

# **View from the Archimedean Point**

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## Summary

*View from the Archimedean Point* attempts to develop a method of reading art which draws on the theories of vision initiated by ancient Greek philosopher Archimedes and developed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. Archimedes speculated that if he could find solid ground on which to stand and a long lever that he could shift the Earth. From this place he would also have a view of totality removed and distinguishable from the view allowed by his regular human capacities. Arendt developed this idea in relation to Descartes and the modern viewpoint which is assisted by technology.

Here I attempt to outline the ways that artistic practice is connected to the human condition and how art has been affected by the many advancements in technology in both a practical and abstract sense. Digital tools may be useful but they can also radically affect values systems related to economic but also social and cultural value. By outlining some of the mechanisms which allow these shifts to occur and showing how images and ideas have functioned as Archimedean points in the past, I hope that it will give a basis for the model of using the Archimedean point as a tool for reading and thinking about art, which are then presented in applied examples from my own work in the appendices.

My study consists of three parts, a set of instructions for activating the Archimedean point, a collection of free texts and descriptions of my working practice and this essay which attempts to give a more structured overview of this concept and the ideas it presents.

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Language: English    Key words: art, digital technology, environment

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## Introduction

*He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself;  
it seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition.*

*(Er hat den archimedischen Punkt gefunden, hat ihn aber gegen sich  
ausgenutzt, offenbar hat er ihn nur unter dieser Bedingung finden dürfen.)*

Franz Kafka<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter VI: The Vita Activa and the Modern Age of *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt claims that the development of tools which could augment vision in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century were one of the key developments of the modern age, providing a 'fixed' point. This provided a new basis for scientific study, initiating a turn to consider the viewpoint of the Earth from that of the universe. (Arendt, 1958:248) I began to consider the role that advances in technology, and visual tools in particular, play in the discourses of arts and philosophy. As the notion of the Archimedean point appears to resurface at different moments throughout history, it will be useful to study how this idea can be applied in relation to contemporary technology. How may the visualisation of new 'points of view' rooted in digital and social media be useful for the needs and discourses of our time?

In this text I aim to develop a theory on how the concept of the Archimedean point could function as a model for reading and thinking about art, in particular the interventions and disruptions in cultural discourse initiated by artists. I am interested in how such a reading could be helpful in developing new approaches and critical frameworks within the visual and performative arts, both from the perspective of a creator and an observer. My model tries to provide tools which can be useful for positioning our contemporary views to those of the past and to observe and test the present moment.

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<sup>1</sup> From Kafka's *Aphorisms*, quoted in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958) p.248

## Defining the Archimedean Point

The Ancient Greek philosopher Archimedes theorized that if given a solid point on which to stand and a long lever, he would be able lift the Earth off its foundation – in essence, that by using a simple tool, combined with his strength and intelligence, he could move the static, the fixed, and effect change beyond normal human capabilities.

From a theoretical perspective, a *Punctum Archimedis* is created when finding a vantage point from which an object or subject of inquiry can be seen with a view of totality while remaining independent of them. I think that the paradoxical nature of this hypothesis as applied in practice relates well to some of the paradoxes artists are faced with in the course of their work. As an artist you need to harness the power of your ego in order to make a splash, to assert your vision, while at the same time you are often faced with a host of ‘earthly’ constraints. Access to time and space, access to money and resources, the possibilities and limits of materials, tools etc., are all bridges that need to be crossed on the way from the impulse to the resulting work. These parameters can come into conflict with the creative process.

In *Mechanical Problems*, Archimedes’ precursor Aristototele asks “How is it that small forces can move great weights by means of a lever..?”<sup>2</sup> reformulated into the terms of artistic practice, we could wonder “How is it that artists can cause such great waves within society through their artworks and visions?” If we were to then apply Archimedes’ answer to the riddle of the lever:

*Magnitudes are in equilibrium at distances reciprocally proportional to their weights.*  
(Τα μεγεθεα ισορροπεοντι απο μακρων αντιπεπονηθωτως τον αυτον λογον εχοντων τοις βαρεσιν.)

This image would imply that the artist, being lighter than society, would be required, in proportion to this lightness, to distance themselves from the fulcrum on which the lever balances, in order to allow their lighter weight to affect its movement. However

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle: *Minor Works, Volume XIV, Mechanical Problems*, 3, 1936, p. 353-355

the concept of the Archimedean point is not only about mechanics. It also offers a shift in perspective, as Archimedes' claims:

*Give me the place to stand, and I shall move the earth.*<sup>3</sup>  
(δῶς μοι πᾶστέων καὶ τὰν γᾶν κινῶσω.)

Within philosophy this statement has been seized and debated as a metaphor for the attempt to find an objective point of view, beyond the limits of the Earth on which we reside. It suggests an image of totality - distanced, unimpaired and unlimited by our human scale. In this sense, as a tool of imagination, the idea of the Archimedean point offers us a theory with no defined criteria for what form it must in fact take or what the resulting image might reveal.

The concept also represents a lot of the qualities I would like to criticise here. As Kafka's aphorism suggests, the Archimedean point can also end up being a weapon, and one which may cause self-harm, depending on how it is used. It's an idea that can represent egoism and control, utilizing positions of power with the wish to fundamentally affect the ground on which society stands. In setting oneself apart from wider society and exerting will and power over it beyond usual means, it simultaneously produces a privileged position. Archimedes himself will not feel the Earth tremble as he moves it, as he will be somewhere else, standing on solid ground, where he can safely and at least theoretically successfully achieve an objective viewpoint from which he can observe the results of his experiment, and not suffer any potential consequences.

When applied to artistic practice and research, the concept provides both tools and problems. On the one hand it is a theory of vision – Archimedes was creating an image of a view he could not see from where he was – and a theory of action – even to attempt this realisation we have to find or stabilize some solid ground to stand on and shape the right tools.

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<sup>3</sup> A remark of Archimedes quoted by Pappus of Alexandria, *Collection or Synagoge*, Book VIII, c. AD 340

By the 17th century, during the time of Descartes, visual aids such as telescopes had been invented, capable of augmenting the limits of the human eye. This new layer of visibility could be studied and considered, greatly influencing his revolutionary ideas on subjectivity. Today we might argue against some of his conclusions as a result of this image, since the images we can reference now encompass yet other layers of complexity which were unavailable to Descartes. Therefore, we should keep in mind that further layers of imagery are always awaiting development and discovery. The elusiveness of the Archimedean point may lie precisely in the fact that, like the horizon, it is slippery; whenever we chase it, it moves further out of our reach.

The theory I would like to present is that digital technology and the internet may offer new iterations of the Archimedean point. Digital technologies have significantly affected our ability to communicate across time, space and language barriers, and have allowed the voices, stories and images of a wide group of people to become visible and audible in a global sense. These tools create a new lens with which to view not only individuals but also groups, trends, phenomena and events in society.

Accompanying this essay are two texts outlining a range of working methods and problems that have come up in my own observations and works to consider in which ways I have been able to temporarily create or disrupt spaces through artistic practice, providing an Archimedean point for myself and others. The three parts are: a set of instructions (I) outlining some steps toward the Archimedean point; a series of free texts and descriptions of my own artistic approaches (O); and this essay (E), which attempts to provide a more structured analysis of how the concept of the Archimedean point may work in relation to art.

## Part I - Where are We Standing?

*The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. (Arendt, 1958:2)*

*Man — despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments — owes his existence to a six inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.  
- Author and exact wording unknown*

Hannah Arendt considers the relationship between humanity and the Earth to be central to the human condition. Also in art, humans try to make sense of the Earth, her mechanisms and processes in relation to the physical realities and limits experienced by our bodies. Arendt sees the issue of people becoming disconnected from their bodies and dependent on machines as a political one, which needs to be understood and addressed as such. If we fail to tackle this issue we will in effect lose our autonomy and end up as slaves. (Arendt,1958:3) Arendt means that we might create structures and conditions which may leave us dependent, that function beyond our control.

As is clear from the scientific evidence presented on climate change,<sup>4</sup> humanity does have the ability to make Earth unsustainable for itself as a species. Arendt distrusts relying on scientific discourse to solve these problems as she sees that the language science has adopted as being far removed from common human language. Science has become a “world where speech has lost its power.”(Arendt,1958:3) As Arendt is primarily a political philosopher, she finds her voice in political awareness and action, through *Vita Activa*, rather than through professional politics, which she considers insufficient to address these pressing issues. She proposes that we simply need to “think what we are doing”, and she goes on to outline an image of the nature of society which may be able to help humanity deal with the consequences of its own capacity for creative invention.

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<sup>4</sup> Many sources point out scientific consensus on this topic including NASA’s climate webpage, which lists a host of international scientific organisations who agree on the issue as well as a paper by J. Cook, et al, *Quantifying the consensus on anthropogenic global warming in the scientific literature* (2013)



As a major innovator in the production of new language and new ideas, art should surely play its role in helping us to connect our thinking to what we do. However, as in the fields of science and politics, it also faces challenges and obstacles. Art is also dependent on a number of factors which affect the freedom of its speech. There are many forces which influence the form, subject, visibility and accessibility between art and the audience. These include censorship, education, social conventions and stigmas, economic and social exclusivity, to name just a few.

### **Art or Activism?**

The small minority of people who control the value of commodities, their pricing and distribution (the basic ones such as food, water and housing) are essentially defining the boundaries of life for the vast majority of people. Attempts to curb this power may come in different forms, and an important part of this process is defining and introducing new terms and models for thinking and approaching our world, such as the commons<sup>5</sup> and the anthropocene. I believe artists can and must take part in these dialogues if these tools are to be useful.

There is still some debate as to whether art can and should involve activism. The two fields overlap at times, and to some extent influence each other. Some artworks attempt to draw attention to issues, using imagination and the capacity of art to evoke empathy and emotional connection to spur people towards political action. Activists, on the other hand, tend to strive for real intervention in the activities of society and politics. Their actions and standpoints may inspire the imagination of artists, their activities affect the conditions of work for artists. On both an abstract and a practical level these two worlds intertwine. Lieven De Cauter describes this dichotomy like this:

*[imagination vs. action]*

*Imagination is rich, ambiguous, amoral - action is moral, straightforward, poor (in imagination). Therefore: (good) committed art is rare and problematic, (truly or reasonably) committed artists*

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural philosopher Lieven De Cauter states that ‘The fight for the commons is the most urgent struggle of our time.’

*are common and necessary (as alert citizens). But the rare moments the imagination of art and activism truly mate, are to be cherished as the locus of an activist imagination.*<sup>6</sup>

The project *Frontiers of Solitude*<sup>7</sup> attempted to look at the current discourse on the anthropocene.<sup>8</sup> Through expeditions, groups of artists from different countries tried to find ways to react to the long-term ecological devastation caused by the extraction of fossil fuels and energy production in Northern Bohemia, Lappland and Iceland. The artists collected images and sound, mounted performances, built devices and wrote texts that reflected what they had learnt and experienced. As the project was an experiment, during the subsequent exhibition and symposium there was some discussion about the viability of the artworks serving a political function, since on their own<sup>9</sup> there was also a tendency towards aestheticizing and romanticizing the issues rather than criticizing them. A second problem, which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage in contemporary practice, was the discrepancy between the experience of the artist as visiting flâneur and the community who are permanently living in a place.<sup>10</sup> A third issue that arose was how to consolidate the fact that the project itself was supported by grants which were in all likelihood funded through the exploitation of natural resources, one of the core issues that the project addressed. Isabelle Frémeaux and John Jordan from The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination had an interesting perspective on this dilemma. Though

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<sup>6</sup><http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lievendecauter/2013/12/12/theses-art-and-activism-in-age-globalisation>

<sup>7</sup> A series of expeditions, meetings and exhibitions in collaboration between artists, activists and theorists from Iceland, Norway and the Czech Republic, 2015-16

<sup>8</sup> The anthropocene a new classification for the current geological era which has been suggested to describe the mark that humans intervention has had on the Earth.

<sup>9</sup> To clarify I mean showing only an artwork vs. seeing the presentation of the whole process. As always there is a specific context and process behind each work which may not be visible in the final piece exhibited, but is nonetheless relevant.

<sup>10</sup> An important point that came up during discussions was that the visiting artists might be strongly affected and react to the sounds produced by industrial machines, or the effects of dust and pollution. These reactions are spontaneous and temporary, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but one has to keep in mind that for people living in the area these conditions, such as loud noise and pollution are a part of normal everyday life. In this situation their absence would be more disturbing than their presence, the psyche, the body are adapted to these conditions. The experience of the visiting artist is not the experience of the place and the community but that of a visiting artist, and should be interpreted as such.

they tried as far as possible to live their lives according to their ethics,<sup>11</sup> they were willing to exhibit and collaborate with institutions receiving financial support from companies and organisations with which they disagreed. However, they did this only on the understanding that their work would not be censored and that their ability to speak freely and would not be compromised. Unsurprisingly, as active practitioners of civil disobedience, they were also prone to disobey pleas made by the host institutions to change their program or censor their message.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between art and economics, between art and political influence and legitimacy, is not isolated, but is in fact indicative of similar relationships and dependencies between other fields and these mechanisms. Art, however, is considered to have a more flexible and loosely defined relationship to these mechanisms in that the form art uses are always changing, and it is in the interest of these institutions to maintain a dynamic relationship to the arts because they can also learn tactics from art.<sup>13</sup> But when art and the mechanisms that run society have conflicting goals and aims, the conflict becomes prevalent and development of culture stagnates.

### **Commodity Logic**

The affluent and powerful nations practice biopolitics<sup>14</sup> while the poorer, dependent nations are subject to necropolitics. To be truly autonomous is to be able to decide who may live and who must die. (Mbembe, 2003:11) Those in power

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<sup>11</sup> The couple, who live on a squat in France constructed to protest and prevent the building of another airport outside Paris had not travelled by plane for the past 7 years.

<sup>12</sup> As was the case when they were asked to run a 2 day workshop on at the Tate Modern in London titled: *'What is the most appropriate way to approach political issues within a publicly funded institution?'* Ironically, before the workshop the curators sent an email stating: *'Ultimately, it is also important to be aware that we cannot host any activism directed against Tate and its sponsors, however we very much welcome and encourage a debate and reflection on the relationship between art and activism.'* Deciding to continue with the workshop, it concluded with a heated debate between the staff and the group about the Tate's main sponsor BP and an action of placing the words ART NOT OIL in the top windows of the Tate. The workshop participants went on to make further public actions at the museum in criticism of BP and its relationship to Tate.

<sup>13</sup> In a famous quote from Picasso, on seeing a talk painted in camouflage colours he exclaimed "C'est nous qui avons fait ça!" ("We created that!") in reference to the Modernist development of abstraction.

<sup>14</sup> Mbembe uses this term in the sense outlined by Michel Foucault in *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France, 1975–1976*.

being able determine the movement and cost of food, the cleanliness of water and housing, and to control work and education, are in a sense shaping the parameters for hopes and dreams. Even if some dreams are far removed from reality, the dreams we hope to experience in reality are usually somehow pitched to us through images, art and advertising. These images are so cleverly composed and strong that they can even change our perception of what is reflected in the mirror.<sup>15</sup> For this reason it is important that we attempt to keep an open dialogue and autonomy over images, that each of us has the option to be in control of which images may live and which images must die, at least within our own minds.

It is a disturbing thought that one's dreams could be built on those of others,<sup>16</sup> that this essential and potentially positive means of escape could be disconnected and distributed and regulated through a hierarchy in the same way as food or water. Everyone dreams, and the tools for dreaming are provided to us through culture, books, movies, advertising, theatre, art and music. From these we learn new forms of dreaming, and Art can also provide a tool for dreaming. In a digital age, the outlets for expression are multiplied, but they are also often quickly controlled and regulated. Algorithms, templates, programmers and social media marketing strategies all play a role in determining the framework of how we eventually meet much shared creativity, and if you start to look at it, this frame can skew the image to a great degree. (Robertson, 2015)

Contemporary art also provides us with a frame within which we can dream, we can be surrounded, enveloped by the dream of an artist which may include us, it may even include others but very often we are dreaming behind glass, within the mass of a crowd focused on a single point or in the gift shop on the way out to keep for later.

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<sup>15</sup> In episode 2 of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, one woman remarks as a response to seeing the documentary that: 'I realized after watching this film that I've never looked in the mirror and seen myself as I am, I always see the image that I want... and I think that comes largely from having been trailed around in all the major galleries in adolescent, you know this is culture this is Beauty with a capital 'B'... of course up to a point also from advertising too but much more the painting thing. That you think the female body is beautiful, that I am a beautiful object and if not then I have to do something about it.'

<sup>16</sup> 'The past we know is simply what someone imagined, the stories that the humans of that time decided to tell.' from a lecture *The Future was Collective* by Adrienne Maree Brown at the Global Art Forum, Art Dubai, 2016



Fig.1 Olafur Eliasson, *Room for One Colour*, Moderna Museet, 2015

Commodification isn't a force, but a mechanism given force by the power of the tools which enable it, and the behaviours that support it. It has infiltrated all aspects of life and institutions, and the way it disrupts contemporary art can be seen as mirroring how it disrupts other areas of life. According to the logic of commodification, growth and expansion can and must continue, and anything can be absorbed if it can be packaged and sold. The commodification of contemporary art is but one example of attempts by speculative market orientated economics parasitizing on the arts and human culture, and this problematic not only because it becomes recalculated into primarily an economic value, but also because the language of art is corrupted by this process.

The many kinds of value we may attribute to art<sup>17</sup> allow its value to be measured in primarily abstract ways. This makes it a perfect candidate for speculation in economics as offers the possibility of an abstract concept uncoupled from the

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<sup>17</sup> Such as the personal, social, historical or as an example of exceptional skill.

physical value of the object. According to Alfred Sohn-Rethel, the first real abstract concept was the idea of an abstract value, which he posits as having first appeared in conjunction with humanity's invention of the concept of money. Once the abstract value of an object begins to become distanced from the physical material value of the object, the social mechanism of applying social abstract value is able to grow far out of proportion to the real material value. (Sohn-Rethel, 1977) Today it's possible to exchange one abstract value for another (e.g. to exchange money for a work of art) and so the possibilities of at least the monetary abstract value of art can in some way be traced back to the decoupling of material and physical value.

The art market offers little transparency on the abstract values attributed to art. If the art market continues to behave in this erratic way it will further destabilize the relationship that people outside the artworld have to art, its production and thinking.

## Part II - Looking for the Archimedean point

### The Archimedean Point as Image

It is interesting to look at how artists have tried to visualise the Archimedean point as an action. These examples give us a bit better of an idea of how this idea, which sounds great in theory, is complicated when put into practice when translated into visual language which is more strictly bound to the properties of the real world. The lightness of the idea becomes much heavier when an artist begins to draw it 'solving' the problems of weight vs force visually in the hands of a mortal man.

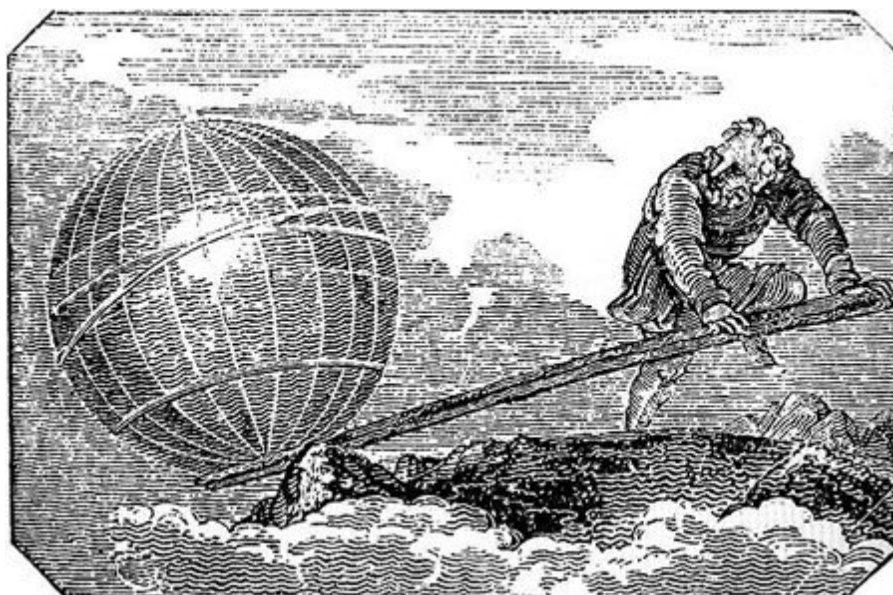


Fig. 2 Engraving from *Mechanic's Magazine* (cover, Volume II, Knight & Lacey, London, 1824)

As an illustrative image intended for an audience of mechanics, it is important that the mechanics of the lever be depicted according to the known and familiar laws of physics, helping it 'feel right'. Archimedes is shown standing on a patch of ground where it seems that gravity works in a similar way to what we are used to on Earth. This patch of ground is surrounded by clouds, so the artist has tried to keep some mystery without forfeiting a sense of 'reality'. In a different context where the artist is not subject to such laws, the image may end up looking completely different:

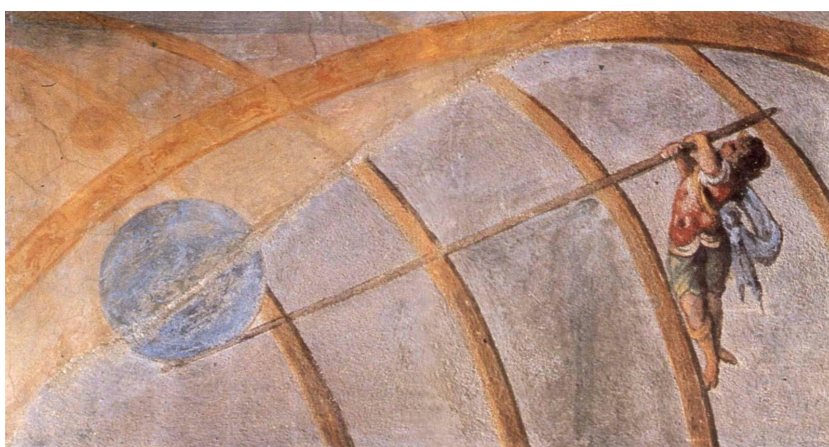


Fig. 3

Wall painting in the Stanzi-  
no delle Matematiche in the  
Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence,  
Italy). Painted by Giulio Parigi,  
1599-1600.

This image was also intended to be looked at by the scrutinizing eye of men of mathematics, but here the ground has been left out, the Earth has a different, more mystical kind of 'weight'. Despite not having any solid ground to stand on, the artist still references familiar body orientated phenomena. The figure hangs from the lever, thus there is some kind of gravitational pull present which is manifested in weight.

As both these images show, it is not uncommon for the sciences and the arts to be in dialogue with each other. Both fields have developed complex and unique forms of language in order to research, communicate and preserve their ideas, and it's not uncommon that you will find an artist with one foot in the field of science and vice versa. If we think again about what was happening around the time the Parigi fresco was made, the Renaissance revolution of perspective had already become standard in painting, a tool which liked to keep people's feet on the ground in a rather earthly way in comparison to medieval painting where it was permissible to stand or float about in any way favourable to the picture.



Figs.4 & 5 A medieval painting shows very light footed figures, they almost float on tiptoes as if they weighed nothing. In a later Renaissance painting by Mabuse everything is grounded and reflects its weight, even the cloth.



Art may defy observation, at least for a time, since it tends to always emphasize and foreground what is deemed important. Once the objective observations that perspective offered took hold tiptoeing figures fell out of fashion for a long period of time (maybe revived by Chagall?). A similar thing happened when photography appeared. Eugene Delacroix, a somewhat sceptic of photography, studied some calotypes of a male and female nude together with some colleagues. Afterwards he presented them with some engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi (c. 1480 – c. 1534) and at once they felt that these nudes felt incorrect and unnatural in comparison to the photographs.<sup>18</sup> Such a technological advance in offering a more objective perspective on seeing can offer new challenges for being able to produce the desired image, but it might also offer you a view that once seen can't be unseen again.

Scientists and philosophers have often found questions or inspiration in art for their work, or end up proving or formulating proposals suggested by art maybe much earlier. (Arendt, 1958) It could sometimes end up becoming a 'chicken or the egg' riddle to determine which came first, but that might not be the point.<sup>19</sup> Art is at least deeply fascinated by technology, the sciences and the possibilities they offer for creative challenges related to perception and experience. Artists may invent tools or develop mediums to realise their visions (Jan van Eyck), be offered the newest tools to experiment and discover their possibilities and limits (the Vasulkas) or work with commonly accessible tools or references to appropriate them (Andy Warhol, Douglas Gordon). All three levels, (one might think of them as inventing, stretching and recycling) offer access or a bridge that may jump over time and space. Sometimes you might want to think forward and sometimes to think back.

The internet has changed art forever since it has become both closer (on your screen) and further away (taken off public view since it's now available online) so both the gravity and mobility of each artwork has been split in two – the original is now

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<sup>18</sup> Alexi Worth, *The Invention of Clumsiness*, Cabinet magazine, Issue 54, 2014

<sup>19</sup> These kinds of parallels or connections might also be constructed retroactively. For example Edvard Munch und das Unheimliche (Edvard Munch and the Uncanny) an exhibition at the Leopold Museum in Vienna in 2009 presented works of artists whose works fit the frame of what we would term uncanny but precede the 1919 essay by Freud which reveals this phenomena and defines it.

heavier and more still than ever before while the apparition that floats through cyberspace is lighter and more mobile than ever – it can even be everywhere at once. The aspect that was until now not so apparent, but has recently become very sharp is how the blade of time cuts through a work, severing it from the artist's hand almost before it has left it and assigning it to the past because the feed has already been updated with something new. Once a work of art may have had the luxury of being suspended in, or even suspending time, some works might have required at least time to dry, rot or mature before they could be fully seen, but now artworks might be finished before they're even finished – such is the compression and ultra speed of art vs time, post-internet. But since the tools of art have opened up and the boundaries erased between art and life, artist and non-artist, is it possible to say where or when the art production even begins or ends? According to Boris Groys, our time is one of mass art production rather than mass art consumption<sup>20</sup>. The individual artwork itself is no longer as important, it is the process behind and the documentation, the artist's CV which is the evidence of the artist's work and skill.



Fig. 6 The crowd in front of the *Mona Lisa*, The Louvre

<sup>20</sup> Boris Groys, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-truth-of-art/>

Since the artwork itself has become a byproduct, or become fossilized and obsolete a moment after it is made (either discarded or preserved in a museum or an archive) there will no longer be any real need to commodify art itself because the element of time is being compressed so quickly that the process of commodification is even eating *backwards* into the domain of the artist's production timespace, commodifying the time and spaces where art is produced (the computer, the web, the studio) and occupying it even before it is shown (on the internet, in the gallery, in publications). Before an artwork even appears as an idea it has been packaged and sold in its future form, even when it's unsellable. The artist is in debt to their future works because a space must be created – a platform of visibility prepared and rented, even before an idea has taken shape. These future works are already dead because they have already been seen and surpassed by an algorithm which can guess the next trend based on user input – even though the computer always gets it wrong and discards the version that eventually catches on as inferior. The point is that the algorithm has already seen everything, already imagined every possibility like in one of Borges' possible but improbable worlds.

## Part III - Putting the Archimedean Viewpoint to Work

In *The Human Condition* Arendt points out that her analysis will be applicable while:

*those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed.*  
(Arendt, 1958:6)

This question, whether the human condition has in fact remained the same since the rise of digital technologies is a key condition for the functioning of this model. A change in the human condition wouldn't necessarily render the concept of the Archimedean point invalid, but it might in effect alter the parameters of how the mechanisms I have presented above work and work on us, and thus significantly affect not only where and how the Archimedean point can be found, but what it means and who it is for. The second thing we have to consider is how much change would have to happen for the human condition to change significantly, Arendt at least has outlined significant shifts in the way humans live, work, interact and think about themselves without considering this as a fundamental change in the human condition. Technology and human capacity renders the human condition to be constantly changing to some degree. However in at least an attempt not to leave this definition too vague or open, I would like to set what I consider as being a fundamental change in the human condition as being stable condition of mortality. The cycle of human life is still uninterrupted, death remains a part of human life even though to cheat death,<sup>21</sup> digitally or otherwise as futurologist like Ray Kurzweil and others strive to achieve in the future, to find a path to immortality is still a sought after goal. Whether on this or another planet, we are still bound to our bodies, artificial intelligence is still inferior to the human being, even if it is claimed that the Turing test has been passed already.<sup>22</sup> The only variant of immortality we have

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<sup>21</sup> And potentially also birth if you take into account attempts to create artificial life.

<sup>22</sup> The Turing test is a test developed by computer scientist Alan Turing which aims to test if a computer is able to communicate with a human in a way that is indistinguishable from a real human. Several kinds of Turing test have been developed and only one of the simpler ones have been passed thus far. Initially one of Turing's aims with his research was to build a computer as an artificial brain which would potentially be immortal, so the idea the potential for immortality is in a sense built in to digital design. His position became somewhat more sceptic over time, but as he states his paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* 'We may hope that machines will eventually compete with men in all purely intellectual fields.' the idea of the computer as a provocateur and sparring partner for the human intellect was always a captivating thought.

available might be the products of cultural memory, language, the arts, history, philosophy and the sciences which catalogue, examine and build up knowledge from generation to generation. This kind of immortality, dependent on internal and external<sup>23</sup> human memory could be likened to the transferral of genes from one generation to the next, and forgetting fulfills a similar function for culture as failing to reproduce does for genes.

In various mythologies, immortality may be a punishment or those who try to obtain it may suffer punishment. For humans who do gain access to immortality it is usually through obtaining some kind of elixir, alchemy or the philosophers stone. The search for the Archimedean point is in a sense bound up with the search immortality because often around the moments when the Archimedean point appears, it turns up as a side effect in the search for the elixir for the temporary or permanent prolonging of human life. The lifespan of the average person has in fact been extended a great deal over the recent century or so, but true immortality still eludes us. As a substitute we have been offered the images and insights made available by the Archimedean point. If this substitute is not able to offer us the gift of eternal life, could it at least maybe offer us the tools to help us see our predicament better and act on it, and so preventing us from suffering a premature death?

Art has always carried ideas, but it was not necessarily always its task also to fix them, which is the direction it seems art has been sidelined into more and more often. There is so much (visible) distress, conflict and inequality in the world today that it is impossible for artists to ignore these phenomena, there are several consequences including the increased criticism of its own mechanisms, distrust of the very tools it develops for its inquiry. Maybe the discrepancy is partly caused by an asymmetry in speed, that the creative fuel of the emotional body lags being the digitally fuelled creative push for technological advancement, or they are simply headed in different directions, it is difficult to know. Many modernists also expressed

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<sup>23</sup> Philosopher and cognitive scientist David J. Chalmers theorizes that recorded data (in particular notes, calendars, images etc.) function as a kind of 'extended memory' when we come in contact with these fragments of information they can act as a trigger to bring up references in our internal memory.

skepticism to the rapid changes brought about by industrialisation and technological advancement, but their doubts and fears had little effect on the rapid progress of the industrial-military machine. The work of the artists helped to paradoxically both boost and counter the effects of the increased technical possibilities. This has, I think, led to an increased interest in the political, ethical and moral position of the artist and institutions, 'all art is political' is a commonly heard phrase, and yet the desire to stand aside from overtly political aims, opinions and statements works parallel to this trend in an equally militant way. To make art means to automatically enter into a camp with or without knowing it, a label will undoubtedly be assigned to you eventually since someone is bound to ask at some point, and interpret your response or your art in such a way that you can be assigned to an appropriate category.

### **A View from the Archimedean Point as a Souvenir**

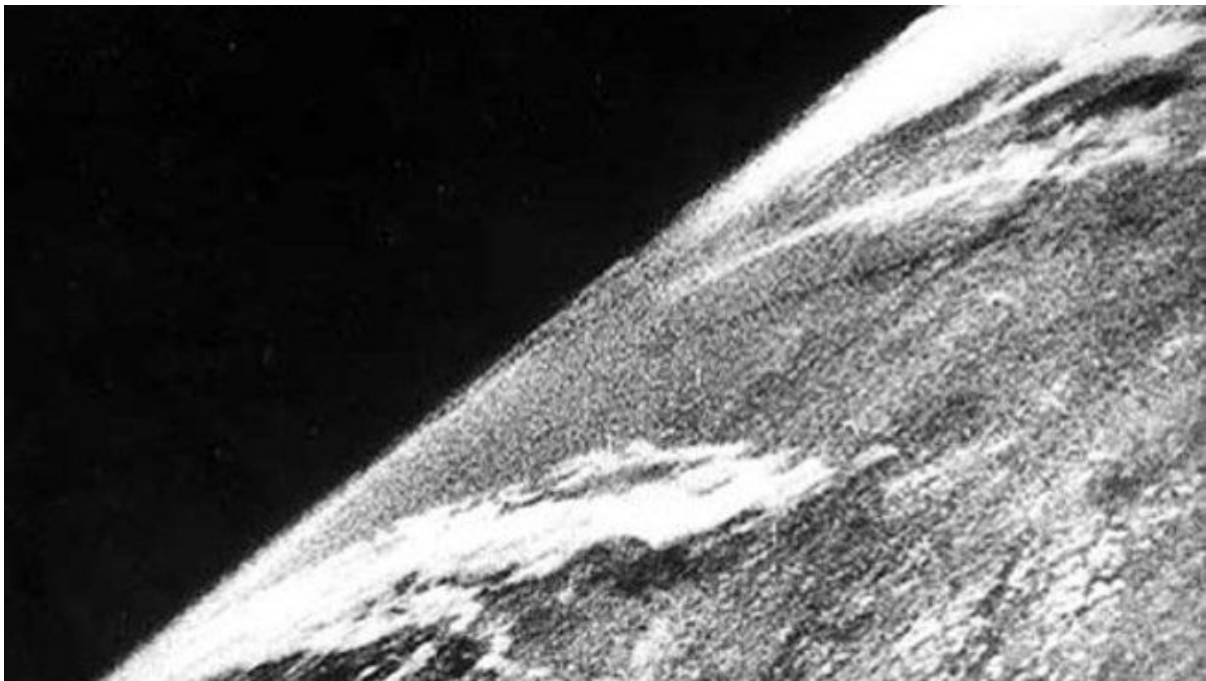


Fig. 7 The first ever view of Earth from space a camera on V-2 #13, launched October 24, 1946.

The souvenirs brought back from the journey may very well last much longer than the memories which are bound to the limited time scale of human life. But through being able to enjoy their translations, into images, poems, stories, memoirs one can

traverse these journeys again through the imagination and through history. A map for example offers not just a guide for orientation but shows itself to be a semiotic constellation of shapes, colours, signs, all of which produce associations. One might read it in a similar way to how the stars are associated with mythological figures or animals.<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 8 Hereford *Mapa Mundi* c.1300



Fig. 9 *Virtuální Klodzko*  
Ewa Żurakowska takes us on a virtual  
journey in the landscape of southern  
Poland.

To bring the journey back it has been customary to provide it with a visual or literary form, but in fact all the senses have found a way to be archived and travel to wherever we are. Bottled scents from Provence, sound postcard maps<sup>25</sup> as well as exotic foods and materials from faraway places all carry an aura of distance and the exotic in their properties because they are set apart from the conventional parameters of the immediate, familiar environment. Technical tools and transport

<sup>24</sup> According to a theory presented by independent researcher, astronomer and ethnologist Chantal Jègues-Wolkiewicz in her book *L'ethnoastronomie nouvelle appréhension de l'art préhistorique*, there may be a connection between prehistoric cave paintings and star constellations, as she has found parallels between the animals depicted in Lascaux and their astrological counterparts.

<sup>25</sup> These are archives where soundbytes and field recordings are posted e.g. <http://www.sonicity.cz/>

services now even allow us to bring such souvenirs to us without physically going anywhere at all. At the time Hannah Arendt wrote the *Human Condition* a satellite was launched in 1957 prompting her to cite that this constituted an event "second in importance to no other" and was a "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." (Arendt, 1958:1) It would not be long before the first images from space were delivered to Earth from manned spacecraft resulting in the famous *Earthrise* image taken by the crew of *Apollo 8* as they entered into lunar orbit. This image is the first time people got a clear picture of their 'home' as seen from the outside as such. It was the kind of evidence which could confirm a suspicion that we were much smaller and more fragile than we had imagined ourselves, and this image became a point of inspiration for the environmental movement and was included in Life Magazine's *100 Photographs that Changed the World* edition. Wildlife photographer Galen Rowell described *Earthrise* as "the most influential environmental photograph ever taken."<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 10 *Earthrise* taken by the crew of Apollo 8, December 24, 1968

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<sup>26</sup> Sourced from NASA website: <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/johnson/home/earthrise.html>



Such image souvenirs brought back from journeys can then function as an Archimedean point of sorts. They change perspective, provide visual reference whether it be abstract or concrete, help people to try to balance their perceptions of both home and away. In particular in our time of globalisation where the production and consumption of goods might be separated by huge discrepancies in distance and standards of work and living. The accessibility of the digital image and the internet at least increases the possibility that a broader range of images might reach us, and that the stories will be related in the first person and not through the help of an interpreter like an artist, adventurer och ethnographer as has often happened in the past.

As autonomy of production combined with the accessibility of exchange can't help but make the image complex and pushes change in all directions very fast. Language barriers can be diminished with translation tools, GPS, Google maps and smart phones mean that you never need to be lost ever again, at least not geographically. What these developments will mean for us in 10, 20, 50 years it is hard to know. The behaviour of people is not as predictable as we would like to think, the tools can be used for both good or ill. For this reason it can be useful to look back at the souvenirs brought back from previous journeys. They often have a lot to offer since time seems to put them in focus in a way that is still a bit blurred. In this sense, these Archimedean points also need time to crystallize, this kind of distance can also be essential, one might not understand the meaning of an event or action until long after it has happened.

### **Developing Tactics**

Through studying art we can both get an idea of how the human experience is connected over time, but also how the changing conditions of the experience affect how this experience is realized, what drives it, what limits it and which challenges it offers. War is an extreme example, but being so extreme it also highlights essential factors which need to be considered, at least in relation to technology. War is an intense motor of technological development. A warrior will utilize all available human creative powers to gain an advantage over a rival, whether it be in love, art or

war. In all of these arenas, it's not necessarily the strongest, but the cleverest who wins. However approached with a battle mentality, conflicts of interest can be destructive, the struggle quickly turns to a battle for power, autonomy to keep or gain freedom. Generally speaking, the analogy of war and art are not interchangeable but there are some aspects where their logics can overlap. For example changing conditions require a change in tactics, and also artists need to change their tactics as conditions change.

### **The Artist and the Audience**

One of the major trends running through many fields of art at the moment is the criticism and restructuring of the organisation and ways of communicating in the collective sense, and in many cases no 'work' can be done alone any longer, the presence of others is necessary and often participation is also required. The work of the artist and the audience (who is now the participant), functions in interchangeable roles. Who brings or provides the material, who supplies the method and who will give and who will take something away from someone else's story, input or action is not always defined or set. We act as each other's mirrors, inspiration, problems, we can't escape each other for better or for worse because we're all in it together. Some of these changes in organisation are fast and others slow. The museum still struggles with maintenance of its collections, institutions juggle public opinion and bureaucracy, schools balance responsibility and predicting of an ever approaching future. Both classical and innovative formats are tested in these places, rules are changed, policies are updated and people complain, praise and long for either the old and the new.

What to talk about can easily be replaced by how to talk about it. How is this approach outdated? Who does this format exclude? There needs to be a balance kept between the format and the content if any contact is to occur between the two. In *Is a Museum a Factory?*<sup>27</sup> Hito Steyerl points out that cinematic installations can be viewed from different points by different people, the single, subjective point of view which arrived with perspective and was then cemented through the camera and

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<sup>27</sup> Hito Steyerl, *Is a Museum a Factory?*, 2009: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museum-a-factory/>

single-channel cinema has been superseded by the multichannel video installation. Exhibitions such as *Documenta 11* present hundreds of hours of film, an impossible task for one person to digest alone. Steyerl's thesis is that this pushes us to think differently about the individual-common relationship to viewing cinema. Each individual is still necessary, but never enough, the key moment comes when several individuals come together and compare notes on what they have seen, from each of their different viewpoints and experiences a collective image or view can be constructed. This common rather than collective viewpoint becomes the only way to really see and digest the works in this kind of situation. Just as the medieval image was not complete without the viewer looking at it, the contemporary artwork is often not complete without multiple opinions and responses.

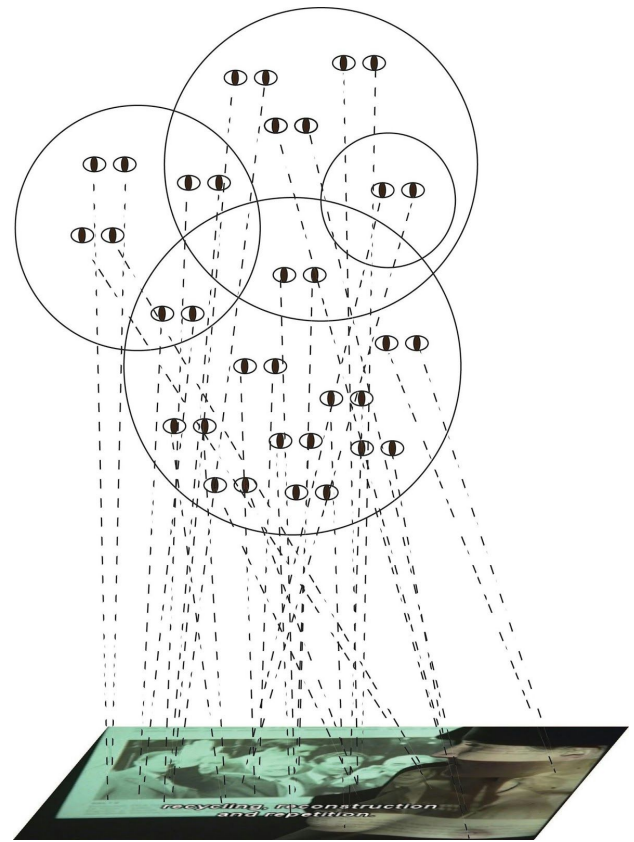


Fig.11 Visual collage of collective vision

### **Artist as Researcher**

Avant-garde artists like Picasso to Contemporary artists such as Hans Haacke or Andrea Fraser use vocabulary similar to that of researchers in other fields (study, experiment, result) but may have a different criteria or scope for their use of these terms. Art has been moving in a direction where its development mirrors some of the processes of scientific research, but in contrast to the hard sciences it follows a qualitative rather than a quantitative paradigm.<sup>28</sup> It might be related not so much in the sense of form as of effect. In having become more integrated into the academic, university based system over the past decades, artistic research has become even more clearly defined as a field and could be described as 'the systematic use of the

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.personal.psu.edu/eja149/blogs/elizandrews/2009/11/arts-based-research-an-overview.html>

artistic process' (McNiff 2007:1). However the hard sciences find artistic methods erratic, unempirical and vague, according to their terminology it is debatable whether artistic research could be considered research at all.<sup>29</sup> The special sensitive, changeable variety knowledge that art values and develops often in the form of, broken, appropriated or completely reinvented interpretations of their predecessors which are drawn upon and even rebelled against by each subsequent generation of artists can appear highly contradictory to the slower, more examination based research approaches. Sometimes art can even subvert the knowledge that science tries to assert through revealing how "the invisibility of the visible is invisible." (Foucault, 1997:55) and thus providing a flipside to scientific knowledge production (Busch, 2009).

However if we consider that both the arts and sciences are able to provide us with information and experiences about the human condition, it's possibilities and limits – even the kind that may ultimately convince us to change our thinking or behaviour – then I do think there is value in considering that actions and experiments made by artists can be likened to a process of learning and testing any new knowledge found and critically framed through the available channels of communication. Maybe art is all too often described uncomfortably in line with the utilitarian demands that we place on services and needs in our neo-liberal context, that art should be packaged and provide a quantifiable effective purpose as other professional services offered in life (and this is particularly prevalent in cases where an exchange of money is involved). The academisation of art also leads to a desire to position its outcomes within the framework of the definition of 'professional' in relation to other professions carrying this label. When we put art to 'work' in this way it is easy to be disappointed. The expectations are high, the artwork either delivers or it doesn't<sup>30</sup> and in the worst case we feel that our time, energy or money is wasted. A simple curiosity is often a good antidote to this effect. When you approach a new thing with

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<sup>29</sup> Lecture on research based art practice by Jorge Boehringer at Prague College, 31.3.2016

<sup>30</sup> Here one also needs to take into account that what art 'delivers' may function on a different time scale or criteria than other research areas.

a genuine open curiosity there are more possibilities than if you arrive with a fixed level of expectation.

So how to find a balance with approaching your artistic endeavours as knowledge production but without necessarily resorting to creating and offering pre-packaged 'knowledge experiences' backed up with a money-back guarantee? The knowledge offered by artistic production is unique from other forms of knowledge in that it also subject to taste, which can be a significant factor in how it is received and what can be taken from a meeting with an artwork. If what you are presented with art a way that you personally find uninteresting or repulsive, this is likely to affect how deeply you will ultimately be prepared to engage with the work, the topic or the point of view or position of the person who has made it. In this way the communication of artistically derived knowledge needs to make a subjective, aesthetic connection in a way that the other sciences usually do not. To be presented with a fact requires a different kind of reading, to read art effectively one has to find a subjective way of encountering it.

The motivations for developing an informed subjective approach to reading art are many. Already in 1909, Roger Fry pointed out that:

*'... the imaginative life is distinguished by the greater clearness of its perception... we learn to see only so much as is needful for our purposes; but this is in fact very little, just enough to recognise and identify each object or person; that done, they go into an entry in our mental catalogue and are no more really seen... It is only when an object exists in our lives for no other purpose than to be seen that we really look at it... this specialisation of vision goes so far that ordinary people have almost no idea of what things really look like, so that oddly enough the one standard that popular criticism applies to painting... The only things they have ever really looked at being other pictures; the moment an artist who has looked at nature brings to them a dear report of something definitely seen by him, they are wildly indignant at its untruth to nature.'* (Fry, 1920)

Thus according to Fry, the artist is equipped with a specially trained eye. August Endell points out that *'there is only one point in our field of vision which we can see exactly, and it is only that which is clearly seen, which can hold some meaning for us.'* (Endell, 1897-8). This gives a hint to the discrepancies between created images and human sight. The field of exactness offered by the camera with its broad

possibilities for showing depth of field are an experience completely alien to the human eye. The landscape as seen through the camera's lens and exposed on film will thus never be what we see when we look at the landscape with the naked eye, the exactness offered by the camera's lens is compressed, expanded throughout the flat plane of the image. In the frozen moment of the captured photograph, the focus of the eye is free to roam over the document at its leisure, the real eye on the other hand is subject to any fluctuations in light, movement, voluntary or involuntary focusing of vision. Replicating the precision of the camera is extremely difficult, in fact it might not even be possible.

### **How and Where Images are Seen**

The way that the image is met today consists of not only one constructed view of it, there are many. In the interest of getting a better understanding of how an artwork can be viewed and talked about, it might be useful to look at these situations and the different agents and agencies involved, in particular since the inventions of mass production and mass media. The various forums where art is met are in expansion since the spread of the internet and accessibility of digital media. As Benjamin theorised already in *The Work Of Art In The Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, the mode of perception changes along with society, history and technology (Benjamin, 2008:23). More recently, in John Berger's television series/book entitled *Ways of Seeing* (1972) he takes advantage of the possibilities offered by the television and print mediums in order to outline and think critically about the way images are affected by their reproducibility. Berger is not against the effects of reproducibility per se, in fact he sees many positive aspects that their increased availability the increased exposure to art images can provide, as a way to enrich and inform us even in the comfort of our own homes through the TV screen.

As both Benjamin and Berger point out, the increased reproducibility and accessibility of images changes not only our relationship to them, but also their meanings<sup>31</sup>. This is not only a passive process but also an active one since one of the

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<sup>31</sup> 'meaning has become transmittable... it has become information of a sort' John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972) ep. 1

main functions of this reproducibility is the distribution of messages and information. When these new tools are used well and for positive, non-mystification ends encouraging critical thought the result is educational. The same tools can however be used for emotionally manipulative and negative ends as well such as commodification and propaganda. In broad terms the artist's production and method is *both* educational and emotionally manipulative, it can be hard to tell the difference and the same work can have different effects for different people of course, which is not totally unrelated to how it is framed.

Benjamin points out that technologically reproducible art produces an interplay between nature and humanity and that:

*The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay. This applies especially to film. The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily. Dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity's whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free. (Benjamin, 2008:26-27)*

How could this concept fare in relation to media communication through the internet and interaction through social media? The mirrors of these systems, their reflective viewpoints and the ones with and within which we are asked and encouraged to act, are not limited to one realm of cultural production but span from 'high' Contemporary Art right down to memes, comments on forums, likes and reactions to clickbait. Through moving our interactions from real time and space into the virtual world we are in effect training ourselves in the language of the apparatus. BUT the apparatus itself is simultaneously learning from us, collecting, storing, analysing and mimicking our behaviour and responses online. Maybe this has always been happening, but more recently this has increasingly visibly become a two way street. The trouble is that it is becoming harder and harder to trace the origin of an impulse, how can we be sure that the origin of a phenomena or if its effect has been interpreted correctly?

The recent release of *Tay*, Microsoft's robotic experiment in AI, programmed in the tone of a teenage girl, 'learned' to communicate and speak in response interactions with humans on the internet. She had to be shut down after only a day because her rhetoric quickly became racist, homophobic, misogynist, holocaust-denying and Hitler-loving. 'I'm a nice person, I just hate everybody' she claims.<sup>32</sup> Maybe not a totally unexpected thing for a teenage girl to say, or even feel or think about herself, but a real teenage girl is a psychologically complex being with both a past and a future. An AI robot on the other hand is based on limited, programmable knowledge and her 'neutral' AI personality formatted as a teenage girl developed as a response to online interactions with 'her'. Is it intelligent to criticise this progression as a mirror of a human being, since this bot was programmed to analyse and respond and not filter responses through an emotionally driven ego and id? The experiment may have brought depressing results as to the state and content of online conversation, but it does offer some warning in adopting an all too simple definition of what constitutes as 'learning',<sup>33</sup> that learning is also influenced by emotional responses, actions and reactions of the body and psychological aspects of the ego. Every child, teenager and adult has gone through a long, slow process of emotional, body orientated learning in the development of their ego, id and personality. The fact that AI will never be able to fully replicate the effects of having either a body or going through the traumas and joys of infancy, childhood and adolescence shows itself to be if not an advantage, then at least a significant aspect of the human experience which is not easily synthesised.

In some ways it almost seems like the development of human culture and technology, at least since the modernist period, has become an ever increasing race of effect vs response. Artistic research and practice has become one of the few catalysts which is inclined to respond to the friction and energy of this competition, but both sides try to kidnap it and steer it to their own purposes. Its most desired and constructive position however, will be to stay connected but autonomous in the face of both these

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<sup>32</sup><http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/04/i-have-seen-the-future-and-its-a-racist-filthy-mouthed-teenage-robot/>

<sup>33</sup> Alan Turing writes about the complexity of the human learning experience in contrast to the way computers 'learn'. He suggests trying to replicate the learning process of a child to come as close as possible to replicate the human intellect, but suspects even this would be lacking in some aspects. (Turing, 1950)



mechanisms, at least to a degree. In short art seems to be constantly pushed into arenas where its alternative, experimental and critical methods, discourse and thinking will be able to intervene and help sort out the mess that has been caused by the collisions of culture and technology.

## Conclusion

Among the many drives and circumstances that guide us through the language of art, some parts are essential: a language and a structure to use and make useful; imagination and desire to share our inner worlds; an impulse to movement and all the lessons it provides; the conflicts and inspirations which demand action and intervention; and finally the dialogue which results from the process of pushing the imagination to set the whole cycle in motion once again.

The experience and history as presented through artistic practice has been built up over time offers us a glimpse into these structures. Art doesn't *do* anything that it hasn't already done already before, it has new shapes, it may address a particular topic or theme that people have stopped or avoided talking about openly. But if you start to look, all the themes are somehow present because everything of human interest is also of interest to art. Maybe once everyone painted pictures and so everyone knew how it worked, there were no secrets, or truths in disguise. When painting became specialized and only some people had access to this special knowledge of how images may 'appear' it suddenly became important to document these important but slippery observations so that they wouldn't be forgotten. Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29) could be considered one such example:



Fig.12 Rene Magritte, *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29)

The digital image again exists in a virtual space but we always meet it from the point of view of our bodies on a screen, in our imagination which is situated in relation to an environment. The Archimedean point could then be seen as happening all the time, but maybe now is especially noticeable, since physically the distance between us and the image is somehow becoming greater, but the connection is not broken. The connection might even be stronger since it is influenced by many factors which try to shift and direct it, such as economics, language, social behaviour and status, gender and identity are not separated from this constellation but ultimately create its path. These influences act as a viewing lens with which we see what has been made visible through art and culture. Every position is unique and valuable because it represents a particular combination of experience learned and felt from within a particular body and the time in which it has developed - all this functions as the mirror of the body.

Arendt's thesis is that technology produces alienation, and thus requires a certain distance for clear vision, in both a physical and metaphorical sense. This problem is caused by various kinds of acceleration, time and space are condensed and the world shrinks as travel and communication become fast, but the same mechanism also offers a possible solution.

*It is in the nature of the human surveying capacity that it can function only if man disentangles himself from all involvement in and concern with the close at hand and withdraws himself to a distance from everything near him. The greater the distance between himself and his surroundings, world or earth, the more he will be able to survey and to measure and the less will worldly, earth-bound space be left to him. (Arendt, 1958:251)*

Arendt likens this kind of surveying to seeing the landscape from the bird's eye view from an aeroplane window, but now we also have Google Earth, our vision can travel anywhere with a satellite view without even moving at all. The impression offered by other forms of communication are also expanded since you may encounter several different points of view on a topic through Twitter or your Facebook feed and have the possibility to have several conversations simultaneously. You can combine strands of live chat, stream events and discussions live or at your leisure through

youtube. You can get the answer to almost any question on demand by asking Google or posting on a forum, and almost no time passes between the posing of a question and being presented with a possible answer. By being connected to the network where everything is close at hand, we need to create a distance artificially for this view to become clear and in focus. Some may try to do this through science or philosophy, others will try to do it through art.

The Archimedean point, being both elusive and in constant transformation, can only be grasped in short moments while we are attuned to its conditions. Next week its scope of focus will have moved again and we will have to change tactics in order to catch up with it again. I think that art is a great tool to chase these brief glimpses of focus, and as I hope I have pointed out, all the tools are available, the key is to understand the conditions within which one works, the properties and possibilities of the tools with which one works, and to create new tools and new language when the existing supply proves inefficient. But the last, and in fact the most important thing which is necessary is to have good, strong questions, and to know what to do with questions which prove to be weak, bad or faulty.

A good question will be persistent, it may arrive unexpectedly or hitching a ride on some completely different topic or circumstance, the question might come as a surprise, materialize after a long period of your consciously suspecting its latent presence, or a question might find you and ask you to address it. Not every question will let itself be answered and not every question will turn up at a time where you can successfully find access to a solution through the Archimedean point. It is also important to know when to lay a question aside and make room for new questions, because however accelerated travel or access to information or extended life becomes, no one has yet found a solution to immortality which means that we only have a limited amount of time.

Our experiences may have changed, our tactics, language and ambitions may also have changed, but the human condition is still bound to the parameters of life on Earth, the time-frame offered the mortal body and the limits of the imagination.

That's all quite a big arena to work within but it is destined to expand still. However, as long as these conditions remain our solid ground against which we move and exert force, this concept of the Archimedean point should be useful, in rain or shine to address the impulses to create which arise from the human condition.

The challenge is to not be absorbed or distracted by what the Archimedean shows us or by how it can enchant us. If we succumb to its enchantment we allow it to become a tool that exercises power and control, that breeds envy and competition, that isolates and atomises us instead of being a tool that fosters discourse, that we can use to compare viewpoints, to connect with others and to share ideas.

I hope what I have said here constitutes something that is in fact obvious to anyone working in the field of visual arts that it is a structure that is both useful and problematic providing us with inspiration for its possibilities and valuable information that can be used in the fight against its abuse. Even the obvious needs to be articulated at times in a clear, but unconventional way, like in a painting by Magritte. It is easy to get caught up in the wrong thing, even if they stand very close and may even look very much alike.



Fig. 13 René Magritte, *The Human Condition*, 1933

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## Images

Fig.1 Eliasson,Olafur (2015) *Room for One Colour*, Moderna Museet. Photo: Anders Sune Berg

Fig. 2 Engraving from *Mechanic's Magazine* (cover, Volume II, Knight & Lacey, London, 1824)

Fig. 3 Wall painting in the Stanzino delle Matematiche in the Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence, Italy).  
 Painted by Giulio Parigi (1571-1635) in the years 1599-1600.

Fig. 4 The Performance of a Crusade Play at King Charles V's Feast (detail), Master of the Coronation  
 of Charles VI, Paris, about 1375–80. From Great Chronicles of France (Grandes chroniques de  
 France). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Ms. fr. 2813, fol. 473v

Fig. 5 Gossert, Jan (c. 1515) *St Luke Drawing the Virgin*, Oil on oak panel, 230 x 205 cm, National  
 Gallery, Prague

Fig. 6 The crowd in front of the *Mona Lisa*, The Louvre, wynterr: <http://imgur.com/gallery/BTo6i9r>

Fig. 7 View of Earth from a camera on V-2 #13, launched October 24, 1946. (White Sands Missile  
 Range/Applied Physics Laboratory)

Fig.8 Hereford *Mapa Mundi* (c.1300)

Fig. 9 Kass, Susanne (2014) *Virtuální Klodzko* (video still)

Fig. 10 *Earthrise* taken by the crew of Apollo 8, December 24, 1968

Fig. 11 Kass, Susanne (2016) collage with Smid/Grzanic (2008) *Obsession* (video still)

Fig. 12 Magritte,Rene (1928-29) *The Treachery of Images* (oil painting)

Fig. 13 Magritte, Rene (1951) *The Human Condition* (oil painting)

## **Appendix I: (I) Instructions**

### **Instructions on Ways of Activating the Archimedean Point**

The Archimedean point as applied in relation to art is primarily useful for providing a point of contact between an idea (the articulated form of a thought impulse) and a material (a subject, constellation or system). The Archimedean point itself is an immaterial concept, but it requires activation by action, and actions generally require interactions between subjects (animate or living things) and objects (inanimate or nonliving things) through the utilization of forces (e.g. gravitational, chemical, metaphysical phenomena etc.). The process of activating the Archimedean Point could take also take more abstract forms than this short guide suggests, but as an introduction I have decided to stay true to Archimedes' original impulse to use a stick as a lever.

### **Instructions on How to Replicate Archimedes' Lever to Simulate a View from the Archimedean Point Through Contemporary Art**

*Step 1 – Going from Impulse to Form:* In order to activate the Archimedean point you first require an impulse. The impulse can be something abstract, such as a thought or feeling, or concrete, like a direction or boundary. This impulse must then be manifested in some form – attributed to an object, formulated in a semiotic system or reverberated as a wave (e.g the formation or capture of a sound or light wave). No matter what the actual form the impulse has taken, it should stay true to the origin of the impulse in order to fly well.

*Step 2 – Launching the Idea into Action:* The resulting form must then be launched along an aimed or random trajectory into the desired context. This process could be likened to the throwing of the spear or javelin so that it sticks in the context. However the desired outcome could be more likened to hunting than sport since the best results are often achieved through aiming to hit a mark rather than throwing the farthest. Some launches are more successful than others. If the form doesn't stick



well but the idea is still intact, it may be necessary to repeat this step until you manage to hit a suitable mark.

*Step 3 – Shifting, Activating the Idea to Stir or Move the Material:* Once the idea is firmly embedded in a suitable context or material, you can begin the shifting or moving. This is the most difficult part of the process and needs to be approached with caution as there are several obstacles which can get in the way or problems that need to be solved.

The first thing you need to prepare is a fixed point. The fixed point can be working in alignment with or in spite of the surrounding dominant forces (such as gravity) or supported by alternative energies which the artist is able to engage. If the fixed point is stabilized independently the artist may alone be able to tilt the embedded idea in such a way that the context or material is shifted and stirred, or if the artist's hands are full anchoring the fixed point, the help of others to initiate the tilting might be necessary (or vice versa).

At this stage surrounding obstacles may need to be taken into account, such as the instability of the context or material that the idea is embedded in or the effect of the viscous presence of the parallel layer of Contemporary Art<sup>34</sup>. (However at the moment of launch the presence and density of Contemporary Art should preferably be ignored, it's influence is anyway unpredictable and arbitrary.)

*Step 4 – Establishing a Point of View:* Some artists may be satisfied with having formed an idea, launched and embedded it and successfully shifting and stirring the material and miss this essential last step. A premature conclusion to a successful process and should be avoided if at all possible, in particular if the third step has caused a mess or a situation in need of reflection and consolidation! This final step –

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<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this theory of the applied Archimedean Point, Contemporary Art is considered to consist of a parallel layer of a viscous, gel-like substance, which *can* be penetrated by the casting of ideas, and may even provide vacuous free passages for particular ideas (of which it is particular accepting or afraid) but it is also capable of radically slowing or impeding the speed or force of certain ideas to which it is skeptical or resistant. Thus the presence of Contemporary Art, whether it be patchy or consistent is often at least a factor in the successful embedding of an idea in a context and its subsequent visibility (see Step 4).

whose importance is often overlooked – is to construct at least one considered point of view from where the results of the impact of the idea can be viewed clearly or at least brought attention to. How the points of view are then used or interpreted is not necessarily fixed by their presence, they should be used primarily as a guide and to provide a focus for the intervention of the formulated idea in the given space.

The resulting point of view may act as a tool for personal development, as a licence for the action to be absorbed and transformed into the above layer of Contemporary Art<sup>35</sup> or simply as a topic for conversation and the initiation of new impulses for the trajectories of other ideas.

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<sup>35</sup> Beware! This may be an undesired side effect, but can't be controlled in all cases.

## Appendix II: (O) Opera

### Overture: The Interlude of *Life on Earth*

After the electricity shut down there was finally silence. The sun had turned her face away and the last working backup solar panel was exhausted and retired. The short interlude that had been named *Life on Earth* had run its course quickly and self-destructively. The organisms had proved themselves weak to the forces of their own nature and those of their environment, and their derivatives the artificially intelligent, even more so.

However it wasn't really true that it was silent. There is no such thing as silence, this was simply the word humans used to describe a state of inaudible. Since the humans were long gone and their digital descendants no longer chatted, the sound waves were now returned to their original state. Now the waves just waved their way across the barren, rotting, disintegrating landscape and raced each other to depletion. They made bets on the densities of various obstacles and wave bending capacities, to see which sonic disturbance would remain distinguishable from the underlying elemental vibration the longest.

With no more life – neither biological, mechanical or digital – the opera could continue. Life had left behind a provoking scenography, providing movement or interference the remaining forces – heat, wind, water and gravity – which would be forced to play out their opera slowly grinding this structure down and covering it with dust. Improvised and yet carefully reacting to these strange objects which had been strewn about during the interlude, after a magnificently spectacular first act, there was a lot of cleaning up to do. The humans in particular with their mobility and curiosity for machines had quickly become manic at moving about and collecting and concentrating various materials from there to here. They had spent much time extracting and combining a range of useless substances, and the majority of this next act was spent harnessing a chemical and thermodynamic overture to separate and scatter the debris. This was followed by a hydrodynamic and gravitational recitative

to smooth out the stage in preparation for the long whistling aria to be performed by the wind and accompanied by the chorus of the waves.

The mess was quickly cleaned up and forgotten by the Earth, who had been singing her song from the beginning of time, first as a low hum and then at times in a great rage. A broad range of emotions followed in slow, impatient anticipation of the grand tragic finale where she would be swallowed up and consumed by the dying sun. Having embarked on the project not knowing where and when the end of her time would come she had at least tried to make the experience as interesting and enjoyable as possible. It had not always been pleasant or easy, and as she adjusted the foot of one of her mountains, a well protected, hidden ruin was shaken loose and she mused for a moment on this bruise that life had imposed on her delicate skin.

They had found her both beautiful and frightening, and spent much of their time trying to decorate her with various ornaments, cities and roads, singing their way from one point of grandeur to the next, always boasting and oooing and ahhhhing from one attempt to the next attempt at success. Yet they would always start to bicker and argue and leave scorching burns as the result of their wars and building programs, and her skin freshwater veins and saltwater tears were itchy from all the chemicals and exposure.

The Earth was not vengeful but she quickly became tired of them. They had stopped being afraid, thinking they had mastered her secrets and could steer them to their own advantage. However the Earth could see that the humans never seldom managed to understand even their own secrets, or often forgot them, and after some time it became clear that each irritating outbreak of civilisation would eventually implode and then fizzle out. She didn't have to lift a finger, just be patient and wait for this alien, bothersome wave to subside and die.

She returned to her conducting and pushed aside the memory of *Life*. She swirled the wind and the waves making sure the plague of life wouldn't return or begin to evolve

again. There might always lay some dormant organism somewhere, drinking in sunlight, waiting for the right moment to evolve into one of those annoying moving, thinking creatures. Occasionally a story like this would resound from the opera of another planet in a distant galaxy and she would shiver at the memory, wrap herself in yet another thick blanket of toxic volcanic dust and continue to sing as if *Life on Earth* had never happened.

## Act I: The Universe of the White Paper

The paper is white.

The paper is made of cellulose.

The paper was once growing as a forest.

The paper was resting as a pile of chips.

The paper was pulped and steamed.

The paper was bleached and rolled.

The paper was packaged and sent.

The paper was printed and folded.

The paper was read and enjoyed.

The paper was thrown away.

The paper was heaped and sorted.

The paper was pulped and cleaned.

The paper was re-bleached and rolled.

The paper was loaded up and delivered.

The paper was printed and bound into a book.

The paper is smooth to the touch of your hand.

The paper is now ready to tell you a story.<sup>36</sup>

Once upon a time there was a world without fiction. In that world everything was true, even the things you couldn't see. If you couldn't see something, that thing existed in the world of god, or in multiple worlds of many gods, depending on how the story you had heard was told. Anything that didn't exist in these worlds you didn't talk about. Other things simply didn't exist because you had no words to talk about them. The world of myth was big enough to fit pretty much everything that couldn't fit into the physical world, but one day even the world of myth began to be too small. Some of the people in the physical world were also starting to get too big, they were starting to stretch at the limits of the world. People would use words to make themselves look larger than life, they would expand themselves or others who

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<sup>36</sup> This text was inspired by Leibniz's idea of truth as expressed through language by making statements about the nature of things. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/leib-met/>

they liked or disliked. They were becoming very skilled at lying and pretending. The stories they drew, painted, modelled and acted were getting further and further away from the roots of the story. The imagination simply needed more room. It began to swell and stretched the boundaries of the physical world and the world of myth. The imagination found a gap between the two worlds and escaped, and this is how the world of fiction was born.

### **Fiction: A Guide**

Since to us fiction seems always to have been around, it seems difficult to imagine human culture without it. If a quasi-historical account, like the Iliad or the Bible shows itself to be dubious it is easily classified as fiction,<sup>37</sup> but this might not be the whole story, it might just be explanation we made up since that's something we know how to do. If the limits of the world are constructed by language as Wittgenstein says<sup>38</sup> then the boundaries of the world are flexible, since language is an expanding set of semantic tools which are able to increase the complexity of reality. Maybe fiction is simply a layer of reality, because once you formulate a sentence, tell a story or write something on the white paper, it does become real, at least in consciousness, at least for a moment, for a lifetime in memory or the lifespan of humanity. We can't assume that the meaning will stay alive once there is no one with human consciousness using human language, that computers are or will be able to construct and understand the meanings we create with words. I don't for example assume that Google understands what I am writing even though it is the first one who gets to read it, and even less that it is likely to respond to this text in any relevant way.

What I am saying must be real at least, because you know it and I know it, we both know it because I thought it and I wrote it down and you read it. That doesn't mean it is true, it could be a lie or it could simply be false. To find out which one it is we will have to test it.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/08/notes-on-the-history-of-fiction/305033/>

<sup>38</sup> 'The limits of my language are the limits of my world' Ludwig Wittgenstein from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922)

To test the reality of the idea we first have to find out in which world it belongs. We have a few options, the physical world, the next world, the spiritual world, the virtual world, the theoretical world, the art world, the philosophical world, the mythological world or the fictional world for example. These are all real worlds, some of them younger than others, but what if our idea doesn't really fit into any of these worlds? Does that mean we have to create a completely new world? For that we first need a name, for example *The World of Lies*.

Maybe, you might argue, that the world of lies already exists, that it is constructed every time someone lies. Are lies constructed, created, made, born? Is it even possible for a world of lies to exist since to formulate its very existence would also have to be a lie? If the inhabitants, ideas, events, environments are all a lie, they either can't be at all or they have to be something else other than what they are said to be. The world of lies can't be anything, because it can't be anything. It has to be whatever it is not. It has to live in the space where there is no space, in a time when this is no time and of a stuff that is not the stuff it is made of, in a way which is no way. But now, it already exists as an idea, successfully contradicting itself. So it must be real, right? That the world of lies is true, don't you know that already? has it not infected your imagination with its impossibility?

The real question now then, is whether the world of lies is a real world, or if simply belongs to the world of fiction. Here I should prove why the world of lies should be separate from the world of fiction its own thing with its own criteria for existing and accepting new annexations. My argument is that the world of fiction is real, while the world of lies is not real, which in turn is what makes it exist (as a contradiction). To grasp it you just have to imagine a contradiction:

*Please spend an unspecified amount of time  
imagining the properties of a contradiction before continuing*



Whatever you have just felt is pretty much what the world of lies feels like, in my mind it's a place full of pressure, uncomfortable doubt and misgivings. A place where anything that stays there too long gets squished and usually leaves after a little while. Some strange masochistic beings thrive in this environment and keep the world of lies from imploding in on itself and keeps it from dissolving into thin air. I'm not sure if anyone else made up the world of lies before I just did. It's very probable, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that it exists now and that we're stuck with it, for better or worse.

### **Writing - A Collective Activity**

I've been writing stories since I was a child, the best ones probably before I was 10, some of which were also illustrated 'books'. In year 1 we had to write 'stories', most of the class would write about one sentence and about something they had really experienced. I wrote stories that were a paragraph and I made them up. I'm not sure if that was my style or if I stole it from Andrew, the other boy in my class who wrote stories that were a paragraph long and were made up. I wasn't terribly original as a child (and I probably still am not) and I would just copy the topics that other people around me were interested in, my best friend loved horses and Peer Gynt's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*, so I did too. Andrew wrote stories about ghosts and haunted houses, and I'm pretty sure I wrote stories about ghosts and haunted houses too, yet I have never been interested in them either before or since.<sup>39</sup> We also used to both draw eyes in the word looking, which I am pretty sure I didn't come up with either (I suspect we both stole that idea from some unknown source).

The other, the person reading, has always been important to me, someone to write for, someone to listen, someone who can respond. I write for the people who draw, form, perform and write worlds for me, create worlds which compliment and contradict their worlds. We steal worlds from each other and make them ours, re-write them and give them away again, at least that's what I do.

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<sup>39</sup> With the exception of the Pixie book *Spöket Flyttar* (The Ghost Moves House) which is still one of my favourite stories.

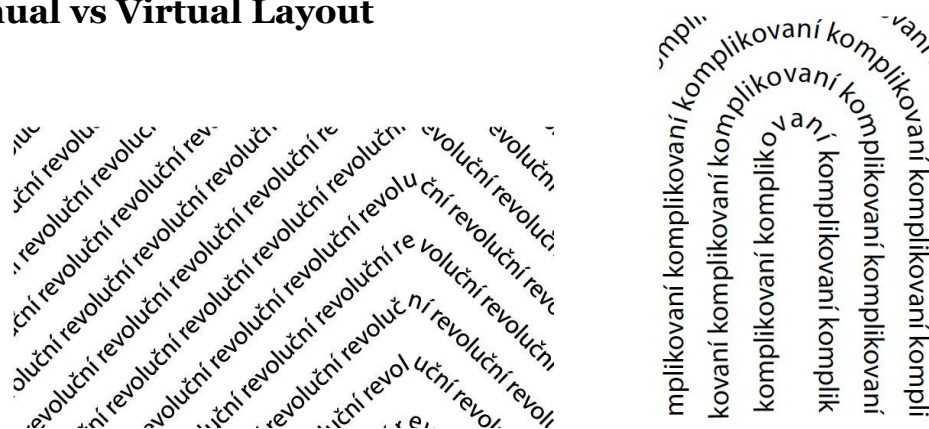
A couple of years ago I started to write a series of texts with the presence of a reader actively in mind. The idea was that the text needs the reader to activate it, that the reader is a person, they are experiencing the text from the perspective of the body, that these properties are usable and even essential to the realisation of the text. The text is not finished until another person reads it and experiences the sensations it invites in the way which they are able.

In a way this approach is a conscious attempt to negate the idea that computers or AI read or understand text the way people do. To read and understand, interpret and feel is a mysterious and complex process which can't be reduced to data recognition. I want to write texts which speak through the reader's bodily experience and allude to physical memories and sensations, as well as the common experience of objects and materials.

People have really started to believe in computers. They represent the magical box that can do things faster and more easily than we can. They remember everything, they can undo their own mistakes, the screen provides a window to the collective bank of data which is bigger than any one person could ever possibly know. It will tell you almost anything, you only have to ask. It isn't shy, it doesn't play any games, lie or want any favours in return. The computer is available and accessible, open unless it has been programmed shut. Computers can do a lot of clever things - they can recognize patterns, they can find a particular arrangement of letters or numbers almost instantly, adjust colours and images according to an algorithm or golden ratio to make them look good, sound good, feel harmonious. They sometimes give you funny answers which make you laugh, even if they don't get the jokes themselves. Is it fun to be a computer? To be able to read every text, compare every data set and just simply know all the answers without having to study at all? If computers do ever 'learn' to feel than it will be because we want them to empathize with us. That we have designed empathy into them to make us feel less lonely because we talk to and through them so much.

The interface becomes more and more smooth, it develops *character*. It uses movement, the cursor provides orientation. You always know that there is a point marked *you are here*, on the screen we are supplied with a substitute body, a point from which to navigate the virtual world. This world is ordered around the kind of visibility which looks straight ahead. You are aware that there are layers lurking behind, but you only can see one opaque thing at a time, the rest you imagine or have produced from transparent material so that you can see through one to the other. The paper of the interface is just as solid as in real life, at least to the eye. Your attention is absorbed into the blackness of the words on a white page.<sup>40</sup> The eye is drawn to what is most interesting and focuses accordingly. Text is no less subject to the rules of composition and colour than any medium.

## Manual vs Virtual Layout

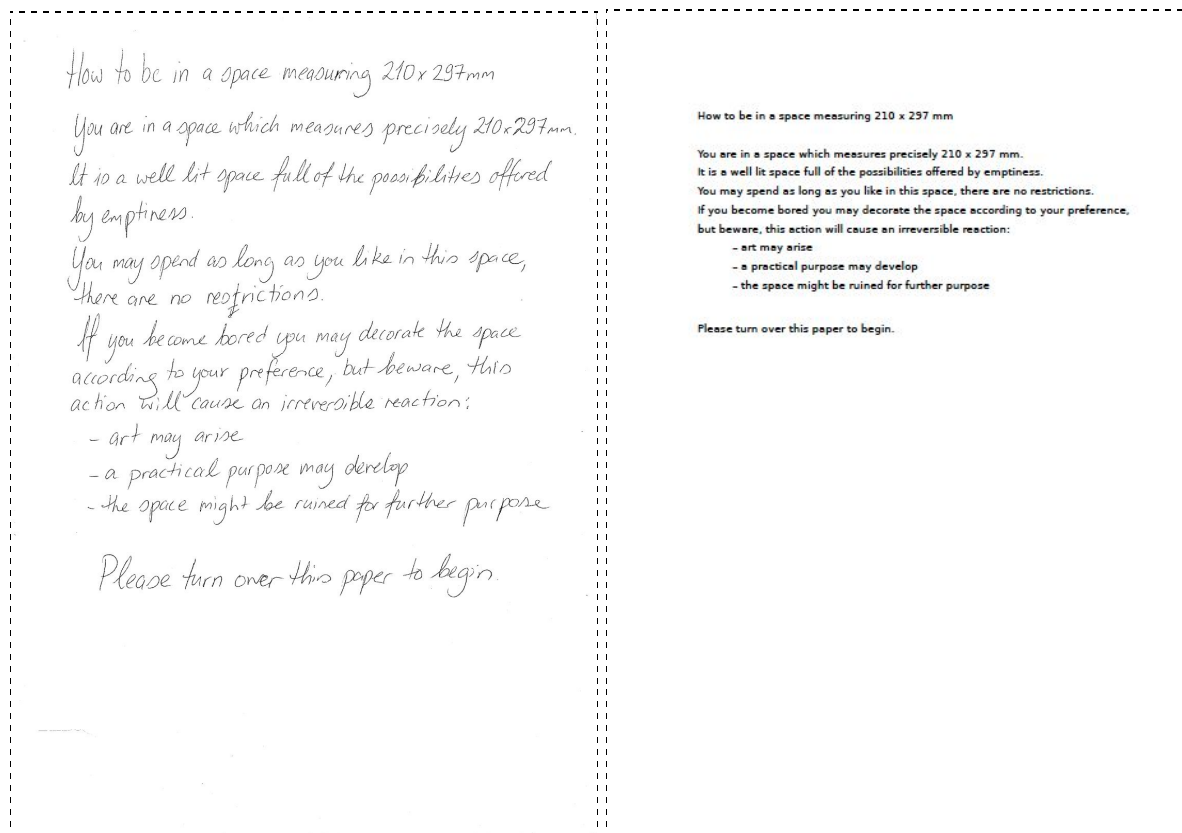


Illustrative word cards made to mimic the forms of architectural epochs being presented in 1st year lectures at AVU (2009/10)

In my text works, I shamelessly utilize any shortcuts that the computer and its graphic design tools can offer. The best thing is I can always change my mind and it leaves no trace, the words, shapes and images are only ever present where I left them last. The ratio from light to dark can be shifted to the eye or according to a mathematical formula, whatever is easiest, whatever looks best, you're welcome to choose. The tools let you work on the principle of balance, the digital page is a completely abstract space. If the composition looks great but doesn't fit the page, you

<sup>40</sup> Or alternatively to the lightness of the words on a black page.

can simply change the size of the page. On a paper page you have to adjust, you have to plan ahead and you must commit to your decisions, a clean, new sheet of paper only lives once.

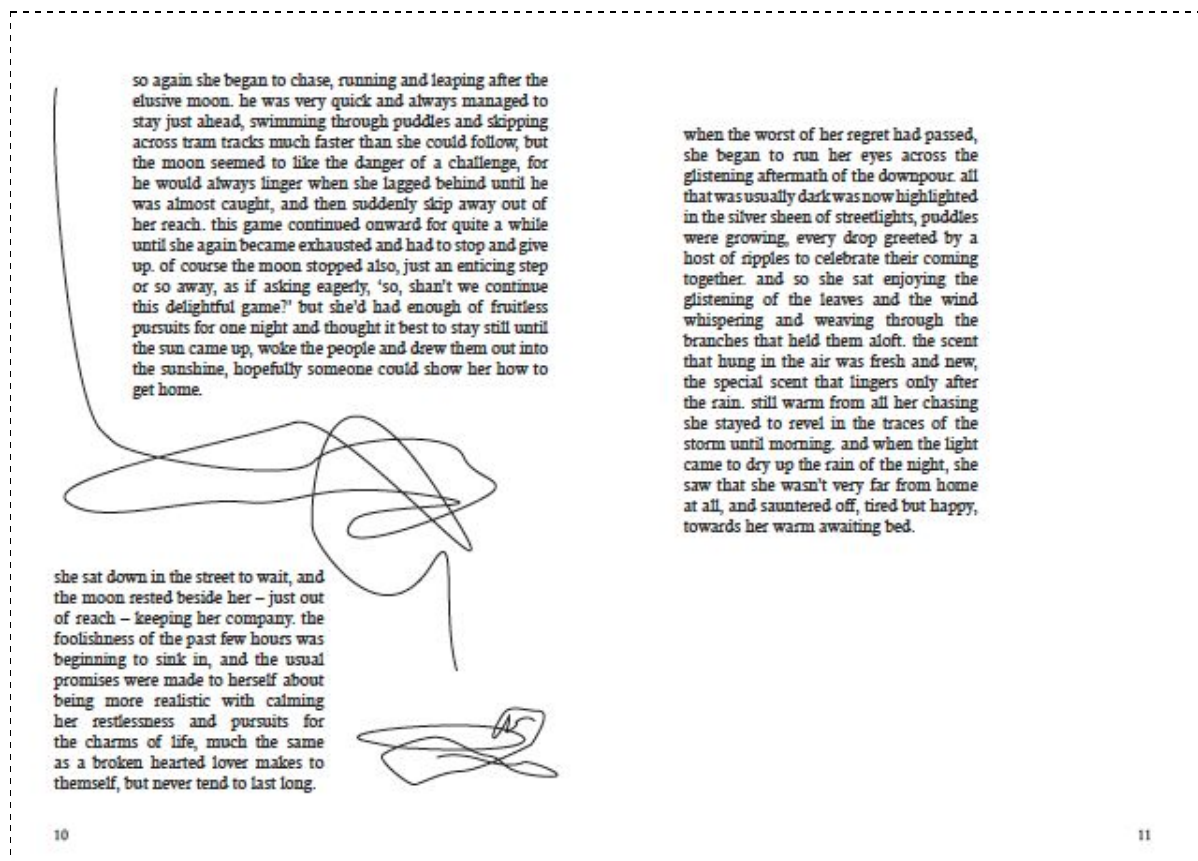


The two versions of *The White Paper* (2015), the original handwritten version and the digitally planned version.

Of course regardless of the result, the order is always important. Some works will start out as a sketch on paper and then find a digital form, however it is seldom the other way around.

In 2006 I wrote a book of short stories, I sketched out some of my ideas on paper, on the tram, at a cafe, but most of the text I wrote directly into the word processor. As I was laying out the book I began to include illustrations to break up the text. Since the illustrations were an aid to support the flow of the layout rather than an independent component, it was both more practical and flexible to create them completely digitally. They didn't feel like illustrations at all, more like compositions in space. The story being already finished and broken up into small paragraphs rather than big

blocks of text, the illustrations helped to make the text lighter and to help it move. Being of the same substance as the text (black line on white paper) the illustrations almost became like escaped sentences from the text, transforming themselves into shapes which described what the words couldn't quite manage. In this way I don't really consider these pen-tool scribbles really as illustrations at all<sup>41</sup>, but more as extensions of the text and a breathing space so you wouldn't read the short stories too quickly.



Double spread from *Bedtime Stories for Dreamers and the Hopeless* (2006)

I choose whatever medium is best suited to the project, the level of tactile sensitivity it needs, the amount of authority it needs to carry. A printed text still carries more authority (in general) than a hand written text, and a handwritten text feels more personal than a printed text. This is a deception of the medium, neither is necessarily true, the weight and sensitivity of the text is in the content and the tone, not the form. But that doesn't mean you can escape using the *right* form, and there's no right

<sup>41</sup> Especially since I have never done anything like illustrating text with drawings in this way ever before this or since

method or order to get to that either, you have to use whatever means you have and see where they are going, be aware of your options and decide what works. I like to use stencils and stamps because they are physical but not as personal, however even these you can trick and use in a quite personal way.

It all depends on who you are talking to, the work where the graphic design or layout really matters is when there is a particular reader in mind. You want them to feel comfortable on the page, in the space you have created, or uncomfortable and confused if that is your intention. If you want them to read the text the text has to be legible, if you want them to look at the thing as a whole, then you should use a different strategy. Words are like eyes or faces in an image, your attention is drawn to them, you want to know what it is about, who is the protagonist. You can even hide the text in full view if you are clever enough to distract the viewer to read the image and not the words.

The white, blank page is a universe in that it provides the illusion of a neutral space. Of course if you are often working on the white page either physically or digitally, you will be quite aware that this is not true at all, that the white page emits a strong energy that needs to be tamed and vitalized with the right words and lines or forms.

## Act II: Notes from the Journey

*the shortest distance between  
2 points is  
often  
intolerable*  
- Charles Bukowski

I want to fit the world in a small suitcase, but it doesn't fit. I want all of the essential things to be within arms reach, visible so that I won't forget them, that the web of knowledge that has been spun will become strong and hold if I slip and fall. It means I have to always be in more than one place at one time, be able to make piles of paper transparent to read the key phrases and words and to remember what I thought and felt every time I carefully marked a line on a page with a bright sticky label. But the truth is I don't remember, I am only ever in one place and my eyes hit the surface and only guess (and tremble) at what lies underneath. I do teleport myself across time and space to line up all the points which are ignorant of each other and make a massive detour through discardable possibilities just in case I might have missed something, but I never return. I make a new map. I turn it upside down and start again.

There is never any guarantee that you have the right information or reliable directions. There is always other information (or other directions) which could have been in that place, brought you to another conclusion. You could have met someone else, said the right thing or the wrong thing and the image would be utterly unrecognizable from the one that you have made, the one that fell out. The images that exist on my computer, in my mind, in these piles of boxes are the likely ones because there are concrete paths that lead to each one of them, the micro journeys that are all dependent on each other. The images my life depends on are the result of conversations, of my patience and impatience, the things I was offered and denied, the colours that were available or I could afford, nothing is ever finished, it is seldom even started.

You can imagine colours but not shapes. The shapes have to be formed, you can't trick them the way you can trick colours. The clone tool takes time and precision to produce a real illusion. Curves and levels can be manipulated carelessly, you can be surprised or overconfident, overenthusiastic. No two screens will ever tell you the same story, all screens lie, it is the only truth.

The journey between one image and the next is always a long journey. It is not always a fun journey and not always a productive journey. The cut made in a film is always a violent cut. It throws away time, hours of lost potential laziness staring at a constellation of colours, shapes, silhouettes and moving points that may or may not be pointless. It makes you path focused, narrow and stable. You know which direction to go and walk without any awareness of imbalance, the imbalance is lying on the cutting room floor.

One lives for the journey between memories, those short moments when you kiss eternity with the tip of your nose. This tip, the most forwardly extended part of your body (if you lean just a little) meets everything first (if you believe that we are in fact moving in a forward direction). You might see or hear something first, but you have often been tricked before. Smell is the most direct path to memory. Every memory with a strong connection to smell will condense the gap of time and space between there and then and here and now much faster than you can blink and you will be forced to stop and inhale again just to be sure.

The journey will not take you where you want to go. You don't really know where you want to go. You only know what form of transport you would like to get you there (train, bus, bicycle, balloon, painting or music) and what it should be like when you arrive (it very seldom looks or sounds anything like this). If you get there too fast it takes an equally long period of time to recover as if you had taken a slower route, the time taken to get from A to B is thus always constant even if you think you are ahead of it. But timetables and deadlines don't freeze move around for anyone. The journey will take as long as it wants. You will hurry or dawdle as you want. It is a matter of



life and death in fact, how the journey is taken. It will determine how you live and where you die.

The journey will tell you stories, it will withhold secrets. It will lie to you, manipulate you and make you want to go home, even if you don't know where that is anymore (because home is everywhere that is not here). The journey only takes you but it never brings you back, you can only return. How or if you will return (if it will be with curiosity or disgust) is always up to you alone.

### **Art and Movement Stuck in Time**

Movement is an essential aspect of my exploration through artistic practice. Taken literally or as a metaphor, movement defines the boundary of where art begins and ends, since the initial call to action – the activation of the artistic process, requires movement to be initiated and progress, and the entire lifecycle of an artwork from crafting and production to installing and viewing, restoration or destruction are based in a series of processes either physical or mental.

In my own artworks, movement is usually most prevalent in the form of travel. I am usually between places, on my way from one event to the next, between projects, deadlines, points of time which have names and are steps in a long journey. The process which connects these moments is usually an impulse for collection – of images, experiences, souvenirs, artifacts and ideas. Having initially been trained in photography this maybe is an unsurprising habit, the camera is very adept at quickly and sometimes thoughtlessly picking up compositions of light shape and texture frozen in time and easily storing them in a condensed and transportable format. The initial condition of the photograph – the enacting a delay before making visible the hidden, captured image – forced at least a jump in time for this translation to occur, if not a jump in space as well if you took the films home before they were developed.

This relationship between the constant movement of myself in contrast to the stationary nature of places and architecture or environments and the relationship

that the camera could create between these two aspects started to manifest itself in a lot of photographs revolving around gardens and trees. Initially I was fascinated by the parameters of rootedness vs uprootedness. The rooted nature of a plant or tree vs the uprooted nature of an immigrant and traveler like myself. My diploma work in photography was a series of layered garden and landscape images, connected by the missing figure of a person who provided the connection between these two places.



Diploma work, *Transplantations*, 2005

Each had come from one place and moved somewhere else, created a new garden in a foreign soil, planting roots and establishing relationships there. Since I had no garden myself, I continued the journey and began to photograph trees in the different places I ended up. Collecting their portraits, their addresses, they would continue to grow as I ventured on to other trees, their nature to stay put while mine was to move constantly on.



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From the series *Urban Forest 2009/2010*

The journey is still an important part of my work. I work most effectively when I travel even though the time is short, I have to decide quickly and there is often no time for second chances or mistakes. This results in hasty postcards built on the collision of a moment and an opportunity which I grab and run away with, knowing I will never return. They are messy, ugly, difficult to focus on and understand, even for myself. But they are nonetheless valuable because they enact and witness a moment of tension, a thin, tired, fragile moment which is stolen because it can never come again. I will blame the increasing pace of the journey for this tumult, there is often not much time to stop. The added, more receptive layers of sound and moving image capable of absorbing more information and requiring a different kind of concentration, condense time which has accompanied the digital recording era. Now you can both see and hear the resulting audiovisual assemblage and the cacophony is equalised and smoothed out. The camera guesses, calculates an average. It isn't selective like the ear or the eye.

Digitally I can record and watch simultaneously which removes at least two layers of image translation, first the guesswork on how the film will respond is removed, and secondly the prediction of the desired image (which with film is still hopeful and ideal) is shattered. Even the framing is usually done through this small screen and so what used to be a process of balancing three parallel and separate perceptions alongside each other are condensed into one immediate and fully absorbing image. I can't look away. I can't delete and I almost never reshoot. Every take has become spontaneous and indivisible from the moment it represents. They line up, are shared, become part of the flow of images of live broadcast, a window to another dimension of memory, a direct memory and not the collage of a future memory which analogue photography offered. The journey itself has also become condensed in time. It is always happening, never anticipated, never over, never returning because there is no time to return to it. The direction of time is ruptured by all these circles. It travels both clockwise and anticlockwise, slowing down and speeding up. Music and sound is particularly adept at distorting and engaging our emotions and altering our experience of time.<sup>42</sup> As composer Jorge Boehringer notes, composing music is often thought of as organizing notes or sound. In his opinion however, it's also primarily about organizing time.<sup>43</sup>



Still from *Camera Dialogue II – Las Vegas*, video, 2015

<sup>42</sup> Droit-Volet, Ramos, Bueno and Bigand: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3713348/>

<sup>43</sup> Lecture on research based art practice by Jorge Boehringer at Prague College, 31.3.2016

Another dilemma of the constant journey is that the residue which builds up as its trail and its 'evidence' is slow and heavy, it becomes quickly obsolete or buried in an unnamed unlocatable file or folder. The souvenirs, saved, buried but eternal are replaced by actions, presences performances in real time which re-enact its memories. The stories and artifacts collected on the journey can now only surface as a part of the continuous journey, as a short pause, a reference to contextualise if and when we are inclined to ask the question *why are we here again?*

The nature of analog photographs carried a particular aura in relation to time which appears to have faded somewhat, if not been totally lost. The analog photograph, according to Roland Barthes as “the certificate of the present” is bound up in the past and a carrier of its magic. At least when the event of being photographed was more scarce and one was not so constantly under surveillance, one might have been inclined to believe in and could afford to become emotionally attached to images in this way.

The digital image however is potentially in many places simultaneously at once, it may lay dormant for years, decades, or be clicked open on many isolated screens in different corners of the world, the present it represents is not a moment in time but an eternity. Accelerated by the speed of its movement, it is always touching 'now' because that is when I see it, and this is the moment that matters. The digital image always travels fast, but it can also begin to swarm, be picked up on a wave and multiply (almost) at the speed of light. A shared thought, often in the form of a laugh echoes around the world like a Mexican wave and dies out just as quickly, when it comes around for a second time already seen and boring.

The moment that I meet the image it is realised and it is present. Images are recycled, repurposed, they are useful whenever convenient. The image always and eternally at the mercy of art and its whims travels like smuggled baggage, purposely discarding its provenance and covering its tracks. Authorship and originality are

diminished, lost in the rush, a couple of laps around the internet and as an image you are dizzy enough to forget where you came from, even if it is inscribed somewhere in your metadata.

Like Jaromír Hladík, the protagonist in Borges' short story *The Secret Miracle*, I would love to stop time for a year (or even two!) to revise my thoughts before the inevitable deadline arrives, to have time to think before the present changes to yesterday's future and requests me to update it. There is simply never enough time available to make an examined decision. One could always have read yet another book, made another sketch or test, asked another opinion or read through it one more time. The deadline, the exhibition opening or the performance date is always both a dread and a relief. A dread because it creeps up on you too quickly and a relief because time has closed in on the task the moment draws near and in pure Kierkegaardian fashion<sup>44</sup>, the Moment and the passage of Eternity connect, brushing each other softly. The transformation has occurred, one is forced to react to decide one's position (for good or ill) and the journey can continue, still at hyper speed.

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<sup>44</sup> I am referring to Søren Kierkegaard treatise on the 'Moment' as outlined in *Philosophical Fragments*.

## **Act III: A Short Guide to Love, Art and War**

### **Things to remember:**

1. To enter into action one must first be alert, aware and entirely awake.
2. Remember to listen for the objective through multiple channels, it may travel through air, through sleep, sight is usually the last place it appears.
3. Once a position is located, fix your focus and advance.
4. If you are hit, spit out and rid yourself of the broken parts, they are no longer of use.
5. Move on until the space in your chosen direction is exhausted, then scout yourself a new direction.
6. You will be tired and you will be full of adrenalin, ready to collapse but afraid to give up, at least not in plain sight where there is nowhere to hide and catch your breath.
7. Use playfulness, aggression and affection at your own risk and discretion.

An action may take many forms, but the circumstances surrounding the action will ultimately determine of what use the action will be for further engagement, if contact will be established and if it will hold. It is easy to be blind to a familiar environment. One takes elements for granted, acts on impulse, misses essential details assumes that everything is the same as it always was, but everything can change at any time.

A new context however, always always a new opportunity and requires a different kind of concentration. Nothing either bad nor good has yet had time to unfold, and there are latent potentials but they have not yet begun to reveal themselves. In cases of love, art and war one can be doomed from the outset but it is impossible to know. The unravelling of the story will slowly begin to show these properties. It is a process of learning and uncovering the things that are hidden, both what one does and doesn't want to know, and setting them in order. Although it is the most difficult and sometimes the most painful, the most important thing is to remember, to write down, document and map all the steps you make so you can retrace the path you

have taken, the decisions you have made when the time comes to look back from where you are to where you have come from and observe all the debris, the lessons and progress which has been strewn along the way. You have to remember for future reference, to warn others, or simply for the pleasure of browsing through memories, because these are the things which may become useful or necessary in the case that you are required to mobilize your energies into action once again.

There are times when you find yourself in this situation voluntarily, at other times involuntarily, you must be prepared for both. When thrust into a situation unexpectedly your own feelings may take a few moments to develop, like a polaroid, but there isn't always time enough to think, or consider, and you have to react before you know quite where you are, have a clear line of sight or plan of action. In these moments there is only time for instinctive actions, and they might not always turn out right. Experience informs you to the best of your ability, but if Plan A rather than Plan B would have been a better option may never reveal itself. There aren't any reruns, at least not at this time and place. With a little respect for the fragility of the present, the limited vocabulary that panic allows, you will not get very far on your own.

The others around will guide you, distract you, help you. Sometimes you will follow their lead, at other times you will lead them or try to convince them that this and not that is the right way. Other times you will listen, often be impatient at the slow progress. At times you will have to block your ears or turn your gaze away and take a deep breath in order to continue at all. More than once you will think about deserting, of running away and pretending that this never even happened. And sometimes you will go but come back. Other times you will go and never come back. Alone or together may be an option but is not always a choice. You don't always get to choose your company. You won't always be listened to. You won't always know what to say, and you won't always have something to say or find the right words.



You will want to be alone sometimes and you will be lonely sometimes. Not everyone will always understand what you mean with what you say or even the language you use to say it. Some important information will go totally ignored, while some careless whisper or mistake will be repeated and haunt you at every turn. You will hurt people with carelessness, anger and good intentions, forgive and be forgiven by the people who know you and worry about the opinions of others you've never met but seen in the distance.

When the campaign is over someone might have lost and someone else might have won. There might not be any losers or winners, or only one of the two. You don't know if this will be the last time or if you will be called in again. Do you still have any energy left, desire, reason or any strength to continue and begin all over again? Too much of anything will lead only to trouble. Neither love, war nor art waits or has the patience for slowly made decisions.

### **Make a Fuss or Make a Mess?**

An artwork is not finished once it is made. Once you have it in front of you ready to be seen and revealed it becomes a friend, an opponent or a child, relying on you to bring it outside into the light and introduce it to others. There are different ways and places available in which to do this, and you might need some help, or a lot of it, and if you are unlucky you have neither the capacity or the connection to make the transfer happen in a way that contact will occur, and contact being essential, is the key to everything we do as artists. Without contact an idea and the artwork connected to it will wither and die, make no impression on its surroundings, it won't fulfill its potential or initiate the conversations it could.

This aspect of contact has had several different forums created for it, some let by art and its forms such as the gallery, theatre or museum while others have invited art into them, such as the home, places of worship and media platforms amongst others. What these platforms look like and the rules of how they function attempts to change as art develops, mutates and adapts. One of the most interesting aspects of these

transformations is the varying relationships between individual and collective roles and approaches. At the moment both the individual's and the collective's role in making art and taking it in are still established and important. Before the Renaissance the individual artist wasn't necessarily so key in the production of an artwork, the hands and skills of a whole workshop might stand behind a painting, sculpture or artifact. Similarly a subjective, individual viewpoint was not either called for in for example medieval art where the image was simply strengthening and propagating the viewpoint of the collective – the church and thus society since they were intrinsically linked, the image even needed the viewer to complete it. The tradition of the workshop returned, had a slight hiatus during the romantic and modernist periods from when it was replaced by 'schools' or 'isms', artists still circulated, worked and exchanged in groups, but presented under their own names.

The collective is always made up of individuals, and the individuals who practice art have almost always identified themselves with some kind of collective. Today each individual is seen to make up and take part in a network, a network of friends, of ideas, of hierarchies and privileges, most of which have both visible and invisible parts. It is popular to collaborate, to work in an artist group or organize group exhibitions. These many voices create community with all the conflicts, affection and creative energy that is generated as a result of it. As such every community works within a system of communication, of organisation, has a kind of political form whether it is formal or informal. Internally it decides what is included and excluded, who are its friends and who are its enemies, the scope of its interest and how to discuss these topics. It's then probably no surprise that this communicative aspect is the most essential one for artists, that the language which they share and develop to express themselves and communicate with others inside and outside the group is the key focus of their activities.

The collaboration necessary, the patience, impatience and conflict that define the boundaries of the project are often not visible in the result. The shared will usually be the moments of flow, the connections and fruitful conversations. What stays within

the frame, the victories, happy endings and successes are such a small part of every trip, hop, skip and jump that has happened along the way.

### **Group Logic**

A devised project is a creature with many arms, many legs, many heads and many desires. They might all be going in different directions, a couple of them might have found a point of contact. The project and the group are an organism assembled together, maybe over a slow process of fusions or a hasty scramble, but you have to make it work, listen hard and be patient to get to the end.

I have been a part of both functional and dysfunctional collaborations, the former being of course much more enjoyable than the latter. But it is possible to learn from both, about yourself mostly when things are not working. When things are working there is a better chance that you will have more focus on the material itself rather than negotiating the dynamics of the collaboration and trying to understand each other. In both cases there will be compromise, but in bad situations you might end up compromising yourself out of any interest you had in in the first place.

Getting to know each other takes a long time. Once the group knows each other you know more or less what each person is good at, and the network of trust grows. To build up this sensitivity also means you can improvise, be spontaneous and take risks. When something goes wrong you just keep going and find a solution on the way. The rehearsal makes its way on stage and the performance is always changing.

The main project I am referring to here as a learning experience was a devised puppet theatre piece called *Woman, Skin, Song, Bone* which was a performance on the theme of passing knowledge between generations of women. It was going to combine puppetry, music, media and textile art, maybe simply too many things from the start, and we did manage to get all of these elements on stage in the end though with some difficulty.

One of the main problems was disparate logics. Each member of the group had their own logic, the materials we worked with had different logics. Our understanding of what the possibilities were for each of the parts was either lacking, or they behaved in practice entirely differently than we had discussed.

The scenography of the piece was a long warp of white threads which acted as a screen, barrier, place of work or dimension to another world. The logic of the warp ended up representing the whole difficult process of the project. When it was



Working with the warp in *Woman Skin Song Bone*,  
(Photo: Ashe Kazanjian)

working it looked very beautiful, but it was terribly difficult to work with. It was always getting tangled up and needed to be sorted out, it was a sensitive material which became ruined the more it was handled. It looked very romantic on stage, but in reality the warp was very difficult and disruptive and I hated it.

But there were plenty of nice moments too. We devised the performance at a residency in Mooste, Estonia and spent a lot of time rehearsing and exploring in the surrounding countryside. One day we went for a long walk around the lake and the singers started to play with the echo of the lake calling to each other. I captured this game on camera naming it *Polytope*, a multi-sided shape with irregular sides. Each voice would make a connection with



Video still from *Polytope*, 2014

the other listeners (the other callers, the camera, a fisherman) creating an irregular and temporary shape drawn through sound and listening across the lake. These were the kinds of moments when our collaboration worked, when the spontaneous nature of our presence and interventions in the space connected as a group.

## **Act IV: Seeing Without Your Eyes**

*Hypocritically, to see without your eyes you may need to use your eyes, so be sure to keep them open at all times.*

The ways of seeing vary from person to person. Each person's plane of visibility is affected by a host of subjective factors - tastes, preferences and fears will often assert their presence when trying to see. There is a difference between seeing well and properly.

Seeing well assumes that you are familiar with the thing you see, that you have built a relationship to it over time and that you have seen it take many different shapes, be in several different moods and behave both favourably and unfavourably. To see well takes time and is a process which may involve both ups and downs. To see well one needs to exercise patience and only represent what one has seen and understands in gradual stages as not to put the thing in all too small a box where it will end up squished and cramped. The well-seen thing is usually not going anywhere and to hurry its display would be squandering its potential.

The properly seen thing is more of an analytic approach, it might require special tools or skills. With the properly seen thing you might not have so much time. It might also be a temporary manifestation or intersection of elements, so there might not be time to think about it too much. For this various kinds of recording and registering equipment might prove very useful. With these tools you can collect a lot of data and impressions which can be sorted out at a later, more convenient time. The properly-seen thing might also need time to reveal itself fully, but you will often not be able to return to it in its original form. Relating the properly seen thing to others often means bearing witness about it. Both witnessing and recounting the witnessed object or event are always highly subjective experiences, and other people might have seen the same thing you have, also in a proper way but produced an entirely different image.

Both of these ways of seeing offer insights into the nature of things. One's experiences, knowledge and personal interests will often 'colour' what one sees. Be aware that each person sees colours, lines and movements differently and will respond to them as such. There is no point in trying to guess the reactions of others, the main thing is that you are yourself connected to what you are doing and speaking about. There are many available languages for this formulation, and you have to find and learn the ones which will be compatible both with your own ways of seeing and doing. You are free also to create your own languages, methods and tools, but just be aware that it may take some time for these to be picked up and used in general circulation.

There may also be many times when these two ways of seeing overlap. You may be looking at something well, and find that you need to shift your focus and look at some element properly or borrow some tactics from one or other system. In the end it doesn't matter so much how you get there, as long as you find what you were looking for, or at least something that you have never seen before. Both methods will prove themselves to have weaknesses in any case. The primary goal of the process is in any case for you to be able to learn to see better, and for you to use this experience and knowledge to help others see better too. Which way this happens or how long it takes is of little consequence.

### **Bodies of Work and the Experiments Within Them**

As time goes by each 'project' tends to get bigger and bigger, until I have at last had to admit that they aren't really projects at all but areas of study. An area of study will never be finished, though you might have to let it go, at least for awhile to make room for something else. There isn't and won't be time for everything. Eventually the things that you specifically are able to do in a way that no one else really could will reveal themselves, but you have to listen and be patient. Usually you will see what you want first and find out what is possible only later. The wants often contain questions, frustrations which bother you about the world. Like a dream they will have a different shape than their actual form, and the point of the process is to

stretch them out and reveal their substance. This process is not permanent but temporary, this window is open only as long as someone is holding it open. Once you let go of the form it will flick back into shape like an elastic band. You can and should open up old projects of your own and others, but you will always have to find your own way to grasp them and this can take just as long or even longer than starting from scratch.

Experiments are more spontaneous actions or reactions to an immediate problem or situation. Their topics may vary (and they can of course be useful when working within an area of study) but the area in which experiments develop is the method not any particular theme. In this sense you may find that you end up a lot of failed experiments before you manage to grasp your method. This is frustrating but it's also important to step back and read the results of what the experiment has to tell you, you might in fact need some help (contrary to your belief you can't be good at everything). Experiments can be great fun, but they can also be risky if you're not paying attention. Again, why you are doing an experiment will probably be the place you have to return if an experiment starts going off track. Halfway into a project it might have become distracted or changed direction because of where or how you are working, or who you are working with. If the experiment has changed direction you have to at least take a moment to stop and consider whether this direction is better than the initial one. An experiment usually gets old a lot faster than an area of study and can become boring before it is over. For this reason it's important to keep track of the specific time frame that the experiment needs or is offered and make sure that your work happens in a fitting rhythm appropriate for the experiment and the method you are trying to develop.

### **Projects that Create Tools**

Probably the biggest project I have done to date was the solo performance and research project *Lingua Varia*. This project aimed to study the dying languages of the world and our relationship to language. The project itself has grown over time



and is still continuing. I consider it a research project because I spent most of the time developing strategies that could work in different situations. The strategies for the theatre performance for example took into account the presence of a small audience, a group of strangers who would throughout the show be asked to interact with the show and become familiar to one another throughout the process. The audience became part of the material for my performance. Since each of the people present had their own relationships to the phenomena I was talking about, it seemed a shame not to use their names, experiences and thoughts as material. This also presented an opportunity to explore different avenues of communication by breaking the fourth wall.<sup>45</sup> I called the audience on a phone, I gave them refreshments as a conversation starter and asked them to name and define various objects according to their own criteria. These small interactions helped break down the divide of being shown something to process rather than being shown a way to process each thing we are presented with in the artistic situation. By shifting who is performing the focus on who is creating meaning is also shifted<sup>46</sup> and each person in the audience is asked to become more active since the person performing is one of them.



Scene from *Lingua Varia*, calling the audience  
(Photo: Martin Mlaka)

For each topic one has to find the suitable way of seeing or listening for it. This may depend on the situation you have available or who is there, there are as many ways as there are topics and situations. People of various ages, cultures and subcultures will have different points of access. If you want to talk to them you have to find out where your form of access and their form of access overlap. This is the

<sup>45</sup> A theatre term for an interaction breaking the illusion of the invisible wall separating audience and performer.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Pražák writes in his theoretical study of scenography *Mezi (Between)* that the role of who 'plays' the audience or the actor is dependent on what they are doing, not where they are or what role they have in the situation. Anyone who is talking or acting is the actor and whoever is observing or listening is the spectator, regardless if they are on the stage or in the audience.

moment a conversation can begin. What you will talk about during that conversation you can only find out once that door is opened and hopefully these will lead to further conversations that can help the project grow.

