



# Cover – *A Second Generation Artefact for Reflecting on Parents’ Wasted Potential* (2012)

Inbal Strauss

To cite this contribution:

Strauss, Inbal. ‘A Second Generation Artefact for Reflecting on Parents’ Wasted Potential (2012).’ *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): cover, <http://www.oarplatform.com/cover-second-generation-artefact-reflecting-parents-wasted-potential/>.

## Statement

Good utilitarian designs tend to go unnoticed because they serve us with great ease; it is only when they malfunction or are poorly designed that we stop and contemplate them. Conversely, works of art *are* meant to be noticed and contemplated. What function, then, can coordinate the “good” design of a work of art?

Speaking the language of everyday utilitarian objects, but with a surrealist flair and a title that undermines the appearance of utility, *A Second Generation Artefact for Reflecting on Parents’ Wasted Potential* calls attention to the (often contextual) distinction between utilitarian and artistic (non-utilitarian) functionality. It features a level of technical specificity and coherency characteristic of serviceable objects, yet spells out something where at a certain point its logic becomes somewhat lazy: it makes sense... it makes sense... and then it stops making sense.

Nevertheless, if the result is disorienting or cognitively dissonant, it is because this heteroclitic object was *designed* to achieve precisely that. Rather than seamlessly leading the audience from A through B to C, its idiosyncrasies create a meandering engagement with the object that frustrates any attempt to identify a clear correlation between its form and function.

Attempting to conflate “use-value” with “useless-value,” thereby subverting the capitalist notion of functionality, this object hopes to negotiate the binary opposition between utility and futility, and promote art as a rational mode of material production that does not serve means-end rationality.

Work details:

*A Second Generation Artefact for Reflecting on Parents’ Wasted Potential* (2012)  
(Jesmonite, stone powder, brass, stained jelutong wood, electroplated plaster, canvas, “suede” coating; 92×28×24cm).

Inbal Strauss is an artist currently reading for a DPhil in Fine Art at the University of Oxford. Inbal holds an MFA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths and a B.Des in Industrial Design from the Bezalel Academy. Her research and practice revolve around questions of objecthood, instrumentality, and artefactual agency under advanced capitalism. Having been trained as a designer and subsequently as an artist, Inbal questions the very repressed language of industrial design and asks: how might art objects pick, twist or accentuate a notion of function that goes beyond the notion of utility?



OXFORD  
ARTISTIC AND PRACTICE BASED  
RESEARCH PLATFORM

## Issue Three, Jan. 2019

### *That's All There Is*

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

*Assistant Editor* Frances Whorrall-Campbell

*Contributors* Inbal Strauss, Sophie Hoyle, Catherine Lord & Michelle Williams Gamaker, Sharon Kivland, Johnny Golding, Damian Taylor, Fiona West, Michele Avis Feder-Nadoff, Evangelia Tsilika, Florian Dombois & Michael Hiltbrunner

*Design* Julien Mercier

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

*ISSN* 2399-5092

OAR is published once a year by OAR: The Oxford Artistic & Practice Based Research Platform.

*E-mail* [info@oarplatform.com](mailto:info@oarplatform.com)

*Website* [www.oarplatform.com](http://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](mailto: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 – A Second Generation Artefact for Reflecting on Parents’ Wasted Potential (2012)</i>	Inbal Strauss
4	<i>Introduction – Let’s Keep Dancing</i>	The Editors
8	<i>Listen to them – Don’t listen to them (Scrawl)</i>	Sophie Hoyle
9	<i>House of Preposterous Women: Michelle Williams Gamaker re-auditions Kanchi</i>	Catherine Lord & Michelle Williams Gamaker
18	<i>ENVOIS II – Letters from JL to SK 1954–1955</i>	Sharon Kivland
26	<i>Of the Thick and the Raw: Cannibalizing the 21st Century</i>	Johnny Golding
34	<i>Merry Christmas* Linear Photography from the Early Carboniferous to Early Dinner</i>	Damian Taylor
40	<i>A Day with Gauguin at the Gold Coast 1892/2017</i>	Fiona West
41	<i>Un-finishing Research: Towards an Anthropology of Making and Perhaps Un-making</i>	Michele Avis Feder-Nadoff
59	<i>The Castle, the Story, the Journey</i>	Evangelia Tsilika
62	<i>Is this the end? Or is it a beginning?</i>	Florian Dombois & Michael Hiltbrunner
74	<i>Call for Responses</i>	



# Let's Keep Dancing

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

To cite this contribution:

Hutchens, Jessyca, Anita Paz, Naomi Vogt, and Nina Wakeford. 'Let's Keep Dancing.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2019): 4–7, <http://www.oarplatform.com/introduction-thats-all-there-is/>.

*Is that all there is, is that all there is  
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball  
If that's all there is*

Recording installed in a goods lift at the Henry Moore Institute as part of Katrina Palmer's *The Necropolitan Line*, 2015. Lyrics: Leiber & Stoller, 1968.

In this, our third issue of OAR, we bring together contributors who tackle the dilemmas and opportunities, in their artistic and practice based endeavours, of finishings, leavings, endings and remains. Researchers, particularly those doing doctoral work under bureaucratic edicts of time to completion, understandably wince at, or indeed are stalled by, the question 'When are you planning to *finish*?' Often, of course, time just 'runs out', or funding ends (or both), while interruptions such as jobs, bodily traumas, or domestic responsibilities intervene. But to what extent do such events equate with *finishing*? What are the temporalities inhabited by research-related notions such as 'funding period', 'conference paper' or even the terminology of 'project' itself? In art theory, project work has often come to mean a kind of tyrannical open-endedness and the erasure of work and life. The slightly defeated but somehow optimistic 'that's all there is' acts as an invitation to re-imagine modalities of finishing, but without valorising endless deferral (and never ending work).

Through the work of our contributors, in this issue we surface interrogations which (we hope) are less anxiety-provoking than blunt questions about submission dates. At their most optimistic, our contributors offer the failure or disappointment of ending as an injunction to act, now, and perhaps differently. Perhaps we might live with different rhythms of beginnings and endings. Crucially, these contributions form a collective voice to counter the assumption of individual triumph or tragedy embedded in the question 'When are you planning to finish?'. This collective voice enunciates a set of generative strategies which include revisiting, 'un'-finishing and – the most notable response to our call for contributions – numerous refusals to let things settle or die without further intervention. Even after the death of Lacan, as Sharon Kivland proposes, one might write him love letters, an opportunity which hijacks any sense of embarrassment with the serious commitment of *not letting it be over*. Alternatively, when Damian Taylor begins a project on clouds which becomes an encounter with rocks, glitches and all, artworks not only pick up on the interruptions of time and purpose, but thrive on them without being seduced by a sense of conquest. Taylor offers us images of the material remains, as well as a stock greeting 'Merry Christmas' to usher us in to his account.

Included in the materials for Issue 3 are imperatives to be more whimsical or playful with remains, and alternative ways of rendering ‘final’ research outputs, including an opening out of the experience of reading a journal contribution. Issue 1 of OAR incorporated an intervention by artist Daniel Litchman, whose sound and moving-image work burst forth as the reader browsed the issue’s contents page, thereby provocatively presenting it as a ‘site’ for artistic research. Similarly intervening into the space of reception, for this issue, philosopher Johnny Golding requests we listen to a track by Nick Cave while reading her text, but also suggests we simultaneously watch Jenny Livingstone’s *Paris is Burning* (1990). Through this invitation, Golding offers us the opportunity to imagine a form of installation around her article which is only one element in the expanded encounter. What could just have been a journal contribution, already dense with philosophically-inclined forms of argument, has been reconfigured as an elaborate encounter between text, sounds, and image. This seems both a hopeful gesture towards the possibility of multimedia juxtaposition, but it also incorporates the risks of potential distraction and confusion. Unlike the partial encounters expected of mobile viewers of video installation, we still usually assume faithfulness from readers to finish a piece, even in distractive online environments. In suggesting too much to handle, where will a reader or viewer find an ending?

We note that some of the terms of Golding’s methodological framework for encountering and responding – notably that of cannibalisation – are echoed in the Society for Artistic Research’s 2018 conference with its provocation about ingestion. The call for papers asks:

*If artistic research eats itself, digests itself and then releases its own waste, does it stink and linger, fertilise new growth or invade new destinations on the bottom of someone’s shoe? If we are to constantly defend and define, are we in danger of having no art left, only the claims for its ability to embody knowledge?<sup>1</sup>*

The danger is that no art remains. When do we finish the meal and make a new one? Cannibalism might seem an extreme tactic, even as a metaphor. However, Golding is boldly optimistic, despite the current context of multiple contemporary crises which frame her argument. Indeed, in general, our contributors here offer a response which challenges writings about the contemporary cultural condition as apocalyptic, such as Slavoj Žižek’s starkly negative image of ‘the end times’.<sup>2</sup> Given the ‘end times’ are identified with a form of approaching catastrophe, we might have expected contributions which affectively attuned themselves to forms of reaction, despondence, or despair. Instead, these contributions offer or enact, through critique or invention, what Orit Halpern has called ‘resilient hope’, a concept which she advocates to counter tendencies that present ‘merely a negative speculation on catastrophic futures’.<sup>3</sup> The latter are evident in discourses both about the ‘end times’ and (often) the Anthropocene.

Against this background, Sophie Hoyle’s voice in her moving-image contribution is a powerful reminder of the ambivalence in the effort to ‘keep on going, keep speaking, keep keep keep going’, followed by the acknowledgement that ‘there is nothing new’ (a particular, poignant reminder for researchers who are compelled to demonstrate ‘an original and substantial contribution to knowledge’). Has she given up? Or is this a reminder to inhabit a different modality of survival? There is a politics here in the minor gesture in which relatively small or modest interventions become the vehicles to enact re-interrogation and revisiting. Writing of her own engagement with the idea of ‘minor theory’, the geographer Cindy Katz comments:

*To do minor theory is to make conscious use of displacement – of not being at home or of being between homes – so that new subjectivities, spatialities, and temporalities might be marked and produced in spaces of betweenness that reveal the limits of the major as it is transformed along with the minor. Working in a minor theoretical mode is to recognize that those subjectivities, spatialities, temporalities are embodied, situated, and fluid; their productions of knowledge inseparable from – if not completely absorbed in – the mess of everyday life.<sup>4</sup>*

This mode of working chimes with Hoyle's contribution, as with that of Fiona West. Here, the doing of minor theory involves the constant reworking of a surface, as fingers drag beach sand around elements of a painting by Paul Gauguin. Figures are moved around to what appears to be ambient sounds, and a new pattern of sand emerges as Gauguin's elements are moved out of shot. It is a surface of sand on glass which remains in the final moments, as a dog barks at a distance. Has Gauguin been erased? Is this possible?

Driving our interest in endings was the awareness that disciplines incorporate a wide range of historical and/or scientific routines of periodization and end-points, and that these do not always sit comfortably with artistic and practice based research. Art history has long been organised around terms such as 'the long 19th century' which, however expansively, demarcate beginnings and endings. To take another discipline within which some of our contributors locate themselves, anthropology also has a tense tradition of finishing and endings characterised by a sense of 'the field' from which one 'returns'. In thinking back to her participant observation study, Michele Feder-Nadoff suggests that we should think about learning a craft skill as a series of 'un-finishings'. An 'un-finishing' is constituted by posing problems for the next vessel to be forged and decorated. Feder-Nadoff writes:

*'Lo que duele' – what might bother you – is what you want to improve. This leads to the next piece. What was important was to go on to the subsequent pieces using discontent as inspiration. Making is a continual process; each completed piece is an un-finishing.*

The copper pots which she learns to make are material traces of a relationship of master to apprentice. And the terminology of remains can be used to think through other cultural objects, namely the representation of a medieval castle, as undertaken by an extended moving-image work by Evangelia Tsilika. Here, the architectural excavation of a medieval castle in Porto de Mós is taken up through layered narration. The video counters established practices linked to the rehabilitation of historical monuments. Instead, the building's state of constant historical development is held together by an architectural 'promenade' that similarly strives to hold together disparate remains. Through this practice of narration, the castle as both site and historical source is un-finished.

Revisitation can indeed force a space for strong critique and even protest, as demonstrated in Michelle Williams Gamaker's work. The contribution by Catharine Lord Williams, writing alongside the work of Williams Gamaker, draws on the language of ghosts, a common figure of the unfinished business of life. The 1947 film *Black Narcissus*, they argue, needs a ghosting

which it seems to refuse. New figures, created by Williams Gamaker, reveal the partiality and colonial commitments of the original film. Williams Gamaker creates queer offspring for a work which wanted to languish without future intervention. This is only revealed by the staging of the new project as a series of auditions. In this way, *Black Narcissus* is given a new beginning, freeing up a different vision of possible endings and futures.

The work of procreation as production of hopeful futures – the ‘next generation’ – is probed in the work of Inbal Strauss, an artist creating a version of ‘design noir’ objects, including the piece pictured on the cover of this issue.<sup>5</sup> If what remains are children, what of the parents? Strauss’s work recalls the Phillip Larkin poem ‘This be the verse’ in its wry take on expectations, parenthood, and futurity.<sup>6</sup>

A different set of tactics is discussed in the interview with Florian Dombois with Michael Hiltbrunner. Dombois was at the forefront of developing the Society of Artistic Research. Yet he found himself at odds with the very ethos of what research might be for/with art, and ended up parting company with this group. In essence, Dombois abandons the dominant form of practice based research. Yet he remains an artist who is entirely committed to research, establishing a wind tunnel experiment, the Venice version of which is explained in the interview. It appears that leaving a dominant forum for artistic research actually frees up Dombois’ commitment to the investigation itself, as opposed to a focus on better representations of research.

In sum, as our contributors indicate, capturing an artwork or research project by the term ‘ending’ is defiantly *not* ‘all there is’. Although they may not directly advocate dancing or booze, as in the song lyrics above, there is certainly hope, resistance, and refusal to abandon a vision for how things might be otherwise. For Palmer, the endings of the exhibition spoke to a focus on the London Necropolis Railway which once linked London’s Waterloo station to a large cemetery. Here, following a trace of material infrastructure, the train line offers a linear path for remains to pass along, with a clear intended destination. In Issue 3, direct lines and connections are certainly made, and endings often become new beginnings, with problems thrown down for future research. Yet, in finishing our introduction, we also want to remind ourselves of the importance of practices which explore the limits of the phenomenal. Rather than a straightforward accumulation of knowledge, we might concern ourselves rather with ‘initiating a strangely cathected materiality, a wild, bent, frivolous, perhaps even joyful surface economics of not-quite-dead/but-not-quite-alive unsayable somethings.’ (Golding, this issue).

Finally, we...

1 SAR Conference 2018 Call for Papers, accessed 23 November 2018, <https://sarconference2018.org/>.

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Living In The End Times* (London: Verso, 2011).

3 Orit Halpern, ‘Hopeful Resilience’, *e-flux architecture* (2017), accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/96421/hopeful-resilience/>.

4 Cindi Katz, ‘Revisiting Minor Theory’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35:4 (2017): 598.

5 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2001).

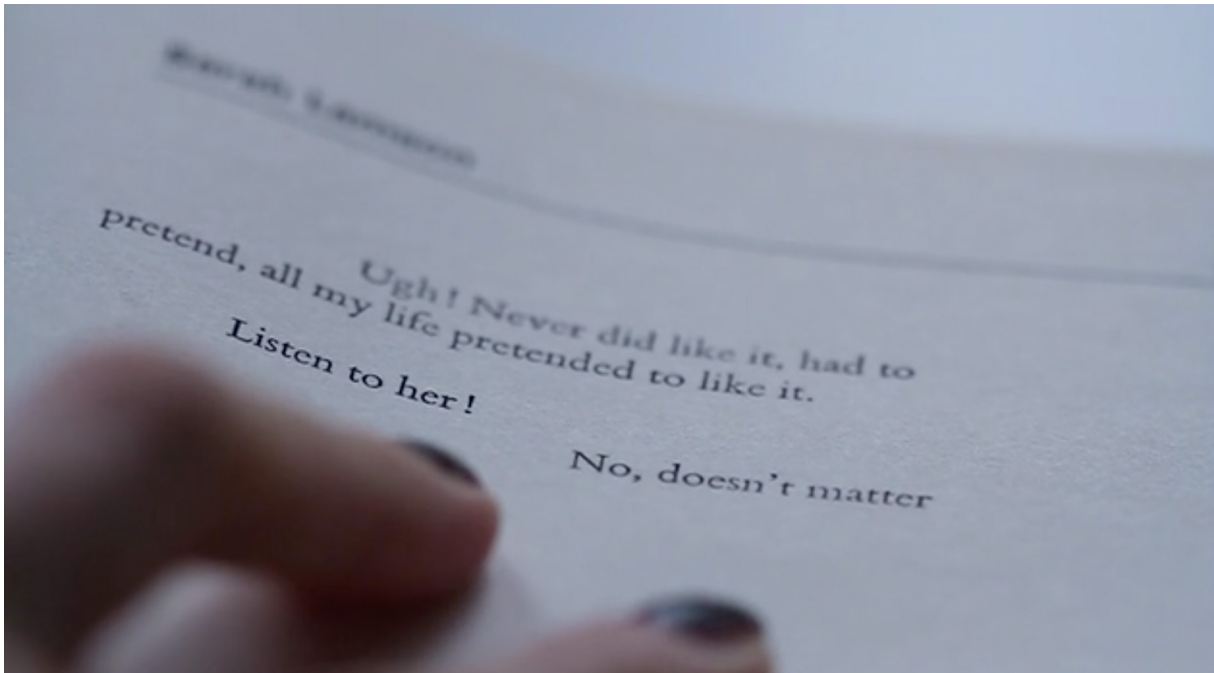
6 Phillip Larkin, *High Windows* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974).

# Listen to them—Don't listen to them (Scrawl)

Sophie Hoyle

To cite this contribution:

Hoyle, Sophie. 'Listen to them—Don't listen to them (Scrawl).' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 8, <http://www.oarplatform.com/listen-dont-listen-scrawl-2018/>.



Sophie Hoyle, video still from *Listen to them—Don't listen to them (Scrawl)*, 2018.  
Available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/listen-dont-listen-scrawl-2018/>

*Listen to them—Don't listen to them (Scrawl)* (2018) explores the intersection between embodied experiences of anxiety disorder and the wider material conditions of practising as an artist in late capitalism. It is a self-reflexive commentary on artistic practice and motivations, negotiating between personal ethics, politics, criticality and sincerity, and shyness and self-preservation in a context where a publicised artistic identity has become a form of cultural capital.

Sophie Hoyle is an artist and writer, currently living and working in London. They relate personal experiences of being queer, non-binary, having chronic mental and physical health conditions and being part of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) diaspora, to wider forms of structural violence, and explore the alliances that can form where these intersect. [www.sophiehoyle.com](http://www.sophiehoyle.com)

# House of Preposterous Women: Michelle Williams Gamaker re-auditions Kanchi

Catherine Lord with Michelle Williams Gamaker

To cite this contribution:

Lord, Catherine, with Michelle Williams Gamaker. 'House of Preposterous Women: Michelle Williams Gamaker re-auditions Kanchi.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 9–17, <http://www.oarplatform.com/house-of-preposterous-women-michelle-williams-gamaker-re-auditions-kanchi/>.

## Take 1: Preposterous and Other Histories

Michelle Williams Gamaker, an artist, filmmaker, and practice-based scholar, is currently exhibiting *House of Women* (2017-).<sup>1</sup> It is a short fictional documentary that depicts an audition for the role of Kanchi, the South Asian, mute and colonized female character of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's celebrated feature film *Black Narcissus* (1947). Adapted from Rumer Godden's 1939 novel of the same name,<sup>2</sup> the 1947 film is set in a religious mission in the Himalayas, where, in the mountains north of Darjeeling, a convent of nuns has established a school and dispensary. The base, in the deserted palace of Mopu that was once a harem for Indian women, is euphemistically called 'The House of Women.' Re-appropriating this sobriquet for her own artwork, Williams Gamaker constructs an aesthetic and political critique of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's tale of white, western nuns attempting to assert their authority over the colonized Other.<sup>3</sup> As Richard Dyer notes, such narratives expose the fragilities of white male power by centring the 'white female soul.'<sup>4</sup> Rather than making a film which dramatizes the white man's anxieties, Powell and Pressburger displaced this central problem of gender and ethnicity onto a group of white, female characters. The nuns become the vehicle for exploring the crisis of colonial masculinity as its powers are on the wane.

In response to these colonial symptoms, Williams Gamaker introduces four auditioning actors, all with equal screen time, each of whom identify as Indian or Indian-British. They form a collective of highly educated, ambitious, talented, articulate female and transgender actors: Jasdeep Kandola, Tina Mander, Arunima Rajkumar and Krishna Isha. Throughout the film, a mystery surrounds the question of whether this recasting is for a future remake of *Black Narcissus* or for an altogether different film or, given another surreal yet strong possibility, whether perhaps Williams Gamaker is re-auditioning the actors for the 'original' feature. Tantalizingly, the film opens with 'in November 2014, auditions were held to recast the role.' In other words, the re-enactment of the casting from 1946-7 could equally well be played out in 2014. Indeed, a 'symptomatic' reading of *House of Women* can accomplish a re-visitation of the antecedent work by addressing some of its key repressions. Could the present film release and transform the symptoms of the precursor work?

If the filmmaker's imaginative re-enactments take place through what cultural analyst Mieke Bal has termed artistic acts of 'preposterous history,'<sup>5</sup> we would respond in the affirmative. For Bal, such artistic works are 'theoretical objects that "theorize" cultural history. This



theorizing makes them instances of cultural philosophy and they deserve the name *theoretical objects*.<sup>6</sup> Bal's concept of preposterous history follows artists who take a style, genre or aesthetic tactic to its extreme. Thus, she argues for an aesthetic re-visitation and re-enactment that can be flagrant and excessive. The implication of Bal's approach is that practice-based works can be likewise daring and extreme in re-enacting their precursors' creations.

Williams Gamaker's 'house' of gender-fluid and Indian/Indian-British talents carries out acts of preposterous history by recreating a Kanchi who might disrupt and correct what Powell and Pressburger's film presents: the emotional and political remnants of a fading British Empire. In a critical practice of re-visitation, ghosts will come to the fore. In his work about Marx's 'spectres', Jacques Derrida proposes that the spectre arrives in order to be re-articulated and re-invented.<sup>7</sup> More boldly than Derrida, Williams Gamaker has made a film which expels colonial ghosts, refusing to let them roam about carrying their hegemonies under their arms. Such 'spectre-busting' requires a bold use of genre and style to subvert, critique, and do practice-based work on the predecessors' work.

Our goal is to explore *House of Women* as a unique act of preposterous history-making. By this we mean that it will not mimic or ventriloquize Bal's concept. Rather, here we understand the term 'preposterous filmmaking' as a process of hybridizing elements of the precursor together with the current work. We will explore how *Black Narcissus* starts to look incomplete without its *enfant terrible* descendant.

In this regard, one helpful interlocutor is Gayatri Spivak. Her canonical concept of the 'subaltern' puts forward the notion of an unspeakable space which radical forms of repetition and re-enactment might liberate.<sup>8</sup> The paradoxical aspect of a filmed audition is its status as what we term *filmed theatre*. The entire premise of actors turning up for interviews about their lives, before reading and then re-reading the script, is taken for granted not just in film and television auditions, but also in stage castings. Rebecca Schneider's ground-breaking study of how theatre 'performs remains' questions the notion that live theatre is somehow free from re-enacting the past as an entanglement of already-made events.<sup>9</sup> While Bal's use of preposterous history joins together contemporary works with historical precedents so that the recent reforms the anterior, Schneider examines how theatrical re-enactment responds to cultural histories in times of political crisis. We argue that preposterous filmmaking leaves the predecessor in need of Other histories and their mediations. Williams Gamaker's film aims to go beyond the task of re-interpreting a historical, cinematic text. Crucially, her film has a mission. It involves re-imagining *Black Narcissus*, using the audition as the point of departure. The aesthetic, political, and imaginative ambition is to re-start Pressburger and Powell's film, as though it might be transported into a contemporary dimension. *House of Women* refuses to let the precursor become 'all there is.'

### Take 2 and 3: Subalterns Get Preposterous

Actors repeat and re-perform lines in different ways. The four auditionees turn up and provide a range of different interpretations of Kanchi. They are roughly the same age –twenty-six – as Jean Simmons would have been when she auditioned for *Black Narcissus*. Following the novel, screenplay, and directors, Simmons sexualized the female Indian identity of the sixteen-year-old Kanchi who, throughout the entire film, says not a word. Actor and filmmakers

engaged in an unspeakable act: white Simmons ‘blacked up.’<sup>10</sup> In stark contrast, Williams Gamaker’s four auditionees are outspoken. They all share information about their multifaceted heritages, mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds, complex diasporic statuses, degrees in law, and acting ambitions. A polite, engaging yet faceless interviewer, played by Kelly Hunter, pursues her interviewees in crisp Received Pronunciation, a voice enameled with serious yet *faux* intimacy and inflected with moments of condescension and threat. In this preposterous audition, one can imagine the young auditionees encouraging Jean Simmons’s character to speak. However, the filmed audition traps them in a vulnerable interview format where one would want to do the right thing to get the role. The spectre of the subaltern looms between takes.

Spivak’s much cited 1988 essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ presents a key problem for a subjectivity so structured by the hegemonies of power and language. Often voiced by white, western, male philosophers who impose their concepts and language on colonial subjects, the often non-white female exists at the margins of society; ‘they’ would express themselves ‘otherwise’ in radically different terms. Spivak’s case-study is the Hindu widow throwing herself on her dead husband’s pyre and the scorching critique hurled at it by white male western discourse:

Faced with dialectically interlocking sentences that are constructible as ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’ and ‘The women wanted to die,’ the postcolonial woman intellectual asks the question of simple semiosis – What does this mean? – and begins to plot a history.<sup>11</sup>

The issue here is the difficulty of tracing the voices of the women between the lines of gender, race, and religion. What would these women say and in what signs and symbols would they voice it? The subaltern’s cultural heritage of silence may mask the potential of voices that can come to life through a new plotting or, in the case of Williams Gamaker’s film, the capability of the prospective Kanchis to reiterate and alter the fixed audition text.



Michelle Williams Gamaker, *Alphabets*, 2017, sequence from *House of Women*, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/house-of-preposterous-women/>.

Williams Gamaker smartly reveals the paradox inherent in discourse and naming. The reading aloud of the alphabet of names is a prime example. The acting hopefuls recite a laundry list of very British names. Some are more or less neutral in terms of class, such as Mary and Tommy. But Oliver, Henry, Lucy, and Edward provide a class of normatively evaluated ‘posh’ names, while the girl’s name, Queenie, is antiquated. Importantly, at face value these names are ethnically white. But, of course, in the context of a multi-cultural society, where hybridity and LGBTQTI+ identity collide, ‘Lucy loves Lucy’ and ‘Peter is Pan’ produce comedy. By bringing together British names from now and from Empire, and by interlacing them with transgender and post-colonial subversions, the four Kanchis bring to life a subaltern who can find their words, ventriloquizing then releasing the silent source through a past made future. This preposterous screenwriting-as-filmmaking fuses past and present in such a way that there is no more blacking up of actors. Rather, they can speak from their own



Michelle Williams Gamaker, *We're just going to shoot you in close up*, 2017, sequence from *House of Women*, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/house-of-preposterous-women/>.

cultural history. One actor, Tina Mander, relates the complex origins of her family’s ethnic and religious hybridity from Jalandhar, India to Stevenage, Hertfordshire. Her T-shirt depicts Muhammad Ali in boxing gear. She wants to be an actor because she has been inspired, not by a woman but by Robert de Niro, specifically his performance in Martin Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* (1980). She aims to be ‘as brave as de Niro.’ Another, Arunima Rajkumar, introduces herself with the poetry of her first name, meaning ‘the first ray of sunlight that falls on Earth.’ This medley of poetic and theoretical language is key to keeping the voices multi-faceted. Arunima is also a photographer – not only is she at the receiving end of the camera’s gaze, but she knows how to wield it herself.

Kelly Hunter begins her reign of innuendos. These underpin the micro-aggressions of the colonial gaze. In this sequence, the concept of the ‘postcolonial’ will crack under the weight of caricature. ‘We’re just going to shoot you’ says the interviewer, with double meanings flying. Did Arunima know, asks the interviewer, that the very terms for camerawork, such as ‘shoot’ in photography, emerged at the time of big game hunts (according to Susan Sontag).<sup>12</sup>

Photography also uses the language of ‘loading,’ ‘stalking,’ ‘aiming,’ and ‘cocking.’ Hunter delivers these words with the inflections of haughty and pernicious sexiness. As she does, the medium shot of Arunima is full frontal and eye-line, a figure no doubt ready to be ‘shot.’

In this way, Williams Gamaker’s film exposes the less-than postcolonial gaze, turning its non-white female ‘object’ into an animal to be hunted and shot. In other words, her camera engages in a preposterous game entangling two types of camera. Reflexively, the insidious aspect of this gaze repeats the trophy-shooting camera of the white male filmmaker. As a gaze that would hunt its prey, it is particularly disturbing. There is the additional cruelty of failing to treat animals as ‘species beings.’ Such objectification of women and non-human animals is tantamount to an aesthetic declaration of war.

Rebecca Schneider has explored the ‘entanglements’ of past history and contemporary representations of civil wars through their re-enactments. She refers to battles that ‘were then’ and are repeated in such a way that they ‘are inside now.’ She underlines how ‘representational practice’ is ‘already a practice of re-enactment’, and quotes Richard Schechner’s adroit phrase to describe the action that produces sameness in difference, namely, ‘twice behaved behaviour.’<sup>13</sup> When Williams Gamaker’s camera repeats and cites the insidiousness of the past, it does so reflexively to point out how the male gaze has sought to hunt down the female and entrap her as a colonized and postcolonial Other. To release the subaltern from this gaze means bringing ‘her’ – Kanchi – inside the voices, bodies and experiences of the auditioning actors. Once the historical Kanchi of the book and feature film is multiplied within the auditionees, she has a chance to be repeated preposterously and thus released into multiple voices. The auditionees hold their own with the faceless Kelly Hunter and remain unfazed. Arunima has a capacity to remain grounded and look back. Tina calmly sports her Muhammad Ali T-shirt. Neither actor loses their professional composure. Neither becomes defensive nor recoils into absolute victimhood, as must Kanchi, who is horrifically beaten for ‘leading on’ the Young General (played by Indian actor Sabu) in Powell and Pressburger’s film. Williams Gamaker’s preposterous filmmaking enables Arunima and Tina to answer back to the camera by assertively meeting its gaze.



Michelle Williams Gamaker, *Have you ever seen the film Peeping Tom?*, 2017, sequence from *House of Women*, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/house-of-proposterous-women/>.

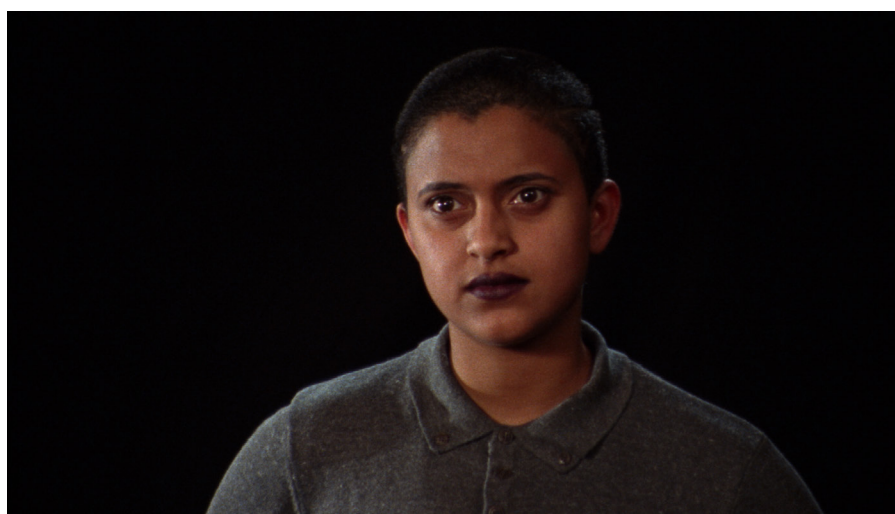


#### Take 4: The Ghost in the Preposterous

As an *auteur*, Williams Gamaker ‘ghosts’ through the montage, script and shot choices another clear and present spectre: that of Michael Powell. The work begins with the interviewer’s announcement that the crew will shoot close-ups. With an increasing and irritating intensity, the front light seems to sway, then starts to flash in the actors’ eyes. It then goes dark, producing an oscillation effect between an uncomfortable fill light and the shadow that appears and disappears across their faces. A metaphor is at stake. I read the subtle ‘torture’ technique of the light with shadow that darts on and off as signifying the insane-making treatment of marginal people in all cultures: the dominant culture acknowledges the existence of Jasdeep, Tina, Arunima, and Krishna as excess or utility. The subtle torture effect as shadow effect is re-enacting past white male habits.

As the subtle and alienating lighting effects begin with Tina, so too does the interviewer’s creepy line of questioning. She asks Tina whether she has ever seen Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom*. The backstory is pertinent. Released in 1960, the film of a serial murderer who tortures and films his female victims’ agonies with a camera as his weapon of choice was so notorious it effectively ended Powell’s career in the UK. The interviewer shares this information with an unpleasant emphasis on ‘ended.’ Tina deals affably with this referencing of *Peeping Tom* as a sub-textual threat when she responds: ‘So the camera was the weapon? Sounds cruel.’ The lighting effects which have intruded like weapons are joined by the soundtrack of a subtle but palpably raised heartbeat. Yet another auditionee, Jasdeep, begins her close up. Jasdeep visibly feels the pain of the light in her eyes. She has a telling moment of vulnerability as her heartbeat starts quickening, and in a disarmingly straightforward way she asks a practical question to mitigate the tension: ‘Shall I just speak?’

Once again, the actors are submitted to more flashing light aggravations and asked not to blink. Then they read the dialogue, a direct citation from Powell and Pressburger’s onscreen script, itself cannibalized from Godden’s novel.<sup>14</sup> Krishna Isha cites the lines of the British agent Mr Dean, precisely: ‘I told you this was no place to put a nunnery.’ The convent is described as too ‘remote’ and ‘looks at such immensity.’ The auditioning Kanchis are re-enacting a white man Dean, while simultaneously embodying Kanchi from the feature film and novel.



Michelle Williams Gamaker, *Let's go through the dialogue*, 2017, sequence from *House of Women*, available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/house-of-proposterous-women/>.

This act of narrative doubling, of giving Kanchi Dean's lines as well as their own, subverts the binary opposition of male-female and white-Asian-British, of authority-powerlessness. Kanchi engages in 'twice-behaved behaviour' through textual citation. The 'twice-behaved' in a different temporal context, in an audition from 2014, has a retroactive and preposterous impact on the entanglements between all the Kanchis – the auditionees, Jean Simmons, the fictional Kanchi characters, and what might have been their multiple possibilities in hypothetical, possible worlds. Yet the past, colonial cruelties of male shooting cameras is reiterated in the oscillating shadows. While Schneider is insightful in delineating the power of entanglement between past and present performances, Bal's concept of preposterous history directs us to read this sequence as a double entanglement in which the present film can change the past. The ghost of the putative Michael Powell, killing his characters with a camera, is brought out of the genie bottle. As a released spectre of filmmaking, a new future for women filmmakers is brought out of the shadows.

#### Take 5: Preposterously - My Place, My name, Sister

When Krishna comes into the frame, the silky tones of Hunter's voice almost climax at the last video slide of mountains and blue clouds which Krishna views, with the camera now at a side angle, removing any full-frontal impositions. The interviewer gets excited by the projected image, using words like 'heaven' and 'God.' Krishna answers right back, now assuming the power of naming, and at this point, addressing the interviewer as Sister Clodagh.

KANCHI

(to Interviewer)

Remember, you and your God aren't on British Territory anymore. (beat) You'll have to get used to living in the wind, Sister Clodagh. The General's father used to keep his ladies here. They call it the 'House of Women' – it will be suitable, won't it, if you decide to come?

Kelly Hunter's interviewer/Sister Clodagh snaps back: 'Don't speak to me like that, Hansanphul.' The voice, which has attempted to efface its white presence, has herself been identified and entangled with the General's prostitutes. Hansanphul, the given name, attempts to pin down and disempower the subject. But Krishna has a retort: 'It's easier if you call me Kanchi, I'm quite used to it.' Hansanphul as Kanchi's designated name is the one imposed by an entanglement of race and gender power interests both 'glocal' and colonial. The name Kanchi also bears its own inflections of subaltern signification, as it is a Nepali word for a 'young girl' who is 'sweet.' In *Black Narcissus*, the term is patronizing. But in *House of Women*, Williams Gamaker's script has reframed the problem. Here, Kanchi has accepted her name, perhaps emotionally re-inflecting it with her triggered and assertive response to that faceless voice of interviewing authority.

In Bal's terms, Kanchi preposterously liberates her subaltern predecessors. By making Kanchi semiotically equivalent to Asia – that is, the continent free from the colonizer – the first step is taken to reclaim a language for South Asian subjectivities both female and transgender. It is important to note that the actor Krishna Isha is non-binary transgender. Thus, the Asian continent, once under Empire and now undergoing the tyrannies of globalization, might still be preposterously released by black and brown, multi-gendered female and transgender forces. For Kanchi will never be all that is.



## Take 6: It's a Warp to the Future

The subversive *House of Women* has served its predecessors well. It has preposterously suggested that ahead of their time, Pressburger, Powell, and Godden were making intimations about colonialism and sexism. *House of Women* teaches its precursor how to do reflexive filmmaking. Williams Gamaker's actors start their audition with the color chart in hand.<sup>15</sup> Once the film's opening provides the textual information about Jean Simmon's Pan Stick make-up, we hear the voices of the crew. We term a film about an audition a meta-filmic event. Reflexivity is its own device, allowing a film to inhabit a film. Once released, these reflexivities inspire us to think of the precursor texts themselves as potentially reflexive in their endeavors. Indeed, once the spectres in *Black Narcissus* have been outed, then its political narratives can breathe. The aesthetic and political accomplishment of Williams Gamaker's endeavor is to allow the interpreter to release more critical interpretations from the precursor work than otherwise come to light. A preposterous intervention as reflexive allows different temporalities to collide, such that *Black Narcissus* already promises plural temporalities beyond its own colonial time-zone. Indeed, the filmmaker's move is to transform the antecedent from 'that's all there is' into 'there is so much more than is'.

Moreover, the film's beginning provides us with one incarnation of Kanchi before we even meet the actors. This is the face of Krishna Isha. We are already told who will get the part before the audition begins. The sequel to *House of Women* is *The Fruit is There to be Eaten* (2018). In this work, Krishna Isha does indeed play Kanchi in a convent set magically between Mopu and Rotherhithe in London. The migrating Mopu and a malleable transgender subject, Krishna as Kanchi, will inhabit the London of this future narrative, to continue a preposterous journey.

- 1 Michelle Williams Gamaker, *House of Women* (Channels Festival, Melbourne, Dokfest Kassel, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Switzerland, L'Alternativa, Barcelona 2017; Transmediale, Berlin, International Women's Film Festival, Cologne, Visite Film Festival, Antwerp 2018, BFI London Film Festival's Experimenta Programme, London, 2018). The film is now part of the Arts Council of England's national collection.
- 2 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *Black Narcissus* (London: Pinewood, 1947). Originally published in 1939, Rumer Godden, *Black Narcissus* (London: Virago Modern Classics, 2006).
- 3 Edward Said's canonical *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979) carefully and comprehensively reveals how the 'Orient' is marginalized and excluded through literary and linguistic strategies deployed by the dominant culture. The use of the concept 'Other' to read Said finds one comprehensive example in Shehla Burney, *Pedagogy of the Other: Edward Said, of 'the Postcolonial Theory, and Strategies for Critique* (New York: Vol 417 of Counterpoints, 2012). Burney argues that Said's consistency is to explore the Orient as the 'Other' to Western literary and cultural discourse, and she is consistent in using the capitalised version of the Other.
- 4 Richard Dyer defines 'end of Empire' texts as ones in which uncertainty invades and we, the spectators, witness the erosion of white, male domination. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 181.
- 5 Mieke Bal, *Reading Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5. Bal takes her point of departure from a pertinent line in T.S. Eliot's 1917 essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. She argues that when a new and influential poem arrives and 'for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if even so slightly, altered,' and therefore the poet 'will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.' T.S. Eliot, *Collected Essays: 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 5.
- 6 The emphasis on 'theoretical objects' draws on the work of Mieke Bal. See Bal, *Reading Caravaggio*, 5.
- 7 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London: Routledge Classics, 1994). The first French edition was *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1993).
- 8 Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.
- 9 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 10 Opening 2 minutes of *House of Women*.
- 11 Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' 93.

- 12 Michelle Williams Gamaker's script for Kelly Hunter's voice-over uses direct quotes of 'loading, stalking, aiming, cocking' from Paul S. Landau, 'Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa,' in *Images of Empire: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 147. Landau adopts these words from a close reading of Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1973), 7. Landau cites Sontag pointing out that 'snapping a shot' means the same thing as 'to snipe', which also means to shoot at a moving target. For a connection between the colonial gaze and the hunting gaze see also John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
- 13 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 92. She cites Richard Schechner, 'Restoration of Behaviour,' in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-116.
- 14 Godden, *Black Narcissus*, 32.
- 15 In film production, a 'color chart' is a flat object which has a broad spectrum of colors used to measure the light temperature, exposure, and white balance of an image. Filmmakers utilise this chart to save time in post-production, as skin tone and clothing are often inaccurate directly after the film has been processed. The use of color grading in post-production makes adjustments by using the chart as reference. American motion pictures used the somewhat dubious term 'China Girl', which referred to an image of a woman framed by colour bars for calibration purposes. The chart within this context also alludes to the nuanced differences in skin tone of the auditionees in relation to the inherent whiteness beneath the brown Pan Stik make-up of Jean Simmons who played the original Kanchi in *Black Narcissus* (1947).

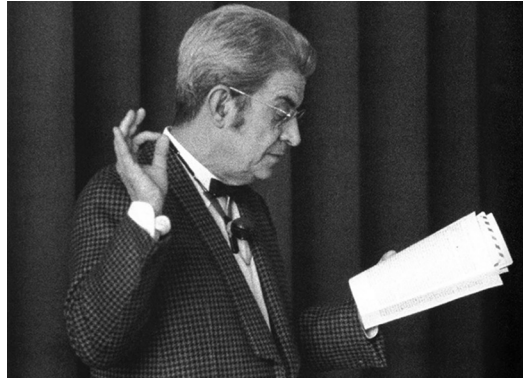
Michelle Williams Gamaker is an artist filmmaker. Her recent trilogy re-explores marginalised characters from Powell and Pressburger's *Black Narcissus* (1947). She is a BA Fine Art Lecturer at Goldsmiths and Pavilion's Chair of Trustees. She also runs the Women of Colour Index Reading Group with Samia Malik and Rehana Zaman.

Catherine Lord is a writer, actor and theatre-maker. She lectures in Media and Culture, at the University of Amsterdam. She has directed new writing at London Fringe (2015-2017) and was selected to take part in the Royal Court Writer's Programme (2017). Her publications focus on practice-based research, post-colonial studies, cross-media, ecology and climate change.

## ENVOIS II

Letters from JL to SK 1954 1955

Sharon Kivland



### I

17 November

Hello, dear old friend, so here we are again.

Well then, it is from *this long way off* that we will start in order to return back towards the centre – which will bring us back to the *long way*. We might well be surprised at such an attraction. Do not forget ...

It remains very enigmatic. What is at issue is the liberating, demystifying treatment of a human relation. It makes no sense, to my mind, to cut up our remarks. Yesterday evening I underlined what one can call the function of truth in its nascent state. When something comes to light, something we are forced to consider as new, well then, it creates its own perspective within the past, and we say *This can never not have been there, this has existed since the beginning*. Besides, isn't that a property which our experience demonstrates?

Look at the literature. What makes you so sure? We don't have to go very far. It was at the centre, at the base. It is quite well expressed by Rimbaud's fleeting formula – poets, as is well known, don't know what they're saying, yet they still manage to say things before anyone else – *I is another*. Don't let this impress you. It doesn't mean anything. Because, to begin with, you have to know what an other means. The other – don't use this term as a mouthwash.

Since Socrates, pleasure has been the search for one's good. Whatever we may think, we are pursuing our pleasure, seeking our good. There is a hedonism specific to the ego, and which is precisely what lures us, that is, which at one and the same time frustrates us of our immediate pleasure and of the satisfaction we can draw from our superiority with respect to this pleasure. But what then erupts, with the crash of thunder, is the sexual instinct, the libido. But what is the sexual instinct? the libido? the primary process? You think you know me – me too – but that doesn't mean we should be as certain about it as all that. You should take a closer look. What is closing up? What is resisting? There is satisfaction... we can sleep soundly. We will consider all of this in its own due time and place. If you put off dealing with it, all you do is make the grossest of errors. I would like...

## II

24 November

I wouldn't want to leave hanging whatever may have been left unfinished in our meeting. It is always hard to knit something into a dialogue. We can't pretend to exhaust the question in one evening. The important thing is that it is still with us, alive and open. I am not avoiding it. I have been skirting around for a long time. But do you agree with what I've been saying? You'll see. It isn't easy to wrap things up. It is simply a matter of what kind of bond it involves. I in fact believe that there are two sorts of relationships. The more we know, the greater the risks. There is a bit of time left. That is precisely where all the confusions began. You spoke of the pleasure principle. You do realise that this is precisely what you subsequently put into question. There is a profound difference between the pleasure principle and something else. You have put the question aptly by saying there is a certain way of talking about it. You were right to underline the difference. You have only sketched it out – otherwise you would have accomplished what I going to help you do.

## III

1 December

Yesterday's evening meeting marked a definite step forward. We maintained the dialogue better and for longer. You mustn't try to say elegant things. In other words, the only criticism I have to make of you, if I may, is that you want to appear too clever. Your mistake goes even deeper when you speak of finality. This is exactly where there was some uncertainty yesterday evening. We are inside it. And I would even say – we are so far into it that we can't get out of it. I think I'll have the opportunity to demonstrate this to you. There's always a moment of weakness when one is inclined to abandon it. I believe that I can show you... If you want to stick by what you are giving me now, I have no objection. Only I believe it to be insufficient.

## IV

8 December

I do not pretend to anything more. I do not pretend to replace that, if you won't commit yourself to it. What are we trying to realise here, if not a subjectivity? There's always a shift, whereby you try to recover your balance. I'm going step by step. In the course of recent months, years even... The core of our being does not coincide with the ego. I defy you not to extract this conception. I claim that this is the essential, and that everything must be organised in relation to it.

I am going to propose to you a way of getting rid of it, of cutting the Gordian knot. I ask you to continue to listen to me. We can take things further. There is nothing left to understand. You won't be able to think of anything else. I hope you'll consider. I'm going too fast. I would like to give you...

Reflection is also fascination, jamming. I will show you this function of fascination. You see how a circle can be set up. An apprehended, desired object, it's either he or I who will get it, it has to be one or the other. I desire that means – *You, the other, who is my unity; you desire that*. Don't believe that for one moment. What I am telling you is purely mythical. It is immediate desire. Next time I will talk about things from a less arid angle. Next time...

## V

15 December

What I am trying to do here is tear you away once and for all. The body in pieces finds its unity in the image of the other. I brought you up short at the moment I was showing you. At the point where I left you, the subject was nowhere. I showed you the consequences of this circle regarding desire. That is where we had got to. Last time I did warn you that I was taking the step of cutting the Gordian knot. I gave myself and you the pleasure. I try to lead you away. Is it simply that what is pleasure in the one is unpleasure in the other. I think I am making it concrete by introducing the notion of insistence. You were telling me that would end up getting shipwrecked on a reef, and that somewhere we'll meet up. Are we playing hunt-the-slipper here? Of course, I acknowledge and indeed admire the fact that you did things as you say you did, knowing what you were doing. What you did last night was very much under control, you knew perfectly well what you were doing, you didn't do it innocently. That is greatly to your credit. Having said that, we are going to see whether what you are suggesting now is true. What you forewarned me would be a reef is more than avoidable – it's already avoided. I leave the question open.

## VI

12 January

You have been spoilt. Now the question is to know what you are going to do. What is pleasure in one is translated into pain in the other, and conversely. It is translated into suffering, and yet, it always returns. These matters, when put like this, are so obvious. When I speak of the libido, I am speaking of the sexual libido.

We have some ground to cover, perhaps a long way to go. Always the puppet strings. I'm asking you to tell me whether I'm not going too far. That is where I am stopping you. We are going step by step, but it is better to go slowly in order to go assuredly. In the end, there is a reciprocal alienation, as you so well explained yesterday evening. It is very strange to be localised in a body. It certainly does have something of a disturbing, scandalous aspect. One can see the meaning we needed yesterday evening. That I cannot name for you as yet.

## VII

19 January

Do you really see the heart of the problem? I don't know whether you spotted it in passing. It was just the same yesterday evening. Don't you agree? Is it a conception of the world? Note that the tendency to union – Eros tends to unite – is only ever apprehended in its relation to the contrary tendency, which leads to division, to rupture. Let us go over it step by step. What impasse had we reached last time? That is something which one cannot but see as excessive. You are in the process of seesawing. Besides, what is said on the telephone, you must know from experience, never does. You will see how we will meet up again. Let us start again with our pleasure principle, and let's plunge back into the ambiguities. Every man runs after his lady. It was clear, and rather fun. One seeks out entertainment, and one is taken in by the game. People seek their pleasure. What should stop us in our tracks, what isn't comprehensible, is simply dodged. I would like to get you to understand. It's funny this thing turning back on itself. It's most complicated. It's very ambiguous. At any given moment, this something which turns has to, or doesn't, come back into play. At the point we have reached, I propose, looking ahead, that you conceive of the need for repetition.

## VIII

26 January

Some very surprising things can happen here. How are we to approach them? The libidinal economy is something which isn't equivalent. One mustn't talk about it in a loose way. The other level isn't the level of the relation, as you claimed. Nothing comes out of it. I'm not saying that what you said was silly. Let us stop there for today.

## IX

2 February

Most of the time, we're fooling ourselves. One is left without a compass, you know neither where you started, nor where you are trying to get to. I can't tell you more about that today. What matters to us is knowing where we have to locate ourselves in our relation. Desire is always confused with need. All this is a play of writing. I'm not saying that this is illegitimate. But you can see where it leads. What detours will have to be taken? You mustn't throw yourself into the void. Learn to let your thoughts dwell on these moments.

## X

9 February

Why this failure? I'd like to remind you that I promised you I'd say something. One thinks everything is resolved. Everything is always there. Our relation must be grasped.

## XI

16 February

Something moves, shifts. I urge you. It's a message. It isn't the obstacle. Doubt is part of the message. I feel this is an important disagreement, that there is some sort of misunderstanding on your part. This may seem funny to you, but I want it to seem tragic. No need to ask yourself questions about I-know-not-what.

## XII

2 March

What's important for us is to know where the relation is to be found. Must we look for the answer in some exceptional, abnormal, pathological features of the other's behaviour? I think that this feature did not escape you. One is sexual, the other is symbolic. We won't be satisfied. Yet again, we suspect that there's something here which doesn't quite work. You offered one solution. I often say very difficult things to you, and I see you hanging on every word, and I learn later that you didn't understand. On the other hand, when you're told things that are very simple, you are less attentive. I deliver it up to your reflection. There are things which work. I leave this question open.



### XIII

9 March

Things can go the other way round, at the point we've got to. I am going to propose to you. I'm not pushing anything. Then comes the night. With this dream. I'll go straight to the conclusion. What is it, this unconscious desire? What is it, this thing which is pushed away and horrifies? What does it mean to speak of an unconscious desire? For whom does this desire exist? We are in a different position. It is well known that women no longer resist it – it doesn't excite us any more, women who resist. That goes very far. What does it matter to us at this point?

### XIV

16 March

What did you get out of yesterday evening? What are your impressions? I would like to know whether what I told you was clearly understood. I wanted your reply to bring confirmation, and I don't know how to interpret your silence. What did I try to get across? It is in the nature of desire to be radically torn. This is something extreme. That's what we will try to get hold of in the encounters to come.

### XV

30 March

I have tried to fashion before you the myth of a consciousness without *ego*. I am going to try to lead you into this domain. You can get a lot out of it. It is a matter of penetration. You will be in the same position to discover something of the same order. I'd like you to see that we are no longer at all in the domain of the real. Now let us see what is going to happen, I'm not forced to reason like this, but I want to show you its limits. I'm not playing at even and odd. But that isn't the point. It isn't a game for the subtlest, it isn't a psychological game, it is a dialectical game. Today, the holidays are getting nearer, it's a lovely day, so let's do something short and sweet.

### XVI

27 April

My comments last time were aimed at giving you a clear sense of the relation. Everything comes back to *to be or not to be*. Isn't there another way of doing it? That is what I am going to try to show you. It's a sort of love-letter. You do see, then, that only in the dimension of truth can something be hidden. Only what belongs to the order of truth can be hidden. It is truth which is hidden, not the letter. An ambiguous protection...

## XVII

11 May

Today, we are coming close to the top of this overly steep hill we have been climbing this year. We are approaching a summit. I think I am giving you a better rendition. Tell me, in your own way, what you think I am trying to get at. If you think there's something we've been evading, say so. I would like you to do it now. Perhaps this doesn't satisfy you. I find it very suggestive. I think last time I got you to realise the difference between insistence and inertia. You have also very clearly understood what I wanted to say last time when I invoked desire. Why don't you fill in what you have said? Are you aware how rare it is for love to come to grief on the real qualities or faults of the loved one? The game is already played, the die already cast. It is already cast with the proviso that we can pick it up again, and throw it anew. The game has been going on a long time.

## XVIII

18 May

The questions you asked me last time don't seem to me to have been misguided – they all bore on very sensitive issues. The remainder of our path will take us to some answers, to a number of them. We have reached a radical crossroads. At this point, one can say almost anything. Indeed, the point we're getting to is none other than desire. It is a world of desire as such.

We necessarily believe that, at the centre, things are really there, solid, established, waiting to be recognised. Desire is the desire for nothing nameable. Sexual desire in our experience has nothing objectified about it. In the perspective I'm opening up for you, it's you who provoke resistance.

## XIX

25 May

I am rarely altogether happy. Last time, I wasn't at all happy. If you're happy, that's the important thing. I would even say – given that I've been reassured that you were happy, well then, good Lord, I become happy as well. But even so, with a little margin. Not exactly *happy-happy*. There was a space between the two. I hope that I will get you to see that it would be wrong of you to think it's the same issue here as that other I sometimes talk to you about. At first blush, I was a bit disappointed. We might have spared ourselves the trouble. You've got your finger on the nub of the matter. I think that you are already quite familiar with it. We have a thousand proofs that it is being pushed in that direction.

## XX

1 June

We've come up against it, or we've come to the crossroads. We've changed all that. I'm not distorting anything. I don't want to take you too far, but it is clear that exciting and rejecting do not belong on the same level. I'm not forcing anything. I will try to show you.

## XXI

8 June

Let us try to overcome the romantic illusion, that it is perfect love, the idea value which each partner acquires for the other, which upholds human commitment. We aren't, and haven't been for a long time, cut out to embody gods. Along this path, we've come full circle, we are returning to the state of nature. This famous love is nothing at all. The genital act doesn't last long – it's nice but it doesn't last – and it doesn't secure anything at all. I've reminded you of some basic truths. Perhaps that's not the best one can do.

## XXII

15 June

I would like us to talk a bit, so I get a sense of where you have got to. I try to put some landmarks in place. That's very delicate. We find ourselves confronted with the problematic situation. I am showing you that the question of meaning comes with speech. All I need do is think about myself. The Rubicon's no wider to cross than what's between my legs. Let us stop there; it was a bit rough-going today.

## XXIII

22 June

What is required? Please give this a thought. When I think I love myself, it is precisely at this moment that I love an other.

## XXIV

29 June

In the course of our meeting, the question I put to you had a mixed response. For me it was a way of tuning my instrument. Although I didn't pause to consider it at the time, because the way things were going, it would have given you even more of a feeling of aberration. So, what were you trying to tell me? It isn't a trap. I thought about it again, an hour ago, and I am no better up on this than you are, almost certainly less so. Do you think that is what I have in mind? It doesn't mean it isn't rational. But that isn't what I had in mind. I am trying to get you to understand another meaning. What's at issue is a succession of absences and presences, or rather of presence on a background of absence, of absence constituted by the fact that a presence can exist. Today I ask you once again to risk yourself in the unknown. We are in the position of having to *conceive*, in the full sense of the word. The problem remains open. Don't be soft. One realises there isn't enough. Before I leave you... It is simply a new version of the story.



The first set of letters in ENVOIS was written for Emily Beber's book *The Bodies that Remain* (New York: Punctum, forthcoming); the second, for the first issue of *Lune. The Journal of Literary Misrule*. For the former, I was distracted by Jacques Derrida's *envois* in *The Postcard*, the sendings to an unnamed beloved (whom one may perfectly well name now as Sylviane Agacinski), which led me to an early seminar of Jacques Lacan, his teaching on the training programme of the Société Française de Psychanalyse, following Freud's papers on technique. For the latter, I was led to his late seminar on love, knowledge, and feminine sexuality. Here I resume, taking up Lacan's second seminar on the transference, where there is knowledge, truth, opinion, as well as desire, love, and death. In my careful reading and re-writing I have removed all that psychoanalytic theory, while retaining Lacan's words (and his alone – I have added nothing, I avow) as love letters, as *envois* addressed to me by my beloved JL, continuing the course of our love affair that has endured for nearly thirty years. And yet, well, and yet, all that psychoanalytic theory remains, as my master breaks the silence.

Sharon Kivland is an artist, writer, editor, and publisher, who lives and works in France and the UK. Her work considers what is put at stake by art, politics, and psychoanalysis.

# Of the Thick and the Raw: Cannibalizing the 21st Century [Radical Matter: Art, Philosophy and the Wild Sciences (Untimely Meditation no. 3)]<sup>1</sup>

Johnny Golding

To cite this contribution:

Golding, Johnny. 'Of the Thick and the Raw: Cannibalizing the 21st Century [Radical Matter: Art, Philosophy and the Wild Sciences (Untimely Meditation no. 3)].' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 2 (2017): 26–33, <http://www.oarplatform.com/thick-raw-cannibalizing-21st-century/>.

'Time is not universal and fixed; it is  
something which expands and shrinks  
according to the vicinity of mass.'  
Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not  
What it Seems*<sup>2</sup>

This piece should be read with the sound accompaniment of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' 1994 song *Red Right Hand* and alongside Jennie Livingstone's film *Paris is Burning* (1990).

## thick

In the dewy decrepitude of science and of life, three overtly common-sense propositions must initially be acknowledged: first, that reality is by far more elegant, confounding, mean-spirited, hilarious, erotic, and supple than any metaphysical re-presentation of it. Second, that there are (at least) two types of logics – sensuous and mathematical – and that these two logics, despite Kant, Russell, Badiou et al, can neither be separated from each other (except in abstract, purified contemplation), nor fully grasped in terms of universal, speculative or totalizing systems, as is so frequently manifested by Agamben, Harman, Žižek, Butler et al, via the Hegelian move. Finally, that in a world dominated by the skewed global corporatism of an increasingly gluttonous petrol-technosphere, with its derivative futures markets and international debt exchanges, violent warfare, mass refugee migrations, and everyday, terrifying extinctions of whole swathes of fauna, flora, and the rule of law, one must take as a given the determination 'to write poetry after Auschwitz', despite guilt, terror or exhaustion.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, one must take as a given not only the determination to write poetry, make art, enable and grow imagination, but in so doing, re-remind those who need reminding of the critical importance to *know* that one *can* think (reason, imagine, dream, love); and that even in the midst of it all, that one learns *how* to do so, and once learned, must *not forget* to do so. Taken together, these three propositions enable a kind of practical imagination, perhaps and dare it be said, a kind of practical, ethico-political mattering: one that gives shape to the here, the now, the past and future, one that enables shape to take place, energy to intensify, community to electrify, politicize, gain speed and pace.

Nietzsche asks, instead – no, he demands – that the artist step forward, not just because (for better or for worse) an artist is seen to inhabit the personae of already boxing with skewed knowledge systems, but, in so boxing, is well placed to have the courage to dream of a reality as it could / should / might (im)possibly be or become. More importantly, the demand is not just to dream – this would be to rehash old clichés to which Nietzsche would, of course, have had severe allergic reaction. It is to demand a certain kind of courage; that is, the courage to *know* that one *can* dream – to *dare* to dream – despite all that lies before us: the violent, the banal, the sometimes fascinating, confusing, shameful and oftentimes cruel. This call to arms, as instead a *call to imagine*, laughs at the pale imitations of what is promised through instrumentalist, even dialectical logics – including the overrated logics of the Phallus, of Castration, of Excess and of Lack. For this is not just a ‘daring to dream’ in the face of rising inhumanity and genocide: it is the courage to have an unwavering hunger, faith, drive (call it what you will) to *want* to dream – no matter what – and, in so wanting, to figure out the *that* and the *how* to make it happen, underlined by an unwavering focus, commitment, dedication, *will* that it must happen. This is the beginning of a logic of sense.

The *real* world – unattainable?’ Nietzsche mocks, ‘Unattained at any rate by Reason! The “real world”/ the “reasoned” world / no longer of any use not even a duty any longer! An idea grown useless! superfluous!, consequently a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Broad daylight; breakfast. Return of cheerfulness and *bons sens*; Plato blushes for shame; all free spirits run wild).<sup>4</sup>

I have always had strong kinship with this passage, for it marks the beginning of a break with dialectics, universal totalities and speculative realisms (pure or otherwise). Instead it opens the way towards the so-called genealogical method, a method, one might say, as the forerunner to discourse analysis (Foucault et al) and, as concomitant, the rhizomatic or minor form of method (Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari), as well as the libidinal economy method (Lyotard, Lacoue-Labarthe) – serving a kind of ‘method-light’ nomadic cartography of mapping the process without enforcing the route. In one manner or another, contemporary (21st c.) methodologies tend to riff off this genealogical move, under the banner of diffractive (Barad), cosmo-political (Stengers), tentacular (Haraway), entangled (Golding), queer (Rogers, Ajamu).<sup>5</sup> Foucault names this three-pronged volley ‘the courage of truth [*parrhesia*].’<sup>6</sup>

#### raw

The so-called ‘practical’ questions – the how or the what or the that of change – are always accompanied by fits of instability. With instability, grows a certain kind of certainty: one founded on sensuous reason/rationality, a certain kind of intelligence, let’s call it a *political* intelligence, a certain kind of logic (the logic of sense, perhaps). The ability to hear that embattled demand of David Ricardo’s ‘*Supposing it could be otherwise! What would that ‘otherwise’ be/become?*’<sup>7</sup> and inhabit it with our bodies, our flesh, our wounds, our fears, our silences, boredoms, infightings and menacing games of play always also ushers in unintended consequences, the so-called ‘collateral damage’, ‘friendly fire’ of circulation, intimacy and exchange. When the old is dying but the new cannot yet be born, what then of change; what then of risk and its (un)accompanying ‘safety net’? For if there is no map, no pre-set direction, no over-abiding Truth – and now, not even a universality to time, space, knowledge, identity, meaning, system, art – then, as the bombs obliterate lives in Riyadh (and Iran, and Palestine



and Israel and... and... and... and...); as the gang-wars defy all sanity, and the age old scream once again lifts its ugly mouth in unison: 'my God, my God! why have you abandoned me/us?' (and answer came there none), perhaps one should take pause to remember a little history. The history of the 1848 Paris Communes, the history of the Suffragettes, the history of civil rights movements, the history of resistance to fascism, the history of feminism; dadaism, pop and, indeed, the very queering of sense. These movements are not evolutions of culture; neither are the impoverished cruelties of everyday life devolutions of culture. They are assemblages, molecular, organic, molar, organized, imagined, built, and therewith can be differently assembled, imagined, built. To suggest that reality (any reality) is but a contemplative encounter with the material world, forgets that it is real/sentient beings and the knowledge-truth-power axes that make the world, our world, real. To quote the first and last remark by Marx from my well-thumbed version of his *Theses on Feuerbach*:

I

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity...Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity.

XI

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, there is only one small problem with this impassioned history lesson. While it is true that it is not enough to interpret the world; while it is also true that human/sentient/sensuous activity is required for revolutionary change; while it is also the case that without this political intelligence, this logic of sense, this courageous determination to inhabit thinking, dreaming, making, becoming; while it is true that 'truth to power' must be recognized (and re-cognized) not only beyond binary and zero-sums games of Truth; it is also no less the case that new forms of matter/materialities have been spotted on the event-horizon of contemporary life. We are in the midst of a massive paradigm shift, with new forms of matter/materialities shape-shifting with new forms of intelligence, new forms of social agency, new forms of science, philosophy, and art. Oddly entangled as dimensional singularities and inundated by realities augmented, artificial or something else yet to be invented, we have entered (or have been entered) into a wildly asephalic, derivatively engineered 'common sense' whose circulation and exchange, globally spores a series of plasticized playing fields, otherwise known as the petrol-technosphere.<sup>9</sup>

This marks a radical paradigm shift that takes sustenance from three seemingly odd environments: on the one side, big data, with its the circulation of information and the debt

economy under the rubric of the so-called block-chain logics and the buying/selling of futures; on the other, quantum physics with an emphasis on superpositionality, non-locality, entanglement and diffraction; and on the third side, contemporary art (with a small 'a'), with its reliance on attunement, feed-back loops, fractal philosophy, erotic praxis and the queering of sense. The technosphere is both ephemeral and real, spurious and intensive, and manages to be in at least two places at the same time, defying not only Newtonian laws of space and time, but Einstein's basic presupposition that nothing is faster than the speed of light – except when it is; what Einstein called 'spooky action at a distance' – where two or more objects move at the same time in the same manner, irrespective of location.<sup>10</sup> (But here I am getting ahead of myself.)

### plural

As far back as 1744, when 'science' meant the fullness of a reasoned knowledge, which included magic, alchemy, philosophy, chemistry and the biological sciences, Giambattista Vico, in his *The New Science*, developed a pluralized sense of truth:

338. [The New Science must]...begin where its subject matter began, as we said in the Axioms [314]. We must therefore go back with the philogians and fetch it from the stones of Deucalion and Pyrrha, from the rock of Amphion, from the men who sprang from the furrows of Cadmus or the hard oak of Virgil. With the philosophers, we must fetch it from the grogs of Epicurus, from the ciadas of Hobbes, from the simpletons of Grotius; from the men and women cast into this world without care or aid of God...(This is the science the philogians and philosophers have given us of the beginnings of humanity!).<sup>11</sup>

One of the important aspects of this form of argument was, of course, that it brought the human condition front and centre as a feature to Knowledge, heretofore regarded as only the providence of God. Change was to be rooted in human (free) will sutured on the grounds of this doubled headed-certainty. And while it may be true that this double-headed certainty could (and did) imply probability, and probability could (and did) imply error, and error could (and did) imply uncertainty, it did so on the basis of binaric contradiction: Natural Science v Human Science whose 'deep cut' division [the '/'] brought to bear an 'abyssal logic' – where change took place on either side of the divide, but never on or in or with the divide 'itself'.

Hannah Arendt was not the first to challenge this view, but she was one of the first to pose doubt with a different sort of character than that which might be linked to an abyssal (deep cut) logic. Unlike the doubting finger of Thomas who poked into the side of Christ to check the status of the being who stood before his troubled eyes, 'to doubt' for Arendt demarcated a kind of 'unsayable something', a kind of un-sutured *materiality* of logic, wherein stood the last bastion of apodictic proof.<sup>12</sup> One might doubt one's eyesight, one's hearing, one's very existence; but one could not doubt doubt itself. It was a clever move, wherein the core of one's being took the form a newly devised intensity, a *cogito ergo sum* that translated to 'I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am.' To put this slightly differently, doubt was to become an a-materialized or ana-materialized plural surface (or ground) upon which – and the propeller for which – the being of human was conditioned. As Arendt was later to rephrase it, doubt was not (and is not) to be pitted 'against' thought: it *was/is* thought; the very condition

of human existence.<sup>13</sup> Foucault would take it one step further: doubt was to be the very basis of imagination, creativity, and indeed, a stylistics of existence: I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I invent, therefore I am.<sup>14</sup> Abyssal logic had nothing to do with it.

Apart from the many long-winded consequences filtering out of this age of reason and enlightenment through an acceptance of change brought about through human endeavor, came a shift in what the role of an external, Archimedean point (called: God) might now be. Within *The Gay Science* [read: *frivolous/happy/joyous/queer*], and as further developed in his *Will to Power*, Nietzsche neatly summarized the God problem with the unforgettable phrase: ‘God is Dead.’<sup>15</sup> This, of course, was no ordinary death sentence, and it certainly did not mean what Hegel took it to mean when, some 80 years earlier he (Hegel) penned a similar decree, flatly condemning the new world order as being enveloped by ‘the feeling that God himself is dead.’<sup>16</sup> For Hegel, the fear was precisely that people were turning away from God; but for Nietzsche, it was precisely the reverse, the fear that they were not turning away fast enough – not so much from God Himself, but from the need to find identity, meaning, indeed Spirit itself, in a totalizing (read: universal) sense of truth. What had died for Nietzsche was an entire moment not so much *in* history but *of* history – that is, the cultural condition which placed metaphysics as the new God-head of meaning, change, progress, prediction, man-made in all its mediocre glory. His ‘God is Dead!’ was not so much a lament as it was a wake-up call attempting to remind all those who needed reminding that the time was nigh to rip sensuous knowledge, creativity, fearlessness from the mastiff of a resurrected eternally unfolding existence and be brave enough to look into the void, and deal with ‘it’ as it actually was/would be/might have been. It was time to get rid of this decrepit empty shelter called Metaphysics and to embolden the ‘is’ with an ever-expanding intensity beyond that of doubt, daring, or even a stylistics of existence.

As is well known, the move, this ‘call to arms’ did not work; he was, as Nietzsche so woefully intoned, ‘writing before his time’:

“Whither is God?” he cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns?...Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night [and more night] coming on all the while?...Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God’s decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us – for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.” Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. “I come too early,” he said

then; “my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering – it has not yet reached the ears of man.”<sup>17</sup>

It was not so much that one was too afraid to peer into the abyss, thought Nietzsche; it was rather that people were not afraid *enough*. For Nietzsche, the intimate chemistry of change was always already connected with life-force; life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change; change with life-force – and then a repeat of the pattern – the chemistry of change as connected to life-force, life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change – and then a repeat of the pattern – the chemistry of change as connected to life-force, life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change and etc. *This* – and not transcendence, dialectics, deep cuts, abyssal logics or otherwise – was the Eternal return, always already returning an ‘intensity’, an erstwhile ‘will to power’, through a repeat performance that both copied itself and, in so doing, created anew: a kind of re-remembering complex ‘feedback loop’, a kind of fractal mimetic repetition, a networked logic of the genus. Nietzsche named this materialized slice of a return a genealogy, one without predetermined cartographies – though creating cartographies nevertheless; one without ‘insides’ (or ‘outsides’) to the real, but initiating a strangely cathected materiality, a wild, bent, frivolous, perhaps even joyful surface economics of not-quite-dead/but-not-quite-alive unsayable somethings.

#### cannibalizing.

Perhaps it is now worth considering something that may seem entirely obscure to the multiple dimensionalities and pluralized conundrums of entangled radical matter and materialisms just laid bare. For the moment, let us call it ‘the problem of the Greek debt.’

In a small gathering over pizza and beer, a circle of freshly minted MBAs, all or most global CEOs in their respective fields, threw open the question ‘what is the most expensive item you have bought in your lifetime?’ Around the wooden tables and saw-dusted floors came answers such as: a house! A string of restaurants! A yacht! A Maserati! A trip around the world! When almost all had responded in such-like terms, the last to speak took to the floor, raised a glass and flatly declared: ‘I bought the Greek debt.’ Needless to say, he did not keep the Greek debt (for any meaningful length of time); he did not buy the Greek debt in order to lighten the load of those suffering due to austerity, homelessness, job loss, health issues. He bought the Greek debt as equity in a ‘futures market’ and then summarily sold it (the Greek debt / future) for quite a tidy \$billion+ sum. This may tug on the ethical heartstrings of those appalled by this nonchalant gluttony (and it is appalling). But something else is at stake in the recapping of this story: the sticky cohesions of circulating ‘futures’ neither able to arrive nor leave, ‘futures’ that manage in their quick-flip circulation to solidify a global upper class, surfing over the collective heads of those still crippled with that debt, whilst creating pockets of the wildly wealthy, against the vast swathes of disenfranchised citizens, refugees, intellectuals, artists, educators and the dispossessed.

Of course, ever-expanding, wild disparities between the wealthy and the poor is not necessarily ‘new’. What is new is that this ascephalic matter is neither an ‘empty’ form to be filled nor a fully positioned ideological mandate to be heralded. Instead it enables non-thought out, anti-intellectual strategies underpinning for example ‘the news’ (fake or otherwise) by cherry picking its own set of futures and block-chain derivatives, circulating ‘futures’ and then

selling them on. And it is not simply limited to the news or the stock exchange or the circulation of debt. Here far right social movements employ the same language tropes as the socially conscious; there big data information engines click-bait, slice up and (re-)store 0's and 1's as fodder for disrupting national and local elections.

If ever there was a moment to start collectively imagining the 'how' in the famous clarion cry announced at the outset: 'supposing it could be otherwise,' now is the time to do so.

### Radical Matter: Untimely Meditation no. 3.

- 1 This published (3rd) meditation was developed over a two-year period. Its first incarnation was given as Keynote at *Modus Operandi: Uncertainty*, International Conference at the invitation of María Angélica Madero, Directora Programa Artes Plásticas, Facultad de Artes Universidad El Bosque and Carolina Cerón Castilla, Departamento de Artes, Universidad los Andes, Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Bogotá, Colombia, 18-21 October 2016. It was introduced by the musical score/composition: *Red Right Hand* by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, and delivered with the film *Paris is Burning* directed by Jennie Livingston (1991) in the foreground. A second version was subsequently trialed at the *Lessons in Physics Conference*, mac Gallery, Birmingham, 18 November 2016, this time in complete blackness with no musical or visual accompaniment and an emphasis in the main on Einstein's 'spooky action at a distance'. Its debut at the Oxford University Philosophy Society and Ruskin School of Art, 10 May 2017 sought to highlight encounter, attunement, diffraction, and the radical matter to which this kind of encounter, attunement, diffraction leads.
- 2 Carlos Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum* (Middlesex: Penguin, 2017), np.
- 3 For Adorno, this was a pain too great to bear, and yet too great to leave alone. 'Perennial suffering,' writes Adorno, 'has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living - especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier.' Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1973] (London: Routledge, 1990), 362. And yet for every woman, man, transgendered being, child who has been sexually assaulted, raped and/or tortured in their own private or community Auschwitz hell, re-remembering how to dream and indeed knowing that one *can* dream is at the base of the third proposition outlined above.
- 4 Friedrich Nietzsche 'How the Real World at last Became a Myth,' in *Twilight of the Idols* [1895] (Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), accessed 11 June 2017, <https://thefloatinglibrary.com/2010/03/08/how-the-real-world-at-last-became-a-myth/>.
- 5 For the most obvious examples of each, see: Michel Foucault *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (London: Routledge, 2002); Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* [1986] (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol II* [1980] (London: Continuum, 2004); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Class, Race* [1983] (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011); Isabelle Stengers, *Comopolitics II (Posthumanities)* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Experimental Futures)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Johnny Golding, 'Friendship,' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Lynn Turner, Undine Selbach, and Ron Broglio (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Henry Rogers, *QueerTextuRealities* (Birmingham: Article Press, 2014); Open Democracy (eds), *What is it To be Fierce: The Photography of Ajamu*, accessed 12 June 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/zia-x/what-is-it-to-be-fierce-photography-of-ajamu>.
- 6 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Other II), Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, [2008] (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and especially 'One: 1 February 1984: The First Hour,' and 'Five: 15 February 1984,' 1-23; 73-95, respectively.
- 7 David Ricardo, *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo: Volume III Pamphlets and Papers 1809-1811*, ed. Piero Sraffa (Cambridge: The University Press for the Royal Economic Society, 1962), 62. Paraphrased.
- 8 Karl Marx, *The Theses on Feuerbach* [1845] (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 13-15.
- 9 I am indebted, in particular, to the arguments developed by Gerald Nestler, especially in his 'Derivative Logics' unpublished paper presented at the *Tokens Platform, 1948 Unbound: Unleashing the Technical Present*, 30 Nov - 2 Dec 2017, HKW, Berlin, accessed 7 December 2017, [https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/1948/1948\\_start.php](https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/1948/1948_start.php).
- 10 Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen, 'Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?' *Physics Review* 47 (1935): 777.
- 11 Giambattista Vico, 'Book II: Poetic Wisdom: Corollaries Concerning the Principal Aspects of this Science, Chapter II,' and 'Book I: Section IV: Method,' in *The New Science* [1744] (New York: Cornell University Press, 1948), 88.
- 12 René Descartes, *The Meditations*, as cited in Hannah Arendt, 'The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age,' in *The Human Condition*

[1958] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 248-524, especially 293-303.

13 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 280-84.

14 See Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, (New York: Random House, 1986), 64-5.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* [1877] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), section 125, 119-20.

16 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, as quoted in Martin Heidegger, 'The Word of Nietzsche,' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 58-9

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, as quoted in Martin Heidegger, *The Word of Nietzsche*, 59-60.

Johnny Golding is a philosopher and poet. Using an over-arching eco-sophy called 'Radical Matter', Golding's research presents a practice-led intellectual challenge to established lines of thinking in contemporary philosophy and art especially in term of the (or an) art 'object'. In her role as Professor of Philosophy and Fine Art at the Royal College of Art, Johnny Golding is Head of the MA Contemporary Art Practice - Public Sphere and is Research Leader of the PHD/post-doc/staff research environment: *Entanglement*. She is currently finishing her latest monograph *Radical Matter: Wild Science, Philosophy and the Courage of Art*.



# Merry Christmas\* Linear Photography from the Early Carboniferous to Early Dinner

Damian Taylor

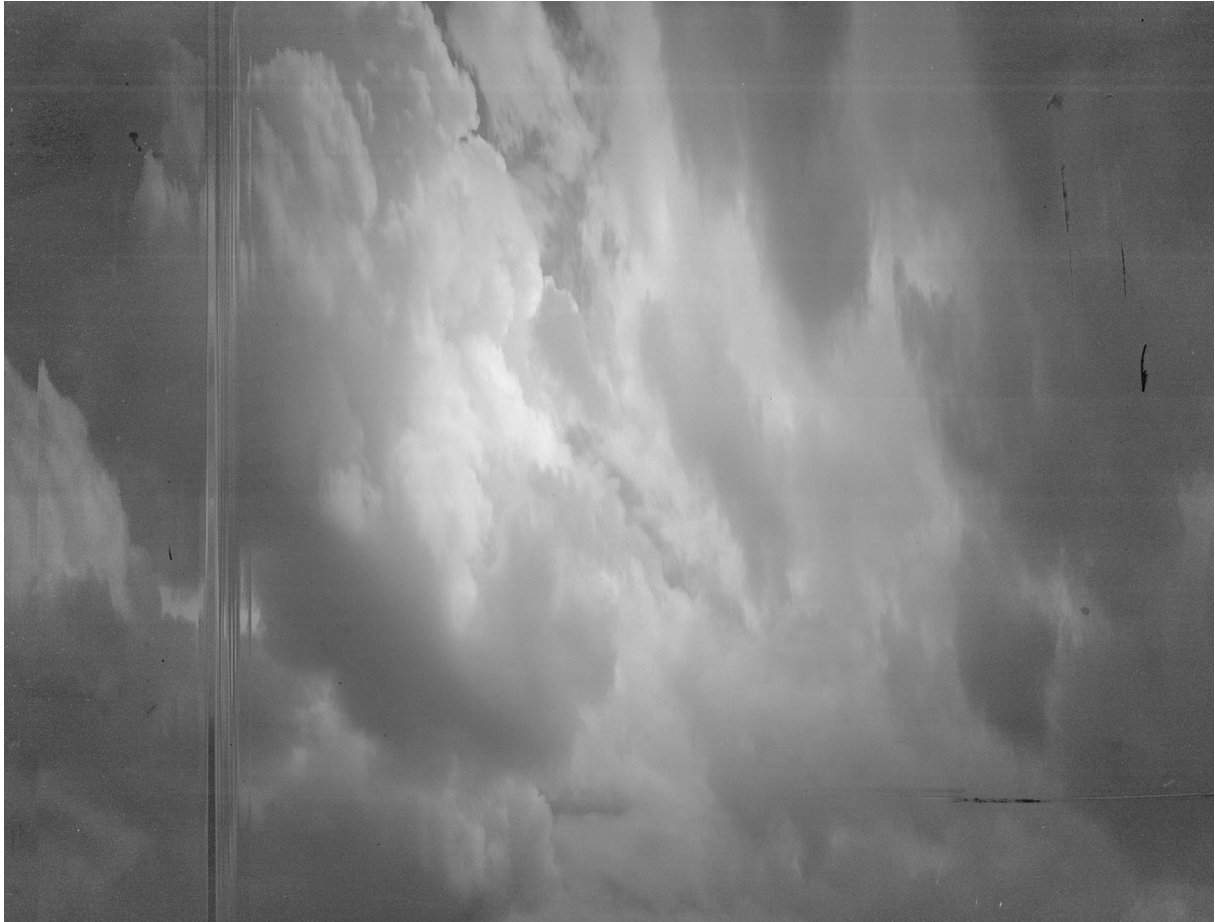
To cite this contribution:

Taylor, Damian. 'Merry Christmas\* Linear Photography from the Early Carboniferous to Early Dinner.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 34–39, <http://www.oarplatform.com/merry-christmas/>.

Towards the close of a summer of sketching on Hampstead Heath, at around one o'clock in the afternoon of the 13th September, 1821, John Constable painted his first oil study devoted entirely to the sky. On the painting's reverse was later inscribed the conditions it recorded: 'Sept 13th. one o'clock. Slight wind at North West, which became tempestuous in the afternoon, With Rain all the night following.' Constable only painted two or three more pure cloud studies in 1821, but the following year he painted about fifty.

I think that I return to Constable's cloud studies because of their confused relationship with time. Clouds have long symbolised instability and, as such, can be understood as ideal subjects for an artist who sought to arrest the transitory; to render permanent 'one brief moment caught from fleeting time'.<sup>1</sup> In this the cloud studies have been understood to be congruous with contemporary desires driving the development of photography.<sup>2</sup> Yet, during these years, Constable expressed a desire that viewers appreciate the brushstrokes that animated his paintings, brushstrokes that evoked the duration of making.<sup>3</sup> The paintings wed two very different times, being both traces of accumulated bodily movements and potent evocations of observed moments. In highlighting the time of making whilst presenting an image that is emblematically of a fleeting moment, the cloud studies make clear not only that the subject would have greatly altered between the artist starting and finishing the work, but that even as a brushstroke moved from left to right the clouds may have perceptibly moved from right to left.

†



Damian Taylor, *Hampstead Heath* 20/05/2017, 11.55-12.03, 2017, digital image.

On 20th May, 2017, between 11.55 and 12.03 on Hampstead Heath, looking south, I made a photograph of clouds. Each pixel has an exposure time of a fraction of a second. The image is formed from left to right, building into a linear record of eight minutes. At about 11.57 the Tupperware box on which I had propped the front of the camera slipped. I put it back.



Damian Taylor, *Dunbar 20/02/2017, 15.41-15.44*, 2017, digital image.

I made the camera in January and at first photographed clouds. Other subjects soon proved equally or more compelling. On 20th February, 2017, on a very windy day in Dunbar, East Lothian, between 15.41 and 15.44, I took a picture of the sea. What appear to be waves moving from left to right is actually the record of waves moving directly towards the lens over several minutes, recorded from left to right. Three months later I returned to the East Lothian coast to photograph the sea again, but I ended up photographing some rock.



Damian Taylor, *North Berwick 11/05/2017, 14.00-14.06, 2017*, digital image.

On 11th May, 2017, between 13.59 and 14.07, I took a photograph of a cliff face in North Berwick. I later trimmed a minute from each end. In the image, the vertical tonal banding results from the sun's passage behind clouds – after half a minute it came out for about five seconds, between about one minute and three it was behind thin cloud, then bright sunlight prevailed until four minutes in, when the sun hid more successfully. The register of six minutes from left to right overlaps with the stratigraphic record of millions of years running from bottom to top, in which – crushed and mutated under its own weight – the strata slip, time buckles. This elision of fleeting light and the seemingly intransigent fabric of the earth remind me of their shared transience, operating in vastly different temporal registers. And of their shared indifference to me.



\* It is unlikely that I would have made the photographs had I not spent a long time researching and writing about Constable. Equally, I would not have started thinking about Constable if I hadn't been making photographs. Perhaps some reflection on how these strands interacted would be of interest. If not – unless you want the endnotes – I suggest reading something else or looking at the pictures again.

On the shortest night of 2013, from an hour after sunset until an hour before sunrise, I sat in a field a few miles outside Oxford. For nearly four hours I exposed a single 35mm photograph of a bung from a whisky cask, into which lines had been burnt by focusing sunlight through a lens. A drawing made with light. A photograph. More precisely a heliograph, to appropriate Nicéphore Niépce's term for the earliest photographic process of which examples survive. Sunlight from eight minutes and 93 million miles away, condensed through a lens to darken a receptive surface, now re-lit by sunlight reflected from a full moon and recorded through the lens of a camera. Inconceivable vastness compressed into the palm of a hand. Not my art.

As a last-minute thought I had brought with me a four-foot-wide roll of photographic paper, some scissors, and a couple of paintings that I had made more than two years earlier using a raking mist of enamel paint on 9 gsm abaca tissue paper, each about five-foot by seven and drawn from a series of approximately twenty works that had developed from the previous year's Christmas cards. At around midnight I rolled out two overlapping eight-foot lengths of photographic paper and placed one of the paintings on top, leaving this to expose by moonlight for about twenty minutes. I then removed the painting and rolled up the sheets of paper, developing them the next morning in a makeshift darkroom. Despite my initial disappointment, the resulting photograph grew upon me. During the next half year, on still, moonlit nights, I produced about five more (alongside many failures). Throughout this process I wrote on the reverse of each work the location, time, date, and sometimes the weather conditions of its exposure. That winter, without evident prompting, I recalled that Constable had written similar annotations on his cloud studies. From this emerged an interest in how these early nineteenth-century paintings might relate to photography. I shall not dwell upon what led me to spend the night of the summer solstice sitting alone in a field. Rather, I will outline the dialogue between Constable and my studio practice from the moment that I noted the similarity between the inscriptions on my photographs and those on Constable's sketches.

As key examples of Constable's sketches are in the collection of the Yale Center for British Art, I found a plausible and subsidised pretext to spend time in an environment that turned out to be better suited to nurturing over-reaching aspirations than to sustaining research-related holidays: having left England with the intention of developing an oblique aside on Medardo Rosso, I returned three months later with a long and excitingly under-researched manuscript. Having been adamant that my engagement with Constable was to be limited to America, I put the draft to one side. However, unwilling to leave behind a subject that I was finding engrossing, I appropriated Constable's *Hadleigh Castle* as the overt subject matter of a video work that I took to be more fundamentally concerned with other matters, not least with the quasi-agential quality of reproduced images. Yet from working with the shimmering insubstantiality of video there arose a growing interest in the relationship between Constable's works and contemporaneous understandings of electricity, which reinforced my desire to return to Constable more comprehensively.

I don't know whether my writing would have engaged with electricity had I not made the video – the connections now seem self-evident, but they did not always. Would I have returned to the draft at all had I not made the video? Probably, I'm bad at letting go. Either way, given that it developed from an initial interest in the parallels between the Hampstead sketches and photography, the draft already paid considerable attention to the relationship between Constable's artistic practice and contemporary scientific research (which really should have led to electricity in time). Humphry Davy already featured prominently in my interest in Constable, due to his essay of 1802, which outlined his and Tom Wedgwood's attempts to fix the image of the camera obscura using solutions of silver nitrate applied to paper or leather. I had some silver nitrate in my studio, residuum from a series of works that involved using a mid-nineteenth century mirroring technique to precipitate a layer of silver onto epoxy resin casts (a process that was incorporated in the video mentioned above). Having repeated Davy's experiments on paper, I wanted to try them on parchment. As a cheaper source of vellum than a bookbinder's supplies, I spent £5 buying an old legal document on eBay. The terms of a £300 loan arrived, wax-stamped and 'dated 14th day of July 1821' – signed within a few hours and a few miles of Constable painting the first of his 1821 sketches, a work that had become central to interest in the artist after my return to England. I ended up not using the parchment, yet I can well imagine that thinking about it heightened my awareness of how an inscription that asserts the singularity of a temporally and spatially discrete event can also strengthen that moment's ties with other times. How assigning a time and date to an image that seemingly captures a specific, unrepeatable instant can re-inscribe it within the calendar, thus conflating linear and cyclical conceptions of time.

A few months later, on the 195th anniversary of each sketch that Constable painted and inscribed in 1821 – whether at noon or 5.30 am, in 34°C swelter or in driving rain – I revisited the Heath, exposing for an hour an abstract cyanotype that recorded the intensity of light, the fall of rain, the slither of snails, and so forth. I am not sure that making this body of work especially affected my thinking about Constable. That said, I can well imagine that the process deepened my appreciation of the complexity of the term 'exposure' (it poured with rain on the anniversary of the only occasion that Constable painted back-to-back studies) and sustained my interest in the different senses of time that can inhere in a simple image, such as the tension between the linear application of paint and the all-over quality of the image's address. Such a tension seems to underscore the above photographs.

†

If far from comprehensive, I trust the above is not misleading in highlighting both the historical back-and-forth that underscored this research alongside the contingencies and complexities that sustained it and from which it arose – I would not have spent three years engaged with Constable had I not made Christmas cards in 2010.

- 1 Ronald Brymer Beckett, ed., *John Constable's Discourses*, (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1970), 9–10. The line is borrowed from Wordsworth's sonnet 'Upon The Sight Of A Beautiful Picture Painted By Sir G. H. Beaumont, Bart', Beaumont being a mutual supporter of Constable and Wordsworth.
- 2 Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 99–100.
- 3 Beckett, ed., *John Constable's Correspondence*, Volume 6 (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1978), 185.

Damian Taylor is an artist and a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. In 2014 he held a fellowship at the Yale Center for British Art, from which emerged a recent article on John Constable in *British Art Studies*. Articles on Medardo Rosso are forthcoming in the *Oxford Art Journal* and the *Sculpture Journal*.



# A Day with Gauguin at the Gold Coast 1892/2017

Fiona West

To cite this contribution:

West, Fiona. 'A Day with Gauguin at the Gold Coast 1892/2017.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 40, <http://www.oarplatform.com/day-gauguin-gold-coast-18922017/>.



Fiona West, video still from *A Day with Gauguin at the Gold Coast 1892/2017*, 2017.  
Available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/day-gauguin-gold-coast-18922017/>.

Fiona West is a Zimbabwean born Australian artist based in Brisbane, whose practice includes handcrafted video and photography. Materiality and circulation are key factors in her works that investigate narratives of portability. She has worked in the arts industry in South Africa, London and Australia, and is currently a Doctor of Visual Arts candidate at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane.

# Un-finishing Research: Towards an Anthropology of Making and Perhaps Un-making

Michele Avis Feder-Nadoff

To cite this contribution:

Avis Feder-Nadoff, Michele. 'Un-finishing Research: Towards an Anthropology of Making and Perhaps Un-making.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 41-58, <http://www.oarplatform.com/un-finishing-research-towards-an-anthropology-of-making-and-perhaps-un-making/>.

How is research a constant embarking, an endless unfolding, rather than a beginning that ends in a safe harbor, or a voyage that ends in returning? How might the processes of 'making' – in craft and research – be less about products, conclusions, tidy finishings, and more about becoming? This paper addresses this 'un-finishing' by sharing the ethnography and analysis of my long-term apprenticeship experiences with the 'traditional' coppersmiths of Santa Clara del Cobre in Michoacán, México.<sup>1</sup> This research, a learning through making, has taught me about both.

My first apprenticeship was with Maestro Máximo Velázquez Correa, in the town's technical school, Cecatil 66, where I began my study of the traditional '*cobre martillado*', copper-forging in 1997. Subsequently, I began apprenticeship with the coppersmith artisan, Maestro Jesús Pérez Ornelas, most especially from 2004 until his death on June 24, 2014. I continue to study with his sons.

Maestro Pérez insisted on the 'un-finishable'. In many ways, he instructed me on the un-finishing of things. In his insistence on the impossibility of perfection, whilst training me in the practice of that honored perfection, he taught me that perfecting is infinite, and is infinitely an unraveling. An un-finishing. It is finding new problems and difficulties, confronting new challenges and contingencies, while resolving others in an un-abbreviated flow, encounter and correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

This un-finishing also points out the limitations of knowledge gained through all making projects, research and craft study. As Trevor Marchand reminds us, all 'human knowledge like our physical bodies is constantly reconfigured'.<sup>3</sup> Un-finishing then, also means to 'go from known to unknown' and from outside to inside.<sup>4</sup> As Tim Ingold, argues:

We human beings do not live inside our heads; nor do we look out upon the world through the windows of our senses. We inhabit the world itself, and through our senses we participate from within in its perpetual formation. It is from the ground of this participation that all knowledge arises. That's what we mean by Knowing from the Inside.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, anthropology and ethnography were performed in two steps: first, being inside the study via ethnography, and then going outside the study through theorising. Indeed, a moving from ethnography to theory.<sup>6</sup> A beginning that leads to a final ending. This approach has also imposed a structural hierarchy. In this study with the coppersmiths, theory arises

in doing and is translated, interpreted, and analysed discursively. Entering into the forge – behind the scenes – privileges wandering, confusion, discomfort, and the truthfulness of disaccord, disapproval, and honest engagement.

This is intensified and complicated by the fact that I not only work in the forge, but also live within the family home, which is similar to living in a village within a village. This compound is a familial nucleus space for at least twenty-three people of four generations. The complex fits a small territorial area in which the forge serves as a central unifier, a *hogar* – a hearth and home – for the fire and family. Chickens, dogs, cats, and birds run about, as do young children who often stop to play with tools or to help an uncle or a father. Cows, pigs, and sometimes the occasional goat can be seen and heard nearby.

After over twenty years of visits with this family, with stays that lasted anywhere between one week to several months or even several years (as during my doctorate), I am not a privileged visitor: I have become more like a family member. Alternately, I am called an adopted daughter, or the oldest daughter. Most recently, doña Sagrario, my teacher's wife, called me her favorite daughter-in-law and, with a smile, affectionately added that I was also the most 'spoiled'. I, in turn, joked that I am the daughter-in-law without a husband. I now have my role within the family's pecking order and dramas and am as liable to be teased and corrected as anybody; and as a constant learner, this can include anything from hammering to cutting vegetables improperly. The family joke is: 'Even when you are not here, anything that goes wrong is your fault'. I am compared to the indigenous, colorful, and outrageous, 'India María',<sup>7</sup> who does not know how to behave in the city and forever makes errors and laughable blunders. Also like her, I am neither 'here' nor 'there' and exist in the nomadic terrain of wandering anthropologist-artist.

To study in the forge within this familial and generational space is, for these reasons, personal. It is also because in the forge, I am physically and psychologically vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> I am on the entry-level, lowest rung within the space. My previous experiences – kinesthetic and aesthetic training as an artist – that are relevant to copper-smithing hardly seem important, except as an education to be challenged. My ranking was established by Maestro Pérez, the *jefe*, the boss of this studio, which he ran autocratically until his passing.

Artisanal teaching is social as well as technical, and not in any way about being passive.<sup>9</sup> The learning-by-doing and observing is always about action, solitary and collective. It involves anticipation of not only the proximate steps of the artisan process in which I am directly engaged, but also those of the activities of my fellow artisans around me. For these reasons, apprenticeship is also about solidarity. In the forge, I must be sensitive and aware of the movements and needs of all the artisans working in the space, and to respond to them when needed. If, for example, José Sagrario is smelting silver for a newly commissioned piece, I offer to work the bellows for him as silver is a more sensitive and costly metal than copper, demanding careful observation as it is delicately heated. José is then freed to note the silver's changing colors, visually measuring its progress as it heats to melting point in the small crucible nested over the raised *cendrada*, the traditional fire pit.<sup>10</sup>

Often, I receive conflicting directions or advice. But as Maestro Jesús is my primary guide, he would often be angry if I chose to take advice that ran contrary to his, even if it was given by one of his sons. Sometimes this would embroil me in the middle of an argument about

techniques or even safety. Yet, certainly each coppersmith follows the same general ‘traditional’ path, a fluid adaptable mapping of the steps involved in forging a vessel in Santa Clara. Each artisan’s maneuvers and subsequent tactics are developed over time and through repetitive yet varied practice and application.

Although I am responsible primarily to Maestro Pérez, I must respect all of my teachers. So, for example, when Napoleón helps train me to use the sledgehammer, I follow his orders and instructions, swinging the tool with entire mental-corporal concentration over my head to land correctly or incorrectly on the *tejo*, the round chunk of hot copper, to thin it. I repeat until barely able to raise the hammer. Napoleón wants me to understand not only my own experience of training, but also his own; his instruction, then, is also how he shares his experience as a child in training. My bodily and emotional experiences in the forge trigger his memories, prompting a naturally serendipitous opening for sharing vulnerabilities and the challenges he faced as a child-apprentice.

For these reasons, the apprenticeship model was so key to this research (as it can be to others). It was a form of learning to know with/in the active dynamic flows of the materials, people and place of Santa Clara del Cobre. In retrospect, in selecting the apprenticeship model, I was also following in the ‘pioneering footsteps of Victor Turner’s attempts to bring ethnography to life through performance and drama.’<sup>11</sup> As Rupert Cox, Andrew Irving and Christopher Wright, the editors of *Beyond Text: Critical Practices and Sensory Anthropology*, explain:

Turner was particularly interested in how corporeal experience and emotion could be evoked through the aesthetics of the performative and collaborative activity that can be used to research and represent the complexity and diversity of human experience. Turner’s students would not only read ethnographies but enact and perform them in order that the social life and rituals of other places could be brought to life and partially experienced, if not understood, in their nervous systems and bodies.<sup>12</sup>

Apprenticeship also brings additional meaning to Michael Taussig’s concept of ‘the magical power of the copy’.<sup>13</sup> In the mimetic activities of the apprentice studying with a master, we might also argue that: ‘The representational force of the copy is derived from the stickiness of the reference as an affective presence of the original’.<sup>14</sup> The apprenticeship experience is a complex in which the doubling activities of learning through making – by observing and doing – form the structure, texture, context and matrix of an extremely empathic ethnography. In this learning process, the ethos-aesthetics of the master artisan and the community also becomes instilled, demonstrated and imparted to the apprentice.

This means that ‘how-to-work’ – to make the copper objects, the labor and aspects of production and relationships between artisans, materials and the particular space – comprises and entails an ‘aesthetics of making’. This ethos-aesthetics nurtures a social and aesthetic partnership of labor, production, and creativity. These activities are not merely technical; but rather encompass differentiated knowledge and idiosyncratic solutions to crafting copper-objects. These artisanal activities, then, are the very ‘dispositions’ of Santa Clara, a place, whose culture is encoded, embodied, and transmitted within these making (culture and craft) practices. This sense of place is also embodied in the ethos-aesthetics of the copper pieces



produced, whose stylistic expressions of ‘taste and distinction’ is dictated by community values and its codes of conduct.<sup>15</sup>



Unknown photographer, *Maestro Jesús Pérez Ornelas with his son Felix who steadies his father's piece as he hammers it*, circa 1976, family forge and studio, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México, image courtesy of Pérez Pamatz family.

We might see making, then, as a hopeful, even ecological and political enterprise, whose processes enact natural correspondences and flows between peoples, places, and materials.<sup>16</sup> Anthropological studies of emotions, the body, the senses and its sensorium, embodiment, performance, and phenomenology help enunciate the complex, even existential dynamics of making. This approach to thinking in doing further extends our anthropological understanding of techniques and leads us to what I propose is a ‘critical aesthetics’.<sup>17</sup>

The intention is not only to reclaim and restore aesthetics to its sensorial feeling-based roots of *aesthe*.<sup>18</sup> It is also to identify, analyse, and map its affective and effective aspects within the sociopolitical circuits and dynamics in which they are produced, function, and become constituted.<sup>19</sup> This is naturally complicated further by interactions with the expectations and aesthetic demands of the global market.

So, for example, in the Santa Clara forge, the admired extremely polished finished copper surface goes beyond mere planishing. Its countless layers of hard work and gentle hammering refer to the importance of a job well done and to a life-work well-attended to, perfected like the surface and symmetry of the copper vessel one makes. Aesthetics, then, is ultimately relational, social, sensorial, and felt in-making, in-transmission, and in-reception.<sup>20</sup> Because aesthetics are particular to person and place, they impart colour, sound, smell, and texture to these ‘techniques of the body’ that, as Marcel Mauss argued, are far from universal.<sup>21</sup>

Working in the forge, one learns that to understand social agency, one must understand aesthetic agency. This is especially true when studying Santa Clara. Its craft trade is profoundly informed and constituted by a confluence of cultural memory and socio-political-ecological conditions. The village history is passed on orally and corporally through the smiths' techniques. And, importantly, it is also generated via intersecting tropes of Mexican nationalism and identity, tourism and marketing, in parallel with a variety of government and non-profit programs that have supported artisan crafts – '*artesanía*' and '*arte popular*' – since the post-revolution.<sup>22</sup>

*Artesanía* is a terminology that was developed in the early 20th century to capture the various related categories of popular art, craft, and the hand-made vernacular and/or 'traditional' artisanal production of Mexico. This terminology of *artesanía* or *arte popular* was intended to capture an 'authentically Mexican craft form' and was part of the larger nationalistic transformation post-Mexican revolution to forge a unique Mexican identity and synthetic culture. This movement of *Mexicanidad* took place through a vigorous collaboration of Mexican artists, intellectuals, and politicians, and included support from some North Americans. One might see in this history a story of ongoing tensions between the different ideals of a rational modernity – of a developing industrial nation, based in the romantic melding of a new race, created from the mixing of ancient mythic indigenous origins with a (superior) European religious and secular elite. In many respects, the most contemporary Mexican craft is produced in marginalised rural and indigenous communities, which have been pawns in this play of authenticity, often only poster children for tourist promotion but with questionable political power.

Notwithstanding, the coppersmiths are (entirely) aware of these tropes and their often precarious or dubious class status, and utilise all these aspects in their creative positioning via their craft, playing their roles as submissive artisans or as their own political ethnic agent as appropriate and when permitted. The agency of the artisans of Santa Clara is not necessarily or always externally evident; to the contrary, their utmost expression of agency may be their ability to hide it, often under a mask of what may be interpreted as submissiveness, timidity or friendly compliance. As their apprentice, this was precisely what I studied, on their terms and within their context.

Critically, it was understood between Maestro Jesús, his sons and myself that I was there to study '*como ser*' – literally 'how to be' – an artisan. This meant learning 'to become' in learning how 'to make.' It involved an inculcation of not merely tasks and gestures, but of incorporating the habits of the forge and community and its stylistic elements. Within my relationship to my master-mentor, the tasks of learning, such as listening and observing, reflect collective values and its ethos-aesthetics. For example, I was not to answer back to his criticism, nor was I to question – but to listen, return to work, and try harder. I was to respect my elders and know my place. In my position as an apprentice, I was un-made, as my autonomy was moulded to be reshaped to fit into the forge and family structure.

Studies of artisan embodied knowledge and craft transmission help outline the social and cognitive significance of nonverbal forms of learning. These forms of learning are active and unfinished, constantly shifting. Studying with the coppersmiths of Santa Clara challenges the assumptions and mis- and pre-conceptions of terms such as 'tacit knowledge' and 'hand-made', which obscure artisanal making.



As Leroi-Gourhan explained, all ‘automatic’ skills are first obtained in awkward practice.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, one learns clumsily and through error; these ‘plateaus’ of skill acquisition vary with the production needs presented, but they can splinter. To use the word ‘tacit’ is to oversimplify making, and to leave unexamined critical and complex transforming processes. The work of the artisan lies in the rough edges, when a technique accomplished with proficiency is disrupted. As Napoleón proudly declared, a good artisan can take on many types of projects and this is precisely how he learned new things from each designer’s or client’s commission.

In addition, the coppersmiths, as other artisans, do not only use their hands, they use their entire body-mind within a confluence of forces, moving between distal to proximal, and beyond. Their actions and gestures are not just from hand to object, from fingers (distal) to the shoulder and trunk (proximal); but, rather, their movements, even in seated positions, require an attendance of total involvement from feet to position of neck and head. As yoga or tai chi, all elements are raised to conscious attention. As the sun salute in yoga practice runs through the entire body, the smith’s hammer swing is made alive and precise, effective. And this is also because it must actively engage and respond as countless studies of hammering have proven.<sup>24</sup>

Artisans’ perceptions are not just ‘passive impressions of external information.’<sup>25</sup> Rather, the coppersmith must attend to materials and things with a deeply somatic attention.<sup>26</sup> These careful movements open up to each other interactively, haptically.<sup>27</sup> The skilled coppersmith sees and perceives by hearing, and hears and senses by seeing.<sup>28</sup> Tones come in colours and sounds. Visual and aural echoes, pitches, and vibrations become actions that are also instruments to interpret thickness, rigidity, temperature. Duration, speed, resonance, and repetition, flow and disjuncture constitute both activity and information.

It is through the relationship between the metal and my body that I learn about copper’s capabilities and the states it is in, work-hardened or soft, thick or overly thin. As I worked with heightened self-consciousness, my inculcation included not only listening to instructions and berating; more importantly, it involved mimesis, in a profoundly haptic, empathic sense. This is not so much to do with concentrating on the direct exacting imitation, but rather that with these efforts to mimic, I can feel the complexity of movements that by watching (superficially) can appear simple and effortless. Techniques may be executed gracefully by the experienced smith, but for a novice apprentice it was difficult. I felt like a bad dancer to the well-coordinated steps of my fellow smiths and teachers.

As I watched Napoleón work, I felt my own back straighten, my thighs and knees began to stabilise the copper object held over the stake. As my own body became more centred, the hammering increased its effectivity. And even when I failed to execute what I observed, the awareness found through the intense effort of mimesis and imitation provided a window to the knowledge of its goal, and I often was much more likely to be able to break down the steps or components of the actions I had missed in the making process.



Michele Feder-Nadoff, *José Sagrario applying a natural red patina to his piece*, circa 2013, family forge and studio, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México.

To enter the world of the forge, I must learn to see and hear anew; by learning to see what my teachers see and hear, they teach me. New knowledge is experienced, acquired when rhythm breaks, is punctured and ruptured by errors that open to reflexivity, even shame and recriminations. Additionally, the bar of expectation by my teachers is continually raised. Training is perpetual and unfinished.

Every day in the forge, like a child, as I grow physically and mentally into the role of apprentice and learn to acquire facility, I take on more responsibility and independence one step at a time. Each tiny step requires additional skill. And each skill level requires additional actively acquired knowledge. Can I identify the specific type of wood by its bark? Is it oak or pine? Do I know which wood not to use when I am just annealing the copper? Do I know how fast it burns? Which to use for which process in the smithing? Do I know how to efficiently cut the wood for the fire? Can I swing the axe firmly and safely?

The master, too, is always in training. ‘Until the day I will die I will never stop learning how to be an artisan!’ Maestro Pérez would declare as many other artisans have equally told me. As one trains one’s eyes and ears and body-mind, what was sufficient at one stage is lost in the dust of the next. The body itself is not frozen.

Across the span of a life-time, the copper-smiths’ muscles strengthen through related daily practices not only in the forge but in the field, through the related movements of wielding a hammer in smithing or the hoe in farming. Sight and feeling are linked, and the more I do – or, try to do – in the forge, the more my visual observation becomes haptic, increasingly

interpretive, acute. One feels the movements of the masters as one observes them; the efforts of mimesis even unsuccessful open up a field of understanding of how metal feels and how it feels to move and meet the metal as it moves. As a trainee apprentice, I become more sensitive.

Yet, capacities change over time: with age, my own master's sight and strength is diminished. And as a woman and with later entrance to the work my body must adapt and transform; age and gender play significant roles.<sup>29</sup>

I worked to transform my physique, to stride and assert myself with force and control. To enter the masculine world of the *fragua*, the forge, as a woman has meant to apply the transformative nature of gesture to gender. As Judith Butler has theorised, the 'body becomes its gender in a series of actions which are renewed, revised and consolidated over time'.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, in the forge, my gender identity is constituted by actions, confirming that gender is permeable and performative in support of the feminist position of Simone de Beauvoir, asserting that 'one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman'.<sup>31</sup> In this, my gender is made, re-created in the forge.<sup>32</sup>



Michele Feder-Nadoff, *Maestro Pérez Ornelas and his sons José Sagrario Pérez Pamatz and Napoleón Pérez Pamatz forging the 'tejo,' ingot of copper, circa 2012, photograph, family forge and studio, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México.*

This physical transformation of body and strength is pragmatic and necessary when working in the forge with metals and extreme heat, within the dynamics of the masculine relationships of bonding and camaraderie. As I engage as fellow coppersmith, although a novice, my 'femininity' is suppressed, until at times my teacher forgets and cannot understand why my

hammer-blow is not equal to his. On Sundays, he would be reminded by my non-forge garb and say, 'Now you look like a woman'. However, it is more than only actions and body representations and postures. The understanding of the process and the work itself bonds us, in a language and discourse, a conversation of particular intimacy, of shared understanding, interest and concern.

Unlike the classical images of the smith – portrayed, for example, by Peter Paul Rubens<sup>33</sup> and De Goya Lucientes Francisco<sup>34</sup> – it is grace and agility, rather than brute force, that are key. Like the dancer, alone and in partnership, I learn rhythm, balance, coordination, and how to use centrifugal force. And, like the musician or tango-dancer, I must acquire an almost telepathic, intuitive empathy with my fellow smiths, my tools and copper material. The hammer and its weight must be perceived as a friend and companion, rather than an enemy. Gravity and weight become forces to join with; as in martial arts, rather than resist these, the enemy's power is integrated into the movements and intentions of one's own body. This incorporation from outside to inside is transformed into new sets of synesthetic unities.

The copper-smith navigates like a blind mole tunnelling, via a sense of direction and volition smelled and sensed along the way of the path they carve. These routes unwind through a visceral memory of making into a future un-finishing.<sup>35</sup> This is why even when repeating a particular style, it may still be tweaked, adjusted, and transformed. As the artisans would promptly reply upon being asked what they are making: '*Voy a ver como se sale!*' – 'I will see what turns out!'

Movement in artisan practice – as in all creative efforts – is complicated by combining a mixture of invisibles senses of direction, that although not visible, nor audible, are perceptible. These comprise (what I humorously call) the 'mole theory' and attest to a haptic visuality. This attending in the moment is similar to what occurs in wheel throwing of the potter, when their touch remains in one place while the press of their fingers and hands give form to the spinning clay, moulding its space through stillness and time.

The year before my teacher's death, he began to tell me that if I did not make a piece in his style, namely with 'heads' and 'feet', he would never know if I had become a good artisan. Although I had been working on forms intrinsic to the traditional styles of the community, and had focused on *gajos* – the gadroon ribbed or rounded gourd-like shapes – Napoleón, as well as his father, were insisting that was not enough. One needed to venture beyond the comfort zone of what one has learned, like a runner seeking out new terrain or a different speed or stride. It was also a privileged invitation. Personal artisan style is not to be taken-up freely. This was an invitation for a closer enskillment and inculcation. This last lesson before my master-teacher's death represented his trust in me to not betray him; but rather, that my efforts would honour him by sharing a deeper understanding of his work. Even his own sons, such a Jose Sagrario, did not make a piece with human heads until several years after his father had passed on.





Jesus Pérez Ornelas, *Detail Vase with twelve heads*, circa 1980, vase, approximately 12 × 12 × 12 inches, forged and engraved copper, collection Museo Nacional del Cobre, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México, photograph by Michele Feder-Nadoff.



Jesus Pérez Ornelas, *Vase with twelve heads*, circa 1980, Vase with twelve heads, forged copper, approximately 12 × 12 × 12 inches, forged and engraved copper, Collection Museo Nacional del Cobre, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México, photograph by Michele Feder-Nadoff.

Tradition comes with a double meaning derived from its Latin root-word, *tradere*, implying that the handing down of tradition can also mean a handing over, becoming a traitor to this very tradition.<sup>36</sup> So, careful thought is given to what you teach and to whom. To receive maestro Pérez's command bore with it a serious privilege and responsibility. I took up my teacher's call knowing it was crucial to obey and also feeling the limitation of time as Maestro Pérez was now past 85 years of age. I spent months on my first piece. First learning how to make feet and then beginning to learn how to make the heads. This process evoked discussions which helped me learn even more, not only about how to work the copper, but about maestro Jesus's process and how and what these shapes meant to him.<sup>37</sup> He thought the faces of my first headed piece were *feas* - ugly - that I should have thrown it into the street, trashed it. The aesthetics of my first piece might have conformed to Giacometti's aesthetics but not to Santa Clara's.



Michele Feder-Nadoff, *Diablos y Angeles*, views 1, 2, 3, 4, 2013, 4 × 5 × 5 inches, forged copper, photographs by Michele Feder-Nadoff.



This piece was followed by another one, to which I also devoted months. Then, one night, in the evening of Mother's Day, Maestro Jesus and his wife Doña Sagrario and I were gathered in the kitchen for an evening snack, when my teacher began to berate me gently (in the forge, criticism was given out much more harshly). He told me I had spent inordinate time on the piece and that I could have made ten pieces in the same time period. But his criticism was not about economies of time and resources alone; he went on to explain: 'Do you think the first time I made the piece with heads that I was happy with it?' One is never content, there is simply always something wrong. '*Lo que duele*' – what might bother you – is what you want to improve. This leads to the next piece. What was important was to go on to the subsequent pieces using discontent as inspiration. Making is a continual process; each completed piece is an un-finishing.

In addition, how an artisan performs is always unfinished; work capacity, strength agility, and focus change over time and are diminished or heightened by contingencies of unexpected injury, illness, or old age. When Maestro Jesús suffered a stroke, he was quickly back to work, rising early every morning and very persistently, consciously cutting wood so as to retrain his body and its nervous system to readapt, compensate, and readjust. In these later years, he would tell me, 'Now our pieces are the same, mine are crooked (*chueca*) also!'. Yet, his skill was always maintained in this will and intention, a determined desire to continue to work and create.

Curiously, the pieces that seemed to mean the most to my Maestro when we talked just a few days before his death, were his tools. All his finished copper pieces that had travelled far from him, with this or another client, meant little. Many photos of these completed copper-works had been taken, but had flown away with the visitors who took them, and in albums lent out, but never returned. What meant something to him, ultimately, were his tools, especially his array of forged stakes, each one a footnote to a style and to a particular piece he or a son had created and invented.



Michele Feder-Nadoff, *Maestro Pérez's tools: various small stakes*, 2014, photograph, family forge and studio, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México.



Michele Feder-Nadoff, *Maestro Pérez's tools in his corner: small cinceles*, 2014, photograph, family forge and studio, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, México.

One must also remember that artisans do not only *use* tools: the coppersmiths often make them. Moreover, artisans perform not only with tools, but also *as* tools. As agents, artisans are instruments of their own agency, yet at times, instruments for others. And, finally, tools age, as artisans do, conforming to use and disuse, abuse or care across their lifetimes.

As Walter Benjamin describes, we give things agency, the ability to look back at us through our caring gaze in which their aura is gathered near.<sup>38</sup> Tools, like rituals with their ceremonies and festivals of a collective past, produce an amalgamation of *mémoire involontaire* and *mémoire volontaire*.<sup>39</sup>

Through their use, the artisan acquires both a memory of tool-use, called up in practice, voluntarily, intentionally; yet also, the tool calls up the involuntary and improvised way of using it anew, afresh based upon the old and familiar. So, as a rite performed twice or three times, it has meaning, a pattern to be broken in the contingencies of performance. That is to say, that artisan practice combines the new and the old, techniques that accommodate and respond to changes in material differences, subtle fluctuations, challenges, and inventions based upon inner visions and imagination, or the complicit changes of organic metal or the demands of a designer or client.

In this way, over time, for the artisan, their hammers and other tools, become responsive 'handles' for both voluntary and involuntary recollections that lose their 'mutual exclusiveness'

in performance and use.<sup>40</sup> One knows how to use the tool without looking for it, and as one comes around an unexpected bend, or unplanned resistance, one responds and accommodates. This shift in attention borrows meaning from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who explains that ‘memories need to be made possible by the physiognomy of the givens in order for them to come to complete the perception.’<sup>41</sup>

In artisan practice, the tool comes alive through a coalescence of caring relationships – between humans, materials and things.<sup>42</sup> As Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue: ‘Even technology makes the mistake of considering tools in isolation: tools exist only in relation to the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible.’<sup>43</sup> Tools are made-things which, like artisan agency, are bound up in a potentiality, whose un-finishing is precisely the source of its power.

For the artisans of Santa Clara, the objective of their artisan trade and practice is not simply making pieces to be bought and sold, to maintain themselves and their families. It is also about engaging in *poiēsis*, an open-ended never-ending process of un-finishing. What Heidegger posited as the creative versus the pragmatic *praxis*, linear, Hegelian, rational and completely efficiently intentional and hylomorphic.<sup>44</sup>

For Santa Clara’s coppersmiths, as for the ancient Greeks, *praxis* and *poiēsis* are shared yet distinct experiences. Pure *praxis* is finite. To create with will and to complete with intention. To make ‘things’, nothing else. Yet, their other goal is captured by *poiēsis* which means to reveal – to un-finish, to unravel the fabric of reality, to uncover the invisible presence of the concealed. Because for many of the artisans of Santa Clara, skills are bequeathed providentially, gifts to be constantly honed in a world of relationships – collective, personal, with family, and community – balancing the demands of this world with another, the spiritual.

In this study, the un-finishing of things has also taken place in the mortal finishing, the apparent completion of a lifecycle of Maestro Jesús Pérez Ornelas. Yet this lifecycle remains incomplete, unfinished. His story continues in an after-life imprinted in the history of his family and the Santa Clara community, passed on and received by his sons and former students, including women who studied with him in the community school. This legacy also travels with(in) his copper vessels.

February 12, 2016, more than a year and a half after Maestro Pérez’s death on June 24, 2014, a homage exhibition, titled *Pasión y Orgullo, un Legado Perdurable*<sup>45</sup> was inaugurated in the Museo de Artes y Industrias Populares in the nearby town of Pátzcuaro.<sup>46</sup> The pieces shown paradoxically did not conform to my teacher’s explanation of a well-made piece.<sup>47</sup> They were far from perfectly balanced. Many had been left unfinished or were awkward, humble. Scratched lines still visibly mapped a symmetry that often failed. Yet, the final copper pieces were powerfully present in being un-finished. They were tender reliquaries of extended aura and agency. And they also reveal another aspect of *ambákiti*, the local P’urhepecha indigenous term for the beauty of the well-made: rather than static perfection, their palimpsests of process attest to being ‘made with great passion’, and even tenderness.<sup>48</sup>





Maestro J. Pérez Ornelas, forged, engraved, chased and repoussé copper, approximately 4 × 6 × 6 inches, 2014, in exhibition *Pasión y Orgullo, un Legado Perdurable*, Museo de Artes y Industrias Populares, Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, México, photograph by Michele Feder-Nadoff.



Maestro J. Pérez Ornelas, forged, engraved, chased and repoussé copper, approximately 4 × 6 × 6 inches, 2014, in exhibition *Pasión y Orgullo, un Legado Perdurable*, Museo de Artes y Industrias Populares, Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, México, photograph by Michele Feder-Nadoff.

In my apprenticeship, the ontological and epistemological goals were linked, definitely intertwined. I learned the importance of the functionality of an object; its decorative qualities; emphasis on evenness, smoothness and equality of parts and surface; putting every part in its proper place with proportion; working with patience; working hard; valorising traditional motifs; taking great care with the finish; balancing whole and parts; creating symmetry; and using architectonic design and organisation of form.

But, in this concentration in making in the family forge, I was also initiated to a way of life and a way to be. In learning the actions and gestures of the smith, I learned the stance and modes of maleness, what it meant to become more *macho*, or what the woman in the family called *macha* for a woman. To not cry openly, to be internal, guarded. To protect myself.

In this training, though the relationship built between my teachers and myself, I am also taught social guidelines: to know my place in the social hierarchy; to work hard; to be patient; to pay attention to details; to not give up; to be efficient; to be respectful towards my elders; to be quiet and listen; to not respond openly; to have balance and be centred; to have rhythm; to be devoted; to concentrate; to be focused and remember; to know when to give up and move on; to work collectively and help others; to know when to leave others alone; to be observant; to be vigilant; to be loyal; to reciprocate and exchange; to form alliances not based on money; to keep perspective in all ways; to respect tradition and the ways things are done; to be practical; and finally, as we have seen, to make the work with great passion and the heart.

To study alongside the master coppersmiths of Santa Clara has been to un-finish the divide between subject and object; praxis and theory; anthropology and ethnography. Ingold's (often misunderstood) argument is not that ethnography is not useful, but that by dividing praxis and theory or by separating ethnography from anthropology, we tend to form a colonising bridge to knowledge that subsequently clouds our ability to understand the epistemic value and properties, the ecology of doing and knowing in practice.<sup>49</sup>

Un-finishing is also integral to this study's primary methodology – apprenticeship.

My ethnographic discoveries in learning to become an artisan are encountered tangentially, through disparate fumbling connections and analogies, through loose threads and in little bits. Codes of conduct are discovered in bodily engagement and everyday practices,<sup>50</sup> such as learning to hammer copper in the forge, as well as washing clothes or dishes in the family home. I developed a sense of a specific place, felt when walking upon these simple but tenuous paths guided by one's teachers, their family and other community members. The irony and efficacy of ethnography is precisely its un-finishing. This is because it is based upon processes of displacement and re-emplacement of its subjects, the ethnographer and the persons and place being studied.<sup>51</sup>

This essay initiates an anthropology of making that, in acknowledging un-making and un-finishing, has examined the performative and cognitive processes, powers and potential of artisan-makers and their made things as instruments, tools of becoming. This agency (of artisan life and practice) is possible only by being, in its persistence and resistance, un-finished. This is the resilience of un-finishing. And this is its very plenitude.



- 1 This paper draws from my doctoral thesis, 'Cuerpo de conocimiento – *entre praxis y teoría* – La agencia de los artesanos y su artesanía. Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán. Hacia una antropología de hacer' (Body of Knowledge – Between Praxis & Theory – The Agency of the Artisan and their Craft, Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán: Towards an Anthropology of Making), (PhD diss., El Colegio de Michoacán, 2017).
- 2 I use the word 'correspondences' to link it to Baudelaire's world of correspondences (1861), taken up also by other writers, such as Proust, as well as to Tim Ingold, who argues that 'Anthropology is an inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world...thanks to its embedding in our observational engagements with the world and in our collaborations and correspondences with its inhabits', and see: Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 241–43.
- 3 Trevor Marchand, ed., *Making Knowledge: Explorations of the Indissoluble Relation Between, Mind, Body and Environment* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xii.
- 4 Cristián Simonetti, 'Feeling Forward into the Past: Depths and Surfaces in Archaeology,' *Time and Mind* 8:1 (2014): 69–89, accessed 2 July 2018, at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1751696X.2014.992686>.
- 5 Tim Ingold, *Place* (Aberdeen: Knowing from the Inside Project, University of Aberdeen, 2017), Citation from the publication folio 'Place', produced for the occasion of the exhibition *The Unfinishing of Things*, May–September 2017, as part of *Knowing from the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design*. This 5-year project funded by the European Research Council Advanced Grant was led by Professor Tim Ingold in the Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, starting in June 2013 and running through May 2018.
- 6 These comments are also based on conversations with Tim Ingold in discussion with the author, on June 28, 2017, regarding his attitude towards ethnography and anthropology as will be elaborated further in this text.
- 7 India María is a personality of an indigenous woman who comes to the city and does not know how to behave. She appears as a character in a popular series of movies, and is also used in many television programs. The program is totally not politically correct, being classist and racist, yet it is regarded as amusing. One of the characters is a stereotype of the tourist 'gringo'. The family had me look up some movies and we watched parts of them together.
- 8 This is not in any way to suggest that the family and the coppersmith masters are not protective of me. Indeed, the family is both exceedingly caring and also tough and ruthless in their criticism, in their training me as to how to live in their home and how to work in the forge.
- 9 As articulated by Jean Lave through the contrasts she articulates between formal and informal situated learning, and see: Jean Lave, *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*, (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). See also: Michael Herzfeld, *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), where he discusses how the social hierarchies and complexities of apprenticeship can lead to confusing and difficult situations where some knowledge is hidden from the apprentice. The stresses in apprenticeship-based ethnography and apprenticeship generally lie in identifying the secrets, the mis-information, the mis-informed or 'missed', left-out on purpose to preserve the secrets-of-the-trade.
- 10 The family of Pérez Pamatz is one of the few families in Santa Clara that still use the (non-electric) bellows for creating the air draft for the wood-based fire. Most fire pits in other forge-studios use electrical draft systems to maintain the fire-pit. These are similar to blow-dryers which create a strong draft running from tubes along the ground to the entrance of the pit.
- 11 Victor Turner and Edith Turner, 'Performing Ethnography,' *The Drama Review: TDR*, 26:2 (1982): 33–50; See also: Dwight Conquergood, 'Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, Culture,' *TDR* 32:3 (T119):174–208, who took this methodology up in his work with(in) the Hmong community in Chicago. This is also connected to the work by Loïc Wacquant and his research as a novice boxer apprentice in the south side of Chicago. See Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 12 Rupert Cox, Andrew Irving and Christopher Wright, eds., *Beyond Text: Critical Practices and Sensory Anthropology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 3.
- 13 *Idem*, 4.
- 14 *Ibidem*.
- 15 Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinción: Criterio y bases sociales del gusto* (México: Taurus, 2002).
- 16 Trevor Marchand, *Making Knowledge*; Marchand, *The Masons of Djenné* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009); Marchand, *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen* [2001] (London: Routledge, 2012). See also Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, eds., *Making and Growing: Anthropological Studies of Organisms and Artefacts*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), and also Ingold, *Being Alive*, and Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* [2000] (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 17 See Michele Avis Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 346–56. The term 'critical aesthetics' is developed in my doctoral thesis building upon Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) and *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn, ed., Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 2007). See Gell on his clear articulation of aesthetics (of material culture and works of art) as part of 'social technology', whose cognitive and psychological processes refer as much to the maker as the spectator-perceiver. Aesthetics is not a frozen body of traits congealed so to speak within objects, but rather a spectrum of socially imbricated affects and effects, whose efficacy is bound up in their social relations and ability to communicate and express and generate these relations.
- 18 See Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptic Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), who explains that the etymology of aesthetics comes from the root *aesthe*, meaning to feel and perceive via the sense.
- 19 On relational aesthetics, see also Jennifer Fischer 'Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics,' *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine* 87 (1997): 4–11. Building similarly upon the works of Ingold and the relationship between making things by non-humans and humans, or examining weaver-makers with nest-building birds.
- 20 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 286–93, on an aesthetics of making and esp. 288 on relational aesthetics; and 114,

- interpreting Gell's theories of anthropology of art in relationship to a relational aesthetics.
- 21 Marcel Mauss, 'Les Techniques du corps' [1936], *Journal de Psychologie* 32 (2009): 3-4.
  - 22 See, among many other references: Ruth Hellier-Tinoco, *Embodying Mexico: Tourism, Nationalism & Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y Poder* (México: El Colegio de Michoacán and Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013); Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, 'Peace by Revolution: Una Aproximación Léxico-visual al México Revolucionario,' *Historia Mexicana* LVI 4 (2007): 1263-1307; and, Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
  - 23 André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* [1964], trans. A. Bostock Berger (Boston: MIT Press, 1993).
  - 24 See, for example, Nicolai Bernstein, 'On Dexterity and Its Development,' In *On Dexterity and Its Development*, ed. Mark L. Latash and Michael T. Turvey, trans. Mark L. Latash, (London: Routledge, 2016), 3-246.
  - 25 See Simonetti, 'Feeling Forward,' 4, citing James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 149.
  - 26 Thomas Csordas, 'Somatic Modes of Attention,' *Cultural Anthropology* 8:2 (1993): 135-56.
  - 27 See Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 245.
  - 28 Ibidem.
  - 29 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 199-200, on gender in Santa Clara and its relationship to this study.
  - 30 Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,' *Theatre Journal* 40:4 (1988): 523. This essay explores gender-based actions that are performed to not only 'reproduce' social gender norms but to 'subvert' them drawing from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and feminists such as Simone De Beauvoir.
  - 31 Ibid, 519.
  - 32 See also: Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
  - 33 Peter Paul Rubens, *Vulcan forging the Thunderbolts of Jupiter*, (1636-8), collection Museo del Prado, Spain.
  - 34 De Goya y Lucientes Francisco, *The Forge*, c. 1819, oil on canvas, 191 x 121 cm, Collection of the Frick Museum, New York, United States.
  - 35 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 230-33, chart of a 'Haptic Glossary: Towards a Preliminary Vocabulary of Embodied Perception'; and also on the 'mole-theory', 94, 211-12, 320, 390, 239.
  - 36 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 411-12.
  - 37 Maestro Pérez confided that the original model for his vessels with heads was his son Felix, who passed away at a young age, barely thirty in 1993.
  - 38 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 188.
  - 39 See Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 159, on his reflections on Baudelaire and his references to these concepts of voluntary and involuntary memory drawn from Proust.
  - 40 Ibidem.
  - 41 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. D.A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 20.
  - 42 See Barbara Bolt, 'Heidegger, Handability and Praxical Knowledge,' *TEXT* 3 (2006). See also Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed., William Lovitt (London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 8.
  - 43 Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 90.
  - 44 See Ingold's writings, and specifically his essay 'The Textility of Making,' *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010): 91-102. Ingold argues against the hylomorphic notion of making and creative design of total intention beforehand, concept and making thus separated, or sequential. My essay argues that this confluence of making - that generates design, techniques and processes - is also bound up into socio-political-economic ecologies, and systems. These are strategies that make and unmake, constitute and contest, are always un-finished.
  - 45 In English: *Passion and Pride: An Enduring Legacy*.
  - 46 See Feder-Nadoff 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 405-08.
  - 47 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 286-326, a chapter dedicated to an analysis of this last discussion with Maestro Pérez about how he defined a 'good-piece,' as a 'well-made' piece.
  - 48 See Feder-Nadoff on 'ambákiti,' 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 294-95, 299, 417-25.
  - 49 These comments are also based in conversations with Tim Ingold in discussion with the author, June 28, 2017, regarding his attitude towards ethnography and anthropology.
  - 50 See Jackson, 'Knowledge of the Body,' *Man, New Series* 18:2 (1983): 327-45.
  - 51 See Feder-Nadoff, 'Performing Knowledge: between Praxis and Theory in Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán,' in *Artistic Research: Is There a Method?*, ed. Alice Koubová (Prague: Academy of Performing Arts, 2018). See also James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 53; Michael Jackson, *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 11. See, finally, Feder-Nadoff, 'Cuerpo de Conocimiento,' 78.

Michele Feder-Nadoff is an artist and anthropologist based in Mexico. Her research studies artisan agency, embodied knowledge and aesthetics gleaned through twenty years of apprenticeship-based ethnography with the traditional coppersmiths of Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán, Mexico. In 2013 Rockford Art Museum and Brauer Art Museum held mid-career retrospectives presenting major new installation projects.

# The Castle, the Story, the Journey

Evangelia Tsilika

To cite this contribution:

Tsilika, Evangelia. 'The Castle, the Story, the Journey.' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2018): 59–61, <http://www.oarplatform.com/the-castle-the-story-the-journey/>.



Evangelia Tsilika, video still from *The Castle, the Story, the Journey*, 2018.  
Available at: <http://www.oarplatform.com/the-castle-the-story-the-journey/>

This film is the product of a research project on the medieval castle of Porto de Mós, a small town located in the region of Leiria, Portugal. The research was conducted in two phases. The first took place during my semester-long Erasmus fellowship at the University of Porto, in 1996, where I conducted a broad-scoped literature review regarding the castle's history. At the same time, I gathered all the necessary documentation for planning and designing a number of projected architectural interventions that included illustrations and drawings (plans, sections, and elevations) of the existing state of the monument, video and sound field recordings, and photographs. It is noteworthy that the research expanded beyond the castle walls and the city of Porto de Mós, as I, a foreigner to Portuguese culture and history, attempted to uncover the ways in which the site was embedded in its narratives.



The main objective was to explore new ways for an architect to approach a historical monument. In this framework, the concept of reuse/rehabilitation, in the sense of applying a new functional value to the monument in order to render it sustainable, was seriously questioned. The proposed architectural approach did not aim to rehabilitate the castle through a functional program, or to turn it into a museum of itself. The idea, instead, was that through the interventions, the observer should be able to recognize and treat the castle as a living organism in constant development. The practical outcome was the design of architectural interventions, presented in the form of drawings and collages, with a view to constructing a new balance, capable of revealing the nature of the monument, its history and its role in the wider region, while highlighting human presence as the site's on-going life force. In this way, people, objects and sediments were related back to their context and nothing was singled out of the flow of the castle's history.

The second phase of the research took place in 2013, when I re-visited both the area of Porto de Mós and my previous work on the castle. The main purpose this time was to find a way to reconstruct my personal experience together with the proposed architectural interventions, creating a continuity that could resemble that of an observer's experience. Here, the methodology was based on Le Corbusier's concept of 'promenade architecturale', the architectural promenade, or the observer's experience of walking through architecture. Apart from the aspect of space, this method also uses the aspect of time as an architectural value, introducing a four-dimensional way of thinking about architecture. The narrative structure of the architectural promenade employs senses, memories, and reactions in a carefully choreographed sequence of images that unravels before the observers' eyes, re-sensitizing them to their surroundings.

The creation of a film that could gather all the previous work on the castle (drawings, collages, still images, photographs, video, and sound field recordings) under a script or a narration, presented itself as the ideal tool to simulate the experience of the architectural promenade. The main idea for structuring the narration was to follow someone else's footsteps, creating a journey within a journey: a long-lost diary published in the local press intrigues a contemporary tourist, who decides to follow the itinerary described in its pages. It is the itinerary of a pilgrim from the mid-20th century who did not follow his initial intention to visit Fátima, a major center of pilgrimage for the Catholic Church, but deviated instead, concluding his journey at the castle of Porto de Mós. In the narration, the two paths combine in a journey of exploration and self-awareness that engages all the senses in a playful way, designed to stress the castle's artistic and symbolic significance, to awaken the viewer's consciousness of space, and to support their understanding of the castle's history and architecture.

In the film, the question about the concept of monumentality in architecture – foundational for this research – is examined not only through the issues of scale, proportion, and massive appearance, but also through the principle of interrelationship, by means of exploring the idea of a centrifugal or radiant architecture, able to impose its influence upon the surroundings and function as a landmark. Apart from monumentality, this mixed media production seeks to address various other architectural concepts, employing the basic analytical structure of antithetical pairs: the frontal (static, partial) view, as opposed to an all-sided (integrated) perspective which the observer perceives while approaching the castle, the distinction of the old and the new through the materials employed, the encouragement of movement in contrast with that of pausing, along with the polarities between the past and the present,

the vertical and the horizontal, lightness and darkness, the sacred and the secular, the public and the private, the accessible and the inaccessible, the eternal and the ephemeral.

More importantly, this work is clearly differentiated from the logic of what Robert Hewison describes as the 'heritage industry', the contemporary practice that thrives on the conservation of the past as an isolated, dead relic, disconnected from the present, hence disrupting the continuity of collective memory.<sup>1</sup> What this film attempts instead is to establish a crucial link between the past and the present, transforming the medieval castle of Porto de Mós from a once-lived experience to an on-going adventure.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987).

Dr. Evangelia (Evelyn) Tsilika, is an architect and independent researcher in contemporary theory of architecture.



# Is this the end? Or is it a beginning?

Florian Dombois and Michael Hiltbrunner

To cite this contribution:

Dombois, Florian and Michael Hiltbrunner. 'Is this the end? Or is it a beginning?' *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* Issue 3 (2019): 62–73, <http://www.oarplatform.com/is-this-the-end-or-is-it-a-beginning>.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: How did you get involved in artistic research? What did the arts look like at the time? And why was this idea of artistic research attractive for you?*

*Florian Dombois:* What kind of artistic research do you mean? I am not sure if there is only one single kind of artistic research. If you mean how I became interested in speaking of 'research' in the context of art, and of 'art' in the context of scientific research, then I can tell you a story. It is a long story, but I will keep it short. There are some interesting parallels between artistic and scientific practices, even though I don't see them as sisters. One we have known for 500 years, the other for 40,000 years. In family terms I think you could call science an ill-mannered daughter of art.<sup>1</sup> And I like to provoke myself and others to think. Claiming that art does research provoked most scientists enormously - and very often still does. And yet I love to tease them, as they very often cling to the belief that only science holds the truth. This debate can become quite agitated, for instance, when one points to the limits of science, especially when using artistic terminology. I studied geophysics between 1986 and 1992 and very often provoked my fellow students with questions about, or truth claims for, art. As I was good at mathematics but grew up in the art world in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, I soon developed an affinity for both worlds. Besides provoking, I detected a number of poetic ideas, approaches and installations in the world of science that I could hardly share with anyone. So I built up a body of unseen work instead, exploring poetic spaces in mostly scientific surroundings. In 2003, I was asked to develop an interdisciplinary institute at the newly established Bern University of the Arts. The idea was to bring together students from theatre, music, design, fine arts, etc. Since I distrust(ed) the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('total work of art') and opera because of their strong hierarchical organisation, I suggested calling every student a researcher instead, to ensure they could meet eye to eye. The students on my programme had to work in what we called *verschärfte Nachbarschaft* ("enforced neighbourhood"). This enabled them to watch each other while working, as well as steal, copy and pervert each other's strategies, and then channel this experience into their own artistic practice. I called it "art as research" as I wanted to nurture a sense of collaboration about developing art, not about the product. Initially, all was well. But then I realised that my claim - 'art as research' - was provoking my fellow art professors. I realised that at a time during which everybody assumed that scandals in art were a matter of the past, we could have heated debates about what art is - or rather about what art is not. This was a great prospect. Thus, in 2006, for example, I wrote a manifesto comprising 10 commandments.

- § 1 “Art as research” presupposes an epistemic interest.
- § 2 The epistemic interest is clearly stated.
- § 3 Knowledge is formulated within the respective art form.
- § 4 A grouping according to subjects complements the classification by form of representation.
- § 5 Research is done by many people, not only one person.
- § 6 The evaluation of the results of research is carried out by experts.
- § 7 The results are made accessible to the general public via publication.
- § 8 Quality criteria are agreed upon for the discussion of research results.
- § 9 “Art as Research” takes into account the “State of the Art”.
- § 10 “Art as Research” can take up the solutions scientific research offers and bat them back as questions.

Florian Dombois, Manifesto, 2006.

The biblical number was intentional. It created wonderful and fruitful *tohu wa-bohu*,<sup>2</sup> even on an international level.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: I remember you as one of the co-founders, or even as the founder, of SAR, the Society for Artistic Research. How did this happen? What were the goals? When and how were the later Journal of Artistic Research (JAR) and the Research Catalogue (RC) founded?*

*Florian Dombois:* Well, one of the limitations of the research done in the humanities and in the natural sciences is that it ends up in a written publication. Now if the medium of thought influences what we think and what we can think, then changing the medium of publication can have a great effect. I have always wanted to test this assumption. What happens if we break the dominance of the written word and allow sound or film to be the backbone of (scientific) thinking? Can we flip the status of media as the mere illustration of a text into its opposite? What kind of science would that be that arranges its thoughts around film or sound or images? The shift from book rolls to codices to printing - the so-called 'Gutenberg Revolution' - fundamentally transformed our knowledge cultures. Against this background, I came up with the idea for a *Journal XXL*, as I called it. Then, in 2008, I met Michael Schwab. He had similar ideas, so we both developed a concept for the JAR and the RC. I wanted a publication format that would allow for an opposite hierarchy of media: non-verbal first, verbal second.



Florian Dombois, Image for the founding of JAR, 2009.



*Michael Hiltbrunner: And what role would an artist have in this context? I also remember that you left the SAR board after a while, also on account of your role and work as an artist?*

*Florian Dombois: I feel at home in the non-verbal. So I thought that I might help to develop new formats of expression and new articulations of thought in the digital. After a while, however, I realised that my artistic contributions and concerns were not shared. Many people at the JAR and SAR are great intellectuals, very much at home in verbal thinking. But for me, this was not enough. Poetic spaces were rare or, if they existed, they were flooded in words. Even here and now - what are we both doing? We are talking...*



Florian Dombois, The foundational meeting of the Society for Artistic Research, Bern, 2010

Note: The Swiss artist Manuel Burgener, commissioned by Dombois, built a huge pole from fresh wood, which smelled strongly of resin and which also interfered with the projection.

Tellingly, not one of the eighty present artists and directors took note of it.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: How did you encounter the development of artistic research at the time? How did the field change? What was your position in it? What did you make of it?*

*Florian Dombois: I am not a historian. I remember that claiming art as research in 2002 was new in Bern. Apparently, my approach was also new in Switzerland, and fresh on the international level, or at least I was told so. And I could feel it from the reactions I got, especially in 2006, when I launched the manifesto and distributed it in talks, happenings and podia in Bern Kunsthalle, Zurich Shedhalle, Berlin Walter Benjamin congress, Galerie Rachel Haferkamp (Cologne), Amsterdam International Conference Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, London International Conference for Auditory Display and University College and so on, discussing it with people such as Elena Filipovic, Philippe Pirotte, Win Van den Abbeele et al. In the following year it was discussed in Karlsruhe Art Academy,*

Lucerne Music Academy, Basel University, Manchester Tuesday Talks, Annecy Conference Experimenta at the Art Academy (who translated and published my manifesto in French), PACT in Essen or also Madrid during Art Contemporary (ARCO) where I shared my thoughts with Chuz Martinez, Pavel Büchler or Jesus Fuenmayor, who were all on the same panel about group exhibitions. For example, I remember that Chuz had not thought about research at all. Ah, there was also The Madrid Trial happening at the same time, where Anton Vidokle and Tirdad Zolghadr staged their ruined manifesta. There was Jan Verwoert as judge, Vasif Kortun and Chuz Martinez as prosecutors and Charles Esche as defense with lots of fancy art world witnesses such as Maria Lind, Liam Gillick and Anselm Franke. So fancy and so boring! You have to watch their documentation video, it feels dead. I was coming from art production, from interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary exchange among artists. Whereas institutional and political reasons were fuelling the Swiss and the international debate. So I was drawn into the debate and sparked to life some fires here and there. But fighting institutional dynamics becomes boring, because you can't win, and because your audience consists mostly of bureaucrats. So after I had enough fun, I stopped the game of calling art a form of research.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: For many involved in artistic research it is a valuable alternative to an art system focused on products and individual careers, as artistic research should build on a critical tradition, work with groups, teams, collectives, move away from the artist as an isolated genius or entrepreneur, and turn him or her into a specialist for image production in a broader sense, and thus once again into an artist.*

*Florian Dombois: I don't completely agree. Many art collectives and very critical artists are successful in the market. But I share your hope, that research environments could nurture other forms of criticality and cooperation. Nevertheless, the two main tricks that I would like to steal from the scientific research funding are: (a) to be paid by effort, for the time spent, not for the product; (b) to allow peers to decide where the money goes. In essence, mathematicians decide for mathematics, not the historians of mathematics, nor the collectors, nor the critics. You need to be able to *produce* good mathematics, or keep your mouth shut. Oh, sometimes I dream about what art would be like if not everybody thought they knew better....er?*

*Michael Hiltbrunner: Do you see that team spirit in artistic research? What culture has been established, also with research funding? You built up a research group in Zurich? How is this work developing?*

*Florian Dombois: Uff, so many questions. Okay, let me try to answer each in turn. I mentioned enforced neighbourhood earlier on. I don't think that art as research automatically means that you make art as a collective. I mean, scientists also publish individually after exchanging ideas with their colleagues. You might share a laboratory, use data from others for your own work, you discuss, you challenge each other, locally but also internationally. Throughout, however, you remain responsible for your published claims. And as far as I know, Michael, you aren't publishing your books or essays as collective, are you? I just received an publicity mail for you with all your books and name on the front page, ha ha ha. And for me this is ok, as I see authorship not naively. 'If you believe to have a new idea, it means only you haven't read enough.' As Alexander Demandt used to say to us. And this is absolutely right. So putting your name on something means to me also to risk counter-action, aggression, misunderstanding.*

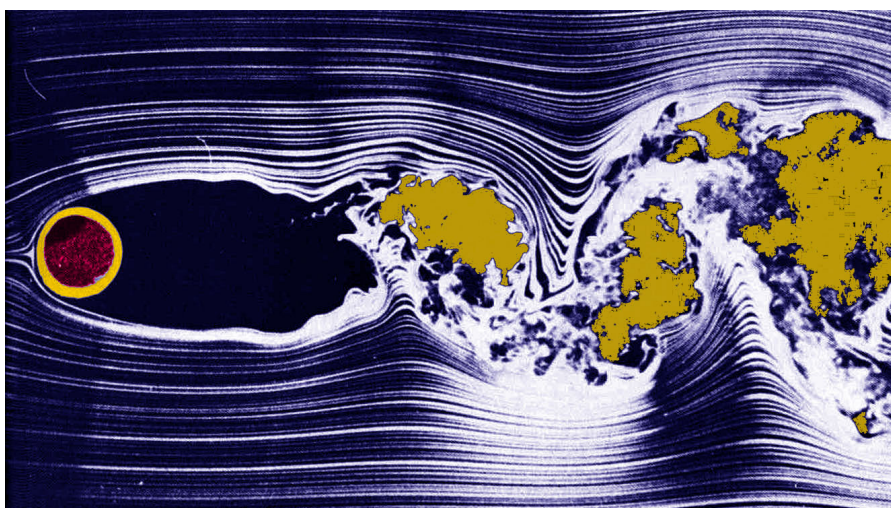


And I am experiencing it with the research terminology. I think most of the people still don't get what I mean and am interested in. Anyway, once I realised that the institutional interest in artistic research is simply about being able to say 'we are doing research', I thought, right, I can offer this, too. Unlike in Bern, where I'm now (in Zurich), this will not be a game of undermining our ideas about art, but instead a very pragmatic and strategic venture. If research serves to develop a discipline, then we need (a kind of) research that develops the arts. Besides, we only want peers, i.e., experts in the making of art, to decide on funding. I don't want to talk *about* art. I want to open poetic spaces. I want to experiment with new forms. I believe in the "truth" of art, because it is not simple.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: How does the critical culture of academia encounter that of artists at an arts university? You insist on artistic research helping the artist and the field of art. What might this look like in practice? What is the role of those in the field (like myself) who are not working primarily as artists? What do you think about 'us', academics from other disciplines working in and close to artistic research?*

*Florian Dombois: I am not sure who 'you' are. What is clear to me, however, is that art schools and their research units should focus on the making of art. This is our duty. What does making art require? How can research support the process of making art? The dividing line is not between artists and non-artists - if we look at large studios such as those of Eliasson or Koons, which also involve non-artists in the production process.<sup>3</sup> For me, the question is if 'you' merely look at art and artists and don't contribute to the making, and if 'you' remain in the comfort zone of watching others trying to make new works: Well, then, 'you' had better work in academia, e.g., in an art history department. So it's less about 'your' identity or disciplinary background, but about what exactly is your concern? Who do you want to support? Who are your peers, who needs your work and who will make use of it?*

*Michael Hiltbrunner: Your Venice project was an artistic research project. You had decided to produce a solo work within the research field. What made you break with the research tradition of collectives and move into a solo work again? Why did you do this within the research field?*



Thomas Corke and Hassan Nagib, manipulated by Florian Dombois, Publicity image for Venice Research Pavilion, 2017.

*Florian Dombois:* First of all, I didn't want to use the Research Pavilion as an opportunity to show off institutional activity. Nor did I not want to use it to represent or validate research or its outcomes. As you know, I am quite critical about research being used today to validate art. So, for example, I reduced the exhibition area/the white cube to one third of the Sala del Camino, and shifted the areas supporting the art into the room from both sides: the workshop/studio and the discourse. The centre of the space I left empty as I wasn't showing any artwork. My main activity concentrated on the support areas. I spent Tuesday to Friday in the workshop and Saturdays in the Palaver area discussing questions about research with invited guests. I wanted to do research; to use Venice as a lab allowing for chance. I didn't set up something ready-made and safe like also most other pavilions. I wanted to work on-site, to use local materials and energies, to articulate from what I found. I wanted to rely on local transport, local energy, on Fortuna, who, at the Punta della Dogana, turns according to the wind. I hoped to accomplish an art work. I opted for all-out risk, for uncertainty, for discomfort. I didn't conceive research as an academic straitjacket, but as a process, as a willingness to take risks, as something open, with an unknown outcome, as a form of not-yet art. So I planned a *Galleria del Vento*, which translates both as a 'Gallery of the Wind' and as a 'Wind Tunnel.'<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the exhibition, I had a machine with artificial wind in the workshop and I opened the windows to enable the natural wind to cross my white cube. Over the next five weeks, I slowly shaped the artificial wind, while the natural wind was crossing the Sala del Camino. Fortunately, I finished the wind tunnel, i.e., turning the artificial, now-laminar flow into itself. The same day a huge storm raged for two days outside. And then came a dead calm, zero wind. That was the last day of the exhibition.

*Michael Hiltbrunner:* How come your research group, which helped to create the project, wasn't mentioned, but only some multi-disciplinary students?

*Florian Dombois:* As I said, I didn't want to represent the work I was doing in Zurich. My aim was to do new research. And you seemed to have missed the fact that the institution, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHsK), received prominent mention (i.e., credit) on every poster, flyer, public text, etc. I literally sailed under the flag of ZHdK (a white Z on a black background). I also had an information desk installed at the very centre of the Sala del Camino. On unmistakable display was *The Wind Tunnel Model*,<sup>5</sup> a volume containing texts by all my team members about their projects, plus a shelf with copies of *The Wind Tunnel Bulletin*,<sup>6</sup> which my team and I have published over the years; I also displayed a copy of *Domesticated Wind*, a CD produced by Kaspar König, my assistant.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the collective that I had established was variously credited.

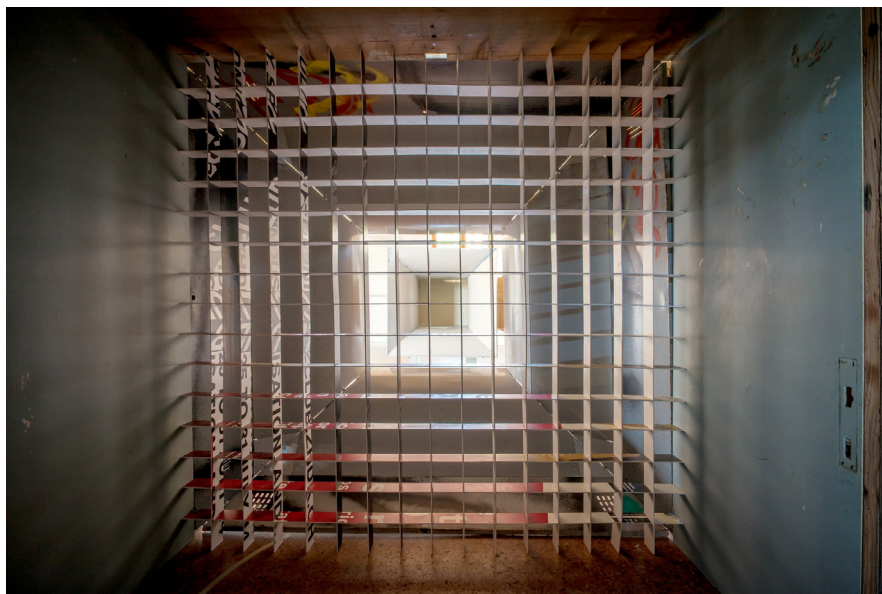
And you need to know a bit more about how I set up the Zurich team. In 2011, I founded the 'Research Focus in Transdisciplinarity' and developed the idea of a wind tunnel as its centre. In 2012, I hired Kaspar to build a wind tunnel for me. I organised the funding, wrote the research applications and initiated the intellectual discourse aimed at discussing why an art school should have a wind tunnel etc. I encouraged my team members to publish their work in their field individually, mentioning ZHdK and others merely in the acknowledgements. For instance, I encouraged Kaspar to make the CD, funded it, organised a publisher, etc. And I supported Haseeb with developing his artistic PhD, again funding his work, his shows, lectures, etc. But I never used the wind tunnel for one of my own works of art. Venice was the first time that I wanted to articulate a wind tunnel the way I think it ought to be done.





Florian Dombois & Ugo Carmeni,  
Venice wind tunnel, 2017.













Ugo Carmeni, Sailboat which was used for collecting building material in the lagoon, 2017.



Florian Dombois, View into the *Galleria del Vento* from the info desk with book and online log of the daily travels, 2017.

*Michael Hiltbrunner: Why did you highlight the students? How could or should a student become involved in artistic research?*

*Florian Dombois:* Yet again, talking, talking. Everybody in artistic research seems to talk. I organised housing for everybody in a palazzo instead, drummed up travel expenses, arranged for two study credit points to be awarded, and asked students whether they were prepared to work with me, physically. Every day, we sailed out to different abandoned islands in the lagoon, collecting old wood and forming with it a wind sculpture, as I like to see the wind tunnel. We did what good researchers do - we explored unknown territory, collected different kinds of material, formed something new from that material, which was subsequently even published in a professional surrounding, and engaged in discourse with our international peers.

Just compare this to the usual artistic research courses at our school, where they usually read philosophers and teach how to write footnotes or a bibliography...

*Michael Hiltbrunner: Do you see this moment as an endpoint of artistic research? Have you broken with it? Or how do you want to establish a new debate, a new culture? What might the future of artistic research look at in that respect?*

*Florian Dombois:* I don't know. I hesitate to contribute to a future of 'artistic research', especially because it is now very often defined and regulated by visitors of art and not by art makers.<sup>8</sup>

Also, I'm not sure whether we will ever reclaim this word for the arts. So I avoid using the term artistic research. For me, we are at the end of the poetic power of artistic research, not though at the end of thinking about new ways of making art. I also believe that the research units at art schools can provide great opportunities for developing art – if we are smart enough to use them. So is this the end? Or is it a beginning?

1 Florian Dombois, 'Die ungezogene Tochter' [The ill-mannered daughter], *Gegenworte* 26 (2011): 66.

2 Taken from the Bible, it is in German an expression for 'utter confusion'.

3 Studio Olafur Eliasson in Berlin, <http://www.olafureliasson.net/studio>; Studio Jeff Koons in New York, <http://www.jeffkoons.com>[.]

4 <http://www.researchpavilion.fi/galleriadelvento>[.]

5 Florian Dombois (ed.), *The Wind Tunnel Model - Transdisciplinary Encounters* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2017).

6 Distributed by art book stores like Printed Matter, New York, or Motto, Berlin, and online on <http://windtunnelbulletin.zhdk.ch>[.]

7 Kaspar König, *Domesticated Wind*, CD 27672, tochnit aleph 2016, <http://www.tochnit-aleph.com/>[.]

8 Florian Dombois: "<FLORIAN.DOMBOIS@ZHDK.CH> KIRJOITTI 17.6.2017 12.04:" in Jan Kaila, Anita Seppä & Henk Slager (eds.) *Futures of Artistic Research - At the Intersection of Utopia, Academia and Power*, (Helsinki: Writings from the Academy of Fine Arts, 2017), 73-81.

Florian Dombois is an artist who has been focussing on time, wind, and tectonic activities. He studied Geophysics and Philosophy in Berlin, Kiel and Hawaii. In 2010 he received the German Sound Art Prize and Kunsthalle Bern dedicated him a monograph. Since 2011 then has been a professor at Zurich University of the Arts. 2017 he was shown with a solo show at the Research Pavilion in Venice.

Michael Hiltbrunner is a cultural anthropologist and art scholar at the Institute for Contemporary Art Research at Zurich University of the Arts. His recent research focuses on personal archives of research based art and the F+F School in Zurich as a lab for experimental design. He also works as an independent curator and lectures on art theory and cultural analysis.

# 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 ‘That’s All There Is’ 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](mailto: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/>.