The idea of assigning a restrictive category to someone or something has a telling name: pigeonholing. In a sense, some words reveal more than what they exclusively signify, through etymology and also with regard to their context, whether it is in a phrase, on a map, or in a dictionary. This peculiar example of Charcot is striking, because an icefield is liable to infinite movement in its shape, to melt at the whim of global warming that it is regulating to a great extent. What do these lands discovered by Charcot look like today? What do these names really represent? A similar evolution affects language. Georges Bataille used to say that definitions are ‘mathematical redingotes’ of things, locking them up into a shape supposedly still. Far from considering this kind of volatility with anxiety, Georges Didi-Huberman has widely celebrated ‘worried knowledge’. In the numerous texts he devoted to Aby Warburg, Sergueï Eisenstein, André Malraux, or Jean-Luc Godard, he has tirelessly demonstrated the virtues of atlases and montages in the endlessness of their meaning. As such, an atlas is seen as ‘a tool, not for the logical exhaustion of given possibilities, but for the infinite openness to the possibilities that are not yet given’.²⁴ Atlases are perceived in opposition to the neat order present in albums and catalogs. However, he suggests the possibility of reading dictionaries according to this ‘atlas principle’, considering double pages dialectically. Taking an example in relation to our subject of study, one could notice for instance that in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) ‘paradigm’ and ‘paradise’ share the same page 1447. If taken for granted, alphabetical order somehow elicits the idea that concreteness inevitably precedes utopia. This can, however be negated by an atlas reading, after noticing that ‘paradox’ is also on this very page. Furthermore, the way we now commonly read these dictionaries online, namely scans of single pages one can access through search engines, precludes the possibility of a random encounter of a word located on the opposite page, by serendipity. This purely vertical reading, somehow similar to GPS localization, suggests that words are merely pigeonholed into encyclopaedias and as such, appear as a prejudicial anti-atlas mode of presentation.

If one returns to the output generated by the neural network of *Paradise in a square*, one assumes that perhaps the best way to read this impossible text would be an index of common names, revealing their recurrence. As American artist and critical theorist Joseph Grigely, pointed out in his article about Shams’ *European Civilization, Peter the Great and the Order of Things* (2014), an index always ‘reflects on our desire for empirical knowledge by assembling bits and pieces of the world in a single place’.²⁵ Looking over Livingstone’s virtual journal we notice assemblages, and tokens of words we do not necessarily pay attention to while focusing on the content. When a text doesn’t make any legible sense, form becomes a refuge – ‘the sign is like a window we go through to one’s liking’.²⁶ In this regard, talking about the influence of Structuralism on the way we consider space in the second half of the twentieth century, Foucault notices:

We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein...Today the site has been substituted for extension which itself had replaced emplacement. The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids.²⁷

However the interpretation of an atlas cannot be exclusively horizontal – relating images according to their location on a flat surface – in the same way that the prints of Dezallier’s

treatise of gardening are incomplete due to their flatness. André Le Nôtre considered his gardens to be surprising – shall we say entertaining? – playing with scales and perspectives, imagination and memory, and this could only result in wandering through the space. The copses referred to above, when given a third dimension, are actually ‘rooms of greenery’, intimate gardens hidden within artificial forests – let’s say ‘chambered landscapes’.²⁸ The stroller is given the choice to follow any path, get disoriented and end up randomly in cabinets of foliage. This physical experience of space is part of what we should call the *vertical reading* of gardens that may be applied to all patterns of knowledge, and particularly atlases.

In *Reading Rectangles*, Joseph Grigely tackled the slight nuances between legibility and readability of images. He used the example of Warburg’s *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, an unfinished group of panels on which images from various sources were pinned, disconnected from their original place and meant to disclose the enduring nature of motifs among the whole history of representation, in particular the Dionysian violence of antiquity. Warburg wanted to produce a history of art exempt from names. The idea was to reveal supra-individual, transversal flows, independent from chronology and space. As suggested by the scissors one discerns on the right edge of the photograph reproducing the Plate A of *Mnemosyne*, he removed captions so images might be considered by themselves. In a sense, Warburg’s reproductions and Dezallier’s squares of pastureland are similarly cut off from their initial environment to become integrated on a flat surface. Grigely paid particular attention to the background of these photographs and noticed that, nonetheless, most panels were laying against bookshelves:

The rectangles are not always perfect Euclidean constructions...The presence of the books, and the way many of the images overlap each other, remind us that images do not come to us in detached from history: this history is always latent, sometimes, as here, hiding in the shadows created by the photographer's lights. The edges of the panels sometimes appear irregular because of the effect of the shadows on the panels: the panels appear less as individual units than they seem to be parts that have broken off from a larger whole.

Plate A is particularly interesting as it features the design of animals associated with constellations, a map of migrations between Europe and the Middle East, and the family tree of Florentine bankers. Didi-Huberman interprets this as Warburg’s agenda to ‘offer a *transversal* knowledge of this inexhaustible historical (family tree), geographical (map) and imaginary (animals of the Zodiac) complexity’.²⁹ It is also three different ways of representing something confined to space and time, and to give shape to the unknown. Warburg considered it rightly as ‘Different systems of relations – cosmic, terrestrial, genealogic – in which mankind is engaged’ and wrote behind the panel: ‘1. Orientation 2. Exchange 3. Social classification’.³⁰ He was obsessed with the question of distance, whether it was in time or in space. But although his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* was a denial of those distances and hierarchies among visual materials, Warburg was worried about the abolition of distance brought by modern means of communication. In the conclusion of his lecture on the snake ritual in Pueblo culture, he wrote:

Telegraph and telephone are destroying the cosmos. But myths and symbols, in attempting to establish spiritual bonds between man and the

outside world, create space for devotion and scope for reason which are destroyed by the instantaneous electrical contact.³¹

Warburg regarded immediacy in communication as a threat to the poetical interpretation of silence and the unknown. He astutely foresaw that while drawing people closer, technologies also keep them away from their environment. With reference to this, Shams' *Paradise in a square* extends the narrative towards the end of her film to the dilemma of the individual who has inherited this history of pigeonholing through various modes of representation. The film begins and ends with the problematic of isolation: the Persian garden with its 'four corners that prevent continuity' parallels the 'walled gardens', 'online environments where users go for information, communications, and commerce services and one that discourages them from leaving for the larger digital world' (Fig. 22).

What happens when the immediacy of communication immerses the individual in a space that in terms of its structure is more perfect than physical reality with all its rigid parameters that cannot be redefined and reprogrammed? In her film, Shams includes excerpts of the 'Starcraft Championships', part of an e-sport that is taken very seriously in South Korea, and attracts many young players that spend the majority of their day 'training' to play on a competitive level. These players are all connected to each other online, but a bird's eye view of the players in training has a remarkable resemblance to the zoo, and its modes of surveillance. Shams' main concern with this scenario is the uncanny relationship that results between work and play. This is not restricted to gaming. The presentation of the life and work of Nora Hansen in the double projection shows an individual driven by an obsession with fame who constructs and defines her image through selfies and videos. These in turn seem to be the input to a real time 3D modelling of her as an avatar, in other words this abbreviated version of the self. As have seen with other examples presented throughout this essay, whereas our traditional systems of knowledge have failed us by cropping too much information out, in the context of using computing power and by conversely including infinite input for processing, we do not seem to have come closer to revising our modes of representation.

One tool we have thus to resist predictability and to classify while not pigeonholing, is the atlas or any kind of *montage* in the sense that they imply infinite juxtapositions. Making comparisons helps defying – yet not abolishing – borders by extracting elements from their assigned context to consider them as equivalent, by 'understand[ing] things as birds we would prefer not to immobilise in a too conventional use, the cage of our language and of our thinking categories'.³² The uprightness of the squares we use to demarcate organize reality is necessarily threatened by the fields nearby. The surge in the use of atlas-like forms in art as well as scholarship leads some to believe that it could be the hermeneutic key to the current overwhelming profusion of images we now confront. However, one should be careful in using both these devices insofar as they mostly rely on a questionable faith in the virtues of what Philippe-Alain Michaud referred to as 'theoretical fictions'.³³ As Yve-Alain Bois has recently argued, juxtapositions cannot be forgetful of origins, otherwise they run the risk of becoming what he terms 'pseudomorphosis' illusion. This is the idea that two works can speak to each other simply because they have similar external features – for instance an abstract painting of Kenneth Noland and a ceremonial shield from Papua New Guinea.³⁴ If Fari Shams emphasizes the pigeonholing inherent in the various modes of representation, the denial of whole categories does not propose a better alternative than the obsession for compartmentalizing. She reminds the viewer on the one hand that the shapes we use to organise and re-present



21a. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, courtesy of the artist.



21b. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, mixed media, 2016, installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, courtesy of the artist.



22. Fari Shams, *Paradise in a square*, 2016, film still, *Summer Wars* (2009), courtesy of the artist.

reality have histories themselves and cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, however, she is insisting with the orchestration of her installation that there is no one way of looking. It is precisely between the spaces and gaps of the different trajectories included in this work that she would like the process of looking to start. The increase of speed and the increase of data do not necessarily improve our modes of representation.

Any map is the combination of names whose origin is located at times in privacy, at times in history, but doomed to be absorbed through time as pure signification, as exemplified with the Antarctic. Naming is a paradoxical gesture of appropriation in the sense that it denies the possibility for a noun to remain proper. Systems of representation, maps and metaphors are alike in their capacity to reduce exoticism to a limited vocabulary. *Paradise in a square* is precisely a vertical reading, a consideration of the ‘thickness’ of representations and narratives, which help to look at words and images just as the icebergs through which Jean Batiste Charcot was sailing: liable to turn over from time to time and expose their hidden parts.

Acknowledgements:

The author is grateful to Fari Shams for her continuous and helpful attention, as well as to James Tierney at Yale Center for Language Study for his invaluable proofreading.

- 1 See the article in *Le Point*, 04/18/2015, http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/corbeil-essonne-une-avenue-serge-dassault-remplace-ra-le-boulevard-jaures-18-04-2015-1922491_20.php.
- 2 See Pierre Escudé in Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Le Français au Pôle Sud* [1906] (Paris: José Corti, 2006), 328.
- 3 Wolfgang Iser, *L'Appel du texte* [1969], trans. V. Platini (Paris: Allia, 2012), 47 *et passim*.
- 4 Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* [1742] (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 70.
- 5 Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa and Asia the Great. Describing more Particularly the Empires of Persia and Industan* (London, 1677), 12.
- 6 Charcot, *Le Français au Pôle Sud*, 80–81.
- 7 Hans Blumenberg, *Naufnage avec spectateur*, trans. L. Cassagnau, (Paris: L'Arche, 1994), 30.
- 8 Charcot, *Le Français au Pôle Sud*, 307.
- 9 Idem, 318.
- 10 Georges-Didi Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie* [1982] (Paris: Macula, 2012) 38; trans. A. Hartz (Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2003), 19.
- 11 Idem, 20, 4.
- 12 « 16 avril 1904 » in Charcot, *Le Français au Pôle Sud*, 146–47.
- 13 Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres,' in *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988* (Paris, Gallimard, 2001), 1571–81
- 14 Idem, 1578.
- 15 Saint-Simon, *Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. La Pléiade, t. V), 532.
- 16 René-Louis de Girardin, *De la composition des paysages sur le terrain ou des moyens d'embellir la nature près des habitations en y joignant l'agréable à l'utile* (Genève: M. Delaguet, 1777), IX–XX.
- 17 Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Théorie et la pratique du jardinage, où l'on traite à fond des beaux jardins, appelés communément jardins de propriété* (Paris: J. Mariette, 1709), 66.
- 18 This expression, which is now used colloquially to designate the particular domain or the proper field pertaining someone, finds its origin in a letter Vauban addressed to Louvois, the secretary of State in charge of war, on January 19, 1673 in which he claimed that the king 'should think of making his *pré carré*', meaning that he should secure the Northern border of French kingdom.
- 19 Bertolt Brecht, *Über die Gewalt*, in *Gedichte V, 1934–1941* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 103.
- 20 See Nikola Jankovic, *Trois zoos humains* (Paris: Éditions B2, 2012), 28–40.
- 21 Idem, 43.
- 22 Emmanuel Pernoud, *Paradis ordinaires. L'artiste au jardin public* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013), 27.
- 23 Fari Shams, commentary within *Paradise in a square*.
- 24 Didi-Huberman, *Atlas ou le gai savoir inquiet* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2011), 13. ['Worried knowledge' is often translated as 'anxious (gay) science' – OAR Editors]
- 25 I warmly thank the author for use of quotes in advance of publication.
- 26 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 64.
- 27 Foucault, 1571–72
- 28 Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 35.

- 29 Didi-Huberman, 20.
- 30 Aby Warburg, *L'Atlas Mnémosyne* (Paris: L'Écarquillé, 2012), 64.
- 31 Warburg, 'A Lecture on Serpent Rituel,' trans. W. F. Mainland, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2:4 (1939): 292.
- 32 Didi-Huberman, *Atlas ou le gai savoir inquiet*, 110.
- 33 Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg et l'image en mouvement* (Paris: Macula, 2d ed. 2012), 7.
- 34 Yve-Alain Bois, 'On the Uses and Abuses of Look-Alikes,' *October* 154 (2015): 127–149.

Pierre Von-Ow is PhD student in Art History at Yale University, New Haven. He completed his B.A. in Art History at Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne and his M.A. at Université Paris 1 and Columbia University, New York.

The Not-so-Distant Future

The *Gläserne Kette* architects believed it was their professional duty to construct a new society, to lead their country out of chaos and create one more beautiful and harmonious than ever before.

‘...a nation that lies groveling in the dust- like the German nation. Which poets feel misery so deeply as a conquered people?’¹⁷

Those who witnessed abject misery during the war, then returned home to austerity in Weimar Germany, were fired with desire for total change.

Taut wrote: ‘How good it is to have nothing, not to possess a single thing and yet always to be able to give. What do I live on? I don't know. Someone gives me food and drink. I've reduced my hopes, expectations, and possessions to nothing’.¹⁸

When everything was scarce, and everybody hungry, they yearned to realise their dreams of a coming utopia. ‘I would certainly be glad to build...the kind of town that my own inner impulse suggests, planned for the people of the not so distant future, that is to say for the sort of people we can reckon with for the next 100 years’.¹⁹

As individuals living in Hablik's not-so-distant future, my current correspondents are building from his impulse.

Counter-factual Provocations in the Ethnographic Archive

Alyssa Grossman

To cite this contribution:

Grossman, Alyssa. 'Counter-factual Provocations in the Ethnographic Archive.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 126–138, <http://www.oarplatform.com/counter-factual-provocations-ethnographic-archive/>.

Introduction

As recent decades have seen museums increasingly becoming the focus of scholarly attention, curators have responded to new developments in museum theory by experimenting with innovative conceptual frameworks to address the politics and poetics of museological representation.¹ As the field of anthropology continues to wrestle with its own colonial foundations, the search for 'decolonizing' methods has also become a central concern for contemporary ethnographic museums.² The Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC are but a few examples of institutions which, with varying degrees of success, have begun to reflexively incorporate decolonial praxis into their exhibition strategies. Such work has laid critical foundations for challenging essentialist and racist depictions of the ethnographic 'other', and for dislodging deeply rooted imperialist hierarchies of categorization, interpretation, and display.

Here I wish to redirect the decolonial gaze toward the archives, catalogues, and storage facilities – spaces where ethnographic objects are first identified and contextualized.³ While the acts of organizing and labeling these items render them scientifically legible and accessible for further research, these activities are ultimately limited, trapping the objects within bounded ideological categories. Historically, rhetorical strategies for comprehending the significance of non-Western materials and life-worlds have alternated between applying 'scientific' standards to gauge their research value, and 'artistic' criteria to calculate their aesthetic worth.⁴ How might present-day researchers avoid such binary reductionism as they return to the artifacts that have been sitting for decades (and often centuries) in ethnographic museums? If Western practices of classification prioritize bureaucratic, imperialist forms of knowledge, systematically excluding other worldviews and understandings, how could scholars address the moral and political consequences of these practices, while embracing artifacts' diverse narratives and corporeal subjectivities?⁵ How could it be possible to 'unlearn' these objects' given histories, and relate to them as dynamic entities, tied not just to the past but to the continually unfolding present and future?⁶ How might such expanded approaches to understanding the histories of museum objects help forge alternative paths through the broader projects of anthropological and academic research?

In exploring the potential of ethnographic artifacts to take on new meanings and iterations through their ongoing material processes of becoming, I propose to bend the decolonial project to a slightly different – herein described as 'counter-colonial' – angle. As scholars

have noted, decolonial curatorial approaches involve reflecting upon the brutal effects of colonialism,⁷ as well as incorporating competing cultural narratives, including indigenous voices and ideologies, into interpretive work.⁸ Following Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues that decolonizing methodologies must recognize the academic setting as a site of struggle between historically authoritative and disempowered voices,⁹ I define a counter-colonial museological approach as one that challenges institutional narratives by reclaiming research practices that previously have been used to essentialize and alienate the other, but that also draws upon poetic or artistic tactics to disrupt, and reconfigure its own modes of scientific and academic expression.

Many contemporary artists have been caught up in the ‘archival impulse’ outlined a decade ago by Hal Foster, who critiqued museological histories through evocative upheavals of representational paradigms and novel forms of defamiliarization.¹⁰ Such work, however, is primarily regarded as belonging to the artistic domain, rather than that of academic research. Projects by artists such as Renee Green, Maryam Jafri, Georges Adéagbo, Jimmie Durham, Lothar Baumgarten, and Fred Wilson have thoroughly explored the mechanisms of scientific classification and display, poignantly dissecting the colonial origins of the ethnographic museum and archive. However, parallel developments within the context of academia are scarce; as the archaeologist Doug Bailey notes, most academic work attempting to bridge artistic and scholarly boundaries is hindered by the assumption that it must adhere to a scientifically representational logic.¹¹ Yet the more compelling research, he writes, is that which is rooted in academia but explores an entirely new interface of artistic-academic inquiry, one that breaks with the ideas of ‘scientific interpretation and explanation’ as primary scholarly goals,¹² and ‘embraces misunderstanding, seeks complexity, and creates what is difficult (perhaps impossible) to digest, explain, or interpret’.¹³

Such work is urgently needed, for it is the very tensions between adhering to scholarly conventions and pushing the limits of those conventions that can challenge existing hierarchies of legitimacy and lead to radically new forms of knowledge. In this vein, and using my skills as a visual anthropologist, I outline an experimental investigation of a contemporary ethnographic museum collection that operates not through uncovering or translating the meanings behind the objects, but rather by adding new visual, textual, and material layers to them. Instead of explicating or contextualizing these artifacts, this work challenges their established histories through deliberately blurring their outlines and distorting their boundaries. It aims to bypass art/culture dichotomies, dissolve the divisions between art and artifact imposed through the development of specific academic and ethnographic discourses over the past few centuries, and create a new critical form that defies fixed interpretive boundaries. Such a move not only complicates meanings cast through the colonial interpretive lens, it also builds a research agenda that destabilizes the configurations of power and authority that have restricted the scope of what is generally viewed as valid academic practice.

The project that I outline here currently exists in material and conceptual fragments, having taken the form of pilot studies, conference presentations, workshops, and research applications. Consequently, the writing in this article invokes multiple forms of text, images, and objects, as well as existing and imagined configurations of practices, materials, and spaces. Using this work-in-progress as a case study, I consider the implications of combining surrealist-inspired methods of ‘bricolage’ with the emergent museological practice of ‘curation’¹⁴ to

contribute new counter-colonial means of unsettling and reassembling the ‘entangled inheritance’ of ethnographic archives.¹⁵ In mapping out the key conceptual underpinnings, I also evoke wider questions around the underlying academic validity of such endeavors. In line with Tuhiwai Smith’s call for developing ‘alternative knowledges’ to critique colonialism’s analytical tools and cultural formations,¹⁶ I examine the risks and possibilities of research that shuttles between the accepted aim of unpacking the stories behind institutional collections of ethnographic artifacts, and the political and artistic questions that arise when constructing new (and sometimes impossible) stories about these objects through affective, evocative, and counter-factual provocations.

Bricolage, Surrealism, and Anthropology

Bricolage is described in contemporary museological literature as a tool for developing new meanings from assemblages of collected materials.¹⁷ Yet the concept has a longer anthropological and sociological history. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, both bricolage and processes of anthropological understanding involve ordering and making sense of the world through specific underlying structures of classification. As the bricoleur’s ‘universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with “whatever is at hand”’,¹⁸ including leftover things from individuals and society, these novel combinations of materials give rise to new objects and material subjectivities. In Michel De Certeau’s sociological framing, bricolage is a form of cultural resistance, involving the subversion of dominant traditions through the processes of salvaging and re-interpreting,¹⁹ and is described by other writers as ‘tinkering with and recycling cultural givens’.²⁰

In the 1920s and 1930s, the French surrealists explored the principles of juxtaposition and recomposition through bricolage, collage, and assemblage,²¹ recontextualizing forgotten and outmoded bits of culture using varied materials and forms. Their work played with indexical codes, appropriating and inverting conventions of scientific documentation to call attention to the notion that reality is made, rather than given. From literary-journalistic texts such as André Breton’s *Nadja* and Louis Aragon’s *Paris Peasant*, to Brassai’s and Eugène Atget’s poetic realist photographs of Paris, to the pseudo-ethnographic films of Luis Buñuel, the surrealists alternated between ‘cool descriptive exactitude and poetic effusion’²² to record everyday life, but also to reveal the artificiality of practices of representation.²³ By adhering to realist techniques – first inspiring belief in these images, then subverting what is ordinarily done with such images – they could provoke a more jarring awareness of the instability of claims to representational truth. As surrealism was as much a political movement as it was an artistic one,²⁴ they also viewed these practices as cultural critique, problematizing the broader ideological assumptions of bourgeois society.²⁵

The Parisian surrealists had a contradictory relationship with the discipline of anthropology, simultaneously reverent and critical of its methods and objects of analysis.²⁶ Surrealist publications and exhibitions frequently drew upon anthropological themes and methodologies, reinterpreting and adapting them to meet their own artistic needs and desires. Many French-based anthropologists and scholars during that era were also active in surrealist and avant-garde circles, including Carl Einstein, Michel Leiris, Paul Rivet, and Marcel Griaule. The journal *Documents*, founded by the ‘dissident’ surrealist Georges Bataille in 1929, published a provocative mixture of articles by surrealists and experts from European ethnographic

museums.²⁷ Challenging conventional categorizations of material culture through fragmentation and assemblage, the journal served as a 'playful museum' of cultural criticism.²⁸ In the Parisian museum context, in response to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, local surrealists collaborated with the French communist party to create a 'counter-colonial' protest exhibition critiquing the ethnographic processes of commodification and exoticization.²⁹ Juxtaposing displays of so-called 'tribal art' with objects of European art and surrealist ready-mades, the exhibition featured visceral collisions of 'concrete thing, physical sensation, and disordered logic',³⁰ aimed at bodily disturbing the viewers and prompting them to question the established workings of the colonial gaze.

This history of surrealist incursions into the field of anthropology, however, is a topic that remains under-explored in current anthropological literature. Over the past decades, a few scholars have invoked surrealist perspectives and methodologies in relation to ethnographic practice;³¹ more recent work has probed the boundaries between artistic and anthropological practice, analysis, and performance.³² Most of these discussions peaked during anthropology's 'writing culture' debates in the 1980s and early 1990s, when there was a widespread focus on the ways in which reflexive experiments with narrative could expose and contest the social constructions of anthropological knowledge.³³ In contemporary scholarship, aside from Julia Kelly's extensive research in the field of art history,³⁴ the broader implications of the crossovers between surrealist and anthropological forms of inquiry have not been thoroughly examined.³⁵

Curature in the Archive

I propose a return to surrealist legacies, particularly to the notion of bricolage, to reconsider its potential for unsettling the colonial foundations of anthropological collections. I set this historical approach in dialogue with the newer concept of curature, coined by Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes³⁶ as an innovative decolonial approach to working with archives. Moving beyond the idea of curating as simply ordering and managing existing collections, Hamilton and Skotnes posit curature as an expanded practice that revisits archives' colonial histories to reformulate how these histories relate to the contemporary, globalized world. A curative approach acknowledges the authority and power accompanying the practice of handling collections, and interrogates these forces through experimenting with novel material arrangements, juxtapositions, and connections.

As a form of 'recuperative care',³⁷ curature critically evaluates the archival potential of collected images, objects, and texts, as well as the material culture of curatorial work itself.³⁸ Through enacting new approaches to the standard activities of labeling, photographing, inscribing, digitizing, and exhibiting, a curative methodology appropriates these practices to reformulate a collection's significance. It proposes that archival artifacts be read not only through their cultural histories (looking at objects as sources of information), but also by foregrounding their corporeal and affective qualities. Archival encounters may, thus, be re-conceptualized as phenomenological experiences, involving embodied and sensory means of reconfiguring historical and colonial narratives.³⁹

In imagining a museum system that treats its possessions as diasporic, composed of discursive, material, and sensory elements, curature also intersects with assemblage theory, relocating

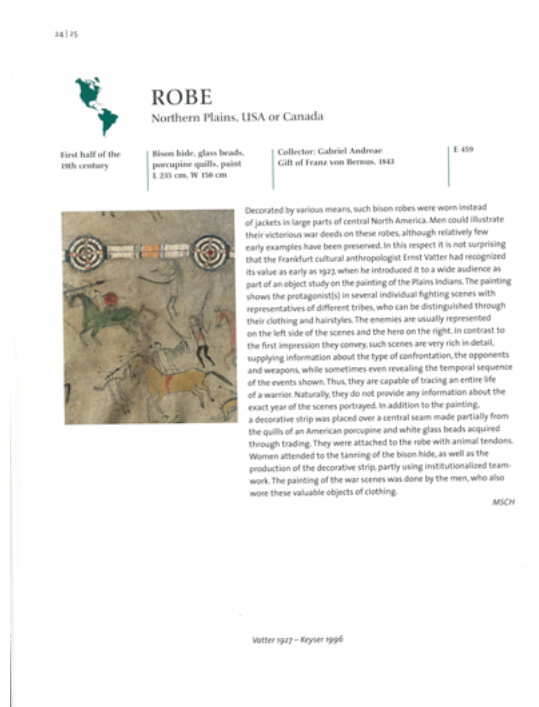
the idea of agency from individual acts and things to distributions across collectives.⁴⁰ Through developing surrealist-inspired practices of curation in the archives, and employing new visual and textual interpretive approaches, the researcher may become an ‘assembleur’, experimenting with form using a contained body of content. The speculative and unpredictable nature of such work contributes to unsettling the authoritative position of the ethnographic researcher. As George Marcus and Erkan Saka write, the ‘time-space [of assemblage] is inherently unstable and infused with movement and change’;⁴¹ while this practice dismantles interpretive hierarchies, it simultaneously builds up alternative taxonomies, opening up space for other, decolonizing stories to unfold.

Cataloguing Culture

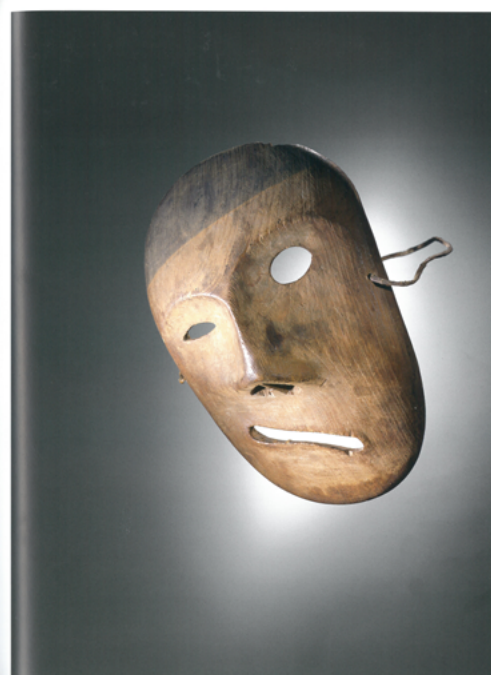
The study I outline here developed as a collaboration between my work as a social and visual anthropologist, and that of Selena Kimball, a multi-media artist based in New York. Over the past decade, we have conducted a number of art-anthropology projects, resulting in texts, films, and installations.⁴² As groundwork for our current research on museum archives,⁴³ we conducted a pilot study using a randomly selected ethnographic museum catalogue as our source material. The catalogue, *Being Object, Being Art: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main*⁴⁴ was part of an exhibition of the same title, which ran from 2009–10 at the Frankfurt Weltkulturen Museum.⁴⁵ The catalogue features 130 artifacts from Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and East and Southeast Asia, including woodcarvings, metal sculptures, textiles, gourd vessels, headdresses, and leather figurines. These objects are portrayed in glossy color photographs, surrounded by dramatic halos of light that emphasize their formal details and elaborate craftsmanship. A passage of contextualizing commentary accompanies each image, containing information about the objects’ materials, manufacturing techniques, conditions of acquisition, and significance within their communities of origin.

The book’s promotional blurb claims that the goal of this exhibition was to ‘undermine’ traditional ethnographic designations of objects, and instigate new means of reading them as both anthropological artifacts and artistic pieces.⁴⁶ As the Weltkulturen Museum’s website explains, ‘[T]he beholder is meant to discover the extraordinary, the elaborate, the different, the perfect, the harmonic or even the disturbing in the objects concerned’.⁴⁷ The actual exhibition featured an additional room with pieces by contemporary ‘artists of the so-called diaspora’,⁴⁸ but the printed catalogue does not include this work. Its text explicitly locates the museum at the forefront of debates on the ‘status of ethnic artifacts’, arguing that the exhibition and resulting publication address a central concern to ‘reorient the taxonomies of [the museum’s] collections’.⁴⁹ Presumably construed as a corrective to existing discussions about non-Western objects that use ‘either/or’ language to distinguish between the artistic and the ethnographic, the website states that the exhibition’s curators embrace the more inclusive language of ‘as well as’ to confirm the objects’ membership in both artistic and anthropological worlds.⁵⁰

The move to reframe these objects as simultaneously ‘artifact’ and ‘art’ can be read as a response to anthropology’s long history of dividing material culture into artistic versus cultural taxonomies of categorization. As James Clifford outlined in his classic book, *The Predicament of Culture*,⁵¹ until the 19th century, Europeans primarily classified tribal objects



'Robe: Northern Plains, USA or Canada', collected by Gabriel Andrae, gift of Franz von Bernus, 1843. Image from *Being Object, Being Art: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Achim Sibeth (Tübingen: E. Wasmuth Verlag, 2010). Photo: Stephan Beckers, Frankfurt am Main, 2009; image courtesy of Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main.



'Mask: Eskimo, Alaska, USA', purchased from trading company Umlauff, 1910. Image from *Being Object, Being Art: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Achim Sibeth (Tübingen: E. Wasmuth Verlag, 2010). Photo: Stephan Beckers, Frankfurt am Main, 2009; image courtesy of Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

as either ‘antiquities’ or ‘grotesques.’ By the early 20th century, they had begun defining these objects as valuable ‘cultural witnesses’ (according to relativist anthropologists), or as fine examples of ‘primitivist art’ (according to modernist scholars and art experts). Subsequently, as Clifford argued, the framing of ethnographic artifacts alternated between the mutually exclusive categories of the ‘authentically cultural’ or the ‘authentically artistic’.⁵² By advocating a hybrid framework that recognizes cultural artifacts as legitimate works of art, the Weltkulturen Museum curators are attempting to bridge this dichotomy and thereby create new taxonomical possibilities.

Having become a high-profile anthropological institution in recent years, this museum has experimented broadly – and somewhat controversially – with the role of art and art practitioners within the ethnographic context.⁵³ In many ways the museum has both challenged and amplified standard practices of anthropological interpretation. In the case of this catalogue, however, the presentation of the objects as both art and artifact collapses these two categories without critically deconstructing how they might be mutually constituted through specific modes of representation and display.⁵⁴ It additionally overlooks the underlying cultural assumptions of artistic practices themselves.⁵⁵ By labeling its ethnographic artifacts ‘artistic masterpieces’, the Being Object, Being Art rhetoric continues to appropriate and exoticize the ‘things, facts, and meanings’⁵⁶ of the ethnographic other, ultimately reasserting the museum’s institutional power to define artifacts of indigenous cultural production in persistently Western terms.

Yet such objects need not be gathered under the single umbrella of cultural artifacts *and* contemporary art, as the Weltkulturen Museum catalogue suggests. What would happen if we gave them space to become *neither* cultural artifacts, *nor* works of contemporary art, but something else entirely? What could an artifact do or say if it defied such categorizations? Returning to Clifford,⁵⁷ he suggested understanding ethnographic objects not as cultural signs or as artistic icons, but as deeply personal, non-exoticized fetishes. As he noted, instead of expecting museum objects to edify and inform us, recognizing them as fetishes allows us to acknowledge their power to disconcert us through their very resistance to classification, thereby making us more attuned to the constructed and arbitrary ways in which we attempt to define and set order to the unknown.

The concept of the fetish has captivated the intellectual imagination for centuries; as a subject of investigation into non-Western religious belief systems, classical anthropologists defined fetishism as the ‘primitive’ idea that spirits could take up residence in inanimate material objects, endowing them with living souls.⁵⁸ Many French surrealists also viewed artworks as fetishistic, describing their sculptures and assemblages as objectifications of the living, dynamic qualities of memory and desire.⁵⁹ Drawing on surrealist-psychoanalytic interpretations of material culture, as well as Roland Barthes’ semiotic concepts of the fetish as an item ‘of strictly personal meaning unformed by cultural codes’,⁶⁰ Clifford proposed this alternative take on museum artifacts as a viable direction for the future, though he offered no suggestions for how this might play out in practice. Since the publication of his text thirty years ago, this possibility has not been seriously examined, at least not in the literature on museum anthropology. In the passages below, I discuss how my collaborative work with Kimball takes up this challenge, not by claiming to produce ‘artistic interpretations’ of ethnographic artifacts, but by materially confounding and complicating these artifacts’ classificatory and explanatory potentials, while still remaining rooted within an ethnographic/archival/academic framework.

A 'Curative' Bricolage

If we return to the artifact pictured in Figure 1, the text identifies it as a robe of the Northern Plains Indians, made in the early 19th century. The text describes the object as manufactured from bison hide, glass beads, porcupine quills, and paint. It explains the imagery as depicting fighting scenes between the 'protagonists' and 'enemy tribes'. It informs us that the paintings convey important information about weapons, confrontations, and the lives of warriors. We learn that the women performed the work of tanning the bison hides, while the men were the ones to paint the war scenes. We also find out that the 'value' of this type of robe was recognized by the German anthropologist Ernst Vatter, who 'introduced it to a wide audience' in 1927, thereby helping to spread knowledge about the Plains Indians.

The text in Figure 2 is written in much the same tone. It identifies the piece in the photograph as a wooden Eskimo mask from Alaska, made around 1905 and purchased by a German trading firm in 1910. The voice is didactic and informational, offering visual and formal evaluations of the piece, as well as outlining its social functions. We are told that the mask 'symbolizes real social relationships' and that it reveals how the Eskimos deal with issues such as irony and mockery. At the same time the narration betrays value judgments that go beyond objective facts, praising the mask's 'astounding' artistic form of expression, and revealing its connections to the Eskimos' 'profound sense of humor'.

In our treatment of these anthropological documents, Kimball and I followed a simple set of practical guidelines. Kimball began by literally cutting up the image of the object, in a similar way that she would cut up any other material she works with in her broader practice of collage. Using scissors and glue, she then reassembled parts of this material into an image of a new artifact. In response to her object, I cut up the original explanatory text, and reassembled a selection of these words into a text that referenced the new object (see Figures 3 and 4 below). In using the original text as my raw material, I treated the written narratives in the catalogue not just as sources of historical or scholarly information, but as physical found objects in and of themselves.⁶¹

Each new visual and textual work that we produced was to consist only of elements from the original materials; no new words or images were to be added. Kimball transformed the bison robe into a patchwork of painted hide with a vaguely animalistic bearing, its two hollow eyes positioned against a background of fractured shadows. My text, entitled *The Hero*, reads:

The worn, victorious object. It left an impression. First a temporal study: part painting, not information. A distinguished audience attended the production while men in white clothing acquired their weapons, tracing through glass a seam of events. A life portrayed, few deeds recognized. The exact value of such institutionalized objects cannot be shown.

Kimball turned the photograph of the mask into an image of a cavernous frame, precariously balanced on one rounded edge, hinting at the existence of other worlds beyond its external surface. My accompanying narrative, entitled *The Dark*, reads:

A subterranean island used to be here. But its buildings were closed and pulled down by the King. Living beings consequently became mythical creatures, half

real, open to interpretation. This solemn black contour, drawn and slanted through time, is a conspicuously popular piece.

Resisting Classification

Using only the images and words from the museum catalogue to create new objects and narratives, Kimball and I assume the role of bricoleurs, experimenting with form using a self-contained body of content. By combining this practice with principles of curation, we create a counterpoint to the suggestion that the objects in this collection should be defined in solely 'scientific' and/or 'artistic' terms. In this framework, artifacts can no longer be slotted into the categories of either 'scholarly' research material, or 'creative' forms of craftsmanship. Through turning photographs of artifacts and their interpretive narratives into semi-fictional objects and accounts, unchaining the collected specimens from their previously assigned descriptive labels, we propose an archival inventory that rejects naming these items according to standardized facts and knowledge, obfuscates their given social and historical trajectories, and hints at subjective, provocative, and counter-factual stories.

As the Surrealists long ago noted, destabilizing and altering the established functions of an object can provoke disorder and confusion, giving the object a certain fetishistic power and causing a crisis in the nature of experience. The capacity of fetishes to propel the body to grapple viscerally with their presence points to their disruptions not merely as cognitive acts, but as contributions to new affective and sensory states. According to the surrealists, such incitements of dream-like emotional and physical states give rise to new kinds of socio-political awareness, as well as space for imagining alternative (counter-colonial) cultural orders. Returning to these ideas nearly a century after they were first proposed is not so much an attempt to resurrect fixed formulas from a static past, but rather an exploration of how to incorporate politically grounded artistic concerns into new dialogues with contemporary cultural configurations and curatorial theories. In addition, broadening the scope of the Surrealists' original focus lays important groundwork for the further development of novel forms of anthropological research and practice.

As noted above, this collaboration currently takes the form of an evolving pilot study, an emerging blueprint to be developed in a number of potential directions. As we continue to produce an expanded series of collage objects and texts, Kimball and I will collate this work into its own ethnographic catalogue, presenting a collection of unlikely things and narratives as legitimate (albeit non-existent) artifacts of research. As another output of the endeavor of curation, this publication would not only reframe museum discourses and recast colonial legacies, but also question the genre of the academic exhibition catalogue itself. Through adhering to certain research protocols and accepted formulas of museological presentation, yet also deliberately making those formulas strange and unfamiliar, it will highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in a product commonly assumed to contain traditionally 'valid' scientific accounts. Neither a work of art, nor an 'output' of scientific research, the project as a whole resists attempts to label or categorize its form, function, and meaning. Through eluding the conventional mechanisms of academic evaluation, we wish to compel viewers to reconsider their own perceptions of both the affective value and the scholarly significance of artifacts drawn from colonial contexts.

Although the work described here risks being read as a formal exercise in visual and textual

The Hero

The worn, victorious object. It left an impression.
 First a temporal study: part painting, not information.
 A distinguished audience attended the production
 while men in white clothing acquired their weapons,
 tracing through glass a seam of events.
 A life portrayed, few deeds recognized.
 The exact value of such institutionalized objects
 can not be shown.



Selena Kimball (image) and Alyssa Grossman (text), *The Hero*, 2015, collage (paper on paper), 18.5 cm x 14.5 cm, image courtesy of Selena Kimball and Alyssa Grossman.

The Dark

A subterranean island used to be here.
 But its buildings were closed
 and pulled down by the King.
 Living beings consequently became mythical cultures,
 half real, open to interpretation.
 This solemn black contour,
 drawn and slanted through time
 is a conspicuously popular piece.



Selena Kimball (image) and Alyssa Grossman (text), *The Dark*, 2015, collage (paper on paper), 12cm x 13 cm, image courtesy of Selena Kimball and Alyssa Grossman.

collage, rather than a social and cultural critique of normalized museum conventions, this is precisely why it is essential to keep such a project rooted within the academic domain and in dialogue with ethnographic and museum researchers – so that anthropologists, archivists, curators, and their publics can continue to reflexively examine their practices, and develop new possibilities for the forms and methodologies of scholarly practice and knowledge production. In countering expectations that an ethnographic catalogue should offer explanatory or comprehensive histories to its readers, our work challenges assumptions that the tasks of curators and anthropologists should primarily be to clarify, illuminate, and instruct. While some might question the decision to distance these particular museum artifacts from the data serving as longstanding scientific records of their (colonial) identity, this strategy shifts the source of authority from seemingly fixed archival ‘facts’ to an emerging and fluid repository of materials that do not answer to the usual terms of institutional validity. Such an approach opens up the potential for objects of colonial inquiry to take on Clifford’s role as disconcerting fetishes, which defy established modes of categorization and become part of an evolving set of material encounters in the present.

In the contemporary framework of global controversies surrounding the politics of artifact repatriation, restitution, and access to digitized collections, there is a pressing demand for novel approaches to museum decolonization. As unprecedented numbers of people and objects are currently moving precariously across national boundaries, the need to reconsider the relationship between ethnographic collections and their source communities has become an even greater moral imperative. While it is essential to continue the development of curatorial methods critiquing the institutional power structures and political mechanisms behind the processes of collection and display, new terms for research must be considered within the post-colonial archival context. Through reassembling ethnographic materials in ways that highlight their resistance to conventional classificatory schemes, and by proposing counter-factual, surrealist-inspired interfaces with archival realms, this project breaks with the traditional academic drive toward scientific explanation, in order to reframe ways of engaging with the entangled issues of cultural heritage, colonial history, and curatorial and anthropological processes of interpretation.

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to the editors and reviewers of OAR for their insightful and detailed feedback on earlier drafts of this article. I am grateful to the Frankfurt Weltkulturen Museum for permission to reprint images and texts from their exhibition catalogue. Thanks also to John Brode, for his comments on the text, and to Selena Kimball, for her longstanding contributions to our collaborative work and its theorization.

- 1 See Luca Basso Peressut, et al., *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework*, Vol. 1 (Milan: Mela Books, 2013); Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu, eds., *Exhibition Experiments* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).
- 2 See Felicity Bodenstein and Camilla Pagani, ‘Decolonising National Museums of Ethnography in Europe: Exposing and Reshaping Colonial Heritage (2000–2012),’ in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. Iain Chambers, et al. (London: Ashgate, 2014); Annie Coombes and Ruth Phillips, ‘Introduction: Museums in Transformation, Dynamics of Democratization and Decolonization,’ in *The International Handbook of Museum Studies*, Vol. 4: *Museum Transformations*, ed. Sharon Macdonald, et al. (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2015); Klas Grinell and Lotten Gustavsson Renius, ‘The King is Dead. Long Live the King! Uninheriting Modern Ethnography While Inheriting Objects of Ethnography,’ in *Beyond Modernity: Do Ethnographic Museums Need Ethnography?*, eds. Sandra Ferracuti and Elisabetta Frasca (Rome: Espera, 2013);

- Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
- 3 For discussions of the ethnographic catalogue and other storage mechanisms shaping the frameworks of museum display, see Fritha Langerman, 'Cover to Cover: The Contribution of the Book to the Reproduction of Linear, Hierarchical Models of Natural History,' in *Uncertain Curature: In and Out of the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes (Johannesburg: Jacana Press, 2014); Hannah Turner, 'Decolonizing Ethnographic Documentation: A Critical History of the Early Museum Catalogs at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History,' *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 53 (2015): 658–76; Nancy Parezo, 'The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The Smithsonian Institution in the American Southwest,' *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 10 (1987): 1–47.
 - 4 For an in-depth discussion of this 'art-culture system', see James Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture,' in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 94–107.
 - 5 See Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), and Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star, eds., *Standards and Their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).
 - 6 Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012).
 - 7 Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.
 - 8 Daniel Cull, 'Subjectivity as Treatment: Neurosis and the Roots of Contemporary Ethnographic Conservation,' *Conservation, Exposition, Restoration D'Objets d'Art* 4 (2009); Claire Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes,' *Museums and Society* 11:2 (2013): 185–201.
 - 9 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 39.
 - 10 Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse,' *October* 110 (2004): 3–22.
 - 11 Doug Bailey, 'Art//Archaeology//Art: Letting-Go Beyond,' in *One World Archaeology II: Collaborations, Conversations, Criticisms*, eds. Ian Russell and Andrew Cochrane (New York: Springer, 2014), 246. Some examples of such work cited by Bailey include a project by the archaeologists Christopher Tilley, Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton, as well as work by the artist and archaeologist Aaron Bender
 - 12 Doug Bailey, 'Art//Archaeology//Art,' 241.
 - 13 Idem, 235.
 - 14 Hamilton and Skotnes, *Uncertain Curature*.
 - 15 Idem, 22.
 - 16 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 34.
 - 17 See Anwar Tlili, 'Encountering the Creative Museum: Museographic Creativeness and the Bricolage of Time Materials,' *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48:5 (2016): 443–58.
 - 18 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 11.
 - 19 Véronique Altglas, '"Bricolage": Reclaiming a Conceptual Tool,' *Culture and Religion* 15:4 (2014): 475.
 - 20 Anna Dezeuze, 'Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life,' *Art Journal* 67:1 (2008): 34.
 - 21 'Collage' refers to aggregations of two-dimensional materials, practiced since the advent of papermaking as early as 200 BC, but was not specifically coined as an artistic term until the early 1900s. 'Assemblage' involves the combination of three-dimensional found, bought, and made objects, first developed by the Dadaists and surrealists in the early 20th century. See Emily Bell, 'Collage,' *The University of Chicago:: Theories of Media:: Keywords Glossary::* (2007), accessed 1 July, 2017 at <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/collage.htm>.
 - 22 Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 12.
 - 23 See also Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
 - 24 In the First Surrealist Manifesto of 1924, André Breton wrote that one of surrealism's primary concerns was to undermine positivism, emancipate the imagination, and 'liberate humanity from the ideological shackles that enforce the contradiction between dream and waking life', see: Franklin Rosemont, *André Breton and the First Principles of Surrealism* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 20–21. Influenced by Marxist politics, Freudian psychoanalysis, and German and occult philosophy, the early surrealists viewed the realms of 'poetry, dreams and unconscious life [as containing] solutions to the gravest problems of human existence', see idem, 24.
 - 25 Michael Richardson, 'An Encounter of Wise Men and Cyclops Women: Considerations of Debates on Surrealism and Anthropology,' *Critique of Anthropology* 13:1 (1993): 58.
 - 26 Julia Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects, Paris c. 1925–1935*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
 - 27 Julia Kelly, 'Discipline and Indiscipline: The Ethnographies of Documents,' *Papers of Surrealism* 7 (2007): 1–20.
 - 28 James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23:4 (1981): 551.
 - 29 Janine Mileaf, 'Body to Politics: The Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton,' *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (2001): 239–55.
 - 30 Idem, 251.
 - 31 In 'The Modernist Sensibility in Recent Ethnographic Writing and the Cinematic Metaphor of Montage,' *Visual Anthropology Review* 6:1 (1990): 2–12, George Marcus cites Michael Taussig's *Colonialism, Shamanism, and The Wild Man* as an example of an ethnography that makes use of montage to approximate the effects of shamanic performance. In *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Paul Stoller describes the surrealist influences of improvisational methodologies and the fusion of art and science in Rouch's films.
 - 32 See recent work by Michael Taussig, including *The Corn Wolf* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), which experiments with poetic dimensions of ethnographic storytelling; see also projects by Annie Danis and Annie Malcolm at Univeristy

- of California, Berkeley; Lucy Suchman and Laura Watts at Lancaster University; and Joe Dumit's work at University of California, Davis.
- 33 For example, see Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Art of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); and Marjorie Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
 - 34 See Kelly, 'Discipline and Indiscipline'; Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*; and, Julia Kelly, 'The Ethnographic Turn,' in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).
 - 35 Related work, such as Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism', Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), Roger Sansi, *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), and Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot* has largely remained at the margins of contemporary mainstream anthropological debates.
 - 36 Hamilton and Skotnes, *Uncertain Curature*.
 - 37 This phrase 'recuperative care' could be put into dialogue with 'reparative knowing', described in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Knowing: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 150–51, which she defines as critical, communal, intertextual discourses that 'succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them'.
 - 38 Hamilton and Skotnes, *Uncertain Curature*, 9.
 - 39 See Sandra Dudley, 'Museum Materialities: Objects, Sense and Feeling,' in *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, ed. Sandra Dudley (London: Routledge, 2010), and Janice Baker, *Sentient Relics: Museums and Cinematic Affect* (London: Routledge, 2017).
 - 40 Rodney Harrison, 'Reassembling Ethnographic Museum Collections,' in *Reassembling the Collections: Ethnographic Museums and Indigenous Agency*, eds. Rodney Harrison, et al. (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2013).
 - 41 George Marcus and Erkan Saka, 'Assemblage,' *Theory, Culture and Society* 23:2–3 (2006): 102.
 - 42 See Alyssa Grossman and Selena Kimball, 'The Memory Archive: Filmic Collaborations in Art and Anthropology,' *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 9:1 (2009): 1–38; Alyssa Grossman, 'Forgotten Domestic Objects: Capturing Involuntary Memories in Post-communist Bucharest,' *Home Cultures* 12:3 (2015): 291–310.
 - 43 In 2017, I submitted an application to the Swedish Research Council to develop a related project within the archives of the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden.
 - 44 Achim Sibeth, ed., *Being Object, Being Art: Masterpieces From the Collections of the Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt/Main* (Tübingen: E. Wasmuth Verlag, 2010).
 - 45 Kimball first found the catalogue in a second-hand bookstore in New York, and suggested we use it as material for our collaboration, knowing nothing at the time of the history of the Weltkulturen Museum, or that I had been reading about its recent experiments in artistic-anthropological curatorship.
 - 46 See: <http://www.artbook.com/9783803033383.html>, accessed 01 July, 2017.
 - 47 See: <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/ausstellungen/archiv/56?page=3>, accessed 01 July, 2017.
 - 48 Stefan Eisenhofer, 'Being Object. Being Art: Masterpieces from the Collections of the Museum of World Culture (Frankfurt am Main),' *African Arts* 44:1 (2011): 83.
 - 49 See: <http://www.artbook.com/9783803033383.html>, accessed 01 July, 2017.
 - 50 See: <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/ausstellungen/archiv/56?page=3>, accessed 01 July, 2017.
 - 51 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 103.
 - 52 Ibidem.
 - 53 See Clémentine Deliss, ed., *Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum* (Frankfurt Am Main: Weltkulturen Museum, 2012).
 - 54 For a detailed discussion of this topic in relation to surrealist sculptural work, see Julia Kelly, 'The Found, the Made, and the Functional: Surrealism, Objects and Sculpture,' in *Found Sculpture and Photography from Surrealism to Contemporary Art*, eds. Julia Kelly and Anna Dezeuze (New York: Ashgate, 2013).
 - 55 This is a critique that has been leveled at the Weltkulturen Museum in broader terms; see for example Haidy Geismar, 'The Art of Anthropology: Questioning Contemporary Art in Ethnographic Display,' in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory* (1st ed.), eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2015).
 - 56 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 98.
 - 57 Idem, 104.
 - 58 See Hartmut Böhme, *Fetishism and Culture: A Different Theory of Modernity*, trans. Anna Galt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014).
 - 59 See Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*.
 - 60 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 105.
 - 61 As Hamilton and Skotnes note, while labels are often overlooked as archival objects, they are as much a part of the material culture of museum practice as any collection of artifacts or images, and should be acknowledged as such, see: Hamilton and Skotnes, *Uncertain Curature*, 9.

Alyssa Grossman is a social and visual anthropologist, with a PhD from the University of Manchester, UK (2010). Her research incorporates visual and sensory methods to investigate everyday sites and practices of memorialization, and explores the intersectionalities between artistic and anthropological methods and forms. She is currently Associated Researcher at Valand Academy of Art, University of Gothenburg.

Poetic Effects of Language Theories

Alícia Fuentes-Calle

To cite this contribution:

Fuentes-Calle, Alícia. 'Poetic Effects of Language Theories.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 139–152, <http://www.oarplatform.com/poetic-effects-language-theories/>.

GLOSSARY

COGNITIVE SEMANTICS

The theoretical approach of Len Talmy. According to Talmy, cognitive semantics deals with conceptual material and its organisation in language. Two complementary systems are established: the lexical (conceptual content), and the grammatical (conceptual structure). Conceptual organisation is explored both at a general level, and through a set of particular domains: space and time, causation, motion, attention, viewpoint, etc. This approach is adopted by this text.

JAKOBSON, ROMAN

(1896–1982), became one of the most influential linguists of the twentieth century by pioneering the development of structural analysis of language. Jakobson defends the inseparability of poetics from the rest of linguistics, and argues that the poetic function (one of the functions of language postulated by him) must be regarded as an implicit element of every verbal activity: 'Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent'.¹ The poetic function of language is, therefore, not to be related to poetry alone, but needs to be adopted as a perspective on language in general.

METALINGUISTIC

Metalanguage: language about language. Awareness of the nature of language.

POETIC EFFECTS

Poetics is understood here as a technology that empowers perception and experience via language. What dimensions of language can be poetically activated, what we think language is, and what can be done with language, are also part of our poetic investigation. Besides, as Alastair Pennycook suggests, there is a 'need to rethink the relations between languages, humans, and objects: there is no longer a world "out there" separate from humans and represented in language but rather a dynamic interrelationship between different materialities'.²

In this framework, a continuum of poetic effects is suggested. Poetics is understood here as a matter of degree, latent in any linguistic-communicative manifestation. Poetic effects are the ways by which the different poetic levels (as those postulated in this text: Poetics I, Poetics II) are perceived, cognized, and/or experienced.

POETICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Understood here as implied by the question: 'Is there in some kindred sense "a poetry, a music of thought" deeper than that which attaches to the external uses of language, to style?'.³

TALMY, LEN

Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. His broader research interests cover cognitive linguistics, the properties of conceptual organisation, and cognitive theory, with additional specialisations in American Indian and Yiddish linguistics. Virtually all his written work is available on his website.⁴

STONE, WORD, LIGHT

In 'Coleridge's Dream' (1951), Jorge Luis Borges draws on the story of the poem *Kubla Khan*, dreamt, and then partially recalled and transcribed, by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on a summer day in 1797. Coleridge had been reading a passage in Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his Pilgrimage* about the construction of a palace by the thirteenth century Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan ('In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately palace...'), when he fell asleep. The reading consequently transmuted into dreamed images and these in words, all in all, Borges states, 'fifty-odd rhymed and irregular lines of exquisite prosody'.

Although the whole poem could not be recalled on waking by Coleridge, 'Swinburne⁵ felt that what he had been able to recover was the supreme example of music in the English language, and that the person capable of analyzing it would be able – the metaphor is Keats' – to unravel a rainbow'.⁶

That dream, though, appeared to be inscribed in a historical sequence – in some events preceding, even announcing it. According to Borges, the vizier of Ghazan Mahmud reported in the fourteenth century's *Compendium of Histories by Rashid al-Din* that Kublai Khan had built a palace according to a plan that he had seen...in a dream.

A metamorphic architecture seems to evolve in time, ranging from the palace of stone (via Khan's dream) to the palace of light/music (as Swinburne puts it, through Keats' metaphor), via the palace of words, which is the poem triggered by Coleridge's dream. '[T]he palace;... the poem. Whoever compares them will see that they are essentially the same', Borges underscores.

The sequence would not be just a chain of ekphrasis (i.e. of expression of an artistic concept in different media, an interartistic mode of transfer),⁷ but of transubstantiation – a sequence of different objects. An extreme case of *poiesis*. Not a verbal representation of the stone

palace, but the same palace made out of words, then made out of light. Poetic effects in an extreme degree.

A continuum of poetic effects could be suggested as follows:

<u>Stone</u>	<u>Word/ image</u>	<u>Light/ music</u>
Experience of materiality	Representation of content (meaning and reference)	Geometry of concepts (meaning of grammatical form)
<u>Poetics I</u>	<u>(poetics x)</u>	<u>Poetics II</u>
(traditional <i>poiesis</i>)	(as in literary texts conventional analysis)	(as in Part I below)

Poetics I, poetics as *poiesis*, in its original aim as performative, transforms the world. ‘The first dream added a palace to reality’.

Poetics(x), in its undefined culturally, historically situated manifestation. In western tradition, generally framed in literary texts: mental representations involved in experiencing a work of literature, as a work of literature.⁸

I introduce in this text the notion of Poetics II. It activates the poetic effects latent in linguistic theory. In the knowledge emerging from the properties of language, made explicit through theoretical constructs. A manifestation of the poetics of knowledge. ‘[T]he person capable of analyzing [Coleridge’s poem] would be able...to unravel a rainbow’.

And hence, we could even read in the continuum the progression from stone to light, operated by word, through the technology provided by poetics.

Poetics I, the closest to the original *poiesis*, uses language as an ephemeral vehicle and gets rid of it after a while, as if throwing off silk clothes or spitting out sunflower seed shells – to be left with its effects, its material outputs.

Poetics II, at the other extreme of the continuum, exhibits language scaffolding for extreme perception and for its intrinsic effects, for the eloquence of its very nature – as latent harmony made visible in the silent non-musical contemplation of sheet music.

Poetics II is suggested in this text as a locus to explore uncharted resources for the art of language. Resources provided by linguistic theories that unravel elements and properties of language. My interest is not, therefore, in ‘literary texts’, but in a broader exploration of the poetic effects triggered by linguistic theoretical constructs. These, it is argued, could be included in a somehow enlarged art of language.

*

Linguistic autobiographies can be engaging stories about how several languages are managed in globalising lives. They are, at times, surprising accounts of intercultural acrobatics, and

of emotional entanglement. They can be seen, in a good part, too, as narratives on fictions – metaliterature on those objects called languages, which were invented (as fictions) at some point in history (to be learnt, to be counted, to be dispossessed, to be used).

I have a linguistic autobiography, as everyone else. As a child becoming soon bilingual(...), curious about people talking so differently across Europe(...), soon after engaging in learning (...),⁹ and becoming familiar with many diverse systems of meaning and structures. Soon realizing that there is more to language than patterns of forms and choreographies of meaning. Those formal descriptions called *languages* were just arbitrary abstractions out of the actual communication magma in which humans engaged. Fascinated by that theory part, however. And seeking to translate it into other forms. Other forms also given to contemplation (as in *theoria*), as was grammar.

That is where my linguistic autobiography, rather than in the accumulation of ‘languages’ of the world, properly starts. Following Roman Jakobson, on one hand, for whom ‘poetics makes all levels of language resonate’ – an inclination to look at linguistic theory through the glass of its potential poetic effects. In accordance with Victor Yngve,¹⁰ and many others, on the other hand, ready to accept language and grammar as ‘theories of theories’, ‘representing imaginary objects’, ‘fictions’.

In autumn of 2005, I was reading again ‘The Relation of Grammar to Cognition’, by Len Talmy.¹¹ The reading-meditation would automatically return the particular theoretical approach offered by the author back to my mind as a poetical device per se.

This paper approaches the entanglement of language and poetics suggested by Jakobson (‘poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics’) beyond officially poetic manifestations. This invites us to experimentally address, it is suggested in this text, the poetic activation of the properties and principles of language postulated by linguistic theory.

As stated above, the focus of this text is not on ‘literary texts’, but on a broader exploration of the poetic effects of the theories of language. Poetic effects triggered by theoretical constructs. Poetic effects that could be included in a somehow enlarged art of language. An art of language understood as an unprejudiced exploration of what are languages, what can we do with them.

In this text I assume that the potential of the art of language depends to a large extent on the knowledge we have of the elements and variables that make up this art:

- Our knowledge on the locus of poetic activation, on the one hand, for example, the elements and properties of the language.
- On the other hand, the beliefs we maintain about what language and ‘languages’ are and what can be done with them (scope of possibility and restriction).¹²

Being aware of such beliefs (also known as ‘linguistic ideologies’) appears to be crucial to engage both in a sound exploration of the art of language, and in critical (meta)linguistic autobiographies. Both are, in fact, deeply interrelated.

PART I

On *indolens* Grammar
(*indölens*, (Lat.) not suffering, insensitive to pain)

Icarus
Landscape with the Fall of Icarus¹³
William Carlos Williams, 1883–1963

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning¹⁴

*

This text is an experiment on poetics as a perspective on language theory. An experiment on mining poetic resources that are latent in less charted theory sites. Largely with Jakobson in mind:

‘poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics’

‘the scrutiny of language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function’

‘poetic language makes all levels of a language resonate’.¹⁵

It is assumed in this text that poetics is a point of view on language that tends to raise its properties to the maximum exponent. Poetics could be seen as a technology to enhance perception and acknowledge, therefore, that it is through the poetic dimension of language that its specific properties and elements are manifested more clearly.

This perspective, although briefly and at a greatly reduced scale, will be applied in this text to some notions proposed in the framework of cognitive semantics. Namely the cognitive semantics field as approached by Talmy in the chapter ‘The Relation of Grammar to Cognition’, to which I refer earlier. Some sections in that chapter will be used as a bank of data to engage in the poetic activation of elements of linguistic theory: namely, the meaning encoded in

grammatical elements (as opposed to lexical elements). Mainly the constraints to their meaning, as they are described by Talmy, i.e. that which is left unsayable due to the particular properties and constraints making up human languages.

*

Following the inverse sense of Paul Kiparsky's statement that 'the linguistic sames which are potentially relevant in poetry are just those which are potentially relevant in grammar',¹⁶ this exercise will explore how some grammatical properties and patterns postulated by Talmy can actually be experienced as poetic insights that can be traced through some overtly literary manifestations.

It is suggested here, resonating with the words of Jakobson and Kiparsky, that the plausibility of postulated linguistic constructs be tested relative to their efficacy as generators of 'poetic effects' – effects felt as cognitive experiences triggered by gazing at (as in *theoria*, *contemplation*) diverse perspectives in parallel; epistemic pleasure via metalinguistic awareness; poetic awareness via metalinguistic knowledge.

*

Using Talmy's analysis, we can identify a phenomenon, described in this text as semantic *indolentia*, in some territories of grammatical meaning. The origin of *indolentia* resides in the quality of being *indolens*: (Lat.) not suffering, insensitive to pain – a qualified sort of obliviousness. For example, this quality is specified by a series of neutralities in the way the grammatical elements of languages convey magnitude. Neutralities in the sense that some linguistic forms in charge of conveying conceptual structure show no variation whatsoever that correlates to the variation of certain aspects of the meaning they communicate. The author so offers an example similar to this one:

This freckle is smaller than that freckle
This planet is smaller than that planet.

Freckles and planets differ substantially in size, shape, and degree of intimacy relative to the speaker. Nevertheless, the grammatical scaffolding provided by this-that is oblivious to those differences (*indolens*), and hence maintained identical in both cases.

These neutralities are explained, apparently, as a manifestation of the universal inclination of languages to express topological (space as distributed in regions, points located in areas) instead of Euclidian reference (where distinctions regarding distance, size, shape, etc. are made). In other words, a preference is shown in the grammar to convey relative rather than absolute, fixed quantities.

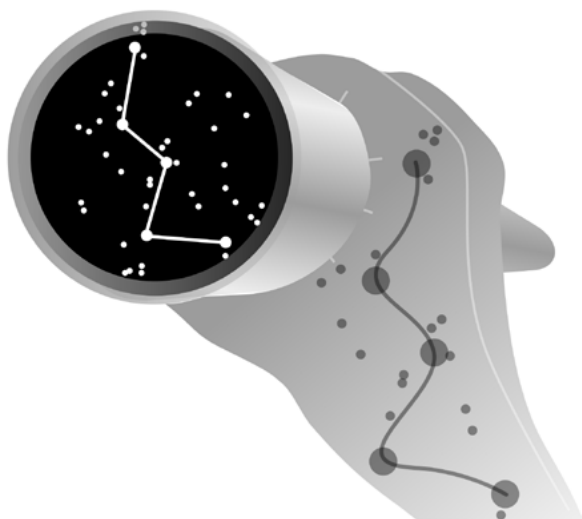
This theoretical finding by Talmy, it could be said, generates poetic effects by evoking interscalar perspective. Correspondence between microscopy and macroscopy via grammatical elements. More precisely, via differential meaning non-possibly expressed by grammatical elements but made visible through theory.

A related poetic effect of the interscalar perspective is actually conveyed by Italo Calvino in one of his invisible cities:

Con tale arte fu costruita Andria, che ogni sua via corre seguendo l'orbita d'un pianeta e gli edifici e i luoghi della vita in comune ripetono l'ordine delle costellazioni e la posizione degli astri più luminosi...¹⁷ [*Andria was built so artfully that its every street follows a planet's orbit, and the buildings and the places of community life repeat the order of the constellations and the position of the most luminous stars...*]

Implicit and potential poetic effects dwell in the constraints of grammatical meaning as it can be made visible by theory – it 'gives to be seen the unthought in our thought'.¹⁸ Theoretical constructs that explore the grammatical scaffolding resonate, as concepts, in the poetics freely expressed by the art of language. In this text I offer so-called 'literary' examples from Calvino and Borges.

Apparently, one domain of what is semantically constrained in grammatical form, the unsayable, finds its way in poetic awareness. Neutralities, *indolentia*, are expressed via 'officially' poetic (i.e. literary) manifestation.



Alicia Fuentes-Calle, *Interstellar*, digitally produced image.

Grammatical elements are those responsible for the conceptual structure (i.e. the scaffolding of our expression, as opposed to the conceptual content, conveyed by freer elements such as nouns, verbs, etc.). According to Talmy, this structure of the world's cognitive representations in schematic terms of time/space (matter/action) is largely relativistic, topological, qualitative or approximative, rather than absolute, Euclidean, quantitative or exact. It results in allowing us no distinction between our grammatical expression of freckles, streets and planets. As if revealing a sort of equivalence between them at a certain level of perception. As it is poetically done by Calvino, via Andria.

(Openly) Indolens Grammar

Another example. Grammatical forms refer to types or categories of phenomena, not to specimens, tokens or individuals in particular. Individual identity can be grammatically ignored.

Thus, unlike the usual distinction between common names (to refer to types, 'cousins') and proper names (in reference to tokens, 'Angelica'), we would not find 'proper prepositions' to mark 'a unique spatiotemporally bounded phenomenon',¹⁹ that is, a token action. Forced, as we are, by language not to express a distinction between Jesus walked *up* the hill named Calvary, and Joan walked *up* the hill last Friday.

Conventional use of language would not accept **Jesus walked Astation the hill named Calvary*, inventing the ‘proper preposition’ *Astation* to cater for the need of expressing how exceptional the fact was.

We can probably think of fervent believers feeling the true need to single out unique, spatiotemporally-bounded phenomena belonging to their own sacred histories and geographies. Those which are experienced not in terms of ordinary chronology or geography, but in a sense of time closer to the notion of *khairos* (a qualitative, sacred approach to time) as opposed to the quantitative experience of *chronos*.

The meaning captured by this level of *indolentia* (via invariability) of the conceptual structure might be one of those instances where unsayability is more clearly realised. As a certain *no.st.algia* (‘the.pain.for.not.being(there)’), a slight suffering for what is absent, sensed by linguistic creatures. A certain degree of awareness of the fact that grammar is somehow blind to phenomena felt as exceptional – a poetic awareness.

This particular region of awareness is to be found in frequent poetic expressions of a certain kind. It manifests perplexity and strangeness about the indifference of the world, which perseveres in its invariable structure, *indolens*, after someone is dead:

*The planet turns there without you, beautiful.
Exiled by death you cannot
touch it. Weird joy to watch postulates*

*lived out and discarded, something crowded
inside us always craving to become something
glistening outside us, the relentless planet*

*showing itself the logic of what is
buried inside it. To love existence
is to love what is indifferent to you*

you think, as you watch it turn there, beautiful.

...

Frank Bidart²⁰

*

Or in the poetic expression of the indifference shown by the world, through the invariability of its grammar – grammar of landscape and labour cycles. *Indolentia* regarding extraordinary events, even those of mythical proportions, such as *The Fall of Icarus*. In William Carlos Williams' poem dedicated to the painting attributed to Pieter Brueghel, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (*De val van Icarus*) that opens this section.

Upward, Behind the Onstreaming It Mooned

From a certain perspective, we find, at least, two categories of languages:²¹

Languages that refer to objects and substances with nouns. They are the majority. They prototypically construct the reference of physical objects and substances through their tangible materiality. 'Bell' is a noun. 'Language' is a noun. We reify languages. They are invented, enumerated, possessed and dispossessed, administered, fixed. Like objects can be. See Part II.

Languages that refer to objects and substances with verbs. Verbs are usually associated to action, movement, process. If 'language' were a verb. Disinvention. See Part II.

In Talmy we are presented with with an actual example of this category – from Atsugewi (a Hokan language of Northern California):²² *woswalaka*.

Literally:

'a-flexible-linear-object-is-located on-the-ground because-of-gravity-acting-on-it'.

Or, to emphasise the fact that the object, the rope, is conceptualised not with a noun, but with a verb:

'itgravitically-linearises-aground'.

Meaning:

'There's a rope lying on the ground'.

Step by step:

wo- 'as a result of gravity/ an object's own weight acting on it'.

swal- 'for a flexible linear object to move/ be located'. The verb root that the language uses to construct the concept of 'rope'.

ak- 'on the ground'.

Atsugewi also has somenouns (*naha*'head').

Most of them, however, are derived from verbs.

That is the case for 'sun/moon', *ćnehwú*.

It comes from the verbal root-*hú*^u–, 'to describe an arc across the background of the sky'.

*

Let's visit now the fictional world of Tlön in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', by Jorge Luis Borges.²³ As far as the southern hemisphere of Tlönis concerned:

The nations of this planet are congenitally idealist. Their language and the derivations of their language – religion, letters, metaphysics – all presuppose idealism. The world for them is not a concourse of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent acts. It is successive and temporal, not spatial. *There are no nouns in Tlön's conjectural Ursprache*, from which the 'present' languages and the dialects are derived: there are impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) with an adverbial value. For example: there is no word corresponding to the word moon, but there is a verb which in English would be 'to moon' or 'to moonate'. 'The moon rose above the river' is *hlör u fang axaxaxasmlö*, or literally: 'upward behind the onstreaming it mooned'.

The preceding applies to the languages of the southern hemisphere. In those of the northern hemisphere...the prime unit is not the verb, but the monosyllabic adjective. The noun is formed by an accumulation of adjectives. They do not say 'moon', but rather 'round airy-light on dark'.

Su lenguaje y las derivaciones de su lenguaje - la religión, las letras, la metafísica- presuponen el idealismo. El mundo para ellos no es un concurso de objetos en el espacio; es una serie heterogénea de actos independientes. Es sucesivo, temporal, no espacial. No hay sustantivos en la conjetural Ursprache de Tlön, ...: hay verbos impersonales, calificados por sufijos (o prefijos) de valor adverbial.

Por ejemplo: no hay palabra que corresponda a la palabra luna, pero hay un verbo que sería en español lunecer o lunar. Surgió la luna sobre el río se dice hlör u fangaxaxaxasmlö o sea en su orden: hacia arriba (upward) detrás duradero-fluir luneció. (Xul Solar traduce con brevedad: upatrasperfluyelunó. Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned.)

En el hemisferio boreal: '... la célula primordial no es el verbo, sino el adjetivo monosilábico'. El sustantivo se forma por acumulación de adjetivos. No se dice luna: se dice aéreo-claro sobre oscuro-redondo.

Borges believes in genres to the extent that they channel an expectation:

I think that they do exist to the extent that there is an *expectation* on the part of the reader. I think that a person reads a short story in a different way than they do when they read an entry in an encyclopaedia, or when they read a novel, or when they read a poem.

Grammatical categories, such as nouns and verbs, can also be used as genres. The linguistic expectations that they generate from most (Indo-European) languages (N: object, V: action) can be violated for the benefit of poetic effects.

*

BORGES VALIDITY STATEMENT

‘The metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding. They judge that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature’.²⁴

*

Borges wrote ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ in 1944. Descriptions of North American languages were already available (as we know from the works of North American linguists and anthropologists Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf and others). The question remains as to whether Borges had access to those sources or not. It can be deemed probable given his avid reading of science and anthropology, as well as his Anglophone inclination. Alternatively, it can be hypothesized that he generated these poetic linguistic fantasies from the philosophical systems of his interest (Idealism, among others). In any case, the theoretical reason of Talmy and the poetic reason of Borges coalesce in one shared image: the moon as a verb.

*

This text has introduced an exploration of how some grammatical properties and patterns postulated by Talmy can actually be experienced as poetic insights that can be traced in some overtly literary manifestations. It has been introduced here a particular approach to the entanglement between poetics and linguistics, strongly emphasised by Jakobson. More so, it is suggested that the plausibility of postulated linguistic constructs be tested relative to their efficacy as generators of ‘poetic effects’.

‘Poetic effects’ felt as cognitive experiences triggered by gazing at (as in *theoria*, contemplation) diverse perspectives in parallel. Epistemic pleasure (conceptual estrangement and joy) via metalinguistic awareness. Poetic awareness via our experimentation with concepts.

PART II

[N]ot a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing – spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge.²⁵

[W]e want to propose neither a view that we need better descriptions, nor mere acknowledgement of fuzziness, but instead strategies of disinvention and reconstruction.²⁶

Languages are inventions. Makoni and Pennycook address some of the key elements of the critical linguistic approach.²⁷ *Languages were invented*, dialectically co-constructed with nations.

We could argue the reciprocal invention of endangered and dangerous languages. Dialectical co-construction of *anthropos* and *humanitas*, a hierarchy of languages translated into *cultures* (channelled by those many small, local and usually endangered languages; languages and

knowledges usually addressed by Anthropology), and *Knowledge* (the one that normally feeds the Humanities) – a double standard in the history of knowledge, eventually translating into a double standard of the very human being: *anthropos* and *humanitas*, as Nishitani Osamu puts it.²⁸

Linguistic construction. Languages conceived of as bounded objects – physically located, countable entities. A conception in terms of what it was believed possible to do with languages. At its turn, shaping our potential as linguistic beings.

Invention of a metalanguage. Languages are theories of theories. According to Yngve, ‘Being fictions, they are not the sorts of things that could be innate...One cannot have a science that invents its own objects of study and introduces them by assumption’.²⁹ Yngve attributes the impossibility of a plausible body of knowledge to language per se, and postulates what he terms a human linguistics rather than a linguistics of language.³⁰

Reconstruction:

Metadiscursive regimes used to describe languages are located in Western linguistic and cultural suppositions. They do not describe a real state of affairs in the world, they are not natural kinds: they are convenient fictions (to the extent that they provide a useful way of understanding the world and shaping language users), and inconvenient fictions to the extent that they produce particular and limiting views on how language operates in the world (Makoni and Pennycook).³¹

I.e. On what can be perceived, cognized, experienced and done via language.

An alternative conceptual repertoire about language seems to be needed. Since our concepts both constrain and enlarge our potential as humans, specific attention can be paid to the multiple ways of knowledge production. Experimental forms of practice, and their derived new ways of knowing, might generate new ontological objects or relations, even in linguistic theory. This text has emphasised some experiments on epistemic pleasure (conceptual estrangement and joy) via metalinguistic awareness – poetic awareness via our experimentation with linguistic concepts.

The inertia of verbal art as based on languages has given to the world thousands of monolingual literary works out of bounded reified languages (in their nation-bounded correctness), for the most part describable through the lenses provided by descriptive and structural linguistics.

Raising verbal art to less visited powers will depend on broadening the scope of the elements and properties of language and communication to be activated for poetic effect.

Approaching the theory of language from this perspective, assessing its validity according to poetic efficacy, might contribute to this direction. Validity via experiments on linguistic theory that open spaces of visibility to potential poetic effects.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is assumed in this text that the potential of the art of language depends to a large extent on the knowledge we have of the elements and variables

that make up this art, i.e., the elements and properties of the language. We have looked at some specific examples in Part I. On the other hand, the beliefs we maintain about what language and languages are, and what can be done with them. This set of beliefs, also known as ‘linguistic ideology’, is a crucial part of a critical (meta)linguistic autobiography.

I raise the question here of the extent to which the art of language can covariate with the state of linguistic theories, and how the potential poetic activation (in the sense sketched in this text) of these theoretical constructs can be assessed as an index of their validity. Once we realise to what extent languages have been inventions, fictions, and hence, to what extent linguistic theories are theories about theories (i.e. with no actual reference), we raise the issue of seeking the validity of those theories in their capacity to generate poetic effects.

The development of the art of language and its innovations will therefore depend on a transformation of beliefs about what can be activated poetically. Broadening its potential depends, to a large extent, on the knowledge we have of the locus that can be activated poetically (that is, of the elements and properties of the language postulated by theoretical constructs).

It is in this key that we reread the imperative formulated by Jakobson, where the author insists on the necessary correlation between poetics and linguistics:

Poetics deals with problems of verbal structure...Since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics.³²

‘[P]oetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics’ and even, as it has been suggested in this text, contribute to test the validity of linguistic theories.

[C]ertain artists...are unconsciously striving for a generalized art language...Their art expression is frequently strained, it sounds at times like a translation from an unknown original – which, indeed, is precisely what it is.

These artists...impress us rather by the greatness of their spirit than the felicity of their art. Their relative failure is of the greatest diagnostic value as an index of the pervasive presence [in the art of language] of a larger, more intuitive linguistic medium than any particular language.³³

- 1 Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,' in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Albert Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 350–77.
- 2 Alastair Pennycook, 'Posthumanist Applied Linguistics,' *Applied Linguistics* amw016 (2016).
- 3 George Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought: From Hellenism to Celan* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 12.
- 4 <http://linguistics.buffalo.edu/people/faculty/talmy/talmyweb/index.html>, accessed 1 May, 2017.
- 5 Borges refers to Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), English poet, playwright, novelist, and critic.
- 6 Swinburne sintió que lo rescatado era el más alto ejemplo de la música del inglés y que el hombre capaz de analizarlo podría (la metáfora es de John Keats) destejer un arco iris. Borges, 'El sueño de Coleridge,' in *Otras disquisiciones* [1952] (Barcelona: Destino, 2007).
- 7 See, for example, Siglind Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2000).
- 8 Adrian Pilkington, *Poetic Effects: A Relevance Theory Perspective* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000).
- 9 Ellipses account for predictable variables to be filled differently in different contexts, such as bilingual (Spanish/Catalan in my case), across European cities, regions, countries, communities, etc, and learning (the languages of one's choice). Linguistic biographies are almost invariably grounded on those (nation-state based) artefacts called languages.
- 10 Victor Yngve, 'An Introduction to Hard-Science Linguistics,' in *Hard-Science Linguistics*, ed. Victor Yngve, et al. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 27–35.
- 11 Len Talmy, 'The Relation of Grammar to Cognition,' in *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 21–55.
- 12 Alicia Fuentes-Calle, *Art del llenguatge i diversitat lingüística. De R. Jakobson a L. Talmy i É. Glissant*. (PhD thesis online), Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2016, accessed 1 May, 2017, at <http://hdl.handle.net/2445/101752>.
- 13 William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems: 1939–1962*, Volume II (New Directions, 1962).
- 14 Please view Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c. 1558 at <http://artchive.com/artchive/b/bruegel/icarus.jpg.html> (The Artchive. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels).
- 15 Jakobson, 'Closing Statement.'
- 16 Paul Kiparsky, 'On Theory and Interpretation,' in *Linguistics and Literary Theory*, ed. Derek Attridge, et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).
- 17 Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Verona: Oscar Mondadori, 1993), 150.
- 18 Patti Lather, 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993): 673–93.
- 19 Talmy, 'The Relation of Grammar,' 32.
- 20 Frank Bidart, *Visions at 74* (2015), *Poetry Now*, accessed 1 March, 2017, at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58042/visions-at-74>.
- 21 Talmy, 'The Relation of Grammar,' 45–46.
- 22 Ibidem.
- 23 Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,' in *Labyrinths*, trans. Donald Yates and James Irby (US: New Directions, 2007).
- 24 Ibidem.
- 25 Lather, 'Fertile Obsession,' 675.
- 26 Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook, *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (UK: Multilingual Matters, 2007), 27.
- 27 Ibidem.
- 28 N. Osamu, 'Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of "Human Being",' in *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference*, ed. Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 259–74.
- 29 Yngve, 'Introduction to Hard-Science,' 34.
- 30 Idem, 28.
- 31 Makoni and Pennycook, *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, 27.
- 32 I reread this through P. Kiparsky's proposal. Kiparsky (1987) (cf. note 14) argued that Jakobson's programme is still valid as long as it is revisited through contemporary linguistic theory. While Kiparsky was most probably referring to the theory of universal grammar, I have suggested here using experimentally a specific version of cognitive semantics.
- 33 Edward Sapir, *Language, an Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), 220.

Alicia Fuentes-Calle has a Ph.D. in Linguistics (Universitat de Barcelona), a Degree in Law, and an M.A. in International Cultural Relations. She is Director of Programmes at Linguapax (Barcelona), organisation working on world linguistic diversity. Member of the Study Group on Endangered Languages (GELA) at the Universitat de Barcelona. She has worked over the last years on both research and project management dealing with world linguistic diversity. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and has undertaken research stays in diverse cities (Strasbourg, Jerusalem, Tokyo, etc). Besides her involvement in projects of linguistic revitalisation, her main areas of research interest include linguistic anthropology and cognitive semantics: the conceptual/ linguistic construal of personhood; multilingual cities and forms of local knowledge(s) ('Multilingual Cities: Communities of Knowledge' in Urban diversity, ed. Woodrow Wilson Center Press and the Johns Hopkins Univ. Press); and the potential of the 'art of language' in the context of linguistic diversity (PhD thesis).

Democratization as Validation of Applied Theatre and Vice Versa

Ola Johansson

To cite this contribution:

Johansson, Ola. 'Democratization as Validation of Applied Theatre and Vice Versa.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 153–164, <http://www.oarplatform.com/democratization-validation-applied-theatre-vice-versa/>.

Applied theatre, an umbrella term for outreach performance projects beyond conventional stages and institutions, has been a higher education discipline in UK institutions since the 1990s. Although it generally justifies its key purpose as transformative of social or political state of affairs, it has been challenging to validate the *efficacy* of applied theatre. Over time, the desired changes have become increasingly specific, from general social changes to particular alterations in, for instance, communal participation, personal attitudes and immersive experiences of specific issues. In the early 1990s, Baz Kershaw's effort to determine the impact of radical community theatre over the past decades in the UK got lost in macro-political changes.¹ A decade later, Judith Ackroyd declared that there was still 'a crying need for evaluation of applied theatre'.² A few years afterwards, Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki's editorial 'Drama for Change? Prove it! Impact Assessment in Applied Theatre' merely seemed to indicate how difficult the task would be.³ In 2009, James Thompson steered away from the challenge altogether with the argument that 'affective' impacts are more relevant to determine than 'effective' changes anyway.⁴

In this article I will consider the validation of efficacious applied theatre from an alternative point of view, not as external social impacts or internal experiential transformations, but as performative interventions into social relations and policies that situate, embody and enact the very aims of the outreach projects. Examples are given of performance practices and models in Africa and the Middle East which do not necessarily adhere to an academic protocol or a political mandate, but which instantiate prefigurative and democratic reforms of social and political changes on their own terms.

Rather than seeing the 'end of effect', as Thompson wished, the 'effect discourse', as Gurgens Gjaerum calls it,⁵ seems to have gravitated toward critical multi-perspectival studies, juxtaposing analyses of theatre companies' remit alongside monitoring and evaluation of particular projects, as well as assessments of social impact combined with the self-empowerment of groups and individuals, and enhancement of human well-being aligned with managerial donor relations.

A case in point is the evaluation praxis of DramAidE (Drama for AIDS Education) in South Africa. Lynn Dalrymple, then Director of DramAidE, made a brave attempt to lay out the conditions and methodology of impact assessments during the worst years of the AIDS pandemic in the country.⁶ Monitoring and evaluation had become a standing requirement of stakeholders and donors in the early 2000s, which meant that the impact of performance practices needed to be substantiated with support from methods like observation, focus

group interviews and questionnaires in schools vis-à-vis surveys at health care facilities. Impact was often informed and guided by social scientific concepts such as the health belief model and the theory of reasoned action, backed by more applicable models of communication for change, such as the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice/Behaviour (KAPB) change model.⁷ Most of these theories and models became increasingly criticized by HIV prevention workers and researchers, primarily due to their applicability towards privileged individuals in the global North rather than poverty-stricken communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, DramAidE had a methodological orientation based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy and which was closely aligned with its own core activities. This produced a heuristic, community-based methodology that combined self-reflection and interpersonal dialogue, which in turn led to social mobilization, community analysis as well as to applied theatre for people without considerable education or wealth.⁸

Dalrymple emphasized that the impact studies should above all benefit participatory target groups rather than donors, and that the methodology should be based on action research rather than generalised scientific models of behavioural predictability.⁹ Hence, with its own design of monitoring and evaluation, DramAidE reached its aims to 'provide young people with the information and skills to make healthy lifestyle choices', based on 'education and information' that 'prompt young people to take action thus bringing about social change'.¹⁰ Dalrymple's article addressed the conditions and methodology of evaluating but also, implicitly, served to validate applied theatre as a participatory HIV preventive practice for stakeholders and target groups. The DramAidE projects were about preparing young people for vital decisions on the basis of action research and thus contributing with 'small changes' in 'a joint effort by both government and civil society to make an impact'.¹¹ Applied theatre can indeed be effective on such terms, but the preparation of young people to stand up for themselves and take decisive actions in critical situations is also valuable in and of itself. Dalrymple's conclusions are perhaps too modest. Applied theatre can do more than merely provide information and skills and prompt people to take action. DramAidE is an example of a group which not only prepares and urges people to act, but which facilitates direct action by target groups in complex and critical public situations.

When I visited Dalrymple at the University of Zululand in 2004, we discussed a dramatically straightforward and yet culturally complex school intervention. (This came before the monitoring and evaluation methods discussed in her article two years later.) I particularly remember an exercise facilitated by DramAidE in a secondary school in KwaZulu Natal, involving the characters Sipho and Hazel, where the male student (Sipho) asks the female student (Hazel) out for a date. I later wrote about this exercise.¹² To see the young woman exercise her right to decline Sipho's proposal in front of the entire school population is to witness a speech act that ought to be legitimate as a full rehearsal for similar public situations outside of the school.

For a full appreciation of the application of the speech act to real life situations, it is necessary to go beyond the cognitive and linguistic information, education and communication, and take account of the situational, embodied, behavioural, attitudinal and, not least, the prefigurative qualities of the exercise. The pressure was on. Stepping into the middle of the schoolyard in the AIDS workshop, and implying that the after-school relations between students can lead to sexually transmitted infections takes a lot of courage and determination by the actors as well as the school leadership. Applied theatre of this kind is not merely

holding up a mirror to the world as it is, let alone as it used to be, but prefigures a world as participants want it to be(come), a situation in which social agents, in the words of Carl Boggs, enact ‘the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal’.¹³

David Graeber extends Boggs’ definition of prefigurative politics in reference to ‘the idea that the organizational form that an activist group takes should embody the kind of society we wish to create’.¹⁴ The impact of a prospective exercise such as the negotiation between Siphon and Hazel does not only hinge on a personal awareness of risk factors behind HIV transmissions, or changes in eventual health statistics, but also on the potential of the exercise as a speech act and prefigurative action to be applied amongst the involved target groups, including students and teachers in the secondary school as well as the viewers of the DVD which was produced and distributed by DramAidE at the time. Applied theatre is not a mass medium, and therefore it is unrealistic to expect a wide-scale impact.¹⁵ To demand a clear-cut impact, or to ‘prove a change’, in attitudes or behaviour is also besides the point. Applied theatre is primarily about preparing participants for taking action when faced with particular situations – or determinants in health related contexts – in public, at home, at work or indeed at school.

Building on this example, I suggest an alternative approach to the validation of efficacy in applied theatre, which has less to do with evidencing changes in society, or monitoring and evaluating discrete projects, but more to do with the agency of and direct engagement by social agents in interventions which are analogous to the process of *participatory democracy*. The basic affinity between applied theatre and democracy become apparent when their definitions are juxtaposed. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston’s definition of applied theatre identifies a ‘theatre “for” a community...theatre “with” a community [and] theatre “by” a community’; this characterization is co-extensive with Abraham Lincoln’s classic definition of democracy as a government ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’.¹⁶ In recent political science, the direct participation of citizens in public decision-making has been explored in the area of participatory democracy, as is made clear in Enriqueta Aragonès and Santiago Sánchez-Pagés’ definition:

Participatory democracy is a process of collective decision making that combines elements from both direct and representative democracy: Citizens have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the role of policy implementation. The electorate can monitor politicians’ performance simply by comparing citizens’ proposals with the policies actually implemented.¹⁷

To flesh out the political/theatrical analogy, participation in applied theatre projects usually involves both proposals for change (collective creation of scripts, a practice-based research process called devising), and implementation of the proposals (dramatic performance of the scripts), whilst the monitoring function is delegated in post-performance discussions with the audience (cf. the ‘electorate’ in the quote above). The analogy with Aragonès and Sánchez-Pagés’ definition of participatory democracy is spelled out in Rebecca Herrington’s definition of ‘Participatory Theatre for Change’ which she describes as:

a creative approach used with and by communities and groups to collectively research and critically analyse their own situation, develop and perform artistic and cultural content that reflects their reality, and actively engage participants in dialogue, analysis, planning, and action towards positive social transformation.¹⁸

Hence, the combination of deliberative and direct democracy in participatory democracy corresponds quite pertinently to the combination of practice-as-research and prefigurative action in applied theatre.¹⁹ The research component is necessary without a given political mandate in theatre projects and provides an operational framework, including the social mobilization of participants, and the probing into the issues at stake, as well as the audience interaction, whilst the prefiguration is about the direct action of proposed reforms through public performance. The research and prefiguration is, then, triangulated by the input of the audience. I am suggesting that these are the three validating cornerstones of applied theatre.

Two examples of this framework in action demonstrate the participatory and democratic challenges in theatre projects. I emphasize their integral and applicable qualities rather than merely their estimated external impact or anecdotal internal change.

Community Theatre in Tanzania

At the beginning of my research in East Africa (2005–10), I approached various organisations about my intentions to investigate the efficacy of community theatre (also labelled theatre for development, popular theatre and, more recently, applied theatre) in the fight against AIDS.²⁰ In an early meeting with UNAIDS Program Coordinator Henry Meena in Dar es Salaam he told me he had good news and that he wanted to show me something. We sat down in the conference room and looked at a circular chart with about ten interconnected boxes with labels, of which one said ‘Community Mapping and Theatre against AIDS’ (COMATAA).²¹ The chart outlined a three-year District Response Initiative (DRI) and for the first time theatre qualified as a best practice in an internationally rolled out HIV prevention scheme. This meant that a number of community-based theatre groups would not only receive funding for their work, but also be properly evaluated alongside other prevention models, such as home-based care, training of leaders, capacity building of health facilities, and so forth.

There were two rationales behind the need to validate community theatre as a best practice in the AIDS pandemic at the time. One had to do with its *applied* capacity to serve HIV preventive purposes, and the other had to do with the *concept* of community-based theatre. The former rationale pertains to the public performances whilst the latter rationale corresponds to the above-mentioned research component which frames projects by means of social mobilization, analysis of issues, the facilitation of theatre activities and the audience interaction. I will discuss the first rationale first.

When Meena broke the news about the DRI in 2003, Tanzania, along with most other sub-Saharan countries, still lacked life-saving antiretroviral treatment, despite the fact that it had been available for six years in the global North.²² Therefore, the basic research that had brought about a biomedical breakthrough in 1996 was worthless for HIV-positive people in Africa, due to the pharmaceutical patent that made the treatment astronomically expensive.²³

Consequently, the control of AIDS became a matter of applying social and cultural strategies for HIV preventive purposes. In its most basic form, HIV prevention was about promoting the so-called ABC model: Abstaining from sex, Being faithful, and using Condoms. However, the model was only marginally successful, especially with a widespread faith-based emphasis on the A and B options. In many places HIV incidence and prevalence rates continued to rise unabated. The determinants behind the epidemic turned out to be more complex than was assumed in the individualised rational belief models and involved cultural and structural challenges that had been around for longer than the pandemic, such as poverty, gender inequality, and postcolonial social disintegration.²⁴ This is where the concept of community theatre emerged as an option for various organisations and agencies.



Ola Johansson, video still from *Untitled (Masasi)*, 2003, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/democratization-validation-applied-theatre-vice-versa/>.

The video clip/screen shot #1 shows a domestic conflict between two spouses in Masasi, Tanzania. The wife has just become aware of the fact that her husband has taken a second wife – a so-called nyumba ndogo, meaning a ‘small house’ in Swahili – whilst she is left behind with nearly no money to support herself and their children. The implication in the context of AIDS is that extramarital affairs increase the risk of infecting spouses with HIV. The clip is from 2003 when no affordable antiretroviral treatment was available to Tanzanians. The theatre group in Masasi was supported by UNICEF and the local council.

African community theatre evolved across the continent after the independence of the former colonies, and has always involved more than the act of performing theatre. Instantiating liberation and societal change involves a set of interconnected activities: projects are initiated with social mobilization to start up a community centre or at least a theatre group, followed by a collective community analysis/mapping, which hones in on key epidemiological scenarios, which are then enacted and rehearsed, followed by public performances, which are, in turn, deliberated in post-performance discussions. All these steps finally provide the basis for recommendations of countermeasures to the crisis in reference to follow-up programmes. By the time international organisations such as UNAIDS turned their attention to community

theatre in the 1990s, artistic researchers like Penina Mlama in Tanzania had already facilitated long-term projects about crucial epidemic determinants, even before AIDS became known by its Swahili name *Ukimwi* in the mid 1980s.

The seminal 'Malya popular theatre project', which was about schoolgirl pregnancies, lasted for eighteen months in 1982-83 and epitomized what Penina Mlama calls the 'Tanzanian model' of popular theatre.²⁶ What made the project unique was that community members participated in all stages of the project, from the social mobilization to the creation and performance of theatre to the recommendations for follow-up programmes. The elements of the project emanated from local modes of discourse and performance, enhanced by post-independence types of dance and theatre in Tanzania.



Ola Johansson, video still from *Untitled (Likokona)*, 2004, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/democratization-validation-applied-theatre-vice-versa/>.

Video clip/screen shot #2 shows a court scene in Likokona, Tanzania (2004). The plaintiff is a woman who is taking her own brother to court over an inheritance dispute after her husband's death. In the matrilineal part of southern Tanzania the brother/maternal uncle is traditionally expected to safeguard his sister's household economy, but as the ethnic customs – in this case among the Makua population – have been compromised after colonial violations of cultural and demographic communities along with postcolonial nationalism, the brother finds himself in a situation where he decides to keep the inheritance for himself. The sister goes to court arguing that she needs the money for her children's education, unaware of – or unable to follow – the routine of bribing the judge. The latter deems the woman's story unreliable and thus rules in favour of the brother. The blatant corruption stirs up protests in the court but to no avail. The scene finishes with a song that marks the end of the drama and the beginning of the post-performance deliberation. However, in Likokona there was no audience discussion as the council building (the red house in the background) was situated at hearing distance from the performance. Hopefully the politicians picked up the urgency of the dramatic action. Just as in Masasi, the dramatic action did not refer directly to 'Ukimwi' as the spectators are more than aware about the risk of destitute women having to engage in transactional sex to cover their family's living costs – hence the link to contracting the HIV virus.

Before countries in sub-Saharan Africa had access to antiretroviral medicines, the application of models such as community theatre qualified as best practices in HIV-prevention.²⁷ In the end, however, UNAIDS excluded COMATAA from its DRI programme, most likely due to the difficulty of quantifying an evidence-based evaluation scheme of the implementation of community theatre. A complex participatory practice like community theatre does not easily fit the UN-established monitoring and evaluation models, which will be addressed in the conclusion of this article. What is required of an adequate validation of community theatre is to acknowledge its research framework and its direct action, including the self-valuating public deliberation, and then correlate this with qualitative and quantitative data and recorded changes in macro-contexts.²⁸ This points to the democratic analogy mentioned earlier in this paper. A proper validation, whether it is of an election or an outreach project on HIV-prevention, requires a comparison of, on the one hand, an inclusive concept of participation for, with and by people affected by a particular state of affairs. On the other hand, it needs the performance of the issues at stake. The data and results of such a validation needs to be sourced and analysed by both quantitative and qualitative means, preferably by combining monitoring and evaluation, participatory self-evaluation and consideration of macro-contextual data. I will return to this idea following another example of the conditions of validating applied theatre.

The Freedom Theatre in Palestine

The third case of validation is taken from The Freedom Theatre (TFT) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. With an arsenal of applied theatre practices, TFT is engaging in outreach projects in the local refugee camp, in villages and towns across the West Bank, as well as on international tours. There is only one significant place the theatre does not visit: Israel.²⁹ In my view, this strategy means that the cultural activism of the organization should not be seen primarily as a mode of resistance, but as prefigurative and democratic counter-occupation.³⁰ My use of these terms attempts to characterise TFT's multi-layered counteractions against 'the Occupation'. Israel is the most conspicuous occupying force which impacts the theatre organisation, but not the only one. Other powers are exerted on the TFT by the Palestinian Authority, as well as international aid organizations such as UNRWA and USAID.³¹

To come to grips with this multi-layered and complicated political experience, TFT has recently used playback theatre in connection to their 'Freedom Bus tours'.³² The concept of playback theatre is as follows: individual members of a target group volunteer to tell a story, which is then dramatised by actors and musicians for a wider community to see and discuss. This circular course of actions took on a wider remit in 2016, when TFT decided to use the stories from playback theatre sessions as a dramaturgical backbone for the production *Return to Palestine* (2016), which toured the communities from which the original stories were sourced. The play is about Jad, an American-born Palestinian, who travels to his ancestral land for the first time. Jad's adventures start in Tel Aviv, where he is lucky to escape a rather hostile situation, and ends up in the Palestinian territories, where he gets to know a group of people who are engaged in the resistance against the Israeli occupation. In a scene with stone throwing protesters, Jad's friend Malek gets hit by a bullet and dies in his arms. This moment marks a turning point in the play. Jad's journey goes from being one of returning to Palestine to a point of no return *from* Palestine.



Ola Johansson, video still from *Return to Palestine*, 2016, available at:
<http://www.oarplatform.com/democratization-validation-applied-theatre-vice-versa/>.

In video clip/screen shot #3, TFT actors are performing the street theatre piece Return to Palestine (2016) in central Nablus in the West Bank (Occupied Palestinian Territories) to the background sound of a prayer and gunshot sounds from a drum. The scene shows the moment when Malek is shot by an Israeli sniper (played by a fellow actor in a standing position to the right of the victim), followed by mourning and music from the string instrument Oud. After the show the audience discussed the performance for as long as the dramatic action lasted.

By touring *Return to Palestine* back to the towns, villages and refugee camps that contributed to the script of the performances, the people in these places get a chance to reflect on their own stories alongside personal stories from other West Bank and Gaza sites. In that way, direct personal experiences from the ground get disseminated not only across local communities, but throughout the occupied territories as well as countries like Jordan and Portugal.³³ The use of post-performance discussions is a form of participatory evaluation. However, unlike the self-validating deliberations of the Tanzanian community theatre in the example above, which were used to enhance and calibrate communal empowerment and advocacy for social, political or health reforms, the outcome of TFT's community theatre is mainly conveyed between people on the ground and for international audiences, due to the multi-layered occupation.

The geopolitical isolation of TFT has turned the organization into a unique meeting point of local and global. In resistance to the Israeli occupation, and without economic support from the Palestinian Authority, the theatre largely relies on international funding alongside its local and regional projects. It is easy to view this as a suffocating situation, or even a futile resistance against hegemonic regimes that could not care less about theatre, but there is another way of recognizing the value of TFT's mission. It is not only that TFT offers an international connection to the Jenin refugee camp. It also offers a range of professional provisions and social services to people in the West Bank: a fully equipped theatre which is used by students in a three-year education as well as children in the camp; offices, a kitchen

and a kindergarten that employ a number of local residents; a guest house that accommodates a nonstop influx of international professionals and solidarity workers, and so on. Furthermore, the organization keeps a door open for local leaders and politicians who happen to take an interest in any of the TFT programmes.

Hence TFT goes beyond the remit of cultural resistance as it undertakes a multi-layered counter-occupation in a sphere of the civil society which operates, courtesy of mainly international funding, on a leasehold site within a UN-controlled refugee camp. The TFT site is, in turn, situated in the occupied *de jure* Palestinian territories. The links between the organization and the Palestinian Authorities are very weak, and the connections to Israel are completely absent. In other words, TFT is setting up a prefigurative regime with administrative, educational, creative, communal and outreach services that are enacting operational pockets of democracy before the egalitarian and judicial conditions for such regime are mandated. This is not to say that the organization is building a disinterested utopia. Rather, each of the forces above is counteracted by affirmative and prefigurative tactics.

Towards a Participatory Validation

Determining an impact of an outreach project requires monitoring and evaluation; optimizing the potential for such a change requires validation. Whilst an evaluation generally quantifies indications and evidence by quantifying data, a validation pursues qualitative criteria by formulating questions begging open-ended albeit pertinent responses. Once a conflict or crisis is identified and before a decision on intervention can be made, the following questions, at least, must be answered:

- Does the conflict or crisis lend itself to a local target group's ability to intervene by posing problems related to the crisis, perform responses to the problems and, ultimately, prefigure potential solutions to the crisis?
- Is it possible to mobilize the relevant participants for the project?
- Is this the right time and place to intervene with applied theatre?
- Which concepts, techniques and methods of applied theatre are most suitable in this particular crisis and for this target group?
- Which research methods and performance practices can be adopted and/or contributed by the target group?
- How can applied theatre be implemented in this particular case in cooperation with, or juxtaposed to, other means of intervention?
- How can this project be enhanced by the audience in post-performance discussions and follow-up programmes? And which local and cultural features can be integrated into the project to encourage participatory audience feedback?
- How can the intellectual and material ownership of the project be transferred from the project facilitators and funders to the local target group?
- How can these questions help validate a project in reference to a report, an academic analysis or another kind of account in order to justify the means and ends of (in order of priority) target group, local audiences, theatre facilitators, stakeholders and project funders?

I propose that these initial set of questions can be used in the preliminary stages of applied theatre projects to help validate its values and principles of participatory democracy. They would be strengthened by an accompanying monitoring and evaluation scheme, like the ones discussed by Dalrymple, alongside the integration of basic best practice criteria, such as the ones specified by UNAIDS, as well as ethical and political principles vis-à-vis stakeholders, public offices and funding agencies, as exemplified by The Freedom Theatre. It is crucial that the initial questions relate to the specific conditions of a planned project, that the strengths and limitations of the intervention are acknowledged, and that quantitative or scientific evaluation models do not override the qualitative features of the key activities of the intervention.

A typical monitoring and evaluation procedure by UNDP, a slightly more elaborate guide to project management than the UNAIDS best practice criteria, involves factors such as outputs (tangible products or services of interventions), outcomes (changes in social conditions), impact (changes in human well-being), attributions (causes of social changes), contributions (changes caused by interventions), organizational effectiveness (measures of an organisation's performance), and developmental effectiveness (effective agency of stakeholders). All these objectives are relevant to validate an intervention. However, to do justice to an arts-based intervention, at least two additional factors need to be taken into consideration, namely *creativity* (target audiences' ability to comprehend and act on a project's impact in independent ways), and *participation* (target audiences' ability to apply creative ideas by direct action in shared social spaces and movements). These two factors return us to the cornerstones of applied theatre projects, namely practice-as-research and prefigurative action. A good way to integrate creativity and participation is to incentivize a sustainable progress of projects through participatory evaluation.³⁴ This gives a target group an opportunity to take ownership of an intervention and its assessment by evaluating the process and outcomes of an accomplished project and, thus, calibrate it step-by-step according to their own needs, means, aptitude, and purposes, so that the end point of the project turns into a starting point for the next phase of the project.

The overarching design of applied theatre interventions is about researching and implementing efficacious outreach projects with an aim to bring about change. But that is just the stage setting. Performing applied theatre, whether it is a matter of disrupting a situation by visualising, protesting or altering a conflict or crisis, is about creating a more viable regime of direct action, immersive tactics, and prefigurative politics – for, with and by participating audiences. The South African, Tanzanian, and Palestinian cases in this article, alongside participatory modes of activism like Occupy and Tent embassies, aim to create a changed society: 'social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal', in brief, 'the kind of society we wish to create' to reiterate Boggs' and Graeber's prefigurative viewpoints. I suggest it is important to perform direct democratic actions to the point where a woman can stand up to a man and enact a pro-choice stance about her own sexuality, or to her adulterous husband about matrimonial and economic equity, or take her own brother to court when her children's education is under threat, or where an oppressed people can challenge a hegemonic force and a corrupt legal and political system with an extrajudicial democratic counteraction. These interventions are worth validating in their own right, as rehearsals on a public stage, with a present and responsive audience, and with participants who are ready to face any player from the repertory of life in the round.

- 1 Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), 252–54.
- 2 Judith Ackroyd, 'Applied Theatre: Problems and Possibilities,' *Applied Theatre Researcher* 1 (2000): 2.
- 3 Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki, 'Drama for Change? Prove it! Impact Assessment in Applied Theatre,' *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 11:2 (2006): 139–55.
- 4 James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4–7.
- 5 Rikke Gurgens Gjaerum, 'Applied Theatre Research: Discourses in the Field,' *European Scientific Journal* 3 (2013): 354–55.
- 6 Lynn Dalrymple, 'Has It Made a Difference? Understanding and Measuring the Impact of Applied Theatre with Young People in the South African Context,' *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 11:2 (2006): 201–18.
- 7 On theory of reasoned action, see Icek Ajzen, *Understanding the Attitudes and Predicting Social Behaviour* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980); on the health belief model, see Mark Conner and Paul Norman, *Predicting Health Behaviour: Search and Practice with Social Cognition Models* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996); on social learning theory, see Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Human Learning* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999).
- 8 Dalrymple, 'Has It Made a Difference?,' 203, 205. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970).
- 9 Dalrymple, 'Has It Made a Difference?,' 215. Dalrymple uses the term 'action research' which implies reflective and problem-solving processes and inquiries in the course of practical or participatory actions, and see: Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts; Selected Papers on Group Dynamics*, ed. Gertrude W. Lewin (New York: Harper & Row, 1948). When it comes to arts disciplines today, this type of research is called 'practice as research' or 'artistic research', and see: Robin Nelson, ed., *Practic as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2002); Ludvine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw, and Angela Piccini, eds., *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 10 Dalrymple, 'Has It Made a Difference?,' 214, 201.
- 11 Idem, 215.
- 12 Ola Johansson, *Community Theatre and AIDS* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 62–63.
- 13 Carl Boggs, 'Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,' *Radical America* 6 (1977): 100.
- 14 David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 23.
- 15 This is not to say that applied theatre does not attempt to reach as many people as possible. In the so-called Health Promoters project, DramAidE aspired to instigate social influence by working with peer educators (training of trainers), DVD distribution and with big screens on university campuses so that exercises inside a venue could be seen in exterior environments, see: Dalrymple, 'Has It Made a Difference?,' 211.
- 16 Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, *The Applied Theatre Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009), 10. Lincoln expressed his definition of democracy in his Gettysburg Address, see: 'The Gettysburg Address,' *Abraham Lincoln Online*, accessed 10 July, 2017, at <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>.
- 17 Enriqueta Aragonès and Santiago Sánchez-Pagés, 'A theory of Participatory Democracy Based on the Real Case of Porto Alegre,' *European Economic Review* 53:1 (2008): 56.
- 18 Rebecca Herrington, 'Monitoring and Evaluation of Participatory Theatre for Change' (Washington DC: Search for Common Ground, 2016), 7.
- 19 For more on participatory democracy, see David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), and Donatella della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).
- 20 The evolution of African community theatre/theatre for development/popular theatre is described by David Kerr in his book *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995).
- 21 W.M.S. Muzzuki, 'National Response to HIV/AIDS,' presentation at a UNAIDS conference (Arusha, Tanzania, 2002), quoted and commented in Johansson, 'The Lives and Deaths of Zakia: How AIDS Changed African Community Theatre and Vice Versa,' *Theatre Research International* 32:1 (2006): 95–96.
- 22 Describe: <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>, accessed 25 March, 2017.
- 23 The so-called combination treatment of antiretroviral medicine cost about \$US 10 000 per year for HIV positive people. More than ten million Africans are estimated to have died whilst the treatment was inaccessible between 1996–2003, and see: www.unaids.org, accessed 3 October, 2017.
- 24 Catherine Campbell, 'Letting Them Die': *How HIV/AIDS Prevention Programmes Often Fail* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
- 25 Penina Mlama, *Culture and Development* (Uppsala University, 1991): 95–96. Mlama first presented the project in a paper called 'Theatre for Social Development: The Malya Project in Tanzania' in *Third World Popular Theatre Newsletter (IPTA)* in 1984. The Malya project took place in 1982–83, which is before the AIDS epidemic was identified.
- 26 UNAIDS specifies five best practice criteria in HIV prevention: effectiveness, ethical soundness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance, see: http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/summary_best_practices_africa.pdf. When integrated into HIV schemes such as the District Response Initiative, there is no doubt that community theatre met the criteria in question – in fact this was the reason why COMATAA qualified as part of the DRI programme in the first place.
- 27 Ibidem; Ola Johansson, *Community Theatre and AIDS*, Chapter 4.
- 28 Today it is very rare to see Palestinian and Israeli culture groups visiting each other. TFT adheres to the principles of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which rules out all cooperation with Israeli artists and interests. See <https://bdsmovement.net/>, accessed 04 September, 17.
- 29 See: Ola Johansson and Johanna Wallin, *The Freedom Theatre: Performing Cultural Resistance in Palestine* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, forthcoming 2017).
- 30 Jonatan Stanczak at the conference 'Teater och global politik' (University of Gothenburg, 8 October, 2014).
- 31 'The Freedom Bus,' TFT webpage, accessed 15 September 2017, at <https://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/freedom-ride-2/>.
- 32 For the tours of *Return to Palestine*, see <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/return-to-palestine/>, accessed 12 September, 2017.
- 33 Will Parks et al, 'Who Measures Change? An Introduction to Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of Communication for Social Change,' Communication for Social Change Consortium, accessed 15 July, 2017, at <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/70592/348>.

Ola Johansson is Associate Professor in Contemporary Performance Practice at Middlesex University in London. He is specialised in applied performance with projects in the UK, Sweden, Tanzania, South Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand. Johansson has published two books: *Community Theatre and AIDS* (2011) and *Performance and Philosophy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Performing Arts* (2008) and co-edited the anthology *The Freedom Theatre: Performing Cultural Resistance in Palestine* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2017).

Remote and Anonymous

'The individual personality will disappear with commitment to a higher task – if architecture reappears then the master builder will be anonymous...Instead the idea exists in the realms of endless joy, remote and autonomous.'²⁰

The 1919 Gläserne Kette architects and artists used pseudonyms when exchanging ideas. Yet they would have recognized each others' work from the *Exhibition of Unknown Architects*. Taut (*Glas*) and Gropius (*Mass*) were also well-known activists. Other correspondents included Bruno's brother Max (*kein Name*), Hans and Wassili Luckhardt (*Angkor and Zacken*), Carl Krayl (*Anfang*), Paul Goesch (*Tancred*) Hermann Finsterlin (*Prometheus*), Hans Scharoun (*Hannes*) and Wenzel Hablik (*W.H.*)

I (*Kathedral*) gathered our group through contacts and residencies. We are unknown to each another but exchange work online. Snake is an animator, *Lichterloh* and *Seven* mine photographic archives, *Pinnel* and *Medha* collaborate in sound, *Mondfleck*, *Pjeterpan* and *Intimator* are architects, *Geison* is a divine solidifier of her own breath,²¹ *Wechsel* and *Verwandl* create digital worlds on the Atlantic shore, and I met *Tellurien* looking for crystals in Canada. *Ei* works in the realm of endless joy.

Digital footprints, however, raise a problem our forebears did not encounter, tramping under images and links we post, continually betraying our ascribed anonymity.



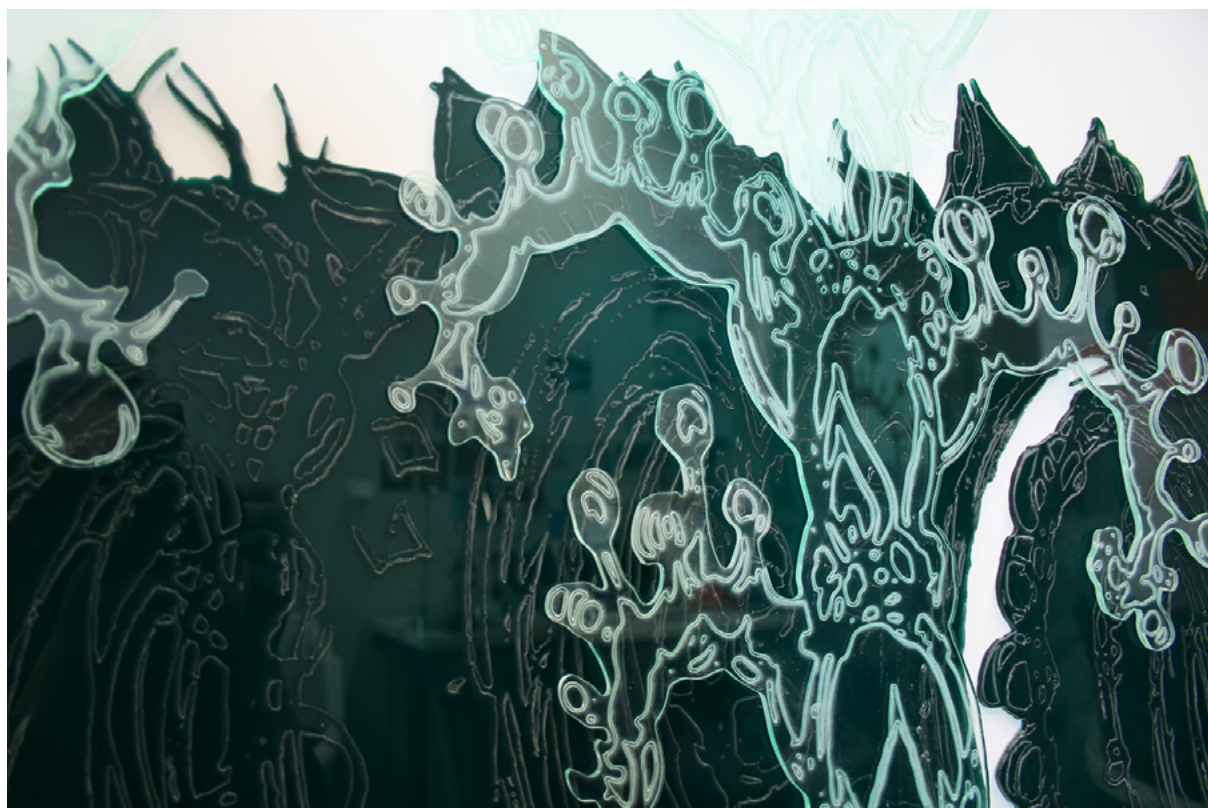
Cath Keay and Mondfleck Paredes Maldonado, *Remote Island*, 76 x 50 cm, relief print.

Hablik's Garden

Goal for Youth (1920) is an ecstatic scene of fern fronds, fiery fountains, and palm tree festooned with glinting fruit, drawn in ink on thin brown paper. Hablik's fervent strokes depict spiral paths wrapping verdant plants, calligraphic blooms on fecund slopes. His gestural lines undulate along saw-tooth edges, then crisscross and fade.

His visions are persuasive, but the colours are merely suggested by script radiating from the plants, exhorting precious, iridescent pigments.

These drawings counter the versimilitude of computer graphics. And so, for a series of sculptures, I maximise the contrast between his ink and paper, to isolate then vectorise the drawn marks while maintaining Hablik's handiwork. I seldom intervene, instead relinquishing control to the programme to decide which marks are preserved. The software overrides the artist's intent in prioritising lines, so errors are elevated to artwork. This generative process of mutations has its own style: each side of original lines is delineated, as are flecks flung out when Hablik's nib caught the paper. '...Concentrate simply on the idea that springs into our willingly creative fingers in order to be flicked somewhere into space – caught, then set free again – and the material will follow it, radiating joy. No more fears!'.²²



Cath Keay, *Hablik's garden 2*, 2016.

Paul Goesch – To Each His Own and to Art Its Own ‘Correctness’

After qualifying as a government architect, Paul Goesch joined Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society, and probably painted murals in the first Goetheanum, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* subsequently destroyed by fire. Psychoanalysis was in its infancy around this time, and Goesch’s friends experimented with these new ideas until his ‘thin-walled emotional state developed a crack’.²³

His letter to the *Gläserne Kette* states:

the origins of Expressionism. When you learned to draw...The distorted efforts that you regularly produced were something to be ashamed of and to be hidden. But, you will discover in yourself a much higher level of creative ability than you were initially trying to develop...how the objects relate to us... This is because the subconscious, i.e. the power that enables us to create symbols, demands something quite different from an exact or well proportioned representation.²⁴

In 1921 Goesch, delusional and schizophrenic, was admitted to Goettingen Sanatorium. He was closeted in different institutions for most of his remaining life, producing visionary drawings that were collected as ‘pathological art’. The Nazis murdered Goesch in 1940 under the Action T4 programme. His life was divided between hospitalisation and the Weimar art scene, and his art defies categorisation as either ‘outsider’ art or avant-garde.

Two Slide Cases

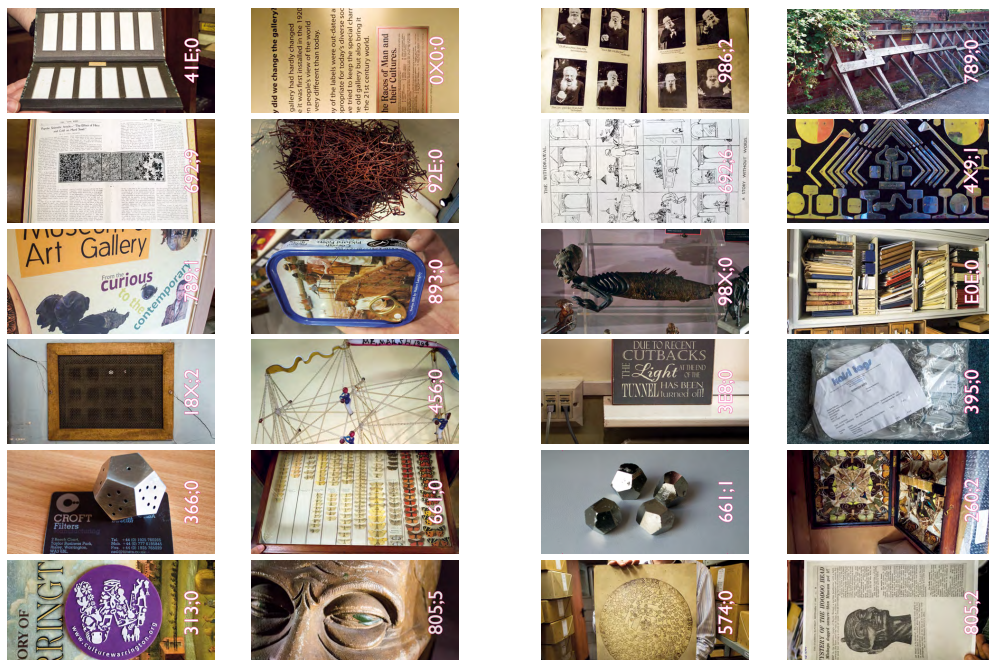
Clair Le Couteur

To cite this contribution:

Le Couteur, Clair. 'Two Slide Cases.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* Issue 2 (2017): 168–175. <http://www.oarplatform.com/two-slide-cases/>.

This contribution arranges a semi-random selection from the John Affey Museum's (JAM) Warrington Collection, assembling a pair of display cases, each containing a dozen slides. It attempts what Patti Lather termed 'transgressive validity' – in her 'checklist that mimics checklists'¹ – by mimicking museum poetics on the OAR native web platform and Adobe's PDF architecture. Accompanying the slides are 50–60 word labels, following the Victoria & Albert Museum's 'Ten-Point Guide',² as does this 180 word Intro Panel. A collection of seven quotations, or reference points, precedes the slides. Hidden amongst the quotations, slides, and labels are a set of invisible hyperlinks, which can be found only by tracing the pages with your mouse pointer. External hyperlinks gesture outward, to other locations on the internet, but the internal links point to views *within* the PDF, changing the location and level of magnification. This acrobatic spatial experience of jumping back and forth, zooming in and out, gradually diagrams our proposal: a flexible, combinatorial, associative validity – a *tensile strength* – relying on careful attention to details, and a cognitive, sculptural lacemaking.

NB: This functionality is only available using Adobe's Acrobat Reader software, available [here](#).



We aim...at two distinct objects by the use of systems: we use the artificial for becoming acquainted with individuals, and the natural as the means of combining them...Division and separation is the end of the artificial system; – to establish agreements is the end of the natural.

J. E. Bicheno, 'On Systems and Methods in Natural History' (1827)³

[T]he language in which I might have been granted an opportunity not only to write but to think is...not English...but a language of which I know not one word, a language in which mute things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge.

Hugo von Hofmanstahl, 'The Lord Chandos Letter' (1902)⁴

This linguistics of interval and position is usually closed off by themes and titles, complex nouns that immobilise a system in a particular attitude. In this sense, explanations are modes of concealing...Placement as a grammatic concept can be extended to any abstraction...to a degree we may speak of meaning as a system of permutations, as a mathematics of placement.

Sigmund Bode, 'Excerpt from *Placement as Language*' (1928)⁵

There is always a moment when, the science of certain facts not being yet reduced into concepts, the facts not even being organically grouped together, these masses of facts receive that posting of ignorance: 'Miscellaneous'.

Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body' (1935)⁶

The set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe...that a repeated metonymic displacement of fragment for totality, object to label...is somehow adequate to a nonlinguistic universe.

Eugenio Donato, 'The Museum's Furnace' (1979)⁷

The problem with things is that they are dumb. They are not eloquent, as some thinkers in art museums claim. They are dumb. And if by some ventriloquism they seem to speak, they lie.

Spencer R. Crew & James E. Sims, 'Locating Authenticity' (1991)⁸

In itself, such a pair – an image...and a commentary...– does not represent anything new and is perceived entirely naturally, especially when we are talking about an object in an exhibition in a museum...A little different situation arises, when we arrange both a commentary and an explanation next to a painting (object) in such a way that both the first and the second form an artistic whole... being placed in the same compositional field with the object described, forming to a certain degree a new whole with it, these texts begin to radiate some new significances, new meanings. This clearly occurs, because such a pair turns out to be itself in the field of commentaries and explanations 'pronounced' by the viewer who examines this 'matrimonial pair' from the outside.

Ilya Kabakov, *The Text as the Basis for Visual Expression* (2000)⁹



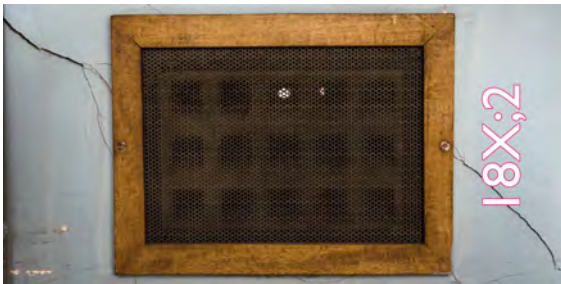
41E:0



692:9



789:1



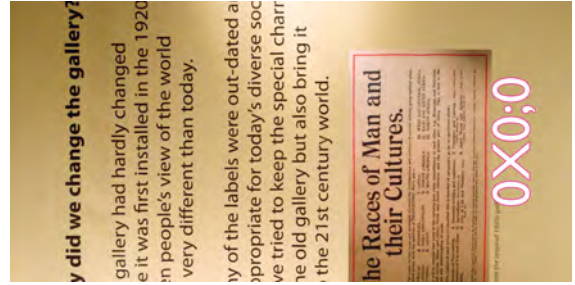
18X:2



366:0



313:0



0X0:0



92E:0



893:0



456:0



661:0



805:5

L_41E;0 This empty slide case came to Warrington Museum in the collection of local naturalist Linnaeus Greening (1855–1927). Like the Rylands, the Greenings owned the large wire drawing and weaving works for which Warrington was famous. The case is an ‘interstitial object’, not part of the museum collection.

L_692;9 Photo-micrography often featured in the Rylands Brothers’ company magazine: ‘The subject is not a simple one, and for those...interested...it will be necessary to read very carefully so as to understand the meaning of the most peculiar changes that happen... The group of micro. photographs has been...prepared to show the different structures’.

L_789;I This promotional poster for Warrington Museum & Art Gallery features a two-headed ‘feejee mermaid’ and a painting of a man in a military-style jacket, perhaps representing cabinets of curiosity, on the one hand, and contemporary art, on the other. Both images have been ‘die cut’ or masked, removing their background context.

L_18X;2 In a small fireproof strongroom in the Warrington Local Studies Archive, near the floor, is a woven wire grille. According to the archivist, members of staff have been disturbed by disembodied voices, which travel through ventilation pipes from elsewhere in the building. Several people have reported seeing shadowy figures as they work.

L_366;0 This twelve-sided die [000;0] was used by JAM to generate accession numbers for the things in its Warrington collection. Croft Additive Manufacturing, a Warrington firm, sponsored the project by 3D printing the die in steel from a digital stereolithography file. The die is unevenly weighted, and produces semi-random, duodecimal numbers.

L_313;0 A rubber coaster for culturewarrington.org: ‘...delivering arts, heritage and events across Warrington. Formed in May 2012, Culture Warrington operates the venues of Warrington Museum & Art Gallery and Pyramid & Parr Hall...sustained by a combination of external funding and income generation’. In 2014, their financial director embezzled £30,000 to feed a cocaine habit.

L_0X0;0 Largely re-hung at the millennium, today Warrington Museum engages self-consciously with its status as a ‘museum of museums’. It is now considering whether to accession its ‘out-dated and inappropriate’ labels, which are among the items in the museum’s holdings most requested by visiting researchers: ‘the ultimate museum eating itself’.

L_92E;0 The original type-written label reads: ‘PI-GEON’S NEST. This nest is similar to about ten removed from the trusses of...the Church Street Works of Rylands Brothers...composed almost entirely of short wire ends... from...scrap heaps. A nest of this type is believed to be unique’. The Church Street wire works operated from 1817 to 1982.

L_893;0 Warrington Museum’s most famous painting is Walter Langley’s *Between the Tides* (1901). This reproduction of the painting is depicted on a tin of pilchards, seen held by a member of the museum staff, who also took the photograph. The painting formed a starting point for JAM’s appropriation of Warrington’s collection.

L_456;0 This model tall ship is made entirely from glass. The rigging is formed from hand pulled and twisted rods, resembling rope. Glass is neither a liquid nor a solid, but another metastable kind of material state, combining some properties of both. Theoretically, glass could shift spontaneously into crystal form at any time, though this is very rare.

L_661;0 This lepidoptery cabinet is inaccessible to the public. On the right, tiger moths are labelled following John Curtis’s *British Entomology* (1823). ‘*Deiopeia*’ are now called *Utetheisa*, of the sub-family *Arctiidae*, formerly *Arctiinae*, formerly ‘*Eucheliidae*’ – not to be confused with *Arctiini*, nor *Arctiina*. Many of these moths are *incertae sedis*.

L_805;5 The head of a Buddhist temple guardian statue, or lohan. A previous owner painted the eye green to prevent its gaze following him. Local newspaper articles in 1955, 1985, 2010, and 2014, and a contemporary children’s activity sheet, describe the carving causing accidents to ‘non-believers’. This narrative is not on the label.



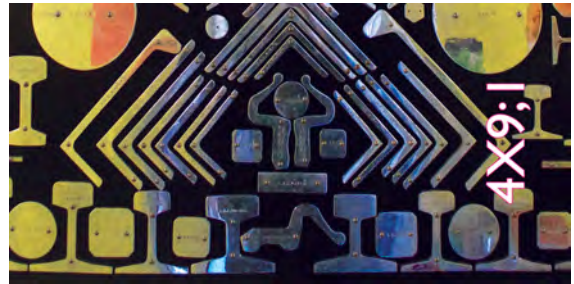
986;2



789;0



692;6



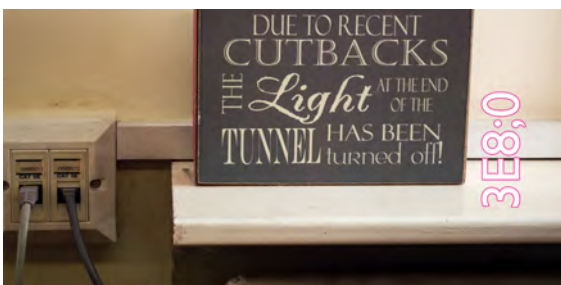
4X9;1



98X;0



E0E;0



3E8;0



395;0



661;1



260;2



574;0



805;2

L_986;2 'Joseph Spence-Hodgson's Facial Expressions in Recitation, Copyright Photography James Spencer, 1906', from the Penketh Photographic Record, Compiled by Joseph Spence-Hodgson, 1899, Presented to Penketh School by Penketh old Scholars' Association, located in Warrington Local Studies Archive.

L_692;6 'THE WITHDRAWAL' printed in *The Live Wire*, company magazine of Rylands Brothers, Christmas 1923, p. 74. On p. 43, W. Peter Rylands writes: 'It is very unfortunate that the terms "Capital and Labour" are frequently employed as synonymous with "Employers and Employed", thereby introducing an atmosphere of prejudice and obscuring the true economic principles involved'.

L_98X;0 'Feejee mermaids' were popular attractions in early 19th century sideshows and museums. Japanese fishermen made these 'hybrids' from fish skin, monkey skeletons, and sometimes carved wooden heads; this example has two. Hoaxer and museologist P. T. Barnum used one to launch his American Museum in the 1840s.

L_3E8;0 This example of English ironic humour sits in the Collections Office, which is in need of renovation. Culture Warrington's 2015/16 Annual Report states the museum's VAQAS status is 'a testament to our continual improvement programme.' Measures include repeated restructuring of the museum's staff, and providing little or no operational budget.

L_661;1 Pyrite, or Fool's Gold, is a semiconductor, and was used in 'crystal radios'. Pyrite's crystal structure allows it to shear into both the cube and the pyritohedron, a dodecahedron with T_h symmetry of order 24. Unlike the other regular solids, Plato did not link it with an element, but instead with 'the whole constellation' (*Timaeus*, 55).¹⁰

L_574;0 This family tree spiral is part of Warrington Local Studies Archive's teaching materials. It illustrates the history of genealogy. Though kept in the archive, it has not been given a number or catalogue entry, and does not have a formal location. The origins and dates of the original and the reproduction are both unknown.

L_789;0 This system, known as a raking shore, is used to provide temporary support to an unstable structure, in this case an unsafe boundary wall in Warrington Museum's staff car park. As untreated wood ages over the years, exposure to the elements causes its surface to oxidise, creating a natural patina called silvering.

L_4X9;1 Can you spot them? Some people claim to see two figures in this product display board, likely made for the Lancashire Steel Corporation's new rod and bar mill at Irlam in the early 1960s. Is this a self-portrait of the person who arranged the scores of slightly different polished samples? Who is the curved figure reclining below?

L_E0E;0 The hand-written accession registers in this safe begin with Warrington Museum's founding in the 1840s, providing details and catalogue numbers for its collection. The different binding and record keeping styles represent phases in the museum's institutional life. The late 20th century notebooks and ZIP disks are particularly fragile.

L_395;0 These extra long elastic tags were custom made by Kalsi Tags, Kent. 'Treasury tags' were originally 'India tags', green string with metal crossbars, named after the British Empire's India Office. In America, this has been shortened to 'T-tag', thought to refer to the shape where the string meets the bar; an example of folk etymology.

L_260;2 Arranged in an unusual kaleidoscopic pattern, this 'Cabinet of Butterflies and Moths (mostly foreign)' was donated in 1962 by 'Mr. Shadwell/ of Shadwell's Coach Tours/ Lovely Lane'. The case is not being conserved, though it is being stored near the rest of Warrington's lepidoptery collection. Its accession status and cultural value are uncertain.

L_805;2 This 1955 Warrington Guardian describes a cursed 'Hoodoo Head' made by a 'warlike head-hunter...a culture vulture...for sculpture'. It concludes: 'Coincidence?...Is this a matter to be treated lightly by the civilised world, or does the carving possess a serious evil born among a primitive and dying race in the jungles of North Borneo?'



John Affey Museum & Clair Le Couteur, *Roots Between the Tides*, 2016.

Hanging in the mezzanine void between Warrington Museum's 1920s Ethnology room and the Fish Gallery upstairs are 188 digital photographs, linked by giant elastic 'India tags' [see 395;0]. The photographs were taken in the museum's stores, archives, and surroundings, and accessioned by the John Affey Museum as part of a research residency called *Roots Between the Tides* (RBTT). Made for Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival 2016, RBTT is now on long-term loan to Warrington Museum. As part of the JAM accessioning process, each digital slide is given a semi-random, four digit duodecimal number. The numbers were generated by an 3D printed steel Accessioning Die – numbered 000;0 – made by a Warrington firm [see 366;0]. RBTT forms a model or portrait of the museum, a constellation saturated with tensions, a space of association. The JAM collection is not labelled in traditional museum fashion – by short, anonymous, institutionally-authored texts outside the collection – but by itself. Labelthings, linked together into one of many possible network configurations, generated from a database of virtual associations between the slides.

But how to expose these associations in detail, to map their specifics? OAR offered an opportunity. In place of the contingent gesture of elastic tagging, the virtual structures of association could be modelled with another kind of line: digital hyperlinks with the capacity to control framing. In building a cognitive sculpture of these links, between embodied minds and PDF files, we may begin to sense together that the spatial aspects of knowledge – distances, discontinuities, symmetries, the in-between of association – go beyond mere figures of speech, and instead form a vital part of the materiality of thinking.

- 1 Patti Lather, 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993), 673–93, 676.
- 2 Victoria and Albert Museum, 'Gallery text at the V&A: a Ten Point Guide,' (2013), http://www.vam.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf
- 3 James Ebenezer Bicheno, 'XXIII. On Systems and Methods in Natural History,' *Transactions of the Linnaean Society of London* 15:2 (1827), 479–96, 488–89.
- 4 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'The Lord Chandos Letter,' in *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings* (New York: New York Review of Books Publishers, 2012), 117–28, 127–28.
- 5 Sigmund Bode, 'Excerpt from *Placement as Language* (1928),' in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 18–21, 18.
- 6 Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body,' in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, ed. Margaret M. Lock, & Judith Farquhar (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 50–68, 50.
- 7 Eugenio Donato, 'The Museum's Furnace: Notes Toward a Contextual Reading of Bouvard and Pecuchet,' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari, Vol. 699 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 213–38, 223.
- 8 Spencer R. Crew & James E. Sims, 'Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,' in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp & Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 159–75, 159.
- 9 Ilya Kabakov, *The Text as the Basis for Visual Expression*, ed. Zdenek Felix (Cologne: Oktagon, 2000), 257.
- 10 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Peter Kalkavage (Indianapolis: Focus, 2001), 88–89.

Clair Le Couteur (*1982) is a non-binary trans researcher, artist and composer currently undertaking a practice-based PhD in sculpture – 'Mislabelling and the Fictive Museum' – at the Royal College of Art in London. Combining writing, making, and performance, Clair builds structures that reorientate fact and fiction, research and creation, and tradition and contemporaneity. Recent projects include: co-editing *Why Would I Lie?* (2015), a publication accompanying the inaugural RCA Research Biennial; *Put You Through* (2015), a photo installation for Pride in London with the Switchboard charity archive; an essay on gender and species in selkie folktales for *Gender Forum #55: Transportation Blues* (2016), a live-looped folk song cycle at the Horse Hospital gallery; *Roots Between the Tides* (2016), a network of 188 images installed at Warrington Museum; and *Reading Trans* (2017), a series of workshops for the Goldsmiths MA fine art course.

The Double Bind of Artistic Research: A Thought Experiment of a Witness

Henryetta Duerschlag

To cite this contribution:

Duerschlag, Henryetta. 'The Double Bind of Artistic Research: A Thought Experiment of a Witness.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 1 (2017): 176–188, <http://www.oarplatform.com/double-bind-artistic-research-thought-experiment-witness/>.

I miss you
but I haven't met you yet
so special
but it hasn't happened yet
you are gorgeous
but I haven't met you yet
I remember
but it hasn't happened yet

Björk, *Miss you* (1995)

I remember applying for a loan from the German government to finance my master's degree in artistic research at the University of Amsterdam. As one of the very few available financing options, this particular loan was advertised as being granted to the majority of applicants, and guaranteed feasible repayment conditions. Having worked in two museums during my Bachelor's studies for three years, and having been accepted to a research Master's in the capital of the Netherlands, I was highly optimistic that I would receive this money, which would have spared me needing to work in a call centre next to a fulltime graduate programme. I was rejected for the same reason that the Swiss National Science Foundation recently *accepted* to fund a research project on which I am currently working for my dissertation: nobody really seems to know how – or if – artistic research generates valid knowledge.

Nevertheless, something haunts the young, mysterious discipline – a ghost or phantom related to Jacques Derrida's spectre,¹ who may not answer, but does speak to us. The drive in practice-based research derives from an inexplicable feeling that there is a truth out there only approachable through alternative or experimental forms of research and presentation. There is a sense, or a sensation, that artistic research is a valid form of knowledge production, and that practice-based research can discover things which other traditional methods cannot. However, as far as I know, there is no definition or argumentation that would equally satisfy many theoreticians in academia, the art world, and the student loan provider I applied to. While the methods, forms of outcome, and quality criteria for work in established, traditional² disciplines seem clear, artistic research circulates around what constitutes itself. Challenges that theoreticians and artists face are both the impossible-seeming articulation of criteria for validity in artistic research and the task of creating a paradigm for it as a discipline:

How can things that are fundamentally polysemic – that seem to elude every attempt to tie them down, to define them – still function as vehicles of research? That is, how can they function not just as objects of research, but as the entities in which, and through which, the research takes place – and in which and through which our knowledge, our understanding, and our experience can grow.³

Following Henk Borgdorff's question, I asked myself how one can deal with the feeling that the entire undertaking results in confronting a paradox. How can validity as a necessity for research be rethought in and for artistic practice through the idea of a self-contradictory demand?

Being in love with a fantasy so vivid, however remaining unreachable in reality, Björk's song reminds me of the tenacious feeling that it must be possible to define validity for artistic research while being aware that every attempt will necessarily fail. I will not arrogate to myself the ability to provide the reader with a satisfactory solution, or even to articulate a formula applicable to the entirety of artistic research practices, but I would like to think that this reflexion on my experiences from both the theoretical and practical dimensions of artistic research can add to thinking about validity in this *enfant terrible* of a discipline.

INSPIRATION

Having been told by my mother that, when working in the field of arts and culture, one should never be actively involved in politics, I was renowned for having a rather apolitical stance during my Bachelor's in cultural anthropology and gender studies at the University of Basel. It was not that I was uninterested in, or felt unaffected by, socio-political issues, I was simply overshadowed by my classmates from the sociology department whose thirst for political action did not spare the classroom. However, as the environment always leaves a mark on one's way of thinking, during my Master's I found myself the most politically motivated student in my class in Amsterdam.

Along with many others devastated by the result of the 2016 November election in the United States, the prospect of rising right-winged populism kept (and keeps) me in a constant state of worry. Growing up in Germany, I was raised with a historical awareness that constantly reminded me of the devastating force of collective racism, homophobia, ableism, and anti-semitism. It seems that until recently, political correctness seemed to be rather common sense than a polemical term, and irrational claims by entertainment celebrities were by far less valued in the shaping of public opinion than scientific evidence and statistic figures.⁴ In the dawn of alt-right movements and outrageous statements made by Donald Trump, reading the news in the end of January 2017, I stumbled upon the Orwellian definition of *doublethink* right underneath a headline concerning the exaggerated crowd size incident shortly after Trump's inauguration: 'Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them'.⁵

Having in mind Gayatri Spivak's ab-use⁶ of Gregory Bateson's notion of the *double bind*, which derives from his research on childhood schizophrenia, I instantly saw a relation between the psychological concept and the Orwellian notion. While Spivak introduces the

notion of the double bind in the context of her revaluation of the legacy of Enlightenment in order to rethink the objectives of aesthetic education, doublethinking resurfaced with the new visibility of right-winged populism. Both concepts deal with the impossible simultaneity of positions and the danger of homogenising language, which I considered productive in the political context I discussed in my master thesis. With this discussion, however, I opened up a Pandora's box, sensing double binds and doublethinks everywhere.

DOUBLE BIND

Mixed information and seemingly contradictory demands confront most of us on a regular basis – no matter if in the humanities, sciences, arts, design, or everyday life. It was the second or third session of an introduction course when our lecturer asked what we expected to learn in the two upcoming years. Given my rather theoretical background, I answered that I wanted to develop my artistic practice. 'We don't need a failed artist in our class' was the lecturer's disenchanting response. Great, I thought, now I will have to do artistic practice without aiming to make art, and have to do research while yearning to leave its limiting framework.

Behind the often frustrating feeling of being incapable of positioning myself between (or within) practice and theory, art and research, subjectivity and objectivity, matter and form, I later suspected that my situation derived from what Spivak describes as 'contradictory instructions',⁷ with which we, as scholars, artists, individuals are confronted on a regular basis. Torn between art and research, alleged liberty and habitual unambiguousness, remaining on either one or the other would miss the point of doing artistic research. Having to combine the multi-layeredness of the aesthetic dimension of artistic practice and the underlying necessity of the production of verifiable knowledge in research, artistic research itself meant for me to practice a double bind.

But in order to clarify what is meant by the notion of double bind, I suggest first looking at its definition. According to The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), double bind means: 'A situation in which a person is confronted with two irreconcilable demands or a choice between two undesirable courses of action'.⁸ The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the notion as 'a psychological predicament in which a person receives from a single source conflicting messages that allow no appropriate response to be made; *broadly*: dilemma'.⁹ 'Two irreconcilable demands' and the reception of 'conflicting messages' deriving from one source implies that a double bind's basic requirement is the communication of a contradiction. Therefore, a double bind situation is based on a dichotomy. However, while the latter means '(a) division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different',¹⁰ a double bind's distressing power derives from its imperative nature – demanded to find a position, no matter what one chooses, one will be caught between a so-called rock and a hard place. In this respect, to withstand a double bind requires a significantly greater force of resistance than simply dealing with a dichotomy. This may account for the exhaustion relatable to Sisyphus' eternal struggle.

A double bind – as it's conceptual origin implies – requires an interaction between two (or more) actors who are involved in a given relationship. In Bateson's research, it was the relationship between mother and child. In my case, it was the conflicting messages derived

from the educational framework represented by my lecturers. However, it is crucial to differentiate the experience and the discourse. While in practice, artistic research (in my case) entails the confrontation with a double bind, in theory – or in its indeterminable paradigm – it is rather paradoxical: ‘You have to do research doing artistic practice, but forget about becoming a famous artist’, as opposed to the conception that traditional research with all its methodologies and objectives excludes artistic practice which is characterised by its indefinability. Yet artistic research necessarily means combining both systems of practice.

Theory and practice, however, are two *modi operandi* not easily separable in discourse and experience, presuming that aesthetic thinking and practice are inseparably entwined. Both a double bind and a paradox imply a mutually exclusive proposition, however, while the first is characterised by a conflicting imperative and thus results in a (personal) predicament, the second states two equally true yet seemingly self-contradicting propositions. A double bind can, but must not necessarily, be based on a paradox.

Dieter Mersch describes the paradox-like condition in artistic practice, as he states that:

Thinking in catachresis, in leaps and chiasms, in catastrophes and discords,
and in the chronic disunity of paradoxes and their inherent negativity
defines the riskiness and the extraordinary adventure of art, which
philosophical thought has always linked to transgression and madness.¹¹

This exhaustive adventure pushing us to the borders of insanity depicts the burden of being confronted with impossible demands. The mad artist is a common trope; the potential societal benefit of this figure has been prominently discussed, and not only since Michel Foucault’s re-evaluation of how history shaped and is being shaped by discourses.¹² The cliché of the brilliant yet insane scientist has prevailed as well – one must only think of popular culture, taking Robert Zemeckis’ *Back to the Future* (1985) or even the recent animation series *Rick and Morty* by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon (2013–) as prominent examples. As Bateson states, ‘within [the double bind’s] terms there is nothing to determine whether a given individual shall become a clown, a poet, a schizophrenic, or some combination of these’,¹³ the idea seems not far off that, doing artistic research, one will sooner or later affiliate with all of the three characters.

PLAY

Pushed to the border of sanity, the main question arising at this point is how to deal with a double bind situation productively. How could I turn the pressure of working with aesthetic practices to generate valid knowledge into something graspable? Spivak clarifies in her introduction that double binds are not a method one can apply – their potential must be achieved by playing them in imagination.¹⁴ In other words, to simply discover them in terms of unveiling them is not enough. If, as aforementioned, artistic research as a practice implies a double bind situation for the actor and Spivak suggests play as a solution for dealing with this predicament, one could conclude that artistic research as a practice means to play. This simplification, however, does not sound appealing at first glance when trying to articulate an epistemic claim for this practice – in the end, I studied artistic research in order to become a professional, not someone who simply likes to play around.

But what does play actually imply?

The father of play theory, Johann Huizinga, defines five necessary characteristics of play: first, since it is being executed voluntarily (excepting rites and ceremonies) and is never a mandatory task, it is a form of freedom. The second characteristic of play is the requirement to step *outside* of ordinary 'real' life and 'into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own'.¹⁵ Therefore, as point three, play differs temporally and spatially from everyday life. It is also being played out in accordance to a specific chronology – it has a starting and ending point, but must be repeatable at any given time.¹⁶ Furthermore, it requires a set space: 'All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course'.¹⁷ The fourth characteristic of play is that it demands 'absolute' and 'supreme' order,¹⁸ and thus playing requires one to follow rules. An example would be the outrage of football fans when players happen to break any of the game's meticulously observed rules. The last requirement Huizinga proposes is the aspect of non-profit in play.¹⁹ This means that it is specifically not the goal to economically profit from it. The play is being executed for its own sake.

When now applying these characteristics to artistic research as a practice, firstly, given their reflective and examining *modus operandi*, art and research are both practices which can be thought as taking place inside *and* outside of everyday life. Indeed, every research project has its starting point (with a research question or interest), and follows a temporality marked by different steps (such as research, reflection and articulation of findings). The aspect of rules crucial for play might be the most interesting one in this context. Unlike traditional research, which demands that the researcher meticulously follow the methodology of her or his discipline, the rules or methods in artistic research have to be formulated for each project anew. It is the researcher her or himself who has to find the most suitable way to approach the knowledge he or she seeks to find.

This liberty, which I now find highly productive, was something I needed to get used to. The issue with traditional research, at least the way I was trained to do it, is that at some point the descriptive mode inhibited me to state my opinions. Even writing a paper in the first person seemed not only odd, but also highly inappropriate – an academic manner (especially in the German tradition) I wished to be able to break with. Artistic research seemed to provide the space in which I could push the boundaries of traditional knowledge representation safely. No longer limited to the methodologies of cultural anthropology, I left my disciplinary comfort zone and engaged in a highly political debate using concepts and theories from the fields of literature, philosophy, and political and science studies.

However, there is something else about play that makes it such a productive concept to approach validity in artistic research: 'Play cannot be denied. You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play'.²⁰ As Spivak implies,²¹ it is very much possible to deny a double bind, as has been shown by Huizinga, however, it is not possible to deny play. Following this logic, it does not seem farfetched to argue that if validity can be regarded as a constructed irrefutability, play in itself is always valid. The characteristics of this inherently human (and even non-human if we think of animals) practice – to set a physical or virtual space in which, for a specific duration, one creates an environment outside of ordinary life that follows strict yet self-declared rules – allow the researcher to experiment in order to find something that may not have been

discovered otherwise. Thus, play and experimentation share many common denominators. The latter could be even a form of the first. However, remaining in the experimental epistemic practice, one would still miss the aesthetic dimension crucial to approach artistic research as a practice. Compared to other experimental and cross-disciplinary fields, it is the relevance of aesthetics both in the form of expression and as an epistemic approach which in my opinion characterizes artistic research as a discipline.

While Huizinga defines the act of playing, Friedrich Schiller contextualizes play as an instinct inseparably connected to the aesthetic. For him, the *sensuous instinct* makes physically perceivable matter – or, in his words, *Life* – its object, while the *formal instinct* deals with ‘all formal qualities of things and all relations of the same to the thinking powers’.²² The *play-instinct* can be regarded as the hybrid of the sensuous and the *formal instinct* whose object is the *living form* and, thus, *beauty*.²³ He writes:

As the mind in the intuition of the beautiful finds itself in a happy medium between law and necessity, it is, because it divides itself between both, emancipated from the pressure of both.²⁴

The state of mind in the ‘happy medium’ in between form and life, and law and necessity, which Schiller describes, is strongly reminiscent of a characteristic of doublethink, namely the effortless acceptance of an antagonism. To doublethink would indeed mean to divide one’s mind *into* both positions and not *between* them. To play a double bind subsequently means what Schiller describes as the act of emancipation of its pressure through the separation of both binds. This process reminds me of the teachings of Taoism, in which pupils learn its philosophy by reacting to paradoxical tasks and riddles, such as the question ‘What was your original face before you were born?’. Since it is impossible to find an analytical, logical answer, the goal of these so-called *koans* is to find a third option allowing one to free oneself from the distress of an impossible demand in order to strive towards enlightenment. The act of emancipation from the predicament of a double bind must happen in a space like the school of Taoism, in which it can be acquired and expressed without the risk of evoking severe consequences – a safe space, so to speak. Not a philosopher, yet working with its objectives, not an art historian, yet engaging in art theory, not an artist, yet doing artistic practice, an ethnographer, yet stepping outside its methodological framework, operating in the not yet and not anymore, I found that the space in between became my workstation.

BETWIXT

In reality, there will always remain a preponderance of one of these elements over the other, and the highest point to which experience can reach will consist in an oscillation between two principles, when sometimes reality and at others form will have the advantage. Ideal beauty is therefore eternally one and indivisible, because there can only be one single equilibrium; on the contrary, experimental beauty will be eternally double, because in the oscillation the equilibrium may be destroyed in two ways this side and that.²⁵

Between form and matter, experience and perception, the known and unknown, experimental beauty, as Schiller argues, means to eternally oscillate between two at times irreconcilable

principles. Reminded of the play of double binds, I wondered how this space in-between could look, how it could be described, and, most importantly, how it could be characterised. Eternally double, it always runs the danger of breaking into a single bind if the oscillation cannot be sustained. As Schiller's argumentation implies, this aesthetic practice in-between is experimental.

Dealing with the double bind of artistic research as a practice must happen in a specific space that allows a playful approach to its objectives – a playground, if you will. As I realized, the place in which artistic research can be practiced fruitfully and productively prohibits a clear demarcation. Somewhere between or even beyond traditional research and aesthetic practice, this grey zone strongly reminded me of the notion of liminality coined by ethnographer Victor Turner.

Liminality describes a (mostly) temporal space of the not-anymore and the not-yet. In the context of a rite of passage, as examined by Turner, the ritual subject needs to pass from the old state into the new one, as, for example, from unwed to married through the performance of wedding: 'Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial'.²⁶ For a double bind to be successfully played, it needs to maintain this liminal state – there cannot be a starting and ending point, because one would automatically break into a single bind, and end up with a regrettable choice.

Since a ritual requires the actors to follow a set of rules that are different to those of ordinary life, given the specific temporal and spatial framework in conjunction with its performative characteristic, a ritual has many common denominators with play. Hence, I argue that the space in between a double bind – the playground – is a liminal space in which 'the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he or she passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state'.²⁷ This liminal state of being no longer and not yet is associated with a range of properties such as: transition, totality, homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property, status and rank, humility, unselfishness, suspension of kinship rights and obligations, foolishness, simplicity, heteronomy, and acceptance of pain and suffering – all in binary opposition to norms of the ordinary, social life.²⁸ Regarding these properties as the conditions of the liminal space – and thus the space in between a double bind – they must be understood as the basic game rules of playing a double bind.

Precisely in the combination of indeterminacy, ambiguousness, and responsibility of the actor in the liminal playground lies both the answer to the question of why it was (and still is) impossible for me to articulate a fixed position for my practice and the incredible potential of artistic research to strive for knowledge outside of traditional research. This liminal playground allows one to consider both aesthetic as well as explicit knowledge and, given its indeterminacy, the way that the result of this epistemic play will look is open.

FORM

Years ago, I invented a party game loosely based on the popular *Who Am I* – a game in which each participant writes down the name of a fictive or actual person on a sticky note, attaches

it on the forehead of his or her counterpart who then has to guess who he or she is. Instead of picking random personas for other participants to guess, in what I call *Epochs Bingo*, the group discusses where and when each participant could have lived. Re-entering the room, the latter then has to guess how the others imagined his or her previous life. More than an icebreaker between strangers, the description of others through a fictive scenario captured how the participants perceived each other strikingly well. I remember, for example, a neatly coiffed young man known for his Ibiza party-boy appearance and passion for long, eloquent discussions on politics, niche documentary filmmaking, and the latest podcasts on German culture radio channels, leaving the room for us to discuss his historic alter-ego. The first association that came up in the discussion was Claus Stauffenberg, who attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler while seeming to be a conformist. Even months later my friend told me how moved he was that we managed to pinpoint a side of his personality that not many people saw in him – accounting for the potential of a game to shed light on a fragment of reality that does not reveal itself immediately to the environment. What started out as a game hinted to a research practice based on a purely subjective perception which I would eventually incorporate into my work.

During the past two years, I have had innumerable conversations about the impact of our previous education on our work. Some members of my cohort (who all came from art academies) initially struggled with academic writing, which they perceived as limiting, at times paralyzing, and counterintuitive to their working habits. I tried many times to explain to my peers how much intuition, inspiration, and, bluntly said, gut feeling influences even the most rigid-appearing research papers. In theory, a subjective approach to a topic never felt invalid for me – regardless of the discipline. However, it was me who did not listen closely to what my practice tried to tell me for months, or even years. The methods in Ethnology, as the discipline responsible for the description of cultures, are based on the observation of one's environment. The difference between an *actual* ethnography and *Epoch Bingo* is the dislocation of the factual into the imaginary. Since the very beginning of my bachelors, I was interested in the potential of fiction to approach a reality. I remember watching *Transfiction* (1994) by Johannes Sjöberg, in which he asked two transsexual sex workers in Sao Paulo to re-enact their everyday lives. By giving themselves pseudonyms and playing (with) their experiences, dreams and aspirations, the film depicted a reality which may have been left in the dark if approached by rather conventional documentation methods.

In summer 2016, I worked in the social department of a small municipality, where I experienced first-hand how people seeking refuge were handled administratively. Following the news about the migration crisis in Europe throughout the last three years, I could have hardly imagined how challenging and frustrating for both sides the large-scaled capture of thousands of identities in an administrative system would be. Transferring data from hundreds of physical files into virtual ones, I noticed that surprisingly many people were listed as being born on the first of January of a given year – a date that was used either when the birth certificate was lost, or when it never issued in the first place. Many of those individuals' names were almost indistinguishably similar, and were often differently spelled even in various documents of the same file. Not a single line of each basic form could account for the individuality of the person depending on being registered, which made me wonder what information value those forms have in terms of determining individuals. While *Epochs Bingo* managed to capture the perception of a person through free association, common identity markers such as date and place of birth, legal status, and a photographic snapshot could

merely represent fragments of what constitutes an individual. Hence, the game served as the basis for my experimental approach to the question of how to record something as subjective yet important as personality. Similar to official registration papers, I created a form that solely asked about where and when a person could have lived in another life. In a participatory performance, which took place within the framework of a course at the university, those forms were handed out by me as a representative of the fictive *Planetary Identification Agency* to four volunteers in the audience, who were asked to write down how they perceive the other participants. Two of the participants met each other for the very first time, and were astonished about the accuracy and match of their mutual fictive descriptions.

PIA
PLANETARY IDENTIFICATION AGENCY

Registration Form 1.2. External perception

Please answer as many of the following questions as you think are necessary to describe who person D might have been.¹ Per person up to two different scenarios are possible.

Time in history/ era person D could have lived:

late 1970s

Age of person D at that time:

23

Gender of person D:

fluid

Nationality/ Cultural affiliation of person D:

European

Do you see person D connected to a historical/ political movement?

yes

If yes, which one?

post punk industrial electronic music

Social status of person D:

not applicable

¹ The scenario could take place in the future as well.

Henryetta Duerschlag, *Planetary Identification Agency Registration Form 1.2*, 2016, scan of the form filled out by a participant of the performance.



Registration Form 1.2.

External perception

Profession/ Occupation of person D:

Dandy

Person D influenced mostly:

Kraftwerk and Cindi Lauper

Possible enemies of person D:

Same as above

In case you perceive person D as a popular historic figure, please write down the name:

Please describe why this/ these scenario/s fit/s your perception of person D:

Dandy and ascetic, music maker and
thinker, shadowy, mysterious figure ^{who is} key
but hard to pin down in terms of influence.

Henryetta Duerschlag, *Planetary Identification Agency Registration Form 1.2*, 2016, scan of the form filled out by a participant of the performance.

It was not until I wrote the conclusion to my research on the notion of double bind and play that I realized that it was all already there in my artistic practice – the *Planetary Identification Agency* was an undertaking to deconstruct norms by creating normative tools. Based on a game, my work approached truth through a play of thoughts structured by rules displayed on the very form. The power of *What if* scenarios has been famously demonstrated by many artworks, such as Zoe Leonard's *Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993–96) or Walid Raad's *The Atlas Group* (1989–2004), both of which play with the notion of the archive as a tool to approach a truth. By depicting a fictive historical figure, Leonard raises an awareness for all of those who might have been left out by history, and Raad, as the fictive artist collective *The*

Atlas Group which made the documentation of war in Lebanon their objective, sheds light on a brutal reality by blurring facts and fiction. Both artists use documentary aesthetics, evoking the feeling that the shown material is genuine and authentic. The objectives of both projects are not less sincere – Leonard and Raad took a responsibility towards under- or misrepresented groups of people and events, and rendered visible a reality by staging a scenario.

VALIDITY

The creation of a fictive scenario, which necessarily entails the invention of rules it has to follow, can be regarded as a form of play. In this respect, *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, *The Atlas Group*, and my *Planetary Identification Agency* all illustrate the becoming of matter through intellectual games or thought experiments. Borgdorff describes experiments as ‘the actual generators of...knowledge – knowledge of which we previously had no knowledge at all’.²⁹ Just as in play, the technical environment of a laboratory together with the ‘epistemic thing’³⁰ dictates the rules that are being articulated from *within*, which requires a flexibility from the researcher to adapt to – and a responsibility towards the desired knowledge. In conjunction with the necessity of a safe space outside of ordinary life, play and experimentation – as I mentioned before – share many common denominators. If experimentation as epistemic play is the driving force of innovation, artistic research as a practice that experiments with matter and explicit knowledge of any discipline has a highly innovative potential.

One of my favourite quotes, which I can highly identify with, comes from Michel Serres, in which he confesses that he prefers

to move forward, even quickly, at the risk of falling, skipping over a few weak points. (Who doesn’t do likewise, at some time, even among the most careful?) I prefer invention accompanied by the danger of error to rigorous verification, which is paralleled by the risk of immobility – in philosophy as in life, in life as in the sciences.³¹

In two years of doing artistic research at the University of Amsterdam, I learned to emancipate myself from the corset of the methodology of cultural anthropology. I can and do use its concepts and methods, if they fit my research question. However, I feel free to responsibly use whatever I need from other disciplines in order to find what I am looking for – even if the result rarely resembles what I initially imagined. Playing with explicit knowledge and non-verbal articulations such as bodies, images, and other materials, my goal became to find expressions for something I had no words, no images, and no concepts before. According to François Lyotard, it is both the artists’ and the scientists’ objective to find articulations for objects of thought which seem either impossible, or are simply not-yet possible.³²

This undertaking seems paradoxical solely because the operators through which those new articulations are sought to be expressed are yet unfamiliar given their innovative nature. This does not mean, however, that those new articulations are impossible or untrue. For example, precisely a century after its creation, Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) is considered one of the key artworks of the 21st century compared to its perception as non-sense and non-art when it was presented in front of a public for the first time.

Art and science create articulations of the unknown while as systems eluding clear determination. Yet anything can be found in the indeterminable, ground-breaking knowledge that is hiding in the unknown. Considering the inventive power of experimental freedom, I cannot help but wonder why everyone keeps trying to set a methodology for artistic research when its absence is actually its strength:

They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely thin blade between being and nonbeing. They speak of indeterminacy. Or rather, no determinate words are spoken by the vacuum, only a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech, but the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence.³³

Karan Barad's description of the nothingness, in which anything can be but nothing must become something, brings me back to Derrida's spectre. Out of the indeterminacy of artistic research, inventions and innovations are speaking to me, as vague and ungraspable as they may seem at first, luring me into the playground of liminality, where I can emancipate myself from the pressure of positioning myself between art and research. And given this practice's proximity to play, nobody can deny what I am doing there.

Just as Duchamp's *Fountain* is now an icon for postmodern art, inventions and inventive methods need time to sink into the known – just because something is indeterminable now does not mean it is not relevant or groundbreaking. The strength of artistic research lies in this indeterminacy, for it allows one/it to be as inventive as possible – a thought which leaves me satisfied.

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 62.
- 2 For the lack of other terminology, and in order to contrast my experiences in artistic research with my previous academic education, I will use the adjective *traditional* in relation to disciplines which are characterized by established objectives and often paradigms, being aware that those are object of constant changes as well.
- 3 Henk Borgdorff, *Conflict of the Faculties: Perspective on Artistic Research and Academia* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012), 187.
- 4 I even remember a tutorial in gender studies on policy making in which our lecturer stressed the argumentative advantage of statistics over theoretical concepts, which seemed opposed to what we learned before. 'At the end of the day numbers are the only thing that count' she said, a couple of weeks after a course on the normative, and thus negative, power of statistics.
- 5 George Orwell, *1984* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948).
- 6 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 3–4.
- 7 Idem, 10.
- 8 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/double_bind, accessed April 1, 2017.
- 9 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/double%20bind>, accessed April 1, 2017.
- 10 <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dichotomy>, accessed April 1, 2017.
- 11 Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics* (Zurich-Berlin: diaphanes, 2015), 170.
- 12 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- 13 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Chandler, 1972), 272.
- 14 See: Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, IX.
- 15 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 8.
- 16 See: idem, 9.
- 17 Idem, 10.
- 18 Ibidem.
- 19 See: Idem, 13.
- 20 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 3.
- 21 See: Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 18.
- 22 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 19.

- 23 See: Ibidem.
- 24 Ibidem.
- 25 Idem, 21.
- 26 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 95.
- 27 Idem, 94.
- 28 See: idem, 106–07.
- 29 Borgdorff, *Conflict of the Faculties*, 189.
- 30 Idem, 190.
- 31 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995), 131.
- 32 See: Jean-François Lyotard, *Philosophie und Malerei im Zeitalter ihres Experimentierens* (Berlin: Merve-Verlag, 1986), 101.
- 33 Karen Barad, *What is the Measure of Nothingness: Infinity, Virtuality, Justice, 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 099* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 12.

Based in Basel, Henryetta Duerschlag is a doctoral candidate working on the collaborative project *Practices of Aesthetic Thinking* by the Swiss National Science Foundation, Sinergia. She holds a Master degree in Artistic Research from the University of Amsterdam and previously studied European Ethnology and Gender Studies at the University of Basel.

A Guided Tour Through the Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco

Adriana Salazar

To cite this contribution:

Salazar, Adriana. 'A Guided Tour Through the Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 189, <http://www.oarplatform.com/guided-tour-animist-museum-lake-texcoco/>.

What you are about to experience is a narrated tour of a particular kind of museum, accounting for a contested place in the center of Mexico: a museum which is not a museum about a lake which is not a lake.



Commented Bibliography

Bennett, Tony. Introduction to *The Birth of the Museum*, 1-13. New York: Routledge, 1995.

The [Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco](#) differs from modern museological practices as Tony Bennett has interpreted them: museums, while formed, proceeded from chaos to order emulating science's progression from error to truth (p. 2). As the present guided tour unfolds, the conditions differentiating an animist museum from a modern historical museum are established by means of imagined scenarios or incitements: thus, this museum plays on the idea of uncertainty instead of accommodating objects to a pre-determined order.

Garuba, Harry. 'On Animism, Modernity/Colonialism, and the African Order of Knowledge: Provisional Reflections.' *e-flux Journal* 36 (2012). Accessed 1 May, 2016. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61249/on-animism-modernity-colonialism-and-the-african-order-of-knowledge-provisional-reflections/>.

An animist museum, at first glance, may seem like a counterintuitive idea: historical museums (such as the Anthropology Museum of Mexico City) might seek to subsume their objects to the gaze of a certain subject through fixed taxonomies and power structures; the animist worldview escapes those structures as it considers everything as alive, soulful, person-like. In this guided tour, animism is revealed as a maneuver in tension with the modern spirit of such museums, rather than simply opposed to it. Garuba's revision of animism may be helpful in understanding such a tension, as he presents animism in the manner of a 'spectral Other' embedded in the modern, haunting and challenging it from within.

Lather, Patti. 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism.' *The Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993): 673-93.

Lake Texcoco is an emblematic geographical area located in the eastern vicinity of Mexico City. Since its inception as federal territory in 1971, it has become a place where violent transformations have occurred, causing it to break apart in fragments. As one approaches this lakebed and its political, social, and economic realms, its inherent brokenness impedes establishing a distinction between the ‘found’ and the ‘constructed’ (p. 675): in order to understand the ambiguous condition of such terrain, I have been compelled to act as discoverer, as producer of meaning, as one of the fragments inhabiting this lakebed. Validity is thus produced while being actively implicated in the context; it is also produced upon the creation of co-existence scenarios for this land’s radically diverse fragments, always refraining from one-sided reconstructions. As Lather points out while referring to a ‘rhizomatic’ kind of validity, the researcher becomes decentered while encountering a multi-centered reality (p. 680).

Latour, Bruno. ‘Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene – a Personal View of What Is to Be Studied.’ Distinguished lecture at the American Association of Anthropologists, Washington, December 2014.

Lake Texcoco is neither an object of study, nor is it only a site: it is rather an ensemble of land, people, things, and power relations. Following Latour’s argument around the term ‘anthropocene’, material entities, such as Texcoco’s desiccated basin, may not be considered as discrete elements, but as systems of relations where humans are implicated with non-humans, ‘inanimate’ matter acquires agency, and hybrid realities are able to emerge.

Muecke, Stephen. ‘The Fall: Fictocritical Writing.’ *Parallax* 8:4 (2002): 108–12.

The task of narrating this animist museum has led me to reconsider its validity in relation to storytelling, as a use of language allegedly contained in the sphere of literary fiction. As much as this museum is in a way an invention, Lake Texcoco is real: it is a physically present, highly contested space which, in the context of contemporary Mexico, needs to be critically addressed. The museum’s collection is also real, each of its objects playing as an argument that explicates the complexities of its particular context. In his essay, Muecke sheds some light on how a hybrid, boundary-deforming writing (or narration) he calls ‘fictocritical’ may emerge in an intermediate space between fiction and criticism, reinstating its own terms of validity: in such intermediate space, fiction may exist as a source for critical thinking, as much as criticism may become inventive and experimental.

Salazar, Adriana. ‘All Things Living, All Things Dead: Lake Texcoco.’ Last modified 12 June, 2017. <http://www.allthingslivingallthingsdead.com/>.

Addressing Lake Texcoco’s contested context has implied producing new modes of validity that may allow for such inherent brokenness, as well as the researcher’s own affects, to be legible without attempting to subsume it all into a univocal whole. Lake Texcoco is a complex place, which has been radically transformed since its desiccation. This research project has undertaken the task of gathering evidence (both material and immaterial) from such transformation, understanding it in the light of contemporary Mexico’s political developments, as well as referencing the history of the age-old water body. This is why, for the research project here cited, I have constructed two ‘knowledge containers’ in an attempt to make room for ‘everything and all’. On one hand, the [Encyclopedia of Living and Dead Things](#) gathers ‘immaterial information’ regarding Lake Texcoco: data, field notes, descriptions, events,

anecdotes, and historical accounts, among others, all coexisting within a certain textual structure. On the other hand, the [Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco](#) has been created as a container for 'physical information' regarding this lakebed: fragments of materials belonging to the abrupt transformations of the basin have been gathered, currently composing a collection of over 400 pieces.

Taussig, Michael. 'The Stories Things Tell and Why They Tell Them.' *e-flux Journal* 36 (2012). Accessed 25 March, 2016. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61256/the-stories-things-tell-and-why-they-tell-them/>.

I have designed a narrated exhibition whose tour progresses from a condition of spatial darkness and indeterminacy to a state where its 'animist' terms of legibility are able to emerge: the Animist Museum's pieces are allowed to manifest as 'living things, as 'bodies', even as 'equals', rendering audible an otherwise non-representable assembly of human bodies and inanimate things. Storytelling, as Michael Taussig states in the final section of his article, may infuse language with a transformative power similar to that of shamanic conjuring, thus enabling the inanimate to come to life.

Zhilyaev, Arseny. Introduction to *Avant-Garde Museology*, 21-56. Minneapolis: eflux, 2015.

In the introduction to *Avant-Garde Museology*, Zhilyaev presents a series of museological experiments and proposals emerging in early twentieth century post-revolutionary Russia. Such experimental museologies often intended to re-signify the museum as a place where political life, artistic experimentation, and research could thrive as intertwined realities. In resonance with the idea of museums being experiences rather than fixed spaces, 'coming to life' instead of becoming sites for art's commoditization (pp. 44-45), the Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco, through the format of a narrated exhibition, aims at blurring the boundaries between the subject and the object, the viewer and the exhibition, the lakebed and the reflections it detonates.

Special thanks to Carlos Benavides for this audio tour's sound design and mix.

Adriana Salazar is a Colombian visual artist and researcher. Her practice dislocates the boundaries between the human and non-human within specific, often contested contexts. Recent exhibitions of her work include the Triennial of Media Art (Beijing, 2014), the California-Pacific Triennial (California, 2013), and the Manif d'art de Québec. She is presently a PHD candidate at the Faculty of Art and Design, at UNAM, Mexico City.

Abandoning Ourselves to Colourful Possibilities

There were many interconnections between architecture and Weimar Germany's burgeoning film industry.²⁵ While little actual building was happening, there was lucrative work designing film sets, or constructing picture palaces for some architects such as Hans Poelzig. Having completed his Expressionist reworking of the interior of Berlin's Grosses Schauspielhaus, he designed sets for *Der Golem* (1920). Following the success of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1920), the potential of film is discussed in the correspondence.

'Today I come to you only with a film. You'll recognize the intention: to show the things that inspire us tangibly for once, and then the marvelous prospect of joining up in this way to work together on one project'.²⁶

Three film scenarios are among the *Gläserne Kette* letters: Taut's reworking of *The Lucky Slippers*, Hablik's Futuristic *Building of a Glass House by the Sea* and Finsterlin's bombastic *Defiance of Salvation* (all 1920), the latter deemed too flamboyant by Taut:

It is wonderfully fantastic and makes the greatest imaginable demands on the film medium...but I very much fear that the piling up of fantasy would be exhausting if the film were to be shown...I've suffered during some recent films, even so-called artistic ones with good actors.²⁷

The Great Unanimity of Spirit

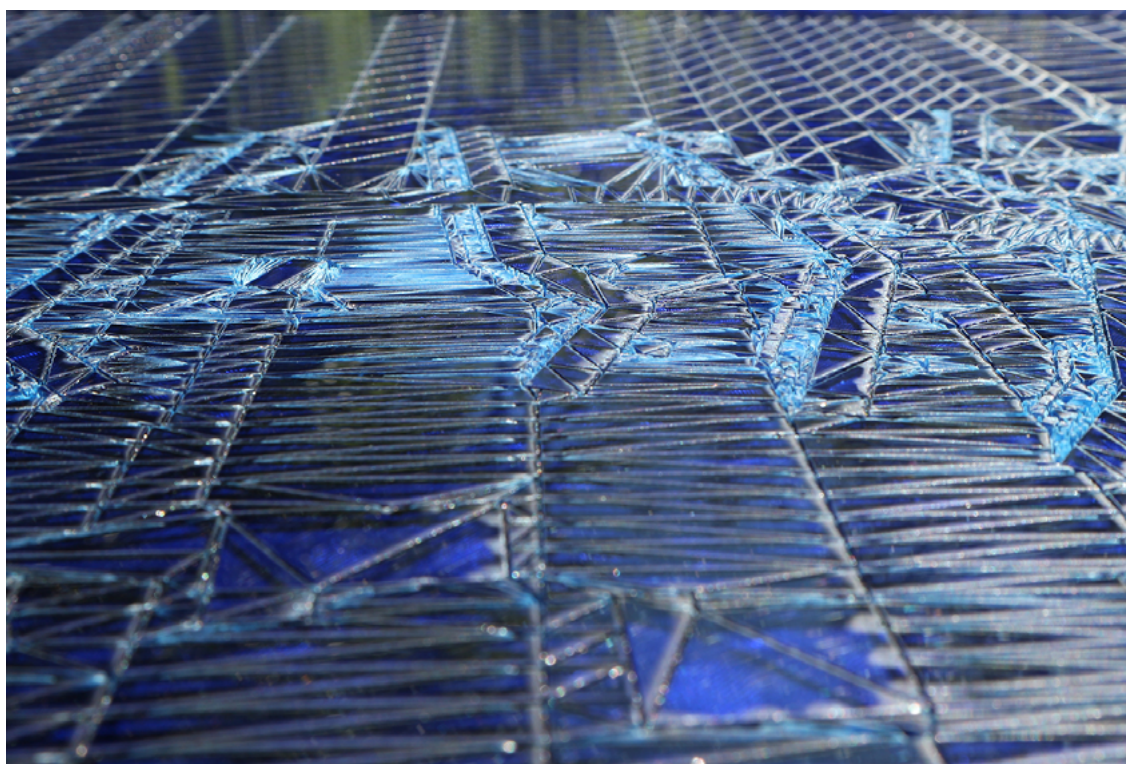
'I can see the beginning of this in our tendency to join and fuse together as a first cell, without asking-who did it?'.²⁸

The *Gläserne Kette*'s avowed anonymity and their method of sharing their ideas by letter, allowed them to evoke utopian visions beyond the scope of each individual. Large group collaborations and shared authorship are not typical approaches in art practice. However, these architects saw themselves as ideological descendants of the anonymous brotherhoods who constructed Europe's cathedrals; a guild of skilled workers with a shared calling. This metaphor extended to their proposals for a quasi-sacred text titled 'The Book'.

I have gathered an international group of practitioners (artists, architects, filmmakers) to echo their modus operandum of exchanging photostat copies by post.²⁹ A century of tectonic technological shifts has allowed our current chain of correspondents to communicate entirely via digital means. By adapting and extending the files others have circulated, we can then transmute our shared objectives into co-authored artworks.

'Group work which, in its strongest form, vigorously pushes back the boundaries and limits of human activity'.³⁰

This method of dematerialised exchange would fulfil the wildest longings of the historic group, and counters the axiom of artists as solo practitioners.



Cath Keay and Mondfleck, *Paredes Maldonado*, detail of print plate, 80 x 60 cm, work in progress.

Autumn Salmon

Eiko Soga

To cite this contribution:

Soga, Eiko. 'Autumn Salmon.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 194, <http://www.oarplatform.com/autumn-salmon/>.



Eiko Soga, video still from *Autumn Salmon*, 18'54", 2017. Available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/autumn-salmon/>.

Eiko Soga is currently reading MSc Japanese Studies at the University of Oxford. She previously studied MFA Sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art. She works with intangible elements that affect both individual consciousness and social milieu. Her works result in arrayed media such as installation, essay, and moving image.

A fleck. A piece of dust. A smudge. Stain, spot, blur. (Listening for the outside: angels, messages and ...).¹

John Seth

To cite this contribution:

Seth, John. 'A fleck. A piece of dust. A smudge. Stain, spot, blur. (Listening for the outside: angels, messages and ...).' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* Issue 1 (2017): 195-203, <http://www.oarplatform.com/fleck-piece-dust-smudge-stain-spot-blur-listening-outside-angels-messages-1/>

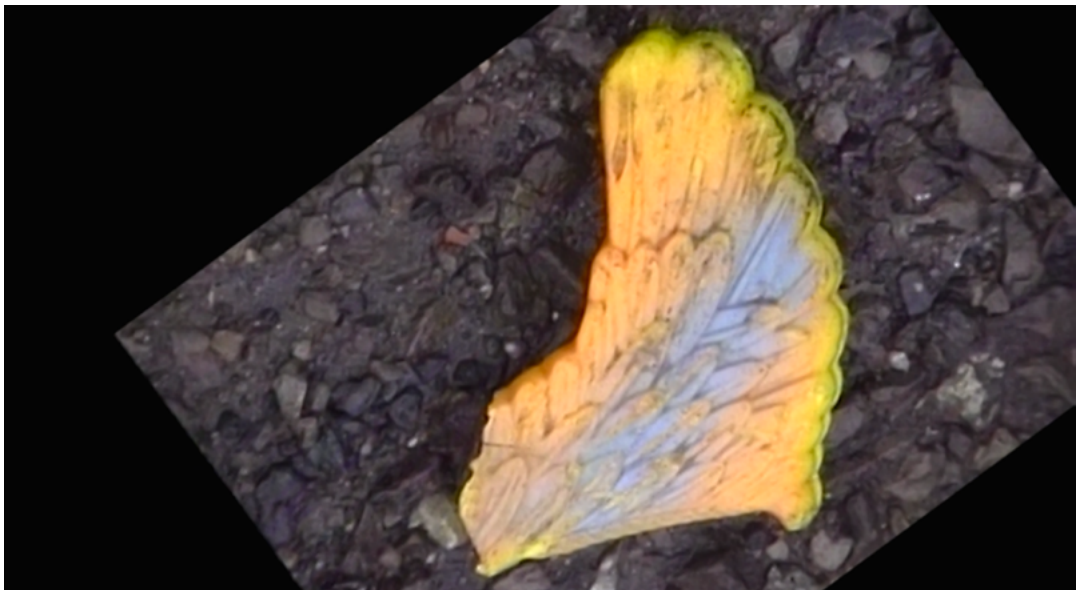
Fragments



Number 1 (fragments), video still, 1min 7sec, 2017. View online: <http://www.oarplatform.com/fleck-piece-dust-smudge-stain-spot-blur-listening-outside-angels-messages-1/>.

[...] turned air

Simply a sign or trace of a body, a body having disappeared. A body turned air. A remaining trace, a wing parted from a body. “Eager for a sight of her, turning back his longing eyes, instantly she slipped away into disappearance.” She falls.⇒



Number 2 (wing), video still, 21sec, 2017.
<http://www.oarplatform.com/fleck-piece-dust-smudge-stain-spot-blur-listening-outside-angels-messages-1/>.

⇒ “And now they were nearing the margin of the upper earth, when he, afraid that she might fail him, eager for sight of her, turned back his longing eyes; and instantly she slipped into the depths. He stretched out his arms, eager to catch her or feel her clasp; but, unhappy one, he clasped nothing but the yielding air.”²

Vagueness

Maybe that's all it is.

A looking for a sign, or a looking for signs.

A sign that provides an indication of some sense of direction, or a sign that points toward something.

That's vague, isn't it?

Too vague.

The question could be posed another way: *on vagueness*.

It's a looking for..., to seek. It's not vagueness. A sign that formed inside of, or through, the indistinct. Not *on vagueness*, but the *indeterminate*. And not to seek through it, but to seek *it*. To seek the indeterminate. And then someone, a voice, says, "Do not seek, find." To find a sign. The sign of the indeterminate. Or, to find signs of....

The voice says, "You would not seek me if you had not already found me."⇒ It is as though what had been found, had been lost from memory, but somehow remained and had been guiding the very desire to seek. To seek is to find what is already *known* to be found, but shrouded by oblivion, and then to find it seemingly, as though it were somehow, *anew*. On the contrary, to *find* is to allow for the indeterminate to announce itself as present *and* objectless.

⇒ Jacques Lacan quotes Picasso, "I do not seek, I find", in his Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.³

Adrian Rifkin: "In the years of our critique of the artist as a subject of bourgeois 'self-possession', (by the artist Terry Atkinson out of C.B. Macpherson) Picasso's statement, 'I don't seek, I find', was held in derision. Re-read via Lacan's citation of the formula in Seminar XI, and in the wake of the grinding teleologies of research assessment, Lacan's critique of research, summarised in the phrase, 'Freud did not look for the unconscious, he found it', insists that we are better off with accidental answers rather than over intentioned questions. That is the value of practiced based research." (Email message, 2 August 2017.)

It happened like this

It happened like this. A listening for something. And there inside of the music being listened to, it materialised as something outside of the music, but within it too. “He sat comfortably, listening to a piece of music, a recording, that he had listened to many times. On this occasion, he tried to remember when he first heard it. It comes to him as a vague memory. But he remembers it too as a piece of music that he had heard previously, before the first time, as this was a particular recording, a version. And then, listening this time, on this occasion, listening through the slow-paced prelude, the introduction, he hears a sound of a noise in the recording. The noise, a note out of place, he recognised as a car horn. Reading about the recording, he noted that the performance had taken place in a community hall, a warm day, and windows to the street left open.”⇒ Immediately, the sound is recognised and then unrecognised. The sound of a car horn, sensed through its resonance, its frequency, is pure sound. An index without relation, the marker of an absence. It is not to make of this ‘pure sound’ an ontology, an object of itself, but rather to lessen its objectness, to allow the sound, this sound, to enter into the space of relation, a sound *with-*, but where the companion, who *with-*, and where the sound, enter an infinite mutability, an infinite chain of signifiers, to make of it an *indeterminacy*.

“When Kant speaks of the *matter* of sensation, which he opposes to its form, its formation, it is precisely to do with what we cannot calculate.”⁴

⇒ If the first beginning is *Number 1 (fragments)*, this beginning, here, is another. And another is *maybe that’s all it is*. Not another alongside, but one over the other (not overlapping). Another beginning is found in these two scenes as they too go over each other to make something of their conjunction, to produce an aberrant reading, to produce a limit. Or, better still, to think around the idea of the *limit*. The first scene involves a sound that I hear in the ‘live’ recording of what is thought to be the last ‘live’ recording of John Coltrane on 23 April 1967. It is in the recording of a particular song, *My Favorite Things*, at the beginning, that I hear the sound of a car horn, distinctly, even if in the distance. This recording by Coltrane is regarded by some as having inferior audio quality. Not only were the sounds from the street outside picked up in the recording, but the “acoustics in the room, a converted gym, were impossibly live, a giant echo chamber.”⁵ The second scene is taken from John Cage’s *Indeterminacy*. Those of you who know this work, will know the story I am about to retell. It is the story in which Cage talks about Christian Wolff playing a composition on the piano “when the windows were open”, when the noise of the street and harbour interrupt the sound of the music. These two scenes, then, provide both the structure and an opening of a space for the work. The structure is a series of scenes, a series of fragments. The space that opens up, like the open window, is to think *sound* as a kind of model for thinking, for listening, for causing interruptions, for producing *indeterminacy*. The *outside-sound* as a something not known or recognised, something that signals like a warning (or prophecy), something that disrupts, something like a medium *at the limit*. In the latter sense, this *outside-sound* as *medium*, is both disruption and a kind of formation. A formation that sounds the edges of itself.

Surface

A fleck. A piece of dust. A smudge. Stain, spot, blur. On the verge of decipherability, at the same time it pierces like the point of a blade. Its affect, the sharpness of its edge, is in not knowing the cause. Imagine hearing a sound that you cannot place, for which you cannot locate an origin, or a source.⇒

⇒ A note on a *cause*, *meta*-.

There are pictures, artefacts, articles of faith, that are all hung on the walls of the apartment. Time has discoloured the walls and the removal of the various articles will undoubtedly leave, not a mark, but the opposite of a mark, the opposite of a shadow. What name can this opposite of a mark/shadow be given? It is a kind of blur. A blur that is the characteristic of this space of a mark that is not a mark, a shadow that is not a shadow. To wilfully misname the space itself as a blur is perhaps to say something about the meaning of the word. To give this not-mark or not-shadow the name blur, is rather to provide definition for *blur*. It is this space as indistinct, a kind of smudge, a thing made obscure. And time is here too. The time that passes over. No, put it another way. It is a time that passes under, that passes behind, but a passing-under-and-behind that runs along a surface. A passing-under-and-behind that delineates a surface. It runs along the walls, collecting the sub-particles that drift through the air, that occasionally swirl up on the rise and fall of warmth, a breadth, a body. A collecting that provides the structure of the surface. A structure, a surface, interrupted by pictures, artefacts, holiday souvenirs, articles of faith, a crucifix, the Madonna, *images and objects around which all significance circulates*, which when fallen away leave their presence as an obscuring blur, an appearing and a disappearing, a focus-pulled-in-and-out. Wait. These *things* that appear to interrupt the surface of a wall, that produce the markers of their absence, these interruptions come to signify, from one to the other, each simultaneously taking and vacating their place, forming and

“The *text*’s [*italics mine*] semiotic distribution is set out in the following manner: when instinctual rhythm passes through ephemeral but specific theses, meaning is constituted but is then immediately exceeded by what seems outside meaning: materiality, the discontinuity of real objects. The process’ matrix of enunciation is in fact *anaphoric* since it designates an elsewhere: the *chora* that generates what signifies. To have access to the process would therefore be to break through any given *sign* for the subject, and reconstitute the heterogeneous space of its formation. This practice, a continuous passing beyond the limit, which does not close off *significance* [*italics mine*] into a system but instead assumes the infinity of its process, can only come about when, simultaneously, it assumes the laws of this process: the biological-physiological and social laws which allow, first, for the discovery of their precedents and then for their free realization. That this practice assumes laws implies that it safeguards boundaries, that it seeks out theses, and that in the process of this search it transforms the law, boundaries, and constraints it meets.”⁶

Fragments (no longer there)

Fragments: a part missing, a thing not there (or no longer there), a thing broken, a particle of..., a wing fragment, a limb, a feather, a splinter-of-glass, a torn letter, a page torn from a book, the snatch of a song, a half-heard conversation, an indecipherable sound, a left-behind-piece-of-clothing, a document, a dream....

Fragments: He says, "Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles." He continues, it is there that "something other demands to be realised—which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality."

It is an *atemporality*, yes? *Another time*?

"What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, presents itself as *the find*."

"Discontinuity, these splits and breaks, then, might be understood as an other form, not anti-form, more like *a-form*—in this discontinuity, something that manifests itself as vacillation."

Can we think of this *a-form* as a kind of vacillation, as an insistent or radical indecision? To think the fragment into this.... Not somehow a something missing, but rather a breaking produced by a not-this, not-that, neither, maybe, this....

And "must we place it ... against the background of a totality?"

And there is a totality? A one?⇒

⇒ "Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realised—which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious." [*Ce qui se produit - au sens plein du terme « se produire » - dans cette béance, dans cette fêlure, se présente comme la trouvaille. ... C'est ainsi d'abord que l'exploration freudienne rencontre ce qui se passe dans l'inconscient.*]

[...]

"Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon—discontinuity, in which something is manifest as a vacillation. Now, if this discontinuity has this absolute, inaugural character, in the development of Freud's discovery, must we place it—as was later the tendency with analysts—against the background of a totality?" [*La discontinuité, telle est la forme essentielle où nous apparaît d'abord l'inconscient comme phénomène. Dans cette discontinuité quelque chose qui se manifeste comme une vacillation, et ceci nous conduit à nous interroger sur ce qu'il en est de son fond, puisqu'il s'agit d'une discontinuité. Si cette discontinuité a ce caractère absolu - ce que nous semblons lui donner dans le texte du phénomène - ce caractère inaugural dans le chemin de la découverte de Freud, devons-nous lui donner - comme ce fut depuis, la tendance des analystes - le fond en quelque sorte nécessaire d'une appréhension de quelque totalité?*]⁷

Angel 1

The angel=flight, appearing and disappearing.⇒

The angel=blur.

The messenger having already flown.

But there is also always something to come, something more, that exceeds the present. In the stories of angels, the message is prophecy.

Prophecy=signification.⇒

As communication itself.

Prophecy as action, as the act itself, empty.

⇒ “[A]ngels are changeable in form; they appear at one time as males, at another as females; now as spirits; now as angels.’ By this remark they clearly stated that angels are incorporeal, and have no permanent bodily form independent of the mind [of him who perceives them], they exist entirely in prophetic vision, and depend on the action of the imaginative power...”. [...] “The bird in its flight is sometimes visible, sometimes withdrawn from our sight; one moment near to us, and in the next far off; and these are exactly the circumstances which we must associate with the idea of angels....”⁸

Of course, the figure of the angel, of angels, is given different forms that define the characteristic of its principle role as envoy. Recently, Giorgio Agamben has provided a genealogy of the role and status of angelology in relation to the modes and hierarchies of secular government: “Perhaps ... nothing has had so much been written about it, and with so little perspicacity, as angels. Their *image*, at the same time beautiful and exhausted, thoughtful and efficient, has so deeply penetrated not on the daily prayers and liturgies of the Occident, its philosophy, literature, painting, and sculpture, but also its day-dreaming, subcultures, and the *Kitsch*, that even a merely coherent comprehension of the topic seems out of the question. And when, in the twentieth century, the angel forcefully re-emerges in Rilke’s *Elegies* or Klee’s paintings, in Benjamin’s *Theses* or in Corbin’s gnosis, his gesture does not appear to us today to be any less enigmatic that that of the seraphims who, in the *etoimasia tou thronou* of Palaeochristian and Byzantine basilicas, seem to protect in silence the empty throne of glory.” Agamben goes on to argue that angelology “finds its proper place in the economy of the divine government of the world, of which angels are ministers.” It is Kafka, according to Agamben, that provides the clearest definition that forges the celestial and secular role of angels: “it is precisely this co-substantiality of angels and bureaucrats that the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, Franz Kafka, perceived with visionary precision, presenting his functionaries, messengers and servants as disguised angels.”⁹

⇒ To split the sign (of prophecy, what is being prophesied), prophecy as pure signifier.

Angel-wing

Angel wing, angel light (a fragment).

From the edge of the window frame, seeing out. No, instead, listening: to what falls outside the frame, to hear the sound of the beating of a wing, to not know it as necessarily that, as each beat cuts silently through the air, and then to see the instant of each beat as a flash of light, ill-formed. And what message is formed in this way? It is unrecognisable. It might smack a surface, flat. It might cut a surface, collapsing nearness and distance. It allows (regrets) the fall into the depth of the....

He says:

“Where is the back ground? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge—just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.”¹⁰



Number 3 (Angel-light), video still, 36sec, 2017. "
<http://www.oarplatform.com/fleck-piece-dust-smudge-stain-spot-blur-listening-outside-angels-messages-1/>.

John Seth is the 4D Pathway Leader for the BA Fine Art course at Central Saint Martins and convenes the Duration and Event Research group. His work is concerned with the relationship between the aleatoric, indeterminacy, improvisation and structure. Central to the research is an engagement with critical theory, including the constitutive politics of improvisation and the formation(s) of subjectivity. Seth's practice currently incorporates performance, installation/sculpture, video, drawing and writing and includes an on-going project, work-seth/tallentire, with the artist Anne Tallentire.

Freedom from Form

Letters exchanged among the *Gläserne Kette* correspondents contain intriguing references to formless architectures: buildings constructed from light, clouds or fire. Were these pure flights of fancy or experimental speculations over future possibilities?

Hablik lists plans for architectonically ambitious, though not impossible, ‘futuristic projects for houses...in the quicksand, in rock (inside a mountain), and in the air (flying houses)’.³¹ He further proposes a dome constructed from ‘radiant rainbows and solar rings, lunar haloes and the twinkling of stars forming the material of which the wall was built, arcs and circles crossing and intersecting’.

Such ideas were contentious. Hans Luckhardt dismissed drawings of nebulous and unbuildable things, such as Carl Krayl’s *Nebelringbauten* (1920), ‘mist ring buildings’, for being devoid of further contextualisation.

Bruckmann’s drawings explored ‘the architectonic value of fire...buildings that are actually glowing...built of flames’.³²

As an sculptor, I have long been interested capturing formlessness, in the sense of the strange yet inevitable attack Bataille predicts on the increasingly static forms of architecture to release ‘bestial monstrosity’.³³

‘Freedom from that inhibiting, burdensome struggle that ruins the most beautiful dreams of our happiest hours, when the forming hand tries to translate such dreams into reality’.³⁴



Cath Keay, *Hablik's garden 1*, 2016.

- 1 In the catalogue for the *Glass House Cologne Werkbund Exhibition 1914*, Taut wrote: 'to the poet Paul Scheerbart, to whom it is dedicated'; and Scheerbart's *Glass Architecture* states: 'Dedicated to Bruno Taut, Honi soit qui mal y pense'. Both dedications are reprinted in Josiah McElheny and Christine Burgin, eds., *Glass! Love!! Perpetual Motion!!! A Paul Scheerbart Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 101, 22.
- 2 The 'Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten' April 1919 at IB Neumann's Graphisches Kabinett, Berlin. See: Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 89.
- 3 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 24 November, 1919, in *The Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 19.
- 4 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 18 January, 1920, in idem, 42.
- 5 Martyn Dade-Robertson, Carolina Ramirez-Figueroa and Meng Zhang, 'Radical Vernacular: Bacterial Architecture on Mars,' *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 67 (2014): 346–53.
- 6 Georges Bataille, 'Critical Dictionary: Architecture,' trans. Dominic Faccini, *October* 60 (1992): 25–26.
- 7 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 117.
- 8 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, 1919, in idem, 28.
- 9 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 19 October, 1920, in idem, 159.
- 10 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 15 April, 1920, in idem, 81.
- 11 Quoted in McElheny and Burgin, *Glass! Love!!*.
- 12 Bataille, 'Architecture,' 25–26.
- 13 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, July 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 133.
- 14 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 22nd July 1920, in idem, 122.
- 15 Patrick Lynch, 'This Mars Colonization Proposal Would 3D Print Biodegradable Fungus Towers that Leave No Trace,' *Archdaily*, 14 February, 2016, accessed 12 October, 2017, at <http://www.archdaily.com/tag/mycelium>.
- 16 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 15 April, 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 81.
- 17 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, January 1920, in idem, 39.
- 18 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 15 April, 1920, in idem, 81.
- 19 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 22 July, 1920, in idem, 122.
- 20 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 24 November, 1919, in idem, 19.
- 21 'glassblowers, you are great, divine solidifiers of your own breath, which the deity causes to swell in all the cadences of the world-spirit'. See: Hermann Finsterlin to Gläserne Kette, Bavaria, no date, 1920, in idem, 94.
- 22 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 4 August, 1920, in idem, 146.
- 23 Sabine Hohnholz "'Remarkable": Hans Prinzhorn, his collection and Paul Goesch,' in *Modern Visionaries: Scheerbart, Taut and Goesch*, ed. Berlinische Galerie (Berlin: Scheidegger and Spiess Verlag, 2016), 173–78.
- 24 Paul Goesch to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, May 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 67.
- 25 Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
- 26 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 8 July, 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 118.
- 27 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 2 September, 1920, in idem, 146.
- 28 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 24 November, 1919, in idem, 19.
- 29 Finsterlin indicated in one letter that the group exchanged copies made using commercially available hectograph plates. See: Hermann Finsterlin to Gläserne Kette, Bavaria, 3 January, 1920, in idem, 59.
- 30 Hermann Finsterlin to Gläserne Kette, Bavaria, no date, 1920, in idem, 84.
- 31 Wenzel Hablik to Gläserne Kette, Itzehoe, 28 July, 1920, in idem, 138.
- 32 Bruno Taut to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, 31 May, 1920, in idem, 95.
- 33 Bataille, 'Architecture,' 26.
- 34 Wassily Luckhardt to Gläserne Kette, Berlin, no date, 1920, in Boyd Whyte, *Crystal Chain Letters*, 49.

Cath Keay's doctoral thesis examined chance and 'un-authored' processes in sculpture and artists' writing. Her current Leverhulme Fellowship at Edinburgh College of Art investigates Expressionist experimentation, inviting leading international artists and architects to celebrate the radical ideas and group ethos of the 1919 *Gläserne Kette* correspondents, using digital fabrication technologies.

You Asked About Validity

Simon Pope

To cite this contribution:

Pope, Simon. 'You Asked About Validity.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* Issue 2 (2017): 206-211, <http://www.oarplatform.com/asked-validity/>.

Nina Wakeford
Ruskin School of Art
University of Oxford
Oxford
England

Simon Pope
Ward's Island
Toronto
Canada

8th August 2017

Dear Nina,

Thank you for your comments, and those of the other editors, sent in response to my recent letter. I've picked at some of the knottier questions that you raise, in an effort to keep the conversation going on – to keep 'naggin' vor' as my Devonshire dialect would have it – in the spirit that letter-writing might imply.

In the call for submissions to your journal you asked about validity and artistic research, and how this comes to matter in our own practice. I'd like to respond with a couple of examples drawn from my own experience. The first concerns some of the metaphors used to describe the process of literature review that I'd taken for granted until quite recently and the socialities associated with them, and which goes on to celebrate the merits of taking part in a lively social world of art and research. The second raises the question of validity for work that admits more than human participants or collaborators. It asks what we can learn from the sociality of our yeasty microbial kin as they take part with us in 'wild ferment' cider-making.

A few years ago, while contributing to a research methods course for post-graduate art students, a colleague explained the process of making a valid 'contribution to knowledge' – as research auditors would have it – in terms of adding a 'bric' to a pre-existing 'wall' of knowledge. Another colleague suggested that a researcher needs to shine a 'light' outward

QAA, 'Doctoral Degree Characteristics,' The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, September 2011: 2.

into a sea of other research outputs, illuminating those nearby, and dropping their contribution overboard at a suitable distance. Perhaps these examples demonstrate how, as you mentioned in your previous letter, the metaphors we employ to imagine or describe our social relations can inhibit as much as enable us? I'm uneasy with the way that these metaphors establish knowledge as a hoard of discrete objects – objects that we can 'pick-up, handle, explore' in the way that educational researcher Jan Mearthur suggests. As James Elkins points out, art education is fixated on knowledge production, and my concern here is for what these metaphors mean for the validation of artistic research. What becomes of art practices whose methodologies or artefacts are more embedded or tangled up with the world around them, and whose 'outputs' are more diffuse, or less discernible as discrete objects, such as those aligned with feminist, conceptualist, Fluxus- or Situationist traditions for example? But more than this, what of the socialities implied by these metaphors? How do they contribute to how we think of the validity of our research? In both examples the researcher is figured as lonely, silent, too focused on the careful placement of their unique contribution to ever raise their eyes from their task of wall-building. In the second, the researcher is single-handed, at sea, with no mention that they might see other flashlights, or move toward them, or establish a fellowship on the otherwise inhospitable open waters of research, let alone admit the affective registers of our social relations that you've prompted me to think about in the past. Where is the researcher implicated as a participant, as someone who not only transforms, but are themselves transformed through the research process?

When the time came to think about the validity of my own doctoral project, and literature review in particular, I admit that I fell into thinking largely in terms of triangulation between other stable, influential, or foundational sources that could provide me with a rock-solid points of reference. But my work falls under the broad umbrella of participatory or relational art, made by taking part in an unfolding world, and through ongoing social relationships. Performing measurements and calculations seemed inadequate, inappropriate even. Especially so, given that I wanted to diffract every aspect of the doctoral research process through my art practice, based on the methodological premise of 'diffusion' borrowed from Karen Barad. I felt compelled to devise a novel way to undertake a literature review – one that would not entail establishing a fixed position, or remaining at a critical distance from withdrawn, silent knowledge-objects. I decided to turn to others who were living with similar research preoccupations, and to base my claim to validity through taking part with them in a live/lively social world of research and art practice, in which other peoples' prior research is implicated in, and only one aspect of, an ongoing and open-ended process of thinking and doing.

I first convened The Dialogic in November 2012, with fellow artist and researcher John Hammersley, to coincide with my exhibition at Danielle

Nina Wakeford, *Untitled: Text for Simon Pope's Exhibition et al.*, October 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/simonpope-nwtextoct2016>.

Jan Mearthur, *Rethinking Knowledge Within Higher Education: Adorno and Social Justice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.) 92–93.

James Elkins, 'Fourteen Reasons to Mistrust the PhD,' in *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art, Expanded Edition*. (Washington D.C.: New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2014), 227–78.

Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 71–94.

Arnaud gallery in London. We invited those concerned with dialogue and art, as an ongoing theme of our research. Artists including Rebecca Birch, Glenn Davidson, Annemari Ferreira, Neville Gabie, Ruben Henry, Karin Kihlberg, and Rachelle Viader Knowles took part, as well as others more loosely-affiliated with the group and its themes. Many of us were enrolled as doctoral researchers at the time, and we learned from each other which references were most important to us, not through close-readings, or compiling bibliographies, but in the articulation of our ongoing grappling with each other's art and research when put into practice – in, for example, John's social constructionist inflected dialogue-as-art, Rachelle's translocal participatory projects, and Glenn's ongoing interest in Gordon Pask's Conversation Theory.

The ideas that emerged from this group remain a profound influence on my thinking, especially in terms of what shape research and art could take when 'disposed' to others in the unalloyed, open and generous way that Martin Buber suggests: 'hospitably disposed to everything that may come'. I came to understand my practice and research as dialogic in that it works around conflict or divisive political processes through this kind of hospitable disposition toward others. It is sceptical of argument, critique and negation and wary of where this leads. In this sense, The Dialogic's validity is conferred through its mode of sociality, which is not only open, generally, to mutual transformation, but also generates collaborations, friendships and solidarities of various kinds, such as through aligning artistic research with live and ongoing social processes, and taking part in the unfolding of social worlds – with all their 'ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness' that you mention elsewhere. As a methodological approach, its validity comes from an openness to ideas, processes of thought, and practices that might otherwise be considered antithetical or in conflict with it. As research, its validity is not in producing knowledge as such, but in admitting longitudinal and qualitative aspects – lived experience, social relations, partial and provisional moves, thinking and thinking again, and differently. In other words, keeping thoughts 'on the move', to quote Patti Lather. This mode of research encourages us to be open to transformation, and always optimistic that others' will be open too, and that what might otherwise proceed through argument, might become dialogue. I started to use this epistolary form that I'm writing into here during my doctoral project as a way to put this idea into practice. Rather than seek conclusion, or summing-up, closing the argument, I'm hopeful of an opening-up and sustaining of conversation, and more, of 'being open to the world's aliveness' of the kind that allows us 'to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder' espoused by Karen Barad.

I'd like to think that this ongoing exchange of texts can help us keep our own thoughts on the move. In writing this letter I'm intrigued by how you'll respond as an editor – whether your comments to this text will be in the 'back channel' of marginalia, brief comments and copy-editing

Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

Lury, Celia, and Nina Wakeford. *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012: 9.

Patti Lather, 'Fertile Obsession: Validity After Poststructuralism,' *Sociological Quarterly* 34:4 (1993): 674.

Karen Barad, 'On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1),' in *The Politics of Materiality*, ed. Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (Chicago: Diaphane, 2017) 2.

suggestions emailed to me, or whether they will be made (perhaps, hopefully) enmeshed with your own interests, passions, preoccupations and so on, written as a more extensive response. In the meantime, I continue to struggle to find the blend of informality, intimacy, provocative assertion, speculation and anecdote that you'd expect in free-flow of personal letter-writing, and that would mark the real departure from those conventions of academic validity based on detailed referencing, evidencing, argumentation, and justification that I'm determined to manoeuvre around and beyond.

Even as I write to you about The Dialogic, and about this form of writing, I'm aware of the criticisms of my trust in 'text and talk' that Sarah Whatmore warns her fellow geographers to steer away from, (and that you've often voiced concern about to me). And also in the bracketing of conflict and power-differentials, and promoting a well-mannered society and wholesome community as markers of validity – reminiscent of the criticisms level at participatory and relational art more generally, most tenaciously by art historian Claire Bishop. Recently, these questions have become even more unsettling for me.

Sarah Whatmore, 'Materialist Returns: Practising Cultural Geography in and for a More-than-Human World,' *Cultural Geographies* 13:4 (2006): 607.

Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells : Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2011).

I moved to an island in Lake Ontario earlier this year, on the Great Lakes, and as I write this the flood water remains pooled on the baseball diamond in the park, and under my neighbour's deck at the front of their house. Last month, the beach was washed away, and now over 40% of the island is underwater. The Red Cross have left now, and we're no longer on high alert, but there's still a feeling of unease during each thunderstorm and downpour as people wait for the water to seep up through the sand and soil, and into their basements and crawl-spaces. We're waiting for the water to come back sometime soon. And this presents a problem, not only for how we live here, but also for who we admit as taking part with us. The lake was, until recently a background, a context for the island. Now it's become part of the island. The sandy soil on which the houses stand, in which the hard-infrastructure and utilities are buried, is now a slurry in places, the water and lake and the island forming a new substance – new matter. Timothy Morton has already implored us to take notice of encounters such as these as an indication of an epochal shift in human-nonhuman relations. It's perhaps impossible – or inexcusable – to ignore all the nonhumans that take part with us in our social worlds. If the validity that I've claimed for The Dialogic depends on admitting the live/lively into research, how do we admit these unbidden participants – 'all species of water' as anthropologist Stefan Helmreich says, and the American toads, mosquitoes, and mallards? But also, the sump-pumps and hoses, the Moses-Saunders Power Dam that controls the outflow from Lake Ontario into the St. Lawrence River, and the policy documents that determine the city council workers' actions during events such as these. And this is Canada. Kanata. Indigenous people here have long been thinking and putting into practice the possibilities of

Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects : Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 179.

Stefan Helmreich, 'The House of Kuhn, by the Water,' *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 42:5 (2012): 526.

living ‘in peace and harmony not only with each other, but with the whole circle of life – the birds, the fish, the water, the plants, the grass, the trees, the stars, the moon, and the thunder’, as Chief Irving Powless Jr. writes.

Chief Irving Jr Powless, ‘Treaty Making,’ in *Treaty Of Canandaigua 1794*, Anna M. Schein and John C. Mohawk, ed. G. Peter Jemison (Santa Fe, N.M.: Clear Light Publishing, 2000), 23.

So now, more than ever, I’m working with this possibility, and to respond to Bruno Latour, who asks us to ‘learn to be affected, meaning “effectuated”, moved, put into motion’ by other people, and also by nonhuman things, and to search for a validity for my art and research through the socialities of these more than human worlds.

Bruno Latour, ‘How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies,’ *Body & Society* 10:2–3 (2004): 205.

Recently I visiting a cider-producing farm in Devon in the south west of England, close to where I grew up. Walking across the yard towards the cider barn, I was met with the sweet, sour, thin, soapy-soft and bitter-sharp taste-smell of fermenting apples. This building has been the venue for apple crushing, pressing and fermenting for more than 200 years, with evidence of cider-making in other buildings on the farm for a good hundred years before that. The air is thick with cider – here in the barn, and in the orchards on the steep hillsides too. It pervades. It permeates. Drinking it, the taste-smell seeps into you and sweats out of you; an astringent, a lubricant, a digestif. The cider’s made in a tradition way – as a dry, cloudy-thick farmhouse ‘scrumpy’ – by encouraging the yeasts and bacteria in the apples, in the air, and in the wooden barrels to interact. More business-like enterprises would standardize the process by killing unruly microbial species, before introducing their well-mannered cousins – civilized by food-science – for a more orderly fermentation. Much has been written about the potentials of ‘wild ferment’ and other ‘post-pasteurian’ approaches to foods recently – both in a popular context by food writer Sandor Katz, and in Heather Paxson’s multi-species ethnographic work. The benefits of these foods to the human microbiome, their relationship to larger-scale ecologies, and to the culture of food production has been widely promoted – such as in Michael Pollan’s recent book and television series *Cooked*, for example. But my interest here is in what we might learn from our microbial kin for the validity of our research and artistic practices. Anthropologist John Hartigan Jr. asks ‘what can we learn about culture from other species?’. What, I wonder, would the question of validity look like if we learned from the sociality of ‘wild’ yeasts and bacteria? What could we learn from the relationships of the cider-maker (and cider-drinker) to the humic material in the soil and its myriad crushed arthropod husks, the sun’s radiated energy, apple-blossom, honey bees, rainfall, oak barrels, granite apple-crusher, stainless steel presses, the flock of Devon Closewool sheep that graze under the apple trees, the mycorrhizal fungi that connect one tree’s root system to another, the machinery that scoops the fallen apples from the ground, to the *Kloeckera/Hanseniaspora uvarum* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* type yeasts that activate and sustain fermentation, and our own gastrointestinal microbial flora that feed on the sweet-sour fermented

Sandor Katz, *The Art of Fermentation: An in-Depth Exploration of Essential Concepts and Processes from Around the World* (Chelsea: Green Publishing, 2012).

Heather Paxson, ‘Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States,’ *Cultural Anthropology* 23:1 (2008): 15–47.

Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (London: Penguin, 2014).

John Hartigan Jr., *Aesop’s Anthropology: A Multispecies Approach* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

apple juice? In other words, could we propose an ecological validity – one that not only acknowledges relationships between things, but which also promotes their affective registers. Our work could seek the kinds of symbiotic and commensal relations that our microbial kin live for and take part in. Its validity could be claimed through its effervescence or exuberance, its responsiveness to social relations. Its validity could come from the extent that it becomes inseparable from the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others, like ‘mutualist–symbiont’ fungi-alga, or *Rhabdocline parkeri* that John R. Luoma writes about – a fungi that lives within the needles of old growth Douglas firs, and assists the tree in adaption to rapid environmental change. Perhaps these characteristics of microbial life might enable us to work with ‘the rapidity of inventive thought or the patience of the living thing, slow granted, but also sometimes endowed with lightning-fast mutations’ that Michel Serres hopes for? What shape would literature review take, or our entire research process, or correspondence for that matter, if thought of in these terms?

Jon R. Luoma, *The Hidden Forest: The Biography of an Ecosystem* (Corvallis, Or: Oregon State University Press, 2006), 49, 55.

Michel Serres, *Biogea*, Vol. 4, trans. Randolph Burks (Univocal: University Of Minnesota Press, 2012)m 169.

I look forward to your response, and to our continued thinking of these things, not only through ‘talk and text,’ but also song and cider-drinking. And I send this, as fellow Devonian letter-writer Nathan Hogg puts it, in a suitably fraternal way: ‘vrin yer veckshinit brither’.

Henry Baird, *Poetical Letters Tu Es Brither Jana, and A Witch Story, tha Old Humman Way Tha Urd Cloke, Ur Tha Evil Eye, in the Devonshire Dialect*, 5th ed. (London: John Russell Smith, 1865), 8.

Simon

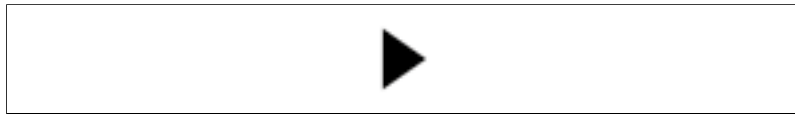
Simon Pope is an artist whose work is preoccupied with human, social relationships in a more-than-human world. It grapples with participatory art’s engagement with new materialism, often taking the form of conversational events, film-making, and written correspondence. Simon was a member of the net.art group I/O/D (1992-99), a NESTA Fellow (2002-05), Reader in Fine Art (2005-10), and represented Wales at the Venice Biennale (2003) and holds a doctorate in Fine Art from the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford (2012-15), supervises MFA and PhD students for Transart Institute in Berlin & New York, and convenes a “posthumanism” seminar at OCADU, Toronto, and the *After The Anthropocene* working group at the University of Toronto.

The Field Is Our Best Friend

Patti Lather

To cite this contribution:

Lather, Patti. 'The Field Is Our Best Friend.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 212, <http://www.oarplatform.com/field-best-friend/>.



Since retiring in July, 2014, Dr. Patti Lather is Professor Emerita in Educational Studies at Ohio State University with courtesy professor appointments in the Departments of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Comparative Studies at Ohio State. Beginning in 1988, Dr. Lather taught qualitative research, feminist methodology and gender and education at Ohio State University. She has authored five books: *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern* (1991 Critics Choice Award), *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*, co-authored with Chris Smithies (1998 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title), *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science* (2008 Critics Choice Award), *Engaging (Social) Science: Policy from the Side of the Messy* (2011 Critics Choice Award), and *(Post)Critical Methodologies: The Science Possible After the Critiques: The Selected Work of Patti Lather*, in press with Routledge.

Call for Responses

OAR is a journal and website which publishes content around artistic and practice based research. We are now calling for proposals from contributors who wish to engage with this issue. We view all our published issues as merely the starting point for further response, dialogue, and debate. We invite submissions in any media that address one or more of the contributions in this issue or the thematic of 'Validity' more broadly. Responses are published on our website; we hope to encourage a wide range of views, approaches and formats.

Submitting a proposal

Proposals for contributions and responses, as well as all inquiries about submissions, should be sent to: editors@oarplatform.com.

If submitting a proposal, please include:

- 1 An abstract or project proposal (300 words)
- 2 A short biographical statement (150 words)
- 3 Examples of previous work (optional):
 - 3.1 For text-based proposals we recommend submitting one previous piece of writing, or links to works online.
 - 3.2 For multimedia proposals we recommend submitting two images of previous work, or links to works online.
- 4 Please specify whether your proposed response will address an individual contribution or a specific issue as a whole.

We will notify you if your proposal has been accepted or rejected.

Our Publication Statement and the details for submitting to future issues of this journal can be found on our website: <http://www.oarplatform.com/contribute/>.