



Writing Visual Culture

Volume

9.0



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**Series Editor**

Alana Jelinek, University of Hertfordshire

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Abstracts

9.2 'Doing Things Alphabetically: Sartre's Autodidact and Tactically Absurd Practice'

Informed by my practice-based PhD research into 'tactical' absurdity, this article explores parallels between my own ongoing project A to Z and the activities of the Autodidact in Jean-Paul Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea*. Begun in 2011, A to Z is a project based on the premise of visualising every word in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary in alphabetical order. Around 10,000 visualisations will need to be made, taking around 35 years to complete; 1,788 images have so far been made, the most recent being 'damage'. In a pivotal moment in Sartre's novel, the character of the Autodidact is discovered reading the books in his local library in alphabetical order. Whilst his absurdly systematic acquisition of knowledge represents for Sartre a naïve humanist folly, a misplaced faith in the betterment of the self through rational learning, considered apart from this, the fictional action becomes amenable to a much more positive reading. By negotiating the differences between the sense of 'absurdity' ordinarily associated with existentialist literature and the 'absurdity' attributable to a distinct mode of playful and humorous conceptual art practice, the Autodidact's alphabetical reading is reimaged here as a deliberately deployed performative act that increasingly comes to resemble a work of alphabetical absurdity. Just as mine is.

[\[click here for the full paper\]](#)

- 9.3 Pink has a multiplicity of meanings but its use as a signifier for feminine overrides all. This essay tracks an artistic exploration of the problematic use of text by PINK in their lingerie range for girls and young women, and contextualises my artwork, I'll Workout Tomorrow (video 33min) in feminist critique of gender stereotypes, commercialisation and the sexualisation of girls.

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9.4 'A Critical Engagement With the Haptic Visual, Making Sense of Trauma Through Touch and/or Being Touched.'

Finally, we will speak of the haptic [...] when sight discovers in itself a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function" (Deleuze 2005,109).

In this paper, I will deconstruct a traumatic event through two moving image and sound works, *Ghost II* (2016-2017) and *Remembering* (2017), created as part of PhD arts-practice research completed in 2017. Through an application of Derrida's theories of spectrality with Laura Marks' exploration of the haptic visual, my intention is to create, in Juhani Pallasmaa's words, 'a conceptual short circuit between the dominant sense of vision and the suppressed sense modality of touch' (2005,10-11). Laura Marks emphasises the tactile and contagious quality of haptic imagery as something viewers brush up against like another body, a form of visuality that muddies intersubjective boundaries (2002, 17). Seen from a psychoanalytical perspective, it is an aspect of the visual that moves between identification and immersion, an *over-closeness* to the image (2002, 18). In addition, taking the latter into consideration and in relation to the artwork, I will discuss Derrida's concept of the spectral and his writings on mourning. The spectral does not arise out of social or biological death, rather it emerges from a future absence where the ghost is neither present nor absent, but both at the same time, a presence negated by absence. I will also briefly mention *Nachträglichkeit*, Freud's concept of deferred action, to understand the constant revisiting of a traumatic memory and its ongoing presence.

[\[click here for the full paper\]](#)

9.5 'Disorientation Re-Presentation'

This paper takes seriously Bruno Latour's challenge to replace the blue marble with a better representation of the earth. Latour makes the provocative claim that we need to replace our conception of the earth from the well-worn planetary view defined and accepted since the beginning of modern science in order to shift our attention away from the globe to the surface of the earth, to the critical zone where all life exists. Through an analysis of two alternative representations presented by Bruno Latour in his performance/lecture, *Inside*, this paper explores the powers and limits of representation, focusing on the question: can philosophy, art and science, by working together, change the way we know the world, and our relationship and attitude towards it, by successfully changing our representations of it?

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9.6 'The Art of Becoming Soil in the Anthropocene: Reclamation and Decomposition'

In this new era of climate consciousness, to look at soil is to ask an ethical-aesthetic question. This paper glides through a series of Deleuzian plateaus to examine Ecological Art Practice (EAP)'s engagements and contributions to environmental philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics in the artwork of artists Jea Rhim Lee's Infinity Burial Project (2009) and the collective Wormfarm Institute's Fermentation Fest (2010-ongoing). Examining soil reclamation, as an artistic practice, reconsiders Nietzsche's principium individuation double aesthetic function to acknowledge the power of individual representation and to endure material transformation as a collective event. The purpose of this study is to draw closer connections to re-think reclamation as a philosophical and creative tool that reveals the delicate and crucial entanglements of soil, technology, and art unfolding soil's cycles of life-death-life. EAP explores creative collaborations and artistic innovation that underscore soil's role as the main player in global environmental sustainability. Soil relates not only to our food, water, and energy security but also directly affects climate change and biodiversity protection and our aesthetic quality of life.

[\[click here for the full paper\]](#)

9.7 'Diffraction as artistic process'

Barad's theorisation of diffraction supports the following interrogation as artistic process. Diffraction, used in this context, demonstrates a combustible sum of melting, active, sifting and overlapping applications to embrace artistic process as co-constitutive and intra-active. This position differentiates reflection as a metacognitive process often associated with art-making and educational research. The divide between reflection and diffraction in this article is not presented as a binary comparison, but rather as theoretical and political arguments aimed to disrupt the weight awarded to humanist and patriarchal ways of thinking and doing. Art-making is considered an active form of thinking rather than a passive collection of experience. The author provides access to an artwork made to support this examination.

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Alana Jelinek, University of Hertfordshire

Introduction to Volume 9

I am pleased and honoured to edit this edition of *Writing Visual Culture*, a compilation of six essays of the sixteen wide-ranging papers delivered by artists and curators at a 2019 symposium hosted by the Theorising Visual Art and Design (TVAD) research group in the School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire. Since taking on the role of research group leader for TVAD in 2018 from Grace Lees-Maffei, I have changed the focus of TVAD's research endeavours while also trying to maintain and honour the legacy of Lees-Maffei, the renowned Design Historian. As a practitioner who writes about the role and value of art in society, I work with TVAD to further knowledge about practice from the perspective of practitioners. The contributions here are from artists, although I do hope to work with designers in the future, in addition to historians and theorists of art and design, among others.

The aim of the symposium was to bring together artists and other types of practitioners who think deeply about their practice; who make and think with and through philosophical ideas with rigour and originality and, most importantly, from the perspective of practitioners. Various artists, curators and philosophers from Australia, Europe, the US and across the UK, responded to the open call, each bringing their own interests in philosophical concepts to the occasion. The keynote, delivered by Kerry Power of Monash University Australia, which thinks through and with Karen Barad, is published here along with five others papers, by Lisa Taliano, Mimi Cabell, Dave Ball, Anna Walker and Maria Patricia Tinajero. Together these artist-thinkers cover a range of subjects, exemplifying the fact that artists engage with the gamut of theory and philosophy, from Existentialism to New Materialism, and from Feminism to Environmental philosophy. Although the connections between these lines of enquiry may be immediately apparent to any reader of this edition, I will draw them out here from my own perspective, and specifically in the light of what I write about in the *Between Discipline and a Hard Place: the value of contemporary art* (Bloomsbury 2020) with regard the type of knowledge that art specifically produces, and my interest in Sartre's ideas of freedom and responsibility, explored in *This is Not Art: Activism and Other Not Art* (IB Tauris 2013).

Writing this introduction from the perspective of early 2020, when environmental disaster and the critique of capitalist business-as-usual seems to be uppermost in the minds of many across the globe (that, and now the corona virus), the year of the conference, 2019, appears to be a turning point. Artists have turned, with fellow thinkers, to try to re-conceptualise our worlds and how we fit into them. The symposium was remarkable for the intellectual integrity shown by its contributors. This is worth noting as the prevalence of citations within the art world of Gilles Deleuze and Felix



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Guattari, Karen Barad, and Bruno Latour is sometimes less than illuminating. A cynical reading is that they are simply names to conjure with, names that signify a certain engagement with thought. It can seem that artists and others in the allied trades of art history and art theory refer to these thinkers simply because they have the greatest currency right now. Their names imply both currency and a particular politics. Where once it was Michel Foucault, Karl Marx, and Roland Barthes (for example), now it is Deleuze, Barad and Latour. Three of the papers here in this edition of *Writing Visual Culture* employ this range of references, two because they specifically address the Anthropocene, and the third, by our keynote speaker, for the post-humanism of Barad's writing. What stands out, for me, is the fact that the artists who contributed to the symposium and to this edition of *Writing Visual Culture* share a genuine attempt to get to the grips with our moment in time, attempting to understand how art fits into it all, for themselves and for wider society. Here, the use of Latour, Barad and Deleuze to think through things seems to be a sign that finally, after decades of writing about inter-connectedness, interdependence, networks and emergence, the required shift in our thinking and practice is happening.

I will take each of our contributors in turn, starting with Ball's exploration of Sartre through his Existentialist novel, *Nausea*, and then moving to Cabell's Feminism and Walker's engagement with memory and trauma. Taliano and Tinajero chose not to write about their own artwork, but instead about the work of other artists in their exploration of the role of art in the Anthropocene. Interestingly interconnected, as a consequence of meeting at the TVAD symposium in 2019, they are now collaborating. Finally, I will attempt to give an overview of Power's keynote paper as presented here in writing, and at the conference, as live art.

Existentialism, born in the nineteenth century with Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche later, was the prevailing philosophical project throughout Europe in the twentieth century. Nietzsche's emphasis was on the death of God, that the meaning of life had been found erroneously through a relationship with a fantastical God. Pronouncing Him dead, Nietzsche insists that meaning therefore has to be found elsewhere, in fact meaning must be found in the fact that we die, in Death itself. Existentialism for Nietzsche was the philosophical imperative to create meaning in an inherently meaningless life and it is exemplified in Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist response to the Second World War and specifically the Vichy Government of France as described in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). With Sartre, it is imperative to face Existential meaninglessness not just head-on but without 'bad faith' and with responsibility.



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Sartre explores some of these ideas in his novel, *Nausea* (*La Nausé* 1938), including through the Autodidact character, on which Ball bases his paper and his artwork A to Z. The Autodidact is taking refuge from meaninglessness by embarking on a durational and endless, possibly impossible, project. For many artists, we face this meaninglessness when we face the blank canvas, literally. Through the blank canvas we stare meaninglessness - and also infinite possibility - in the face. Infinite possibility and meaninglessness are twinned, of course. For Sartre, there may be infinite possibilities, but only few that are not the action of bad faith, the flight from responsibility. The Autodidact and the relationship between the character and the narrator, Antoine Roquentin, is both distant and complex.

Like many contemporary artists working in the tradition of 1960s and 1970s Conceptual Art's arbitrary rule-making, following rules *ad absurdum*, Dave Ball creates meaning through the self-imposed rules of his durational art project: 'to do somethings is to create existence' (*Nausea* 2000, 254). Ball's project is to illustrate all words in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* from A to Z. We infer that the arbitrary but finite artwork itself creates a reason for Ball's existence, at least for the next few decades: his personal existentialist imperative to create meaning from meaninglessness. But there are many differences between Ball and the Autodidact of *Nausea*. One is that Ball brings a contemporary artistic sensibility to his A to Z project. Ball is self-conscious, unlike the Autodidact character, who imagines he wants to read and know everything available in the library. This desire is mocked throughout by the novel's narrator and Ball's essay explores this mockery. Another difference is the relationship to knowledge. Unlike the Autodidact's Humanist project, Ball's is not a project of knowledge but of illustration, making visible what has already been categorised and described in language, compiled in the dictionary. The playfulness, and therefore the reflexivity, of the project is enacted in Ball's changes in artistic approaches to each letter of the alphabet, referencing the list of the Chinese Emperor imagined by Jorge Luis Borges and enlisted by Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1970). Ball describes his process:

The As, for example, were 'drawings', the Bs were 'drawings done entirely from memory', the Cs were 'photographs taken through the lens of my camera', and the Ds (currently underway) are drawings done 'blindly' (that is, without looking at the paper).

It is this playfulness (that is, playfulness in the sense of artistic experimentation) that distances the artist from the project, placing Ball's A to Z within a poststructuralist context, and entirely different from the Autodidact. Ball's is not the naive project of Humanism, to know all things and thereby also to conquer all things, which are aspects of the Autodidact's bad faith. Indeed, the



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Autodidact's bad faith is exemplified, further teased out, by the contrast between his purported love for Humanity and his being a child sex abuser. (The character is beaten up by the librarian who catches him and taunted by other witnesses. Ultimately the Autodidact realises he must leave town because he cannot return to the library and his project.) The Autodidact's paedophilia is revealed at the end of the novel, occurring over books at the library. Ball is a knowing absurdist, with a history of Dada and other artistic forays into the absurd to inform him. Ball's project is to enact the random absurdity of it all. So the artwork is a synecdoche for life, both in its arbitrariness and its finitude.

It is possibly by virtue of the respective standpoints our different genders enable that Ball does not mention the paedophilia of the Autodidact in this essay. I mention it, though Ball is silent. Sexual abuse looms in the imaginations and in the work of many women artists, including another contributor to this edition of *Writing Visual Culture*, Cabell. Like Ball, Cabell's essay centres around a description of an artwork, her artwork, which is engaged in a theoretical and philosophical debate, this time feminism. The artwork she describes, *My Pink*, is informed by the work of other artists, in particular Jeong Mee Yoon's *The Pink and Blue Project* (2005-ongoing), and by established feminist critique of the male gaze and the objectification of (young, able-bodied) women, as well as the Marxist-feminist critique of capitalism's monetization of sexuality and desire. Cabell is also informed by Judith Butler's idea of performed gender.

Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) took what had been a commonplace understanding of gender formation gained through Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, that gender, the categories of man and woman, are not genetically determined but that gender is created by the person's education and cultural milieu. Her famous line that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', was taken a step further by Butler, and Butler's debt to Foucault. We each of us perform and through this performance we thereby recreate the status quo, which includes gender norms. We do this unconsciously and willingly, with our desire, our knowledge and how we act in the world. Our gender performances create the society in which we live. We are not only subject to societal norms, but also constitutive of them. In her essay, Cabell wonders about American girls' performance of gender (and more obliquely their American-ness) when they consume underwear.

Cabell's art project shares with Ball's a process of rule setting, rules self-imposed by the artist. Her rules were to purchase all the knickers, 'panties' as Americans call them, for sale in the youth lingerie store, Pink, that are sized extra small (XS) and that have words on either the front or the back, and that are not thongs. The second part of her method was to film a staged



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interaction between the knickers and members of the public and friends, who don't ordinarily wear or buy these types of underwear. Participants answered a series of questions and their responses are edited into a 33 minute film. *I'll Workout Tomorrow* is available online (<https://vimeo.com/289603140>). The first part of the art process is informed by the random but strict rule-making of Conceptual artists such as On Kawara (1932-2014) who, for example, made a series of paintings of the date on which the painting was made over a period of 30 years. The second part of the process is informed by the 'ethnographic turn' in art, as it is sometimes known, in which artists set up experiments in 'the social' that enable particular types of conversation to emerge. It is often hoped these conversations will demonstrate, or produce, insights into social, political, ideological, or epistemological truths.

Where the artwork works, though, is not in these processes or in the rules, but in how the film is framed and then edited. It is the process, the many decisions that go into an artwork that make it work. Stills of Cabell's art film pepper the essay published here. They show only hands and piles of luridly coloured panties. To illustrate the idea that the artist's edit of the work, their decisions and processes, and not the raw materials, that makes an artwork work, I want to imagine a workshop in an art school, in which each student is given a pile of knickers and asked to find respondents, filming the interaction. It is possible to imagine that each student would produce a different type of film. Having conducted such workshops, I know that there would be much variation between the students' work. Not all of the films would work and only a few students would produce art that moves beyond cliché to produce complexity and nuance, which is the point at which art produces knowledge and does something other than reproduce the status quo (Jelinek 2013). What makes *I'll Workout Tomorrow* and Ball's *A to Z* work as artworks is not the rules the artists have chosen, or the quality of the concept they are pursuing, but the execution of the rules and the minute, both conscious and barely conscious, process of decision making (Jelinek 2020). This is as true of Kawara as it is of Cabell and Ball. The artwork works as a disturbing and powerful artwork because of the way in which Cabell frames the camera and because of the way in which she has edited the film.

The same assertion can be made of Walker's *Stage II: Six Fragments* and *Stage III: Remembering*. There may be many thousands of artists who have dealt in their artwork with the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, and also some who were witnesses, whether directly or indirectly, to '9/11' and subsequently traumatised, but Walker's films are uniquely powerful and moving. The reason for this lies not the fact she was a witness, nor that she was traumatised, nor does the reason lie in the types or quality of the audio and visuals she has used in her artwork. Instead the power of her work lies in the edit and the processing of the material. As with any artwork when it works, Walker's work works because of the relationship between form, content and context.



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It is through her engagement with the made- and the found-sound, and the made- and the found-video, that she has created a powerful series of artworks.

These artworks are the product of Walker's doctoral research 'In and Out of Memory: Exploring the Tension Between Remembering and Forgetting When Recalling 9/11, a Traumatic Event', and she theorises them well. The art is well grounded in theory of visuality and wider philosophies of Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and others, but Walker avoids merely illustrating the theory. Like the best interactions between art and philosophy, art and theory, the art takes the theory somewhere new. Walker's contribution demonstrates how artists successfully contribute to theory and philosophy of art, by working as artists and not imitating philosophers.

Extracts of her videos are provided through the links in the text. On watching them, we observe that Walker does not merely illustrate the 'haptic visual' (which she describes), her memories, theories about time or '*hauntology*', but instead her work helps us, the viewer, to understand these theoretical concepts from within. Because her artwork develops the theory, we do not need the academic vocabulary, the references of Deleuze and Derrida, however interesting they also may be. The-aeroplanes-twin-towers-the-smoke-and-the-collapse move as imagery from the familiar, from known territory, to a particular nuanced rendering of the singularity of an individual's lived experience. The theory has helped Walker to make her art, informing her process as she describes in her essay, but in her actual artworks, the theory is left implied, as muse perhaps. Informed by the theory but not tethered to it, the artwork avoids becoming a mere manifestation of a psychological process. Walker does not illustrate trauma, nor is her film simply the expression of it. It is art, moving and powerful, because it is a self-conscious engagement between the artist, her subject and the materiality of audio and video, working within a history of such artistic engagements. Her essay here traces this knowing engagement.

Somewhat akin to Walker though referencing Latour, Taliano writes about visualisation from within, about working from the inside and avoiding the problematic and misleading clichés formed when viewing from the outside. Taliano writes about the problem of representations of the earth from the outside as the famous blue marble floating in deepest dark space. She begins by articulating the problem with reference to Latour: our culture visualises life, the earth, from the outside, as if we are not part of it, in ways that tend to reproduce the idea of human sovereignty over all else in nature, reinscribing humanity's rightful domination over all else. This is the problem, and Taliano describes those artists' answers to this problem who were invited by Bruno Latour to imagine 'Gaia 2.0' in 2018. Taliano makes a powerful argument that Latour problematically instrumentalises



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art for his own theoretical ends. This is a common and unfortunate occurrence in many sci-art collaborations. (It is one of the reasons for the TVAD symposium 2020, 'What the world needs now is artists engaging with science'.) Non-artists all too often utilise art to do their discipline's theoretical bidding, using art in the service of communicating and visualising ideas established in science, anthropology, or economics, for example. But, as Taliano points out, art does more than illustrate, and much more than illustrate the ideas of others. Referring to Heidegger, she writes, 'In its openness to what-is, art multiplies possibilities, rather than reducing them ... When art is characterised by an openness to what-is, it has the potential to proliferate possibilities rather than reducing them.'

Looking specifically at the potential for painting in avoiding the pitfalls of 'representationalism', that is, the pitfalls of outside view, Taliano makes an argument for paint as a non-illustrative, non-representational, immersive and performed medium, referring for example to traditional Australian Aboriginal art and its performativity. Taliano goes well beyond the philosophers she cites in her contribution, demonstrating with her writing, the idea that art can and does contribute to knowledge, to ways of knowing; that art, and the thinking that comes through making, is distinctive. I state this on the basis of her writing. She writes as a maker from a painter's perspective, with the unique contribution to the knowledge that this perspective gives her. As her paper avoids mention of her own practice, I similarly do not mention it here except to say she is a painter and espouses paintings as a way of getting inside, of performing, instead of representing. What I am arguing is that even in the medium of words, being a maker, specifically a painter, produces a standpoint, a perspective, that has its own unique contribution to knowledge. Artists make a distinctive and important contribution to knowledge about art, and also to knowledge about anything that art touches, including science. This is true, as Taliano describes, only if it is not instrumentalised.

The subject of Taliano's essay is representations of the 'critical zone' that forms a few kilometres above and below the earth's crust, and one critical part of that zone, the soil, is the subject of Tinajero's essay. Tinajero describes two different engagements with both soil and fermentation as artistic media. The two art projects that form part of a larger thesis about Ecological Art Practices (EAP), in which an engagement with soil is both art and activism are the WormFarm Institute's Fermentation Fest and Jea Rhim Lee's Infinity Burial Project. Tinajero's argument revolves around the importance of such environmentally aware art practices in a time of climate emergency. She employs Process Philosophy's understanding of profound interconnectedness between things, including both the human and non-human (acknowledging Barad, Donna Haraway and the various Social Anthropologists who find the division between human and non-human both simplistic and untrue), and between life and death, using the materiality of soil and fermentation to draw this out.



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Soil and fermentation are not metaphors of life and death, but are life and death simultaneously and, Tinajero argues, artists who use soil centrally in their work embody the epistemic change needed in how we do and how we see. She compares WormFarm Institute's *Fermentation Fest* with the *Infinity Burial Project*, ending her contribution with the very hopeful: 'Soil reclamation and fermentation prove that [ecological art practice] is a resilient modality of care capable of bypassing feelings of guilt and impotence produced by the environmental crisis. Resilience is hope in action.'

Epistemic change, that is, the change in how we know things or attempt to know things, is also central to Kerry Power's essay, which works through Haraway and Barad to help us understand the importance of diffraction, as distinct from reflection, in art practice and also in art education. Her audience is composed of both fellow artists and fellow educators. Power models diffraction as a way to move artistic practice, and the education of artists, forward, beyond the problematic modernist paradigm, proposing it in replacement of the time-honoured concept of reflection. Reflection, she argues, is a process that:

requires a circumvention of an event in order to represent it ... a privileged human experience that is separated from all other forms of material interaction. In other words, anthropocentrism is at the centre of reflection... [Reflection] embraces and excludes knowledge, depending on who and what you are.

Referring to Haraway's observation that diffraction trains us to 'a more subtle vision', as a material gateway for embracing and challenging how meaning is made, Power describes diffraction as the encounter of seemingly different things such as waves and particles and observes that diffraction locates the art-making process as a synergistic, experimental form of interference: 'When creating or addressing a problem to work through, the objective is not to reach a determined path but rather, to tune into how materials work together and repel each other.'

As well as making a compelling proposal in its own right, Power does something in addition to offering an interesting, generative way of understanding what art can do by also embodying it. During the symposium, as she delivered her keynote talk about diffraction she was also standing in front of an artwork, an art film, made to explicate her thesis simultaneously, using a visual and audio artistic language. We listened and as we listened we also listened to and watched a real time video of a piece of old sketchbook paper as water dripped, interacted with the paper's fibres to distort and buckle while Power manipulates, as it becomes saturated. The wet paper moves suggestively, or it just moves, perhaps breathing, perhaps not. The video, with its atmospheric



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Artists and the Philosophers We Love

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incidental sound, was amplifying, exemplifying, embodying the text. (A link to the video is provided in her text.) It runs in one direction and then all the action undoes: the traces of action run backwards until order, or the original, is restored. Power buckles and distorts the text, interjecting into a theoretical treatise the highly personal: how we, she and I, met after many years, decades after we left art school. During her talk, I feel myself blush. Inexplicably. Her changes of mode are embarrassing, perhaps it is the personal content of the change that makes me blush, or how the paper and water in the film behind her moves?

There is a history of feminist writers changing modes in their scholarly writing, challenging norms and ways of knowing: Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Haraway disrupting the phallogocentric flow of academic - indeed any other form of - writing, disrupting with other modes, enlisting other methods to investigate, to explicate, to embody, to allow for the indeterminate. Power brought in the visual as well. Stills of her film sit within the text, juxtaposed.

Power's essay is an invitation to think otherwise with ethics. Like Taliano, Power addresses head on the problems of representation and for the same reason: representation led us down a path of domination and exploitation. This needs to stop. We are living the destructive consequences of an inability to live with diffraction, within a linear paradigm of consequences that exist but that we do not control. That artists are attracted to the New Materialism of Barad, among others, should come as no surprise and not only because we engage with material in our practice. Philosopher of aesthetics Peter Lamarque observes that even the most conceptual of artists consider the medium in which their work is enacted. Arguably therefore we are primed to think through and with materiality, that the poststructuralist foundations on which New Materialism is built could never be enough for us, being focused on language, grammar, translation. (Though of course at the time, it was.) But our awareness of the Anthropocene, our awareness of the human impact on our fellow beings, brings us back down to earth, to soil, to the critical zone. We are once again engaged with the material, but this time, we are going beyond reflection.

Alana Jelinek 'Artists and the Philosophers We Love'
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Call for Papers - The Provocation:

Artists have long been interested in the field of philosophy; it has been subject to both fascination and scepticism. Artists are found quoting nuggets of philosophy as inspiration and as context for their work. For some, philosophers are names to conjure with, to add theoretical ballast to their perspectives, whereas for others philosophy is a vital source of criticality, offering a new perspective on an individual's art and the context in which we find ourselves. For generations, artists have looked to philosophers of the Frankfurt School to understand the art-society-politics nexus and their role in it, and artists, such as Joseph Kosuth, engage with the Analytic tradition. In *Art After Philosophy* (1969) Kosuth responds to AJ Ayer.

Philosophy comprises one aspect of an art education at BA and MA levels, and for many, a Doctorate in Fine Art practice, requires a serious engagement with philosophy in addition to theory, history and other disciplines. Can artists contribute meaningfully to philosophy? Can there be a productive relationship between art practice and philosophy that goes beyond name-checking the Good and the Great, and merely illustrating a well-honed philosophical phrase? What is it for an artist to love a philosopher? In this workshop, we want to explore the relationship between art and philosophy from the perspective of practicing artists. Our aim is to examine how art can engage with, and contribute to the theoretical problems of philosophy, and offer a critical rethinking of philosophies re-imagined and interrogated through art practice. The symposium is open to both senior and early-career artists and scholars who are planning or conducting projects in philosophy and art.



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Alana Jelinek 'Artists and the Philosophers We Love'
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Dave Ball, Winchester School of Art

What does it mean when a work of contemporary conceptual art starts to resemble the activities of a character in a 1930s existentialist novel? What, if any, are the overlaps between the deliberately deployed absurdity of the former, and the existential absurdity associated with the latter? This essay will explore some of the points of intersection between my own alphabetical project A to Z and the alphabetical reading habits of the character of the Autodidact in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*.

Alphabetical Absurdity

A to Z is a multi-part project begun in 2011 in which I am attempting to visualise every word in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary in alphabetical order. Although certain limitations have been defined (for example, that the words should already be in the artist's vocabulary, and that only nouns should be visualised), around 10,000 visualisations will need to be made, which will take around 35 years to complete. Building on this basic premise, each letter of the alphabet proceeds according to its own logic, forming a series of 26 successive semi-independent projects defined according to a specific medium or conceptual parameter. The As, for example, were "drawings", the Bs were "drawings done entirely from memory", the Cs were "photographs taken through the lens of my camera", and the Ds (currently underway) are drawings done "blindly" (that is, without looking at the paper). At the time of writing, 1,832 words have been made, the most recent being decipherment.¹

Jean-Paul Sartre's 1938 philosophical novel *Nausea* is a first-person account of the descent of its central protagonist Antoine Roquentin into an existential crisis, in which, one by one, the certainties of his existence lose their meaning. One of the most important secondary characters in the novel, who is referred to simply as the Autodidact, becomes acquainted with Roquentin due to their time spent together in their local municipal library. Both, in very different ways, are engaged in projects that involve acquiring knowledge. Roquentin is writing a history of an obscure eighteenth-century French aristocrat, the Marquis de Rollebon, but is increasingly losing faith in the value and legitimacy of his project. The objectivity of his pursuit is undermined by his admission that 'nothing can ever be proved' and that the 'facts' he is able to learn about his subject 'adapt themselves at a pinch to the order I wish to give them,' thus amounting to little more than 'a work of pure imagination' (Sartre 2000, 26). Having become 'the only justification for my existence' (Sartre 2000, 105), the arbitrariness of Roquentin's project is mirrored by the absurdly systematic reading of the Autodidact:



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All of a sudden the names of the last authors whose works he has consulted come back to my mind: Lambert, Langlois, Larbalétrier, Lastex, Lavergne. It is a revelation; I have understood the Autodidact's method: he is teaching himself in alphabetical order (2000, 48).

If such a doggedly determined pursuit of knowledge represents for Roquentin (and for Sartre) an exemplification of a naïve humanist folly and a misplaced faith in the betterment of the self through rational learning, the curious appeal of its alphabetical logic nevertheless shines through Roquentin's ostensibly mocking words:

I contemplate him with a sort of admiration. What will-power he must have to carry out, slowly, stubbornly, a plan on such a vast scale! One day, seven years ago (he told me once that he has been studying for seven years) he came ceremoniously into this reading room. He looked round at the countless books lining the walls, and he must have said ... : 'It is between the two of us, Human Knowledge.' Then he went and took the first book from the first shelf on the far right; he opened it at the first page, with a feeling of respect and fear combined with unshakeable determination. Today he has reached 'L' (2000, 48–49).

On one level, the character of the Autodidact is deployed by Sartre in the novel at the service of an explication of the existential condition; his role, that is, is as a stooge to the all-too-painful intellectual clear-sightedness of Roquentin, whose 'nausea' arises out of his rejection of the comforts of bourgeois humanist rationality. Philosophically speaking, the Autodidact simply lacks the insight of Roquentin, his eccentric reading habits serving as an illustration of a deluded and inauthentic existence. Considered as a novelistic conceit, however, freed, that is, of its function within Sartre's philosophical programme, the Autodidact's commitment to alphabetical order can be viewed in a more positive light. Indeed, Roquentin's own professed admiration for his counterpart's strangely compelling activity hints at a less reductive reading.

Lateral Thinking and the Arbitrariness Of Order

The initial idea for the A to Z project was sparked by research into chance procedures, and in particular, the use of randomness as a means of fostering creativity. Edward de Bono's work on lateral thinking, for example, deployed a range of techniques for breaking free from the 'restricting patterns' of 'vertical thinking' (Bono 1970, 10–11). One of these techniques involved choosing a random word on a random page of a dictionary and applying that word to whatever problem was at hand. By employing what he called 'random stimulation', the limitations of linear thinking could be overcome. 'With vertical thinking,' he wrote, 'one deals only with what is *relevant* ... With random



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Fig. 1. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); detail: "aardvark", ink on paper, 17 x 24 cm.

Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); installation view at Gallery Oldham.

Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); detail: "annihilation", pencil on paper, 17 x 24 cm.

Courtesy of the artist.

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stimulation one uses any information whatsoever ... [in fact, the] more *irrelevant* the information the more useful it may be' (Bono 1970, 169 [my emphasis]). With this in mind, using a dictionary that happened to be on my shelf at the time (a 1982 edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*), I tried out the technique. Although the words I chanced upon led to little of practical value, the process of selecting a random word and being confronted by its determined irrelevancy was nonetheless compelling, and it seemed a natural extension of the technique to start on the first page and work through the entire dictionary alphabetically.

Whilst lateral thinking functions for Edward de Bono as a technique for facilitating a creative approach to problem-solving, for me, the use of the dictionary serves no sensible end – the relentless randomness of *A to Z* representing an entirely nonsensical over-identification with the dictionary's own imposition of orderliness. By working through the contents of the dictionary in strict sequential order, the organising principle of the dictionary is turned against itself, its alphabetical logic followed ad *absurdum*, to the letter. If Bono's exploitation of irrelevancy has a clear goal, that is, to sidestep the restrictions of orderly thinking and to generate ideas that will in hindsight appear entirely relevant (Bono 1970, 174), in the *A to Z* project it is deployed as a means of undermining the concept of relevancy itself. For as Foucault relates in his encounter with Borges' fable of the Chinese encyclopaedist who divides the animal kingdom into such categories as 'those that belong to the emperor,' 'mermaids,' 'those that are included in this classification,' and 'those that at a distance resemble flies' (Borges 1999, 231), it is not so much the absurdity of that particular classificatory system that is so unsettling, but the inference that any attempt at imposing order on the world is, in fact, arbitrary. 'Order,' he concludes, 'has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language' (Foucault 1970, xxi); the 'entities of our world,' in other words, only take on any semblance of orderliness through our looking, speaking, or thinking about them (Foucault 1970, xix).

Sartre's own view of the inadequacy of language to account for the pure phenomenological reality of the world, vividly expressed in the scene in *Nausea* where Roquentin is confronted with the brute existence of a chestnut tree root in a park prefigures Foucault: 'I no longer remembered that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface' (Sartre 2000, 182).

The world, in all its seething viscerality, Roquentin comes to realise, remains resistant to any orderliness that is imposed on it: 'faced with that big rugged [root], neither ignorance nor knowledge had any importance: the world of explanations and reasons is not that of existence' (Sartre 2000, 185). The Autodidact's appeal to alphabetical order, then, is simply an absurdly



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exaggerated form of this same, all-too-human urge to shape the world in such a way that it is rendered meaningful. Neither *Nausea* nor *A to Z* pursue any specific critique of *alphabetical* order per se: for its arbitrariness is simply the arbitrariness of order in general.

Carrying Out An Absurd Premise

The central premise of the *A to Z* project hinges on a specific instruction to 'visualise every word in the dictionary in alphabetical order', which is accompanied by an additional set of clarificatory rules that dictate how the instruction should be executed. Despite the unreasonableness of its underlying premise, the project proceeds according to a basic assumption that its rules will be carried out. As a conceptual undertaking, *A to Z* aligns itself with a certain tradition of 1960s and 1970s conceptual instruction-based art. Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969), for example, in which the artist carried out his own directive to 'follow a different person every day ... until that person enters a private place,' or Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing 46* (1970), a work that is designed to be executed by assistants according to the instruction 'vertical lines, not straight, not touching, covering the wall evenly'. This points towards a model of practice in which, as LeWitt himself famously put it, the 'idea becomes a machine that makes the art' (LeWitt 1967, 214).

A to Z falls in line with these works in that it deploys a clearly defined premise that governs the activity that follows. The tone of the work, however, would appear to have little in common with these early exercises in conceptual austerity, with LeWitt's work in particular serving as an image of rationalism made manifest. Examined more closely, however, this characterisation of conceptual art starts to break down; already by the end of the seventies Rosalind Krauss was drawing attention to the 'mad obstinacy' at work in LeWitt's *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974), which presents 122 variants of a cube made from between three and twelve segments that 'sit in regimented but meaningless lines' (Krauss 1978, 54). She saw the work as an embodiment of an 'obsessional's unwavering ritual, with its precision, its neatness, its finicky exactitude, covering over an abyss of irrationality' (Krauss 1978, 56). Its deployment of 'logic,' she wrote, suggested the 'spinning gears of a machine disconnected from reason' (Krauss 1978, 57).

There is in *A to Z* a similarly absurd clash between the pseudo-axiomatic concision of the rules and the demented scale and 'mad obstinacy' of a commitment to spending 35 years carrying them out. As a conceptual device, the deployment of, and adherence to, a set of arbitrarily-defined rules in the work functions as a fully intentional absurdity, a pushing of rationalism beyond its limits. It is in this light that parallels with the activities of the Autodidact can be drawn; for whatever philosophical argument is forwarded in the novel, it is done so through the device of a character's



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absurd commitment to alphabetical order. Sartre, in other words, by exaggerating the Autodidact's bourgeois inauthenticity to a degree far beyond the requirements of a simple illustration of an existentialist bad faith, deliberately introduces into his narrative a formally absurd conceit. Thus, in precisely the same way that I (as the artist-performer) am required to execute the absurd premise of *A to Z*, the fictional character of the Autodidact is tasked with carrying out Sartre's absurd conceit. The absurd alphabetical rule, moreover, has, in both cases, been drawn up entirely intentionally.

Encyclopaedic Absurdity

Suddenly This Overview is a work by the Swiss artists Fischli & Weiss made up of a collection of 350 clay models depicting scenes from history, culture, entertainment and everyday life (one element, for example, features two figures lying under the covers in separate twin beds, and is labelled 'Herr and Frau Einstein shortly after the conception of their son, the genius Albert'). Originally titled *The World We Live In*, the work playfully attempts an encyclopaedic comprehensiveness. Its obvious failure to achieve this can be read as an ambiguous engagement with what might be termed an Enlightenment attitude towards knowledge, epitomised in the heroic acts of the French encyclopaedist Denis Diderot or the English lexicographer Samuel Johnson, whose celebrated *Dictionary* was painstakingly written alone over the course of nine years. By 'undercutting grandiose ambition with absurd humour', argues Mark Godfrey, *Suddenly This Overview* highlights 'the ludicrous nature of all totalising projects' (Godfrey 2013, 15); its viewers are 'continually jolted by the disorder of presentation', since there is 'no suggestion of a chronology or hierarchy, and the register shifts wildly from the banal to the monumental' (Godfrey 2013, 16). Playing on the viewer's associations of the encyclopaedia with reliability, objectivity and seriousness, the work's absurdity emerges precisely through the unreliability, subjectivity, and humour of the individual clay tableaux. By aiming at visualising every word in the dictionary, *A to Z*, too, operates according to a similarly misguided aspiration towards completeness that is undermined by the subjectivity and particularity of its images. The 'fantasy' of the project (which has been knowingly entered into) is that, when it is complete, 'everything' will have been objectively accounted for.

Both *Suddenly This Overview* and *A to Z* can thus be seen as staging a collision between the ideal of an objectively reified knowledge and the necessarily compromised attempts of an individual to become reconciled with it, which is precisely what Sartre achieves through his characterisation of the Autodidact. If the Autodidact's alphabetical reading programme is not simply dismissed as a foolhardy adherence to an inauthentic means of making sense of the world – a sort of *rationalism done badly* – it, too, can be imagined as a deliberately absurd means of encircling knowledge. Modelled as such, the absurdity in all three cases emerges as a liberation, a witty, seductive and joyful release from the stifling conventions of rationality.



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Absurdity: An Existential Theme or a Formal Device?

Absurdity as a critical concept suffers from certain imprecisions in its usage. These stem in part from a failure amongst critics to distinguish between its everyday, literary and existential senses, as well as a failure to uphold a distinction between absurdity as *subject-matter* and absurdity as *form* (Gavins 2013). Existential absurdity, defined as a subject-matter, relates to the sense that individual existence has no meaning, or, more precisely, that the meaning *expected* of life proves to be an illusion. In strictly philosophical terms, the notion of absurdity has largely been discredited (Foley 2008), with recent attempts to revive the concept, such as Matthew H Bowker's *Rethinking the Politics of Absurdity* having found it necessary to 'relinquish the metaphysical pretensions associated with [it]' (Bowker 2014, xv). The (formal) absurdity deployed tactically as a device in conceptual artworks such as *A to Z* or *Suddenly This Overview* also steers clear of any metaphysical understanding of absurdity as characteristic of man's relationship with the world. Indeed, Martin Esslin, originator of the term 'theatre of the absurd', draws attention to precisely such an often overlooked distinction. He points out that whilst the plays of Samuel Beckett or Eugène Ionesco deal with the absurdity of the human condition, they are crucially different from the plays of Sartre or Albert Camus. The difference is that in the dramatic works of Sartre or Camus, the *form* is entirely conventional. Their plays conform largely to a nineteenth-century realist model of theatre based on 'highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning' (Esslin 1961, 23–24). The Theatre of the Absurd proper, Esslin argues, has 'renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images' (Esslin 1961, 25). In other words, absurdity has shifted from a philosophical theme to a dramatic form. The activities of the Autodidact can, accordingly, be understood as absurd in both senses – thematically, as part of Sartre's explication of existential absurdity, and formally, as an absurd narrative conceit deployed within his novel. It is, then in this latter sense that its resonances with the *A to Z* project can be seen.

Emma Cocker has written about a similar reimagining of the concept of absurdity. In an essay *Over and Over, Again and Again*, she focuses on the Sisyphus myth, which is used by Camus to explicate his understanding of existential absurdity. Moving away from its existential overtones, Sisyphus might also be used, argues Cocker, to characterise the activities of a certain kind of conceptual art practice and specifically the kind that 'play[s] out according to a model of purposeless reiteration, through a ... relentless obligation to a rule or order that seems absurd, arbitrary, or somehow undeclared' (Cocker 2010, 265). Cited as an example is Francis Alÿs's *The Paradox of Praxis (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)* (1997), an action documented on video in which the artist pushes a large block of ice around the streets of Mexico City for nine hours until it melts away to nothing. The absurdity of such a performance is characterised through

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Fig. 4. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); installation view at Gallery Oldham.
Courtesy of the artist.

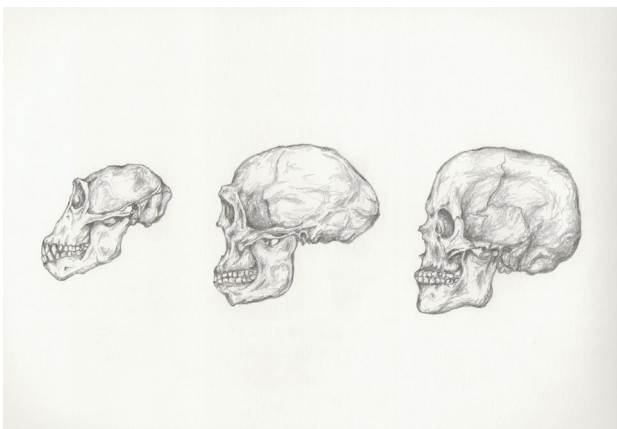


Fig. 5. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); detail: "ape", pencil on paper, 32 x 24 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

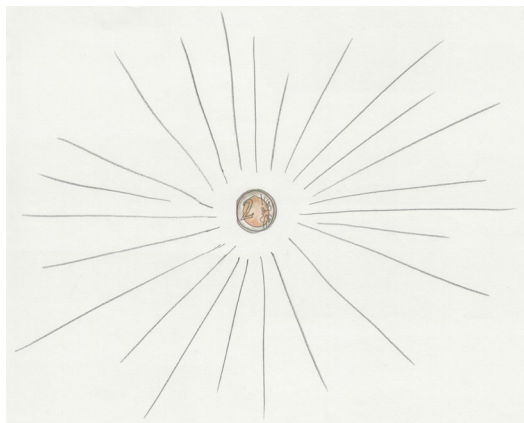


Fig. 6. Dave Ball, A to Z (2011-ongoing); detail: "allure", pencil and watercolour on paper, 32 x 24 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

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'a sense of ambivalence or indifference,' which makes it possible to 'imagine the Sisyphean task inhabited, if only momentarily, as a site of humour, ridiculousness, or ... even joy or happiness' (Cocker 2010, 272). *A to Z*, likewise, is not about an individual metaphorically pushing a stone up a hill again and again in order to illustrate 'the futility of human existence locked into a framework of unrelenting and aimless action' (Cocker 2010, 267). Rather, it unfolds via a playfully absurd strategy, a deliberately ridiculous undertaking that, in Cocker's words, 'disrupts normative expectations and value ... in favour of another logic' – which, moreover, is more funny than bleak (282). Granted a similarly 'affirmative reading' (Cocker 2010, 266), the analogous, alphabetical absurdity of the *Autodidact* need no longer be written off (as Sartre invites us to do) as an act of bad faith, but reimagined instead as an unexpectedly joyful form of proto-conceptual art.

Even if I have offered a reading of the *Autodidact* somewhat against Sartre's own intentions, this is because both the *Autodidact* and I are engaged in our own absurdly-conceived projects of following the logic of the alphabet. While Sartre's philosophical preoccupations may well result in a portrayal of the activities of the *Autodidact* as naïve folly, when considered apart from this context, they emerge in a more positive light. By negotiating the differences in the senses of absurdity ordinarily associated with existentialist literature and that attributable to a distinct mode of playful and humorous art practice, it is possible to imagine the *Autodidact* as an unexpectedly astute conceptual artist, and to imagine the *A to Z* project as that of a character in an existentialist novel.

Footnotes

- [1] The complete sequence of A, B and C-words were shown as a solo exhibition *A to Z: The First Seven Years* at Gallery Oldham, Manchester from November 2018 to March 2019



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Mimi Cabell, Rhode Island School of Design

In 2013 I began a project called *My Pink*, named for the PINK brand of Victoria's Secret lingerie store, and because, in contemporary US slang, the word pink can mean both the deed for a car and a woman's genitals. I am interested in the performance of gender and the different mechanisms and structures by which it is learned. *My Pink* is a series of artworks that take their inspiration from the underwear from PINK, including the visual and textual content that comprise the advertising for the PINK line. *My Pink* is an artwork in dialogue with fellow artist, Jeong Mee Yoon. According to Jeong Mee Yoon's website, her artwork *The Pink and Blue Project* explores the trends in cultural preferences and the differences in the tastes of children (and their parents) from diverse cultures, ethnic groups as well as gender socialization and identity.¹

Jeong Mee Yoon began the project after her 5-year-old daughter fell in love with the colour pink and apparently only wanted to play with pink objects and wear pink clothes. The photographs in the series are of children and all of their pink or blue toys and clothing. The choice of colour depended on the gender of the child. Sometimes the quantity of paraphernalia is so great that it takes several moments before one can even find the child to whom all the objects belong. Reading the description of Yoon's project I was struck by the repetition of the word 'pink' and the way it seemed to cease as a signifier of colour. And I thought, isn't pink related to Victoria's Secret?

Victoria's Secret was founded by Roy Raymond in Palo Alto, California in 1977 in order to make men feel comfortable buying lingerie for their wives. He imagined a Victorian boudoir and chose the name Victoria 'to evoke the propriety and respectability associated with the Victorian era' (Barr 2013). He and his wife, Gaye, wanted the stores to feel private and fanciful and enjoyed the historical association with the name Victoria. The word secret was used to 'double up on the sense of intimacy for shoppers' (Fabry 2015). Later in 2004, and under new ownership, a junior line of Victoria's Secret (VS), Pink (stylised PINK), was launched as a lower-priced offshoot and marketed as 'fresh, fun and free-spirited' (Bhatnagar 2004). The aim of the PINK brand was specifically to target college-age girls (18-22 years old) with a collection that included lingerie, loungewear, and sleepwear featuring 'girly slogans such as "I like boys"' (Bhatnagar 2004).

In stores, the two lines differentiate themselves through lighting, décor, and colour.² VS stores are dimmer with red being a dominant colour throughout including all of the garments in the store. Next door at PINK the lights are brighter and there is a wider range of colour, including pink, teal, and purple.³ The garments are hung and folded in a more casual style. Large black and white



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I'll Workout Tomorrow

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Fig. 1 — Screenshot from *I'll Workout Tomorrow*, 2017



Fig. 2 — Screenshot from *I'll Workout Tomorrow*, 2017

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images taken during the Victoria's Secret fashion show hang on the walls on the VS side, while colour images of younger women wearing clothes from PINK, hanging out with friends, throwing a football, drinking hot chocolate, or otherwise engaging in other aspects of 'co-ed' life hang on the walls of the PINK store.

Pink, used specifically as the name of a colour, was coined only in the 1840s. Prior to this, meanings for the word included 'a young salmon, a kind of fishing boat shaped like a young salmon, a jagged fencing wound, and a method of decorating fabric by piercing or scalloping the edge' (Paoletti 2012, 86). The colour pink was normalised for girls, and its counterpart blue for boys, only in the 1950s (Paoletti 2012, 89). Prior to this, pink was the colour for boys' clothing as it was a 'stronger colour... more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl' (Maglaty 2011). All forms of gender-specific clothing was first introduced shortly before World War I, but these didn't take hold until after World War II and the 1970s saw a brief hiatus in the twentieth century colour norms when more neutral colours such as orange, yellow, green and brown were used for both boys and girls, only for the normalisation of the pink-blue binary to resurface aggressively in the early 2000s (Paoletti 2012, 131). In *Pink and Blue, Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (2012), Jo B. Paoletti writes:

For parents of girls, the most troubling aspects of their fashions in the last decade have been pinkification, princesses, and sexualization... In the early 2000s pink became ubiquitous—not just in baby and toddler clothing but for girls and women of all ages, and not just for clothing but for cell phones, power tools, and other products once devoid of gender. (Paoletti 2012, 131)

My Pink is a critical intervention into the 'pinkification' of global mainstream culture. I started buying underwear from the PINK line, all size XS, and only those pairs that had text on them. Phrases like 'Hey Hey', 'I want it all', 'No Basic Beaches', 'I'll Workout Tomorrow', 'Sun Your Buns', 'More More More', 'Smack', 'I (heart) my boyfriend', 'Cheers' and 'Let's Party' are some of the phrases that appear either across the front or the back of the underwear. I also only bought 'full-bum' underwear, meaning no thongs or explicitly sexualised nearly-naked underwear. What initially compelled me to start buying them was an equal fascination, discomfort, and horror that such objects existed, and that they were being sold to customers as young as 13. Size XS is small, and depending on the style, the waistband of the underwear did not measure more than 8 or 9 inches across. There was also the matter of the text. Words and phrases are meant to be read, which implies an audience. This implicitly asks, who is reading this text on the underwear that these young women were wearing? Themselves? Their friends? Their boyfriends?



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(I use boyfriends not to suggest that only heterosexual women buy underwear from PINK, but rather to follow in the norms of the brand image, that is, that PINK is [mostly] white and blonde, [emphatically] hetero-sexual, and [definitely] thin.)

It is notable that sales assistants at PINK invariably referred to the underwear as 'panties'. I asked a sales assistant if they were instructed by their manager or if it was VS policy to refer to the underwear only as panties. The answer was 'no'. Journalist, Sarah Fentem, writing on the use of panty for women's under-pants, notes that the term was first used in 1908 in a set of instructions for making doll clothes:

...the hatred of the word 'panties' comes from how disconnected the sexy word is from the function of what it means. Women's underwear serves the same utilitarian purpose a man's underwear does. However, 'panties' forces us to call our underwear something sexy, when really we decide for ourselves whether our underwear is sexy or not. While saying 'panties' might not be downright degrading, that's enough to leave a foul taste in a woman's mouth. (Fentem 2013)

I was curious who bought the underwear, and how those people relate to their own bodies, embodiment, and desire — how they understood themselves as either subjects or objects (or both). Did they consider themselves feminists? Did the words on the panties represent a kind of feminism? What most disturbed me about the underwear was that they seemed to encourage a displaced and external sense of one's body, one's embodiment and one's desires. They trained girls to perform and see themselves through the eyes of those who looked at them as well as understanding their bodies (not themselves) through the pleasure someone else derived from them. This of course, is one point of view. In casual conversations filmed as part of my artwork, many more viewpoints emerged.

In *Performing Gender Identity, Young Men's Talk and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity* Deborah Cameron unpacks Judith Butler's idea of the performativity of gender and also discusses the role of language in the construction and performance of gender. She argues that while Butler asserts that '[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body', so too speech performs gender through repetition (Cameron 2006, 63). In short, how a person talks determines, by reiteration and performativity, who that person is.

So, PINK is creating what kind of girl, and what kind of girl has created PINK?

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It is also worth noting the influence of capitalism and consumption on the gendering of clothing, accessories and toys for children. As Paoletti argues, when expectant parents found out that they were having a boy or girl, they would then buy the appropriately gendered paraphernalia. If they had one boy and their second child was a girl (or vice versa), they would buy new, appropriate to gender. It is the logic of capitalism, normalised through culture: what is normalised as appropriate was in fact the market's need to create more consumption (Paoletti 2012, 129).

I'll Workout Tomorrow is a 33-minute video that forms part of the *My Pink* series. Through casual conversations with a variety of people from different cultures, ages, races, and genders, I tried to find out how women and men feel about these panties [sic]. I conducted interviews with participants recording their hands as they sifted through the underwear while asking:

- How would you describe these?
- How do they make you feel?
- Who do you think the target audience is for these objects? Who do you think buys them?
- How do you define feminism, and what is your relationship to it?
- What do you think of the colour pink?

I did not interview individuals who are frequent and enthusiastic consumers of Victoria's Secret or PINK underwear. I wanted to make an artwork with participants who do not readily fit within the brand conventions peddled by Victoria's Secret and PINK. In addition, participants were educated and accustomed to thinking critically about the culture in which they live, including the forces that shape that culture. One participant, Sebastián, remarked on the relationship between labour, specifically labour performed by women in developing countries, and how their labour underpins the 'self-care' adopted recently by many women in the United States. She noted in the film that just 'because you are able to focus on your identity as a woman doesn't mean that that identity isn't shared by the people whose oppression is also enabling your self-care'. VS is a fast fashion company.

The underwear I purchased for the project are made in one of three places, India, Israel, or Sri Lanka, and up to 7 pairs cost \$25. They are both poorly made and not expensive. Sebastián questions the chain of production, asking who is benefitting and suffering from the way this chain is set up.

Hera, another participant, expressed her skepticism of companies such as VS and PINK that align themselves with political-cultural movements including feminism and Black Lives Matter. She mentions that, when the company has so much to gain financially by participating in the cultural moment, she can only conclude the gesture is insincere. While some panty phrases were obviously



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Fig. 3 — Screenshot from *I'll Workout Tomorrow*, 2017



Fig. 4 — Screenshot from *I'll Workout Tomorrow*, 2017

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linked to the holidays around which they were sold, for example 'Unwrap me' for Christmas and 'Feeling Witchy' for Halloween, other phrases aim at specific threads within feminism. 'I want everything and more' for example was sold in the same time span as the release of Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* (2013), which describes ways in which women can assert themselves in the workplace. As a mother and successful businesswoman, Sandberg represents one example of a woman who has attained a version of the femi-nist dream of 'having it all'. The 'I want everything and more' on PINK panties leaves unanswered the question of what the 'everything' is, or even the 'more,' it being written on the front of a young woman's underwear that covers her genitals.

On film, Hera articulates her position with regards to feminism and the history and evolution of that position. She explains that a few years prior she would have identified herself as a feminist but that more recently she has begun to feel that the term was not inclusive enough of the many feminisms and womanisms she believes and participates in. She noted that feminism, as she understood and observed it, did not seem to take into account her specific concerns and experience as a woman of colour.

Another participant, Alesdair, sums up his response to the underwear quite succinctly:

I think what I am drawing from this is that capitalism, as per usual, is making everything worse... because VS has decided that there is money to be made off of young children... and it is like 'Oh, we will expand our market to do funny things for babies'.

This unconsciously echoes Howard Tubin and Marshal Cohen's pronouncement in 2004 when PINK launched, and the success of VS in capturing a new customer base so that young women are introduced to PINK at a young age before moving to Victoria's Secret as they grow up (Bhatnagar 2004).

These represent only a fraction of the conversations that were had over the PINK underwear. *I'll Workout Tomorrow* is reflective and dialogical. The artwork attempts to provide space for a variety of ideas to emerge. My intention with the piece was to privilege the experience of each individual and allow them to respond from a place of knowledge, including both the academically-informed and the anecdotal. Participants are only identified by their first names and in the film only their hands are shown, thus further honouring their privacy. By filming only the hands, each participant is anonymised. Implicitly I ask the audience to assess their own assumptions, their judgements as they watch and listen to each participant speak. In this way not only were participants invited to respond in a protected way, but the audience is asked to be active in their experience, actively reflexive in their viewing pleasure.



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Footnotes

- [1] Yoon, Jeong Mee, Artist's website. Available online
[Http://www.jeongmeeyoon.com](http://www.jeongmeeyoon.com). Accessed August 26, 2019.
- [2] As exemplified in the Providence Place Mall in Providence, Rhode Island, USA
- [3] The colours dominant during the period of 2013-2015 when I was buying the underwear.



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Background

Physical contact is not always necessary to experience the tactility and materiality of the world. As Pallasmaa writes in *Eyes of the Skin*, all of our senses are related to tactility.

Our contact with the world takes place at the boundary line of the self through specialised parts of our enveloping membrane. Touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world with that of ourselves (Pallasmaa 2005, 10-11).

With this in mind, I will consider two video works I created as part of my PhD research: *In and Out of Memory: Exploring the Tension Between Remembering and Forgetting When Recalling 9/11, a Traumatic Event* (2017). The starting point for my doctoral research was a personal remembering of the events that took place on September 11, 2001, layered upon a well-established collective memory of the terrorist attack. It involved deconstructing a journal written in the days before, during and after 9/11, which had remained unread until 2012. Making work from this place functioned on a number of levels: i) as an exploration of trauma from the inside out where my memories and my body existed as a site of trauma, ii) the externalisation of trauma to further an understanding of the collective memory, iii) a personal bearing witness to a global trauma that was arguably appropriated by the media, and (iv) a concerted remembering of an event that I would prefer to forget, highlighting the inherent tension within traumatic memories. The research was divided into three very clear stages (*Stage I, Stage II, Stage III*) that moved from the periphery of the traumatic memory into its centre and out again.

The first video is, *Ghost II*, 2017.¹ At just over 3 minutes it is the final segment of a series of moving imagery and sound works that make up *Stage II: Six Fragments* (2015-2017). In this series of artworks, I am actively seeking the sounds of the Towers falling, which despite being present in lower Manhattan on September 11, 2001, I did not hear. To begin this interaction with the past, I utilised the text written in my journal to trace the memories backwards in time. The second video from the final *Stage III: Remembering* (2017)² is a short 4-minute excerpt taken from the beginning of the full-length video of 17 minutes. In *Remembering*, having located the sounds of the explosions, and the falling of the Towers, I was tracing the affect of this traumatic memory on my body. This was achieved through remembering as much as I could in one recording, without props or interruption.

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Ghost II

Ghost II was made for a large cinematic screen with stereo or surround sound. It is comprised of a series of abstract, grainy flashes of light and vertical and horizontal movement across a darkened screen. The accompanying sounds start as high-pitched scraping of train wheels on tracks, moving into rumbling and layered heavy tones, broken by the interjection of voices and words. Out of the abstraction an image of a figure emerges, seen from above as it moves across the frame, while seated figures aboard a train come in and out of view. Towards the end of the footage a hand moving a lever can clearly be identified, giving way to vertical lines of shape, form and light and a flurry of urgent sounds.

Through making this work, I was researching how fragmented a memory, and therefore an artwork, can be used to communicate something of the sensation of trauma and its historical lineage.

I was also seeking what was hidden, what was being sheltered within my memory. It is useful here to explore the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*³, the concept of deferred action, to experience what yet remains to come, a ghost of or from the future, the spectral (which finally led to Stage III and the video, *Remembering*). The video's title, is a direct link to the Derridean notion of spectrality: the anachronistic spectre, outside of time and place, which exists between life and death, absence and presence. As Derrida writes 'a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met' (Derrida 1995, 84). Throughout *Six Fragments* I am coming face to face with the spectre, the trace of the traumatic event and its delay. It constantly returns, never in repetition but layered, in another formation, which Derrida draws attention to in Freud's view of the psychic mechanism as a process of 'memory traces being subjected from time to time to a re-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances—to a re-transcription' (Freud, 1896). It is an ongoing dialogue with the dead and with the past, a constant call to responsibility and transformation.

Searching for the spectral through the making of *Ghost II* was therefore a way to navigate the evasiveness of trauma and its deferral; a method of entering a space of forgotten memories and dissociation to seek restitution, as a witness rather than one subsumed by the memory.

The spectral arises from the concept of a future absence. To haunt, Derrida writes, does not mean to be present, in that it is not necessary to seek immediate meaning, rather haunting is there in the very construction of a concept: 'Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time' (Derrida 1994, 13). This notion of 'hauntology', a pun on ontology, is a link between being and presence. Every aspect of life is haunted by the past. It is through the figure of the ghost that the past and present are indistinguishable and the spectral continually brought to life.

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The imagery for *Ghost II* was filmed with a macro lens pressed up close to the computer screen. The grid of the screen is clearly defined, as is the pixilation of the footage, two layers of texture to represent the grainy spectrality of memory. It is this textural component that Laura Marks refers to as the *haptic visual*. In this instance, it is the texture that connects *Ghost II* to my body and traces the passage of time from the origin of the Towers to their downfall, an indelible historic layering that insinuates itself into my system.

The term *haptic visuality* was initially devised by the art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905) in 1901. He used the term to define the link between the eye and the hand in relation to Egyptian bas-relief, the notion of the eye moving over a surface, like the sense of touch. Deleuze expanded upon Riegl's concept, describing the eye as polyvalent and transitory addressing the 'pure presence of the body... visible at the same time the eye becomes the destined organ of this presence' (Deleuze 2003, 37). In *A Thousand Plateaus* (2000) he and Guattari describe smooth and striated space, where smooth space, the transformative space close to the viewer, becomes difficult to navigate so the whole body is engaged in haptic viewing. The eye moves over the texture of smooth space, privileging the material presence of the imagery in search of a place to locate the body, as opposed to striated or codified space where the sky and the horizon become landmarks in negotiating distance and therefore location. 'Smooth space is occupied by intensities ... striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 557).

Despite drawing from the same source, Marks' notion of the haptic is different from that of Deleuze. She writes of the viewer's haptic engagement happening not only psychically but also sensorially (Marks 2002 18). In other words, the haptic visual does not depend on the viewer identifying with a recognisable figure or character but on a more sensuous bodily relationship between the viewer and the subject: 'haptic images and haptic visuality encourage a subjective position of intimacy and mutual entanglement between viewer and viewed' (Marks 2015, 227). This distinction, between haptic and optical images, where vision is tactile, 'as though one were touching a film with one's eyes' (Marks 2000, xi) relies on moving *close to* the screen, touching not mastering. It is the close-to-the-body form of perception of film as skin, where 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch [and] move over the surface of its object to discern texture' (Marks 2000, 62) thereby taking in, or absorbing the imagery into the body.

Throughout the making of *Six Fragments*, the lens of the camera, pressed against my eye, touched the computer screen creating space from actually seeing what was unfolding. Through witnessing the texture and the grain of the event, the trauma was viewed from a distance. As I filmed and then

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edited, I built from the inside out, managing and tracking, layering the imagery and sounds upon each other, repeating both, embedding mimesis into the process. I yielded to the knowing, to the remembering, to the spectral within. I sensed and felt my way through a process of discovery and rediscovery, consciously activating haptic visuality, which Marks articulates in *Skin of the Film*:

The works that I propose to call haptic, invite a look that moves over the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realizes what she or he is beholding. Such images resolve into figuration only gradually, if at all. Conversely, a haptic work may create an image of such detail, sometimes through miniaturism, that it evades a distanced view, instead pulling the viewer in close. (Marks 2000, 163)

Here the distinction between the self and the other becomes porous and flexible, mimesis opening up a tactile experience. From my body, my memory, to that of the viewer, mimesis is the representation that requires getting close, being in contact, in Marks words, a flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic distance (Marks 2002, xiii).

The footage for *Ghost II* was pieced together from a section of Port Authority's documentation of the construction of the World Trade Centre, which began in February 1967, and was completed with the last piece of steel placed on the North tower (One World Trade Centre) on December 23, 1970, and the South tower (Two World Trade Centre) in July of 1971. I found a digital version of the original footage, which despite editing and digitisation retained the blurred quality of a handheld camera, figures and steel in motion. I slowed the film down in the editing, stalling fragments of seconds into much longer, over and under exposed imagery. Purposefully included, was the visual 'noise' that had been gathered in the transference, from film stock to its digital rendering and then to my camera and back to the computer. These were scratches that were evident in the actual 70's documentary footage, dust on my computer and on the camera lens, light leaking in from the window of my house, my reflection briefly glimpsed on the screen and my hand on the camera. All of which helped to situate the event externally from my body, maintaining a sensory and tactile link back to it, while bridging the past and the present. Through layering sounds, *ripping*, or *tearing* the footage, and the repetition of both phrase and imagery, *Ghost II* becomes an exploration of anxiety, a predetermined anxiety embedded within the Towers. In between the fleeting glimpses of bodies, steel and light, of the reverberating sounds and interrupted voices, lies the uncanny spectral, present from the beginning, warning of the traumatic inevitability of their fall. The sounds for *Ghost II* are stitched together from the footage of the falling towers, from my voice and from odd snippets of life. They allude to the eerie quality of electrical interference, of turning a dial to locate a radio

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station. I wanted to capture the noise of the past. The sound of the buildings that once creaked and shifted on their axes. The giant steel girders that once rubbed up against each other. The trains that ran noisily on the tracks beneath the buildings, unseen from above. These were once the sounds of life, simultaneously happening on a multitude of levels out of which a man asks, ‘do you guys hear that?’ A question that pauses the moment temporarily before the noise again swallows up the voice. He repeats, ‘do you guys hear that?’ It is a warning to the listener that something is about to happen and will keep on happening, keep on repeating, for that is the nature of trauma. Which brings me to the final stage of the PhD research, *Remembering* (2017).



Fig.1: Still Image from Ghost II, (Walker, 2017)

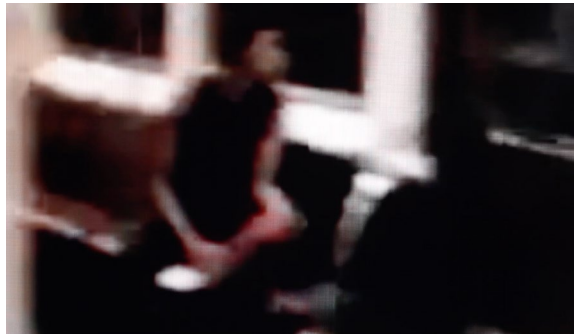


Fig. 2: Still Image from Ghost II, (Walker, 2017)



Fig. 3: Still Image from Remembering, (Walker, 2017)

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Remembering

Remembering, also created for a large theatre screen with stereo sound, was completed in 2017. It picks up where *Ghost II* left off. While making this artwork, I researched whether it was possible to find resolution to the traumatic experiencing of 9/11. Seventeen minutes in length, shot in black and white, *Remembering*, traces the moment the planes hit the Twin Towers, their downfall, the devastation at Ground Zero and the clean-up. The imagery was taken from the hundreds of hours of footage of 9/11 videos on YouTube. Again, shot through a macro lens, the intention was to reveal a close-up, distorted and abstracted perspective of that time, to accompany the stripped back simplicity of the soundtrack, my voice. Alone, 14-years after the event, sealed in a soundproof room, I stood in front of a microphone, remembering all that took place, on September 11, 2001, and the days and weeks thereafter. The moments that surfaced were personal and intimate and resonated through my body, a re-visitation of the past rather than a fragmented layering of imposed memories onto the past. In this way, my body and my memories served as a constant point of arrival and departure. The spectral moved through me, spoke through me to be heard by others. I am telling the audience what it was like to be in New York at that time, how it was to experience that level of trauma.

My voice moves through and around the visuals and out into the auditorium, settling into the contours of the space, into the listening. The words unsettle and create a link backwards in time, to the listeners' own memories, connecting to their invisible world of fragmented imagery and noises. My voice now becomes part of them, part of their memories. It is an uncanny transmission. The uncanny seeking restitution. *Remembering* signifies a necessary search for a subjectivity to accommodate the multiplicities of voices and temporalities required to place meaning on this traumatic experience. The ghost: 'the double (and its various manifestations such as mirror images, déjà vu, doppelgangers, out of body experiences, etc.)' (Rahimi 2015, 3), neither claims to be nor is experienced as a replica or a representation of the self as Freud posits, but rather the 'ghost disturbs by producing an uncanny version of the other' (Rahimi 2015, 3).

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida considers the conflict between presence and absence, inside and outside. Derrida argues that the true logic of uncanniness is a phantom-logic, a necessity of learning to live with ghosts, phantoms, and spirits, because 'there is no Dasein without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity [*Unheimlichkeit*] of some spectre' (Derrida 1994, 125). It is a state of being that is to be always and everywhere haunted by ghosts, phantoms or spirits: the visibility of the invisible (Derrida 1994, 125). Spectral logic is the presence related to the otherness of the self, or the self that is found within the other (whether person, place or time). Referencing Roland Barthes, Derrida writes, 'Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the punctum in the studium, the completely other, dead, living in me' (Derrida 2003, 42).

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In *Remembering I* am also asking what is it to transfer the experience of trauma to an audience? In Laura Marks' emphasis of the tactile and contagious quality of cinema as something viewers brush up against like another body, considerations naturally arise around the effect of such contagion on the viewer: what is the maker's responsibility and to whom. What is the value of evoking such memories, of bringing them alive again? But it is here, at this place of seepage where potential exists, an in-between space where the spectral meets memory, the real meets imagination, provoking disorientation. Despite the imagery taken directly from film shot on the actual day, I am questioning the reality of the experience and mimicking my fuzzy recollection of events from the past. The blurry close-ups of planes and buildings create eeriness, a surreal interaction with the footage. Black and white, the imagery is layered with texture and digital pixilation. The boundaries are suffused, and the edges blurred, the planes melt into the towers, which in turn diffuse into the exploding flames. The depiction of the imagery in this way activates the memory, the tactile quality links the viewer back in time, to touch, smell, and physically experience their own version of this past event. *Remembering* reframes the event, and though it is a reminder of what the event felt like when it was first experienced it brings the past into the present and vice versa. Through a blending of existing digital documents and footage from 9/11, layered with effects and digital manipulations, my intention was to add to the existing memories that an audience has already formed of the event, connect the imagery to the bodies of the audience and repeatedly insinuate it into the physicality of the audience body. Here, the potential for the viewer to engage with all that is revenant is set in motion. The work does not produce the spectral per se but does allow for what is already spectral to appear or reappear. The spectral is inscribed as a trace, a spectral memory, and creates, as Derrida writes, the potential for 'a magnified work of mourning' (Derrida 2001, 23).

The hazy quality and broken pixilation of the footage is intended to engage on a haptic level. Through its surreal and dream like quality I both recreate and encounter moments of the actual and virtual, real and imaginary, subjective and objective and inside and outside. It is an interstitial place of indiscernible momentum, it is a flashback, a link to the past, an experience. Since making *Remembering*, I have replaced the explosiveness of the event with the animated close-up footage of my film. This is more than a bodily relation to the screen, or a process of entering and feeling the past, it is about taking the imagery, the past, into the body, while simultaneously being absorbed by it. This optical tactile space embraces, nay, consumes the viewer. *Remembering* asks the viewer not only to draw on their own memories but to position him/herself back in time, in such close proximity to the event that it feels like it is happening again and again. Through conscious engagement with the haptic visual, the possibility is created for an increase in awareness of one's

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body, of its physicality, and the interaction with what is on the screen which, to paraphrase Marks, creates for the viewer a sense of being both physically and subjectively connected to the source of the imagery (Marks 2015, 276). The artwork brings the virtual and traumatic event into the actual to be freshly perceived, imagery and voice provoke introspection, an evocative remembering that weaves through memory circuits towards an 'attentive recognition ... [and a] participatory notion of spectatorship' (Marks 2000, 48). In addition, watching *Remembering asks, me*, (both maker and viewer), to rethink the past with my whole body. As I absorb the footage, I occupy both the relational and the symbolic space, where the artwork functions, to borrow a term from Michele Serres, 'desmologically' (Serres 2002, 204)⁴, connecting what is being viewed, heard and senses to contemporary situations, whether personal, cultural or political. As such, there is a case to be made for a different kind of interlocution and communication, one which points to a future full of hope and joy. To expand, in a dialogue between Serres and Mary Zournazi (2002), the philosopher frames his optimism for the future on the continuing development of transformative relationships between each other (and all that entails) and the expansion of cognitive functions. He suggests, when the media deliver nothing but violence, providing no information whatsoever, there exists the potential that out of this monotony comes sadness. Which, he goes on to say: '[r]are and unexpected, peace or inventiveness interrupt this sad, grey monotony and cause an eruption of joy' (Serres 2002, 199). In other words, through watching *Remembering*, the whole body is engaged with the processing of information, thereby clearing a space for the potential to experience something new, something akin to a release.

In its depiction of the past as blurred, repeated and fragmented, *Remembering*, manages to reproduce the shock of the trauma and return it animated and softly focused: copy and contact. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, film provides a new schooling for our mimetic powers, through the enlargement of an image, space is stretched, when we slow down motion, movement expands, creating "entirely new structural formations of matter' (Benjamin, 1936). I propose here, that the artwork delivers *manageable* matter through a rendition that is *smoothed out*. Here, the black and white footage of faceless moving bodies become Derrida's ghosts, moving between the visible and the invisible, the real and imaginary, spirit and body, both ghostly residue of a departed reality, and material passing into sensation. The digital grain of pixilation and noise are reminiscent of memories transported over the passage of time, retaining remnants of the original trauma but now repeatedly broken and blurry. It is within these fragments and the space in-between that there exists the potential for something new. Deleuze describes the absence of certain images, such as with a black or white screen or an underexposed or snowy image, as having the 'genetic' power to restore our belief in the world (Deleuze 1989, 200), creating something new out of the ruins of the image. In *Remembering*, the imagery, softened, abstracted, thick with texture and depth in its

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black and grey rendering, creates a past that is no longer hard and fixed to be used as a political statement of terrorism and trauma. Rather, it becomes a place of mourning, a passage through time towards transition an opportunity for transformation.

Footnotes

- [1] Anna Walker, Ghost II, <https://vimeo.com/351427207> (password Ghost)
- [2] Anna Walker, Remembering, <https://vimeo.com/351430968> (password Remembering)
- [3] Derrida writes in *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1978: 196), *Nachträglichkeit* governs Freud's thought regarding 'the irreducibility of the "effect of deferral"' (205). As La Planche writes, 'What Freud tried to discover, through *Nachträglichkeit*, is something much more connected with the whole of a life. That is another type of temporality. It is the temporality of retranslating one's own fate, of retranslating what's coming to this fate from the message of the other. That's a completely different aspect of temporality' (La Planche 2001: 11). (Derrida, J., (1978) *Writing and Difference*)
- [4] Full quote: 'I don't think it's an ontology we need, but a desmology – in Greek *desmos* means connection, or link. The word is used in medicine, but that doesn't concern us here. What interests me is not so much the state of things but the relations between them. I've concerned myself with nothing but relations for my whole life. Relations come before being. Just as Jean-Paul Sartre said that 'essence precedes existence', I say that 'relationships come before being'' (Serres 2002, 204).

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9.4

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Lisa Taliano, Independent Artist

As global temperatures and sea levels rise, and our hopes of diverting the catastrophic consequences of climate change fall, our concept of the earth as a fixed framework and backdrop to human activity spirals into unfamiliar and shifting ground. As Bruno Latour says, we've become disoriented in space, time and agency. In recognition of the need to reorient ourselves, this paper takes seriously Bruno Latour's challenge to replace the blue marble with a better representation of the earth. Latour makes the provocative claim that we need to replace our conception of the earth from the well-worn planetary view, defined and accepted since the beginning of modern science, in order to shift our attention away from the globe to the surface of the earth, to the critical zone where all life exists. The problem with the globe is that it's a view of the world from the outside; in order to address the problems that are currently threatening life on the planet we need to replace this outside view of the world with a new representation from the inside.

In this paper, I will examine Latour's new representations of the earth, produced with a group of contemporary artists and critical zone scientists, and presented in his performance/lecture, *Inside*. Through it, I will explore the powers and limits of representation, focusing on the question: can philosophy, art and science, by working together, change the way we know the world? Can our relationship and attitude towards the world be changed by successfully changing our representations of it? As an artist, I am particularly interested in the artist's role in re-imagining the world. I contend that the inside/outside problem is a problem of representation; and, the only way to change our relationship to the world is to get beyond representation through a practice of art that produces new forms of subjectivity.

The globe is a view of the earth from the outside. It has no resemblance to the terrestrial place where we actually live and tells us nothing of the way we experience our life on earth from the inside. We've adopted the globe as a way of seeing the world from modern science, as conceived in Europe in the sixteenth century. In this worldview, modernity makes a distinction between inert matter on the one hand, which follows the strict laws of nature, and society on the other, which is made up of free agents, creating a subject/object, inside/outside polarity which severs us from nature, and turns the world into an object. At that point in human history, people took for granted that there would always be air, water, land, and space for us to pursue our life, liberty and happiness. Latour points out that:



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what happened in the second half of the last century is that modernism disappeared in the exact measure where the life supports were made more explicit, one after the next. Ecological crisis, in such a view, are the slow and painful realization that there is no outside anymore. (Latour 2008, 9)

Drawing on the philosophy of Peter Sloterdijk, he goes on to state that:

to define humans is to define the envelopes, the life support systems...that make it possible for them to breath...We are enveloped, entangled, surrounded; we are never outside without having recreated another more artificial, more fragile, more engineered envelope. We move from envelopes to envelopes, from folds to folds, never from one private sphere to the Great Outside. (Latour 2008, 9)

If we accept that we are not outside, and we will never get outside, Latour argues that one of the most powerful images that we have, the representation of the earth as the blue planet, becomes problematic. This beautiful image gives the illusion that we can step outside of ourselves, and outside of our atmosphere, and get an objective, God's eye, view of the world. The irony is when viewed from this distance, all life disappears. The attempt to produce knowledge by standing outside the object of observation, that is, to be objective, as modelled by traditional science, is not only a distortion, but at this point a threat to our continued life on the planet. Science is clearly important, but we need science to shift from the globe, a way of seeing that 'grasps all things from far away, as if they were *external* to the social world and completely *indifferent* to human concerns [to a way of seeing that] grasps the same structures from *up close*, as *internal* to the collectivities and *sensitive* to human actions, to which they react *swiftly*'. (Latour 2018, 67) These are two very different ways of doing science, philosophy and art.

The Gaia Hypothesis, originally conceived by James Lovelock and Lyn Margulis, is one such immersive scientific theory. Lovelock and Margulis argued that the earth's atmosphere would not be possible if we had no life on the planet: in other words, it's not the atmosphere that allows life to occur on earth, life *makes* the atmosphere. The living forms which co-evolve together with their inorganic counterparts are not in an environment, they are the environment. In Latour's conception of Gaia 2.0, the earth differs from our traditional scientific conception in three significant ways: 1) The world has agency, as do all the living and non-living entities which compose it; 2) The world is not separate from the living forms that produce it; and 3) Nature is not one. It is heterogeneous on every level, and can't, strictly speaking, be considered one system.



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Making concrete the notion of Gaia, Latour turns to another concept, the notion of the ‘critical zone’. The Critical Zone (CZ) is the ‘thin, porous and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter by activating or catalysing physical and chemical reactions’ (Arènes 2018, 2). Everything that we’ve ever known or experienced exists within this tiny zone which measures a few kilometres up and a few kilometres down from the surface of the earth. The CZ has only recently been recognised as a distinct, heterogeneous, co-evolving entity driven by physical, chemical, and biological processes, bringing together scientists from different disciplines that don’t necessarily share a common language, encompassing timescales from milliseconds or less to millions of years (Brantley 2017). Compare this to the globe which is grasped in a glance and appears homogenous. By contrast, we have no visual images for the zone in which we reside, which is one of the major challenges facing critical zone science today. Latour argues that a major source of skepticism or indifference to climate change comes from the absence of a shared representation for life in the critical zone. How do we visualise where we are? What imagery can we use to represent the critical zone as opposed to the globe?

Inside: A Performance/Lecture

In recent years, Latour has been collaborating with critical zone scientists and visual artists to come up with the visual imagery to re-imagine the world as Gaia. In a performance/lecture, Inside, which toured across Europe and the U.S. in 2018, Latour presented the results of this science, art, philosophy collaboration. The primary work presented to replace the blue marble image of the earth was *Energetic ‘Maelstrom’* (2018) by Alexandra Arènes.

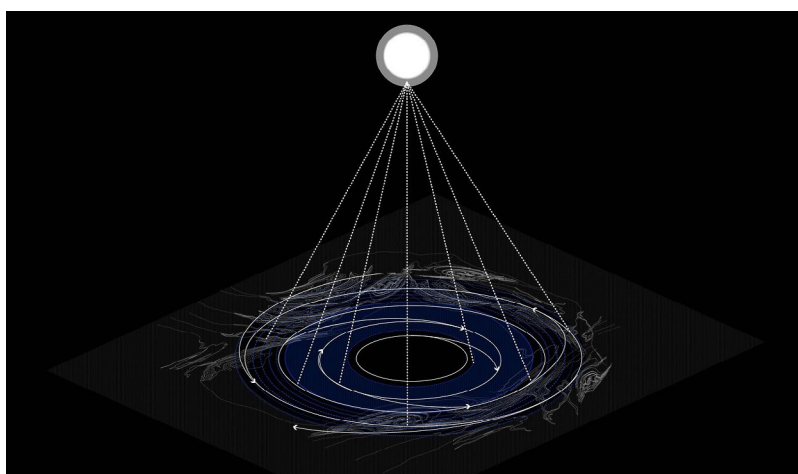


Fig. 1. Alexandra Arènes, *Energetic “Maelstrom”*. Géohéliocentrisme. 2017. Retrieved from <https://gaia-graphy.tumblr.com/image/166321881332> (permission to reproduce work granted by Alexandra Arènes)



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Energetic 'Maelstrom' is an anamorphosis of the world from the inside as represented by the dynamic geochemical cycles driven by living organisms and powered by the energy of the sun and the deep earth rock (Arènes 2018). The artist arrived at this image by cutting the globe in two, turning it inside out, and flattening it into a thin skin. Within the series of nested circles, the earth's core is on the outside and the CZ is in the centre. This gives life its central importance while at the same time, by encircling us, it conveys the feeling of being inside. In between the circular envelopes are vectors representing different geochemical cycles spiralling in both directions creating a vortex. Focusing on the transformation of matter by living organisms and the chemical circulation from one circle to the next, the earth as represented in its dynamic processes renders the difference between biotic and abiotic meaningless. It is through the agency of life forms that atoms are at times constituents of living organisms and at others associated with inorganic elements. This representation is described as a cosmogram and is the basis of 'a speculative scheme, not yet a model' used to develop a grammar in which to gather, organise and represent data coming from an actual critical zone laboratory (Arènes 2018, 5).

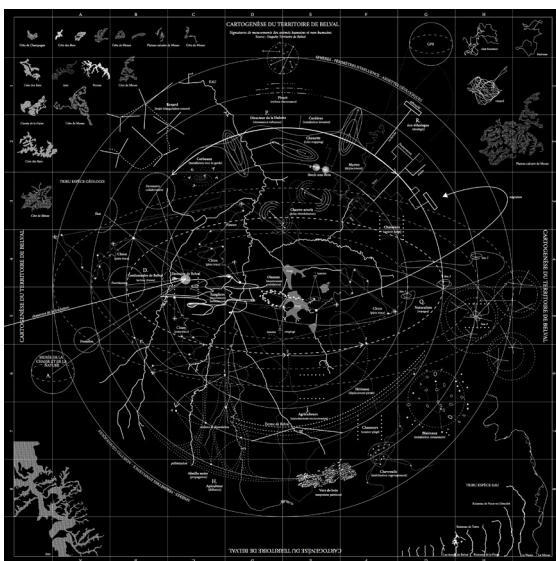


Fig. 2. Alexandra Arènes, *Cartogenesis of the Territory of Belval -- Mapping the Living*. 2017. Retrieved http://s-o-c.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Arenes_Cartogen%C3%A8se_NOIR.jpg (permission to reproduce work granted by Alexandra Arènes)

The second major work presented as a replacement for the globe, *Cartogenesis of the Territory of Belval*, is an animated map by Alexandra Arènes and Sonia Levy. The focus of inquiry shifts from the global biogeochemical level to the local, tracking the movements and effects of all the animated entities, human and non-human, on the surface of the earth in this particular location. It emphasises the notion that the CZ is not a given framework in which life occurs, but that life creates the earth or the framework in which it subsists. Arènes says:



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it is not a map for anyone wanting to reach a place for the first time, but an aboriginal map that tries to show the complexity of bonds and attachments of beings to a territory. The aim is to render visible the multiple agents making the shape of the earth through biogeophysiological actions or 'terraformation', all the human and non-human activity modifying the chemical composition of the Earth, as asserted in the Gaia Hypothesis. (Arènes 2017)

Do these representations succeed in fulfilling the requirements set forth by Latour's conception of the earth as Gaia? Are they successful representations for supplanting the image of the globe? What does it mean to view the world from the inside, and do these images succeed in taking us in?

The Problem of Representation

In a paper published in 1988, 'Visualization and Social Reproduction', Latour identifies two very different representational regimes in Western culture: one originally used in religious worship and the other used by science. The first re-presents something that is always present but needs reminding, the second representation stands in the place of an absent object. In the first, the representation is the thing. In the second there is a gap between the thing and its representation; the representation is a model of the world not a re-presentation. The shift from the first regime to the second began with the advent of modern science. Latour attributes this shift to innovations in writing and imaging that enabled reality to be turned into data and transported over space and time. He calls the new inscription types 'immutable mobiles' because they can be recontextualised without changing their shape and internal relationships. They are our marks, signs, prints, maps and diagrams that can be reshuffled, superimposed and combined to become 'simpler and simpler inscriptions that mobilize larger and larger numbers of events in one spot' (Latour 1986, 17) to produce knowledge. Immutable mobiles are powerfully political because they can be used to create allies and build coalitions around an idea. They act as a force that produces shifts in belief and behaviour. Presumably it is the lack of appropriate immutable mobiles that is challenging for critical zone scientists, and what Latour and his team have set out to rectify. He goes on to describe how the logic of immutable mobiles has come to dominate all forms of representation in contemporary western culture and laments that 'the regime of Presence has been turned into that of Absence', but concludes with the hope that our post-modern world has the capacity to reclaim 'an optically coherent space in which we will be able to represent all our different regimes of representation' (Latour 1988, 34).



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Artist Barbara Bolt compares Latour's conception of the two regimes of representation to Heidegger's critique of representationalism. In his essay 'The Age of the World Picture', Heidegger designates 'the Modern epoch as the era of representation' (Bolt 17). Bolt makes the connection between Heidegger's modern epoch and Latour's second regime and shows how Heidegger traces this form of representation, as does Latour, back to early modern science. According to Bolt, Heidegger argues that Descartes inaugurated a new paradigm of representation that converted the world into a picture. What Heidegger means by a picture here is not the everyday sense of the term as a copy or an image of the world, but rather as a system of organising the world, by which the world is reduced to a model. Heidegger sees representations as positing a particular relation to, or way of thinking about, the world, by which it establishes a frame that produces the objectification and mastery of the world by man-as-subject. By turning the world into a picture, humans become the centre over and above all other possible centres. Through our ability to represent or model the world, we secure the world as a resource for our own use. It is this objectification of what-is by man-as-subject that constitutes the central focus of Heidegger's critique of representation:

Things in the world exist out there, ready to be collected, quantified and calculated, turned into representations, so that man may use them in his quest to master the world. [Furthermore] Heidegger suggests that through its ability to reduce everything to an object, science as research enframes us; it sets limits on what and how we think. (Bolt 22-23)

Rather than merely describing things, it actually prescribes them by setting them up as models. Since it constructs the objects it proposes to recognise, it only discovers that which it produces. Heidegger contrasts this way of representation to art, a way of knowing and relating to the world that doesn't reduce everything to an object. In its openness to what-is, art multiplies possibilities, rather than reducing them. Artistic representation is characterised as an emergent quality rather than constituting something known in advance, freeing us of enframing.

In light of Heidegger's critique, I argue that the problem of the globe, the problem of the inside and outside, the subject/object distinction, is the problem of representation. In order to get beyond understanding the world from the outside, we need to get beyond representationalism. I argue that art can escape the limits of representationalism by operating on a pre-theoretical level through concrete dealings with things in the world, but only as long as it takes the world simply as it is and not as a means to an end. When art is characterised by an openness to what-is, it has the potential to proliferate possibilities rather than reducing them.



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Latour and the Limits of Representation

How can we understand Arènes' images in light of Latour's analysis of the two regimes of representations he identifies? In his performance/lecture is Latour presenting these representations merely as scientific diagrams? That is, does he consider them as models of the world, 'immutable mobiles', or as a re-presentation of the world, or both? On the one hand, the images are considered as working scientific representations to be used in the field and for political purposes. On the other hand, in the lecture/performance and in other artistic venues, the representations are presented as works of art. They are used both as scientific representations and artistic re-presentations, and therefore must be seen as an attempt to fuse the two regimes.

Clearly these works are cognisant of the problems of scientific representation and try to overcome them - albeit from within representationalism - in that they are committed to capturing the flow of life, dissolving boundaries between the inside and the outside, subjects and objects, and weaving the social into nature. The images attempt to represent the world in such a way that we are no longer standing outside and in front of it as subjects. Nevertheless, they hit the limits of representation and fail to take us in. By replacing one form of science with another, they remain a model of the world. They do not become re-presentations, or a form of artistic representation in which the representations acquire a transformative power and become the thing they represent, as does Australian Aboriginal art, for example, which I will show below.

The globe is a powerful symbolic image, and the blue marble photograph triggers a deep emotional response in us. To replace it would require an image with the same power and capacity to move us. *Energetic 'Maelstrom'*, according to Arènes and Latour, is an exercise in the artistic imagination coming to the aid of new scientific concepts (Arènes et. al. 2018). Rather than a re-presentation, it is a translation of the world into data. It is not an image that invites us to feel, qualitatively, the vitality of Gaia; it does not re-present a way of being in the world. *Cartogenesis* on the other hand does something different. In moving away from a 'global' totalising image to a local representation of a specific location, it can be thought of as a mutable mobile staying open to different forms of representation, and not limiting or fixing us into one framework. Whether or not it takes us all the way in, the mapping of the critical zone and its association with Australian Aboriginal 'maps', points to a productive direction.

Arènes likens her mapping of the critical zone to Aboriginal mapping and Bolt describes the very different type of mapping used by Australian Aboriginal artists. Traditional Aboriginal paintings are maps of land, but not maps in the ordinary sense. Traditional Aboriginal artists, according to Bolt, used them to traverse the plane between the human and the divine, and to 'ensure that the



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balance between the human and the divine was maintained (Bolt 140). In this sense, they are not merely representations, they are performative, in that they do not simply have symbolic value, they have real transformative effects. Through painting, Aboriginal people establish direct contact with ancestral beings, those who through their activity gave shape to the earth. Art in the form of maps enables them to participate directly in that world. Paintings allow them not to re-enact or represent these events but to make them part of the present. By keeping alive the presence of ancestral beings, they ensure the regeneration of the landscape and the fertility of the land. (Morphy 1998, 100) This connection to the land is reestablished and experienced through painting, through songlines, through dance and through bodies. Constructed by means of movement through the landscape, where seeing and moving are one, a haptic dimension is infused into the materiality of the work.

By contrast, Arènes maps are purely visual, disembodied images. They illustrate the concepts of the dissolution of the individual and being-in-the-world as representations, but they fail to actually go beyond representation. Because the images do not embody the concepts, the physical connection isn't made. They are a solution to an intellectual problem. By removing the body as a unit of measure we are once again removing ourselves from the equation. A convincing image of the shape of the earth from the inside will incorporate a sensory, immediate, 'lived evaluation' as a unit of measure that proceeds from the human body; one that incorporates the situatedness of our bodies in the world, our "being-in-the-world".

There is a risk when artists work within the domain of an intellectual problem that their work serves as a means to an end and fails to become an aesthetic re-presentation. It is, as Heidegger would argue, an enframing knowing in advance, not an openness to what-is. Although these artists are working with scientists in the field, the works presented are based on data recorded and collected by instruments built on scientific models made within a specifically modern model of scientific knowledge production, with little or no attention given to affect and the role of the body. The artist's way of knowing (imagined as different from this) is eclipsed by the scientific method with its compulsion to data collection, the sophisticated instrumentation used to listen to the earth, and the formidable authority of the scientist - philosopher.

It's easy to be seduced by the power of representation since it gives rise to our power over nature and over other beings. Latour's Gaia 2.0 endeavour of producing models - immutable mobiles - to raise awareness and ultimately manage the effects of global warming through technology and science remains caught in that paradigm. In his attempt to use these representations politically, Latour instrumentalises art and thereby deprives art of its power to go beyond representation and



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reconnect us with the world in a different way. I argue that he prioritises a scientific way of knowing over an artistic way of knowing, using artistic images as a means to an end. Paradoxically, this means those new renderings of the world remain within the regime of scientific representation and fail to bring us into the world, to reconnect us from the inside.

The challenge is for those of us working within a modern (western) paradigm to aspire towards a different way of being, a different way of seeing. We can change our understanding of the world only in so far as we switch our thinking from mastering to responsiveness as a different way of relating to the world. In so far as Latour and his collaborators see the world as having agency and position themselves as listening to the earth, they move us forward. But by approaching the world with a preconceived model, they don't take us all the way there. In order to get beyond understanding the world from the outside, the challenge is perhaps not to invent better representations, but to escape representationalism altogether. As a painter, my claim is that one way to do this is through a direct engagement with the material of the world, through performativity and affect.

Art Beyond Representation

Although from a historical standpoint, painting can be accused of teaching us to see the world as a subject confronted by objects, as Latour does in his essay for *Reset Modernity!* (Latour 2016, B1), western painting has in fact been working in a non-representational mode since at least the turn of the last century and, according to Svetlana Alpers, well before that in seventeenth century Dutch painting (Alpers 1984).

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty first, painting moved from rendering of objects to the re-presentation of sensations and the underlying processes of perception and reality. Influenced by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), European artists defined the highest form of art, Dionysian art, as a work that unveils the illusions of representation and dissolves the distinction between subject and object. Similar to Barbara Bolt, my argument is that painting can escape representationalism, dissolve the inside/outside, subject/object, distinction, and produce an image of Gaia that is a better image of the world than the current globe, one in which the representation becomes the thing, by means of a dynamic productivity of material practice. That is, in a material exchange that occurs between bodies, through sensation, perceptions and affect, the artist, open to what-is, can escape representational enframing, encounter the heterogeneous multiplicity inherent in possibilities, and create the conditions for something transformative to emerge.



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Through the performative act of painting, bodily responses are focused on the demands of the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the material interaction of the paint and the canvas in such a way that the creative gesture becomes a reaction that is released from conceptual ways of thinking. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the world is filled with 'multiplicities' and 'singularities' for which there exists no 'abstract' model or type. I would add that we can open up to this pre-theoretical mode of being through art by means of affect. Affect is the sensations produced as our bodies respond and resonate to the physical world around us. Deleuze and Guattari make an important distinction between personal emotions and affect. Artist Simon O'Sullivan in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari emphasises this point. He states that affect is not personal feelings, instead affect is independent of subjects, moments of intensity, on the level of matter occurring on an a-signifying register. 'They are not the representation of experience to oneself; or the self as constituted through representation (O'Sullivan 128).' Affect is 'trans-human', in that they involve a moving beyond the individual, rendering the subject/object distinction meaningless and making self-overcoming possible. Art can function in this way to transform us, to switch our intensive register, out of our ordinary way of thinking, to reconnect us with the world. By opening us up to the non-human universe that we are also part of we can begin to define new forms of subjectivity. O'Sullivan points out that this is what Deleuze means when he says he is interested in 'modes of individuation beyond those of things, person or subjects: the individuation, say of a time of day, of a region, a climate, a river or a wind, of an event (Deleuze 1995, 26).' In throwing ourselves into the world with an openness to pure sensation, the artist is engaged in an activity that precedes representation, described by Deleuze as a state of chaos that occurs through the collapse of visual coordinates (Deleuze 2002, 82).



Fig. 3. Lisa Taliano painting, New York City, 2020.



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Let us not be too quick to find a solution for our current disorientation, it is in this chaos that something new emerges. We need representation of the underlying relationships and processes in the world, yes, but not only map coordinates based on a specific dataset. We need art that disrupts expectations; art in which the artist enters into and participates in this unlimited haptic space of rhythms and forces, and returns to give us a transformative image that embodies this experience. In this way art can work with science and philosophy on its own terms, on equal footing, and make an original contribution.

In our openness and sensitivity toward non-human others, in our direct engagement with them, a caring and inter-dependent relationship to the earth can replace our need to control, moving us away from mastering nature to a responsiveness towards it. We put ourselves aside and let the materials speak for themselves. Here the world is no longer conceived representationally as an object for a subject, nor is it a resource for use by humans as a means to an end. As Latour teaches us, the world becomes an actor in the drama of existence, and we recognise ourselves as actors engaged in shifting combinations of hybrid assemblages made up of human and nonhuman, biotic and abiotic, entities.

Although the images Latour offers in *Inside* may have been lacking in affect, Latour's performance did not. In his style and passion-infused philosophy, he can be seen as going beyond the representational, producing real effects on various planes, inspiring us towards new possibilities and change. What we need is a collective mapping of the critical zone, a dynamic assemblage of different ways of knowing and representing, similar but different from Latour's wish to find 'an optically coherent space in which we will be able to represent all our different regimes of representation' (Latour 1988, 34). The challenge for artists is to allow the earth and all the living and non-living entities to speak through our representations, through a responsiveness to them and an awareness of co-responsibility and indebtedness. We need to render ourselves and others sensitive to the place where we live, the substratum on which the continued life on the planet depends, by finding a multiplicity of new ways of representing our connections from the inside in all their entangled, heterogeneous, multi-dimensional, fluctuating, fragile glory.

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The Art of Becoming Soil in the Anthropocene: Reclamation and Decomposition

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Maria Patricia Tinajero, Institute for Doctoral Studies in Visual Art Philosophy, Portland, Maine

Everything must be digested (Ayurveda saying)

The misunderstanding of soil today results not only in scientific, political, and philosophical oversights but also in a failure to notice its ethical and aesthetic dimensions. According to arborist and eco-author William B. Logan, soil is ‘the ecstatic skin of the earth’ (Logan 2007, 5). Soil scientists suggest that, regardless of the many studies documenting the importance of soil, there is a general lack of acknowledgment of soil’s vital function and its crucial role for life on earth. They therefore insist that soils must be ‘re-framed’ (Bouma and McBratney 2013, 131). This study does not provide a solution for the soil global environmental crisis; instead, it is a point of reference to continue imagining alternative philosophical frameworks that answer to the environmental question, paying specific attention to soil.

To consider art and soil from the perspective of ecological art is to recognise that environmental problems are at the boundaries of conflict where economy and ecology, and aesthetics and art, are at odds; at these junctures, soil is viewed only as material or resource ready for use and consumption. Ecological art proposes creative ways to bring back a firm connection to soil, considering creative modalities and artistic expressions that recover the aesthetic dimension of being grounded in soil. Curator, Sue Spaid, emphasises how artistic interventions between artists and the environment are developing in terms of creative innovation and collaboration to respond to environmental problems; she coins the term *ecovention* to describe these types of artworks (Spaid 2002, 1). Curator and activist, Linda Weintraub, on the other hand, introduces the term *eco-materialism* to describe how these new types of artworks propose and recognise different ways of making art that go beyond the thematization of the environmental problems (Weintraub 2018, 18), wherein artists engage the environment in a collaboration to develop an ecological praxis that acknowledges the impact of both human and non-human collaborations and interactions (Weintraub 2018, 55).

Ecological art contributes to art and philosophy in the unfolding of the aesthetic principles that underpin the embodied experience of soil reclamation. I argue that in reclamation, ecological art finds different means to reposition our ways of thinking and acting towards soil’s material properties. In this paper, ecological art focuses on two features, soil reclamation and decomposition as artistic and critical tools, in the artwork of artists Jea Rhim Lee (JRL)’s *Infinity Burial Project* (2009) and the collective Wormfarm Institute’s (WFI) *Fermentation Fest* (2010–ongoing). These artworks explore reclamation on two fronts: the impact of soil in terms of community engagement and collaboration, and the links between reclamation and innovation and sustainability and urgency. *Infinity Burial Project* and *Fermentation Fest*

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approach reclamation as an attitude, a mode of being present, that allows exploring philosophically the problem of soil in terms of transformation and circulation of matter in the process of decomposition. Decomposition, in its aesthetic form, is fermentation, and fermentation is the artistic driver of both *Infinity Burial Project* and *Fermentation Fest*.

Environmental Philosophy and EAP

Environmental aesthetics is relevant in philosophical discourse only if we accept the profound transformation in aesthetics since Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten coined the term in 1750 (Harries 2010, 8). On the other hand, philosopher Andrew Bowie remarks on the importance of Baumgarten's aesthetics, stating that because Baumgarten asserts that through aesthetics we are capable of not only differentiating, but also validating as true differently from the rational scientific episteme, aesthetics has an important value. Bowie writes that 'Baumgarten regards empirical perception as an inherent part of the truth of our relationship to the world, which is why he dignifies aesthetics with a constitutive role in philosophy' (Bowie 2003, 6). After 250 years of aesthetic transformation, connective aesthetics highlights the significant shift in art from representational paradigms to open delivery methods that include a critical analysis of the creative processes; hence, we can recognise the significant contribution of ecological art, namely, innovation, experimentation, and social responsibility.

Philosopher Suzi Gablik develops the concept of connective aesthetic as a new theoretical framework for seeing, engaging, and criticising the emergence of non-conventional artworks that challenge modernist conventions of autonomy and individualism reflected in the paradigm of object-oriented art (Gablik 1992, 2). Philosophers, Gilles and Felix Guattari, further emphasise collaboration, processes, and transformation through the principles of becoming and heterogeneity (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 6), which are the defining elements of Gablik's connective aesthetic. JRL and the collective WFI engage in ecological art as a social practice that challenges contemporary definitions of art. Gablik writes that these artists are stepping out of 'the old framework... they are reconstructing relationships between individual and community' (Gablik 1992, 3); for these artists becoming and heterogeneity are praxes of collaboration, processes, and transformation that have a 'social purpose rather than visual style' (Gablik 3).

To examine soil as art, we must also consider the redistribution of agencies and values in soil, not as an art medium, but as an author and collaborator in the art process. Gablik's understanding of artistic authorship, while being from an anthropocentric position, nevertheless offers a valid critique ecological art in the context of the climate crisis. Gablik writes that 'there is a shift in the locus of creativity from autonomous, self-centred individuals to a new kind of dialogical structure' (Gablik 1992,



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Gablik and Weintraub investigate ecological artworks' collective, ephemeral, and provocative responses as dialogic approaches that activate ecological art and its possibilities for dynamic creative networks, but most importantly, it highlights the ethical connection between intent and impact.

Ecological art pioneers the development of artistic methodologies and critical tools that contribute to a broader understanding of metabolic relations and new materialism. Under this approach, the creative process underlines temporal relations in terms of rhythms, which are already present in soil. From this point on, I refer to these temporal relations as the conceptual assemblage of soil-body and body-soil following Deleuze and Guattari's framework of relational and conditional approaches. Ecological art underlines the way in which we must engage with the planet's material substrates — no separation, no exteriority. JRL and the collective WFI establish in their creative processes the principles of connectivity and heterogeneity to potentialise the artistic functions in terms of participation, from individual to collective actions to strengthen diversity and difference.

Another key term in an aesthetic consideration of soil is reclamation. In reclamation, the conceptual assemblage body-soil and soil-body unfold as a provisional 'smooth space' of close vision and intimacy (Deleuze et al. 1980, 493) where gaps overlap from disembodied and discontinued objects to continuous flows of embodied experiences in the process of transformation. Soil's sensorial field glides through the smooth space of close vision and intimacy to actualise the process of becoming. Becoming overflows and saturates the striated space of soil's territorialization (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 10-353) as a natural resource to find in reclamation a re-birthing that resists its re-territorialization; thus, the process of decomposition becomes a vacant smooth space pregnant with a third space, a sanctuary space.

In the sanctuary place, the entanglement produced by fermentation is a cycle of life-death-life similar to the cycles that the cells in our own body perform. We can say that we are in a constant state of birth and death. The sanctuary space allows for embedded creative actions to perform in the field of environmental aesthetics, making connective aesthetics possible and necessary. Moreover, a sanctuary space is imprinted by immanence that becomes apparent in the imminent shift of soil that emerges from soil's sensorial haptic field and the proprioception¹ response that shifts and redistribution energy level. Creative rhythms surrender to the secret of becoming soil.

Philosopher, Brian Massumi, suggests that the re-conception of the subject-object paradigm of knowledge must oscillate in the field of perception, a product of the aesthetic experience (Massumi 2013, 84). Ecological art cultivates a sanctuary place where the unexpected materialisation of

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decomposition in process-oriented artistic experimentations and innovations shift to collaborative and participatory creative events. EAP implements artistic strategies that open up the field of possibilities in the dynamic relationships between artistic interventions and art events. Eco-artists invite non-artists, both human and non-human, to collaborate in the aesthetic exchanges that turn off rational episteme to develop an attitude that slows down rhythms to notice the quiet movements of change.

Fermentation: Aesthetics Practice and Technology for Soil

Fermentation² and soil are a love story, they belong together. The collective WFI focuses on organic and artisanal agriculture, and JRL explores green burials. Both art works uncover the excessive and violent outcomes of industrial agriculture and industrial burial practices, overuse of resources and intensive use of energy, that are unsustainable, irresponsible and unethical.

Philosophers and activists, Shiva Vandana and María Mies, connect patriarchy, agribusiness, capitalism to soil autonomy and health. They write that 'existing patriarchal models are [among] the major contributors to the ecological catastrophes that are threatening our daily life' (Mies et al. 2014, 67). JRL and the collective WFI take on the expansive and all-encompassing dimensions of fermentation to articulate in soil reclamation a critique of these. Fermentation contributes to socio-cultural, ecological, and political positive change by improving the relationships between the capacity to imagine ethical-aesthetic outcomes and its material realisation. And, on the other hand, EAP influences both the social and political spheres by addressing the ever-pressing proliferation of disjointed temporalities that are the product of distressed ecosystems in their environments.

Artist JRL calls on the artwork, the artist, and audiences to reflect on the sublunary phenomenon of death and decomposition. By contrast, artist Donna Neuwirth and co-founder of WFI, approaches the reframing of soil through cultural reclamation in the art of fermentation. Fermentation is a metaphor but it also actualises soil, so fermentation is a cultural living being. In an interview with Jeff Brown from National Public Radio, Neuwirth said, 'We're in this time of rot; we can harvest it at just the right moment' (Neuwirth 2018). After all 'good soil is the result of sustainable practice, a practice that is social as much as biological' (Pentecost 2012, 389).

Fermentation is enigmatic; as a metaphor, it unfolds the meaning of death in the Anthropocene without negating the possibility for final stages. Yet it un-conceals failure, death, and extinction. For artistic reclamation, fermentation becomes part of a collective expression; in soil reclamation and decomposition there is a shift from subjective position to intersubjectivity commitment in the aesthetic experience (Nietzsche 1999, 26). Nietzsche's *principium individuation* performs,



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like fermented soil, a double aesthetic function that acknowledges the power of individual representation and the end of materiality to collapse the *principium individuation*. Fermentation in the processes of reclamation reveals “their energies in strict reciprocal proportions; according to the law of eternal justice individuals and collectives must act as “one” to reshape society’ (Nietzsche 1999, 116). Hence, the transformative powers of reclamation recover symbolic and mythical structures embedded in soil—biological, cultural, and, economic structures— to represent individual-collective will.

Wormfarm Institute: Fermentation Fest

Jay Salinas, co-founder of WFI, describes their creative goals as a wedding of art and agriculture; he writes of ‘the agricultural concept of “terroir” in which the products grown in an area reflect its unique geography, geology and micro-climate. Likewise, arts and cultural products from different culturesheds also reflect their unique local influences’ (Wormfarm n.d.). Neuwirth and Salina go beyond the apparent connections of soil and food; their creative work elicits a proto-ontological (Donaldson 2015, 10-11) way of experiencing the living action of soil across dispersed communities that include artists, farmers, vegetables, microbes, and worms. These artist-farmers develop many creative projects that begin with the idea of ‘the starter’, the agent that activates the fermentation of creative ideas. *Fermentation Fest* is an annual festival around the metaphor of rotting. The festival, which takes place at the end of the growing season, celebrates abundance, transformation and the power of fermentation for food, soil and death. The festival is framed as a convergence of humans and non-humans to celebrate creativity and community ties thanking soil for its abundance and it is an example of soil reclamation as an ecological art practice that is also social practice.



Fig. 1. *Fermentation Fest* (2017). Artists Betsy Persche. Gate. Outdoors installation—seeds, dried-grains, and wood. Image courtesy of Wormfarm Institute.



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The festival invites an array of artists to install artworks, including outdoor sculptures and installations that engage art with farmlands of the Midwest USA. Many events display creative ways to use fermentation, from live music and theatre, to food workshops (www.fermentationfest.org). The rural landscape becomes an outdoor museum, theatre, and recreation site that invites local and regional participants to reflect on our food supply and our connection to the land. *Fermentation Fest's* festival goers are invited to address the basic questions of where, what, and how food comes to us, and what happens with food leftovers and digestion outputs because they are evident as part of the creative expressions on display during the festival.

Fermentation Fest attempts to collapse the boundaries between artists and farmers, urban and rural, life and death, in the process of fermentation, exemplifying how soil's remediation is a commingling of the material properties that bring all things to themselves. The idea is that 'otherness' drops away when we come to terms with ecological participation, provides sustenance for diversity and recovery, combining care and urgency to explore the influence of time as it mingles in the making of soil. Community agriculture as an art practice moves away from industrial agricultural models, focusing instead on local-ecological agrarian practices that encompass soil reclamation, remediation and food autonomy.



Fig. 2. WFI's kitchen: Fermented food harvested from the farm. Digital photo. 2018. Courtesy of author.

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Infinity Burial Project: Sublunary Collaboration

JRL has a trans-disciplinary approach to eco-design. She explores one of the most difficult relations of the assemblage body-soil, death. The artist is critical of our prevalent response to death, denial. She also connects this attitude of denial to a lack of ecological responsibility in times of environmental distress (JRL 2014).³ There is a sense of urgency in JRL artwork;



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she wants to demystify the denial of death by shifting our relationship to the process of decomposition, which she addresses in many different projects. However, due to the limits of this paper, I can only briefly mention that she has launched Coeio, a start-up company, for green burial (JRL 2014), to expand her research to other spheres of influence outside traditional art circles—commercial spheres of consumption, production, and service—the marketplace. I focus, in this essay, on the suit made for the Infinity Burial Project—a decomposition bodysuit.

For this project, the artist collects her body debris—hair, nail-clippings, and dead skin—to experiment with the making of a new kind of mushroom that would help her body decompose faster, to remove the toxic materials stored by the body, and to transform body-soil into a good source of nutrients for the soil-body (JRL 2014). The Infinity Burial Project answers the problem of becoming soil-body from an integrated process that incorporates artwork, technology, and entrepreneurship in a collaboration with a mycologist, mushrooms, and bacteria to challenge cultural, ecological, religious, and economic practices around death. She pushes imagination and innovation by reintroducing an old non-polluting technology—human composting.

Moreover, the artwork addresses the problem of soil contamination to uncover the environmental impact of the American burial industry. Writing for *Scientific American*, Mary Lewis states that “in the United States more than 30 million feet of wood and 90,000 tons of steel are used to make caskets. Furthermore, adding to the already exacerbated abuse of resources in this industry is more than 800,000 gallons of embalming fluid” (Lewis 2008). The main ingredient of the embalming fluid is formaldehyde, a highly contaminating substance and carcinogenic agent that leaches into the soil through the deceased. JRL’s project not only challenges a multimillion-dollar polluting industry; she creates the possibilities for a corpse to restore another kind of vitality in the decomposition of the body.

The decomposition bodysuit is a cotton suit inlaid with the bio-mix of mushroom and bacteria (Lee n.d.). This sculptural work acts as both a costume and the stage for the decomposition of her body. The decomposition bodysuit sets the stage for the assemblage of body-soil that follows the plot of fermentation and the possibility of detoxification. The climax of reclamation, in the work of JRL, is the removal of toxins and the restoration of health to the assemblage soil-body. In decomposition, there is a reversal from body-soil to soil-body, which discharges an emotional overload that echoes with the planet’s material substrate trauma. The Infinity Burial Project replaces the invisible, unwanted, and unannounced character of death with the possibilities for new emotional content that comes from the reclamation of health for the assemblage soil-body, which uncovers the entanglements of the most critical performers, the decomposers—bacteria, mushrooms, and yeast— in the plot of fermentation.

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Soil reclamation shows that the interplay of transformation is possible within multiple exchanges among disjointed ontologies. In reclamation, EAP finds the potential to shift reflective and ethic-aesthetic practices and to bridge the gaps of rational epistemes, emotional indelibility, and social responsibility echoing the Nietzschean marriage of Apollo and Dionysius. For EAP, reclamation becomes an embodied aesthetic experience embedded in the material making of soil-body that makes connective aesthetics possible and necessary. My conclusion returns to the question of ethics and aesthetics, unveiling critical modalities of being by reframing the goals of environmental ethics and sustainability as soil-centric. Soil reclamation and fermentation prove that EAP is a resilient modality of care capable of bypassing feelings of guilt and impotence produced by the environmental crisis. Resilience is hope in action.

Footnotes

- [1] Proprioception is more than mechanical and intuitive motion; it can describe how mushrooms and bacteria move through the soil-body, 'rhythms of movement, as unseen ground of orientation, in flux' (Massumi 2002, 179).
- [2] Fermentation is the traditional technology of preserving food and preparing dead bodies since the Neolithic times. As of December 2, 2019, the Living History Farms website listed that 'Humans have been controlling the fermentation process for thousands of years... Evidence of a fermented alcoholic beverage made from fruit, honey, and rice found in Neolithic China dates back to 7000-6600 BCE.'
- [3] JRL's earlier artwork was part of the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita MIT & FEMA project titled Trailer Project, 2008- 2009 (JRL website n.d.). For JRL the Trailer Project experience was the catalyst for developing a green approach to deal with death, which for her is the ultimate environmental act of existence.



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Dr Kerry Power (PhD), Monash University

Introduction

The application of diffraction in a theoretical context is supported by the physical phenomenon. The physical phenomenon occurs around us as waves encounter particles. For example, light waves can illuminate a cup on a table and cast a shadow. At the shadow fringe, waves of light compete and cancel each other out, creating a diffractive pattern. This encounter, light waves meeting a cup on the table for example, creates new things. Light waves are splintered on and around the cup, causing waves to behave diffractively. These variants can be used as a starting point to understand how diffraction works as a theoretical model when applied to knowledge formation. Barad's (2007) theorisation of diffraction supports the following interrogation as artistic process. Diffraction in this context demonstrates a combustible sum of melting, active, sifting and overlapping applications to embrace difference as co-constitutive and intra-active. This position differentiates reflection as a metacognitive process often associated with art-making and educational research.

Thinking diffractively

Water molecules are described as polar, which means partial negative charge near the oxygen atom is mirrored by partial positive charge near the hydrogen atoms; this creates an attraction and forms a hydrogen bond. You can see this cohesion when a drip of water holds onto paper like jelly: wiggling and obstinate just before it is absorbed. In motion, water can be heavy and light, noisy and gentle. Gravitational forces, including weather patterns and atmospheric pressure, pulls and protracts water at the edge of the sea. Unable to fight this determination, rocks break from their body and wash ashore. Over time, water laps their surface, polishing them into new shapes. There, in the sun, they cradle other such rocks, basking on the water's edge. This bliss does not last long, and soon, the tide returns.

Across the sea, I meet Alana at a research conference in Dublin. We went to art school together in Melbourne, Australia. We discussed our lives and our research. Our conversations moved from present versions of ourselves to other versions, as intra-actions triggered memories and insights, including how we came to know each other through time. I flew home and ripped a page from an old art school visual diary. I zoomed in on the paper through my viewfinder and applied a drop of water. The water seemed to rest on top of the page and hold on for what seemed minutes and then ultimately sink into the paper below.

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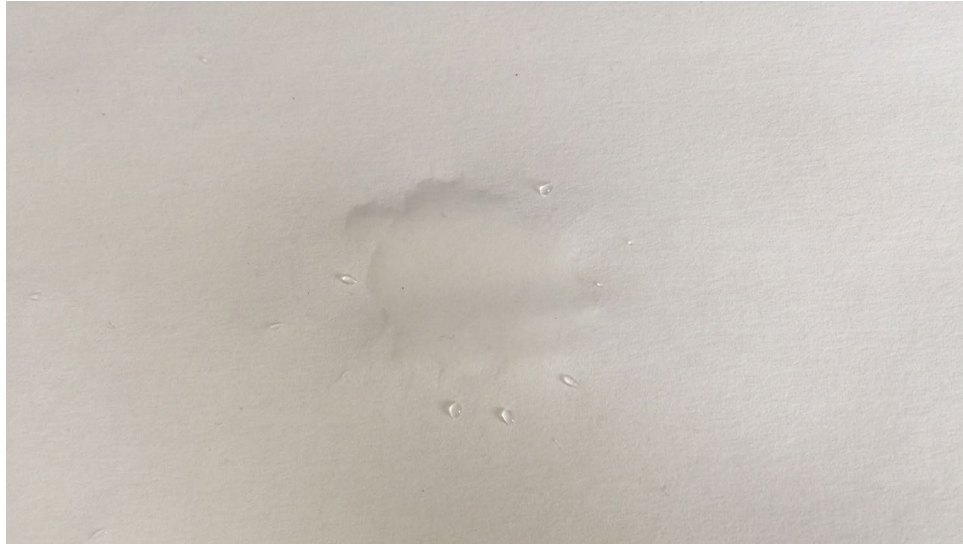


Fig. 1. Slide 4 of *Waves Matter*, film by Kerry Power.

Thinking back to my meeting with Alana, art school and the art conference in Dublin might be viewed as reflection. Reflection or reflexivity is often encouraged as a form of critical thinking, particularly in educational contexts and when creating artworks. Reflecting on a past encounter might be viewed as transformative, as new understandings are encouraged to emerge. However, this process requires a circumvention of an event in order to represent it (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Haraway, 1997). Bozalek and Zembylas argue that this is a 'reductionist way of thinking about things and words', as reflexivity aims to separate the self from what is outside of it (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017, 111). Reflection affords a secluded lens, a privileged human experience that is separated from all other forms of material interaction (Coole & Frost, 2010). In other words, anthropocentrism is at the centre of reflection, which is a humanist discourse that embraces and excludes knowledge, depending on who and what you are.

The object of this article, including a companion artwork *Waves Matter* (see link below), introduces diffraction as a critique of the perfunctory use of reflection as a metacognitive and art-making tool. Haraway critiqued the 'funhouse reflections of oneself' by providing the comparative view of diffraction (Haraway 1992, 299). Whereas reflection provides the 'illusion of essential, fixed position', she argues, diffraction 'trains us to a more subtle vision' (Haraway 1992, 300). It is this 'subtle vision' that locates art-making process as a synergistic, experimental form of interference in the following discussion. Difference is key here, as Haraway initialised diffraction as a material gateway for embracing and challenging how meaning is made (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017).



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To clarify, reflection and diffraction are both physical events and metacognitive strategies, although this is where the similarities end. Diffraction is the encounter of seemingly different things such as waves and particles while reflecting imitates something while remaining the same (Power 2018; Power 2019). The metacognitive processes of diffraction and reflection are equally disparate, as diffractive thinking acknowledges intra-active process as encountering difference while reflection implies that the present self seemingly detaches from the prior self to become objective.

The problem with reflection

Reflection can be a lens which we apply when seeking knowledge and it is often used as a metacognitive tool in educational contexts and artistic practice. This introduces a problem of recording or memorising evidence that supports particular knowledge. Selecting what is valuable in educational contexts is often linked with building a practice, as one might associate events that may not work well with working better through reflection. Likewise, when creating artworks, Rousell and Fell point out that:

Under such regimes, artworks are commonly accorded status as representations of an artist's personal experience and intentionality imposed upon matter, representations that are subsequently evaluated by the viewer, audience or spectator as cultural knowledge. (Rousell & Fell 2018, 93).

To speak to this, Haraway questions the epistemic value of anthropomorphic reflection and representation. She cites Lacan, who uses recognition of the self when reflected in a mirror as a cognitive milestone. In Lacan's example, the image reflected is recognised as the 'self' and then subsequently internalised as meaningfully symbolic to the bearer. The problem with this is the symbolic reference applied to the image viewed. The mirror reflects *his* position, a psychoanalytical cacophony of representationalism which ultimately, is 'not her reflection' in Haraway's view (Haraway 1992, 301). When thinking of the metaphorical means by which we understand human development, we learn that this sort of structural application recognises reflection (including looking into a mirror) as cognitive progress. However, this process is courtesy of a patriarchal narrative that places the original human body as male, creating 'the illusion of essential, fixed position' (Haraway 1992, 300). Fixed positions, including in the case discussed, are laden with social and cultural frameworks from which we acknowledge hierarchical positions that place and displace the viewer. We may recognise the self, and what we consider relevant is used to measure the other and provide scope from which to create meaning. This contrived position distorts the dynamics of the world we share. To counter this anthropomorphic lens, Barad (2007) further theorised diffraction to address knowledge formation as interference. This epistemological position is developed in the following.



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To frame interference, Barad (2007) references Haraway's theorisation of diffraction to demonstrate that reflection and diffraction are both optical phenomena. Reflection provides an optical duplication and, as argued previously, it is informed by external factors, while diffraction is 'marked by patterns of difference' (Barad 2007, 71). This sets these two optical occurrences apart, which can be further discussed in terms of a metacognitive strategy. Reflection, when scrutinising the past, is often argued as evidence of criticality or rigour in research. Whereas diffraction, according to Barad (2007) cuts through the past, present and the future, as temporal composites. This way of thinking counters timelines as a structure and likewise, challenges how and why we think the way we do. The physical aspects of diffraction support the epistemological significance of diffraction theory.

What does diffraction look like?

The application of diffraction draws on the physical phenomenon. The physical phenomenon can be visual, as electromagnetic waves such as light from a single source can illuminate an object. Light waves illuminate the object and cause a shadow to occur. The shadow is made up of various shades and framed by a brighter light just at the edge. If you can remember how theatrically Dali painted shadows, you might get a picture what I'm describing. The oscillating hues in the shadow are framed by brighter light just at the edge of the shadow. These are physical attributes of diffraction. Light waves illuminate an object and then around the edge, they bounce off and around and create diffractive patterns. These waves not only intensify the light at the edge of a shadow but cancel each other out, creating oscillations of light and dark.

Diffraction as artistic process is similar. When creating or addressing a problem to work through, the objective is not to reach a determined path but rather, to tune into how materials work together and repel each other. Ideas work this way as well. Think of an idea or problem by experimenting with it: the process of entangling materials, making mistakes, thinking through problems draws on Barad's theorisation of diffraction. This process was intentional when devising the first steps of using water and paper in the artwork created alongside this discussion.

When viewing *Waves Matter*¹, some of the movement is obvious and some of the movement is subtle. Part of the process of creating the artwork was to isolate two seemingly different substances: water and paper and the process of creating the artwork was the fundamental element as distinct from the finished product. For example, paper was skewed by water and pushed when filmed. Sounds such as clinks of the glass and dripping water were stretched out and played backwards. Drawing on Barad's theorisation of diffraction was not just a process of free falling to provide evidence of what these elements would do, but interfering with the artistic process as it



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was edited. It was important that the artwork, although played as a film with a beginning, middle and end explicated a non-linear process. While water was introduced to interact with the paper, the process did not determine the fate of the artwork but rather provided a vehicle to experiment with two seemingly different elements. Editing the film worked to think through the issues introduced in this article: as light projected from the film intensified the moving paper, while these elements were digitalised and saved in various formats.

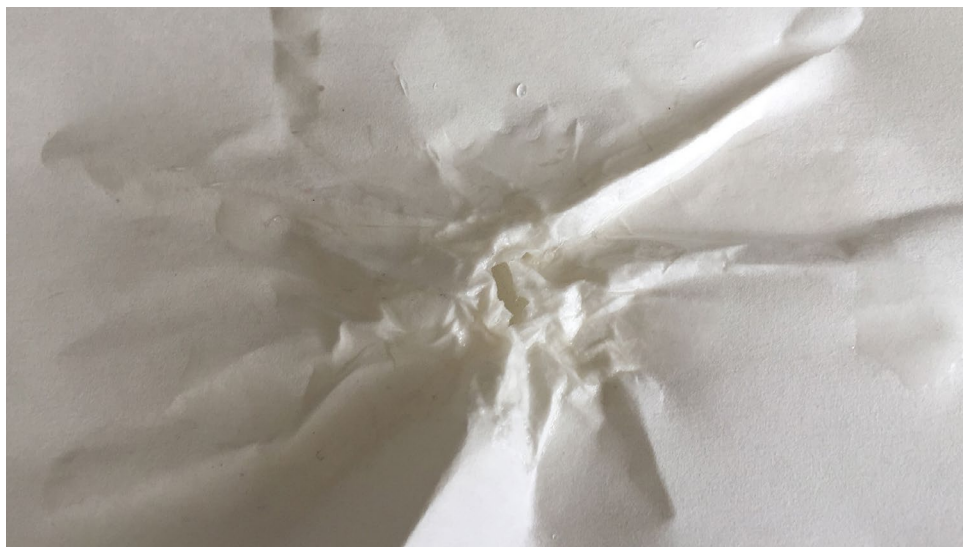


Fig. 2. Slide 31 of Waves Matter, film by Kerry Power.

Waves and matter

Waves and matter are, according to Barad, not being separate from each other at all but part of a fusion of elements that behave in surprising ways. When arguing how elements behave on a quantum level, one thing may be proven only to find out later that it is (also) another. Think about the waves and particles paradox. Light waves are said to create interferences and can be in various places at one time. Particles are said to be localised, as they occur at one point in time. However, quantum mechanics tells us that some waves behave like particles and some particles behave like waves. As a theoretical physicist, Barad welcomes this sort of paradox, and in her view, diffraction works as a methodological model to think with difference. Difference occurs when waves and matter intra-act, and this complex entanglement causes diffraction. Entanglements require responsible exploration, as connections and differences are instigated (which ultimately provide scope for knowledge building or problem investigation when creating artwork). Van Der Tuin argues that new materialists view ways of knowing and being as inextricably entangled (Van Der Tuin 2014). Ultimately, diffraction can be demonstrated philosophically and scientifically, as these seemingly disparate epistemologies, inform the other.



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Fig. 3. Slide 42 of *Waves Matter*, film by Kerry Power.

New materialism and diffraction

New Materialism, as a philosophy or theory, is deemed a departure from post-structuralism: ways of knowing and doing are deemed entwined with matter (Barad, 2007). Matter is considered beings that constitute the world that we live in and are not resolute entities ‘with a fixed essence’ (Barad 2007, 137). Hood and Kraehe draw on Bennet’s distributive agency to contribute to this argument. Distributive agency recognises that ‘material bodies are always dependant on one another’, reiterating Barad’s point (Hood & Kraehe 2017, 35). New Materialism suggests a dynamic material co-dependency that examines the ‘vibrancy of things’ (Hood & Kraehe 2017, 34) and they consider this vibrancy as an interplay of how beings clash and co-depend to produce change and difference.

Framing this co-dependency, Barad distinguishes the hold of representation which further illustrates arguments regarding reflection:

the representationalist belief in the power of words to mirror preexisting phenomena is the metaphysical substrate that supports social constructivist, as well as traditional realist, beliefs, perpetuating the endless recycling of untenable options (Barad 2007, 133).

These arguments harness the power of representation as a sort of reconstruction of past events, as being an antiquated attempt at explaining change or growth. Further, the ethical implication of how and why we place value on language and representations requires examination.



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Fig. 4. Slide 68 of *Waves Matter*, film by Kerry Power.

What happens next is how often history and knowledge is explained. One event leads to another and time stamps build on other time stamps to provide continuity of progress. Often in educational contexts, a perception of continuity is used to theorise how the brain works as one takes steps toward a particular goal and then cognitive progress is achieved. Barad questions this linear trajectory by 'a way of thinking with and through dis/continuity – a dis/orienting experience of the dis/jointedness of time and space' and claiming that there is no such continuity of time and or space, but rather 'entanglements of here and there, now and then, that is, a ghostly sense of dis/continuity, a *quantum dis/continuity*' (Barad 2010, 240). To clarify what this means for thinking through ideas, Barad challenges past/future/present conceptions as never there or here, but rather as iterations that thread 'spacetimemattering' (Barad 2010, 244). Particles, for example, can be described as occupying a point in space at a given moment of time. However, Barad claims:

Waves, on the other hand, are not things per se; rather they are disturbances (which cannot be localised to a point) that propagate as oscillating fields (like electronic waves, the most familiar example being light) (Barad 2007, 76).

So the continuum that we imagine or apply to history or projections of the future are not smooth or linear at all, but disjointed, intersected and diffracted events. As she states 'Time is out of joint. Dispersed. Diffracted. Time is diffracted through itself' (Barad 2010, 244).



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Intra-action

To continue this line of thought, a significant element of how diffraction works is Barad's explanation of intra-action:

the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct entities, agencies, events do not precede, but rather emerge from/through their intra-action. 'Distinct' agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements. Importantly, intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality (Barad 2010, 267).

Intra-action is a dynamic form of change, creating 'ongoing reconfigurings of the world' (Barad 2007, 141). Barad addresses the power of language which governs symbolism, representation and the history we apply to how we see the world. In her view 'language and culture' are 'granted their own agency and historicity, while matter is configured as "passive and immutable"' (Barad 2007, 132). To frame this, Barad refers to the mirrors used in telescopes and microscopes; measuring what there is to know through human eyes. Resulting descriptions support representations of our world view, an anthropomorphic hold on knowledge and thinking that determines 'patterns of thought' (Barad 2007, 134). The humanist stronghold on knowledge and knowledge building jettisons the virtues of matter. Matter is dynamic and behaves in ways that are beyond our view.

Diffractioning art education

Rousell and Fell suggest that when 'responding to these new materialist conceptualizations of matter and agency ... a vision of arts education as a collective process of *becoming a work of art*, rather than an individual process of becoming an artist' (Rousell & Fell 2018, 93). This means that a work of art is not considered the material and intellectual product of an individual human subject, but rather, a dynamic assemblage of multiple agencies and processes that disrupt and interfere with one another. Furthermore, Rousell and Fell argue that 'Posthumanist reconceptualizations of arts education have also been called for in response to the Anthropocene epoch' and refer to Jagodzinski and Wallin's critique of representation inadequacy (Jagodzinski & Wallin 2013; Rousell & Fell 2018, 93). This implies that learning art-making, learning about art, responding to art, intra-acting with art should not rely on reiterative forms of thinking. Art intra-action is connecting with fluctuating patterns of difference that create interference. When this takes place, the artwork and the viewer are forever changed through the dissecting encounter. When considering how meaning is achieved when thinking and creating artwork, the goal if you could call it that, may not be



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communicating as one might share knowledge with the other, but an invitation to work together. This working, or intra-acting, describes what occurs when matter collides.

Conclusion

The process of working with water and paper; absorbing and entangled, competing and cancelling each other out, provided physical and theoretical intra-active pathways to create an artwork. Diffraction is not explored to enquire complex physical attributes; rather, it was used as a methodological tool to support art-making process. Reflective processes are question as pertaining to a humanist and patriarchal discourse that limits and defines experience. This dominant position when thinking with artwork may only produce an 'infinite play of images between two facing mirrors, the epistemological gets bounces back and forth' (Barad 2007, 135). In the face of the arguments posed, artists and art educators are urged to think critically about how we aim to create and think with art-making and artworks. Water, absorbed by paper from many years ago, created new configurations that changed and entangled. Twisted and turning, disjointed and projected, the pulsating paper moved back to the start.

Acknowledgement

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Footnotes

- [1] Power, Kerry. (2019) Waves Matter. Video 42'08". Available online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB_0uXaAf7Y



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