

WEAPONISING

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SPECULATION

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Weaponising Speculation

Conference and Exhibition



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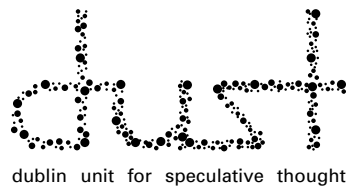
Weaponising Speculation

Conference and Exhibition

Designed and edited by Caoimhe Doyle



*With thanks to Michael O'Rourke, Paul J. Ennis, Fintan Neylan,
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Contents

Preface	1
– <i>Michael O’Rourke</i>	
<hr/>	
Conference	7
Continental Realism and Computation:	9
Turing’s Propaganda	
– <i>Robert Jackson</i>	
<hr/>	
A Seductive Union: Speculative Realism	17
and Contemporary Art	
– <i>Rebecca O’Dwyer</i>	
<hr/>	
Objects, Actors and Sites of Contingency	21
– <i>Alice Rekab</i>	
<hr/>	
Taken from/put in Oscars bin	33
– <i>Sam Keogh</i>	
<hr/>	

**How to make space-time and
influence people**

– *Isabel Nolan*

37

**‘[os mentis] mouth to mouth’
with Nicola Masciandaro**

– *MOUTH*

43

Sweet Dreams Are Made of This: Speculation

– *Ridvan Askin*

61

All that is liquid melts into solid

– *John Ryan*

69

**Mutant – Infiltration of the
Hallucinated Mountain**

– *Rob Murphy*

75

The fossils of Sensation

85

– *Alan Boardman*

restless tongues expending into rest

91

– *Teresa Gillespie*

House of Sheaves:

93

The Asymptotic Horror of

Nested Nature

– *Ben Woodard*

Spider Universe:

99

Weaponising Phobia in Bataille,

Nietzsche, Spinoza and Deleuze

– *Scott Wilson*

Bibliography

107

Exhibition 115

John Ryan 117



Rob Murphy 119



Alice Rekab 120



Andy Weir 121



Teresa Gillespie 123



Alan Boardman 125



Ciara McMahon 127



Preface

Michael O'Rourke

Let's start with the insignificant: dust

– Jussi Parikka, Dust Matter

To pulverise the world but also to spiritualise its dust

– Gilles Deleuze, The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque

One day or another, given its persistence... dust will probably begin to gain the upper hand over the servants, pouring immense amounts of rubbish into abandoned buildings and deserted stockyards: and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night terrors, in the absence of which we have become such great bookkeepers

– Georges Bataille, Formless: A User's Guide

I'll shew you alive/The world when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy

– William Blake, Europe: A Prophecy

Each particle of dust carries with it a unique vision of matter, movement, collectivity, interaction, affect, differentiation, composition and infinite darkness – a crystallised data-base or a plot ready to combine and react, to be narrated on and through something. There is no line of narration more concrete than a stream of dust particles

– Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials

We could also mention Bergson's invocation of life as being composed of eddies of dust

– Ben Woodard, Slime Dynamics: Generation, Mutation and the Creep of Life

The space, or endo-bacterial dust, is a relic with untraceable zones of migration and traversal, a swarm-particle creeping off the radar system, a speck of dust you never know whether you have inhaled or not

– Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*

As an inter-dimensional carrier, dust scavenges xenochemical particles (outsiders) as its cores or constituents, introduces and implants them into compositions, creations and establishments

– Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*

Dust is, of course, the unmistakable emblem of death, decay and dissolution. But it is also, under certain circumstances, powerfully generative

– Steven Connor, *Pulverulence*

Dust already counts

– Jussi Parikka, *Dust Matter*

THE Dublin Unit for Speculative Thought is an art/theory collective which was formed in late 2012 by Paul Ennis, Fintan Neylan and Michael O'Rourke. The impetus behind our coming together was a shared emphasis in our work and our thinking on speculative realism and a mutual antipathy towards and marginal position vis-à-vis the academy qua institution. Initially, we could agree that the main things we had a fidelity to were speculative realisms (broadly conceived) and para-academic modes of thinking which could be deployed in a DIY fashion outside the walls of and alongside (even parasitical on) the business as usual operations of the academy. There is very little that theoretically we three have in common. Paul did a dissertation on Heidegger but is now mostly aligned with a bleak theoretical position. Fintan also began with Heidegger but his work now focuses on the philosophy of Manuel DeLanda. Michael comes from a background in literary theory and his writing is heavily underpinned by Derridean deconstruction. While these are highly reductive accounts – for the sake of shorthand – of our three theoretical and philosophical trajectories they do serve to demonstrate that there is not some unified agenda which DUST was brought about to serve or promulgate. Quite the contrary; it illustrates that DUST is, in fact, a collective (in

the truest sense) which has as its mission the 'opening' up of speculative realism and of philosophical thinking more broadly. From our para-academic (non- and even anti-institutional) position we can afford not to hitch ourselves to any particular strand of speculative realism. As the quotations above (chosen completely at random) attest, DUST interests itself in and opens itself to the widest possible spectrum of thought: continental realism, accelerationism, post-continental thought, weird fiction, Object Oriented Ontology, posthumanism, new materialisms, transcendental materialism, actor network theory, non-philosophy, eliminativism, dark vitalism, assemblage theory, transcendental nihilism, dark or xeno-phenomenology (the list could go on...).

The martial implications of our collective's name, the Dublin 'Unit' for Speculative Thought, should alert the reader that we are each committed to weaponising these many and various fields of thought. Rather immodestly perhaps we set ourselves the task of in some way renewing, reinvigorating, making vital again the ambitions and aims of philosophy in the dust of poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction (without, of course, leaving any of those trailing completely in our wake). This attempt to revitalise philosophy is not something that one can do alone. DUST then was set up to bring together disparate groups of theorists and artists with a shared interest in speculative thought who might not otherwise come together or find each other. Together this group of philosophers, artists, theorists and aestheticians works together to create new techniques of thought (not prescribable in advance), to fashion tools with which to remake and transform the landscape of contemporary philosophy. As Paul has said in an interview with the Visual Artists' Newsletter we are all pragmatists when it comes to philosophy. We pick up a tool here, another there, and see if it works (no matter to us if it doesn't). This idea-theft, in Félix Guattari's sense, is in response

to an assertion from François Laruelle that philosophy does not 'reach the real'. With this in mind, DUST creates desiring-assemblages of artists and theorists who are all committed to approaching the real and affirming a speculative thought which is resolutely material and worldly (whether our approach is eliminativist or generative, aimed at dissolving the world or world-making).

With the stated ambition of opening up new forms of thinking and doing as our platform we wrote the following brief for DUST:

Distinct from the norm. Distinct even from the academic norm. Twice removed the para-academic is doubly unwanted. The ones you have trained are set loose and they know your secrets. They are pests and they want to be armed. The contemporary para-academic is untethered. Promises have gone unfulfilled and yet avenues have opened up elsewhere. To the artists, to the creators, to the fringe, wherever the real can be captured. It is in these topoi that the real work happens. Speculation: to think the world of experience, beyond such experience. But how to seize this reality, how to speculate upon that which the academy has prohibited? Before the storms the para-academic needs to equip herself. Not only with tools, but weapons. DUST is an exploration of the various expressions of DIY theory operative in the elsewheres, the shafts and tunnels of the para-academy. We seek those thoughts that go beyond the institution, beyond the linguistic, beyond the human, to the far reaches of the incommensurate and the extinct; we seek conceptual armoury which will aid thinkers in the siege to reclaim the real.

The real work, or work which approaches the real, that DUST has done since its inception has included several talks, a conference, and a week-long exhibition. We began in January 2013 with a talk at Flat_Pack Gallery and Studios by the theologian and non-philosopher Anthony Paul Smith on François Laruelle and



the speculative turn; next up was a talk at the National College of Art and Design by Smith's co-explicator of Laruelle John Mullarkey on the posture or stance of the philosopher; in March we held our signature event, a two day conference at Independent Colleges entitled Weaponising Speculation which ran alongside an exhibition at Block T gallery (with the same name) featuring the work of the artists Alice Rekab, John Ryan, Andy Weir, Teresa Gillespie, Rob Murphy, Alan Boardman and Ciara McMahon; later that month Michael spoke at the exhibition ROTATOR by the artists Niamh Moriarty and Ruth Clinton at Pallas Projects and Studios; in April DUST held a dialogue inspired by the work of John Ryan and especially his solo exhibition 'Cling' at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios; in May DUST held a dialogue between Paul Ennis and the film theorist and philosopher Steven Shaviro plus a talk by Shaviro at University College Dublin; and in June two talks by the feminist theorist and Laruellian philosopher Katerina Kolozova took place at Basic Space studios.

In a review of the Weaponising Speculation conference for Figure/Ground Communication Liam Jones wrote: 'Who knows where DUST will head to next, and this only serves to add to the audacity and pertinence of the collective.'

If DUST is, as we hope, all about and for thought in and as the future then perhaps our manifesto, written by Fintan Neylan and read at the opening of the Weaponising Speculation exhibition at Block T Gallery, will give some idea of the possible coordinates and future trajectories for speculative thinking set in motion by this coreless experiment we call D.U.S.T:



DUST manifesto:

Every possible barrier has already been infiltrated.

The situation of contemporary theoretical work is one where it is at risk of atrophying within the bounds of institutional walls. Output, interdisciplinarity, and internationalisation have become the watchwords of the contemporary university, contributing to an ever accumulating body of work – one which actively defangs itself – and a faux-openness, comprehending only to that which it expects to find.

But boundaries are porous, for decay is present within their genesis; as intense its efforts may be, along the academy's walls there is always illicit transit with the outside. The academy denies these itinerant lines of transit which run through it, those which it recognises as not its own. It is along such axes we move, encrypted within the institution's own generation. Our infiltration is not an entry from some exterior point, and neither have we been transformed by some seditious force: we have always been of the outside, but have found ourselves on the inside.

Travelling along such lines, amidst every barrier, there is movement of material, carrying an infection of that which we know not into

the sterile zones of academic discourse. This is the movement of DUST. It does not just bring in that which institutions sought to prohibit, but also exhibits that which the contemporary university has failed to maintain: DUST seeks to bring theory back to the outside. Beyond the supposed theoretical divisions concocted by administrators, we investigate not through one discipline, nor even through inter-disciplinarity or multi-disciplinarity, but by way of non-disciplinarity: on the outside there are no such distinctions – there is only theory.

DUST creeps inside by its own secret machination: it is swept into the living's lungs by the desire to breathe; it is the decay which life must concede to in order to survive.

We infiltrate, but also are aware that we ourselves may have already been infiltrated by others, that we may be playing host to something else entirely. Awareness of such forces comes only when it is too late. One cannot predict such infiltration, so to think it, one must speculate: to think the world beyond experience – to the absolute and the extinct.

Not hemmed within confines, to speculate means to realise that we are already on the outside, amidst the incommensurate.



A photograph of a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a black jacket, standing behind a wooden podium. He is looking down and adjusting something on his ear. In the background, a red "FIRE POINT" sign is visible on a white wall. To the right, another person is seated at a table, blurred. The table in the foreground is cluttered with various items including water bottles, a laptop, and papers.

Weaponising Speculation Conference

*2nd + 3rd of March 2013
Independent Colleges,
Dublin*



Continental Realism and Computation: Turing's Propaganda

Robert Jackson

FIRST off, I would like the reader to examine this computer function.

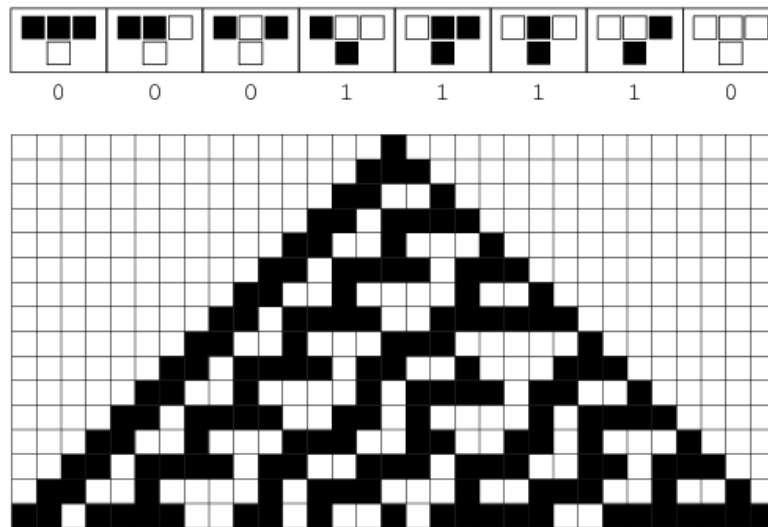
This is a rule called Rule 30, discovered and coined by Stephen Wolfram [1]. This is a determined simple cellular automaton rule, easily describable (basically, if the top set of pixels, are present, it computes the pixel below line by line and so on). It can be manipulated on a set of black and white tiles by hand without an ordinary computing machine for instance. I'll return to this later.

Although academic scholars are trained not to generalise, para-academics might afford themselves some informal naivety. So it is that continental philosophy – a term originally coined by Analytic Philosophers to describe a bunch of people who 'don't do what they do' – has had extremely little to say about computer science and the possible reality of computation.

Here, I'm not talking about the reliance of continental thought in media theory, sociology and studies into digital culture (for example Katherine Hayles, Matt Fuller, Jussi Parikka and Adrian MacKenzie amongst others), but the history of the continental discipline itself. By and large, the automated reality of constructed formal machines, networks and actual systems, in themselves are distinctly waved off. Computation is either bundled in with how human culture fumbles on, in its own agency and language, or is viewed with a menacing variance of Heideggerian *Gestell* – which is to say, computation threatens a more primordial, incalculable, 'human' existence, or at the very least complicates its primacy. Even if there was a chance of accommodating it within the resurgence of mathematical reason in contemporary French theory today (in particular Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux), computation has also been systematically knocked down for its calculative constructive tendencies, in favour of subjective fidelity, or hyper chaos.

1. Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Wolfram Media Inc, 2002) p. 27 – 31.

rule 30



Of course the preverbal question exists: so what? Why should the continental tradition care about computing? These collection of essays only exist to engage and share philosophical and aesthetic insights into the speculative turn, not computation. That said, could it not be boldly asserted that speculative realism and computation have a deeper relevance to each other than it is ordinarily assumed? A sort of *continental computational realism*? I have two reasons to support such a claim; the former being slightly less contentious than the latter.

At first pass, the resurgence of anti-anthropocentrism in speculative realism asks us to consider the reality of things without them being internally correlated to thought. Given that this is the case, the first move would be for the continental tradition to account for how changes in human production and political struggle in the Western world are, in the present instance, partly reliant on the precarious automation of real computing systems. In extreme examples, there are optimised algorithms built to decide the most effective means of building capital, and distributing stock out of finite resources, and more famously the antics and fallouts of algorithmic high frequency trading, now the dominant mode of investment in big business. Yet, even ongoing networked discussions on

social media, which have contributed to and propagated speculative realism's ongoing self-generation, are in part, dependent on the affordances of general purpose computation: e.g. the thankless task of blog trackbacks bridging distant conversations within blogosphere posts for instance. Even the entire sociological mode of scholarly publishing production is changing, in part due to the affordances of the flexible machine and the equivalent networks born out of them.

At second pass, it can be said that both speculative realism and the history of computer science also share a split history.

Once the philosophical position of correlationism is rejected, an incompatible discord in continental philosophy is let loose, and this operates between two broad modalities or orientations. Freely borrowing the terms of Quentin Meillassoux's distinction we can assign two aesthetic and philosophical names to this critical discord.

First there is '*Demonstration*': that a passive, inert material reality can be *epistemologically demonstrated* through (and only through) the formal, inferential properties of thought and an *extrinsic principle of the fact*, so that thought

becomes radically divorced from a non-anthropomorphic being. This position is shared both by Meillassoux and Ray Brassier through their joint commitment to explain the truth of reality rationally using the skeptical internal tools of thought, either through mathematical deduction, or a mixture of inferential and scientific reasoning.

Yet there is also '*Description*': that reality is composed of fundamental entities that have experiential properties: namely, objects, things, forces, actants and powers which are ontologically no different in kind than the experiential limits of cognition and, moreover, they irreducibly *exist in their own right*. *This is an intrinsic principle of the thing*. The correlated relationship between thinking and being is radicalised into entity-specific things, assemblages, Harman's objects, Bryant's systems, Latour's actants.

What is important here is the utter incompatible nature of both orientations, *precisely insofar as correlationism was a pre-synthesis of both*. No middle way is possible, because correlationism *was that middle way*. Like a Hegelian dialectic stuck in reverse gear, speculative realism 'fractures' the correlate into these two halves *and only these two*. Fuse both Demonstration and Description together and one arrives back at correlationism; that the world cannot be known directly, *and only* be internally related by human thought.

Speculative realism then (whether one takes the movement as bona fide or a collection of positions) *simply is* this incompatible splintering, this fracture, and its existence emerges from this rejection. Demonstration argues that the correlate can fruitfully prove or deduce knowledge of itself and thus the world, whilst Description argues that the human correlate never fully deduces anything, to the effect that it is no different in kind from any other non-human ontological entity that possesses

primordial experiential attributes. Once the correlate is rejected, there is no middle way to stake a claim apart from these two broad orientations of 'what is'; *either correlated reality must be epistemologically demonstrated or reality must be described in terms of real ontological variance of finite experience*. Once one Kantian noumenal is chosen, the other recedes from view.

In fact, it increasingly appears that *because* speculative realism manifests itself 'as' this contradictory, incompatible discord, then there only three possible moves forward.

The first move, is already taking place, with Demonstration and Description both making their progressive strides in each orientation, whilst also being stretched and pulled apart more vigorously within certain trench war debates.

The second move simply re-embraces correlationism in the materialist sense and all of its anti-realist flaws.

The third move however requires the difficult, yet more elusive, necessary and creative step in somehow reconciling both orientations together, *without inadvertently arriving back at correlationism*: or without repeating the gesture that the world can only ever be internally related by thought alone. In other words, how does one reconcile the speculative rational/experiential discord without immediately embracing the easy option of anthropocentric anti-realism?

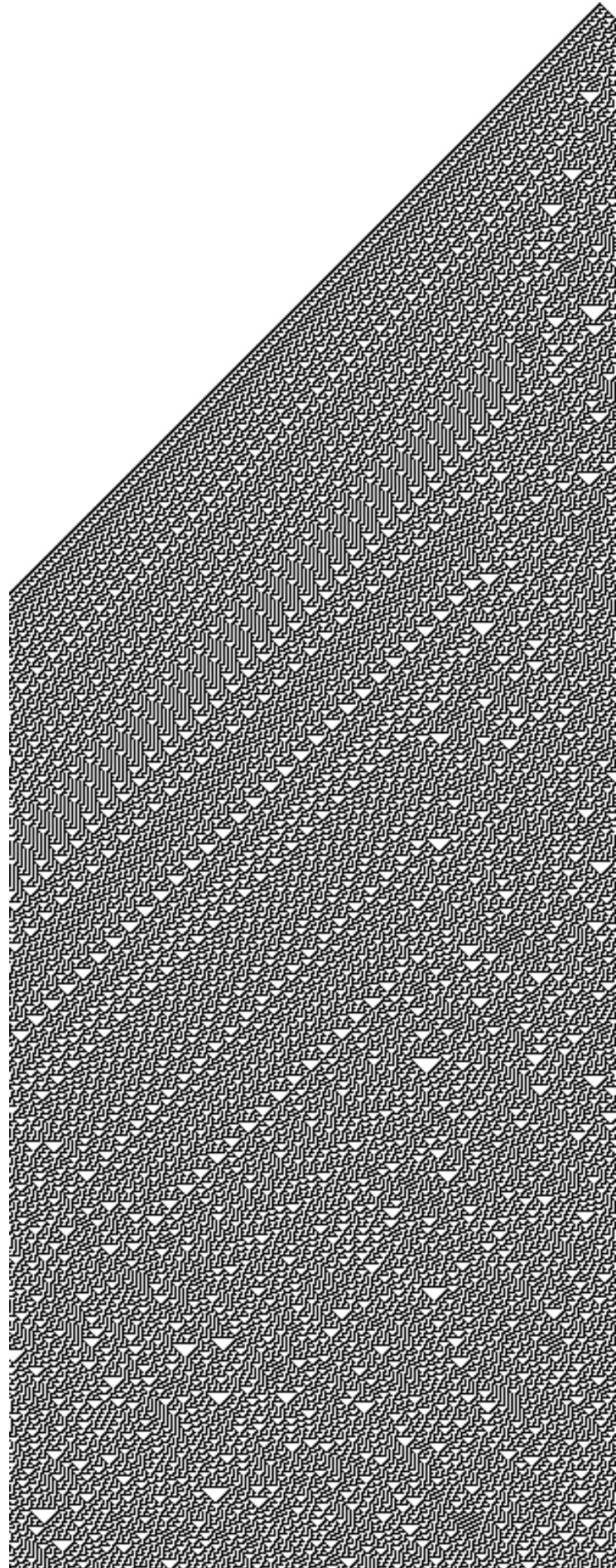
What is fascinating about computer science is it too can be divided under similar incompatible modalities of Demonstration and Description. It can be said that computation originates from theoretical computational reason, which uses the capabilities of rational thoughts to deduce, that is compress complex phenomena into clear rules that are explanatory for the purposes at

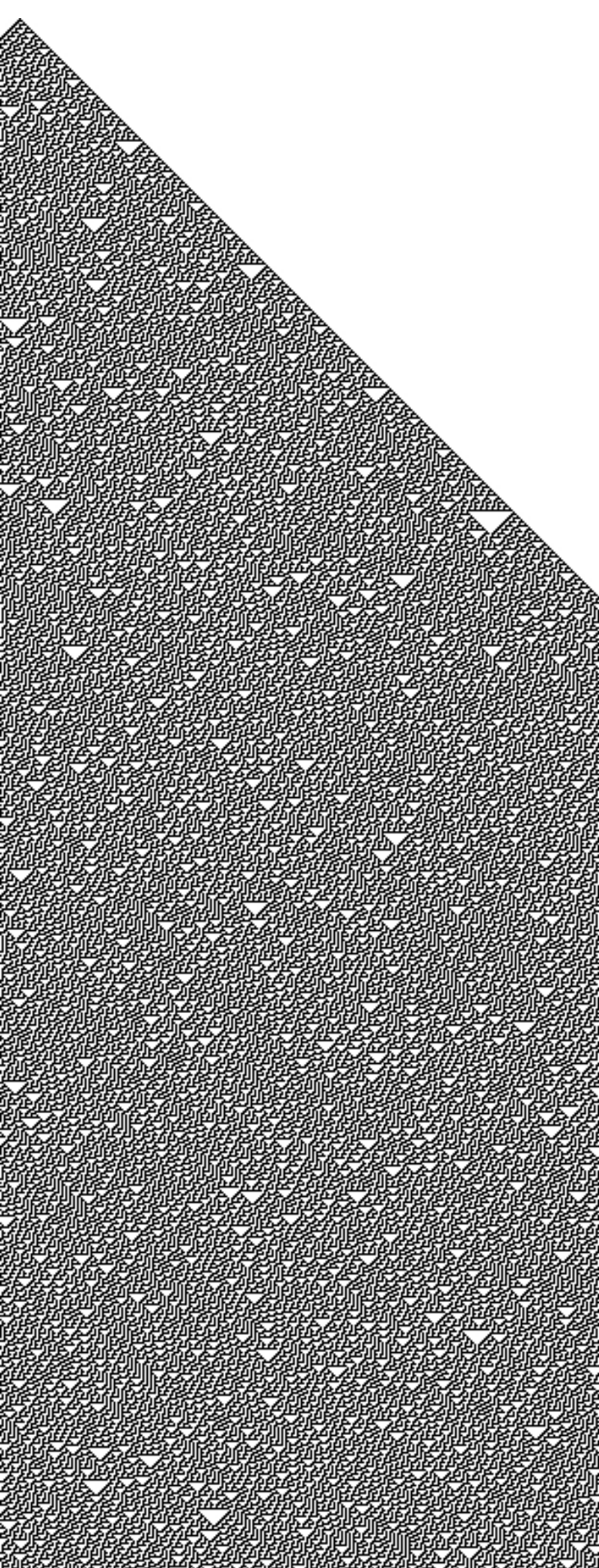


hand. This is certainly a history upon which analytic philosophy has developed; particularly in the functionalist theories of mind, the forays into neuro-cognitive computation, the fundamental properties of autonomous conceptual formal axiom systems, or the application of Chomsky language hierarchies and universal formal grammar into formal computer code.

But it can also be claimed that computation doesn't exist simply as a means end rationalism instigated by thought alone. Computation emerged from the *theoretical failure* to reduce of all mathematics into a formal decidable set of axioms. But there is also the obvious assertion that the mechanism of computer systems, the action of code, occur outside of human thinking, despite the fact that we have constructed them. Computer systems can also be pragmatically engineered into real systems, which are often unpredictable, unwieldy and frustrating, always contingently going wrong, hacked, exploited, glitched, such phenomena is always and only experienced after the fact of its operation. But this view only works, if systems are distributed and understood as real autonomous things operating in the world.

In Demonstration, Computational rationalism and reason have little time for the properties





of hacking for instance, favoring demonstrable mathematical capabilities and functional properties. But in Description real computational systems are constructed, designed and engineered, yet their execution can only be described second hand.

How would something like a continental computational realism operate then? Admittedly I'm on scholarly and ontologically shaky ground here, as no definition of a Continental orientation would be complete. But perhaps this is already a definition of sorts; that the Continental tradition exhibits a broad fascination with incompleteness in its own right – the capacity for given concepts and inherent structures to be made complicated, incomplete, subject to a post-foundational rupture, both unclear and absurd. This is how we could approach such a computational realism altogether different from an analytic understanding, the absurd paradoxical structure of computation in itself, that might be either explained or experienced. Not just a philosophy of computational systems, but also *computational systems as philosophy*; using such a realism to hack, exploit, organise, communicate, gather, propagate. In this sense 'weaponising speculation' seems quite apt, crafting philosophy as a real machine, and launching it out into the reality

with all the others. It comes as no surprise that the only continental publication to treat computation seriously, as emergence nonetheless is one whose position is realist, namely Manuel DeLanda's 2011 book *Philosophy and Simulation* [2].

But before one can even start here, a question surfaces. What is computation? What makes something compute, what makes a machine execute a function? What makes an algorithm run or an effective procedure decide? Speculating on the results of the natural sciences, seems relatively straightforward for the correlate: its easy to muse on a bunch of structures that precede and surround us when we have little to no involvement in their construction. Yet computer science and computability theory is perhaps harder to speculate on different from the deductive properties of mathematics – the path of discovery towards what computation can do, is something constructed by the correlate and yet, the methods of scientific discovery operate on the same basis of speculation: we don't know what is computable and what isn't and moreover why this should be the case at all. Whilst it is said that computation can simulate abstract fragments of the physical world, it demonstrably *isn't* the physical world as such: and yet ontologically speaking, we must account for it, because computation is possible in *this* world.

Questions such as these stray in out of computation's beginnings in the Church-Turing thesis, both discovered independently by Alonzo Church and Alan Turing in the first half of the 20th Century. The Church-Turing thesis is the founding definition, founding thesis for the nature of computation, and yet one of the hidden aspects of it shows that it can't formally be proved in the analytic sense of a 'proof' – it's not a formally true, clear statement, but rather, an informal hypothetical conjecture about computability and formal systems. Its successful universal acceptance and utter

reliance in the modern world, is bizarrely and precariously dependent on a thesis which can't be proved, but only assumed second hand. No-one, in the strictest sense of a proof, knows if computability is provable, but hey, we all use computers don't we?

So what is the thesis? Basically the thesis is an assumption that if some method or algorithm exists to calculate a function – an effective procedure or systematic method – then there is an equivalent machine (such as a Turing Machine) which can execute and automate that function without it being dependent on thought and ingenuity, whether it is executed by thought, or a rule-based formal system in thought or machine. Why can't it be proved? Because no-one can agree on what an 'effective procedure' is, nor agree on definitive criteria which links autonomous machines and effective algorithms. It isn't a mathematical or logical statement, yet it originates from and tells us something about mathematical calculations and logic.

Church originally called it a definition, [3] which only leaves it as a description. This was heavily criticised by Emil Post, another formalist mathematician, who described it as a 'working hypothesis' [4] in need of 'continual verification'. But Turing's own metaphor is extremely interesting and revealing. Here's Turing in one of his last publications before his death in 1954, in a related paper about the thesis' relation to rules and puzzles;

The statement is... one which one does not attempt to prove. Propaganda is more appropriate to it than proof, for its status is something between a theorem and a definition. In so far as we know a priori what is a puzzle and what is not, the statement is a theorem. In so far as we do not know what puzzles are, the statement is a definition which tells us something about what they are. [5]

2. Manuel DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (London: Continuum, 2011).
3. Alonzo Church, "An Unsolvability Problem of Elementary Number Theory," in *American Journal of Mathematics*, #58 (1936), 356, cf. 345 – 63.
4. Emil L. Post, "Finite Combinatory Processes – Formulation 1," in *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, #1 (1936), 105, cf. 103 – 5.

5. Alan Turing, "Solvable and Unsolvable Problems," in *Science News*, #31 (1954) 18, cf 7 – 23.
6. Alan Turing, "Letter to Max Newman on Logic, Shenley Brook End, Bletchley", dated April 21st 1940. Quoting Turing: "As soon as any question arises of having to prove that the formulae one is using are ordinal formulae one is returning to the single logic point of view, unless the kind of proof to be used is something different, being a kind of propaganda rather than formal proof." Reference

What did Turing mean by propaganda in this sense? The word only surfaces twice in Turing's work, here, and in a letter to Max Newman on logic [6]. He wasn't an overtly political writer, so we can't understand the metaphor in its usual, literal way, nor is there any further explanation offered anywhere, either by Turing or his interpreters. In my readings, it surfaces once in an anecdote by Turing's close friend and logician Robin Gandy, who in passing reflects on Turing's famous 1950 article *Computing Intelligence and Machinery*, which famously hypothesised the imitation game or Turing test. Gandy writes that the paper:

[...] was intended not so much as a penetrating contribution to philosophy but as propaganda. Turing thought the time had come for philosophers and mathematicians and scientists to take seriously the fact that computers were not merely calculating engines but were capable of behaviour which must be accounted as intelligent; he sought to persuade people that this was so. He wrote this paper – unlike his mathematical papers – quickly and with enjoyment. I can remember him reading aloud to me some of the passages – always with a smile, sometimes with a giggle. [7]

In my view, I believe that Turing's use of propaganda was his attempt to grapple with something which hovers at the borders of knowledgable demonstrable theorems on one hand and elusive definable descriptions on the other. Something that is clearly understood, as information and as proof, but nonetheless hides its ultimate truth from us, and in its essential nature misleads us terribly: like propaganda. Computation is second hand, derogatory *disinformation*.

And returning to Wolfram's Rule 30 (above), we can get a taste of what Turing's propaganda indirectly means, and what that giggling constitutes, however tenuous. Here is a perfectly ordered rule, a simple effective method and

we understand its simplicity, its workings, its function, its demonstration. The rules of thought, *in principle*, are equivalent to the rules of the function. Yet in our description of it, the pseudo-random function produces bewildering chaos on its right hand side. Rule 30 is utterly determined, yet it becomes informationally misleading and indeterminate to us. Nothing in the rule's first 100 steps, will tell us anything about the next 100, or 1000, or a million, or any number of incomplete 'x' steps. It doesn't simulate anything real in the physical sense, but is more of a realist, random resistance to our functional understanding.

Not that I'd like to end on a hazy, underdeveloped point – but such an informal thesis is – in my mind – the best definition of how one could possibly speculate about the outside of the human condition. Reality propagates. Reality is demonstrably present to us, yet it misleads us, tricks us, exploits us, hacks into us: it does things that are surprising, but whose surprising behaviour actually constructs the environment in which we find ourselves. Like a fit of the giggles, it is continuously uncontrollable (or at least uncontrollably continuous) as is the qualities for how something propagates. Computational reality is not quite evil, but vague, contingent, vaguely mythic and curiously indeterminate, especially when it is constructed out of simple rules and mundane orders: when regular formality suddenly erupts into an informal, irregular burst of activity.

I might hope then, that I am not too arrogant when I suggest that such a discord which constitutes speculative realism may begin and end with the propagation within and through computation.

is taken from a transcription of Turing's original letter in the Turing papers at the Modern Archive Centre, King's College Library, Cambridge (Catalogue Reference D. 2) citation is taken from Jack Copeland, *The Essential Turing: Seminal Writings in Computing, Logic, Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence, and Artificial Life: Plus Secret of Enigma*, edited by Jack Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 213, cf. 211 – 13.

7. Robin Gandy, "Human versus Mechanical Intelligence", in P. Millican and A. Clark (eds.), *Machines and Thought: The Legacy of Alan Turing*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 125.

A Seductive Union: Speculative Realism and Contemporary Art

Rebecca O'Dwyer

AS someone who engages and writes about art on a consistent basis, the challenge to approach research, or even a text, in the absence of an object is always a challenge: there is nothing to fall back upon or anchor the work around. And yet, there is often, too, an over-reliance on the object, as though description alone can redeem the translation of aesthetic experience into language. When writing an account of a work or body of works, whether that be in a review, an artists' text or academic treatment, the sure sign of 'bad' work is to be able *only* to describe it: the text stops short at an engagement with form. So too the one that relies overly on description, whether by laziness or disinterest: it can never be a good text, or speak to the heart of what it describes. Thus, any effective text must diverge from the object it describes – creating a new object – and at the same time avoid engagement with works that appear to invite only description. A two-fold negotiation of the object, then, is what is needed: objects as not only things to get *at*, but also things to emphatically restrain oneself *from*. For me this is the whole problem of writing about art: to adhere but also to *rebel from* the object of study.

I am not purporting some form of poetics at a *deliberate* remove from the object of interest, in this case the artwork. And I am definitely not suggesting a shift in emphasis from the object, to the relation between it and myself. Instead, I argue that an emphasis on substances, rather than relations, makes for a pretty dull criticism. In short, art criticism – at least of the successful breed – is always built on a considered relation; fleeting and impartial though it might be, it demands an engagement that aspires towards some form of *peace* with the thing. The process of writing about art demands reconciliation with the object of study, but not complete degradation of the borders between it and I: in such a case, the object, being dumb, finds only a mouthpiece, and textual representation slides into the inanity of description. Over-reliance on the object suggests an

asymmetrical relation between it and I; not, I must add, through its sublimity or ineffability, but because – and only because – I am not trying hard enough to get at it. It is not the question of some indivisible remainder, to which I have no or limited access, though this may in fact be the case: rather, it is the question of this aporia being *acknowledged*. Through such an acknowledgment, the pre-eminence of the object is codified, resulting in either a fall back towards it – by description – or by disavowal of its transparency, resulting in some breed of mystic abdication of the possibility of access. Both approaches preserve the object or art object as the site of substance, rather than as the product of a relation, or one actor within a relation of potentiality.

I set out to write here as a means of grappling with this particular problem, attempting to articulate my thoughts on it, and of teasing out ways in which Speculative Realism (SR)/ Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) might offer a new means of thinking and working through it – if any. The title of this paper, *A Seductive Union: Speculative Realism and Contemporary Art*, may allude on my part to a certain cynicism or disillusionment with what is now completely saturated within contemporary art discourse. SR, encompassing OOO, is indeed

a seductive breed of thought; Harman's term 'allure' appears only to reciprocate this view. Steven Shaviro, in the text *The Actual Volcano: Whitehead, Harman, and the Problem of Relations*, describes this state of allure as,

(T)he attraction of something that has retreated into its own depths. An object is alluring when it does not just display particular qualities, but also insinuates the existence of something deep-er, something hidden and inaccessible, something that cannot actually be displayed... it stretches the observer to the point where it reaches the limits of its power, or where its apprehensions break down. To be allured is to be beckoned into a realm that cannot ever be reached [1].

Thus Harman's allure, specifically the allure of objects, connotes the existence of something outside of one's grasp or ability to understand. It is akin, as Shaviro says, to the experience of the sublime [2] – a term recognised by every art graduate (that particular painting by Friedrich apparently *the* only example in attempting its representation). Understood thus, the sublime object is the site of terrifying self-reflection. Kant, however, did not apply the term 'sublime' to art; either did Burke. Both were concerned with *nature*, not objects of aesthetic

1. Levi Bryant; Graham Harman & Nick Srnicek (eds) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re:press, 2011), 289.
2. Ibid

reflection: however impressive the artwork was, it could not rival nature, and thus could not be considered sublime in-itself. Of course, this is the Romantic sublime: much has since been written about the possibility of a post-modern sublime that might encompass networks and technology etc.

The temptation to relinquish the artwork to the dominion of the sublime, for me, is much the same as adopting an object-oriented conception of the artwork. Both anchor themselves on some form of non-knowledge, outside of the remit of human understanding. I agree with the proposition that such an exterior exists, but I do wonder whether it is *here* where the art object rests. Arguably, if SR and OOO are in some part indebted to an understanding of the sublime, then perhaps they cannot speak to art *at all*. If we treat the art object as an object of sublimity, its steadfast inaccessibility leads to an essentialised estrangement from thought. It is operative outside of any true relation – even that of the artist who makes it. To me the art object is ‘*neither this, nor that*’ [3]: neither outside of a relation, nor wholly enclosed within its demarcations. It trembles somewhere between relations – between the artist and it, and it and the subsequent subject that apprehends it – and substance, and it is here that our attention must be drawn.

I consider objects all of the time, everyone does. Everything, indeed, might be construed as an object, but I feel art objects encompass their shadowy dimension to the greatest degree. By their transcendence of the mere stuff of the world, and acquisition of what Duchamp called the ‘*art coefficient*’, the inexplicable potentiality available to *all* objects is made explicit. By transformation of the stuff of which it is comprised, to an object of aesthetic consideration, art objects allude to the potential for *all others to do just the same*: anything, even the lowly urinal, is imbued with this potentiality.

But how can their activation *as artworks* be explained as simply the product of substance? Is it a question of some substances being of a more or less aesthetic consistency, and of this bubbling up spontaneously?

What SR and OOO, in particular, appear to usher in is a kind of formalism, whereby art objects

– and all objects alongside them – are treated as distinct substances, shadowy and never quite fully accessible, either to the subject or indeed to other objects. They recede from view. But how can this understanding of objects be made to encompass a definition of art, if not by flattening its privileged position *as art*? SR and OOO put forward a democracy of objects in which no one has priority over another: hence, the somewhat tiresome preponderance of long sentences listing off unrelated things. But are not some objects given a special place in (human) consciousness, among these things being works of art? I would like to think so. Arguably their special status cannot rest on their withdrawn nature, here made explicit, but rather by virtue of something else: in short, it must rest at least to some degree on a *relation* rather than some shadowy substance.

I am problematising this specific treatment of objects because it sweeps everything up alongside it: even though equivalence is only suggested at an atomistic level, not in terms of subjective prehension, objects still arise from a flattened space, art objects included. In such a light, it appears counter-productive, contradictory even, to allude to any natural sympathy between SR/OOO and contemporary art practice. Such philosophical thought cannot, or chooses not to, account for the question of the art object, which is of course an object, *made* like many others, but not adherent to other objects that should, by their understanding, share their tendencies. The chair is not the same as the Rembrandt, and not because of some essentialist understanding of art, but by virtue of the relation between artist and work, and subsequently the subject that apprehends it. Artworks are given their special status – provided that we grant them it – through being in the world: they are not estranged from thought, but a definite product *of it*.

Being in the world: then, what would it mean for an artwork to *not* be in the world? If the artwork – at least to some extent – is validated and granted its status *as art* by its insertion into wider relations and chains of significance, to what does the *absent* artwork attest? I use the example of the Geneva Freeport, which I am indebted to learning about from Barbara Knezevic. This is a 435,000 square-foot tax haven and storage facility in Switzerland,

3. A translation of the Hindu phrase ‘neti, neti’, and the title of a text I wrote for the artist Fergus Feehily, in *Into The Garden* (2012).

currently housing an inestimable amount of priceless art. Bizarrely, due to tax-reasons, many works are bought and sold from *within* the Free Port, changing hands without ever seeing the light of day. The likelihood is that no one, or virtually no one, gets to experience and appreciate these works of art: we can only *speculate* on them, quietly wondering why some of the world's most well-known artworks are slowly slipping from public view. As Nicholas Brett, underwriting director of AXA Art Insurance in London, says, when asked to guess at the total value of Freeport art, 'I doubt you've got a piece of paper wide enough to write down all the zeros. It's a huge but unknown number.' These artworks have become pure relation – exchange value – containing nothing in-themselves. This is the other side of the dichotomy, where no substance at all remains, or is relation-turned-substance. The objects exist, of course, but the question is whether or not one can call them art if and when they are not actors in any relation outside of exchange value. The Geneva Freeport, for me, is illustrative of what happens when substance is refuted altogether, when the artwork is transformed into a shadowy relation that recedes from view.

It might seem that the heir to such a business is none other than Duchamp, whose decision to 'choose' something as art enabled a wholly relational art, in which the artist imbues the object with substance only by means of his relation to it. And yet even Duchamp cannot cede fully to this point of view, and he kind of backtracks somewhat with what he terms the '*art coefficient*', which I mentioned in passing earlier. In *The Creative Act* (1957), Duchamp says,

(I)n the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realise and did realise, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work. In other words, the personal 'art coefficient' is like a arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed. [4]

Thus the objects '*art coefficient*' is what surpasses the artist-artwork relation, undermines and escapes it, in so doing granting it the status of art. The '*art coefficient*' is not born of

substance, then, but of a kind of substance-born-of-relation.

This is how I think about the art object: indeed this might change, and I think it is important to stay open to that possibility. For me SR and OOO are objects in-themselves: the temptation to bend to them is great, employing their method as a stand-in for the description of art; but they too, like the object itself, must be rebelled *against*. It is only in this intersection of positions that they can speak to the discourse of art.



4. <http://radicalart.info/things/readymade/duchamp/text.html>, accessed 28/2/13

Objects, Actors and Sites of Contingency

Alice Rekab

INTRODUCTION

This project began in 2009 as a bold investigation into synthesis and collaboration that successfully brought together the projects of Badiou and Negri – alongside Bergson – in a written theorisation of what I called the *loving aggregate*, but which in fact involved nothing less than rethinking the ontology – and temporality – of a radical politics of community today. This project attempted to articulate the common or collaborative identity of community not simply as a nominated socio-political entity but as an affective moment of unity established through a recognition of difference.

However it became clear to me in the writing of this text that the *loving aggregate* and its functions were limited to an abstract philosophical idea, and how ever audacious its conceptual maneuvers, that without a practical element to test its theorisations, they remained confined to the mind of the reader, on the paper it was written on and thus lacked the lived utility its words aspired to.

Relative to this limitation my current research has taken the form of a series of relationships developed around the desire to test those concepts through the capacities of different forms of collaborative production through arts practice [1] and to discomfort established ideas of the politically or socially engaged within theory and arts practice. By foregrounding the importance of personal exchanges, economies of desire and the commons produced between the individuals involved and the work we developed for exhibition through an on-going negotiation of aesthetics, ethics, and value in dialogue with the thought of Francois Laruelle, Felix Guattari and Antonio Negri.

1. Why arts practice?

1. Because art, as I will discuss later on, is capable of assuming multiple avenues of approach and experimentation across many disciplines while maintaining its own sense of autonomy, principles and purpose and has in its most positive capacity the potential to create new kinds of knowledge and re-envision existing knowledge.

2. Because as a fine art practitioner art and its composites are tools I wish to examine critically.

Over the course of the last year I have been working in remote collaboration with Stars Combine, a group of performing artists and their director Emad Radder, based in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, to produce film and performance works that present an ad-hoc collective physical investigation into our shared interest in the performance of humor and joy as a political position with an aggregative force.

Paying special attention to how platforms for the presentation of such work are negotiated and the effect of the various economies (theoretic, creative, affective, political, monetary), their respective networks and infrastructures are activated to make work possible — Given the absence of a gallery in Bo Town how is it possible to designate space for public display or performance of work, and what meaning can that work take on relative to its platform for presentation? —

Methods

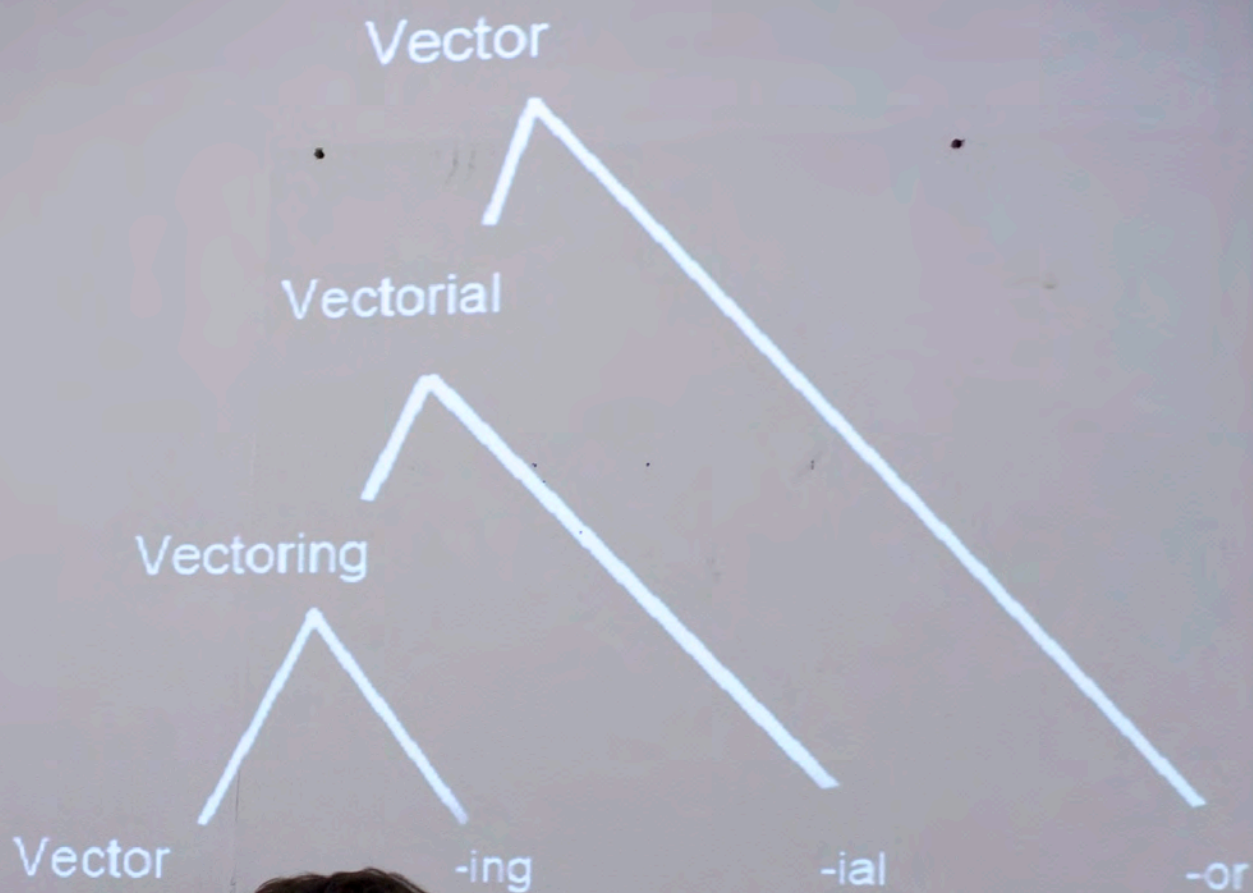
With this new focus on the lived as testing ground for thought I turned my attention to Non-Philosophy and the introduction of a practice defined by François Laruelle as ‘generalised’ rather than ‘restricted’ non-philosophy I have developed a form of research ‘that utilises philosophy as its

material or phenomena’ [2]. Taking those theories of community: being-in-common-through-difference developed in my previous research and testing them in the formation of real relationships with other practitioners from markedly different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Together we have produced new works that seeks out the limits of the theory of a community as affective *loving aggregation* via the location and presentation of instances where such aggregations could think their inherent differences through themselves and through processes of negotiation and co-operation that make use of materials that are available to us respectively rather than through an externalised ontology.

Therefore field-work not just as a research method, but as a gestural site of creative production in it self, developed and performed ‘on the ground,’ objects not just as artwork but as catalysts or actors, film not just as documentation, but as an aggregation of bodies/ subjects and objects which form and practice autonomous and relational logics within that media and the diagram as a methodology that acts not as an axillary supplement to written text but produces thought through itself.

2. François Laruelle, 2012, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, ed. Alkon G. and Gunjevic, B. (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2012), 53.



It was in the development of these relationships and practice-based methodologies that use philosophy/thought as material for production that I made the exhibition entitled *Vector/Attractor* at the Goethe Institute Dublin.

This exhibition presented works developed in creative exchange with Stars Combine and Radison Productions, conducted via correspondence and meeting with their producer Emad Radder, to develop scripts and sketches, which began to explore the idea of a *sphere of influence*.

A *sphere of influence* to be considered not simply historically but as an opening into a concept of hyper-mobile social or cultural forces, that colonise-cross-colonise-decolonise-recolonise and produce new forms, not just through structures of violence/dominance like that of the colonist or the Rebel soldier but through attractive forces that create new structures.

1. Non-standard aesthetics and the indeterminacy of the transdisciplinary

I will now outline my lines of enquiry and the nature of my work to date by foregrounding my exploration of the idea of (non-)art. This is a practice that defines itself an art that is aware of its self as both a conceptual and material creative practice that carries its own histories, hierarchies, semiotics and economies. It is a practice that seeks to expand, elucidate or cultivate relationships with other materials and concepts in the world, or to produce new ones. The idea of non-art is one that acknowledges the exclusions of what I define as the self-sufficiency of 'contemporary art'. Contemporary art here is seen as a specific and apparently inescapable movement in arts history [3], and one that carries a resemblance to what François Laruelle would call 'standard philosophy'. That is, an assumed authoritative distance from which to observe and

represent aspects of the Real from a position of exteriority to it.

Contemporary art, like 'standard philosophy,' maintains a disavowal of the effects of its apparatus, observation and representation on its referents, such as the objects, subjects and situations it seeks to employ in service of its own concepts, at the exclusion of others, which, according to Laruelle cannot be made philosophisable or perhaps cannot be adopted so easily into what the contemporary arts consider familiar.

Relative to this Laruelle's theory of non-standard aesthetics, as discussed in *Photo-Fiction*, speaks to the problematic relationship between art and philosophy within what he would call standard aesthetics.

(Standard) Aesthetics was always a carbon copy of art in philosophy and subsequently art was always understood as a deficient modality of philosophy. It is the phenomena of philosophy's self-modeling with regards to art: where philosophy finds its model in art, but a model, which is philosophically preformed or pre-decided.

One will not be surprised to find reciprocal projections. Their aesthetic rapport can be spoken about within the mode of lack: without art, philosophy lacks sensitivity and without philosophy art lacks thought, but also within a mode of excess, of overlapping, of mixtures and specular reflections [4].

Here Laruelle contests what he sees as pre-decided speculations on the capacities of both art and philosophy, refusing to accept binary relationships of lack, compensation and exchange where one is cast as sensitive rather than thoughtful and the other thoughtful rather than sensitive, linking this toxic relationship to the cultural economies that its logic sustains. Laruelle states:

3. Suhail Malik, *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art*, (Lecture series at Artists Space: Books & Talks, 55 Walker Street NYC, 2013) <http://artistspace.org/programs/on-the-necessity-of-arts-exit-from-contemporary-art/>

4. François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, Trans. Drew S. Burk, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012), 4.

'Taken as a whole, aesthetics is a market of theories about art supported by the art market itself'. [5]

In agreement with this, my thesis would contend that the non-standard philosophical position regarding both art and philosophy is that both disciplines are equally capable of thought and sensitivity and it is perhaps the adoption of a style of thinking-sensitivity, of a transdisciplinary approach that produces the kinds of situated and self-conscious practices necessary to undo the hierarchies inherent in such binary structures. This transdisciplinary approach can successfully articulate the existing reciprocity between object/performer/viewer/fiction/history/artwork in a democratic creative process where each discipline or component is treated as a material of singular but equal value.

Through my continued practical engagement with Laruelle's work on non-aesthetics and photo-fiction I aim to perform this from a position that counts the partiality of its own perspective as part of the situation it envisions and seeks to explore the potentiality in transdisciplinary creative production. My work also seeks to rearticulate what might traditionally have been described as a 'parallelism' between practice, discipline and concept through an expanded notion of a state that reflects conceptual and physical matter itself as a matrix [6] coexistent potential that remains indeterminate until the moment of its observation. Relative to this my work is considered just another material component of this moment; an object a, practice, a meeting, a conversation, an agreement between the artists the viewer and the situation, and in so doing exploring the significance of the relationships which underpin the production, presentation and distribution of artworks.

For, if there are indeed things that cannot be philosophisable (or given a standard

philosophical treatment), perhaps it is also true that there are things that cannot be made into 'contemporary art' or 'standard contemporary art'. For as Laruelle sees Standard Philosophy, I can see Contemporary Art, that is, I see a self-sufficient system that maintains a sense of radical privilege to subsume any and all aspects of knowledge and culture into the service of its concepts, a system that, even as it claims to get outside itself, to escape its own tropes and shake off its habits, still fails to create anything other than more contemporary [7].

Perhaps (non-)art like (non-)philosophy can only perform itself through a flattened instance where art and its platforms, histories, and notions of privilege are considered just another material or component for creative production and presentation of truths. It may also be where a transdisciplinary practice is one whose components remain in a simultaneous and indeterminate process until the moment of their perception, and in that respect in a state of reciprocity with their instance and the observation of that instance, all of which proliferate thought.

In concurrence with Laruelle this approach to thought is exercised within the limits of phenomenal immanence, of being-given or manifested, it is a real 'thought', but (a thought) 'in-the-last-instance; a thought according to real experience, which reduces objectivity itself rather than possible experience, which I would add remains speculative' [8].

To reflect on the suffix trans-, meaning across, beyond or through, we see in its essence a movement or the procession of an indeterminate or undefined element. I see this movement to be present in both Laruelle's (always immanent) relational trans-cendence and, I would contend, in the transitional, relational indeterminacy of the transdisciplinary as a mode of practice.

5. Ibid

6. A matrix is a mathematical mode of organisation and a presentation of the data of a problem, when there are at least two heterogeneous conceptual, and artistic data that are linked in what we will call a matrixial manner. Moreover, philosophy and its objects, such as art, ordinarily direct the matrix but it can also be directed differently toward generic uses or humane ends rather than toward philosophy. There is always a duality of terms or variables in any case and the matrix must be directed by the re-intervention of

one of the terms as a new or third function, and it can be toward two opposite directions, either toward philosophy or indeed precisely toward photography. These scenarios, by their inventive and constructive aspects, correspond to veritable theoretical "installations" (Laruelle, 2012, p. 3).

7. Malik, *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art*, 55.

8. It must be noted here that for Laruelle every experience of transcendence which presents itself and describes the experience of transcendence does so under the

To further elucidate the effects of what I will call the processual indeterminacy of the trans-in transdisciplinary, I want to borrow from Laruelle what Laruelle has already borrowed as a model; that is I will present Young's Double Slit Experiment [9] reflected in Laruelle's utilisation of the quantum concept of superposition (which I will return to in greater detail), and propose that it can be used to support my revision of how transdisciplinary practice is viewed. This vision is one no longer framed as a coordination of parallels, but rather an indetermination of coexistent potentials whose measurable effects are influenced the partiality of the observer's position and the methods and platforms of that observation.

Relative to this proposition we must remind ourselves of the practical demand inherent not just in Laruelle's non-philosophical position but also found at the core of Guattari's exploration of the transdisciplinary as discussed by Gary Genosko in his 2003 paper entitled 'Felix Guattari Towards a Transdisciplinary Methodology':

Guattari's preferred form of transdisciplinary research was a call to rethink relations between science, society, politics, ethics and aesthetics through the development of a meta-methodology adequate to this new field of relations. Problems of organisation directly entail problems of method beyond the compromise of merely uncritically transporting one method from one domain to another [10].

Here we are reminded that it is only through the development of 'meta-methodologies' that the introduction of models from 'outside' art can critically be considered of use in the expansion of creative work and that it is of utmost importance to (non-) arts practice that these models are not allowed to become 'stand ins' for the hierarchies and exclusions we have sought to remove, not allowed to slip back into what Genosko called 'theoretical binarisms'

(e.g. between thought and sensitivity between altruism and the obfuscation of power relations.):

Although Guattari was aware that even meta-modelisations can retreat into theoretical binarisms in which fours fall back into twos or threes, or get stuck on an existing modelisation, such methodological innovation is not merely an option – the demand was there in the hyper complex objects of which the object world of interdependent hyper complexity consists [11].

2. An object world of intra-relational hyper-complexity: Superposition and Exhibition

Having begun to articulate the principles of a non-standard transdisciplinary arts practice it is now time to lay out the steps I have taken this year to begin to research what it might look like to bring those principles into practice in the form of a collaborative project and an exhibition.

Using *Vector/Attractor*, my most recent solo exhibition curated by Georgina Jackson, with works made in collaboration with Stars Combine (exhibited at the Goethe Institut Dublin from Jan-March 2013), as an example, I will present elements of the exhibition as art objects but also as actors that can potentially play the part of apparatus, referent or indeed observer within an indeterminate experimental situation, that is not just the artworks or the exhibition but the axioms and processes operative in their creation.

The exhibition was an experiment in so much as it sought to test my theories of aggregation developed only in the realm of thought and then track in some measure a very particular aspect of the Real.

It was indeterminate because the materials, the politics, the geography and the ecologies of the work remained in an uncertain play within

conditions of an immanence, "in-the-last- instance" or a transcendence relative and according to the Real. Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, 33.

9. Young's double slits experiment consists of three positions: the referent, the observer and the apparatus. It demonstrated the duality of matter and energy which behaves like both waves and particles and the ultimately probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics where matter and energy can exist in multiple and simultaneous positions/states and where the observer and the apparatus are seen to influence that

behavior. Glen, Stark. *Light, Youngs double slit experiment* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/340440/light/258399/Youngs-double-slit-experiment>

10. Gary Genosko, "FÉLIX GUATTARI towards a transdisciplinary metamethodology", Angelaki journal of the theoretical humanities, volume 8 number 1 (London: Routledge, April 2003), 134.

11. Ibid, 135.

each object, and concerned itself more with presenting the implications of its own fluidity, rather than presenting a clearly identifiable and perhaps reduced or authoritative vision of its 'subject matter'.

Relative to nominating the operation of *Vector/Attractor* as an exhibition, its constitutive components could be identified with what Felix Guattari termed 'ecosophic objects', [12] but I would argue that this term and its concept have been expanded in this work towards a notion of a trans-object or one moving between a number of intra-related fields of existence while always remaining decidedly (consciously) part of the Real.

To return to my engagement with Young's double slits experiment, I would like to present each component of the exhibition as an actor that can play the part of either the referent, the apparatus or the observer within this experimental situation. And in doing so foreground forgoe both the positive and negative attributes of a practice that inhabits indeterminacy in the superposition of potential units of force and test the use of this borrowed model from quantum mechanics in the elucidation of a complex point.

In further support of this elucidation I will place emphasis on the exchangeability of roles and the performance of observable coincidences of agency and function that allow each component to be read as equally material and contingent (on both the viewer and each other) and thus all subject to a relational existence as aspects of the one Real.

3. Vector/Attractor: An experiment in repurposing a model through objects

The exhibition was composed of a sculpture, a banner and three films and was developed, as previously detailed, from an ongoing creative exchange between myself, a group of comedic performers (based in Bo Town, Sierra Leone) and their director Emad Radder (based in South London). This exhibition sought to materialise a number of relationships I observed and was a part of.

These relationships formed and were formed by components [13] or materials of equivalent

value but varying degrees of plain visibility, which when interfaced within my own particular experiment, produced an array of observable results which constituted the 'works'. Objects oriented or emanating from some aspect of the Real (some made some found some composed purely of thought or language and some activated remotely through planned and contingent performances both human and nonhuman).

This exhibition could also be situated (reluctantly) within a discourse of political or socially engaged art that seeks to articulate the conditions of creative production within post-colonial realities.

However, I would contend that what differentiates this project from such discourse is that it is devoid of any notions of 'altruism' but rather concerns itself with challenging processes of flattening a creative space through the performance of the unevenness at hand, through nurturing inconsistencies in representation and allowing discomfort to occur in a space where hierarchies of cultural representation and the position of both viewer, subject/object and artist are thought to be established.

Vector/Attractor is not about raising impoverished West African performers to the level of high contemporary art or about sobering contemporary art's excesses by putting it in proximity to meaningful, politically-charged creativity. Rather, taking art (in a generic sense) as an actor that performs as an externalisation of forces allows for a heightened emotional response to cultural phenomena. The images and objects in this exhibition were chosen and made to 'stand in' for artworks, responding to their originary environments and acting in a generic capacity to represent what art might do in a world apart from the gallery and what a film, never before purposed as art, might do in a gallery context. Not in order to disavow or break out of the institution of art but rather to underscore it for what it is and the dynamics active within it.

I now wish to present the individual works within *Vector/Attractor* and repurpose Young's double slits experiment in an effort to articulate what I see as the superpositional potentiality of an artwork produced through collaboration across a number of disciplines.

[Fig.1] Installation shot of *Vector/Attractor* 2013 The Return Gallery at The Goethe Institut Dublin. All images courtesy of Alice Rekab and Stars Combine

12. In his book *Chaosmosis* Guattari proposed that the only way to counteract reductionist approaches to subjectivity was the analysis of complexity starting with an ecosophic object with four dimensions:

1. Material, energetic and semiotic Fluxes,
2. Concrete and abstract machinic Phylums,

3. Virtual Universes of value,

4. Finite existential territories

Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, trans. Paul Bains, & Julian Pefanis, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 124.

13. Humor, friendship, shared interest, poverty, difference,





4. Young's Double Slits Experiment repurposed to see an artwork differently (Art Object as referent; an observer's description: Banner, 3 kinds of Diamond, and three films).

An art object is most often considered the referent of an exhibition, a phenomenon to be observed and described, One that reacts to the observer and the gallery as apparatus in the sense that its behavior or what it does has the potential to occupy more than one state at any instance of observation. The art object is visible in physical space but superposes multiple behaviors meanings or activities dependent on the observer who is in the words of Karen Barad 'within the phenomenon'. [14]

The banner (fig.1) fills the gallery. It is 630cm in length and 330cm in width, semi-transparent and backlit. It carries an image of the Bo clock tower, a meeting point in Sierra Leone's second city Bo (the birthplace of Stars Combine) and an example of those poured concrete edifices

that have come to represent African progress in the nineteen-sixties. It is a portable location, a back drop a stage set and a flag, a thing that people can get behind, a thing that draws them together, a site for gathering, weather proof, it is cloth standing in for a concrete and tarmac space and the title piece for the show.

Suspended in the air between two columns behind the banner is the first diamond (fig.2). Cut into a trapezoid and made of foam this object is flecked with colors, reconstituted from other bits of foam [15] the diamond is visible through the fabric of the banner, and can also be viewed directly from the side. This diamond acts as an artwork; the object performs its associated meanings in the space.

The second diamond (fig. 3–4) is on screen, part of the *Mumu Language*, a comedy filmed in Sierra Leone. The stone is hyperbolic and large. It is another fake but one that performs the role

[Fig. 2] Installation shot of Object/Attractor 2013 The Return Gallery at The Goethe Institut Dublin

[Fig.3] Still Image from Interpret/Attractor 2013 The Return Gallery at The Goethe Institut Dublin

[Fig.4] Still Image from Interpret/Attractor 2013 The Return Gallery at The Goethe Institut Dublin

civil war, a desire to be seen, illicit flows of resources, digital film, printed cloth, reconstituted foam, props .

14. Karen Barad, "Intra-actions" (Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann), dOCUMENTA (13) *Mousse Magazine* Summer 2012, 80.

15. A material component of furnishings and upholstery it is considered the highest quality available due to the fact that, being bound together or reconstituted with glue and odd shaped offcuts, it keeps its shape for longer and coincidentally makes up something that looks like static on a screen, cut marble, a loud speaker, or a pink, blue, white, black and yellow kind of diamond.





of a real stone in a sketch depicting two men, performers Saidu Temperature and Momoh Ranka, and a Lebanese Merchant who remains nameless. This diamond is the subject of a conversation, a trade and a joke. Its surface is shining and it is semi-transparent, probably plastic or possibly glass. It comes wrapped in a tissue carried by a Momoh who speaks a language only Temperature can interpret. This diamond acts as currency, and performs alongside its human counterparts in a film that does not consider itself 'contemporary art' but rather a satirical commentary on the casual trade of alluvial diamonds in Sierra Leone.

The second film continues on this theme. It is a music video that recounts the adventures of Momoh as translated by Siadu in different locations in Bo town. There is religious com-

mentary present and the video (or commentary) is animated through gesture, humorous dancing and consume. It performs various iterations of the concept of *Mumu Language*.

Switching out the human for the objectile actor, this still image (fig.5) from the 2013 film *Object/Attractor* shows a replica of a sculpture that was exhibited in Dublin, on location in Bo Town Sierra Leone, where it was used to reshoot scenes that had previously appeared in Stars Combine sketches. These short clips form a series of test shots that were edited together to form part of a two channel video installation that was screened in the Exhibition.

As the third film in the exhibition, this work takes the form of another kind of performance, the human actors now replaced with

[Fig.5] Still Image from
Interpret/Attractor 2013
The Return Gallery at The
Goethe Institut Dublin

a nonhuman actor, the third Diamond (fig.5), which stands on location replacing Stars Combine's performance with a performance of its own strangeness in the environment and the contingency [16] of the film's production.

5. Art Objects as observers

Can an object be an observer? What does the object observe? In one sense, we cannot know this. Its 'observation' is not visible to us naturally. But perhaps what is visible to us is the influence of its observation on the behavior of its referents.

In astronomy we can detect the presence of an unseen distant planet, only via its gravitational field. In the case of the artwork what the Object observes, we experience as the work becoming something in excess of its component materials and their combination, and thus it exerts a shift in our vision of the universe and reveals another form of observation.

For if we cannot know it, then we can only speculate on what the film observes or what its referent might be. The result is what we in turn might experience as the exhibition. This hypothesis makes the demand that we see the film as equally thinking and not simply as an extension of the artist's knowledge but acts in excess of her knowledge and her intentions in its production.

6. Art Objects and Apparatus

For a viewer who takes the concept of an art work as their referent, the art object becomes the apparatus they look through to gain a (partial) measurement of the matter or material that make up the display of the exhibition

Here the art object becomes a kind of optic or scope where aspects of the Real, that might not otherwise be visible, are brought into view. It is through the particularity of this function that the 'settings' of this optic: its agency, its stance or the partiality of its view of the Real/ phenomena becomes most apparent.

The obviousness of its bias (the artists subjective representation) enables us to envision the multiple and super-posited potential variants that could be made visible but are not, by virtue

of the partiality of both the optic as apparatus and the particularities of observer herself [17] all this indicates that these art objects are set from a particular stance and that that stance is part of the complex intra-action of materials.

The gallery as separate to the artwork should also be considered another form of apparatus, with its own economies, infrastructures, super-structures and networks that affect our vision of the art object *in situ*. To return to Laruelle 'the art market supports particular theories about what art is and what art can do' [18].

In conclusion to this initial experiment it is clear that an artwork can be seen to perform many roles, often simultaneously, in the course of an exhibition being observed, observing and being used to observe in any single encounter. Following Barad, while there are bodies which define the experimental conditions and which embody particular concepts to the exclusion of others, those excluded bodies are of equal but different value and part of one common Real [19].

It is with this awareness, this new vision of art and its composite indeterminacies, that that I propose to go forward and attempt a new way of material negotiation in art and in theory.

My PhD research at the London Graduate School will continue to produce new works in the form of a thesis, fieldwork, images (film and diagram) and objects. Through academic and practical rigor this research will seek to develop both a theory and practice of (non-) art, bringing Guattari's ideas of the production of individual and collective subjectivity ecosophy and the ecosophic object parallel to Laruelle's ideas relative to a non- standard position/set of principles of resistance and victims, non-Marxism and non-aesthetics to develop a transdisciplinary set of practices that will seek to provide insight into the mechanisms active within the formation and sustenance of affective 'loving' aggregates and the position of indeterminacy (for better or worse) occupied by the artist and by an art that attempts to practice/test/produce thought on the ground, an object, relative to the world.

16. This diamond was sent as a 'flat pack' replica of the one in the gallery space and was taken to the locations by the Director Emad Radder and placed and filmed here as part of a collaborative experiment. The transfer of files for this film to me was dependent on an unreliable Internet connection and trusting Emad to come through in time for the final edit.

17. The particularity of the film's content, the particularity of the sculpture's shape, its materials and its position in the gallery, the particularity of the image on the banner, the place it presents and its connection to the other works

18. François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 4.

19. Barad, K. "Intra-actions", 80.

Taken From/Put in Oscars Bin

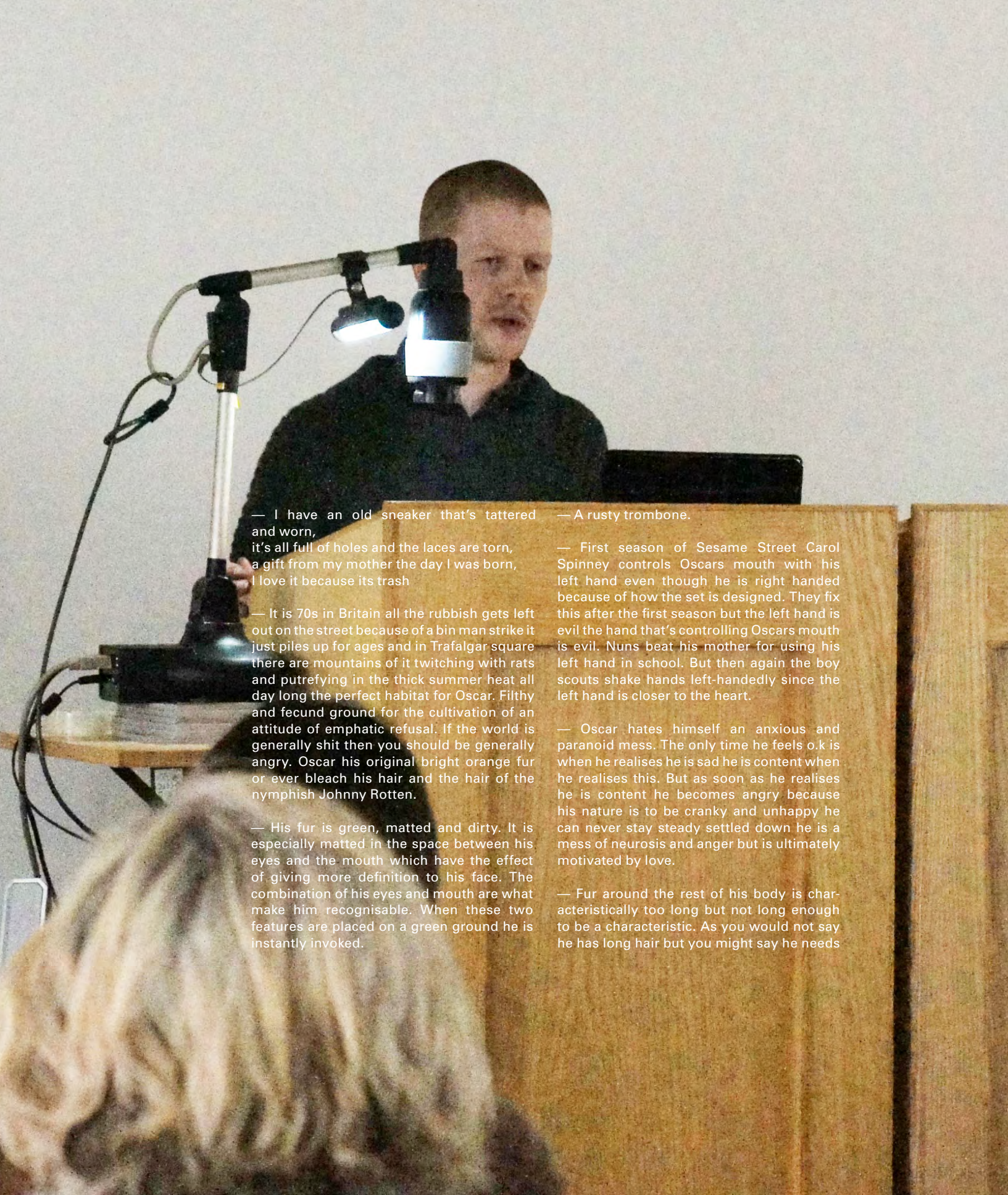
Sam Keogh

— Oscar **GIVE HIM THE GOODS** or he will burn him alive in his bin. He will slash his eyes and force himself to eat a ripped in half coke can and kick his face. No actually give it up or he will hug him. He will love himself and caress himself and spoon him. He will make him watch episodes of glee with him in bed on his own laptop on a wet Sunday afternoon eating Monster Munch and Percy Pigs and taking breaks between episodes to have lazy sex.

— His eyes are large white balls with a large black pupil in the centre never moves. Probably polystyrene or plastic or something which will outlast the rest of his body in the future when he is disposed of and curls into his degradation decay and communion with rubbish. They are framed by a furry brown unibrow the same texture but a different colour to the rest of his body.

— Whole figure of Oscar the fat bloated head of the later day Elvis singing the song of pig-headed individualism Frank Sinatra's 'My Way'. His jowls turgid with beef fat valium and ketchup. Elvis with his hips is the conduit for violent teenage lust and summons idol riots from loins. For years the rich electricity runs through and out of his body its split-ends gradually curling through the softest parts of his flesh swelling him with the remainders of horny juices. Gout (but bigger in excitement in the case of Elvis) where a prolonged diet of rich foods leads to the crystallisation of uric acid in the blood Elvis becomes slowly tumescent from the corrosive flow of adolescent energies. Same thing with Oscar from the ingrown hopes of the 60s instead of teenagers.





— I have an old sneaker that's tattered and worn, it's all full of holes and the laces are torn, a gift from my mother the day I was born, I love it because its trash

— It is 70s in Britain all the rubbish gets left out on the street because of a bin man strike it just piles up for ages and in Trafalgar square there are mountains of it twitching with rats and putrefying in the thick summer heat all day long the perfect habitat for Oscar. Filthy and fecund ground for the cultivation of an attitude of emphatic refusal. If the world is generally shit then you should be generally angry. Oscar his original bright orange fur or ever bleach his hair and the hair of the nymphish Johnny Rotten.

— His fur is green, matted and dirty. It is especially matted in the space between his eyes and the mouth which have the effect of giving more definition to his face. The combination of his eyes and mouth are what make him recognisable. When these two features are placed on a green ground he is instantly invoked.

— A rusty trombone.

— First season of Sesame Street Carol Spinney controls Oscars mouth with his left hand even though he is right handed because of how the set is designed. They fix this after the first season but the left hand is evil the hand that's controlling Oscars mouth is evil. Nuns beat his mother for using his left hand in school. But then again the boy scouts shake hands left-handedly since the left hand is closer to the heart.

— Oscar hates himself an anxious and paranoid mess. The only time he feels o.k is when he realises he is sad he is content when he realises this. But as soon as he realises he is content he becomes angry because his nature is to be cranky and unhappy he can never stay steady settled down he is a mess of neurosis and anger but is ultimately motivated by love.

— Fur around the rest of his body is characteristically too long but not long enough to be a characteristic. As you would not say he has long hair but you might say he needs

a haircut it is too long and a mess and kind of unmanaged. His hand for instance has too much fur. It unfurls from the tips of his fingers in long wisps of grime. He would find it difficult to use a key or tie his laces with how long it is the fur would get caught in the laces

— Was once orange but due to orange being harder to read on a black and white TV screen they turn him green. He was originally orange in the first episodes of sesame street but due to damp habituation and poor hygiene he grows a layer of green mold all over his body which produces penicillin products. Unprocessed and still growing though it is poisonous. It is not as bad as black mold in his bathroom but can still cause breathing problems. He gasps through words his laugh is gaspy 'heh heh heh'. Green mold can live anywhere moist around the house in the fridge or attic or bin.

— Fur is damp with rubbish juice. Stench liquid mostly brown or orange and usually leaks out the bottom of cheap binbags in a trail through the hall. And smells acrid and sweet and it smells bad, stinks like it is decayed. He says in landfills it is called leachate and is highly contaminated with ammonia halogenated hydrocarbons other chemicals.

— Ughughugh Oscar sees him get sick in the river and to his left is a good looking thin him arguing with a himself in a camel coat with long straight hair died blond at the ends. Immediately he knows who it is and panics and runs in the other direction cursing. They are arguing and gesticulating himself is probably drunk and belligerent in the wafting vapours of his vomit the argument mixing with the vapours or miasma of burrito and whiskey in stomach fluids caught by the wind off the river.

— He is a mop for it soaks up those juices in his texture and attitude they taint his breath and his tastes and customs. He soaks up the rubbish juices and contains them because he is a mop. They are contained but spill over sometimes and produce a lesson in liberal tolerance of non-normativity. Tolerance quarantines the non-normative in

a cheap binbag. Tolerance destroys difference by passing it through indifference of a cheap binbag. Oscar asks why is it better to put rubbish in landfills. Sesame street puts the question in the bin and calls it Oscar. Oscar is tied into a moral universe he has a proper place it is his nature to be grouchy. Ghettoized contained unable to lance himself as an abscess farmed for the production of bad taste garnished with charm.

— His birthday is the first of June.

— Carol Spinney invents Oscar. He bases the voice of Oscar on a New York cab driver who says 'WHERE TO MAC?' in a thick New York accent. Carol Spinney makes tacky paintings of big bird in different environments around the world like the Great Wall of China. Flying over the Great Wall of China. He does public speaking allot. He has a white bowl haircut and mixed with his white goatee and jackets with no collars or cardigans makes him look creepy but he gets away with it because he is the most invincibly benevolent man because of his involvement with Sesame Street. He is the now familiar image of a sexless monstrously benevolent eccentric.

— He says gangrene is where a part of the body dies and begins to decompose whilst still attached to a living body and is caused by poor circulation and gangrenous limbs have to be amputated unless it is dry gangrene where the limb will shrivel up and just fall off at a point where blood supply is adequate to keep tissue alive and this is called auto amputation and wet gangrene happens in moist tissue and organs like in the mouth bowel lungs cervix and the vulva and the affected part is soft putrid rotten and dark.

—His matted fur is sick. It contains putrefying food, it is damp with rubbish juice is stained from bloody condoms and coffee grinds and burst open nappies. These juices seep through to his interior where Carol Spinney can feel them stain his shirtsleeves up to the shoulders. He always remembers to keep his nails short before putting his hand up Oscar. He wretches but reminds himself he is made of the same stuff as Oscar basically.

— Truly Oscar sucks is when he is taken out of sesame street and put with a 'straight man' who provokes him with expected normative tastes and opinions but knowingly. Oscar then responds unknowingly but his dialogue and the drama it creates is necessarily knowing as the voice of the puppeteer. This conceit does not exist on SesameStreetwherecharactersarecartoons (exaggerated caricatured scripted as being actually annoyed at Oscar's behaviour) or children (who kind of believe in the sentience of Oscar). Oscar and Michael Buble Christmas special. The Emmys where he sits in a golden bin wearing a tuxedo and complaining to a presenter.

— He lives in a barrel and he lives on a diet of mostly onions and his only real friends are stray dogs. He is called the dog. He thinks virtue is better revealed in action than in theory which means he does what he thinks. He goes to the oracle at Delphi once and he gets told to 'deface the currency' so he sets about defacing roman coins for a while. After this he realises the oracle probably means to deface the currency of custom. So he sets about being outrageous in public as a means to show the contingency of things like common sense taste and good behaviour masturbating in the market and saying 'if only I could get rid of my hunger by rubbing my stomach in the same way as it is easy to get rid of my erection by rubbing my penis.'

— Fuck you Oscar bad project. He is full of nostalgia and his appeal cancels everything else about him out. He can only use his fur to absorb his liquidised complaints and lazily half baked notions that there might be something interesting about over identifying with him in a lazy way that mix his laziness with his enthusiasm but the intensity of the laziness is stronger than he anticipated. A ton of laziness is the same weight as a ton of enthusiasm but laziness smells worse its flavour taints everything it touches it is more overpowering it muddies parts that might be more convincing without it when he spills milk in the back seat of a car in summer the car always smells a particular way.

How to Make Space-time and Influence People

Isabel Nolan

ADRIENNE Rich in 1977 wrote that women students speaking in public often ‘throw their words away’ unconsciously advertising that they think they ‘do not deserve to take up time and space’[1]. Reading this recently I couldn’t help but think that this is the opposite of what artworks do – they not only act as if they deserve to take up space and time, they actually produce it. As a maker and viewer of artworks what follows from this, is an inference that I’m still endeavoring to find a way to articulate, which is, that artworks somehow make reality.

The idea that art works produce space time is not new – but I believe the most compelling artworks do this, not out of some necessity, or in the service of some formula, but perversely and stubbornly, they can do it abjectly or with great self importance, but chiefly they do it in ways that are not constructive, utilitarian or purposive. This art is complex, it is not reasonable, good for us or useful, it does not establish facts or speak to definitive conclusions. The artwork is not an agent and yet it performs a speculation.

Part 1:

Around eleven years ago I put myself forward for a clinical trial. It was an odd thing for me to do but I had had a tricky year and a warranted interval away from my day to day life seemed attractive. Most of all I could earn enough money to live off for quite some time. There was an interview, a very involved screening process, and I was invited to participate in a 21 day trial.

The clinic was large and specially geared to running trials. Four were underway at the time and the guinea pigs all shared lounge

1. Adrienne Rich, ‘Taking Women Students Seriously’, ed. Arthur Eastman, *The Norton Reader, Sixth Edition, Shorter, ed* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), 194.

areas and recreational facilities (though our meals were segregated). I'd intended to keep to myself but the set up geared us to socialise. Everyone was anxious to account for the reasons that brought them to this means to make money. There were several post graduate students and I remember that one subject from my group was writing a screen-play so unusually was there for research purposes.

Anyway the trial underway was quite unusual, it was an investigation of unconsciousness and lucid dreaming. In the first week I had lengthy conversations with one doctor about dreams I'd had. There was lots of crude personality testing, one-on-one interviews with different specialists, and also group seminars about the process.

We were told that the research was highly experimental, safe, though physically very taxing, and that it pertained to studies of acute unconscious states. The way I remember it they hoped to aid the development of ways to communicate with comatose individuals, and potentially those suffering the horror of being locked-in. Essentially we were being placed in a state of medically induced unconsciousness, at a

point conducive to dreaming, and then by stimulating specific regions of the brain with different combinations of drugs the researchers hoped to both input and extract 'information'.

For about a week we were being monitored at night, and by day prepared for 12 days of intensive sleeping. Each night we were hooked up to a machine beside our beds. A nurse would apply electrodes to our heads, thumbs, and chest. Then after all the preparation, which had included really bizarre guidance in the art of dream manipulation, the drugs were finally administered.

And so I found myself spending these elastic, immeasurable stretches of time in a parallel world of my own making. It was rich, detailed, complex and peopled by my family, friends, and as many strangers as my 'real' life.

We were being kept asleep for 5 hours out of every 8, and as a result of this, or because of an intense identification with myself in my new world, or perhaps just as a side-effect of all the drugs, I found almost overnight the waking hours in the clinic became utterly dreary. The time dragged and I found the

isolation, the repetition, and the routine depressing. I grew to loathe most of the people there, staff and patients alike – that first flush of friendliness, of sharing, wore away. I spent most of my time alone waiting for the next sleep session and tracking the days until I could leave.

Spending these regular chunks of time completely alone I thought intensively about art as a viewer, as a developing practitioner, and also as someone who installed art in a museum for a living. I came to think, that as with this highly engrossing parallel world I was being repeatedly guided into, that art works, in order to have impact, to have any chance of impinging on the real world, had to compete with, to somehow out perform, our socially structured world by producing their own real. Initially, I simplistically thought that this entailed the production of an elaborate parallel world, like the work of the artist Matthew Barney. Very quickly I understood that it was more important that artworks spoke to versions of the real that were somehow sidelined. The real that was socially unacceptable or embarrassing, and so at that time I concerned myself with making work to do with the importance of uncertainty and failure.

Since then, I came to find that certain artworks can produce their own sense of what is real. They make a place in the world without always referring to back to it. They demand that we remake our understanding in order to contain them. They resist our efforts to do so. In so doing art works, frequently, painfully and pleasantly remind me that my present understanding is profoundly insufficient.

Artworks have to be a thing from which we can learn something, a place where we might find something new to think or a new way to think something previously thought.

At their best they can demand that our idea of real be reformulated to account for them, or, at least they can concretise a rationale which is never fully available.

To demand our engagement artworks need to be generous, to have some quality of beauty, however defined or experienced, a compelling aesthetic dimension which invites and sustains attention, and yet, can resist easy categorisation and exhaustion by metaphor, precluding the dogma of 'it is like this... it is about that...' , and the 'it reminds me of...'. This is an important quality because it enables both producer and viewer to engage in the pretence that somehow artworks are their own things.

Part 2:

Here I'm quoting my own work a little [2]... Before beginning an installation I rarely see an utterly empty gallery space. The work from the previous show may be wrapped and ready to go; a tool chest, a work-table, and perhaps a ladder may be present, as well as, more often than not, my own work awaiting attention. Still, it is easy to imagine empty galleries and even to imagine a gallery with these somehow neutral things in it, as empty. A gallery full of nothing can feel oppressively or thrillingly empty whilst it awaits the first pass of an installation. It is the placement of objects that will fill it with spaces.

There are metaphysical questions regarding the meeting of things and how this occurs. Questions including, is space an empty, objective container, or a system of relations? Whilst noting that the question of how matter meets is contentious, perhaps I can sidestep the issue, and argue that we need to consider that there is a distinction between space and nothing. And maybe this variance necessitates alternative means,

Room for a Rug,

Kerlin Gallery,
Dublin, 2012.

Image courtesy Isabel
Nolan. Photographer
Denis Mortell

2. Isabel Nolan, 'How do things meet', essay commissioned for 'A Macguffin and Some Other Things' an exhibition curated by Vaari Claffey, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2012.



be they poetic or scientific, to describe the spaces that keep things apart. Perhaps this difference, and the experience of it, should be considered in aesthetic terms?

Gaps, tensions, connections, and failures to fit appear when artworks are placed in a room. The empty spaces between works have properties in a way that *nothing* does not. These spaces can have an array of qualities – they may be exciting, welcoming, disturbing, or alienating. I am not for a second suggesting that empty rooms don't have character or atmosphere, rather that artworks make new spaces and collapse existing ones. These non-neutral objects project themselves into a room and give shape to the nothing between them.

In relation to this I think it important to note that there is a residual misapprehension that affects the reception of static, singular things: a hangover from the time that separateness was mistakenly understood to confer autonomy. This misapprehension leads people to treat artworks as representational, symbolic or semiotic entities, (that is, things 'to be read') but artworks should be responded to in terms of the agency they have, how they act in the world, and how they perform being themselves. Time, of course, is an important dimension in the performance of an artwork. Time understood spatially perhaps, (as a continuous present, where now is a word that names the sense we have of the existence of before and an after), rather than a linear progression of successive moments. After all the time of an artwork is not simply a history of process – an index of the labour involved in conceiving, producing it and looking at it – the artwork produces an experience of time contributing to the sense that the work has its own reality.

Part 3:

During the clinical trial the parallel world I lived in had certain unusual qualities. Oddly, still visual representations in any form: drawing, painting, sculpture did not exist. The medium of digital film was in use, although photography did not figure in its history. Language was the only means of understanding existence. I guess a kind of radical idealism pertained, because the

natural sciences were seen as occult, and attention to the external world was deemed of no value in the pursuit of knowledge.

The point being that it was a profoundly different world to this, and yet whilst I inhabited it these conditions were simply given and not strange. Most of the time my experiences in this other life were just like the kinds of dreams I had normally. Except that being supervised, drugged and prompted by clinicians, I was brought to the same dreamspace each time I slept.

A defining moment of my experience in the clinic occurred, when in my parallel life a friend was shot and died. I was utterly distraught. After just a few minutes, which unfolded in a nightmare of panic, tears and the arrival of an ambulance, my seemingly dead friend stood up. I was in a film set. It was a standard dream moment where everything is normal until suddenly reality breaks down.

Out of nowhere appeared cameras, crew and false walls. My panic grew as I could not understand what was happening. Minutes passed and I realised everyone around me had been acting. I frantically tried to explain that to me this had been real – I knew no other life and yet I was just a very minor character in a film about a person who was not my friend but another character. It was like 'The Shit Truman Show' – I was not the centre of conspiracy that would buffer me from encountering the real, I was delusional...

However we continually participate in shared illusions about the world – we agree upon conventions and social contracts to build meaningful narratives that give shape to our experience. Art is a means of escaping the constraints and daily obligations that we act as if life is meaningful. Art produces a reality that can be free from the necessity of having purpose or lending purpose to the world.

Conclusion:

In preparing to speak at a recent panel discussion on Speculative Realism, I was considering what might be the particular aspects of SR that were seductive to artists, what motivates us to embrace a new vocabulary for talking about the real? And I perceived what seems to be a hole in the fabric of correlationist philosophies. If all our experience of the world is authored by language, by our own consciousness, or by the society, history and ideology that have authored us, why does the world seem weird? Why do we often feel outside of that which the correlation, or just commonsense, names as real? I do not mean the specific experience of being an outsider, of being socially excluded, but rather the more intangible experience of feeling at a remove from any idea of what is real, of feeling outside of meaning.

Some artists go to extraordinary lengths to construct narratives which write the world in their own image, there are others who ambitiously try to improve the stories that shape the world because they hope to afford the chance to flourish to more people. For me the likelihood that life is inherently meaningless has always been, for better or worse, stimulating. It is a compelling possibility and one which, I think, welcomes art as a reality unto itself. A reality that shapes the space-time we share with it.

Like, I trust, many people, I am somehow embarrassed by my own existence, it is a matter of some anguish to find myself responsible for my presence in the world and faced with the impossibility of justifying why I am here at all. And whilst all that I have said here is part of an arsenal with which, resolutely, I defend the insistent

uselessness of my work as an artist, I sometimes wonder whether the work I make is a ludicrous attempt to atone for this shame, or if I am merely trying to displace attention onto a set of attractive and contingent signifiers. However my ambition is to find ways to work that reject the instrumentalisation of artistic practice. Because art as a vehicle for anguish is not interesting anymore, and the power of art does not rest with, or end with, what it signifies. Art works have a bearing in the world and they produce affective places where space and time is not just taken up but made.

'[Os Mentis] Mouth to Mouth' with Nicola Masciandaro

MOUTH

Edia Connoles & Scott Wilson – In association with Matt Beeching,
Mairtin Mac Con Iomaire, Kathy Tynan & Pat Zaidan

THE British playwright and wit Noel Coward once quipped that having to read a footnote was like having to go down stairs to answer the door while having sex; in fact, he didn't say 'having sex,' he said 'making love' [i]. As if to further cement this distinction, in expressing his own trepidation at tackling the subject of 'notes,' in his work *Paratext*, the literary theorist Gerard Genette described them as the 'mediocre attached to the beautiful' [ii]. '[O]ften so closely connected to a given detail of a given text,' for Genette, notes are 'crumbly, not to say dust-like' objects, with no autonomous significance; 'hence,' he suggests, 'our uneasiness in taking hold of them' [iii]. And yet 'there is,' for some, 'no line of narration more concrete than a stream of dust particles,' 'each... with it[s] unique vision of matter, movement, collectivity, interaction, affect, differentiation, composition and infinite darkness'; the annotations of a text, in this respect, form 'a crystallised data-base or a plot ready to combine and react, to be narrated on and through something' [iv].

This may well have been what Bruno Latour intended when he compared the un-annotated text to a child without an escort, 'walking at night in a big city, isolated, lost, anything can happen to it' [v]. For the latter 'the presence or absence of references, quotations and footnotes is so much a sign that a document is serious or not that you can transform a fact into a fiction or fiction into fact just by adding or subtracting' them [vi]. Implicit in Latour's position is the belief that the higher number of notes in a text, the greater the measure of its erudition [vii]. In a *Journal of Legal Education*, we read that "[A]cademically uncouth", as this assumption may be, it is a particularly common one for the unanointed: "Neophyte writers have a tendency to go for quantity [we learn]... The customary objective is 500 or more footnotes. Exceeding 500, [we are told], is a dramatic expression of footnote machismo"[viii]. Well, the reader will find nothing even close to '500' footnotes here, but even if

- i. See Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 69–70.
- ii. See Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 319; Genette actually says this in a footnote, and is quoting the French author Alain, who is in turn quoted in the *Petit Robert* dictionary: 'Hatred of notes,' we read here, 'is one of the most unchanging stereotypes of a certain anti-intellectual Poujadism (or sometimes dandyism). That had to be said in a note,' he notes, before offering the following definition of Poujadism: "[Poujadism] – after Pierre Poujade, who led a 1950s political movement supported mainly by small shopkeepers - is now a pejorative term connoting narrow-mindedness and negativism (*Petit Robert* dictionary)].'
- iii. Genette, *Paratexts*, 319.
- iv. Reza Negerestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 88.
- v. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 33.
- vi. Latour, *Science in Action*, 33.
- vii. Kenneth Lasson, 'Scholarship Amok: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure,' *Harvard Literary Review* Volume 103, 1990, 926, 937.
- viii. Joan Ames Magat, 'Bottomheavy Legal Footnotes,' *Journal of Legal Education* Volume 60 (2010), 65–66; Magat is quoting Arthur D. Austin, 'Footnotes as Product Differentiation,' *Vanderbilt Literary Review* Volume 40 (1987), 1131, 1141; Austin is in turn quoting Frederick C. Thorne, 'The Citation Index: Another Case of Spurious Validity' in *Journal of Clinical Psychology* Volume 77 (1977), 1157.



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she did I do not believe this to be an expression of bravado or masculinity, rather an act of love, of a loving commentary; whose etymology, as Nicola Masciandaro suggests, '(via *com-minisci*, to devise, invent) indicates the creativity of thinking *with* something'; like Latour's 'escort,' 'commentary is,' for Masciandaro, an 'homologous *amor fati*, that stays with its text gravitationally, remain[ing] faithful to it as what remains, as what it cannot depart from:'

Formally, commentary makes of a text, its earth, an orbis, a round world, by bringing text into space around it. A dwelling in and on the text ... [quoting Heidegger, from 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' he notes of how]... The work lets the earth be an earth... likewise [commentary] does not break its text, but preserves its integrity, shaping itself to it even in the midst of digging through it interlinearly and dwarfing, dominating it circumferentially [ix].

The acute observer will note immediately that with Caoimhe Doyle's design we have inverted this logic here, we have elevated the footnote. The text proper, what Christina Bok once described as 'consisting of nothing but a void – filled with the exegetical projection of our own imagination,' now forms the 'outside' [x]. To the

avid annotator this layout may recall Rabener's *Notes Without a Text*, a dissertation produced in the middle of the eighteenth century when enthusiasm for footnotes was at a peak. But rather than satirising academic values which saw at this time less merit in writing original work than in commenting on those of others, the appearance of the elevated annotation here refers only to itself as a kind of dream within a dream – a para-academic dream, co-existing in that moment at the DUST symposium when we drew our chairs closer to the speaker and bent forward: 'Now we're getting close to the good stuff, now we're getting to the heart of it' [xi].

Edia Connoles

- ix. Nicola Masciandaro, 'Becoming Spice: Commentary as Geophilosophy,' *Collapse* Volume VI (2010), 51, 35 (respectively).
- x. See Jenny Bouilly, *The Body: An Essay* (Essay Press: New York, 2002).
- xi. Magat, 'Bottomheavy Legal Footnotes,' 72; Magat is quoting Bruce Anderson, 'The Rise and Fall of the Footnote,' *Stanford Alumni Magazine* (January/February 1997), available at Stanford Alumni.Org: <http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/1997/janfeb/articles/footnotes.html> ; Anderson is in turn quoting G.W. Bowersock, 'The Art of the Footnote,' *The American Scholar* (Winter 1983/84), 59.

For NM: (the 'great man ... who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.') [1]

With him I speak mouth to mouth: and plainly,
and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord.

– Numbers (12:8) [2]

Teaching Augustine last night brought me across the cool expression 'mouth of the mind [os mentis]' which he uses to gloss the 'mouth to mouth' direct speaking with God in Numbers 12:8... I think the fun of connecting the os mentis formulation... is that it exposes the ingestive aspect of intellect ... Mind as mouth, consciousness as [...] an animated image of ingestion as metaphysical act, pointing to the sense in which eating is a being.

– Nicola Masciandaro [3]

Meanwhile, I learned a great deal, much too much... and as mentioned, from mouth to mouth... and I might as well at last begin to give you, my friends, a little taste of this philosophy, as much as I am permitted?

– Friedrich Nietzsche [4]

[After all...] It is wisdom to savor what is good.

– Bernard of Clairvaux [5]

With the speculative turn in philosophy there has been a surge of interest in mystical theology, of which Nicola Masciandaro is a leading exponent, and hence, the many studies arising from it, all strongly feature Nicola's thought. Rarely, however, do such studies attempt to present plainly the philosophical argumentation that underlies Nicola's work, and in the case of his own mystical writings such an understanding is particularly difficult to achieve because he notoriously eschews argumentation in favour of proclamatory exposition.

This paper is a prolegomena to a commentary on Nicola's work that would, following him, be infinite, that would be a work not so much 'on' him, but 'with' him in elaborating and embellishing his thought with ours and others, mouth to mouth. Before that, however, we have to try to locate ourselves in the philosophical tradition that informs his mysticism, the structures of thought and experience towards which his own is articulated. In particular here we focus on the Neoplatonic tradition exemplified by Dionysius.

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1993), 23; from the climactic sentence of Nicola Masciandaro's 'The Sweetness (of the Law),' available from: The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2013/01/the-sweetness-of-law.html> (accessed February 20, 2013); 'As much a law as not a law: the real principle of universal synthesis and sweetness (of the law), a sweet new style that is always invented by the few who are concerned only with what they *must* do, the "great man... who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."' In relation to Nicola's own 'Sweetness/sweetness,' it has been noted that 'In a world of cosmic personalism the "great men" theory of history is valid. Great men do produce historical discontinuities that are crucial. But they make these changes within a framework of historical continuity. They become crucial as pivotal characters precisely because there is a broad historical milieu which is ready to be pivoted. The "great man" is nothing without the "little men," past and present, who have participated in the development of the historical setting that at last makes a radical break with the past. The law of God is one important aspect of historical continuity. It is man's tool of dominion, and the measure by which man is either blessed or judged. It speaks to men in all eras because man is still made in God's image in all eras. Thus, it is true, as the French proverb says, that "the more things change, the more they stay the same." It is also true that as things stay the same – man's creaturehood, God's law – the more things are able to change. The radical discontinuity in a person's individual life is ethical: from death unto life, from the old creature to the new creature, from condemnation to blessing, from rebellion to obedience, from covenant: breaking to covenant-keeping. Without this discontinuity, every man stands condemned by the original discontinuity of Adam's ethical rebellion. Adam inaugurated a continuity of death by his act of rebellion. The continuity of spiritual death will otherwise prevail in each person's life apart from the discontinuity of regeneration'; Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh* (Tyler, Texas: The Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), 175-176. Elsewhere, we read: 'The products of putrefaction are to be traced to the Soul's inability to bring some other thing into being'; Nicola Masciandaro, 'WormSign,' available from: The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2011/01/wormsign.html> (accessed February 20, 2013).

2. The circumstance that God spoke to Moses not by dream or vision (12:6) but mouth to mouth (12:8) is adverted to as proof of the peculiar favor shown to Moses by God: God admitted him to an intimacy of intercourse he did not accord others. Still, even though Moses is thus distinguished, there is no distinction drawn between the revelations given through him and those given through other prophets in point either of Divinity or of authority. And beyond this we are told that we have no scriptural warrant to go on contrasting one mode of revelation (dreams or visions) with another (mouth to mouth). The etymological research into the Hebrew words – of which there were at least three: ro'eh/roeh, nabi/n'adi and hozeh/chozeh – representing 'prophet' (from Greek *prophetes*, from *pro* – 'before' or 'for,' and *phenai* – 'speak') in the Old Testament does, however, connote a definite difference, and accordingly a degree of heterogeneity in (grades of) prophecy (qua mystical vision; see below). Of all three Hebrew words, which are found in 1 CH 29:29: 'Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer (hozeh),' W. Graham Scroggie notes, 'Roeh means one who is taught in visions divinely brought, and is usually translated as "seer", that is, one who sees. Chozeh means one who beholds, who gazes, and is used constantly with reference to the prophetic vision. N'adi is from a verb which means "to cause to bubble up." This is the word most commonly used, and signifies "to pour forth words abundantly," from the divine prophets having been supposed to be moved rather by another's power than their own' (Gesenius); hence we read that "men sent by God spoke as they were impelled by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). So the N'adi is "the utterer of a divine message, one who conveys to his fellows truth otherwise hidden, and imparted to himself by God for them. He is, in short, the mouth of God's mind towards men (Findlay). It would seem that the same person are designated by all these words, the first two pointing to the prophets power of seeing the visions presented to them by God, and the last, from their function of revealing and proclaiming God's truth to man... This is pointedly illustrated by Exodus 4:16; 7:1, where Moses is seen to be the "mouth" of God to Aaron, and Aaron the "mouth" of Moses to the people ... The bearing of all this on the subject at hand must be apparent ... "How did they discern what was the will of God, under what conditions, and in what way did they receive divine communication?" A fairly exhaustive answer to these inquiries will be found in

Numbers 12:6-8 ... [Where] It will be observed that communications were by "visions," "dreams," and "mouth to mouth." Between the first two there is no precise distinction, but the third was a special mode of communication, and of rare occurrence.' See Scroggie, *Is The Bible The Word of God?* (Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Company, 1922), 25-26. See also Albert C. Knudson, *The Beacon Lights of Prophecy* (New York and Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1914), 2, 12 and 13, and Israel Zangwill, *The Voice of Jerusalem* (UK: The Macmillan Company, 1920-21), 68; Zangwill concurs with Scroggie that the Hebrew *nabi* means a mouthpiece; *roch* [and ...] *chozeh* a seer; the 'prophet' proclaimed the message given to him, as the 'seer' beheld the vision of God. Knudson notes that 'much stress has been laid upon an annotation found in i Sam. 9, 9, which originally belonged after verse u. We here read that "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a prophet was to beforetime called a Seer." From this it is inferred that the name "prophet" was not applied to Samuel in his own day. He was then called a seer. And it is true that he is to be distinguished from the members of the prophetic bands of his day. None of their wild frenzy belonged to him. He was a calm, clear-sighted man.' 12. On this note A.C. Spearing has stated that for the Middle Ages, it was the explicitly visionary element in Scripture that provided a major justification for a literature of dreams and visions; in citing Numbers 12:6-8 she says: 'This distinction between the two ways God speaks, either "in a vision, in a dream" (*in visione, ... per somnium*) or, very occasionally "mouth to mouth" (*are ad os*) and "not by riddles and figures" (*non per aenigmata et figuras*), was to be of great importance when the Fathers of the church came to discuss mystical experience as one kind of dream or vision ... [the] visions of St. Paul [II Corinthians 12:1-4] and St. John [Apocalypse 4:1-2] were to be taken as types of mystical experience by theological writers such as St. Augustine and St. Gregory'; Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 11-13; see also Jessica Barr, *Willing to know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

3. Personal communication over two emails, February 8, 2013 and February 15, 2013; Nicola is referring here to Book XII of Augustine's *On Genesis*: 'On the

Heavenly Paradise: different kinds of vision,' where, in having outlined three kinds of visions (or 'grades of prophecy,' apropos St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologica* II, 2, qu. clxxxiv) – bodily (with the eyes), spiritual (with the human spirit), and intellectual (with the attention of the mind), Augustine says of the third: 'There the glory of the Lord is to be seen, not through some significant vision, whether of the bodily kind such as was seen on Mount Sinai, or of the spiritual kind such as Isaiah saw or John in the Apocalypse, not in code but clearly, to the extent that the human mind can grasp it depending on God's grace as he takes it up, so that God may speak mouth to mouth with any whom he has made worthy of such conversation – the mouth of the mind not the body, which is how I consider we have to understand what is written about Moses [Numbers 12:8]; see *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 495. What is the relevance of all this for Nicola? Well, firstly, if we follow St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, qu. 12, art. 2, where he argues that God cannot be known in this life in His essence, but by his effects alone, the notoriety of mystics such as Nicola is that they maintain God can be known in His essence in this life, that the attainment of the union of the soul with God, however fleeting, is possible; 'Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance, my mind,' said Augustine, in his account of his first purely contemplative glimpse of the One Reality, 'arrived at That Which Is. Then indeed I saw Your *invisible things which are understood by the things that are made*; but I lacked the strength to hold my gaze [*nota bene, 'chozeh,* 'one who gazes'] fixed, and my weakness was beaten back again so that I returned to my old habits, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight and desire as for something of which I had caught a fragrance but which I did not yet have the strength to eat'; see Book VII. Cap. XVII in *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 133. Augustine's reference to eating God, here, brings us nicely to what Nicola calls, above, the 'ingestive aspect of intellect... pointing to the sense in which eating is a being.' Augustine's vision is an 'intellectual vision,' the third and highest kind, in which he beholds God with his mind, and more specifically with the 'mouth of the mind,' as he mentions apropos Moses. He wants to eat God but doesn't yet have the strength. How then does this point to the sense in which eating is a being? Well, it could be that eating is a being concreated in the mystical vision, in the union of the soul with God; as

Having said what this paper is, we may as well say what it is not. This paper is not, in its present capacity at least, an exposition of the Judaeo-Christian aspect of Nicola's thought. This is regrettable, because for Nicola, as for Dionysius, Moses is equally as important a figure as Plato. Two 'ascents' prefigure their mysticism: the allegory of the philosophers ascent to wisdom in Plato's *Republic* 7., and Moses' ascent to a 'dark cloud' on Mount Sinai in Exodus (19:18-19) [6]. In both we find ascent to the darkness of excessive light, and in both a return to an opposed darkness of ignorance.

'Light is darkness, knowing is unknowing, a "cloud," and the pain of contemplating it, is the pain of contemplating more reality than can be borne: "Man may not see me and live (Exodus 33:20)"' [7]. Mystical sorrow is the sorrow of being, then, [8] 'more than a feeling, it is the live form of the refusal of the principle of Reason whereby the absolute is alone thinkable,' or as Nicola notes after Bonaventure, 'this sorrow is the gemitus cordis [groaning of the heart] that is the essential double of the fulgor speculationis [brilliance of speculation] whereby mind is deliriously led beyond itself' [9].

The entire vision of reality articulated here arises from the single fundamental principle that to be is to be intelligible. This, Parmenides Law, gives rise to what Nicola terms 'Exhibit X: the folly of thinking that thought can pass beyond itself yet remain the correlate of oneself, [this is] the lie of all critique of correlationism that does not attack the correlation itself, the real -ism: you' [10].

And so, at the end of this paper, in an homage to Nicola Masciandaro, and 'in order to really fuck the passions of finitude,' we will invite you to 'weaponise the correlation, to behead your being-in-the-world' [11]. After all, speculation alone is not sufficient, 'Better to study than to be ignorant. Better to feel than to study. Better to experience than to feel. Better to become than to experience...' [12]. 'Enter then into this () hole' [13].

This (), the largest of the breaches in the sheath that protects your body. This (), the principal material incorporator of the outside world. This (), the last defence, the point at which the *critical decision of incorporation occurs* [14].

MOUTH

Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name. It is and it is as no other being is. Cause of all existence, and therefore itself transcending existence, it alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is.

– Dionysius, *Divine Names* [15]

But I am a worm, and no man.

– Psalm 22 [16]

How to express the otherness of the divine in human language was the central question that exercised the Pseudo-Dionysius. How to weaponise the speculation that the Thearchy [17] is ontologically transcendent; beyond being, substance, and knowledge, and at the same time, the Cause of everything that exists [18]. 'For It is above every essence and life,' he writes, 'No light, indeed, expresses Its character, and every description falls short of Its similitude... we rightly express its non-relationship to things created, but we do not know its super-essential, and inconceivable, and unutterable, indefinability' [19].

As Enrica Ruaro has suggested, in scholarly discussions of this question the *via negativa* or path of negation is seen as the principal means by which Dionysius weaponises this speculation [20]. In his *Mystical Theology*, key to this methodology, he writes:

The Cause of all is above all and is not in-existent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. [Nor is it...] soul or mind. [It does not...] possess imagination, conviction, speech or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality... It has no power, nor is it power... It does not live nor is it life. It is not substance, nor is it eternity or time. It is not wisdom... spirit... sonship... fatherhood... Darkness and light, error and truth – it is none of these [21].

For Dionysius, it is *more true* to say that God is not, rather than God is, because 'being,' 'that which is,' necessarily means 'that which is available to thought'; thought is always the apprehension of some being, and since God is 'beyond being,' he is beyond intellection [22]. God is precisely *unthinkable* to us

Nicola notes after Plotinus 'Contemplation (*theoria* [which, we can add here, is linked to the 'gaze,' *chozeh*; the one who beholds *qua* 'speculation']) and its object constitute a living thing, a Life, two inextricably one'; see Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna (New York: Burdett, 1992), 3.8.8., as cited in Nicola's commentary on Stephen Shakespeare, 'Of Plications: A Short Summa On The Nature Of Cascadian Black Metal,' in *Glossator* Vol. 6, Black Metal, eds. Nicola Masciandaro and Reza Negerastani, available from: Glossator.org, <http://glossator.org/> (last accessed February 23, 2013). For instance, both Augustine and St. Thomas agree that it is said in the person of God: *No man shall see me and live* (Exodus, xxxiii, 20). Augustine addresses this in addressing Paul's rapture (2 Cor 12:2-4), when, in acknowledging the certainty that he was indeed 'snatched up to the third heaven,' he addresses Paul's uncertainty, apropos different grades of prophecy or mystical vision, about the nature of alienation from the body when this happened: 'whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows,' Augustine will go on to say: 'whether it left his body totally and simply dead or whether while the soul was in some way still there animating his living body, his mind was torn away to see or rather hear the *inexpressible words* (2 Cor 12: 4) of that vision'; see Augustine, *On Genesis*, 469-470. As Nicola has noted on the ontology of *theoria*/contemplation apropos *chozeh*/*hozeh*: the 'one who beholds,' who 'gazes,' such vision is the *telos* of all speculation: '*visio sine comprehensione*, as Cusa defines it,' or as we read elsewhere: 'Seeing more than is comprehended – cf. Levinas' thought "which thinks more than itself" – is precisely... vision without comprehension, [it is] speculation' ... 'It is the opening of reality measured by the space of the eclipse of *what* by *that* [and since ...] "The process of perception ... runs parallel to the process of creation, ... the reversing of the process of perception without obliterating consciousness amounts to realising the nothingness of the universe as a separate entity"'"; see Nicola Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation,' available from: The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2012/07/absolute-secrecy-on-infinity-of.html> (accessed February 10, 2013), and Stephen Shakespeare, 'Of Plications: A Short Summa On The Nature Of Cascadian Black Metal,' in *Glossator* Vol. 6, 36.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Section 9: What is Noble? Aphorism no. 295, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, eds. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 360-361: 'Meanwhile I learned much, all too much more about this god's philosophy and, as mentioned, from mouth to mouth – I, the last disciple and initiate of the God Dionysus, may now be finally allowed to begin to give you, my friends, a little taste, as much as I am permitted, of this philosophy?' In the post-*Zarathustra* period Nietzsche increasingly identifies with this Greek god-philosopher, even signing his letters, 'Dionysus,' in his last half-mad months of lucidity. His use of the 'mouth to mouth' formulation is fortuitous here as it suggests the extent to which prophecy is by no means a simple phenomenon. As Knudson has noted in relation to the historicity of prophecy, 'we may distinguish the rank and file of the prophetic order... [OT] prophets come into special prominence at two important crises of the nations history during the Philistine wars of the eleventh century and the Syrian wars of the ninth century. But they are frequently referred to by the canonical prophets, and appear as late as the time of Nehemiah (6. 10-14). It is probable, then, that they formed a continuous institution in Israel, at least from the eleventh century before Christ down into the postexilic period. Groups or bands of prophets first appear in the time of Samuel (i Sam. 10. 5-13). They then apparently moved about the country devoting themselves to a rather extravagant type of religious life. They carried musical instruments with them, and by means of music and song seem to have worked themselves up into a state of frenzy. Indeed, so conspicuous a feature of their life was this physical excitement that they were called madmen (2 Kings 9. n; Hos. 9. 7), and the verb "prophecy" came to be used in the sense of "rave" (i Sam. 18. 10). They were thus ecstasies, resembling to a certain extent modern dervishes and the ancient Greek worshippers of Dionysus. They also bore some resemblance to the prophets of Baal in i Kings 18. 25-29. The latter fact has led to the theory that prophecy was not an independent institution in Israel but was borrowed from the Canaanites. In support of this view it is claimed that the Hebrew word for "prophet," nabi, was of foreign origin. But this claim is without adequate foundation. There is, it is true, no verbal root in Hebrew from which nabi could have been derived; but this is also true of many other Hebrew words ... which no one thinks of regarding as loan-words. Then, too, the name nabi is applied to a number of persons before the time of Samuel, such as Abraham (Gen. 20. 7, 17), Moses (Deut. 34. 10), Miriam (Exod. 15. 20), and Deborah (Judg. 4. 4). This does not necessarily

(indeed, Eruigena would go so far as to say God is unthinkable even to Himself) [23].

The doctrine that God is beyond being, and beyond thought, is not an ungrounded starting point or doctrine of faith for Dionysius, but rather the conclusion of a rigorous sequence of philosophical reasoning that began with Parmenides [24]. In first making

mean that these persons were called prophets in their own time. We may have here simply the view of a later writer [see above footnote on this point], 2-3. On Knudson's point that Israeli prophets were ecstasies that resembled to a certain extent modern dervishes and the ancient Greek worshippers of Dionysius, he later notes that prior to the time of Samuel prophecy had, in Israel, been confined to individuals; 'Here and there a person was seized with the Spirit of God (compare Judg. 5. 12; 6. 34; 14. 6, 19). But in the time of Samuel whole groups of men were thus affected. The prophetic spirit became contagious,' 3. Knudson then notes that the reason for this new development was probably the national and religious crisis brought about by the victories of the Philis times: the ark had been captured, Shiloh desecrated, and the land in a large part subdued,' 3. While this is fascinating, what is of particular interest here is the nature of prophecy in relation to what Knudson identifies as its contagion, insofar as this further suggests the extent to which prophecy is by no means a simple phenomenon, but contains different and discordant elements, that are to a certain extent pan-historical. Hence in the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was able to say: 'Either through the influence of the narcotic drink, of which the hymns of all aboriginal humans and peoples speak, or with the invigorating springtime's awakening that fills all nature with passion, these Dionysian impulses find their source, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete loss of self-recognition. Even in the German Middle Ages singing and dancing crowds, ever increasing in number, moved from place to place under this same Dionysian impulse... There are people who, from the lack of experience or thick-headedness, turn away from such manifestations as from "folk-diseases," mocking or with pity derived from their own sense of a superior health. But of course these poor people have no idea how corpse-like and ghostly their so-called "health" looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian swarm buzzes past them; see Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* from the Spirit of Music, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, 45. Consider what is given by Zangwill in relation to Jeremiah, the 'greatest of OT prophets,' as the definitive definition or 'scientific diagnosis' of prophecy proper: 'He is mocked and derided and there is upon him the fear of even graver persecution. Nevertheless, "If I say I will not make mention of Him/Nor speak any more in His name/Then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire/Shut up in my bones./And I weary myself to hold it in,/But cannot."' , 68. Is it not the same mystical sorrow and holy foolishness unfolding here, 'visible and readable' in all its social dramas, that we find in the time of Symeon, for example, who, in having spent a number of years in the desert, fasting, praying, and through silence separating himself from all earthly bonds, decided to return to the city in order to "mock the world" (e)mpaizw – to ridicule, make dance, make fun of; or that we find in the Middle Ages, in Margery of Kempe's uncontrollable sobbing, for example: 'so loud and wondrous full that it made the pepyl astonyd'? See Andrew Thomas, *The Holy Fools: A Theological Enquiry* (PhD: University of Nottingham, 2009); see also Nicola Masciandaro, 'Eros as Cosmic Sorrow,' in *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1-2 (March/June 2009), pp.59-103; and *The Book of Margery of Kempe*, trans. Lynn Stanley (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 50.

5. *Sapientia Sapor Boni*. 'Perhaps *sapientia*, that is wisdom, is derived from *sapor*, that is taste, because, when it is added to virtue, like some seasoning, it adds taste to something which by itself is tasteless and bitter ... For in nothing is the victory of wisdom over malice more evident than when the taste for evil – which is what malice – is purged away, and the mind's inmost task senses that it is deeply filled with sweetness'; see Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Irene Edmonds, 4 vols. (Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 85:8-9, IV.204-5, as cited in Nicola Masciandaro, 'The Sweetness (of the Law).' As Nicola states here, 'the deep logical connection between the gustatory and the elective is shown in IE root *gens*: to taste, chose (origin of both *choose* and *gustus*). As knowledge proceeds via discrimination, so is pleasure or disgust also a choice. The horizon of knowledge is governed by the ethics of taste.' Nicola's entire oeuvre, is, to borrow his words, moved 'toward realising the profound relation between wisdom and taste, *sapientia* and *sapor*, according to which truth is always a matter of discriminating for and through oneself the difference between good and bad, a process of tasting or providing its *right flavour*,' or as we read elsewhere: "'The Psalmist says ... *Taste and see*. *Taste* refers to the affectus of love; see refers to the intellect's cogitation and mediation. Therefore one ought first to surge up in the movement of love *before* intellectually pondering ... For this is the general rule in Mystical Theology: one ought to have practice before theory. For *this* is what you do anyway'; see Nicola Masciandaro, 'The Severed Hand: Commentary and Ecstasy,' in *English Language Notes* 50.2 Fall/Winter 2012, 96.

explicit the idea of being as intelligible, Parmenides had said that one 'could not know that which is not, for it is impossible, nor [could one] express it; for the same thing is for thinking and being' [25]. In establishing this correlation it necessarily followed that to think non-being would be to have no object or content for thought, to be not thinking anything, and hence not to be thinking. If we trace the development of this reasoning down through Plato to Plotinus we witness the birth of the via negative in negative or apophatic theology (from Greek *apophatikos* meaning 'negative,' from *apophasis*: 'denial,' from *apo* – 'other than' and *phanai* – 'speak,' intending (knowledge of God) obtained through negation) [26]. According to which, to think or refer to the divine One at all is, inevitably, to treat it as some being. For even in thinking and saying it is 'not this,' we are precisely thinking and saying it is 'not this,' thought and language can deal only with beings. To say that the One is 'not this' is also, inescapably, to think it as something else; not as multiple and complex but as unitary and simple, because even the term 'One,' as Plotinus points out, 'contains only a denial of multiplicity' [27]. And so, in the end, we must negate even such negative definitions, including the name 'One' itself, because all language represents conceptual definition and intellectual apprehension. The profundity of this statement arises from the fact that it would seem, as Paullina Remes puts it, 'unity must be connected to a first principle [for Plotinus]' [28]. But he himself says that 'if the One – name and reality expressed – were to be taken positively, it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all; for perhaps this name was

given it [he suggests], in order that the seeker, beginning from this, which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well' [29].

Geniune apophasis consists then, for Plotinus, not in any words or thoughts whatsoever, however negative or superlative, but

6. See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7-18. See also William Johnston, 'Moses the Mystic' in *The Wounded Stag* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 24-35. For this synthesis in Dionysius' work, see especially the *Mystical Theology* 1000D-1001A in, for example, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 137. For this synthesis in Nicola's work, see especially 'Secret: No Light Has ever Seen the Black Universe,' available from: The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2012/04/secret-no-light-has-ever-seen-black.html> (accessed February 20, 2013).

7. Turner, 18. Turner is citing Exodus (33:20). St. Thomas notes, 'If the connatural dependence of our understanding on phantasms prevents us in this life from understanding other pure spirits, much less can we in this life see the divine essence, which transcends all angels. Of this fact the following may also be taken as an indication: The higher our mind is raised to the contemplation of spiritual things, the more it is abstracted from sensible things: but the final terminus to which contemplation can possibly arrive is the divine substance: therefore the mind that sees the divine substance must be totally divorced from bodily senses, either by death or by some rapture. Hence it is said in the person of God: No man shall see me and live (Exodus, xxxiii, 20); *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. J. Rickaby (London: Burns and Oates, 1905), 216. See also Johnston on this point, he says 'A solid theological tradition, rooted in Exodus itself, states unhesitatingly that Moses did not see God. His audacious prayer to see God's glory meets with a clear refusal [... Exodus 33:19-20]. The Lord then comes down in a cloud; Moses is filled with awe as the Lord passes before him; but the face of God he does not see. And this scene finds an echo in the fourth gospel which firmly declares that "no one has ever seen God ..." (John 1:18)... In his ... study, *Western Mysticism*, Edward Cuthbert Butler... maintains that the tradition that neither Moses nor anyone else sees the face of God is firmly grounded throughout Christian theology. However, the other theory, that Moses and Paul enjoyed a fleeting vision of God, is found in Augustine and Thomas... Augustine based his claim principally on the text of Numbers that God spoke to Moses "mouth to mouth" ... Edward Cuthbert Butler rightly says that this text (like others stating that God spoke to Moses face to face) says nothing about the beatific vision... "In the face of ... biblical evidence [Cuthbert Butler says], and of the grave philosophical difficulties involved, it may well be thought that but for St. Augustine's ill-founded speculation, accepted and endorsed by St. Thomas, the idea of the vision of God's essence by any man would not have found a place in the theological tradition"; our emphasis [St. Thomas himself says: 'Further, the Lord said to Moses: "I speak to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord" (Numbers 12:8); but this is to see God in His essence. Therefore it is possible to see the essence of God in this life. *Praeterea, Num. XII dicit dominus de Moyse, ore ad os loquor ei, et palam, et non per aenigmata et figuras, videt Deum. Sed hoc est videre Deum per essentiam. Ergo aliquis in statu huius vitae potest Deum per essentiam videre.* St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* XI-XIII l^a q. 12 a. 11 arg. 2; leaving Cuthbert Butler behind, Johnston then goes on to say] The old Theologians were fascinated by the picture of Moses entering the darkness. Remember how God came down in a thick cloud. Sinai was wrapped in smoke. "And the people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (Exodus 20:21). In his *Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa, watching Moses enter the thick darkness, claims that [... he] did have a direct vision of God, a knowledge which is ignorance. Graphically he describes how the mind (the mind of Moses or any mystic) travels beyond all sensible seeing, beyond all imaginative seeing, beyond all understanding and reasoning until it sees *God in darkness*," Johnston concludes via Nyssa and St. John of the Cross that we see God through 'faith', and that in 'naked faith this dark vision of God is filled with mystical suffering,' 31-32.

8. This is obviously an over-simplification due to time/space constraint here in the introduction, see rather Masciandaro, 'Eros as Cosmic Sorrow,' particularly pp. 81-82,

and in relation to what follows: 'This sorrow leads to the joy, not of enclosure, but of escape, identified by Levinas as "the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that I [moi] is oneself [soi-meme].'" Yet the *Clouds* sorrower does not break out of self into anything, a new container, but is rather purely opened from within via the very ecstasy of escape, via becoming "abil to reeseive that joye, the whiche revith fro a man all wetyng and felyng of his beyng" (44. 1560-61).'

9. Nicola Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.' Masciandaro is referring to the prologue of the *Itinerarium* here, where Bonaventure invites the reader of the work to enter upon it with a deep longing, with prayerfulness, and with the groanings of inner man, 'so that he may not believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy ... knowledge without love ... or reflection without divinely inspired wisdom,' see *Bonaventure – The Souls Journey Into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 55-56.

10. Nicola Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

11. Nicola Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

12. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

13. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

14. This is our variant on a statement made by Paul Rozin in 'Food is Fundamental, Fun, Frightening, and Far Reaching' in *Social Research* 66 (1999), 9-30. In "'Truly the Ear Tests Words as the Palate Tastes Food (Job 12:11)": Synaesthetic Food Metaphors for the Experience of the Divine in the Jewish Tradition,' Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus situates Rozin's statement in a discussion of Job (12:11, above), and says 'when Job compares the palate's tasting of food to the ear's testing words, he's referring precisely to this sort of "critical decision" whether or not to incorporate his friends words, to take them intimately to his heart.' We similarly cite (a variant of) Rozin's statement here in the context of Nicola's work, as a figurative aside to what he calls above the 'ingestive aspect of intellect.' Brumberg-Kraus' text is available from: Wheaton College.edu, <http://wheatoncollege.edu/faculty/files/2011/07/Brumberg-Kraus2009.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2013).

15. CHI (588b). This translation is from Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

16. Psalm 22 (21:) 6.

17. This term is used by Dionysius to define the divine unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for a discussion of the term see Enrica Ruaro, 'God and the Worm: The Twofold Otherness in Pseudo Dionysius's Theory of Dissimilar Images,' in *American Catholic Quarterly* (Vol. 82, No. 4, 2008), fl, 581.

18. See Ruaro, 581; Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 5-34; Dermot Moran, 'Neoplatonic and

Negative Theological Elements in Anselm's Argument for the Existence of God in the Proslogion' in *Pensees De L' < Un > Dans L'Histoire De La Philosophie*, Jean-Marc Narbonne and Alfons Reckermann, eds. (Laval: Laval University Press, 2004), 199-202.

19. CH II, 3 (140B-141A). This translation is from John Parker, *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 2 vols. (London: James Parker, 1897-1899).

20. Ruaro, 582.

21. MT: CH IV, V (1040D - 1045D); Parker translation.

22. Perl, 6 - 34.

23. Moran, 200. See John Scotus Eruigena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae [On the Division of Nature])*, eds. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and Edouard A. Jeanneret, trans. John. J. O'Meara, 4 vols. (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999-2009), IV.73.

24. Perl, 5-16.

25. Parmenides, fr. 2.7-8 and fr.3 in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 7th ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954), 1:231, as cited in Perl, 117; Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides [1942-43]* trans. Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojewicz (Bloomington and Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), available from: Internet Archive, http://archive.org/stream/Heideggerparmenides1942-1943/Heidegger-Parmenides_djvu.txt (accessed February 10, 2013).

26. We follow Perl's argument here; Perl's *Theophany* is the culmination of more than twelve years of research into the Neoplatonic thought of Dionysius; taken together with that of Plotinus and Proclus, as *philosophy*, not 'mysticism,' if that be taken to mean something other than philosophy, i.e. as a rationally justified, coherent account of the nature of reality.

27. As cited by Perl, 12.

28. Paulina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 38.

29. Perl, 12; Contra Vladimir Losky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 31, Perl notes in an aside of how in refusing to attribute to God the properties which make up the matter of affirmative theology, Dionysius was aiming expressly at the Neoplatonist definitions: 'He is neither One, nor Unity'; and that in negating the name 'One' Dionysius is simply following the precepts of Plotinus here. See Perl, 117.

30. As cited by Perl, 12-13.

31. DN 1.5, 593C; Parker translation.

32. DN 1.4, 592 CD; Parker translation.

33. MT 1.3, 1001A; Parker translation.

34. MT III.1, 1033C; Parker translation.

35. MT I. 2, 1000C; Luibheid, translation.

36. Perl, 14.

37. Perl, 14. Perl specifically says: 'A "God" who either is or is not anything at all, who could be grasped by thought whether positively or negatively, would not be God but a being, and as such finite and created.' Perl refers here to a comparable reading available from John Jones, which is interesting in relation to our translation taken from Luibheid below; see Jones, 'The Ontological Difference for St. Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius,' in *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 119-32, and idem, 'A Non-Entitative Understanding of Being and Unity: Heidegger and Neoplatonism,' *Dionysius* 6 (1982), 94-10.

38. Ep. 5, 1065A; Perl's translation. Luibheid's translation reads quite differently: 'It is in this sense that one says of the divine Paul that he knew God, for he knew that God is beyond every act of mind and every way of knowing. He says too that "inscrutable are his ways and unsearchable his judgements," that "his gifts are inexpressible," and that "his peace passes all understanding," for he found him who is beyond all things and he knew, in a way surpassing any conception that the cause of all surpasses all,' 265-266. This Epistle opens with a discussion of 'divine darkness,' as that "unapproachable light" where God is said to live. Nicola and Eugene Thacker based a symposium on this concept of 'divine darkness' in the context of Francois Lauruelle's Non-philosophy, called 'Dark Nights of the Universe,' which was held in NY, in 2012; details are available from: Recess, <http://www.recessart.org/activities/5136> (last accessed February 10, 2013). Thacker also presented a paper on 'Divine Darkness' at the 'Dark Materialism' conference, sister to the BMT Symposium 'Melancology,' held in 2012, it is available from: The Backdoor Broadcasting Company, <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/01/eugene-thacker-divine-darkness/> (accessed February 10, 2013).

39. Nicola Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation,' available from: The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2012/07/absolute-secrecy-on-infinity-of.html> (accessed February 10, 2013).

40. John Scotus Eruigena, *Periphyseon* IV.73.

41. As cited by Perl, 12.

42. Plotinus says "phuge monou pros monon" (Enneads 6.9.11) [the flight of the alone to the Alone], as cited by Masciandaro in "Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation." Masciandaro's translation would seem to be derived from either Plotinus Enneads in *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O'Brien, or *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna; See footnotes (36) in WormSign. Masciandaro notes that these are Plotinus's 'dying words.'

43. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

44. Exodus 3:14. Though we have inverted the punctuation here, Masciandaro's term 'whatless that,' is, as we show here, drawing on a translation of the response God used when Moses asked for his name: 'I Am that I Am.'

45. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

46. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation'. We have unjustly condensed Masciandaro's text here, it specifically says, in the lead up to this statement: '... the exacerbated actuality of the mystical subject is not an effect of visionary

in the absolute silence of the mind: 'if you want to grasp the isolated and Alone,' he says, 'you will not think' [30]. Far more specifically, Dionysius, who adopts this doctrine from Plotinus, and whose thought can be understood only in this context, says, that the union of minds with the One takes place 'in the cessation of every intellectual activity,' [31] and that 'ceasing from our intellectual activities we throw ourselves into the ray beyond being as far as possible' [32]. Similarly, in the *Mystical Theology*, he explains that we are united with the altogether unknown 'in the inactivity of every knowledge,' [33] and that 'entering into the darkness above intellect we find not little speech but complete non-speech and non-intellection' [34]. '[F]or it has neither word nor act of understanding,' as we read in another translation, 'and it is made manifest only to those who leave behind every... light,... voice,... word, and who plunge into the darkness where dwells the One who is beyond all things' [35].

As the repeated references to the cessation or absence of thought, *qua* abandonment here, indicate, this is not 'mere mystical hyperbole, or an attempt to articulate some sublime experience,' but rather the strictly philosophical consequence of the correlation between being and intelligibility, from which it necessarily follows that to think non-being would be to have no object or content for thought, to be not thinking anything, and hence not to be thinking [36]. As long as any speaking or thinking is taking place we are necessarily in the realm of beings, and being, and hence are not attaining to God. A 'God,' incidentally, who either is or is not anything at all, who could be perceived or grasped by thought, whether positively or

experience, but its content as it were – a virtual virtual whose realness is infinitely in excess of all presence. The mystical secret is one's identity with the immanent hiddenness of secret itself in its radically literal sense of something set apart, severed, disjoined (*secret* is substantive of the verb *secerno*). Mystical vision is the unitary realisation of oneself as *radical actuality*, a pure actuality or absolute individuation, the infinite haecceity of nothing/everything, next to which one's person is necessarily an indivisible division – as figured in Dionysius's legendary cephalophory, a perfect emblem of the non-difference between individuation and the divine *actus purus* if there ever was one. In one direction, mystical vision secrets the subject, unites it with the Hidden. As John of the Cross says, "we call mystical wisdom 'secret' – and it is actually so – because it has the characteristic of hiding the soul within itself ... so engulf[ing] souls in its secret abyss that they have the keen awareness of being brought into a place far removed from every creature." In the other direction, mystical vision hacks open the subject, evaporates and airs it into the limitless open of perfect, primordial actuality, a totally simple and unimaginably flat place, not of profound wisdom, but of sublime stupidity, the instant, dumb, unquestionable intelligence with which Dionysius's corpse rises and picks up his head. "Tunc erigens se sancti viri corpus exanime, apprehendit propriis manibus sanctum caput abscissum" [Raising itself, the lifeless body of the holy man then grasped with his own hands the sacred severed head]. The stupidity of which the philosopher accuses mysticism is his ownmost, disregarded stupidity, his deferred intoxication whose literally returning repression is the post-conference drink. This stupidity, "the very stone which the builders rejected" (1 Peter 2:7; Ps. 118.22), is the cornerstone of mystical intelligence. This intelligence, the real intelligence of intelligence, is the actuality of a knowledge that surpasses memory, of a pleasure that surpasses its object. The "custom of such Souls," says Marguerite Porete, "is to understand much and to forget quickly . . . and she is inebriated not only from what she has drunk, but very intoxicated and more than intoxicated from what she never drinks nor will ever drink." As though foreign to it, absolutely foreign. I am not an alien, but something stranger still, an insider whose essence is to actually be a virtual absolute outsider. The hellishly real impossibility that you are you is the true stupidity according to which the absolute is alone thinkable.'

47. Psalm 22 (21): 6.

48. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.' Masciandaro provides a full break-down and translation of the extended commentary on this Psalm: 'John Scotus Eriugena comments Psalm 22.6: 'For none of the material things in nature is more lowly than the worm, which is conceived from simple earth. Nevertheless, through this is represented

the incarnation of the Word of God, which transcends every sense and intellect [Phil 4.7]. 'Who will explain his begetting?' [Acts 8.33, from Isa 53.8, cf. Augustine, Expositions of the Psalms: 'In what sense "no man"? Because he is God. Why then did he so demean himself as to say "worm"? Perhaps because a worm is born from flesh without intercourse, as Christ was from the Virgin Mary. A worm, and yet no man. Why a worm? Because he was mortal, because he was born from flesh, because he was born without intercourse. Why "no man"? Because In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; he was God (Jn 1.1)'] It can also be understood thus: 'I am a worm and a human is not,' that is, I am a worm and human is not a worm. As if he were to say, I who am more than a human penetrate the secrets of all nature, as a worm [penetrates] the bowels of the earth, which no one participating only in human nature can do. With the sense agrees that which is written in another Psalm, 'and my substance in the depths of the earth [PS 139.15], that is, and my substance, which is wisdom in itself, subsists in the depths of the earth, that is, the innermost folds of created nature. 'For the divinity beyond being is the being of all.' Thus the worm that penetrates the hidden things of all creation is the Wisdom of the Father, which, while human, transcends all humanity (Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy).' See also, for second reference: Nick Land, *Thirst for Annihilation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 93-94. Herewith Land, (punctuation ours – with particular reference to Masciandaro's closing-remarks in 'WormSign' outlined below):

'God savours Himself, says Eckhart. This is possible, but what He savours is, it seems to me, the hatred which He has for Himself, to which none, here on Earth, can be compared (could I say: this hatred is time, but that bothers me. Why should I say time? ... Why should anyone be interested in time? I cannot imagine. The scrawniness of an arm, a finger, an enigma of a face; these things (hurt). Time, on the contrary, is as vacant as a marriage, or God alone in the dark', 94.

Of importance to the proposed relevance of [God's hatred toward] time in Land, here – and with specific reference to Masciandaro's Neoplatonism – is Woodard's dark vitalism, which occurs over and through time, in *Slime Dynamics* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2012):

'Summed up, for Deleuze, Guattari, Bergson and Merleau Ponty, vitalism cannot be a thing (since gene are what is passed on, not life itself) and it cannot be a force because it says nothing about life itself as a force, only that it develops but not how. What all the aforementioned critiques leave out is Time as something beyond thought which is the force of vitalism (life emerges over time) and the substance of vitalism is not the germ plasm trumping heredity but space as it is filled with life,' 9.

'Vitalism, as it has been articulated here, is a minimalist metaphysics which operates on reality by way of

following an ontological cascade mirroring the cosmological procession of forces and matter. At the root of this vitalism is the forces of forces following from an original One, a One not as pure unification but the possibility of 'isness' itself stemming from the original explosion of time and space as well as from the resulting emanations, immanences, emergences and transcendences. That is, vitalism is a mental shadow of the progression of the universe, from the speculative moment before the Big Bang, as highly condensed mass, to its extension into time and space and matter, to biological life, and finally to reflective thinking. The above mentioned ontological cascade moves (in philosophical terms) from the Real, to Materiality, to Sense, and finally to Extelligence. Or, put in terms of the levels of possibility, to the configurations of matter and energy, to the interaction of stimulus and sense, ending with the extension of ontic being via symbols, structures, technologies et cetera. The degenerate take on vitalism and the Neo-platonic One will be taken together as a dark vitalism,' 10.

49. 'A few remarks must be made on this subject. The body of a large worm consists of from 100 to 200 almost cylindrical rings or segments, each furnished with minute bristles. The muscular system is well developed. Worms can crawl backwards as well as forwards, and by the aid of their affixed tails can retreat with extraordinary rapidity into their burrows. The mouth is situated at the anterior end of the body, and is provided with a little projection (lobe or lip, as it has been variously called) which is used for prehension. Internally, behind the mouth, there is a strong pharynx...which is pushed forwards when the animal eats, and this part corresponds, ... with the protrudable trunk or proboscis of other annelids. The pharynx leads into the oesophagus, on each side of which in the lower part there are three pairs of large glands, which secrete a surprising amount of carbonate of lime. These calciferous glands are highly remarkable, for nothing like them is known in any other animal. Their use will be discussed when we treat of the digestive process. In most of the species, the oesophagus is enlarged into a crop in front of the gizzard.

This latter organ is lined with a smooth thick chitinous membrane, and is surrounded by weak longitudinal, but powerful transverse muscles. Perrier saw these muscles in energetic action; and, as he remarks, the trituration of the food must be chiefly effected by this organ, for worms possess no jaws or teeth of any kind. Grains of sand and small stones, from the 1/20 to a little more than the 1/10 inch in diameter, may generally be found in their gizzards and intestines. As it is certain that worms swallow many little stones, independently of those swallowed while excavating their burrows, it is probable that they serve, like mill-stones, to triturate their food. The gizzard opens into the intestine, which runs in a straight course to the vent at the posterior end of the body. The intestine presents a remarkable structure, the typhlosolis, or, as the

old anatomists called it, an intestine within an intestine; and Claparede has shown that this consists of a deep longitudinal involution of the walls of the intestine, by which means an extensive absorbent surface is gained... The circulatory system is well developed. Worms breathe by their skin, as they do not possess any special respiratory organs. The two sexes are united in the same individual, but two individuals pair together. The nervous system is fairly well developed; and the two almost confluent cerebral ganglia are situated very near to the anterior end of the body.'

See Charles Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, available from: Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1448720 (accessed February 10, 2013).

50. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

51. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

52. Psalm 78 (:65); this is one of Dionysius' favorite sources of symbols: 'the Lord awoke, like a strong man, powerful but reeling with wine.'

53. Mark Forsyth, *The Etymologicon* (London: Icon Books, 2011), 175.

54. Masciandaro, 'Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation.'

55. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

56. Consider how the 'speculative turn' itself has been variably identified with apophatic and cataphatic modes of mystical theology in ways that pit these terms against each other as though they were contrary rather than complementary qualities. See for example Daniel Whistler, 'Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the "Spinoza Effect,"' *Speculations III*, available from: Speculations Journal.org http://www.speculations-journal.org/storage/Speculations%203_Whole_Issue_Ver2.pdf (accessed February 15, 2013), and Daniel Coluciello Barber, 'Namelessness and the Speculative Turn: A Response to Whistler,' available from: Speculations Journal.org http://www.speculations-journal.org/storage/Namelessness%20and%20the%20Speculative%20Turn_Barber.pdf (accessed February 15, 2013). We follow Bernard McGinn here in noting that apophatic and cataphatic discourses are complimentary rather than mutually exclusive; see McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 12-1350* (Crossroad Publishing Company: New York, 1998), 230. On this point see also Elizabeth A. Andersen, *Mechtild of Magdeburg: Selections - The Flowering Light of the Godhead* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998.) For a contrary account, and one that exclusively aligns

negatively, would not be God [37]. As Dionysius says, 'If anyone, having seen God, understood what he saw, he did not see [God] himself, but something of those things of his which are and are known' [38].

Only this Neo-platonic argumentation enables us to grasp the meaning and philosophical just-ification of Masciandaro's extreme 'mystical' formulations. In *Absolute Individuation*, [39] a text that radically disrupts our habituated understanding of mysticism as an experiential realisation that necessarily dislocates the integrity of the individual, Nicola repeats this position, adopted by Dionysius and expounded by Eruigena in the *Perypheson* [40]. Here, in a crucial passage, we are perforce reminded of Plotinus, who, in ruminating the 'One,' had said: 'Even to say "cause" is not to predicate something accidental of it, but of us, *that we have something from it*,' he continues, '... whatever that is in itself... neither ought one who speaks say precisely "that" or "is"' [41]. All that we are left with, actually left with, on this view, is 'in itself' - 'a flight of the alone *with* the Alone,' then, in Masciandaro's twist of Plotinus' terms, [42] the pheonix flight you can never properly undertake because it is your actuality' [43]. 'The radical spatio-temporal asymmetry of this ['actuality'] curves and distorts

the entire cosmos. It is the universal twist which reveals the identity of inner and outer worlds. Wrapped around the black ()hole of the fact that I am me, everything is unveiled to be a vast mirror or speculative reality,' where, 'or rather not where, the nullibiquitous not 'not this' or '*whatless* that' ['I am That I am'] [44] standing at the occluded placeless center of being, in

the mirror itself, is equivalent to...[45] an essential stupidity, to my stupidity, to stupid human being: 'I am an insider whose essence is to actually be a virtual absolute outsider' [46].

Correlatively Christ would say, 'I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people' [47]. 'As if he were to say [comments Nicola, after Eruigena], I who am more than human penetrate the secrets of all nature, as a worm [penetrates] the bowels of the earth, which no one participating only in human nature can do'; or after Land: 'If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds because to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and -isms' [48].

But I am a worm, and no man [49].

This image of Otherness incarnate, given in what Masciandaro terms 'the hellishly real impossibility that you are you,' [50] is an absurd, incongruous, stupid image, from Latin *stupere*, meaning 'stupor,' and from which ontologically if not etymologically we get 'stoop,' indicating the very same near-unconsciousness or insensibility: 'the instant, dumb, unquestionable intelligence with which Dionysius's corpse rises and picks up his head,' [51] for example, as if in a drunken stupor, the holy man (...reeling with wine [52]) condescends to do something and in having the shoulders and neck habitually turned to the ground, precisely 'turns' (as if to enter into this ()hole) as a worm); this is a tautology in fact, the worm does not turn, we worm – from Proto-Indo European *wer* meaning 'turn,' [53]... At any rate, Dionysius' worming on this occasion is the perfect ocular analog of what Masciandaro terms 'true stupidity,' according to which the Absolute is alone thinkable, and therefore representable [54].

[But] all this talk of 'turns'... [he would say], [talk] that now infects every culture, of this turn and that turn, is only deferred, perverted desire to become, to convert to the worm you already are, to the multiple singular agency that is culture's very ground. When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, [he would add] we should remember that its smoothness... is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the

cataphatic with 'affective' mysticism, and apophatic with 'speculative' mysticism, and then proceeds to produce further sub-categories of mystical personalities, apropos piety, based on these, see Urban T. Holmes III, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction* (Harrisburg PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002). For a counter-critique see Barbara Newman, 'Gender,' in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* ed., Julia A. Lamm (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 41-55. Against authorship stemming from Evelyn Underhill, who Eugene Thacker follows in *In The Dust of this Planet; Horror of Philosophy, Vol. 1* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2011), for example; who Colucello Barber, in turn, follows above, Newman notes how 'Empirically, a close reading of mystics shows, on the one hand, that 'speculative' does not always mean 'apophatic,' and on the other, that *such categories constitute a spectrum* rather than a dichotomy,' 83 (our emphasis). Such a dichotomy is not present in Nicola's mysticism, his understanding of the relationship of these two modes of mystical theology is highly sophisticated however and a proper exposition of it goes beyond the reach of this paper insofar as it pertains to the chief dynamic of Dionysius' thought, *remaining-procession-return*, not dealt with herein; suffice it to say that John Marenbon's analysis of the Dionysian adaption of the Neoplatonic paradox of procession and return serves to elucidate Nicola's exposition of the inter-relationship of apophatic and cataphatic modes: 'In commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides*, it had become the practice to apply the series of negations found in Plato's dialogue to the One (whose absolute transcendence had been stressed ever since Plotinus), and the series of positive statements to the hypostases which emanated from the One... Consequently, he [Dionysius] applied both series of statements, positive and negative, to God himself. God is at once describable by every name, but only metaphorically, by reference to his manifestation of himself in his creation; and he can be described by no name – every attribute may be more truly negated of him than applied to him positively'; see Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy* (480-1150) (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 19. This mirrors the cosmos of Dionysius which is produced by the procession of the One in the act of creation ex *nihilo*, and the return of all that is created to the One from which it comes; see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse* (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 23-60. Consider, then, the above in relation to an exposition of apophatic and cataphatic modes in Nicola's

thought: 'The love of black metal twists toward absolute cosmic exteriority along a mystical path of intensive inversion. Ordinate mysticism takes an *inward* and *upward* path to God as the source and goal of everything, withdrawing from the exterior phenomenal world in order to ascend beyond it to the One in a movement that is anabatic, apophatic, and anagogic (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4.8.1; Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.10.16; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1.1). The love of black metal, reversely and contrarily, leads *downwards* and *outwards* into a paradoxically disordered and multiple cosmos that is no less divine, pursuing a musical path that is catabatic, cataphatic, and apogogic (a path, however, that necessarily twists these terms according to its own essential negativity)'; 'On the Mystical Love of Black Metal (P.E.S.T. Abstract),' available from The Whim, <http://thewhim.blogspot.ie/2011/09/on-mystical-love-of-black-metal-pest.html> (accessed February 22, 2013).

57. CH II, 1-3.

58. Qua 'incongruous,' apropos of Proclus, or 'absurd,' qua 'absurdities.' See Parker's translation; and see Ruaro, 586, and 583, respectively.

59. CH II, 5 (145A-B); Parker translation.

60. CH II, 1-3 and Ep. 9/IX (1104B-1105C).

61. CH II, 5 (144D-145A); Luibheid translation.

62. CH II, 5 (144D-145A); Parker translation.

63. As above: Psalm 22 (21): 6.

64. Psalm 22 (27): 46.

65. Ruaro, 588.

66. Ruaro, 588; for Christological commentary on the worm see Masciandaro WormSign, as above.

67. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

68. Ruaro, 588.

69. Ruaro, 588.

70. See Aristotle, *History of Animals* (Elibron Classics:

superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass, every few years through the bodies of worms.

Inhabit the interface and turn into the worm that you are [55].

As the only image the Thearchy applies to itself, worm is the prototype in a dissimilar imaging of the Absolute that operates as a functional counterpart to Nicola's negative theology [56]. Called cataphatic theology (from Greek *Kataphatikos* meaning 'affirmative,' from *kata* – 'as an intensifier,' and *phanai* – 'speak,' intending (knowledge of God) obtained through affirmation), this theory of dissimilar images is first presented by Dionysius in the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Here, having explained the distinction between similar and dissimilar images applied to angels or to the Thearchy itself in the scriptures, Dionysius outlines three levels of images present: high images, middle images, and low images, which proceed from the less dissimilar and higher in the ranks of sensible things to the more dissimilar and lower in the ranks of sensible things [57]. The low images, which Dionysius himself calls stupid, [58] are in fact preferable, he explains, because 'If the negations respecting things Divine are true, but the affirmations are inharmonious, then the revelation as regards things invisible, through dissimilar representation, is more appropriate to the hiddenness of things unutterable' [59].

Toward the end of the second chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy* (and the same topic returns in *Epistle IX*) [60], Dionysius discusses images that are distinctively applied to the Thearchy itself. He begins with the less dissimilar ('star of the morning' and 'light') and moves on to the more dissimilar ('(non-consuming) fire'), and then onto the most dissimilar ('sweet-smelling ointment' and 'corner-stone'), and having mentioned even more incongruous animal imagery (such as 'lion', and 'charging bear') [61]. Dionysius ends with that which is conceived as the lowliest and most

incongruous of all 'viz. that distinguished theologians have shown it to us as representing itself under the form of a worm' [62]. The source of this reference is clearly Psalm 22, [63] in which the persecuted Christ raises his complaint to his Father while suffering on the cross, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' [64] which Dionysius interprets as lament, and

London, 2005), 539a-b, 550b-557b, 569a; Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* trans. H.H. Joachim (733a, 758a-b; 762a-763a), available from: Pink Monkey <http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/gp006.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2013).

71. Ruaro, 590; See Aristotle, *Problems in Aristotle in Twenty Three Volumes*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1965-1990), IV.13, 878a-34. Alternate translation available from: Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12699/12699-h/12699-h.htm> (accessed February 10, 2013).

72. Aristotle, *Problems* IV.13, 878a-34.

73. Ruaro, 590- 591.

74. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

75. Ruaro, 590-592.

76. Ruaro, 592; See Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 762b28-763a7. As Ruaro notes Aristotle's standard view is that the human race is eternal, this is just a brief, if intriguing, hypothetical discussion.

77. Ruaro, 592.

78. Or 'Leper Creativity,' or even 'Slime Dynamic' apropos Woodard, though Woodard would seem to suggest that what separates his 'dark vitalism' from the Neoplatonic tradition is a notion he has that the Neoplatonic One, apropos Plotinus, is 'transcendent,' whereas his One is radically immanent: 'merely the generative material sum as the speculative epoch prior to the Big Bang' (2012, 58.) However, as Perl has noted, and as is evident throughout Nicola's oeuvre, 'In Neoplatonism, in Plotinus, Proclus, and Dionysius, divine transcendence is conceived so radically that it coincides with divine immanence,' 112.

79. See David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1996).

80. Williams, 83; see Catherine of Sienna, *Little Talks With God [The Dialogue of Catherine of Sienna]* trans.

Henry L. Carrigan Jr. (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2010), 3; Thomas Mc Dermott OP, *Catherine of Sienna; Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

81. Galatians 2:20. On this point see Simon Critchley, *The Faith of Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 130.

82. For a treatment of this in our previous work see Edia Connole and Scott Wilson, 'A Taste of Faith: Experiments in Culinary Psychology,' available from: Arrow DIT - Dublin Gastronomy Symposium 2012, <http://arrow.dit.ie/dgs/2012/june512/7/> (accessed February 10, 2013).

83. See *Life of Blessed Henry of Suso by Himself*, Ch. LVI, 'Of the Very Highest Flight of a Soul Experienced in the Ways of God' (cited in Critchley, 2012: 130).

84. Nicola Masciandaro, 'On The Mystical Love of Black Metal [MS],' forthcoming; Masciandaro is quoting the opening prayer from *The Cloud of Unknowing* ed. Patrick J. Gallacher (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1997), 21. Of interest here is the worms place in a discussion of black metal music. As Darwin notes in a discussion of their senses: 'Worms do not possess any sense of hearing. They took not the least notice of the shrill notes from a metal whistle, which was repeatedly sounded near them; nor did they of the deepest and loudest tones of a bassoon. They were indifferent to shouts, if care was taken that the breath did not strike them. When placed on a table close to the keys of a piano, which was played as loudly as possible, they remained perfectly quiet. Although they are indifferent to undulations in the air audible by us, they are extremely sensitive to vibrations in any solid object. When the pots containing two worms which had remained quite indifferent to the sound of the piano, were placed on this instrument, and the note C in the bass clef was struck, both instantly retreated into their burrows. After a time they emerged, and when G above the line in the treble clef was struck they again retreated. Under similar circumstances on another night one worm dashed into its burrow on a very high note being struck only once, and the other worm when C in the treble clef was struck. On these occasions the worms were not touching the sides of the pots, which stood in saucers; so that the vibrations, before reaching their bodies, had to pass from the sounding board of the piano, through the saucer, the bottom of the pot and the

then 'But I am a worm, and no man,' which is taken to be a self-definition of Christ himself [65].

In the earliest extant commentaries on Dionysius' text, this interpretation is supported and accompanied with an explanation: Christ calls himself 'worm,' we read, because like a worm he came to life from the Virgin Mary without sexual intercourse [66]. This 'old doctrine of spontaneous generation,' which is, as Nicola suggests, 'not only biologically incorrect but ontologically true of every entity,' – 'moved from within itself,' [67] – alleged that worms came to life, not through copulation, but directly from matter – as fleas from dust, they were borne of mud and dirt, and other animals corpses, in the so-called *generatio equivoca* authoritatively endorsed by the church fathers [68]. Though he himself remains silent on the matter, it is widely agreed [69] that this doctrine, coherently synthesised by Aristotle [70], could not but have motivated Dionysius in his selection of worm as Otherness Incarnate.

The worms equivocal generation epitomises its otherness to every form of animal life, but in particular to man, as is well shown in the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*; one of which concerns what is proper to man with regard to his offspring. Aristotle asks: 'Why is it that, if a living creature is born from our semen, we regard it as our own offspring, but if it proceeds from any other part or excretion, we do not consider it our own? For many things proceed from decayed matter as well as from semen [he says, and then, having established an opposition between what is 'proper' and 'good' *qua* 'natural,' and what is 'improper,' and 'bad' and therefore alien or 'other' to man, Aristotle says]... If then, anything should be born from our semen, for instance, a worm from putrefying semen, it must not be called our offspring' [71].

The worm is portrayed as 'Other' to man here, indeed to all forms of life produced through copulation, and it's Otherness is portrayed as a 'bad' otherness, emerging as it does from excretions and putrefactions, which Aristotle adamantly adds 'do not belong to us,' but 'are other and foreign to our nature' [72]. This portrait certainly could have preempted the worms place in the Dionysian doctrine of dissimilar images, in which worm is low otherness, and God, high otherness, and according to which – based on the equivocal generation of

both Christ and worm, which emphasised the genetic dissimilarity and incarnate Otherness of both, with respect to the human and animal kind – these two entities can be compared, indeed, are connected in a certain mysterious way [73]. As Nicola notes,

Worms is not a self-grooming we. It is the only, unbounded community – a line of openness that slashes through God, the human, the earth – the unimaginable ever-present perfect abyssal consummation of all in one [74].

Nonetheless this connection *qua* consummation here is itself better exhibited in what are offered as two alternate explanations behind Dionysius' motivation to select worm as Otherness incarnate [75]. The first of these takes us momentarily back to Aristotle, according to whom, in writing On Generation and Corruption, one of the possible explanations of the origin of humankind is that the first human beings were [spontaneously] born from earth in the shape of worms: 'with regard to the generation of human beings and quadrupeds,' he says, 'if, once upon a time, they were "earthborn" as some allege, one might assume them to be formed in one of these ways: either it would be by a worm taking shape to begin with or else they were formed out of eggs... It is however less reasonable to hold that their generation would take place out of eggs,' he adds. Moreover, in current times, he says, 'it looks as though all animals produce a worm to begin with, for the fetation in its most imperfect state is something of its sort' [76]. This ambiguity of the worm, who is portrayed as the radical opposite of man, and at same time considered to be his origin here, could certainly have been an inspirational source for Dionysius in his selection of worm as Otherness incarnate, insofar as it recalls the contradictory doubleness of God who is origin and Otherness at the same time [77]. What this explanation lacks however, is a consideration of the worm's place within the Dionysian cosmos, which, while speculative, is not only realist, but Neoplatonic. We would suggest then that this explanation is better situated in relation to Nicola's work through a 'deformed dynamic' [78] that underscores this entire (Neoplatonic) tradition, which, of course, he himself is situated in [79].

While Christian theological speculation speaks of the retention of personal identity in beatitude, the language of mystics such as Nicola, is distinguished by ideas of absorption into God, permeation by God, and

divine ravishing, emphasising the annihilation of the soul, and the disappearance of the self into the Godhead: 'Being united in love in this way ... the soul becomes as it were changed into [... God]' [80]. Everything goes back to Paul's word in Galatians, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' [81]. Varieties of this claim can be found throughout the mystical tradition, where-in the re-emergence of the negated self in God presents the self that is attained by abandoning

damp, not very compact earth on which they lay with their tails in their burrows. They often showed their sensitiveness when the pot in which they lived, or the table on which the pot stood, was accidentally and lightly struck; but they appeared less sensitive to such jars than to the vibrations of the piano; and their sensitiveness to jars varied much at different times... The Peewit (*Tringa vanellus*, Linn.) seems to know instinctively that worms will emerge if the ground is made to tremble; for Bishop Stanley states (as I hear from Mr. Moorhouse) that a young peewit kept in confinement used to stand on one leg and beat the turf with the other leg until the worms crawled out of their burrows, when they were instantly devoured. Nevertheless, worms do not invariably leave their burrows when the ground is made to tremble, as I know by having beaten it with a spade, but perhaps it was beaten too violently.' See Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*.

85. Williams, 81.

86. Williams, 81.

87. Williams 81; see Catherine of Sienna, 29.

88. Williams, 83.

89. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

90. Ruaro, 590.

91. Forsyth, 175-176. Nicola treats the etymology of 'worm' in WormSign, and in using the Wedgewood and Atkinson *Dictionary of English Etymology*, finds an intriguing link to 'swarm': 'Worm. As. wyrn, G. wurm, Lat. vermis, worm; Goth, vaurms, serpent; ON. ortnr, serpent, worm. Sanscr. krmi, a worm; Lith. kirmis, kirminis, kirmele, worm, caterpillar; kirmiti, to breed worms; Let. zirmis, maggot, worm. The origin, like that of weevil, lies in the idea of swarming, being in multifarious movement, crawling. Pl.D. kribbeln, krubbeln, krcmelen, krimmeln, kriimmeln, to be in multifarious movement, to swarm, boil. 'Idt was daar so vull, dat idt kremeled un wemelde:' it was so full that it swarmed. Up kribbeln (Hanover krimmeln) la/en: to let the water boil up. Du. wremelen, to creep; Da. vrimle, to swarm; vrimmel, a swarm.' See Nicola Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'

itself, and its [true] identity discovered to inhere in the 'Other' [82]. 'The spirit dies, and yet it is alive in the marvels of the Godhead' [83]. Or as Nicola himself would say contra 'this self without a self,' which he terms 'metal head,' in opining the love of black metal as the love of that which 'materially makes and perceptually does what mysticism spiritually is': 'All love is a fire, but a spiritual fire. What a corporeal fire does for [metal], this fire... does for an impure, cold and hardened heart... and the mind changes into the similitude of him who inflames it. The whole mind becomes white hot... flares up and, at the same time, liquefies in the love of God' [84]. Loss of self here is clearly related to loss of form and to loss of order [85]. Deformity shows forth the reality of Form, it disorders to reveal the full nature of Order itself [86]. 'A soul in this state,' says Catherine of Sienna, 'sees that in itself it is nothing, that all its virtue, all its strength belongs to God...' [87]. In Neoplatonic metaphysics disorder provides a proper description of the Absolute, both in its basic negativity and its unlimited potential, because the One is also properly described as 'the matrix of permanent possibilities of order' [88] – above all order, source of existence beyond existence, origin of movement without movement: 'Worm' is the 'Sign' of this disorder because 'It knows how to bring forth from its very powerlessness to do so' [89].

The second of the alternate explanations behind Dionysius' motivation to select worm as Otherness incarnate [90] tends to the etymology of the word 'worm,' which, according to one school of thought, used to mean 'dragon,' until that meaning declined to mere 'snake,' and from then slowly to the lowly 'earthworm' we find in our garden today [91]. The 'dragon' meaning is said to have lasted for centuries however, as late as 1867 in fact; when William Morris could still write that wonderful line: 'Therewith began a fearful battle twixt worm and man,' and keep a straight face [92]. According to another pagan school of thought 'worm' designated nothing like the exoticness of a fire-breathing monster but rather meant mere 'matter' itself, matter in its radical otherness [93]. In Celsus' *True Discourse*, for example, which makes use of this etymological association, we read: 'But I would prefer to teach about the order of nature and say that God made nothing mortal... And the souls work is God's work but the nature of the body is different. In fact, in this respect,' he says, 'there will be no difference between the body of a bat or a worm... or a man. For they are all made of the same matter, and are all equally liable to corruption' [94]. There can be no doubt which of these etymological associations Dionysius himself adopted, because given the perfect structure of the celestial hierarchy, in which the lowest and highest elements are always related through incongruity, what could be more incongruous than to compare God to matter [95]? Born of matter, and at the very bottom of the universe, 'worm' is best-suited to represent matter, but

just as it can represent matter in its badness, it can also represent matter in its substantial goodness, thus serving as the living substantiation of the biblical statement, 'everything is beautiful' [96].

While Dionysius was most likely aware of this aspect of the Christian evaluation of the worm, as it perfectly fits the para-

doxical construction of his theory of dissimilar images that underlies so much of Nicola's work, this cannot be the last word on it, because Masciandaro's metaphysics is not a form of 'pantheism,' if by this we would read into the above statement the doctrine that 'everything is God.' On the contrary, for Nicola, following the Neoplatonic tradition that Dionysius is situated in, every being, in that it is a being, *ipso facto*, is not God [97]. The God of Dionysius is 'all beings and none of beings,' 'all things in all things and nothing in any,' and in these formulas the 'all' can never be separated from the 'none': 'Wherever we look, we are not seeing God, in that every being, and every object of thought, is not God; and wherever we look, we are seeing God, as he appears, for every being, every object of thought is nothing but a presentation [or appearance] of God' [98]. Nicola follows Dionysius in negotiating a path by means of the Platonic concept of appearance, which is taken up into the doctrine of being as Theophany, according to which, as we read in Plotinus:

The last and lowest of things, are in the last of those before them, and these are in those prior to them, and the one thing is in another up to the First, which is the principle. But the Principle, since it has nothing before it, has nothing else to be in, but since it has nothing to be in, and the other things are these in which came before them, it encompasses all other things. The One, then contains, or better, is the undifferentiated containment of all beings [99].

Or, as we read in Masciandaro's mad-dening mystical formulation:

The worm stands for not standing for anything. It even knows how to bite off its own head, to swallow itself whole. 'What should I do now?' And a voice said, 'Eat! Eat Yourself!' He had no choice but to eat, so He ate Himself! At that moment He found that He was Everything' [100].

92. Forsyth, 175-176.

93. Ruaro, 590.

94. Ruaro, 591; see Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV. 52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); see Ruaro, 'Resurrection: the Hope of Worms. The Dispute between Celsus and Origen on the Resurrection of the Body,' for a discussion of the role of the image of the worm as to represent matter (and the material part of man) in Celsus' polemic against the Christian theory of Resurrection.

95. Ruaro, 591.

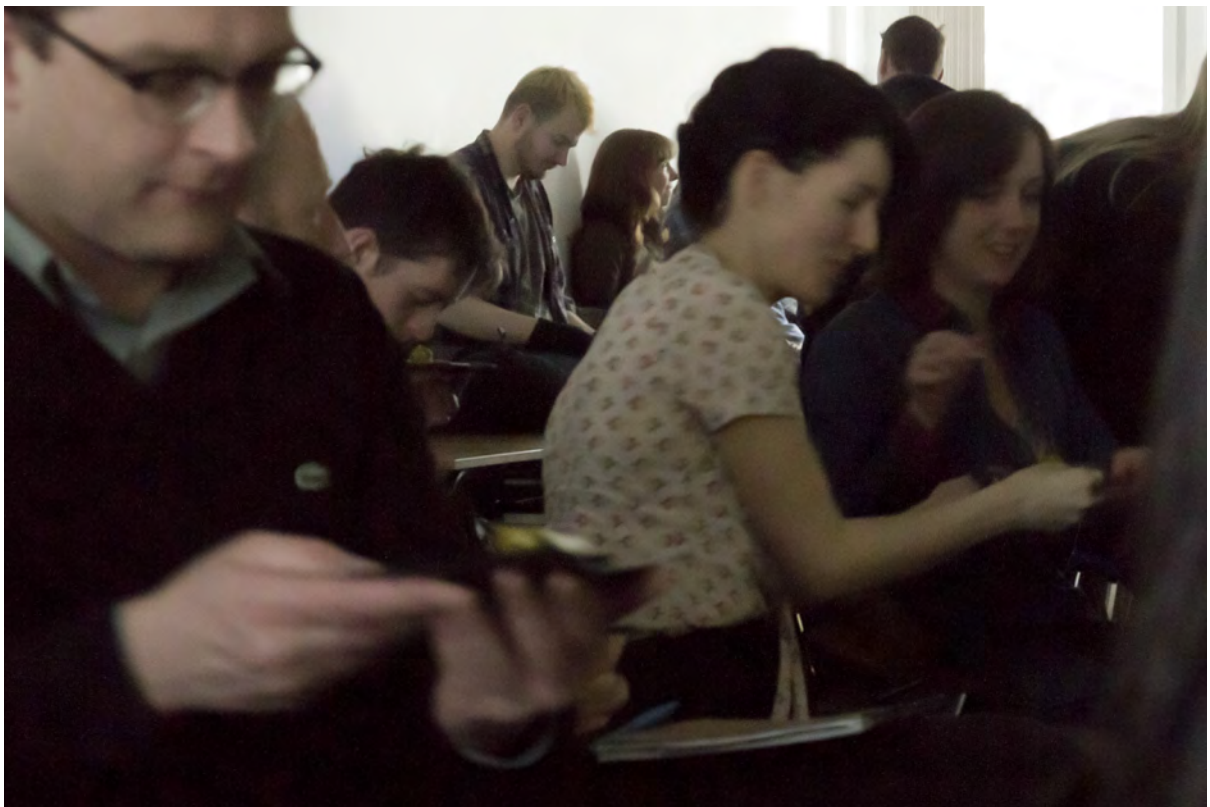
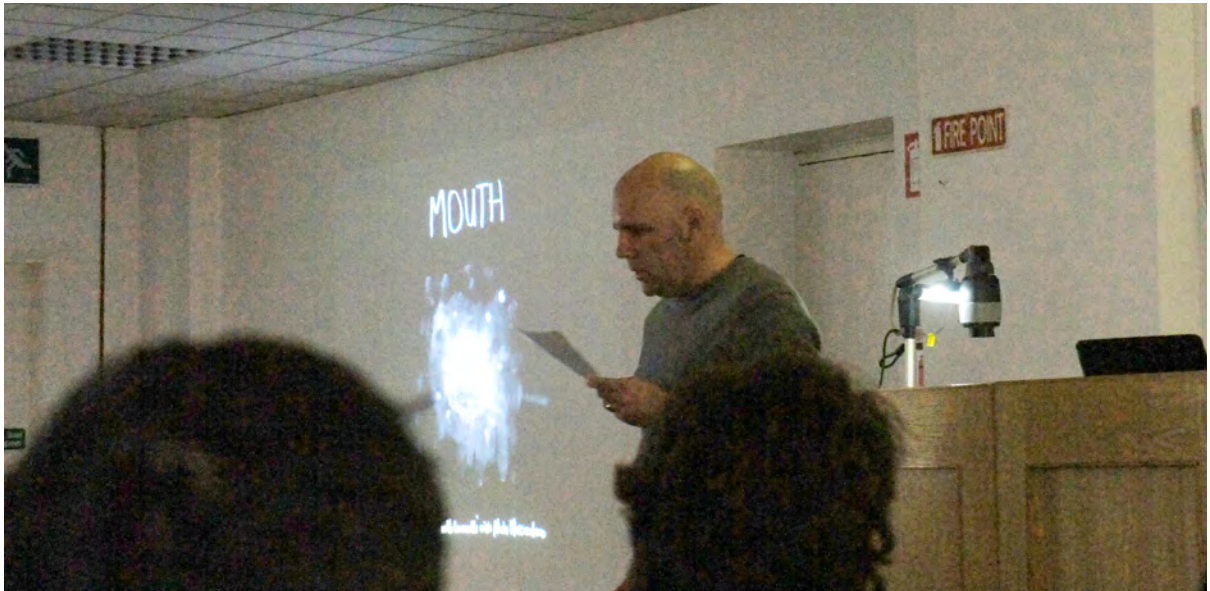
96. Ruaro, 591.

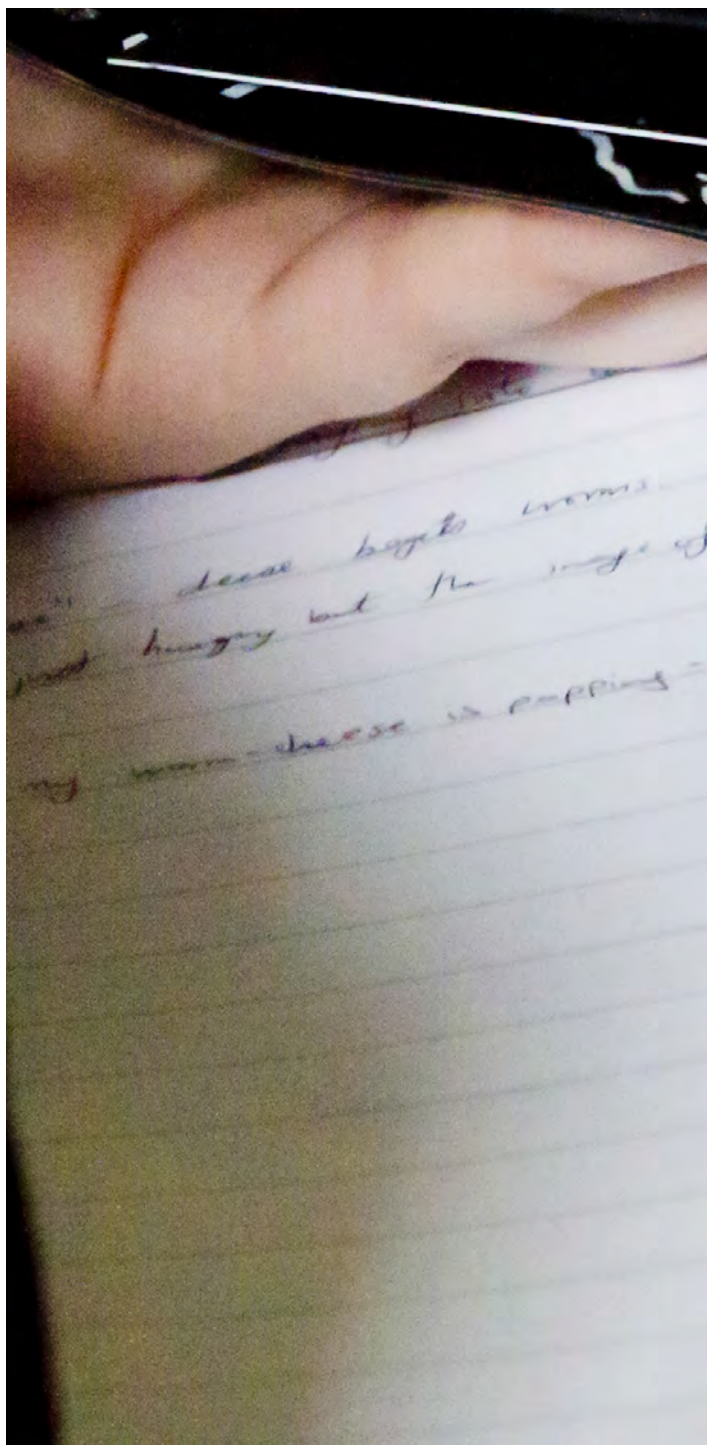
97. DN V (824A): 'But beings are never without being which, in turn, comes from the Preexistent. He is not a facet of being. Rather, being is a facet of him. He is not contained in being, but being is contained in him. He does not possess being, but being possesses him'; Luibheid translation.

98. Perl, 33-34; see DN VII (872A): 'He is not one of the things that are and he cannot be known in any of them. He is all things in all things and he is no thing among things. He is known to all things from all things and he is known to no one from anything'; Luibheid translation.

99. As cited by Perl, 24.

100. Masciandaro, 'WormSign.'





Welcome, good worms to the food part of our session which we have entitled 'Decaying into Divinity: The Culinary Cosmology of a Twenty-First century Mystic,' featuring worms of heretical perversity, devil's cheese and seaweed. I want to say a few words concerning the rationale for the food and how it relates to Edia's paper. When we committed MOUTH to this event we both – and I believe Mairtin & Pat also – immediately thought of Carlo Ginzburg's famous micro-history *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmology of a 16th Century Miller* (1980). This is the story of a miller called Mennochio who was executed as a heretic because he believed that the cosmos was made out of cheese. Under interrogation about his beliefs he said that in the beginning in his 'opinion all was chaos... and out of that bulk a mass formed – just as cheese is made out of milk – and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels, and there was also God, he too having been created out of that mass at the same time...' In this subversive, folk inversion of both Neoplatonic and Christian creation myths, worms are the elemental forms from which human beings, angels, even God take shape, paradoxically base forms that are spontaneously generated out of cheese, the One Big Cheese (that Plotinus calls 'the undifferentiated containment of all things') which here has congealed as a putrefying mass out of a chora of chaotic cosmic milk.

Now, I was interested in this story because I was working on a paper on Gilles Deleuze's phobia for milk products, schizophrenia and the schizophrenic horror of worms that you see recurrently throughout his work. I'm not sure why Mairtin and Pat were interested in the story, but Edia was interested in the story because, as I found out later, she was working on the culinary divinological aspects of Nicola's work which you can find in his spice essay, the sweetness of the law, the Wormsign essay and the essay on habit and cataclysm. In these essays Nicola does not, as far as I am aware, mention the story of Mennochio although in Wormsign he does reference Leibniz's use of the idea to suggest that mass is the aggregate of corporeal substances, just as cheese was sometimes believed to consist of a concourse of worms. And indeed for Nicola's own 'neoplatonism', the worm is not simply a specific life-form but something prior to all life forms,

something weirdly and undecidably both form and matter. The worm is 'the elemental idea' or the 'real concept of corporeal life', and therefore an element of being, which at the same time it is also the 'self-othering of matter' and 'the formlessness of form'. Born in decay and associated especially with decaying flesh, the worm for Nicola is a figure not of demise but of 'the negative emergence of spontaneous being into the subject' and of the 'real immanence of that which is beyond and outside' of the flesh that is co-emergent with the 'real arrival of post-subject individuality'.

The worm writhes at the heart of the self that places itself in darkness and unknowing all the better to hunger for the hunger of the impatient God who can 'hardly wait' for you to open up and enter Him. As Nicola insists, the worm is not just hungry, but the pure agent of hunger, prior then to the hunger of the subject or even of God, tasting and moving in the famished anteriority of all the dimensions of being. And yet, even as the worm may bite off its own head, its hunger is not simply the hunger of radical openness that characterises both Dionysus's God and the 'nihilistic carnage' of Reza Negarestani's acephalous mouth, a mouth which scorns 'taste' as both a 'strategic illusion' and the 'judicial basis of subjectivity.' For Nicola the worm 'tastes and moves'; it is the agent of a taste that establishes, throughout his oeuvre, a 'profound relation to wisdom, sapientia and sapor, according to which truth is always a matter of discriminating for and through oneself the difference between good and bad, a process of tasting or proving its right flavour.'

Or as we have said previously on another occasion when we invited Thinking Absolutists to taste the corpse of God as a form of ordeal or test, where taste became therein 'not a form of aesthetic judgement, nor even a "strategic illusion," but a form of culinary transubstantiation, [God's wound's] "sinister convalescence" becomes salivating mouth, a pool of chaotic sensations' 'in which forms and forces mingle and (re)produce both corporeally and incorporeally.'

So come you worms, hungering for all the dimensions, decay into divinity by feasting on the pure forms of yourself in the satanic mirror of cheesy putrefaction.

Mairtin Mac Con Iomaire
and Pat Zaidan: *Decaying
into Divinity: The Culinary
Cosmology of a 21st
Century Mystic –
worms of heretical
perversity, devil's cheese
and seaweed.*





Sweet Dreams Are Made of This: Speculation

Ridvan Askin

Exit light
Enter night
Take my hand
We're off to never never-land
– Metallica, "Enter Sandman"

THE aim of this paper is to bring together literary narration and philosophical speculation in an attempt to show how these seemingly divergent fields in fact mutually inform one another[1]. In order to do so, I will use Ana Castillo's 1986 novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters* as my tutor text [2].

The Mixquiahuala Letters recounts its protagonists Teresa and Alicia's travels to and adventures in Mexico and is usually read in terms of a quest for Chicana identity and independence [3]. Against this established consensus view I hold that identity is merely the starting point of the narrative which in fact embarks on a journey of disintegration, differentiation and dissolution both in terms of content and form. This disintegration and dissolution constitutes the novel's speculative exploration of its very own constitution as narrative. This exploration is most prominently expressed in the novel's monologic epistolarity (it consists of 40 letters), its hypertextual form (it presents three distinct possibilities

1. I would like to thank Philipp Schweighauser for his very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. Ana Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
3. The consensus view holds that the novel expresses the search for, struggle to achieve and affirmation of some kind of personal and/or collective Chicana integrality. At least one of these variants is explicitly posited in each of the following texts: Tanya Long Bennett, "No Country to Call Home: A Study of Castillo's *Mixquiahuala Letters*," *Style* 30.3 (1996): 464; María C. González, *Contemporary Mexican-American Women Novelists: Toward a Feminist Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 85; Kelli Lyon Johnson, "Violence in the Borderlands: Crossing to the Home Space in the Novels of Ana Castillo," *Frontiers* 25.1 (2004), 56; Deborah L. Madsen, *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 82; Jadwiga Maszewska, "The Quixotic Strain in Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*," in *Seeking the Self – Encountering the Other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation*, ed. Tuomas Huttunen et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 266; Fatima Mujčinović, *Postmodern Cross-Culturalism and Politicization in U.S.*

Latina Literature: From Ana Castillo to Julia Alvarez (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 33; Roland Walter, "The Cultural Politics of Dislocation and Relocation in the Novels of Ana Castillo," *MELUS* 23.1 (1998): 82; Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "Chicana Literature from a Chicana Feminist Perspective," in *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature*, 2nd ed., ed. María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 218.

of actualisation of its story matter) and in the structural and thematic importance of sleeping and dreaming. For the present essay, I will confine myself to this third characteristic and show how the novel casts dreams as acts of speculation while simultaneously presenting itself precisely as such an act of speculative dreaming [4]. Since it does this by means of narrative this leads me to postulate the correlation of speculation and narration.

In *The Mixquiahuala Letters* sleeping and dreaming are presented from within the framework of Chicana esotericism with dreaming assuming a role akin to that of *brujería* – that is, sorcery or witchcraft. In her volume of essays *Massacre of the Dreamers* Castillo says this about Chicana esoteric spiritualism or *espiritismo*: '[E]spiritismo [...] is an acknowledgement of the energy that exists throughout the universe subatomically generating itself and interconnecting, fusing, and changing' [5].

While the novel does reference *brujos* and *curanderas*, staple figures of Chicana literature, I take its treatment of dreaming and of falling asleep as a means of accessing the realm of dreams to be its most salient feature of *espiritismo*. In the novel, sleeping and dreaming function precisely as the means to tap spiritual subatomic cosmic energy. In what follows, I will recast this esotericism in properly philosophical terms trying to translate what could be termed folk metaphysical intuitions into metaphysics proper.

Metaphysical Dreams

In his recent non-phenomenology of sleep in *The Fall of Sleep* Jean-Luc Nancy bluntly states that 'I fall asleep and at the same time I vanish as "I"' while unmistakably making clear that this vanishing of the 'I' amounts to the unearthing of one's essential being: 'It is in the self the sleeper is, as *in self* as the Kantian *thing* can

4. I discuss both the novel's hypertextuality and its epistolary form in detail in the much expanded treatment of Castillo's novel in my forthcoming *Narrative and Becoming: Differential Narratology*.
5. Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (New York: Plume, 1995), 159.

be, that is the being-there, posited, the very position independent of all appearance and all appearing' [6]. Falling asleep thus constitutes both the attainment of my innermost self and the dissolution of a distinct 'I':

I fall to where I am no longer separated from the world by a demarcation that still belongs to me all through my waking state and that I myself am, just as I am my skin and all my sense organs. I pass that line of distinction, I slip entire into the innermost and outermost part of myself, erasing the division between these two putative regions. [7]

A little later Nancy clarifies that sleep's erasure of division between inside and outside with respect to one's essential being constitutes simultaneity per se as true simultaneity only exists 'in the realm of sleep. It is the great present, the co-presence of all compossibilities, even incompatible ones' [8]. Nancy locates the essential self in the fusion of distinctions in an eternal presence. In other words, the in-itself of one's self turns out to be the eternal dissolution in an undifferentiated *apeiron* attainable only through sleep. Nancy's sleep thus epitomises Hegel's dictum of the 'night in which every cow is black' [9]. It constitutes a realm that concepts (distinctions) cannot reach. All one can do is cautiously circle the event horizon of this black hole – hence Nancy's poetic non-phenomenology surfing its outer brinks. While Nancy thus articulates the necessary link between dissolution and essence of one's self, he, due to his phenomenological commitments, cannot say much about this dark essence itself. It needs a metaphysician to probe this darkness. In

contrast to Nancy, Gilles Deleuze self-identifies as a 'pure metaphysician,' and it is not too difficult to see that Deleuze's conceptualisation of the virtual-actual fold is apt to provide the detailed metaphysical account that Nancy cannot offer [10]. More importantly, Deleuze's topological folding of inside and outside immanentises Nancy's black hole of the in-itself and plants the seeds of conceptual distinction into the obscurity of this darkness. Deleuze's virtual qua realm of the in-itself qua realm of implicit multiplicities or Ideas is precisely not an undifferentiated *apeiron* – it is the incessant differentiation of difference. Accordingly, falling asleep does not amount to a fall beyond the event horizon into oblivious indistinction, but to a plunge into obscurity where obscurity is conceived as the very germ of the distinct: difference itself. This plunge is precisely what Castillo's esoterico-poetic figuration of sleeping and dreaming in *The Mixquiahuala Letters* constitutes: while falling asleep gives access to this realm, dreaming provides the images closest to it. In the novel, dreaming thus never figures as a mere personal experience but always indexes the impersonal as expounded in Deleuze's conceptualisation of the virtual and Castillo's own esotericism of subatomic cosmic energies. In short, in Castillo's novel dreaming constitutes a veritable visionary act.

With fabulation, a term they hijack from Henri Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari provide the corresponding visionary faculty to these acts [11]. Fabulation qua visionary faculty is the proper faculty of speculation, that which makes it possible to go beyond experience in experience. In *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, fabulation's work

6. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 11, 13, original emphasis. For this reason, Nancy states that there cannot be a "phenomenology of sleep, for it shows of itself only its disappearance, its burrowing and its concealment." Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 13. What follows directly from these two statements is that there can only be a metaphysics of sleep. Working from within the tradition of phenomenology, Nancy himself never embarks on such a metaphysical project. To him, sleep profoundly remains a state of "indistinctness," an "effacement of my own distinction" which cannot be adequately conceptualized. Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 7. Since Nancy still wants to make positive statements about sleep, however, the only

alternative he has left is a kind of phenomenology that allows for speculation but is not metaphysical, hence my term non-phenomenology to capture this endeavor.

7. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, 5.

8. Ibid 7.

9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), 496.

10. Gilles Deleuze, "Responses to a Series of Questions," *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development* 3 (2007), 42.

11. See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 171, 230n.



comes in the guise of 'mystical dreams'[12]. Teresa's dream in letter 27 constitutes the end point of this fabulatory journey. In this letter, Teresa presents Alicia and the reader with a story of origin which could easily be detected as an invocation of mythical Aztlán were it not for a number of details that do not fit this picture. In fact, the images this micro-narrative evokes produce a counter-Aztlán that sets originary, virtual repetition over against the repetition of mythical origins. The dream is set in a 'provincial town' from sometime 'between the sixteenth century and the present,' its people of mixed blood [13]. That the dream is a narrative of origin becomes evident when the town's existence is traced to the beginnings of time in the dream's invocation of God's creation of the first human. This originary creation is cast as successful only after two failed attempts that produce people too dark and too fair-skinned, respectively. God is finally satisfied with his 'brown, firm and strong' creation, which posits *mestizaje* as originary rather than derivative [14]. That the dream is about origins that exceed filiation and familial ties and thus go beyond psychoanalysis' 'familialism' is further substantiated in a scene where Teresa enters a house 'with a sense of familiarity' but is 'surprised' when the old woman she meets turns out 'not [to be her] mother' but 'still of [her] people'[15]. The dream thus presents a vision of the origin of Teresa's people and simultaneously casts this origin as universal: all people are essentially brown, all people's origin lies in *mestizaje*. While this claim to universality is already at odds with the Aztlán myth's claim as being foundational for a particular ethnic identity, the Chicano appeal to this originary myth is further eroded in the subsequent scene where Teresa passes 'a group of young people caught up in rhetorical debate' who 'fight and defend theirs with words and ideologies' [16]. This is a thinly disguised attack on the Chicano movement's leading figures and strategies, which becomes even more evident a couple of lines further on, when she confronts the group

a second time: now they are explicitly referred to as 'intellectuals' and it seems safe to assume that the group consists of men only as Teresa furiously tears open her shirt and yells, "'i am a woman [...] but i am first human'" [17]. This proclamation again casts feminism as a universalist endeavor in opposition to male particularism [18]. Accordingly, Teresa calls them 'fools' knowing that 'they, too, were scornful of [her] and [her] methods,' the narrative thus clearly marking the methodological difference [19]. This difference can be encapsulated thus: empirical and verificationist vs. transcendental and speculative. The verificationists are 'word dealers' and thus rely on logic (logos) as their primary method [20]. The dream reveals this to be an utterly ineffective method for facing real and not just formal problems: the word is by no means mightier than the sword when it has to face the 'thundering sound of marching troops' which announce the town's looming downfall [21]. Only fabulatory speculation is adequate to cope with these real problems. Instead of logicians, we need dreamers, witches, sorcerers: this is the quintessence to be drawn from the dream's and the novel's climax where the method of fabulation (speculation), ontology (becoming of being) and politics (transformative action) meet and merge in one visionary dream-image: Teresa pointing her weapon [22]. Let me unpack this image. The climax is reached when Teresa, in the face of the marching troops, races to retrieve her gun:

My weapon. It was my own and I had used it before, fit into my hand like that of a faithful lover.

i made certain that it was fully loaded and loaded another that had been left by someone else. There was no time! [23]

In terms of politics, the contrast to the ever-debating 'word dealers' could not be starker. To remain with the image evoked above, swords trump words when it comes to action. Not because one cannot do things with words, but

12. Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* 27. Deleuze himself, rather than discussing dreams, prefers to revert to the more obscure examples of sorcery and witchcraft in his writings. No doubt this is partly due to psychoanalysis' claim on the dream as its legitimate object of study, and partly due to the fact that dreams are still too close to us. They are very much a part of our experiential world while the same can hardly be said of sorcery or witchcraft. Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, (London: Continuum, 2007) is the book to go on these issues, particularly on the ambiguous status of the dream in Deleuze's writings. The most sustained discussion of sorcery and witchcraft in Deleuze's work can be found in the plateau on becoming in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (London: Continuum, 2007), 264-278. It

is thus important that dreams in *The Mixquiahuala Letters* figure as visionary rather than ordinary dreams, dreams akin to sorcery and witchcraft.

13. Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 101.

14. Ibid 102.

15. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 51; Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 102.

16. Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 102.

17. Ibid, 103.

18. This is congruent with recent re-evaluations of feminism. See for example Claire Colebrook, "Feminist Extinction," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, ed. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni

because they are utterly ineffective and simply the wrong tool when it comes to dealing with real problems. Reality is not linguistically structured. This is not to say that *Teresa* will defeat a whole army, but it is to say that her *method* harbors the potential to change the course of events whereas the group of young intellectuals' does not. The gun thus becomes the vivid figure of her speculative methodology. In terms of ontology, in the framework of the Deleuzian differential metaphysics espoused here, the dream image, akin to the sorcerer's and witch's incantations and visions, is as close as we can get to the non-appearing, the non-phenomenological, in short, the in-itself. It is the image closest to the virtual. The principle which grounds, or rather ungrounds, the virtual is the Deleuzian third synthesis of time, the unfolding of time itself, repetitious difference and differential repetition: becoming. As such, becoming does not emerge and happen in time, but is the emergence and happening of time. And this is indeed what Teresa's dream imagines – in the sense of putting into image – in its positing of originary and universal *mestizaje* as synthetic ground the principle (God) of which is precisely that of difference (two different skin colors inhere) and repetition (two other beginnings persist). That God is a name for becoming, the unfolding of time, is revealed when the dream narrative asserts that this story of synthetic origin marks the 'beginning of time' inaugurated by God 'one eon of a day' [24]. The dream draws a difference between eon and time here, with time denoting the time of succession, that is chronology, which only comes into existence with the human, and eon, the time of God, that grounds and generates chronology. This of course is also the distinction that Deleuze makes when he differentiates between Aion and Chronos in his *Logic of Sense* [25]. What is crucial to Deleuze's account, however, is that Aion is not split from Chronos. It is not another, prior and transcendent temporal dimension but folded into Chronos. Teresa's dream

narrative embraces this temporal topology in its climactic final moments. The exclamation '[t]here was no time!', which is italicised and thus emphasised, not only transports a sense of urgency, but more importantly marks the fact that this dream-image fabulates an origin literally out of time [26]. There is no Chronos in this nowhere and 'never never-land.' Accordingly, when the sentence following the negation of chronology exclaims that '[t]he moment had come,' this is precisely not the coming of yet another moment in the sequence of moments, moment after moment, but the advent of Aion, an eruption *within* Chronos, the moment that harbors 'the history of the world and [...] its future, [...] all that had lived and died and had been born again'; it is the moment Teresa 'approache[s] an opaque window and point[s] [her] weapon' [27]. *This* is the ultimate speculative moment in the novel, this image of Teresa pointing her weapon at an opaque window. This image encapsulates virtual co- and pre-existence, the zero point of chronology ('history and future of the world'), the rebirth of the new ('born again'), originary repetition: becoming. By the same token, it makes clear that the only way to reach becoming is by means of fabulatory speculation. This dream image redoubles on itself – the opaque window – and exclaims: speculation is the weapon! This is *The Mixquiahuala Letters'* revolutionary politics, its call to arms: speculate, cast your spells, dream! If one wishes for transformation and regeneration, one has to ceaselessly go beyond the restrictions of empirical life and tap the sources of transcendental becoming.

That fabulation as the faculty of speculation is etymologically related to fabula – story – is no coincidence. In Bergson's coinage, it conceptualises religious myth-making and is indeed translated as myth-making [28]. In Deleuze and Guattari's use, fabulation is shorn of its theological import and secularised as a faculty that artists, particularly writers, capitalise on [29].

and Fanny Söderbäck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 71–84 where she presents feminism as an intrinsically universalist project, both historically and systematically. Castillo's novel certainly confirms Colebrook's assessment.

19. Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 102.

20. *Ibid.*, 103.

21. *Ibid.*, 103.

22. *Ibid.*, 104.

23. *Ibid.*, 103.

24. *Ibid.*, 102.

25. Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 186–193.

26. Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 103.

27. *Ibid.*, 103 – 104.

28. Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudsley Brereton (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), 108.

29. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 171.

It is thus closely allied to the production of art and, specifically, literature. Against Deleuze and Guattari, I wish to suggest that fabulation's true function is the production of stories in the general sense of narrative rather than in the restricted sense of fiction. Fabulation would thus be the faculty to narrate, with narration amounting to the rendition of visionary knowledge. This knowledge has nothing to do with conceptual knowledge. Rather, it is aesthetic in the sense of Baumgarten's original coinage of the term as 'gnoseologia inferior' [30]. Being less rigorous (and thus inferior) than conceptual knowledge since unable to draw precise distinctions it is adequate to probe obscurity precisely because of this lack – it is still gnoseologia. This characterisation not only ties in very well with aesthetics as being concerned with darkness rather than luminosity, but also with the etymological origin of narration in Latin *gnārus*, having knowledge of, being acquainted with a thing. One of the notorious difficulties in narratology is to reconcile this origin with narration in the sense of fiction as fiction stems from *ingere* – to form. How can something constitute knowledge and creation at the same time? Suffice it to say here that the answer inheres in Teresa's visionary dream: for when she recounts the myth of the origin of humanity, God's creative act consists in forming clay. To form out of clay in turn is the specific root of *ingere* in the general sense, a root that goes back to the Proto-Indo-European word *dheigh*, which survives in today's English as dough and means to knead. Fiction as *ingere* then denotes originary creation in the sense of kneading, shaping into form. 'To fiction,' to forge, thus describes the activity of morphogenesis. If narration is an act of knowing and if fiction-making means creating form, then narration, and particularly fictional narration, might well be the adequate means of probing the origins and workings of this making, of acquiring knowledge about morphogenesis. In this sense, narration is by default creative and speculative. It all boils down to this: in order to

narrate, one has to make use of fabulation. In order to speculate, one has to tell a story.

Dream Poetics

Castillo's novel substantiates and exemplifies Claire Colebrook's assertion that '[t]here is a voice that is other than speech, a sound or intensity that is not the expression of a self or body and that occurs extra-organically as a rhythm or pulsation from which something like a social body or territory would emerge' [31]. This extra-linguistic, extra-psychosomatic and extra-organic voice is precisely the voice grounding all voices, what Deleuze quoting Lawrence Ferlinghetti calls "'the fourth-person singular"'. [32]. Fourth, because it marks an additional dimension to the three grammatical persons thus going beyond any grammar of person – it is impersonal; person, because it nevertheless inheres in all of the three forms as their immanent condition; singular, because despite this universality it is only one voice, but a voice devoid of a particularity of its own. It is the transcendental ground of all empirical voices, the universal singularity productive of all its particular expressions. This voice is unconscious, impersonal and non-human and as such persists in all human, personal and conscious voices. While these statements concerning voice are obviously metaphysical and not narratological statements it is my contention that the metaphysics and narratology of voice are profoundly intertwined. In this vein, the fourth-person singular is the voice that grounds every single enunciation, the impersonal voice that produces any personal account without transcending it. *The Mixquiahuala Letter* takes a first-person account, emphasised in its monologic epistolary form, as its starting point to successively uncover its conditioning fourth-person singular. On the surface level, this is already indicated by the novel's consistent employment of the lower case *i* whenever Teresa speaks of herself. This can be read as the narrative's acknowledgement of the 'larval

30. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 7th, rpt. Ed (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1963), 10.

31. Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life* (London: Continuum, 2010), 118.

32. Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 118.

33. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 100.

34. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2008), 54.

35. I refer to speculation's "other" root in *speculum* – mirror, as explained in Michael Inwood's entry on speculation in his Hegel dictionary:

Spekulation, spekulativ und spekulieren ("to speculate") come from the Latin *speculatio* ("spying out, reconnoitring; contemplation") and *speculari* ("to spy, observe; to look around"), which in turn descend from *specere* ("to see, look"). (The Latin for a "mirror" is *speculum*, which gave rise to the German *Spiegel*, "mirror"). *Spekulieren* developed other senses: "to count on, rely on; to guess, conjecture", hence, in the eighteenth century, "to engage in risky commercial ventures". *Speculatio* was used by Boethius for the Greek *theoria* ("contemplation"). Augustine, the scholastics (e.g. Aquinas) and the mystics (e.g. Seuse, Nicholas of Cusa)

subjects' teeming underneath and constituting the fully developed subject that is 'I' [33]. This foundational fourth-person singular is made tangible in the novel's hypertextual epistles and its valuation of visionary dreams. In fact, while the novel's hypertextuality simulates the intensive process of actualisation, the unconscious process of morphogenesis, its visionary dreams grant access to this unconscious process. Castillo's novel ultimately suggests that, by dint of displaying its hypertextual form and showcasing the powers of visionary dreaming, it has to be viewed as precisely such a visionary dream itself: it is a delirious dream and a veritable act of *brujería* summoning the forces of becoming. *The Mixquiahuala Letters* pursues a dream poetics that is adequate to the fourth-person singular, that voice, that intensity, that rhythm and pulsation that makes things happen, that is creation itself. This dream poetics thus warrants an adequate method of scrutiny. As has been shown, this method cannot rely on a representational framework as the light of representation cannot enter the 'night' of 'never never-land,' it merely makes the shadows recede and announces the relentless reign of luminosity (clarity and distinctness). This reign is built on the excision and exorcism of darkness, a darkness on which it nevertheless depends in order to shine, a darkness without which it would be impotent. In order to dream properly, in order to reach 'never never-land,' one has to use the sandman's method and sprinkle some dust on one's eyes distorting and obscuring one's vision; one has to immerse oneself in darkness and dream along. This immersion, this dreaming, is what intensive narration qua fabulatory speculation achieves. It is in this vein that Deleuze pits his anamorphic understanding of the dream against psychoanalysis' insistence on its essentially tropological nature when he says that 'the dream is not a metaphor but a series of anamorphoses which sketch out a very large circuit' [34]. Why anamorphosis and not metaphor? Because metaphor emphasises representation.

In metaphors, something stands in for something else, whereas anamorphosis is dynamic and transformative. It captures changes in form. While dreams qua metaphors qua signs facilitate hermeneutic decoding – the default methodology of both psychoanalytic praxis and literary interpretation – anamorphic images, in order to be properly seen, need to be viewed through prisms and mirrors. Thus, the method adequate to anamorphosis is not that of hermeneutics but that of speculation – and the method adequate to the analysis of narratives qua anamorphic dreams that of a speculative narratology [35].

associate it with speculum, and, following St Paul (1 Cor. 13: 12), argue that God cannot be seen or known directly, but only in his works or effects, as in a mirror. Thus speculation goes beyond sensory experience to the divine or supernatural.

Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 271. As has been shown, this reaching for the supernatural and divine is at the heart of Castillo's esoteric espiritismo while Deleuze's speculation is not theologically conceived but thisworldly. Sleeping and dreaming as redoubling acts of contemplation, as obscure kinds of seeing, as 'risky [...] ventures' into the unknown are perfect examples of such a thisworldly speculative act. This act can be summarised thus: closing one's eyes to see properly.

And this is the formula, the magic spell that both constitutes and is perpetuated by *The Mixquiahuala Letters*. In this light (or darkness), the title of Castillo's first manuscript of poems is programmatic for her entire oeuvre: "I Close My Eyes... to See." Ana Castillo, "I Close My Eyes...to See," in *Ana Castillo Papers: California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives 2, Special Collections* (Santa Barbara: University of California, 1975).

All That is Liquid Melts into Solid

John Ryan

THIS paper is a compilation of notes and thoughts in response to the brief of Weaponising Speculation. It is a paper that is written in the way that I write best, erratically, with fluctuating styles – I am not a writer, I'm an artist.

I make objects that are large lumps of vibrant matter made from the material oil paint. I am often referred to as a painter, although I don't believe I fit into this category. In the term painter, there is a suggestion that the subject is tied to a strict, and perhaps conservative tradition. Materially I am tied to this tradition, as I invest in well developed tools that are made for very specific tasks. But my methodology is thought driven. I have no interest in imagery, or the abstract that has no base in reality. Because of a very specific logic that I apply to art making I seem to have stumbled into this Speculative Realist and Object Oriented bracket, happening through no intentions of my own. I have only been aware of continental and analytic philosophy for about a year and a half now. I have spent a lot of my time since then trying to catch up on things which are seemingly relevant, and it seems that there are a lot of parallels, and a lot of similar questions, problems and ideas are being posed. Historically, it seems that art often mimics, or at least is influenced by, current thought at the time of its production. Since Marcel Duchamp, and his value of thought over aesthetic which transformed art into something of value not only to the eyes but also to the mind, it was only a matter of time before art and philosophy started to crossover. Perhaps one day, academically, they could amalgamate into one system of ideas, but at the moment I feel there are problems with this. There are definite rules at play in engaging with art that just don't translate into theory, and vice versa I presume. An artist can have all the theory to back there argument up, but for some reason their art is weak. I can't delve into this theoretically, because I'm not a theorist, but I do look at a lot of art and generally speaking, can didactically explain why an art isn't working.



*Yellow painting, oil under
cling film over mdf
Weaponising Specualtion
Exhibition, BLOCK T
Image courtesy of
the artist*

I am going try to avoid directly talking about objects, or ontology, as by talking about my practice I hope that the same, or a least a similar point is suggested. I guess that this is one of the things that art does. It discusses philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, sociology etc in an alternative way to the academic norm. I find that sometimes when art and theory are mixed, and the boundaries between them are not kept clear, it all gets a bit wishy-washy, a bit confused, or maybe, just a bit shit. Speculative Realism has been popular in Irish art circles for about a year now and I have seen artists alter their statements and press releases to suit this trend, literally swapping certain words for certain other words, particularly this one word, object. This is easy to do of course, because we all know that everything is an object. Everything has definitive parameters in space and time which give a thing its objecthood. So what is the point to this petty and obvious observation, I guess the observation is the point, given that Weaponising Speculation seems to be asking a question about the relationship between art and philosophy. Artists seem to want to be on top of things when it comes to what's hot in philosophy circles, maybe this works both ways. Perhaps I sound cynical, assuming that there is a negative ulterior motive for people deciding to talk about their work within the

subject of objects, but I would suggest that this recent surge in attraction to objects is not a negative one. Perhaps it is something divine, or political, or maybe it's just an area of aesthetics previously unexplored, and of course, these three things are inherently related. So am I cynical? No, of course not. I accept that things are topical. I appreciate and wholeheartedly enjoy anything that intelligently and gracefully makes the art that we experience more interesting, more challenging and more beautiful.

So back to my own work, thus far, I have built my very young and emergent practice around one simple phenomenon, paint is liquid when removed from a tube, it then responds to air and gravity and turns into a solid. In critical terms, if I had to sum my practice up in one sentence I would say that it is Modernist abstraction as an object rather than a subject, although I try avoid talking about it this way as it is very boring – I guess because the work is essentially about observation. I use shapes and forms that have come into being because of the legacy of Modernism – for instance, colourful squares on a wall or cuboid sculptures placed on the floor, but when using these visual tropes I am not alluding to Modernism for any kind of conceptual reasons, it is more because they are shapes and forms that are now instilled in our contemporary visual vocabulary. I will try to explain this a little more using an analogy.

The music genre Black Metal, and I am using this specifically because of its relationship to Speculative Realism, like most Modern music uses a basic formula. Intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus, end of song, or some variation of that. For those of you with some basic music theory knowledge, most of it is just 4/4 timing at varying tempos and use of the pentatonic scale with some minor augmentations. Bear in mind I'm putting lyrical content and the identity that this genre had conjured aside. Although Black Metal uses this very common songwriting template, it is not an

allusion to rock and roll, or at least, it doesn't seem that way to me. This music template is now just something that happens to be. When it is used it is not alluding to where it came from, it is a template that has a life of its own. I would say the same about some contemporary art that uses shapes, forms, colours and methods of display that came to be during the period of Modernism. I would say this about my practice. I have been told by teachers, books, artists and friends, that the colours that Modernist artists used were an expression, a symbol, or a statement about optimism, and that the shapes they used were an enquiry into certainty and geometry. So when introduced to Modernism for the first time in third level education, for me, the colours just were what they were. The shapes just were what they were. I had grown up in a world where these things to me had always been. They had turned into nature and it was difficult for me to think of them as anything other than that. For some, art historians especially, this may be difficult to fathom, but when it comes to art making, you always have to carry the weight of all the other art that has ever been made before you on your shoulders – and what made sense for me to do, was to examine what these legacies actually are, rather than what they once represented. They were objects for me to play with, objects that held no metaphysical properties – only physical realities. So in the way that Black Metal is just a variation of a Modern song writing template, with a load fuzz thrown in, I guess you could call my work Modernism with a load of goo, slime, texture or whatever you'd like to call it, a Modernism that uses contingency rather than certainty.

I mentioned Marcel Duchamp earlier, so before I show you some images of my work I will end this paper with a quick note on a quote of his; 'The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.'

Red Painting, oil under
cling film over mdf
Weaponising Speculation
Exhibition, BLOCK T





This is one of thousands of aphorisms used to justify art, what it is, why it exists and why it should be part of our society. Although these quotes are often poetic and inspiring, I think that they're bullshit. Art, like science, is just a method. It is a way of translating a thought into a medium, which, is just an agency between two people. It is not an outlet for people to have their head in the clouds as often depicted in popular culture. It is a platform for serious speculation. The procedures and outcomes aren't tied to tests and rules like in most strands of academia. I consider this freedom to be a good thing, but unfortunately, we are all dependant on funding, which, is often dependant on results rather than speculations.

Hanging Bag, oil over
black bin liners under
transparent bin liners
Weaponising Specualtion
Exhibition

Mutant – Infiltration of the Hallucinated Mountain

Rob Murphy

A mutant subsists within contemporary continental theory. It endures on ridicule, horror, skepticism, comedy, excess, and groundless speculation. Conspiracy and contingency are at once its detraction and tactic. This mutant tricks unconditionally as an interpreter and paradoxical maker of meaning. It is what I call here: Optimistic Absurdity.

Absurdist philosophy has been haunted by its ancestral considerations as nihilist, meaningless, and devastatingly regressive. My responsibility and intention here is not to deny any of those potent conditions – it is rather to reveal how it can operate as a form of metaphysical *infiltration* when contemplated under object orientated ontology, continental realism, post-secular occasionalism, and aesthetics. This is what Ray Brassier may define as a 'speculative opportunity'.

This infiltration is carried out in several ways. Firstly through a use of post-continental logic. What Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux allow through their rigorous use of logic is a zone where absurdity can manifest and operate *weirdly* [1] within it. Infiltration is also facilitated by a speculative approach to objects, as seen in Harman's 'Speculative Realism', as well as utilising a post-secular interpretation of occasionalism that has use as a structure within my visual art practice [2].

1. Graham Harman, *On the Horror of Phenomenology: Lovecraft and Husserl*. Collapse IV (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2008), 334.

The use of the word 'weird' here defines the attempt within my position to not negate, but naively infiltrate, a subjects inherent weirdness through confronting it as such.

2. Expanded on from 9–15.

3. Graham Harman, *On the Horror of Phenomenology*, 334.

However, there are a number of important aspects to clarify before indulging in this weird argument: initially we must state the precise expectation of such a stance, and following that, where we begin our philosophy. The expectation of any interrogation of *being* should be to achieve some level of real emergence or at least an illuminating mode for such a colossal pursuit. This is why Harman's Speculative Realism is vital to this discussion; It is through developments in his complex ontology, read through a speculative, nihilistic and optimistically absurd position, that a tangible emergence is allowed to develop. I borrow from his ontology its thrilling reading of object theory to stabilise optimistic absurdity and its structure of comedic-horror as first philosophy.

Harman is also important as he recognises that we require a realist origin for philosophy that is as weird as the structure it wishes to infiltrate: 'Philosophy... must be weird because reality is

weird' [3]. In an approving consideration of both Harman's 'weird' and 'naïve' beginnings [4] and Simon Critchley's sentiment that the beginning of philosophy '... and the beginning of true thinking in general, is disappointment' [5], it is imperative that an optimistically absurd philosophy begin in the 'comedically horrific'. A sludge of uncertainty and unsubstantiated hope from which the mutant is evoked. It is through this we must crawl to find our positioning as human beings to many of the constituents of optimistic absurdity: like insincere-sincerity, formal and theoretical paradox, fear, and horror-comedy. The moniker of 'mutant' is vital to a nuanced understanding of this idea [6]. Mutants mutate; the changes that occur to their constituent elements during experimentation or tragedy to emerge as a mutant are specific to integral mirrored events within my claim and practice such as situation, relation, and infiltration.

4. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Arelesfort, Hants [UK]: Zero Books, 2011), 7.

5. Simon Critchley, as cited in Badiou, A. *Comments on Simon Critchley's: Infinitely Demanding* (City unknown. Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy, 2007), 11.

6. Graham Harman, as cited in Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (2006) Trans R. Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 33. "Harman's object orientated ontology proposes that 'it is language, in particular metaphor, which offers the path of least resistance to the 'things themselves'."

Indeed our relation to real, or tangible objects of the world, and *relation* as a theme are quite necessary to this discussion. That is where the importance of post-secular occasionalism within contemporary theory lies. There needs to be a reasonably clear formulation for mutation and in some way the structures of post-secular occasionalism frame it in a way that doesn't indulge the sentimentality of secularism or the seemingly phantom belief structures held in the writings of the transcendentalists. It is through an occasionalist structure that we will look at the formal functioning of my own art objects in the context of object orientated metaphysics by discussing the denial of privileged human access to the world as an insightful or reasonable position of object orientated philosophy. For example: the kind of human centered enlightenment philosophy facilitated in Kant's 'Transcendental Being' – the tradition that Quentin Meillassoux terms Correlationism [7].

Another central problem for optimistic absurdity is its tendency to fail and to fail immediately. For if an artwork is made to fail, and fails accordingly, failure cannot be the central point if we are to gain any real emergence or conduct a critical discussion around it. Failure within my practice could be followed through many portals: as the physical impossibility of a detergent tablet surviving intact within the water of an isolation tank, the theoretical failure of a sea made out of sugar, or the metaphysical failure of a yoga mat to achieve a humanly conceivable 'higher knowledge'. It is in direct consideration of my practice that we will debate the helpfulness of failure, the

inability for human interaction with objects and the 'stuckness' and exclusion of the human in the relation to the object. This democratisation of objects and humans within the work is the preeminent affinity of object orientated philosophy's speculations and the practical implications for the art object [8].

For when the human is removed from the centre of the orbit of the theory they have enabled, and the object takes its place, we are presented with a philosophy unbalanced, with optimistic possibilities for a spectacular contingency. By enacting the philosophy of Harman, Meillassoux, and Brassier, through optimistically absurd gestures and post-continental logic, we momentarily transfer the comedic-horror of our human metaphysics to the object until it emerges anew – a tricky mutant, on groundless ground.

Stuckness | The Comedic-Horrific Object as Metaphysic

Humour functions by exploiting the gap between being a body and having a body, between – let us say – the physical and metaphysical aspects of being human. What makes us laugh, I would wager, is the return of the physical into the metaphysical, where the pretended tragical sublimity of the human collapses into a comic ridiculousness which is perhaps even more tragic [9].

What Simon Critchley so distinctly points out for us here, is the phenomenological link between the comedic and the horrific within lived human experience. Where a human's

7. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

"...the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of correlationism. By 'correlationism' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism."

8. Graham Harman, *Space, Time and Essence: An Object-Orientated Approach* [Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures] (Hants, [UK]: Zero Books, 2008), 147, 148.
Graham Harman's brief list of object-orientated rules about objects:

1: Relative size does not matter: an atom is no more an object than a skyscraper.

2: Simplicity does not matter: an electron is no more an object than a piano.

3: Durability does not matter: a soul is no more an object than cotton candy.

4: Naturalness does not matter: helium is no more an object than plutonium.

5: Reality does not matter: mountains are no more objects than hallucinated mountains.

9. Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.

10. Open Posting Policy. Tommy Tiernan. TV.com. [Date Unknown] accessed 8th August 2012. <http://www.tv.com/people/tommy-tiernan/trivia/item-2052401>. Website: www.tv.com



knowledge about life and death are diluted and concurrently strengthened by their suppositions on experience while on the verge of both. What the comedian Tommy Tiernan described as ‘... the feeling of running down a hill that was a bit *too* steep for you, and you could fall over at any moment, but you couldn’t stop laughing’ [10]. It is around this idea that we can begin to construct an objective for our use of objects as metaphysics. As I have just stated, the central aim of most object orientated ontologies is the realisation of a real emergence earned through a philosophical, aesthetic [11] and political [12] engagement with objects [both real and imaginary]. My ambition here is no different to where I am trying to carry out a somewhat partial realist encounter with specific objects along with theories of access, agency, contingency, spirituality and secularism within post-continental and absurdist philosophy, in order to assess their ability for true emergence in conjunction with ‘object’.

The objects we consider here to be comedically-horrific form the integral component of this discussion. It is my position that we are hypothetically, and in some cases literally, *stuck* at objects – that the human is incapable of escaping not only the limitations of her own corporeal form and thought, but is also incapable of finding any metaphysics [human or object] through objects. Quentin Meillassoux describes this position stating:

... any philosopher who acknowledges the legitimacy of the transcendental revolution – any philosopher who sees himself as ‘post-critical’ rather than as a dogmatist – will maintain that it is naïve to think we are able to think something – even if it be a mathematical determination of the object – while abstracting from the fact that it is invariably we who are thinking that something. [13]

To approach such a subject with comedic absurdity might be seen to negate the grim

certainty of death and unrealised metaphysical transcendence; however it is the very opposite. The comedy and seeming ridiculousness of objects is their, and our, *true* horror. Although, it is important to mention that this comic-horror, which seems to emerge in the sublimity of objects, may be the closest we can come to an aesthetic understanding of what metaphysics can mean for contemporary object theory and for the art object itself. The reasoning behind discussing this claim through art, when art is arguably no more absurd than a joke, is relatively straightforward. Contemporary art contains the capability to explore its own absurd condition through engagement with other absurd centres of philosophy: that of the human *and* the object. It is also the antagonist of this particular argument as a lot of art can’t be conceived of without *relation*. Which makes it eminently problematic and an ideal host.

So why the inclusion of aesthetics and art – and in what way can they create a dialogue capable of emergence through objects? I will try answer this in two parts. Firstly, I echo Jean-Luc Nancy’s sentiment that: ‘The image is the obviousness of the invisible’ [14]. There is an unrealised or subterranean level to objects that are dulled in the vastness of global visual culture. In certain cases, when they are viewed as art objects, or curated as such, this concealed area of objects can be drawn from by theory and a more knowingly engaged level of interaction by its viewers to facilitate a remarkably horrific and elating experience. Put simply: objects are removed momentarily from us because there has been a shift in their use or situation. Secondly, it is the traditional surrounding in which we usually view contemporary art that heightens this sought contingency: the gallery. The gallery can act as a crossroads, as an interpreter of meaning, but most importantly for our objects, it can be amoral – a space of unlimited intellectual regression, a bedlam of confusion, and a downright messer of concepts and things [15]. All of these qualities

11. Graham Harman, *Vicarious Causation Collapse II* (Falmouth, [UK]: Urbanomic, 2007), 221.

12. Graham Harman, *The Prince and The Wolf: Harman and Latour at the LSE* (Arlesfort, [UK]: Zero Books, 2011), 50.

13. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 4.

14. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 12.

15. Tommy Tiernan: *Ok Baby* [2007] [DVD] Ireland. McMahon, Y. Power Pictures Productions [1minute 7seconds onwards].

“What’s gonna happen here....it cannot be used in the real world...There are no rules. We’re not concerned with political correctness or not offending anybody...The things

that are gonna be said here cannot be taken and used in the real world. It’s like when you’re having sex with your girl friend and as part of the process to liven the whole thing up for the pair of you, you roar out ‘Go on! You big fuckin’ hewer ye!’ She is not allowed to come up to you the next day and go ‘What did you call me last night!?!’. I would like you to think of this gig as the opposite of mass. Somewhere we can come in the darkness and just fuckin’ let go for a little while. I am concerned with what is funny, and sometimes what is funny is not clever, sometimes what is funny is crude and it’s cock and cunt and balls – but it’s funny. It is funny.”

are vital to enabling the contingency of the objects within it. Various stand-up comedians address the idea of a similar place, in this case the stage, as a platform for behaviour with the intention of subversion of morals, expectation, humour and reality. A place where the formal appearance and interaction with such a landscape in a person's mind are placed against the entirety of the universe and serves only to unravel the presumption of any regularity – be it art historical, phenomenological relation, or any supposedly lived context. To quote Tommy Tiernan: 'Nobody knows we're here... so let's wreck the joint!' [16]

Agency & Tragedy | Manmade Objects and Situations

There are two very real things I wish to pursue in order to elaborate on how objects, speculation, and comedic-horror bleed into each other to create an atmosphere for this proposed optimistic absurdity: manmade objects and horrific situations.

The reasoning behind manmade as opposed to natural objects is quite simple. In considering natural objects we would be obliged to delve deep into the history of the universe and overflowing vats of theology before enabling our discussion to move to where it needs to be. Also, the idea of having a closer agency to the objects we create, and not merely acting as a liberated drone for any god or deity, is quite vital. Agency is also important in light of Critchley's concise study that 'All tragedy is concerned with partial agency in a situation' [17]. This may seem obvious but is never the less crucial. For the 'new-age' or 'spiritual' objects, as well as the coyly juxtaposed objects depicted and mimicked within my practice, can be accused of illustrating the tragedy in our agency, and the possibility of its horror. This horror seems to be the result of viewing objects that were engineered in, and presented to, the world, whilst concurrently having an

'un-getability', what Harman would term their 'receding nature'. It is through the agency in tragedy, and thus the tragedy in our failure, that we can seize understanding of the objects which we create and produce our platform for considering the optimistically absurd object. As Harman notes: 'When objects fail us, we experience a negation of their accessible contours and become aware that the object exceeds all that we grasp of it' [18].

It is this kind of stuckness at objects that transfers into the human situational realm, especially through comedy, that allows us to better understand this comic-horror. A good example of this would be comedian Stewart Lee's recollection of the aftermath of misguided grief around London in the wake of Princess Diana's death. Lee recalls walking around the different royal landmarks and Buckingham Palace seeing the huge amount of flowers and tributes laid at the gates in memorial. In this moment of contemplation and sadness he notices a life-size inflatable of E.T. – the extraterrestrial from the seminal Spielberg film. At once this somber regaling by Lee erupts into a recollection of shock and confusion. All of his logic fails him in the object's presence. But what he done next exemplified the ability of absurdist-humour to infiltrate the mourner's seemingly impenetrable logic. Lee tediously imagines the couple waking that morning and hearing news of Diana's death. He imagines the shock that watered their eyes and the disbelief dulling their thoughts. The eventual action that the husband takes, in Lee's mind, is suggesting they get the giant E.T. inflatable out to place at the gates of her home [19]. What Lee plays out in this skit has as much to do with optimistic absurdity as it does with his personal beliefs on zealous public grief. He works back from the situation, considering the object, through the speculative logic of what may have brought it there. In this encounter with the fundamental paradox of logic, he justifies the use of logic in the weird arena of the comic, and exposes

16. Tommy Tiernan, [Date Unknown]. Quoted by editor. [Web Article], accessed on September 17 2012. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/celebrity/tommy_tiernan/biography.php Website: www.rottentomatoes.com "Do you ever get the feeling that we really are extremely insignificant in the whole context of things? Think about all the other galaxies that exist in our universe and there's millions of them! Vaster and more expansive than our one! There's also millions more universes than ours. Then there's also the millions of universes that we don't know about. But. We fucking know about. So it got me thinking, that far from

being at the centre of things, far from being important, far from even being relevant- nobody knows we're here...so let's wreck the joint!" [Full Quote].

17. Simon Critchley, [27th March 2012]. Speaking on Hamlet and Tragedy at the 46th Inaugural Lecture of the Philosophy Society. University College Dublin.

18. Harman, *Vicious Causation*, 177.

19. InaudibleWhisper. [2008] Stewart Lee – Princess Diana. [Video]. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1H913UqQ6w> Website: www.youtube.com Accessed: 5th June 2012



American Dream [Detail]
2012
Video projection
49 seconds
Dimensions variable
16:9 aspect ratio
Image courtesy of the
artist

the groundless ground on which our optimistic absurdity can be built [20]. It is what Meillassoux explained through his version of correlationism in discussing absolutes:

... the strong model of correlationism can be summed up in the following thesis: it is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible. I cannot provide a rational ground for the absolute impossibility of a contradictory reality, or for the nothingness of all things, even if the meaning of these terms remains indeterminate. Accordingly, facticity entails a specific and rather remarkable consequence: it becomes rationally illegitimate to disqualify irrational discourses about the absolute on the pretext of their irrationality. [21]

What I have temporarily concluded here is that objects seem to recede into a shadow realm beyond the reaches of human understanding or apprehension [22]. The horrific *lack* in our knowledge, experienced in transcendental and phenomenological understanding of objects as well as our agency in object production, plays a pivotal role in allowing the weird to intervene with devastating implications for a human metaphysics through objects. From this we must establish how we can utilise all of the above elements into an effective object based

discourse. I believe that the optimistically absurd art object can facilitate this discussion while creating more nuanced readings through its aesthetic conditions. What Nancy set forth as the 'obviousness of the invisible'.

The Absurd Object Understood Through Post-Secular Occasionalism

To contribute to a defense of optimistic absurdity as a first philosophy, and an emergent paradigm for art making, I must first base this proposition in a tangible *real*.

A good place to launch such a discourse is around occasionalism [23]. A central theme to both theology and continental philosophy. If we take a basic description from Islam of how occasionalism might operate we can move on to an optimistically absurd interpretation of it. Islamic occasionalism considers anything that may happen between two entities, for example: fire burning cotton *without* the direct influence of God to be blasphemous. Here we have the traditional religious interpretation of occasionalism. With this in mind, let us describe what the absurdist version of this would entail [24].

Within my practice, when I place an object within another object's realm of purported or suggested speculative transcendence I am at once continuing a possibility for emergence for the objects 'within themselves'; creating the possibility for emergence within the breakdown of relation of the objects to each other – under a human understanding. We are only privy to one spectacle (usually sad and imbecilic one) but speculating on another, maybe a sublime transcendence or wobbly failure, that we will continue to discuss using the 'relatable' limits of human language, experience, sense and thought. We will still converse and deconstruct an 'object version' of metaphysics with a human notion of metaphysics. We will never find out if a teabag or detergent tablet find transcendence within a waste bin or Zen garden, because we continually use logic inappropriately. However, this is not an outright rejection of logic in the slightest. It is a way of interacting with the inherent paradoxes of its use in the correlationist tradition - within the quest for emergence. As Nietzsche proclaimed: 'The irrationality of a thing is no argument against its existence, rather a condition of it' [25]. The

20. A member of the audience clarified that the doll was in fact Alf, from the American TV series of the same name [Alien Life Force]. Ibid.
21. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 41.
22. Husserl, E. As cited in Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 19.
23. The doctrine ascribing the connection between mental and bodily events to the continuing intervention of God.

- [New Oxford American Dictionary 2011].
24. Harman, *The Prince and The Wolf*, 32.
25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, Trans R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, [UK]: Cambridge University Press, 1878), 182.
- Graham Harman, *Mind that Abides – Panpsychism in the New Millennium: Zero-Person and the Psyche*,

suggestion within my work is that even if a teabag had its own version of metaphysics – what if it encounters the same situation as humanity? A break down at the impenetrability, incompleteness, and impossibility of itself which had the facility to do no more than make lukewarm tea from its porous form.

If we take Harman's call for a leveling of the echelons of philosophical centrality [26] – his call for an engagement with the reality of the objects, without the hangover from the dominance of Enlightenment thought, and place the object on the same pedestal of importance as the Transcendental Being – we have initiated the first step of an absurdist occasionalism. Within my practice, that is *literally* what is being proposed. Objects, particularly new-age and 'spiritual objects', that are purported to have metaphysical outcomes for their human users are mimicked and engaged with other objects. The suggestion being that since we are seemingly so spiritually and technically developed as human beings to induce a metaphysics *through* an object, that a reasonable speculation might be that an object could inhabit its own metaphysics *through* another object – essentially an experience not actively involving humans and without human knowledge if it was a failure for the objects in question. What I am attempting to do here is to develop on the theorists of the absurd who have noticed the importance for occasionalism in understanding the emergent possibilities of absurdity. Albert Camus seen the possibility in absurdity's utilisation of occasionalism for emergence when he wrote: 'The absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God. Perhaps this notion will become clear if I risk the shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God' [27]. This somewhat reflects a realist absurdity that my work should emphasise – a stuckness at objects without a saviour or even a facilitation to induce meaning.

This practice of excluding the human from the quest for transcendence, and in some instances damning the object to quite possibly the shittiest and remarkably un-profound experience of its existence, is not merely to maintain the thesis that there is no 'God' or 'no absolute'. But it functions as a discussion about how we imbue objects with our sensibilities and senses

– thus negating the opportunity to encounter objects in terms of their actual reality. This is the distorting and fumbling tendency that Harman termed the 'Overmining and Undermining' of objects in the Kantian tradition [28]. This must be what Brassier rightly asserts to be the 'speculative opportunity' for radical logic and what Paul Ennis points out about Harman's stance; the need for philosophical, and I would assume aesthetic, scrutiny of the paradoxical relationship between object and object:

Harman argues that for the most part we falsely ascribe human notions into objects: 'We distort when we see, and distort when we use'. The true test of a metaphysical realism about objects is to deduce how objects must interact with each other beginning only with the basic, inevitably anthropocentrically inflected, human insight into object-object iteration. This is not a failure in 'purely' seeing objects, or an embargo on reason in the vein of finitude, but simply the starting point of a first science of objects... [29]

Object Within Post-Secular Occasionalism | Object, Thought & Human Access

Allow me to state clearly what is at stake in the claim that an aesthetically-based optimistic absurdity can act as an infiltrator for contingency in contemporary theory – if we take into account the works tendency, and sometime objective, to fail. Failure in this case being either an inadequacy in providing a humanly accessible process of emergence – or a non-fulfillment of a touchable, fully livable, state pertained by the process' theoretically achieved transcendence. Addressing this theory and the work through a post-secular occasionalism, we can begin to confront the meaning of these problems.

When working with objects in an aesthetic context the agenda of the process is to push the idea of a non-secular, object facilitated, metaphysical interaction between objects. For this reason I tend to work with objects or 'object situations' that have some sort of vague transcendent intention that can never be fully dismissed or realised; Tank-Isolation techniques, Zen gardens, yoga, eastern meditation etc. This is important because it faces up to not only the idea of aesthetics as a speculative means for metaphysics [30] but also the

Ed D. Skrbina. (John Benjamin Publishing, 2009) PDF Download. Accessed September 12 2012, 257–272. <http://aaaaarg.org/text/26346/graham-harman-essay-collection>.

26. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus – An Absurd Reasoning* (1942) Trans J. O'Brien. (1995), 21. PDF Download. accessed: September 29 2010.

<http://aaaaarg.org/text/10757/absurd-reasoning>

27. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 7–19
Harman's 'Overmining' is defined as the empiricist model [seen in Hume] that objects of experience are nothing but bundles of qualities under nicknames for things; the word "apple" is merely a collective nickname for a series of qualities linked to it: red, sweet cold etc. What exists are

non-religious and realist interpretation of occasionalism that links the three elements of this unholy trinity; object, thought, and human access to the world in the quest for a tangible absolute. Alain Badiou describes this gesture as allowing '...thought to be destined towards the absolute once more, rather than towards those partial fragments and relations in which we complacently luxuriate while the 'return to the religious' provides us with a fictitious supplement of spirituality' [31].

As an example of how failure for human access to a given work is not an *absolute* failure – consider *I am a destiny* 2012 [32]. We are presented with a new-age situation; that of the isolation tank and its user. These positions are played out by a gel detergent tablet (user) and a waste bin filled with salt-water and illuminated from within by a pond light (tank). As the light spills from the tank over the floor, lighting the path potentially taken by the tablet into the 'isolation tank', it also highlights the tablets thin and dissolvable skin – reminding us that if the tablet chose to seek a metaphysics of mind and/or body through an isolation session in the waste bin – the materiality and occasionalist catch that will break it down to produce an underwhelming bluish sludge. What is happening here between one material or 'simple' object, as Harman would call it, and another is crucial to our human admittance of a failed speculative transcendence through objects. The real horror of the situation being that the objects, which were seemingly the tools for experimentation, are the sole bearers of their potential. This reveals the comedic-horror of the situation which Paul Klee describes as: '*Les choses me regardent*'.

It's no longer the ego that regards objects in the world and makes epistemic claims about them – or in Husserl's sense that I could manipulate those things for my use, like Heidegger with his hammer. Instead, it is an experience when things turn and look at me, when as Paul Klee

says 'things look at me'... This is the reversal of intentionality in the experience... [33]

We become stuck at the object as a visual or empirically provable portal of metaphysics. Stuck at the point of not being the observer within this process but the *observed*. Essentially we become lodged at the simplicity and inadequacy of our experience through objects; even stuck. It seems we can speculate on the potential of a detergent tablet's version of the real, metaphysics, empiricism, and thought, in a *human* mode or structure. This is an underlying argument against my interpretation of Speculative Realism (and indeed the use of SR in visual culture in general) in the humble announcement of optimistic absurdity; 'For how is one to legitimate the assertion that something subsists beyond our representations when one has already insisted that this beyond is radically inaccessible to thought?' [34] [35]. Responding to this I hold a position close to Brassier's critique of Meillassoux's version of facticity and his necessity of contingency;

... the reaffirmation of facticity in the attempt to deny its necessity absolutizes it as something which is a necessary property of existence in-itself, rather than a contingent feature of our representation of existence. In doing so it unwittingly confirms the strong interpretation of the principle: it is not just a contingent fact that contingent entities exist; it is an absolute necessity. [36]

Therefore this occasionalist trinity of object, thought and human access or in-access, inherently contain the conditions for an optimistically absurd emergence. Here, emergence is not denied by the dead end traditionally provided by the logic of facticity (that usually makes room for the dogmatism of the mystical to flourish) [37] and our absurd reality. Instead it is viewed optimistically as something that is provided and discovered in the very conditions

individual impressions, ultimately in the form of tiny pixels of experience that we weave together habitually to form into larger units. 'Undermining' is determined to be a collection of strategies dealing with objects [philosophies of difference, monism, modern day materialism etc.] that undermine the objects in question by stating that 'only what is basic can be real' or that objects are only a crust of aggregates that are produced by the underlying flux that sustains them.

28. Paul J. Ennis, *Continental Realism*, (Alresford, [UK]: Zero Books, 2011), 35.

29. Harman, *Vicarious Causation*, 221.

30. Alain Badiou in *After Finitude*, viii.

31. Rob Murphy, *I am a destiny*. 2012. Aluminum waste bin, aquarium LED light, holistic bath salts, tap water, gel detergent capsule. Dimensions variable. Images at: www.robmurphy.ie

32. Simon Critchley & Carl Cederström, *How to Stop Living and Start Worrying* (Cambridge [UK]: Polity Press, 2010), 142.

33. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 38.

34. Ibid, 3, 4. [Preceding position that "...we cannot know any thing that would be beyond our relation to the world."]

35. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* (Hampshire, [UK]: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 72.

36. Ibid, 73.

of our being, extinction, reality, and our speculative reality of objects. Our failure at the essence of our condition is the reasoning that we must utilise in order to overcome it – to re-encounter the absurdity of philosophy which uses humanity as its heart and ransack our understanding of logic in the Copernican sense.

Orbit of Impotence

The absurd impenetrability of objects that cohabit our universe remain that: impenetrable. But they *can* be infiltrated. This language may seem contradictory; and it is. This however this is the method of the mutant. To qualify such a position the mutant submerges itself within the comedically-horrific paradox and radical instability at the heart of reason; to ransack logic for its weirdness which has traditionally escaped scrutiny in correlationism. It is what Meillassoux noted as transcendentalism's depth when he wrote: 'The virtue in transcendentalism does not lie in rendering realism illusory, but in rendering it astonishing, i.e. apparently unthinkable, yet true, and hence eminently problematic' [38]. These problems *must* be encountered with the weirdness and radical logic that we see within them, and ourselves, in order to deny negation of our first responsibility to metaphysics – emergence.

The problems we face in the implementation of optimistic absurdity as first philosophy come through two very obvious yet fundamental doubts. On one hand, there is a real and shared concern that objects, especially objects of art, under such a theory might be raised to a spiritual or mystical level. Optimistic absurdities response to this is twofold. In an optimistic reading of this the qualities ascribed to the spiritual or mystical *are* present. But they are present *in* the object *in-itself* and not in the 'Overmining'/'Undermining' discourses and assumptions taken up and continued in Kantian tradition [39].

'There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.' 'But the mystical does not consist in other-worldly knowledge – it is the indication of science's inability to think the fact that there is a world. Hence "it is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists."' [40]

Finally, to address the other self-imposed anxiety of optimistic absurdity: failure. Our mutant sees the idea of failure to be misappropriated in its use in the qualifying of a metaphysics. Failure is approached in optimistic absurdity as necessary rather than necessarily negative. This is how we begin our philosophy in the negative, lack, disappointment or naïveté. It is seen as an opportunity for speculation and engagement with what it means to fail at such a task as metaphysics or to get stuck at a hippy's bead curtain, or the Hadron Collider [41]. Failure, in the case of our mutant, is not failure of a given metaphysical theory – but a valuable and viable position in itself.

The most important object here however is our mutant. Going forward this mutant must be more self descriptive, transparent, dense, complex, shadowy, criminal, real, monstrous, horrific, penetratingly doubtful, fictitious and comic, than the objects through which it emerges. With this mutant as our starting point we can infiltrate the hallucinated mountain and begin to interrogate the reality of everything else.

37. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 27.

38. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 7-19.

39. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 42.

40. Slavoj Žižek, *Wake Up and Smell The Apocalypse* (2010), As cited in L. Else. [Web Article]. accessed September 25 2012 Available at: <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20727751.100-slavoj-zizek-wake-up-and-smell-the-apocalypse.html> Website: www.newscientist.com "There is an old philosophical idea about God being stupid and crazy, not finishing his creation. The idea is that God (but the point is to think about this without invoking God), when he created the world, made a crucial mistake by saying, 'Humans are too stupid to progress

beyond the atom, so I will not specify both the position and the velocity of the atom.' What if reality itself is rather like a computer game where what goes on inside houses has not been programmed because it was not needed in the game? What if it is, in some sense, incomplete?"

Fossils of Sensation

Alan Boardman

THIS essay proposes a relation between contemporary painting and Manuel DeLanda's Deleuzian inspired materialist ontology. However, my approach does not negotiate direct relations with contemporary painting, instead seeks to investigate structure-generating processes that are common to both non-human geological expressivity and human mediums of expressivity. Through a speculative use of the concept of mineralisation, the relation between the materiality of fossilisation and the immateriality of sensation will be configured through temporalities of emergence.

DeLanda's Geophilosophy

Manuel DeLanda's materialist philosophy is based upon the key principle that all entities that exist are independent of human minds (social entities are independent of human conceptions) and are the product of the same structure generating processes that are immanent to matter energy[1]. This is contrary to the general trend in western philosophy, where matter is an inert receptacle awaiting form projected from the outside. DeLanda claims a matter that is emergent and self-organising. Matter is always loaded with distributions of energy, with potentials for change and novelty. This potential is a continuous flow of becoming or morphogenesis.

To speculate these structure-generating processes, DeLanda draws on the science of non-linear thermodynamics where intensive physical properties such as temperature or pressure, produce extensive physical properties such as length, area, volume or entropy. For DeLanda, the actual world we inhabit emerges from morphogenetic processes structured by a realm of virtual multiplicities defined by 'zones of indiscernibility' [2]. This dynamic emergence has no place for static entities instead all component parts or wholes are process and continuous flux.

1. Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (Swerve Editions, 2000) see Introduction, 11–22.
2. This brief outline is based on Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London, New York: Continuum 2002).

Image courtesy of
the artist

DeLanda uses various examples to reveal how intensive differences produce structure. In *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (2002) he expands the process of 'mineralisation'. For DeLanda, the term relates to a physical process, in geological and biological structures but it can also be used to explore the relations between the actual, the intensive and the virtual, the dynamic emergence that fuses the material with the immaterial.

In the organic world, soft tissue (gels and aerosols, muscle and nerve) reigned supreme until 500 million years ago. At that point, some of the conglomerations of fleshy-matter energy that made up life under-went a sudden mineralisation, a new material for constructing living creatures emerged: bone. It is almost as if the mineral world that had served as a substratum for the emergence of biological creatures was reasserting itself, confirming that geology, far from having been left behind as a primitive stage of the earth's evolution, fully co-existed with the soft, gelatinous newcomers.[3]

The term 'mineralisation' has multiple applications. Soil mineralisation is the result of chemical compounds in organic matter decomposing into plant accessible forms. In geology, the process introduces metals into rock as well as the

process by which sediments replace organic material in the body of an organism that had been buried. In biology, the term relates to the process where an organic substance is transformed into an inorganic one, when, as DeLanda says, soft tissue becomes bone, or when bacteria dissolves the organic matter and leaves behind the minerals to produce a fossil.

DeLanda expands the meaning and process of mineralisation, when he speculates 'about 8000 years ago, human populations began mineralising again when they developed an urban exoskeleton' [4]. Here, mineralisation is understood to be part of the process of the production of things, of the material production of 'reality'. It is in this context that I see a trajectory for the relation between the material and immaterial in relation to painting. Pigment emerged from the natural and material world of plant tissue, animal matter and inorganic mineral and subsequently from industrial hydrocarbon extraction and chemical synthesis. Colour emerges from ground minerals such as transition metals where the atomic scale environment, the crystal field, and chemical constituents engender a unique singularity of colour. The materialities of paint have emerged, like fossils, through the entropic cycle of organism, ossified matter, non-organic life and toward the immateriality of sensation.

3. Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years*, 26.

4. Ibid.

Fossils of Sensation

Fossils, like mineralisation, refer to processes shaped by temporal and material singularities, a reclamation process born underground. For example 'trace fossils' are the residues of life movement, habitat or excretion something left out or left over, no longer connected to the organism that emerged through it. It is the preservation of a process or pattern of sensation, which itself is a process of its own.

'Urolites' are trace fossils made from liquid excretion, malodorous hybrid materials, decaying sediment that erode up and layer down like an industrial ruin or a chemical accident deep underground. This subterranean oil spill is drawn down into the earth by patination but this seepage is also growing up, out and around what has become an ambiguously permanent concrete fossil.

Sub-fossils are remains where the fossilisation process is incomplete, where the contingency of time cuts short the production of non-organic life, once sealed within a solidifying slowing time allowing the fossilisation process to gestate, the geological process is interrupted, an extraction or exposure takes place, a disruption by a higher-level of complexity. Sub-fossils are often found in caves, preserved only for thousands of years, they are caught in a liminal state between the organic and the inorganic.

A third mineralised entity is the Pseudo-fossil, a non-fossil, at least not accepted into the taxonomy. Pseudo-fossils are visual patterns in rocks produced by geologic flows rather than biological processes, such as dendrites formed by naturally occurring fissures in the rock that get filled by percolating minerals. These fossils give the appearance of the mineralisation process, but the organic host was never there. The mineral deposits are mimics of life, by forming what seem to be complex organic structures. Pseudo-fossils are representations of fossils made by same non-human forces, the flows of matter-energy, from which fossils emerge.

The trace fossil, the sub-fossil and the pseudo fossil are strange analogues to the material and temporal conditions of painting. The trace fossil is a residue of a primordial mark on the landscape, the inception of externalised

expressivity by an unknowing 'soft, gelatinous newcomer'. The sub-fossil reveals that any trace of time is always incomplete and is often defined by what is absent, a catharsis for an unknown ailment. The pseudo-fossil is a further incursion of the absent into the material world. Representation of a false organic presence is the onset of overwhelming concern for the immaterial.

These mineralised analogues for painting inhabit the continuous temporal transformations of painting. Deep geologic time is the basis for the mineralogical conditions of painting. Industrial time produces chemical synthesis and the refining of the geologic into a readymade. In the contemporary realm, the mineralogical material of painting has become the hardware for the immaterial information of the digital. These phases of transformation reflect the emergent properties of painting, a system manifest through both material and immaterial manifestations of sensation.

Sensation and Emergence

Extending this framework to incorporate a Deleuzian theory of art, we could say that the process and materiality of paint are 'mineralised sensation', composed of emergent and affective flows that manifest independent of human perceptions and affections. Deleuze proposes that 'percept extracts itself from perceptions of things and from a perceiving subject while affect extracts itself from states of transition' [5]. The traces of 'nonhuman becomings' and 'non-human landscapes of nature' are crystallised in paint matter as monuments, much as the traces of geologic time are inscribed in the process of mineralisation and in the materiality of the fossil record.

all things as contemplations not only people and animals but plants, the earth and rocks. These are not ideas that we contemplate through concepts but the elements of matter that we contemplate through sensation. The plant contemplates by contracting the elements from which it originates – light, carbon and the salts- and it fills with colours and odors that in each case qualify its variety, its composition: it is sensation in itself.[6]

Exigere Ecologies,
oil spill on floor

5. Gilles Deleuze, & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (London, New York: Verso 2009) 169.
6. Ibid, 212







In this context, we encounter the reconnection of the genetic conditions of real experience with the structures and materiality of art. Sensation is an aesthetic theory that, while revealed within the conditions of the work of art, expands beyond art into all systems. As John Protevi has pointed out, Deleuze and Guattari show that at critical thresholds, some physical and biological systems can be said to 'sense' the differences in their environment that trigger self-organising processes. In this way, signs – thresholds sensed by systems – are not only conceptualised as occurring beyond the register of their relation to signifiers, they are beyond the human and even the organic, they are understood as triggers of material processes.[7]

Allied to this conception of sensation is the distinction of hard and soft in the work of Michel Serres [8]. Serres provides an engaging insight with regard to the material immaterial distinction. His work, again focuses on, thermodynamics, information theory, noise and sensation. He reorients the material immaterial distinction toward a system that focuses on levels, characterised by the transformation of scales of maximum and minimum materiality. In the 'hard' sense of materiality, we register the physics of energy and entropy, while in the 'soft' sense of materiality we encounter the theory of information and noise. Serres, as with DeLanda, brings together mixtures of materiality and meaning that are not distinct categories but continuous relational assemblages comprised of mixtures of forces and codes. For Serres, the relation that produces these mixtures of forces and codes is 'sensation', 'Sensation, never pure, filters energies, protects itself and us from an excess of it, encodes and passes on information: it transforms hard into soft'[9].

The immateriality of language and information are the filtrations of sensation. They are the softening of the hardness of things. Much

like DeLanda's 'mineralisation', matter energy, hard and soft, material and immaterial are not frozen unchanging entities, but are in constant flow, always producing novelty. In this sense, matter is mineralisation and its residues are the emergent patterns of sensation.

Sensation is immanent to the material energetic flows that fluctuate between the matter of the extensive world, the processual fluidity of the intensive and realm of the virtual. Sensation is a multiplicity of intensive interactions, layering's and couplings of material processes. Sensation as emergence does not seek to map or represent transcendence projected onto the material world instead it is a component of the mechanisms of immanence as matter shifts through the levels of materiality.

Aesthetics orientated in this way can set out to uncover the traces of intensive processes left behind in the informational patterns of matter. Art and the materiality of paint might become a speculative theory of matter. Aesthetics may be a transformation in the matter of an assemblage an intensive transition from one state to another. The material processes of affective, emergent and contingent transition are the processes through which art attempts to siphon the intensive information of the imperceptible.

7. John Protevi, 'Deleuze, Guattari and Emergence' *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 29.2 (July 2006), 19–39.
8. Steven Connor, 'Michel Serres: The Hard and the Soft' from talk given at the Centre for Modern Studies, University of York, 2009, accessed January 2013. www.stevenconnor.com/hardsoft/hardsoft.pdf.
9. Michel Serres, (1985) *The Five Senses, A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (I)*, trans. M Sankey, & P Cowley (London, New York: Continuum, 2008), 115.

restless tongues expending into rest [1]

Teresa Gillespie

1. Please see: soundcloud.com/teresa_gillespie/restless-tongues-expending



House of Sheaves: The Asymptotic Horror of Nested Nature

Ben Woodard

BRACKETING the taxonomic controversies surrounding Speculative Realism (is it a species of thought, how many subclasses are there, does it cohere at all?) one can assert that the rhetorical if not argumentative core of Quentin Meillassoux's reopening of the 'great outdoors' has been, and continues to be, a pervasive trajectory in contemporary thinking. This wilderness is differently carved according to varying rubrics: the proliferation of entities (Harman), the unbinding of the transcendental power of thought (Brassier), the absolutisation of facticity (Meillassoux), and the precedence of being-as-nature prior to thinking (Grant). I wish to argue, unsurprisingly, for the importance of Grant's model for speculatively navigating the spaces of nature. Grant's position is fortified, I would argue, by the utilisation of Peirce's continuum and the numerous thinkers of the geometric-cognitive (geo-cog) turn who cast alliances, however obliquely at times, with Schelling and the project of *Naturphilosophie*.

In order to narrow the boundary of this argument I wish to focus on the realm of the biological, (as the third of Schelling's *Potenz* or potencies alongside physics and chemistry). Following Giuseppe Longo's construal of the biological as a kind of 'geometry gone wrong,' I wish to outline a geometrically inflected biology paying particular attention to parasitic nesting taking the genus of gelatinous fungus *Septobasidium* as an illustrative case study.

Following this claustrophobic biology, I want to argue that speculation (as biologically nested in the philosopher-as-meat-sack) calls for a rigorous theory of localisation to be heretically adapted from sheaf theory as a means of tracking movement in a topological space (here the space of life). Thought, becomes an asymptotic effluvium of the nested parasite that is not only cast out in into the world as a speculative probe and lure but also directly and indirectly haunts the biological, gluing the folds of thought

to the folds of nested-composition comprising/compromising the speculative thinker.

/1/ – Schelling's Organics

Schelling's writing on life begins from the simultaneous critique of vitalism and mechanism. In many ways, as Grant has pointed out, Schelling utilises the organic as a form of organisation. Schelling's valorisation of life is not, like Bergson's, a romanticisation of creativity but posits life as a particular corruption of dynamics, or feedback loop between spatial forms at the level of the biological. That is, life is not an explanation but a problem necessitating further explanation; while nature is a kind of movement for Schelling, this does not explain life. This was the impetus beyond my coining 'dark vitalism,' [1] thereby painting life as a kind of cosmologically-scaled trajectory of putrescence splattered across the undulations of local space-time vectors. To pull back from the gothic imagery (though useful in blasting the long standing coruscating aesthetic of life) the goal, the difficult project beyond the rhetorical acid, is of attempting to understand the relation of actualisations of life to so-called capital 'L' Life (Life as a triumvirate of Humanist, Existential, and Theological hangovers). The trick is understanding life as life-forming

particularly in relation to seemingly limitless thought.

For Schelling evolution or the unfolding of forms always presupposes involution (enfolding) but Schelling importantly dismisses immanence as a model for nature, as it exaggerates stability in the real whereas pure idealism hypostasises the stability of mind. For nature to be what it is, it must be fundamentally contradictory as infinite productivity which is infinitely inhibited, which explains how an organism can be productive yet in a limited fashion, it remains vaguely itself as it continues to exist.

Biological entities do not result from a development of fixed forms which exist ideally in nature, but are merely 'the visible expression of an internal proportion' between ordinary qualities such as electromagnetism, chemical reactivity, and the like.

These qualities are valences of nature which can only be described as unconditioned dynamics, nature can produce only as it is an agon of forces, but these kinds of dynamics, or activities, can only be ideally surmised. It is here that Schelling's particular take on the transcendental is pivotal.

1. For more on Dark Vitalism see my *Slime Dynamics* (Zero Books: 2012).



In his remarkable essay 'Movements of the World: The Sources of Transcendental Philosophy' Grant demonstrates how Schelling's articulation of the transcendental is not the sterilised schematic of Kant's idealism, nor the perilous march of Hegel's logic, but is the motion of the formless, the dynamics of form's derivation [2]. While in the realm of physics this entails exploring the dynamics of light and darkness, and in chemistry the visceralisation of empiricism and the inversion of phenomenology ('what thinks in me is outside of me'), in biology, as has been suggested, this derivation the exploration of the involution and evolution of life. Let's take a particularly odd example.

/2/ – Septic Space

Septobasidium is a fascinating genus of gelatinous fungus found on tree bark that Diana and Mark McMenamin discuss in their text *Hypersea*. Septobasidium appears in different varieties but often as a mound of folds. Scale insects of the family Coccidae, which feed on plant sap via 'suctorial tubes' [3] engage in what was seen as a parasitic relation the septobasidium but what is now seen as oddly symbiotic. The relation between the insects and fungus which is described as 'animal-lichen' [4] is described by the McMenamin's in the following way:

Septobasidium forms a dense, flat mycelial growth on a tree branch. The mycelial mat possesses chambers, channels, and tunnels which harbor a colony of scale insects. Some of the adult insects are penetrated by the

septobasidium hyphae, which branch into complex haustoria inside the scale insect. The 'lichenised' insects are paralysed but not killed, and they are able to give birth to numerous progeny. In effect, the insects are turned into living pumps; they continue to feed on the sap of the tree branch even as nutrients and water are passed through their bodies to the invading fungus [5].

The younger insects born inside the fungus, due to their waxy shells, carry the fungus with them to found new colonies. There is even a wasp which parasitises the scale insect that is already in symbiotic relation with septobasidium.

This example, I hope, demonstrates the importance of spatiality in constructing a modern *Naturphilosophie*, as proposed by Giuseppe Longo (and other related thinkers). In numerous co-authored texts, Longo discusses biology in relation to entropy, not, as commonly done, as negentropy but as anti-entropy. Life does not apparently violate physics but borrows and maneuvers in ways only possible due to complex spatial connectivity and particular proximities.

One strange spatial aspect is that life-as-organism becomes a hollow in which its external and internal configurations are maintained by the activities of its parts in combat with its affordances. As Longo, Montevilli, and Kauffman put it, nature becomes non-ergodic (non-averaging) above the atomistic level [6] which complicates the idea of physical entropy, in terms of whether a biological phase-space

2. Iain Grant, "Movements of the World: The Sources of Transcendental Philosophy" in *Analecta Hermeneutica*, 3 (2011), 1–17.
3. Diana & Mark McMenamin, *Hypersea* (1996), 229.
4. Ibid, 230.

5. Ibid.
6. Giuseppe Longo, Maël Montévil & Stuart Kauffman *No entailing laws, but enablement in the evolution of the biosphere* (Cornel University Library: 2012), 2.

is even possible [7]. In an essay co-authored with Buiatti, Longo suggests that biological randomness is altogether different as it is a nested randomness, one composed of biological antinomies [8], between chance and necessity, and continuity and discreteness. The potentialities of life do not break or reverse entropy, but complicate it as a kind of local acceleration, as any account of a biological phase-space is a dissipative one [9]. But, in its dissipation, the organism is 'largely the iteration of a never identical morphogenetic process' [10] and this is why an organism is not just a process but a permanent passage through a critical state, as it is continually breaking symmetries but always replacing them [11]. As thinking beings, this articulation can cause a certain claustrophobic reaction, as the space where that festering imp 'the subject' once lived is made vacant and filed with parasites and symbiotes and its exterior becomes a wasteland of irritants and susceptibilities.

Here we can conjoin Longo's wonderful description of life as a geometry 'gone wrong' with Schelling's use of the 'unthinned' resulting form his particular twist on the transcendental. Since ideas and things are equally natural for Schelling, the thing is that which never ceases to be what it is while still remaining part of an active continuity, the boundless sea of diversity, though the movement of things away from each other as a transcendental break is not a purely ideal move but where form as such shifts to another form. The transcendental is space making space for other spaces. In this sense, Schelling's strange philosophical move is to support the continuous at the cost of the discrete without allowing thought to determine individuation. The transcendental is the redoubling of the problem of the continuous and the discrete at the level of thought while asymmetrically, in the last instance, emerging from nature.

/3/ - Sheaf-Surgery and Claustrophobic Biology

The organic dictum 'everything is connected' can now mean something claustrophobic in terms of biological composition as this intense form of nestedness redraws what a biological trajectory means, and how thought attempts to intuitively practice this enmeshed

mapping speculatively on a global level by itself parasitising the biological. In other words, thinking the biological becomes a form of self-mutilation, a kind of Frankensteinian surgery in that we must isolate and operate on particular boundaries which are themselves bigger on the inside than on the outside.

This is one concept that can be taken from Sheaf theory as outlined by Fernando Zalamea. A topological sheaf is a cut of regional fields from the continuum yet this cut, this selection of the supermultitudinous continuum, is an unbound genericity. As Zalamea relates the concept to Rene Thom, if the sheaf is a cut in the continuum, then the selection (in our case the organism) becomes a vacuum in a qualitative homogeneity. Sheaves become a way of cutting out in order to track the local while it remains attached to the global, or to the continuum, to examine (in the terms here) the homology between a local life-form and the formations of its global environment. Sheaf theory is a means of intuiting an impossibly complex category but isolating a section of it in and thinking it in terms of its relations to the larger category ('how does this particular life-form form life?').

Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* illustrates this troubling 'bigger on the inside' geometrical and topological maneuver as the exploration of an isolated selection of space becomes a trajectory with a universal ambit. In the novel the inhabitants discover a 'spatial disparity' as doors appear which lead to seemingly infinite rooms as well as an endless spiral staircase. The children in the house explore without fear as 'There are certainly no primal associations with spatial anomalies' [12]. We might say that there are no primal associations with spatial anomalies because exploration and association is the anomalisation of space-as-it-appears for us. This is the importance of Gilles Chatelet's notion of the virtual separate from Deleuze's: the virtual is the pressure of movement, not a predetermined or decided power, but a propulsion diagrammed by the arrow from the cut out object. This loosening of the constraints of the arrow-of-movement, marks the central shift from set theory to category theory, from thought as a construction of belonging, to a construction as a function from one topology to another.

7. Ibid, 12.

8. Marcello Buiatti, Giuseppe Longo, *Antinomies and Multi-level Interactions in Biology*, *Theory of Biosciences*, vol. 132, n. 3439-138 (2013), 1, 6.

9. Ibid, 19-20.

10. Ibid, 23.

11. Ibid, 19.

12. Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, (Pantheon Books: 2000), 39.

The emphasis Chatelet makes is that one should avoid falsely assuming the force of the arrow is a cause which is purely externalised. The outside is another's interior and thus, following this, the organic becomes a miasma of enablement (against abstract law and order), which in turn colors thought as an intuitive construction as already implicating nature. But this does not give us harmony as the movements of nature and of nature-as-thought are always fed back through the local actualisation of the singular thinker, and, therefore always suspect to negation and failure.

/4/ – Conclusion

The mobility of the explorer in nature is one of envolding with thought while being envolded by nature. Schelling's organic nature is that which works to be at a point of indifference but, such polarised activity causes it to hack itself into pieces only to produce new productivities: 'Nature is an activity that constantly strives toward identity, an activity, therefore, which in order to endure as such, constantly presupposes the antithesis' [13].

In relation to the organic in particular 'Life, where it comes into existence, comes against the will of external nature (*invita natura externa*), as it were by tearing away from it' [14].

This freedom, or tearing away, is one highly constrained and, for the human organism, we might say that speculative thought is the freedom of a parasite that detects and reproduces abstract movement. Following Longo perhaps this is why despite, and because of, our ability to change our environment 'Living entities go wrong most of the time' hence his invocation of Heraclitus', 'Life Bubbles Forth' [15].

Thinking or navigating nature, in utilising sheaf theory (as well as other forms of topological thinking) is a program in the spirit of the scream common to biological horror films involving invasive forms of life, the scream of 'Get this thing out of me!' yet with the realisation that one cannot escape the continuum of life as a conglomeration of chemical and biological forces.

The alternative, to take a cue from our aforementioned scale insects, is to weaponise our parasitic nestedness while accepting the parasites with which complicity will extend our influence. Speculation is the freedom of the diseased organ, still connected by striving out, attempting to leave its ground, demonstrates, as Christopher Lauer puts it, 'reason is neither entirely self-grounding nor grounded in nature's circulation of forces, the Freedom essay begins to carve out a place where reason can be positively determined as freely given' [16]. But this is possible only by thought internalising the constraints of the physical world while unfolding the apparently unreasonable into reason.

To reassert the spatial here, we can relate Schelling's thinking of the world as never attempting to overcome the *Spielraum der Kontingenzen* (the placespace of contingency). That is, there is space to think because the unconditioned spaces outward and inward, because the actual is possible because of an unprethinkable dynamic movement, but a movement that belongs to the actual in all its parasitic tangles, and is thought only by rooting and exponentialising the fleshy extractions we are.

13. F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (State University of New York Press, 2004), 220.

14. Ibid, p62

15. Longo, Montévil & Kauffman *No entailing laws*, 2.

16. Christopher Lauer, *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling* (Continuum Books, 2010), 177.

Spider Universe: Weaponising Phobia in Bataille, Nietzsche, Spinoza and Deleuze

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I

THE image is from Lars von Trier's film *Antichrist* [1] – indeed it provided the basis for the promotional poster. I'm not going to talk about the famously phobic director today, but wish simply to indicate how the image and indeed the film 'weaponises' phobia, which is to say turns it into an offensive rather than defensive weapon. Initially it would seem that phobia is defensive in that it crystallises in an object an indefinite fear or anxiety, a crystallisation that supports the process of individuation which senses mortal danger from the very universe that has given rise to it. As Freud suggested in his case study on Little Hans, phobia is an effect of the question that being raises for the subject 'from where he was before the subject came into the world' [2]. Anxiety occurs the moment discontinuity apprehends the vulnerability of its existence in the presence of a voracious outside, an order, momentarily, of exteriority that would return existence to the infinite continuity of intimate violence (there are plenty of mothers who eat their offspring).

The phobic object is initially defensive then because it gives definition and a particular shape to fears that are related not so much to a 'what' but to a 'where' that is indefinite and formless, without limit or boundary, lacking even the regular dimensions of time and space; which is to say that the only way to sustain individuated existence is to turn these dimensions into vectors of fear arcing over the abyss or chaos that threatens to engulf it.

It is this chaotic order of intimacy that Bataille famously regards as the basis for religion, and in a certain tradition of Judaic-Christianity, going back to Solomon, the fear of God recognisably takes on a phobic structure in which God exercises his cruelty through his crystallisation of the evils that are multifariously present in life. The fear of God is 'the remedy

1. 2009, Denmark: Nordisk Film Distribution

2. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 432.



Nature is Satan's Church



for a world made up of manifold terrors' [3],[4] a multiplicity of evil out of which God makes himself One, rendering the latter nothing but mortal manifestations of the indescribable, infinite terror of God.

This 'cultish' God has of course long since passed away and been replaced by the 'moral' God who, as Kant argues, requires us to act as if He had also passed on, the role of correlating the subject to its sense of reality falling to the faculties of reason and a critical reflexivity that patrols the boundaries of perception even as it pursues the goal of moral improvement.

The function of science is not much different such that in its calibrations of the outside, 'the ocean of electromagnetic radiation, a wild and raging mixture of different wavelengths', it simply seeks to provide superior services and applications to the castrated hedonism of techno-scientific capitalism. Nevertheless, neuroscience shows that the brain's relation its outside is both combative and creative, differentiating it in its own way the raging mixtures into shades of fear and hunger indicating predator and prey and further into a world of colours signalling danger and opportunity, horror, desire, fascination.

To return to this image from Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*, another image of the great outdoors. On the one hand, Von Trier's movie has a very simple narrative that dramatises the disastrous effects of cognitive behavioural therapy in a treatment that is based to a large degree, according to the director, on his own treatment by the same method. In a key scene of pillow-therapy following the death of their son – their child defenestrates himself after witnessing coitus between his mother and father – the 'man' played by Willem Defoe, a therapist, attempts to treat his wife, played by Charlotte Gainsburg, for her grief-enhanced phobic anxiety.

'Exposure', he says, in good CBT fashion, 'that's the only thing that really works... everything else is just talk'. He asks his wife to itemise all her fears, but she cannot bring specific things to mind: 'Can't I just be afraid', she asks, 'without a definite object?' After taking time out to fuck his patient once again, the therapist shifts the point of address from objects to space, and in post-coital repose, asks 'if you can't tell me *what* you're afraid of, perhaps you can tell me *where* you are afraid. Where do you feel most exposed? What would be the worst place?'

'The woods', she replies.

'It's funny because you were the one that always wanted to go into the woods. What scares you about the woods? What frightens you there?'

'Everything', she says.

As part of his exposure therapy he encourages her first to visualise and then enact complete immersion in the wood, site of labyrinthine darkness and the unknown, locus of irrational fears, and this she does, becoming a creature of the outdoors, the pure expression of natural malevolence, a 'wild and raging' force of radical exteriority, that wages war against her husband, his genitals in particular, against men, herself, the world and the earth, finally going up in flames. 'Nature is Satan's Church', she says, 'the wind, his breath'. While the 'antichrist' of the title is clearly the son, 'young Nick', his sacrifice unleashes hell on earth through the offices of his mother and her self-loathing grief that become mingled with the rage of Satan in the exhalation of violent expenditures.

The scene depicts the act of parental coitus that repeats the opening scene of the movie, but this time it is an act in which the father desperately tries to satisfy or quell the jouissance of the mother – we have just seen her run naked into the woods to start masturbating ferociously at the foot of the tree. As he has done before, the man tries to make love to her in an act of pacification. It doesn't work; instead, as the camera draws back to frame the image that we see

3. Thomas Metzinger *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 20.
4. Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-56*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 267.

here, and the scene takes on a particular form in which the couple become a composite eight-limbed figure at the base of a network of roots that has caught and apparently held captive a number of prey designated by the fragments of pale body parts. What emerges is a the eight-limbed shape of a spider and its web, here a web of roots and branches that extend out into the entirety of the scene comprising the whole field of perception and its dimensions of space. The universe of the great outdoors becomes a web at the base of which sits a monstrous spider, a tangle of anguished jouissance, the phobic form of formlessness par excellence, a precise even mathematical form that defies paradoxically all mathematical attempts to account for it.

For Lacan, the phobic object is a 'signifying crystal' [5], and the crystallisation of the phobia in this image can perhaps be well described by using Deleuze's definition of his own idea of the 'crystal-image' from *Cinema 2*. There he writes of the 'indivisibility of an actual image and "its" virtual image' [6] that combines both present and past, recollection and perception in the defining image of an actual existence that is continually duplicated by a virtual existence. Thus, the spidery image of a phobic universe emerges into sight on the basis of the recollection of the fatal scene of coition between the man and the woman at the beginning of the movie, crystallising for the viewer past and present in a determining pattern of existence that raises the question of being to the subject from where he was before he came into the world.

II

This paper is part of a larger project in which I use this crystalline image as a pattern for creativity in film and philosophy that broaches the question of the subject as an effect of (and affect of) the exteriority of the universe where this exteriority is also an anteriority and an interiority. The phobic crystal is both a creative

effect and an organising principle of the screen of perception and recollection that forms, deforms and reforms in the access, production and deployment of reality. In *The Fold*, Deleuze draws a direct correlation between film making and perception generally in his gloss on Leibniz and Whitehead and answers essentially his own question concerning how 'the One' emerges from 'the Many' by evoking the 'great screen [that] has to be placed between them. Like a formless elastic membrane, an electromagnetic field, or the receptacle of the *Timeaus*, the screen makes something issue from chaos...' [7]. For the screen of phobic perception, the universe is a non-euclidian space without vanishing point other than an open mouth, or rather a multiplicity of endlessly reflected mouths drooling crystalline gobs of spit – the mirrored galaxies of spidery phlegm that have fascinated poets, philosophers and astrophysicists over the millennia.

Or as Georges Bataille famously writes, 'affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit' [8]. Perhaps appropriately, this doesn't make much sense. To say that the universe is something like a spider or spit is of course *precisely* to give it a form, the form of a spider or spit. But this is the point where the involution of phobic perception folds and twists form into a paradoxical figure of formlessness. This can be seen in Nietzsche who invokes the universal spider as a figure simultaneously of violence and of rationality and *ressentiment*. In Book II of *Zarathustra*, 'The Tarantulas', Nietzsche finds the root of reason to be nothing but 'the spirit of revenge' [9], similarly in Book III he denounces the idea that the heavens constitute an 'eternal spider or spider web of reason' [10], contending rather prophetically, that heaven is 'a dance floor for divine accidents' [11] – which of course it was in Charing Cross in the 1980s. In *The Antichrist* (Nietzsche's not Lars von Trier's), the spider is evoked as a figure of

5. Jaques Lacan, *Écrits*, 432/520

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Bloomsbury Academic: 2013), 82

7. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Continuum: 2006), 86.

8. "Formless" Georges Bataille, *Documents 1*, Paris, 1929, p. 382 (translated by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr., *Georges Bataille. Vision of*

Excess. Selected Writings, 1927-1939, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press "Formless", 31).

9. Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Available at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#link2H_4_0028.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



the Christian God, conjoining both spirit and sickness; and yet, in *The Gay Science*, in a key fragment, a moonlit spider in its glistening web poised between two trees is a figure *for* and a witness *of* the eternal return, evoking both horror and the necessity of its affirmation. And perhaps it is the ambiguity of this gnomon, this spidery dial casting its multiple shadows by the light of the moon that is essential with regard to the notion of the eternal spider and her web of reason, 'the great net of causality' [12], whose tensile strength has been precisely calibrated over 300 million years of evolution to the form and force of the fly that thus becomes ensnared, bound and liquidised by jaws and enzymes. Nietzsche's use of the metaphor in its claustrophobic entanglement and devouring intimacy is also a power of horror.

But is it rational to fear spiders? Is it reasonable to evoke them, as Nietzsche does here, as a figure for his revulsion for the rational God of revenge, *ressentiment*, sickness? Arachnophobia, it is sometimes claimed is virtually universal; like a phobia for snakes and other poisonous animals, a fear of spiders is assumed to have evolutionary causes, but there is in fact no reason to assume this. Only 0.1 percent of the 40,000 known species of spiders are poisonous to human beings, and there are many more types of wasp, fly and numerous other insects that are more devastating to human beings than spiders – you just have to think of the tsetse fly or malaria-bearing mosquito. Indeed, given flies like these (and even for that matter the common house fly) are so much more deadly to populations than spiders, one assumes that if it had crossed the minds of human beings to cultivate them they might have evolved a positive fondness for spiders along with companion species like cats and dogs. And yet culturally, pictures of spiders are commonly met with fear and disgust. Fear of spiders is irrational, then, there is no reason for it, but it exists and as such perhaps denotes the insufficiency of reason. Must there be a

reason for everything, including reason? The spider then hangs in its web at the vanishing point of reason's (in)sufficiency. No doubt, Nietzsche uses the figure to suggest or justify an irrational fear of reason precisely because there is no reason to reason other than God who, of course, is unreasonable. Reason's (in)sufficiency is plunged to infinity, or rather to the eternity of an endless returning that is figured and witnessed by the spider as phobic object.

Similarly for Bataille, then, spiders and spit are evoked as universal forms of formlessness in the sense that they are phobic objects whose powers of horror reduce many people to a state of abjection beyond all rational control or determination. This is the formlessness of the universe for Bataille, a formlessness that arises as an effect of a form that is impossible to grasp, an impossibility precisely missed through mathematical formularisation. A spider or a gob of spit is not its mathematical form even though it does indeed have a form and this form, beyond the threshold of sense, reduces us (or some of us) to formlessness. Hence, in Bataille, the conjunction of spiders and spit both mark or emerge from holes that indicate the infinite, that is to say the exteriority and non-sense of death and corpses to which is attached an undead, universal process of unbinding and putrefaction. Bataille writes, concerning the inassimilable disorder of death that cannot be incorporated into a coherent or clear vision of the world: 'Before our eyes, death embodied by a dead person partakes of a whole sticky horror; it is of the same nature as toads, as filth, as the most dreadful spiders... Something awful and bloodless attaches itself to the body that decomposes, in the absence of the one who spoke to us and whose silence revolts us' [13].

Before our eyes, the dreadful spider is an object that supremely distinguishes, in psychoanalytic terms, image, imaginary and look.

12. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Columbia University Press: 2006), 27.

13. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share Volumes II & III* (Zone Books: 1991), 216-217.

With its eight-legs, and four pairs of eyes, the fanged spidery beast presents a powerfully disgusting image to many. Crawling imperceptibly and inaccessibly in the night of death, it is an image we can't face, or conquer, or even struggle against, so that it necessarily disturbs the imaginary mastery that is supported by a sense of coherent reality. The spider marks the point of incoherence, a crack in reality. She crawls out of this crack, crouching in the hole at the vanishing point of a universe rendered phobic, her gaze orienting the space and time of perception.

In solidarity with the scopic drive, spit emphasises the orality of horror in a violent gesture of revulsion and disgust, globules of sickness arcing in the firmament, glistening with death. They designate the universe as hawked-up sputum from an expectorating abyss. The revolting interior depths of chaos are exteriorised in abjection as spit supports the dimension of space organised by the look. Drooling, like a madman spitting in the eye of the universe, or into its mouth.

III

In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze concludes his book on the famously agoraphobic author by characterising the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* as a spider. 'The Search' he writes, 'is not constructed like a cathedral or like a gown, but like a web' [14]. This web is continuous with the narrator's 'body' which we may also suggest is continuous with the author's 'persona' in so far as this persona, in contrast to the 'conceptual persona' of philosophy, is a figure that crystallises a certain block of affects and percepts, just as a 'person' is shaped out of various syntheses of perception, recollection and habit that ground consciousness and self-knowledge in states of fear, desire and auto-affection. Proust's 'spider-narrator' is pre-eminently a power of sensation. It perceives through feeling, and since it is blind, 'sees' through touch, sensing and deploying its characters and objects in its web:

It is this body, this spider's web that opens or seals each of the tiny cells that a sticky thread of the Search happens to touch. Strange plasticity of the narrator: it is this spider-body of the narrator, the spy, the policeman, the jealous

lover, the interpreter – the madman – the universal schizophrenic who will send out a thread to Charlus the paranoiac, another thread towards Albertine the erotomaniac, in order to make them so many marionettes of his own delirium, so many intensive powers of his organless body, so many profiles of his own madness. [15]

While for Nietzsche, the universal spider casts a confining web of reason, here the agoraphobic author transforms himself, according to Deleuze, into the spider as universal schizophrenic who casts over the abyss his own net that is filled with mad marionettes, paranoiacs, erotomaniacs, the products of his own body's delirium.

The schizophrenic spider's web is continuous with, or an extension of, his body-without-organs, that provides the boundary, the screen or membrane, between a pure multiplicity that it may sense in an involuntary way thereby awakening organs of perception in a process of differentiation and shaping of objects and characters in the web. In his reading of Proust, Deleuze selects the commonly phobic figure of a spider to characterise a schizophrenic process of narration that sustains nevertheless a schizophrenic narrator as a central orienting figure, which would perhaps be more common in a phobic narrative. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari invoke similar kinds of figures as central to the powers of creation in thought and art, philosophy, film and fiction. In this book a significant and problematic difference is made between the 'conceptual persona' that crystallizes the power of the concepts of a particular philosophy, and the 'one great figure' in aesthetics or literature (a kind of 'perceptual persona') that embodies an intensive block of affections and perceptions such that a whole system is organised around it, 'like the single sun of a constellation of a universe' [16]. As we have seen, the 'great figure' that sits at the centre of Proust's universe is not a sun as such but a composite persona-figure, the schizophrenic-spider. Deleuze and Guattari note the existence and significance of these kinds of 'figurological' composites that produce a concept of thought, just as they give affectivity to a concept [17]. No doubt, then, that the 'Schizophrenic' provides the persona for a certain image and modality of thought which

14. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: Continuum, 2008), 117.

15. Deleuze, Gilles *Proust and Signs*, 182.

16. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (Columbia University Press: 1994), 65.

17. Ibid, 66.

18. Ibid, 65.

the spider provides with an affect and indeed a modality of perception that can accede to the virtual dimension of things. But what kind of affect does the idea of a spider give to the idea of a schizophrenic?

Like the great figures of literature, conceptual personae require narrative to give them shape. For the latter, this is the philosophical anecdote. 'A few vital anecdotes are sufficient to produce a portrait of philosophy' [18], write Deleuze and Guattari, citing Diogenes Laertius. Another example is drawn from an anecdote that concludes the opening chapter to Deleuze's book on Spinoza concerning his life. In this anecdote spiders feature once again but this time as part of the narrative assemblage that goes to construct the conceptual persona of Spinoza's philosophy, a figure embodying his system of ethics. Spinoza's biographer writes that the philosopher of immanence commonly enjoyed looking 'for some spiders [which he] made fight together, or he threw some flies into the cobweb, and was so well-pleased with that battle, that he would sometimes break into laughter' [19]. For Deleuze this activity is an example of neither sport or pastime but practical philosophy and science. In *Spinoza*, Deleuze suggests that these gladiatorial, staged battles demonstrate that 'animals at least teach us the irreducibly external character of death. They do not carry it within, although they necessarily bring it to each other: an inevitable *bad encounter* in the order of natural existences' [20]. One is tempted to interject that the 'bad encounter' surely involves the misfortune of coming across Spinoza who subsequently introduces the spiders and flies to each other. However, the interventionism of animal experimentation notwithstanding, Deleuze regards such empiricism as the reproduction in 'a pure fashion' of 'relationships of modes in the system of *Ethics* as higher ethology' [21]

Surely there is something a little forced in the characterisation of this child's game as 'ethology' especially in the endorsement of its 'purity' and 'elevation'. Is Spinoza's laughter simply what Deleuze might call the 'joy' of disinterested science, or is it rather the gleeful play of a 'wanton boy' who kills flies for sport, something not unknown in the Seventeenth century. In his commentary in *Spinoza*, Deleuze clearly recognises the apparent negativity

of the game but only to reject it in a gesture that looks suspiciously like a classic form of Freudian negation the purpose of which is to both acknowledge and countermand the pertinence of Hegel's famous reproach about the general absence of negativity in Spinoza's system. Deleuze is at one with Hegel here except in the attribution of a fault: there is indeed no negativity in Spinoza, not even when he's torturing spiders.

While perhaps not evidence of arachnophobia (unless it can be seen as an intuitive form of cognitive behavioural therapy in which a staged familiarity provides the setting for the over-coming of fear), Spinoza's anecdote certainly betrays the aggressive misuse – formal, disinterested, and scientific though it may be – meted out to spiders generally as an effect of the fear and disgust that they produce. How many readers have beaten a spider to death purely because it scares you? Spinoza's staging of 'battles' perhaps betrays the ambivalence inherent to a particular identification. Spinoza casts his own web over the inassimilable externality of death and in a rather Bataillean if not Nietzschean fashion, laughs in horror and delight. 'There's an indefinable gaping in laughter, something mortally wounded – this is nature, violently suspending itself' [22]. In a chapter called 'the Divinity of Laughter', Bataille calls 'man', the human being, simply the occurrence (or we could also say the event) of a question or a process of questioning. It is he claims a different question to the cosmic questioning posed in the stars or micro-organic life; it is a questioning that becomes conjugated into forms of consciousness that eventually reduces itself to questions that don't have an answer. At this pointless point, nature, in 'man', erupts in laughter, not least at the idea of autonomy from nature to which such questioning has led. Laughter opens up in a burst of disturbing ecstasy, the indefinable gap that splits being apart, in the laceration of all other things and itself as an isolated being. This radical opening is for Bataille the opening to the divine. Situated therein in this divine gap, the spider universe of weaponised phobias suspends, briefly in an object of horror, 'the enigma that constitutes us, and our unsolvable nature [which] is the source of glory, delight, laughter and tears' [23].

19. As cited in Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (City Lights Books: 1988), 12

20. Ibid.

21. Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 72.

22. Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, 103

23. Ibid, 107

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A photograph of an exhibition space. In the foreground, there are several people, mostly men, who are out of focus. They appear to be looking at something off-camera. In the background, there is a large window or glass partition. Through the glass, a white metal fence or railing is visible, suggesting an outdoor or semi-outdoor area. The ceiling is white and has some recessed lighting fixtures. The overall lighting is warm and somewhat dim.

Weaponising Speculation Exhibition

2nd – 7th March 2013

BLOCK T, Smithfield, Dublin



John Ryan

Green Painting, oil under cling film over mdf

Blue Painting, oil over cling film over mdf

Hanging Bag, oil over black bin liners under transparent bin liners

Red Painting, oil under cling film over mdf

Yellow Painting, oil under cling film over mdf

John Ryan graduated from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and is currently undertaking a Masters in Fine Art in the Glasgow School of Art and is participating in an exchange in The Stedelijk School in Frankfurt (studying under Professor Douglas Gordon).

In 2012 he co-founded, with artist Tom Watt, the Resort projects (a series of offsite residences experimenting with new methods of art making, communal living and friendship in remote locations). The most recent Resort Project was selected to be supported by Project Anywhere: A Global Peer Reviewed Space for Art at the Outermost Limits of Site Specificity, which will be reviewed at a conference in Parsons, The New School in New York in November 2014.

In October 2014 he will be included in the Babel Biennial Meeting in Santa Barbara, California. Other recent publications include *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 2014).





Rob Murphy

Portrait (2013)

Sound installation

1 second. Repeated every 3 and 7 seconds

Rob Murphy is a visual artist living and working in Dublin, Ireland. He is a graduate of the MA – Art in the Contemporary World [2012] at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, and previously the BA in Visual Arts Practice [2011] at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin. He has been working collaboratively on various projects with the artist Lily Cahill since 2012. Recent solo exhibitions include *Prodigy* at Broadstone Studios, Dublin, 2014, *The Crusades* at The Drawing Project, Dublin, 2013, *Scum* at The Joinery, Dublin, 2013.

www.robmurphy.ie

We were in transition year of secondary school. All of us were about fifteen or sixteen. They brought us out to this Catholic retreat compound near the airport that was run by Jesuits. They had a day of activities set out for us to do. In the morning we played five-a-side amongst ourselves and ran around and stuff. In the afternoon they gave us a really shit lunch. After that they lead us into an old gymnasium where they played the last ten minutes of The Dead Poet's Society for us. Twice. After that they split us all into two groups. A woman lead my group into a room with lots of sunlight. There were lots of different coloured yoga mats on the floor. We were told to lie down on them. We were told to close our eyes and place our hands loosely across our stomachs. The woman told us to relax and to 'Breathe deeply', to '...become aware of the rhythm of our breathing and breath smoothly to relax'. To 'Feel the warmth of the room and the weight of our bodies on the floor'. To 'Ease any tension we may have had from the day'. To 'Forget any thoughts that might be filling our minds' and keep our eyes closed.

She asked us to imagine ourselves "lying down on lush grassy hills". She said: "Your eyes are closed and you are fully aware, but at ease...you feel the grass beneath you and the gentle summer breeze that is whipping up from the river flowing at the foot of the hill. You stand up opening your eyes, and see that all around you are lush meadows, roaming hills. As you look down, you see that you are not wearing your regular clothes, but garments made of finely woven cloth that flow and keep you cool in the warm sunshine".

At this point she had just hired up the whale sounds that were playing on the cd player in the background and continued talking at us.

"As you look around at all the grace surrounding you, you see a man walking over the hill towards you. He looks friendly and is wearing similar clothing to you. He has a friendly smile which puts you at even greater ease. As he approaches you he nods a greeting and you reciprocate. The man walks right up to you and stands with you. Both of you remain silent to enjoy the simple pleasure of being in each other's company on such a beautiful day. The man then breaks this silence with a gesture towards his hand. "I would like to give you something" he says... "It's a rock". He holds out his hand and you see a rock of a shape, size, colour and quality that is specific just to you...and special to every one of you."

"You are amazed at the different qualities of the rock as you take it from his hand. You study the rock for a time... you feel its warmth from the man's hand. When you look up, you see that the man has left".

It was at that moment she switched the track to a Brian Kennedy song and continued: "And it slowly dawns on you, that man... was Jesus Christ".

Rob Murphy Excerpt
from 'The Last Ten
Minutes of The Dead
Poet's Society' (2012)

Alice Rekab

Diamond 2

Single Channel DVD installation, Specifications Variable.

This video takes the form of a .gif. It borrows a scene from a comedy sketch by Stars Combine entitled *MuMu Language*, filmed in Sierra Leone and it gives an account of an illegal Diamond trade between a man who cannot be understood, his friend who attempts to interpret him and a Lebanese Diamond Trader. *MuMu Language* is currently screening as part of *Vector/Attractor* and exhibition at the Goethe Institute Dublin. This Video was produced as part of an ongoing collaboration with Stars Combine.

Alice Rekab is a visual artist living and working in Dublin and London. She completed an MA in Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmiths University of London in 2011, following a BA in History of Art and Fine Art Media at NCAD in 2009. She is currently undertaking PhD study at London Graduate School. Her work explores the affective Dynamics between subjects and objects of attraction, examining the performative, the mimetic, the amateur, the viral and the regional.

Recent projects include *Vecor/Attractor*, The Goethe Institute (2013); *Flag Stain*, Gracelands Circling the Square (2012); *Worlds Combine*, EVA International (May-Aug 2012); *A MacGuffin and Some Other Things*, Project Arts Centre (April 2012); *This is Going to Take More Than One Night*, The Model, Sligo, (March 2012); and *Units of Potential*, a public art commission installed at the Lir Academy Dublin (2011).



Andy Weir

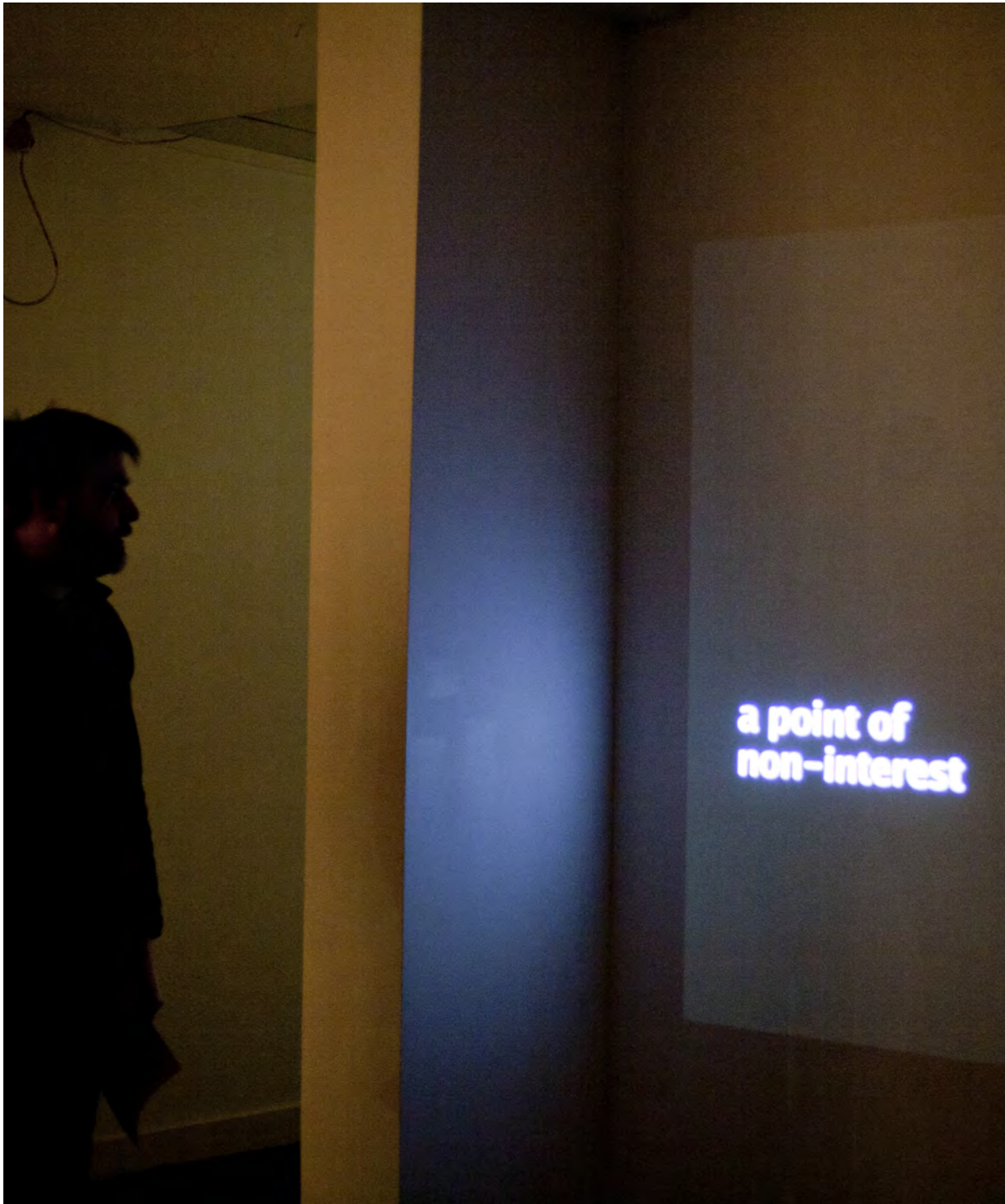
DESERT SCAN GALLERY VERSION

HD video, 2'30" loop

DESERT SCAN GALLERY VERSION/provides a didactic explanation/
alongside seeing it/in the gallery/and then provide a didactic explana-
tion/alongside seeing it/at the conference/in Lucida Grande/PULSES/to
strip away reduction to your interpretation/AT LEAST/respice against/
lazy romantimagicism/as limit to reason/and claims to openness/to
freedom of interpretation/as a re-assertion/of subjective priority/Google
meets MRI scan experiments/converging towards/a point of non-interest
/determined neurally/image residue/of collapse of delay test/brain as
material/bypassing perception/as a dream of the data industries/relayed
alongside your perception/addressed to you/in another narrative/
DESERT SCAN GALLERY VERSION/loops... mmmmm

Andy Weir is an artist and PhD researcher at
Goldsmiths, University of London





Teresa Gillespie

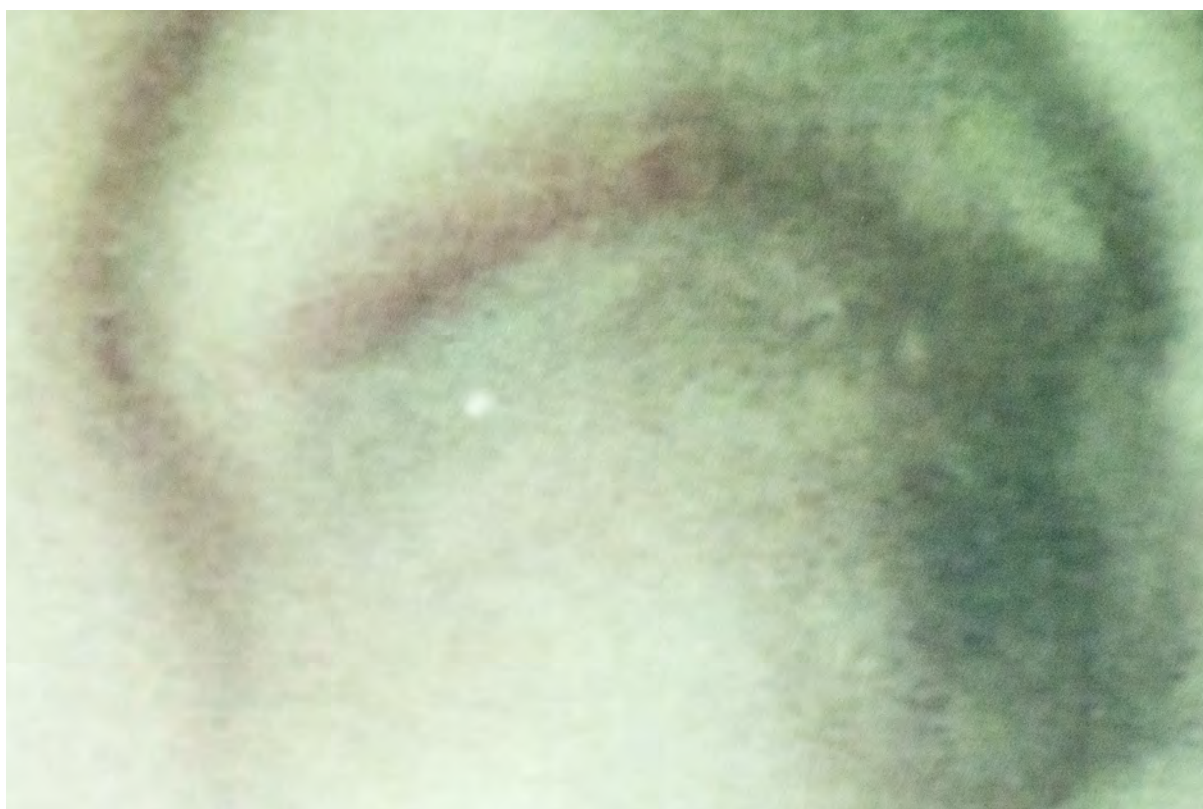
Spica's Dream After Bataille (2013)
(Greenaway's car park outside Le Hollandais)

(05:00 mins loop, single channel video projection)

Teresa Gillespie is an artist based in Dublin. She works primarily through installation with a focus on spoken word, sound, video and objects. She is a graduate of Glasgow School of Art and the Royal College of Art, London.

Recent solo shows include: *return to the borderland bends*, John Jones Project Space, London; *inside an outside (tracing the shadows of a strange attractor)*, Residencia Corazon, Buenos Aires ; *among objects*, The Joinery Dublin; *along the borderlands bends*, The Return Gallery, Dublin; *too old to be playing house...*, showreelproject, Milan; *p.s I love you Yassin*, Atelierfrankfurt, Frankfurt. She has exhibited in group shows nationally and internationally and undertaken numerous artist's residencies including the Frankfurter Kunstverein Deutsche Borse Program.





Alan Boardman

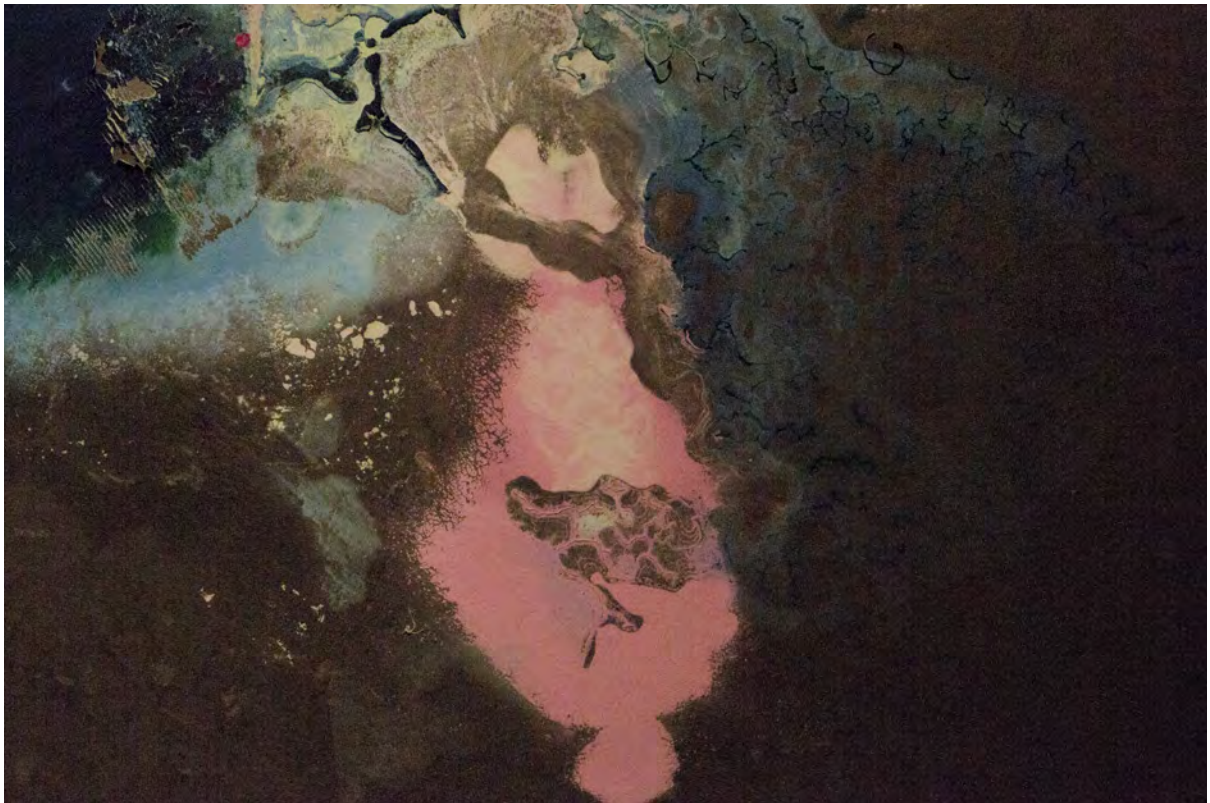
Exigere Ecologies

Installation with oil, gloss and resin on aluminium, oil spill on floor and video projection with audio (video and audio collaborative work with intermedia artist and composer Derek Foott).

This project incorporates three iterations of the non-organic life of painting. Material cartographies of the geologic, industrial and the digital, trace painting through the flows of matter-energy and information as a fossil of sensation.

Alan Boardman is a PhD candidate in Visual Culture at NCAD. His research project is a speculative aesthetics based on Manuel DeLanda's new-materialist ontology. He is also a practicing visual artist.

www.abstractgeology.wordpress.com
www.derekfoott.com





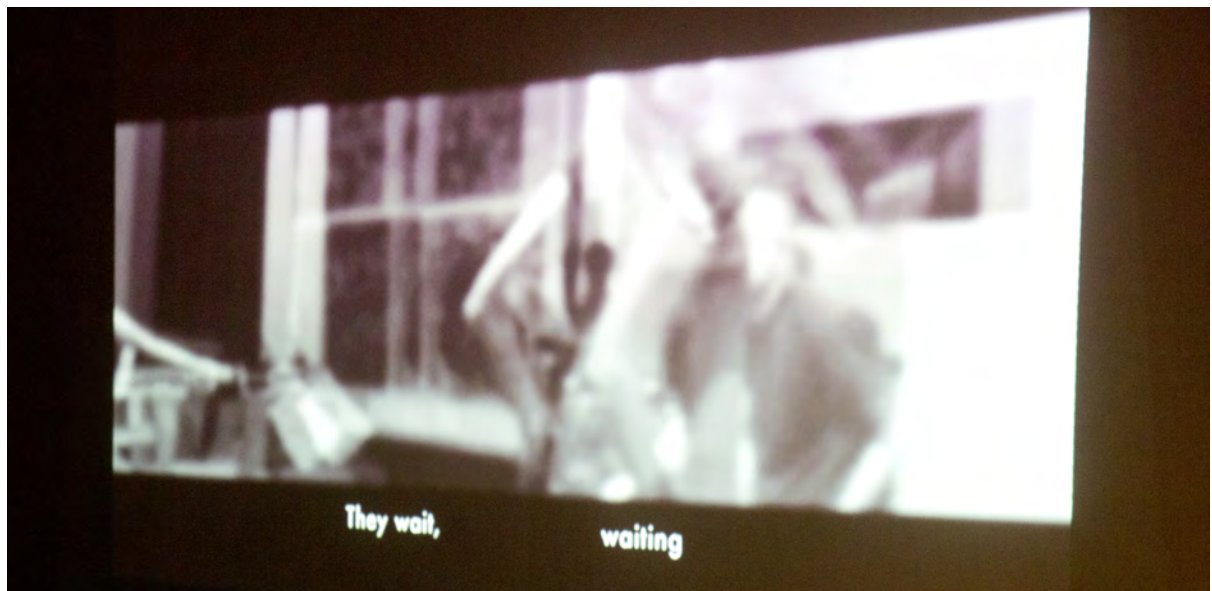
Ciara McMahon

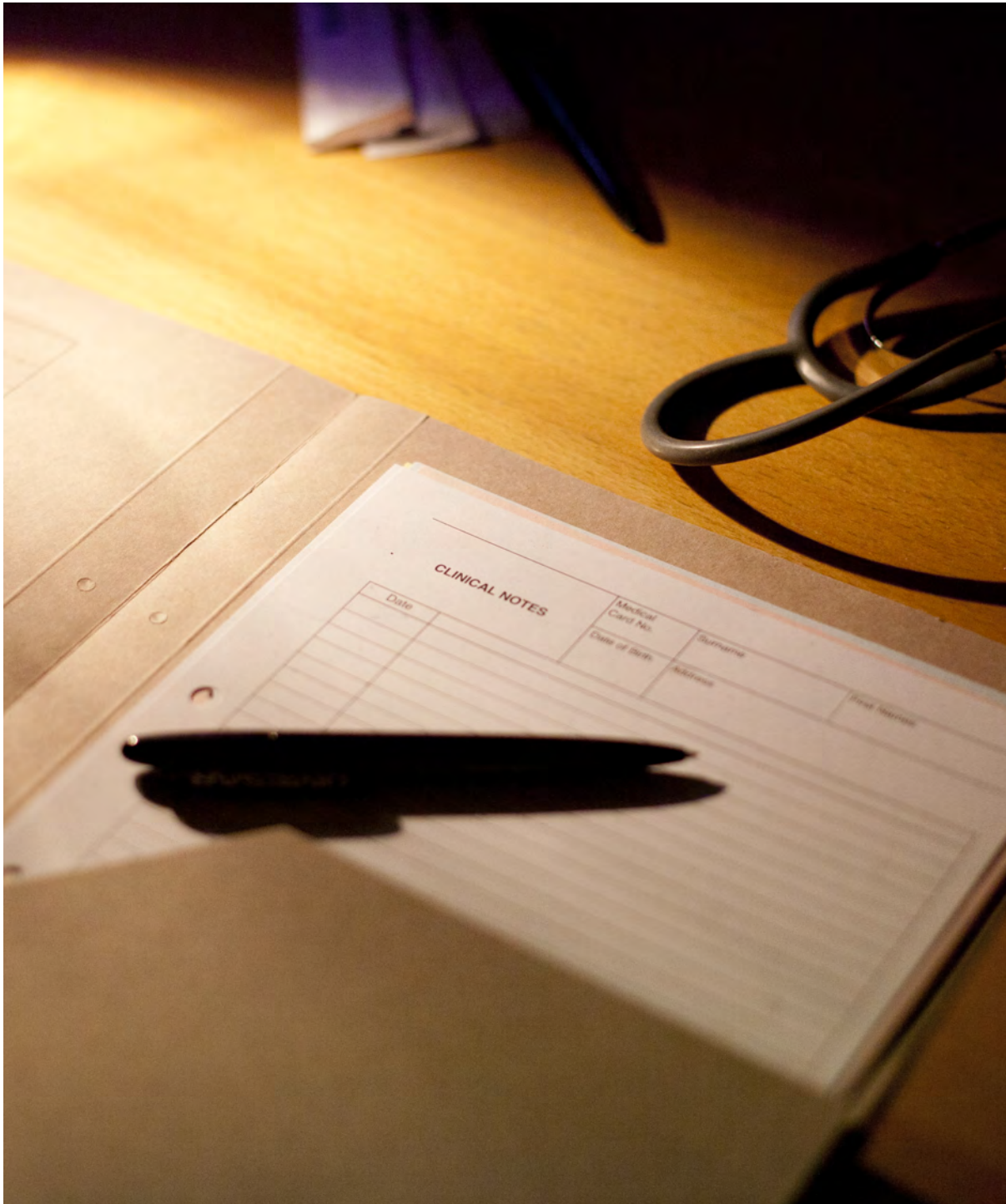
Offering Singularity

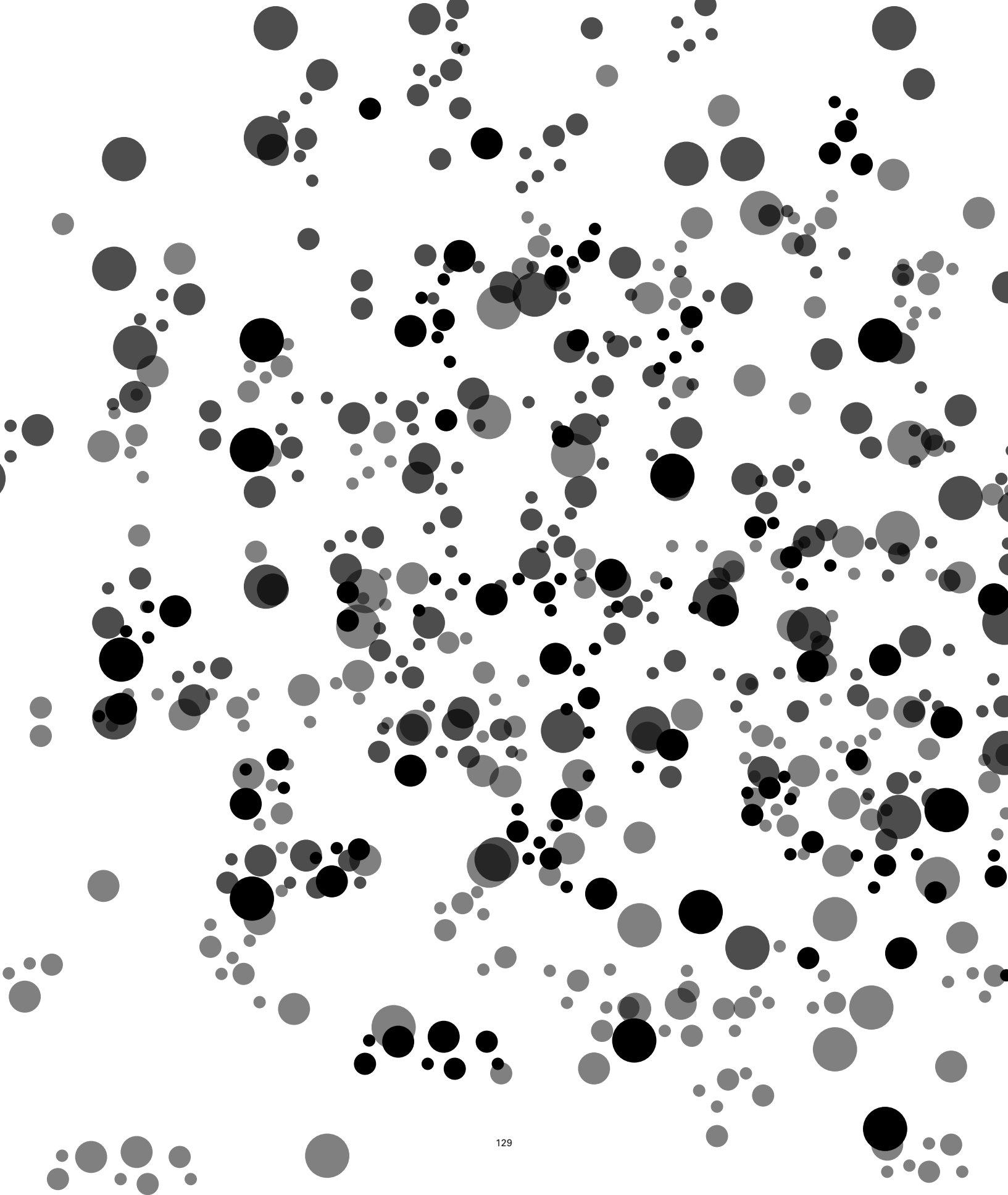
Mixed Media Video installation. 3'20"

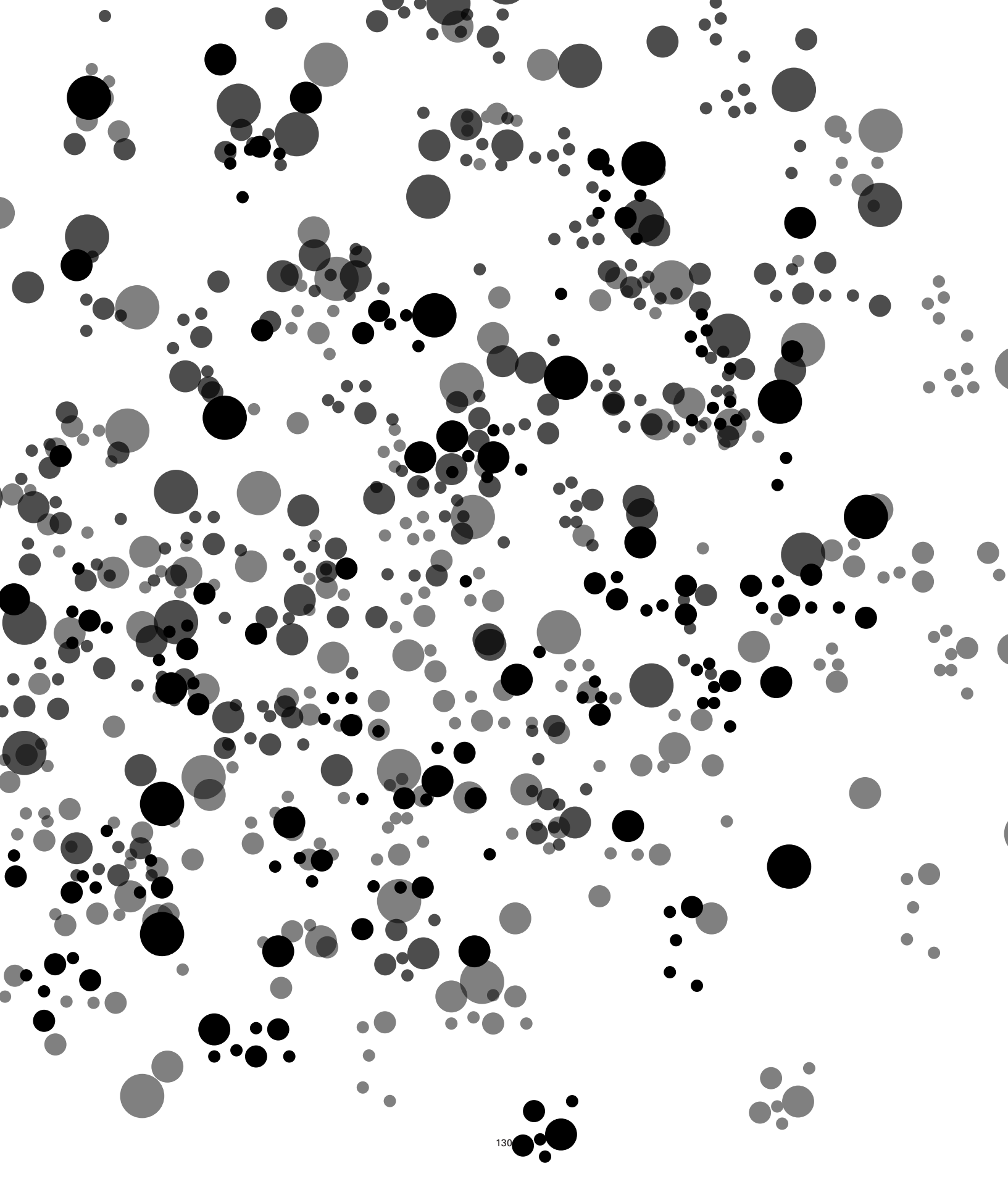
Offering Singularity is a meditation on the moment of 'between' in conversation, in medical consultation. Positioning itself as neither fact nor fiction, this video installation mobilises the long history of musical and theatrical improv where different thought systems struggle to communicate. *Offering Singularity* wonders about the moment of reciprocal response, that slightly-after-and-yet-before moment in a conversation and the potentials or possibilities this moment can and does offer.

Ciara McMahon practices both art and medicine. She has an MA in Art in the Contemporary World, joint pathway and a BA in Fine Art Practice and Art History from NCAD. Her art practice is frequently collaborative and performative, realised through photography, film and site specific installation. Subjectivity, intersubjectivity and the body are explored in her work, which negotiates the osmosis between the disciplines of art and medicine. McMahon is currently working with TheOpenRehearsals on an Arts Council of Ireland funded film commission. In 2011 McMahon was awarded a travel and training award from the Arts Council in addition to the Audrey E. Klinck Scholarship at the Banff Arts Centre, Canada. In 2010 she received funding via the artist in the community scheme managed by Create the national agency for collaborative arts, to research and develop the collaborative Leaky Self Project. McMahon has exhibited widely in Ireland and internationally.









Distinct from the norm. Distinct even from the academic norm. Twice removed the para-academic is doubly unwanted. The ones you have trained are set loose and they know your secrets. They are pests and they want to be armed.

Weaponising Speculation is an exploration of the various expressions of DIY theory operative in the elsewheres, the shafts and tunnels of the para-academy. Before the storms the para-academic needs to equip herself. Not only with tools, but with weapons. This collection is a weapon with which to break open academic discourse, to invade and conquer as yet unknown territory, and to aid thinkers in the siege to reclaim the real.