

I HEAR VOICES...

This text/talk is part document, part outcry. There are not many art works, and those pictured don't illustrate an argument. Writing and reading become important. There are some interwoven pictures [often google-searched], stories, artist writings and a fragmented string of asides.

I can hear voices...

'...the voices start. Sometimes they are low disembodied grumblings that coalesce out of the air itself; sometimes they emanate from behind the furniture or inside the walls. They are indistinct yet full of meaning... They are angry, accusatory, disillusioned. They seem sometimes to be reciting text...' ¹

Cunningham's title references a working draft written by Woolf in 1924 called 'The Hours', later published as *Mrs Dalloway*, in which she explores 'stream of consciousness', a 'modern' way of writing in which the imprint of experience and emotion on the inner lives of characters is as important as the stories they act out. Reading Virginia Woolf, I have the sense that she is present in the text.



DAD ...I mean, to be able to 'read a mind' like the words on a page – assumes the mind is made up of words, like the words on a page.

STAY And that isn't in 3D.

DAD I work with words

STAY What do you mean you work with words?

DAD Words just come into your head, trust me.

DAD What kind of words come into your head? Do you write them down?

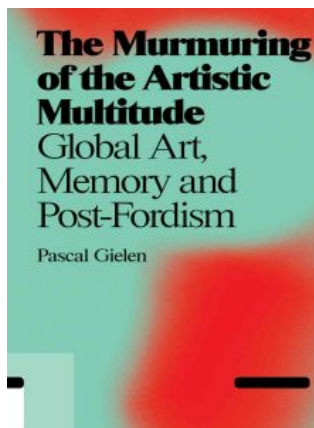
STAY They come like voices, not words on a page. ²

I am interested in the differences in tempo when you read something quietly in your head and out loud. Reading without speaking, the words (or are they voices?) seem to flow so

¹ Excerpt from Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*, Fourth Estate, London, 1999, Mrs Woolf, pp.70-71.

² Excerpt from *Game Keepers Without Game*, scene 9, a film by Emily Wardhill dialogue between Dad, a writer, and STAY his estranged daughter. pp.72 – 73.

much quicker, nearer and sooner than when reading aloud. Different temporalities. Complex, reversible relationships. Reading/utterance unhinges from the page. The murmur is adrift.



A MURMURING

I am thinking about murmuring and about the 'global'. About the everyday and the structural; formlessness and the idea of the encounter. About 'history as the continual transformation of provisional forms by new, indecipherable and unanticipated events'; history without the internal logic of trajectory or continuity.³ About system as unbounded field that resists theoretical totalisation. 'A multitude of interconnected processes that sustain proliferation and crisis... productivity and reproduction.'⁴ And about the 'global art world' as a 'multi-modal', 'detotalised totality' (not my terms). Everything in relationship.

Pascal Gielen's 'murmuring multitude'. Foucault's 'great murmur, otherwise known as the language-being or the there-is of language'. The self-production of subjectivity. The role of discourse in maintaining social order.

I am thinking about murmuring and the spell of inner speech; the endless (silent) commentary of thoughts (words) as a kind of murmur that is a shifting ground that defines the conditions and limits of meaning. According to Foucault this anonymous murmur is an 'enigmatic and precarious being' that is particular to each age.⁵

Deleuze, writing on Foucault;

'A single statement can even have several positions (and subjects). So much so that what comes first is a ONE SPEAKS, an anonymous murmur in which positions are laid out for possible subjects: 'the great relentless disordered drone of discourse'.⁶

If 'the great relentless disordered drone of discourse' is inside my head, where am I? Could this discourse be what meditators call monkey mind? Impossible to suppress, they advise quietly attending to this whorl/world of thinking, until after some time you apprehend a spaciousness with room for everything; a vantage that allows both the watcher and thinking mind to coexist.

³ Dianna Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms; ontology, agency and politics*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 2010. p.35.

⁴ ib id. p.29.

⁵ Giles Deleuze, Foucault, Continuum, New York, London, 2006 (original translation 1988. p.48.

⁶ ib id. p.47.



SWARM

Pascal Gielen writes of a murmuring artistic multitude that has grown up as globalization has unlocked creativity and a proliferation of artists. This 'heterogeneous swarm of individuals that now make contemporary art is described as a 'polyphony of singularities and idiosyncratic meanings alongside and in opposition to each other.' ⁷

Aging rock star, Cheyenne, musing with a tattooed guy sitting next to him in a bar...
'WHY IS IT THAT NO ONE WORKS THESE DAYS,
AND EVERYONE WANTS TO DO SOMETHING ARTISTIC.' ⁸

Gielen is looking at the 'socio-logic' involved in artistic choices. For Gielen, murmuring doesn't refer to an outer assumed reality but 'hangs in the ether like a formless crackle'. The murmur, while 'pregnant with meaning' contains so many paradoxes and contradictions it is rendered meaningless by its complexity. His murmuring artistic multitude is so heterogeneous that it is difficult to know who it is for and what it all means. It is an unsettled, indefinable, resistant, generative potential.

IS 'NOT KNOWING' THE SAME AS 'UNINTELLIGIBLE'?

'What does it mean?' is a question often asked of artists and their work. This seeking of a declarative answer or singular definition in itself denies communication. Knowing what something means then becomes the problem of many meanings and intelligibility. Do we opt for partial meaning and clarity over the impossibility of meaning and inclusive diversity?

And here we come to the margin or limits of language, of what it is possible to say, or not to say. Language as system or logos. According to Gielen, murmuring arises at the place where language reaches its limits and 'culture proliferates at the margins where not yet authorized, not yet solidified into meaning...' This 'babble' is hard to define, and thus difficult to integrate. ⁹

It is this grotesque inexhaustible murmuring, context?

⁷ Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism, Antennae Series no.3, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2009. p.14.

⁸ Quote from film by Paulo Sorrentino, *This Must Be The Place*, 2012.

⁹ Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism, Antennae Series no.3, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2009. p13.



So we have the creative murmur and the idea of a swarm. The murmur as ‘a sparkle, growl or buzz.’ A ‘collective visual or auditory murmur’ - both problematic and vitalistic force. The swarm as the folding of language or the uncovering of a ‘strange language within language’. A kind of collectivity that is non enduring; not outside the world.

‘Here is a way of seeing the world: it is composed not of identities that form and reform themselves, but of swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific forms of identity. Those swarms are not outside the world; they are not transcendent creators. They are of the world, as material as the identities formed from them. And they continue to exist even within the identities they form, not a identities but as difference. From their place within identities, these swarms of difference assure that the future will be open to novelty, to new identities and new relationships among them.’¹⁰

WORDS AND AIR

When I think of the murmuring of language as a generative force, I think of ancient practices of prayer; incantation, poetry and song. (Read George Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought*, and listen to the sounds of abstract thinking).¹¹ I think of 7th Century Hebrew texts in which full notation was avoided to allow for the sounding of vowels in speech and in breath. This interpretative instance happens in the text and in margins of the text. It is your breath that animates or inhabits the text.



¹⁰ Giles Deleuze, quoted in Todd May, *Giles Deleuze: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005. p.114.

¹¹ George Steiner, *the Poetry of Thought; From Hellenism to Celan*, New Directions, 2011 and Penguin, Canada, 2011.

And so we move from song to self-chatter... from speech to sounding words quietly in your head. Sounding words, like talking to your self. Now I am thinking about the cultivation of self, the thinking-subject and the artist-subject.

‘There has been an inversion between the hierarchy of the two principles of antiquity, ‘Take care of your self’ and ‘Know thyself’. In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle.’¹²

CARE OF THE SELF

In *Care of the Self*, Foucault writes on the Ancient Greek and Roman practice of reading and writing as part of the cultivation of self; diaristic writings and letters were a means to reflect on how to live a good life. This written dialogue is, for us, internalized and has become a site for self-censorship, surveillance and a site for social control.

Note that this structure is not unlike the traditional art historical mode of surveillance and evaluation. Also note the diaristic and methodical systems of production devised by artists like Alighiero Boetti, Ugo Rondinone, Nasreen Mohamedi, On Karawa. (I am tempted to argue that all artist employ such systems, some more plainly than others.)



WHOSE VOICES DO WE HEAR?

What of the voices you are hearing inside your head? What if they are not your own, but the voices of the collective present... ancestral voices... the voices of the animate and inanimate world? A conversation with a past that is not a past. And how do these voices relate to the economies of art? To the slope of globalization?

When silence is not refusal. What does it mean to speak?

The ‘art world’ is a loud chatter. When I think of the role of art in globalization, colonization and post-colonial nation building (now generally described as a borderless interactive site), I think about the ‘thickness of the present’ as the relational structure through which things reveal their existence.¹³

I think of artists listening for the sound of the time.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, L.H. Martin, H. Gutman & P.H. Hutton, 2; *Care of the Self*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988, pp.22.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *‘What is an apparatus?’ and Other Essays*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, 2009.



What of the ways artists are aware of and configure 'context', murmuring?

Context: Is there such a thing?

How do artists negotiate the possibility (and impossibility) of communicating across cultures and languages?

What of the individual artist and their place in the collective?

How do they figure 'freedom'?

A WORLD ITINERANT

*'A passport won't be necessary I am an artist of the unobserved life.'*¹⁴

Are artists outsiders, wanderers of the street? Are they writing on walls, in cafes, doorways or on scraps of paper... with no home? If culture is always in a state of negotiation and constant translation, we are all outsiders (listening to the murmur).

Note: I could list many artists whose personal histories delineate a trail of perpetual movement and relocation; artists who identify as outside of one particular identity or geographical location; artists who work and exhibit in different countries and without studios. To demonstrate how this status informs their work, would be a given.

*'Transnational transition is not a movement it is too diverse in mode and oppositional in motivation... it is a content driven art aware of the influence of ideologies, problems of translation, intensely local but also mobile, international, concerned with issues of nationality, identity and rights. All these elements are in a state of constant transition.'*¹⁵

How do artists figure them-self; construct a vantage from which to work/speak?

¹⁴ John le Carre quoted in *Tacita Dean, An Aside*: selected by Tacita Dean, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London, 2005.

¹⁵ Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art World Currents*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2011. p.82.

I have been collecting artist's self portraits...



THE THICKNESS OF THE PRESENT – CONTEMPORARINESS

Coexistence, the immediacy of difference, and the thick air of the present.

For Agamben, contemporariness is 'a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and also takes distance from it'. He writes of a distancing and a nearness that characterize contemporaneity; obscurity and 'that which remains unlived'.¹⁶

On MATTER (and other immaterial things)...

'There is an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of

¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the contemporary?' in 'What is an apparatus?' and Other Essays, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, 2009.

immaterial things seem to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul, also imagination, emotions, values, meaning and so on.’¹⁷ Thick air.

Terry Smith, art critic and historian on the notion of the contemporary writes:

‘...To live in the ‘thickened present’... (is) to understand particular contemporaneity to mean the immediacy of difference – in three strong and usually, but not necessarily, interdependent senses; difference in and of itself, as a truth about the world; difference to proximate others, as a shaper of social relationships; and difference to oneself, as a fact of subjective experience.’¹⁸

There seems to be general agreement about the dissembled state of things ‘contemporary’. Kathryn Weir, writing on the ‘Aesthetics of Inclusion’ says that ‘it has become increasingly difficult to *remain oblivious* (my italics) to the complex interweavings of cultural histories in the 21st century. The geographic spread of sites of contemporary art, and the great variety of people who participate in it, have changed how histories are told and contexts understood.’ Weir writes of the ‘huge expansion of networks of communication and distribution for art practice’ and suggests that ‘artists today understand the importance of being attuned to a collective historical moment’.¹⁹

...‘Contemporariness’, ‘thickened present’, ‘collective historical moment’...

If there is such a thing as ‘context’, it begins with a murmuring... and a listening; a wanting to speak as a way of understanding the self, and the encounter between self and other. It exists in this movement between; as embeddedness, (subjectivity, collaboration) and as distance from (criticality, appraisal). It exists as noise as the very inadequacy of language; and in translation, as misapprehension and aporia. This movement reminds me of making. When I am involved, integrated with and participating in the thing/idea and when I step back (or turn somewhere else) to find/create a critical vantage.

I am interested in this movement. This is like meditation.

Note: Buddhist thought might describe the shape of freedom as ‘a step back’ - freedom is found in awareness. In seeing things ‘as they are.’ A kind of ‘not thinking *about...*’; an indifference or disenchantment.

¹⁷ Dianna Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: ontology, agency and politics*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 2010. p.2.

¹⁸ Terry Smith, *Profiles in Currency: Contemporary Art Today*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Kathryn Weir, ‘In This Together; the Aesthetics of Inclusion’, In Miranda Wallace, *Twenty-First Century: Art in the First Decade*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2010.



For Kitaro Nishida, a Japanese philosopher who influenced work of Korean born artist Lee Ufan and concrete artists of Mono-Ha, (Japan late 60's & early 70's) the so called material world is something conceptualized and abstracted out of actuality. He wrote that the fact of being able to see and feel the world is in itself mysterious. The body stands, not apart from things, but among them and the reciprocal stimulation of making is a back and forth process, the maker and the art work bring each into being. Did Heidegger read Nishida?

AN ASIDE: THE RIM OF THE BOWL

A retelling of a short but potent story told to me by a potter friend who lived for a time with the Pueblo Indians in South America – he says: 'when I was working with the Pueblo Indians, I observed that they drew a line of slip on the rim of each bowl they made. When I asked why this was done I was told: we call this line the spirit line, and the opening in it allows the spirit of the potter to get out and that of the bowl to get in. When I asked why that was important, (thought I heard her saying under her breath: stupid white man), she told me that if your spirit gets caught up in any object (or relationship with anything or anyone) it cannot travel and thus can't grow.'²⁰



YES NO AND OTHER OPTIONS

Giorgio Agamben relates our 'sense of agency, of being able to say 'I can' to a moment of existential indebtedness to others – a reciprocity. Everything is a collaboration.

'The challenge (is) to understand the conditions of our agency in order to define them according to our own terms... And secondly to imagine another logic of agency and ethos

²⁰ Story recounted to the author (a couple of times) by artist, Petrus Spronk.

which can help us to defy the pressure to perform and eschew the regimented options for consumption.’²¹

If we understand our potential to perform as a kind of gift (and debt)²² received from others, we no longer have to assert the illusion of the infinite potentiality of self. We can rest, step back, choose. So some relief from the voices in our heads; and from the processes of self documentation that can be exhaustive in every sense of the word.

‘The sense of inhabiting an articulate landscape – of dwelling within a community of expressive presences that are also attentive and listening, to the meanings that move between them – is common to indigenous, oral peoples on every continent. ... most of my Pueblo friends here in the southwest are curiously taciturn and reserved when it comes to verbal speech. (When I’m with them I become painfully aware of how prolix I can be, prattling on about this or that for minutes on end.) Their reticence... is a consequence of their habitual expectation that spoken words are heard, or sensed, by the other presences that surround.’²³

ANOTHER ASIDE: THE SPEECH OF THINGS

What of the speech of things? If language is the ability to communicate across the ‘thickness’ of time and space, then the animate world has language.²⁴

The body itself speaks. What of the material reverberation of my speaking?

The sensible world as the source of itself.

TIME AND THINGS

Bruno Latour, the French sociologist and philosopher, proposes in his Actor Network Theory that new relationships can be formed forwards and backwards through time. A time which is both linear and sedimentary.²⁵

Note: His thinking informs the speculative realism of Graham Harman and Ian Bogost that posits a non-human vantage when considering things (and people) in relationship.

²¹ Jan Verwoert, ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance, Ways to defy the Pressure to Perform’ in Dot Dot Dot, No.15, Winter 2007, p.91.

²² Giorgio Agamben in Jan Verwoert, ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance, Ways to defy the Pressure to Perform’ in Dot Dot Dot, No.15, Winter 2007, p.102.

²³ David Abram, The Speech of Things, Becoming Animal, An Earthly Cosmology, Pantheon, New York, 2010, p.173.

²⁴ ib id. p.175.

²⁵ Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2005.



THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE

Lee Ufan, who recently had a retrospective *Marking infinity* at the Guggenheim Museum is a philosopher-artist and also an early example of ARTIST NOMAD or 'transnational artist'. He writes of a precarious marginal identity that has shaped a quietly subversive practice. 'His detachment has defined his aesthetics and what one critic calls his 'strategy of destabilisation', one that is not without emotional cost.'²⁶

'A resident of Japan since 1956, (with a studio in Paris since the early 1970's) Lee is at home neither in his native land nor his country of residence; some Korean critics have been skeptical of his 'servile attachment to foreign thinking', while in Japan, historic prejudice against Koreans has prevented his full acceptance there.'²⁷

'Koreans see me as being Japanised, the Japanese see me as being fundamentally Korean, and when I go to Europe, people, set me aside as an Oriental... I am left standing outside the collective, seen on the one hand as a fugitive and on the other as an intruder... the dynamics of distance have made me what I am.'²⁸



²⁶ Alexandra Munroe, *Lee Ufan – Marking Infinity*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2011, p.21.

²⁷ op cit.

²⁸ Lee Ufan, *The Man in the Middle*, 1991-1997, in *The Art of Encounter*, Turner/Lisson Gallery, 2004, p.1.

MONO-HA

Ufan was a key theorist of Mono-ha, an antiformalist, materials-based art movement that developed in Tokyo in the late 1960's.



Mono-ha was Japan's first contemporary art movement to gain international recognition. It 'coincided with Arte Povera in Italy, Joseph Beuys' circle in West Germany, Process art and Earthworks in United States... all in all among the first vanguards to develop simultaneously beyond a single geographic center in cities across the globe.'²⁹

The Mono-ha school of thought rejected Western notions of representation, choosing to focus on the relationships of materials and perceptions rather than on expression or intervention.

LISTENING CLOSELY TO THE 'STRANGENESS OF THINGS'

The artist is listening closely to the 'strangeness of things', finding forms of articulation that free things from preconceived ideas and inherited concepts and testing the world to mediate a vivid encounter with 'things as they are.'

Ufan describes the feeling of the Mono-ha artists as an 'inability to put into words the things that lay before them'.³⁰

THE SHAPE OF FREEDOM (how to give freedom a shape)

And so we return to an understanding of the ever present margins at the limits of possibility and understanding; to 'that which we are incapable of living'³¹ and to the question of how we use or misuse our abstractions; to the nature of the encounter between self and other, and to heuristic questions of freedom.³²

²⁹ Alexandra Munroe, *Lee Ufan – Marking Infinity*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2011. p. 20.

³⁰ Lee Ufan, quoted in Alexandra Munroe, *Lee Ufan – Marking Infinity*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2011, p.55.

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *'What is an apparatus?' and Other Essays*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, 2009.

³² 'We feel free because we lack the language to articulate our unfreedom.' Slavoj Žižek, *Why be happy when you could be interesting*. You Tube video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U88jj6PSD7w>

Giorgio Agamben writes '... the entryway into the present necessarily takes the form of an archaeology; one that does not however return to an historical past, but rather to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living.'³³

'...Going on without resistance or notions is called discipline.
Going on where hope and desire have been left behind I called discipline.
Going on in an impersonal way without personal considerations is called *a discipline*.
Not thinking, planning, scheming is a discipline.
Not caring or striving is a discipline.

Excerpt from Agnes Martin, Writings, Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwatrz (ed.), Hatje Cantz, Verlag, Germany, 1992, with exhibition 'Agnes Martin, paintings & Works on paper 1960-1989', Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 1992, p.70.

WRITING

Agnes Martin's work 'unseats the dialectical' and in favour of an ethos or cognitive structure in which no singular perspective gets the upper hand or can claim the field.' Her process elevates the disinterested (is this something like Agamben's 'attention to the un-lived?') and an understanding of the individual's creative relationship to freedom and determination. It requires discipline.

As if writing to herself, Martin reflects on her work as an artist. She writes of the artist's encounter with world as 'living with a perceptual focus'. For her 'each moment is a full response' and 'any response to art is obedience.'³⁴

I like to consider the ethos of the encounter. I find it a useful way through iterative form and infrastructure.

READING (when not at home)

Michel Certeau on The Practice of Everyday Life writes;

'The activity of reading has all the characteristics of silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance'. He writes of the reader, 'unprotected against the erosion of time'... of 'moments lost in reading'; and how the reader 'Insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralises (her)self in it like the internal rumblings of one's own body'. Reading, 'the thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces, a different world... this mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. ... It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient.'³⁵

Two things interest me here – reading as silent production, and the pluralising of the self in the inhabitable text.

³³ Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the contemporary?' in 'What is an apparatus?' and Other Essays, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, 2009, p.22.

³⁴ Agnes Martin, Writings, Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwatrz (ed.), Hatje Cantz, Verlag, Germany, 1992, with exhibition 'Agnes Martin, paintings & Works on paper 1960-1989', Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 1992.

³⁵ Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 1980, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984, Introduction p.71. Introduction p.71.



The artist Jeff Wall, rented an apartment in Vancouver, paid a woman to live there for a few months, to furnish the space as she liked and inhabit the provisional space. Wall began document her daily activities and routines using a video camera to record her 'patterns of movement'. I like the way the artist has chosen to focus on the view from there; to talk about the construction of a vantage; about how we each inhabit and construct our daily life.

Are artists 'at home' in more than one place? Are they ever 'at home'?

Our endeavor and inheritance (murmuring) don't seem to have a geographical home. Artists transit between the way we think and the way we make.

DIFFERENT THINGS
IN DIFFERENT PLACES
IN DIFFERENT TIMES
MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS

'Moving beyond modernism's unified histories of progress, formal developments and reactions to these... particular forms and ideas occur in different places at different times - and mean different things.'³⁶

If 'history is the weaving together of many various and conflicting forces that emerge at different times and intersect with each other unexpectedly. (I am beginning to hear a murmuring)... it is impossible to see the past as it once was, or to put it another way, the past periodically breaks out into the present...'³⁷

³⁶ Kathryn Weir, *In This Together; the Aesthetics of Inclusion*, In Miranda Wallace, *Twenty-First Century: Art in the First Decade*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2010, p.28.

³⁷ Rex Butler, *Parallel Collisions*, In the Shadow of All Our Relations and Traumatized Art, in Alan Cruickshank (ed.), *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet* 41.2, June 2012, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, pp.132-133.



Natasha Bullock and Alexie Glass-Kantor, the curators of Parallel Collisions; the 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, at the Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012, address this 'paradoxical condition of history: the fact that at once past and present come together, collapsing the distance between them, and that in order for this to be possible the same time must also be shown to be two times, a distance revealed to lie between even the closest of moments'. The curatorial structure involved 'Incursions' in which contemporary artists were commissioned to make work in response to existing art work from the museum collection. Looking through the exhibition catalogue, as I did not see the exhibition, I follow a single artist, Susan Jacobs.



Susan Jacobs created 'Snake Drawing' – a performative work to 'occupy' the Elder Wing, which houses the entire collection of Australian Art including 'Circe', a bronze figurative sculpture by Bertram Mackennal, 1893, which shows Circe encircled by snakes holding out

her dripping hands after dipping them in the river and 'Circe Invidiosa', a painting by J W Waterhouse, 1892, in which jealous Circe pours her potion of herbs into the spring in which Scylla bathes transforming her lower body into a many-headed monster. Jacobs has spoken about the similarities between the snake-like effect of freehand drawing and the sand casting made by snake tracks. The work addresses the psychology of control and lack of control. I am interested in the reference to the constant re-creation of self (as artist), like a snake shedding its skin...

Butler argues that their 'incursive' curatorial strategy of hanging contemporary works amongst historical works 'turns all contemporary works of art into commentaries on (refutations of) the art of the past.'³⁸

CAUGHT IN THE TEMPORALITY OF THE CONTEMPORARY

As one of the 'speculators' or critical interpreters in the catalogue, Lily Hibberd writes that 'Time is change' – an abstraction, and that we are caught between being and its depiction, in the temporality of the contemporary. She reinvents the artist interview by writing a 'spectral allegory'; positing a 5 year old girl, Nora, who comes to the artists as in a dream. They appear to her as the rings of Saturn. The dialogues with the artists weave senses of time, voice and place to talk about action and agency, incarnation, ventriloquism, and the charismatic.³⁹

CURRENCY

The 11th Baltic Triennial of International Art, Vilnius, 2012 is an episodic, twelve day event of film and performance. A single actor will play Mindaugas (the name of the only King of Lithuania and the most common name in the country), presenting, interpreting, translating works by participating artists.⁴⁰ Here, an emphasis on contingency, a particular sensibility, encounter and the aleatory or chance intervention.

In a pleasing irony, the 2011 Istanbul Biennial curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffman, 'acts beguilingly as if the biennial were a museum exhibition, estranging both at once. Advocating for a renewed attention to the importance of the exhibition itself, by privileging the display and juxtaposition of artworks in one central location.'⁴¹

(The volume/density (image=movement=matter) of the murmur ramps up as curators experiment with new ways to shift old infrastructure.)

Artist, Tino Seghal's practice is all about the encounter and refiguring the exhibition form. He writes that 'the exhibition has always been much more about people, that is, visitors walking through space as individuals, and being addressed by an art experience as

³⁸ Rex Butler, Parallel Collisions, In the Shadow of All Our Relations and Traumatized Art, in Alan Cruickshank (ed.), *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet* 41.2, June 2012, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, pp.132-133.

³⁹ Lily Hibberd, Saturn's Baroque Manoeuvres and the Theft of Time, Exhibition Catalogue for *Parallel Collisions the 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Natasha Bullock and Alexie Glass-Kantor, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012.

⁴⁰ e-flux promotional email 8.09.12.

⁴¹ Adele Tan, Return of the Exhibition: 12th Istanbul Biennial, *Eyeline*, 76, pp. 68-71.

individuals...about individuals seeing each other. The museum was governmental in a Foucauldian sense. It's much more related to people than things.' ⁴²

(Back to) Butler, wanting to retain a kind of hold on historicism, criticizes contemporary curators for not having something to say...

'...the curators are part of a post-theory, post-discursive, post-art-historical generation, for whom a sign of their youth, their independence, their break with what comes before, is precisely that they don't seem to have much to say about art. Or that they understand their task as the mere 'asking of questions', without really saying which ones and without attempting to answer any of them.' ⁴³

Confusion between open-endedness and singularity remains unresolved especially in relation to the vertical structures of local and international art worlds. What of the one-to-one level at which art gets made...

HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY (OR NOT)

Nairy Baghramian, born in Iran and living in Berlin, as part of the Sculptural Matter public programs, spoke about the growing silence of the artist subject/producer and the discursive potential of art.



She argued that the artist as speaking, not silent subject, is an essential part of practice. Instead of simply speaking about their own work, Baghramian urged artists to choose to participate in discourse as speaking subjects. The murmuring is then constitutive and generative, not iterative and constraining.

'Art must be seen in relation to its context. Meaning grows out of an ensemble in which works are placed – art works are not spectral, free-floating detached from everything else (even while artists are more nomadic)... Understandings of freedom are always posited as desire or freedoms embedded in actual living and choices made....Art as providing a frame for the transformative power of aesthetics and politics against repression and conformity.' ⁴⁴

⁴² Interview with Tino Seghal in C. Arsene-Henry and Shuman Basar, (eds.) Hans Ulrich Obrist, Interviews, Volume Two, Charta, Milan, 2010, p.837.

⁴³ Rex Butler, Parallel Collisions, In the Shadow of All Our Relations and Traumatized Art, in Alan Cruickshank (ed.), Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet 41.2, June 2012, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, pp.132-133.

⁴⁴ Nairy Baghramian, (paraphrased author's notes from lecture, VCA, August 2012).

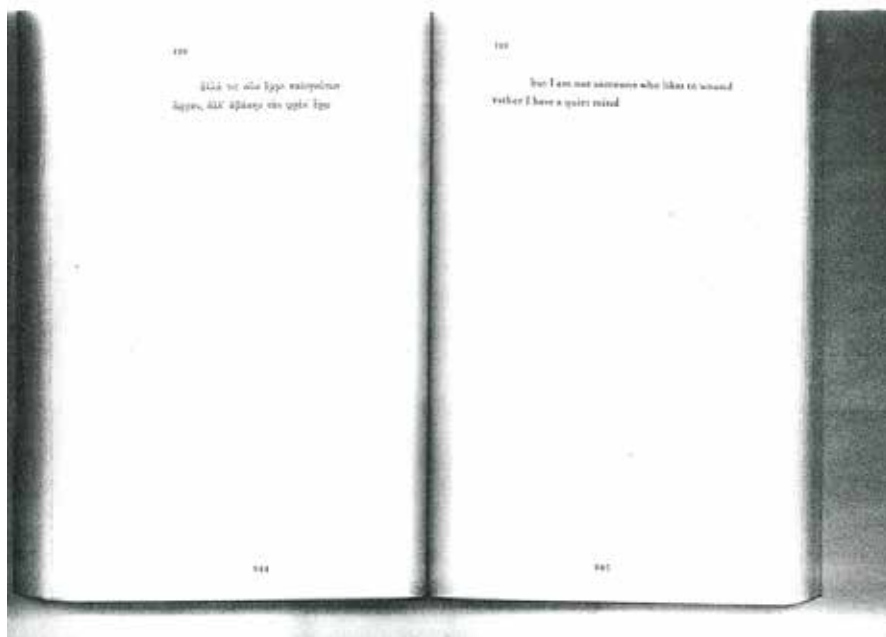


(I want to show some images of her work here, as she had chosen not to do so when she addressed us publicly.)

ALMOST AN ASIDE

Michael Ashcroft, writing in *un Magazine*, notes that in Ute Meta Bauer's discussion of her curatorial practice, she mentions, almost as an aside, that contemporary art has become over-institutionalised and 'that it might be time to consider ways in which contemporary art could become 'more inaccessible''.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Michael Ashcroft, Contemporary Art and over-institutionalisation, *un magazine*, 6.1, June 2012. pp.77-78.



FOLDED MEANINGS

Writers in archaic and classical times used hinged wooden or wax tablets (deltos) that folded to conceal the text. In a kind of private address ancient readers would unfold the tablet (like turning the page or opening the envelope/book) to encounter its/their meaning. Here, the allure of the written text, as a space for the imagination.

‘Words that are written, may fold away and disappear. Only the spoken word is not sealed, folded, occult or undemocratic.’⁴⁶

‘HOW DOES IT HAPPEN THAT IN SUCH A SHORT TIME
WE GO FROM SAYING “THAT WILL BE MY LIFE”,
TO “THAT’S LIFE”.’⁴⁷

THE FEAR OF HAVING NOTHING TO SAY

Jan Verwoert in his article entitled ‘Exhaustion And Exhuberance’, 2007, writes ‘the insistence to speak – or make work in any other way – about that which is neither readily understandable or immediately useful is in itself a strong claim to agency. I can speak or make work about what I cant speak or make work about.’⁴⁸

Giorgio Agamben writes about this potential to perform as a kind of gift and burden received from others.

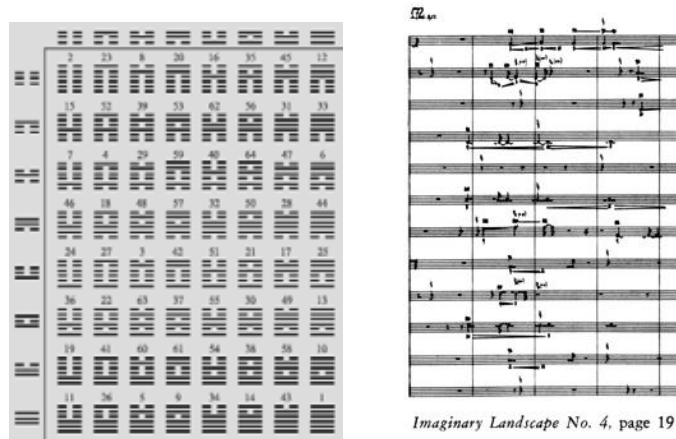
‘Can you...?, ‘Yes, I can.’

⁴⁶ Aeschylus, *Suppliants* (942-49) in Anne Carson, *Eros: the bittersweet*, Princeton university Press, New Jersey, 1986.

⁴⁷ Quote from the film by Paulo Sorrentino, *This Must Be The Place*, lead character, an aging rock star Cheyenne, to a young waitress in a roadside café.

⁴⁸ Jan Verwoert, ‘Exhaustion & Exhuberance, Ways to defy the Pressure to Perform’ in *Dot Dot Dot*, No.15, Winter 2007, p.97.

An encounter or ethos which acknowledges our debt to the other instead of asserting the illusion of the infinite potentiality of self. Such a vantage confers the recognition of our own limits and of other people's potentiality.⁴⁹



Until now Cage said, he had based his music on the traditional notion that a composer has to 'say' something: 'The charts gave me my first indication of the possibility of saying nothing.'⁵⁰

When I think about silent production, I think of John Cage - and how away from the dialectic of noise and silence, we begin to hear that 'there is no such thing as silence' sounds like. Is this murmuring?

WRITING (is reimagining fiction?)



In *Seeking a Meridian*, 2011, Lily Hibberd chooses to exhibit the referent itself – pre-historicizing the work and talking about time with a kind of delay, the referent is not just a footnote but the subject. Writing is important, reading's time(s) is important, it creates its own fluid understanding of context, rather than seeking to contextualize time's relationship to matter and to memory.

'Seeking a Meridian examines the contradictions of the historical measurement of time, in contrast with its material reality and abstractions of temporal experience...

⁴⁹ Jan Verwoert, 'Exhaustion & Exuberance, Ways to defy the Pressure to Perform' in *Dot Dot Dot*, No.15, Winter 2007, p.102.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Silverman, *John Cage, Begin Again*, A Biography, Alfred A Knopff, New York, 2010

this series seeks out the place of time, and its present relationship to matter and memory. Amid these contemporary questions of time, Seeking a Meridian revisits and retrieves specific histories, such as the global influence of French devices and conceptions of time measurement, the historical conjunction of this history within the lineage of French revolutionary politics, and the social impact of the temporal structuring of daily life across western civilisation.’⁵¹

TACTICS OF THE MARGINS



‘Art in the Margins is a new tri-annual publication that invites researchers and practitioners who operate under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism to critically reflect on what we call the ‘thickened global margin’, encompassing historical, geographical, as well as philosophical or theoretical post-peripheries. A far cry from the emphatic claims to homogeneity and universalism that characterized postmodern globalism, such an agenda implies a shift in the definition of what it means to speak to, or from, the margins: away from the binary center model that dominated modernism and postmodernism alike to one that conceives the periphery as a zone of contact in which the possibilities for a different future may be explored. Marginality, we submit, is less a condition or geographical given than a tactic that intervenes in dominant theoretical, historical and interpretative models and methodologies... it is in this spirit, and not with a view to correcting history that ART margins hopes to offer a forum to those who are currently trying to pry open and reclaim the archives, historical legacies, and artistic and political traditions that for decades have been kept, or continue to be kept under lock and key.’⁵²

Like murmuring, the margin interferes surgically in a core text the way in which words scribbled into the margins of a page may intervene in central scripture. It is a tactic of interference or interpolation rather than refutation or correction.

⁵¹ artist’s website at http://www.lilyhibberd.com/Seeking_a_Meridian.html

⁵² Art in the Post-periphery: ARTMargins, MIT Press, email July 31, 2012. www.mitpressjournals.org/artmargins



The recent Sydney Biennale curated by Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster, *All Our Relations*, began with two curators in dialogue. They proposed a conversational model instead of thematic exploration that focused on 'engagement with artist and audience through storytelling'.⁵³



Everything Falls Apart, ARTSPACE, Sydney, Symposia, Rethinking Our Relations, July 2012 was a response to the curatorial approach of the biennale – a tactic of the margins that introduced a different vantage, complexity, criticality...

Co-Curators Mark Feary and Blair French devised a two part narrative structure for the three-month exhibition in counterpoint to *All Our Relations* involving artists from London, New York, Berlin, New Zealand, Sydney. *Everything Falls Apart* looked at the dissolution of systems and the generative possibilities that come of such ruins, rather than looking at the connectedness of individual artists. Issues of global capitalism, interracial relationships, activism and warfare were addressed with an understanding of the connectivity of global crisis and issues; how events in one part of the world have ramifications in other areas.

⁵³ promotional email, *All Our Relations*, 18th Biennale Of Sydney, MCA, Sydney.

Part one offered a broad view of systematic failure with artists like Jem Cohen presenting documentary footage of the aftermath of a tickertape parade in the US after the supposed victory of the Gulf war in 1991. Part two focussed on more specific events and situations to create an entrance into broader issues. Tony Garifalakis presented targets with self-improvement slogans that reveal a tension between optimism and fatalism. Feary says they were working from within rather than outside the Biennale.⁵⁴

AN OTHER ASIDE

I am thinking about the curatorial gesture, the artistic gesture... and ways of disassembling infrastructure...



‘...Sharon Lockhardt’s film NO is an autumn elegy about time, perspective and ;about in a landscape that is changing colour... there is a soundtrack of rural quietnes. This is the background.

In front of this, the landscape is also changing colour, but through the labour of the famers who cover the field with straw in perpartition for winter... This is the foreground.

A male farmer and a female farmer working in harmony and cycle, bring and place piles of straw into both the projected picture plain and agricultural mud plain....’⁵⁵

Tacita Dean, in *An Aside – selected by Tacita Dean*, 2005, an exhibition curated by the artist, allows herself a meandering, intimate narrative structure that does not mind time.

(Much like mine here, this meandering is such a pleasure and relief, a kind of unexpected freedom. I first thought of the global murmur as oppressive, malignant even. But I have used my fear as a passion. I have written and spoken myself into being, into the thickness of the murmur and out of the malignancy.)

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

In *Take Care of Yourself*, Sophie Calle presents 107 interpretations of a break up email she received. Using the tactic of the margins, the original text becomes subsumed into the new,

⁵⁴ Interview with Mark Feary www.dasplatforms.com/das_cinema/artspace-everything-falls-apart/

⁵⁵ Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean, An Aside - selected by Tacita Dean*, Hayward Gallery, London, 2005, p.42.

myriad texts and performances. There is a screenplay, flower arrangements, tarot readings, transitions, linguistic analyses, protocol commentary, transcription, encoding... The referent is absorbed into these transcriptions, new texts and performances. She uses what people do in their everyday lives, their skills, the way they view the world.



BEING IN THE WORLD

So what is your vantage? How do you recognize your self?

What about your relationship to your desire? Your inspiration? What is the nature of your effort and focus around it?

How do you listen?

‘As a child... I wanted to see whether it was possible to experience absolute stillness. I found that I was able to slow way down. With closed eyes, I got very close. But there was some quiet motion that I couldn’t halt.

I remember being a little confused, annoyed. And then I realized that this was just breath. My own breathing. My own heartbeat. It was the simplest thing, but I’d never realized it before, felt it. Of course I couldn’t stop it. It was life. This was the baseline. This was the common denominator. This was metabolic, the soft sound of blood coursing through veins.

True stillness does not exist while one is alive. There is always this hum, this thrum. This quiet, constant push, of light to dark, of beat to beat...’⁵⁶

END NOTE:

You can study a Master of Transnational Arts at VCA.

Transnational denotes a more complex relation to the world than the terms ‘global’, ‘international’ and ‘multinational’. In this sense, the Master of Transnational Arts degree does not seek to impose a generic arts practice, rather it acknowledges and draws upon aesthetic, material and ethical practices, customs and protocols at local and regional levels. It generates dialogue between the individual artist and broader contexts. The various methodologies of translation are developed as imaginative models for transformation, yielding new genres of being and new regimes of representation in the Arts. Through experimental teaching and projects led by local and international artists, academics, curators and writers, this degree develops each student’s capacity to create new networks, understandings and appreciations of international contexts - particularly in Asia, South America and Europe - in preparation for Artist residencies, exchanges, exhibitions, arts-based research and collaboration. The compulsory research project may involve students in travel overseas. Students will be required to fund their own travel and accommodation expenses.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Zoe Leonard on Agnes Martin, in Lynne Cook, *Agnes Martin*, (ed.), DIA, New York, 2011.

⁵⁷ <http://vca.unimelb.edu.au/mtransarts>

Image List

- [Virginia Woolf] photographic portrait of the author.
- Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude, Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Antennae Series no.3, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2009 - book cover
- [meditator] sitting posture
- [swarm] honey bee swarm
- [consonantal alphabet] neo-punic alphabet, ca. 4th century AD.
- [globalization] – occupy
- Das SUPERPAPER 24, anonymous envelope diagram of influence, August 2012.
- Artist's self-portraits:
 - Ingres, self-portrait, 1804.
 - Eva Hesse, *Self Portrait in Studio*, 1963. (from Bill Barrette, *Eva Hesse Sculpture*, Tinken, New York, 1989.
 - Alighiero Boetti, (next to) *Autoritratto in Negativo*, 1969, stone, 50 x 35 x 15cm.
 - Mark Manders, *Inhabited for a Survey, first floor plan from self portrait as building*, 1986. writing materials, erasers, painting tools, scissors, 8 x 267 x 90cm.
 - Jeff Wall, *Double Self-Portrait*, transparency in light box, AP; 172 x 229cm.
 - Andy Warhol, *Time Capsules*.
 - Ugo Rondinone, *If there was anywhere but desert, Wednesday 2000*, fiberglass, paint, clothing, 220 x 95 x 53cm.
- [Kitaro Nishida] photographic portrait of the Japanese philosopher
- [Pueblo Indian bowl]
- Lee Ufan, studio portrait
- Lee Ufan, painting & sculpture, installation view, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2009.
- Lee Ufan, *From Line*, 1973, glue and mineral pigment on canvas, 182 x 227cm.
- Sekine Nobuo, *Phase—Earth*, (Iso-daichi), Biennale of Kobe at Suma, Detached Palace Garden: Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, 1968
- Jeff Wall, *A View from an Apartment*, 2004-5, transparency in lightbox, 167 x 244cm.
- 'Incursions' and 'The Tracking Shot' in *Parallel Collisions* the 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Natasha Bullock and Alexie Glass-Kantor, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012.
- Bertram Mackennal, *Circe*, c.1893, Paris, bronze, 57 x 9cm.(irreg.) Art Gallery of South Australia, acq.1960. 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012, exhibition catalogue.
- [Nairy Baghramian] photograph of the artist
- Nairy Baghramian, *Butcher, Barber and Angler*, 2009. Installation view, Studio Voltaire, London.
- Nairy Baghramian, *Fromage de Tete* (Réchaud F + Réchaud G), 2011. Installation view, Subjective Histories of Sculpture, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne.
- Anne Carson, *If Not Winter, Fragments of Sappho*, translated by Anne Carson, Random House, New York, 2002, pp.244-5.(but I am not someone who likes to wound / rather I have a quiet mind)
- [Notation] I-Ching hexagrams and John Cage, score for *Imaginary Landscape no.4*, page 19, for 12 radios, 1969.
- Lily Hibberd, *Seeking a Meridian*, 2011, Galerie De Rousseau, Paris, exhibition publication with ficto-critical essay in English and French, Longitude 21.
- *Art in the Post-periphery: ARTMargins*, MIT Press, email July 31, 2012. www.mitpressjournals.org/artmargins

- *All Our Relations*, 18th Biennale Of Sydney, Catherine de Zegher & Gerald McMaster, 2012, split page design. (Authors-Jean Fisher, Bruno Latour, Michael Hardt, Everlyn Nicodemus, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, David Abram, Subhankar Banerjee, Alwar Balasubramaniam, Philip Beesley, Thomas Seeley, Andrew Murphy, Craigie Horsfield)
- Brochure outlining public programs for *Everything Falls Apart*, ARTSPACE, Sydney, Symposia, Rethinking Our Relations, July 2012.
- Sharon Lockhardt, *NO*, filmstill, 2003; Paul Nash, Event on the Downs, 1934; consecutive pages selected from *Tacita Dean, An Aside - selected by Tacita Dean*, Hayward Gallery, London, 2005, p.42.
- Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, Actes Sud, 2007, Arles, France.
 - Ikebana Master, Murette Renaudin.
 - Proofreader, Valerie Lermite.
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 - Clown, Miriem Menant.

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