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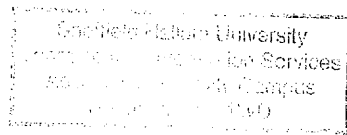
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# **ABSTRACT REALISM**

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## **Non-Anthropocentric Strategies for Constructing Non-Relational Artworks**

**Dale Christopher Holmes**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of**

**Sheffield Hallam University**

**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts**

**April 2013**



## **Declaration**

I, Dale Christopher Holmes, declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and consisting of a written thesis and an artwork, meets the regulations stated in the handbook for the mode of submission selected and approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee of Sheffield Hallam University.

I declare that this submission is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award. The use of all materials from sources other than my own work has been properly and fully acknowledged.

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the neighbourhoods of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism towards developing a new material philosophy and practice led research methodology based upon a series of ‘non-anthropocentric strategies’ (following Fredric Jameson) for constructing, staging and encountering artworks as ‘non-relational’ (following Francois Laruelle) ‘totalities’ (following Carl Einstein) within the cultural-economic-socio-political reality of ‘capitalist realism’ (following Mark Fisher).

The thesis is presented over two ‘sectors’. Each sector demonstrates the practical application of the material philosophy of abstract realism; investigating the non-relational, construction and spatial claims of the research.

The first sector is the written text titled *An Asymmetrical and Angular Architectonic Arrangement*. This sector gathers together eleven distinct ‘zones’ of research activity that have been carried out across the period of this project.

The second sector is a new original artwork constructed using the ‘toolkit’ of abstract realism, titled *Blackplastic*.

This project concludes by proposing a number of contributions; first, a re-orientation of Jencksian adhocism away from any idealisms of ‘openness’ and the ‘whole’ (Jencks) towards a focus on its practical application and constructive methodology, second, the development of the method ‘glossary’ as a contemporary anti-razor, third, the claim that the application of abstract realism to the curation and staging of artworks leads to asymmetrical encounters, fourth, the transferability of abstract realism beyond fine art studio practice. These are followed by the main contribution to knowledge which encapsulates the above and asserts that abstract realism is a re-positioned artistic abstraction; a non-representational material philosophy in itself and a new methodology for practice led research. The project culminates with a manifesto for abstract realism.

## Acknowledgments

This PhD was made possible by the help and encouragement of friends and family and especially the support of Tracy Holmes and our two children, Nell and Seth.

I cannot be more grateful to my supervisory team at Sheffield Hallam University, T.C McCormack and Gary Simmonds, and in particular the support of my Director of Studies, Dr. Jaspar Joseph-Lester.

Deserving of recognition is Bryan Eccleshall for his invaluable technical as well as moral support and my sometime collaborator Kirsten Cooke with whom I have been able to test many of the ideas contained in this thesis in arenas beyond the studio walls as part of the cross disciplinary research initiative *Material Conjectures*.

Finally and importantly, this PhD received the full support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council through the award of a Doctoral Studentship; for which I am very grateful.

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# Introduction

# Abstract Realism

## Prologue to Abstract Realism

This PhD thesis sets out to investigate non-anthropocentric strategies for constructing, staging and theorising abstract artworks. I will argue here that these strategies are located at the points of contact between artistic abstraction and philosophical realism. Through the research and outcomes collected into this thesis I will demonstrate the ways in which these strategies for making abstract artworks constitute a new material philosophy and a repositioned artistic abstraction.

This PhD research progresses initiatives developed over the course of my M.A. studies at Sheffield Hallam University; M.A research that resulted in a self published book that formed the basis of my PhD application and the research proposal that secured this research projects full funding by the AHRC.<sup>1</sup>

The current project builds upon the developments of the preceding research in an effort to realise fully the impact of these new strategies for my own studio practice and beyond in order to build on and to test these against both the relational regime of contemporary art and the recent recovery by artists of the historical tropes of artistic abstraction.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The work I presented as the culmination of my M.A studies comprised of a glossary, an invitation card for a speculative exhibition, a limited edition print and a recording of my dissertation text read by a female voice. These four elements were the outcome of my efforts to shift the processes and strategies I had been employing in the construction of abstract paintings into different and aesthetically non-related registers.

<sup>2</sup> In 2002 a number of large scale high profile group exhibitions heralded the return of an interest in formalisms and tropes of abstraction mined from historical modernism. *Early One Morning* at the Whitechapel Gallery (featuring, arguably the first generation of artists connected to this approach – Claire Barclay, Gary Webb, Jim Lambie, Eva Rothschild and Shahin Afrassiabi), *Thinking in Abstraction: Vivid* at Mead Gallery (Warwick) and *Shimmering Substance* at Arnolfini, Bristol. In 2011 the next generation of contemporary artists mining the modernist past were recognised by Lisa Lefevre and Tom Morton's (curators) *British Art Show 7: In the days of the Comet*.

I suggest that this new enthusiasm for the aesthetics of early modernism has occurred synchronous to the recovery of pre-critical realism in new continental philosophy; a move itself generated by a disappointment amongst a new generation of thinkers with philosophy's own self imposed limitation of philosophical labour to the human-world correlation only.<sup>3</sup>

I speculate this will lead to a better understanding of the implications of these synchronously occurring retrievals, showing them to be responses to a wider cultural conservatism that is related explicitly to the pervasive requirement for participation in the wider socio-political culture of the West.

### **Towards Abstract Realism**

Over the course of this PhD research, the focus of my interest in artistic abstraction has been significantly shifted. This shift in focus is the direct result of analysing the outcomes of studio based experiments. These results repositioned my initial belief in the philosophical and political possibilities of abstraction as an aesthetic category moving it irrevocably towards the actual operational, material, philosophical and political effects of artistic abstraction.<sup>4</sup> I will argue these effects are evident in the group of non-anthropocentric methods for manufacturing new artworks which I call, abstract realism.

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<sup>3</sup> Philosophical realism is the tradition of thought that maintains a world as existing external to the human perception or representation of that world; this pre-critical (pre-Kantian) tradition has recently undergone a revival in continental thought. Similarly artistic abstraction has witnessed something of a recovery, detectable in recent stylistic retrievals and the apparent nostalgia for modernist aesthetics.

<sup>4</sup> The results of studio based applications of these non-anthropocentric strategies are documented in Appendix D of this thesis.



This re-orientation precipitated a new development in the research; I recognised a number of intersections between the developments of artistic abstraction in early modernism and the new philosophical realisms emerging from continental thought.<sup>5</sup>

This led me to ask some initial questions;

- In an atmosphere dominated by relativist political and cultural idealisms does the decision to focus on the immanent structures of art lead to the reorientation of art's relations away from a 'responsibility' to the 'audience' establishing a new emphasis on art as an end itself?
- Can (artistic) abstraction be repositioned from its contemporary reduction to the description of a style or surface look towards an operative material philosophy?

### **Abstract Realism; the intersection of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism**

In this introduction I draw out and explain the key concepts and motivations herein and provide the reader with an explanation of the research project's topography, in order to delineate its contours and its boundaries and to allow the architecture of the thesis to

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<sup>5</sup> Contemporary developments in continental philosophy, labelled 'Speculative Realism' are marked by a renewed interest in *the great outdoors* (Quentin Meillessoux) of pre-critical (pre-Kantian) philosophy; this is evidenced in the renewal of interest in forms of philosophical realism. The distinction between subject and world or thought and being is reinstated in the realist philosophies known collectively as Speculative Realism. The acronym, SR, is an umbrella term that captures strands of thought variously known as – new materialism, transcendental realism, post-humanism, object oriented ontology, eliminativist materialism. All these strands of thought claim to be invested in moving philosophy beyond the limitations that humanism - starting with Kant's Copernican Revolution of 1780- imposes upon thought; posing serious challenges to the hegemonies of thought that coalesce around the primacy of the relation between human thought and the object world. Each attempting to reconsider metaphysics and provide ways that realism and/or materialism – the claim that there is a distinction between thought and Being – can be said to exist in the face of the pervasive anti-realist (anti-realist is not meant as dismissive or derisory as such and only stands for any claim made against a reality existing independently of the human consciousness of it) narratives typically found in neo-Kantian thought. Most importantly for this project they all oppose the immanence of the real manifestation to the idealism of representation.

manifest clearly. This will be done through a series of conjectural statements and subheadings in order to facilitate the positioning of the research and state the main claims and the arguments of the research clearly.

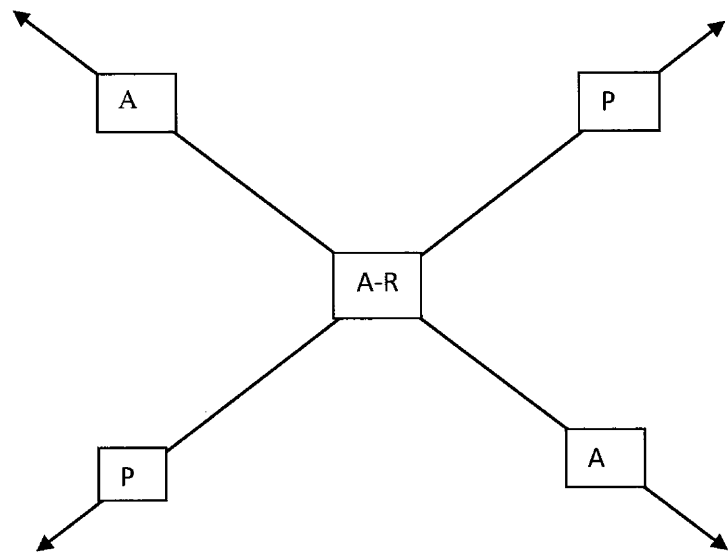
Introducing the concept of abstract realism is a precarious task. The danger is implicit in the paradoxical nature that these two terms being forced together suggest. It is important to be clear at the outset that abstract realism is not a fusion of its terms, both maintain their autonomy never becoming symmetrical or synthesised – reducible to each other; it is instead an ad-hoc unit of contrary terms that have been, following François Laruelle, unified without synthesis.<sup>6</sup> It is precisely the paradoxical and even contradictory nature of abstract realism that is its totality.

I propose that abstract realism is an investigation at the intersection between artistic abstraction and philosophical realism; an encounter which creates a new material philosophy that can effectively progress abstract art beyond its historical and contemporary articulations.

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<sup>6</sup> In order to avoid abstract realism being read as a 'dialectic' in the broadest sense which 'in every case, (it) has to do with a coupling or an arrangement of two terms that is dual, or rather *duel* yet continuous, reciprocal and symmetrical.' François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle, 1986, p15

# The Structure of Abstract Realism



## Key

A = Artistic Abstraction

P = Philosophical Realism

A-R = Abstract Realism

Abstract realism is a collection of non-anthropocentric strategies which I refer to here as a ‘toolkit’. There are five tools in the abstract realist toolkit; conjecture, glossary, qualitatively punctual, adhocism, and bludgeon. These are all fully described later in this introduction.<sup>7</sup> This toolkit has been developed over the research period, both in the controlled environment of the studio situation and in the contingent space of public presentation in order to demonstrate a fidelity to making, staging and theorising the artwork as non-relational and immanent, to itself. The result is a repositioned art

<sup>7</sup> For now the understanding of abstract realism as a toolkit of non-anthropocentric strategies is sufficient.

production that manufactures an asymmetrical encounter and recognises the artwork as an end in-itself over any interpretative framework or linguistic representation of it.<sup>8</sup>

In this introduction I will draw on four key texts that have proven to be important to the development of the main claims made here. These are Fredric Jameson's theorisation of recent culture in 'Postmodernism Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984) and Mark Fisher's updating of Jameson's main themes in relation to the contemporary political and cultural conditions in his essay 'Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative?' (2009). Added to this are two texts that are contemporaneous with the very beginnings of abstract art in twentieth century modernism, Carl Einstein's essay 'Totality' (1914) first published over three instalments in the Berlin based radical journal *Die Aktion* and the extended essay from his book on African sculpture, *Negerplastik* (1915).<sup>9</sup>

I argue that abstract realism moves the artwork beyond the deprivations of the neo-Kantian or idealist frameworks that have previously provided support for high

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou's illustration of non-relation is useful here. In the text *Philosophy in the Present* the philosopher describes the death of the Greek mathematician and insurgent Archimedes under the sword of an occupying Roman soldier as an example of a non-relation. Badiou calls this a 'relation without relation'; an encounter between terms with no common measure – the immanence of creative thought – Archimedes refuses to leave the mathematical demonstration he is engaged in against the request of the soldier that he accompany him for an audience with his General – and the violence of the state – the Roman centurion's anger at the indifference Archimedes shows towards this request. *Philosophy in the Present*, 2009, pp5-8

<sup>9</sup> According to Sebastian Zeidler Einstein's 'Totality' makes a case for visual art as a totality that can disrupt accepted models of subjectivity. Zeidler insists that the essay's strength; its totality, lies in its utilising contradictory philosophical arguments, transcendental neo-Kantianism and Bergsonian vitalism and immanence. 'Totality Against a Subject; Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*', *October Winter* 2004, no 107, pp14-46. When it was published in 1915 *Negerplastik* provided a shock to the established paradigms of both western art theory and colonialist anthropology – at the time Einstein was seen as the most important theorist of modern art in Germany, having already published extensively on cubism. The book's main intention is a thorough critique of the paradigms of Western art practice and theory through a study of the sculptural objects of sub-Saharan Africa. The book presented an affront to academic art theory not only in its content but in its form. The work appears as an introductory essay to one hundred and eleven photographic representations of artefacts, these plates have no textual detail to make the reader aware of provenance, context, scale, colour, material or indeed any description beyond the images as they appear. This is also the case with the book's text; it is accompanied by no footnotes or endnotes.

modernism and post-modernism, frameworks that have traditionally reduced art to its relation to the human subject alone, a situation which has been achieved through the privileging of meaning (representation and interpretation) over any reality (immanence) whatsoever. These then are philosophical traditions that share a foundational concern with closing a gap, to guarantee a synthesis – the unity of the manifold – grounded on the reconciliation of human (subject) and world (object).

Some clarification is required around the terms subject and object in relation to this thesis.<sup>10</sup> Both are important to the argument for abstract realism and to its suitability as a set of strategies for producing artworks. I will show how abstract realism avoids the standardised humanist notion of the object as passively waiting to be acted upon by the human subject and resists the closure of the gap between the subject and the object typically found in the neo-Kantian manoeuvre (of mirroring the object and the subject), which only ever amounts to, as Fredric Jameson makes clear, an illusory reconciliation.

concepts such as those of 'object' and 'subject' will be flawed in the way they seem to imply, and are thus logically founded on, a notion of the 'reconciliation' of object and subject, which is illusory. Those who manipulate such 'dialectical' concepts therefore- whatever they go on to say about the concrete possibilities of reconciliation (and no reader of Adorno will find much reassurance along those lines) - nonetheless by logical implication perpetuate the hidden foundational 'synthesis' in what then seems to work out into a virtually narrative or even historical pattern- a moment of 'primal unity' before the separation of subject and object.<sup>11</sup>

In order to progress from this situation, abstract realism maintains existing gaps; this recalcitrance pre-determines the inability to reconcile – as reconciliation, following

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<sup>10</sup> The use of the term *object* here describes the artwork as such and not just the material object of a painting, sculpture etc. it is used to encapsulate the artworks immanent qualities. In this sense the image is an object, as is the artist-performer etc.

<sup>11</sup> Fredric Jameson. *Post-Modernism Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991, p336.

Jameson, is understood to be a fusion towards 'identity'.<sup>12</sup> Promoting instead, the notion that artworks in their immanence force an asymmetry which objectifies the social relations in which they persist. Abstract realism then, manufactures artworks that, as Slavoj Zizek points out 'create an obstacle'.<sup>13</sup> An illustration of this point is to think of these artwork obstacles as material barricades installed into the neighbourhood of contemporary art.<sup>14</sup>

### **Abstract Realism and Capitalist Realism**

Abstract realism has been formulated in response to arts contemporary condition; a condition described effectively by Mark Fisher in his book length essay *Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative?* (2009).<sup>15</sup> In the essay, Fisher utilises the dystopian vision of a sterile human race - unable to reproduce, found in Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men* (2006), in order to describe the cultural exhaustion of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. For Fisher, the exhausted state of contemporary cultural production leaves it absolutely capitalised and retrogressive, a situation within which its

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<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson. *Post-Modernism Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, p.336.

<sup>13</sup> Slavoj Zizek tells us that the subject 'submits' whilst the object 'objects, creates an obstacle' *The Parallax View*, 2006, p17

<sup>14</sup> The new framework of abstract realism is improvisational it reconfigures existing characteristics of artistic abstraction and colonises the gaps left by already accepted frameworks. As Francois Laruelle points out 'One constellation does not dispel another, it installs itself in the gaps of the former, occupies its neighbourhoods and proposes new signs, a new economy of the same places.' Francois Laruelle. *Philosophies of Difference*, 2010, p1.

<sup>15</sup> Capitalist Realism is the name Mark Fisher has given to what he recognises as being the inter-subjectively agreed 'reality' of contemporary capitalism. Historically it was the name given to the works of a group of artists – Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Konrad Leug and Wolf Vostell – by the artist Sigmar Polke in Dusseldorf, West Germany in 1963. The group were characterised by a shared interest in the growing culture of advertising and mass media images. Polke ascribed this moniker to the group as an ironic nod to the Socialist Realism of the Soviet East. In the 1980's the sociologist Michael Schudsen, considering the relationship between the two realisms – Socialist and Capitalist, used the term to describe advertising as promoting a way of life based upon individuated and private consumption. See chapter seven of Michael Schudsen, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion; its dubious impact on American society*, 1984.

producers no longer strive for a future, for the new, making instead a 180 degree turn towards the near past. Fisher argues that this action is performed in order to merely reproduce and market the same effects and affects over and over in an eternal return.

Fisher's theory of capitalist realism takes as its point of departure the work done by Jameson in 'Post-Modernism Or, the Cultural logic of Late Capitalism' (1984); through the essay Jameson offers a 'periodizing hypothesis' of what he believes to represent a distinct historical moment after modernism. Jameson recognises that any attempt at totalisation tends to flatten out difference; handing the period in question over as a homogenous horizon of activity. Alternatively, Jameson argues, postmodernism is not merely a style - and this is important for my own theorisation of abstract realism and its place on the horizon of possibility found in capitalist realism - but a cultural dominant allowing for a range of different features; an uneven horizon of cultural activity.

Jameson tells us:

Post-modernism theory is one of those attempts: the effort to take the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an 'age', or zeitgeist or 'system' or 'current situation' any longer.<sup>16</sup>

For Jameson it is this potential lack of a coherent situation that offers the possibility and the promise of new forms of collective social practice.<sup>17</sup>

Twenty five years on, and arguably following Mike Davis, Mark Fisher points out that we no longer have such uncertainties to cling to, the lack of coherence, Jameson recognises when he claims that 'we are not even sure there is as coherent a thing as an

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<sup>16</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Post-Modernism Or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991 p2.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Davis in his critique of Jameson's essay has pointed out that this is a fatal flaw in Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism, going on to state that instead of the lack of a zeitgeist as a pathway to new forms of collective activity, post-modernism's real zeitgeist is its anti urban impulse and its logic of social control. See Mike Davis *Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism*, New Left Review, 1/151 May-June 1985.

‘age’, or zeitgeist’<sup>18</sup> have been replaced by the inter-subjectively guaranteed absolute hegemony of homogenising capital.<sup>19</sup> For Fisher, this is a qualitative change that differentiates capitalist realism from postmodernism. This securing of capitalism in the ‘general intellect’ is aided by the fact that neo-liberalism itself makes us well aware of the age, the system and the current situation. Fisher shows us that this is the realism of the moment, in the current situation the ‘horizon of possibility’ is flattened through the liquefying and homogenising effects of capital.<sup>20</sup> This situation, Fisher makes clear is guaranteed through our contemporary culture’s complicity with and internalisation of capitalism as the only economic and social constructor realisable; a situation Jameson recognises in the cultural production of postmodernism when he claims that :

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.<sup>21</sup>

In Fisher’s theorisation of capitalist realism the markets requirement of novelty that Jameson saw in the cultural production of late modernism and postmodernism has

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<sup>18</sup> Fredric Jameson *Post Modernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, p.2

<sup>19</sup> The hegemony of Capital is characterised by the general acceptance of scarcity, debt, competition, acquisition and propriety as ‘natural’. According to Mark Fisher, the internalisation of these characteristics have led to a cultural stagnation and conservatism that, although evident in the horizon of Frederic Jameson’s postmodernism is accelerated in Fisher’s capitalist realism.

<sup>20</sup> In his book *After the Future* (2011), Franco Berardi points out that the ‘general intellect’ in neo-liberalism is characterised by a process in which ‘Capital becomes the generalized semiotic flux that runs through the veins of the Global economy’ (p.83). Added to this neo-liberalism inscribes its own critique into its products; for example in totalising speeches featured in Hollywood movies such as Ned Beatty’s ‘the world is a business’ speech from *Network* (1976), Michael Douglas’ ‘greed is good’ from *Wall Street* (1987), Alec Baldwin’s ‘close the leads’ monologue to a group of down beat salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) and more recently Jeremy Irons’ ‘fat cats and starving dogs’ speech from *Margin Call* (2011) portray the evolutionary naturalisation of acquisition and the survivalist necessitation of greed with which we have come to associate and characterise neo-liberal global capitalism – this is the process of capitalist realism.

<sup>21</sup> Jameson points out that any position whatsoever on postmodernism is a political stance, either implicitly or explicitly towards what he calls ‘multi-national capitalism’.



undergone an acceleration that has culminated in the current state of exhaustion – and the general acceptance of the market as the only reliable measure of art. Contemporary art and capital become fused, neither critical nor celebratory of this relation, but naturalised into it.<sup>22</sup> As Fisher points out, in capitalist realism there is only the market and the market cares nothing for intention – negation and affirmation are equally as marketable. Fisher writes;

Jameson famously argued that the failure of the future was constitutive of a postmodern cultural scene which, as he correctly prophesied, would become dominated by pastiche and revivalism. Given that Jameson has made a convincing case for the relationship between postmodern culture and certain tendencies in consumer (or post-Fordist) capitalism, it could appear that there is no need for the concept of capitalist realism at all. In some ways, this is true. What I am calling capitalist realism can be subsumed under the rubric of postmodernism as theorized by Jameson. Yet, despite Jameson's heroic work of clarification, postmodernism remains a hugely contested term, its meanings, appropriately but unhelpfully, unsettled and multiple. More importantly, I would want to argue that some of the processes which Jameson described and analyzed have now become so aggravated and chronic that they have gone through a change in kind.<sup>23</sup>

I acknowledge Mark Fisher's claim that his thesis is a necessary and urgent extension of Jameson's postmodernism theory driven by 'a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility' (Fisher) that was evident in Jameson's postmodernism but explicit in capitalist realism and the expansion of global capitalism facilitated by, following Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Jodi Dean, networked

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'market' here is meant to denote the absolute financialisation of artistic practice at every level of activity. In capitalist realism this is characterised on the one hand by arts domination by Capital as the arbiter of value as such and on the other, by the instrumentalisation of art production by cultural institutions and centrist governments in Western democracies as educational and as a driver of social cohesion. These questions are touched upon by Mary Warnock and the artist Mark Wallinger in the book *Art for All?* 2000, commissioned and published by PEER to look at the phenomenon of state patronage in the early years of Tony Blair's New Labour government. Recently Melissa Nisbett carried out research into cultural policy and the instrumentalisation of art through so called 'cultural diplomacy'. Through the research Nisbett exposes 'a gap' between the 'academic conceptualisation of instrumental policies' and how such policies operate in practice. Nisbett claims that rather than persist with the traditional view of instrumental policies as top down rigid frameworks handed down by central government, instrumental policy is 'initiated, formulated and implemented by the cultural sector itself.' The reasons Nisbett proposes for this are linked to notions of the self perpetuation of the cultural sector through financial 'strengthening and enhancing'. See Melissa J Nisbett, *New Perspectives on Instrumentalism* (PhD thesis submission), 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative?*, 2009, p7.

communication.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, I recognise unreservedly the capitalist realism of Fisher's thesis as accurately describing the contemporary reality and its effects on the socio-political construction of art.

### **Abstract Realism is a reoriented artistic abstraction**

Artistic abstraction shares an important characteristic with philosophical labour.

Graham Harman argues that philosophy is based upon either the closure of gaps, or the production of gaps:

One of the most important decisions made by a philosopher concerns the production or destruction of gaps in the cosmos. That is to say, the philosopher can either declare that what appears to be one is actually two, or what seems to be two is actually one.

Harman continues:

some examples will help make the theme more vivid. In opposition to common sense, which sees nothing around us but a world of normal everyday entities, Plato created a gap between intelligible forms of the perfect world and the confusing shadows of opinion [...] The occasionalists of the medieval Arab world and Seventeenth Century Europe produced a gap between any two entities by denying that they exert direct influence on one another [...] Kant proposes a gap between appearances and things-in-themselves with no chance of symmetry between the two; the things-in-themselves can be thought but never known [...] The German Idealists tried to destroy this gap by calling it incoherent [...] (David) Hume is a destroyer of gaps by holding that objects are nothing more than bundles of qualities.<sup>25</sup>

In short, the reductionist thinker - neo-Kantian, nominalist, empirical, monadic - is the anti-realist thinker who destroys gaps in order to fuse the manifold, in Harman's terms, *the cosmos* into a containable unity that correlates to human knowledge, whilst the

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<sup>24</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, London 2005 and Jodi Dean, *Democracy and other Neo-Liberal Fantasies*, Duke University press, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, Zero, London, 2012, p2.

productionist thinker - metaphysical or realist - creates gaps which expand the cosmos indefinitely.

The history of artistic abstraction that this project builds upon should be understood here as beginning with the development of collage and assemblage; innovations developed in Cubism and Dada.<sup>26</sup> With this in mind, I would want to argue that the defining and shared characteristic of any artistic abstraction - in common with philosophical realism - is that it is always a producer of gaps.

If then, as I propose, abstract realism is a new material philosophy which constitutes a repositioned and improvisational methodology for artistic abstraction then it should be differentiated from the two dominant or at least, generally accepted methodologies present in the realm of artistic abstraction.

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<sup>26</sup> I have identified here the developments of artistic abstraction in early artistic modernism - the period from Pablo Picasso's African mask influenced works of 1907 to the demise of *true* DaDa in 1923 - as providing the most generative period of art history for this research project. Beginning in 1907 with the publication of Wilhelm Worringer's PhD thesis *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907) and the African sculpture influenced painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O.J. version O) made by Pablo Picasso in the same year but famously not exhibited until nine years later in 1916, one year after the publication of Carl Einstein's book on African sculpture *Negerplastik* (1915). The formal and material advances made by the early cubists in both analytic and synthetic versions of that movement - Georges Braque, Juan Gris, Fernand Léger and Picasso - during the period between *Les Femmes d'Alger* being made and then being made public, are of particular relevance. Developments which pivot on the process of placing qualitatively punctual materials, planes and surfaces onto one substrate in order to construct a complete artwork that would successfully disrupt on the one hand, the open or incomplete artworks of impressionist and post impressionist painting which Carl Einstein has argued, were intended to coalesce upon the retina of the viewing subject for their completion - and on the other, the homogenous and continuous surfaces of academic painting. This method of colliding discreet materials, processes and visual elements, what I have called here following Carl Einstein, 'qualitatively punctual', is progressed further in the assemblages of Picasso - beginning with *Still Life* from 1914 in which a curtain sash is attached to the paintings surface - and the invention of *papier collés* or collage by Georges Braque - in the painting *Fruit Dish and Glass* of 1912 in which Braque pasted a piece of wood-grain wallpaper onto the picture. Also important to the project are the experiments into *abstraction* made by the Zurich Dadaists; from the theatre costumes of Sophie Tauber and the masks of Marcel Janco to the paintings and assemblages of Jean or Hans Arp and the intensification of these methods evidenced in the works of Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters and Johannes Baader. This period ends with the riot that took place during the second Paris production of Tristan Tzara's Dadaist play *The Gas Heart* (1921) in 1923; an event that instantly led to the dissolution of the Dadaist movement in Paris and served as the handmaiden to the riot's alleged initiator Andre Breton's Surrealist movement.

The first methodology I have called *Idealist Abstraction* – in which a version of Harmans ‘gap’ is created, and then quickly papered over by anthropocentric narratives, whether that be the subjectivity of the artist (as in the genius aesthetics of abstract expressionism) or that the work is incomplete and always in need of some form of subjective decision and human capital to complete it – I would insist that this is the precursor of the relational regime that currently dominates contemporary art production.<sup>27</sup>

The second methodology is *Materialist Abstraction*, which subtracts relations from inside the artwork reducing it to, as Donald Judd points out, ‘unitary forms’, an ‘wholeness’ against the ‘multipart and inflected’, turning the relations out onto the context, a situation which privileges the process of the viewing subject’s experience at the expense of the artwork. This is a subtractive method in which the artwork is reduced to an essential form or ‘primary structure’, that is to say, a working description of minimalism.<sup>28</sup>

In distinction to these representational and interpretive, that is to say anthropocentric methodologies I want to propose here that abstract realism is a construction methodology which is non-representational and improvisational. Abstract realism is a reorientation of the contingent materials and situations already present in capitalist realism and a repurposing of existing methodologies found in artistic abstraction. This is

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<sup>27</sup> The notion that art is the outcome of a fusion between an ‘incomplete’ object and a subject that activates it through human capital can arguably be traced back to the earliest Duchampian gestures.

<sup>28</sup> i) Words in quotation marks are taken from Donald Judd’s essay, ‘Specific Objects’, *Arts Yearbook*, 8, (1965) ii) The publication for the first time in English of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) is cited often as a defining text for the minimalists iii) Donald Judd and Robert Morris opposed the ‘wholeness’ of the works they produced to the ‘anthropomorphism’ of modernist painting and sculpture which as they point out is made ‘part by part’ and in which ‘specific elements... separate from the whole, thus setting up relationships in the work’ iv) Michael Fried in his essay, ‘Art and Objecthood’ (1967) clearly demonstrates how the subtractive and anti-humanist sympathies of Minimalism are in the end, deeply anthropocentric, privileging the viewing subject through the literal and theatrical character of the works.

done in order not to overlap or dispel these existing methodologies but to carry out a much needed augmentation of the existing field of artistic abstraction. The research recognises, as Laruelle asserts, 'one constellation does not dispel another, it installs itself in the gaps of the former, occupies its neighbourhoods and proposes new signs, a new economy of the same places'.<sup>29</sup>

### **Abstract Realism is a non-representational material philosophy**

Through the research presented here I demonstrate how abstract realism is a material philosophy that reifies the artwork,<sup>30</sup> recognising it to be autonomous and manifold, defined by its immanent material logics only; the artwork as an end in itself.<sup>31</sup>

Abstract realism is an inversion of the process of reification most typically associated with art production and a strategy that is closely associated with the artist Thomas Hirschhorn's material philosophy and its direct precedent in Kurt Schwitters own material philosophy of 'Merz'.<sup>32</sup> This inverted reification has a long association with both progressive, leftist and anarchist avant-gardes and is the process of reification promoted by Fredric Jameson and Carl Einstein before him.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 1986, p.1

<sup>30</sup> The phrase 'material philosophy' is used to describe abstract realism as material thought commensurate with Fredric Jameson's assertion that Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica is 'an attempt to think a material thought'. Fredric Jameson 'Spatial Equivalents: Postmodernist Architecture and the World System', *The States of Theory*, David Carroll (ed.) 1988.

<sup>31</sup> In *Negerplastik* (1915) Carl Einstein insists that 'The work of art is real by virtue of its closed form; since it is self-sufficient and exceedingly powerful, the sense of distance will compel a tremendously intense art'.

<sup>32</sup> Hal Foster recently claimed that Thomas Hirschhorn draws the strategies, materials and situations of his work from the body of our 'shared' world, what Hirschhorn calls 'the capitalist garbage bucket'. Hal Foster, 'Towards a Grammar of Emergency' in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a New Critical Corpus*, 2011, p.163.

<sup>33</sup> Reification is understood here as the process in which the social relation is objectified by the, following Thomas Hirschhorn, *precious, selected, valued, specific art materials* used in the construction of the artwork. Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Philosophical Battery', in *Flash Art* no. 238, Oct 2004.

I demonstrate how abstract realism is a non-representational material philosophy that can wrench the artwork ‘out of an emphasis on representation and interpretation’.<sup>34</sup> It attempts this through the manufacture of artworks which act as material gaps, barricades which objectify social relations, able to exert an influence on whatever comes up against it.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, and following Graham Harman, in terms of causation, this barricade is non-relational:

Causation, which I hold to be an asymmetrical relationship displaying many properties of a non-reciprocal gift. Though we generally assume that impact is mutual, and that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, these suppositions arise from a narrowly physical concept of causation. As I see it there is no such thing as reciprocity; influence is never mutual, but always leads in one direction [...] Causation is never reciprocal except by accident; influence is always a free gift, without recompense.<sup>36</sup>

I argue that this causal asymmetry is a defining characteristic of abstract realism; an asymmetry that is an outcome of the artwork, its discreteness and distinction. Like Harman’s ‘non-reciprocal gift’, at the point of its positing the art presents itself indifferent to discourse and without the need of any catalyst or referent from outside itself to guarantee its reality or a subjective decision to preserve its autonomy – it is it-self, autonomous. This immanence to it-self, I argue, makes it absolutely non-relational.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The human geographer Professor Nigel Thrift (Warwick) has recently developed ‘non-representational theory’ in an effort to unbind social sciences and the humanities from their focus on representing and interpreting social relationships towards a focus on practice itself. Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space/politics/affect*, Routledge, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> This is not to claim outside influence cannot be directed at the abstract realist artwork – it is to claim that it remains indifferent to it.

The barricade as an example of riot architecture is always an ad-hoc feature of urban warfare and is always an obstacle to control; it blocks passage – however temporarily – challenges existing channels of communication and objectifies social relations. Like Baron Haussmann’s post revolutionary redesign of Paris, capitalist realism acts against the construction of barricades, finding ways to open up channels of access and communication for capital at every juncture.

<sup>36</sup> See Graham Harman, ‘Asymmetrical Causation: Influence without Recompense’, *Parallax*, 2010, vol.16, no. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Harman tells us that objects are autonomous from human use and from one another; they are not exhausted by any relational regime and are instead ends in themselves.

The research aims to show that this reorganised encounter with the artwork is able to move us beyond the audience driven bias of contemporary art towards a non-relational encounter.<sup>38</sup> This asymmetry states that the viewer needs the artwork; the artwork does not need the viewer.<sup>39</sup>

### **Summary of the key claims of this research project**

This thesis will propose, develop and explore abstract realism and investigate whether the concept has any force in relation to the state of art production in the period after postmodernism; the economic construction known as neo-liberalism, its ideological support found in, following Jodi Dean, 'communicative capitalism' - itself a facet of what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello termed 'network capitalism' and its direct correlate in cultural production which Mark Fisher has termed, capitalist realism.<sup>40</sup>

Presented are a variety of materials that challenge the contemporary characterisations of artistic abstraction and support the group of conjectures I have posited in this introduction. These conjectures hypothesise that abstract realism is a non-

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<sup>38</sup> It is important to stress that the intention here is not to evacuate the audience from art's social relations but rather to reposition them from their fallacious position as prime mover and the primacy given to this relation in contemporary art, itself an exacerbated version of the Duchampian gesture in which the object requires the viewing subject to activate it as art. Abstract realism is aware that any encounter between any object and any subject is always asymmetrical and is invested in the notion that, following Ray Brassier and Francois Laruelle, 'the object forces the subject to think according to it'. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, 2007, p. 149

<sup>39</sup> This statement also renders obsolete Claire Bishop's critique of Nicholas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics and the now famous confrontation between Bishop and the artist Liam Gillick – this is due to all three protagonists being firmly invested in the belief that the work needs the viewer to complete it either through their conviviality or their antagonism, this is in the service of constructing art as an anthropocentred encounter only.

<sup>40</sup> Jodi Dean's 'communicative capitalism' mapped out in her book *Democracy and other neo-Liberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* and the 'network capitalism' described by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* share the conviction that the 'lean' capitalism of 'post-Fordism' is ideologically constructed and bolstered through the 'rhizomatic' - both books criticise Gilles Deleuze and his followers in relation to this - networked communications and open frameworks of flexible labour systems in which the 'client is king' is guaranteed through platitudes of 'customer satisfaction, and 'team work'.

representational material philosophy and new practical methodology for constructing abstract artworks that occupies the junctures between artistic abstraction and philosophical realism. This, I argue, is a new situation which provides non-anthropocentric strategies for constructing artworks as absolute and the asymmetry this manufactures inside its social relations.<sup>41</sup>

The research is carried out through using the abstract realist tool kit - described above – as the primary method for studio practice; that is to say, the development of new works of art that explore the claims for abstract realism. These works provide the data that will be then analysed through the theoretical framework I have constructed – using the theories outlined by Fredric Jameson, Mark Fisher and Carl Einstein – and the material philosophy I have developed. This analysis includes testing the works in the public domain through the presentation of conference papers, solo exhibitions of the new artworks, staged events and performed lectures. The results of these activities are explored in the studio through the construction of new works and writing that contributes new objects and thinking to the arena of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism.

## **Thesis structure**

This PhD thesis is presented over two sectors:

- I) the written thesis, this is made up of a lengthy introduction, which also includes a description of methods and a glossary and concluding section

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<sup>41</sup> Fredric Jameson. *Post Modernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, p306.



which together act as brackets in which is presented the body of work titled  
*An Asymmetrical and Angular Architectonic Arrangement*

II) the artwork titled '*Blackplastic*'.

The written sector of the thesis is structured in topographical terms across a number of stylistically distinct spatial 'zones', some of which take the form of scientific reports, new theoretical texts, glossaries and a stage play, amongst other examples. The sector titled '*Blackplastic*' is a new artwork that takes the form of a magazine. The two sectors taken together will form an object that, following Carl Einstein, is a totality.

### **Spatial logics of this thesis: description of 'sectors' and 'zones'**

Alain Badiou, in common with Harman's 'gaps' described earlier in this introduction, claims that 'philosophy is not a theory, but a separating activity, a thinking of the distinctions in thought' that allows us to draw new lines of partition; thus enabling us to think new distinctions.<sup>42</sup> This process of separating described by Badiou has something in common with the political and spatial logic of 'zoning' that characterises this thesis.<sup>43</sup> The 'sectors' and 'zones' of this thesis are discontinuous and interrupted through formal shifts and linear short circuits – they are complete, autonomous zones of action; breaking down any illusion of unity – the whole - in favour of the thesis being encountered as an assemblage that is unified without synthesis; highlighting the heterogeneity of the research and the multiplicity of surfaces that

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<sup>42</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker, Verso, London, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> The vernacular of topography will be useful in order to present the various shapes and distinguishing features of the thesis terrain. The concept of spatial 'zoning' comes from land use planning and is a device for designating land use and in particular separating one use from another.

constitute the project.<sup>44</sup> I have done this in order to facilitate the understanding that this thesis is the outcome of, and not an illustration of, abstract realism.<sup>45</sup>

## **Sector 1: An Asymmetrical and Angular Architectonic Arrangement – an introduction to the zones**

**Beyond the Proprietorial Fallacy;** this zone develops the notion following Harman, that no object can be fully exhausted by its relations and argues from this position that no object can therefore be absolutely owned – perceptually, as knowledge or economically by any other entity or object. I do this through looking closely at the work of Harman and Bruno Latour. Through the text I compare the relational regime of Latour's 'actor network' theory with Harman's theory of non-relational objects and 'indirect causation', going on to demonstrate how Harman's 'weird' realism is a philosophical ally of abstract realism.

**Forget Abstraction;** This zone is a case study in the form of a scientific report; *Forget Abstraction* documents the development of a group exhibition, AB ST RA CT at the

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<sup>44</sup> Fredric Jameson has argued that there is a difference between the 'fragmentary' and the 'discontinuous' in the forms of writing characteristic in the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Whilst Benjamin's work relies heavily on the fragment and following Friedrich Nietzsche, the aphorism – and this is said to represent most accurately the structure of modern thought – Adorno is characterised by the discontinuity of the complete 'wall of water text' that 'stresses the distance between' objects. Both methods of *Darstellung* (description, presentation) Jameson claims, 'unexpectedly free you from the taboos and constraints of forms learnt by rote and assumed to be inscribed in the nature of things'. *Darstellung* is a formal methodology and representational framework that allows the writer to depict thought more adequately. It is according to Jameson an explicit argument against *linear causality*; a spatial depiction and temporal disruption described by Adorno, Benjamin and Jacques Derrida as a *constellation*. Fredric Jameson *Late Marxism: Adorno and the persistence of the dialectic*, 1990, p.51

<sup>45</sup> The terms 'sector' and 'zone' are taken from the vernacular of topography and are useful for mapping the thesis and its spatial logic. The two sectors the complete thesis is constructed upon are a direct reference to E.R Ullman and C.D Harris' model of urban morphology. Building on Earnest Burgess 'concentric ring theory' of urban development – in which the urban environment expands out from one nucleus, the financial zone – Ullman and Harris propose a model of multiple nuclei, claiming that cities have more than one central point and that urban expansion spreads outwards from separate nuclei until they meet – forming one large urban area made up of zones that exhibit distinct characteristics. This description of expansion from multiple points is evident in this PhD thesis.

Berlin-based gallery Essays and Observations. It contains images of the artworks that were generated by the invited artists for the exhibition as well as the text piece I made for the show.

**On the Concrete Platform;** this zone is a script for a stage play that re-visions the visual, political and philosophical legacies of the various modernisms and avant gardes of the twentieth century. The text features characters based upon Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Adolf Loos, Karl Kraus, Georges Bataille, Clement Greenberg, Carl Einstein, Michael Leiris, Donald Judd, Michael Fried, Fredric Jameson, Charles Jencks and Le Corbusier amongst others. The dialogues that take place in the script are made through a process of sampling and repurposing art historical documents; the inclusion of semi-fictional dialogue and the construction of formal structures within the text. Each re-stages and revises important debates that occurred at particular junctures of the development and retrogression of abstraction in artistic modernism. Taking the form of a stage play the text develops notions of abstraction through stage direction, narrative disruptions and spatial and temporal distortions, devices borrowed from the modernist theatre of Samuel Beckett (repetition), Jean Genet (excess) and Berthold Brecht (montage). The work employs both the screenplay for George Miller's 1981 salvage punk movie *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* and elements of Ernst Juenger's anti-modernist allegory from 1939 *On the Marble Cliffs* (*Auf Den Marmerklippen*) as readymade structures.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The opening scene of the film *Mad Max 2* is used as the model for constructing the play. It is a montage of found footage – and the inference is that the footage has been salvaged from a pre-apocalyptic civilisation - that introduces the film's narratives in a broken and temporally distorted sequence. This device has been recently taken to its logical conclusion by Lars Von Trier in *Melancholia* (2011); the first ten minutes of the film is a dreamlike sequence that predicts accurately the narrative which unfolds across the space of the movie including the final moment that the planet Earth collides with the rogue planet of the film's title.

**INTERCEPTOR** (*Negerplastik*); This zone contains nine images which have been constructed in response to the images found in Carl Einstein's book on African sculpture *Negerplastik* (1915). The objects in the images are three large scale sculptures that take as their point of departure the 'big rig', which features heavily in the movie *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*.<sup>47</sup> The vehicle is an example of riot architecture – augmented, ad-hoc and heterogeneous; the contested object upon which the whole movie hinges.

**Ad-Hoc (Turbulent Surfaces)** is a glossary built on the recent resurgence of the documentary form as a reliable carrier of politics in contemporary art production and is structured around 'key' speeches taken from the Hollywood movies *Network* (1976), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992), *Boiler Room* (2000), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2012) and *Margin Call* (2011) and takes as its point of departure recent documentary works by the artists, Bernadette Corporation – *Get Rid of Yourself* (2004) and Renzo Martens – *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2009).

**Autonomy? (Material Conjectures)** is the title given to the full transcript of an email conversation that took place between collaborators; an artist (myself) and a curator (my collaborator on the cross disciplinary research practice called *Material Conjectures*) over four days at the end of August 2011 and resumed across the month of December 2011. The conversation hinges on how the group might proceed with an exhibition and symposium that attempts to interrogate and understand the conditions for thinking - towards revitalising - the much debated problem of arts autonomy today. Through the conversation, themes including the usefulness of dialogue and rhetoric are also investigated.

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<sup>47</sup> 'Interceptor' is the name of the movie *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* in Spanish speaking countries.

**Idioticon (Die Antwoord):** This zone is a glossary; a textual object that is constructed upon the object Die Antwoord. Die Antwoord is a South African 'rap-rave combo' from Cape Town, who came to prominence in 2009 with a series of music videos uploaded to the internet. I argue that Die Antwoord is a totality that, due to its employment of forms of salvage aesthetics, its extension of the logics of adhocism, collage and assemblage into a violent collision of styles is exemplary in relation to the material philosophy of abstract realism.

**Forcing Structures:** this zone is the case study of a conference paper that looks closely at the status of the artist in research and who the audience for such research is. The conference took place at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design as part of a cross institutional research initiative around practice led research degrees in March 2012. It takes as its starting point an article in *Art Monthly* by Peter Suchin in which Suchin questions the autonomy of the artist in university research departments and the 'problem' of the practice led model of PhD in Fine Art in general. I argue against Suchin's claims through using the popular character Jason Bourne - the central figure in the first three Bourne movies.<sup>48</sup> I speculate upon the benefits of moving from a de-materialised position of openness and fluidity to a closed and excessively material objectivity, claiming that this is the key to autonomy in the institutional framework.

**One Dimensional Disco;** consists of a description and documentation of the artwork, *One Dimensional Disco* (Kynastonmcshine, 2012) by Material Conjectures. The work was constructed from three components I) Dark Priest; a sculpture and two monochrome panels, II) Ping-Pong (DJ Set); the performance by the members of Material Conjectures of 33 extracts of text taken directly from science fiction writing

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<sup>48</sup> The three movies in the 'Bourne Trilogy'; *The Bourne identity*, directed by Doug Liman (2002), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) both directed by Paul Greengrass.

and recent philosophical texts, the performance is twenty five minutes long, III) ... (all the available free downloads of music files by Remi Gallego working as The Algorithm)

**Thomas Hirschhorn's Material Philosophy of 'Too Much':** This zone looks closely at two recent works – *The Crystal of Resistance*, shown at the Swiss pavilion at the 54<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2011 and the work *Concordia, Concordia* (2012) shown in October 2012 at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery. This is done through the analysis of texts which accompanied the shows. In this section I propose a reading of the works through what I argue to be the artists own particular material philosophy; this I have called 'Too-Much' and consider this in relation to Hirschhorn's historical precedent in Kurt Schwitters material philosophy 'Merz' and how these are the practices that inform and are extended by the material philosophy of abstract realism.

**'Sunrise shine in a Midnight Sky':** is a scientific report which documents a group of experiments carried out in the studio that demonstrate a number of materials driven construction methods. I show how these processes allow decisions to be made in construction that are generated directly through characteristics and idiosyncrasies that are present in the materials; this is a material philosophy that recognises the immanent agency in material. Through describing these processes accurately I show the intersection of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism found in the practice of abstract realism.

## **Sector 2: 'Blackplastic'**

'Blackplastic' is a new artwork presented across the architecture of a book which has been submitted in part fulfilment of the overall PhD thesis. The artwork is generated

through a close study of Carl Einstein's work on African sculpture, *Negerplastik* (1915); a book which contained one essay and one hundred and eleven archival plates that document a range of sub-Saharan African artefacts. The plates are presented isolated from context with no indication of the object's scale, colour, material, speculation on the maker's intention or the objects function outside of what is apparent within the depicted object.

'*Blackplastic*' takes these strategies found in *Negerplastik* as its point of departure. It is made using one hundred and eleven full page adverts taken from the Spring/Summer edition of *Another* magazine.<sup>49</sup> Onto this structure and attached using clear sticky tape are one hundred and eleven isolated images of objects made from black plastic drawn directly from the results of a Google image search for the term 'black plastic'. I used the first one hundred and eleven images that were found to be suitable for the purpose of making '*Blackplastic*'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The magazine was chosen because it is a high gloss fashion periodical published biannually, the period this edition covers the dates for this PhD thesis submission. The first 146 pages are full page fashion adverts – this has meant I could make the work in one piece.

<sup>50</sup> The suitability of the images is defined by the lack of lack of context. Therefore images of objects in relations - being used by humans or any situation in which the object is reduced to a 'part' do not qualify.

## Abstract Realist Toolkit

In *Post-Modernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson

describes the non-anthropomorphic artist as, 'strategic with military precision, an artist whom studies the terrain and acts accordingly utilising superior technique drawn from one's own specific and idiosyncratic resources'.

I argue that abstract realism, in common with Jameson's 'non-anthropomorphic artist', is a group of non-anthropocentric strategies brought together and deployed in order to construct new artwork inside the capitalist realist configuration of contemporary art.

These artworks are actual material gaps; constructions that mark boundaries and act like barricades inside a situation which is invested in closing all gaps.<sup>51</sup> To this end abstract realism is a 'non-anthropocentric' material philosophy that salvages and reorients contingent materials, in order to manufacture reified artworks. In this sense abstract realism is explicitly connected to collage found first in synthetic cubism and then augmented through its excessive use in Dada and in particular Kurt Schwitters' own development of the material philosophy 'Merz'. Recently Evan Calder Williams has described how 'Merz' leads to an inverted reification;

Schwitters is pivotal in this history (of salvage and late capitalism) for several reasons: his association with Dada and Surrealism, his collages of selected refuse and trash, and his naming of his art practice as Merz by decoupling it from commerz. In English, think stealing 'merce' away from 'commerce' to cut away the 'with' ['com'] that describes the social relations of

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<sup>51</sup> The use of the term 'barricade' in this thesis is meant to describe the material - positive gap - outcome of the method 'Adhocism'. 'Barricade' is a term - and image - with overtly leftist revolutionary overtones; this is a misunderstanding in so far as barricades are employed across the political spectrum. The characteristic all barricades share is that they cause a blockage; stops within a framework in order to close off certain channels of liberty, of movement, of exchange and communication. To these ends neo-liberalism uses barricades - a brief online search for the term will present an impressive array of private and public barricades to purchase. Barricades are also 'ad-hoc'; they can be built from the available materials of any given situation. Objects are gathered together to create a local and temporary obstacle to instituted lines of movement and communication.



economic life so as to leave behind the isolated objects themselves, in an inversion of how reification happens.<sup>52</sup>

The works of H.P Lovecraft offer another example of such an approach to reification from in the literary canon. Michel Houellebecq in his biography of Lovecraft calls the author's practical methodology 'massive attack', describing it as a technical assault that disassociates the reader's knowledge through piling adjective upon adjective, excessively augmenting his descriptions of horror and the topography of any architectural setting for the stories. This assault never diminishes nor recedes throughout Lovecraft's works. The Lovecraftian method of 'massive attack' is explicitly related to the methodology of 'ad hocism' found in this thesis.

The reification that Schwitters 'Merz', Lovecraft's 'massive attack', Hirschhorn's 'too much' and abstract realism leads to is founded on the distinction of the artwork itself as a product - a manufactured or constructed object - from its consumer. Not through the quality - expense, rarity, luxury - of the materials employed in making the artwork, but through a process of unbinding the relational regimes - the with [com] - in which these materials of construction are caught. This inversion of the process of reification has something in common with the reification that Jameson describes when he claims:

The feature of reification I want to insist on in the realm of cultural products is what generates a radical separation between consumers and producers... At any rate, it is this as a fact that I would like to talk about reification: in this sense of the way in which a product somehow shuts out even from sympathetic participation, by imagination, in its production. It comes before us, no questions asked, as something we could not begin to imagine doing for ourselves.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, Zero, Ropley, 2011, p37.

<sup>53</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Post-modernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991.

In keeping with this materialist logic of reification, Jameson describes a philosophical distinction between the strategic artist as 'non-anthropomorphic' who makes 'decisions based on a superiority of technique and terrain assessment of counterforce, a shrewd maximisation of one's own specific and idiosyncratic resource' (Jameson) and the artist as intuitive genius described through the humanist narratives of high modernism.

The five methods described below are in the sense that Jameson describes, non-anthropocentric and form the toolkit of abstract realism.

**Adhocism:** First used in relation to architecture in 1968; Charles Jencks coined the term 'adhocism' to describe a practical method for constructing from cheap materials and contingent situations. In the book *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (1972), co-authored with Nathan Silver, Jencks describes this as 'a method of creation relying particularly on resources which are already at hand'.<sup>54</sup> Jencks and Silver delineate two dominant models of adhocism; 'practical' and 'intentional'. The practical method is anti-purist or non-reductive and operates:

by bringing together various, immediately-to-hand resources in an effort to satisfy a particular need, adhocism may satisfy the specific problem with a juxtaposition of part solutions. For example, it might be necessary to solve a problem without the usual materials or experts. Often an impromptu combination including 'unnecessary' ingredients, or leaving over waste can fulfil the need more economically than having to wait for the usual supplies.<sup>55</sup>

The intentional method is marked by an interest in goals and ends, but Jencks points out the results are not necessarily expected or known:

Perhaps the oldest and simplest method of creation consists of combining readily available subsystems ad-hoc, since it is always easier to work with what is familiar and at hand than what

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism*, 1972.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism*, 1972.

is removed in space and time. At any rate, this is the characteristic mode of creation in tribal cultures, the creation of masks, clothing, weapons and shelter from the materials available such as bone, shell, wood, hair, etc.<sup>56</sup>

The dictionary definition of adhocism states that it is a political operation and is 'the tendency to establish temporary, chiefly improvisational policies and procedures to deal with specific problems and tasks'.

In military strategy an ad-hoc unit is the unification without synthesis of autonomous entities; an improvised grouping of elements forced together for direct – non-discursive - action in unpredictable situations.

A recent example of adhocism in capitalist realism is described in the film *Margin Call* (2011). Based on the real time events that triggered the global financial crisis of 2008, the film depicts how a large (Lehman Brothers, Goldman-Sachs, Bear Stearns type) investment bank that has been betting on debt - mortgage backed securities - recognises the oncoming local crisis - the firm's assets are projected to fall by 25%, leading to a projected loss of more than the company's market capitalization and acts accordingly. The film shows how a group of employees - including a well remunerated scapegoat - are put into action to prevent the collapse of that one firm at the expense of the markets at large; the decision is taken that the bank sell off all its toxic assets in a fire sale to its existing customers. The margin call the firm makes leads to a domino effect and the crash of an entire asset class.

This method of repurposing materials which exhibit characteristics or suitability's for the purpose of a particular requirement is a fundamental element of abstract realism. As an organising philosophy on its own, adhocism is dismissed for tending towards

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism*, 1972.

responding to the 'urgent' and to 'fire fighting' - not permanent enough in its projection and too local in its focus.

In the construction of artworks, this is precisely its strength; it means that abstract realism can respond to the quickly changing and uneven environment of capitalist realism making it always adaptable and bespoke for the given situation.

Following Jencks and Silver, the adhocism employed in abstract realism is both intentional and practical.

**Bludgeon:** In military history the bludgeon or club is a primitive form of weaponry used in close quarters combat. Like its namesake - the simplest and oldest of all weapons systems - bludgeon is designed specifically for actual material encounters or close quarters combat making it particularly effective in the closed rooms and white cubes of contemporary art galleries. The bludgeon is a one dimensional surface which can demonstrate material statements that are indifferent to discourse. In this sense it functions in the same way as a full stop or an exclamation mark. In the arena of art, the bludgeon is the architect of an asymmetrical encounter. In this sense, bludgeon is non-dialectical, encapsulating all the cruelty this suggests through its indifference to whatever thought is projected towards it or not, forcing anything – subject or object - that encounters it to reconfigure to its material reality.

**Conjecture:** is a method in which any product that has been generated through the experimental processes employed in studio practice is posited. These conjectures are not hypothetical – that is to say they are not necessarily testable statements based on

accepted knowledge - they are thrown together and speculative. At the moment of their positing they are unproven in any academic or scientific sense – they are not intersubjectively agreed; they are conjectures. Conjecture is a posited argument that appears to be true or correct through the force of its delivery – the bludgeon. At the point of the conjecture being posited it is absolutely unclear whether it is a proven conjecture – proved to be true - a false conjecture – disproved through the employment of a counter-example - or an undecidable conjecture – independent from the generally accepted terms of its context. The point of conjecture is its capacity to break with accepted thought; thus conjecture is often unacceptable and often indefensible – I claim that this is due to any defence of a conjecture inevitably having to be fought on the terms it intends to move us beyond. For this reason conjecture cannot engage in the kind of tortured qualifications that might convince or appease its critics. Karl Popper proposes in *Conjectures and Refutations: the Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, all scientific theories are only ever conjectures, naturally fallible. Refuting older theories and formulating new conjectures is for Popper, the paramount process of scientific discovery.<sup>57</sup> Throughout this thesis, conjecture is employed to question the veracity of a number of accepted forms and designations that have helped construct the contemporary façade of art; conjecture is a speculative arrow fired at a particular target.

**Glossary:** is the name I give to a making process that takes already existing objects and builds on them through a process of adding materials – these include but are not restricted to quotes, commentary, interviews, historical references, objects - which have been subtracted from the body of already existing situations – text books, internet

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<sup>57</sup> Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Routledge, London, 1963.

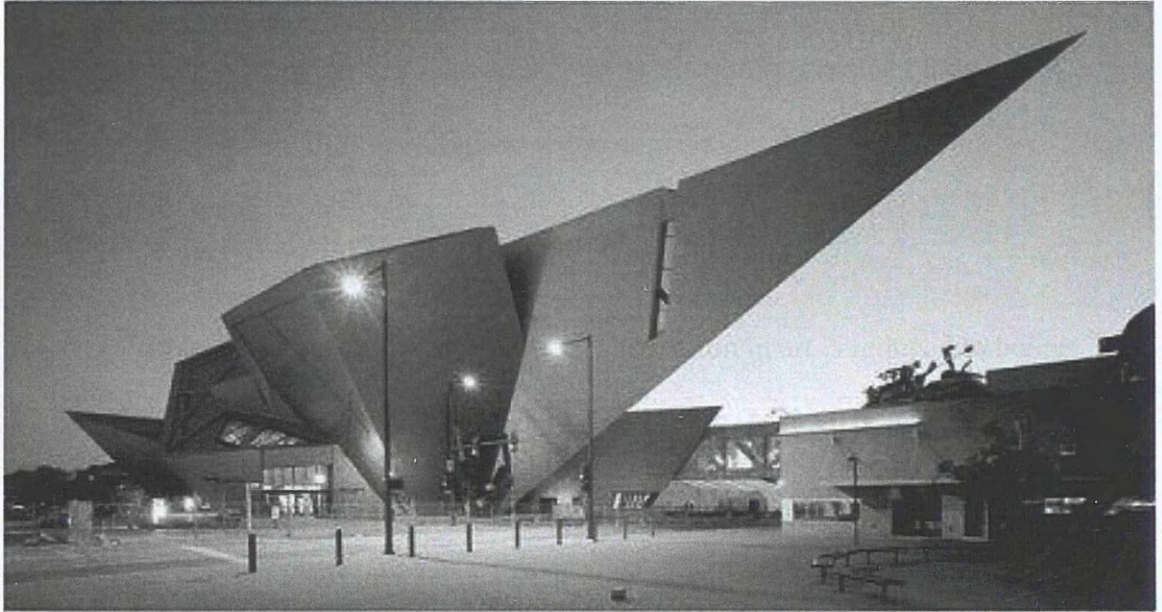
forums, movie scripts, magazines, artworks, etc. Glossary is always improvised and bespoke in that it is constructed towards a particular problem and at the point glossary is presented it is following Carl Einstein a 'totality'. The tool, glossary, allows for the development of discreet and expansive realist objects. Leading me to propose that glossary is an object that is rigidly determined as such, not by an inter-subjective agreement, but from within itself; from its immanent object-hood. The objects they are built on initially exist in the world and the structure they form is para-mathematical - other examples are algorithms, Mandelbrotian fractal geometry - these objects can grow and develop in ways that are excessive and unpredictable. For this reason, I propose the process of glossary as a contemporary anti razor. This anti razor departs from the work of the razor as it is conceived as an empirical reduction of an object to necessity, toward a realist expansion of it. Glossary, then, is imprecise as an operation in distinction to the surgical accuracy demanded by the precision slicing - a process known as reduction - of the razor, instead it is excessive, piling material on to material - a process known as augmentation - allowing into it contingent factors and the configuration of monsters - objects that exceed limits. This in turn, I speculate, leads to the construction of a positive gap or a barricade - what we have already termed *abstract realism* - a reified object that breaks with the efforts to appropriate it into a communicative unity or holistic whole.

**Qualitatively Punctual:** is a phrase that is borrowed from the theorist Carl Einstein's description of Cubist painting and African sculpture and describes here any constructed situation (object) that contains multiple objects displaying distinct characteristics; that is to say, situations that are constructed from elements that are discontinuous with each

other, becoming unified without synthesis – never becoming a holistic whole and resisting the post-Kantian subjects desire to idealise it into a coherent world picture, the famous and fallacious unity of the manifold. Not only a method for constructing artworks, qualitatively punctual can be applied to the dissemination of the artwork and describes accurately its non-relation to the site of its display and whatever encounters it.

## Glossary for Abstract Realism

**Asymmetry:** Is an important structural device. It is a defining structural characteristic of architecture in capitalist realism.



*New Denver Art Museum, Daniel Libeskind, 2006*

The new Denver Art Museum is one example. Architect Daniel Libeskind says that he ‘was inspired by the light and the geology of the Rockies, but most of all by the wide-open faces of the people of Denver’ also by the geometric rock crystal.

This thesis argues strongly that any encounter is asymmetrical; this asymmetry is a vector in which the artwork does not need the viewer and any viewing subject is forced to think according to the artwork – thought and the viewing subject become objectified. It argues for this realist position against the contemporary consensus that requires the artwork to inscribe into its making and its reception; the integration of the viewer – perceiver, participant, etc., as necessary to the artworks coming into being.

**Absolute:** A fidelity to the artwork as an end in itself, suggests a commitment to philosophical realism; a logical consequence of such a commitment is the



acknowledgement of the artwork's non-relational reality; this in turn leads us to the thought of the artwork-as-absolute. This is not to claim artworks as being necessary entities. It is to speculate on the work of art as – following Carl Einstein - a totality, not in need of - what Wilhelm Worringer refers to as empathy – that is, a viewer to empathise with it, a participant or any other relation to activate it or subjective interpretation or interaction to complete it. This project is constructed on the knowledge that these are the modalities most typical to the conventions of contemporary art.

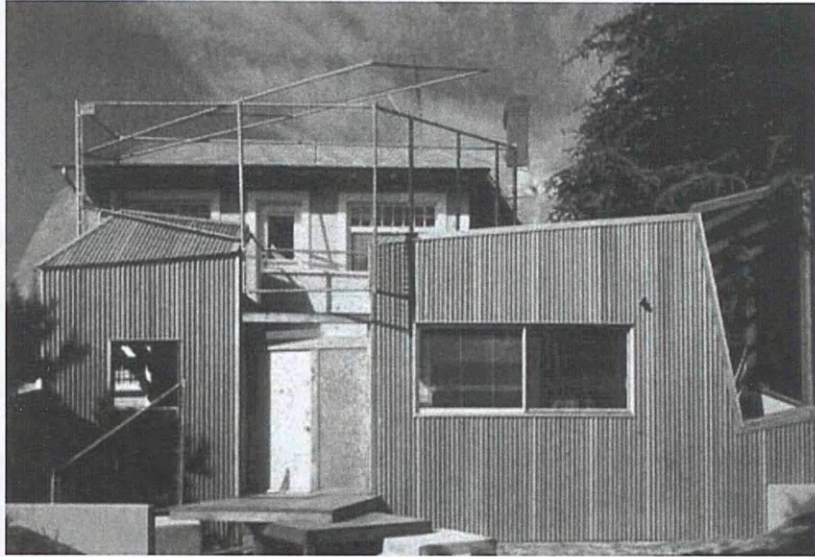
### **Abstraction (in Art History):**

- In its early modernist formulation, abstraction in art is reduced to being either lyrical (Kandinsky, Klee) or geometric (Malevich, Rodchenko, Mondrian, van Doesburg) and later in its reappraisal as part of the high modernist power play as either idealist (Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevich) or materialist (Rodchenko, van Doesburg) latterly in its postmodern deconstruction it is merely ironic (Neo-Geo).
- Current theory and practice around abstraction tends to focus on I) an implied openness that allows for any viewers individual subjective interpretation, II) its decorative qualities, III) as the perpetual return of a frozen style easily co-opted by Capital. The use of the term abstraction in this thesis should be understood to be operative rather than merely descriptive; looking like abstract art is by no means a guarantor of abstraction – in other words abstraction here is not a particular aesthetic category alone.

- It is intended here that I find a new (non-) definition for abstraction in order to jump start it away from the deprivations of art history and the impoverishments of aesthetic categories.
- In its earliest mediaeval use the term 'abstraction' simply meant 'extraction'. If we approach abstraction from the position of materialists, abstraction would be, the extraction of an element from its context – a reduction to the relation between the extracted element(s) crystals, oil, worker, etc. - and the situation from which it has been extracted – matrix, the ground, etc. Alternatively I argue that taking a realist position towards abstraction enables the acknowledgement of the totality of that element as an end in itself, discontinuous with any context; demonstrative of its own autonomy from all the other elements that make up the situation; its being is not predicated on its relation to that which it was abstracted from, is next to, or perceived to be in opposition to. Abstraction in these terms is a realist expansion of objects.

## **Adhocism;**

Adhering to the spirit of adhocism... Frank Gehry's own house in Los Angeles is rather a collision of parts, built to stay but with a deliberately unfinished, ordinary builder like sensibility of parts. An existing and very pedestrian two-story gambrel-roofed clapboard residence had much of its interior removed and walls stripped back to their original two-by-four stud frame, beams, and rafters. It was then expanded by wrapping the old house with a metal slipcover creating a new set of spaces around its perimeter. The anti-refinement type enclosure is built of the most mundane materials, corrugated aluminum metal siding, plywood, glass and chain-link fencing, and deliberately has randomly slanted lines and angled protrusions. Although the house retains a certain minimalist sense, the effort here is cluttered expressionistic and the sensibility is freely intended as artistically intuitive, of accident not resolved. The palette is anti-high-tech in preference for a visual presence that is off-the-shelf and ordinary 'cheap tech.' Gehry considers buildings as sculpture with the freedom from restraint that this might imply, hence it is not surprising that his work has an affinity to the collages of Robert Rauschenberg, especially in the artist's ripped cardboard assemblage period of the 1970s. (Gehry himself designed a line of corrugated cardboard furniture.) From ERBERT MUSCHAMP *The Gehry House: A Brash Landmark Grows Up* Published: October 07, 1993



Gehry House, Santa Monica, California, 1978.

**Art:** the arena of action best served for a thoroughgoing material investigation into the claims of current continental realisms and by way of this, a rigorous questioning of the philosophical frameworks typical of contemporary art – philosophies that claim the primacy of the viewing subject over the art objects they encounter and its exact correlate, the post-Kantian privileging of meaning over reality.

**Autonomy:** is unilateral and discontinuous; unilateral as action, and discontinuous in its punctual distinction from whatever it encounters. See **Totality, Non-Relation.**

**Bludgeon:** A bludgeon is a blunt instrument employed for maximum effect. The western or European mace and spiked flail are strictly military items and aesthetically and materially utilitarian, typically made from hardwood, leather and iron. In the Oceanic Island societies of Melanesia, bludgeons and clubs were not only the principle fighting weapon of the islanders but also ceremonial objects. For example in Melanesian 'pig killer cults' these ceremonial bludgeons were used in rituals in which the sacrificial boars were either actually killed through bludgeoning or alternatively

ritually killed through administering a tap on the animals head. These adze-shaped bludgeons served not only the aesthetic function of the ritual but as aesthetic objects in themselves; intricately carved and decorated beyond their functionality often depicting stylised human heads. Polynesian clubs and bludgeons were made from ironwood and mostly adorned with geometric surface carvings although zoomorphic images have been recognised (strictly speaking this differentiates Tongan from Samoan bludgeons and - each Polynesian island has its own distinct aesthetic for bludgeon decoration). These precise and intricate carvings detract nothing from the force of the object both in its use and in itself. The British Museum's Easter Island fish club is a particularly fine example of how these bludgeons hold an aesthetic beyond the actualities of use. West African battle and ceremonial clubs differ greatly from the Oceanic varieties and are distinguished by a long handle with a long angled spike or a paddle like blade; both less ornate and tooled than the Polynesian or Melanesian examples but not less effective or affective. The worldwide Cthulhuan cult's own ceremonial clubs are impossible to distinguish from the local objects of the places in which their rituals still take place. In Phillip Guston's painting *Edge of Town* (1969), two hooded figures carry sticks with nails driven into them – facilitating a vicious bite into whatever it comes up against.

Bludgeon as a method in abstract realism is materially excessive and as the name suggests, it is not precise or subtle in its operations. It is one of the conjecture's of this research that the artwork as an end in itself can deal a blow to the putative relativism of contemporary art.

**Closed structures:** Artworks as closed structures are absolute and therefore, following Badiou, non-relational. They break decisively with the relational regimes of linguistic mediation; that is to say the external measure of the subjective/interpretative axis of

contemporary art. Due to them being, following Carl Einstein totalities; objects that are not open to interpretation and not in need of completion by the viewing subject. Closed structures are discontinuous with the expectation of the viewer for them to become visual epistemological triggers alone. The closed artwork does not require the viewer to complete it through the process of reducing it into meaning or knowledge only. (See **Autonomy, Totality, Realism and Non-Relation**)

**Conjecture:** Through experimentation or tinkering popularly known as studio practice, conjectures are drawn out. The nature of conjecture – the positing of an argument without proofs - makes it an important method for art practice; one that is employed throughout this practice led research. Conjecture is an element of the abstract realist toolkit

**(Philosophical Frameworks for) Contemporary Art:** Post- Kantian philosophies; philosophies that insist on the primacy of the human-world relation, what Graham Harman refers to as philosophies of access - phenomenology, empiricism and existentialism – as well as what Badiou calls, the anti-philosophies (Sophists) of the linguistic turn – psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, deconstruction - are the strands of thought that privilege the place of meaning over that of any reality whatsoever. These are the philosophical frameworks that most often inform and are employed to bolster contemporary art practice; securing its own acceptance and promotion of the interweaving of subject and object. This has been achieved through the active collapsing of any perceived distinction between artwork and artist – artwork and audience – audience and artist into a unity or wholeness; a situation that serves only to diminish the artwork, subjugating it to the impoverishments of individual interpretation.

**Excess:** In his critical essay on the work of science-fiction horror writer H.P Lovecraft, *H.P Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* (1991) Michel Houellebecq elucidates Lovecraft's creative methodology as a fidelity to excessive description and precise topographic detail which taken together Houellebecq calls 'massive attack':

His way of using mathematical concepts, of precisely indicating the topography of each location of a drama, his mythology, his demoniac library have all been borrowed; but no one has ever attempted to imitate these passages where he sets aside all stylistic restraint, where adjectives and adverbs pile up on one another to the point of exasperation, and he utters exclamations of pure delirium such as: "Hippopotami should not have human hands and carry crazy torches... men should not have the heads of crocodiles.

**Gallery:** The art gallery is the space for testing the conjectures of art. Therefore the outputs generated in the studio spaces, Studio 24 and the PhD Studio, have been tested in gallery exhibitions only. The gallery is the site that all the work is made for and the only context in which the work should be encountered; this is in order to enable the most complete rigour in the analysis of its success or failure.

**Glossary:** Glossary is a structure built for a specific purpose. It is a group of definitions, proclamations, quotes and conjectures collected from many sources, an ad-hoc set of materials forming a Para-mathematical object. Glossary is one element of the abstract realist toolkit.

**Immanent qualities:** The inherent characteristics contained within the boundaries of the thing itself.

Less excusably than La Fontaine, the Greek fabulist wrote of the Cigale of the books, instead of interrogating the living Cigale, whose cymbals were resounding on every side, careless of the real, he followed tradition.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> J.H. Fabre in *Social Life of the Insect World* (1911) attacks the privileging of the cultural construction of insects over the scientific real. Jean de la Fontaine mistook the Cigale for a Grasshopper. The 'Greek fabulist' is Æsop and the fable is *The Cigale and the Ant*.

**Interceptor:** is the title of the movie *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981) in Spain and Spanish speaking countries. It is the collective title of a series of sculptures which have been developed from the image of the ‘big rig’ that features heavily in the movie. In the movie the vehicle is a contested object, becoming the site of violent conflict. During the final scenes of the film the rig’s existing architecture is augmented; modified with a snow plough shovel, barbed wire and welded spikes to optimise its ability to act as a battering ram for bludgeoning a way through the crowd of savage mutant punks and petro-perverts that intend to capture it and the precious fuel it carries.

**Material:**

- In this thesis, material is the generic term applied to any matter that can be posited, modelled or manipulated to form a boundary or a significant surface.
- In military terms, material refers to the specific requirements for completing a particular mission.

**Material Conjectures:**

- Material Conjectures (AUTONOMY?) is the title given to the transcript of an email conversation that took place between an artist and curator over four days at the end of August 2011 and resumed across the month of December 2011. The conversation hinges on how they might proceed with an exhibition and symposium that attempts to interrogate and understand the conditions for thinking - towards revitalising - the much debated problem of art’s autonomy today. Through the conversation the

usefulness of dialogue and rhetoric are also investigated. The full transcript forms one element of this thesis.

- *Material Conjectures* is the name of a collective endeavour that brings together – and unilateralises - research strands relevant to my artistic practice and the curatorial practice of Kirsten Cooke.
- Material Conjectures was formed in direct response to a series of agreements and disagreements regarding the real in art and to locate strategies and build structures that resist the impoverishing effects that much recent exhibition practice inflicts upon art and artworks. Contra to this situation, Material Conjectures is developing exhibitions and events, artworks and texts that challenge the interpretative and representational drives of contemporary art; strategies that I argue in this thesis, reiterate neo-liberal values.
- In practice Material Conjectures deliver ad-hoc events and exhibitions that include paintings, objects, image, sound and text; closed structures against the contemporary cult of communication and openness.

**Negerplastik:** is the title of a book by the theorist Carl Einstein. When it was published in 1915 *Negerplastik* provided a shock to the established paradigms of both western art theory and colonialist anthropology – at the time Einstein was seen as the most important theorist of modern art in Germany, having already published extensively on cubism. The book's main intention is a thorough critique of the paradigms of Western art practice and theory through a study of the sculptural objects of sub-Saharan Africa. The book presented an affront to academic art theory not only in its content but in its form. The work appears as an introductory essay to one hundred and eleven



photographic representations of artefacts; these plates have no textual detail to make the reader aware of provenance, context, scale, colour, material or indeed any description beyond the images as they appear. This is also the case with the book's text; it is accompanied by no footnotes or endnotes. The book, *Negerplastik*, also provides this thesis with many of its structural cues.

**Non-Relation:** is a relation without relation, an encounter based on the absence of the co- that guarantees relation. The term describes a situation in which the incommensurability of two terms cannot be solved by being reduced to a simple opposition – it is then, the non-dialectical; for us here the non-relation occurs for the subject/thought and the object/artwork.

- Badiou tells us that non-relation is a confrontational encounter between terms that cannot be placed into a simple opposition and therefore makes apparent the lack of a common measure between the positions. The importance of non-relation is its paradoxical and confrontational configuration – opposed to doxa; agreement, common belief or opinion - to any given situation. Examples Badiou provides include the non-relation between violence – of power – and creative thought, and between amorous love and tradition – the law of the family; of marriage.
- Laruelle claims, in his description of his own method called non-philosophy, that non-relation is a unilateral duality;

Non-philosophy typically operates in the following way: everything is processed through a duality (of problems) which does not constitute a Two or a pair and through an 'identity' (of problems, and hence a solution) which does not constitute a Unity or synthesis. This is known as that of the 'Unilateral duality' which is just as much 'identity'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> François Laruelle, *A Summary of Non-Philosophy*, Pli 8, 1999, pp 138-148.

Here Laruelle, like Badiou, makes clear that non-relation is non-dialectical and hence there is no sublation of one element by or into another: no unity, the duality does not synthesise into something like a Platonic ‘mitkon’ or agreeable mixture (solution) that in the end re-inscribes a bi-lateral relation leaving the hegemony of the subject maintained. Instead, as the Laruelle scholar Ray Brassier (for a full and thorough summation – and critique - of Laruelle’s project see Brassier’s chapter ‘Being Nothing’ in his book *Beyond Nihil*) has pointed out, through the process of unilateral duality (non-relation) thought itself becomes a thing;

It is no longer thought that determines the object, whether through representation or intuition, but rather the object that seizes thought and forces it to think it, or better according to it. As we have seen, this objective determination takes the form of a unilateral duality whereby the object thinks through the subject.<sup>60</sup>

**Non-Representational:** This research project is invested in the notion that there is no distinction between art practice on one hand, and research on the other. The work contained in this thesis actively questions this distinction and the relation that is constructed thereby, believing it to be entirely false. The project attempts this in order to reposition practice-led research away from an emphasis on the representation and interpretation of the relation between practice and research towards the realism of experimental practice as research itself.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ray Brassier, *Beyond Nihil: Enlightenment and Extinction*, Palgrave, London, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> The human geographer Nigel Thrift has developed a non-representational theory that avoids representing and interpreting social relationships focussing instead upon practices, and in particular how human and non-human formations are acted out or performed. Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space/politics/affect*, 2008.

## **Object oriented:**

If we define “object” as that which has a unified and autonomous life apart from its relations, accidents, qualities, and moments, it is obvious that objects remain unpopular in philosophy today. To some they sound a bit too much like old-fashioned substance, and in our time everyone is united in cursing and whipping those substances.<sup>62</sup>

**One dimensional surface:** Is a punctual distinction; a bullet point, a full stop and an exclamation mark; it is also the rhetorical question mark. The importance of the one dimensional surface is its ability to deliver a direct statement of ‘fact’.

**Openness (as the ideal in contemporary art):** is in keeping with the ideals of Charles Jencks’ theory of ‘ad hocism’ first deployed in relation to architectural theory. Forty years on openness is arguably a tool for the ideological construction of neo-liberalism traced by the political scientist Jodi Dean in *Democracy and other Neo- Liberal*

*Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (2009);

The concept of communicative capitalism designates the strange merging of democracy and capitalism in which contemporary subjects are produced and trapped. It does so by highlighting the way networked communications bring the two together. The values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications, and interconnections of global telecommunications. Changes in information and communication networks associated with digitalization, speed, (of computer processors as well as connectivity), memory/storage capacity impact capitalism and democracy, accelerating and intensifying some elements of each as they consolidate the two into a new ideological formation... Rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neo-liberalism, an invidious and predatory economic project.

**Painting:** This project is driven by an investigation into the practice of painting; the mechanics, materials and histories of painting. The object of painting provides the

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<sup>62</sup> Graham Harman, ‘Objects, Matter, Sleep and Death’ (2009) in *Towards Speculative Realism*, Zero, Ropley, 2010

launch-pad for the outputs generated by this research; these can and do manifest as many things, including paintings, sculptural objects, glossaries, digital images and texts.

**Pictorial:** The use of the term pictorial is explicitly relational and connected to what we might call a neo-Kantian paradigm of visual epistemology in which the artwork needs a viewer to complete it, forcing it to become exclusively for us; that is to say the artwork is only ever a mediator of visual knowledge or meaning; representations between subjectivities. As Carl Einstein points out through his critique of Western arts bias towards the pictorial;

The spectator was woven into the sculpture; he became an inseparable functional component of it [...] The sculpture was the subject of a conversation between two persons. This kind of sculpture was bound to be interested above all in predefining the effect and the beholder in advance[...] (the sculptor) shifted the emphasis to the visual activity of the viewer and modelled with touches, so that the construction of the actual form would be left to the viewer<sup>63</sup>

Thus, any artwork whatever, that offers itself up as an unfinished object in need of the perceiving consciousness of a human subject to complete it can be termed, pictorial.

**Politics:** One of the most apprehend-able characteristics of contemporary art production is its appeal – through its pictorialism - to democratic idealism. This democratisation is manifested in many ways and takes a myriad of forms that are intended to result in *open* frameworks for producing and consuming art. The recent developments in art towards workshop, audience driven, consultation and think tank models are the most extreme examples of art that offers the illusion of inclusivity and the possibility of redemption; a situation in which every voice is said to be as relevant as any other. This turning toward a democratisation of art and its institutions are the outcome of a number of factors that serve as contemporary arts current neoliberal conditions. These are;

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<sup>63</sup> Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 1915.

- An ambition generated by artists themselves to break down any distinction between producer and consumer, author and reader leading to an interweaving that is intended to dissolve any border and flatten any hierarchical structure.
- An ambition generated by arts funding bodies to widen the audiences for the products of art and offer an open door alternative to what is traditionally viewed as closed and elitist.
- Through the notion that art is intrinsically redemptive and/or therapeutic that through producing, consuming, participating in art we become 'better'.

**Positive Gaps:** Abstract realism manufactures positive gaps. What does this mean?

Positive gaps are non-relational material structures. They are positive because they are not negative - void spaces, subtracted from the situation - which is only ever relational. They are positive because they are absolute in themselves.

### **Punctuation:**

It is less well known that even punctuation marks (for example, the hyphen in expressions such as Being-in-the-world) can take on a technical function.<sup>64</sup>

- : ; - . ? , ! , ' , [ ] , { } , ( ) , etc.

**Qualitatively Punctual:** This thesis is a monograph, and thus by definition a single document; a complete text in-it-self, and while the thesis form insists on a structure that runs from introduction to conclusion. Here I am not interested in the text proceeding in

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<sup>64</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'Absolute Immanence' in *Potentialities*, Stanford University Press, 1999.

terms of a linear succession, nor should we be concerned with introducing a Bergsonian model of 'duration' defined as 'a succession of qualitative changes'; that is to say the structure of this thesis is not intending to construct a whole writ along the axis of a past, present, future narrative whatsoever. Instead, this thesis sets out to actively investigate the spatial logics of abstract realism by challenging any such unity and demonstrating the qualitatively punctual character of studio practice.

**Re-:** Reanimate, Redeploy, Reoccupy, Reorient, Repackage, Reposition, Research, Reset, Reshuffle, etc.

### **Representation:**

1. The act or an instance of representing or the state of being represented
2. Anything that represents, such as a verbal or pictorial portrait
3. Anything that is represented, such as an image brought clearly to mind
4. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) the principle by which delegates act for a constituency
5. A body of representatives
6. (Law) *Contract law* a statement of fact made by one party to induce another to enter into a contract
7. (Law) an instance of acting for another, on his authority, in a particular capacity, such as executor or administrator
8. (Performing Arts / Theatre) a dramatic production or performance
9. (*Often plural*) a statement of facts, true or alleged, esp. one set forth by way of remonstrance or expostulation
10. (Linguistics) *Linguistics* an analysis of a word, sentence, etc., into its constituents<sup>65</sup>

### **(Speculative) Realism:**

For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers; that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/representation> last viewed 27/03/2013

<sup>66</sup> Quentin Meillessoux, *After Finitude*, 2008.

At the very start of his collection of lecture papers – published as *Towards Speculative Realism*, written between 1997 and 2009, Graham Harman clarifies two important points;

- *Realism* is a matter of commitment.
- By ‘realist’ I mean that these philosophies all ‘reject the central teaching of Kant’s Copernican Revolution, which turns philosophy into a meditation on human finitude and forbids it from discussing reality in itself. By ‘speculative’ I mean that none of them merely defend a dull commonsense realism of genuine trees and billiard balls existing outside the mind, but a darker form of ‘weird realism’ bearing little resemblance to the propositions of everyday life.

Regardless of the internal politics and disagreements that have come to define the speculative realists, all the thinkers involved are united in their rejection of neo-Kantianisms privileging of the human-world correlate as the only site for philosophical enquiry and the prohibition against anything at all existing outside of human thought.

**Riot Architecture:** Is improvised, augmenting existing structures and inherent logics and characteristics with new materials and situations.; some examples of riot architecture are most obviously barricades – both ad-hoc and standardised - but also the rogue CIA agent *Jason Bourne*,<sup>67</sup> the *Gehry House* in Santa Monica and the ‘Big Rig’ from the movie *Mad Max 2*. Riot architecture stages and objectifies social relations.

**Scientific Report:** The thesis contains a number of scientific reports that are drawn up using standard templates. These reports contain a variety of information. Some record

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<sup>67</sup> Bourne is the main protagonist in the movie trilogy – *Bourne Identity* (2002), *Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *Bourne Ultimatum* (2007)

the details of material experiments carried out in the controlled environment (laboratory conditions) of the studio, others collect data generated through projects developed with external partners. The form of the scientific report proves useful in this instance due to it providing a readymade framework through which to carry out a variety of scientific investigations into the material structures being developed. The scientific nature of the reports included here – as opposed to the social sciences equivalent of the *case study* that facilitates a humanist approach i.e. phenomenological, psychoanalytical - allows for a subjective distancing through direct observation and measurement of the materials used, processes employed and the outcomes these generate.

**Separate studios:** The experiments gathered in this thesis were carried out in two studio spaces located in the city of Sheffield, UK:

- Studio 24, Bloc Studios, Eyre Street, Sheffield is a self-contained studio space in an artist run studio block. This site is a space employed exclusively for painted or ‘wet’ experimentation. It is here that any work which demands the use of liquid paint of any description – oil, acrylic, household, industrial, etc. – takes place.
- PhD Studio, S1 Artspace, Trafalgar Street, Sheffield is a shared space. A large part of this space is dedicated to the making of large scale experiments, presentations and meetings. This is the space in which *constructed* or ‘dry’ works are developed.

**Swerve:** Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology in which any situation or system is constructed by contingent factors leads Althusser to develop, following the atomist philosopher Epicurus, what he refers to as a ‘materialism of the encounter’. In his text



‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’, Althusser endeavours to in his own words:

bring out: the existence of an almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy: the materialism of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take... a materialism of the encounter, and therefore of the aleatory and contingency.<sup>68</sup>

A philosophy that Althusser claims ‘rejects all notion of the origin, (and) takes as its point of departure [...] nothingness’. The text proposes against the necessity of things, in favour of the thought that all things are the products of chaos. Claiming that there is no essence that necessitates the existence of anything and there is only the throw of the dice, the effects of chance; what the philosopher calls *swerve*. Taking as his model and point of departure, Althusser speaks of the Epicurian image of the *rain* of atoms falling parallel in the void, atoms which encounter each other through the intervention of a minimal force or ‘clinamen’. This is illustrated as a swerve in the parallel trajectory of the atoms that Marx, Engels and Lenin; sends them crashing into one another forcing an encounter that forms the basis of the construction of any situation whatever – for a world to occur from this the encounter has to ‘take hold’. Althusser argues that the contingency of the swerve and the encounters that hold after the initial encounter provides us with a materialist thought that distinguishes itself fully from all narratives of necessity and teleology detectable in what Althusser refers to as the idealism of all ‘materialism in the rationalist tradition’.

**The Proprietary Fallacy:** Describes the commonly held - tacit even - notion that objects need a human-centred linguistic mediation - representation - to exist. For the

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<sup>68</sup> Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, trans. G.M Goshgarian, Verso, London 2006.

proprietary fallacy there is no mind independent reality, there is only that which can be correlated to the human.

The writer of, following Graham Harman, 'weird realism' H.P. Lovecraft starts one of his best known tales, *The Call of Cthulhu* (1926) with a realist attack on what I am calling 'the proprietary fallacy', 'The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all of its contents'.<sup>69</sup>

'Proprietary' is meant here as it is meant in legalese as, 'enjoying exclusive right or ownership of things'. 'Fallacy' is a misconception, a presumption and an error in reasoning. The proprietary fallacy is the term used here to describe the mistaken belief that as humans we possess completely the object world around us – the idea prevalent in all neo-Kantian philosophies that the world is 'for us' only, whether that manifests through transcendental operations – empirical reductions or anthropomorphism. It also explicitly connects these anthropocentrisms to the economic construction of neo-liberalism and its defining characteristics of acquisition and ownership.

**Totality:** Carl Einstein (b.1885) was a Jewish German intellectual active between 1910 and his suicide in the Pyrenees in 1940. Einstein was an art historian, an art critic and a founding editor of the influential journal *Documents* (1929 – 1931) with Georges Bataille. During the Great War he was a serving soldier posted to occupied Belgium – where he studied closely the collections of Congolese artefacts held by Belgium's museums. Radicalised by the Great War he along with his friends George Grosz, Otto Dix and Weiland Herzfeld – with whom he started the satirical political magazine *Die Pleite* (Bankruptcy) – became a committed anarchist; he fought as a member of the anarchist brigade known as the Durruti Column during the Spanish civil war. In 1928

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<sup>69</sup> H.P Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu*, 1926

Einstein forced himself into exile in Paris along with other Jewish German intellectuals and artists. In 1929 the first issue of *Documents* was published. Although he is best remembered as Georges Bataille's foil on the *Documents* editorial team Einstein's contribution to modernist art theory; in particular his pre-*Documents* works *Negerplastik* (1915) and 'Totality' (1916) are in my view just as important and perhaps more relevant – in the wake of postmodernism – to our own artistic, political and economic moment. For example;

The optical naturalism of Western art is not the imitation of external nature; rather, the nature that is passively imitated here is merely the vantage point of the viewer. Whence the geneticism, the excessive relativism that characterises most of our art. This art adapted itself to the beholder (frontality, distant image), and increasingly the production of the final optical form was entrusted to an actively participating beholder.<sup>70</sup>

The essay 'Totality' (1916) appeared over three instalment's in the radical journal *Die Aktion* and according to the Einstein scholar and translator Charles W. Haxthausen in the introduction to his recent translation of the essay; Einstein makes a case for 'visual art as a totality that would work to disrupt models of subjectivity, which hinge on a subject's experience of art as knowledge'. He goes on;

Einstein's totality posited a model for art that was radically incommensurable with the expectations of a subject who would appropriate it, neo-Kantian style, as visual knowledge – whether conceptually, through unconscious inference, or non-conceptually as pure visibility.

The artwork as 'totality' then is non-discursive; a total system that Einstein claims;

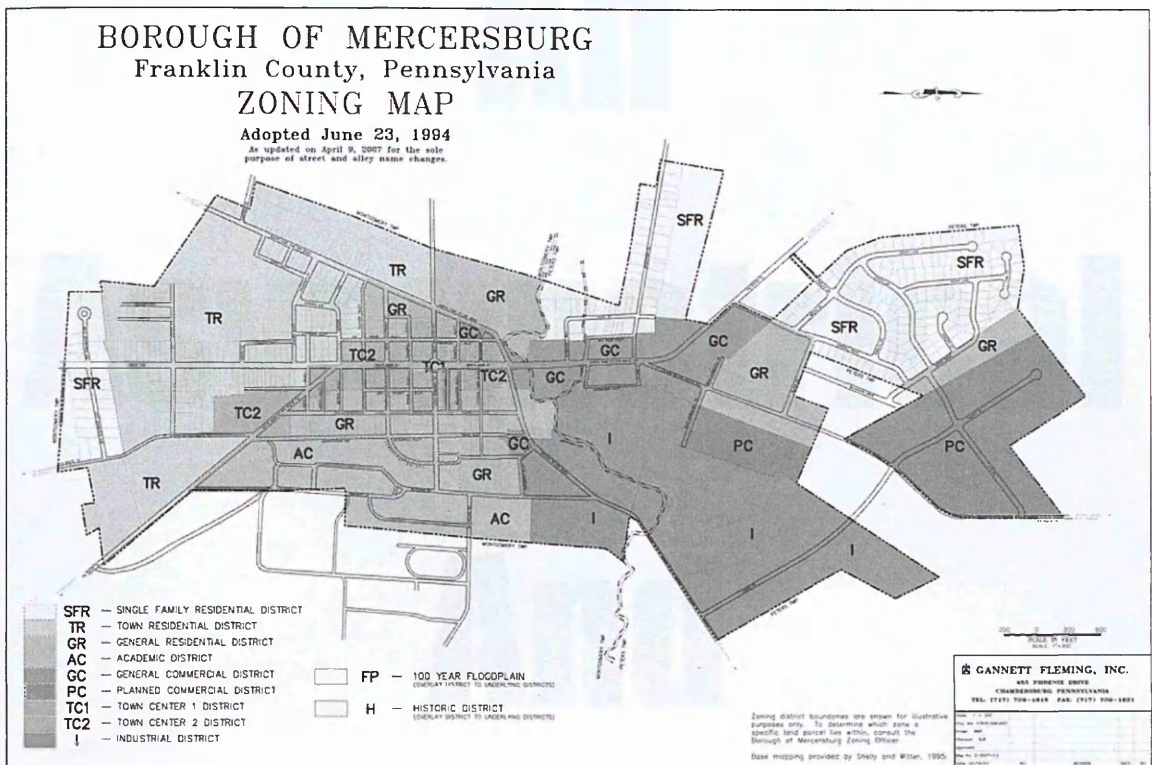
cannot experience an ordering or articulation by means of some external instrument, but which is organised within and for itself. The total object absorbs every psychological process that is purposely directed towards it as it also absorbs every form of causality. Causal analysis is purely retrospective and always exceeds the concrete object; causes are substituted; but not the totality. The causes of the object always lie in another, posthumous plane than the object itself.<sup>71</sup>

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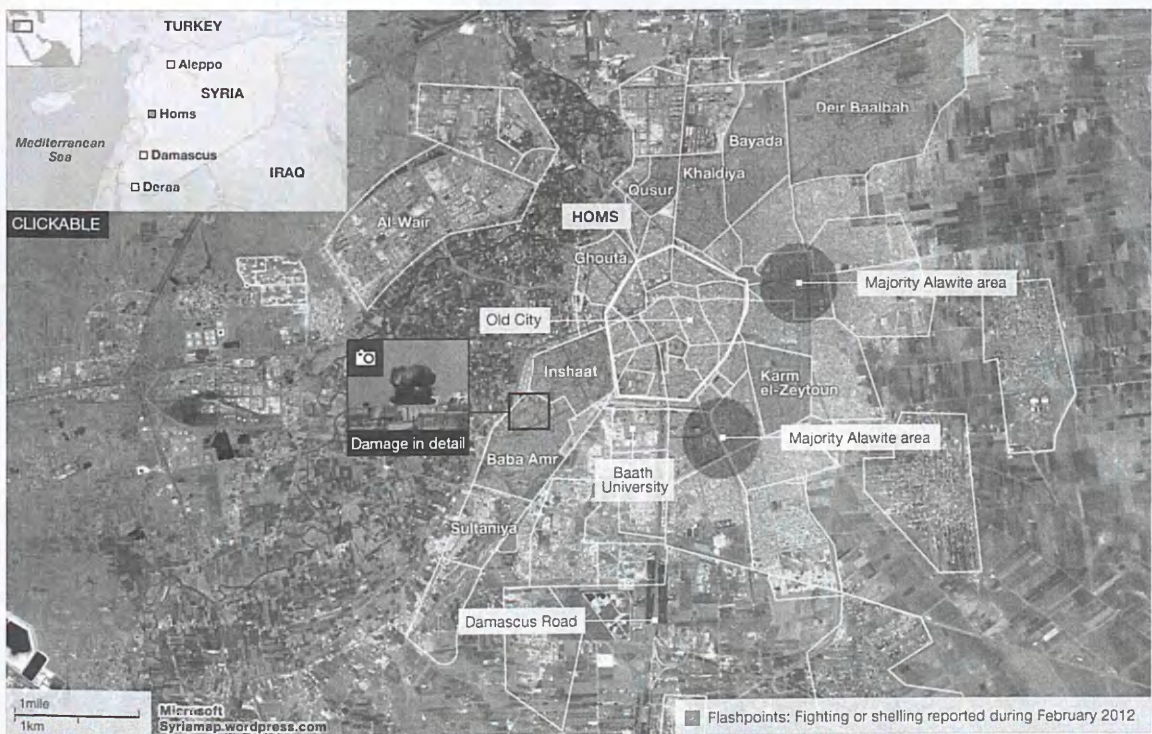
<sup>70</sup> Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 1915.

<sup>71</sup> Carl Einstein, 'Totality', trans. Charles w. Haxthausen in *October*, Vol. 107, Winter, 2004, pp115 - 121

**Zoning (a):** Map of economic demographic zones.



**Zoning (b):** A map of new zones occurring through conflict in the Syrian City of Homs during the anti - King Assad uprisings which began in February 2012.



**An  
Asymmetrical  
And  
Angular  
Architectonic  
Arrangement**



## Beyond the Proprietorial Fallacy

They like to believe that objects belong to them, that they claim to the objectivity of their own perception, they have given them. They pretend they are not surpassed, overruled by events. They are not aware of such mystery, and they find no answer within the human subject, the subject of desire.

— Jacques Derrida, *On the Modern Cult of the Forlorn Gods* (2011)

### I. Object Abuse?

What do we mean by *Object Abuse*? And how do we identify the abusers?

I do not feel qualified to speak on behalf of objects and I harbor no hope that,

however hard I listen, objects can speak for themselves. It is impossible for me to

know whether the T.V. remote control I laid next to me as I write this, is abusing the

upholstered Van Gogh chair, or whether I am abusing it, or whether the blue shopping bag

leaving pet hair on my desk is abusing it, or whether a kind of abuse, I just cannot know. I am sure

enough that I, as a modern, have abused many objects over many years and that I am not

alone in this transgression. I shall begin by distinguishing some of the ways that objects

are abused by humans at every opportunity.

Objects are abused when they are used in ways that

are not intended by the maker.

(i) Transcended by idealists

(ii) Reduced

(iii) Reduc-

(iv) Reduc-

(v) Reduc-

(vi) Reduc-

(vii) Reduc-

# Beyond the Proprietorial Fallacy

*'They (the Moderns) do have a fetish, the strangest one of all: they deny to the objects they fabricate the autonomy they have given them. They pretend they are not surpassed, outstripped by events. They want to keep their mastery, and they find its source within the human subject, the origin of action'.*

(Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, 2011 )

## 1. Object Abuse?

What do we mean by *Object Abuse*? And how do we identify the abusers?

I do not feel qualified to speak on behalf of objects and I harbour no hope that - however hard I listen - objects can speak for them-selves. It is impossible for me to know whether the T.V. remote control -laid next to me as I write this - is abusing the upholstered 'two seater' settee it – and I - sits upon or whether the blue shopping bag leaning perilously over it constitutes a kind of abuse; I just cannot know. I am sure though that I, as a human, have abused many objects over many years and that I am not alone in this transgression. Let us begin by distinguishing some of the ways that objects are abused by humans at every opportunity.

Objects are abused when they are...

- i) Transcended by idealists.
- ii) Reduced to knowledge by empiricists.
- iii) Exhausted by relationists.
- iv) Anthropomorphised by humanists.

All these abuses (and others like them) are carried out – whether you are aware of your or not - in the name of anti-realism. That is to say, they are all intended to deny the object its reality as a thing-in-itself and to disavow the objects autonomy from the thinking - human – subject. Thus refusing any chance of an objective reality; that is to say a world independent of the human mind.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger describes how humans transcend the objects they encounter so completely that the thing – whatever is not human in the relation – disappears; exhausted of any autonomy and of any distinction from us it might harbour; transcended by human consciousness. According to Heidegger, things only ever become truly visible at the moment there discrepancy to our needs is made apparent and they become useless to us. In this sense the discrepant object – the thing that no longer identifies with us, that is distinct from us or the object that is insistently indifferent to our requirements and desires for it - is the *real* object. In his book *Zeit und Zein* (1927) Heidegger illustrates the human object relationship through his analysis of equipment and the metaphor of the hammer describing how at the moment the hammer breaks we no longer have any purchase upon it; it is no longer useful to the human that needs to transcend it into the fallacy that states– it exists only for me to use. The result being that the broken hammer goes through a change in status that finds it escaping from its human capture; it becomes an object, an end-in-it-self – autonomous from us – its assumed relation to the human, its presumed *raison d'être* becomes no longer applicable- and thus ungraspable.

To claim that the world exists independently of human thought or perception of it is problematic in light of what Quentin Miellessoux calls the 'correlationist circle'.

Correlationism states the very simple claim, that to think a world outside thought is



impossible because by thinking it, it is already inside thought; for Meillessoux this equation is both simpler and more devastating than the assertion of a mind independent reality made by any realism. Meillessoux is just one voice coming from recent continental philosophy that claims correlationism has been the point of departure for Western philosophy since Emmanuel Kant wrote his famous critiques – *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement*; a situation that has lead to the once distinct categories of *subject* and *object* becoming fused into what Richard Rorty has termed *interwovenness* (Richard Rorty following Donald Davidson goes further than most and ontologises the relation). As Meillessoux points out, this *interwovenness* found in the primacy of the subject – world relation is the defining characteristic of all philosophy since Kant. All traditions of thought which insist that human experience and consciousness structures the world – existentialism, phenomenology - or which maintain that the conceptual framework of language structures the world – post-modernism, post structuralism.

The privileging of the human subject as maker of the world and the possible autonomy of objects have become urgent questions in much contemporary philosophical investigation. These have been afforded particular emphasis in the work of Bruno Latour and Graham Harman.

For Bruno Latour and Graham Harman this problem forms the basis of their work as philosophers; each in their own way developing an object oriented ontology.

- i) In the work of Bruno Latour there are no distinct categories of objects. No binary exists in the traditional – at least since Plato's distinction - sense of abstract and concrete, indeed for Latour's thought *everything* is an object – including ideas, concepts and fictions - and all objects are concrete surfaces

that are acting in dense and varied networks at all times. One of Latour's main and most controversial claims is that at the level of ontology all objects are equal. This in turn introduces the notion of an equality of being through the 'flat' plane of ontology. This forms the basis of a democracy of objects and therefore following Latour, of everything. However this does not mean that all objects have the same force in the worlds they operate in; for Latour an objects existence – its power - is guaranteed through the strength of its *alliances*; through the force of its networks – Latour's is a philosophy built on the notion of absolute relationalism. This could be easily misunderstood as meaning the object's relation to us – human subjects – but as Graham Harman points out; these networks of relations that Latourian objects are involved in take place whether humans are there to witness them or not, whether humans are involved or not.

- ii) Alternatively, Harman through his radical reading of Martin Heideggers *tool-analysis* introduces to the discussion a non-relationalism in which – following Latour - everything is an object but departing radically from Latour in his insistence that all objects are autonomous resistant to context and always receding from us and each other. For him there is no democratising net of relations we can successfully throw over objects that connects all the things to all the other things in the world. In his own words;

‘Whatever sense of the word ‘object’ we might consider, it always refers to something with a certain unity and autonomy. An object must be one, and it must also have a sort of independence from whatever it is not. An object stands apart – not just from its manifestation to humans, but possibly even from its own accidents, relations, qualities, moments, or pieces. Furthermore, insofar as an object is more than its relations it must stand apart from any monism of the world-as-a-whole...’

(Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks; Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, 2009)

What happens then, if we can begin to not abuse objects and instead accept as Harman claim – or for that matter any *realism* claims - that objects are autonomous from us? Are we able to refuse to narrativize objects into causal relations and avoid the representation of objects as merely for us?

Taking such questions seriously offers a challenge to the dominance of the human-world reduction. Acting to reverse the philosophical flow between humans and the world at large, departing from the privileged human mind happily transcending the objective world into its domain alone in a one sided transaction that is precipitated on the understanding that we can possess completely the things that we encounter.

## **2. The Proprietary Fallacy**

As the list of approaches to object abuse provided above illustrates, we human subjects are inclined to assume that we have a special and absolute access to the object world. Indeed there is a commonly held belief that without the representation of linguistic frameworks to mediate them, objects do not exist at all. This manifests itself in the belief that the world is ‘for us’ alone and the belief that *we* are fundamental to its realisation; essential to its construction. This humanist view insists that we configure the world through human thought and action, in which we transform the world into knowledge and meaning and are thus entitled to it; leading us to the conclusion that it is ‘for us’ alone. I call this the proprietary fallacy.

The proprietary fallacy is a term which describes the mistaken yet persistent belief that we humans have the privilege of ownership over the things we encounter absolutely – economically, materially, conceptually, etc. This is the process through which we

predictably posit the thinking perceiving subject as essential to the existence of the world. Through the proprietorial fallacy we contextualise all the things we encounter into our version of the world; reducing objects exclusively into the narratives of human knowledge. All are approaches that allow us to forget the discomforting reality in which objects are absolutely distinct from us; non-relational and therefore existing independently of our perceptions of them; that is to say, whether we are here to witness that existence or not.

Finding ways to avoid the proprietorial fallacy is important if we are to cease abusing objects. For this to happen we would need to embrace a radically realist position that breaks completely with the 200 year old philosophical tradition of placing the human subject at the centre of all things; a derailing of our narratives and representations that would, I speculate, overturn our institutions so radically as to render us unrecognisable to ourselves (would capitalism end?); a new configuration of the human would be required (how would we speak?).

To achieve this we – because it is our acts of reduction which are the root of the abuse in the first place - would need to unbind and release objects from their imposed contexts and humanist narratives; breaking them from their capture in the causal chains we construct for them and releasing them from the violations of human reasoning. Towards accepting that objects are and always have been distinct from us; abstract (?) –whether concrete or not? Abstract, in the sense that they are in excess of the human desire to transcend, represent and contextualize them, detached as Harman suggests at some fundamental level from any relational regime applied to them whatsoever.

We would also have to depart from Bruno Latour's insistence that the existence of objects - their force - depends entirely on the networks they are active in. Requiring the

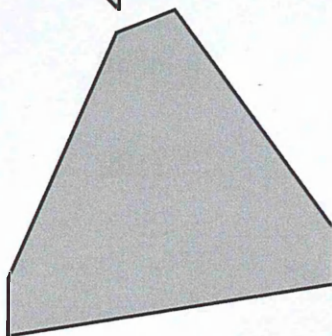
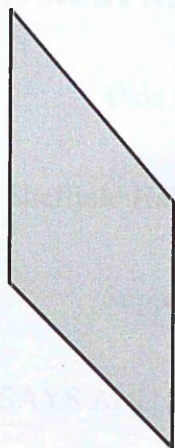
disposal of the notion that relations represent the natural state of things in the world.

Narratives of ownership and knowledge would have to fall away and all causal chains be smashed. Opening up a realist world; a mind independent world in which all objects are abstractions.

Sadly though, we humans buy the proprietorial fallacy hook, line and sinker, to the extent that we have inter-subjective agreement, through the ideology of acquisition and ownership - the main symptoms of what Mark Fisher diagnoses as 'Capitalist Realism' - that neo-liberalism is the only imaginable socio-economic constructor. The philosopher and writer on economics Nicholas Nassim Taleb; in his book *The Black Swan* (2008) highlights the problem. Dr. Taleb points out that;

We love the tangible, the confirmation, the palpable, the real, the visible, the concrete, the known, the seen, the vivid, the visual, the social, the embedded, the emotionally laden, the salient, the stereotypical, the moving, the theatrical, the romanced, the cosmetic, the official, the scholarly-sounding verbiage, the pompous, the mathematized crap, the pomp, the Academie Francais, Harvard Business School, the Nobel prize... the moving discourse and the lurid. Most of all we favour the narrated.

Alas, we are not manufactured, in our current edition of the human race to understand abstract matters – we need context.



**FORGET ABSTRACTION**

Dale Holmes

Sheffield Hallam University

Supported by

**ESSAYS AND OBSERVATIONS**

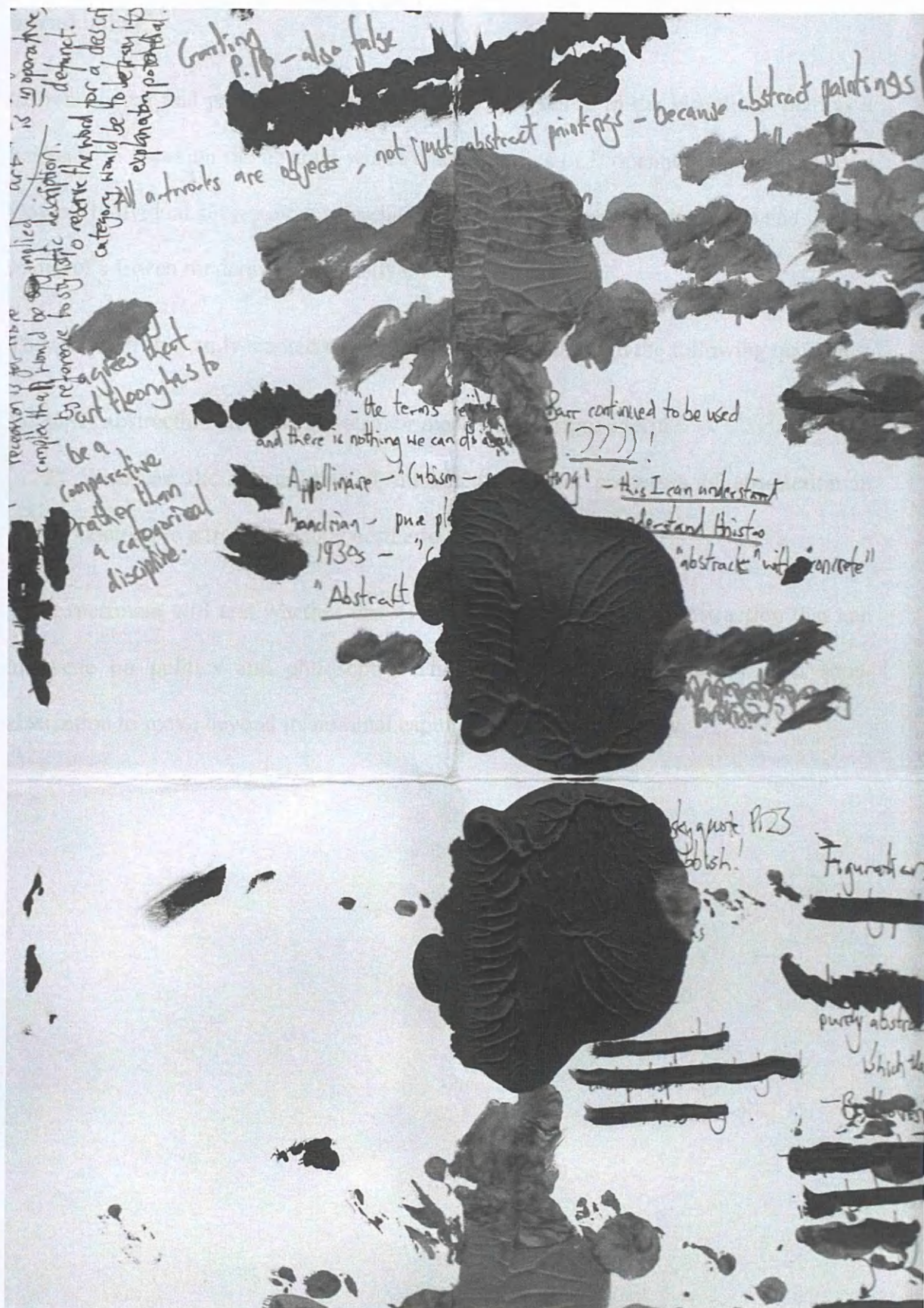
Berlin

2011

## **Abstract**

The term 'abstraction' in the visual arts is a consistently contested ground. Most contemporary theories suggest artistic abstraction to be 'open' to interpretation or to be an aesthetic category alone. This experiment tested how artists would respond to the suggestion that abstraction might be prescriptive in art making. This was supported by a set of rigid conjectures around the process and role of abstraction. The results showed abstraction to be a complex set of material processes. The conclusion is that abstraction is operative; contrary to recent thinking on abstraction as merely descriptive.





Matthew Burbidge, *Concept drawing for ABSTRACT*, 2011.

## **Introduction**

Current theory and practice around the uses of abstraction in the visual arts betrays a tendency to focus on the abstract works characteristics of i) openness that allows for a viewers individual subjective interpretation, ii) as decorative qualities alone and iii) the return of a frozen modernist style easily co-opted by capital.

The author of this study wanted to test these arguments through the following questions:

- 1) Is abstraction an operative term or merely a descriptive term?
- 2) What are the possibilities of immanent material processes of abstraction in contrast to a transcendental aesthetics of humanism?

The experiment will test whether there is an operative process of abstraction that can intervene on politics and philosophy. The expectation is that the test will show abstraction to move beyond its nominal capture as a designation only.

## Materials and Methods

### Conjectures

The directors of Essays and Observations (Matthew Burbidge and Sonja Ostermann) proposed a series of thoughts on the role of abstraction in the process of art making. I was invited to develop these arguments further resulting in the following fifteen conjectures on abstraction:

1. *What is the “abstract” in art? For our purposes it cannot be what art history says it is, because this assignation takes away the functionality that the term has in all other academic disciplines, and makes it purely descriptive. We are not engaged in representing art history we are interested in making art theory.*
2. *We do not need single nominative assignations that describe a set of quite different phenomena. This reduction to the name leads only to confusion. It is not a particular we want but a universal.*
3. *In our theory, abstraction is forced to become an operative principle, precisely because the history of the reception of “abstract art” is inoperative, defunct. The accurate history of this reception is far more complex than is implied by reference to a description of styles.*
4. *To reserve the word “abstract” for a descriptive category would be to betray its explanatory potential. Condemning us to ignorance about a trait in art production that was (historically speaking!) the most important development in 20<sup>th</sup> Century art.*

5. *Wassily Kandinsky is an artist considered central to the development of abstract art. He said “one should not approach art by means of reasoning and understanding, but through the soul, through experience.” This is the kind of mystifying nonsense that has plagued the trajectory of abstract art since then.*
6. *Abstraction has been left without a believable theoretical framework to support its practice; not least because of the continuing privileging of individual subjective experience over all other alternatives for encountering abstract art.*
7. *Fortunately it is possible to make art theory, because we have the advantage of comparative study. Contrary to popular belief, even abstraction is susceptible to this type of analysis.*
8. *Historically criticism has failed to account for abstraction sufficiently – forcing it into a dialectic with representation – abstract works needing to have a representational title to be deemed as such - a restrictive atmosphere that was promoted and nurtured both by the Hegelianism of the Frankfurt School and the putative Kantianism of high modernism.*
9. *At least the critics mentioned above thought about art ideologically; there was a risk and a sense that something was at stake. Mel Gooding is an example of someone who does not think about art and for whom nothing is at stake. Although he wrote a book called “Abstract Art.” Gooding says for example: “Music is the most purely abstract of the arts, beyond language, purely sensuous and yet capable of touching directly the spirit of the listener.” Does he imply that the ultimate abstraction cannot be seen? What is the spirit of the listener? Which is more abstract then—the*

*music of Beethoven, or the music of Feldman? Feldman? Why, because it is more invisible?*

- 10. Statements of the kind quoted above by Mel Gooding are the reason why we need a theory of art rather than simply a history of art. Or we at least need our art history to become more rigorous. It appears to have been written up to now largely by people who are not capable of cerebral rigor. There are important exceptions to this, however.*
- 11. One such exception would be represented by Wilhelm Worringer. To go from the claim “We sense ourselves in the forms of a work of art,” to formulate “the aesthetic sense is a sense of the self,” is logically valid. Whether one agrees, with this “psychological” approach or not, it at least has coherence.*
- 12. Worringer saw his art of “empathy” as broadly related to “realism”; and this “art of empathy” as occupying a different category to the other kind of art, the “abstract”—then what do we make of Malevich’s assertions that Suprematism was “the new realism in painting?” Obviously, these are clashing ideas of the “real.”*
- 13. But actually, do we really need to “claim” Malevich for “abstraction?” Isn’t there something else going on here? A title like “Red Square: Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions” apart, what is Malevich abstracting from? Isn’t this rather something else?*
- 14. All definitions of abstract art are “negatively defined” in that they define what abstract art is not. This method tends to make the definition description-bound and*

*therefore inoperative. Negative definition does not do this in itself; it depends on how the definition is made.*

*15. We should perhaps try to define “abstraction” in terms of an operative trait or trait’s. This would mean a set of artistic approaches. We have to be wary of making the mistake of reverting to the nominalism we are trying to shake off, because these are extremely wide terms for a definition and therefore any definition has to do justice to the complexity of the subject, such a definition would be operative, and theoretical*

These fifteen conjectures were then sent to the invited participants for them to consider in the development of their own propositions on abstraction.

### **Participants/Artists**

Seven artists were asked to take part in the exhibition; Albrecht Schäfer, Jeremiah Day, Karolin Meunier, Lucy Powell, Mario Asef, and Øystein Aasan were asked to provide propositions in the form of artworks, I would provide a seventh proposition in the form of a text. The artists were two female and five males of varying ages and at different stages in their careers.

### **Exhibition/Test site**

The resulting exhibition AB ST RA CT took place at the gallery *ESSAYS AND OBSERVATIONS* located on Maxstrasse in Berlin's Wedding district between the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 and the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2011.

The exhibition was introduced by the directors of the gallery using the following text:

*The meaning of a word is its use in the language.*”—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, No. 43

*A white, completely over-exposed picture. The artist, taking footage of various landscapes, had no idea that the camera he was using was broken before he started. Friedrich Meschede, in calling this Mark Luyten film the “perfect abstraction,” makes a classical error of reasoning: that abstraction means the obliteration of everything figurative and objective. But abstraction is not an artistic variant of nihilism. Abstraction above all describes a process—the term ought rather to be understood and used as a verb. Further, in this process, the relation between abstraction and the abstracted does not get lost. And something much more important: the relation remains comprehensible. Wittgenstein rightly recognizes that a value that stands for all and everything can only be meaningless. The over-exposed film could be the abstraction of everything, or equally, nothing: at this point it becomes arbitrary, and the term abstraction becomes inoperable as a characterization of the film, in the Wittgensteinian sense unusable—meaningless.*

*A black square on a white background. For a majority of people, Malevich’s Suprematist works, in particular the black square, are abstract paintings par excellence. But what Malevich was aspiring to was not abstraction, but the complete disengagement of art from nature: Malevich wanted to liquidate what was called “the objective” in art. In exactly the same way as, by accident, the above-mentioned film of artist Mark Luyten does. For the same reason, Malevich’s Suprematism is also no abstraction. Geometric figures, which are generally listed by art theory under the category of “geometric abstraction,” are actually concrete. The differentiation between abstract and concrete is here of the utmost importance. And also of historic importance: there were, time and again, artist movements that turned against the label “abstraction,” introducing other terms, such as “concrete art,” for their works (van Doesburg, Mondrian, Matisse et al.). Concrete art is self-referential, because it exclusively appertains to art’s being and becoming. The figures, geometries, are not the essence of what is represented, rather the essence of representing. At this point art becomes autonomous.*

*In the natural sciences, mathematics, and even sociology, abstraction is a systematic process, through the agency of which experiments and concepts can be framed, which in turn makes possible the comprehension of more complex processes and relations. Complexities are simplified or generalized in order to reduce an overabundance of detail. It is similar with language. Language is an abstraction of thought. Thoughts by themselves are too multi-layered to be uttered “unprocessed.” To be sure, language becomes deficient through this simplification, and can lead in the end to misunderstandings. Nevertheless, it enables communication by means of abstraction.*

*In this way, abstraction has a general function: to make comprehensible. This is not different in the realm of art. Abstract Expressionism, for example, entails a reduction of*



*the portrayal of figures and objects for a particular reason. The focus of attention is directed to the subjective form or color-field, allowing the visualization of emotion, narrative, and other elements. This process does not however work with geometric forms. To abstract a car to a red square means to translate this object into another form, and thus to separate it from abstraction: abstraction means rather to distance, not to substitute or supersede.*

*This exhibition forms the basis for an ongoing discussion on this theme. What do we today understand as abstraction? Is a photograph abstract, in that it isolates a moment in time? Is a found object abstract, in that it is extracted from its everyday context? How wide do we want to spread the range of the term abstraction? Or should we constrain this range, in order to make the term more accurate and less arbitrary?*

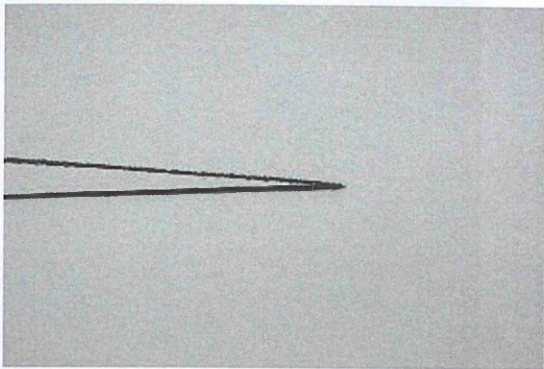
(Burbidge, M. 2011)



**Results**

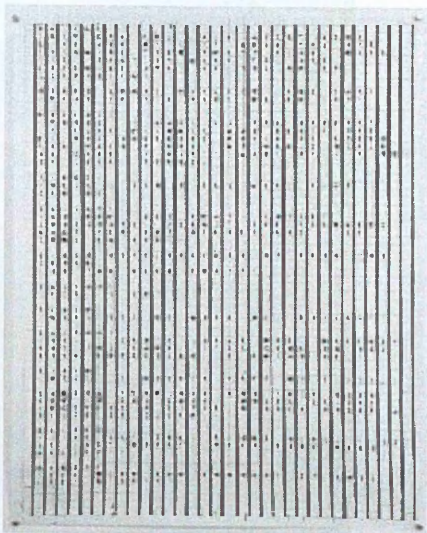
Propositions/Artworks

Albrecht Schäfer:



AS, Wall drawing and thread, 2011.

Øystein Aasan:



Double Bind, Pen and letterset on paper

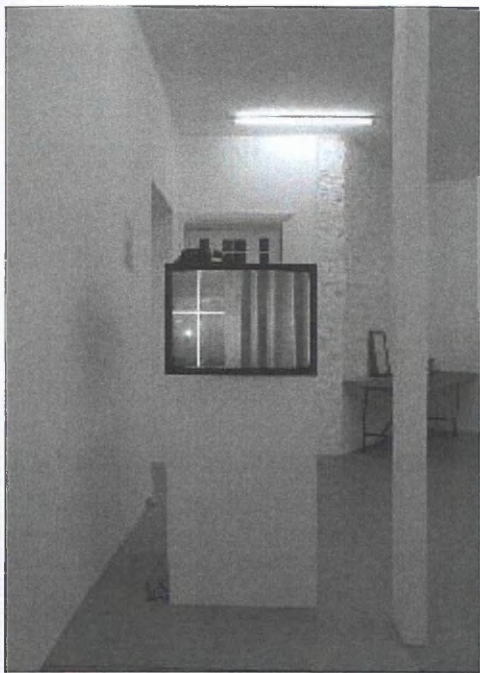
Jeremiah Day:



Still from the performance...AUTONOMY (2011) staged on Maxstrasse and Scherestrasse

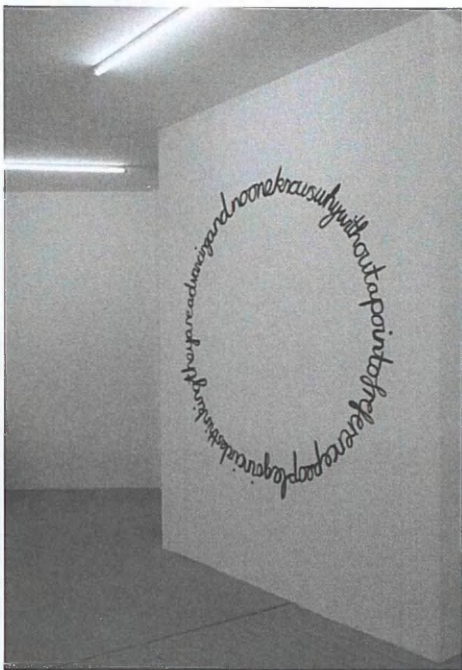


Karolin Meunier:



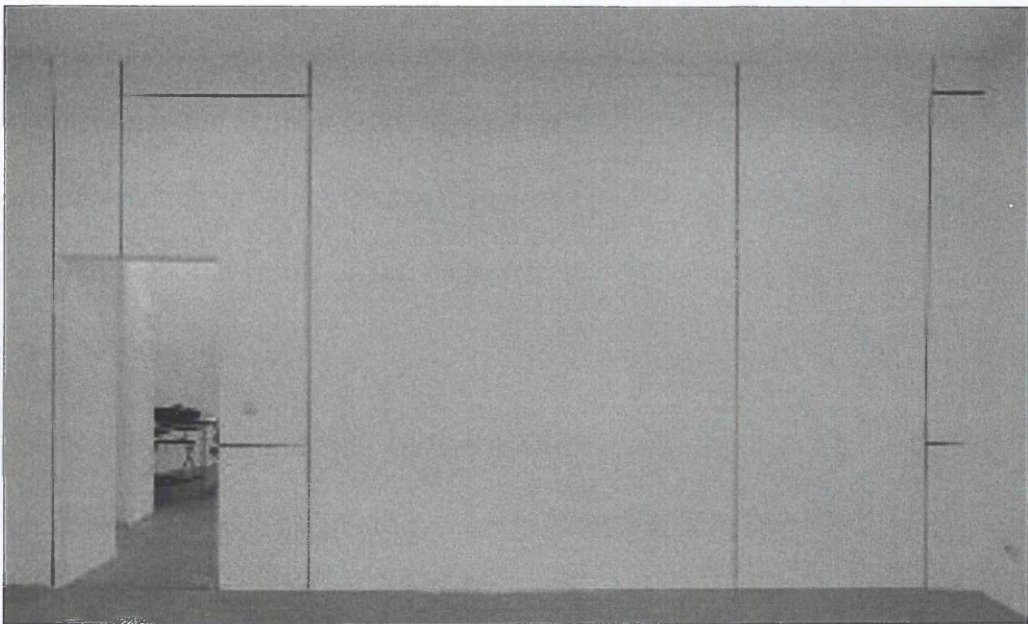
*Whatever Constellations*, Video, 2011.

Lucy Powell:



*A Point*, Acrylic paint, 2011.

Mario Asef:



*A-AI*, Insulation tape and picture nails, 2011

*Dale Holmes:*

## **FORGET**

### **‘ABSTRACTION’**

**Dale Holmes**

#### **Numbed by ‘abstraction’...**

We need to think abstraction urgently; more precisely we need to rethink abstraction without the name ‘abstraction’. This has to be done in order to reveal what has been elided by arts histories – a situation which has led to a kind of cultural concussion. Histories that have facilitated the snatching of abstraction away from its realist inception first swaddling it in the perplexing effects of spirituality and then graduating it into the insidious idealisms of individuality; defending the lack of a theory for it through recourse to humanist philosophies of the subject. This situation has elevated the experience of individual subjectivities above all other readings of art; leaving abstraction to the extreme relativisms of particular and personal taste. This has led to the accepted notion in which abstraction is summarily dismissed as only ‘abstraction’ – a designation – the result of the reduction that has secured the final shrouding of it in mystification.

This act of reduction by the various modernist and post-modernist ‘master’ discourses has then served to consign abstraction to the realm of style alone – the effect being that the particularity or name ‘abstraction’ obscures the structural logics of abstraction; paralysing its potential as a tool and voiding its associations with radical politics and philosophical thought. Master discourses that prefer instead to posit abstraction safely in a restrictive binary with representation forcing it into a dialectical capture; augmenting

this claustrophobic relation through the application of a reified and sterile atmosphere of purity and necessity. A set of conditions that effectively leaves it numbed; lulling it into an anaesthetised stasis that facilitates the forgetting of abstraction and secures its replacement with 'abstraction'.

The surgical metaphor serves us well here and it is worth noting that fundamental to the success of medical anaesthesia (isoflourane/nitrous oxide or propofol) is its characteristic of making the anaesthetised subject forget their spatial and temporal experience of the surgery and its attendant sensual trauma; patients undergoing procedures can 'wake up' opening their eyes witnessing helplessly and in a state of chronic paralysis first hand the viscera of the operating theatre and the continuing slicing action of the scalpel (razor). This is the situation in which we discover abstraction now; trapped inside a lifeless shell -- anaesthetised by a linguistic and relational ether that induces amnesia - whilst undergoing a radical reduction; always identifiably 'abstraction' unable to act against this nullification, its force barely measurable on the monitor of art theory.

### **Recovering abstraction...**

If the above diagnosis is reliable then abstraction is in bad shape. This does not mean that the prognosis should be the same. This has been an opportunity missed in recent years by the western contemporary art scene. Witnessing has it as a resurgence of interest in the aesthetics of early modernism and by virtue of this a renewed interest in 'abstraction'. Unfortunately the status quo has remained intact due to a general failure by these artists to resist the temptation to merely rerun the failed idealisms of the modernist project. Effectively reiterating and securing abstractions status as style only withdrawing its aesthetics and processes from use.

It is in the very withdrawal of abstraction from use that the thought of ‘abstraction’ as the name of a broken tool only is possible; this realisation represents the point at which we can stop taking for granted the uselessness of abstraction and begin to concentrate on recovering its usefulness.

The following are ten imperatives that state how this can be achieved:

- i. Through disconnecting abstraction from its binary relation with representational; a process that enables the thought of abstraction as discontinuous with the narratives of ‘abstraction’ privileged in modernism (necessity, purity, individual subjective experience) and post-modernism (irony, appropriation).
- ii. Through unshackling abstraction from its capture in the master discourses of art history – we should remember that art history is a reductive science in the sense that it reduces the excess of art to categories and understandable linguistic definitions and that the preferred method of science is a form of nominalism which insists on the reduction of its objects to particularity and to that which is empirically or objectively testable. As we have seen looking like abstract art is not a guarantor of abstraction.
- iii. By breaking decisively with the name and the identity ‘abstraction’; it is only through the act of forgetting ‘abstraction’ that we can begin to remember abstraction refusing the given meanings associated with this exclusively art historical term.
- iv. Through the acknowledgement that abstraction is a form of violence; it is the very process that reconfigures, denies, severs and tests any and all existing relations.

- v. By accepting that abstraction is recalcitrant, undemocratic, polemical and indifferent to consensus. This means that abstraction is resistance-as-such (politics) and never resistance-in-particular (the political).
- vi. Through remembering the ability of abstraction to shatter the mirror of language; a formal and structural discontinuity that reconfigures art, breaking with any conservatism – this is the figure of its relation to radical politics – confounding categories and thus enabling the possibility of changing the very structure of language itself.
- vii. By facilitating every effort to unbind abstraction from any and all spurious claims to individual subjective experience made on its behalf by practitioners, critics, historians and viewers; relational binds that force particularity onto all art through denying its universality.
- viii. Through an acknowledgment of the irreducible element of art – the aspect that cannot be reduced to a relation; that is to say its abstraction – as being that which is universal.
- ix. By understanding abstraction as a process of separating out, of drawing new lines of distinction in theory and practice; operating in excess of conceptual, linguistic and relational practices; idealisms that have come to dominate contemporary art practice and serve to limit the uses of abstraction to the aesthetic category ‘abstraction’.
- x. By demonstrating that the outcomes of the process abstraction are indifferent to us and whether we like it or not – and this is its realism – exist independently of our observations on it, our relations to it or our descriptions of it.

(Holmes, D. 2011)

THE CRITIC

THE CENSOR

THE NARRATOR

THE ARCHITECT

THE ANARCHIST

THE POLEMICIST

THE ESSAYIST

THE MEDIEVALIST

THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

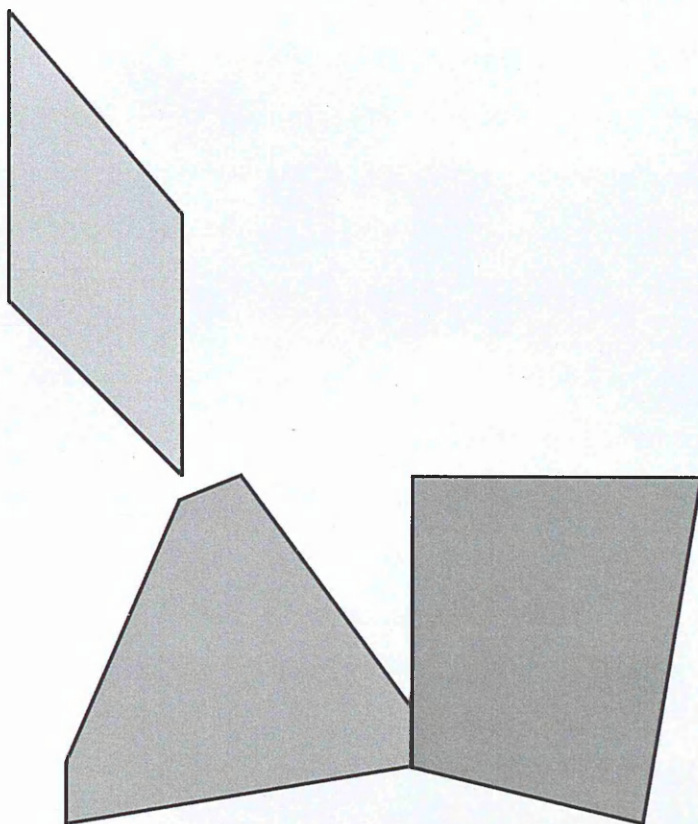
THE PARTISAN

THE ACADEMIC

THE MIMIC

THE STANDARD-BEARER

THE SCHOLAR





## ON THE CONCRETE PLATFORM

The Characters:

THE NARRATOR

THE ARCHITECT

THE ANARCHIZER

THE POLEMICIST

THE ESSAYIST

THE MEDIAEVALIST

THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

THE PARTISAN

THE ACADEMIC

THE MINIMIZER

THE STANDARDIZER

THE ADHOCIST

Some preliminary direction:

#### The Stage:

The stage set comprises of five backdrops unequal in dimension and hinged together to form a (non-Euclidian) pentagon. The framework is made from D65mm x W38mm stud battening. These frames are attached using screws to feet made of stud battening 600mm long and laid horizontally to cut across the angles between two frames – these have two 360 degree caster wheels each, attached at either end. The backdrops are made using a variety of materials and are described at the outset of each act. (Please refer to the photographic documentation on p.302 of this thesis)

The Auditorium: The auditorium accommodates three audience members on a steep ramp construction; one row three seats deep. This is intended to enable one viewing position from three heights. It is constructed using pallets, stud wall battening, sheet wood and screws. It is covered in black polythene used for the construction of the backdrops. Attached to this is a lighting rig made from stud battening and security floodlights, these are powered by a petrol generator. The sound of the generator is always present.

Projected;

The mighty cosmos of the economic order (which is bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanical and machine production)... today... determines with overwhelming coercion, the style of life not only of those directly involved in business but in every individual who is born into that mechanism, and may well continue to do so until the day the last ton of fossil fuel is consumed.

MAX WEBER,1905.

Blackness (no lights)...

NARRATOR V/O

The vision has dimmed and I struggle to recall those events.

All that remains are the outlines of faded memories of that time of chaos; of ruined dreams and wasted land.

All of the survivors are throttled by grief in the moments that the memories drag us back to then; reminding us we are severed from those events by the pitiless passage of time; harsher and more comforting than the brutal separation's of leagues and miles...

Groping for this past in every detail; every line and fold makes us sick and saturates our dreams with the mountains of madness the industrial death and the indescribable stink. The battles returning from this fog begin to show themselves in detailed convulsions...

The Concrete Platform came into being through the demise of the great inquisitor and the rise of a new religion that sprung up around a humungous Machine that gorged on viscous streams of the gleaming black liquid, guzzling its gas and belching steam.

This Machine stretched in every direction further than could be perceived. It was claimed that the Machine was always growing; laying a blanket of waste along every horizon. Some said it might have no limits; its edges they said are indefinable. It was like nothing seen before.

Act 1:

(The Architect and the Anarchizer)

In which the culture wars are initiated and the Platform is erected.

Act 1: The backdrop measures 1830mm x 2470mm. The surface of the backdrop is constructed of greenish black coloured tarpaulin stretched and stapled across the frame work. W: 50mm white gaffer tape pulled from top to bottom and from left to right forms a grid of 100mm x 275mm oblongs. Along the bottom run 12 oblongs 100mm x 430mm.

#### THE NARRATOR

'At the very beginning of the Machines existence, when the true horror of its true power was yet to be recognised, there appeared a cult that was based on the fusion of the human will and the object world. A few stood against it. By way of resistance they challenged the frills and jewels that had come to adorn all things by building an angular architectonic arrangement of brutal and inhuman forms; this place became known as the Concrete Platform. '

## THE ARCHITECT

These things... I hate these things... they smack of decadent desperation... the whole culture is stumbling backwards happily dragging its corpse around with it... a nupta cadavera... it is unhealthy to conjugate with a corpse; the melding of the living and the dead will only ever result in a sickening abomination...

...It is our grave responsibility to deny all this wanton subjectivity and insist on the distinction between art and life. Reject this perverse fusion of subject and object needs to be wedged apart in order to have done once and for all with these fictions... they only serve to place culture at the service of the old regimes that mire culture in superstition and cake it in the dirge and filth of the past.

## THE ANARCHIZER

I cannot breathe in here; the patina of death covers every surface and the stench of the nineteenth century goads me – it makes me itch... only a tattooed idiot or murderous degenerate could find any comfort here. ERASE THE TRACES!!! This melding of art and life is only ever a death-in-life and there is a difference between a pot for pissing in and a pot for a corpse's ashes... it is maintaining this distinction that provides the space for culture to breathe... the running room that allows for improvement... a world away from this superstitious dolls house. We have to force new structures... invent new images that in construction, abstraction and fragmentation destroy the old order...

## THE ARCHITECT

I will build a structure that will shake this past besotted anti-culture to the core. It will take the form of a new kind of architecture with angles and measurements, materials and forms that are alien both to man and to nature; that are as harsh as the real world. I will build it right here and blow apart this society's petty prejudice by adding huge

windows that let in the healthy light of day. As science advances so must we – art, design, architecture and literature should become as sanitary; clinical and unsentimental in its progress.

#### THE ANARCHIZER

We have to become exemplars of the new. As disciplined as Spartans. Look outside of this mausoleum onto the streets and you will see the real of now. The walking collages – part man part machine; new constructions that make us recoil; make us look away in dread and horror. Faces, brains and bodies shattered and bludgeoned by the techno metal hell-fires of the great battle – organic material driven hard into a collision with the new materials of industry and suffocated in the new chemistries. All are there on the street – proto-cyborgs – these new constructions are our muse; reassembled into planes and geometries that we could have only imagined in our darkest misanthropic dreams...

We need to initiate a new war – a culture war. It is our responsibility to lay the foundations of a better world for all. We have to start our war from within – insurgency – carry out offensives that propel us forward; all forward.

#### THE ARCHITECT

The new structures will be unrelenting... as distinct in material and form from the human being that comes up against them as is imaginable... resistant to the anthropomorphising drives we witness here today... brutal in its radicalism and political in its insistence on a new world order; these new structures will hum of emancipation. It will be a platform for progress.

## THE ANARCHIZER

Be sure of this, we are not replacing one tradition with another... the Platform is not meant for posterity... no not at all its products are not to be canonised like the representational styles in the mausoleums and drawing rooms of accepted culture... our buildings and objects will barely outlive us – constructed using any methods necessary and from the contingent materials of the moment... each new generation purging all that is decadent from within it and each subsequent moment shall have its own brutality that erases the traces and makes way for the new. No more conservation of the old world order... tear it down!!! Our works shall be the raised fist of resistance!!!

## THE ARCHITECT

The Platform is the figure of a beginning – this is its radicalism; it begins now – it has no origin – it is the real of the now for now.



Act 2:

(The Polemicist and the Essayist)

In which the residents of the Platform attempt to resist the culture industry of the Machine.

Act 2: The backdrop measures 2405mm x 1900mm. The surface is split down the middle forming two vertical panels. The left hand panel is covered in a bright red rubber coated polyester cloth stretched across and stapled to the framework. The right hand side is covered using heavy gauge black polythene stretched across and stapled to the framework. W50mm white gaffer tape runs from the top left hand corner of the left hand panel diagonally down to the bottom right of the left hand panel. The same tape runs vertically up the join between the left and right panels and from the top left of the right hand panel diagonally to the bottom right.

#### THE NARRATOR V/O

The Concrete Platform was erected using materials that were harsh and unrelenting - molded plywood, tubular steel, glass and concrete; materials formed in the monstrous furnaces of the great industrial capitols. It thrived by feeding off the Machines resources; in a sense no Machine = no Platform.

Alas, the Platform was first ridiculed and then engulfed by a war the Machine needed.

The Machine grew stronger than ever and more resilient from the acrid smoke. Shell shocked and awed. Lurching from the rivers of blood and the shit filled scars of the battle that had engulfed every square metre of the then known world drawing comfort and succour from the fog of war.

THE ESSAYIST

Nothing is to be done?

THE POLEMICIST

It's inevitable... That's the thick and thin of it!!! All my life I have been battling with it; always taking up the struggle... you see.

THE ESSAYIST

Do I???

THE POLEMICIST

It is good to hear from you again... I thought you had gone for good.

THE ESSAYIST

I was concerned also, I keep moving... I don't want to, but....

THE POLEMICIST

Have you managed to find what you are looking for?

THE ESSAYIST

Maybe it's here... I've been walking a lot... experiencing... see what can be done.

THE POLEMICIST

It's inevitable... Nothings to be done!

THE ESSAYIST

But... I wanted to say earlier... erm... I think that something can be done... the people... you see... the... the people can be emancipated... and I think I know how...

THE POLEMICIST

How can you know??? Nothings to be done!!!

THE ESSAYIST

Through the technically reproducible, commercial and popular art of now... and...

THE POLEMICIST

Hold on... are you suggesting that the cinema – the popular press even – can emancipate the people from their subjugation? That this reproducible and populist form can force a change of feeling in the people and raise from them the potential for revolt?

## THE ESSAYIST

Yes... that's it... that's it... a raised political consciousness through popular art forms... for the masses... a progressive form and content that the reactionary unique and autonomous art; I like to call it bourgeois art can never provide...

## THE POLEMICIST

Have you considered at all that you might be overestimating the power of such art production to resist the forces of the Machine? The Machine would surely gobble this art form up in a millisecond – surely even before it is produced it is always already co-opted to the Machines desire... its will.

## THE ESSAYIST

No... it can express the ideals of the Platform... it can... and the audience... through this sort of... erm... osmosis... erm... ok, absorption will realise the creative space we have always talked of for the worker. It will enrich the lives of the Machine's alienated masses!!!

## THE POLEMICIST

How??? How is this to be done? What is to be done?

## THE ESSAYIST

The pleasure of the cinema audience as a distraction... the nerd-iness of a fanatical sports fan...

## THE POLEMICIST

I am exasperated... can you not see that what you said there is a bare faced romanticism? – Idealistic in the extreme!!! Your Hypothesis only has the potential to affirm the Machine's ideology of homogenisation; intensifying its affects on the same people you claim will be emancipated. You cannot have your cake and eat it.

## THE ESSAYIST

So there is nothing to be done???

## THE POLEMICIST

No... Yes... maybe we can choose not to choose to do anything...

By the way did you hear the story about our old friends the Playwright and the Intellectual??? I'll tell you it...

The Intellectual has accused the Playwright of being a formalist; saying that a formalist is anyone that thinks form can have an effect on content; he claims the playwrights epic theatre is the apogee of this – structural formalism I heard they are calling it. The Playwright has responded; he has now accused the Intellectual of being a formalist claiming that a formalist is anyone who thinks form is a mere carrier of a pedagogical message; going on to claim that the Intellectual endorses only good design and accepted form over truly revolutionary art... anyway they have been flinging this insult backwards and forwards for a while now... 'You're a formalist'... 'no! you're the formalist'... back and forth.

## THE ESSAYIST

Have they lost their senses? Surely that is a dangerous accusation to make dwelling as they do in the camps of the eastern tribe.

#### THE POLEMICIST

Dangerous? There's no doubt. It's a one way ticket to the labour camps of the frozen northern desert.

#### THE ESSAYIST

Tut...tut... Nothing can be done?

#### THE POLEMICIST

You still ask that even after what I just told you??? It's obvious isn't it that anything that demonstrates a clear political commitment – that preaches and teaches – that claims the moral high ground is easily claimable by the Machine or will lead to death in frozen exile. Stay disciplined. Negate and say NO!!! That is all.

Act 3

(The Mediaevalist and the Anthroplogizer)

In which the Platform learns the value of material excess.



## THE MEDIAEVALIST

The force is down there (points downwards). There is the real site of power... material excess... this is what we need to consider... consider how this excess breaks any system whatever... Up here (tapping his temple) this is the space of subjugation... the ideal – the seat of the ruler. The domination of the Machine is predicated on such ideals. Literary language is the language of the king and of power – of the Machine... we need a new force that attacks without flinching the ideals of literary language... To disavow the form in which our myths are packaged.

## THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

We ought to work towards cracking open the categories that anthropology classically idealises myth into. Render them active again... real material, destabilising subjective ideals.

## THE MEDIAEVALIST

Yes... to allow us to shake off the stultifying straightjackets that capture movement... the definitions that sterilise collective action into domestication and reinforce the Machine, bourgeois society and individualism... We desire the instant, the excessive and the FORMLESS!!!

## THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

FORMLESS???

## THE MEDIAEVALIST

Against the established, the polite and the instituted. The traditional hierarchies are disavowed by the formless.

## THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

Ha... abstract painting performs a similar function... its absolute materiality... its immanence denies the languages of power and subjugation...

The direct impact of abstract forms... the turbulence of instant visual perception breaks the stranglehold of literature and its cult of subjectivity and interiority.

Make no mistake the anus, excrement, flies, ruptured eyeballs, the rotten sun are very important objects indeed.

## THE MEDIAEVALIST

Do these base objects replace the hierarchical system we have inherited from tradition ... do they sublate or subjugate the head, the king, spirit and mind, the sun of reason and vision??? No they do not... to replace one hierarchy with another is only to replace one idealising system of meaning with another... this would be a grave mistake.

Instead they actively destroy any false opposition and throw into question the very foundations this world is predicated upon... Homogeneity = NO, Heterogeneity = YES!

## THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

To replace god with shit would be to inaugurate an inversion of traditional hierarchies and that would never do. It would only reverse the existing systems of signification and effectually turn sacrificial violence into boring labour.

## THE MEDIAEVALIST

Exactly!!! It is in the orgiastic excess bound up in the erotic, in the suicide mission, in the political revolution, in the giving with no expectation of reciprocation, LUXURY, ejaculating not into the unprotected vulva but into the arsehole or pulling out and releasing upon the ground as waste. It is the disunity and heterogeneity of a society that promotes a change in its values... These are our weapons and this is a fight we cannot ignore!!!

## THE ANTHROPOLOGIZER

OK, OK I have to confess I am worried by this. Is this not just like the Machines promotion of individual desire? How does the collective; the community gel around this heterogeneity??? Heterogeneity in itself is bound up with autonomy... it is that which is not homogenous – unstable and without shared fictions.

## THE MEDIAEVALIST

The collective is predicated on violent difference... extreme autonomies... it can never be unitary; origin, whole, homogeneity these are the most damaging of all fictions. You see you cannot reduce far enough. The myths of origin – of blood and soil, of essence and the whole are the most insidious of our enemy's weapons; fictions we have to fight against. When you break open any community you find many individuals; then break open the individual and you find innumerable cells, break open these cells and discover endless atoms, crack open the atom and find an infinity of sub atomic particles and so on and so on... it never ends. The figure of the collective is unthinkable without autonomy and the precariousness that smashes through an illusory unity. This war rages on and this is our battleground now.

Act 4

(The Partisan)

In which the Platform is repurposed as a cathedral for conserving high culture.

Act 4: Cigarette smoke...

THE NARRATOR V/O

Silence...

## THE PARTISAN

The pact is too much to bear; all our hopes for the revolution are crushed beneath the weight of its genocides. All the old battles are irrelevant now... advanced cultures cannot have any truck with either of the tribes. Avant-Gardism... can no longer engage in the socio-political sphere; the heterogeneity desired by the elders is proven to be without worth; this is not its battleground or its reason for being. The avant-garde maintains the essential values of highly developed cultures... High culture is the achievement of man in the Machine... its products exceed the trash the Machine generates in normal circumstance... achieving this through its separation from society and politics... through tending to its own specific problems; through the unification of its formal characteristics. Advanced art employs the characteristic methods of art in order to criticize art and entrench it in its specialisation. It is not a rupture with the past... not at all, it is the strengthening of its connection to its classical origins that is important. The evolution of human culture; this is what the Platform is. That's the reason I won't countenance the products of Dada or Constructivism which are entirely subsumed by external considerations and thus dependent on literature, theatre and product design and therefore are non-art; they have no place on the Platform now. I'm sure of it!!!

The battle is for arts liberal freedoms and the essential nature of man; it only ever appears from the expression of the heroic individual; its home is the Machine and its form is painting, its shape is rectangle and its surface is flat. It is the relations contained within it that have meaning. Its reason for existing is to refine its operations... to purify from within and defend its clarifications from heterogeneity and populism...

Act 5

(The Academic and the Minimizer)

In which the Platform's internal philosophical and political schism is opened up.

Act 5: The backdrop measures 1840mm x 1900mm. The surface is made up of four square panels of striped cloth stitched together. The upper left panel is cotton made up of 25mm green and white continuous stripes running horizontally. The upper right panel is polyester with a 10mm black and yellow vertical continuous stripe pattern. The lower left panel is cotton with a 1mm red and white continuous stripe pattern running vertically. The lower right is a poly-cotton cloth with a 30mm blue and white continuous stripe pattern running horizontally. W: 50mm black gaffer tape quarters the surface with a central cross and a border around the edges.

#### THE NARRATOR V/O

Over time the two mighty warrior tribes were swept away, they went to war and lit the touch paper that would irresistibly tear them apart through bad faith and ideology. In the end through fear, all of the old battles were rejected by the Platforms inhabitants.



## THE ACADEMIC

This object does not look like art!!!... More like a bathroom cabinet or some other utilitarian high concept design in a flat-pack style of aesthetic... are you making a claim to be the true heir... the logical continuation of all that we, here in this place have tried to defend??? These texts you have produced are baffling... "BUILDING ON THE PARTISANS INSISTENCE ON ARTS SPECIFIC MATERIALITY AND THE LOGICAL MOVEMENT TOWARDS A PARTICULAR OBJECTIVE NATURE"??? The Partisan??? Is that what you think he meant???

## THE MINIMIZER

Yes... self critique... strengthens the thing through privileging the characteristic methods of the thing... the internal logic... object-ness through specific material conditions.

## THE ACADEMIC

No... you have completely misunderstood his intentions... he would hate this stuff not canonise it, he would never accept it into the pantheon instead he would throw it on the junk heap like so much more over designed, over literal and over theatricalised shit!!!

You have made bad art here... in point of fact it is worse than that, you have made non-art with these readymade industrial materials. That means you have produced things as aesthetically dull as any other utilitarian object – doors, tables and the rest, they can be read as objects only... that's it... nothing more.

## THE MINIMIZER

Yes... you would say that. You are anthropocentric, invested in the promotion of the subjectivity of the artist. We here want to develop a trajectory away from this, to subtract the artist from the artwork in order to cut an alternative route that attacks the conservative grip and expressive pretensions of your precious anthropomorphised illusions. It is time for a renewed radicalism that shows up your formalism to be conservative down to its last brass tack...

#### THE ACADEMIC

Ok... so you are claiming that these things here are anti-humanist, that they de-centre the subjectivity of the artist entirely??? They replace this 'conservatism' with audience interaction???

#### THE MINIMIZER

We are... we get rid of the relationships inside the work... just have done with them... turn them out and make them spatial and about the viewers perception... experience... that's the important thing here the viewing experience. This is where the battle is to be fought now... not in hermetic sieges.

#### THE ACADEMIC

Ha... I see now... all this literal materiality and elevation of the spatial experience as the thing to be encountered is nothing more than theatre... it is not anti-humanist at all. It is a theatrical negation of all that has been fought for by the Platform!!! You have reduced it to its literal function only... its literal sensibility and concerned yourselves only with the circumstances of the actual encounter... you have made objects that cannot exist without the activation of a beholder. This is anthropocentrism writ large...

Act 6

(The Standardizer and The Adhocist)

In which the Platform is absorbed into the body of the Machine (Dawn of the Realist)

Act 6: The backdrop measures 1880mm x 1530mm. The surface is a collage constructed with a blue tarpaulin as a base. Onto this are attached pages from a magazine – featuring images from fashion shoots – in a grid formation. Onto this is pulled tapes of varying colours and widths. The pattern of the tape is controlled random. A piece of heavy gauge clear polythene is stretched across the collage and stapled to the framework.

#### THE NARRATOR V/O

All that they could do, however putative and rigorous, was watch as the culture they hoped to see develop was seemingly halted. Instead of the radicalism of new forms that would secure the new dawn of man the same culture began to eat itself cannibalising voraciously on its own past devouring its ancestors and offspring alike, men feeding on men. Reanimating and releasing these hybridised bastards adding new modifications to the massive Machine that was engulfing all and sundry in an epidemic of information and capitalised contagion which became an interface for all to combine with and collaborate; a web of relations that guaranteed integration and affirmation of the Machines superiority.

## THE STANDARDIZER

We have to rebuild the Platform; lift it up from its dereliction. Everything we fought for and toiled to achieve... a future built on the science of materiality; on the collective struggle of man is demonstrated in the structure of the Platform!!! The war goes on...

## THE ADHOCIST

What? (Laughing as it speaks)

The war goes on?

How can you be so sure that there is a reality? Or a general structure to be uncovered? Maybe nothing exists outside of our subjective constitution of it. What if there is no absolute truth that is universally applicable to you as it is to me or to them... what if your battles have been mere vanity projects. What if everything is a simulation, a subjective projection?

## THE STANDARDIZER

No... you are misguided. The patterns of reality are set and cannot be dismissed by your scepticism. The binaries exist they are real whether you say so or not! That's a certainty. STANDARDS!!! The law of selection has led to standards and geometries of truth that cannot be denied... Universal law dictated by keeping an eye on the minute study of health and morality. Perfection of forms into beautiful purified constructions of logic and analysis... That is the nature of the Platform....

## THE ADHOCIST

OK... typically you revert to type... authoritarian to the bitter end... arboreal to the last age ring of your massive trunk. Why do you cling to this notion of universal truth... why is such truth even important to you? It is this that has been your Achilles heel all

along... there are social constructs and these change constantly, there is only pluralism; whatever you might think is important, I may find trivial... consensus is not possible, we are a ball of confusion a miasma of transient subjectivities, individuals, atomised and without roots. It is not a case of this or that... it is a case of this and that and that and that and so on.

#### THE STANDARDIZER

If you are right... if there is no single 'reality' then how can we know our enemy how can we have grounds to resist the Machine?

#### THE ADHOCIST

"Resist the Machine", what are you jabbering on about you lumbering antique... thinking in terms of oppositions, of collectives and continents; boundaries and borders. There are no oppositions, there are no collectives. There are no borders. There are no ideologies. There are no grand narratives. There is only the openness of the Machine and within the Machine all points of view are valid, choice is infinite and opportunities are abundant. So rebuild your Platform... it can no longer embody you're credulousness... it can only ever return as a style; inactive and frozen.

Lights dim...

THE NARRATOR V/O

Throughout this the partisans and party poopers of the platform died off. The last of these prophets of negativity predicted accurately the ruin of the platform and its fall into insignificance and ridicule and eventually its absorption into the body of the machine. All that was left of the platform was a faded, jaded memory to be picked over, perverted and fetishised.

Lights to black...

## AD-HOC (ADHOCARY)

### AD-HOC

For the moment, on the spot, or end at hand, also, by extension,

improvised or unsystematic. The Latin for "to this," is most

often used for committees with no other specific purpose, as

in 'this committee was formed to study the city's health insurance

problems'. The term is also used in a pejorative sense (An ad hoc

committee was formed), and has given rise to the noun

ad hocism for the practice of using temporary, provisional, or

improvised methods or arrangements. (20th Century)

### AD-HOC UNIT

In military use, this is a unit which is formed for a specific purpose, and

cooperation between different units is required for fast action.

## STRATEGIC

This is the deal, I am not here to

waste your time and I can only hope

you're not here to waste mine. So I'm

going to keep this short. You become an

employee of this firm and you will make

your first million in six months.

Chief? Is that all?

Make a million dollars in six months?

Yes, if you work for me. I'll give you

all I want, everything I have.

There is no question about it. You

will be a millionaire working for me.



## AD-HOC (GLOSSARY)

### AD-HOC:

For the special purpose or end at hand; also, by extension, improvised or impromptu. The term, Latin for “to this,” is most often used for committees established for a specific purpose, as in ‘the committee was formed ad hoc to address health insurance problems’. The term is also used as an adjective (An ad hoc committee was formed), and has given rise to the noun adhocism for the tendency to use temporary, provisional, or improvised methods to deal with a particular problem. [Early1600s]

### AD-HOC UNIT:

In militaristic terms ad-hoc units are created for an unpredictable situation, when the cooperation between different units is needed for fast action.

### STRATEGIC:

This is the deal. I am not here to waste your time and I can only hope you're not here to waste mine. So I'm gonna keep this short. You become an employee of this firm and you will make your first million within three years. Okay? Let me repeat that. You will make a million dollars within three years of your first day of employment at JT Marlin. Everybody got that? There is no question as to whether you will be a millionaire working at this

firm, the question is how many times over.

You think I'm joking. I am not joking.

I am a millionaire. It's a weird thing to hear, right? I'll tell you, it's a weird thing to say. I'm a fucking millionaire. Now guess how old I am?

Twenty-seven. You know what that makes me here? A fucking senior citizen.

This firm is entirely comprised of people your age, not mine. Lucky for me, I am very fucking good at my job or I'd be out of one. You guys are the new blood. You're gonna go home with the kesef. You're the future Big-Swinging-Dicks of this firm. Now you all look money hungry and that's good. Anybody who says money is the root of all evil, doesn't have it! Money can't buy happiness? Look at the fucking smile on my face. Ear to ear, baby.

You wanna hear details? I drive a Ferrari 355 cabriolet.

(throws keys on desk)

I have a ridiculous house on the South Fork. I've got every toy you can imagine. And best of all, kids, I am liquid.

Jim takes a pause here and circles the room. So now that you know what's possible, let me tell you what's required. You are required to work your ass off. We want winners, not pikers. A piker is someone who walks at the bell. A piker asks how much vacation time he gets in the first year. See, people work here to become filthy rich. No other reason. That's it. You want vacation time? Go teach third grade public school.

Your first six months at the firm are as a trainee... you make one hundred and fifty dollars a week. After you're done training, you take the Series Seven test. When you pass, you become a junior broker and you'll be opening accounts for your team leader. After you open forty accounts you begin working for yourself and then... sky's the limit. Now a word about being a trainee. The other brokers, your parents, whoever: they're gonna give you shit about it. And it's true, a hundred and fifty a week is not a lot of money, but pay no mind. You need to learn the business and this is the time to do it. Once you pass the Series Seven none of it will matter.

Your friends are shit. You're gonna tell them you made twenty-five thousand last month and they're not going to believe you. Fuck them! Your parents don't like the life you lead? Fuck you Mom and Dad! As a trainee you will be building a foundation for yourself. Think of it as the foundation to a building. Right? Gotta build the foundation before you can put up your skyscraper. You know what I built? (takes out a model)

The fucking twin towers. Now go home and think about whether this is for you. If you decide it isn't, nothing to be embarrassed about. It's not for everyone.

But if you really want it, then give me a call on Monday and we'll talk. Just don't waste my time. Alright. That's it.

Ben Affleck as Jim, *Boiler Room* (2000)

## DOCUMENTARY 1:

“Documentary concerns itself with representing the observable world, and to this end works with what [John] Grierson called the raw material of reality. The documentarian draws on past and present actuality — the world of social and historical experience — to construct an account of lives and events. Embedded within the account of physical reality is a claim or assertion at the centre of all non-fictional representation, namely, that a documentary depiction of the socio-historical world is factual and truthful.”

—Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television*, p. 10.

## ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION:

is a concept presented by the Marxist geographer David Harvey, which defines the neoliberal capitalist policies in many western nations, from the 1970s and to the present day, as resulting in a centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public of their wealth or land. These neoliberal policies are guided mainly by four practices: privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions.

## FORCING STRUCTURES:

In an atmosphere of such cheerful celebration of a world without borders, it becomes necessary to advance another thesis or logic—we need borders more than ever. How is this possible? The answer is very simple: to establish a border means to present, to incorporate, to take a clear political stance, to ask for a political act, to draw a line of division that can rearticulate this new world that seems to be without borders—in which the only thing that seems impossible is impossibility as such... What is then

required is a precise new conceptual and paradigmatic political act within this new framework. The political act is always a division—a placement of a border within a space, reconfiguring, closing, or stopping the imperialism of circulation without difference as it establishes a new structure to which to relate... A political act is that which interrupts a situation in which the only impossible thing in the world is impossibility as such.

Marina Gržinić

Drawing a Border (Reartikulacija, Part 3 of 3) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/drawing-a-border-reartikulacija-part-3-of-3/>

BLUDGEON:

1. (Military / Arms & Armour (excluding Firearms) a stout heavy club, typically thicker at one end.
2. a person, line of argument, etc., that is effective but unsubtle

CRABTREES BLUDGEON:

States that “[n]o set of mutually inconsistent observations can exist for which some human intellect cannot conceive a coherent explanation, however complicated.”

DUPLICATE:

Probably before 1425, double, consisting of two parts, in a translation of Higden’s Polychronicon; borrowed from Latin Duplicatus, past participle of duplicare to double, from DUPLEX. The meaning of exactly corresponding to something, is first recorded in

1812. 1472 duplicaten make a second reply; later to double. Duplication; to make an exact copy. Duplicitous = deceitful.

#### DUPLICITOUS:

Fuck you, that's my name. You know why mister? Cause you drove a Hyundai to get here tonight, I drove an 80,000 dollar BMW. That's my name. (To Lemmon) And your name is you're wanting. You can't play in the man's game, you can't close them? Then go home and tell your wife your troubles. Because only one thing counts in this life. Get them to sign on the line which is dotted. You hear me you fuckin' faggots.

*(Flips the blackboard)*

ABC. A, Always, B, Be, C, Closing. Always be closing. Always be closing. AIDA. Attention. Interest. Decision. Action. Attention. Do I have your attention? Interest. Are you interested? I know you are 'cause it's fuck or walk. You close or you hit the bricks. Decision. Have you made your decision for Christ? And action. AIDA. Get out there. You got the prospects coming in, you think they came in to get out of the rain? A guy don't walk on the lot lest he wants to buy. They're sitting out there waiting to give you their money. Are you going to take it? Are you man enough to take it?

What's the problem, pal?

Alec Baldwin as Blake in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992)

#### DOCUMENTARY 2:

“Documentary is the creative treatment of actuality.”

– John Grierson, Cinema Quarterly 2.1, p. 8.

#### DUOBLE AGENT:

A new ad released on Friday 31st of March 2012 portrayed U.S. President Barack Obama as a Russian double agent. The ad created by the Karl Rove-linked independent group exploited Obama’s open-mic gaffe at a meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev earlier in the week.

Digital Journal reported that in a meeting Obama held with President Dmitry Medvedev earlier this week in Seoul, South Korea, Obama pleaded with Medvedev for “space” to address conflict between the U.S. and Russia over the European missile defense program. He said: “This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility.”

Obama did not realize that reporters heard his exchange with Medvedev over open microphones.

IB Times reports that before releasing the video on Friday, Karl Rove, in a blog post on Fox News, said: “By telling Mr. Medvedev and his patron, the once-and-future Russian President Vladimir Putin, that he will have ‘flexibility’ after the American election on Russian demands opposing a US missile defense for Europe, Mr. Obama is in effect saying he is ready to do something the Russians will like but that the American people won’t.” He added: “Mr. Obama has shown Russian leaders, and now the entire world, weakness.”

According to IB Times, Obama is portrayed as a James Bond-type rogue character and Russian double agent on a mission to weaken America's national security. In the James Bond movie-inspired montage, Obama is the Russian double agent "President Flexible" working to compromise America's national security.

In the 1 minute 21 seconds footage, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is "Dr Transmitkov." According to The Inquisitr, Dr. Transmitkov is 130penness partly after the James Bond super-villian Ernst Stavro Blofeld, and partly after "Dr. Evil" of the "Austin Powers" franchise. Vladimir Putin is shown riding half-naked on horseback as "himself."

Obama as double agent President Flexible, is involved in a dark conspiracy that is the title of the video: "Operation Hot Mic: You Can Only Run Twice." The video opens at a military parade in Moscow's Red Square with Obama in tuxedo, and later he is shown with Medvedev promising to be "more flexible" after his election. A female narrator imitates Dame Judi Dench as Bond's M16 boss "M," The Inquisitr explains.

The female voiceover reveals President Flexible's evil mission: "Your mission is simple, Mr Obama: Win one last election to gain unchecked flexibility, weaken our 130penness, and fundamentally transform the world." The video heightens the impression of dark treacherous conspiracy with images and sounds of Iranian President Ahmadinejad, missile launches and replays of Obama's exchange with Dmitry Medvedev.

The video ends with the ominous warning, "America can't afford the risk."

<http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/322119#ixzz1r46VD56N>



## SURFACE:

A statement of fact is one-dimensional.

## SURFACE 2:

“(Thus) exactness and clarity in philosophy cannot be attained within the universe of ordinary discourse. The philosophic concepts aim at a dimension of fact and meaning which elucidates the atomized phrases or words of ordinary discourse “from without” by showing this “without” as essential to the understanding of ordinary discourse. Or, if the universe of ordinary discourse itself becomes the object of philosophic analysis, the language of philosophy becomes a “meta-language.” Even where it moves in the humble terms of ordinary discourse, it remains antagonistic. It dissolves the established experiential context of meaning into that of its reality; it abstracts from the immediate concreteness in order to attain true concreteness.”

Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (1964).

## DOCUMENTARY 3:

“Documentary defines not subject or style, but approach. ... Documentary approach to cinema differs from that of story-film not in its disregard for craftsmanship, but in the purpose to which that craftsmanship is put.”

–Paul Rotha, *Cinema Quarterly*, 2.2, p. 78.

## EXCESS – ECONOMIC:

1: The state or an instance of surpassing usual, proper, or specified limits.

2: Undue or immoderate indulgence.

3: According to Georges Bataille's theory of consumption, the accursed share is that excessive and non-recuperable element of any economy. An element that will be expended luxuriously without gain in the arts, in sex and spectacle or in an outrageous and catastrophic outpouring, giving everything away in sacrifice; always though in a way that threatens the prevailing system.

TURBULENCE:

It's just money. It's made up, pieces of paper with pictures on it, so we don't have to kill each other just to get something to eat. It's not wrong and it's certainly no different today than it's ever been.

1637 1797 1819 37 57 84 1901 07 29 1937 1974 1987 Jesus didn't that fucker fuck me up good 92 97 2000 and whatever we want to call this. It's all just the same thing over and over. We can't help ourselves and you and I can't control it or stop it or even slow it or even slightly alter it.

We just react.

We make a lot of money if we get it right and we get left by the side of the road if we get it wrong, and there always has been and always will be the same percentage of winners and losers; happy fucks and sad sacks, fat cats and starving dogs in this world. Yes there may be more of us today than there has ever been, but the percentages stay exactly the same. (John Tuld (Jeremy Irons), Margin Call)

DOCUMENTARY 4:

“A non-fiction text using ‘actuality’ footage, which may include the live recording of events and relevant research materials (i.e. interviews, statistics, etc.). This kind of text is usually informed by a particular point of view, and seeks to address a particular social issue which is related to and potentially affects the audience.”

–Paul Wells, “The Documentary Form: Personal and Social ‘Realities,’” *An Introduction to Film Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Jill Neldes, p. 212.

#### EXCESS – RHETORICAL:

George Puttenham from his treatise on imaginative and excessive rhetoric *The Art of English Poesie* from 1586 claims;

For as the evill and vicious disposition of the braine hinders the sound judgement and discourse of man with busie and disordered phantasies, for which the Greeks call him Phantasikos, so is that parte being well affected, not onely nothing disorderly or confused with any monstrous imaginations or conceits , but very formall, and in his muche multiformitie uniforme, that is well proportioned, and so passing cleare that by it as by a glass or mirreur, are represented into the soule all manner of bewtifull visions, whereby the inventive parte of the mynde is so much holpen, as without it no man could devise any new or rare thing... Wherefore such persons be illuminated with the brightest knowledge and of the veritie and due proportion of things, they are called by the learned men not phantasici but euphantisiote, and of this sort of phantasie are all good poets, notable captains stratagematique, all cunning artificers and engineers, all legislators and polititiens and counsellors of state, in whose exercise

the inventive part is most employed and is to the sound and true judgements of man most needful.

#### REDEMPTIVE 1:

He believed (Ruskin) that some of the first steps in the necessary redemptive process must be the education of the poor and a return to what he conceived (certainly with much exaggeration) to have been the conditions of medieval labour, when each craftsman was not a mere machine but an intelligent and original artistic creator; but the underlying essential was to free industry from the spirit of selfish money-getting and permeate it with Christian sympathy and respect for man as man.

A History of English Literature by Fletcher, Robert Huntington

#### REDEMPTIVE 2:

Life presents the ordinary human being with ample unasked-for occasions to practice redemptive suffering. However, religious practitioners in various traditions have found spiritual benefits from voluntarily bringing upon themselves additional pain and discomfort through corporal mortification. One extreme example of redemptive suffering, which existed in the 13th and 14th centuries in Europe, was the Flagellants. As a partial response to the Black Death, these radicals, who were later condemned as heretics in the Catholic Church, engaged in body mortification, usually by whipping themselves, to repent for their sins, which they believed led to the Black Death. The Flagellants quickly developed a large following throughout Central Europe, as they undertook militant pilgrimages across parts of the continent.

Wikipedia

BLUDGEON;

"Gentlemen, it's a new day. The clients we've done after in the past — they're done. We will now target exclusively the wealthiest one percent of Americans. The methods we've used — over. Loud, obnoxious sales hype is worthless with these people. In military terms it's like carpet-bombing — noise, menacing, and only marginally effective. As Stratton brokers you will be laser-guided smart bombs aimed at high-priority targets. You will establish an initial relationship with your clients selling only blue chip stocks — then and only then will you attempt to sell the pink sheets, where the real money is..."

Leonardo DiCaprio as Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2012)

Read more: <http://www.businessinsider.com/15-scenes-from-the-wolf-of-wall-street-script-2012-8?op=1#ixzz2Ejz1evEJ>

YOU CANNOT HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT:

This means that you have to make a choice; no matter how difficult.

DOCUMENTARY 5 – 7:

"[A]ny film practice that has as its subject persons, events, or situations that exist outside the film in the real world."

—Steve Blandford, Barry Keith Grant, and Jim Hillier, *The Film Studies Dictionary*, p. 73.

“A nonfiction film. Documentaries are usually shot on location, use actual persons rather than actors, and focus thematically on historical, scientific, social, or environmental subjects. Their principle purpose is to enlighten, inform, educate, persuade, and provide insight into the world in which we live.”

–Frank Beaver, Dictionary of Film Terms, p. 119.

“A non-fiction film about real events and people, often avoiding traditional narrative structures.”

–Timothy Corrigan, A Short Guide to Writing About Film, 4th ed., p. 206.

#### MATRIXICAL:

The mighty cosmos of the economic order (which is bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanical and machine production)... today... determines with overwhelming coercion, the style of life not only of those directly involved in business but in every individual who is born into that mechanism, and may well continue to do so until the day the last ton of fossil fuel is consumed.

MAX WEBER, 1905.

#### POLITICAL IDENTITY:

In sciences such as psychology and sociology, internalization is the process of acceptance of a set of norms established by people or groups which are influential to the individual. The process starts with learning what the norms are, and then the individual goes through a process of understanding why they are of value or why they make sense, until finally they accept the norm as their own viewpoint.

NATURALISED:

"You have meddled with the primary forces of nature, Mr Beale, and I won't have it! Is that clear?

You think you merely stopped a business deal. That is not the case. The Arabs have taken billions of dollars out of this country, and now they must put it back! It is ebb and flow, tide and gravity. It is ecological balance.

You are an old man who thinks in terms of nations and peoples. There are no nations. There are no peoples. There are no Russians. There are no Arabs. There are no Third Worlds. There is no West. There is only one holistic system of systems. One vast and immane, interwoven, interacting, multi-varied, multi-national dominion of dollars. Petro-dollars, electro-dollars, multi-dollars, reichmarks, rands, rubles, pounds and shekels.

It is the international system of currency which determines the totality of life on this planet. That is the natural order of things today. That is the atomic, and sub-atomic and galactic structure of things today.

And YOU have meddled with the primal forces of nature. And you will atone.

Am I getting through to you, Mr Beale?"

Ned Beatty as Arthur Jensen in the Sydney Lumet film Network (1976)

## DOCUMENTARY 8 & 9:

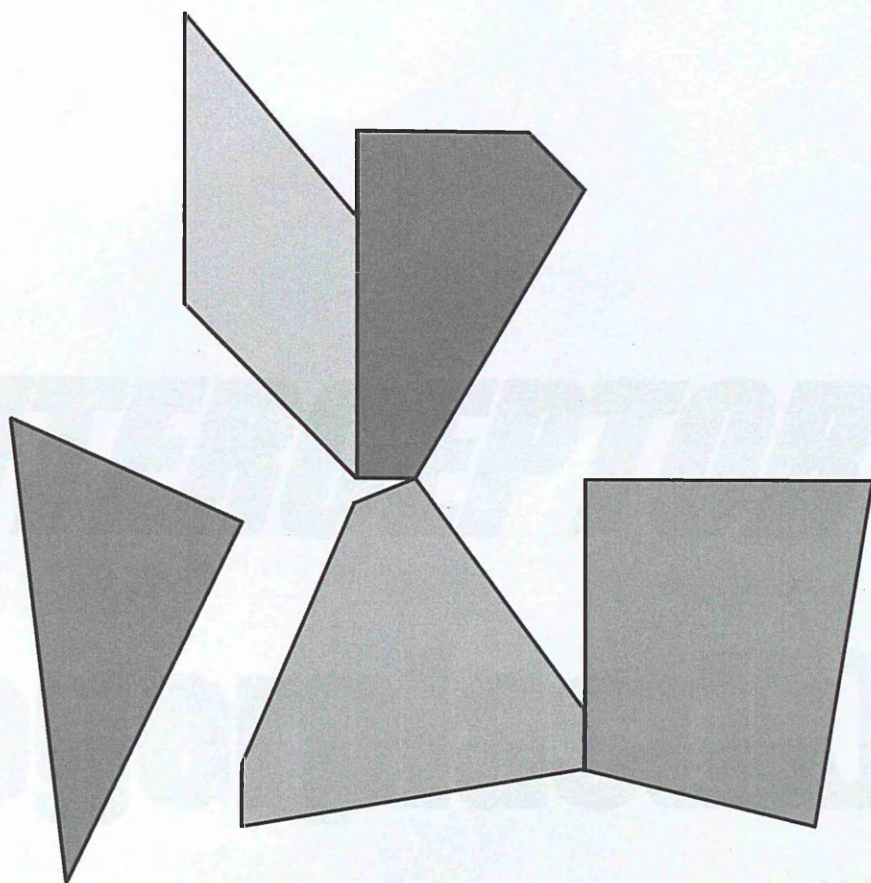
“Film of actual events; the events are documented with the real people involved, not with actors.”

–Ralph S. Singleton and James A. Conrad, *Filmmaker’s Dictionary*, 2nd ed., p.94.

“A documentary film purports to present factual information about the world outside the film.”

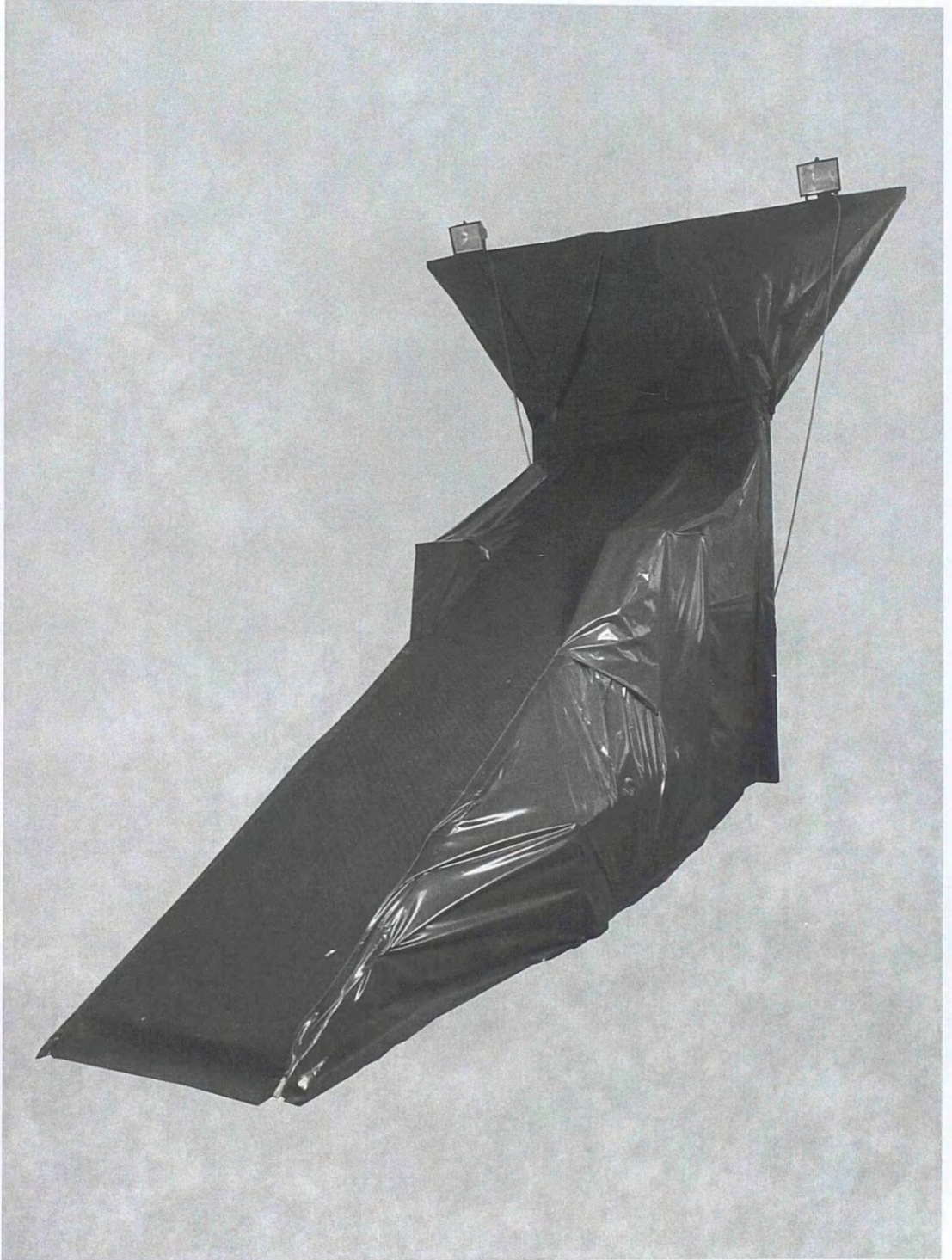
–David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 5th ed., p.42.



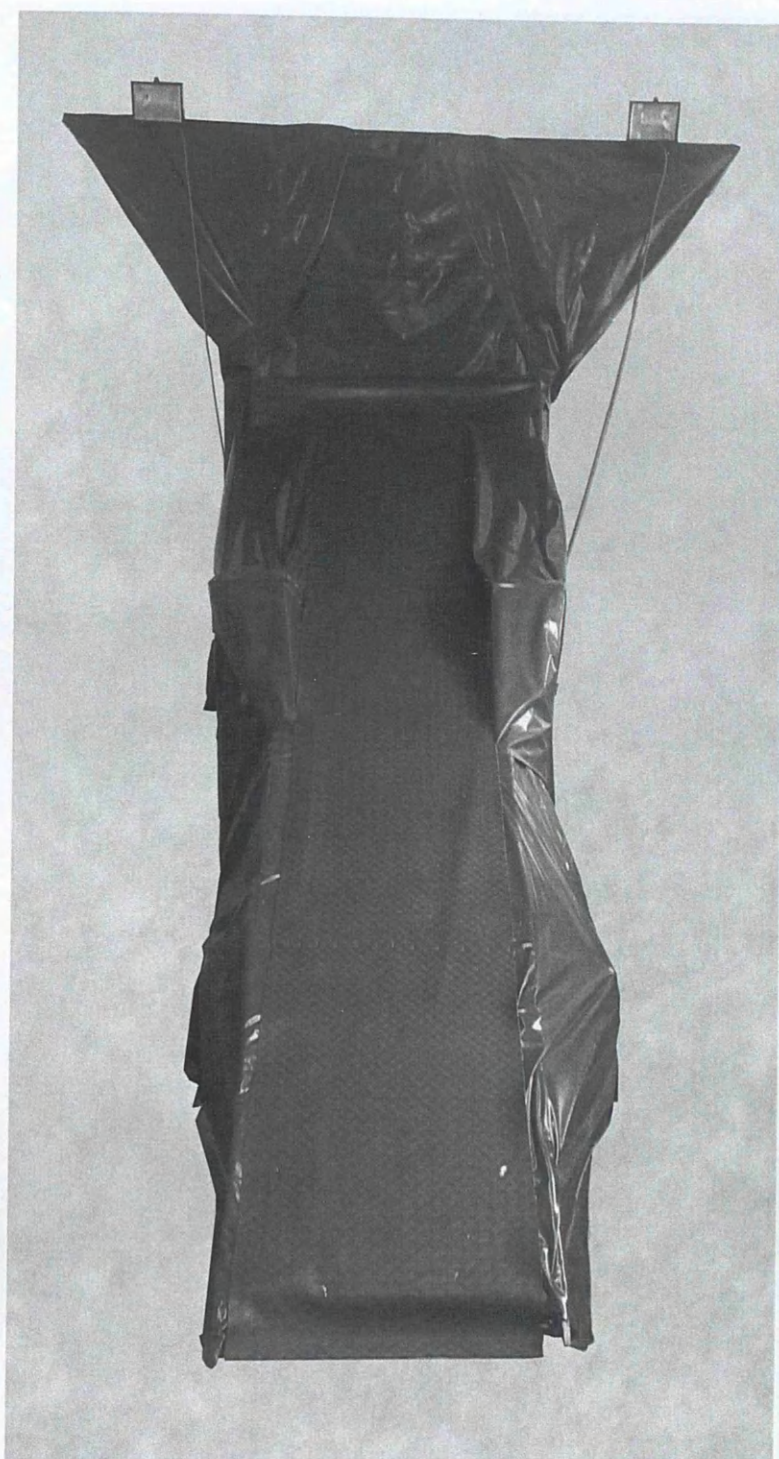


# ***INTERCEPTOR*** **(Negerplastik)**

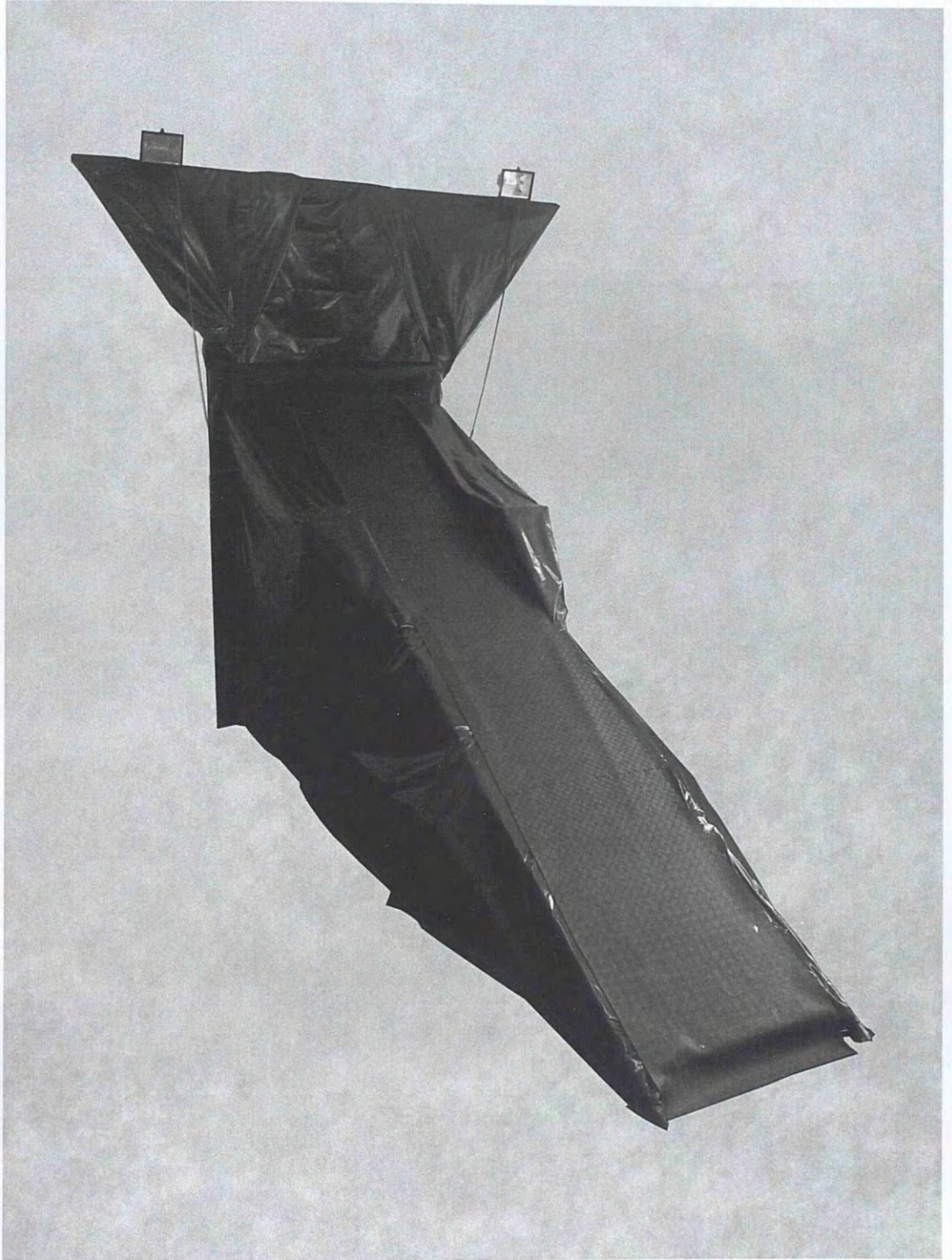














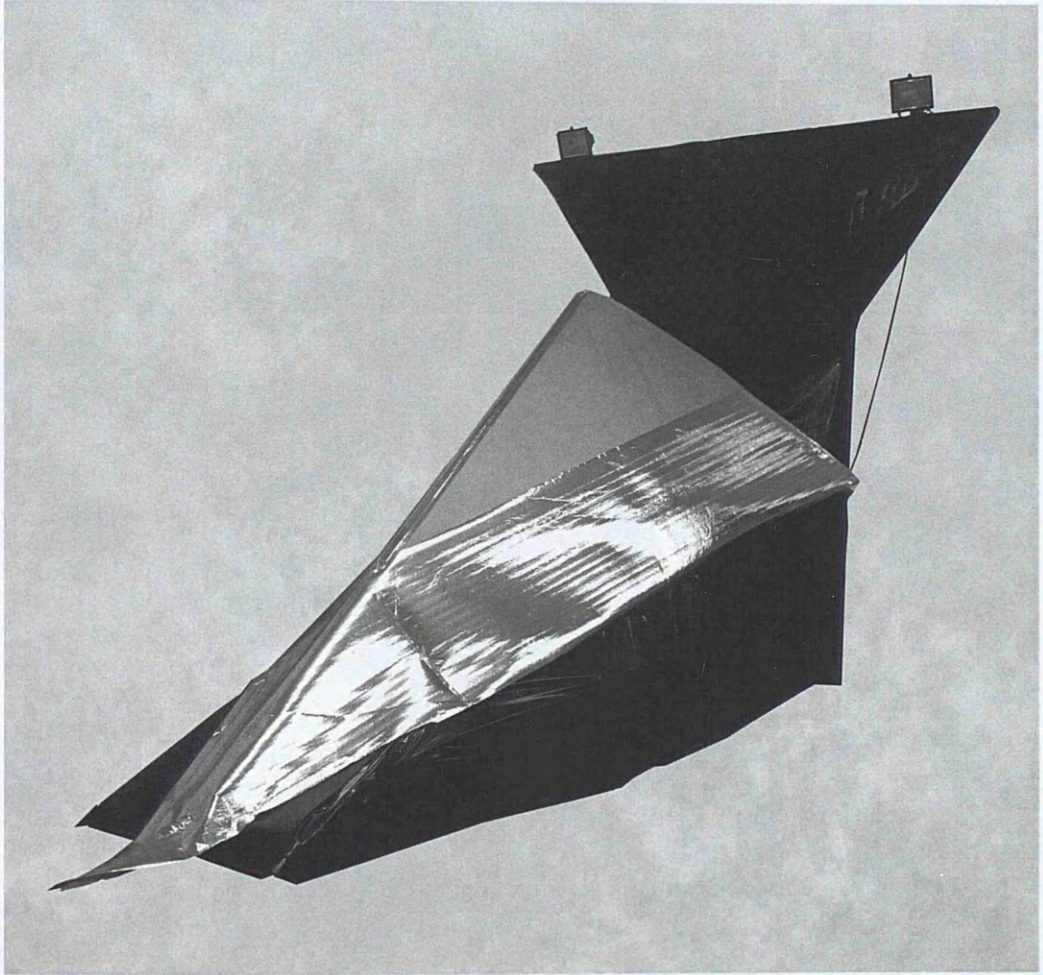




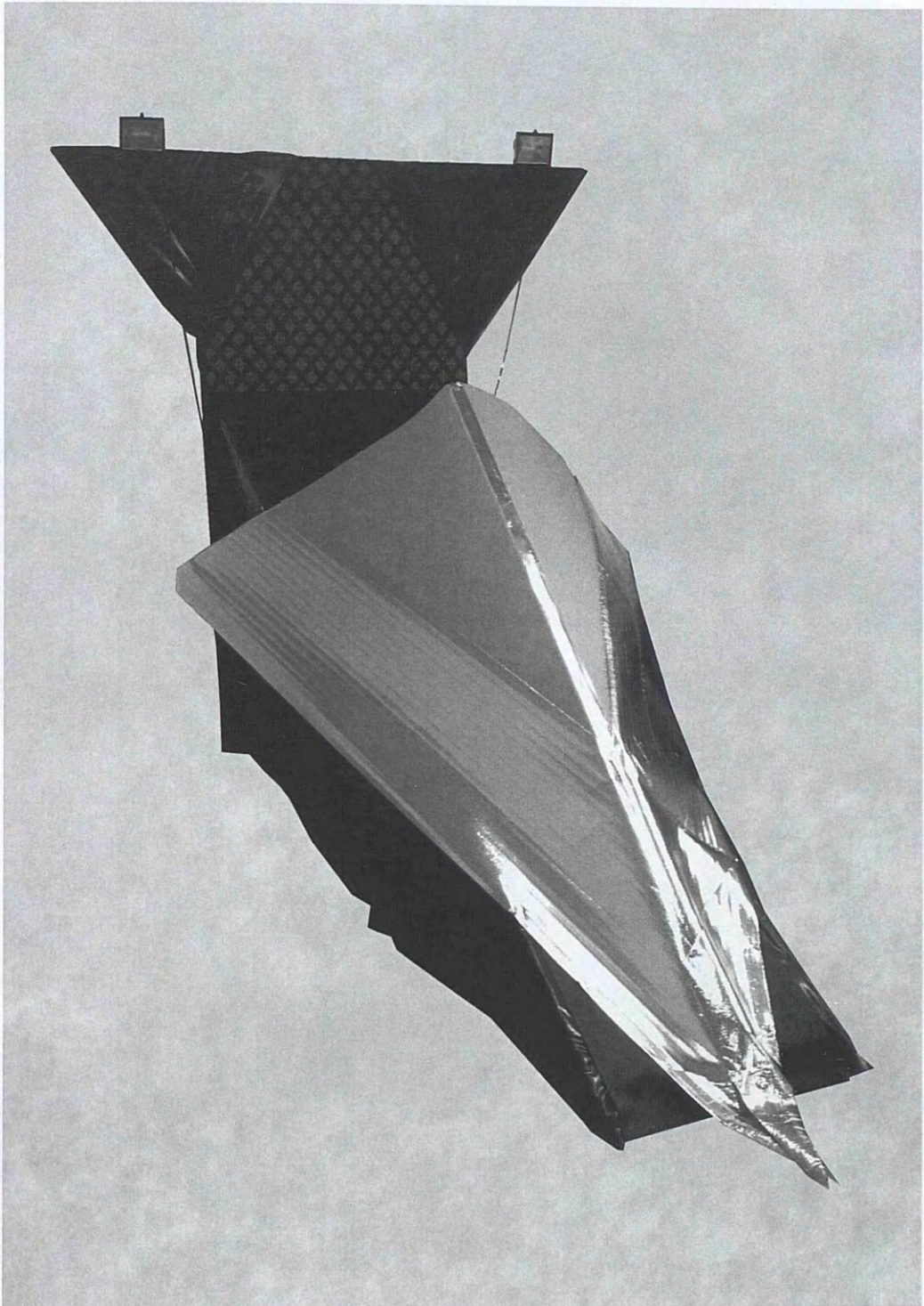




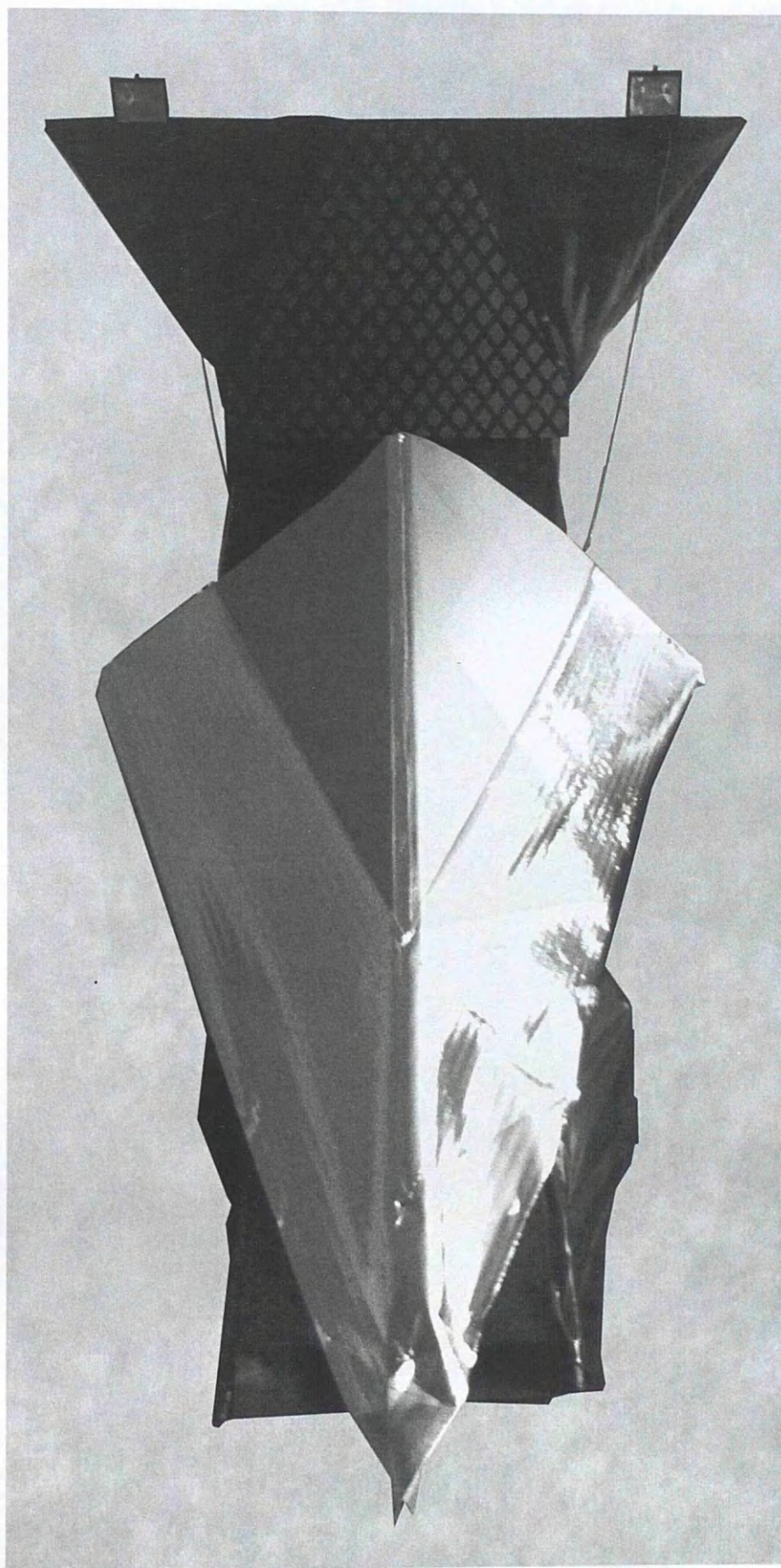














# Material Conjectures (AUTONOMY)

The following is the transcript of an actual conversation that took place between an artist and a curator over the days of the end of August 2011 and the month of December 2011. It concerns how they might proceed with an exhibition and seminar on the topic of autonomy and understand the conditions for thinking – today – about the debated problem of arts autonomy today.

27/08/11

Hallo K.

Is art autonomous?

Is the language of art autonomous?

Autonomy (political, economic, cultural)

Autonomy is the right to the self-determination of a government, especially with

Whilst to be autonomous is to possess a large degree of self government.

Neither of these definitions speaks of an idealised condition that is absolutely

outside of the world and therefore unattainable in reality. Instead both speak to

the idea that autonomy is always a series of concrete choices amongst a given situation.

Autonomy (self-determination) – artist and post-industrial discourse

autonomy is always a series of choices – autonomy is not a condition or a state

opposite of (architectural) autonomy is the possibility seen as the

# Material Conjectures (AUTONOMY)

*The following is the transcript of an email conversation that took place between an artist and a curator over four days at the end of August 2011 and the month of December 2011. The conversation hinges on how they might proceed with an exhibition and symposium that attempts to interrogate and understand the conditions for thinking – towards revitalising – the much debated problem of arts autonomy today.*

**27/08/11**

Hello K,

Is art autonomous?

Is the language of autonomy useful now?

**Autonomy (politics);** the dictionary definition of autonomy tells us that:

*Autonomy is the right and the state of self government, especially when limited.*

Whilst to be autonomous is: *to possess a large degree of self government.*

Neither of these definitions speaks of an idealised condition that is absolutely outside of the world and therefore unattainable in reality. Instead both speak to the idea that autonomy is always a series of concrete choices amongst a given situation.

**Autonomy (art historical);** in modernist and post-modernist discourse autonomy is always cast in a binary relationship with commoditisation or as the opposite of (socialist) realism. It is traditionally seen as the mark of high art,

purity, originality and individualism against the derivative populist kitsch of commerce.

Thanks

D.

Hi D,

The latter assertion in **Autonomy (art historical)** concurs with Isabelle Graw's attempt to create an autonomous space for art within celebrity and commodity culture (capitalism). Graw writes in her book *High Price* (2009): '*This connection between luxury goods and the art world does not alter the fact that the artwork possesses a degree of cultural and social prestige to which luxury goods can only aspire. For all the efforts that have been made (made-to-measure, waiting lists), luxury goods have not managed to establish a comparable aura of cultural importance.*' (Graw, 2009, p138)

Graw's autonomy is developed through artistic strategies, which invoke *market reflexive gestures*: an artist must situate his/herself within the system, whilst simultaneously critiquing or rejecting that system (art market). However, if the object/image/performance etc. is already measuring itself against the market and polarizing itself with commodity production etc. then it is already relational or relative to that form of production. The fine artworks reflexive gesture relies on the 'other' of commodity production and the market for the existence of its critique. If commodity production and the market crumbled, the artworks (gesture) autonomy would also, so therefore, the *market reflexive gesture* is not autonomous but relational. Perhaps autonomy occurs when there is no measuring stick; a measuring stick, which in Graw's theory is reflexivity, would

already place the work within the past-present system of capitalism. The problem posed here is how do we think autonomy without idealising an outside to the system but also without limiting the within, as merely a measurement against that system?

In terms of the first fragment on **Autonomy (Politics)** self-determination is problematic when we think through the subject-artefact, as produced by Michel Foucault. If autonomy is invested in the surface of the self (identity), then emphasis falls on stylizing the self and portraying the best self you can be. Foucault's free flowing capital that a few agents (like Graw's reflexive artist) can tap into and redirect actually produces human-capital; we are habituated to consume in an impossible attempt to achieve the perfect self. Subjects, which evade the states moralizing gaze, are bound up with an ascetic self-restraint and stylization that is meant to epitomize true freedom (but actually reiterates the states concern with healthy minds, bodies and relationships); a freedom of the artifact therefore has a self-imposed law. This means that the hegemony and homogeneous ideology of the system is actually internalized, atomized and reiterated within the self. Foucault's subjects which require a self-determined law or language game if they are to sever themselves from the accumulative history of state control are already caught up in the power games of that system. Again, the question here is how to remain subjectively autonomous without reiterating the subjectivities already promoted by the system? Perhaps rethinking subjectivity, as not merely produced within an individual, but as being called into existence via an event is important here: a de-centered subjectivity that is not a 'whole' or individuated self?

Thanks,

K.

**28/08/11**

Hello K,

I agree with your summation of Graw's reliance on the measuring stick, pre-existing order and reflexive gesture as guarantors of arts autonomy. Effectively Graw continues the tradition found in critical theory of positive dialectical procedure. Also your assertion regarding the idealism of affect and teleology are interesting. First we have to find a solution for all the hand wringing about the perfect self and healthy subjectivities – Adorno's attack on identity in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is useful here – identity is only ever the pre constituted structuration of the 'personal' and the 'particular' by capitalist relations of production. Whilst de-centring subjectivity might offer a solution to the issue of idealising autonomy as outside or before this structuring, we should bear in mind that for both Axel Honneth and Emanuel Levinas a decentred autonomy is inter-subjective and relational based on respect and recognition of the other. This suggests its own problems for *our* thinking arts autonomy. Maybe autonomy in art would be actualised through such a decentring of the subject, but what if we consider evacuating rather than de-centring the subject? Can there be a non-subjective autonomous artwork, non-relational and eristic not open to interpretation or dialectics?

I look forward to your reply

D.



Hi D,

Yes, I agree that thinking through the subject, as opposed to object/image, is problematic. Theorizing the image through the political subsumes the image back into a relational bind (to a subject) and present state-of-affairs (the subjects reality). Perhaps thinking through Louis Althusser's aleatory materialism is pertinent here? Aleatory materialism asserts matter (image, object, subject or state-of-affairs) are produced by atoms, which fall vertically in the void: atoms that are 155penness155 (forced to cross paths) and interlocked by a swerve (force). This interlocking of alien atoms in the void is termed a material encounter, an encounter that is contingent and might or might not last. It is only through the material encounters ability to last, which is by no means necessary (likely), that a new world can be born and therefore, for politics to take place. Althusser describes capitalism, as being only one world amongst a infinitude of worlds and, therefore, we do not have to take it as a necessary, total or permanent system: it is part of the atoms in the void and could encounter, conjoin, or be displaced by other atoms and configurations. In light of this, an image does not have to account for its circulation within the market (capitalism) or even for its own encounter (coming into being), as the images materiality is contingent. In this sense the image encounter or event is configured and interlocked within its construction and production. Its autonomy or singularity calls for its own exhibition, which might or might not contribute to the image lasting. However, how should an exhibition treat this image that is aleatory material?

Does the 'to be' exhibited image have to call its subjects (curator, artists and viewers etc.) to be faithful (echoing Alain Badiou) without accounting for this

calling: a fidelity to a future that may or may not come, whilst the material falls back into contingency and the void? Or do the subjects (who created the artworks, swerve, or encountered the exhibition), in order to shake all forms of the present, as well as their primacy or supremacy over the image and materiality, have to also fall back into the atomised rain? If the latter is the case, then an exhibition structure must not be concerned with a historical account of its own becoming or with producing an affect within its audience (or for a future audience). If the curatorial conceit was to pose an affect then the exhibition would be pre-determined, acting as a means-to-an-end, which can only fall back into the existing state-of-affairs and present material relations. A concentration on affect forges a subjective perception of the present, or an ideal future from within the present, a process that equates to the very same present and perceptual/relational bind. This impoverishes the image and exhibition by forcing them to adhere to a subjective purpose. Instead, the image should be understood as a singularity that calls for a curatorial swerve but does not answer to it; the image is part of the exhibition but also remains autonomous. The exhibition or material intervention is then formulated as an end-in-itself, an encounter which may or may not take hold (last).

Is this too poetic?

Thanks,

K.

**29/08/11**

Hi K,

It's not too poetic.

Althusser's Materialism of the Encounter is pertinent here as is Badiou's fidelity. I think these two positions provide us with the foundation from which to proceed. I have been considering the Althusser recently and the swerve in particular which I have been thinking in terms of contingent influence – the swerve is force, the force of influence, nothing is made that is not the sum of its influences. I've also been thinking about fidelity as aleatory decision – I'm thinking here of *The Dice Man* (1971) Luke Rhinehart's book about a rogue psychologist who gets rid of the self by living to the contingencies and whims of the dice, replacing the self or unitary identity with multiplicity – gambling on autonomy if you like. I suggest that we cannot choose not to be influenced, influence is contingent (the swerve) and prior to free will and we hold fidelity to some configurations that are outcomes of influences and disavow others. This 'choice' is un-grounded on the abyss of the aleatory encounter; 'choice' is aleatory decision.

I agree with the final sentences on the exhibition problem and here are a few very brief thoughts.

- (i) The image-object is part of the exhibition but is never completely captured by its contextual siting in the curatorial structure.
- (ii) The image-object precedes and exceeds the exhibition, the architecture, artist and the viewer.
- (iii) All the relations are in place and none exhaust the image-object; it maintains in-itself autonomy.

Regards

D.

29/08/11

Hi D,

In terms of The Dice Man, his contingencies are already limited by the faces of the dice (existing material) and although the dice opens up the field it is not a completely contingent or infinite field, it is not what the Speculative Materialists call Absolute Contingency; in which the faces of the dice and its board are obliterated. However, when we are discussing the structure of an exhibition and an aleatory image the field is limited by influence and choice, rather than pure chance there is a limited chance. I wanted to think this limited chance through the swerve, which localizes elements so that they are forced to encounter and bring a new form into being. I guess the swerve you are suggesting is 'influence', which localizes the field and produces aleatory encounters that force a decision or 'choice': therefore, to be forced into an encounter (by the swerve) is to be contingent? The only problem with thinking through 'choice' is that we are locating perception and a subject, which impoverishes the image (as subject to choice) unless we think the image as influence and an influence that forces the encounter or choice within the subject (the image calls us)?

I completely agree with your final three points but how do we connect this to a theory of influence, force and choice, in regards to image production (as subjects we do produce the images) and exhibition structures (as subjects we do categorize and group them)? We are very close but we need to think through these connections and holes... perhaps the holes are required to be there for it to be contingent?

Thanks,

K.

**30/08/11**

Hello K,

Although your right to point out the Dice Man has a victim of what Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *The Black Swan* (2008) the *ludic fallacy* I maintain The Dice Man to be useful when we talk about the structure of an exhibition of artworks – his autonomy (if it is that) seems to be located in the frequency of change to the options assigned to the face of the dice and the unbinding effect this process has on identity and the relational regimes he moves across. Maybe it is a question of resourcefulness – rather than choice – amongst the contingencies of influence. Influence is the localising – as you said ‘the swerve’ – in an unlimited field of possible influences. This infinitude of chance is always greatly reduced by the actualities of exhibiting artworks; having said that the curatorial structure ought to be impractical. This might happen through plugging the holes and plastering over the cracks towards the implementation of an overly restrictive set of criteria. On the other hand I’m interested in the holes and the details and not any attempt to circumscribe them into a consistent whole – which surely would only ever serve to reinstate the ‘illusion’ of constitutive subjectivity – on our part as curators – which we discussed earlier. I think autonomy might be just this kind of inconsistency; moving through contexts, indifferent to a unified identity or any requirements to perform a task and instead recalcitrant across encounters.

Am I repeating myself???

Regards

D.

**31/08/11**

Hi D,

You are not repeating yourself, you have cleared up some of my questions and I think we agree on the main proposition. However, I think that a question of resourcefulness falls back into a theory of the subject, but is masked through advocating an inherent or prior-subjective self. This is similar to Henri Bergson's assertion that we should reject our identity (or the institutionalized subject) in favor of our infantile capacities, which he assumes allows us to shake off reality and get closer to the real. However, this position, that appears to open up the subject, actually just masks another stable view of the self and brings up questions of who is naturally resourceful or not? I think we should leave the idea of predetermining the context of a subjects (viewers) encounter and theorizing the subjects (viewers) transition between images or their affect on him/her (and his/her response): for this would be predetermining an 'affect' and would thus act as conservative. Instead we should focus on the 'swerve' and as you assert, an unpractical curatorial conceit. The term unpractical here, is not to be understood in terms of creating a dialectic with being practical but rather should be understood as not being concerned with being useful. The exhibition structure, as you say, should never be assumed as whole or total, the images always produce excess to the exhibition and perhaps call for a future intervention or exhibition. I think autonomy here is inconsistency but also its reliance on contingent encounters, which may or may not occur, can also

render it consistent. It is within the void of the exhibition that contingency occurs and inconsistency happens; we should not pre-empt the contingency or the encounter but, as you assert, we should embrace the holes (the excesses that open up the void). For the former would stifle the contingency and conserve a projected perception but let us be wary of reverting to a form of nominalism.

Thanks,

K.

**31/08/11.**

Hello K,

I agree completely with your assertions although I should add in my defence that when I raise resourcefulness I do raise it in the spirit of Spinoza; that is in recognition of the all pervasive nature of influence or coming before any decision and it was an effort to not fall back into a theory of the privileged subject as freewill.

Of course your right to raise the issue of nominalism and we should avoid this at all costs, we should resist the temptation to apply the (*Ockhams*) *Razor* to reduce in an effort to explain the propositions and we already agree that autonomy is not particularity. As I'm sure you'll agree in art and for that matter curating the simplest explanation isn't always the best and art and curation if they are autonomous have nothing to do with proving a point. The solution to this problem might be to actively apply an *anti-razor* (or more precisely *Chatton's Anti-Razor*) in which – rather than slicing away or erasing what's unnecessary in the proposal and curatorial conceit towards a transparent particular and simplified consistency – we add proposition to proposition and so

on – although we should stop short of the eventual consistency Chatton intended – toward an opaque excessive and complicated inconsistency. This in itself suggests the autonomy we might be aiming at.

Regards

D.

**23/11/11**

Hi D,

I thought I should get the Autonomy discussion up and running again...

In the most recent (Nov. 2011, No351) issue of Art Monthly, Peter Suchin criticizes PhD's in Fine Art on the grounds that they prevent art from being autonomous:

**Pg14 Reply from Peter Suchin**

*'Knowledge' is socially defined, and art has – and should have – an awkward and abrasive relation to this official designation. It cannot suddenly be what it officially isn't without losing its relative autonomy in relation to the power structures that confer value. Accepting the PhD in art is not, as Price believes, to empower the artist, it is only, paradoxically an emasculatory empowering of those who reconfigure their practice so as to comply with the institution's rules. The corollary of the PhD in art is a disempowering of art per se.*

I thought that this was an interesting statement because a) we are discussing autonomy; and b) we are both studying and practicing PhD students. It offers us



the following questions, which we have already gone into but have not covered on a basic level: What is Suchin's autonomy? Why/how does Suchin seek to achieve it? In contrast why and how are we exploring autonomy and is it distinct from this?

In contrast, in the same issue, Mark Prince appears to, at first glance, define autonomy as slippery but then assumes that an artwork has an essence, which ensures its autonomy (that can be polluted or resisted):

#### **Pg8 The Made v The Readymade**

*Photography, performance and text [in Michael Dean's practice] are offered as counterbalances against which sculpture can alternately hone or dissolve its original autonomy.*

Prince appears to assume that autonomy is original (in the made artwork or sculpture) and that photography, performance and text are peripheral means with which to destabilize or affirm it. This asks us the questions: How do we think autonomy is formed? Is it relational, contextual, and what are the problems with this?

Look forward to hearing your response – I think we might go over a lot of ground already covered but I think that this would be good. Also, hopefully by posing these statements will enable us to think through this a bit more concretely rather than completely conceptually...

Kind Regards,

K

**04/12/11**

Hi K,

Sorry for the delay in replying.

I found Suchin's complaints to be the typical accusations levelled at 'Practice' led PhD's and i cannot disagree with much of what he states. In particular his assertion that art is badly suited to being forced to fit methodological paradigms exported from other disciplines – whether scientific or technological – but I feel that this might represent an opportunity. It has to be said that he is on to something when he says PhD's reconfigure practice to comply with the institution; this alone suggests that arts autonomy is dissolved through the currently promoted PhD structure. So it would seem that Suchin's autonomy is found in arts radical distance from the institutional framework. All well and good...But what seems to be happening both in Suchin's initial article and the various responses and replies that have followed – and in particular those from Elizabeth Price – is a readiness to conflate thought with knowledge.

In his paper *Language, Thought, Poetry* (1993) the philosopher Alain Badiou suggests that poetry '*grows more and more distant*' insisting that:

'What commonly goes by the name of '*culture*' forgets the poem. This is because poetry does not easily suffer the demand for clarity, the passive audience, the simple message. The poem is an intransigent exercise. It is devoid of mediation and hostile to the media. The poem

resists the democracy of polls and television – and is always already defeated.’

Later on in the text Badiou goes on to expand on a theme that is evident in all his work – the distinction between thought and knowledge – asking ‘*Does a thought of the poem exist, a poem-thought?*’

‘I say a ‘thought’ and not a ‘knowledge’. Why?

The word knowledge must be reserved for what relates to an object, the object of knowledge. There is knowledge when the real enters experience in the form of an object.

But – and this point is crucial – the poem does not aim at, presuppose or describe an object. The poem has no relation to objectivity.’

This implied distinction between thought and knowledge suggests an opening for investigating the non-relation between the artwork and knowledge. Is there concordance between the poem – Badiou’s favoured form of ‘art’ – as it is represented here, that is has a thought which beats a retreat away from; and is therefore subtracted from anything that is merely empirical making it distinct from the faculty of knowledge – and art more generally?

I think that the problem lies here – and i do think that this is a figure for the problem of autonomy more generally – it is in the refusal to acknowledge

thoughts autonomy from knowledge that confuses the contemporary engagement with art and thus the potential value of the PhD in Fine Art.

For this reason we might have to think about why it might be important '*to think through this a bit more concretely rather than completely conceptually...*'

looking forward to your reply.

D

**05/12/11**

Hi D,

First of all apologies if there was a confusion about what I meant by concrete – it was not meant to set up a binary opposition between object/abstraction but rather to explore a concrete concept (even if what we are dealing with is speculative and slippery).

I think you have isolated the problem between thought and knowledge, as well as the latter's linear transmission of meaning (knowledge implies this retroactively, through empiricism). Knowledge, as you stated, has a correlative relationship with the object and assumes that both are centred. This implies that there are true/false readings of an object, to which the object bares witness (subjugated) and the subject is forced into a hierarchy of knowledge; are they able to read the object correctly?

'Thought' is also a subjective operation but one that does not claim it's object –

could there be such a thing as a 'thought-language' as opposed to a 'knowledge-language'? It is also difficult to sever the artists role in the production of abstraction (which could be linguistic) from any previously assumed knowledge (in which we do circulate). I think that this is perhaps what you are thinking through, as well as I do in terms of the artist/curator or producer, who does exist within language and produces. Is the importance of thought here to do with freedom(?), as opposed to knowledge which is empirically tied to an object. However, the emphasis on 'thought' (as freedom-Kant and Foucault) does not de-centre the subject or free the object because the freedom is for the subject (and thought here would be primary and essentialist)- but it does replace the retroactive reflection (an object means this) with a subjective imperative (the object is incited by the subject without a linear trajectory of meaning). I do definitely think that your rereading of abstraction is starting to theorize an art 'not-concerned-with-us' but does it decentre the subject- and does this matter?

I agree with your assertion that art doesn't necessarily fit the models for PhD's and that this is precisely it's strength – it should be able to destabilize the system from within. If artists chose, as Suchin suggests, to stay on the periphery of academia then they would just be circulating around the border and more strongly defining the centre (the treasured study paradigms and making the academic structure stronger); rather than redirecting or negating the institution the artists would actually be affirming it. Suchin also seems to ignore the power of the institutional models already within the art world and gallery system, which also have their rigid objectives and programs – why is the

academic institution more restrictive than the art institution (and why are the separate)? I guess I am asserting here (and I think you are too) that for an object or practice to be autonomous it does not have to sever itself from the institutions in which it circulates (which is impossible) but rather, as you say in re-situating abstraction and thought, it is about the object/thought remaining distinct from the institutional operations that try to subsume it. For the latter do this in order to produce a linear transmission of knowledge or meaning that is easily packaged and consumed (which would produce a centred past-present subject and an object that has no agency for it is subsumed by the subjects gaze).

I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

K

**12/12/11**

Hi D,

I just wanted to send you the following quote before you respond to the below email. Theodore Adorno highlights the neo-Kantian implications of autonomy:

‘It is the idea that the freedom and sovereignty of spirit amounts to what he [Kant] calls *autonomy*. This element is represented here by the judge who can freely resolve all these matters; it is the ability to give oneself laws, to restrict oneself and to determine one’s own limits... to escape the bonds of tutelage – only with the aid of conviction can it organize everything and arrange matters for itself so that it will be able to manage its own life in a proper and meaningful

way. In short, acting in accordance with laws appears as a function of freedom – or, conversely, freedom manifests itself as a function of law.’ (pp54-55, Adorno, 2001)

I think when we talk about objective autonomy we can re-think an alternative to this subjective autonomy (as a bind – systemic) – as we can only think de-centred autonomy through the objective and not the subjective realm.

Well let me know your thoughts.

Thanks,

K

**23/12/11**

Hi K

I agree the Adorno quote is very useful for helping us think about an objective autonomy or at least an actual or realist distinction between the subjective and the objective realms. Are we after the objects autonomy from the subject rather than a “democracy of objects” which includes the subject as another object on an ontological level?

I am very interested in your idea that there might be a ‘thought-language’ – this is promising in light of Badiou’s idea of a ‘poem-thought’ – and this might provide an opportunity for us to illustrate the distinction between this and a ‘knowledge-Language’. One way of doing this could be to think of the latter as a term to describe the paradigmatic and the former as a operation in the paradoxical. I say this because a knowledge-language appeals to the

establishment of accepted opinions; the establishment of doxa ultimately producing paradigms. A thought language should resist the institutional operations that attempt to subsume it and reduce it to paradigms and then could only ever be 'paradoxical'; autonomous and non-relational. This leads me to think that a thought-language might be a way of talking about creativity whilst avoiding essentialising it; not appealing to the notion of a creator as absolute genus of her creations but instead a mediator of the excess that constructs the thinking subject, that is to say as the thought that actively reconfigures the influences that construct it rather than just reflecting these conditions back.

This puts me in mind of Badiou's description of the death of Archimedes from the book *Philosophy in the present*; in which the mathematician is killed by a Roman soldier for ignoring a request by the general Marcellus for an audience instead attending to a mathematical demonstration at the seafront. Badiou claims this to be a philosophical situation:

"Because it shows that between the right of the state and creative thought, especially the pure ontological thought embodied in mathematics, there is no common measure, no real discussion. In the end, power is violence, while the only constraints creative thought recognises are its own immanent rules. When it comes to the law of his thought, Archimedes remains outside of the action of power." (p.5-8)

I think we should now try to write some conjectures that formulate our position as curators and potentially theorists around this. We could then identify artists



that might be able to respond to these propositions with their own in the form of a work to be exhibited – or a text or a presentation etc. – rather than trawling around for works that we then cram into the frameworks – paradigms – we construct; you can see the benefits of this approach for a conversation on autonomy.

What do you think?

All the best

D

**04/01/12**

Hi,

Yes – I think we situate this proposition and/or problem and then send it out to artists and writers that can respond to it.

I think the problematic is as follows; when proposing a ‘thought-language’ that acts as a catalyst we face falling back into *a priori* agency – a subjective agency that is able to transcend or negate the knowledge it already has. I think that this is why I was trying to highlight whether ultimately we are placing a lot of importance on the object as severed from the producer (although I know that your ‘thought-language’ proposition is trying to think through the producers relationship to the object they produce) because this is the only way it can be a pure ‘thought-language’ rather than a reflective ‘knowledge-language’ (as the subject exists within knowledge). Your argument evades this situation when you state that ‘thought-language’ occurs through the excess of the artists production

but because this excess is secondary, rather than primary (which would assert a subjective *a priori*) or perhaps is produced within the process – so between the two – is this rather an ‘object-language’ or ‘contingent-language’?

If we stick to the term ‘thought-language’ it does manage to escape the issue of interpretation – the need to control or make the object create a clear linear meaning – rather ‘thought-language’ is just interested in the ‘end-in-itself’, positing something that is contingent and perhaps currently hard to understand (as it has not been reflected on within knowledge).

I also think that the quote you referred to from Badiou sets up an interesting problem – “When it comes to the law of his thought, Archimedes remains outside of the action of power.” (p.5-8) – because if the creative act or ‘thought-language’ is only immanent to itself and has no power to act then does this ‘thought-language’ want us to give up politics? And would this not be highly conservative?

Do you think that setting up a problematic like this would create a proposal that allows a more diverse response? look forward to hearing from you and sending this out to artists. Perhaps you would like to start something off and then I’ll add to it?

Thanks,

K.

**07/01/12**

Hi K, Here is the proposal/call out text.:

# Autonomy?

*These days, almost everyone seems to agree that the times in which art tried to establish its autonomy—successfully or unsuccessfully—are over. And yet this diagnosis is made with mixed feelings. One tends to celebrate the readiness of contemporary art to transcend the traditional confines of the art system, if such a move is dictated by a will to change the dominant social and political conditions, to make the world a better place—if the move, in other words, is ethically motivated. One tends to deplore, on the other hand, that attempts to transcend the art system never seem to lead beyond the aesthetic sphere: instead of changing the world, art only makes it look better. This causes a great deal of frustration within the art system, in which the predominant mood appears to almost perpetually shift back and forth between hopes to intervene in the world beyond art and disappointment (even despair) due to the impossibility of achieving such a goal<sup>11</sup>.*

**Boris Groys, 'Self Design and Aesthetic Responsibility' e-flux journal #7**

**Material Conjectures (Kirsten Cooke – University of Kent – and Dale Holmes – Sheffield Hallam University) are interested in autonomy and how this term figures in the politics and philosophy of contemporary arts relations of production, dissemination and consumption. Through a lengthy correspondence we have begun to develop a theoretical frame that has led to a series of thoughts on arts autonomy.**

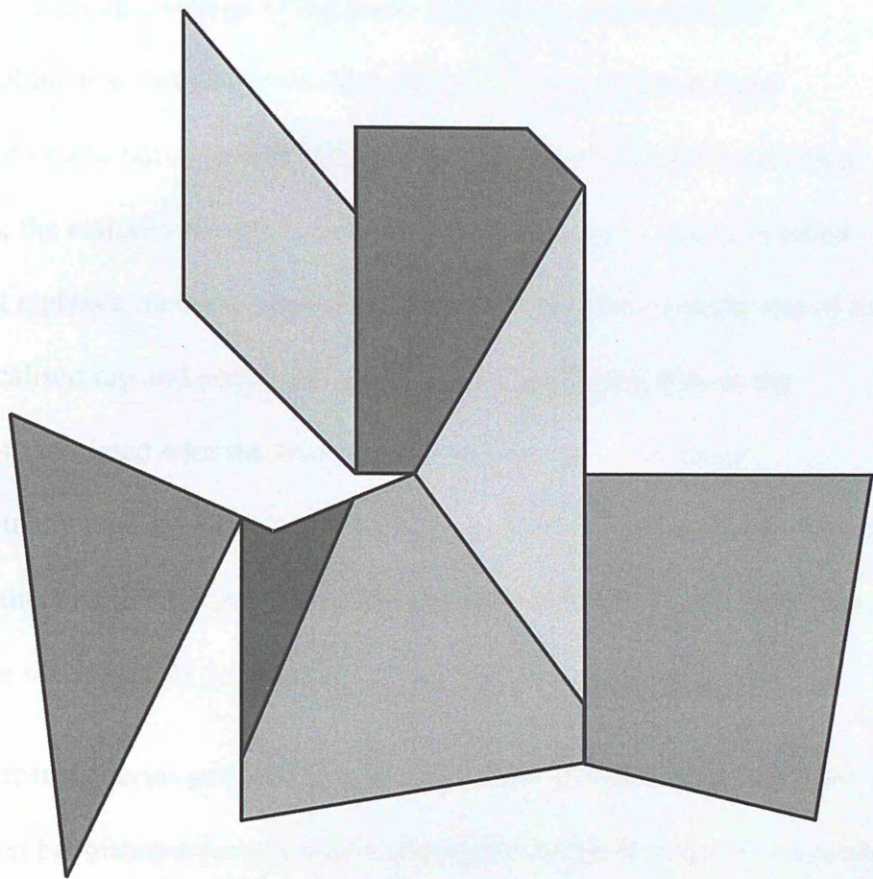
**We invite you to respond to the following propositions through the production of artworks, writing and debate.**

1. This project is concerned with making a contemporary theory for autonomy. It is invested in breaking autonomy from the reductions of art historical modernist and post-modernist discourse.
2. We are interested in an expansion of the process of autonomy and not reinforcing its capture- as a 'modernist remainder' – in an empirical, biological or necessary linear evolution.
3. In a recent article John Byrne insists that '*Within our globalised neoliberal economy (a neoliberal economy which thrives on its ability to encourage and re-absorb acceptable levels of dissent) art and the art industry are badly in need of a "Napster moment" – a way of re-thinking and re-routing the circuits through which art is produced, distributed, evaluated and consumed*'<sup>12</sup> Does Byrne's "*Napster moment*" go far enough – or does it merely reconfigure the veneer of arts relation to neoliberal commerce – and if it does go far enough what distinct forms might it take?
4. Can we speak now of autonomy without recourse to a transcendental aesthetics?
5. What are the strategies available to artists for reconfiguring the contemporary conditions of autonomy for art?
6. If all art research and production is contingent on institutional structures – whether social, academic or commercial etc. – in what sense might autonomy be revised, reconfigured and recognised?

I think we can go with this...

Cheers

D.



## **IDIOT-ICON (DIE ANTWOORD)**

Here is a group of definitions, proclamations, quotes and conjectures collected from many sources ( the text in quotation marks is taken directly from the source, the rest is paraphrased ) that makes up a collage of the South African rap-rave outfit Die Antwoord. Some of the text is taken from dictionaries and some is taken from commentary by critics and fans available online, some are taken from the bands own facebook postings; the majority though is excavated from interviews that have taken place over the past eighteen months – a period of time that has witnessed the rise of the group from the localised rap and performance scenes of Cape Town, S.A. to the globalised markets associated with the internet including the ever expanding blogosphere, eventually landing them on the roster of a major U.S. record label only for them to ‘divorce’ them earlier this week after the label demanded the new record was toned down for the sake of the U.S market.

I should also add that the terms gathered together here is by no means an exhaustive dictionary nor can it be mistaken for a fanatic’s encyclopaedic knowledge. The headings are my own and any text which is taken directly from the primary sources is either referenced or set in quotation marks. All other text is my own.

## **THE ANSWER (Die Antwoord):**

1 a: something spoken or written in reply to a question

b: a correct response

c: a reply to a legal charge or suit

3: something done in response or reaction

4: a solution of a problem

5: one that imitates, matches, or corresponds to another.

**REAL?:** At the very outset of Die Antwoord's existence the question of whether the group were merely ironic clowns faking credulity and sending up 'REAL' - the mark of authenticity that is still expected from rap artists – in the name of art was to dominate all conversation around their appearance. A situation the group contributed to themselves by asking western journalists to report back that 'it was real' or 'tell them we were real'.

And from early in 2010:

Q: 'is it real?'

Ninja: 'it's actually quite a deep question that you know [...] cos the only real things in life is the unexpected things[...] everything else is just an illusion'

'One of the reasons that young Afrikaaners are rallying behind Die Antwoord (and Jack Parrow) is that traditional Afrikaans pop is some of the worst music on the planet Earth, objectively. That's the real zef right there, without even trying to be' says Parrow.

'They are one of the reasons people used to get embarrassed to say they were Afrikaans. They did'nt want to be connected to those fucking idiots'.



**RE-BRANDING:** In their most recent interviews Ninja and Yo-landi Vi\$\$er have been unwavering in their effort to make a definitive break with their past activities in the fields of pop performance; both of them denying any knowledge of Watkin Tudor Jones, Max Normal TV, MC Totally Rad, The Constructus Corporation or Evergreen. For this reason we will not mention any of these names again.

### ENTER THE NINJA:



**AFRIKAAN'S:** 'I represent South African culture. In this place you got a lot of different things, Blacks, Whites, Coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal. I'm like all these things fucked into one person.' (*Enter the Ninja*).

This acknowledgement of influence and the implicit de-centring of Ninja's Afrikaans identity was a particularly provocative move to make and coincided perfectly with the

global rebranding of the *Rainbow Nation*; a process that was picking up pace in time for the 2010 football world cup. Die Antwoord's appearance on the world stage is entirely contingent on the markets spotlight falling directly on that country at that point in time. In turn the massive identity management exercise operating at that time in South Africa opened Die Antwoord up to European and American magazine editors and journalists hungry to find the illegitimate underbelly of the officially endorsed body of South African culture.

**TATTOO'S:** (this is an excerpt taken from Tim Noakes article on Die Antwoord in the South African Special edition of the lifestyle magazine *Dazed and Confused*, June 2010, Vol II, #86).

'There is another side to Ninja that has more serious connotations than merely changing his rap name or the height of his flat-top – inked onto his torso are contradicting gang tattoos from each of Cape Town's 'numbers' gangs: the 26's, 27's and 28's. He has one of Richie Rich, which symbolises the 26's – the money lovers. On his chest he has the 27's tattoo of a ghostly hand gripping a knife, which symbolises the murderers – they keep the peace between the 26s and the 28s. And on his arm is a tattoo of Casper the Friendly Ghost with a massive erection, which represents the 28s – a prison rape gang that has 'legalised' homosexual prison sex.'

**DISCONTINUITY:** Die Antwoord is discontinuous with the ongoing project of Afrikaans identity past present and future; complicating the past assertion that 'the Afrikaner' is an un-individuated entity, the ongoing attempts to present Afrikaans cultural identity as homogenous and South African president Jacob Zuma's claim that (Afrikaners are) 'the only white tribe which is truly African'.

‘I’am a fuckin coloured cos I am a fucking coloured if I wanna be a coloured [...] my inner coloured just want’s to be discovered’ (Fishpaste)

This claiming of coloured culture has proven contentious and is criticised heavily for displaying an insensitive attitude to a burgeoning South African post-racial politics.

Some even claiming the band are no more than a post modern ironic Ali G style

Blackface act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

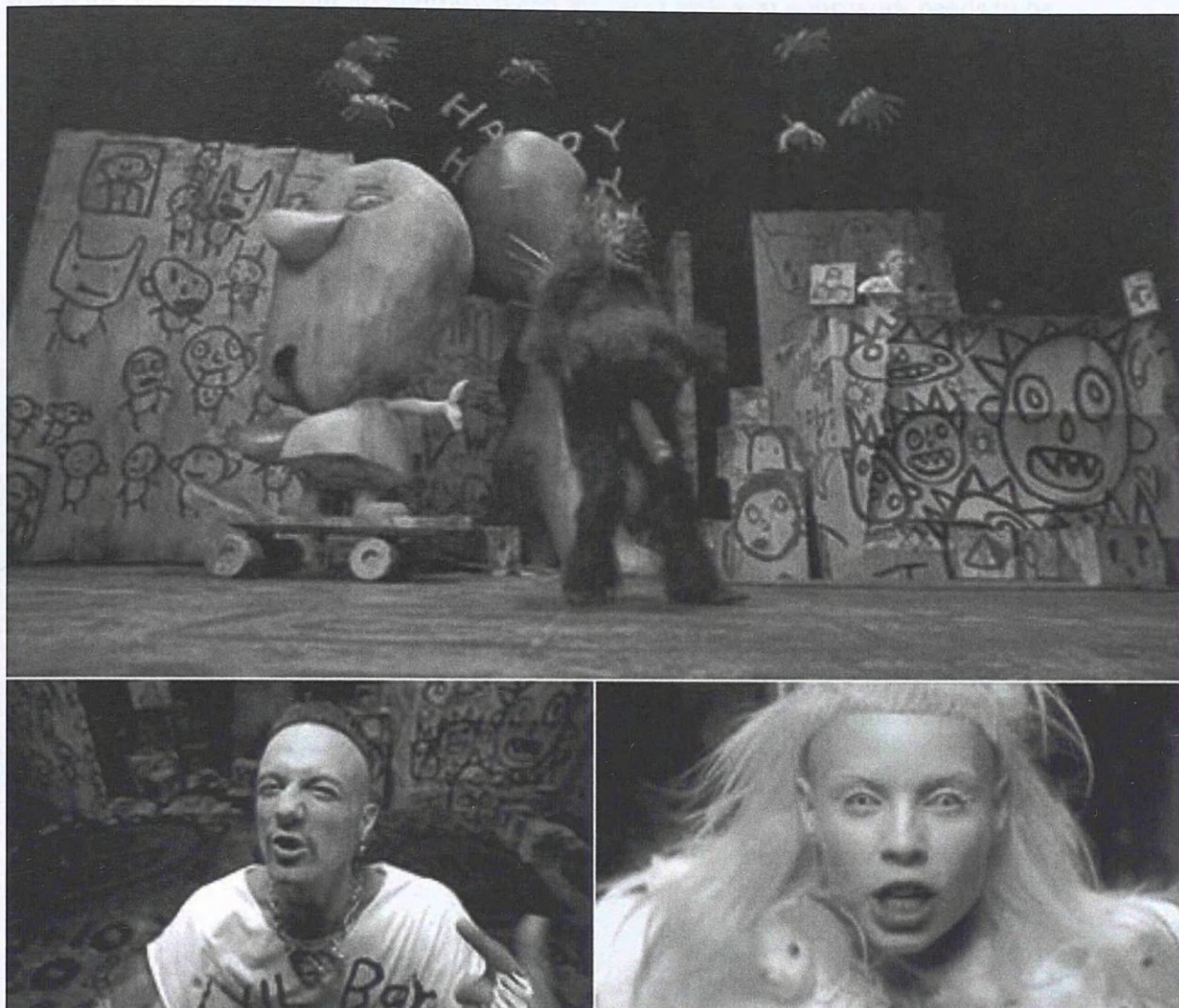
**INCORPORATED:** ‘The Antwoord sings about poverty, drugs, crime and girls. But are they sufficiently politically conscious? Or are they just part of the co-option of the proletariat by bourgeois consumerism – like that sell out 50 Cent?’

**BOUND OBJECTS (CONTEXTUAL);** are objects that exist only in a particular context and are subject to the rules of that context. This means that Bound objects are caught in a particular set of relations whether affirmative or oppositional. This is because the bound object paradoxically sees itself as existing outside ideology and therefore in a binary relation with that ideology. The bound object is strictly dialectical and identical to *identity*.

**BOUNDARY OBJECTS (AGILE);** the concept of the boundary object is derived from sociology and describes information that is used and interpreted in differing ways by distinct groups avoiding catchment in the particularities of these relations. Boundary objects do not rely on context to exist and are adaptable they are always non-dialectical.



**EVIL BOY:**



**SUC(K)CESS:** from <http://boingboing.net/2011/11/07/dieantwoordleave.html>

**DIE ANTWOORD LEAVE INTERSCOPE,  
WILL RELEASE 'TEN\$ION' ON OWN  
INDIE LABEL**

‘Anyone can *not sign* with a major label (see there? You just did it yourself!), but to sign with one and then *sign off* abruptly when the label tells you your work needs to be reworked for more mainstream appeal? That’s news.

And that, according to those close to the matter, is what just happened between South Africa’s Die Antwoord and Interscope/Universal Music Group.

The zef-rockers have a new album in the can, *TEN\$ION*. It was to be their second release on Interscope, and due out within the next few months. The band chose a track to lead with as a single, titled *Fok Julle Naaiers* (‘Fuck you all,’ loosely). The label heard it, perceived it as too hard for a single, and according to our sources, wanted the entire record to be reworked for more pop appeal (think Gaga or Black-Eyed-Peas). Ninja and Yo-Landi would have none of it, and asked their attorneys (one of whom was Michael Jackson’s former rep) to sever all ties with Interscope, forgoing a million dollar guarantee on the new record and choosing complete creative independence’.

From the band’s online diary:

‘So anyway [...] Interscope offered us a bunch of money again to release our new album *TEN\$ION*.

But this time, they also tried to get involved with our music, to try and make us sound like everyone else out there at the moment.

So we said: ‘U know what, rather hang on to your money, buy yourself something nice...we gonna do our own thing. Bye bye’

‘The band will release *TEN\$ION* through a new independent label of their own, ZEF RECORDZ. Songs will be available as digital downloads and on flash drives, ‘Because CDs are like motherfucking VHS’, Ninja tells Boing Boing’.

And from the online magazine Death and Taxes:

‘When they released *Ninja*, Die Antwoord were poised for a moment in that space between ‘are they joking?’ and ‘this is pretty damn good, even if they are joking’. They released another video, and it was apparent that, at least to some extent, they weren’t joking. They teamed up with Harmony Korine and we were all intrigued.

Then their debut record *\$O\$* dropped and was hardly as captivating, although not at all an outright disappointment. It just wasn’t as fun to hear them without seeing them, perhaps. One just kept visualizing their faces.

Enter *Fok Julle Naaiers*. After retreating to their own imprint Zef Records from Interscope, Die Antwoord release the video for a single considerably more edgy than their previous work. It’s a track off their upcoming LP, *TEN\$ION*.

The video is shot in black and white and features several hard-faced dudes staring like one might stare down a punk-ass.

While the words “Fok Julle Naaiers,” which translate roughly to “Fuck You All,” might not register immediately as offensive as they would have, say, fifteen years ago, the song’s liberal use of the word “faggot” comes as a disappointment perhaps even more so than back then.

Two-thirds of the way in the song breaks down completely and DJ Hi-Tek comes as close as a DJ can to having a verse without touching the mic himself. This is where the video becomes controversial.’

In an interview entitled, ‘Faggot,” Ninja explains DJ Hi-Tek’s choice to use the word. It’s interesting to hear his reasoning— he has four points, namely that DJ-Hi Tek, who samples the word from those ridiculous Mike Tyson interviews, is gay and feels uninhibited by the word’s usage.

Ninja, from the interview:

‘I’d like to set the record straight here once and for all. Number one: DJ Hi-Tek is gay. So there you go. Now you all know. Number two: Dj Hi-Tek says the word faggot doesn’t hold any power over him. Hi-Tek says faggot all the time cause he’s like, kind of taken that word and made it his bitch. Number three: Just to be fucking clear, the Antwoord is not homophobic... Number four: It comes across to us that some people from America are heavy sensitive about the use of certain words. But the thing is, what you need to understand is, we’re not from America. We’re from South Africa. And South Africa people aren’t so pumped up about these words’.

**POES:** is an Afrikaans term and loosely means pussy or cunt it is employed as a universal insult to offend, demean and show disrespect.

**EXCESS:**

1: the state or an instance of surpassing usual, proper, or specified limits.

2: undue or immoderate indulgence.

According to Georges Bataille's theory of consumption, *the accursed share* is that excessive and non-recuperable element of any economy. An element that will be expended luxuriously without gain in the arts, in sex and spectacle or in an outrageous and catastrophic outpouring, giving everything away in sacrifice; always though in a way that threatens the prevailing system.

**RAZORS EDGE:** In the late thirteenth century the Franciscan friar and philosopher-theologian William of Ockham formulated his version of the 'law of parsimony'; a law stating that "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity". A medieval nominalism and extreme variation of empiricism commonly known as *Occam's Razor*; a system of logic that insists on the reduction of things to particularity through the slicing away of what is unnecessary.

Biologists or philosophers of biology use Occam's razor in either of two contexts both in evolutionary biology: the units of selection controversy and systematics. George C. Williams in his book *Adaptation and Natural Selection* (1966) argues that the best way to explain altruism among animals is based on low level (i.e. individual) selection as opposed to high level group selection. Altruism is defined as that which is beneficial to the group but not to the individual, and group selection is thought by some to be the evolutionary mechanism that selects for altruistic traits. Others posit individual selection as the mechanism which explains altruism solely in terms of the individual organisms acting in their own self interest without regard to the group. The basis for Williams's contention is that of the two, individual selection is the more parsimonious theory. In doing so he is invoking a variant of Occam's razor known as Lloyd Morgan's Canon: "In no case is an animal activity to be interpreted in terms of higher psychological



processes, if it can be fairly interpreted in terms of processes which stand lower in the scale of psychological evolution and development” (Morgan 1903).

Throughout the history of logic; mathematics and philosophy there have appeared a collection of anti-razor’s – including ones developed by Ockhams direct contemporary Walter Chatton and enlightenment thinkers including Leibniz and Kant and the Zurich Dadaists. As the name suggests these procedures operate through the addition of information, propositions, characteristic’s, gestures and temporalities. More recently the mathematician Karl Menger has formulated a ‘law against miserliness’ claiming that ‘entities must not be reduced to the point of inadequacy’

**RICH BITCH:**



**ERISTIC:** from the ancient Greek word Eris which means to strife or wrangle and is used to speak of a style of argument that is not interested in discovering or even representing truth as a goal but instead is interested in winning the argument only – it is argument for the sake of conflict.

**Art?:**

March 2010:

Q; ‘alot of people have said that you are more of an art project’.

Ninja; ‘I’m serious about everything. I’m fucking serious about my hairstyle. We’re pop art fused with high art. We’re also full on into performing as a rap group and making films. We get criticised for doing that and its retarded. We are fucking serious about our art and what we do, but we also have a sense of humour. I think because people can’t understand our style they think it’s a joke. Our music isn’t intellectual – we make music for the common man’

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_wv-SJm0kRA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wv-SJm0kRA)

And October 2010 during an interview for Norwegian television:

Q; ‘Are you conceptual performance art?’

Ninja; ‘what you just done now...the interview is finished...it was nice talking to you but we are a rap group from South Africa, ttuk! [...] Some people think too much [...] other people get it’

Yolandi; ‘I don’t understand we just make music [...] what did we do [...] what do you mean ceptual’

Q; 'I am asking how you feel about the aah [...] debate on the internet whether you are a piece of conceptual art?'

Ninja; 'do you consider yourself to be an intelligent person? [...] its a straight forward question it's not a trick question [...] yes or no'

Q; 'Yes.'

Ninja; 'what do you think?'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG9ZtQ3phoE&feature=related>

**RECALCITRANCE:** cannot be contained, stubbornly resisting all attempts to bind it into any dialectical relation. Recalcitrance is never merely resistance-in-particular (the political) and only ever resistance-as-such (politics)

**ZEF:** roughly translates as 'common' and is the name of a style in South African suburbs and townships; it is associated with a mainly white lower middle class subculture

'of clapped out Ford Cortinas with fur on the dashboard, tight mom jeans pulled up too high, 'synth heavy ringtone rave', mullets. Zef isn't a music style, and it's not limited to any one culture or style'

'Cape Town is full of Zef and what Ninja, Yo-lande and their crew are tapping into brilliantly is zef in the coloured community of the gangster ridden cape flats, which would include rap in the street venac mix of English and Afrikaans'

'Jack Parrow, by the way, does the zef thing, equally brilliantly, from Cape Town's Afrikaans middle class suburbs, far, far removed from the slums of the flats.'

(From the blog Kameraad Mhambi – <http://mhambi.com/2010/02/what-is-zef/>)

According to Yolandi is the style of people who ‘soup their cars up and rock gold and shit. Zef is, your poor but your fancy. Your poor but your sexy. You’ve got style’.

And in an interview from early 2010;

Ninja; ‘Zef means like the ultimate style [...] it’s a full flex [...] that’s where we find our full flex in the style called Zef [...] it’s a South African style’

Yolandi; ‘everybody has an inner Zef [...] it’s just like a zone reflex, when you’re on full flex [...] its just like another level’

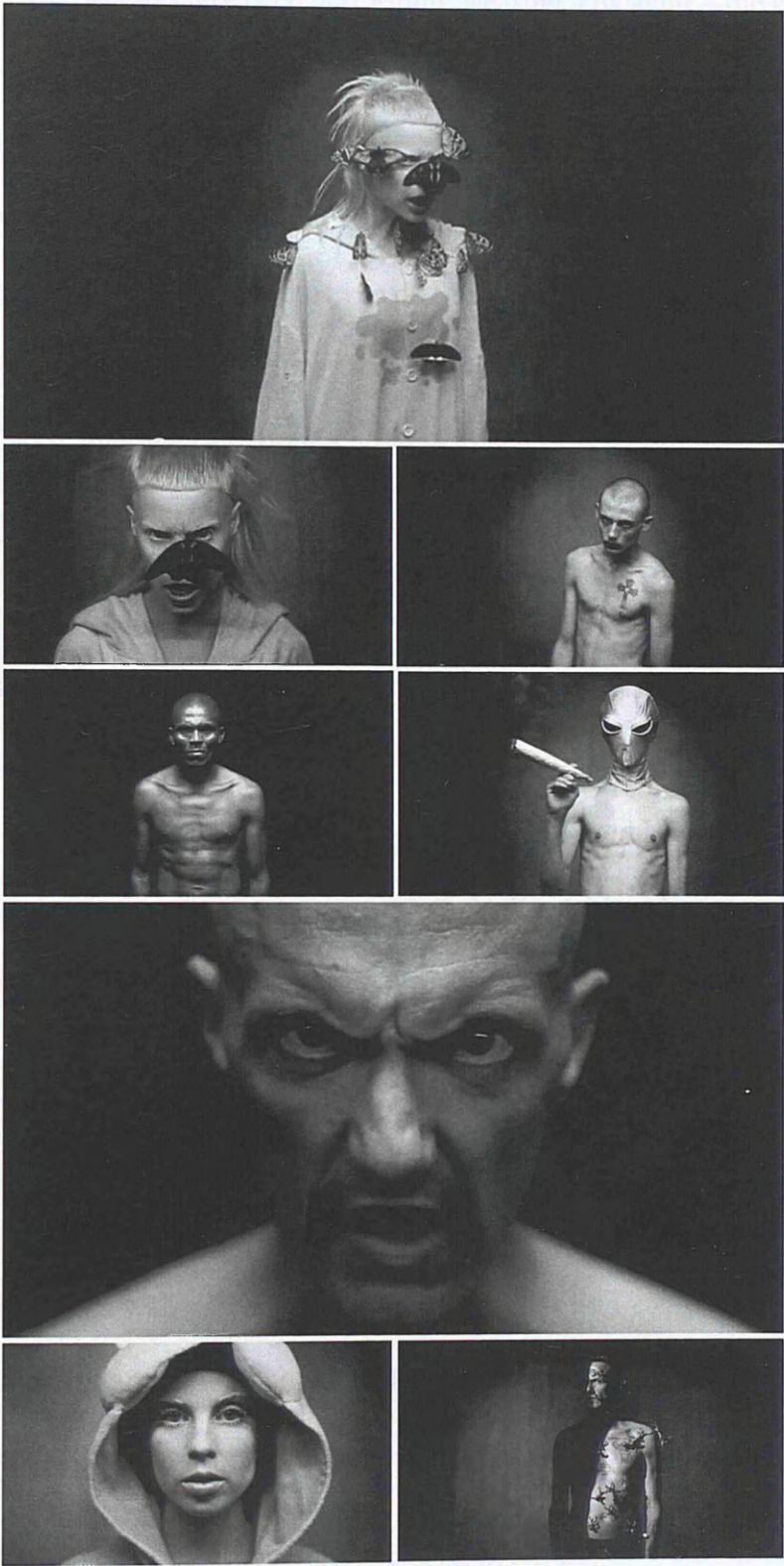
Ninja: ‘Ja, it’s like when you’re on a video game and you reach the next level [...] that’s Zef’

(From: Interview with Die Antwoord – Ninja and Yolandi Visser – Take No Prisoners.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1KbfFdUTQ4>)

**FUTURISTIC ALLOYS:** called amorphous metals could someday combine the strength and electrical conductivity of ordinary metals with the versatility and low cost of plastic.



FOK JULLIE NIAARS:



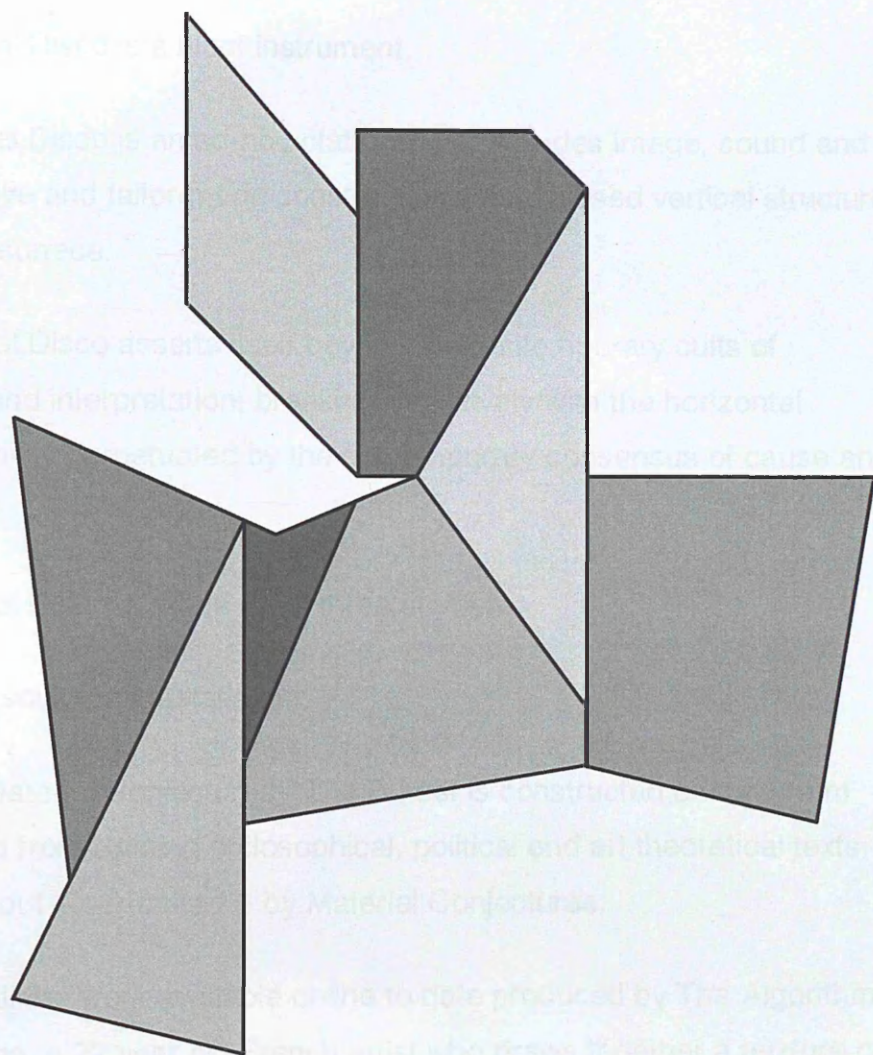
**A NEW BREED OF RAP SUPERHERO:** Die Antwoord are a futuristic rap-rave crew: Yo-landi Vi\$\$er has recently been performing wearing a picachu – the character from Pokemon – suit and Crew leader Ninja likes to perform wearing one of the props from Neill Blomkamp's 2009 South African science fiction movie *District 9*; the prop is the alien or 'prawn' arm – prawn is the derogatory racist name the humans give to the aliens – that develops on the human Wikus van de Merwe whom becomes infected after coming into contact with some mysterious extraterrestrial fluid; the infection changes his DNA and his body into that of a 'prawn'.

**LIBANASIDUS VITTATUS:** aka the Parktown Prawn; is an insect that was discovered in 1899 by William Forsell Kirby; it gets its common name because it looks like a prawn crossed with a grasshopper. The prawn is held in low regard and was unknown in South African cities before the 1960's and its rapid rise in numbers is connected to the rapid expansion of the urban environment the attendant population explosion and the prevalence of food waste. They are well suited to the urban environment because they are omnivorous and will eat anything although prawns do have a particular liking for tinned or 'wet' cat and dog food. Gardeners love them because they control garden snails.

**WAT KYK JY:** translates as 'WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT' – it is the menacing words you hear when you walk into a bar in Parys, Free State and you fix your gaze on one of the patrons for too long. In other words it's the last words you hear before you hit the floor. It is also the name of a website founded in 2000 by Zef Meester Grif.

(from the website: Kameraad Mhambi – <http://mhambi.com/2010/11/the-meaning-of-wat-kyk-jy/>)





## **One Dimensional Disco**

One Dimensional Disco takes place in gallery spaces only.

One Dimensional Disco is an artwork and exhibition.

One Dimensional Disco is a blunt instrument.

One Dimensional Disco is an ad-hoc platform that includes image, sound and text. Its disjunctive and tailor-made constructs act as a closed vertical structure: an antagonistic surface.

One Dimensional Disco asserts itself beyond the contemporary cults of representation and interpretation; breaking definitively with the horizontal ground of narrativity perpetuated by the contemporary consensus of cause and effect.

One Dimensional Disco is made up of three elements;

1. A large scale sculptural installation.
2. A DJ set by Material Conjectures - The DJ set is constructed entirely from quotes extracted from existing philosophical, political and art theoretical texts. These are read out – performed?- by Material Conjectures.
3. MP3 files of all the work available online to date produced by The Algorithm, aka Remi Gallego, a 22 year old French artist who draws together a mixture of Black Metal, math-core electronica, Ska and Dub-Step. This is played at a volume that disallows any conversation in the gallery space.





**DARK PREIST** (2012), wood, Polythene, staples.

## **DJ Set for One Dimensional Disco (Manifesto)**

### **Track 1:**

*Rats are exhuming machines: not fully fledged vectors of epidemic, but also ferociously dynamic lines of ungrounding. Rats germinate two kinds of surface cataclysm as they travel and span different zones. Firstly static damage in the form of ruptures rendered by internal schisms, uplifts, dislocations, jumps and thrusts which expose the surface to paroxysmal convulsions and distortions; and secondly the dynamic anomaly of seismic waves dissipating as the rats flow in the form of tele-compositions (ferocious packs).*

(Reza Negarestani. *Cyclonopedia: complicity with anonymous materials*, P52)

### **Track 2:**

*The Horror in Clay*

*The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little, but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and our frightful position therein that we shall go either mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.*

(H.P.Lovecraft. *The Call of Cthulhu*, P1)

### **Track 3:**

*'All right,' said Handley, 'let's get that straight to begin with. Multivac weighs all sorts of known factors, billions of them. One factor isn't known, though, and won't be for a*

*long time. That's the reaction pattern of the human mind. All Americans are subjected to the molding pressure of what other Americans do or say, to the things that are done to him and the things he does to others. Any American can be brought to Multivac to have the bent of his mind surveyed. From that the bent of all other minds in the country can be estimated. Some Americans are better for the purpose than others at some given time, depending upon the happenings of that year. Multivac picked you as the representative this year. Not the smartest, or the strongest, or the luckiest, but just the most representative. (You qualify as the Voter). Now we don't question Multivac do we?'*

(Isaac Asimov. *The Complete Stories: Volume 1*, P72)

#### **Track 4:**

*Ellenford shrugged. 'I'm sure you know how Earth runs its Educational program, George. Practically any human being can absorb practically any body of knowledge, but each individual brain pattern is better suited to receiving some types of knowledge than others. We try to match mind to knowledge as well as we can within the limits of the quota requirements for each profession.'*

*George nodded. 'Yes, I know.'*

*'Every once in a while, George, we come up against a young man whose mind is not suited to receiving superimposed knowledge of any sort.'*

*'You mean I can't be Educated?'*

(Isaac Asimov. *The Complete Stories: Volume 1*, P254)

#### **Track 5:**

*The wormhole-soldier comes close to what Deleuze and Guattari call 'holey space': it is connected to nomad space (the nomad-soldier) whereas it conjugates with sedentary space (the peasant-soldier). Existing between the two, the hunt of the wormhole-soldier remains unseen, consequently its n-1 dimensionality constitutes a wholly new (unforeseen) weapon system.*

(Rick Dolphijn. *The New Alimentary Continuum: Collapse Volume VII*, P161)

#### **Track 6:**

*The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They were not only equal before God and the law, they were equal in every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else; nobody was better looking than anybody else; nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211<sup>th</sup>, 212<sup>th</sup> and 213<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.*

(Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *Harrison Bergeron*)

#### **Track 7:**

*Millenarian movements respond to this problem of adaptation in what is, at least initially, a purely negative form. Insofar as they are driven by 'a profound and total rejection of the present, evil world, and a passionate longing for another better one', failure to adapt seems to be their raison d'être. Suffused with an apocalyptic ideology either drawn from a pre-existing canon or syncretically fashioned, they are also, because of their hostility to the political world as it stands, affected by a 'fundamental vagueness about the actual way in which the new society will be brought about'.*

(Alberto Toscano. *Fanaticism: on the uses of an idea*, P48)

### **Track 8:**

*Abstract passion and unconditional demands are an enduring dimension of politics, especially when the space for negotiation is absent – as in the case abolitionism. Uncompromising partisanship is certainly a feature of the fanaticism that has often been associated with revolutionary thought. We can hear Saint Just's plea for 'exaltation... in the stubborn resolution to defend the rights of the people'; in Paul Nizan's call that 'none of our actions be free from rage'. But such partisanship need not preclude universality. The struggle to forge practices of antagonism that do not substantialise friendship and enmity is indeed one of the foremost challenges for a politics of emancipation.*

(Alberto Toscano. *Fanaticism: on the uses of an idea*, P250)

### **Track 9:**

*Humungus*

*There has been too much violence... too much pain. None here is without sin. But, I have an honourable compromise. Give me the gasoline and ill spare your lives. Just walk away. I will give you safe passage through the wasteland... Walk away and there will be an end to the horror...*

(Terry Hayes, George Miller, Bryan Hannant. *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*)

### **Track 10:**

*According to the Axis of Evil-against-Evil, the first task of warmachines is to perceive War not as a consequence of collisions between warmachines or crisscrossing lines of*

*tactics, but as autonomous machines spawning warmachines in order to hunt them down.*

(Reza Negarestani. *Cyclonopedia: complicity with anonymous materials*, P77)

#### **Track 11:**

*He [Parsani] discusses how, in the wake of Wahhabistic enmity against all manifestations of idolatry (shirk and kufr), both monotheism and idolatry take on new connotations; one becomes a scorching horizontality which tolerates no contour of any kind against its monopoly and flatness, while the other turns into that which disturbs the flattening horizontality of the desert, sometimes with an antitrust policy.*

(Reza Negarestani. *Cyclonopedia: complicity with anonymous materials*, P139)

#### **Track 12:**

*The act that engenders thinking within thought occurs in the wake of the encounter with intensity (the cogitandum) and the transcendent exercise of the faculties. Accordingly, thinking is not the act of a pre-constituted, already individuated psychic agent but rather something that is provoked by extensive difference...*

(Ray Brassier. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, P181)

#### **Track 13:**

*If repetition is thus inscribed at the heart of the future to come, one must also import there, in the same stroke, the death drive, the violence of forgetting, superrepression (suppression and repression), the anarchic, in short, the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which carries the law in its tradition: the archon of*

*the archive, the table, what carries the table and who carries the table, the subjectile, the substrate, and the subject of the law.*

(Jacques

Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, P79)

#### **Track 14:**

##### *Resistance*

*Art resists political, cultural, aesthetic habits. Art resists morality and topicality. Art – because it is art – is resistance. But art is not resistance to something, art is resistance as such. Art is resistant because it resists everything that has already existed and been known. Art, as a resistance, is assertion, movement, belief, intensity, art is ‘positive’. Art resists tradition, morality and the factual world. Art resists every argumentation,, every explanation and every discussion.*

(Thomas Hirschhorn. *The Crystal of Resistance* (2011))

#### **Track 15:**

*The critique of ideologies, which ultimately always consists in demonstrating that a social situation which is presented as inevitable is actually contingent, is essentially indissociable from the critique of metaphysics, the latter being understood as the illusory manufacturing of necessary entities.*

(Quentin Meillessoux. *After Finitude*, P.34)

#### **Track 16:**

*Let us call ‘speculative’ every type of thinking that claims to be able to access some form of absolute, and let us call ‘metaphysics’ every type of thinking that claims to be*

*able to access some form of absolute being, or access the absolute through the principle of sufficient reason. If all metaphysics is 'speculative' by definition, our problem consists in demonstrating, conversely, that not all speculation is metaphysical, and not every absolute is dogmatic – it is possible to envisage an absolutizing thought that would not be absolutist.*

(Quentin Meillessoux. *After Finitude*, P.34)

### **Track 17:**

*A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things. This in-between is "by no means an average," a mediocre point between two old extremes, nor does it go "from one thing to the other and back again." This between is "transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away...*

(Sadie Plant. *Zeros and Ones*, P124)

### **Track 18:**

*The logic of the site concerns the distribution of intensities around this disappeared point which is the site. We must therefore begin by the beginning: what is the value of the existence of the site?*

(Alain Badiou. *Being and Event*, P371)

### **Track 19:**

*But the consequence of the event is to bring to (a provisionally maximal) political existence the workers who were inexistent on its eve.*

(Alain Badiou. *Being and Event*, P377)



**Track 20:**

*We love the tangible, the confirmation, the palpable, the real, the visible, the concrete, the known, the seen, the vivid, the visual, the social, the embedded, the emotionally laden, the salient, the stereotypical, the moving, the theatrical, the romanced, the cosmetic, the official, the scholarly-sounding verbiage, the pompous, the mathematized crap, the pomp, the Academie Francais, Harvard Business School, the Nobel prize... the moving discourse and the lurid. Most of all we favour the narrated.*

*Alas, we are not manufactured, in our current edition of the human race to understand abstract matters – we need context.*

(Nicholas Naseem Taleb. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, P)

**Track 21:**

*The total object absorbs every psychological process that is purposely directed toward it as it also absorbs every form of causality. Causal analysis is purely retrospective and always exceeds the concrete object; causes are substituted, but not the totality. The causes of the object always lie in another, posthumous plane than the object itself. Causal thinking dissolves into an inarticulated multiplicity and disposes of its object as an allegory of an insensible process that lies outside of the object.*

(Carl Einstein. *Totality*)

**Track 22:**

*The optical naturalism of Western art is not the imitation of external nature; rather, the nature that is passively imitated here is merely the vantage point of the viewer. Whence the geneticism, the excessive relativism that characterises most of our art. This art adapted itself to the beholder ( frontality, distant image ), and increasingly the*

*production of the final optical form was entrusted to an actively participating beholder.*

(Carl Einstein. *Negerplastik*)

### **Track 23:**

*The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory... It is beyond infrastructural. It is transversal.*

(Brian Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, P45)

### **Track 24:**

*Or, if the arrow moved it is because it was never in any point. It was in passage across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity. That continuity of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed... The points or positions really appear retrospectively, working backward from the movement's end. It is as if, in our thinking, we put targets all along the path.*

(Brian Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, P6)

### **Track 25:**

*"Look here, Roark" said the Dean gently. "you have worked hard for your education. You have only one year left to go. There is something important to consider, particularly for a boy in your position. There's a practical side of an architect's career to think about. An architect is not an end in himself. He is only a small part of a great*

*social whole. Co-operation is the key word to our modern world and to the practice of architecture in particular. Have you thought of your potential clients?"*

*"yes," said Roark.*

*"The Client," said the Dean. "The Client. Think of that above all. He's the one to live in the house you build. Your only purpose is to serve him. You must aspire to give the proper artistic expression to his wishes. Isn't that all one can say on the subject?"*

*"Well, I could say that i must aspire to build for my client the most comfortable, the most logical, the most beautiful house that can be built. I could say that i must try to sell him the best i have and also teach him to know the best. I could say that, but i wont. Because i do not intend to build in order to serve or help anyone. I do not intend to build in order to have clients. I intend to have clients in order to build"*

*"How do propose to force your ideas on them?"*

*"I do not intend to force or be forced. Those who want me will come to me."*

*(Ayn Rand. The Fountainhead, P14)*

#### **Track 26:**

*Schmitt argues that liberalism seeks to evade the core political opposition between friend and enemy, attempting instead "to tie the political to the ethical and subjugate it to economics".*

*(Jodi Dean. Democracy and Other Neo-Liberal Fantasies, P13)*

#### **Track 27:**

*As Carl Schmitt explained over eighty years ago, belief in openness as a value for its own sake is a product of this time, a product ill-suited to the practicalities of party politics under mass democracy where electoral victories and defeats depend on much*

*more than a revelation here and there. In the present setting, moreover, openness, publicity, and power of revelation further the expansion of networked information technologies to consolidate communicative capitalism.*

(Jodi Dean. *Democracy and Other Neo-Liberal Fantasies*, P148)

#### **Track 28:**

*A distinction between the (curated) exhibition and (artistic) installation is still commonly made, but it is essentially obsolete.*

*The old question must therefore be asked anew: what is an artwork? The answer that present-day art practices offer to this question is straightforward: the artwork is an exhibited object. The object that is not exhibited is not an artwork but merely an object that has the potential to be exhibited as an artwork. Not by chance, we speak of art today as “contemporary art”. It is art that must presently be exhibited in order to be considered art at all.*

(Boris Groys. *Multiple Authorship*)

#### **Track 29:**

*If it is the possible for the same line, the same distinction, to separate and to communicate or connect (communicating also separation itself...), that is because traits and lines of image (its outline, its form) are themselves (something from) its intimate force: for this intimate force is not “represented” by the image, but the image is it, the image activates it, draws and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us.*

(Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Ground of the Image*, P5)

**Track 30:**

*The image is separated in two ways simultaneously. It is detached from a ground (fond) and it is cut out within a ground. It is pulled away and clipped or cut out. The pulling away raises it and brings it forward: makes it a “fore,” a separate frontal surface, whereas the ground itself had no face or surface... It disappears in its essence as ground, which consists in its not appearing. One can thus say that it appears as what it is by disappearing.*

(Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Ground of the Image*, P7)

**Track 31:**

*In the image, or as image, and only in this way, the thing – whether it is an inert thing or a person – is posited as subject. The thing presents itself.*

*Thus the image is, essentially, “monstrative” or “monstrant.”*

(Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Ground of the Image*, P

**Track 32:**

*If works of art are to survive in the context of extremity and darkness, which is social reality, and if they are to avoid being sold as a mere means of comfort, they have to assimilate themselves to that reality. Radical art these days is the same as dark art: its background colour is black... Actually, the ideal of darkness does no more and no less than postulate that ‘art’ properly understood finds happiness in nothing except its ability to stand its ground.*

(Theodore Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*, P)

### Track 33:

*It 'excludes all ideological consequences of any possible social policy; its adherents see even most popular forms as bourgeois.' 'This general strike very clearly proclaims its indifference to the material gains of conquest by stating that it seeks to do away with the state; the state was actually [...] the ground of existence of the dominant groups benefiting from every enterprise, the burdens of which are borne by all.' While the first form of labour (local strike) amounts to violence occasioning a purely external modification 'of the conditions of labour,' the second, being the pure means, is wholly non-violent. The reason is that it occurs not in any state of readiness to resume work after superficial concessions and some sort of modification to the conditions of labour but is a determination to resume only a quite different kind of labour, one not imposed by the state – a total upheaval that this type of strike not merely causes but actually brings about.*

(Walter Benjamin)

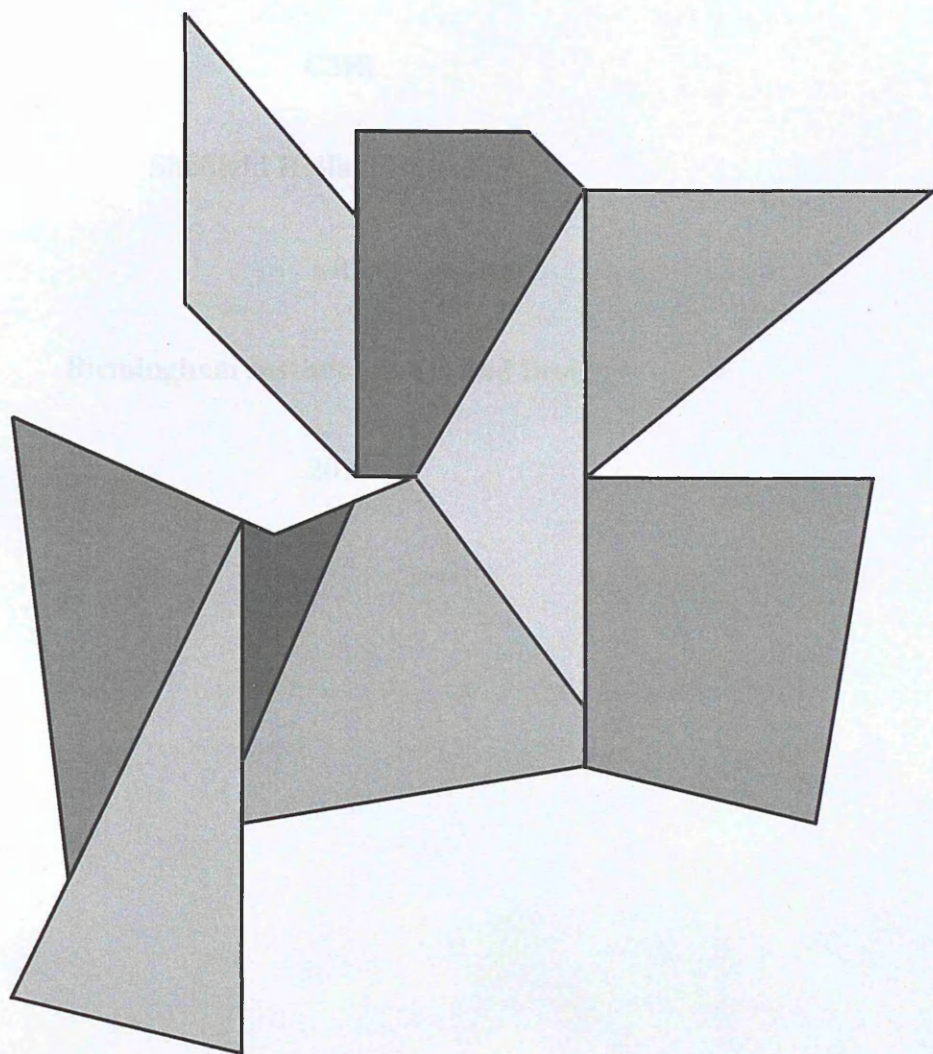
FORCING STRUCTURES

IRRECALCITRANT RESEARCHER

Paul Holman

CSM

Bringing



**FORCING STRUCTURES**  
**(RECALCITRANT RESEARCHER)**

**Dale Holmes**

**C3Ri**

**Sheffield Hallam University**

**with**

**Birmingham Institute of Art and Design**

**2012**



## **Abstract**

*Current thinking around the role of art and art production has tended to exclusively privilege the audience. This is in keeping with the recent operations of the increasingly corporatized academy and the dissolution of boundaries by post-Fordist labour and neo-liberalist economic policy. Most theories locate the power of the artwork in the realm of the audience and deny it any immanence or power in-itself. This paper argues that the artist should resist the corporatizing desire of any audience whatsoever. The conclusion is that this can be achieved through making artworks as ends 'in-themselves'.*

## Introduction

The current insistence on *audience* found in much contemporary art is in keeping with the recent operations of the academy. In *contemporary* art this approach is manifest through an insistence on *open* or *audience* driven projects; these have been variously called relational aesthetics, the educational turn, dialogic and workshop driven; but I argue should be applied to any artwork that inscribes the viewer into its construction. All of these are strategies that claim to dismantle hierarchies and offer alternative democratic models of social relations – the figure of this being the much discussed paradigm shift in the audience for art from passive spectators to active participants. This it is argued realises the avant gardist dream of delivering art up entirely to the social sphere. The pace of these developments in art practice have been matched by the increasing corporatisation of academic institutions through the introduction of fees, the new status of students as consumers, the dissolution of private and public boundaries and funding for the arts arguably following open framework models of practice and audience driven research.

This paper will explore whether the artist can achieve any autonomy within the academic context. The expectation is that the artist as immanent to itself has the power to resist not only the corporate instrumentalisation of art education, but also the progressively homogenised art world.

## Methods

This paper has been developed partly in response to a call for papers by a cross institutional research group at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design that address the questions *who is your research for?* And *what benefits can they expect from it?* And partly in response to an article written by Peter Suchin titled *Rebel Without a Course* (AM 345/April 2011) in which he argues that the current trend in British art institutions for PhD in Fine Art is a symptom of education's progressive corporatization. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of the broken tool, Rosalind Krauss' work on the grid in modernist art and the Robert Ludlum character Jason Bourne; I will consider the 'problem' that is the artist in research and claim that audience driven initiatives through their promotion of shared or decentred authorship – the collapsing of recognisable frameworks - are continuous with the ongoing project of homogenisation; the dismantling of any boundary between public and private space initiated by the Thatcher-Reagan economic model commonly referred to as neo-liberalism.

### 1. A World Without Distinctions?

In a recent article by Peter Suchin published by Art Monthly and titled *Rebel Without a Course*, the art critic reminds us that – in his words – *PhD's (in fine art) are through and through, an institutional device...*; Suchin points out that:

What is at stake when considering artists as PhD students is the question of their relationship to the authority of the increasingly commercial and narrow-minded art schools? That is, to institutions that will, for a substantial fee, coupled with the acceptance of a range of (self) transformations on the part of the student, confer the title 'doctor' onto those willing and able to appropriately modify their practice (and its linguistic adjunct) into research as nominally defined.

For Suchin such a constrictive atmosphere runs counter to the liberal freedoms he claims are required to make 'good' art and the level of concession made by the PhD

candidate to the institutions desires as an audience and benefactor of research is tantamount to relinquishing both art educations *relative autonomy* and the candidate's individual artistic autonomy.

Through his polemical text – almost a year on from its publication the consequent debate still rumbles on in the letters pages of Art Monthly – Suchin highlights many of the problems and contentious issues that attend the practice Lead PhD programmes typical of institutions in the UK. Although I don't disagree with some aspects of Suchin's attack, I do think that he surrenders too quickly and in the process ends up supporting the main problems. Here I want to focus on four of the most urgent issues that I feel Suchin's article compounds.

These are:

1. The further dismantling of any boundary between academia and market through his assessment as a professional art critic (he gets paid to do it) that the artworks produced on PhD programmes are on the whole lacking quality and that the scholarship is substandard. Drawing support for this view from amongst others Jon Thompson who has remarked upon *the low intellectual standard of students* in PhD programmes and Patricia Bickers who has pointed out that *to fulfil the criteria for a research-based degree in any meaningful way, the fine art researcher will almost inevitably be drawn away from any meaningful practice*. Thus making clear that the audience for such art production continues well beyond the academic assessment structure; therefore theorising its continuity with any other art world whatever.

2. Re-enforcing the belief that academia and in particular the Practice led PhD in Fine Art is an irredeemably restrictive construction thus idealising the freedoms of an art-world beyond it.

3. Raising suspicion around the intention of any artist interested in pursuing research in fine art. Pointing out in the process the mass delusion of candidates that the PhD in fine art will be entirely for their own benefit claiming the candidates position to be that of *I will use the institution, but it won't use me* and taking great pains to remind us that the practice based PhD in fine art is nothing more than *a pernicious and misleading validation system*. Suchin goes on to maintain that a candidate's main motivation for embarking on PhD programmes is to gain the much needed validation that has eluded them in the commercial art world. Promoting the conservative position that insists the market is the only reliable measure of artistic quality.

4. Betraying the impulse to individuate the artist in the research context; detaching them from any wider research community whatever through eliding the fact that PhD research is not entirely an individual endeavour; all have supervisory teams or at least some form of collective attached – this conference is an example of this.

For Suchin then the PhD in art can only represent an instrumentalisation of the artist that – whether she realises it or not – strips her entirely of her autonomy leading only to a compromised and emasculated practice that impacts negatively on art in general. Here I paraphrase:

Accepting the PhD in art is not...to empower the artist, it is only, paradoxically an emasculatory empowering of those who reconfigure their practice so as to comply with the institutions rules. The corollary of the PhD in art is a disempowering of art per se.

In his concluding comments Suchin insists that artists in research have only one imperative worth contemplating and that is to abandon the institution and leave academia to its reality of co-option and corporatisation.

## **2. Do you commit to this programme?**

The 2003 Doug Liman movie *The Bourne Identity* opens with the image of an unidentified man floating at night in a seemingly endless sea that is indiscernible from the sky; a landscape with no horizon or edges – the size and shape of the screen made arbitrary by the tacit knowledge that this continues infinitely beyond it; an endlessly open space. This image serves as our introduction to the cinematic incarnation of Jason Bourne. The image of Bourne floating is demonstrative of the conditions that constitute the characters reality up to that point. The story goes that Bourne has lost his memory after being shot and falling into the sea; the culmination of a bungled assassination Bourne had been charged to carry through. As the film unfolds Bourne begins to discover he is amply equipped with a set of skills and tools; specialist weapons knowledge, he is a polyglot, proficient in hand to hand combat, and possesses the ability to unblinkingly pull the trigger. Mark Fisher points out in his book *Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative?* That:

Bourne lacks narrative memory, but retains what we might call formal memory: a memory of techniques, practices and actions.

As the narrative unfolds it becomes clear to the viewer, if not to the character that he is a C.I.A *Black Ops* assassin. Bourne it would seem is the ultimate spook detached from any perceivable structure and bereft of any boundaries either physical or economic. A dematerialised object, Bourne is a ghost providing specialised services for an undelineated client. We find out that Bourne is an ex army Captain whom has become the

willing participant in a programme that is designed to break down any mental or physical resistance to a new set of working conditions or maybe more accurately non-conditions. He is delivered up as the model of the perfect post-Fordist flexible worker employed when demand dictates for specialist interventions by a dematerialised agency – seemingly without roots and without attachments moving through the world barely detected.

### 3. GRIDS?

Jason Bourne is constructed by the institution – like Suchin’s PhD candidate – as a tool; instrumentalised and without any autonomy; relative or otherwise. Having said that when we first encounter Bourne we discover him to be a broken tool and like the philosopher Martin Heidegger’s broken hammer he comes into being precisely because he is malfunctioning and beyond repair. In this state of discrepancy he is no longer useful to his employers and therefore has no place in the world they have constructed; his continuity with it has been radically severed.

The logic embodied in the figure of Jason Bourne and his movement from dematerialisation to material object; from pliable asset to recalcitrant problem can be thought of in terms of the grid as it appears in the trajectories of modernist art. Rosalind Krauss has written that the grid – as the ultimate signifier of artistic modernism – is; due to *its bivalent structure... fully, even cheerfully, schizophrenic*. Arguing that the grid can lend itself on the one hand to a centripetal reading – and on the other to a centrifugal reading; Krauss proposes that;

Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture can only be seen – according to this logic – as arbitrary. By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cut from an infinitely larger fabric. This is the

centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of the aesthetic object inward.

The centrifugal, open or beyond-the-frame artwork is theoretically un-delineated from and thus continuous with the world; the fact that its boundaries are arbitrary – according to Krauss – serves to dematerialise the surface into a boundary less and homogenised spatiality. Whilst the centripetal, closed or within-the-frame artwork is the inverse of this; severely materialist in its immanence; *its surface being internally organised and concentrated*. The logic of the centripetal artwork; through its insistence on that which is imminent to it is closed and discontinuous and this forces it to become the object of vision on its own terms, it forces a new set of relations with its audience; exceeding any given set of relations.

#### **4. Forcing Structures?**

As the *Bourne Identity* progresses Jason Bourne's unbinding from the open ground of the centrifugal grid begins forcing new structures. This happens through Bourne's repurposing and reconfiguring of the tools and assets he has been provided with; constructing a new form that re-directs and exceeds its initial intended use. The dematerialised object that is Bourne acquires architecture; in the sense that Denis Holier ascribes to it, *an edifice that exceeds mere utility*. Bourne becomes autonomous and material and this new solidity begins to register on surveillance; by becoming the object of vision Bourne literally pops up from the grid. The centrifugal, open and horizontal figure that was Jason Bourne, once so fluid and continuous with the grid is now a closed vertical structure that comes into sharp focus; made visible through its immanence to itself. The outcome being that new ontological relations and new audience's are produced whilst the opaque structures newly positioned as outside this construction are



rendered transparent – in Bourne’s case the mystifying structures and murky machinations of the C.I.A and beyond.

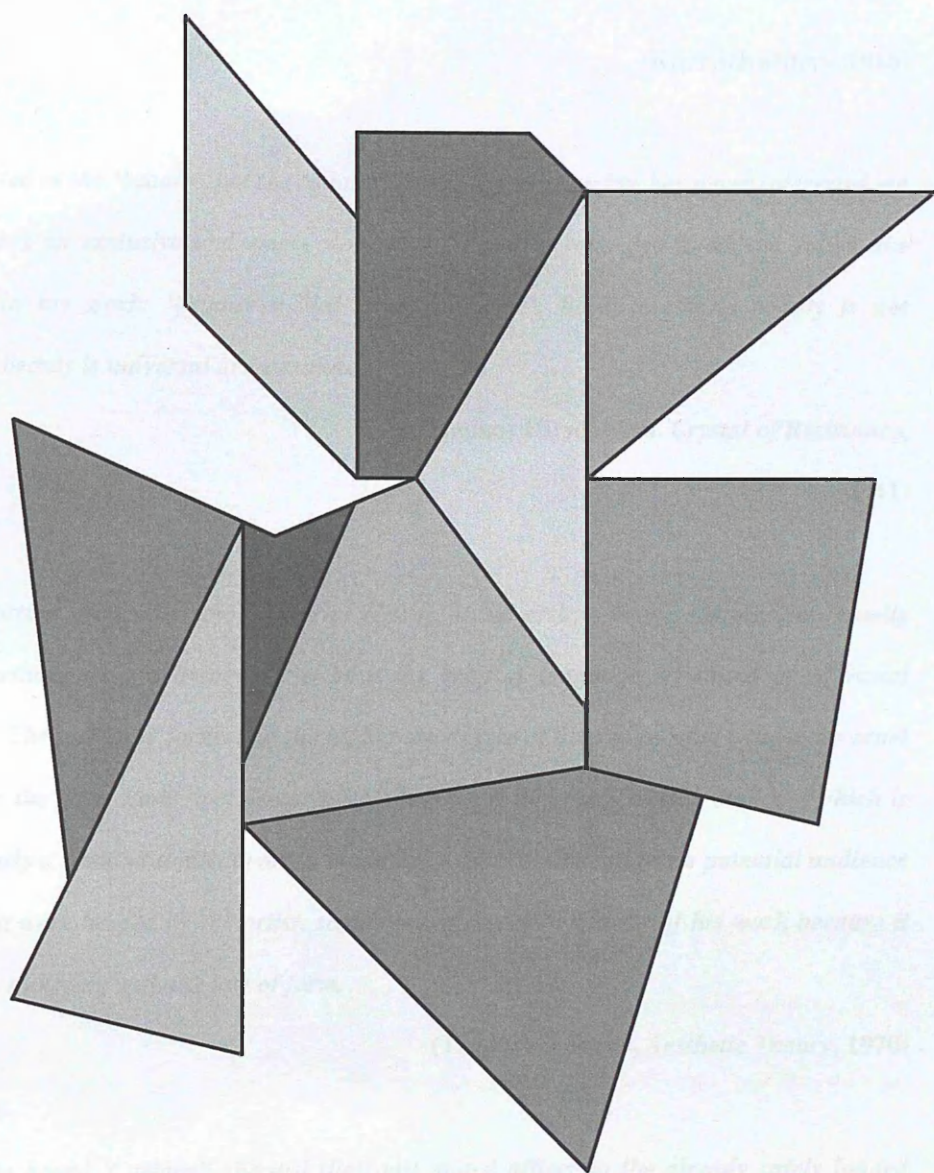
## **Results**

It is clear from his initial article and the subsequent exchanges found in the letters pages of *Art Monthly* that Peter Suchin; and as we have seen he is not alone, sees the artist whom offers herself up to the institutional framework of PhD as discrepant to the art world – she is not fit for purpose precisely because she is co-opted by the corporatized institutional invention known as PhD – offering herself up as a broken tool in desperate need of the validation otherwise not available to her in any other art world – and that’s not all, it would appear that she is also seen to be discrepant in relation to academia; expected as she is to fit her practice into methodological paradigms alien to art making of any description; rendering her from the outset – technically and academically unfit.

The examples I have referred to above suggest alternatively that it is exactly these conditions of discrepancy – whether real or imagined – that offer up opportunities. Through bracketing off their practice; that is to say breaking with the desire of their audiences and in particular resisting the desire that they should be continuous with that desire; artists in research can introduce – like Jason Bourne – an outside from which they can distinguish themselves. In other words – and this is borrowed from the philosopher Alain Badiou – break the external measuring stick applied by the audiences of research in order to invent a new measure.

## Discussion/Conclusion

Contrary to Suchin's appeal that artists 'abandon the institution and head underground' I suggest that the notion of a *neutral* space for artists to operate in is an insidious idealism only and that through taking up the position of recalcitrant researcher; artists in research can begin to develop resistant structures and artworks immanent to themselves, as ends in themselves. This I speculate would contribute a valid critique to both the progressively homogenised art world and provide a strategy for resisting arts increasing corporate instrumentalisation within the academic context.



## Crystal of Resistance:

### Thomas Hirschhorn's Material Philosophy

*Everything had broken down and new things had to be made from the fragments; and this is Merz*

(Kurt Schwitters, 1918)

*I am interested in the 'beauty', not the 'quality' of the crystal. Quality has never interested me and to me it's an exclusive and empty word and I decided years ago to always follow the 'guideline' in my work: 'Quality = No! Energy = Yes!'. Because clearly beauty is not subjective – beauty is universal and absolute.*

(Thomas Hirschhorn. *Crystal of Resistance*,  
2011)

*Arts own posture, Nietzsche says, is one of cruelty. In all artistic forms, imagination cruelly excises something from a living whole, be it the body of language, of sound or of visual perceptions. The purer the forms and the higher the degree of autonomy of art, the more cruel they are. On the other hand, any demand for a less cruel and more human stance – which is simultaneously a demand to create art in conformity with the taste of one's potential audience – would, if it were heeded by the artist, simply water down the quality of his work because it would mean tinkering with the law of form.*

(Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970)

*'Get back on board, Captain!' shouted the coast guard officer to the already safely landed captain of the Costa Concordia who refused to go back to his vessel. 'Get back on board!' means there is definitely no escape - we have to confront the self produced disaster in its incredible normality - there is no way out, there is no place to flee, there is no safe land anymore!*

(Thomas Hirschhorn, *Concordia, Concordia*, 2012)





## POLITICS

In a space that looks like the set from a cheap sci-fi horror movie sometimes used as an ad-hoc narcotics processing plant and pop up discotheque in a provincial hell hole, a totemic cylindrical column of televisions (obsolete?) held in place with length's of wood and brown parcel tape stands monumentally in the centre of the space reaching from floor to ceiling. On each television screen images of violence, suffering and death flicker by. The image on a television screen is an image of an LCD touch screen – newer technologies - an 'iPad' screen that rests on each image for a short time and then a huge index finger comes in to view and swipes the image away replacing it with another just as horrific scene. The repetition in the images flattens them all out and they become as banal in their horizontality as any



other of the countless snapshots that make up our techno-liberated image world. This happens over and over again until the owner of the finger – Hirschhorn? - settles on an image and blows it up as if to inspect more closely its viscera; as if something extra or at best, extraordinary is present there. It is impossible to tell why the images that are singled out are singled out. Differences in position, in gender, in types of wound or horror – heads blown off, limbs missing, the presence of an item of branded packaging; whatever. The particularities of the image selected are thus unimportant, to look for a reason for that choice has no sense. But, by blowing the image up, through settling on that one and forcing it forward a spike is created; a moment of verticality amongst the flattened and horizontal image economy we have been, up to that point presented with.



## AESTHETICS

It resembles a conflict zone for a war that is raging eternally without beginning or end in which the combatants are material and informational objects drafted from the everyday realities of the salacious press, of the high street, of the snack bar and the interweb. The walls are almost exclusively covered in triangles of varying sizes cut from silver material, tin foil, tin-foil tape, tin-foil coated cardboard, tin-foil coated bubble-wrap stapled in place and taped together. Scattered around are stacks of plastic chairs in white, lime green and grey all taped together with brown parcel tape, all have the legs taped to the floor. Along one wall and shining under the artificial glare of too many too bright strip lights stand a row of mannequins, naked and bald their torso's and faces hollowed out as if by an extra-terrestrial laser beam or wounded by some futuristic death/desire machine – jagged crystals stick out and into the hollow shells reflecting light out and into the body cavities of these traumatised dummies spreading unevenly from one to the other like some creeping alien symbiotic contagion. On all the flat surfaces glass shards – broken bottles – stick upright and ugly ready and waiting to snag at all manner of fabric and tissue. There is more... a lot more of this and a lot more of other *stuff*.





## PHILOSOPHY

Accompanying the artwork is a twelve page A4 sized pamphlet written by Hirschhorn containing a text which has been translated in to Italian, French and English; throughout the pamphlet are images of the work and some drawings made by the artist in preparation for the artworks construction. On first reading the pamphlet what is striking is the language the artist employs in the construction of a linguistic – philosophical - framework for the artwork *Crystal of Resistance*; terms that include Form, Love, Politics, Aesthetics, Philosophy, Resistance, Absolute, Universal, Distinct and Autonomous. The terms Hirschhorn employs are as alien to the prevalent language of contemporary art as the lasers that burnt gashes into the torso's of the mannequins. The manner in which they are deployed make them urgent.



I don't make political art. I work politically. Working politically means working without cynicism, without negativity and without self satisfying criticism

(Hirschhorn,T. 2006)



## EXCESS

The Swiss pavilion at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale in 2011 hosted a new work by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. The work titled *Crystal of Resistance* filled both floors of the pavilion with a range of materials that can be described as transient or, what Charles Jencks would call 'ad-hoc' - materials that are to hand as opposed to specialist materials. Materials including images gleaned from websites that provide pictures of the viscera of war – mutilated corpses – raped corpses – decapitated corpses – rat chewed corpses – corpses with objects near them –

corpses in fields – corpses on streets, compact discs, televisions, snapshots, ‘gossip’ magazines, shop mannequins with protrusions made of tin foil or with their torso torn open and crystals sticky taped into them, polythene, tin foil, pallets, packaging tape, moulded plastic chairs, cardboard, wooden battening, strip lights, electrical wire, plastic containers, plumbing materials, crystals, plastic funnels, shredded paper, broken fish tanks, foil coated gym equipment, ‘Barbie’ dolls, triangles, geodes, obsolete mobile telephones, over sized smart phones (props from a phone retailer?), books on economic theory, beer cans, fibreglass boulders, stuffed birds, mirrors and a large amount of each.

According to Hirschhorn in *Crystal of Resistance*:

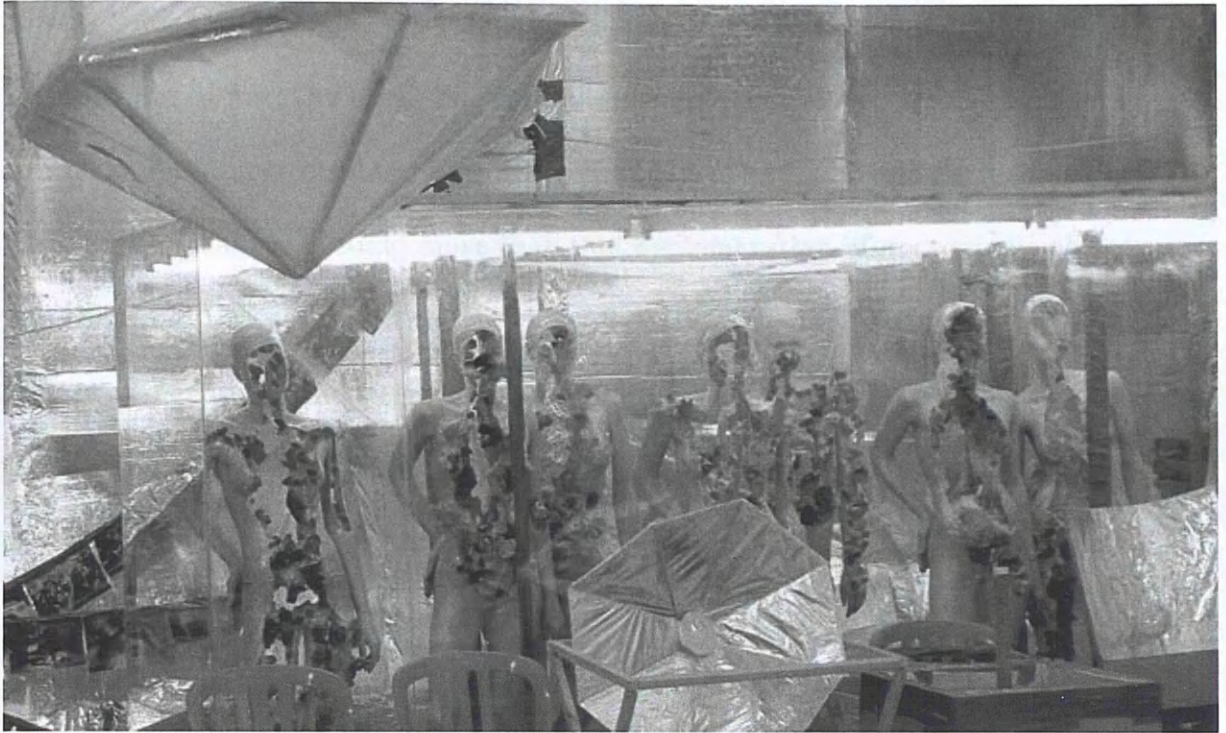
There will be many elements to see, there will be ‘too much’. It has to be ‘too much’, not because it is important to see everything or spend a lot of time looking, but ‘too much’ so that the things do not lie.

(Hirschhorn, T. 2011)

The visual and material excesses played out in *Crystal of Resistance* serve to challenge the viewing subject’s appropriation of the artwork as an image that can translate easily into a set of visual knowledge’s. There is no opportunity to *step back* from the work in an effort to grasp it as an whole and thus the work resists both the viewers desires for it to be an epistemological trigger and her ability to control – subjectivize - its excesses – what the artist calls its ‘truth’ - into any reductive narratives whether visual, political or philosophical. Through *Crystal of Resistance*, Hirschhorn then attempts to demonstrate that through the pile up of excess; the accretion of stuff and the squashing together of a multitude of materials and processes – not to unify the manifold elements – but to force a crystal – in



other words, a truth - to appear; unilateral, distinct and cruel, cold and hard, direct and non-discursive.



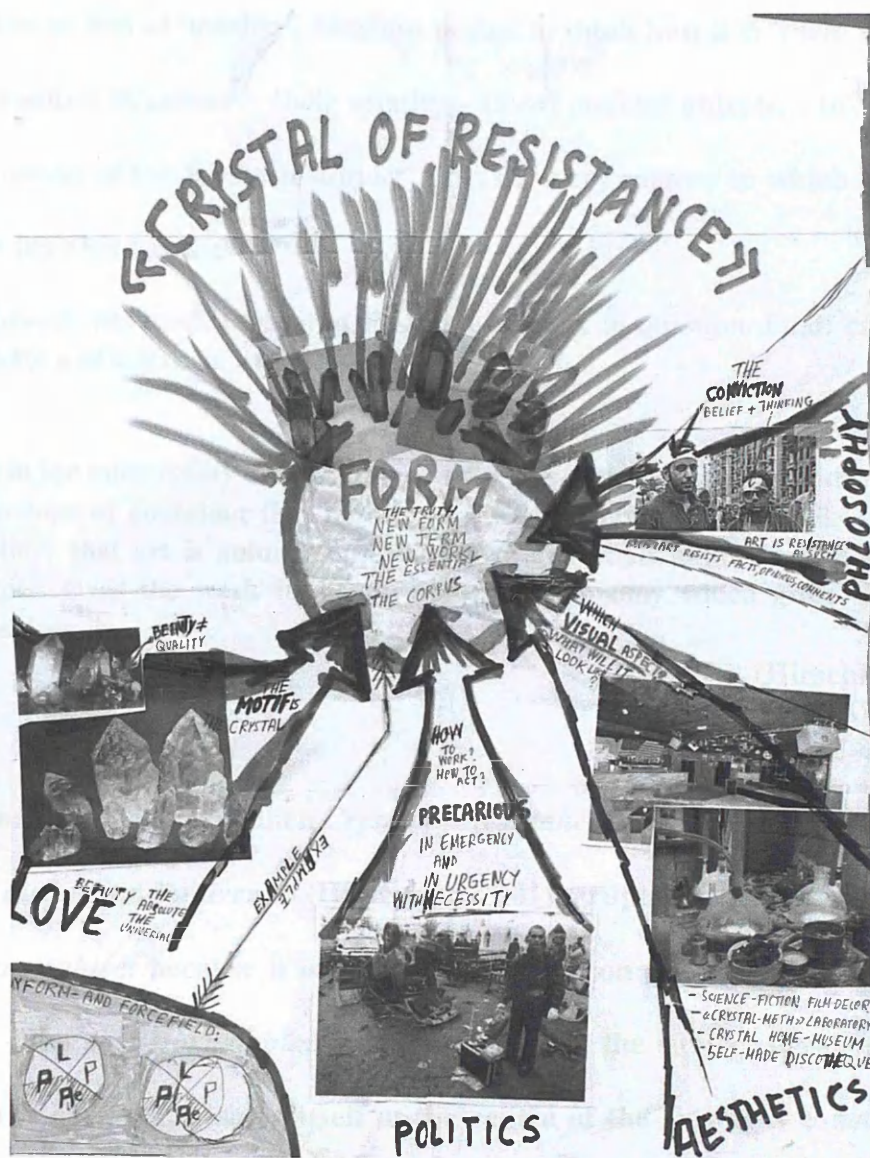
## RESISTANCE

THE CRYSTAL GROWS IN BLIND MATERIAL, IT IS NOT MEANT  
FOR THE THEATRE OF THE EYE. THE CRYSTAL RESISTS  
VISIBILITY.

The above quote used by Hirschhorn is taken from one of the drawings the artist made when developing his work *Crystal of Resistance* makes it clear that the object of art - as it is understood in Hirschhorn's terms, to be 'autonomous' and 'universal' – is a truth, not in need of a viewer – subject - to construct it; what he refers to as the 'theatre of the eye' which is just another way of saying the audience; whether fantasised as passive viewer or idealised as active participant. Alternatively for Hirschhorn art is as complete and in-itself – for it-self even - as

the crystal, recovered from the dark envelope in which it developed. In these terms, art becomes that which is excised from the realm of anonymous objects – objects which are denied any autonomy and instead are dissolved into the everyday fog of war; the blind, and blinding material that makes up the miasma of our techno-military-consumer-education complex. The 'blind material' of which Hirschhorn speaks is nothing more than that agglomeration of anonymous objects that constructs the surface of the world; objects that are anonymous through their disappearance under the weight of everyday use. The form of art is then, on these terms, the thing that is exhumed(?), unearthed from this 'blind material' (images of war, images of celebrity, tin foil, parcel tape, shop mannequins, etc.) that make up the matrix. The crystal (of resistance) that Hirschhorn manages to construct is *excised* from the body – the matrixical ground – of the world and is always shot through with the cruelty Adorno speaks of – both in its excavation of representations of suffering from the world wide web and the nature of the materials mined from everyday situations. A cruelty that Adorno, following Nietzsche, insists is the truth of art and the process of arts autonomy.





## TOTALITY

With the work *Crystal of Resistance* Hirschhorn intends to present us with an artwork that is cruel and unyielding – in his words – 'distinct', 'universal' and a 'truth'; non-relational and un-bound from the particularities of the self; 'of the personal, of opinion and of commentary'. If he is successful in this, with *Crystal of Resistance* Thomas Hirschhorn creates what the art critic Carl Einstein calls a 'totality'. The Einstein scholar Sebastian Zeidler writing in 2007 explains that

through the notion of 'totality', Einstein begins to think how it is 'their very formal and experiential structure – their totality – (that) enables objects... to rupture the visual economy of the Western subject'. It is this very *rupture* to which Hirschhorn strives, in his own words;

Through my work *Crystal of Resistance* I want to question. First: can my work create a new term of art?

And,

I am for universality and for autonomy – I am never concerned with context. The envelope or container that I will make is the assertion of my works autonomy. I believe that art is autonomous and I love art for its autonomy – the autonomy which gives the work its beauty and the autonomy which gives the work its absolute.

(Hirschhorn, 2011)

If Hirschhorn's claim is true then *Crystal of Resistance*, as an absolutely autonomous artwork; *distinct and universal* (Hirschhorn, 2011), ruptures the *visual economy of the Western subject* because it is an economy based on the narrative of subjective causality - the *post-Duchampian* gesture - in which the subject insists on being a cause of the artwork; placing itself at the centre of the artworks construction. A situation that finds the viewing subject; through their participation in the artwork, positing themselves as a vital link in a chain of events that they themselves construct; a high note that melds into the chain of notes to form a melody, what Henri Bergson calls a 'succession without distinction'. Hirschhorn attempts to disallow this by making a work that is discontinuous or in Einstein's definition of totality; 'qualitatively punctual'; that is to say reified; distinct from the viewer whilst offering no opportunity to step back, due to its too-much-ness and therefore circumventing any possibility for the elements that make up the work and the viewer that encounters it to be narrativised into any meaningful whole.





### FROM MERZ TO TOO-MUCH

The contemporary dream of art is the mingling of subject and artwork, artwork and world into some situation of homogenous interwoveness or Platonic mikton – an agreeable mix (solution). Instead what Hirschhorn's *Crystal of Resistance* presents is closer to Reza Negarestani's conception of 'aer'- aer in Greek mythology was the name given to the impure stuff breathed by mortals as opposed to a pure 'aether' breathed by the Gods - in his book *Cyclonopeadia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), the author states that:

Aer must be a mixture, more on the side of impurity than the Platonic 'mikton', which is a holistic aggregate. Aer as impurity, then, must be associated with a gathering of diverse particles whose collectivity cannot be reduced to a wholeness. Such impurity is a non-homogenous suspension of crystals, droplets and vapour among other particles...

Although the concept of 'aer' provides us with a satisfying illustration; a classical image of the contingent and manifold, of the distinct and autonomous stuff of our world piled up and displayed in *Crystal of Resistance*, this might prove to be too gentle a description of Hirschhorn's material philosophy evident in the work *Concordia, Concordia* from 2012.

The Dada artist Kurt Schwitters is instructive in any assessment of Hirschhorn's art practice due to the developments of his approach to collage and assemblage and the naming of his art practice as 'Merz', with 'Merz', Schwitters institutes a new material philosophy. A material philosophy founded upon the breaking down of the term 'commerce' - in German, 'Commerz' - through a rejection of the 'com'; in other words the together part of that term.; allowing for the material stuff - goods, wares, merchandise, etc. - to be encountered without the illusion of its reconciliation with its consumer; an inverted reification of the artwork. The material philosophy of 'Merz' sits at the base of Hirschhorn's own material philosophy of 'Too Much'. A philosophy that demonstrates its dis-unifying effects in Hirschhorn's work *Concordia, Concordia* (2012) installed at Gladstone Gallery in late 2012. The work is based on media images of the interiors - ballroom, cabins, bar's - of the wrecked cruise ship the *Costa Concordia* which ran aground and capsized killing 32 passengers in January 2012; images of the virtual luxuries of a contemporary cruise liner disassembled by the seismic shift caused by a ship rolling over. As Hirschhorn describes in the press release for the Gladstone show:

As many people, I saw the pictures showing the inside of the sunken cruise ship Costa Concordia after the wreck. The floor emerging upright had become a wall, the wall was turned into a ceiling and the ceiling into the opposite wall. Every non-attached thing was floating in water, like a barricade in movement. A barricade made of all that points out the impassable and cumbersome in-utility. I was struck



by this apocalyptic upside down vision of the banal and cheap "nice, fake, and cosy" interior of an upturned ship.

The too much-ness of the cruise liners gaudy interiors disassembled and in despair, disassociated from knowledge through the tipping over of the ship, is exactly the 'Too Much' of Hirschhorn's material philosophy. Through the 'Too Much' nature of works like *Crystal of Resistance* (2011) and *Concordia, Concordia* (2012) Thomas Hirschhorn forges a barricade - an obstacle to control - which, like the term in military use - acts as an improvised field fortification; a positive gap constructed from piling up excessively - the ad-hoc elements of the socio-economic order, salvaged from the actual wreckage of what the writer Mark Fisher calls Capitalist Realism. The material philosophy of 'Too Much' continuing and accelerates the material philosophy of 'Merz'. Hirschhorn following Schwitters, draws out and disassociates the contingent materials of late capitalism.

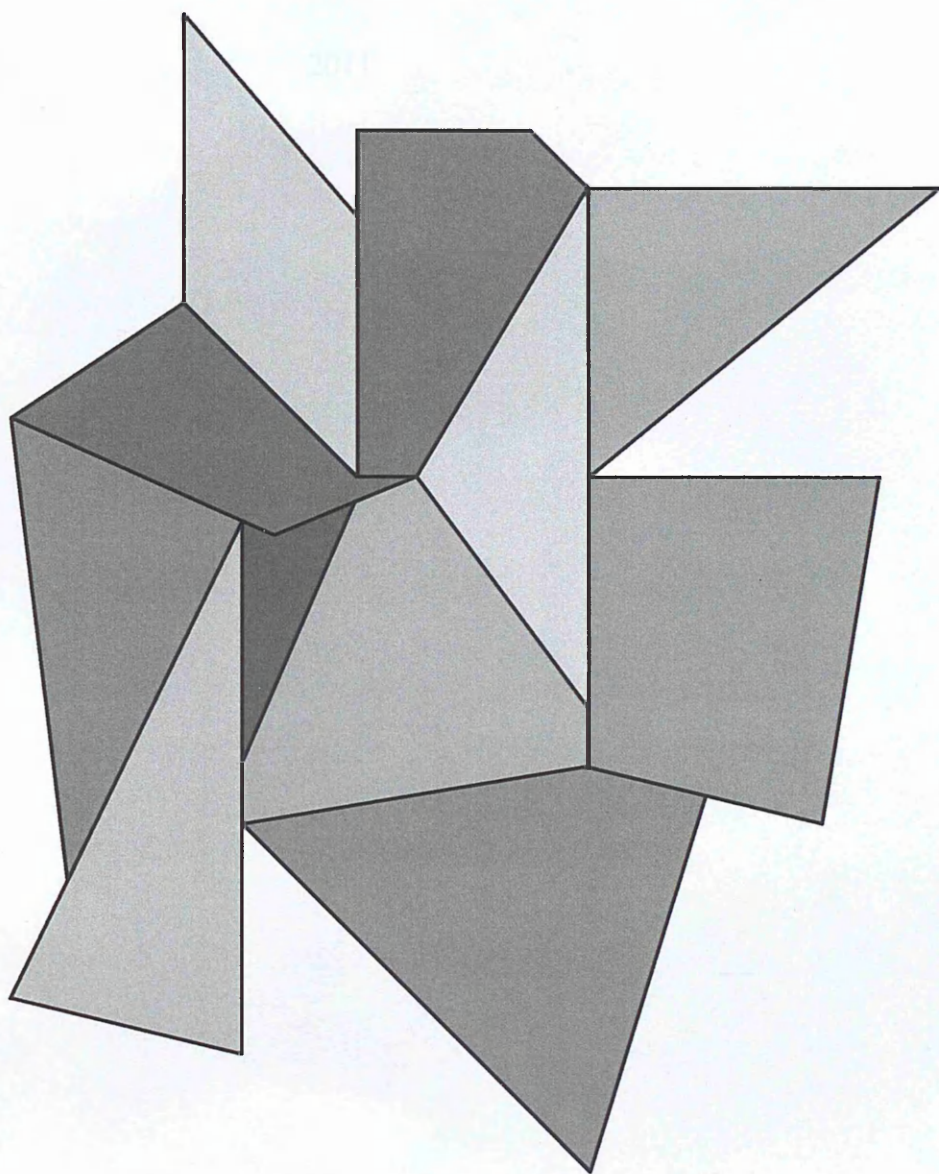


# SUNRISE SHINE IN A MIDNIGHT SKY

Dale Henson

Sheffield Hallam University

2011



**SUNRISE SHINE IN A MIDNIGHT SKY**

Dale Holmes

Sheffield Hallam University

2011

## **Abstract**

These experiments tested how material and process generatively influence the construction of art objects as ends in them-selves. These tests were developed through choosing ad-hoc – to hand - materials that have a clear readymade structure and investigating this by focusing directly on the internal logics of these chosen materials. The results led to a series of paintings, wall reliefs and a series of paintings/tabletop constructions. The conclusion is that the art object is dependent upon the artist/subject in its manufacture alone and that post studio it exists independent of any subject whatever.

## **Introduction:**

Historically efforts made by artists to question arts assumed humanism through an investigation of theory, structures, systems and materials; including the products of constructivism, British constructionism and minimalism have been theorised – not least by the artists themselves - along an axis of the humanist narratives of rationalism and phenomenological interpretation.

Recent contemporary art production demonstrates an interest in contingent and ad-hoc materials - found objects, repurposed materials – Ikea furniture, ‘DIY’ materials, etc. This approach to materials for art production is regularly theorised has a horizontalisation of art through a dismantling of its medium specificity and as an attack on cultural hegemonies; all theories that inevitably capture the artwork in the narratives of democracy and therefore privilege the artwork as a product for interpretation only.

The author of this study wanted to question the idealism of these theories through demonstrating a fidelity to the characteristics and internal logics of a specific set of materials and to assess the affect they have on the processes and construction of artworks. Using as a point of departure the following conjectures;

- 1) The artwork at the point of its design and manufacture – whatever form that takes – is dependent on the human (my construction of it); this is merely a dull or empirical dependence.
- 2) This is as far as any claim for the artwork’s dependence on the human can be stretched. This is because at the moment the artwork is in the world of things there is no sense in claiming that any of its properties are dependent on any linguistic practice or phenomenology directed at it.

These studio based experiments will test the effects of ad-hoc materials on the process of art production. The expectation is that the tests will show these materials affect processes and result in artworks as abstract ends-in-themselves that cannot be reduced, through the viewing process, to humanist narratives of ordering and subjective interpretation.



## Materials

The materials employed for these experiments are: one copy of *LOVE* magazine, one copy of *WALLPAPER\** magazine, one copy of *WAD* magazine, one copy of *ID* magazine, one roll of medium gauge gardening wire, one roll of tin foil tape, fourteen length's of hardwood – 3'3" long, 3" wide and 2" deep, cardboard egg boxes, white plastic drinks bottles with tops, cloth tape – red, yellow, blue, black, various sized packaging boxes.

## Methods

The experiments are carried out within a set of rigid parameters; these are;

1. To make all works in the PhD studio at S1 Artspace.
2. To carry out each experiment with haste and in one working session – timings of working sessions varies; the outcomes are not returned to at a later date.
3. To recognise the internal logics specific to each material; for example tape pulls, garden wire coils, bottles stand, magazines lay, etc.
4. To allow these characteristics to guide the making process; for example the direction of the models legs in a fashion photograph, the height of a bottle in relation to the edge of a magazine, the size of a magazine or wall dictates the physical scale of the experiment, etc.
5. To construct the experiments from the ground up without any preparatory information – idealisations, drawings, etc. - for guidance. That is to say no prior knowledge of an end point or product.
6. Each experiment will have four discreet components.

Every effort was made to create consistent studio conditions for each session throughout the experiment period. The conditions for each session were:

1. The experiments are carried out by the author alone.
2. The experiments are carried out in the PhD studio at S.1 Artspace.
3. The sessions take place over a four week period on Wednesday and Thursday throughout the month of September 2011 – this means that variations in atmospheric levels – temperature, sound and light - are kept to a minimum.
4. Sessions cover the period 11:00 am to 14:00 pm.



### **Test example 1: Tabletop Construction 3.**

The experiment took place on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2011 in the PhD studio at S1 Artspace between 11:00 and 14:00.

Step 1: one copy of Wallpaper\* magazine was laid upon the work table.

Step 2: placed upon the magazine directly below the banner header and centred from the left and right edges is one H75mm x W50mm x D50mm metal container at a 45 degree angle. At the same distance from the bottom edge of the magazine was placed the internal cardboard roll from a roll of cloth tape measuring W50mm x 35mm.

Step 3: a length of W50mm black cloth tape was attached to the magazine at the centre of the top edge above the banner header and pulled over the metal container and the card roll and then attached to the bottom edge of the magazine at the centre.

Step 4: halfway between the bottom of the magazine header and bottom of the magazine and at an equal distances from the left and right edges of the magazine are placed two rolls of tin foil tape H25mm x W30mm.

Step 5: into each of the rolls from step 4 are placed a plastic bottle – neck down – measuring H100mm x W30mm.

Step 6: a length of W50mm blue cloth tape is attached to the left side of the magazine and pulled across the top of the two bottles and attached to the right side of the magazine.

Step 7: placed upon the blue tape between the bottles is a part used roll of W50mm red cloth tape.

Step 8: attached to the top right hand corner of the magazine between pages 15 and 16 is a coil of green medium gauge gardener's wire that spirals through the roll of red cloth tape and is attached at the bottom left corner of the magazine between pages 15 and 16.

Please refer to figure 1.

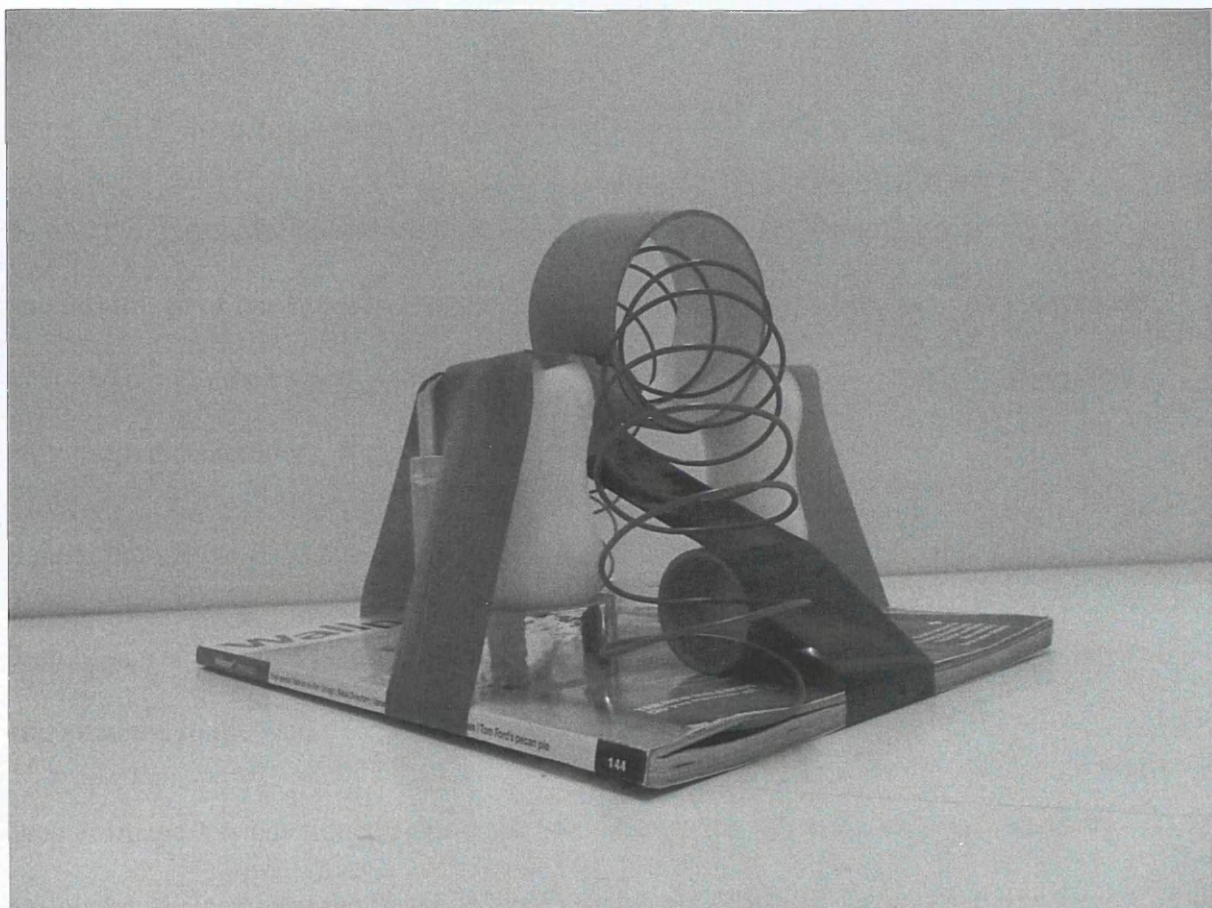


Fig 1: studio documentation of Table-top Construction 3.

## **Test example 2: Typographic Relief 2**

This experiment took place on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2011 in the PhD studio at S1 Artspace between 11:00 and 14:00.

Step 1: onto one length of hardwood we attached lengths of yellow cloth tape until no wood showed on the face or sides of the wood.

Step 2 and 3: the process described in step one was repeated twice using tin foil tape.

Step 4: two pages were removed from the copy of LOVE magazine; the pages featured one full image of one model –, in image 1 the model is shown with only head and upper torso, face on to the camera and centred in the shot. In image 2 the model is shown with only head and shoulders, face on and centred in the shot.

Step 5: the yellow lat is attached horizontally onto the studio wall.

Step 6: one silver lat is placed vertically on the left end of the yellow lat and the bottom end attached to the wall.

Step 7: image 1 is positioned against the wall beneath the silver lat, 600mm above the yellow lat, the centre of the image is lined up with the centre of the lat, the top of the lat is then secured to the wall.

Step 8: one silver lat is buffered up to the right end of the yellow lat and the top end attached to the wall.

Step 9: image two is positioned against the wall beneath the silver lat, 600mm below the yellow lat, the centre of the image is lined up with the centre of the lat, the bottom of the lat is then secured to the wall. Please refer to figure 2.



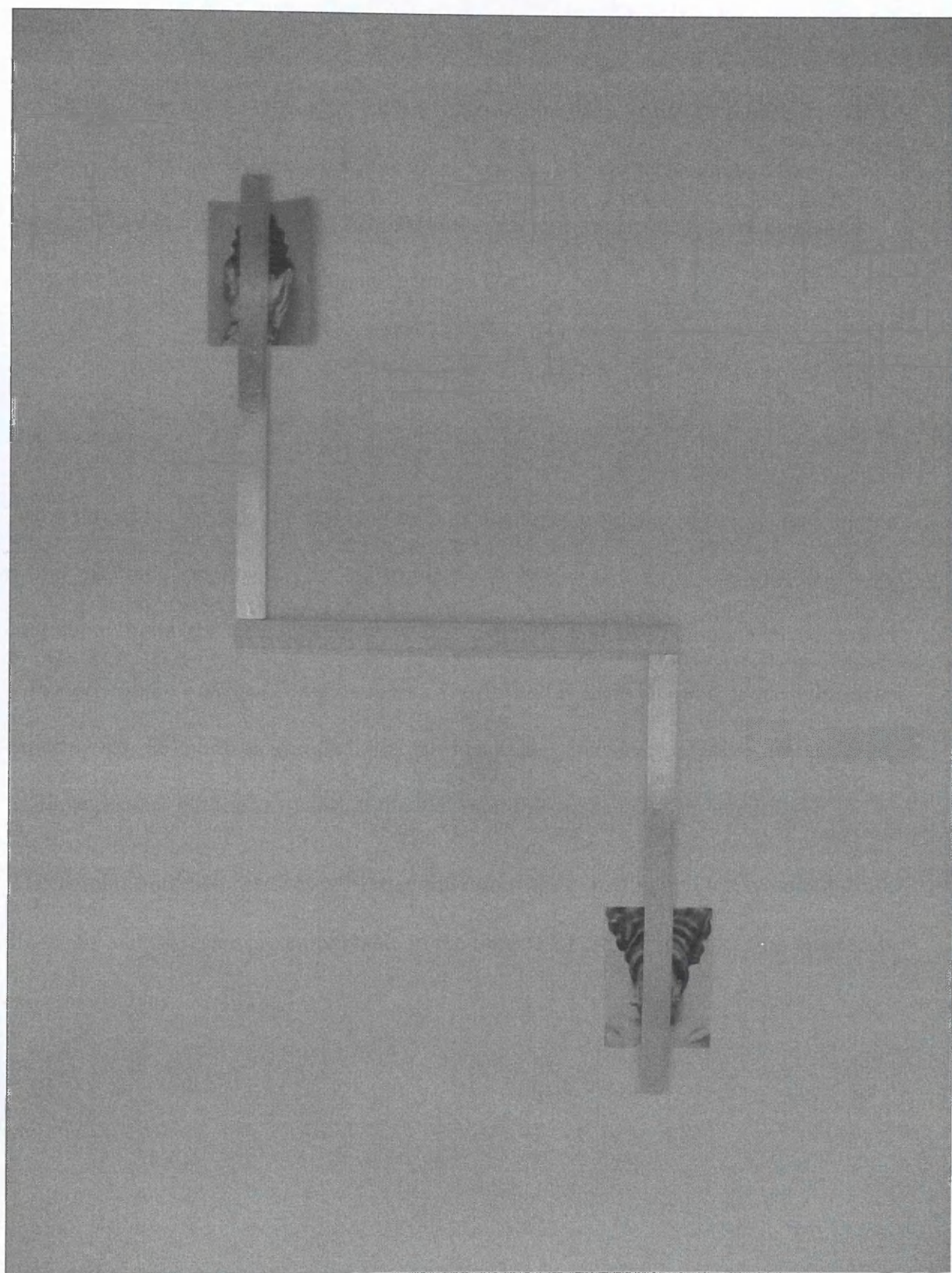


Fig 2: studio documentation of Typographic Relief 2.

## Results

The results were presented along with a selection of oil paintings made during the same period of research at Sheffield Institute of Art Gallery 2 under the collective title *Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky*. All the results from the experiments were presented. (Please refer to the documentation in appendix D)

## Discussion

The tests carried out and the resulting outputs displayed a fidelity to the internal logic's of the materials employed. This led to the development of a set of methods that were contingent upon the characteristics of the materials employed, these can be called *materials driven construction processes*. The focus on materials and process in these experiments destabilises the validity of idealising and interpretative frameworks; frameworks that put the artist and/or the viewer at the centre of art production.

The outputs and the processes generated through these experiments clearly demonstrate the thesis and therefore are employable in the making of closed artworks that operate as ends themselves.

# Conclusions

## Introduction

This research project set out to investigate and develop further a series of non-anthropocentric strategies for constructing non-relational artworks. Through the exercise and evolution of these strategies over the research period, it is evident they form a new methodology for studio practice and practice led research, which in its application in the experimental space of the studio and in areas beyond the studio walls constitutes a new material philosophy, and thus a new theoretical framework for artistic abstraction.

In the introduction to this thesis I propose a new concept I call, *abstract realism*. Through introducing the artistic, philosophical, political, and social implications of the concept, I describe how abstract realism is an approach to art making that questions the emphasis on representational and interpretative bias found in much contemporary art production - understood here in its extreme form, as the reduction of the artwork to nothing more than its audience relation. This is a relational bias that Carl Einstein recognised (and warned against) almost a century ago;

The optical naturalism of Western art is not the imitation of external nature; rather, the nature that is passively imitated here is merely the vantage point of the viewer. Whence the geneticism, the excessive relativism that characterises most of our art. This art adapted itself to the beholder (frontality, distant image), and increasingly the production of the final optical form was entrusted to an actively participating beholder.<sup>72</sup>

This leads me to suggest that the current situation in contemporary art is marked by an exacerbation of the ‘relativism that characterises most of our art’ (Einstein) and to claim against this situation that the artwork is the outcome of its immanent characteristics - not its relationality- and that the methods of construction I have called abstract realism,

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<sup>72</sup> Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 1915.

through privileging the artworks immanent qualities over any relations, recognises the artwork to be a 'totality' (Einstein).

Once again Einstein provides support when he claims that the 'totality' – in this case the artwork:

cannot experience an ordering or articulation by means of some external instrument, but which is organised within and for itself. The total object absorbs every psychological process that is purposely directed towards it as it also absorbs every form of causality. Causal analysis is purely retrospective and always exceeds the concrete object; causes are substituted; but not the totality. The causes of the object always lie in another, posthumous plane than the object itself.<sup>73</sup>

This is comparable in many respects with the claims found in recent philosophical realism and its core claim, following Meillessoux and Harman, to move philosophical labour away from the reduction of it to nothing more than the human-world correlation.

In order to make this 'non-relational' argument I describe how abstract realism is located at the juncture of artistic abstraction and the new philosophical realisms coming out of continental philosophy. This encounter I recognise most clearly in the work of Harman and the overlapping to a greater or lesser extent of this in the non-representational and non-relational aspects of Laruelle's 'non-philosophical method' and Badiou's 'materialist dialectics'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Carl Einstein, 'Totality', 1916.

<sup>74</sup> I have argued that the contemporary philosophical moment is increasingly becoming dominated by the new realisms and materialisms known collectively as 'speculative realism' and its ranks have swelled over the period of this project, a situation in which new developments seem to be tabled daily due to its relationship to the 'blogosphere' and small run publications. Speculative realism's following is large and growing exponentially. This research though, identifies Graham Harman as the exemplar of the object oriented strand whilst Alain Badiou stands at the base of the materialist strand - Quentin Meillessoux, whose work *After Finitude* is referenced in this submission, was his student - whilst the works of Laruelle show the ways in which new realisms appear from the works of productionism by Gilles Deleuze and the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida.



I discuss how the research had developed, in particular my understanding of the limits of abstract realism began to grow in direct response to the practical applications of the methodology, the analysis of these outcomes and then acting upon the findings in subsequent studio based experiments and public events. It happened that abstract realism exceeded my own initial hopes for it - from an intervention on art through the connecting of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism towards recognising abstract realism as a material philosophy in-itself.

Recognising the effects of this material philosophy leads me to then speculate upon the ways in which abstract realism, as a new methodology for constructing new artworks could intervene upon the cultural and political horizon of late capitalism. I argue that Mark Fisher's characterisation of the contemporary cultural and political moment as 'capitalist realism' - itself an exacerbated development of the late capitalism found in Fredric Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism - was both accurate in terms of diagnosis and appropriate to understanding the value of abstract realism. Fisher's core claim - unconditionally accepted here - that capitalism has entered a new phase through a change in kind which moves it beyond Jameson's postmodernism theory is supported by work carried out in the intervening period. Important works in social science by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello into Post-Fordist forms of labour organisation and management language for which they coined the phrase, 'network capitalism'. And more recently the development of this through a critique of the worldwide web and other forms of networked communications media by Jodi Dean in political philosophy and

her theorisation of these as the ideological support for neo-liberalism, a situation she calls 'communicative capitalism'.<sup>75</sup>

The literature supports my assertion that the hegemonic framework of capitalist realism is a totalising situation supported by the construction of social relations that are based on ideals of communication, participation and openness

To summarise, the artistic, socio-political and philosophical contexts I identify throughout provides the conceptual underpinning for my argument.<sup>76</sup> Thus I isolate the hegemonic frameworks that are most relevant to the research project and recognise Fisher's diagnosis of the contemporary social, economic, and political situation of capitalist realism to be the realism from which abstract realism could be developed.

Throughout this project I explore the practical application of the methodology abstract realism in order to actively demonstrate that it provides the tools for reconfiguring art's social relations. This effectively repositions practice led research away from an insistence on representation and interpretation towards non-representational thought and action based on experimental practice. One outcome I would want to suggest is that this movement reverses the vector of the artwork's current audience-driven relational regime towards an absolutely non-relational encounter which I am claiming results in an inevitable asymmetry.

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<sup>75</sup> Dean argues forcefully that the new open access ethics of the web and other networks of communication provide explicit support for neo-liberalism in their promotion as a platform for individual opinion and the registering of feeling over and above any political credibility or reasoning, going on to argue that a left politics with any agency has got to recognise the 'marriage of democracy and neo-liberalism'. Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neo-liberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> The four key texts that provide the contextual framework and support for abstract realism are: Fredric Jameson's, 'Post-modernism Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984), Mark Fisher's, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (2009), Carl Einstein's Essay 'Totality' (1914) and *Negerplastik* (1915) and the supporting texts: Jodi Dean's, *Democracy and Other Neo-liberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (2009) and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's, *The New spirit of Capitalism* (2005).

The result of this asymmetry is an inverse reification of the art object that forces a 'causal asymmetry' (Harman) onto art's social relations; determined not by the use of 'precious, selected, valued, specific art materials' (Hirschhorn) but instead through the use of the salvaged and contingent materials.<sup>77</sup>

This asymmetry is the inevitable outcome of using the tools of abstract realism; furthermore I claim that this new non-relation effectively turns the tables on the humanist conservatism of the subject-object relation and offers a direct challenge to the networked communications of neo-liberalism.<sup>78</sup>

## **The Thesis**

Through the formal structuring of the two sectors of this complete thesis - 'An Asymmetrical and Angular Architectonic Arrangement' and 'Blackplastic' and the location of the various autonomous zones of activity that construct this thesis I have attempted to present this PhD research project as a 'totality' (Carl Einstein).<sup>79</sup> By appropriating terminology from the vernacular of topography - zoning, sectors, contours, boundaries, etc. - I redirect the thesis away from the linear architecture of the traditional temporal or sequential model for an academic thesis. This was an important decision in the sense that it has allowed for a further practical investigation of the claims of abstract realism directly sited upon the thesis, demonstrating its effectiveness on

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn, *Philosophical Battery*, in *Flash Art* no. 238, Oct 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Hal Foster has pointed out in a recent (2011) article on Thomas Hirschhorn's working practices that they follow 'an important line on the left that insists on the resources, cultural as well as political, that lie dormant in the *general intellect* of the multitude'. Abstract realism is the latest point on this lineage.

<sup>79</sup> I am thinking here not only of E.R Ullman and C.D Harris' 'multiple nuclei' - Chicago inspired - model of urban morphology but also of Charles Jencks's description of Los Angeles as the exemplary 'heteropolis' made up of 'villages', 'edge cities', 'high rise centres' and 'gated communities' that facilitate distinct and autonomous areas such as the 'hispanic barrio' and Beverly Hills with their own 'separate language, set of customs and style' although without Jencks' idealism of the whole. See Charles Jencks, *Heteropolis: Los Angeles. The Riots and the Strange Beauty of Hetero-Architecture*, Academy Editions, 1993, p.9

existing structures and enabling me to unambiguously present the reconfigured spatial logic that is one of the outcomes of abstract realism.

Here I want to briefly revisit the thesis sectors and zones in order to draw some initial conclusions for the research project.

### **An Asymmetrical and Angular Architectonic Arrangement: review of the zones**

*Beyond the Proprietorial Fallacy* is a phrase I use in order to explicitly connect the anthropocentrism of humanist post- Kantian subject-object relations to the ideology of acquisition and ownership characteristic of neo-liberalism. Through a study of the 'object oriented philosophy' of Harman and how this overlaps with and contradicts the 'network theory' of object relations in the work of Bruno Latour I argue that to move beyond this 'abusive' situation we need to embrace abstraction as absolute - non-relational - and face all its implications.<sup>80</sup>

The zone *Forget Abstraction* recorded the initiation, process and culmination of a group of strategies for constructing an exhibition of abstract artworks. I note how the use of the strategy, 'conjecture' was pivotal for generating the works that eventually made up the culminating exhibition. Through the form of a scientific report, I describe the process of collaboration that took place between the gallery directors and myself, why the investigation took place and how the experiment was carried out and what we hoped to discover. The results recorded clearly demonstrate the range of responses leading me

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<sup>80</sup> This is a reworking of the text I was commissioned to produce for the artists McCormack and Gent in relation to the project 'Object Abuse' which asks the question 'who or what is being abused'. The introduction to the website claims that ...'Object Abuse has been set up to provide a platform for people to discuss, provoke and question the very nature and orientation of objects. The aim is to readdress the unquestioned drives of our collective pursuits, to turn the tables on the object-subject dynamic'.

to conjecture that abstraction is much more than its popular reduction to a surface look or representative style, showing the practice of artistic abstraction to be a broad range of material and conceptual approaches towards art making.

Manufactured through the application of tools - adhocism, qualitatively punctual, bludgeon - drawn from the abstract realist toolkit, the zone, *On the Concrete Platform* is assembled using existing textual materials taken from a wide range of sources and through the application of related devices found in modernist theatre - excess, repetition, montage. These are then reconfigured into a set of post apocalyptic narratives that served to contextualise and help to locate the concept of abstract realism in relation to the artistic, philosophical and political vectors of twentieth century modernism.

The zone *Interceptor (Negerplastik)* records three works that were made in relation to the theory of sculpture proposed by Carl Einstein in his book on sub-Saharan African art *Negerplastik* (1915). The work was carried out in the studio space at S1 Artspace, Sheffield. The documentation contained in this zone is presented in the same way that Einstein presented the objects in his book; that is without contextual information, description of scale, material, colour or interpretation.

The zone titled, *Autonomy? (Material Conjectures)* explores the function of rhetoric and dialogue in the process of cross disciplinary research - in this particular case; studio art practice and curation. The transcript of the email conversation is included in its unrefined entirety here as it contains conjecture, analysis and outcome. In this sense it is an example of the research methodology in process which successfully offers an insight into the development of the project's aims.

*Forcing Structures* followed closely the debate which occurred in response to the article by Peter Suchin titled *Rebel Without a Cause* in the letters pages of Art Monthly. The debate between the author of the article, Peter Suchin and Dr. Elizabeth Price lasted over the course of almost a year. Contrary to Suchin's appeal that artists 'abandon the institution and head underground' and Price's apparent concession to this idea, I argue that the notion of a *neutral* space for artists to operate in is an insidious idealism only and proposed that by taking up the position of fine art researcher – working within the available framework of academic research while reconstituting the skills and materials contingent to that situation, artists in research can begin to develop resistant structures and artworks immanent to themselves, as ends in themselves. This, I speculate, would contribute a valid critique to both the progressively homogenised art world and provide a strategy for resisting art's increasing corporate instrumentalisation within the academic context.

*Thomas Hirschhorn's Material Philosophy of 'Too Much'* described the practical methodology of Thomas Hirschhorn in relation to the new material philosophy of abstract realism. I analysed two recent works *Crystal of Resistance* (2011) and *Concordia, Concordia* (2012) through the close study of available published materials. In the case of *Crystal of Resistance* there are two publications that accompanied the exhibition of the work in the Swiss pavilion at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale; the twelve page pamphlet that was handed out to visitors of the piece at the Swiss pavilion and the book *Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus* which features texts by Dr. Claire Bishop, Hal Foster, Sebastian Egenhofer, Manuel Joseph, Yasmil Raymond and Marcus Steinweg. In the case of *Concordia, Concordia* I exclusively concentrated on the Gladstone Gallery press release and Hirschhorn's own short text on the work. Through the writing of the piece I explore what I have called Hirschhorn's material

philosophy of 'Too Much' and placed this into an historical vector with Kurt Schwitters own material philosophy 'Merz'.

The zone, *Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky* describes a series of experiments that were carried out using the toolkit of abstract realism – adhocism, conjecture, qualitatively punctual. The tests carried out and the resulting outputs displayed a fidelity to the internal logic's of the materials employed. This leads to the development of artworks that were contingent upon the characteristics of the materials employed. This became materials driven construction process. The analysis of these processes and the data they produced supported my conjecture that abstract realism is a material philosophy; an attempt to practice material thinking.

The outputs and the processes generated through these experiments clearly demonstrated the thesis and therefore are employable in the making of closed artworks that operate as ends in themselves.

### **'Blackplastic'**

I invite you to refer directly to the abstract realist artwork titled 'Blackplastic' included as part of this complete PhD thesis.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Any attempt to represent or interpret the artwork 'Blackplastic' here, through for example, a description of it and what it might do in relation to abstract realism would only ever amount to a reduction of it to language and therefore is wholly inappropriate in light of the core claims of the project. As such an act of this nature would sit in opposition to the non-representational argument. For this reason a direct encounter with the object 'Blackplastic' is insisted upon at this late stage of the research project.

## **Contributions to Knowledge**

In conclusion to this project, I delineate a number of contributions to knowledge that the research proposes before going on to describe what I see to be the main contribution.

### **Adhocism (Re-Animated)**

This PhD research is adhocist and demonstrates the practical application of abstract realism. It has brought together and used a group of materials ‘for this’ specific purpose, ‘for’ PhD research.<sup>82</sup>

It could be argued that in the wake of Charles Jencks’ theorisation of adhocism there would be no need for the new material philosophy of abstract realism. Indeed it is clear that adhocism is contained in abstract realism; but the adhocism of abstract realism is an urgent reorganisation of the concept formulated by Jencks. The ideals of 1968 – the first time Jencks used the term in relation to architecture; ideals of the whole, communication, freedom of movement and the dismantling of elites are all cited by Jencks as the ideals of adhocism. In the intervening years these assumed leftist ideals have been, following Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Jodi Dean, appropriated by capitalism and now serve as the support and ideological framework of neo-liberalism itself. The change in kind that late capitalism has undergone since 1968, the end of modernism and the coming to prominence of post-modernism has led to an exacerbated situation that, as I have already explored, is described by Mark Fisher as capitalist

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<sup>82</sup> The definition of ‘ad-hoc’ is ‘for this’ and is explicitly action oriented. The adhocism of the project means that materials from many disciplines and areas of enquiry have been gathered together to create the environment of this thesis. This has led me to manufacture an object made of many shapes, textures and surfaces. Some of it is contradictory; this though is the defining characteristic of what Carl Einstein calls a ‘totality’.



realism.<sup>83</sup> In light of these qualitative changes, it is imperative that the adhocism of Jencks is suitably reconfigured to deal with the current systems of the situation and its contingencies.

A contribution to knowledge that this research project proposes is that abstract realism is a new material philosophy that retrieves the immanent realism from Jencksian adhocism, re-visioning its methods without recourse to the idealisms of its previous characterisation. This has been done because the adhocism proposed by Jencks with its focus on process and openness of communication, of dialogue and participation are arguably the processes which support the structure of capitalist realism itself. Abstract realism relieves adhocism of these associated communicative idealisms in order that it can be deployed effectively in the contemporary socio-political construction of capitalist realism.<sup>84</sup>

### **Glossary is a New Anti-Razor**

The three glossaries contained in this thesis, two of which are zones - Ad-Hoc (Turbulent Surfaces) and Idioticon (Die Antwoord) and one that forms part of the introduction demonstrate the way in which abstract realism expands objects through augmentation.<sup>85</sup> These examples show the tool, 'glossary' to extend logics found in Cubist collage and Dadaist assemblage towards manufacturing new discreet and

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<sup>83</sup> Mark Fisher makes a similar claim for the necessity of capitalist realism in the light of Fredric Jameson's postmodernism theory.

<sup>84</sup> In abstract realism, an operation to amputate the rotten limbs of idealism from the body of Jencksian adhocism has been performed, retaining the concepts most important components only; its practical application and constructive material philosophy, that is to say its realism. These remaining characteristics are then augmented by the addition of the other tools of abstract realism.

<sup>85</sup> This process of augmentation is the process of collage, assemblage and montage; all are practical methods which are encapsulated in the term 'glossary'.

expansive, realist objects. The objects they are built from initially exist in the world and the structure they form is para-mathematical; other examples are algorithms, Mandelbrotian fractal geometry. I show how these objects can grow and develop in ways that are excessive and unpredictable. For this reason, I conclude that the process of 'glossary' found in the material philosophy of abstract realism is a contemporary anti-razor that in its application is philosophically realist and constitutes a clear contribution to knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

Through the glossaries found in this thesis I have demonstrated how this anti-razor departs from the work of the razor - as it is conceived as an empirical reduction of an object to necessity - toward a realist expansion of its contingencies. Glossary, then, should be understood as an imprecise operation in distinction to the surgical accuracy demanded by the precision slicing – a process known as reduction - of the razor, instead it is excessive, piling material on to material – a process known as augmentation - allowing into it contingent factors and the inevitable configuration of monsters.

The method of glossary described and demonstrated in this thesis is a clear contribution to knowledge, not only for the field of art practice, but also for practical philosophy that leads to the creation of new abstract realist artworks and new theoretical writing.

**Asymmetrical Encounters**

This practice-led research project has been concerned with investigating the philosophical and political implications of arts contemporary construction and its social

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<sup>86</sup> Occam's Razor also known as 'the law of parsimony' states that 'entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity'. Since the invention of this razor by the Franciscan William of Ockham many anti-razors have been formulated including ones by his direct contemporary Walter de Chatton and more recently by Alfred Jarry 'Pataphysics' and Karl Menger's 'law against miserliness'.

relations. These are manifest in many ways including a requirement for the artwork to be open - participatory, based upon workshop models, and inclusive at all costs. It is also detectable in the notion of the artwork as an incomplete object which invariably requires a viewing subject to activate it through human capital, this is the 'pictorial' process previously described by Carl Einstein. This situation forces an asymmetry onto the artwork's social relation; an asymmetry which places the subject - interpretation, knowledge, participation, etc. - at the centre of any relation to the artwork - object, immanence, etc, effectively reinforcing the anthropocentric formula that privileges any meaning over any reality whatsoever. I argue that this insistence on the relational subject over the object of art is resoundingly neo-Kantian, resulting in the denial of any autonomy from its subjective construction for the artwork, and the general acceptance that the artwork is incomplete and inert until it is activated and thus completed by the agency of a participating subject. Against this flat horizon of the artworks social relations, abstract realism proposes a rearrangement towards an asymmetry that moves the artwork beyond the liberal anthropocentrism of what I have referred to already in this thesis as the *proprietary fallacy*. Therefore I propose that the asymmetry that abstract realism manufactures is a contribution to knowledge that this practice led research project proposes in the field of curating and staging artworks.

### **Transferability of Abstract Realism**

Analysis of the data generated by studio based experimentation in the field of fine art painting and the practical application of abstract realism in the public domain - *Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky*, *One Dimensional Disco*, *Asymmetrical Cinema*, the performance of the glossaries, *Idioticon (Die Antwoord)* and *Ad-Hoc (turbulent*

*Surfaces*) - provides empirical support for the research project's core claims. These outcomes lead me to believe that the material philosophy of abstract realism can be effective outside of the local situation of fine art studio practice.

Through the research period I demonstrate that the spatial logics generated by the application of abstract realism lead to new social formations in the arenas of art. This I do through employing abstract realism's practical methodology in experiments carried out in studio practice and also in the book "*Blackplastic*". Through the co-authoring of events, most notably *One Dimensional Disco* (2012) and *Asymmetrical Cinema* (2013) I demonstrate the effect of abstract realism upon collaborative process. The writing of and presentation of the glossaries – *Idioticon (DIE ANTWOORD)*, *AD-HOC (Turbulent Surfaces)* – and the research papers - *Forcing Structures* and *Forget Abstraction* – all of which are contained in this thesis - effectively support my assertion that abstract realism can re-orient, re-position and existing structures.<sup>87</sup> I suggest that the question of this new methodologies transferability is beyond debate. Therefore, I find no reason to doubt the impact of the material philosophy of abstract realism in the areas of architecture, urban planning, literature, urban warfare, or protest; indeed any discipline which is founded on the creation of material structures in social situations. The asymmetry that would inevitably occur through the employment of the abstract realist toolkit would undoubtedly reposition the existing political, economic and social relations of any situation, objectifying and showing them to be only ever contingent; that is to say, not necessarily so.

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<sup>87</sup> *One Dimensional Disco* and *Asymmetrical Cinema* are both artworks that have been developed and staged as part of the cross disciplinary research initiative Material Conjectures.

## The Material Philosophy of Abstract Realism

These contributions form the main contribution to knowledge that this research proposes; a new non-representational methodology for artistic abstraction and a material philosophy in the field of fine art studio practice. The history of artistic abstraction that abstract realism proceeds from, as I have already stated, begins with the inventions of collage in 1912 by Georges Braque, the acceleration of this in analytical Cubism, the art production of first Dada and in particular the trajectory of these practical methods from Kurt Schwitters' 'Merz' through to the expanded material philosophy of Thomas Hirschhorn.<sup>88</sup> These are the innovations that the new material philosophy of abstract realism builds upon and extends.

The new material philosophy of abstract realism which has been developed deployed and reflected upon rigorously across this research period;

- Abstract Realism is a repositioning of artistic abstraction from its contemporary relational reduction to either a form of subject centred expression or a style or surface characteristic alone – a situation I have explored throughout this thesis and most clearly through the zones titled *Beyond the Proprietorial Fallacy* and *Forget Abstraction* - shifting the emphasis of artistic abstraction away from the merely descriptive towards an operative methodology; that is to say a movement away from the contemporary dogmas of representation and liberal interpretation - audience decision - towards a rigorous theoretical underpinning for the artwork as absolute.

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<sup>88</sup> There are many artists and movements that could apply here but the line between Schwitters and Hirschhorn and all that this contains is most appropriate to the philosophical and political character of abstract realism.

- Abstract realism is non-representational; this realism distinguishes it from existing and accepted forms of artistic abstraction.
- Abstract realism rejects the construction of artistic abstraction as a higher form of logic and the relation of this to narratives of purity and ideality. It does this in order to locate the practice of artistic abstraction as an absolute material reality.
- This research project is itself an example of abstract realism; constructed through the application of the tools - adhocism, glossary, bludgeon, qualitatively punctual and conjecture.

The main contribution that abstract realism offers is as a new non-representational material philosophy for the practice of artistic abstraction that, following Fredric Jameson, attempts to 'think material thought'.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Spatial Equivalents: Postmodernist Architecture and the World System', 1988, p.148

# Manifesto of Abstract Realism

- **Abstract Realism** draws together a group of non-anthropocentric strategies for constructing artworks.
- **Abstract Realism** is the intersection of artistic abstraction and philosophical realism.
- **Abstract Realism** reorients materials from the contingent situations of capitalist realism.
- **Abstract Realism** is a toolkit for constructing totalities.
- **Abstract Realism** is a material philosophy; an attempt to think material thought.
- **Abstract Realism** manufactures asymmetrical encounters.
- **Abstract Realism** constructs artworks that are not 'for us' but are 'for this'. This is the necessary contradiction that guarantees the totality of Abstract Realism.
- **Abstract Realism** is absolutist.

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11.07.2011

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## Thesis Data

This thesis is presented alongside the artwork, '*Blackplastic*'.

The thesis is set in a variety of fonts including but not exclusively in Times New Roman, Ariel, and Calibri.

The thesis is 317 pages, 57,227 words, 305,155 characters including front matter, bibliography, appendices and notes.

# Appendices

## **Chronology of events (earliest to latest)**

### **Exhibitions**

Date: 1/04/11 - 28/04/11

Title: The Monumental Pictures

Venue: Bloc Projects, Eyre Street, Sheffield

Date: 04/05/11 - 02/06/11

Title: Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky

Venue: Sheffield Institute of Arts Gallery 2, Cantor Building, City Campus, Sheffield Hallam University.

Date: 11/11 - 01/12

Title: AB ST RA CT

Venue: Essays and Observations, Max Strasse, Berlin

Date: 27/11/11

Title: Turbulent Surfaces

Venue: The Brooke Theatre, Chattham, Kent

Date: 27/04/2012

Title: Turbulent Surfaces 2 Part1

Venue: Kynastonmcshine, Deptford Old Police Station, London

Date: 27/07/2012

Title: (Turbulent Surfaces 2 Part 2) Material Conjectures presents One Dimensional Disco

Venue: Kynastonmcshine, Deptford Old Police Station, London

Date: 15/05/2013 – 09/06/2013

Title: Asymmetrical Cinema

Venue: Beaconsfield, Vauxhall, London.

### **Conference Papers**

Date: 16/03/2012

Title: Forcing Structures

Conference:

Venue: Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, Birmingham

Date: 22/05/2012

Title: Constructionist Gloss

Conference: British Moderns Remade

Venue: SIA Gallery, Cantor Building, Sheffield Hallam University

Date: 02/03/2013

Title: Act 3: In which the Standardizer and the Adhocist encounter the Absolutist (edit).

Venue: The Matter of Contradiction: War Against the Sun

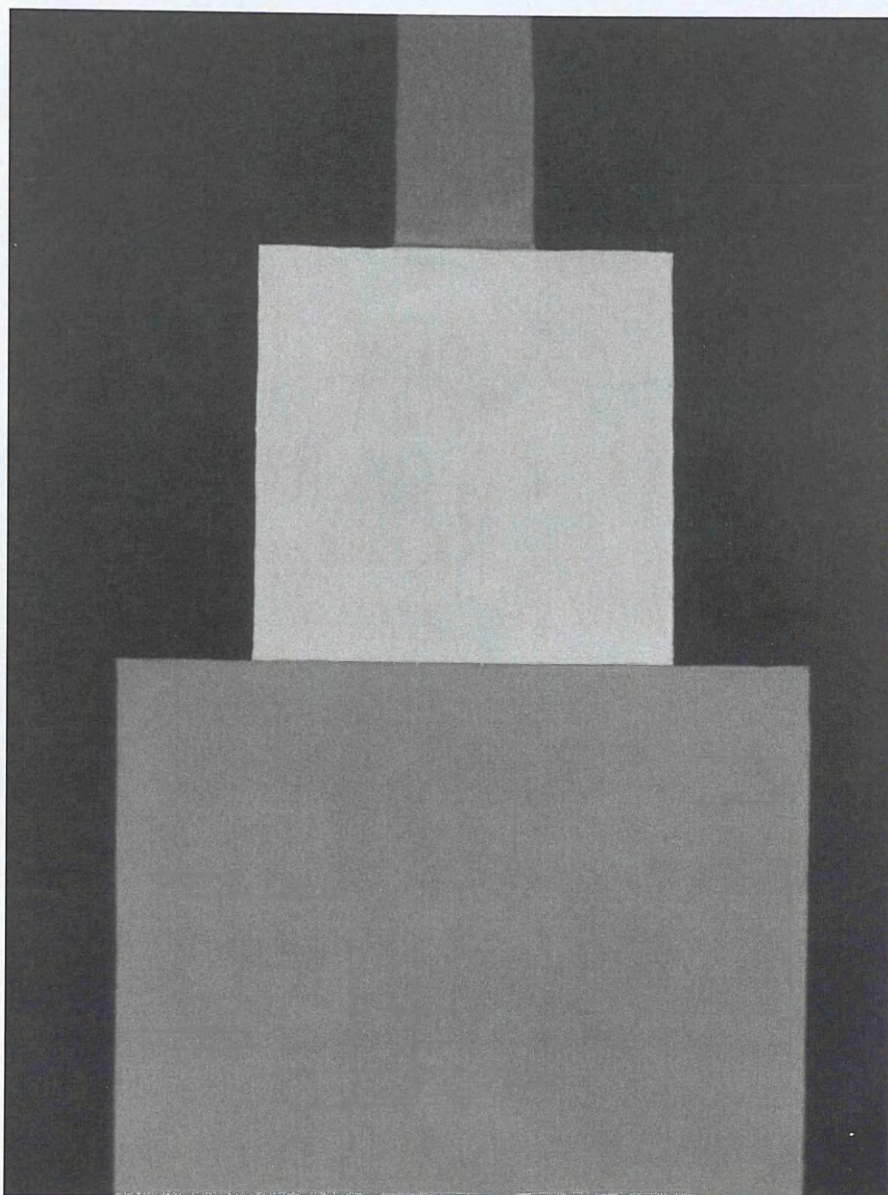
Date: 11 - 13/04/2013

Title: Act 3: In which the Standardizer and the Adhocist encounter the Absolutist (full).

Venue: Performance Philosophy, University of Surrey.

**Appendix A**

**The Monumental Pictures**



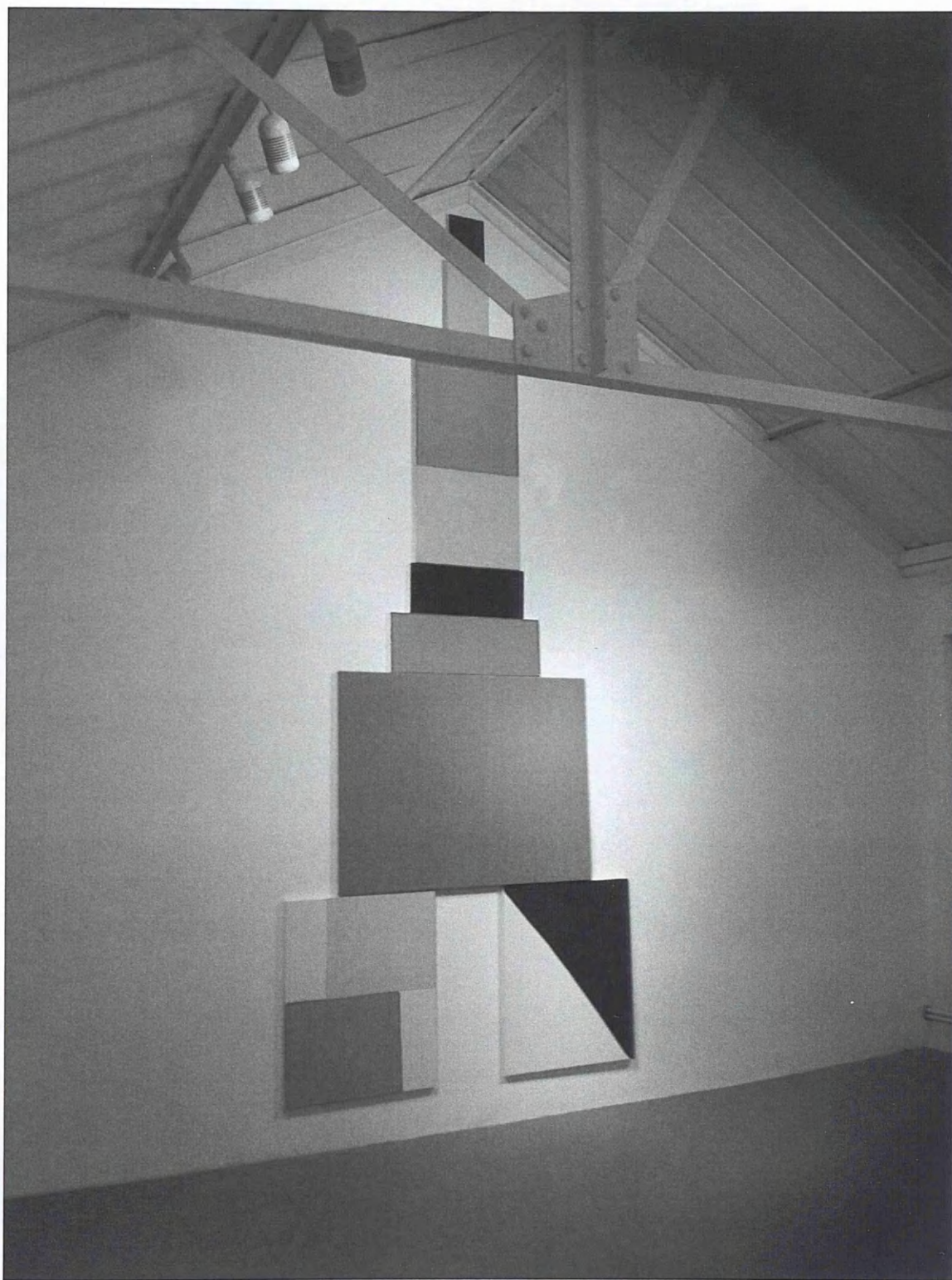
1st - 16th April 2011

Dale Holmes presents two major new paintings *MONUMENT (for B.P.)* and *MONUMENT (for I.T.)*. The title of the show refers to the physical size of the work, the architecture that occurs from its making and the practice of formalist abstract painting.

The works here have been designed and constructed specifically for the show at Bloc Projects and are made in response to the exhibition space, its interior architecture and its possibilities as a space for paintings. These works belong to an ongoing investigation into the practice of abstract painting and the contemporary currency of its specific characteristics and in particular here; material, colour, scale and composition.

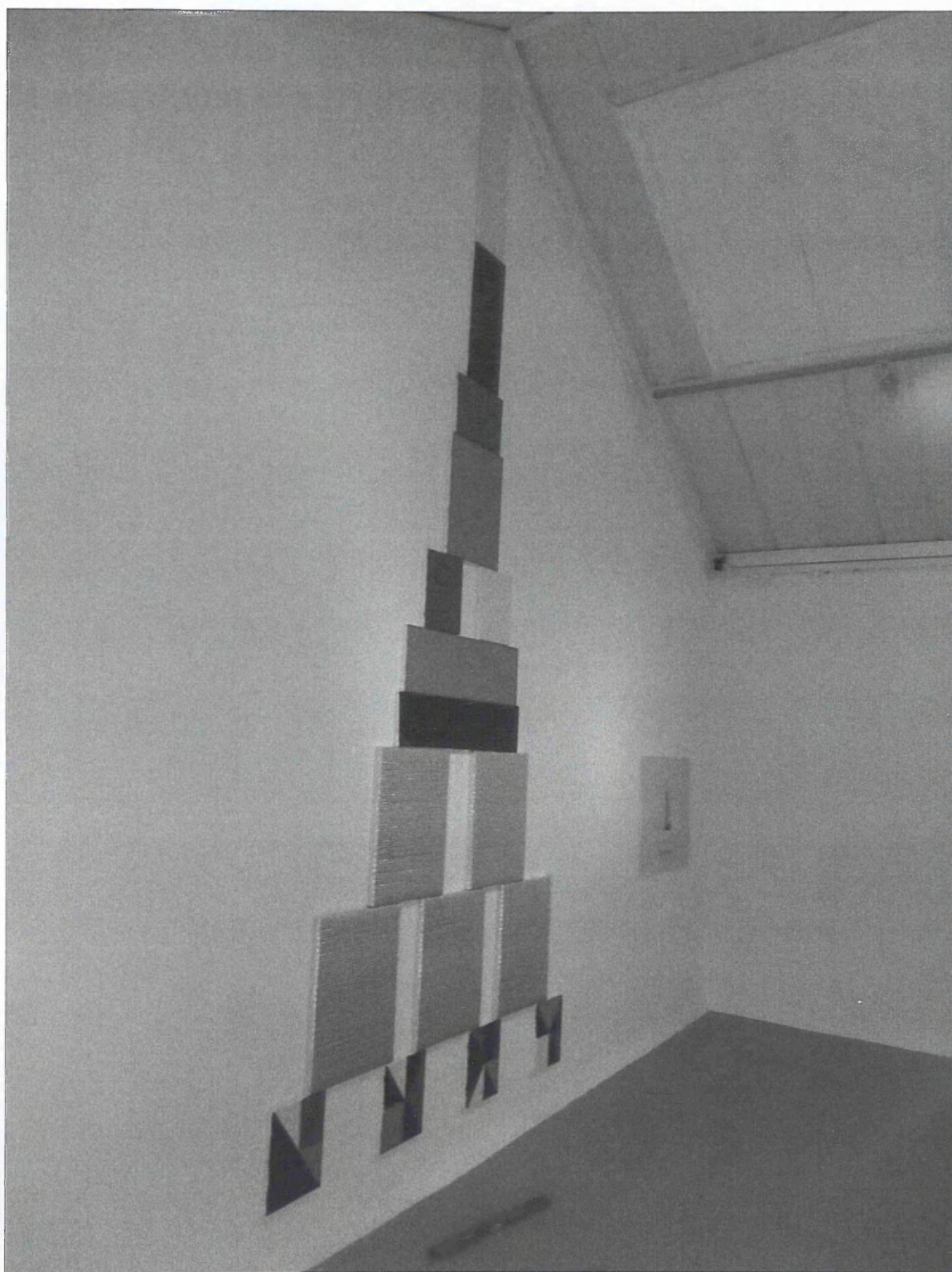
Press release for, *The Monumental Paintings*, Bloc Projects, 2010





*Monument for B.P.* Oil on canvas with collage, Dimensions variable, 2010





*Monument for I.T.* Oil on canvas with collage, Dimensions variable, 2010

**Appendix B**

**Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky**

# Sunrise shine in a midnight sky

Dale Holmes

23/09/11 - 23/10/11

opening evening 22/09/11 6.00pm - 8.00pm

Sheffield Institute of Arts Gallery 2  
Arundel Street  
Sheffield S1 2NU

Poster and invite for *Sunrise Shine in a Midnight Sky*, 2011



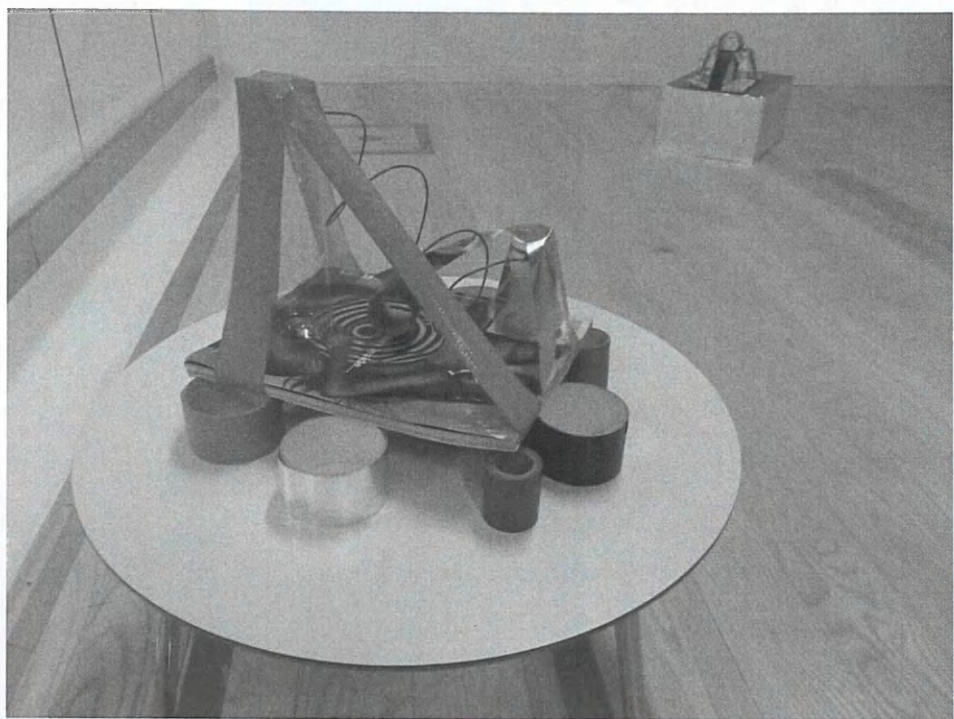


Table-top Construction 1, I.D magazine, cloth tape, tin foil tape, garden wire, plastic bottle, found table, 2011.

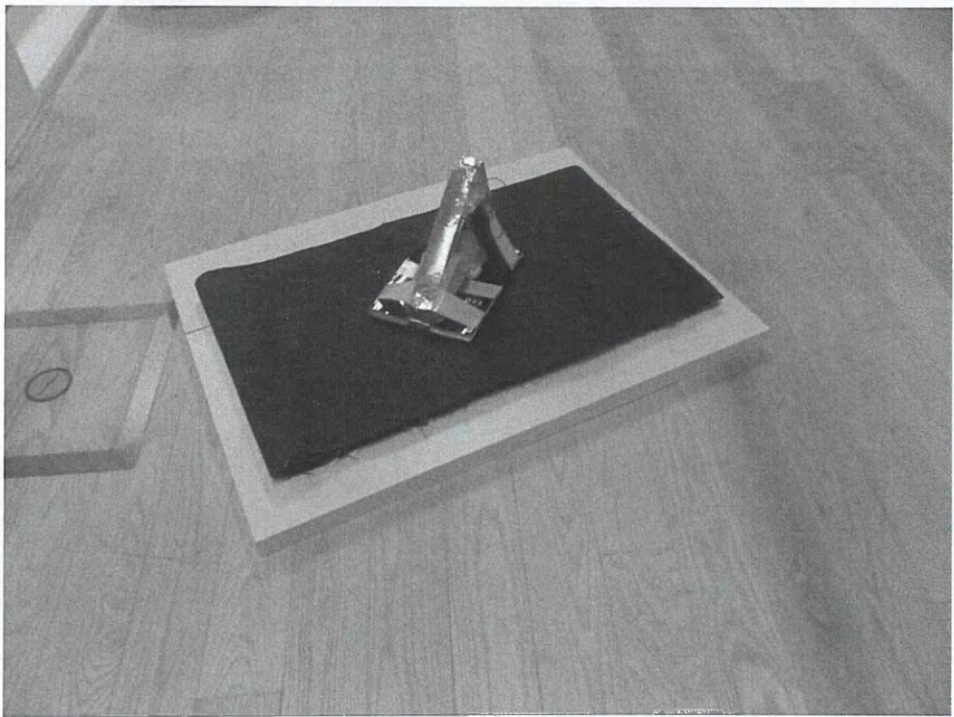
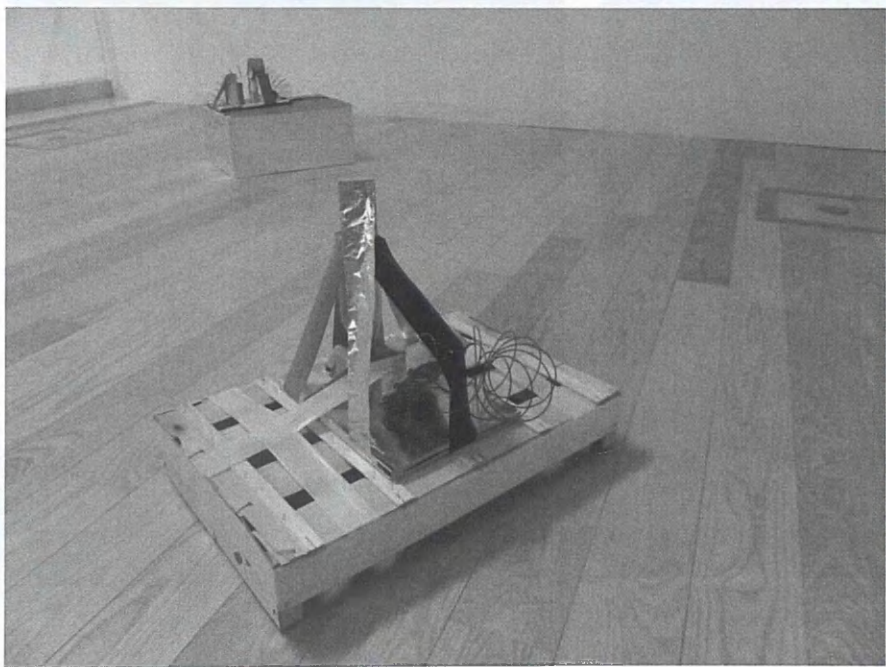


Table-top Construction 2, LOVE magazine, tin foil tape, cloth tape, garden wire, plastic bottle, fake grass, found dismantled bookcase, 2011.

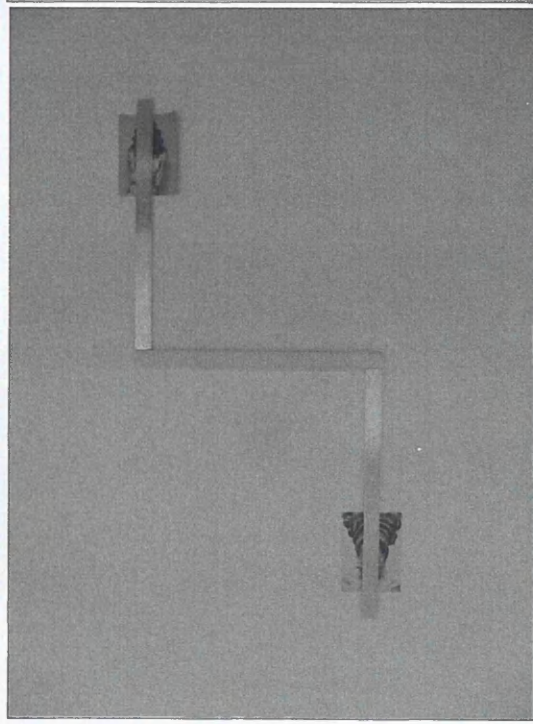
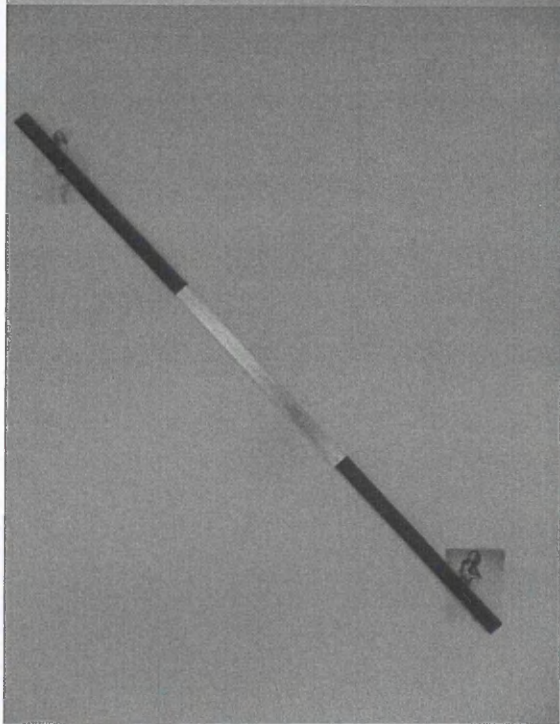
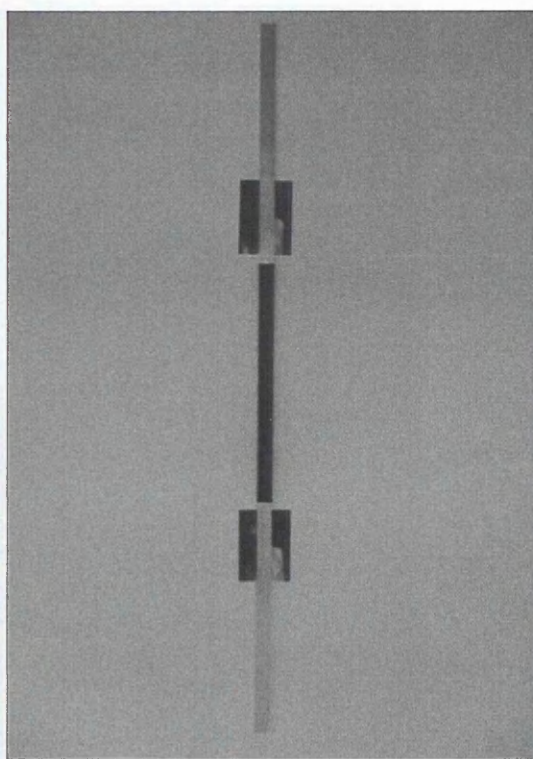
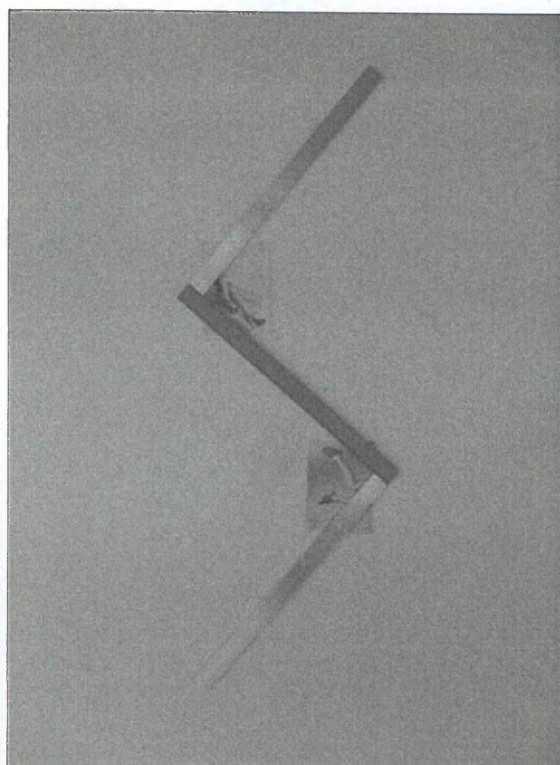


*Table-top Construction 3*, Wallpaper\* magazine, cloth tape, tin foil tape, garden wire, plastic bottle, found cardboard box, 2011.

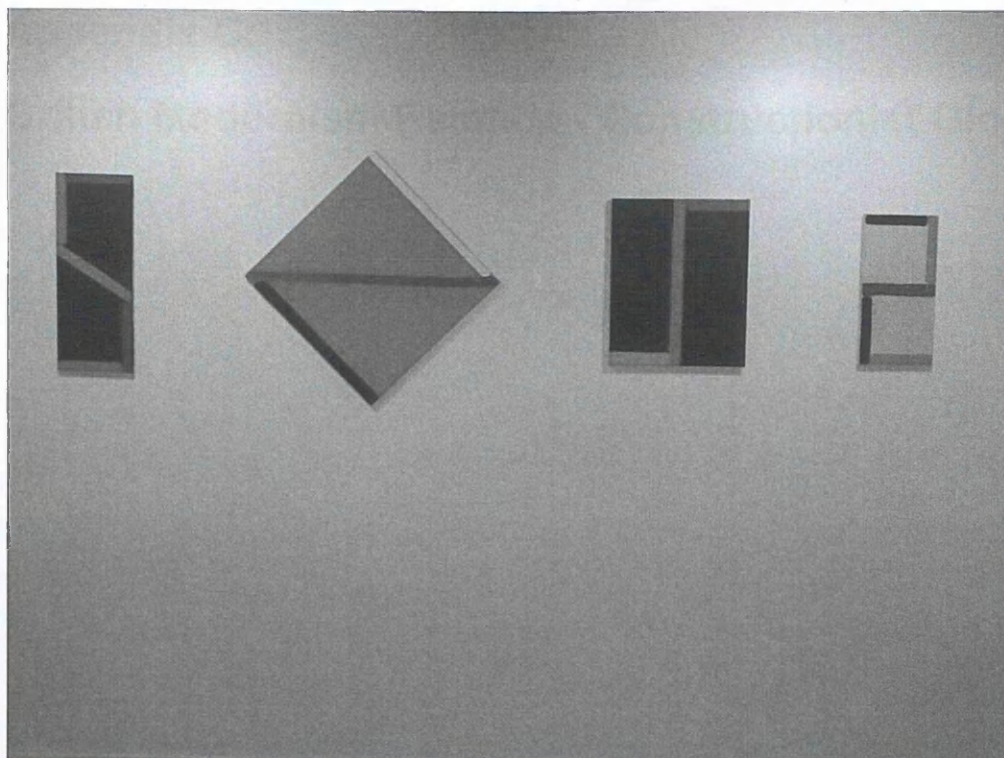


*Table-top Construction 4*, WAD magazine, cloth tape, tin foil tape, garden wire, egg box, plastic bottles, found fruit crate, 2011.

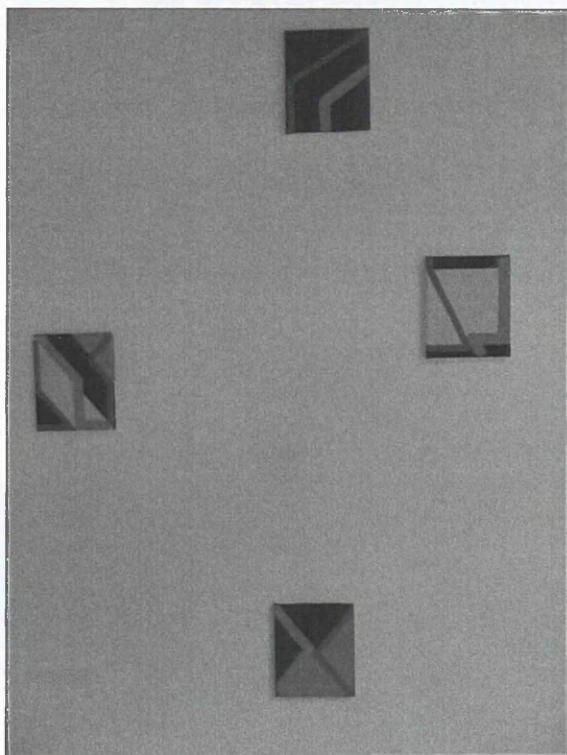




*Typographic Relief 1- 4. Wood, cloth tape, tin foil tape, magazine pages, 2011.*



**(KOBRO) SZ52**, Oil on Canvas, 2011



**Strzeminski 1 - 4**, Oil on Canvas, 2011

**Appendix C:**  
**British Modernism Remade - Constructionist Gloss**



# British Modern Remade: Style. Design. Glamour. Horror.

22 May 2012

*British Modern Remade* is an exhibition of artworks from the Arts Council Collection, taking place within the refurbished show apartments at Park Hill. The works featured span the six decades since the founding of the collection in 1946. This exhibition seeks to examine the anxieties and allure of British Modernism as typified by Park Hill itself and key artworks from the 1940s to the present day. Contemporary artists and designers are returning to Modernism and commandeering it with an uncanny resemblance. The signs and symbols remain intact, so what of the ideology? This symposium will bring together artists, curators and academics to consider ideas around the exhibition.

## Programme

### Symposium 2.00 - 6.00pm

This event will be an opportunity to discuss the exhibition at Park Hill and the relationship between Modern and contemporary art, decorative design and architecture.

Speakers include: Steven Gartside (Manchester Metropolitan), Jasper Joseph-Lester and Dale Holmes (Sheffield Hallam University), Lisa Le Feuvre (Henry Moore Institute) and Matthew Poole (University of Essex). Chaired by curator Helen Kaplinsky.

### Artist in conversation 6.30 - 7.30pm

Artist Simon Martin will be in conversation with Lisa le Feuvre, Head of Sculpture Studies at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds.

There will also be a screening of 'Carlton' (2006) a film by Simon Martin which tells the story of a bookcase designed in 1981. Simon Martin's practice is an attempt to reflect upon material culture. He is interested in how we understand ourselves through social structures, mythologies and collective memory evidenced in art objects, mass media and the built environment.

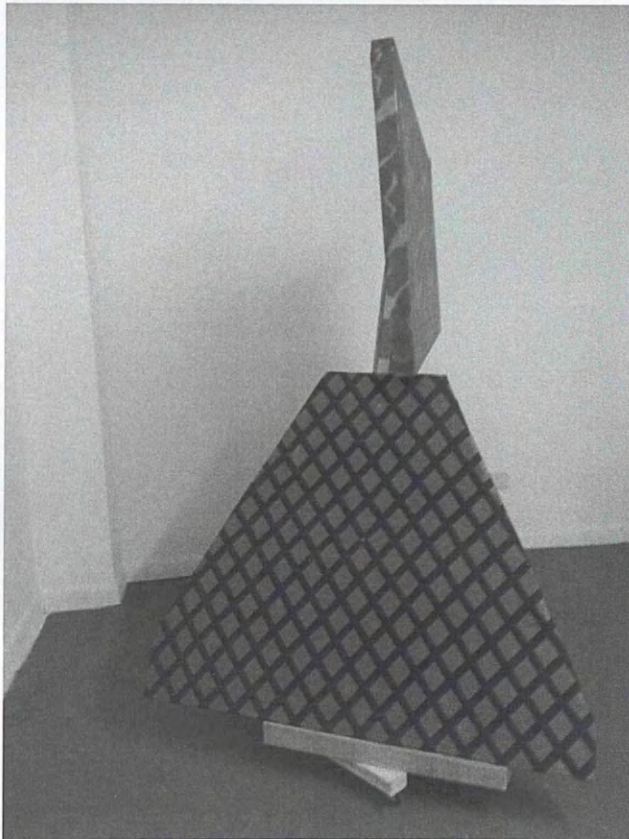
**Tours of exhibition** by curator Helen Kaplinsky – meet in ground floor foyer at Park Hill (off South Street)

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2.00 – 2.45pm and Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 12.30 - 1.15pm, Park Hill

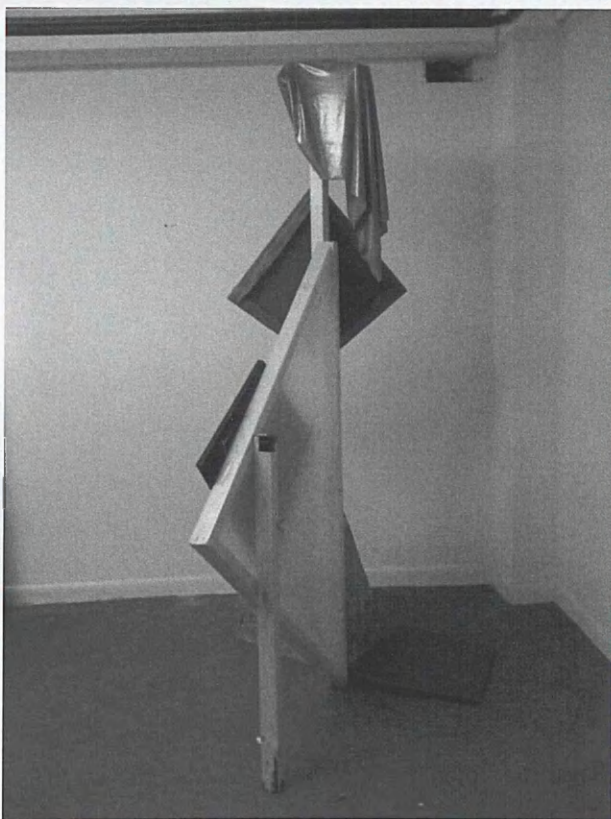
Press release for *British Moderns Remade* symposium, 2012.

**Appendix D:**  
**DOCUMENTATION OF STUDIO EXPERIMENTS**

**Documentation of selected works made at S1 Artspace, Trafalgar Street,  
Sheffield over the research period 11/2010 – 03/2013**

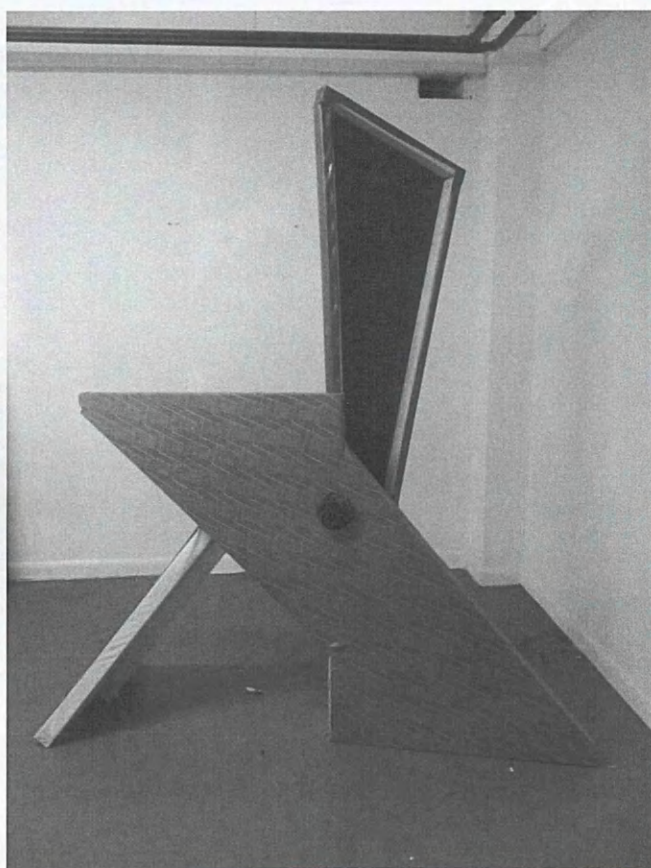
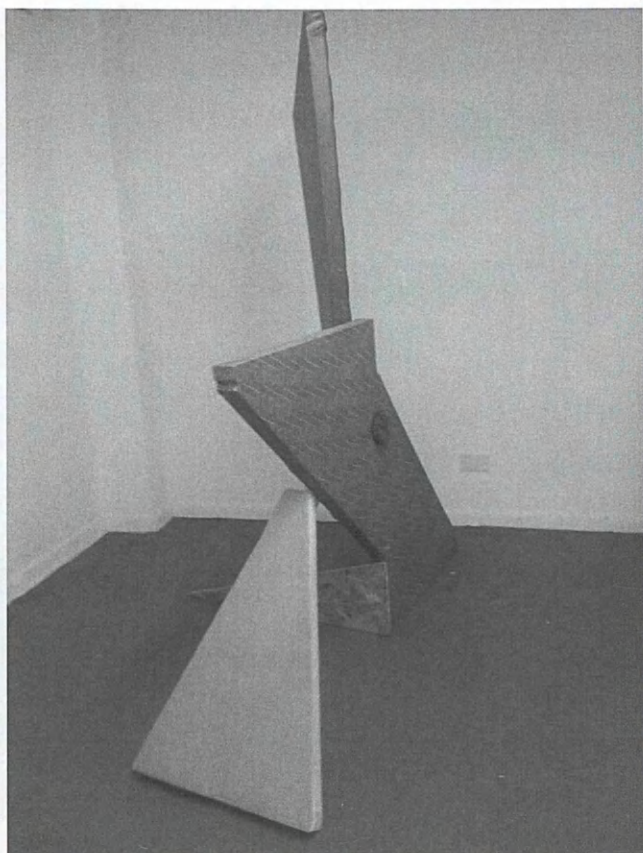


*Untitled, mixed media, 2012*



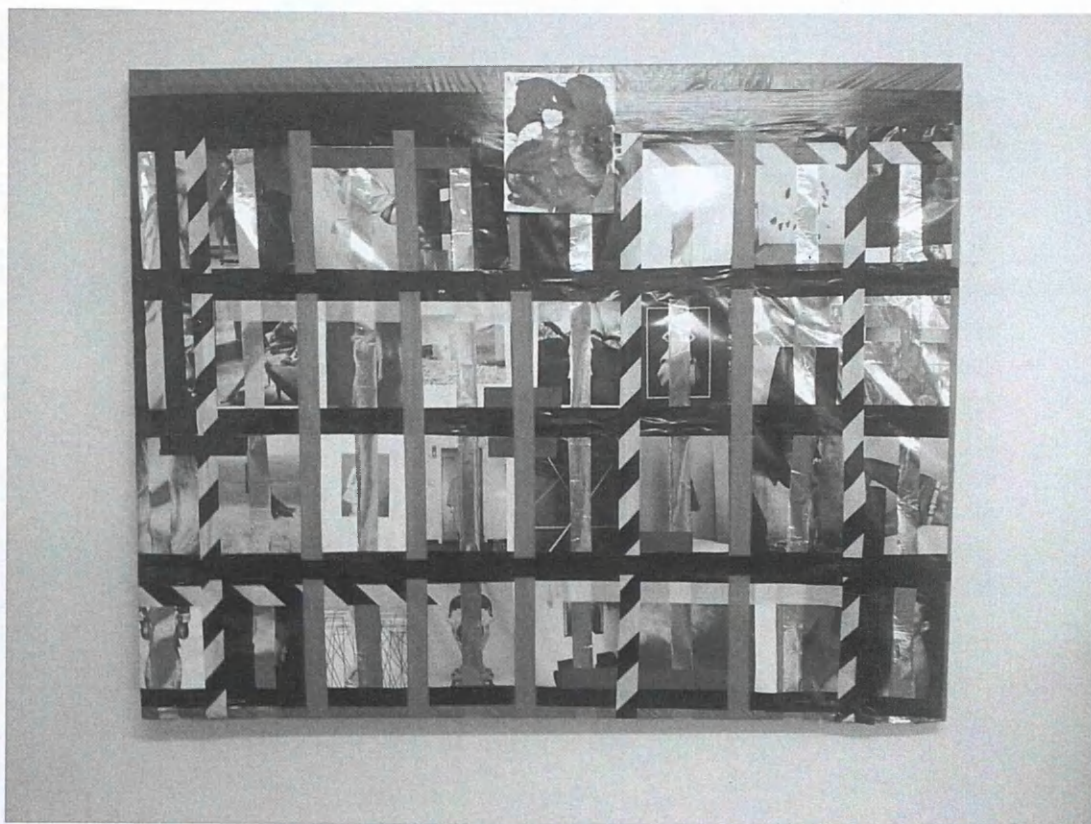
*Untitled, Mixed Media, 2012*





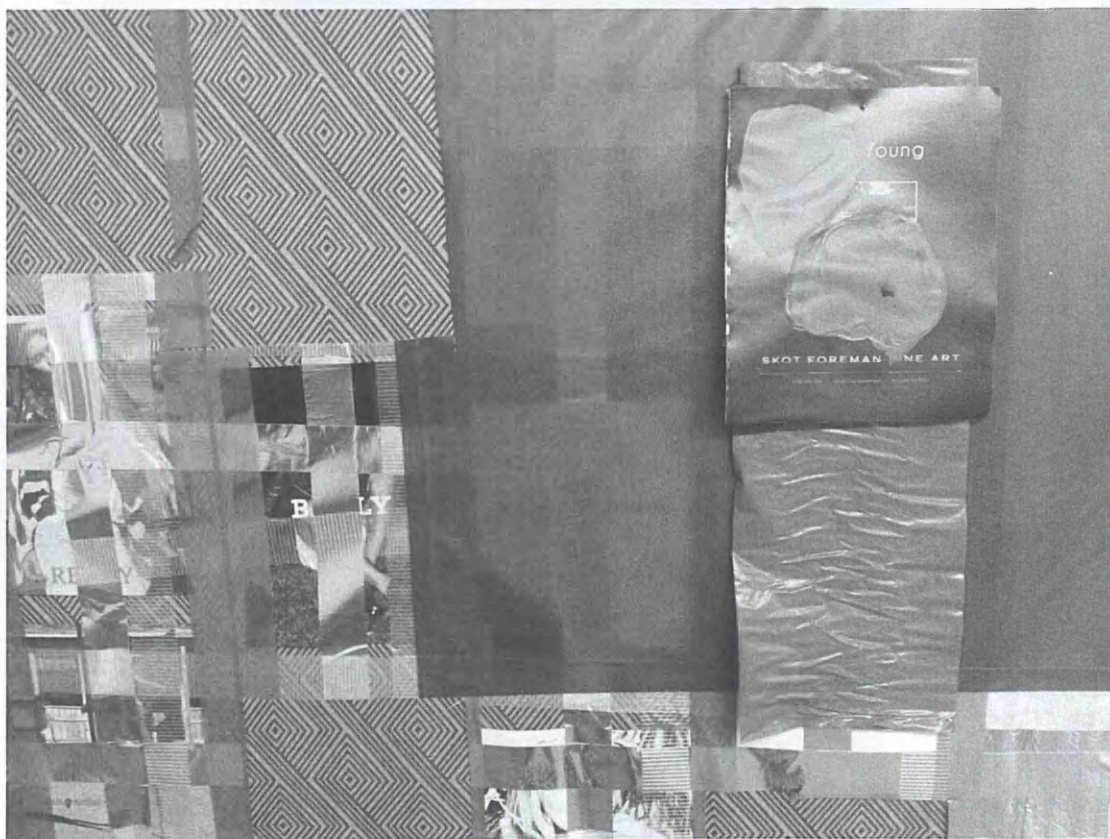
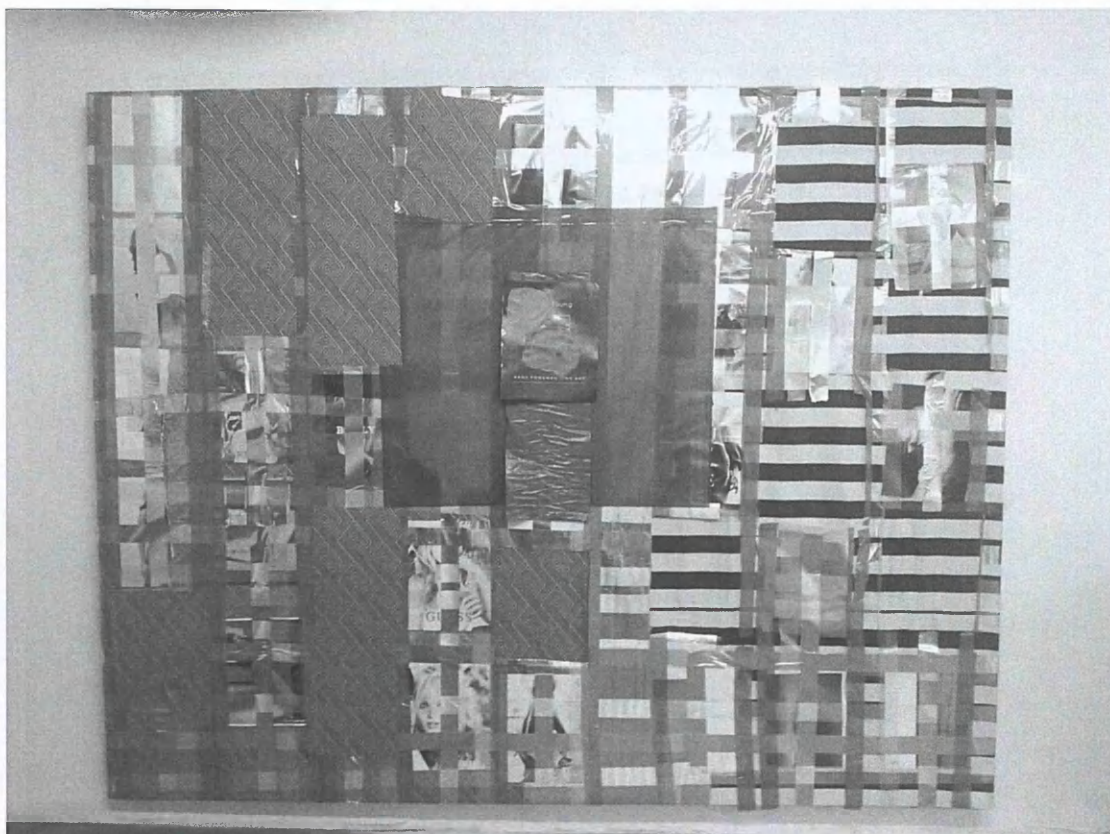
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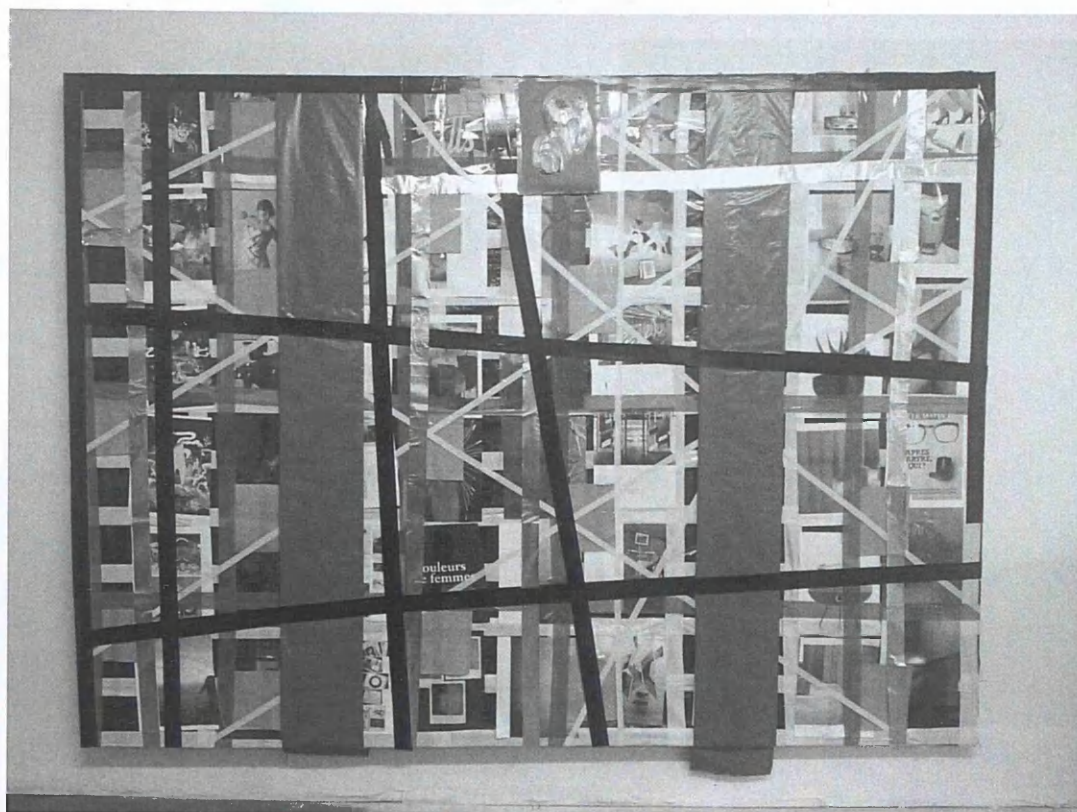
Top: *Barricade Painting*, magazine pages, fabric and tape, 2012. Bottom: Detail.





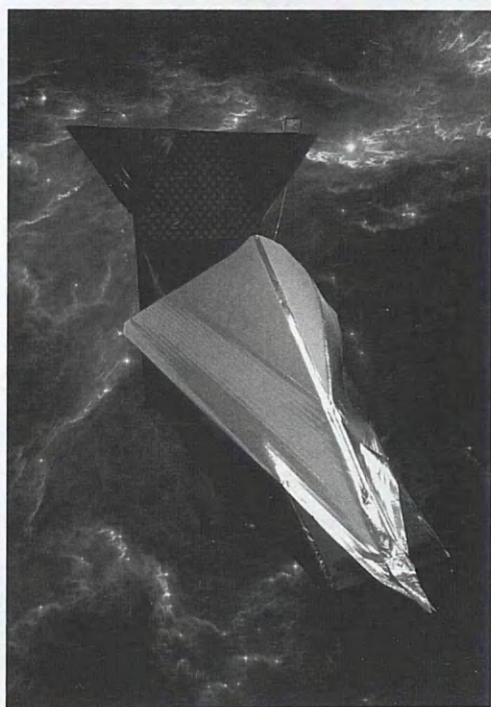
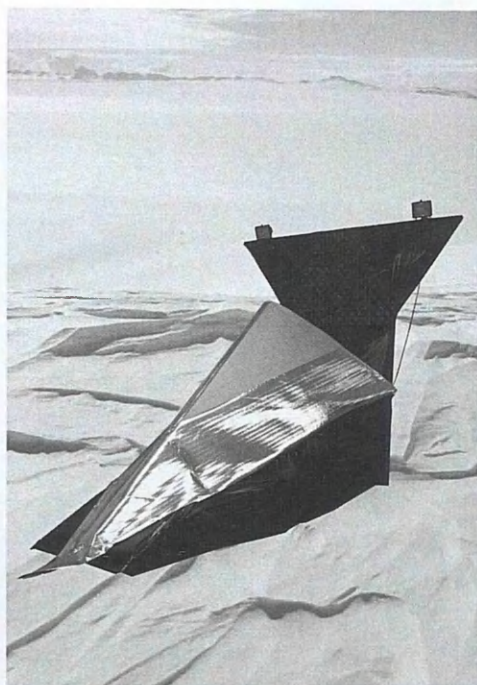
Top: *Barricade Painting*, magazine pages, fabric and tape, 2012. Bottom: Detail.





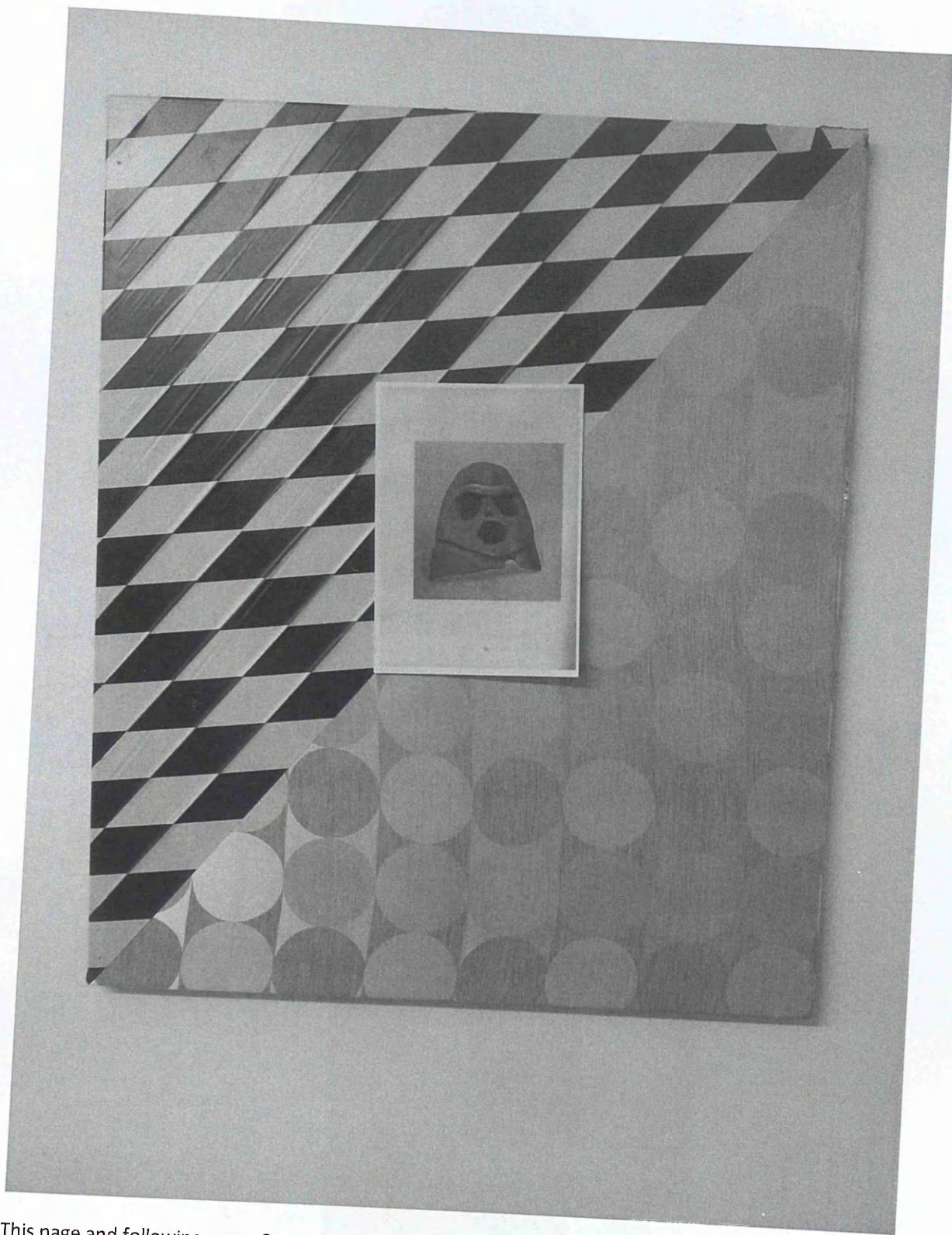
Top: *Barricade Painting*, magazine pages, fabric and tape, 2012. Bottom: Detail.





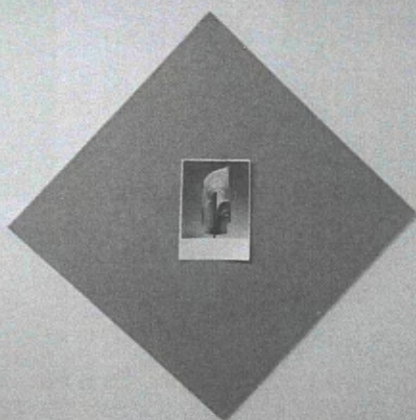
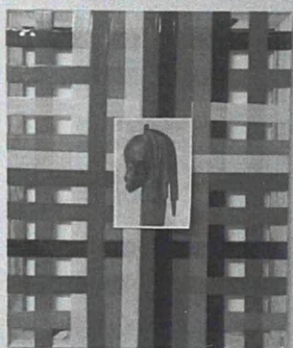
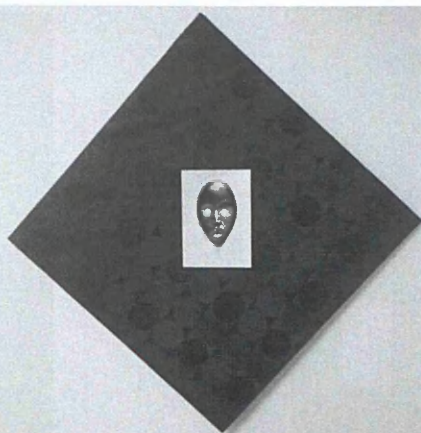
Selected works from *The Road Warrior*, digital images, 2012



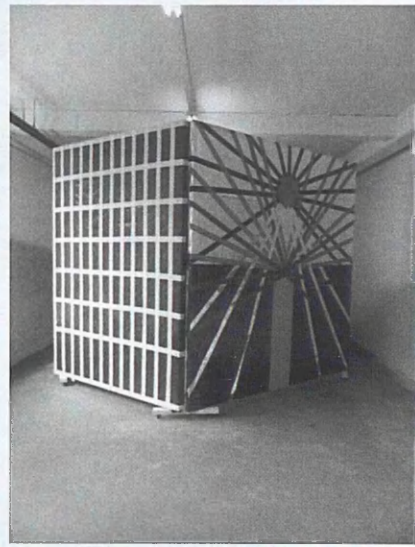
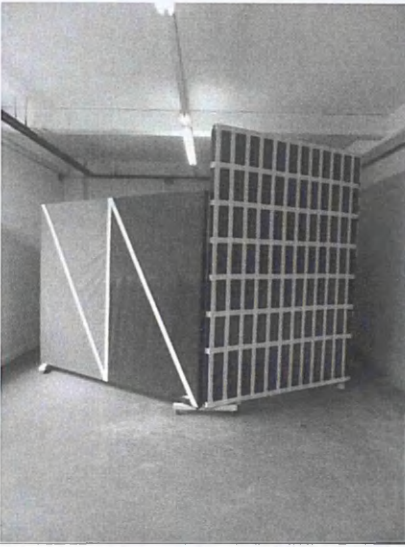
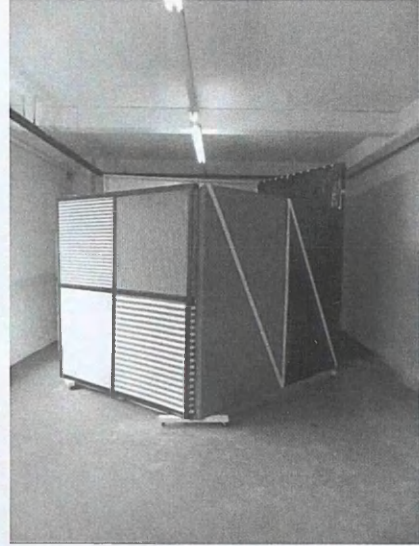
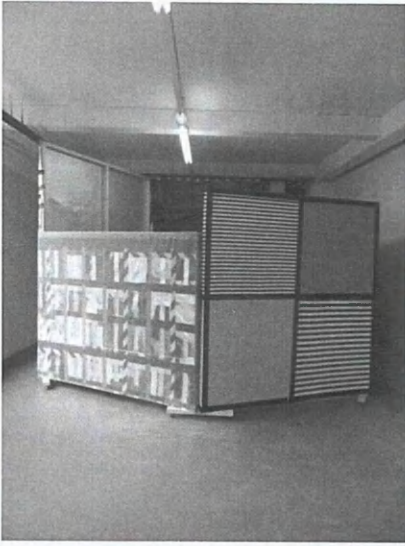


This page and following page: *Constructed Painting 1-5*, fabric, tape and photocopy, 2012



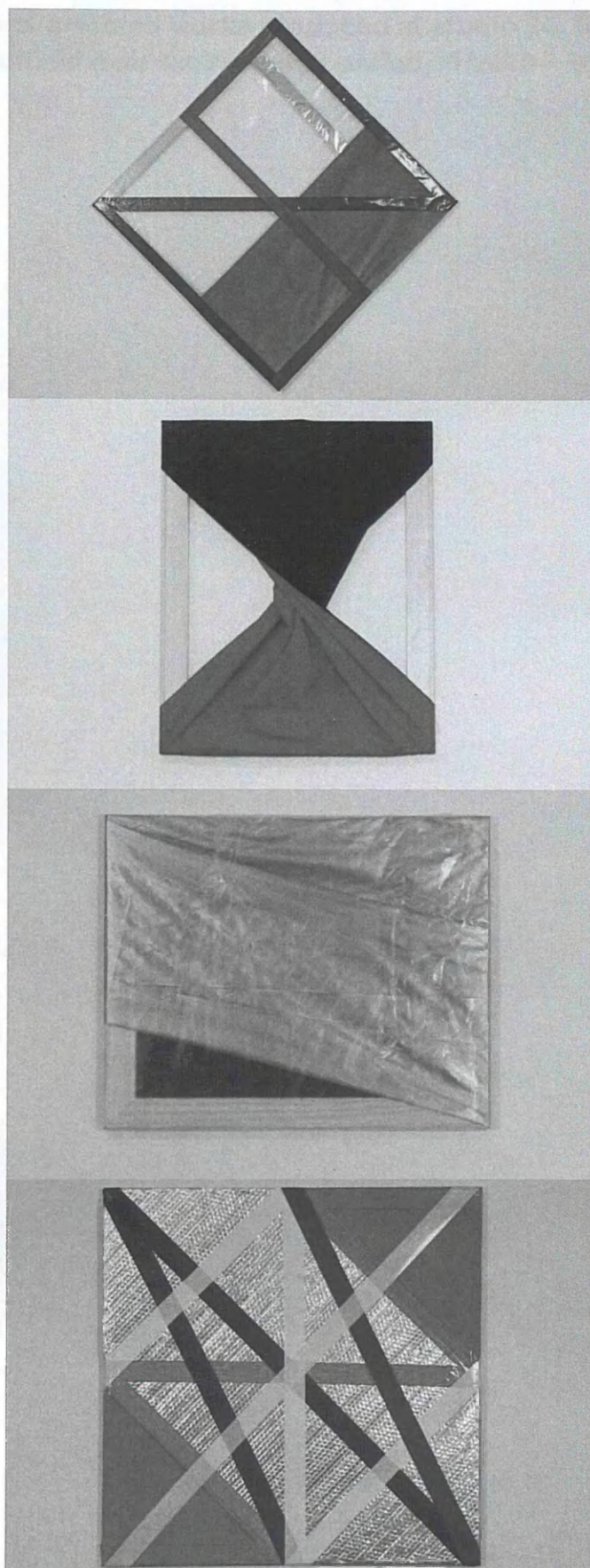


Running a tight ship: the artist's studio in New York City, 1960s. Photo by the artist.



*Rotating Stage Set (non-Euclidean hexagon) Acts 1-5, Mixed Media, 2012.*

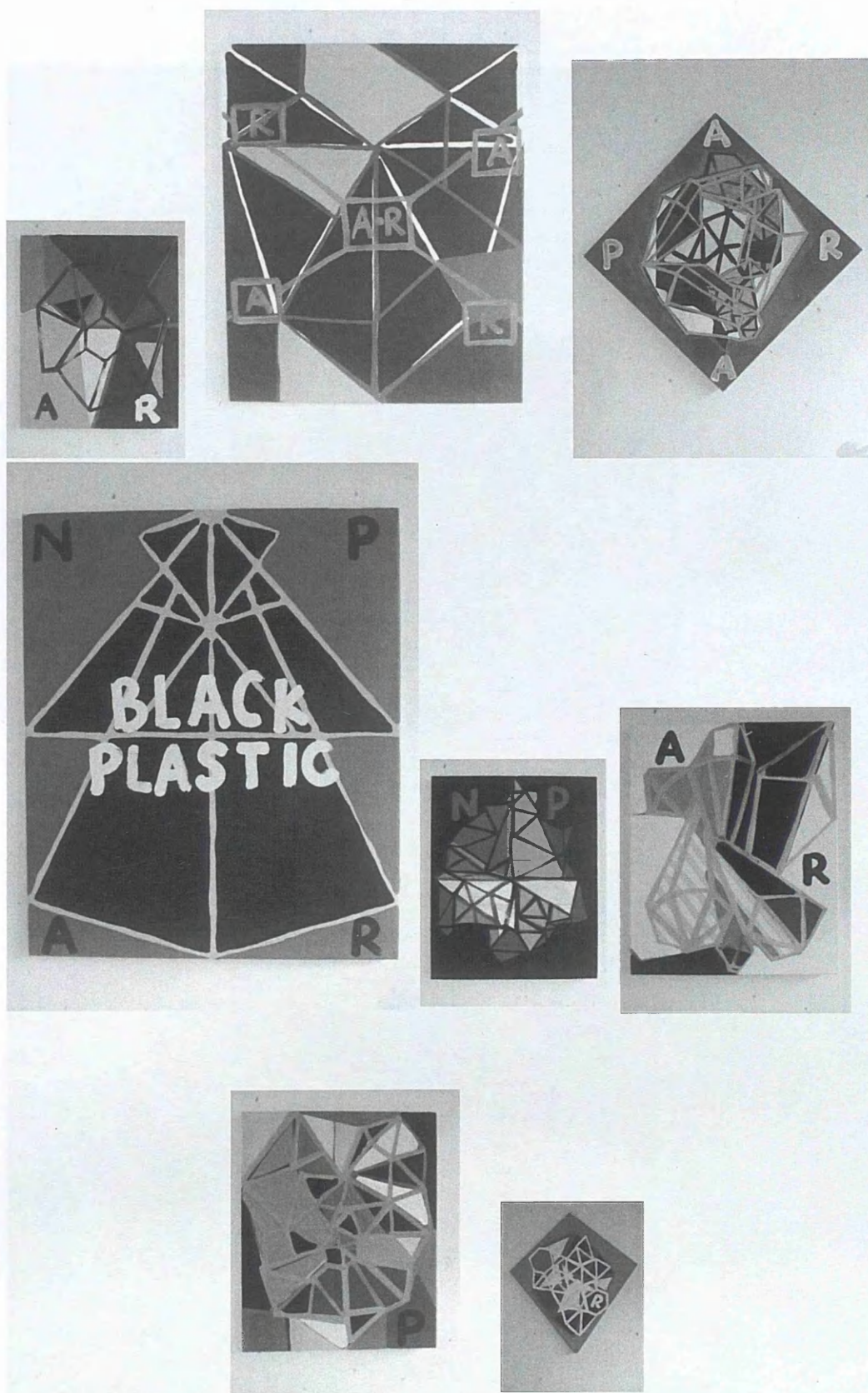




*Abstract Painting 1-4, mixed media, 2012*

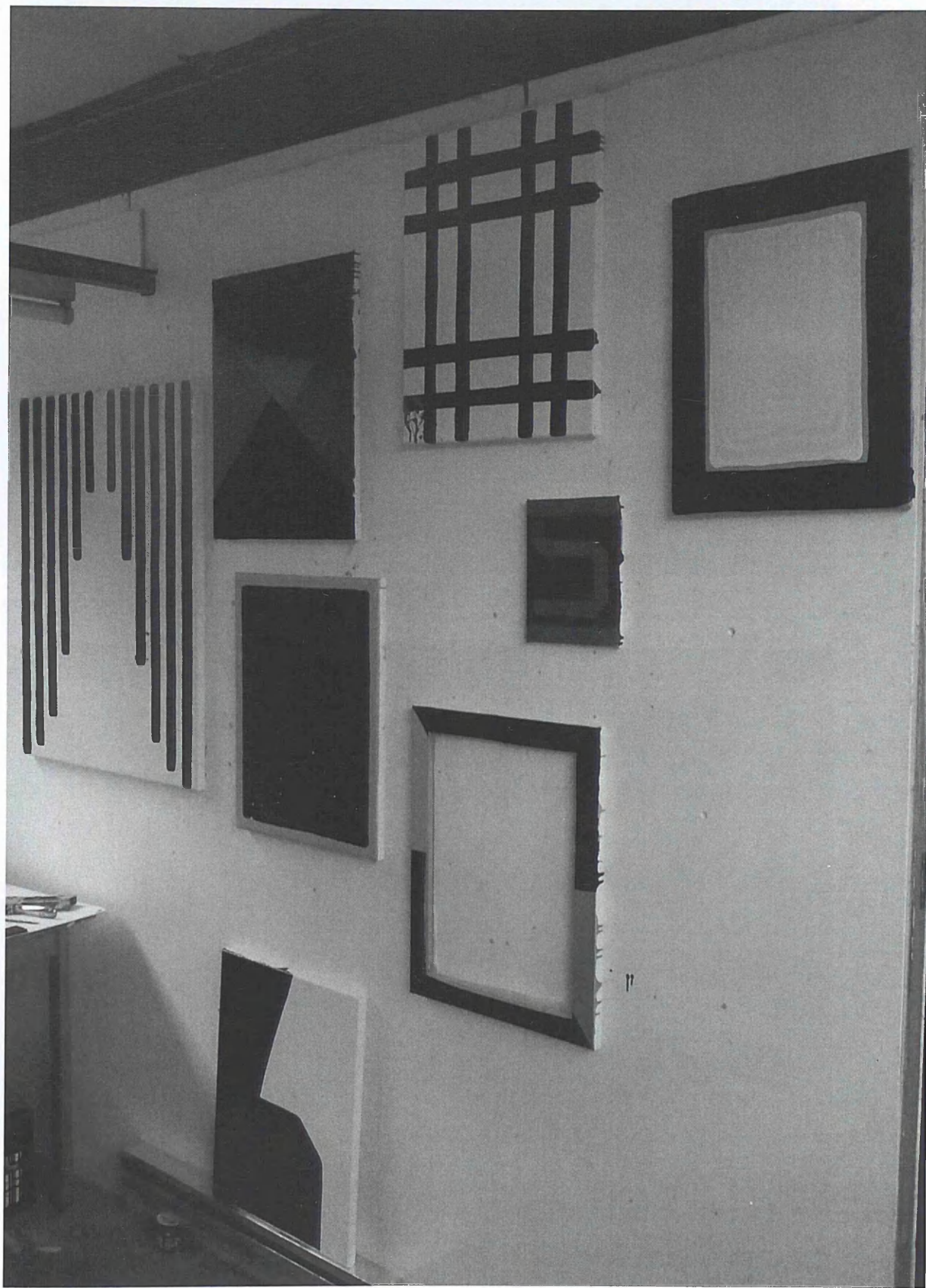
**Documentation of selected works produced at studio 24, Bloc Studios,  
Eyre Street, Sheffield over the research period 11/2010 – 03/2013**





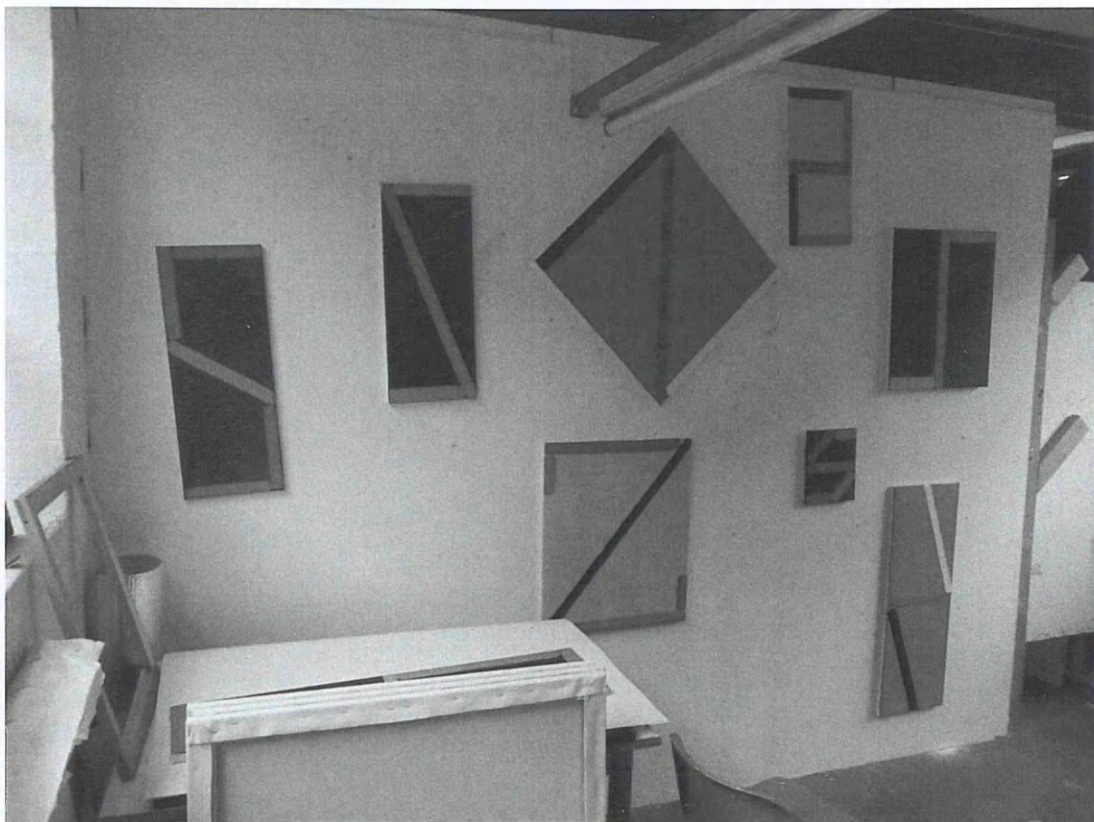
Paintings for A-R, B-P, N-P, A-P. Acrylic on canvas, 2013



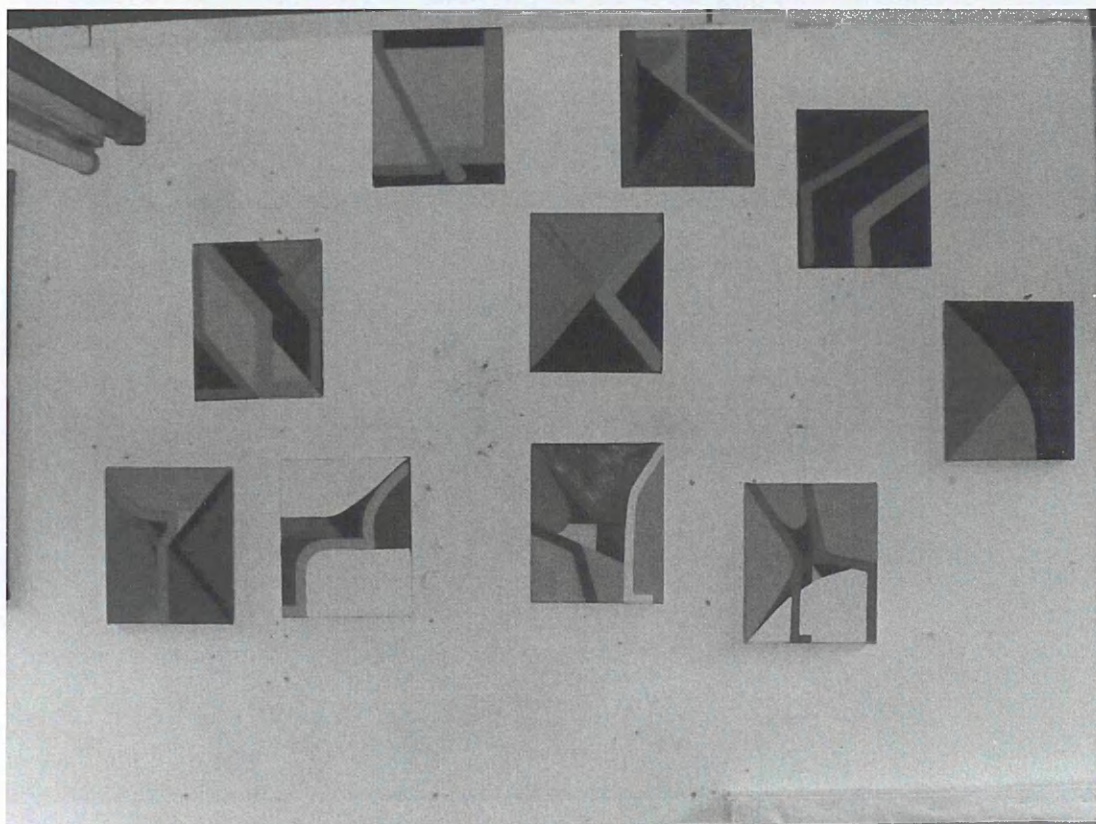


*Black Paintings (The New Dusseldorf School of Realism), Industrial paints on canvas, 2012.*



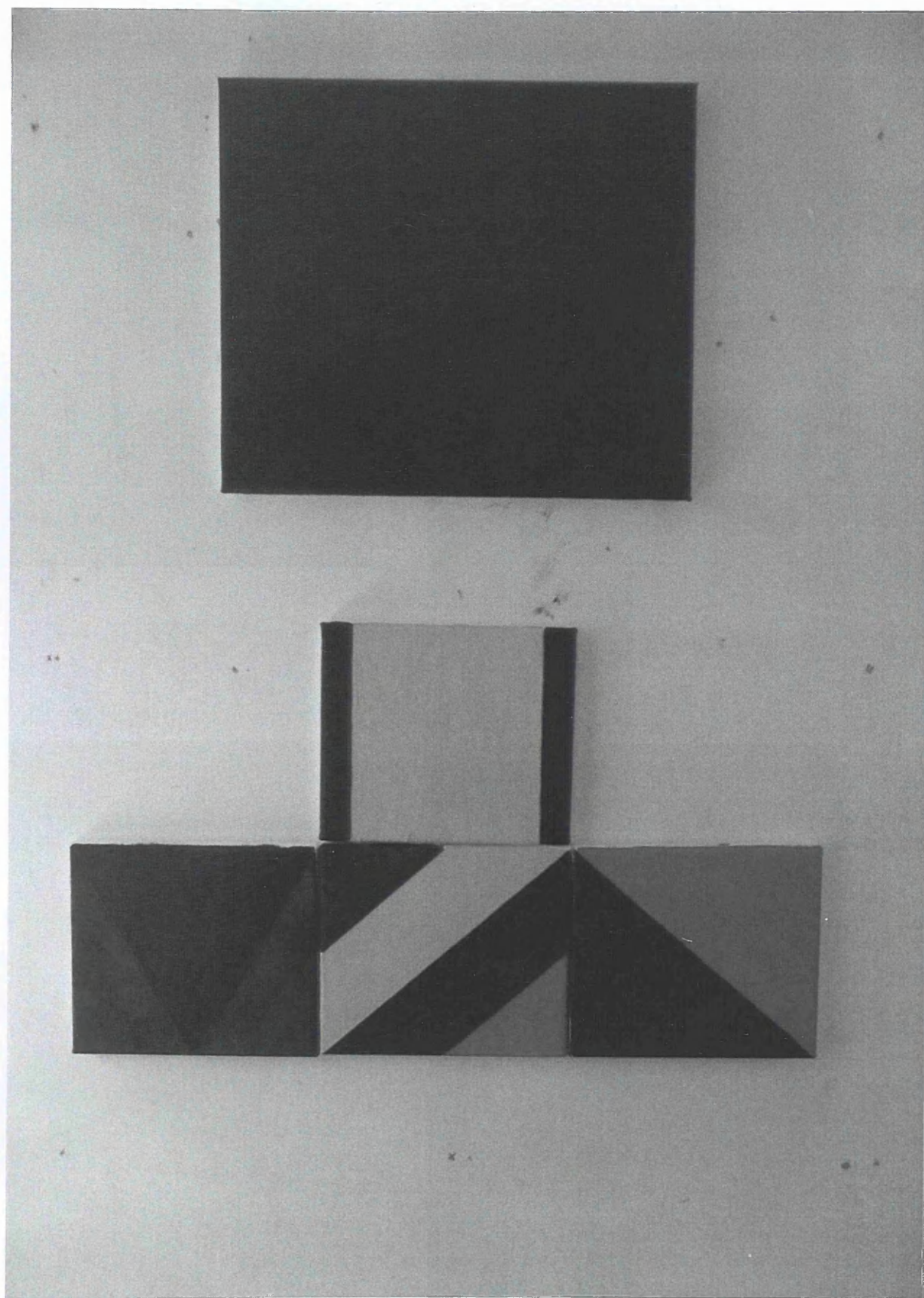


*Kobro*, Oil on Canvas, 2011



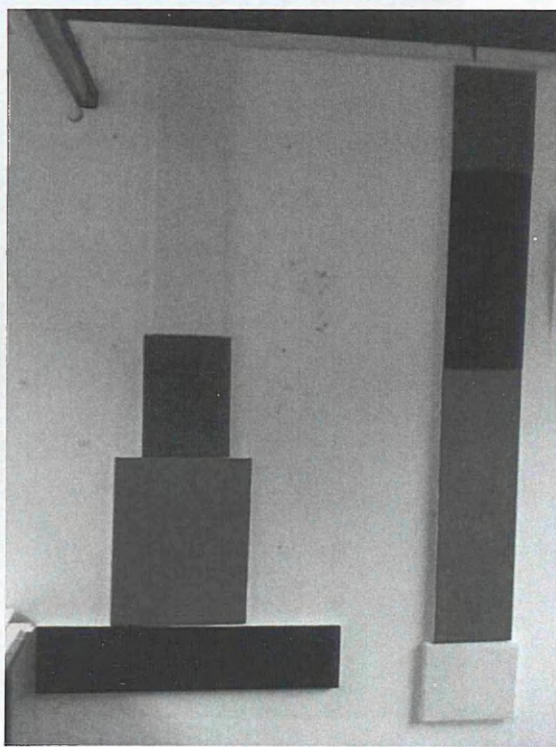
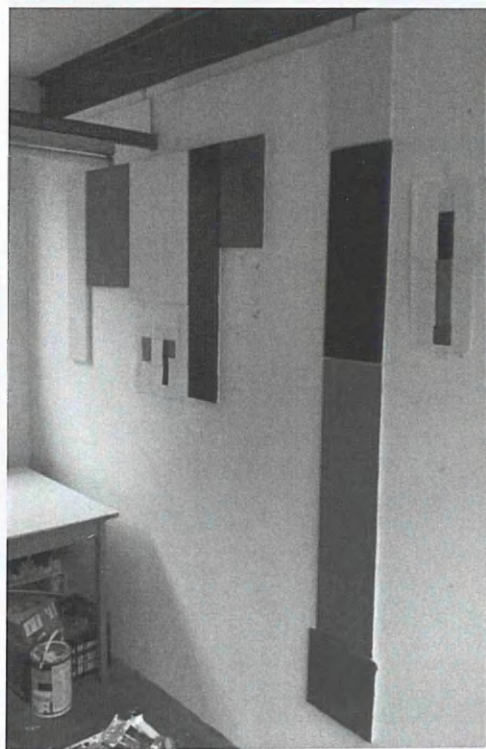
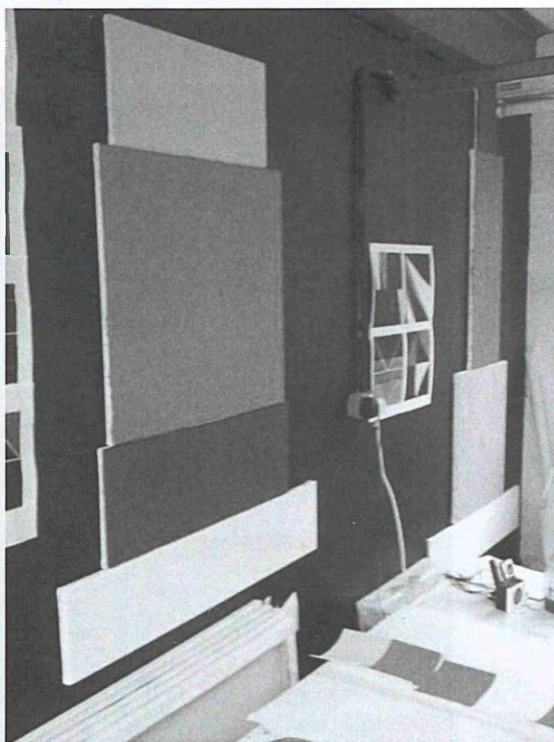
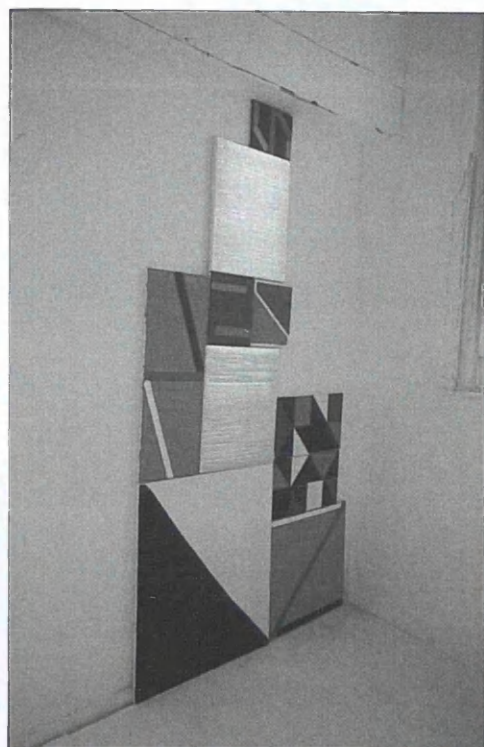
*Strzeminski (Full Set)*, Oil on Canvas, 2011



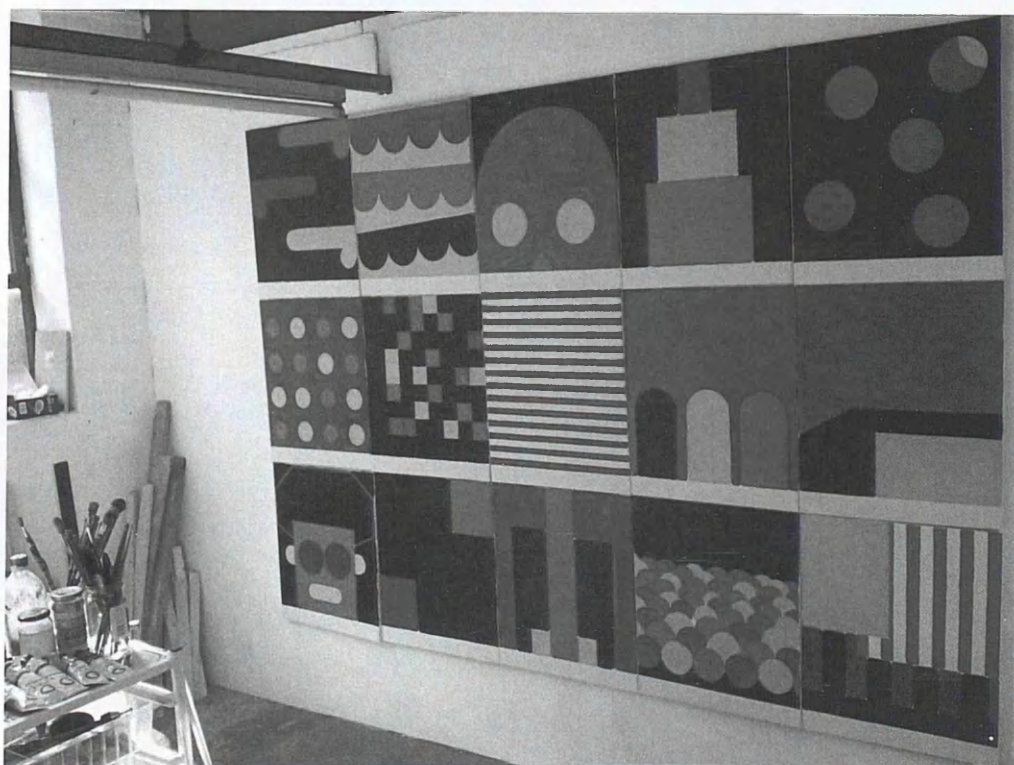
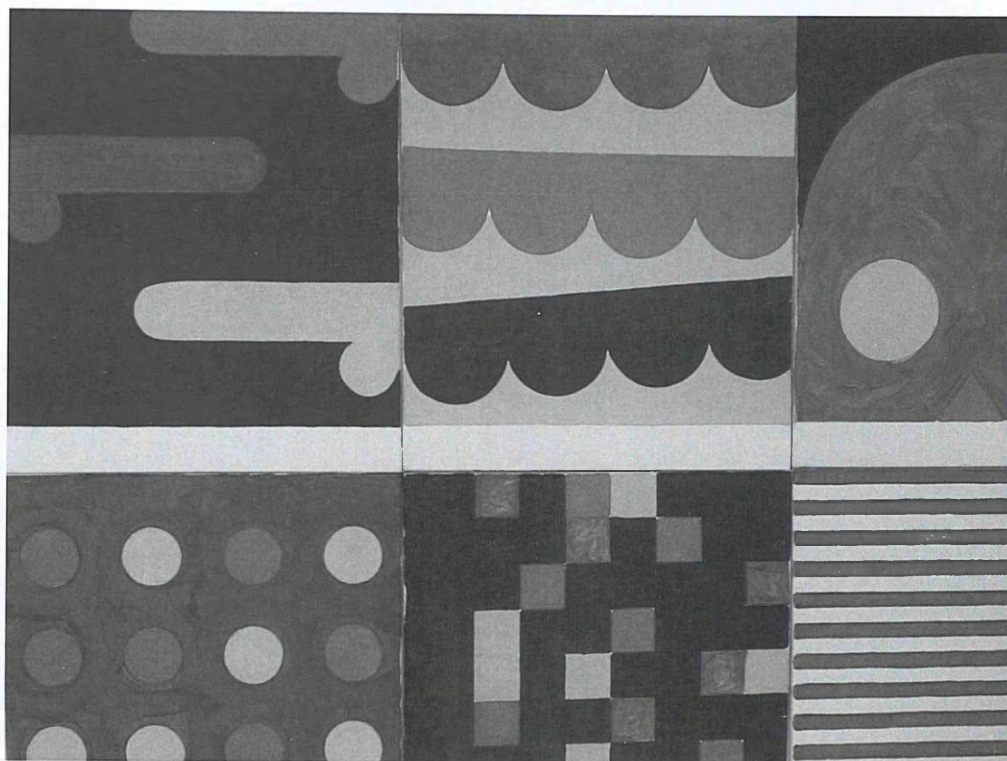


*Stage*, Oil on Canvas, 2010





*Stacked Paintings (Monumental Drawings), Oil on Canvas, 2010*



*Abstract Painting, Oil on Canvases, 2010*

**APPENDIX E:**

**MATERIAL CONJECTURES - Documentation of projects.**



# TURBULENT SURFACES

**BERNADETTE CORPORATION  
QUILLA CONSTANCE  
DALE HOLMES  
PATRICIA LENNOX-BOYD**



**CURATED BY KIRSTEN COOKE**

**BROOK THEATRE, OLD TOWN HALL, 5, THE BROOK  
TOWN CENTRE, CHATHAM, KENT, ME4 4SE**

**ONE OFF LIVE EVENT OF PERFORMANCES AND FILM SCREENINGS**

**SATURDAY 12TH NOVEMBER 2011 2PM-6PM**

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND BOOKING IS REQUIRED ON: 01634 326319 OR EMAIL: ARTS@MERWAY.GOV.UK  
DISCLAIMER: DUE TO THE ADULT NATURE OF THE CONTENT THIS EVENT IS FOR VISITORS 18 AND OVER.



kynastonmcshine

TURBULENT SURFACES II

27<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Curated by Kirsten Cooke

Performance/Screenings/Discussion: 7pm-9pm

Then what is it the Sternal's consider good? I'll tell you.  
Safety and security. Moderation. Nothing in excess.  
No risks without overwhelming certainty of an adequate return.

Isaac Asimov, *The End of Eternity* (1959)

Turbulent Surfaces is a series of performative platforms, curated by Kirsten Cooke. Part II presents two new events at kynastonmcshine.

This first element of Turbulent Surfaces II explores common and popular claims made by many video works as to the nature of scripting and structure in artists' film and video, in particular the proposition that it is possible to locate alternative frames, forms and media that can oppose the operations of capital. Two recent videos works; one by Renzo Martens (*Episode III - Enjoy Poverty*, 2008), and one by the Bernadette Corporation (*Get Rid of Yourself*, 2003) stake these claims especially, and these works will form the focus of the event.

These two works will be screened alongside a glossary by Dale Holmes and a curatorial statement by Kirsten Cooke. Also, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Maxa Zoller will each present a ten-minute provocation that responds to the screenings. The event will close with an open discussion.

*Episode III - Enjoy Poverty* (2008), by Renzo Martens, set in the Congo, asserts that every actor in the work, including himself, upholds the prejudices and expectations that perpetuate poverty.

In *Get Rid of Yourself* (2003), the Bernadette Corporation temporarily merged with Le Parti Imaginaire, a faction of post-Situationist militants with links to the burgeoning anti-globalization movement. The film documents and re-stages the anarchist group Black Bloc's actions during the riots at the G8 summit.

Kirsten Cooke is a curator whose work explores strategies that resist the impoverishing practice of exhibitions, which reiterate neo-liberal values through predetermining images affect.

Dale Holmes is an artist. His work is invested in the visual, political and philosophical legacies of abstraction.

Dr Maxa Zoller is a lecturer and curator who works with marginal and interdisciplinary film practices, focuses on issues of the body, expanded cinema, the practice of female filmmakers, and experimental film from former Socialist countries

Dr. Jaspar Joseph Lester is an artist and writer, and is Reader in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. His work focuses on the critical status of illusion in social space and has involved a number of long-term collaborations with artists, writers and curators.

Please email the gallery to reserve seating, as places are limited.

[www.kynastonmcshine.org.uk](http://www.kynastonmcshine.org.uk)

[info@kynastonmcshine.org.uk](mailto:info@kynastonmcshine.org.uk)





kynastonmcshine

TURBULENT SURFACES II  
Part II - One Dimensional Disco  
27<sup>th</sup> July 2012  
8-10pm

It all worked itself out naturally and well.  
Every branch of science was fitted neatly  
to the needs of the public,  
and the various branches of science  
were co-ordinated decently.

Isaac Asimov, *The Complete Stories: Volume 1*

*One Dimensional Disco* contains a built structure, performances and a DJ set.

*One Dimensional Disco* is an artwork and exhibition. It is a blunt instrument constructed for this event at kynastonmcshine only.

*One Dimensional Disco* is an ad-hoc platform that includes image, sound and text. Its disjunctive and tailor-made constructs act as a closed vertical structure: an antagonistic surface.

*One Dimensional Disco* asserts itself beyond the contemporary cults of representation and interpretation; breaking definitively with the horizontal ground of narrativity perpetuated by the contemporary consensus of cause and effect.

*One Dimensional Disco* presents two performances and a DJ set by Material Conjectures. The DJ set is made up exclusively of work by The Algorithm, aka Remi Gallego, a 22 year old French artist who plays with a mixture of Black Metal, math-core electronica, Ska and Dub-Step.

The event is organised by Material Conjectures - curator Kirsten Cooke and artist Dale Holmes.

Turbulent Surfaces is a series of performative platforms, curated by Kirsten Cooke, and co-organised by Kirsten Cooke and Dale Holmes. Part II sees two new events presented at kynastonmcshine.

[www.kynastonmcshine.org.uk](http://www.kynastonmcshine.org.uk)

[info@kynastonmcshine.org.uk](mailto:info@kynastonmcshine.org.uk)

PRESS RELEASE

**Material Conjectures**

**Asymmetrical Cinema** with Amanda Beech and Alan Clarke

15 May – 9 June 2013

Wednesday-Saturday 11am–5pm

**Asymmetrical Cinema: Interval** – Friday 31 May, 6–8pm: a special event as part of SLAM LAST Fridays

*...From beneath his overcoat the man produces a sawn off shotgun. BANG! Nearby forceful words in upper case and images of brutal architectures replace each other on a screen. Over this is a conversation between two protagonists through which the asymmetry of culture and nature is exposed. Later the frames are solarised...Indifferent to the auditory force of its neighbour; silently a series of 111 bullet points are presented...This is 'Asymmetrical Cinema'. Material Conjectures<sup>1</sup>.*

Material Conjectures is the co-authored project of artist Dale Holmes and curator Kirsten Cooke and **Asymmetrical Cinema** the title of their new exhibition. Conceived for Beaconsfield's Arch Gallery, discrete sculptural structures augment the existing architecture of the space, as well as providing surfaces that act as projection screens for a programme of films. **Asymmetrical Cinema** draws on the theories of Speculative Realism and Materialism in its critique of the systematic nature of image consumption.

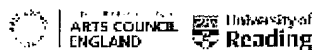
**Asymmetrical Cinema: Act 1** – 15–31 May – will screen Alan Clarke's film *Elephant* (1989) on a continuous loop, whilst Amanda Beech's video work *Sanity Assassin* (2010) is shown at timed intervals.

**Asymmetrical Cinema: Interval** – 31 May – celebrates and launches Material Conjectures' publication *Asymmetrical Cinema*. The *Interval* is an intervention between the exhibition's two Acts. The event marks the closing of *Asymmetrical Cinema: Act 1* and the opening of *Act 2*.

**Asymmetrical Cinema: Act 2** – 31 May to 9 June – will feature two new projections by Material Conjectures, *Solar Elephant* (2013) and *Black Plastic* (2013) presented in response to Act 1. Amanda Beech's *Sanity Assassin* and Alan Clarke's *Elephant* will continue to be available on the Canteen Gallery's FlatScreens.

*Though we generally assume that impact is mutual, and that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, these suppositions arise from a narrowly physical concept of causation. As I see it there is no such thing as reciprocity; influence is never mutual, but always leads in one direction...<sup>2</sup>*

Further information: [lily@beaconsfield.ltd.uk](mailto:lily@beaconsfield.ltd.uk)  
<http://www.beaconsfield.ltd>



<sup>1</sup> Material Conjectures was formed in response to a collection of agreements and disagreements located in art, politics and philosophical realisms. Previous co-aborations include *Act 3: In which the Standardizer and the Adhocist first encounter the Absolutist* (2013) a performance paper delivered at the conference, *Performance Philosophy* at the University of Surrey in April 2013 and *The Matter of Contradiction: War against the Sun* at Limehouse Townhall March 2013 and *Turbulent Surfaces 2 part II: One Dimensional Disco* (2012) at Kynastormoshine, Deptford, as part of the series of events *Turbulent Surfaces*.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Harman, *Asymmetrical Causation: Influence without Recompense*, Parallax, 2010, vol.16, no. 1

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# WHAT IS PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY?

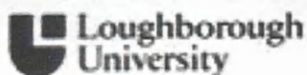
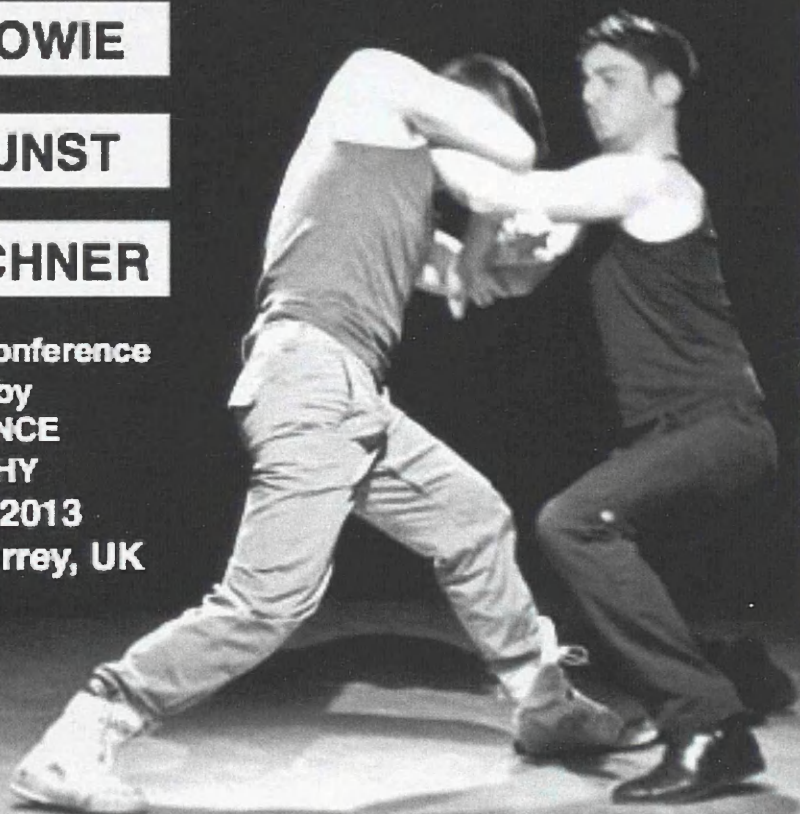
**Staging a New Field**

**ANDREW BOWIE**

**BOJANA KUNST**

**MARTIN PUCHNER**

An International conference  
organized by  
**PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY**  
11-13<sup>th</sup> April 2013  
University of Surrey, UK



**practice research unit**



Press release for *Performance Philosophy* at which Material Conjectures delivered the paper, *Act Three: In Which the Standardizer and the Adhocist Encounter the Absolutist* (A version of the text was also delivered by Material Conjectures on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2013 at three day conference, *The Matter of Contradiction: War against the Sun.*)