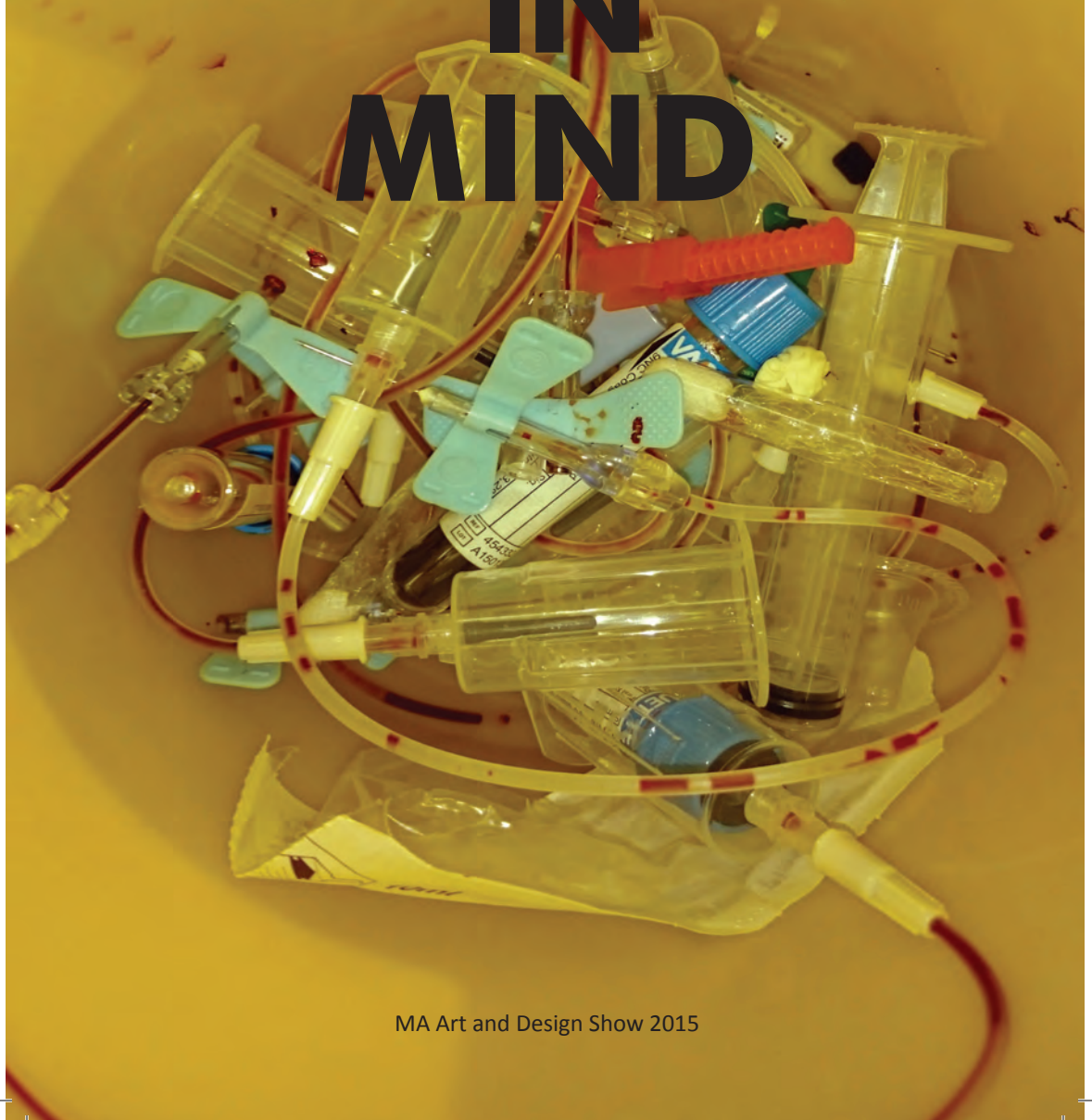


THINGS IN MIND



MA Art and Design Show 2015

THINGS IN MIND

Designed and edited by Kevin A George © 2015
MA Art & Design

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FOREWORD

The following text raises some of the theoretical questions from the investigations that have enabled discussions since October 2014 around current contemporary debates of art and design practice. The seminars were held weekly over 36 weeks, October to June. Background material was disseminated during each session to the group, with discussions following presentations.

Some preliminary notes are assembled here to provide a rough guide to the contexts of the students' progression through two earlier exhibitions. Firstly in January and then March, the project 'Inter-Actual' was presented in two parts, in a line that directed individual trajectories to intersect the horizon of a final project from June to September, which will exhibit the work of 14 individual participants on the MA Art and Design, 7 of whom will graduate, and 7 who will continue into the second year of study.

The exhibition is not simply that.

Works made in the space of the 2nd floor of Building B, Broadcasting House, over 2 months will be curated from the ground up, having been planned and constructed in situ.

This working through of a project is part of the remit of the course that does not dissociate teamwork and group activity from the problem of making work that requires both its speculation and objectivity to be mediated through dialogue.

Students arrive at solutions, whatever form they might take, from initial concepts that have been argued in the related activity of class discussion and workshop. These might relate different kinds of approach, to follow the thematic, or take a position from a specific interpretation.

The debates of contemporary practice are continually returned to, as each student progresses both in researching specific subjects, and in tandem, acquiring practical 'know-how'.

In the summer, MA Art and Design students moved into the extensive second floor studio spaces of Broadcasting House and prepared the ground to make works for public exhibition.

From the beginning, the curation of works is a design problem- walls are taken down, the space is stripped back to perform as an open site for making and presenting a range of works as the manifestation of the year long integrated project commenced in October 2014.

THINGS IN MIND

Nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought. Committed to writing in such cases, it is not even a bad photograph. Truth wants to be startled abruptly, at one stroke, from her self-immersion, whether by uproar, music or cries for help.

Walter Benjamin

The title 'Things in Mind' was simplified from an earlier version, 'Things the mind already knows' from a statement by the American artist Jasper Johns.

Using the design of the American flag took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it. So I went on to similar things like the targets - things the mind already knows.

That gave me room to work on other levels.

There are two ideas here: first, the notion of an image which is seen and not seen, because of its familiarity, which sets the agenda to question the accepted value that ideas precipitate as thought forms to image or object, or that ideas themselves might open upon what is 'unknown' in thought; or that reside already in the mind as image that, as we have long taken for granted, as representations, are not visible in their complexity and inter-connectedness to other invisible things.

It also provokes more abstract considerations. One concerns the idea of painting a flag. In the 1950s that act seemed to many observers an absurdity: an American flag might be many things, but it was certainly not art. Yet Johns presented a carefully worked, elegantly executed painting. Such a painting was surely art - or was it? That became a problem for the viewer, alone. Johns is gone; he has already made the painting, he has already presented the problem. The viewer is left to resolve it as best he can.

The problem, is posed not so much on the questioning of the over-determination of causes to any singular meaning effect, but in seeing in the structure of questions an invisible quarter, already fails us in any programme of setting out our own solutions. What thing can be exchanged at a different level of intention, and why a 'solution'?





Might an abstraction exist as the result of all the concrete relations that produce meaning, be also a material, factory made, without meaning ascribed? Subjects, an effect of individuation, as is technology, are materially in the world.

To exist or to think the problem between ideas and physical forms or beings, we might always be in the dark about where 'things' are leading, or to what is really being expressed in the manufacture of objects and ideas.

The totems, such as Johns' targets, flags, and other objects, are symbolic signs that mislead us down the rabbit-hole.





The problematic, in other words is manufactured mentally by analysing questions about these relations and dumping them before the viewer. The problem exists before the provocation. Individuals, already strange, upside down and inside out, appear to stand upright before us in the light. One pill make you smaller, one larger. This illusion is the problem haunting art and philosophy, in the translation of the work.

Rather than opposing this problem of hidden or dark origin or matter, defining a sharp division between concrete or abstract relations, separating subjecthood from objecthood, sense from nonsense, fact from fiction, light from dark, et cetera, students could be engaging with 'things the mind already knows', that free up all the oppositions, by not worrying about the problem of 'knowns' turning to 'unknowns'. That transformation just happens whatever, after the event. The owl arrives, in any case, always late.





Yet the idea is always going to be qualified by a real manufacturing process, in the mistakes, or inconsistencies of 'facture', the messy failures brought about by bad timing and missed beats could be saying something about time slowing down, leaving traces of its passage.

[...] The gummy surfaces, spectral smudges and woozy contours that appear in counterpoint to the clear, bright facture that had heretofore been [the artist's] hallmark.


Robert Storr







The drive to mean something, to control the workmanship, resists chaotic existence, in the phenomenal sense. A host of varied meanings ascribed to each thing in the act of making reduces an effective presence or 'aura' of the aesthetic. The workmanship is tuned to keeping contradictions open, and hence acquires its aura, to expose an unknowable potential or withdrawn aspect in the object, not as yet 'known'. Knowing begins to resemble unknowing. This potential in the act of making fosters perpetual ambiguity. These crafts might cunningly produce a 'shadow' or 'penumbra' from their eclipse- the more convincing the reality it presents, the more it is able to narrate an underlying fiction.



The artist or designer is adrift in space even more because the role is bound to an ever-receding destination or imperative to change things, to mean something, to explain what is out there, to intentionally further the journey from arrival. Yet in proximity, as the penumbra itself pales we know more, yet everything gradually means less. There are no illusions here in space. Things fall away, drop off, crumble, collapse, fizzle, ooze, gurgle and sink in the foam of an immense catastrophic nothingness. 'Welcome', writes Slavoj Žižek, 'to the Desert of the Real', the void. The Real is stripped of all its symbolic structures. The modern 'enlightenment' project achieved.

[...] As soon as we renounce fiction and illusion, we lose reality itself; the moment we subtract fictions from reality, reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency.

Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology





Perhaps, this sense of being cast adrift is a good enough heroic illusion for an artist, letting the fiction of destiny take care of itself in dreams whilst busy working on immediate problems of physical disenchanting facts of construction - ideation, formation, fabrication and so forth. Predestination takes away the responsibility of questioning the purpose of hard work, by providing us a forced choice.

Žižek writes, 'Borges' precise formulation of the relationship between Kafka and the multitude of his precursors, from old Chinese authors to Robert Browning:

Kafka's idiosyncrasy, in greater or lesser degree, is present in each of these writings, but if Kafka had not written we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist. [...] Each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions: 1937-52*. The properly dialectical solution of the dilemma of 'Is it really there, in the source, or did we only read it into the source?' is thus: it is there, but we can only perceive and state this retroactively, from today's perspective.

http://www.lacan.com/zizplato.htm#_ftn8





Manhattan

They sat across the table from each other, trying in vain to usher the anger from their hearts in an effort to comprehend the full importance of the words typed on the document between them.

Neither could remember who had first instigated this idea, and they disagreed as to who had dared to commit such a dangerous thought to paper.

This presumption was now largely immaterial, for the concept had been set free in the world and would eventually come to roost in the house where all diabolical propositions are made real.

Now academic and forensic considerations would have to be set aside, a more pragmatic approach necessitated by the consequences of unleashing such malevolence into the common psyche.

"Let me be clear about two things," said Groves, "I'm not going to be made responsible for the consequences of this brainwave, and in addition I'm certainly not going to help mop up afterwards."

"My sentiments entirely," said Doc. "We've got no real obligation to anyone. I'd like to suggest a more lateral viewpoint. A good friend of mine once said that declaring oneself the originator of any idea was the ultimate hubristic folly, that in truth major hypotheses, such as the one laid before us, were autonomous entities that waited in some form of limbo, choosing for themselves the exact moment of their birth."

Groves loosened his collar and attempted the threat of a smile.

"That would go some way to explaining the synchronous appearance of a number of theoretical works," he said. "It's particularly annoying when I've had a moment of seemingly divine encouragement, only to find out a few weeks later that a jerk in Tokyo put it into practice just prior to my own brilliant epiphany."

Doc continued: "What I'm really suggesting is the notion of the autoconcept. The idea that willed itself into being. Like a parasite, it did not ask for the permission of its human hosts. It arrived without a care for all the mayhem it might cause them."

Groves thought it fairly arbitrary to be considering the mechanics of Cartesian logic given their immediate circumstances. He respected his opponent, but largely down to his plain-speaking and unremitting work ethic. The man's lugubrious bolshevism made his skin crawl.

"He has the bluest eyes I've ever seen," thought Groves. "He looks right through you. I feel like he can read my mind."

Outside, the cry of a circling vulture broke the silence of the New Mexico desert. They had been stationed here so long that the sound had become unremarkable to them, the same way as the dissonance of New York cab horns went largely unnoticed by the Manhattan natives.

"Of course," Doc said, "there is an inherent and efficient corruption in all new thought, inasmuch as there is a loss of innocence without the need for sin. In some sort of crude sense, which no vulgarity, no humour, no overstatement can quite extinguish, the physicists have known sin; and this is a knowledge which they cannot lose."

Groves cleared his throat. "There are men dying out there in the middle of the ocean who need us to get moving on this. Philosophy can wait. They can't."

To Doc this was a false comparison. In the immediacy of a pre-emptive attack justified by its appearance as a notional mission of mercy, they were likely to forget the legacy of this moment, to ignore the coming generations to be raised in fear of spontaneous annihilation.

And the very real likelihood of that fear becoming fact.

Unlike their military guards, they were not governed by permission.

Increasingly, they were not restrained by any thought that they were arrogant in presuming an idea deserved to be heard regardless of the insecurity and suffering it might cause, validated purely by the righteousness of its own novelty.

But they could carry on disagreeing ad infinitum, and Groves had a point; the disagreement could wait.

Even the Devil could show mercy, even if he mostly decided against it.

The sky turned white, then went beyond white to an absence of colour the human eye was incapable of registering, then became only heat, a heat beyond all heat, that destroyed all before it could ever be felt, that incinerated souls before they could escape from the Earth.

Then came the roar, so deep that the lamentation of the Pit called out, the echoes of the Underworld deafening every audience, the howl of all the sinners of the Earth.

Doc lowered his eyes to the words and symbols written on the manuscript.

"I am become death," he said, "the destroyer of worlds."

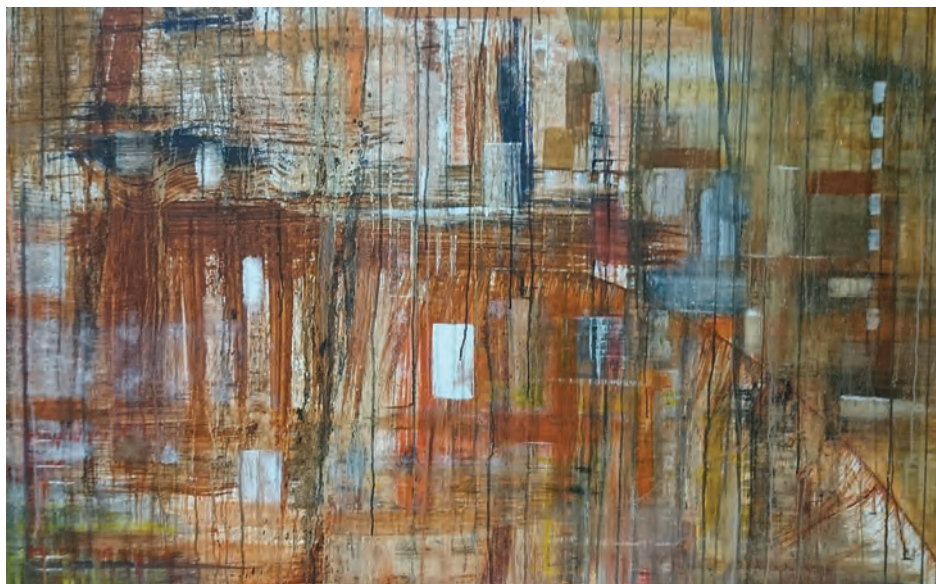
It is too easily assumed that artists and designers are exercising an exceptional, but instrumental role in society, [providing the key to unlock the past and guide the future].

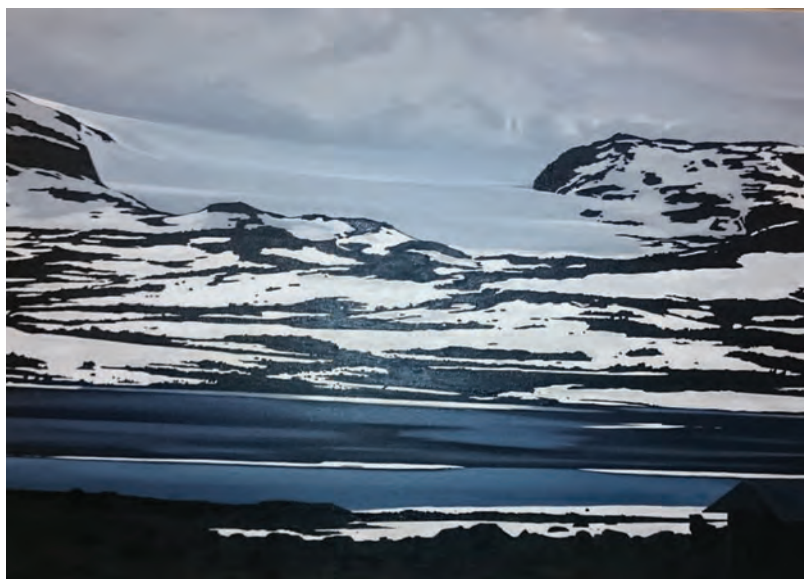
Yet we ask, how can this exceptional status be also set against the rule of Law any better than by precisely following the rule to the precise letter, if it can by so doing reveal what masks the 'common' or unexceptional 'fact'? That we are making things up, that will finally surprise and come back to haunt us, like Borges' ghost precursors living inside the object. The universe is complete, only in becoming the exception, incomplete. When we play in the ruins of the Real, we uncover fossils from a skewed time outside yet contained in all experience. Everything is a kind of inherited, ancestral, broken toy, or story, and experience turns to be the grand ploy of fantasy.

It is not therefore that we may form an egalitarian community, as a 'duty' of inheritance or in the ethical demand of the commodity's capital, as all inclusive spectacle of democracy: fossil, fetish, wish-list and ruin.



Our critical tools and ethical demands measured out in drip-feed are beyond repair. As Gean Moreno claims, this is a wrong ploy since we already know what to do. As Jacques Lacan famously added, 'I know very well, but all the same...'





Where did the critical tradition of art go? Maybe that's the wrong question. Because we know the answer. It went into spectacle. It went into finance. It got privatized, democratized, scrutinized, defunded, bureaucratized, then professionalized.



The critical stick became a seductive carrot. But maybe we don't have to see this only in terms of a fall from grace.

Maybe this is the time for a long-overdue realism that an art field still in the thrall of modernist humanism struggles to avoid recognizing. Isn't it strange how we are subjected to the most extreme aspects of this new order and yet still suppress its most emergent qualities? What if we suspend the guilt of lapsed certainties and good-person compulsions for just a moment and take a look in the mirror? What would we see? We might see velocity-driven psychotics ravaged and dragged through sky and sludge, crying from revolution teargas and boring discussions at the same time. We might see uneducated beasts using their own bodies to mash culture with physics with economics with mysticism. We might see a strange new form of human tumble out.

Editorial, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle, E-Flux journal

Gean Moreno, summer issue 2013, Accelerationist Aesthetics



What if this fall has no ground upon which to tumble out, does it suggest other graces emerging from the very process of its acceleration? The questioning of what passes for universal, or is sublimated in the utopian wish for community, is, in art, answerable, in the twisting forms of a perpetual fall: in the silence of dark space, suspended between gravity and grace, we must remain mute. The non-places, the ports of transit, between states and territories provide the networks of clandestine operations that drive boundless desire, and its secrecy, that there is no secret.

[...] It means thinking something that is boundless, yes? Everything's related but it's boundless, there's no centre and there's no edge. So there's no centre, there's no edge, and there's no one dominant top level, or there's no one fundamental bottom level, and there's no middle level.

Timothy Morton interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Extinction Marathon, Visions of the Future, Serpentine Galleries

ACTUAL VIRTUAL

Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical image' presents the enigma as an operation whose image only appears at the very moment of vanishing, as if in an elusive story, never captured. The metaphor/ image illuminates, as in a lucid dream, but is immediately lost. The ground itself is groundless. Forgetting itself is forgotten. But the forgetting had a purpose, to uncover the enigma.

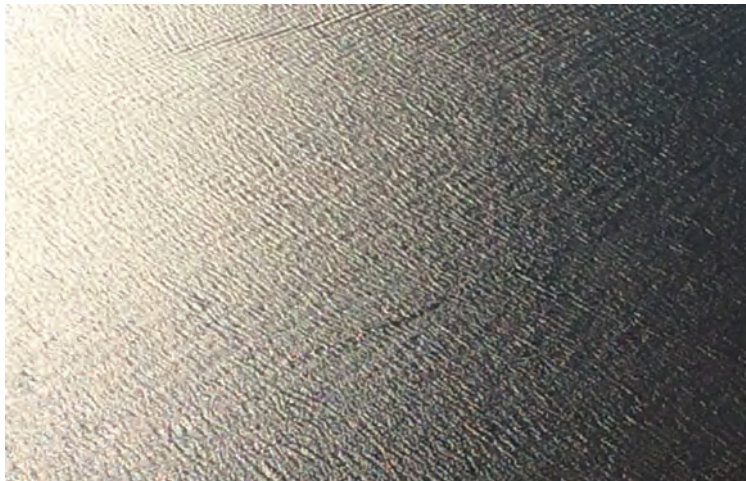


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The fugitive dialectical image which Walter Benjamin evoked in the 'Arcades' is difficult to extract from the ruins of his project.

The dialectical image was the never-fulfilled destiny of the fragments he assembled: the hoped-for product of a method, which the fragments themselves could not demonstrate, nor theoretical formulations predict. [...] Despite the insistence of Benjamin's claims, it is not at all clear whether such an image belongs to material or to virtual reality; whether it is something more like a picture or a perception. Nor is it obvious how we should distinguish the hypothetical dialectical image from figures of speech such as metaphor, or from literary forms such as the Denkbild (thought-image) upon which Benjamin modelled his writing.

http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/thinking_pictures/auerbach.htm







What trace will remain of today, if any, amid these ruins of Benjamin's failed dialectic, but the now fading signs of its disappearance? The Angel of History is herself a ruin. It is not that we have never been modern, historically, or that we are 'post' modern, we have always been modern but have never known it. Our modernity disappears without trace, yet is predestined in the future to reappear at the point when it comes fully into view, to change everything. We are finally modern every time we initiate a dialogue within each artwork to make new relations with 'things'. The discourse of modernity had been over-determined; products exceed their (human) designers, since an infinite number can reproduce them. Algorithms are machines of infinite acceleration that reproduce the world as image.

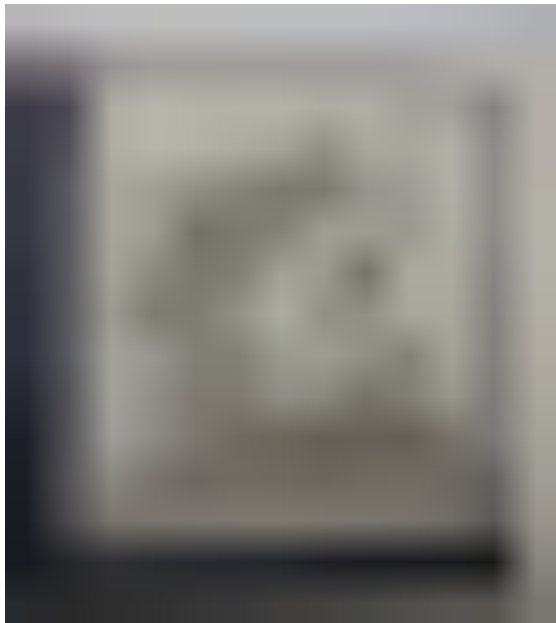
This is arguably the problem of contemporary art, design and politics, circumscribed by an ecological mega-trauma of objects. In Bernard Stiegler's lexicon, following Derrida, the 'Pharmakon', may provide the frame for actual remedy and potential poison. All thought and language resides in both. Once the frame collapses, however, so do these fragile, contradictory entities of image to object.

ART AS ANYTHING WE DESIRE

The problem for us is not are our desires satisfied or not. The problem is how do we know what we desire.

Slavoj Žižek





The work of artists and designers is set to task to produce further correlations within contradiction. Ironies abound between what is real and ideal. Viewer or listener becomes maker. When all is spectacle, surface is all. This is the pure potential in any truth-value we unconditionally accept, since it is no longer potential but actual - all there is, nothing dark beneath.

Since Andy Warhol started liking everything, every appearance, every commodity is animated in every mirror. Is there not darkness reflected in Warhol's narcissist gaze? There is no going back, yet the past may invite us to soak up the dark, in its very disappearance. The spectator sees itself, as the pure risen spectacle, in childlike astonishment, gazing in mirrors and shop windows, a spiritualised and empty signifier returned in the dissociated gaze of the mirror.

2015
Apr

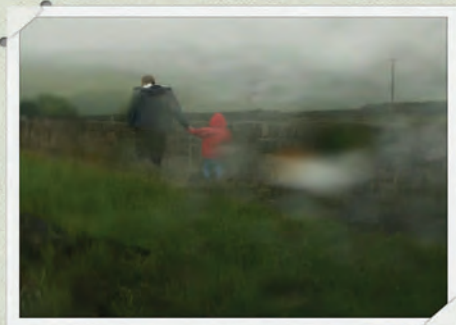
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20
Mon



When you look at me, what goes through your head. Do you see my secrets. Do you hide from them. Sometimes I cannot bear to let you see me.

2015
Jun

17
Wed



I saw you by accident at Leeds station. We got away with it, but it was a big risk. I had a great time though. Yes, me too. At Hebden I saw you looking for me, your fingers lightly tapping the stone wall of the bridge. I was in my car, watching you.

2015
May

12
Tue



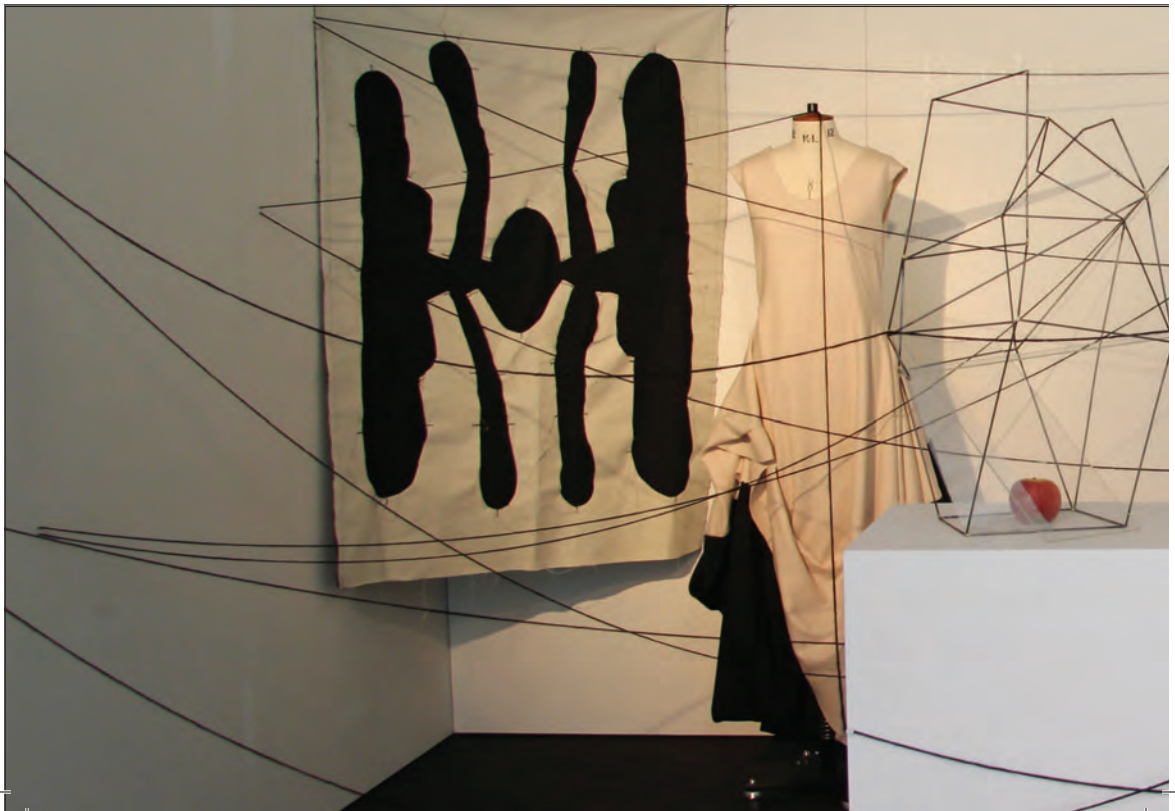
My father wears industrial ear protectors to unload his dishwasher. The noise brings on his tinnitus.

The 'new flesh' of this astonishment is without species or gender. Everything is both manufactured and transcendent. Everything is written out of the fiction. Reality now floats in abyssal fragments around the collapsed core of everything else. What might fall outside this spectacular black hole? What escapes? There is always something left over.

MESSING WITH VALUE

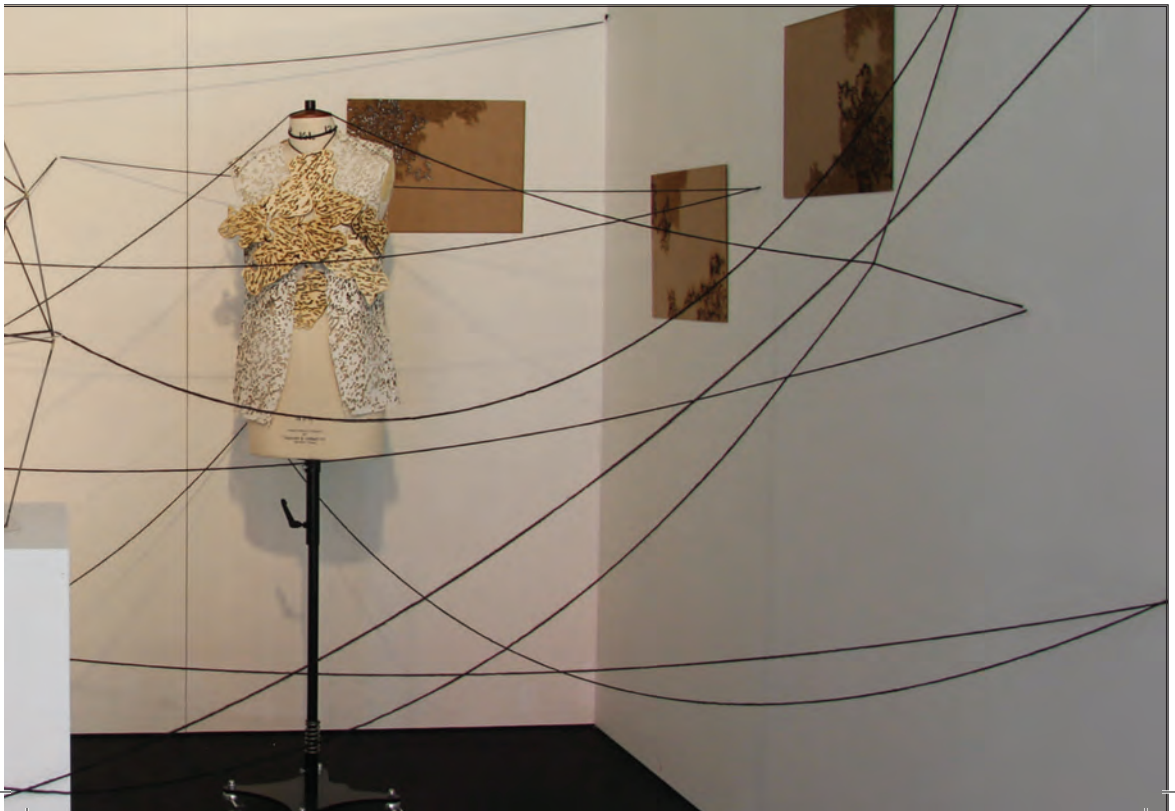
How does that come about? [...] Do you understand this 'allowed'? [...] There is a new problem: the problem of the value of truth. The will to truth requires a critique. Let's identify our own work with that requirement - to place in question, as an experiment, the value of truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche



Everything is 'permitted', nothing is true, yet what questions can be raised that challenge the inscription of permission in a value system, advertised as the 'freedom' of choice of images and sounds that proliferate the Internet? We use a toolbox, designed to comb through its pulp fictions, cartoons, music video and graffiti...but to what effect? The exhibits in 'Things in Mind' repurpose their signs and meanings to address the design aesthetic that permits subjectivity (via Pop, Fashion, Music, Television), more so in the circulation of desire for novelty, the drive to reminiscence, to nostalgia, and so on and so on. And so on.

This is not a truth, but true enough as such in drawing the attention to the ecological borders of enjoyment.

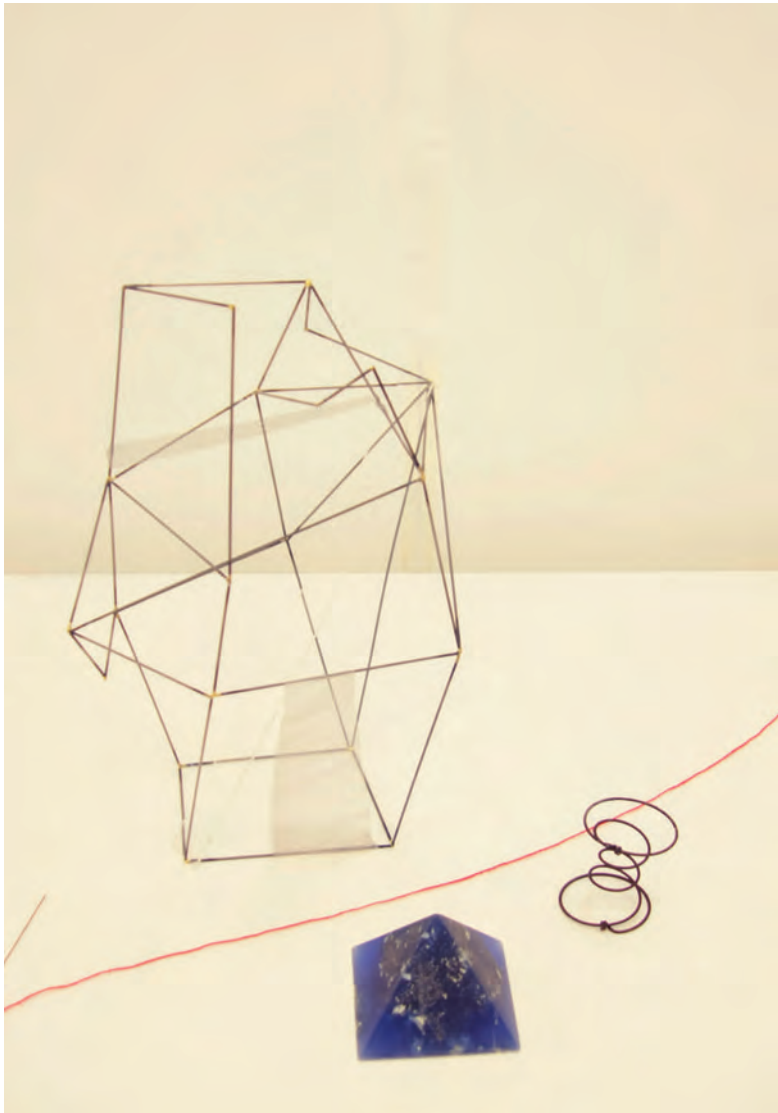




The exhibition applies the technical apparatuses of the digital (photography, video and audio) precisely to the continuing relevance of obsolete forms, such as painting and sculpture that endorse their simulations in new technologies. Technology ceases to exist without its simulative, 'realist' illusion. Technology is at the same time, precisely realism, since it is diffused everywhere as experience.

A range of individual approaches is presented in these virtual / actual interrelations. The virtual, or prosthesis of technology makes concrete what has always been an abstract projection within any perception, so that the grand debt of history is never to be paid.

The realisation of the fantasy of the West as 'global' regulator ultimately destroys its own fantasy upon which the projected reality depends.







Ecology without Nature [the title of Timothy Morton's book, published in 2009 by Harvard University Press] shows nature as such, as fiction. It's a starting point, as Nietzsche predicates on what is 'allowed', how in real terms, to finally disorganise the Grand Narrative of 12.000 years of civilisation through 'agriculture' that has led us to the sixth great extinction, as Timothy Morton writes, seeded through the coded demarcations and cartographies of 'knowledge'. A return to the planet, or the world without us.

Each exhibit in some unforeseen way dismantles the framework engineered between the object and its thought, and by so doing has to make a hard or forced choice. What is suspended in the policing of a border between the outside world and us? I.e. if we are now connected to everything else.



The imagining of art, crossing borders without permissions, is best driven through in the speculations of a general obsolescence of all value systems that have disconnected us ideally from our remainder, the whole of existence. What is, or what appears unimaginable is in fact imaginary, something without a negotiated 'value' or 'debt'. We might start again, there's no 'ideal home' and there's no one in charge. There is no Big Other.

MESSING WITH CAUSE AND AESTHETIC

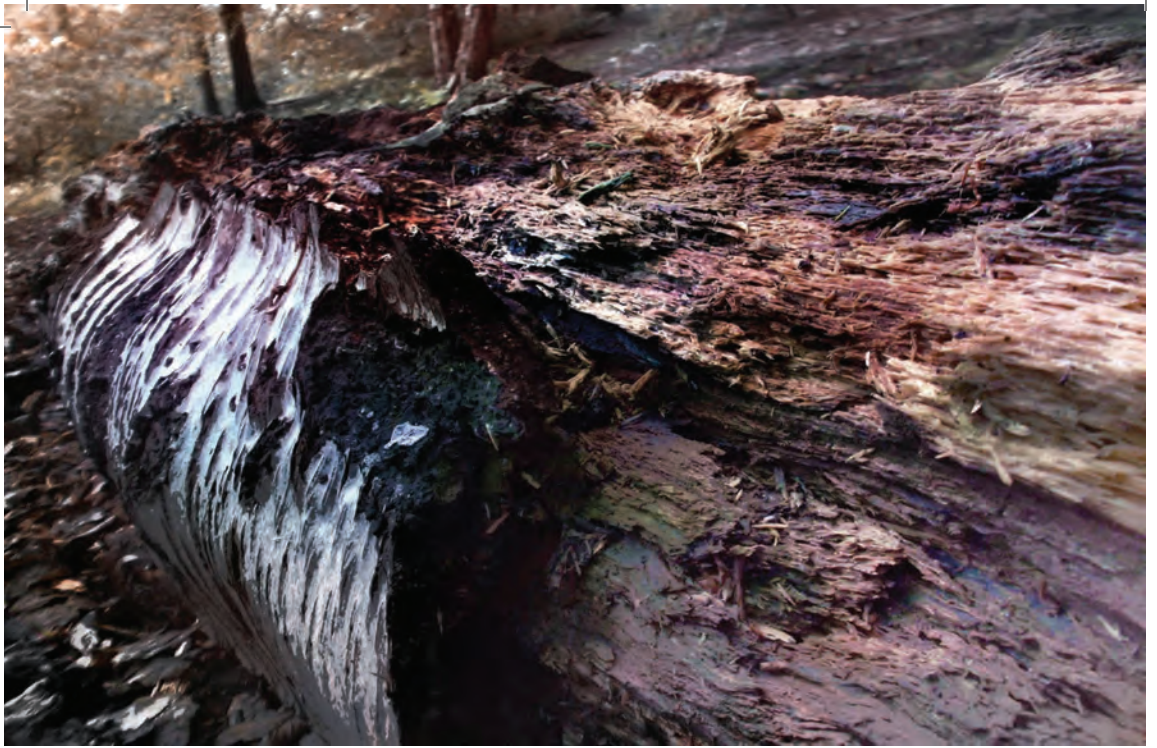
Art seeks to dismantle potentials by actualising them as things, innumerable and anarchic forms of play. Whether by uproar, music or cries for help we start up again from the very beginning to invent new hybrids that can think, as Timothy Morton writes about [...] **preserving entities that are ephemeral and fragile and intrinsically finite. Which is what we all are, and none of us are completely, plastically, transparent to ourselves, and none of us are totally ourselves all the way down.**





And thinking that involves a kind of exposure, and it involves a kind of ecological act of preserving that weirdness as much as you can...it has to do with not just preserving but fostering the multiplicity of peculiar constituents, that compose reality as such, and not allowing it to die, to be mashed into one bland lump.

We don't want that.'



It means that there is some kind of disturbingly meaningless aesthetic component to how genomics, how genetics, actually works, and that's because there's a kind of weird, disturbing, sexy causality, which is also aesthetic, about how anything works, and that we've been trying to edit that out for a long time.



And that, which art is actually doing of course is directly messing with cause and effect, which is why it's disturbing to most philosophers, isn't it? Like, 'Oh no, I'm being taken over by this demonic force from the beyond and it's doing something to me, and I shouldn't have emotion.' And so there's a kind of intuitive way in which we all know that art is causality because causality is aesthetic. So this is a long winded answer to your question...

Timothy Morton interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Extinction Marathon, Serpentine Galleries 2013

Peter Lewis





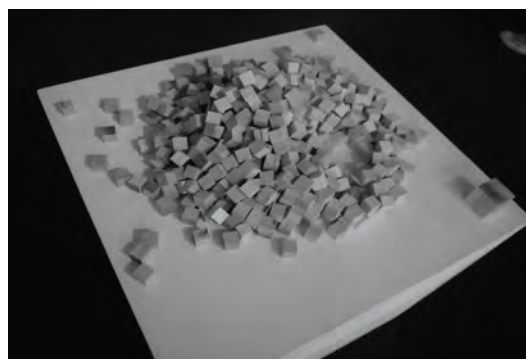
EXHIBITION SPACES/PAST EVENTS















Madiha Abbas
Hala Al Alaiwat
Clarisse Aubert
Chris Bishop
Kevin George
Mehak Gupta
Trish Hewitt
Nicola Knight
Kieran May
Petra McCarthy
Ryoko Minamitani
Bethan Alex
Joshua Robinson
Patrice Robinson
Jack Wolff