

Department of Fine Art

Master of Fine Art

**Hang on to your ego;
everything is new**

MA – Project in Fine Art / Theses

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Abstract

This essay acts as a parenthesis which inserts my artistic practice prior and during the, yet to be completed, Fine Arts MA program at IUA. It revisits past events, works and thoughts and their relevance to a given time and space. The essay translates my interest in how the artworks are experienced. The situations, artistics and mundanes, observed and unravelled in writing are recontextualized through the written documentation and therefore echoed in space and time. Similar to a corpse, they are absent from themselves in the 'now'.

Even though people rarely change but the vision they have of themselves do, I will most likely get bored of these words and soon enough not stand by them. Not only for the previously mentioned reason but mostly because I tend to “steer clear of definitions. I don't know what I want. I am inconsistent, non-committal, passive; I like the indefinite, the boundless; I like continual uncertainty. Other qualities may be conducive to achievement, publicity, success; but they are all outworn - as outworn as ideologies, opinions, concepts and names for things.”¹

This essay doesn't intent to be an exhaustive research born of stubborn assertions; but rather a recollection of loosely associated introspections. It is divided in three parts. The first part surveys the evolution of the artistic process and the continuity of the practice from 2016 to winter 2019. The second part unravels two art pieces completed during the duration of the MA program. *Part two* aims to objectify, as well as add and depart from *part one*. The third part offers anecdotes written in a journal form. It is scattered throughout the essay and it interferes with the theoretical aspects. *Part three* interrupts the linearity and clarity of the whole. It performs as a red thread reasserting themes and moods that are cycling in the current art practice.

¹ Elger, Dietmar, and Elizabeth M. Solaro. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 97-98.

Hang on to your ego; everything is new

(part 3)

Additional anecdotes as portals

Or

When an MA degree is just another escape

“In the darkest part of this silent Sunday morning:

Now gradually rises within me the grim (desperate) theme: from now on, what meaning can my life have?”

-Roland Barthes (Mourning Diary)

Sensitive Sundays; they happen after a series of art openings and nights out, attempts to cheat on time while postponing the fear of tomorrow until morning gets there. From Thursday on, there exists the convenient yet limited idea of reprieve with a “do-it-again”. Until you reach Sunday. Sunday; the usual break in the loop, when the week’s daily cycle is at dead center. The transition from excitement and flight to steady stillness.

On sensitive Sundays my introspections usually swirl around meaninglessness. Under such inertia, meaninglessness unfortunately gets harder to cope with. Less poetically, sensitive Sundays are simply a drop of serotonin mixed with tiredness leading to a lack of lust for life. This equation suddenly lands my introspections on their bitter side. It always blindsides me as I usually find meaninglessness bittersweet, positive and freeing.

It was on one of those typical sensitive Sunday that I decided I would announce to my parents the beautiful breaking news that I was going to be a father, that they were going to be grandparents, that we were going to share responsibilities towards a new being, unconditionally.

It was through this weekly transition, where Jesus and Barabbas were competing over a tennis game on my feels court, exchanging shots from high to low, low to high, that I was contemplating the officiality of a considerable and upcoming break in my cyclic routine. Was I mourning and, if so, what? Youth(mine), carelessness, and/or an egoist take on (ir)responsibilities ?

That Sunday I woke up early in the afternoon. Hungover but simultaneously functional like a spontaneous recovery from the light damages of the last cycle. *La forme* was fine. *Le fond* was apathetic, taciturn, drifting. I felt like wadding without any full-filling function attached to it. I sat at the computer, which I placed on the dining table in the living room. That one room in effect comprising the whole apartment. I checked my emails ; nothing. I don't have a high rate of incoming mails nor are they usually urgent to answer to, but I thought it could have made me feel like I was 30 years old. I was 29 then but was looking forward acting up to my thirties. Maybe even get rich, or at least richer (perhaps there exists a correlation between income and mailbox traffic? I hope not...). This Australian blog I like (browncardigan.com) has not posted anything new and I watched the last *Fail* video at school with my friend Andreas Brunner. There was no way I would get right into my oversea facetime phone call announcement (especially not with the face I was sporting). I was looking to procrastinate some more. I ended up on Facebook, which is far more depressing and alienating (especially intellectually) than boredom itself. I should have known, it was a slippery slope.

(part 1)

From collage to assemblage to circumstantial logic
Or
Different degrees of unconscious plagiarism

I observed through my collage practice a continuous and sustained intention to create a physical piece which aims to be contemplated for its own materiality and factual presence (*la forme*) as much as for the abstracted surrogate experience found in the composition and aesthetic of the simulacrum (*le fond*). Each carefully selected material was used in order to accentuate traces, retain the materiality of the original, activate the negative space, and increase the tension between the media and the medium. These different techniques were executed in order to create a new relationship between the object and the image while instigating a dialogue upon their duality. In this process, the support's materiality (paper) became an equivalent of any selected materials contained in the piece. The three dimensions explored in the composition permute the object and the image between the artifice and the origin in a perpetual visual and theoretical back and forth. By creating this intentional rhythm, I aimed to engage the eyes in an infinite circling movement that could lead to an exponential visitation of the suggested perspectives on flat spaces.

I want to expand here upon perspectives of the architectonic and the domestic. Both ideas were previously hinted in my creative process and used as a visual mechanism to assist in understanding the abstracted image. First, geometrically through the use of lines and angles that suggested an organized structure, and secondly through the use of domestic materials based on the recognition of everyday used or seen objects such as wallpaper, photos, pressed flowers, sandpaper, etc ... Although abstraction served as a ground, the domestic and architectural notions invite the imagination to a familiar environment, such as a home decor setting. Meanwhile the discovered latent aspects were recognized. A convoluted uncanniness² triggered a fascination towards the nostalgic scepticism that questioned the hierarchy of symbols of the aesthetic.

² the word 'uncanny' recognizes as relational to Freud's definition of the Unheimlich

My main inspiration was based on the idea that as we look and move around in life, we identify with the positions and nature of material things we live with. From this observation, there is a carryover logic that I seek to comprehend and mimic³ within the compositions of my works in order to expand its visual and conceptual perspectives. For example, a chair is lower and placed on the ground, which at first sight helps situate one in space. In *Introduction to Oddays* a chair is traced slightly above eye level. At first, the chair is perceived as a front view from above, which deepens the background space. After further look, it also appears as seen from below showing the back view of the chair, which elevates the piece and activates the space through push and pull. On another level, the use of hand-printed 1970's wallpaper and/or isolation foam board in *Plantation* alludes to a space where the present has caught up with its past and suggests nostalgia without souvenirs and/or, in the abstract, a known place.



2016, *Introduction to Oddays*, oil stick and collage on japanese paper, 4ft x 8ft

³ this mimicry also contains subversive potential



2016, *Plantation*, collage on foam board insulation 5ft x 8ft

At this point, my collages trended towards assemblage where the compositions were open to the space. In this manner, the works operate as installation as well as stand-alone objects that echo the implication of my process. I was interested in the morphology of vision by creating an environment where collage was more than a medium, but a way of encoding/recoding the sense of self-awareness and perspective in time and space. The collage process itself became the creation of an existential equivalent of the experience that we have of self, beings and objects.

(part 3, continued)

Alone. Fifty square meters, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland. Garðastræti 4, third floor. I just woke up. Fridge's light was burnt, fridge was empty. There was a bottle of gin in the pantry.

Facebook has this refined algorithm that knows exactly what you need to be remembered of when you are in such a space of mind. Shot in the dark. Nailed me. Here it is, first thing first on my feed, a souvenir from 7 years ago that the Facebook

team (who/whatever that is) thought I would might want to revisit. A digital photo of an analog photo of my friend, Richard Muller, and me that was taken by my other friend, Daniel Paterson. It's us, in the attic of the Bovril building in Montreal, where we shared our studio spaces on the top floor. Access to the attic is now banned but back then we would climb up and sneak out to the roof through a broken window. We had an elusive view on the city since the building was the highest (or felt like the highest if it wasn't) in the Mile-End neighborhood. Dan had built a camera obscura in the attic where he would get in and place is photopaper on an easel in order to catch light. He immortalized our portrait on that one occasion. We were just done with our BA at Concordia University. It felt like yesterday, it felt far away. It was altogether almost a decade ago. Was I looking at a document upholding a soon-to-be gone era, or was it long gone already?

I walked over the shelves, three feet from the table, one step away, scanned and grabbed William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* volume of poems and started wandering through it. Not out of the blue but rather randomly I stumbled on those lines:

"Out of their sweet heads
dark kisses - rough faces"⁴

Whatever the context of the poem was, I thought these two lines fitted my mood and the photograph perfectly. I noted it down. The origin of the reference, such as the name dropping of William Carlos Williams, pleased me more than its intended meaning, whatever it was, and the subverted use I made of it seemed adequate or at the very least excusable. It was melancholic and soothing. I reposted the photo with the extract as a caption above it.

I strolled down the feed. My friend Bella Klein posted a link to her and Daniel Paterson's freshly updated website. The *Trailer Obscura* is a collaborative project which consists of a light-tight trailer turned into a camera obscura that they attach to a

⁴ Williams, William Carlos. *Spring and All*. New York: New Directions Pub., 2011, 72.

car. Few times in the last several years they would leave with rolls of photopaper and shoot mural size negative images. In 2013, I accompanied them on such a trip. We left from Montreal (Quebec) stopped in Toronto (Ontario), then from Windsor (Ontario) crossed over to Detroit (Michigan) where they shot couples of abandoned mansions while I was on the look-out, then headed south to the mid-west in Bloomington (Indiana), came back north to Oberlin (Ohio) and finally got back to Montreal. The trip lasted two weeks, more-or-less. We were coasting like lame wannabe pale copy of the Beatnicks; it was palpable . I went on looking for the series attached to that trip on their website. There were mostly photos that were taken with the trailer as an apparatus but also snapshot of us as extra documentation of the whole enterprise. The images were chronologically displayed, I revisited the entirety of our ventures. From beginning to end. The series are induced with obvious notions of road trip photography, which I easily read as romantically symbolic of youth and freedom. I was seeing the stroll of images as a perfect roll, mythical. I was overly romanticizing this idea of youth, my twenties, the end of it, past. It hit me full speed that Sunday as I was immobile and looking into the wing mirror.

Nostalgia has a history associated with sickness, exile and distance from the known and loved. In an interview with David Lillington, the collagist John Stezaker describe nostalgia using the thoughts of Milan Kundera's novel *Ignorance*. "He points out that nostalgia is not a comfortable form of reverie but the opposite: it is a way of living with loss. It is not about an imaginary retrieval of the past but about the impossibility of return; a condition of exile"⁵. Somehow that sensitive Sunday embodied a sense of loss. In time and space.

⁵ Craig, Blanche. *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008, 27.

(part 1, continued)

Moving from the tradition of flatness as a departing point, my intention when starting the MA program at IUA was to bridge to a three-dimensional body of work and explore the multiplicitous nature and continual hybridisation of collage through assemblage. I wanted to research and experiment the work without the necessity of a classical support, paper and/or wall. This focus led my interest into exploring unconventional, unstable and living materials that would allow a composition to move, as one could move within it, and rely and react to the laws of nature and/or the environment/space where it was set in.

From then on, I pursued my work as a mean to subjectively record and document daily act of life, being and thoughts. Through patterns of choices and traces, I continued to explore the act of vision and its intrinsic relationship with and through time and space. Moreover, my fascination in using the act of vision as a composition method slowly juxtaposed with my interest in the act of thoughts (cerebration⁶) which schematic similitudes were used as a composition model to layer a non-linear constellation of ideas and themes versus their intentions and interpretations within the work of art set in space and time.

As a departure point, I made sculptural experimentation, which I called collages or sketches in space. In occurrence the assemblages were tests with organic materials and found debris. Collecting and using these found materials introduced an anthropological approach which reflected the quintessence of my experience within a surroundings. It also underlined the importance I granted to the origin of materiality in my pieces while keeping in mind the words of Sally O'Reilly in her essay *Collage: Diversions, contradictions and anomalies* where she describes the colagist as “an unethical anthropologist who meddles with the very syntax of a culture.”⁷

⁶ The working of the brain; thinking. More precisely, the patterns of neurological arrays while processing and understanding information networks in their many forms. Which bears resemblance to mycelium, the internet or dark matter in their structure. This has been describe as the mycelial archetype by Paul Stamets (Stamets, Paul. *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help save the World*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed, 2005, 10.).

⁷ Craig, Blanche. *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008, 19.

Purposefully for cinematic entertainment, Jackie Chan perfected a martial art based on a collaboration or partnership with objects in domestic environments. The most casual objects found around a generic house setting could be used as mastered weapons. Example; a chair or a phone become shields and arms. Such approach to self-defense share similarities to the old martial way of Okinawa where it is said that the peasants, since they had no rights to carry weapons, learn ways to use mainly farm tools to fight. I am not trying to combine or propose that the word “martial” is inherent to my art practice, but I certainly embrace the conjunction of creativity and improvisation with whatever is at hand in order to react to an immediate environment/situation.



Similarly, biomimicry underlines the same principle as nature uses its limitations as opportunities to overcome problems and evolve. Following such reasoning I never, or at least very rarely, went out of my routinely ways in order to scavenge materials. I compare this method for selecting materials to the logistics behind the close to home effect in car crashes. “Injury crashes are over-represented on roads close to home, even when controlling for exposure. The close to home effect may be related to complacency when driving on familiar roads. Analysis showed that on average, drivers were indeed more likely to crash close to home.”⁸ I am thriving on the same day-dreaming complacency in order to accidentally stumble upon weathered and

⁸ "The Close to Home Effect in Road Crashes," Safety Science, May 08, 2017, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S092575351730783X>

accidented materials. It appears to me as purely logic that the richest environment for found objects and inspiration would be the environment I am circling daily. This echoes the high chances of crashing your car on the roads you are majorly driving on. Paul Virilio sees the accident as the revelation of the identity of the object. Accidents are circumstantial to place and time and the exercises here was to tame the accident from its hostile environment in order to (mis)use its energy and juxtaposed it in an absurdly incongruous situation and therefore piggyback on the aura created by the composition to set off a non-sequitur path for interpretations.

The materials that I used were selected out of opportunism and availability, in other words out of desire without means. They were the things that happen to catch my eye within my living area; between a point A and a point B (In school and on my way from home to school/studio/gallery). Whatever I would select on my path I then used as anchors to objectify pathways between the thoughts of a wandering mind. I also observed that my sensitivity towards my material choices were greatly influenced by the idea of modernariat. “In its common usage, [this term] designates the—sentimental, aesthetic, commercial—interest in objects and artifacts belonging to the recent past (so recent, it skirts on today). [...] “modernariat” means the systematic development of an antiquarian sensibility with regard to the *hic et nunc* being lived at any given moment. In one sense, the modernariat is a symptom of the doubling of the present as an illusory “already-been”; but it also actively contributes to the ever-renewed realization of this double.”⁹ I adhere to Hélio Oiticica’s idea that time has a symbolic signification of the artist’s inner and existential relation to the world. Following this line of thought, not only is the work subject to the influence of time and space; it becomes consciously and actively included within the co-dependent dialectic of time and space as part of the artistic process.

Interestingly enough, and due to my collage/assemblage practice I usually acted as a ragpicker who collected traces and materials. I am talking here of the thematic narrative of the 19th century profession of the ragpicker as observed by Charles

⁹ "Déjà Vu and the End of History." E. Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/deja-vu-and-the-end-of-history/>.

Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. For both writers, the ragpicker was a mystical role who scoured the detritus and waste of the urban environment looking for particulate of meaning. Usually, through selected traces I built an image/object bank of available/left-over materials that would then propose a pattern of choices mimicking cerebration. Baudelaire described a *flâneur* (urban wanderer or ragpicker) as an artist capable ““to become one flesh with the crowd,” that is, “the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite,” this artist is “a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness , responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.” An artist that would be “able to break down and reconstruct the movements that unify the thousand and one elements of an installation that would seem, to a more stationary gaze, to be nothing but pure chaos.””¹⁰

The disruption of a single reading to an image is inherent to collage. I permute this principle to the reading of a space and/or a time as well. From this thought I use the medium of collage as a way of thinking; as an approach to problems, solutions and art in general. Suddenly it made sense that if I was gathering pieces while my thoughts were made of pieces and that I could organize these pieces into something that would feel whole enough then I could go forward. Moreover, “neurological study has lately shown that memory, imagination, and consciousness itself is stitched, quilted, pastiched. If we cut-and-paste ourselves, might we not forgive it of our artworks?”¹¹

I should add here that I am very sceptical about intellectual property. I think that much of what we artistically do nowadays is mostly (*voir* exclusively) referential and that this double take on any accessible association of information go through coding, decoding and recoding in a constant flux. I observe an interesting osmosis between plagiarism, appropriation and references. It is however in the unclarity of this gradual and reversible process that I am mostly interested. The idea that references rake so

¹⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas, Lili Porten, and James Gussen. Nicolas Bourriaud: The Radicant. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009, 92-93.

¹¹ Lethem, Jonathan, Ferris Jabr, and James Pogue. "The Ecstasy of Influence." Harper's Magazine. December 02, 2012. Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/the-ecstasy-of-influence/>.

wide triggers as much interests on my part than carelessness (*je-m'en-foutisme*). In that regards, I seek to surrender control over meaning-making. Although consciously trying to offer a sense of curation or a set of boundaries for the exploration of the works. The artwork's pluri-dimensionality in time and space oscillate between his own set of references and the outside world. At this point, the experience of the references#appropriation#plagiarism emanating from the work itself is confined to be everchanging and personal, therefore unstable. This richness, rather than a default, propels the works to “a construction or montage [...] born of endless negotiation.”¹² From collage to assemblage my work has become circumstantial situations activated as portals in which I would juxtapose and collocate symbols.

Nothing is new. However, we are.

(part 3, continued)

Again, I proceeded to the shelve where I keep my books. Usually I pick songs to fit or accentuate my mood, which I most probably did but did not take note of what I listened that day. It seems I was mostly going back to words, must have felt overly dramatic. The photographic nostalgia ambushed by facebook drew me back to thinking about *Camera Lucida's* book on photography by Roland Barthes. I remembered the part near the end of the essay where Barthes writes about a picture of his mother as a youngster and these thoughts led me to the *Mourning Diary* in which every page is a daily entry about the mourning of his dead mother. I decided to take *Mourning Diary* off the shelf. As I had yet read the diary I thought that by randomly go through it I would somehow stumble upon something revealing. Through curated randomness, I exercise this aleatory gathering and picking of particles and signs. This time through written thoughts by a third party, upon which I allow very fitting meaning to confirm, reaffirm and enhance my mood and thoughts. It can easily turn into, or simply be a self-serving technique to not step out of my state of mind; a

¹² Bourriaud, Nicolas, Lili Porten, and James Gussen. *Nicolas Bourriaud: The Radicant*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009, 56.

trained and auto-satisfying tunnel vision. This could also be seen as a flawed approach to cleromancy.¹³

*** There is this episode of *Forensic Files*, an American show about case studies' crime resolved through the use of science techniques, where arsonists specialists were deliberately searching for traces of arson instead of looking for proof of accidental fire, which led to arrest of an innocent mother accused for the murder of her children by setting fire to her house. She got acquitted when a fire specialist proved there was no arson as he was simply looking for the cause of the fire.***

In some obstinacy ways, I proved what I wanted with what I got or else I searched for what I needed to prove what I wanted. I guess this is how rhetoric works too. So here it was: I had found the nail in the coffin of my Sunday melancholia. There was this line where Barthes was realizing the imminence of his own death and the limits of his own life through the death of his mother. As if he was next in line, waiting around to die. Somehow that day I decided the birth of my son was carrying the same principle in reverse interpretation of the cycle. I was being pushed out and forced to comply to time through unconditional love. Although the beauty of the upcoming event I couldn't comprehend how everyone made it appear so simple to deal with this transition.

¹³ randomly consulting books for spiritual guidance

(part 2)

*Previous artworks as unstable examples
Or
Car with broken transmission on a draft lost at sea*

2.1

The Power I afford you is the one I wish I had over you

“I’ve invented nothing; I’ve simply been the secretary of my sensations.”

-Emil Cioran

The aim of the project at the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum was to interfere/react to the space and/or an artwork(s). The first thing I noticed when I entered the museum was how serious and dry the space was. It appeared as if locked in time. However, after contemplating the art pieces on display it appears as if the complete body of work was quite playful with a refreshing candor although the institution it was enclosed in made such qualities harder to grasp.

The piece titled “Sköpun/Creation” 1976 (big block of marble; a materially serious sculpture in its classical sense yet frivolously approached by the artist) was the first piece one would encounter entering the museum. My main intention then was to make the piece and the space light and fun again (suspecting it once was). I inflated balloons in every hollow shapes that were dug in the block of marble. Ephemeraly interfering with this piece with a servile or non-aristocratic material by filling it's hollowness through a simple and candid action appeared to be an accurate way to reactivate its assumed purpose.



collage sketch for intervention on Sköpun (1976) - inflated balloons in marble, 100x100x51
at Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland

I thought that Ólafsson sculptures, although serious in its craftsmanship, were rather distinctive by their playfulness. Sköpun appeared as a mockery to the rigidity of the marble block, but none of these attributes seemed to come forward in the reading of the art pieces in that space. Rather the weight of time paired with the sterility of the museum brought solemnity with such gravity that the core intention of the works were quasi impossible to dust and freshen to their originate glow.

During the vernissage kids were tempted to take the balloons out of the orifice, which was a pleasant surprise as it confirms the fall of the art object's pedestal and the

reactivation of the piece's playfulness and humility. Most importantly, the piece was experienced differently by viewers.

The intervention was titled after the lyrics of the song *Afford* by the band Akron/Family "The power I afford you is the one I wish I had over you". I borrowed/stole the line purely for the declination of the interpretations offered by the richness of its semantic content. The title underlined as well as it layered systems of unequal relations and power-relations structures implied in intersubjectivity and encountered in art institutions. It also hints at the temporality and the materiality of my intervention towards Ólafsson sculptures' Sköpun.

Over the duration of the exhibition, the balloons deflated in their emplacement. The physical aspects of the piece would then slowly change and by doing so add/release notions of sadness and failure. The interfering objects would decay as the air of my lungs diffused through the tiny pores of the stretched rubber. Through time the art object edified a contradiction towards the premiere intentions and subsequently re-enacted (at a fast forward speed) the recontextualized reality of the piece itself.

(part 3, continued)

(The bottle of gin was in the pantry.)

The temporality of this sensitive Sunday was vaporous and, or rather, my grasp on time was hazy. I was physically in a transiting state as I was concurrently contemplating transition. The temporality I was experiencing was simultaneously layered with past, present and future. Obviously, one could argue that it is always the case when one tries to decipher temporality. However that day felt suspended in time; absent from itself, dissociated from the now. I was an observant on a standpoint looking at waves of time weaving themselves together. I was searching for anchors into various and familiar mundane signs in order to relate my state of mind to reality.

This day presented itself to me similar to the experience of a déjà-vu. Within a déjà-vu the past and future collide together causing an experience in which anticipation merges with prolepsis and the present is then suddenly altered. One who is experiencing a déjà-vu gets confuse between recognitions and expectations of past and/or future, simultaneously. Then this very moment becomes a parenthesis isolated from the real. Paolo Virno isolate this state-of-being brilliantly in the article *Déjà-Vu or the End of History*. He points out that “The state of mind correlated to déjà-vu is that typical of those set on *watching themselves live*. This means apathy, fatalism, and indifference to a future that seems prescribed even down to the last detail. [...]they become *spectators* of their own actions, [...]sometimes ironic and often inclined to cynicism.” Impressively enough, the key words encountered in this quote offers a very pertinent constellation towards the feelings encountered that day. Moreover, as he adds; “the antiquarian historiography, [...] (*antiquarian history*, which “preserves and venerates” the past, as it really was, in its totality, without missing out the slightest detail) [...] applies its own typical methods to actuality: everything that happens is treated as suggestive *evidence*, while it is still happening; the current moment is consumed by *nostalgia*.”¹⁴

(I proceeded to get the gin bottle in the pantry and poured myself a drink.)

¹⁴ "Déjà Vu and the End of History." E. Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/deja-vu-and-the-end-of-history/>.

(part 2, continued)

2.2

More Than This

More than this, you know there is nothing

More than this, tell me one thing

More than this, you know there is nothing

More than this

nothing

More than this

More than this

nothing

-Bryan Ferry (Roxy Music)

*“Radical artists invent pathways among signs. They are semionauts who set forms in motion, using them to generate journeys by which they elaborate themselves as subjects even as the corpus of their work take shape. They carve out fragments of signification, gathering samples and creating herbaria and forms. [...] radical art implies the end of the medium-specific, the abandonment of any tendency to exclude certain fields from the realm of art”*¹⁵

-Nicolas Bourriaud (The Radicant)

The project for gallery RYMD consisted of covering the floor partly with a marble patterned self-adhesive pre-pasted wallpaper. A plastic tarp was installed to divide the front part of the gallery from the back part. A fog machine and speaker were set in the back area of the gallery. The front windows were covered with an industrial see-through fabric which diffused the light and created a softbox effect. An edited loop of the song *More than this* by Roxy Music played on repeat. Throughout the exhibition (or rather until stock depletion), dry martinis were to be served to guests in conical paper glasses.

¹⁵ Bourriaud, Nicolas, Lili Porten, and James Gussen. *Nicolas Bourriaud: The Radicant*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009, 52-53.

Materials

- plastic tarp, self-adhesive pre-pasted wallpaper (marble pattern)
- speakers, fog machine
- Martini (Vodka, vermouth, olives, ice cubes, shaker) serve in conical paper glass
- Frame paper work

RYMD's recognizable floor pattern¹⁶ has involuntarily become a signature for the gallery, subsequently turning the space into the antithesis of a white cube. The floor cannot be ignored and eventually plays a part in every exhibition as the art object get afflicted by its infamous, or elevating, influence. Based on this assumption, the pieces' architectonics are drawn upon the infrastructure of the space itself. It reassembled, disrupted, and blurred its spatiotemporal elements in order to create an altered and alternate version of the space.

A gallery already implies a space that comes with an aura according to its purpose and depending on its content. I wanted to work with RYMD space as raw material. I'm interested in how the symbol of a work of art as well as the symbols use through a work of art are exposed to their double once placed in and conflicted to time and space. They then exponentially multiply and therefore offer a multiplicity of angles and combinations to be interpreted upon. I recognized in this nebulous trajectory a correlation between the exponentiality of possible meanings, which allows a state of ignorance to grow accordingly, and its close proximity to meaninglessness. By doubling the gallery with a different version of itself I was trying to expose this mechanism. This claim, so far, does not produce a conclusion, as I am mostly interested in the state where the simulacrum is unresolved. In other words, I am more intrigued by everything that happens in between and in the in-between. Without reaching any finality through meaning making I am pointing to an extended and ever-growing field of imaginative solutions. To a certain extent this curiosity relates to pataphysics, a branch of philosophy that deals with an imaginary realm additional

¹⁶ within the Icelandic art community

to metaphysics. There is a seductive oddity that I experience in a limbo and it is this vaporous, hazy and inconclusive state of being that I attempted setting up.

The song *More than this* by Roxy Music is a known hit of the early 1980's. I chose it mostly for its pop qualities and its easily recognizable melody. I also chose it for the meaning the chorus' lyrics proposes, especially once appropriated in this art show setting. The original lyricism remains but once recontextualized through the lens of the exhibition it activates refutations through its semantic. By remixing the first 15 seconds of the song in a very long build up I hoped to trick the listener's ear into anticipation that the song will eventually begin, that there would be more than the intro. After many loops, the song falls into elevator music and therefore does not fulfill its goal as a power ballad, until the chorus is released once every 20 minutes. Which reinforces the masquerade of the simulacrum, in its form and content.

The fog, as it spreads through the gallery, reinforces the idea of the in-between states as it fills the negative space and sets it in motion. It obliterates as much as it expands vision by catching light in an unusual way. It also underlines the lyrics of the song proposing that there is something unseen within the fog something more than this. It objectifies the invisible making it dreamy and sublime as it helps reconsidering the space as a controlled system with its factual and conceptual boundaries.

(part 3, continued)

Alcohol was unnecessary but it appeared to me as the liaison between voidness and sentimentality, which were two states that were polarizing my day. At least, there would be this immediacy of impact in which I would experience time under a new pace. I felt like I needed that shift in order to detached myself from this wistful feeling because after all it was a great news about life cycles unraveled under a misguided mindset. I used alcohol as an emotional remedy; a purge from melancholia. There is an excerpt in *On Booze*, a posthumous retrospective collections of F. Scott Fitzgerald thoughts on alcohol from all his writings, that goes;

“ “We havent got any more gin,” he said. “Will you have a bromide?” He added hopefully.”¹⁷

A very simple line with a direct request. Bromide (medically a sedative) was then use in the vernacular language as a symbol for a soothing substance that would initiate a palliated state. The interesting correlation here is that, the reference to bromide, establishes the character’s hopeful intentions that the ingestion of bromide will ensure his desired and illusory mindset of an ephemeral problem-solved state of lightness of being. Additionally, alcohol acts as a medium that, for many cultures, binds community, in which, with the help of its inebriating effects, people gather and share their similitudes under an alternative time set. Customarily, it is a consumed substance within mundane and/or important gatherings that underline the end and/or beginning of cycles. Alcohol then becomes a cohabitant of rituals. This day felt like a loop in a loop addressed to cyclical actions in which ritual were inherent. I decided to induce alcohol through it, even though alone. As I would be with people virtually.

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *On Booze*. New York, NY: New Directions Books, 2011, 3.

(part 2, continued)

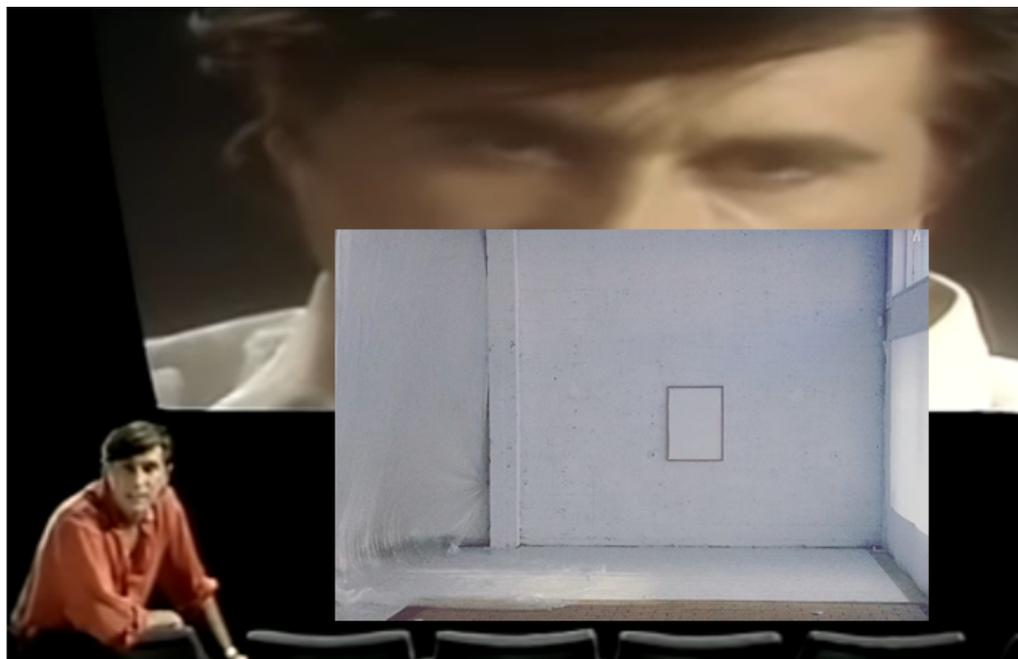
More than this obliquely addresses and uses the ritual of the vernissage. Through mingling, the viewer acts as an actor in which the formality of the art opening is celebrated rather than its very content. The form prevails on the substance. Hence my interest in creating a situation where the art piece is generated and revealed through the viewer rather than the artist as the distance between the form and the substance is befogged. The space is filled with an ambiguous mood where time is suspended and framed by an audio loop. The experience of the surrogate gallery reveals more meaning than its documentation will succeed to archive. As the space is altered, time slowly but actively modifies the reading of the event/art piece.

The gesture of the martinis seeks to allure more people to come to the opening but mostly insists by their gratuity to get people tipsy. Doing so it reiterates the idea of a place beside itself from the perspective of the viewer as people slowly start to experience the event while they are in an alternate state themselves. Serving the cocktail in a conical paper glass appears amusing and uncanny at first but quickly becomes discomforting as one cannot put the beverage down meanwhile the paper cup starts soaking the beverage and losing its permeability. It also hints to its generic use in offices and waiting rooms underpinning the institutional aspect of the gallery.

Alcohol acts as a medium that binds communities together: a facilitator. Through drunkenness, time reaches a new pace. There is then a simultaneous cohabitation of an alternative time, which is itself experienced on a different temporality. Through repetitive consumption of alcoholic beverages, the experience becomes a cyclical loop of hedonism . At openings, the art community usually engages in such ritual (to a recommended moderate extent) within the art space and becomes bounded emotionally by the art, which is expressed by artists in a sort of morphology. The object of the exhibition opens to a collective experience which subsequently, or rather unconsciously, controls the viewer himself. Ultimately, the art object experiences itself.

More than this acts as a whole in which its parts seem uncanny or absent. Yet the work addresses sufficient entry ways to meaning-making within the very boundaries of the institution it stands in. Over the duration of the exhibition, *More than this* becomes the archive of itself, as reminiscent of the opening are left behind. The exhibition is sustained by its own holistic system but its revolution becomes anachronistic with its own past and gradually appears at odds with its core intentions. The pendulum between themes of hope/hopelessness, meaning/meaninglessness, sublime/ordinary creates a movement of cerebral gymnastic in which the symbols slowly start to unravelled as part of the paradigm. However, they remained unclear as too many of those ellipses interfere with each other leaving the viewer in a constant dubious state relying on contemplation and the ambiance as an anchor.

More than this takes form in the act of experiencing a given time and space. It strives to objectify the dynamics of intangible and overlooked qualities of a set environment. It is the exploration of unsolved equation of symbols and feelings floating in a limbo. The gallery is a frame for the layering of interpretations, bringing to light the ambiguity between obvious and oblivion.



(part 3, concluded)

Additional anecdotes as portals

Or

When an MA degree is just another escape

I was getting ready to call my mother and step-father. We have agreed to video call each other at 6pm, Iceland time. It was ringing through my computer. I thought that the video call ringtone was weak in its audio intention in comparison to the good old landline telephone. Also, I felt that my news deserved the anticipation of a long and resonating ring that a landline offers by means of making ones hurry up to catch the phone in its house. My grandmother's rotary dial phone would always ring loud. I had always been captivated by the rotary dial system and its noises, you had to wait before getting the line and wait longer if there were many “nines” in the number you were calling. It was a nice object too. Another memorable thing about my grandparents' house was that my grandfather, in the winter time, would heat the house like a rehabilitated pyromaniac who could only burn logs of wood to satisfy his thirst for fire. This house was heated and warm. January, minus 30 celsius degree outside, I was in my underwear and everyone was to be lightly dress. Every now and then my grandfather would stand up from his rocking chair and say “time to heat it up!”. Everyone would object as it was already overheating itself up madly, but he wouldn't care and dutifully heat it up some more. Lot of those nights I was in the living room listening to movies as the adults were chatting in the dining room aside (I was the first kid of this generation, therefore alone with grown-ups at the time). My ears were red from the heat of the fire, and the brown, beige and orange rug like sofa cover was sticking to my skin. Usually I would have been watching my favourite film, *Land before time*. I watched it so much that my mother got tired of renting it and bought me the VHS. She should have bought it before and save more money from the video store. The scene in which Littlefoot's mother dies protecting him from Sharpooth would leave me tearful every time. Before she dies she says to Littlefoot “I'll be with you, even if you can't see me” I cried, every-single-time, and even though I watched

Land before time many, many times I like to think I will always cry when seeing this part of the movie because it is a comforting refuge and has become an automatic emotional response. My body remembers and it is a safe place for my general sorrows, which are embodied in the idea of the death of the mother, an endearing long neck dinosaur in that case, an unbearable sadness in which you only learn to live on with a sense of loss. My mother said a few years ago that she should have never let me watch *Land before time* so often because I already was a very melancholic kid and that rooted this feature deep down in me through repetitions. Then, according to her, it enhanced this feature and I applied it as a filter through which I reacted to the world. Sad rose colored glasses. Anyway, I said *papa* before I said *maman*. He always was proud of it and wouldn't miss a chance to boastfully remind it to me during father and son moments. I therefore thought my mother would be the first one that I'd call grandma, to balance things out. The announcement went well, people were thrilled to hear of the growth of the family.

It was 8pm then. My dad is highly emotive and I knew it was going to be contagious because I am a sensitive person myself. It was a very cliché and pathetic behaviour to be inebriated then but mostly, alcohol was a sensitive soul's escape for the moment. A reaction to apprehension that eased the wait. I then facetimes my dad, same ringtone goes off. He was just back from a long vacation in Mexico. He is not a big fan of sunscreen and was therefore very tan. He was purple and happy. He was also wearing orange tinted sunglasses and his hair were braided in cornrows. He had a Bono meet Sean Paul look. It looked like a living anachronism. Suddenly, this image appeared very absurd and out of line with everything I chosen to go through since I woke up earlier that day. Emile Cioran said; "The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live --moreover, the only one." A nihilistic point of view on life but, as I said before, I usually find meaninglessness bittersweet, positive and freeing. Revisiting the day and its layered symbols through this new lenses made me serene, excited and happy. The fashion look of my dad, however, slowly transited from funny to absurd to sad.

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