ALLOW TO LEAK

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art

Andreas Brunner
Spring Semester, 2018
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Abstract

The simultaneous experience of multiple presence leads me to the inquiry of how to break away from a paralyzing flood of repetitive value systems in a continuous stream of the contemporaneity. This disruption demands a solidification of a continuously uncertain liquid state, which allows one to perceive a petrified standstill – a dialectical moment in an experienced now. Through the petrified lumps, a new set of relations is created that floats in the consciousness of an experienced now. This fleeting moment of the experienced now is loaded with significance towards a foreseeable future perspective, as well as the recognition of one’s own initiative in the present.

Apart from that this essay should be an encouragement to cross red traffic lights more often, it is an investigation on cultural historical development and the thereout generated circumstances of our present. This essay explores the condition of the contemporaneity as a concept and is aiming to shed light on the limits and boundaries of this notion. I will point out that the contemporary circumstances did not just lead to a condition of simultaneity and displacement on one’s awareness of time and space, but also what effect this condition has on contemporary art. Based on contemporary art, which can be seen as a direct result of these conditions, I will contextualize my own artistic practice alongside other artistic positions. Furthermore, I will elaborate a concept of a more applicable perception of the present, which is achieved through an inner intuitive confrontation of an experienced now. Out of this realization, a suggestion will be elaborated on how to create meaning through intellectual sympathy, rather than a predetermined structure of a metaphorical connoted succession of knowledge. As a conclusion, a suggestion of how to break with the concept of contemporaneity is offered, which enables one to engage with a present, allowing speculative future perspectives.
Content

Introduction 1

Contemporaneity 2

Repetitive displacement 5

Of Marvel movies and Art 7

Within a moment 12

The moving (or being moved) 15

Paralyzing parallelism 20

Outburst 24

Bibliography 29

Image list 32
Introduction

Recently I encountered the youth culture phenomena “yolo”, short for “you only live once”.\(^1\) Although this notion of “yolo” seems to suggest at first glance a poetic, romantic outlook, an encouraging point to enjoy life, and having no regrets regarding one’s actions and decisions, I somehow couldn’t get my head around this term. To me, this sort of cultural phenomena is an egocentric point, a view that seems to evoke no responsibility towards a foreseeable future, shockingly short perceptual span, intentionlessness and no sensibility towards time. Within this motto, no such thing as melancholic struggle on moral decisions, existential thoughts of being, or struggle of finding reason is to be found. It rather describes a post-capitalist ideal where progression through prosperity stagnated and the only goal is the individual fulfilment through leisure and self-enjoyment. All in the sense of “we are doomed anyway”, why should I care. Although this pop-cultural term is probably a very short-lived phenomenon, it left me wondering about the era we are living in and I ask myself if this term is a coherent representation of the present days. Through cultural historical development and the thereby generated awareness of the present, this thesis will explore the condition of contemporaneity as a concept of our present. This essay attempts to shed light on limits and boundaries of this concept, whereby I will argue that it did not just lead to a condition of simultaneity and displacement on one’s awareness of time and space, but also points out, what effect it has on contemporary art. Based on contemporary art, which can be seen as a direct result of these conditions, I will contextualize my own artistic practice alongside other artistic positions. Furthermore, I will elaborate a concept of a more applicable perception of the present, which is achieved through an inner intuition and confrontation with an experienced now. As a conclusion, a suggestion of how to break with the concept of contemporaneity is offered, that allows one to care and engage with speculative future perspectives.

Contemporaneity

Since postmodernism, the visual arts and cultural productions in general have entered a state of simultaneousness. A state, in which its production is obviously repeating itself in always tighter sequences, leading towards an infinite present with historical amnesia.

With the end of modernism, the concept of contemporary art was introduced as a general term for art that is produced within the 21st century. This term encompasses a large variety of different artistic positions, which seemingly have nothing in common except their simultaneous release, their appearance at a same time period, which makes them contemporaries and thus summarizes those positions under the concept of contemporary art. Although those artistic positions seemingly have nothing in common with each other, except of a shared common term, this in itself implies their claim of accuracy towards a present. Through this specificity of a claimed accuracy within the diversity of the present, these positions are actually mirroring quite clearly a certain Zeitgeist of the 21st century. A Zeitgeist of a contemporaneity, which is the consequence of a specific historical development. In the following, I will point out several important dates that have led to this condition of the contemporaneity.

According to Juliane Rebentisch, several happenings throughout the last century where involved in triggering a shift of the visual arts as well as a whole social collective perception of time and space into a state of contemporaneity. As a first date, Rebentisch mentions the end of the Second World War.

“…1945, marks a threshold after which it is no longer possible to conceive history according to the Hegelian model directly as progress in the consciousness of freedom. It stands for the experience of a political-moral catastrophe of such proportions that this notion was shaken to its very core.”

The Hegelian model describes reason as the main theme in history, the theme that creates meaning. One of Hegel’s points is that freedom is generated through steps in a historical progression, and within this progression, history has a clear beginning and an end. In this sense, a narration in history is always progressing towards the notion of freedom, and within this narration every historical era has its own valuable source of wisdom. With the cruelties of the Second World War, Rebentisch argues, that a point has been reached in which freedom is no longer guaranteed through historical progression and development, and therefore marking an end to the Hegelian model of progression in the consciousness of freedom.

The Second World War, as a historical event, was to such a degree irrational, that not just the progression of freedom had come to an end, but also through its expiration clearly no valuable source of wisdom is to be found. This led to a point of inflection, whereby reason and meaning were no longer provided by a clear progress in historical time. A new aesthetic understanding in a direct relation to the visual art was another consequence. An understanding in which conventions of the beautiful and glorified as aesthetic expressions have been criticized as idealistic expression of freedom and that this expression has no longer meaning in the time after the War.³

1965 marks the second date in the shift towards contemporaneity. It is from this date, that artists make use of all sorts of mediums for expression. Art at this point became difficult to classify in traditional art-historical mediums such as painting or sculpture. In fact, this newly established expression, whereby new media and technologies such as industrial production methods, happenings, activism and gatherings have been introduced, denied any sort of known or familiar classification within an art historical context. The border between the everyday-reality and artistic representation became more and more blurry and those aspects have merged into each other.⁴ This date also indicates, that from here on, the object orientated aesthetic of art has been superseded by a rather reflective understanding of aesthetic and “…must instead be understood as the product of experience initiated in the engagement with the object.”⁵

³ Rebentisch, 231.
⁴ Rebentisch, 231–34.
⁵ Rebentisch, 233.
This development in the arts was of course also driven and supported by the cultural revolution of the 1968 movement, in which social conventions were questioned and new forms of social life as well as the liberalisation of the individual were introduced.

As a third date Rebentisch mentions the year 1989. This date is mainly associates with major geo and social political developments, which merged cultural-historical perception and the perception of space into a global context. With the end of the Cold War and the starting point of a capital driven globalization, the date marks a beginning of a transnational understanding of culture and the world, where social networks were widened up, enabling the individual to situate oneself in a more global context. As far as the art is concerned, this development has the consequence of critical re-readings of Western modernity in relation to post-colonialism and cultural exchange. Those topics have been taken up by the contemporary art and processed through “…complex historiographies sensible of contradictions”.⁶

All these circumstances have come about not at least because of the introduction of the Internet and global communication systems, that provided a wide access of knowledge and interconnectedness.

Those three described dates can be seen as entering points into a state of contemporaneity, a shift from which I would say that perception of a singular present got split into multiple presents. It is exactly this state, the state of multiplicity that is mirrored within the cultural production and in the visual arts, summarized under the name of contemporary art.

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⁶ Rebentisch, 235.
Repetitive displacement

Through those multiple presents, the relation to a clear experienced present gets lost and with it also a reference to a single historical narration on which speculative future predictions through an evaluation of historically progressed experiences could rely on.

Within this state of contemporaneity, history appears no longer as something pre-given, but rather is able to alter, according to the demands of its meaning for the present and the future. According to the diversity of demands that are put towards historical pasts, multiple presents as well as multiple speculative future perspectives coexist in a collective consciousness next to each other. This I would say, results in a displacement, a dispersal of an actual experienced now and according to Rebentisch, because of those presents “... sometimes untimely engagement with the past might bring us back to a present that we have not yet been in.”

With no clear present, that references an historical narration to rely on, it becomes rather difficult to engage with any speculative future perspectives, because it leads to repetitive loops of always newly emerging presents. Those loops increasingly tighten up, trapping those simultaneously existing presents in an eternal process of repetition. With no clear references for progression, those repetitive presents are somehow doomed to fail, in the sense that they are leading to nowhere but towards a meaningless white-out space. It clearly marks an end to a chronological historical timeline and describes a dynamic state of normality, in which canonicity is always under debate. Or how Terry Smith puts it:

“The only potentiality permanent thing about this state of affairs is that it may last for an unspecifiable amount of time: the present may become perversely, “eternal”.”

This state of contemporaneity is a construct that not just only concerns time. Through the inseparable intersection of time and space, I would argue, that the constitution of

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7 Rebentisch, 235.
infinite presents also creates an infinitely open space. This increasing space plays a crucial role for the perception of oneself within a contemporary present: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. [...] our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time, than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.”

Therefore, I suggest adding to those three dates mentioned above another date that plays a crucial role in the awareness of history, as well as in the situating of oneself within a present of a spatial context. It is the first of January 1950, to which the short-term BP – before present or before physics refers.

Due to too many nuclear weapon tests and other nuclear waste that has polluted the earth atmosphere, the scientific community has to admit that the methods of radiocarbon dating are from this date on no longer accurate anymore. In general, this means, that any excavations that are made in the future can’t date with accuracy things younger than 1950. From a future point, everything from 1950 on belongs to some sort of a simultaneous time-mass, that reaches from 1950 until the date in the future where the radiocarbon measure will take place. This date is of special interest because it bears empirical scientific evidence and therefore claiming a "truth" that does not depend on whatever point of view is taken on the time measurement or social development. Fact is, that from there on, humanity has reached a state of contemporaneity which is no longer just a Zeitgeist phenomenon, but rather a condition of how we will perceive our environment space from a single future perspective. As well as this single future perspective leads to a displacement through its intersection with its environmental timeline, it also has the ability of unifying the displaced perception of different presents through the factual future perspective.

Of Marvel movies and Art

The notion of contemporaneity addresses the above mentioned conditions in which contemporary art is a direct result and reaction to this 21st century phenomenon. Contemporary art is not defined by art that just simply is produced in the present and therefore labelled "contemporary art", but rather by art that is exactly addressing and reacting to this contemporaneity. With this addressing of the contemporaneity I don't mean the pop-cultural production nonsense, that can be observed in for example Marvel movies, where sequel after sequel are endlessly being ruminated in cinemas, without the aim of generating any meaning within a present, but only to reach out for recurrent financial success. In many ways, this repetition and revival of the already existing, can also be seen as a result of the contemporaneity that is often met with certain normality within the 21st century. This is not what I mean by the addressing of the contemporaneity through cultural production. I mean artistic positions, that claim significance in the present through all sorts of historical art movements, accuracy of mediums, cultural productions, and while seeking meaning in the presents, reaching deep into the past, as well as into the future and operate within an infinite present. Therefore contemporary art can actually no longer be defined by any historical development and claims meaning in every historical time. It becomes adaptable to any time.

Through this repetitive process, the contemporary visual art is in danger of making use of the same symbols and metaphorical references that have been used throughout all kinds of art-historical developments over and over again, without questioning the signified meaning of those repeated metaphorical references themselves. In order to maintain validity in all sorts of different present and historical timelines as well as speculative futures, contemporary art uses an almost infinite palette of possible constellation of juxtapositions, as well as time and space concerning relations through metaphorical references. Whilst these interconnections with an infinite possible validity in the present aim to create meaningful reasons (and most of them even

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11 This feeds into Umberto Eco’s idea of the „open artwork” – an art work that remains significant through its concept of the “openness”. See Umberto Eco – The Open Work, 1989.

successfully do so), the metaphorical references and symbolic mediation used always remain the same.

This condition tends towards an uncritical use of representational systems and this creates stagnation in innovation and a continuation of a predetermined structure. The only possibility I see to achieve progression however, is to break with those repetitive looping presents and the aim of veracity to an infinite timeline, to open possibilities to question the metaphor and the predetermined system itself and allow new interpretation, new meaning.

In my artistic practice I find myself struggling with the contradiction of; on one hand embracing this simultaneousness and making use of all its metaphorical pre-given shortcuts for the mediation of content and on the other hand, trying to break the metaphorical convention and creating an urge for interpretation from ground-zero. In the following I describe such a work I made, which can be seen as an example for this contradictory struggle, as well as a work by Danh Vo, that can be seen as an attempt of breaking with the canonicity of metaphorical mediation but still make use of those repetitive motives of the contemporaneity.

As far as I know

Those circumstances I attempted to address through a work I did in 2016 with the title *As far as I know*.\(^\text{13}\) The installation contained seven transport boxes, each box representing a specific subject that in my opinion urgently need to be reinterpreted according to its demands in the present. Theses contents referred to different accumulated metaphors of art historical contexts, natural materials such as core-samples, tree branches or whale vertebrae, as well as cultural history books and maps. In connection with contemporaneity it is not specifically this metaphorical content that is of interest, but rather the specificity of the titles of each box, that each box has a title in form of a cuneiform symbol.\(^\text{14}\) With the specificity of the titles I don’t mean the particular meaning of the titles, but rather the concept of the cuneiform symbols themselves. The decision to make use of cuneiform symbols as titles happened for

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\(^{13}\) see image 1.

\(^{14}\) see image 2.
several reasons. First of all, depending on their translations, a cuneiform symbol can point towards several different meanings, which enables multiple perspectives and different angles for interpretation and therefore resulting in a multi-layered content for each transport box. Furthermore, the symbols also function as a bridging device, whereby they are not just connecting places from the middle-east of modern day Iraq and Syria, where the writing originates from, with the western culture, but also bridging a time dimension in which the meaning of these ancient symbols still urges for validity in the present. This claim of actuality in our present is mirrored in social political developments of the past few years to which the work As far as I know subtile is commenting on. Compared to similarly old writing systems, such as the hieroglyphs for example, cuneiform writing has a high degree of abstraction. Cuneiform script leaves no visual hint to guess it’s meaning, nor does it make use of figurative recognizable images, which makes it a seemingly arbitrary system that has rather relation to a not yet developed futuristic writing, than to one of the oldest writing system developed. What mainly is of interest, is the developing process of this symbolic system in relation to the social structural development of early societies. This particular writing was also called; “the signs of the gods” and was only available to an elite group of people. The script was not just a tool to record knowledge, whereby accumulated knowledge only remained accessible within this elite circle of society who were able to write, it also served the purpose of recording the availability of goods, which is necessary to coordinate, and sustain a future perspective for a society.\textsuperscript{15} This however, leads me to the thought, that this was probably the first step towards an oppression through a coding of symbols by the intention of a patriarchal elite group, that since then has not been changed in its traditions. Whether it served belief systems or certain codes of conduct, the motivation behind the metaphor of the symbols is somehow always connected to a certain preservation of power, and even though this preservation has seemingly flattened out today, the system of oppression through predetermined mediation of meaning, clearly has to be questioned and this questioning is how the metaphorical content of these transport boxes has to be considered. These contents of the transport boxes are mainly dealing with predetermined symbols of our cultural collective consciousness that were put in

relation with each other. By encountering these relations of contents, one follows a narration within this predetermined system. Through uncommon juxtapositions and the superimposing of contradicting content, this narration is going to be questioned and leads to a certain senselessness within the known narration and breaks with the known metaphorical content of the boxes. Thereby a new ground should be established, which enables not just to restructure the metaphor, but also urge to reinterpret those relations and symbols from their very core.

Mother tongue

Another work I saw, that used similar tools to enable new ground for reinterpretation of pre-given structures was Danh Vo’s contribution to the Danish pavilion at the Venice biennale in 2015. The installation with the name *Mother tongue* reaches through the whole pavilion and is composed by several parts. The central room of the exhibition is particularly exemplary for this subject matter. In the middle of this room was a sculpture, assembled by two parts; a white crystalline, Greek-marble sarcophagus fragment from ancient Rome and on top of which a wooden statue of the Virgin of the Annunciation from 1350 was placed. Furthermore, there was a red fabric, covering the walls of the room with the title *RAL 3020*. The statue is made of actual relics and artefacts, that usually serve a specific metaphorical mediation of meaning which has now gotten widened up by juxtaposing them into a different symbolism. The cuts through the sarcophagus and the statue have been made by Vo himself, who through this act, literally cropped the artefacts in shapes that allow them to fit onto each other and become one. The cut where these two relics now merge, can be read in a wider context as a cut in history, whereby after the roman-empire, a new, Christian ideological era has been introduced. The sculpture is addressing dynamic shifts throughout a linear historical timeline, which is continued by the red fabric titled *RAL 3020* in the rooms surrounding. The title indicates a certain type of red colour, the same type of red, which is used to dye cardinal robes in the Vatican. This colour is made by cochenille lice, which was harvested in the Americas. With this third part, the dynamic interpretation of installation is shifting into a colonist context and addresses religious believe systems and their oppression during the colonial

16 see image 3.
period.\(^{17}\) In many ways, this work references multiple layers of time, and uses symbols that were carefully and decidedly put in a dialog with each other, in order to create a transnational understanding of cultural production. Specially the representational context of a national pavilion feeds in a contradictory way into Danh Vo’s statement of cultural development as interconnections of geographical places and time rather than an imperialistic achievement or nonlinear cultural development.

Both of these works are taking on a contemporary position in the sense that they are addressing the described condition of the contemporary itself. They both deal with merging and migrating of non-linear cultural aspects through time and place and there is a clear interest in Vo’s practice about “...putting different layers of time together, aspects, forms, ideas. It mutates... I wanted to take a starting point which relates to cultural production that derives from destruction, from warfare, from violence.”\(^{18}\) When he mentions the method of putting together different aspects, forms and ideas that mutates, he exactly describes his use of different pre-coded symbols and materials that he rearranges to create meaning through their metaphorical reference. But its more interesting, when Vo talks about his interest in cultural production that derives from destruction, warfare and violence. This is a clear interest that not describes high cultural outcome, but rather of breaks and cuts through a narration in cultural history. Further in the interview with Marianne Trop he elaborates this and explains; “…there is something beautiful about countries that have to build up from ground zero. […]…there is just something beautiful about the material trail left by all these fallen empires.”\(^{19}\) This I think is especially interesting because it describes an interest in breaking with established symbols and predetermined metaphorical connotations and urges for a recreation from ground-zero. There needs to be a fallen empire to come up with new cultural production. There is an urge for breaks in the historical narration that is needed in terms of creating space for a reinterpretation, unbound from predetermined interpretational systems.


\(^{19}\) “Interview with Danh Vo | Slip of the Tongue | Punta Della Dogana, Venezia”.

Within a moment

One of the above described struggles with the contradiction between the use of the metaphorical meaning and the aim of the creation of meaning without a predetermined connotation, can be found in the metaphorical content that every material, object and physical thing brings with it and the contradiction, a deadlock those things often evoke, when used in a work.

As in the work *As far as I know*, the transport boxes are filled with items that carry meaning. Those items are meant to guide an interpretational attempt through their metaphorical meaning into a specific direction, whereby one is confronted with an experienced senseless decoded content. This however, is an attempt of overloading the viewer, to cut loose with the metaphorical meaning and to be left alone with an own interpretational attempt of meaning.

Another attempt for experiencing something rather from a not predetermined perspective that can be seen as an allegory of a direct experience of the addressed meaning, is a work I came up with in summer 2017. The work is titled *Things I kept from vanishing*20. It contains a broken whale rib, a box where the whale rib exactly fits into, a steel construction to carry the rib, as well as the box and marbled paper. The arrangement of the box and the rib refers to an act of unfolding, - an opening of the box, whereby each lid tilts to the side and the whale rib appears between the two lids of the box. This act of unfolding is how the basic idea of the work came along. When I found the whale rib, it reminded me of a character, a symbol, a hieroglyph like mark. While thinking of this, I created a box, into which this rib exactly fitted into, with the idea that the box, of course will have same the form and shape of appearance as the rib does. By putting the rib into the box, it disappears but the form of the rib itself remains in the shape of the box. Vice versa it works like I would open a hieroglyph – as I would open the significant to get behind the metaphorical meaning of the hieroglyph, but when opened, the signified (in that case the rib) appears, which has the exact same form and shape as the significant.21 Of course the material of the content changes because the condition of the object turns from the wooden material of

20 see image 4.
21 see image 5.
the box into a bone, but I liked the concept of this work, in the sense that the shape would represent the meaning and therefore leave the significant always pointing towards the signified and likewise.22

This work however still depends on a specific knowledge of the metaphorical meaning to be addressed and involved within this process.

I wonder however, how to give something the ability to be always capable of new interpretation, disconnected from any metaphorical connotation. Something, that allows the metaphorical content of a symbol to leak. That means, this particular work has always to be under a constant dialectical circumstance, a condition of a constant debate and adaptable to interpretations. The circumstance of contemporaneity however, hinders this act in certain ways. Through the simultaneous experience of history, present and future, everything has at any time accuracy and validity. What is lacking in the condition of contemporaneity is an agreed Now, from which one could dialectically interpret symbols anew. Like Walter Benjamin puts it;

Every Now is determined by those images that are synchronic with it: every Now is the Now of a specific recognisability (das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit). In it, truth is loaded to the bursting point with time. (This bursting point is nothing other than the death of the intention, which accordingly coincides with the birth authentic historical time the time of truth).23

This means that, to reach a point of intentionlessness (in the sense of intentionlessness of the metaphor), there needs to be an authentic historical time, a linear time with a single Now, in which one is able to load truth through the recognisability of the specific Now. To recognize an image in its intentionlessness, it needs to be in a standstill, a standstill that only can be provided through a recognition of a specific Now. And only if the image is read from this Now, its metaphorical meaning becomes

transparent, it becomes truly dialectical and disconnected with all predetermined connotations of meaning.

“The image that is read, that is, the image at the Now of recognisability, bears to the highest degree the stamp of critical, dangerous impetus that lies at the source of all reading.”

This leads to the question of how one could experience this mentioned recognisability of this specific now, and within all those multiple presents, where this Now is to be found? I would argue that this is only to be achieved through a personal inner, through a true intuitive attempt of understanding the Now. That means the only recognizable now is the now that can be experienced through once inner. This also might describe a better way of how to bypass the analysing of predetermined symbols and reinterpret from anew, - through pure experience and an intuitive encounter towards the given.

“….an absolute could only be given in an intuition whilst everything else falls within the province of analysis. By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy, by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.”

A discourse through the absolute intuitive inner, is something I have experienced myself, while encountering a video work that I will describe in the following. Out of that, I also will elaborate on my own attempt of intuitive sensation through a succession of video works, that I have made in the last two years.

24 Smith Gary, 50 [N3,1].

25 This “inner” will be explained in the next chapter.

The moving (or being moved)

In the fall of 2016, I had the opportunity to see a talk by Douglas Gordon in the Reykjavik Art Museum.27 During his talk, he played some random video clips that he has made during his career. One of these clips fascinated me immediately. In this video, two hands of a man can be seen, moving in a very delicate and obviously choreographed way on the screen. The video has a dark background, so that the viewers’ full attention is focused on the movement of those hands. The choreographed movement seems to be dictated by an invisible object, which is seemingly held by those hands and recalled through the movement of the actor in the video.28 Although, the choreographed movement evokes some familiarities by the viewer, it is yet unclear what this familiarity of the actor’s movement is referring to. A poetic movement remains the only information for the viewer to grasp and though this could lead into a speculative chaos of interpretations, this movement is strictly pointing towards a content, which Gordon singles out with this video. This video turned out to be part of a work group entitled *Sharping Fantasy* made in 2012. All those videos where made during a journey to Tanger, Morocco and representing different traditional knife grinder, who are re-enacting their daily working process only by recalled movements. There is neither a knife nor a grinding stone in the video to be seen. A soundtrack of their day’s work accompanied the different videos.29 The piece *Sharping Fantasy* is for me a powerful multi layered construct that evokes thoughts of handcraft, the everyday perception of the eastern culture by a western society, by which the work enters in the current social-political development a political dimension. In many ways, those videos manage successfully to position the viewer into a specific place, rather than just pointing towards a location. As attempted with the work *As far as I know*, Gordon’s work successfully manages to address content

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There is no transcript of the talk on this page, but in this text some parts refer to recalled explanations by Douglas Gordon.

28 see image 6. & 7.

that is generated through an experience from an intuitive within, rather than a
standpoint that has to be entered through knowledge from the outside.

The main component that is of interest to me in this work, is how the movements of
the hands are guiding the viewer into a certain direction, to a certain space which
allows to encounter and unfold the multi layered content in this piece through
experience. This is of course also happening with the help of the connoted knowledge
that the title is referring to, but even more I think through the poetic movements by
the hands. They manage to replace the symbolized act of knife sharpening white a
dynamic gesture that leaves space for interpretation. I guess, the involvement of an
acting hand in this video generates a very familiar image, to which everyone can
relate through his or her own bodily experience. This recalling of a sensual experience
is, I would argue, a reason to connect oneself with a now in which the content of the
intuitive experience is generated through an inner rather than a dictated, metaphorical
mediated knowledge.

This is the idea behind several video works that I have produced in the last two years.
All these videos have the involvement of an acting hand in common. The involvement
of the hand is meant to work in a similar manner like the above described purpose; to
allow the viewer encountering this movement with an intellectual sympathy and
placing oneself within the action / object and experience an intuitive inner of the
consequently inexpressible.³⁰

In those videos, every movement can be designated with a certain statement that is
pointing to the core of the movement itself. Although all of these video works have
been mainly involved as parts of different installations, whereby they have always
been combined with certain sculptural elements or materials, they also can be seen as
independent works. In the following I will sequence these videos according to their
dates of creation and through their core statement a new canonicity will be elaborated.

³⁰ see page 14.
Layering (coding)

As part of the video installation *Alter*, 2016

In this installation, the videos, as well as the museum context form the main body of the work. The videos were shown in Sigurjon Olafsson’s museum as projections, that precisely fitted onto the size of the pedestals, on which the sculptures of Sigurjon Olafsson where displayed. Two videos were shown in this installation. In the first video a hand is rubbing a chunk of clay over a white surface.

In the second video, a chunk of clay is thrown against a white surface, picked up again and repeating the action. Both videos run until the white, smooth surface is covered and over layered with tracks of clay. The action in both videos deals with the idea of coding and over layering of a surface. Generating ground, creating dynamic potentiality that has the ability to build on, a living layer that is to be altered.

Imprinting

As part of the installation *Contrapposto*, 2017

Several video pieces assemble the installation *Contrapposto*. On one video, shown on a tube television, a hand can be seen which is imprinting cuneiform symbols into a flat surface of clay. After a symbol has been imprinted, hands crumble the clay into a lump, kneading it, and form it again into a plain, smooth surface, starting with another symbol. This action is repeated. In this video, it is not just about the meaning of the cuneiform symbols themselves, but more about the action of imprinting, that is needed to actually write these symbols. Although each and every cuneiform symbol has multiple layered meanings in its different translations (which are shown in the video as subtitles), it is more the action and the movement of the hand that is creating or rather acting meaning. The written content can therefore be considered as a reflection or an accompaniment of the action by the hands. Cuneiform symbols are made by pressing a wedged-shaped tool into a flat surface of clay. This wedged-shaped tool dictates the appearance of the symbols. With this particular wedge-characteristic of the tool, only two types of imprints can be generated, whereby these

31 see image 8. & 9.
32 see image 10. & 11.
33 see image 12. & 13.
two types form the whole bases of the cuneiform writing system and remind on the
duality of today’s binary computer system.

Contemplation
As part of Contrapposto, 2017
As well as the previously described video, this video work is also part of the
installation Contrapposto. The video is beamed with a projector onto an emergency
blanket, which hangs like a curtain from a steel construction. The image appears on
the golden side of the emergency blanket and due to the transparency of the blanket,
the light beams are not just visible on the golden side but also on its silverfish-
backside, as a ghostly image on the wall behind the steel construction, as well as wavy
reflections on the opposite side of the room. The video shows a hand with burn
injuries on its fingers that have an almost fossilized appearance. A blurry background
in the video indicates a burned spot with grey ashes. In circle like movements, the
hand rubs with its thumb and fingers over the burned injuries. Through this circle like
movements in the video, which is arranged in a loop, it is all about the action the hand
is implementing. The action of circle like movement that evokes the idea of
contemplation.

Disembodiment
As part of Allow to leak, 2018
At last, a new video I want to mention in which the action of the hand can be seen as a
struggling, failing attempt of a balancing act. From an elevated perspective, a forearm
is laying on a black background. Next to the arm lays a bone with almost the same
length as an ulna. The hand is picking up the bone, puts it on its own arm and slowly
pushes it down its forearm, so that the bone is balancing on the arm. In struggle, the
forearm is trying to balance the bone in place, but the bone loses its equipoise and
falls back on the black surface. The hand alters in a strange position to pick the bone
up again and starts another attempt to balance it on the forearm. When the arm picks

34 see image 14. & 15.
35 see image 16. & 17.
the bone up again, it shapes into an amorphous form. This amorphous position of the arm, as well as the moment when the bone falls form the forearm evokes a certain feeling of disembodiment or disconnectedness. A moment when the bone leaves the structure of the arm, and while doing so, the arm strangely morphs into an unfamiliar position, attempting to put the bone back onto its forearm to regain its usual, functional form.

Through their intuitive experienced reading, these works aim for a certain recognisability of a specific now that one could recognize through an inner intuition. While experiencing this inexpressible now, the state of contemporaneity is repealed and this recognized now creates a clear narration in the present. I would say that it is in this dialectical moment, when also a break with a tradition of the predetermined representational systems is achieved, enabling one to rephrase the metaphorical meaning through an apparent bodily experienced.

This of course, happens only individually, in the sense that everyone intuitively experiences a different inexpressible Now and therefore a different present that points to a different historical narration. This dialectical moment is difficult to achieve in a state of contemporaneity in which everything simultaneously and for an infinite time claims dialectical value.

In the following I will argue that exactly this attempt, the attempt of experiencing a Now through a common inexpressible inner, can also work for a collective break with the expansion of the contemporaneity. A break, where out an agreed present can be generated in which a speculative future perspective is possible.
Paralyzing parallelism

The assimilation with a now in a contemporary scenario of multiple possible presents is, as previously described, hindered by the condition of the contemporaneity itself. This denied assumption of a now that would enable one to recognize a "real" present through the experienced inner, is leading through its repetitions to a stagnation in the progression of historical time as well as an actual involvement in an environmental space. As Foucault describes;

The space in which we live, which draw us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also in itself, a heterogeneous space. We do not live inside a void …[…]… we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.36

With the heterogeneous space, he addresses the inconsistence of a potential experienced now through the multiplicity of presents and the displacement that occurs in the contemporary condition. Therefore I suggest to perceive the current epoch of contemporaneity as such an heterotopia space; a real space, a space that is simultaneously physical, based on the described condition of the “before present”37 state as well as an ideological state that has been reached through a specific historical development, shifting into a contemporary awareness of historical time.38 A heterotopian space that exists parallel to an experienceable reality, a space in which real sites and cultural sites are simultaneously represented. They are further described as circumstances that function the best when a break with traditional awareness of time, like for example when the break with the Hegelian model of historical time had occurred,39 as circumstances where time is indefinitely accumulated, leading into a quasi-eternity.40

36 Foucault and Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces", 3.
37 see page 6.
38 see page 2. & 3.
39 see page 2. & 3.
40 Foucault and Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces", 3–7.
Being in such a condition of a heterotopia assumes that it has been entered through a specific entering ritual. A ritual, that one has to undertake in full awareness. Besides that, one could also end up in a heterotopia without being actually part of the heterotopia itself. For example, the prison visitor that Foucault describes who is visiting a heterotopia (the prison, an existing space within the perceived reality) through the ritual of entering a guarded entrance. But since this visitor is not imprisoned, he actually isn’t part of the heterotopia itself but rather a semi-aware witness of the prison heterotopia.

I would argue that exactly this happened while entering the state of contemporaneity. Those dates, described in the beginning, that caused the shift into this heterotopian state of simultaneity, have to be seen as entering rituals. Entering rituals that a whole collective has unconsciously undertook, leading to a disconnectedness, an unawareness of an experienced now, which results into the loss of progression and is presently consideration of “normality”.

If this would be the case, the case of being in an heterotopian space without actually being part of it, then this break with its paralyzing repetitive presents could be generated and ended by a leaving ritual. To enter an agreed present again, this ritual though has to be practiced in full awareness. The question is; what such a leaving ritual could look like, or how Terry Smith puts it; “The contemporary question is: How can we shape our differences into the connections that the world requires?”

In that sense I would say, the leaving ritual is something that is urging to shape our differences. Something that is running towards humanity in a foreshadowed future, an obstacle that has to be dealt with and more precisely, something that generates a feeling that encounters the inner of every individual in a similar manner, something that will have an existential effect on every individual on a same way.

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Monstrosity

This leaving ritual has to be seen as something similar as the explained condition of “before present”. An unavoidable real event in the future, that has to have an equal effect on every conceivable time perspective.

“The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. It is that, which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and this can announce itself, present itself, only under the species of monstrosity.”

This monstrosity I would argue is to be found for example in such a thing as climate change. A monstrosity, that causes environmental and natural disasters, something that has become an uncontrollable force, an obstacle that threatens the continuation of the always known existence of a global environment. A dystopian foreshadowing that confronts a global collective with the instability of its multiple perceived presents as well as the whole substance of its existence itself.

Through this unavoidable event in the future, described by the monstrosity, a collective intuitive inner is simultaneously addressed that will arguably have an impact on how the present will be perceived. This collective perception and anticipation of the inexpressible occurs in the contingency of the possible impossible, the decay of an environmental structure and leading therefore to a premonition of one’s own non-existence.

It is exactly at this point, I would argue, when one’s inner intuition is addressed which evolves into a same collective experience of a now. As previously explained, this realization of a “true” now can only be achieved through an intellectual sympathetic dispute with the inexpressible, an inexpressible that can be found in the confrontation and the recognition of oneself in relation to the nothingness.

42 Smith Terry. "Defining Contemporaneity", 159.


44 The term “nothingness” is strongly connotes with Heideggerian phenomenology in which its context has been altered and debated through time and has taken on different connotations. In this text however, the notion of “nothingness” is only used in relation of one’s awareness towards one’s own nothingness of existence – the confrontation with one’s end of being.
This encounter with the monstrosity that points to a strong sense of nothingness, is best described in the anticipation of anxiety. The intuitive inner confrontation and experience of anxiety I would say, is the notion that enables one to break with the repetition of the multiple presents, it is a true leaving ritual of a heterotopian space. It allows positioning one’s existence in a singular experience of a now. It might sound contradictory to use anxiety and the promoted nothingness, a mostly negative connote term, as the notion for progression. I would argue though that, this notion is not just the only experience of certainty one could have within the contemporary state of multiple presents, but also that this intuitive dispute of anxiety is exactly the notion that lets one experience a now through the nothingness.

Anxiety gives me the anticipated experience, and the notion, of nothingness. It therewith gives me the sense of being as such, being in its opposition to nothingness. This makes possible the discernment of what is in the field from mere appearances, mirages, chimeras, illusions, conceptual constructs.45

Through the confrontation with the monstrosity that results in one’s imagination of the nothingness, an intuitive experience of anxiety is produced, which allows oneself to be positioned in a now. A now that appears in contrast to this nothingness, a now that occurs a sense of initiatives. Like a self-published magazine of a friend with the title The desire to get hit by a car46 which in relation to the above I always found humorously inspiring, this title however describes in its grotesquery this confrontation with the monstrosity. It implies a desire to be confronted with the inexpressible nothingness of oneself and the environment around one. However, unlike a car as a monstrosity, for me, the feeling of living on a volcanic island, which could erupt anytime, plunging my surrounding and myself into chaos, into the inexpressible nothingness, will always be a rather motivating experience. An experience that is, unlike the notion of “yolo”, rather an anticipation of a nothingness through anxiety. This anticipation of anxiety, I find fundamental important for one’s own recognition within a now and through this experienced relation with a now, a clear present is elaborated from which speculative future perspective can occur.

Outburst

This above described leaving ritual through anxiety, an intuitive inner confrontation with one’s own nothingness, is a radical act of entering a conjunction to achieve a reconciliation with the present environment and the experience of oneself within a now. With this conjunction, I mean an act that enables one of becoming other. An act where singularities change and the conjoined parts become a new symbiotic entity. This however differentiate itself from the concept of a connection, whereby in that sense a connection is rather a platonic encounter, an encounter without any intellectual sympathy. This conjunction with a present environment, the becoming other, the melting into something has to me a very poetic approach. An approach which I would rather connect with a poetic impulse rather than an aesthetic ideal. Then unlike aesthetic, which for me has some sort of a surface connotation, poetic is something which only can be experienced from within, from a conjunction.

Those thoughts have not just influenced me in the way of how I approach and appreciate art, but also led me rethink my own artistic practice, whereby intuition, the possible impossible and the unexplainable play crucial parts in. Therefore, it seems to be a bit paradoxical to elucidate this on an exemplary work I made in reaction to these thoughts but nonetheless an attempt will be in the following.

Allow to leak

As a consequence of these elaborated concepts and thoughts on the contemporaneity in relation to the visual arts, I created the installation with the title Allow to leak. This title is taken from a specific cuneiform symbol that translates to “Allow to leak”. In correlation to the idea of an always dialectical content of an image, a symbol or a whole body of work, I found this particular translation of this symbol oddly poetical.

- see also title page.
In many ways, it somehow contradicts with the idea of a meaning loaded symbol and plays more into the idea of the disconnection of the predetermined metaphorical meaning of a symbol in the sense that the symbol itself (the meaning represented by the symbol) is allowed to leak.

I imagine the creation or the loading of something with meaning as a process where one is building a conceptual container which enables one to fill with all sort of contexts and meanings to what the container is symbolical relying on. After doing so, the container is sealed and the so called “rigid meaning” remains in the container without ever having the ability to alter again. Allow to leak encourages in a poetic way to pierce a hole into this container that allows this gathered meaning to leak and therefore the container never to be full and sealed. In this sense; the only way to contain meaning is a constant filling of meaning into the symbolised container – or in other words; it forces one to treat the container always from a dialectical now out of which its meaning always has the ability to alter and shift according to a required accuracy and validity to its present.

The installation embodies several different sculptural elements as well as two videos. All those elements are arranged on the floor and represent things dispersed in some sort of a field of consciousness. The constellation of the different elements reassembles a set of relations within this dispersed field wherein most of these sculptural elements are set on wheels. This occurrence implies a certain movement of these things and holds the possibility of a potential shift and change of their relation without actually being moved or reconciled in the installation itself. This assumption obliges the elements of constant agreements between each other as well as to the condition of the field itself. Through these agreed conjunctions, to which the elements seem to be constantly involved with each other, the installation is rather performing meaning then actually mediating meaning. All in the sense of the leaking container.

Although most of the elements are set on wheels and implying movement, the images on the video sculptures are the only actual components that display real movement. The two videos are both played on flat screens that are set on wagons. One video

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49 see image 18.
sculpture is the above described video “disembodiment”\textsuperscript{50} the other video is more non-figurative wherein a light source is to be seen, always switching from being in focus to out of focus in the rhythm of my own breathing cycle.\textsuperscript{51} The light source turns from bright to dark and backwards in an infinite loop. Both of those videos have the previous described purpose of encouraging a viewer to build a conjunction through one’s own bodily experience with the image in the video as well as the pieces of the installation and their relation to each other.

Three plaster sculptures mirroring in a poetical attempt the above described circumstance of the term and condition of “before present”.\textsuperscript{52} They have a strong assimilation to petrified lumps, - something that grew organically and has its validity in a natural historical context. In fact, the only thing that familiarizes or places these sculptures in context of real petrification is the way they came about.\textsuperscript{53} Like real petrified artefacts, whereby organic material gets over-layered by sediments, decays and leaves a negative space behind which gets filled up by mineral material – forming an accurate copy of the original item, the lumps have the exact same manufacturing process. The main difference between a real petrified artefact and the exhibited lumps is that the lumps in the installation never really had a form giver. Their shape is dictated by acetone that has been poured onto a chunk of Styrofoam – melting its way through the Styrofoam before evaporating in the air. Therefore, these lumps are referring a certain nothingness that functions as a form giver in whereby also a strong element of chance, the chance of how the acetone floats through the Styrofoam, was involved.

The third part of the installation are island like rubber mat plateaus. On both of those plateaus lays a plate of marble onto which a fragile sculpture construct of a Styrofoam chunk, held by several raw spaghetti stands.\textsuperscript{54} In some ways, these plateaus can be seen as representational models of an environment wherein the installed set of relation

\textsuperscript{50} see page 18. image 19. 
\textsuperscript{51} see image 20. 
\textsuperscript{52} see page 6. 
\textsuperscript{53} see image 21. & 22. 
\textsuperscript{54} see image 23. & 24.
between the different sculptural elements takes place. It is a model of a time construct whereby physical time and cultural time is blurred and the different materials are functioning in a rather metaphysical concept. The rubber mat constitutes in a visual sense a certain void, a void for example assimilated with the universe to what the mats are visually referring to. The marble plate on the other hand is some sort of a footprint within this void and can be seen as high cultural outcome, imperialism, the peak of a predominant systemology of oppression through predetermined metaphorical connotation, the conservation of power and coding of meaning by a patriarchal elite group. The Styrofoam chunk is a remain of the cast from the “petrified” lumps and is referring the contemporaneity, - a side by side, whereby the materiality of the Styrofoam is mirroring a togetherness by multiple entities which are melted into a homogeneity. Between these two plateaus are spaghettis, which separating and connecting the plateaus at the same time. This spaghetti string element can be interpreted as a driving element of mankind. Produced by flour and water, pasta is not just a main energy source and therefore indicating a certain velocity in development of society, but also mirroring the time where mankind settled, giving up a nomadic lifestyle, started agriculture, forming and organizing societies in which a conducted culture started to develop. It is pointing to the time when cuneiform was invented and with it the predominant metaphorical production and mediation of meaning. It is the time from where the translation of the symbol “Allow to leak” originates, and where it might has foreshadowed of what to come in the time of the eternal present, the time of the contemporaneity.

In many ways, this reminds me of how Timothy Morton addresses the idea of ecological art, …”one can’t make anything radically different from what is happening now...[...]...everything that one does is already an expression of ones symbiotic coexistence with a host of life forms in a biosphere.” 55

Therefore, he suggests that we have to change what we mean when we say “make” ecological art. This reconsideration of the term is to avoid that the present kind of ecological art, whereby he refers to art which is generated by a “Mesopotamian agricultural society”, ends is everlasting cycle of “explains itself to itself”. This

explaining itself to itself I would argue is a result of the this predetermined metaphorical meaning system that traps us in those repetitive cycles of the contemporaneity. In this sense, it is true that mankind still hasn’t left Mesopotamia yet, and without facing the monstrosity through the anticipation of one’s own nothingness, probably never will be able to achieve to place itself neither in a now nor in a future.
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photo credit Claudia Hausfeld


photo credit Claudia Hausfeld.


photo credit Claudia Hausfeld.


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1. *As far as I know*, 2016

Installation view of the seven transport boxes.
2. *To sieve* - part of *As far as I know*, 2016
Example for the content of a transport box.
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8. Alter, 2016
Installation view of the „rubbing hand - layering / coding“

screen shot of the video „rubbing hand - layering / coding“
10. Alter, 2016
Installation view of the „throwing hand - layering / coding“

11. Alter, 2016
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12. Contrapposto, 2017
Installation view of the video „imprinting“

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Screen shot of the video „imprinting“
14. *Contrapposto, 2017*
Installation view of the video „contemplation“

15. *Contrapposto, 2017*
Screen shot of the video „contemplation“
16. Untitled, 2017
Screen shot of the video „disembodiment“

17. Untitled, 2017
Screen shot of the video „disembodiment“
18. *Allow to leak*, 2018
Installation view Gerðdasafn
19. *Allow to leak*, 2018
Installation view Gerðudæfn
20. *Allow to leak*, 2018
Installation view Gerðasafn
23. *Allow to leak*, 2018
Installation view Gerðdasafn

24. *Allow to leak*, 2018
Installation view Gerðdasafn