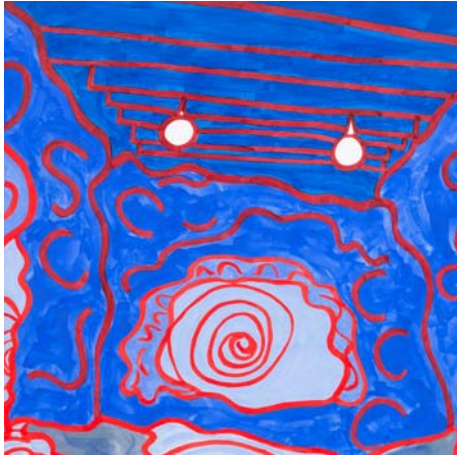


FrameWork 1/14

Anna Kovler on Sandra Meigs



A Descent into the Basement. The Dizzying Paintings of Sandra Meigs

Sandra Meigs has been exhibiting her work in Toronto for over three decades. Across those many years, variety of artworks, and materials used emerge some of Meigs' most enduring choices and preoccupations - architecture, repetition, and the emblem of the spiral. The exhibition currently on view at Susan Hobbs and Georgia Scherman Projects, while entirely new, is also deep in its connections not only to the artist's oeuvre but also to literature, philosophy, the history of art, and contemplative subjective experience.

The Basement Panoramas consists of four paintings so large they require a double venue. As the title suggests, these massive paintings depict long, panoramic views of four distinct basements. Filling the entire length of the wall on the first floor of Susan Hobbs is a rendering of Meigs' sister's basement in Vermont. Each title includes the painting's predominant colour, the address of the house, and a corresponding state of being – this one is *Yellow. 435 Longmeadow. (Insomnia)*. On the second floor along the length of the wall is *Blue. 1000 Mountain Rest. (Breath)*. A few doors down, filling the expanse of the largest wall at Georgia Scherman is *Red. 3011 Jackson. (Mortality)* and folding into the corner of the back room is *Grey. 224 Main. (Transformation)*.

A key to understanding Meigs' work, and this series in particular, is hidden in her very first Toronto exhibition. *The Maelstrom* was the title of that show at A Space in 1980 and included a table which endlessly moved to a horizontal position and back upright, a series of watercolour drawings described as "illustrations for a book of children's nightmares" and a definition of a maelstrom that would appear on screen as part of a 25 minute film. The Maelstrom, it read, "is a whirlpool off the coast of Norway ... People believed that the Maelstrom led nowhere and that persons caught in it would travel through its endless pit forever"¹. Appearing in Meigs' work for a long time, both explicitly as a vortex or spiral, and thematically as an attraction towards dizzying repetition, the Maelstrom is the repetitive embodied, the dangerous, the infinite.

FrameWork 1/14

In *The Basement Panoramas* the Maelstrom appears in the wonky doorways of the *Blue* painting, front and centre in the *Grey* painting, and radiating out from the middle of the *Red* painting. The *Blue* painting is akin to an architectural nightmare. The viewer is positioned as though looking down two apartment building hallways while on a hallucinatory drug or in a bad dream. There is absolutely no escape. The haunting swirl of the Maelstrom is the single thing inside every visible door and window, and like a hall of mirrors at a carnival show, every option is exactly the same. The primary colours are strange and child-like. A blue, a light blue, and swirls of red are applied in a way that evokes using a Crayola marker to colour in a large area; the result is always patchy and irregular.

In the wonky world of the *Blue* painting the red swirl is king. It cannot be contained by the blue doorways and windows and spills out into the puddles that seem to flow from the rounded doorways or portal openings. The only way out is via the stairs on the right and left, but they end abruptly and offer no real perspectival resolution, no way out. At once childlike and serious, this surreal interior is a trap where the only way to go is down into the funnel of the Maelstrom, into the unknown.

The Maelstrom spiral evokes the work of Marcel Duchamp, whose longstanding fascination with spinning, eternal and unfulfilled repetition, is exemplified not only by the spinning spiral of his *Rotoreliefs* but also with the vicious cycle of the erotic machinery in *The Large Glass*. M.C. Escher's architectural loops also come to mind, with their impossible, inescapable spaces. Next to Escher Meigs' architecture is less severe, her lines undulate and breathe, making the impossible space somehow more inhabitable.



In the *Red* painting the Maelstrom appears in the centre as a series of expanding circles like the ones made by a pebble dropped in water. If the *Blue* painting is an architectural nightmare, this one is an architectural storm. Painted in red on a white ground, it features doors jutting out at strange angles, windows aslant, a lattice of ceiling beams, and shelves and cupboards with a cartoonish slant. Words appear intermittently to label the various basement elements, and the expected “water portal” and “electrical portal” are accompanied by more esoteric labels including “Door Mortal Birth” and “Bed Mortal Death”.

These labels quietly hint at the reason for Meigs' descent into her own basement, which the *Red* painting represents. It became a place of fascination for her during her husband's fight with cancer, the labels express an attempt to understand and cope. In the *Red* painting, the circular Maelstrom

FrameWork 1/14

emanates from a rock found by Meigs in her basement, which reminded her of a mortality chamber. Despite the importance of the life of the artist, the power of these paintings lies far beyond the limits of biography. Roland Barthes writes that the author does not precede the work, but is “born simultaneously with his text”ⁱⁱⁱ and *The Basement Panoramas* are a representation of death *and* birth, hopelessness *and* resilience.

In 1841 Edgar Allan Poe featured the Maelstrom in his short story “A Descent Into the Maelstrom”, which inspired Meigs in the eighties while she was living on the coast of Nova Scotia. Poe describes an old man’s survival of shipwreck in the Moskoestrom, a whirlpool off the coast of the Norwegian island Moskoe. This massive vortex appears as a gyrating whirl more than a mile in diameter, a “terrific funnel” sloping to the horizon at a forty five degree angle, whose gaping mouth is a wall of water spinning at a dizzying speed from the bottom of which sounds a terrifying shriek. In the story, the ocean calmed before the old man could be pulled to the bottom of the gigantic vortex where ships, trees, and animals get beat to pieces against the crags at the bottom, to emerge in a completely unrecognizable form. Perhaps Barthes does not go far enough. Like Meigs’ and Poe’s whirlpool, perhaps the author is not only born in the current of the artwork but also broken to pieces against the rocks at the bottom and spit back up to the surface of the world in pieces, transformed, an entirely new person.



In the *Grey* painting the whirlpool is the centre of the composition. It is embedded in a symmetrical grey and black architectural structure reminiscent of a coliseum, which fans outwards as though it has wings. Shoes, clocks, light bulbs, floating orbs, and a string of words appear in the fine and spindly basement architecture. To the right of the vortex are words synonymous with death including cease, eclipse, obliteration, and vanishing. To the left are words synonymous with birth, like attendance, coming, arising and appearing. Positioned by Meigs as mirror images of one another – birth and death, appearance and vanishing – start to lose their difference.

Jean Baudrillard, among others, meditated on the simultaneous movement of the real between appearance and disappearance, “The real vanishes into the concept. But what is even more paradoxical is the exact opposite movement by which concepts and ideas (but also fantasies, utopias, dreams and desires) vanish into their very fulfillment.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Indeed it is the nature of a dream that it ceases to exist the moment it comes true; it dies the moment it becomes real. And the Maelstrom too, with its eternal rotation, is at its birth a death of what surrounds it – as the ocean water swallows itself. In this way, the mirror image of birth and death in the *Grey* painting is fitting for a

FrameWork 1/14

perpetual becoming, going around the circle of the Maelstrom, here appearing, there disappearing, forever.



The *Yellow* painting stands out among the panoramas. Painted with yellow and thin lines of blue on a white ground it radiates a cool electric glow. This basement is full of ubiquitous basement stuff – boxes, baskets of bits and pieces, piles of things. Four figures lounge among the objects, thinking, reclining, ruminating and reading. White gaps contain words that seem to refer to types of people – lost souls, drifters, losers, winners, fools and sinners, planners and dreamers. Who exactly the words refer to is a mystery. Are these the inhabitants of the basement? Is the junk we store in basements reflective of our life’s achievements?

The basement is certainly a place where, looking through boxes of objects and old photographs, we can get lost in a reflective reverie – the sum of a full life, mementos of having lived. Like an archive of memory, the basement is the place where we store thoughts to retrieve them at another time, on a sleepless night or in a moment of crisis, just when we forgot all about them.

The Basement Panoramas are about everything and nothing at once. A lifetime of consciousness stored in the basement and caked with dust is rendered as simple lines and swirls on a white ground. In quick gestures Meigs reduces the heaviest, deepest, most cumbersome parts of a human life to its skeletal beams; wispy, meandering lines, but always telling, always tracing some untold story. The massive size of these paintings suits their scope of things. Meigs leads us with her dancing, winding lines through the circles of birth and death, lightness and darkness, dream and waking, around and around in the eternal Maelstrom that has dwelled in her work for so long.

ⁱ Mays, John Bentley. “A Harrowing Ride Through Sandra Meigs’ Maelstrom.” *The Globe and Mail*. 12 April, 1980.

ⁱⁱ Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” *Image-Music-Text*. Hill and Wang 1977. 42-148.

ⁱⁱⁱ Baudrillard, Jean. “Why Hasn’t Everything Already Disappeared?” Seagull Books. 2009.

FrameWork 3/14

Ella Dawn McGeough on Robert Wiens

In order to feel yourself standing up, look at something laying down.



I am a three-dimensional body looking at a three-dimensional body made flat. A flat body made of thin fields of colour over white paper that become more or less clear as I move my body back and forth in space. The eye becomes lens. I remember that my eye is a lens. Focus in and I lose focus, focus out and focus reappears. Log as photo-real, log as water and colour.

Close up, Robert Wiens' unframed paintings break down. They are stains of browns and grays, greens and gold. For as long as these details hold my gaze, the former is a memory quickly lost. To realize that other reality I have to physically move.

When I invariably do, the force of my attention breaks away from the subject in front of me and I become re-aware of my surroundings: the gallery, its well-lit whiteness, and importantly, my position within it. I look back and around at the logs that fill walls—downstairs: maple, upstairs: a ubiquitous variety—and I see that whiteness also surrounds their bodies. Neither whiteness is neutral; it is the whiteness of constraint, of definition, of isolation.

In these paintings, there is no space for romance, which is not to say they lack beauty, but rather to state that they lack the contextualization of illusionistic space. At one-to-one scale, they are neither miniaturized nor aggrandized. They are literal. They pertain to themselves as themselves through their specific materiality. Refreshingly, irony and imagination are absent. They state a fact. This is what a log looks like; this is what a log is.

With these thoughts I return to my schooldays when I read and reread both Michael Fried and Donald Judd's treatises on Minimalism when it was named Literalism¹ and described as 'specific objects'.² This discourse produced a back and forth disagreement that tried to settle the consequences of the new painting and sculpture of the 1960s that blurred the categorical division of the arts.

For Judd and his contemporaries, this was a necessary diversification of what it meant to make, do, and encounter art. This experience was stressed through specific material and spatial considerations

such as scale and colour in order to bring work fully into the third-dimension. For Fried, these new methods of making and display relegated painting and sculpture to the category of objects or props that relied too heavily on the presence of the viewer to activate them in a theatrical situation. He believed that this slide towards synthesis between visual art and theatre would mean an end to criticality and the creation of a condition where the subjectivity of experience—art’s capacity to be interesting—would become the only value that it could possess. Judd believed that this was a solution, not a problem. In fact, his declaration of “A work needs only to be interesting” is what compelled Fried to rally around the concept that the grace contained within art as such was due to the ability to suspend time in a continual state of ‘presentness’.³

It is clear that Fried’s concerns did little to quell the massive expansion and intermingling of almost every field of art; however, for many, this argument remains unsettled. Because, it is the kind of dispute that needles at our basic conceit that we, as viewers, are critical beyond our subjective interests, aesthetic or otherwise. It has had the power to not only reposition the painting and sculpture that it was aimed at, but also, the rest of it—in either temporal direction—even, an unassuming and convincingly polite watercolour of a log. A watercolour so well-mannered that it does not represent a living tree standing upright and virile, but rather a section, a portion, a piece broken off and laying down (giving up?) in a state of decay.

It is through the subtlety of Wiens’ methods of making that has made his slow move, first from sculpture to painting in the mid-90s, and now from upright paintings of trees to horizontal portraits of logs so compelling. His latest series of works offer an unavoidable contradiction: they clearly maintain their presentness even while operating akin to Minimalist sculpture through their isolation in space as objects and by relying on an activation of charged space between viewer and work.

During a discussion with Wiens after the installation of his current exhibition at Susan Hobbs, he described trees as complete systems. This formed the key to the aforementioned contradiction. He was not declaring that trees exist in isolation; they form many symbiotic relationships with the species around them. More precisely, they are themselves necessary to their own cycle of regeneration. They form the soil from which they grow. In the case of nurse logs—trees that have fallen and subsequently provide useful nourishment for saplings to grow out of—this is a literal statement.

This is most evident in *Rotting Maple*, 2014, which due to its scale and level of decay was unable to be isolated from the forest floor. For these reasons, it stands out as an anomaly. Here, Wiens gives his subject matter the most breadth; measuring at a length of 380cm (twelve and a half feet), it is by far the largest. Additionally, it is the only work to not be contained by paper on all four sides; on the bottom and right it spills off, continuing into space. As the first piece encountered upon entering the gallery, it grounds and affects the viewing of each subsequent work. It both reminds us that the rest of the logs are fabrications that Wiens’ has skillfully decontextualized from their environment, as well as the work that maintains that, in the broader sense, this is an ultimately impossible task. For art preserves its relevance—its existence—by being (re)activated by each subsequent generation. Like a tree, it is in a continual state of becoming within the context that surrounds it.

FrameWork 3/14

Sometimes, context can really feel like standing on my feet for too long. So, with my head full, my three-dimensional body wanders back close. My eyes lay down into the horizontal brush strokes of colour and I lose track, thankfully, of what I was thinking.



¹ Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood*. Artforum, Summer 1967. Reprinted in Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

² Judd, Donald. *Specific Objects*. Arts Yearbook 8, 1965. Reprinted in Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975. Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975, p.184.

³ Leclère, Mary. *From Specific Objects to Specific Subjects: Is There (still) Interest in Pluralism?* Afterall, Spring 2005.

FrameWork 5/14

Heather White on Shirley Wiitasalo

*but what shapes:
the transfers of Shirley Wiitasalo*



The gallery is like a building on fire: you go upstairs and everything is denser. The paintings at the top (there are seven, from Shirley Wiitasalo's *Dark Mirror* series) are sinister and saturated. Each is silver, and overlaid with black, and atmospheric. They are all lush and unsettling.

Though painted and without obvious referents, the *Dark Mirror* pieces are cinematic in sheen and in mood. They could be frames caught by film left rolling. In the dirt after the documentarian, pursued, dropped the camera in the woods. Or pointing out a motel window while someone tired, waiting for someone else. I tried to focus the tones into trees or sky until I understood that these works didn't come from some divested or forgotten thing.

There is much more intention than that to this series. Each composition picks a line to develop (horizontal or vertical; like barbed wire or like steel pipe) and repeats it at regular intervals across the canvas. The lines in *Dark Mirror H4* are thin and scroll tightly enough to conjure television static. In *Dark Mirror V2*, they have the curve and clang of metal gate-beams. But if this is a gate, it doesn't stilt the view; the clouds gleam on our side of it, somehow. Keep this handy: the near does not always mar. What's closest to us need not obscure.

*

The layers don't block the scene, but build it up. *I see it through them and because of them*, wrote Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenology Wiitasalo seems to practise. If there are foregrounds, they are not what interrupts, but what shapes, the backgrounds. What pulls them forward. What might be glitches or cataracts are the fundamentals here. I see what I see *because* of what I see it through. Paint.

So there is no story off-screen that we're missing, and no place behind the paint worth wanting. The medium, the process, is the end, the point. The works study the possibilities of the material. And though the dark mirror lines are parallel, their wavers aren't. Each blots and peters uniquely. Wiitasalo is methodical, but not mechanical. The paintings are not the work of a camera after all, and palpably.

FrameWork 5/14

They still feel viewfound; Wiitasalo is a painter's painter with a photographer's aspirations to be neutral. She embraces play and gesture, but at a distance. She proceeds without the grand expressionism of brushing, dripping, or smearing, taking the painter out of *painterly*. Wiitasalo uses other objects than paintbrushes (she doesn't disclose what kind) to mediate her medium, enacting what she calls, enigmatically, a "transfer process."

*

Transferring is shifting, ferrying, unceremonious. Even if spirit tends to lurk near movement, the term connotes a technical pragmatism. Employees and prisoners are transferred. Commuters transfer in their anonymity, funds in their abstraction.

Despite the bureaucracy, or maybe because of it, whole new places emerge, and whole new experiences. Different horizons, different hopes, new rules and new cells form. Sweet and mundane details attend: the crossword waits undone in the free newspaper; a dozen discrete dreams of dinner swim in the line for the bus door. Or nothing tangible happens, but possibility inflates or diminishes.

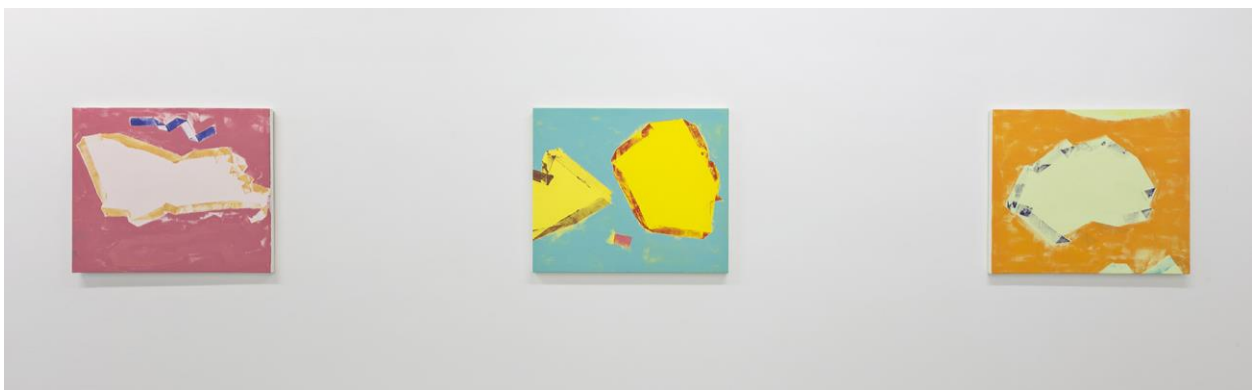
Transference is key in psychoanalysis. It's what the patient brings into the room that didn't start there -- old patterns and structures and expectations. According to much of the theory, analysts draw out the transference by being like blank canvases or mirrors. Transference is the condition of possibility for revelation, a space for it. The work of analysis is said to happen *in the transference*.

A site, transference is both an illusion and a place of labour, a mirage-garage. It encompasses all feelings. Transference happens when (and where) the patient falls in love with his therapist. When and where the patient wants to hurt hers. These are ancient forms.

Of course, not everything that bursts on the scene derives from an invisible past. Sometimes it just bursts. There is space – on the couch, on the canvas -- for surprise. For freshness. Some shapes are not stencilled, but sketched right then and there, and about nothing but themselves. Parts may be sudden, unbidden.

*

When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections, is how Merleau-Ponty began the thought.



FrameWork 5/14

The paintings at the bottom of the stairs (Wiitasalo's *Border* series) could be excerpted from the surfaces of swimming pools. The works evoke water, or the feelings that water evokes. They are far more artificial, and much more contained, than the ocean. Their colours are beach toy-bright and plastic. Their lines are borne of Wiitasalo's transfer process but fold over themselves to delineate haphazard shapes on the canvas. The forms enclosed in each square could read as islands, except that their borders are like Mobius strips. They're closer to trays half turned inside out.

They are trays and twisted rulers on a desk. A wash of a desk. No matter what interpretation I apply, it drops off before the looking is up. Some slice of colour or texture won't conform. The plane I impute breaks on some corner like a wave and upsets the expected order, as above, clouds floated through the gate like ghosts. These canvases humour domestic logics to a point, condone mixing metaphors like textiles, then return to their own foreign whims.

*

The works near the door – the *Distant* series - give the widest angle on Wiitasalo's worlds. Multiple globes fit in one frame, and the surrounding white does not appear to be plaster tightening around them, only void. Bold and patterned moons float freer than pool rafts. Or the other way: these paintings could be microscope slides of material ultra-magnified.

The *Distant* pieces bring out a photogramishness that, I now realize, has been everywhere the whole time. Using paint both to light and to press, Wiitasalo has set unwieldy, unnamed entities on surfaces, and exposed them.

FrameWork 7/14

Kunstverein Toronto (Kari Cwynar and Kara Hamilton) on *Magenta wants to push physical reality to its leaky margins*

The 1c Magenta

On Tuesday June 17, 2014, the 1856 British Guiana 1c Magenta sold at auction in New York for \$9.5 million. It is regarded by many philatelists as the world's most famous stamp. Issued in limited numbers in British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1856, only one specimen is now known to exist. The world of collectors has been desperate to see the 1c Magenta for decades; it has not been on public view since 1986 and is the only major stamp absent from the British Royal Family's private Royal Philatelic Collection.

Measuring 1 inch-by-1 1/4 inches, the stamp is imperforate, printed in black on magenta paper. The colour's presence is indescribable; it has no root in the philatelists' world. A sailing ship along with the colony's Latin motto 'we give and expect in return' in the middle, now only just visible. Four thin lines frame the ship. The stamp's country of issue and value in small black upper case lettering in turn surround the frame. The postmaster's signature can be seen on the left hand side, along with a heavy postmark. The only remaining specimen is in used condition; its paper has been cut in an unusual octagonal shape and its magenta hue soiled.

This item has broken the world record for single stamp auction price each of the last four times it has been sold. Its issue came about through mischance; the recorded results of happenstance experiment. An anticipated delivery of stamps by ship did not arrive, and so the local postmaster, E.T.E. Dalton, authorized printers Joseph Baum and William Dallas, who were the publishers of the Official Gazette newspaper in Georgetown, to print an emergency issue of three unique stamps. Dalton gave specifications for the design, but the printer chose to add a ship image of his own design to the stamps. Dalton was not pleased with the end result – as a safeguard against forgery he ordered that all correspondence bearing the stamps be autographed by a post office clerk. This particular stamp was initialed E.D.W. by the clerk E.D. Wight.

The 1c Magenta was discovered in 1873 by a 12-year-old Scottish schoolboy, L. Vernon Vaughan, in the Guyanese town of Demerara (whose postmark the stamp bears), amongst his uncle's letters. It was in poor condition, ink-smudged and slightly damaged. Unlike anything else, and without record in his stamp catalogue, Vernon sold it some weeks later for six shillings to a local collector, N.R. McKinnon. In 1878, McKinnon's collection was sold to a Liverpool stamp dealer, Thomas Ridpath, for £120. Shortly afterwards, in the same year, Ridpath sold the 1c Magenta to Philipp von Ferrary for £150. His massive stamp collection was willed to a Berlin museum, but following Ferrary's death in 1917 the entire collection was taken by France as war reparations at the end of World War I. Arthur Hind bought it during a series of fourteen auctions in 1922 for over US\$36,000 (reportedly outbidding three kings, including George V). In the 1920s, a rumour developed that a second copy of the stamp had been discovered and that Hind had quietly purchased this second copy and destroyed it. On October 30, 1935 the 1c Magenta was offered for sale at Harmer Rooke & Co auction 2704, lot 26, where a bid of £7,500 was received from Percival Loines Pemberton. However, the lot was withdrawn and returned to Mrs. Scala (formerly Mrs. Hind). In 1940, she offered it for private sale through the philately department of Macy's department store in New York City. Fred "Poss" Small then purchased the 1c Magenta for \$40,000; Small, an Australian-born engineer from Florida, had wanted to own the stamp since he first heard about it as a boy.

FrameWork 7/14

In 1980, the eccentric multimillionaire philatelist John E. du Pont bought the 1c Magenta for \$935,000, setting the world's record for a single stamp price yet again. Subsequently, the stamp was believed to have been locked in a bank vault while its owner was in prison for murder. DuPont died while still incarcerated on 9 December 2010. The vaulted stamp was last sold from the DuPont estate on June 17, 2014 at a Sotheby's New York auction, taking only two minutes to sell to an anonymous bidder.

It has been suggested that the 1c stamp was merely a "doctored" copy of the magenta 4c stamp of the same series, a stamp very similar to the 1c stamp in appearance. In 1999, another 1c stamp was allegedly discovered in Bremen, Germany. The stamp was owned by Peter Winter, who is widely known for producing forgeries of classic philatelic items, printed as seemingly accurate facsimiles on modern paper. Nevertheless, two European experts, Rolf Roeder and David Feldman, have said Winter's stamp is genuine. The stamp was twice examined and found to be a fake by the Royal Philatelic Society London. In their opinion, this specimen in fact was an altered 4c Magenta stamp.

The text is largely sourced from the Wikipedia entry for the British Guyana 1c Magenta postage stamp:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Guyana_1c_magenta



FrameWork 9/14

Henry Adam Svec on Arnaud Maggs

Kisses for Köchel

He begins work on his *magnum opus* in his leisure time: the compilation of a canon so prodigious, so clearly touched by the Creator Himself, yet currently sprawling out into a void of far-flung fragments and gathering dust. The task will occupy over eleven years of an already-old man's life.

"There are things we know, things we don't know, and things I know we don't know that we know," says Ludwig Ritter von Köchel. Thus with pens and postage stamps and good spirits, he heads for darkness, eyes glowing like little compasses, heart steady as a metronome. *Das Köchelverzeichnis!*

Köchel carves days out of night. He catches wild and impetuous virtuosity with crisp, clean labels; tags masterworks and minor ones alike. Slowly he builds a monument.

Pages upon pages fill with inscriptions, enabling generations of connoisseurs, critics, and poor graduate students. Compositions with absolute integrity and coherence are brought out of disarray: their entrails pinned onto heavy stock, placed into cabinets, and given arbitrary names. He makes very few mistakes.¹ In the eyes of a select few, the worlds of both God and Man are made for discovering and framing—for allotting signs. After the slow, sustained flowering of a most methodical desire, Köchel stands among them, with giants.

K.

He dies in 1877, the same year that Thomas Edison's phonograph is introduced. Just another music-writing machine, if less discriminating than our Köchel's finely latticed production, if more vulgar in its technics.

Had Köchel lived in a different age, had he been an American, he might have built a similar contraption: a tube through which to push the grunts of the masses, a box in which to store the buzzing of the arcades, a pedestal on which to place the impossible dreams of vagabonds. A screen for the dark fantasies of young aristocrats.

Perhaps he would have started a jazz label, releasing high-end LPs featuring copious and detailed liner notes. Or he might have dealt in meta-data, selling tags and preferences to curious, insatiable capitalists.

K. 0101101

Each spring a small group of committed followers gathers at Köchel's grave to offer gifts and tokens. A few place tiny pebbles on the tombstone; others leave delicately folded works of origami: ducks, bears, trees, dinosaurs...models of the natural world—with which, in addition to Mozart, Köchel was also fascinated.

Yet, some Köchelites prefer to revere from afar, to render greater honours than stones and paper dolls. They offer tributes in portraiture, not of a person but of his network. They plant kisses for a system.

¹ Konrad, Thomas Edmund. *K for Köchel: The Life and Work of Ludwig Ritter von Köchel, Cataloguer of Mozart*. London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001.

FrameWork 11/14

Scott Lyall on Scott Lyall

Eight ~~Greeked~~ Notes on Color and 'the Soul'

to say a word about procedure,¹

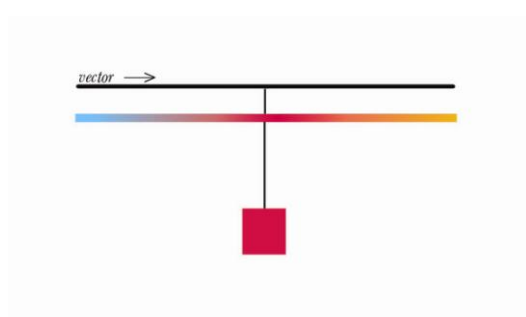


Fig. 2 A Vector includes a Gradient of Chromatic Change. This is what's happening when we isolate a monochrome.

- the very line
- there is already
- a changing color²

Everything now

a reflexive affirmation

void

a mesh around a

an excess

compression³

he wanted to be a machine

–the virtual (unspeakable) incognito

between syncope-like beats⁵

*a sunless condition*⁶

as if color were the bond, the fixity

–

indivisible from assemblage⁷

to radiate from darkness. Return from it. Survive –

(negentropic speculation)

from dead stars, I should say.⁸

This excerpt, edited by Jen Hutton, anticipates the forthcoming publication of an essay on this body of work by Scott Lyall.

¹ *Anti-Establishment*, curated by Johanna Burton, Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, June 21, 2012.

² *The Episcene* (Performance/Lecture), Scorched Earth, New York, November 5, 2005.

³ *Indiscretion*, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, March 6, 2013.

⁴ *Sittlichkeit (Roses/Pinks)*, Silver Flag, Montreal, December 03, 2011

⁵ *Notes, Flash-Crash* Discussion (Hugh Scott Douglas, Scott Lyall, Ben Schumacher, Alex Bennison), Swiss Institute, New York, August 12, 2014.

⁶ *mudes*, Sutton Lane Gallery, London, October 11, 2011.

⁷ *οἶνοπα πόντον* (wine dark sea), Campoli Presti, London, April 07, 2014.

⁸ Panel Discussion on the Occasion of Ad Reinhardt's Centenary, Ad Reinhardt Foundation, Temp Art Space, New York, December 10, 2013.

FrameWork 12/14:1

Darren O'Donnell on Althea Thauberger
with Emma, Isabella, and Neve



Darren: Welcome everybody. I have been asked to bring some younger people in to have a discussion about what they thought of Althea Thauberger's experimental documentary film, *Preuzmimo Benčić*. Let's get some of your first impressions:

Isabella: I loved their outfits.

Neve: Yes, I loved their outfits. I liked the skirts and the dresses and the designs on them.

Emma: Oh yeah. I like the one with polka-dot ruffles.

N: I like that one too. I like her ruffles.

D: So any other thoughts about the video, can you describe what happened in it?

E: Alright. Well, at the beginning, the workers wanted to revive the factory but the mayors wanted to do something else with it... [They came] and said they wanted to do *this*, they said they didn't want to *that*.

D: How about you? Can you describe what you saw in that?

N: They sang quite a beautiful song.

D: Were you able to read what they were singing about?

N: I think, school?

E: I think it was about working.

D: Can you describe the video – what did you see?

I: An old rusty building.

D: What did you think of the building? Did it look like a fun place to be?

I: Kind of.

D: Neve, what do you think? Was it a fun place?

N: Kind of a dirty place to be and a fun place.

D: Would you like to go there? If you had all of your friends there, would you like to run around that place?

FrameWork 12/14:1

N: Yeah.

E: I wouldn't want to.

D: What did you think the young people's relationship was to that place? Why were they there?

I: I think they were there because it was there great-great-grandparents who worked there.

N: That was World War II.

D: Yeah, it closed at World War II. That's right. So why were they there now?

E: Because they wanted to bring it back. Revive it. That's what they were saying: revive, to tell people the history.

D: Do you have a feeling of why they were there? There is no right answer.

N: Maybe their parents put them there to make them work and feel like a grown-up person.

D: So there are two things going on: there are the young people there to make a movie and sometimes they talk about that but then they are there to pretend to be characters. Right?

I: Yeah, basically: to be adults, to pretend to be working there and stuff.

D: Most of the time, were they adults or children?

I, E: Adults.

D: Is it important to make that difference if they are adults or children?

N: No.

E: Children wouldn't really work in the factory unless it was child labour.

D: Right. So we are assuming they are acting. We know they are acting. Is that what you are saying?

I: Yes.

D: What did you think of their performances?

E, I, N: Good.

E: I really liked them, and I understood most of them except for the one they were talking about and then she did a spin, her legs kicked. I didn't really get the point of that.

D: What do you think the difference is between playing an adult and playing a kid?

E: You are more mature.

N: Getting older and bigger and taller.

D: Does what you do change – your behaviour?

N: Yeah!

E: You are more responsible.

N: And serious?

I: You don't have to be serious.

D: So what is the difference between the adults and the kids really?

E: The adults have to take responsibility and take care of the kids if they have them. And they have to make the right choices. If they have kids, they have to make the right choices because they don't want the kids to grow up to be like them if they are making bad choices.

FrameWork 12/14:1

D: There were two groups in the film, what are the two groups?

E: Mayors and workers.

D: What is a worker?

E: A person who works.

I: A person who makes money.

N: A person who works in a building.

I: Not everyone works in a building!

N: They can work inside or outside or in a home or in a house.

E: Their work usually does a singular job. Usually multiple people kind of...

I: No, not always. [*overtop of Emma*]

D: So, they are not alone, there is an organization?

E: Well, no not really. Sometimes, like, if you are a teacher, there are other teachers. And if you are a mayor, there are other mayors. So there isn't just one mayor who works.

D: So what's the difference between a worker and a mayor?

E: A worker is smaller. Well it is different, because the mayor has to...there is provincial and municipal – all control different levels of work. Basically, the different levels of government take care of different jobs.

D: You are correct in that. What's the difference between a worker and mayor, Neve?

I: Does the mayor get money?

E: Yeah.

D: Yeah, they all get money. They all get paid. Yeah, the mayor gets paid.

I: Owww, I just got a spark.

D: What does a mayor do?

I: Sits in an office and types on a computer.

E: They take care of the city. Like, I think each mayor has a city right?

D: Yeah, that's right.

E: So every mayor has a city that they have to take care of, that they have to keep running.

I: Some mayors aren't good at that.

N: Mayors have bigger responsibilities than workers.

D: Ok, that's interesting. Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by that?

N: Workers have little responsibilities and mayors have big responsibilities because they work for the whole city.

I: No, there are plumbers who have to plumb toilets or sinks. They have big responsibilities.

E: But the mayor makes sure they do that.

N: Yeah, so it's kind of a bigger responsibility.

I: Yeah, whatever.

FrameWork 12/14:1

E: Not exactly. The mayor is taking the responsibility for telling the workers and the workers are taking the responsibilities of actually doing the job properly.

I: Is this recording us?

D: Yes, I believe it is recording us.

D: So, who do you think has a more interesting job, a mayor or a worker?

E: Depending on the job. If you are a teacher, it would probably be more interesting than being a mayor.

D: What about the mayors and workers in the video?

E: I think in the movie, I would want to be a worker.

I: I want to be a worker because I don't want to be yelled at.

E: Well actually, the mayors and the workers both have equal rights against the property because it's on the mayors' property but the workers were there before them and so they did work there. They worked for the dude who owned the place and they still work there if they choose to. They still have that authority.

D: Who do you think who owns the building?

E: The workers. But then also the government because it is on their property. So they both kind of own it.

D: Who gave the mayor his job? It's kind of a trick question.

E: The people: the workers because they elected them.

...

D: Do you remember the scene when they were having the big fight, where they were trying to make a decision about what to do with the building?

E: "Yes. No you can't. Yes. No you can't"

D: No, more towards the end when there is a whole crowd of kids facing the people who are kind of sitting in a bunch of chairs, the mayors. Do you think that is good way to make a decision?

E, N: Nope.

D: Why not?

E: There are some parts where they are yelling and some parts that they aren't. And if they weren't yelling at all that this could be a good way since the mayors can't just send a note saying: "We want this." because they are actually talking to each other and interacting.

D: Can I ask you guys, how do you make decisions at home? [Actually,] let's start with school first. What does the teacher do when all the kids want to do something different?

N: Yeah, so we kind of do a vote.

D: Ok so you vote. What about if don't want to do what the teacher wants to do?

E: Usually you do what the teacher wants you to do.

D: So there is no discussion?

E: We'll usually do what the teacher does because s/he has more p-power. P-p-p-power.

I: In gym we have to decide what type of games we want to do but usually we do what the teacher wants because she already has the lesson planned.

D: How is that decision made? Is it democracy again: the majority votes?

FrameWork 12/14:1

E: Yeah.

I: Mostly we play dodgeball.

...

D: [Imagine you have a business...] the economy has had a problem, suddenly there are not many people coming to your store. And you can only afford to hire five people [instead of ten], so what do you do? There is not enough business coming in/

N: I try and get different designs. Hang up posters...

I: But you wouldn't be able to pay the people who work there!

D: So you are going to have a sale and you are going to do more advertising? You still aren't making enough money, what do you do?

I: I just don't pay the workers.

D: Why would they stay there and work for nothing?

E: If I could only afford to pay five people, I would fire the five that wouldn't do as much work or aren't as important as the other five people. I would fire them because they don't actually make an effort to do anything.

D: Ok, so you have two employees. One is really organized but not good with the public. One is disorganized but very good with the public. Who do you fire? You have to layoff somebody.

I: Organized but bad with people.

D: Organized but bad with people?

E: Disorganized but good with people.

D: Why?

E: Because I would do the organizing.

N: That's what I would pick to.

D: So you would take on more work?

N: Yeah, I would fire the people.

I: Then the people who didn't like her, um, they wouldn't come to the store. Then they would go to Neve's! That would be bad.

N: I would put it to a vote.

D: So you'd keep the organized person that nobody likes?

I: No, I'd keep the person who is disorganized.

D: But people like?

I: Yeah.

D: Ok, ok. Then you would take on more responsibility yourself?

N: That's exactly what I would pick, the disorganized person that people like.

D: Hang on, why would you pick that one?

N: Um because I would do the organization, she or he would get the people to like the store and be helpful to choose stuff.

FrameWork 12/14:1

D: Let me put this roadblock in the way, what if you don't have any time to do the organizing?

N: That is mine Isabella!

I: You have good luck. [*pulling up the tabs on Neve's juice-box*]

D: You didn't win?

N: I got good luck, I won.

I: No you didn't win, you got good luck!

E: Can you open mine? [*handing her juice-box to Isabella*]

I: I got green.

This is an edited transcription of a discussion that took place on December 6, 2014.

FrameWork 12/14:2

Srebrenka Zeskoski and Bojana Videkanic on Althea Thauberger



Srebrenka: I have to say I saw the film fleetingly the first time. Then I thought this was not good enough, one should really see it again and look at it a little bit more carefully. Then my second thought was ‘why were there costumes of that sort?’ I know that the idea was that the children chose their costumes. Which actually make sense since kids love to get dressed. But on the other hand, the different costumes set the set a bit apart from the reality of the space and gave it more of a whimsical aspect. I don't know, what do you think of the costumes being what they were?

Bojana: The first thought was that they looked very much like Russian constructivist costumes, that the colours were so bold and it reminded me of the posters and illustrations that I have seen. That was really interesting to me because then I saw the kids in space and especially the scene in the film that shows the kids working and making all these sounds of machinery. In that moment and when you see them dancing as if they are working it reminded me of some avant-garde Russian ballet or theatre. It took me back to the 1920s. I was listening to the sound of the factory, of a factory being revived. It was a very uncanny feeling of these children inside this space that used to make these noises and now they are making them in these costumes that are so colourful. But then you see the gloves...which reminded me of production on an assembly line. It was very interesting to go between the space as a factory, to avant-garde art, to being whimsical as you say and the children at play which creates all these layers of meaning, existing at the same time. You could almost cut it like a cake and see the time as different layers.

S: ...I didn't really think that much about constructivism maybe because I was very much involved within the period and within the country. What was interesting was also the dialogue which [showed] how these two groups of children were divided into “us” and “them”. I don't know if you got that impression, but they were mimicking a situation that still exists today and existed *then*, years ago. When I am saying *then* it's when the factory was in full operation, maybe those kinds of doubts and questions would not have been raised because you were not trained to raise them. Nowadays when this space is supposed to have a second life, their dialogue is very much current...for me personally because I am very involved in politics of space and the failure of many factories with many spaces becoming available either to be torn down or given some sort of second life. In this case, it seemed that they really understood, I don't know how much they were coached, but they really understood what the situation is. I don't know if you got that?

B: I completely agree with you. I was struck by the words, the speeches of the children. As you were saying, they were very much of the now, of the kinds of conflicts and the intentions that exist not just in Croatia and in the entire region, with its economic, social and political pressures. That's what really got to me at first...that it was this truth that was coming out of these children's mouths. It was so unexpected and uncanny because you don't expect

FrameWork 12/14:2

them to speak of these social, political and economic things so clearly and yet so, surreally at the same time. So I completely agree with you there.

S: ...I am trying to figure out how much they were told and how much they really knew. I think that as the film progressed and as they took on much more of identifying with the issues, it seemed they suddenly really understood what they were talking about and that it became very natural. Their own opinions especially the very last or the very next to last scenes they argue – if you don't give us this, we will stay and we will occupy, we will not leave this space. This is something that has been playing constantly in the adult world in that area in these years of transition...I am that much older than you, I lived in those periods and what was pounded into people's heads was that the factories were yours. You work in a place that belongs to you, they were not owned by any corporation because they were state-owned. It was an iffy relationship but people really believed. In most cases they took very good care of the equipment, because it was like having your own sewing machine at home. You are not going to abuse it because it is something that earns you money and livelihood. With the new changes, many of these previous workers, who no longer work, cannot understand that they are not part of the ownership. It is very hard to comprehend and to accept.

B: But what is important is the way in which the transition happened in former Yugoslavia, all of the regions of former Yugoslavia. The economic transition from state owned or self-management as it was known...

S: Yes, self-management.

B: As it was referred to in socialism. The transition to private hands had very problematic circumstances and in extremely traumatic ways illegal things happened. The factories, for example, were sold for like a dollar and transferred hands during the 1990s when the war was happening. [Certain people] used the situation to their own benefit and transferred some of these enormous industries into their own hands. Basically, they became rich by using and selling something that used to be publicly owned or state-owned. What's happening right now is that people have been stripped of their livelihood in many cases, especially people of a certain age. Not a lot of new jobs were created, especially in production and industry so there is kind of an undercurrent there that is bubbling up to the surface of the political and social discontent. I think some of that is transparent in the way that the children have sort of played it out in the film. I think Althea very carefully, even though she is not from there, understood that there are all these layers that have happened in the last twenty years.

I think it very important to know that some of the sadness, as seen throughout the Yugoslav Wars – not being able to cope with what had happened – also came out of a deep discontent with how this place changed...from a self-managing socialism to, in the course of four years, a wild capitalism. This kind of trajectory, that was enormously fast, caught people in its path...

S: They say there are inner factors and outside factors, and the country and all the other republics that were a part of former Yugoslavia were suddenly plunged into a completely new attitude towards work, towards companies and ownership. Yes, it is very true many people became rich but many people could not sustain the modern world. Many, who wanted to take over the factories in the same manner that it was functioning during the Yugoslav period, couldn't compete in the modern world. Look at Detroit, look at Oshawa, Windsor. This is that happened to us as well in Yugoslavia. Suddenly, you couldn't maintain a factory with 2000 workers, where 200 would be good enough. The producers and Althea really understood the problem and certainly spurred these things on with the children...

B: As you say, this is a larger movement, not just the region but across the world. This is what post-industrial, post-Fordist capitalism, has produced – a kind of precariousness of labour, a precariousness of life that has been reduced to it super basic functions for survival. I spoke with Althea prior to coming here today about how former Yugoslavia and some other countries across the world that went through a transition in the 1990s or after the fall of the Berlin wall – exist as a Petri-dish. What happened over the last twenty years, especially in the '90s in Yugoslavia is something that we can see repeated over and over again across the world in many different countries including Canada, including the United States where factories are being closed down, they are moved, labour has been stripped of all of its power and labour movements, unions – what is left is workers who are completely

FrameWork 12/14:2

unable to support or defend themselves against this onslaught of capitalist profit. Some of it has to do with betterment of production in terms of robotics and machinery but a lot of it has to do with the engagement of profit as a kind of final end point in itself and I think we have seen in the last five years since the so-called “Great Recession” is that there has been a turnaround from the recession but without any work created. Across the world. What Althea was pointing at with this work is a kind of laboratory – these kids were pointing to what’s happening across the world. What is a bit different with Croatia and former Yugoslavia is that we were socialist for fifty years; we existed under this very specific socialist condition. I think that these kids who were born in the 2000s are so removed from the experience of socialism. But it was interesting how that experience got played out in their lives, which was surreal because these kids have nothing to do with socialism. There is a scene where two or three boys are reading from a book, and one of them asked...

S: he asks, "what is communism?"

B: What is communism? I was thinking of myself in that age, growing up in the '80s knowing full well what communism was. I was very well aware of the larger structures of society, who the fallen common comrades were like Rikard Benčić, who was a partisan or a leftist and was killed...now, these kids...don't even know what the terminology is that they are using. It was sort of funny and yet, here it is they are speaking the truth of this past period, and even the period past before WWII and they are also talking about the period of the now and what their future is in the post-Fordist world. What is the precarious future that they will be living in, in the new wild capitalist economies that have taken over the entire world?

S: It is actually even more interesting and endearing, I use this word purposely, what is endearing is that these children, regardless of their ideology maybe - left, right, center, whichever – in their discussions about the factory and what is happening right now, they understood justice. And what would be just in this moment...this is an endearing, but also a redeeming, quality of children around the world that once confronted with a situation they are able to process it whether coached or not. Whether ideologically brought up or not. That they see and understand when something is wrong and there should be some way of redeeming the situation...I think that was a very redeeming quality of this particular film because it gives you a hope, even if the things look black and hopeless, that this new generation may, if they continue in this direction, will be able to set the record straight and maybe put the world... It is very idealistic; I am not that idealistic, especially at my age, I shouldn't be...

B: You know I agree with that, I was thinking the same thing that there is hope to see these children...a lot of people from my generation who were born in the '70s lived through their childhood in communism and now, we all have children now and we work, have adult worries, and yet I think a lot of us carry this, I would say idealism and utopian idealism, just because we grew up with it and it was programmed into us sitting in school... and not necessarily acting on it. Right? That we have it, but it's there, especially in the '80s because that generation grew up with all the socialist stuff but also with the western world...It was an interesting thing that happened with us, we existed on two planes, on an ideological utopian plane of socialist life [but] there was also the plane of pop culture, we were listening to Madonna and Prince that '80s culture that spread throughout the world. There was also a level of politics that I knew through my parents. Through what was discussed in the house, the kind of discontent from the people with the system, the political system. Also watching the news, the 7:30 news...

S: “The must”.

B: “The must see” of the period. I remember I always had to be very good and very quiet during that because my father and my mom had to watch the news. Through that I got the struggle and the tension that existed in the '80s so it is interesting how in the film, that some of that tension especially at the moment when the children are in two camps – with the mayor and the workers – fighting, some of those old newscasts played in came to mind with recent newscasts of people staging sit-ins and occupying factories because they have been taken over or sold. I was reminded how surreal it is, because these kids are 7 – 10 years old. It is impossible that they know all this and yet here they are; they know it.

S: There is a bit of a difference between you and me because of age. I grew up in an earlier situation, after WWII. The distinction and the differences between the ‘haves’ and ‘haves not’, practically did not exist. At that time, that

FrameWork 12/14:2

utopian idea was not utopian, it really worked well. Why am I saying this? Because, in the early stages the idealism really worked.

But I want to touch upon something else. When we were in high school students had to work two weeks in a factory environment. This was a must, this was volunteer work. Not that we really contributed much but it was an incredibly good experience to see what these people went through... I worked in a pharmaceutical industry...other friends worked in machine shops and so on. We didn't have any training; but it was incredibly useful. I remember some students in my class who were not terribly interested in studying and so on; it changed their perspective when they saw this very hard repetitious work, day in and day on. Two weeks for a kid is a long time, many changed their mind and decided that maybe their course for life would be different. What the government at that time tried to do is to bridge the difference between the intellectuals, the workers, the students, those who were in trade school and so on. I am not sure whether this was exemplified in this film because it was a very particular thing; I believe they abandoned it after about five-six years of doing that. For some reason it died down, but we were the generation who was in it...Did you do paramilitary?

B: No, I didn't...

S: We were very proud because the women were allowed; we were also given the guns. I think a lot of women benefitted in that environment because we were brought up to believe that we were equal. There was absolutely no difference in anything, in studies, in physical education, in any of the activities. Personally, I think that served me extremely well.

B: I remember my mom who is also post-war generation, she is 68 now, was educated as a doctor. That was what she was saying; she was brought up to think there was nothing stopping her, to become a doctor...

There were these things that really empowered women to do different things so when that generation had their own kids, I remember being brought up to believe there was nothing that would stop me from being whatever I want to be. That was a very good thing that happened in socialism. I think that now it is kind of reversed, so now women and men are falling into their more patriarchal roles. When I came to Canada when was immersed into the Western world was interesting was that women had to fight for these things...

S: Yes, the rights...

B: That I took for granted...because women in Yugoslavia already had those rights. They didn't have to fight. The right to an abortion existed in the Yugoslavian constitution in 1947, it was written into the constitution so, for example, no one had to fight for that....

Today we have women who can't find work because there is no work. I have many friends who are of my generation from Croatia, who have lost jobs and can't find jobs. There are a huge number of young people who are leaving the country – who are just waiting to go which is an unfortunate thing for Croatia. In a way what the state does - in a way of the states in the region do – is that they educate young people who have no prospect for jobs, so they are leaving. That becomes apparent in the film. This idea of abandonment especially since the factory itself is empty, it is stripped down.

S: It is like a skeleton of its former self. It almost difficult to now envision a second life, especially since everybody bickers about it – made especially difficult because public money is relatively scarce. There are many other issues which came again with the discussion between the officials and the workers in the film, where they are explaining how they wanted to take it over and make it into a library or what have you. I don't think it is still is resolved.

B: In fact there is a lawsuit regarding the public contest for the architectural design of the new buildings...

S: And that becomes very convenient since as long as someone is being sued than nothing can be done and then the status quo is achieved and you can keep prolonging it ad nauseam...

B: The discussion between the children in the last portion of the film was interesting: where they ask, what should this space be? I think this is an interesting ethical question related to work...Should it be [used for] cultural

FrameWork 12/14:2

industry or should it be a factory? What would be the ethical thing to do with the space? Especially since Rijeka as a city was for decades if not centuries an industrial hub of the northern Adriatic Sea. Many of its factories have been destroyed – if not all of them – so the question would be: is it ethical to use the space another cultural industry that can only employ a couple of people like a library or a museum space which would only exist for the elites, right? I mean if it is going to be open to the public, who can afford it? This is what the discussion is about between the public on some of the forums. Or is it more appropriate for what could be the local industry, to re-engage these spaces?

...

This seems to speak to Althea's work and her implication within the whole process of the culture industry. I think this is an important political question. I have known of Althea's work and I asked her about this question and she recognized – and wanted to talk about – her own implication within this system of production of the culture industry and how it is in many ways problematic. In many ways we can ask the ethical question, is it right for these children to be participating in someone else's work? Can we ask the same thing about the film industry and production of any film that is collaborative? Those questions are also important in the way that culture is used to fill in the gap of industry that employed a lot of people.

S: Yes, that is a very valid point and in this case also you have to ask can a city of half a million inhabitants really support something that is going to be used in a cultural sense?... It is not going to be used sufficiently. To warrant, to justify...

B: Or should something smaller accommodate the Museum of Contemporary Art?

...

S: The countries that generally can't afford a lot tend to go grand...with a swan song and then they make something that is neither useful nor should be there. Yet, it is this kind of showpiece of "yes, we can do it."

B: I think that also the art world globally has been organized...We have the biennials and the festivals that are world renowned...it's very difficult for smaller countries that don't have the money but it is expected of them to do the same as some other large economies in the West. I think there is that tension between them. You know we can talk about a beautiful conceptual piece done by Mladen Stilinović – a Croatian contemporary artist – who has this banner that says "An artist who doesn't speak English is not an artist." It speaks to these sort of questions that are brought up by Althea in the film - what do we do with this? Should be producing with, yet another, large building dedicated to...

S: The white elephant.

This is an edited transcription of a discussion that took place on December 13, 2014. If you wish to read the full transcript please contact the gallery.

FrameWork 1/15

cheyanne turions and Kim Simon on Althea Thauberger

with

Abbas Akhavan, Peggy Gale, Neil Klassen, Patrick Howlett, Kelly Jazvac, Yaniya Lee, Colin Miner, and Charlotte Rousseau. Emily Vey Duke was unable to attend due to a cancelled flight.



cheyanne turions: Kim and I think that our conversation today could be with all of you as well. Feel free to contribute based on your observations.

I would like to begin by acknowledging our presence on the land of Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

I would like to talk about what it felt like to watch the film; I had many questions going through my mind while I watched. They were not about the film *per se* but rather related to the terms of its production. “How does somebody get access to a million kids?”, “Where did these costumes come from?”, “What is the relationship between the improvisation and structure in the material that these kids are speaking?”, and “What are the terms of this building in the city of Rijeka?” Kim and I have been trying to think through why that was my reaction. Did any of you have a similar reaction when you first watched it?

Patrick Howlett: It certainly seemed that there was a colossal undertaking just behind what we were watching.

Kim Simon: We were trying to figure out what was visible – if there was something actually visible in the film that was making us ask these questions or feel this way, or was it about what was *not* visible in the film? We thought about how the last two decades [have examined] the ethics of social and relational practice – and experiments with ethnographic or anthropological documentary practice. Also, whether it was by virtue of [Althea’s decision to] work with children that these questions were coming up or – and this is a cynical perspective – if we were only able to see these children as puppets for the organizers of the film... [Versus others, who have discussed] the images of these kids as symbols of purity and future... The film and what we are given to see is complicated because its organizing principles were based on the children's behaviour while the structures of the film – the [kid’s] conversations with the adults, the collaborating theatre and choral programs that were involved in the making of film, were not visible. We seem to be meant to take for granted that what these kids are saying is an authentic experience and yet everything in my being wanted to scream: “Noooooo!”

ct: There was definitely a sense of the uncanny – that these kids were not performing being children and yet, there was something about the play of imagination that you associate with childhood that was deeply inflected in scenes throughout the film.

Thinking outside of the terms of the film, the building [that was used in the film] exists in Rijeka and does not seem to be utilized as a factory or a cultural space, which are the main two propositions that were introduced. Is

this film in some background sense supposed to mobilize a conversation in favour of one those options over the other? I am not saying that I think the film is doing this, but rather it is a method for me to think about what the desired effect of the film was.

KS: There are use values to this project [that exist] on multiples levers...Musagetes, who funded the project, their mandate is to go into communities to think through the usefulness of creative practice as integral to citizenship and a community's livelihood. To me, it seems a fairly direct connection to part of their mandate to picture the re-use of this type of building as a museum or as a cultural space. There are multiple levels of institutions and apparatuses that come into play that were actually enacted by the kids.

I wonder, what do people think of the proposed equation of the artists and workers/labourers that is both spoken about in the film and in the apparatus of the distribution of the film – such as in the exhibition press release? Also, the conflation of that question of the 'factory as museum' and whether those things are the same – artists/workers, factories/museums – or, are they really separate concepts?

...

Abbas Akhavan: I think that there is a larger framing of how she uses actors and there is a moment where they lose agency or they don't know how the result of their presentation is going to come out. I am thinking about her work, *Songstress*, the Carroll Street project, and others. Something happens. I am sure in these discussion circles that the questions of exploitation or re-representation have come up. I think those are things that [Althea] is very much invested in. It is not a naïve, or a sinister, or a sadistic way of doing things – I think it is a very complex relationship. I don't know this work well enough...I am trying to understand how you guys are trying to...I think you are saying something but I don't get it.

Yaniya Lee: I think she is conscious of what she is doing. Kids and women have been seen in similar ways historically. Women were painted politically; they weren't seen as full human beings who had agency to do whatever they wanted to do. We still see kids as these things that need to be taken care of and perhaps we could give them more individuality and power. Maybe Althea was trying to point at this sense by using them in a way that pricks us and makes us uncomfortable.

ct: Saelan Twerdy, who analyzed Althea's previous large [photo] mural, "*Who is it that can tell me who I am?*" wrote that [the work] was asking a question or drawing attention to who the author is of the roles that we must play. I feel that this concern is repeated in this work. The work is trying to make us feel uncomfortable in whose voice those children are speaking – if it is their own, if it is regurgitation of their parents, or perhaps a construction of the script that came out of this research that we are sitting within. We are meant to think about where and how agency is negotiated.

Charlotte Rousseau: Although, we are given hints of it in the final credits such as "Original words by" with a list of all the participants. That is when I figured out that there was a script. Yes, they had sheets but they were awkwardly switching between reading the text and improvising...and then repeating adult language.

KS: There are moments [where that sense becomes evident], for instance, the scene where the kid...in the role of the Italian worker talked about how everyone was given characters and the ease of staying in them. There were certainly moments where they seem very childlike. Then there were other moments where it seemed like they were repeating expressions of their parents. I am sensitive to the question of how to work with children ethically or why to work with children. I am also wondering what can be opened up by working with children...

Kelly Jazvac: It is exactly this kind of second question that is where my interest lies. Rather than to make a critique of how the children should have been treated or worked with during the film but, what *is* visible in the film? What is it provoking? Part of that is the imaging of children in relation to my own expectations and desires. There is certainly tension when the children gave testimonies through scripts – whether from texts, or their parents, or their teachers about the history of this space. There is a socialist relationship to labour and the factory that just doesn't exist anymore – to be asked to enact that history to labour in the present tense and equate or compare it to being an artist in that space – it became muddy and complicated for me. Also, the film was not linear, obviously, in the ways that it was edited. It seemed that the footage was from experiments that the kids did.

These may have been, not random but, more experimental movement and gestures in order to get the kids comfortable with thinking about the materiality of the space – imagining the sounds of the machines which are juxtaposed with interviews of the kids as though they were literally in a class being interviewed or tested.

ct: The internal logic, or the internal chronology of the film, was not chronological either. I am really curious about their costumes. This is something that Emily [Vey Duke], Kim, and I talked about as we led up to this discussion. The film began with the children already embodying the characters that they were in the film and then a couple of minutes later they entered the factory and the costumes were sitting in these weird limp piles scattered throughout. Then there was a scene of them putting on the characters that they spent the rest of the film embodying. It is just not linear.

...

KJ: There was an over-imaging with the costumes of the kids as “kids”. The costumes felt like dress-up, with their quirkiness, their energy, and their colour and that seemed very deliberate. In the debate between the workers and the mayors there was a juxtaposition between playing dress up while trying to have this serious debate.

Peggy Gale: [The costumes] were quite fanciful and yes, there was a costume director but I think they were playing dress-up to an extent.

KS: I am saying that “dressing-up” was part of their character. I feel that they were directed to dress up.

Colin Miner: [Are you asking if] they led us to believe that the children were a part of that process of dressing themselves?

KS: No. Rather, that the constructed-ness of their character was, in part, to act as children playing dress-up.

PG: We are also anticipating differences between Toronto and Rijeka. There was some sort of fantasy happening here that seemed to be encouraged by both Althea and her costume director.

CM: I feel that this type of framing is very familiar in Althea's work...I have found myself thinking about questions of agency, pedagogy, and the fact that the project was being filmed. We don't see lights or other apparatuses. Her work raises those questions for the viewer and, as you were saying, she is very conscious of those structures. I wonder if it was an educational project or a therapeutic project we would question the role of those facilitating the kids' activities.

KS: Depending on the context I might. It just brings up the issue of the complexity of the organization of Musagetes who produces in depth community projects. There is a pedagogical aspect but the work was clearly made to be distributed and exported through the context of the contemporary art world.

KS: The work [as I see it] has also been edited to circulate outside of its context of production and that is why the context of the originating community primarily seemed to be a pedagogical gesture. Since it circulates it becomes more of an illustration of something that happened elsewhere. I am [prompted] to ask, ‘What’s being given to me to be seen? How am I being asked to relate to these stories or these people?’ And so, that’s why these questions of ‘What is visible?’ or ‘What is not visible?’ are unavoidable.

KJ: I was very aware of those questions in the film. The costumes were a kind of visual manifestation of them. You could see kid in them, but you could also see a contemporary hip fashion designer in them. Some of the girls had yellow face paint in a perfect line across their face – a kid wouldn't apply make up like that. Whereas other parts of their costumes were so wrong and off that a kid could come up with that kind of assembly. I see both an intervening hand and space for the kids' agency. At least, I hope so.

KS: ... I am asking what happens when I see these costumes? What is enacted by these costumes when in one moment they are playing machines and in another moment debating the concept of artists as workers, or debating the use of the museum versus the use of a factory that produces food and money for people?

PH: I guess a question might be: if something is produced by [an organization] that has goals, like the discussion of the possibility of this being a museum or cultural institution, and those aspects are tabled within the context of

theatre, does that limit it? Or, does that limit it as a work of art that opens up to other ideas? Doesn't any production have certain limitation depending on its distribution, its funders, economic constraints, and thematic content?

KS: To me, it is not so much about where the work is limited or inauthentic rather, it is more about the systems that exist around the work that I cannot help but respond to. For me, those aspects become just as much a part of the work... We are trying to parse meaning out of the work, and yet, what about the form or the editing? What about the installation, where are the moments of actually articulating these concerns? In very implicit, *not explicit*, ways Althea does this because she is very practiced in doing this in her work – a form which we now call social practice.

PG: Has there been any discussion about how the script or the spoken text was arrived at? I only know that the children were a part of the process. They brought their own ideas to it; presumably the editing was done later...

PH: In the credits there were sources of where some of the text came from like websites and press releases.

CM: There are levels [to the film and this conversation] that are entrapments – being that, certain relations or subjects carry more force and power in terms of the type of politics that they access than the potential that they offer. Like, at first, I was dubious about the use of children. Now, our focus is on the script. Or, the question of whether they chose their costumes. For me, these seem like very particular types of autonomy. Through this conversation I am starting to become more aware of broader frameworks for agency. In this kind of project, [Althea] has developed a matryoshka doll. She was accessing a very young generation who are both learning the role – fictitiously – of being labours and they seemed to have acknowledged this, but at the same time, they are also learning the role of being actors or temporary artists. They are becoming aware of these different forms of agency, frameworks, and roles of work and labour. They are dually becoming aware of what it means to be a labourer or a boss. At one point they were asked, “What is it like to work here?” and it seemed that they were becoming aware of performing or acting.

...

YL: Do you think it is significant that it was filmed in Rijeka, a former socialist country with a different economic system? The film is about the power of factories and workers. Why did the artist choose to go all that way?

PG: Musagetes chose the city and then they chose Althea [who chose the place] and went from there. Althea had to decide what to do with this place, this time, and this money... She took on these different circumstances like intervening layers of the before and after of the old political situation and the before and after of the building with a new generation.

YL: Looking at it that way is quite interesting. What is the next generation going to do now? Since their country has changed so much and are dealing with this transition... and with their parents, everybody's, anxiety. They are aware of the disuse of the factory and how their economy works. I don't really know but, I think [Croatian society] is struggling. When I was in Serbia, they were struggling with how to be within capitalism or neoliberalism and how things would work. I wonder how these questions echo [in the film].

KJ: There was an interesting scene with three boys and one of them is reading a text. One asks what activism is, what fascism is, and then it stops when they cannot define what communism is. Cut to next scene.

KS: I was a bit dubious about the nostalgia for certain ways of thinking about labour which do not really exist anymore. I began paying closer attention to the support materials, where Althea referred to the whole project as an occupation of the space. Reading this, the work becomes not a reclaiming of the space for factory labour and capitalism but rather a subtle gesture that could maintain some kind of workers' autonomy under the contemporary language of occupation.

ct: There is definitely some sort mythological history within the film that is constructed as being better than whatever the present moment of the film is. All of their propositions were trying to either reclaim or create a future that had something of the past that was not there at that moment – a sort of romanticism.

FrameWork 1/15

CM: Can you explain more specifically what you mean by nostalgia, nostalgia for labour relations that do not exist anymore?

KS: Just in terms of socialist or communist intentions of what factory labour was. In the film there was – I can't remember the exact language – it talked so much about how they worked happily and harder [and had] a kind of ownership and pride for the factory as a collective space...

ct: The workers were advocating on their own behalf to keep those jobs. For instance, in the first scene at the very beginning they were trying to continue working at the factory.

KS: There was obviously a radical juxtaposition [of the factory in this film] to something like the sweat shop version image of the factory that we have today. I thought that her insertion of the idea of the occupation in relation to labour practices was useful...there was a moment that was not entirely nostalgic but, where she was trying to assert some gesture towards a collective relationship to labour that could still be contemporary – a form of occupation as I understand it.

CM: Maybe an agency over the direction of what labour will develop into? I wonder about the scales of time and how it is rare that something so catastrophic happens where a whole society shifts from one way of being to a new way of being in a short period of time – all aspects of the society, not just one part. Could you imagine everything changing from political structures to industrial structures? One way around this is perhaps the reenactment or the revisiting of this haunted history as a way to give agency to people to work through these things. Theatre is often used as art therapy in different traumatic situations...I wonder if there was something similar happening here, where a chance was given to the younger generation to re-embody roles [of their ancestors], maybe not to become them, but to give them a sense of who they were while also offering other potentials.

KS: There is a slightly more cynical perspective: there have been multiple proposals to turn this space into a cultural centre and by virtue of [Althea's proposal, supported by] Musagetes, an international organization with money, coming in and performing that use of the space it became an economic gesture in that city. In those moments where I saw pedagogical or therapeutic potential, as a testimonial relationship to the kids learning their history and debating their history, it was very interesting to see, alongside, this other layer to the story which was also happening – which you can see by the architectural drawings* for the proposal to turn the factory into a cultural space.

* editor's note: Kim Simon is referring to drawings exhibited within the installation of support material for the project that Althea installed on the second floor of the gallery.

AA: It is interesting how art becomes a stand in for a political gesture that is slippery enough to never be held accountable. Like a play acting out politics which actually have a political impact to undermine [power structures]. These kids, who are benign, become a stand in for someone who is actually mouthing someone else. I watched an interview with Nan Goldin where she was asked why she photographs kids. She said that they are still the most alien beings that we know. The younger they are the less they are from Earth. They are actually being socialized to become human and that there is another coding they potentially have which is non-human. I just don't buy the simple explanation of kids as innocent. So for them to play roles... it is a funny slippage...there is a discomfort in this transition into adulthood, with these kids acting as adults ... They become these slippery stand-ins, like an art work.

KJ: The more we talk about this film the more I am convinced that Althea understood what she was doing. She has made this great muddy place where I am very aware of the kids saying, "Let's make it a museum but let's have a room for just fighting and a room just for stretchy turtlenecks." She lets these structures be, but she is also pulling at their threads really hard. It is a nice space of friction that allows all these questions to come up.

This is an edited text of a discussion that took place on January 10, 2015.

FrameWork 3/15

Ashley McLellan on Krista Buecking

Stepping into Susan Hobbs from the dreary winter is like stepping through time and space to sunny Los Angeles in the mid-1980s. A familiar yet indistinguishable synthy jingle plays loud in the gallery space. It is unclear whether the colours and gradients in Buecking's drawings denote ideas of the sun rising or setting, but the answer seems irrelevant. I feel on the cusp of grasping something familiar but which is just out of reach, shrouded in ambiguity. This current of knowing and unknowing, which hints through parody of an inability to ever fully know, runs through all the works in the show.



MATTERS OF FACT (codified form A) is a large-scale, hand-drawn subtle colour gradation. A saturated periwinkle blue at the top fades through the middle into sky blue, and at the bottom is a barely perceptible light blue reminiscent of a clear sky on a hot day. Painted directly on the Plexiglas frame is a yellow line that begins near the middle of the glass on the left side, travelling up in a relatively steady, steep incline, before plummeting down, peaking once more and ending at the right border; in other words, appearing like a double-peaked line on a graph.



MATTERS OF FACT (codified form B) transitions from teal at the top, warming into a washed out peach hue in the middle and a saturated peach tone at the bottom. Painted on the surface of the Plexiglas are seven black symbols that resemble broken up letters or code, removed from their context and now floating atop the sunrise, casting shadows on the surface of the drawing.

The hand-drawn colour gradations that form the base of the six drawings on the main floor of Susan Hobbs are so meticulously rendered that any index of the artist's labour is imperceptible. It's as if this hazy mist was digitally created; as though a digital image is zoomed in so close that any figuration scatters into this sensual, coloured surface; an "image scattered into data."¹ By removing any evidence of her labour, Buecking creates a tension between seen and unseen. What I imagine takes her many patient hours, leaves no trace. Her work belies her effort, appearing as though quickly and digitally produced. Instead of bringing to the surface this dedication to uniformity, Buecking's work betrays her, masking itself as a manufactured work.

Accompanying the visual experience in the gallery, an audio soundtrack has been flipping back and forth between The Drifters' 1960 hit *This Magic Moment*, sounds of birds chirping – an effect I can only describe as shimmering – and silence. On the hour, the soundtrack is interrupted by a digitized voice announcing, “It’s two o’clock,” while a white clock with black arms hanging high on the wall, *MATTERS OF FACT (all things being equal)*, verifies the passing of time.

In his essay “Images Scatter Into Data. Data Gather Into Images,” Peter Galison tracks the push and pull between image and abstraction in the sciences. At war are two opposing sides: one argues that images create an understanding of the complex forms and calculations, the other that images obscure. Image and abstraction, then, are caught in-between; at one moment shedding any hint of the other only to circle back and realize how, when taken together, a better understanding emerges.

This tension is at play in Buecking’s work, which itself exists somewhere in the middle of this dialectic. The graphs and symbols are extracted from their original communicative form to become abstract; recognizable shapes that point toward a concrete understanding but which are in actuality emptied out. This tension is doubled by the fluctuation between the actual, physical process undertaken by Buecking and her allusion to the digital processes that create and utilize ‘codified forms.’ Returning to Galison, “Even within the image tradition, the picture was always on the verge of being resorbed by the computer, snatched from human eyes and transmuted back into the whirl of numbers.”² In other words, the drawings appear as if they have been translated back and forth between image and non-image to an image again. In their final state on the gallery walls, images appear as abstractions and abstractions as images.

Within the space, we are looking at the graphs and symbols used to verify the concrete matters of fact that build the case for a neoliberal, capitalist system; invisible forces given visible form. Yet, Buecking has removed them from their context, stripped them of their power, and presented them as visual forms to assess and consider. What is striking is Buecking’s ability to highlight how our relationship to these methods of measurement and verification offer about as much information within the context of the gallery as they do within the context of, for example, an infomercial toting the benefits of some magical product. They represent forms of power that seem to promise so much. At the same time, the hazy, meticulous gradation and soft colour choice aestheticize these forms of power and re-cover what Buecking has laid bare. Through this I seem to be able to come to a better understanding of them; as forms *not* facts. There is a magic moment of bringing something close enough to catch a glimpse of understanding but it remains just far enough away that I never reach a full understanding.



Upstairs provides hope that this understanding may be closer than I thought. Colourful geometric objects are presented on a low white platform alongside a presentation pad and easel, with ‘standard tropical foliage,’ adding life to the display. *MATTERS OF FACT (equivalent forms, manipulatives)* isolates the forms painted on the Plexiglas in the lower gallery and turns them into material objects.

Reinforced by the lack of shapes and symbols painted on *MATTERS OF FACT (codified form G)*, they seem to have been removed from the surface and transformed into the objects before me. On the same platform a presentation pad and easel display the only fully recognizable graph, with an *x* and *y*-axis’ and a few differently sloped lines. The objects look like tools developed for hands-on learning, and taken together with the graph seem to finally reveal the abstract ideas Buecking is alluding to. However, she pushes the parody of these forms one-step further, as there is no information or legend describing what the graph represents. The tools are before me yet I am unable to decipher the intended lesson.

This translation of material form to immaterial idea and back again, brings forth the question of what is lost and gained through multiple translations? What I gain is an understanding of my own precarity within the abstract system I have always existed within, but have not been able to stand outside of. What is lost, or was already lost, is any belief in this economic and social system to reveal itself and make good on the neoliberal promises of some future perfect. As if to solidify this realization, the standard tropical foliage remind me that not everything is concerned with the oscillation between image and abstraction, material and immaterial, and what the push and pull of these forces might hide or reveal. Instead, quoting writer and composer Ned Rorem, “Plants do not wish to rule the world like us—they have higher concerns.”³

¹ Peter Galison, “Images Scatter Into Data. Data Gather Into Images,” in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 300.

² Galison, “Images Scatter Into Data,” 319.

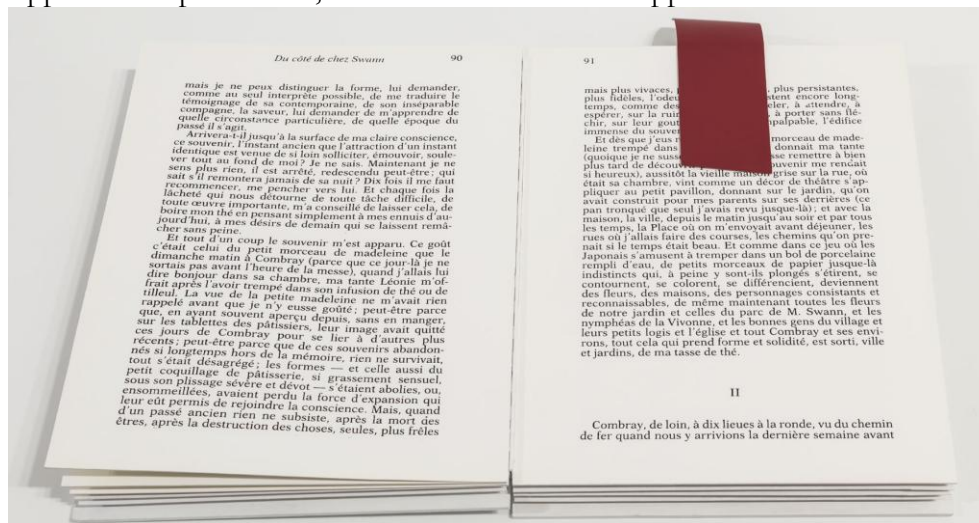
³ Rosemary Barton, “Parliament Hill’s plant war finds green savior,” *CBC News*, February 12, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/parliament-hill-s-plant-war-finds-green-saviour-1.2534323>.

FrameWork 4/15

Daniella Sanader on Ian Carr-Harris

An (incomplete) appendix of moments when reading becomes eating, when creating involves ingesting, when words and ideas are equated with food:

1. Of course, there is Marcel Proust's madeleine. The crumbs of a small scallop-shaped cookie dunked in tea bring forth enough involuntary memories to fill the volumes of *In Search of Lost Time*. Some experts claim that Proust's madeleine is an impossibility: the cookie is simply not dry enough to produce the crumbs Proust describes in his lime-blossom tea. An earlier manuscript for *Swann's Way* may even suggest that the madeleine's precursor was a piece of dry toast.¹ Debates aside, Proust's words are found through food, his remembering happens in the mouth. Would his vision of Combray have been different if sipped in a cup of coffee, crunched in a slice of an apple?



2. "Apple. Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen, cold cream, best shake, potato, potato and no no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and change sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please. A little piece please. Cane again to the presupposed and ready eucalyptus tree, count out sherry and ripe plates and little corners of a kind of ham. This is use."²

3. Anxieties can gnaw at your mind's edges; digesting a problem is a slowness of thought. Eating your words is the very desire to consume an unruly idea, to silence it within the depths of your stomach.
4. Ian Carr-Harris's *Combray* (2008) materializes Proust's remembering. The oversized copy of *Swann's Way* includes a madeleine nestled within a secret compartment filled with tea-leaves. However, Carr-Harris's madeleine has been transfigured into a metal locket and his tea-leaves are dry – no soaking, no crumbs. If this cookie can't be eaten, are Proust's stories preserved or restricted? *Combray* spreads this dilemma out on its pages: it's an (in)edible archive.



5. Martha Rosler's culinary alphabet in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) is equal parts deadpan and violent as she enacts the gestures of cooking without the results. F is for a stabbing fork, H is for a hamburger press that gnashes like sharp teeth. If Rosler is trapped within the (gendered) obligations of her kitchen and the (sequential) structures of her alphabet, she lashes out with an alternative lexicon of frustrated stabs, thrusts, and shrugs. She makes a language for her kitchen that refuses to cook.
6. Ariana Reines likens translating Tiqqun's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of The Young-Girl* to food poisoning. Allowing the difficult (sexist) text to pass through her means withstanding its negative effects, learning to find nourishment while expelling what her body refuses to support. Rhetoric difficulties become gastrointestinal ones. While she eventually achieves a shaky and cautious affection for the finished text, the labour of translation leaves her "shitting rivers."³

7. “Celery.
Celery tastes tastes where in curled lashes and little bits and mostly in remains.
A green acre is so selfish and so pure and so enlivened.”⁴
8. Albrecht Durer’s woodcut *Saint John Devouring the Book* (c. 1498) features a literal interpretation of Saint John receiving knowledge from a fiery angel. “And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.”⁵
9. In 1786, Immanuel Kant begins hosting dinner parties at his home in Königsberg, Prussia. His popular dinners are expertly curated around conversation as much as flavour: “It should begin with narration (of news), continue with reasoning [...], and end in jest (as laughing aids digestion).”⁶ In *The Critique of Judgment*, written four years later, Kant would eventually divorce “taste” from its lowly material and subjective associations with eating, in order to denote superior forms of aesthetic judgment. Is there a boundary between having good taste and wanting what tastes good?
10. In a 2007 interview, Keith Richards is asked about the strangest thing he ever snorted up his nose. His answer: his father’s ashes. Christine Negus references this interview in her video *wild horses couldn’t drag me away*: a meditation on celebrity death and a recipe for ghost-shaped cookies. They each bear little frosted names across their chests: Perry Como, Elvis, Heath Ledger, Tupac, Kurt Cobain, Aaliyah. As each little ghostly body disappears, ingestion is imagined as an (imperfect) strategy for dealing with loss: taking into ourselves those we don’t want to forget.⁷
11. “Chicken.
Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking with a chicken. Sticking in a extra succession, sticking in.”⁸
12. Some things I have eaten while writing this appendix: a steak and potato pie; a bottle of white wine; several cups of tea; a spoonful of peanut butter; a bag of nacho cheese rice chips; a leftover couscous thing from the week before; a Gala apple; baby carrots and roasted garlic hummus; a chicken pot pie; toast with tuna and mustard; Triscuits.
13. In 1979, Les Blank directs a documentary titled *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*. Herzog had allegedly lost a bet to his friend and fellow filmmaker Errol Morris (“if you ever manage to actually make a film, I’ll eat my shoe.”) and the documentary is filmed at Chez Panisse, a restaurant in Berkeley, California.

Herzog does the cooking; the recipe is not saved. Eat my shoe, eat my words, eat humble pie, eat crow: eating inedible ideas is a public performance of humbling, a self-inflicted punishment, acknowledgement of a false claim to truth.⁹

14. An addition: “humble pie” derives from the medieval recipe for umble pie, made from less-valued meats: intestines, heart, liver, lungs. Some sources claim this dish was reserved for the lower classes, hence the idiomatic association with shame. However, this is not known for certain, according to Wikipedia.¹⁰
15. Eating one’s words is also the locus for punishment in the ornate and visceral film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989, dir. Peter Greenaway). Helen Mirren’s character Georgina begins an affair with a bookseller at her husband’s restaurant in order to escape his abuse. When her husband discovers the tryst, he and his thugs murder the lover by force-feeding him the pages from his favourite books. (Would eating his least-favourite books have been a crueller form of torture?)
16. There is definitely a violence in eating. Can the mouth do the work of the colonizer? A quote from Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*: “The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it to his own body, makes it part of himself [...]. Man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself.”¹¹
17. “The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.”¹² bell hooks sees the white mouth as a destructive frontier: eating the Other means consuming difference, eradicating blackness for the pleasure of something exotic and new.
18. In *Memory for Forgetfulness* (1982), Mahmoud Darwish laments for his coffee, for the routine intimacy of the drink in the face of an occupied Palestine: “Conquerors can do anything. They can aim sky, sea, and earth at me, but they cannot root the aroma of coffee out of me.”¹³ Coffee brings the energy for resistance, the inspiration for poetry, the rootedness in place. In short, “Coffee is geography.”¹⁴

19. “Orange.
A type oh oh new new not no not knealer knealer of old show beefsteak,
neither neither.”¹⁵
20. I suppose language and food are so often conflated because they both use the mouth as an interface. “Imagine running your tongue along that,” Heather Phillipson repeats throughout *A is to D What E is to H* (2011), understanding the mouth as a gateway for thinking, feeling, communicating, creating. The artist travels to France for a project generated by a slip of the tongue, a confusion of language for food and sex. “It was going to be a film about French cuisine/French kissing,” she repeats. The resulting assortment of thoughts on voice, self-doubt, creative labour, and sensory/sensual experience spiral outwards through a dizzying collection of almost-homonyms. Language folding over on itself in an awkward mouth: awful/offal; tongue/tongs; resources/the sauces; gut/heart.¹⁶
21. In his particularly synesthetic children’s book *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Norton Juster writes of the young hero Milo visiting a market where words are harvested, bought, and sold. “Milo nibbled carefully at the letter and discovered that it was quite sweet and delicious – just the way you’d expect an A to taste.”¹⁷ For the harvested letters, good flavour anticipates common usage, yet not without a slight Anglo-centric bias. As the letter-seller explains, “Take the Z, for instance – very dry and sawdusty. And the X? Why, it tastes like a trunkful of stale air. That’s why people hardly ever use them.”¹⁸
22. “Custard.
Custard is this. It has aches, aches when. Not to be. Not to be narrowly. This makes a whole little hill.
It is better than a thing that has mellow real mellow. It is better than lakes whole lakes, it is better than seeding.”¹⁹

¹http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2005/05/the_way_the_cookie_crumbles.html

² Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*. Mineola, Dover Editions: 1997 (first published by Claire Marie, New York, 1914): 30.

³http://canopycanopy.com/contents/preliminary_materials_for_a_theory_of_the_young_girl

⁴ Gertrude Stein, 34.

⁵ <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Revelation-10-10/>

⁶ <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/33/turner.php>

⁷ <http://www.christinenegus.com/>

⁸ Gertrude Stein, 35

⁹ <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/kastner.php>

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humble_pie

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolosky, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1968: 281

¹² bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992: 39.

¹³ Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, excerpt in *Revolution: A Reader*. Edited by Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler. Paraguay Press & Publication Studio, 2012: 128.

¹⁴ Mahmoud Darwish, 131.

¹⁵ Gertrude Stein, 38.

¹⁶ <http://www.heatherphillipson.co.uk/videos>

¹⁷ Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York: Random House, 1961: 49.

¹⁸ Norton Juster, 50.

¹⁹ Gertrude Stein, 32.

FrameWork 6/15

Jordy Hamilton on Patrick Howlett

unitholders; symbols, forms, language, playing fields, copies, surrogates, rules, maps, currency, structure, consciousness, value...



It can be said that Patrick Howlett's paintings are symbols from the first—prior to any acknowledgement of the language, colours and signs (or lack thereof) at work inside their frame. Howlett has previously expressed an interest in framing; his current exhibition of works, *unitholders*, and the accompanying titles speak to this concern. I will attempt here to tease out a response. In doing this, I want to start by discussing a couple threads that I have been thinking about for some time. One stems from a reading I did a few years ago of a text titled, *The Coiners of Language*, by Jean-Joseph Goux. The other, stems from a lecture given by Diedrich Diederichsen at Los Angeles' MOCA on the occasion of a survey exhibition for Martin Kippenberger. Both develop an important reflection on the relationship between form and content.

In *The Coiners of Language*, Goux takes as one point of interest, Andre Gide's 1925 novel *The Counterfeiters*. Gide's story is composed of several interwoven narratives but the central story revolves around a writer, Edouard, who is working on a book to be titled *The Counterfeiters*. In this self-reflexive and often cubist-feeling story, Gide's central aim seems an inquiry into the elements that differentiate an original from a copy. Literary form is Gide's primary interest I think, but in one of his story's subplots, readers find young school boys passing off fake gold coins. As one character throws a coin on the table:

FrameWork 6/15

“Just hear how true it rings. Almost the same sound as the real one. One would swear it was gold. I was taken in this morning, just as the grocer who passed it on to me had been taken in himself, he told me. It isn’t quite the same weight, I think; but it has the brightness and the sound of a real piece; it is coated with gold, so that, all the same, it is worth a little more than two sous; but it’s made of glass. It’ll wear transparent. No; don’t rub it: you’ll spoil it. One can almost see through it, as it is.”(Gide)

Goux, in his reading of Gide, is interested in the counterfeit, the forgery, and the surrogate but perhaps more so in locating developments in the arts within an historical context. Gide’s novel was written close to the year 1924, when France removed the gold standard. Goux links this particular moment in economic history to the moment when realism gives way to a crisis of representation, arguing that forms of artistic abstraction emerge alongside those of financial abstraction. When the relationship between currency and gold dissolves, when value is easily and invisibly manipulated, people lose faith. They get suspicious and they begin to divest, or rather, invest differently. In such an environment, judging and estimating the historical value of artworks becomes increasingly difficult. Is this a good painting? Or a good painting of a bad painting? Or a bad painting made by a good artist pretending to make bad paintings? It’s a confusing business.

Fast-forward sixty or seventy years and the counterfeit remains an interest for artists, linguists, and theorists. In Diederichsen’s talk about Martin Kippenberger and the punk community he participated in, he outlines the artist’s interest in semantic networks both inside and outside of art. For Kippenberger, the value that signs produce—and the inequality that sources of power produce while using them—was a primary subject matter in the artist’s output. Diederichsen claims that one of the guiding principles of punk was to make explicit or “to expose that everything is about something.” The meaning derived from a sign is always dependent on who owns or employs the sign and how they do so. To be forthcoming about one’s position within the network and about the signs one uses was, for him, central to being an artist. Kippenberger found art’s rather bourgeois and often traditional tendencies funny... something at once to participate in, to talk and laugh about, and to criticize. Key in understanding Kippenberger is that he used painting because it was the medium that most readily symbolized “Art”. Less interested in its long and lauded history, the decision to use painting and its formal language as a medium then became secondary to the content. For Kippenberger exclaims Diederichsen, the “enemies of the day were vagueness and spirituality.” A lot of the art that follows from this attitude is valuable in its ability to expose art’s often contradictory hopes and desires—it pictures a complex network of forces and blind spots. Kippenberger’s work was generous in its ceaseless rumination on the blind spots. In *unitholders*, I see some of this rumination.

unitholders takes an interest in both the verb, to paint, and the category that is painting. As such, the show exhibits an interest in framing and in being explicit about what painting is. In Howlett’s prior exhibitions, titles are said to be generative—a sentence or phrase might, through a process of translation, lead to an image. Here, titles seem more an addendum, and are seemingly explicit in their content. There are signs

within these paintings but many of the works remain ambiguous. Titles like, *system of the series*, *divisions and returns*, and *stakeholder* present viewers with a more concrete textual conversation about value creation. And then there are the titles that reference repetition and cyclical behavior. Numbered titles like *unitholder 6020*, *generic labour*, and *new trends* lead me to think about painting's often-repetitive history and the action involved in making them. In *a mind free from worry*, two paintings developed around the same form are framed in one frame side by side. The title seems to be a humorous poke at those adherents to painting's redemptive or meditative qualities...to process. Finally, in a small work on paper titled *flexible solutions*, the sentence "make shelves" appears to offer up options: to make some good furniture in lieu of a bad painting? or perhaps a good painting rather than a purposeful piece of furniture? Howlett appears to take the second route.

This combination of text, titles, and image takes a seeming interest in the context, framing, and conditions under which a work of contemporary art is made. Formally though, on the surface of the paintings themselves, these ideas are harder to locate. The signs and symbols in the paintings point to this language but in a rather oblique way. Painting is hard to talk about they say. I read somewhere that Howlett was working through modernist forms in order to see of what use they might be today. Conceptual art's skeptics often claim that abstraction is useful for its complicated, impenetrable, and ambiguous qualities. In the same vein, a curator once told me that he didn't want to think in front of an abstract painting. For me, these works straddle the figurative/abstract relationship in a productive way. They point in many directions. They are all *types* of paintings and in this way the exhibition and Howlett's practice can be read. For Howlett, seemingly modern abstract grids are actually paintings of shelves. The geometric ground of a painting might be a dance floor, a playing field, or a landscape.

Alongside this interest in modernist design and architecture I see brick walls, mazes, green houses, pre-game strategy, bar graphs, the play book, arrows, statistics, stamped letters (I, O, U), some faux bois, three sizes of masking tape, cardiograms, screens, and then the play with frames and nails, patterns on patterns, cells, the cross hatch, and for me most interestingly, the continuous use of the hatched path or line which we usually find on the map we are given when we participate in a treasure hunt. But, *where is the value?*

And so, I want to return to Gide's golden coin. As the story goes, when you rub the gilded layer of a fraudulent coin for too long it wears off and reveals its transparent core. A lot of the art I see feels this way. Thin, weak, unearned, maybe even fraudulent. Some of it is better for this, in that it withholds something we as viewers expect, but most is bad, most is manner. *unitholders* feels at once confounding and explicit. These works are not glib. It is clear in viewing this show that Howlett is engaged in a deep conversation with the history of picture making and that his paintings deal with questions of surface, depth, colour and light in a compelling way. To be making long term work in a seemingly short-term world feels odd maybe but necessary. While the paintings themselves may not be explicit about their role in the architecture of art I do feel that the titling of this exhibition is. The individual titles of the paintings help highlight elements in the work that aim to address this question of value. In this, Howlett seems

FrameWork 6/15

intent on addressing his own blurry relationship to value creation. The question for the viewer then is, what happens when you rub this exhibition as you would that coin? For me the combination of title and image weaves a dense web that I do not see through. I am left engaged and a little confused. Perhaps, pleasantly so.

Diederichsen, Deidrich, *Martin Kippenberger; The Problem Perspective* <http://sites.moca.org/thecurve/2008/10/03/diedrich-diederichsen-on-martin-kippenberger/>, MOCA, Los Angeles, 2008

Gide, A, *The Counterfeiters*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1927

Goux, J. J, *The Coiners of Language*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Translated by Jennifer Curtiss Gage. 1994

FrameWork 9/15

Beth Stuart on Sandra Meigs



((

My knowledge of what a gong is, what a gong does, has until recently been drawn – albeit at negligible demand - from a foggy cultural catalogue. In my mind there was a well-oiled, well-muscled man striking a huge golden disc. His tidy and heraldic emission announces the beginning of a moving picture show.

))

That gong, the Gongman’s gong, was no gong at all. It was just a paper moon, a picture of a sound. That gong was quite literally made of sticks and spit and glitter-shine. That Gongman and his mimic offshoots are the only gongs most of us know, or care to know. I think we don’t know to care to know another gong.

((

Seldom these days is there a thing that so vastly overtakes its various versions as to squish belief into the realm of feeling. As art ought to often do, and often winsomely fails to do, and painting almost never does.

))

Now I know a thing, a thing that shakes your perineum, that gets inside, that forcibly fills up the cavities with something electric. It is not passive, it is not quiet, it does not ramble, it does not soothe. It is gigantic. It pinions you, really. Gets you out of yourself by getting you into yourself.

((

I suppose I could recommend a nice recording, or to check out a video. But, even if that gong pictured there were not made out of paper, any semblance would just behave too well to jar the catalogue of reason. This gong here must be heard to be seen.

))

I asked Sandra about the experience of practicing the gong vs. listening to the gong. I was curious about how much control she had, how much of a cognitive experience it was. The listening experience is the

FrameWork 9/15

farthest thing from cognition. The immensity and edge-less-ness of the sound exist in stark contrast to the physical movements and objects that create them. She described a synergetic meeting of the gong and the striker, rather than a controlled or directed action of one against another.

((

Here in the gallery the paintings are like loosed marbles. A big old bag of tigers-eyes gone tumbling. There are images and evocations. There are colours and shapes that might be migrating from one frame to another. There are pictures here of things, there are the hypnotized eyes of the 'toon, spinning into infinity, there are words and cells and PENTACLES let loose. And yet this is not the narrative that the Gongman announces.

)))

I think then about the constituent parts of painting, about the practice of painting, of transforming a liquid into the semblance of the always-shifting image in your mind's eye. There is something there quite akin in nature to that sweet-spot-gong-strike that Sandra describes. Two trajectories meeting again and again, marks making a whole, that whole neither the same nor completely different from its intent.

((

And yet this painting here is so different from other painting I know. I try and pinpoint why, and it is like trying to dissuade the gong from emptying my mind. I can look back and analyze some aspects of this show, I can question irony, and ideas of abstraction, but inside the show something else happens. The work is boss, and it also gets me outside of myself. It does not get me into my physical self in the same way as the gong does. It does not shake my perineum, but it does shake the tightness out of my thoughts.

)))

I think about desire, and about control, and about how these are often paintings' most alluring of failures. The desire to possess: painting's innocent vice. The maker's desire to possess the image, the viewer's desire to possess that knowledge made visible. I have a hard time picturing, even in my wildest imagining painting that is simultaneously bossy and barely there? firmly itself and yet utterly ungraspable?

((

And yet here it is. Here is the crux of it. Somehow, painting's most constituent of parts - EGO! - has been set free. Its relation to the rest of the world has been dissolved and reconstituted into a glorious and joyful cacophony, another substance all together. Here is not some romantic idea of alchemy. Here is not lead into gold, here is lead into (((GONG))).



FrameWork 7/15

Trevor Mahovsky on *A kind of graphic unconscious*

Their most volatile and delicate substances

Entering the exhibition *A kind of graphic unconscious* at Susan Hobbs Gallery, one encounters an arrangement of silvery slabs, each curved along one profile, some stacked together and others set at right angles, and placed upon a steel-framed table with a top made from the same material as the slabs. It is initially suggestive of a stylized landscape of rolling hills, but it is hard to say if one should situate oneself as if hovering over a miniature world, or as if looking at a distant horizon greyed by atmospheric perspective. This work is Erin Shirreff's *Catalogue, 8 Parts*, and the artist has made a series of these pieces; research reveals the slabs to be graphite-infused plaster casts, taken from unique molds that Shirreff derives from curves she creates through freehand drawing, so the casts can be understood to be traces of movements, thickened and displayed as things.

These pieces are arranged in a formal manner, reminiscent of the monochrome grouping of abstract plaster and wood shapes used in the teaching of introductory tonal drawing. In that sense, the casts simply are what they are, and here they sit at the scale of life. But even then, since the tabletop is made of the same material as the slabs, and the table itself sits upon a plinth, uncertainty returns. Is the framing device of the table full-sized or is it a model: do we take it literally, or do we see it as a representation?

Walking around the table, the relationship between the profiles changes with one's vantage point, and the composition expands and collapses, a pictorial effect associated with Anthony Caro's sculpture. But this misses the way the planes flesh out, attaining a sense of fullness reinforced by the soft grey shadows they cast upon one another, and by the fact that they articulate a more cohesive volume than Caro's extended drawings in air, making the work ultimately more reminiscent of the stereometric sculptures of Naum Gabo in terms of their virtual body.

This final observation identifies why the tabletop has the same sucked-out atmosphere that Jonathan Crary ascribes to the virtual depth of stereo photography. On the wall a few steps to the left of the table hangs Liz Deschenes' *Moiré*, like a window onto this interior, though it admits no air. To create the moiré pattern, Deschenes photographed a window that she had covered with a screen of perforated dots. She created two identical negatives from this setup, laid them one atop the other, slightly out of registration, and produced a print from that. Its surface seems to swell towards us, volume without air; the undulations of the picture plane are palpable, but we can experience that peculiar space only with our eyes.

That experience offered by *Moiré*—of inhabiting a space produced by the confluence of the physiognomic limitations of our sight and an optical trigger—shares something with the fantasy of walking into the space of a film. An oblique view opens onto a haptic experience just as solid material takes on a virtual quality. This feeling of being unsettled proves characteristic of the experience of all the works in exhibition; one accesses a plane of correspondences by virtue of the most straightforward methods and means.

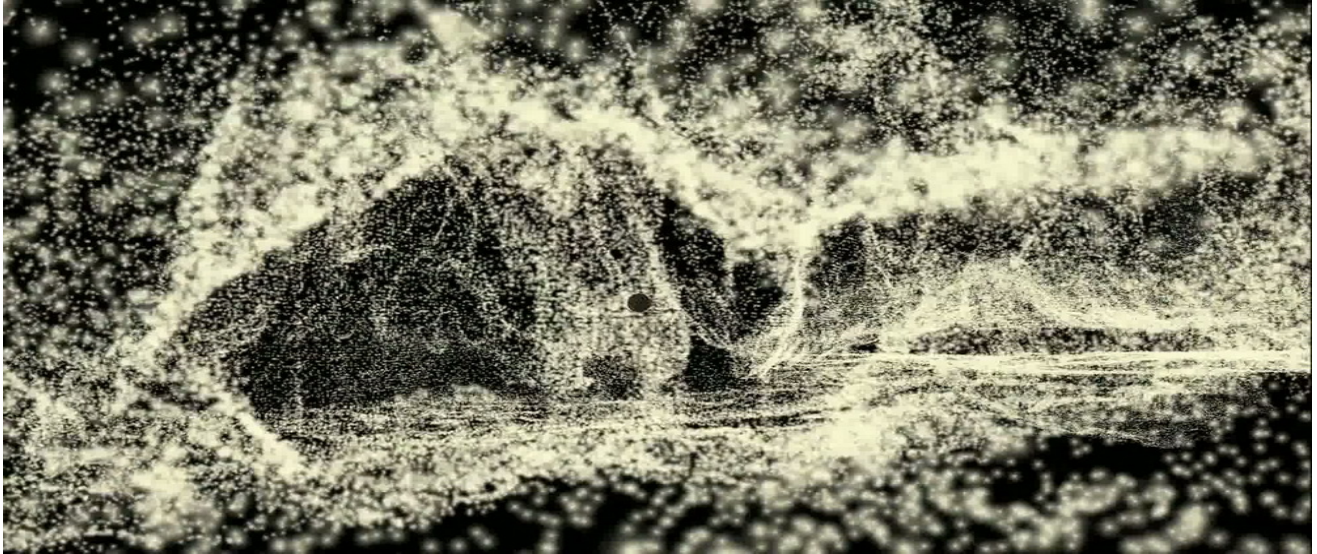
The works of *A kind of graphic unconscious* share some combination of being formally minimal, materially reductive and/or temporally repetitive but they are not inert: beyond the works of Shirreff and Deschenes, consider the black voids at the centre of Eileen Quinlan's prints, and the Ur-forms suspended by rope within the mise en scène of Erika Vogt's video *Darker Imposter*, along with the pulsing, repetitive structure of its editing. As that description of *Darker Imposter*'s montage suggests, there is a sense of volatility, heightened by the way each artist frames the recording and presentation of the trace.

The works variably incorporate processes of casting, photography, gestural mark-making and, in the case of the arm that appears in Vogt's video, acts of showing as a variation of pointing. If this is a list of indexes of things from a world somewhere out or back there, external or antecedent to the viewer's experience of the artwork, that notion is complicated by an uncertainty regarding the relationship between object, process and resulting translation. What sort of spatial or temporal frames are the works asking us to attend to? How are we to situate ourselves, and where are we to focus? What exactly do we see in the slightly blemished, but otherwise mirror-like surface of Liz Deschenes' untitled photograph?

The same could be asked if we follow a lead suggested by the exhibition title, and think of the drawn elements variably incorporated within the pieces—the sketchbook curves transposed by Shirreff into casts, the scribbles etched by Quinlan into the emulsion layer of her negatives, the digitally animated gestural marks in Vogt's video—as forms of handwriting, and therefore subject to analysis following the methods of graphology. As Walter Benjamin notes in *On the Mimetic Faculty*, “graphology has taught us to recognize in handwriting images that the unconscious of the writer conceals in it.”¹ This is not to suggest a search for an explication of the work in terms of the inner life of the artist. Rather, it introduces the idea of the importance of the materiality of the sign—in this case the index—as a means to access a plane of correspondences. Benjamin's ideas are of use here as one formulation of the idea of an optical unconscious, something made complex by way he sees language operating as a storehouse of an ancient—even occult—knowledge of the world. In this account, powers of augury and clairvoyance have yielded, without residue, to writing and language, which nevertheless provides a means for us to inhabit, in some indirect way, that earlier mystical relationship to the world, even if we now lack the perceptive powers to understand it. As Hito Steyerl notes, this mystical reading of the world would have entailed the admittedly bizarre notion of a fluency in the language of things.²

In Vogt's *Darker Imposter* it is as if this process is being staged in reverse. The organizing structure of language is replaced by a field of encounter, a cosmic debris in which we float. The swaying sensation caused by the camera panning across Vogt's darkened studio is intercut with a montage of what appear to be images taken from sketch and notebook pages, as well as digitally-generated elements, including gestural drawings that morph and a grid that spins at a dizzying rate. The ground falls away, its power to anchor replaced by the attractive force of objects, which are themselves suspended on ropes in the studio, and lit in chiaroscuro by a light on a stand that partially comes into view when the camera moves fully to the left. These thickened forms are almost recognizable—one appears to be anchor-like—and they occupy an intermediate state between tactile object and graphic icon.

There are parallels here with the way Werner Herzog films the Paleolithic cave paintings in his 2010 documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. At one point in the film, as a member of the team working on the cave hypothesizes that the flickering light of torches would have once animated the paintings, Herzog's camera pans across the walls of the cave, his makeshift lighting rig likewise producing moving patterns of



light and shadow over the undulating rock surfaces. The volumes of the rock and the movement of the light make the paintings seem palpable. Indeed, some of the paintings are noted to possess a kinetic quality in their own right—there is a stuttered drawing of a rhino, and another drawing of a bison with eight legs—and they are described by Herzog as aspiring towards cinema.

If memory serves, at one point in the film there is a mention that, relative to our contemporary position of looking at the paintings of Paleolithic people, ‘we are locked in history, they were not’. It is ridiculous to compare looking at relatively recently made artworks with looking at 30,000 year-old cave paintings, and perhaps that’s why it is irresistible. Such a comparison is out of scale, a distortion of what it is trying to visualize. Yet is it not apropos, given the problem of perspective that the commentator in the film is alluding to, a problem that results in episodes of a sort of temporal vertigo in both the scientists and the film crew? In his narration, Herzog refers to the way the sense of distance collapses, and it is as if they have stumbled into a living environment, interrupting the Paleolithic painters at work. This fosters a sense in the crew that they are being watched.

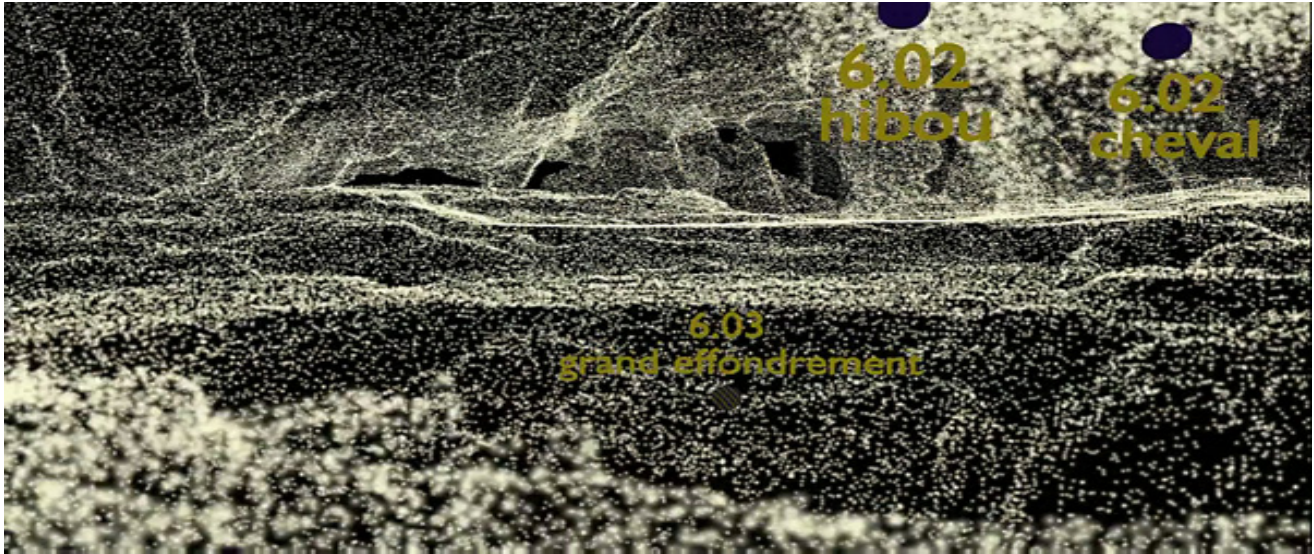
There is an echo here with the photographer Carl Dauthendey’s observation, mentioned in Walter Benjamin’s *Short History of Photography*, that the Daguerreotype’s incredible and unfamiliar clarity was at first so unsettling to viewers that it seemed to them that the faces in the images were staring back.³ This uneasy reaction to the mimetic capacity of photography perhaps helps to understand the violence Eileen Quinlan has done to the two negatives from which she printed the photographs *Bonanza* and *Acting Out*. At first glance, both appear to be images of a delicately crocheted tablecloth which has been torn to reveal gaping black voids: in the case of *Acting Out*, the image is almost entirely taken up by a black hole, surrounded by a few tattered remnants of the cloth. Further inspection of both photographs reveals that it is not a tablecloth that has been destroyed in each case, but an image of one. Quinlan commonly runs her negatives through a cycle of abuse, exposing them to extremes of temperature, leaving them sitting in expired chemicals for protracted periods, tearing the emulsion from the outdated black and white polaroid stock she uses, and otherwise mechanically distressing them. A living face stares back from the prints, though it is only that of the viewer reflected in the frame’s glass, which is even more like a mirror sitting in front the blackened voids that result from the near obliteration of the emulsion in parts of the negative.

These two prints bring to mind Gordon Matta-Clark's 1969 work *Photo-Fry*, for which he fried polaroids of Christmas trees in oil and then applied gold leaf to them before they cooled, though without the mythical overtones. Quinlan's process is less an alchemical one than a prosaic working through, in this case right through the emulsion, wherein focus on medium is intensified to the point of its physical destruction. It can be hard to distinguish between the traces of the manipulation of the negative and the visual depiction of the tablecloth: white rivulets, possibly caused by the residue of chemicals, and feathery wisps of light, possibly the result of the peeling emulsion, appear to be the frayed edges of the crocheted threads. The laboriously crocheted tablecloth is equated with the plane of the image, a kind of shroud of appearance, and thus the work of rending that plane is the undoing of the equal work invested in its assembly. What remains is still an image, made uncannily by virtue of the way traces of a drawn-out studio process blend with the instantaneously captured trace of the tablecloth, itself made stitch by laborious stitch: it is hard to say if the original image is more or less phantasmal than the void that is opened within it.

Liz Deschenes' untitled photogram presents a similar view onto a void, in this case a thick haze. Its surface is heavily silvered and, as in the work of Quinlan, faint traces can be seen of what could be the result of handling, chemicals or possibly even some sort of modulation of light captured in the original exposure. But unlike Quinlan's work, it is difficult to call it an image. Standing at an angle to the piece, so that the rectangle of light from a gallery window is reflected in its surface, perhaps opens up—if we are receptive to it—a time before the invention of photography, when the technology for the capture of images existed, but there was not yet a means to fix them. This evokes not only the fog from which Benjamin has photography emerge, but also Geoffrey Batchen's related concept that photography existed for a long time as a sort of collective dream, well before the technological breakthrough of fixing photographic images arrived. In that dreamspace, to paraphrase Batchen's account of William Henry Fox Talbot's vision of photography, transience and fixity are somehow magically brought together.⁴

But the point is not to erase difference—between moments in time, states of being, categories of experience—but to come to an intuitive understanding of the nature of that difference, an understanding that is rooted in the materiality of things and the materiality of our bodies, and is therefore always in motion. One can feel that mysterious space to be vast, or infinitely small: as nothing in the most literal sense. A universe opens and collapses. This is a way to open an at least shifting perspective on the present, as works such as Deschenes' *Moiré* speak to a condition of visual noise that is more pertinent to the digital image, wherein algorithms replace the indexical processes of analogue photography. In the case of Vogt's *Darker Imposter*, the use of video establishes a self-conscious relation to that now long-lost ability Benjamin ascribes to the ancients, "To read what was never written."⁵ Openly giving ourselves over to a state of uncertainty and confusion—actually a form of play—is the closest we can come, but even then there is a sense of displacement, a product of the way the past time of the studio shoot is reconstituted within the time we spend in front of the monitor.

In *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* the scientists are working on representing the cave via digital plotting, a series of points that correspond not only to the shape of the cave but to the location of drawings, bones, and other artifacts found within it. For all its objectivity, this plotting retains a sense of mystery, since the spaces between its dots are the conflation of a rationally plotted, constricted space with an unfathomably vast sense of time. In the end, it's impossible to say what the space between those dots is, other than an array of possibility, in the same sense as we might describe the future. In Quinlan's *Acting Out*, we stand



at the mouth of the cave, yet its depths are on the surface. It is an encapsulation of an expanse of time within a constricted space; returning to the example of Chauvet, it is impossible to tell if the footprints left by a human child near those of a cave bear mean the bear preyed upon the child, or that they missed each other by thousands of years. The tablecloth in *Bonanza* is both a thread extending through time and a spatialized mesh, a layer made even more complex by its situation relative to layers of process and presentation: emulsion, celluloid, paper and the glass of the frame.

The work of the artists in *A kind of graphic unconscious* encourage us to hazard a measure of such gaps by inhabiting them in an intuitive, bodily sense. The question turns to how this notion of perception and consciousness rooted in the body can relate to such digital visualizations as the plotting of Chauvet Cave. To answer that we can only start by looking to the structure of the exhibition and the correspondences it posits, and to the way they can open up, also like an array of possibility, on to new experiences and things.

A connection is drawn between material and immaterial states: think of the bodily experience a viewer might have of the virtual space in Deschenes' *Moiré* and Shirreff's *Catalogue, 8 Parts*. One can physically walk from piece to piece, from table to window in an airless room, or teleport vast distances by virtue of some echo or other correspondence, as with the back-and-forth way this essay has been put together. These two ways of moving through the exhibit exist in a dynamic and indeterminate relation to one another. At times they fold together in a complimentary way, at other times it is as if one is jarred between different planes of existence. Walking the floor from one work to another suddenly feels like crossing a void. What ultimately connects these works, other than a temporarily shared space and an exhibition title? To Benjamin, collecting things based on similarity was a primordial form of reading the language of things, an idea that resonates not only with the logic of curation but also with the way this text adds Chauvet to the context. Sometimes we feel a similarity between things that is explained only by some unconscious compulsion, an effect Benjamin notes when he speaks of the way that, "To children, words are still like caverns, with the strangest corridors connecting them."⁶

FrameWork 7/15

The title of this essay is taken from Walter Benjamin's "Doctrine of the Similar" (1933) in *New German Critique*, No 17 Spring 1979 p 68

¹ Benjamin, Walter. "On the Mimetic Faculty" in Reflections, New York: Schocken Books, 1986, p 335

² Steyerl, Hito. "The language of things", in transversal - eiccp multilingual webjournal, www.eicp.et/transversal/0606/steyerl/en, 2006

³ Benjamin, Walter. "Short History of Photography", in *Screen Oxford Journals*, Vol 13 No 1, 1972, p 8

⁴ Batchen, Geoffrey. Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History, Boston: MIT 2000, p 11

⁵ Benjamin, Walter. "On the Mimetic Faculty", p 336

⁶ Benjamin, Walter. "Thought Figures" in Selected Writings v2, part 2, 1931-1934, Cambridge: Belknap Press 2005, p 726.

FrameWork 11/15

Anne Low on Liz Magor

Not long ago, by coincidence I had three retail experiences in less than 24 hours. They varied from the lowest end of value in the form of a church basement sale, to a midrange department store slowly going out of business, to a new luxury department store. The categorical principles of organization were consistent in all three places, though more importantly they all had things on sale, marked down. At the church sale people pawed through old plastic bags filled with used Christmas decorations. At the luxury end of the scale it was designer handbags, removed from their hallowed shelves and jumbled together in a bin. The desire driving the shoppers in both places was unabashed; there was no genteel allowance to politeness or a self-consciousness of the pathology of consumer behaviour. If there was any consistent custom to this kind of activity, it would be mania. Sales produce a compression of time for shoppers and a subsequent relative form of panic by the imagined possibility of *not* getting something. There is also a marked shift that occurs in retail presentation once something's been put on sale, there's no longer a false concession to its specialness. The tags of sale items get dog eared and bulky with layers of red stickers and dethroned with every markdown. In the mid-range department store, it seemed as though *everything* was on sale, in a final attempt to keep bankruptcy at the gates. It was like stepping into an alternate dimension in the form of a store. There were so many goods on offer yet so few people. Employees floated around, diffident to customers. Everything was new, but somehow because of the sheer amount of it all the goods seemed leached of the usual retail sparkle that awakens yearning.

The atmosphere reminded me of the big second hand department stores, places where I have a very limited amount of personal fortitude, but which I often find myself within. Time is as infinite as the cavernous spaces they are housed within, open 7 days a week to shoppers and to the vast waves of discarded human effects that shore up endlessly at its back door. There is always a steady stream of clientele that are slow, borderline somnambulist. People navigate amongst the aisles fingering this and that, gleaning items based on their own cryptic appetites. There are no collective criteria of value here. In any of these stores, large or small, one experiences a feebly organized encyclopaedia of object lust and rejection. The quality of the stuff is decreasing while the amount of it is increasing. Where one used to find wool trousers and cashmere sweaters in the women's clothing aisle, one now finds stretchy jeans, 'business casual' and every manner of jersey top that will pill after a handful of wears.

Mood can determine value in such settings. On a bad day one might imagine bedbugs amongst the quilted bedcovers, diseased feet that have soaked in the numerous electric footbaths or meth having been cooked in an empty stockpot. Nausea can set in because of the sheer chest-compressing weight of thrown out stuff. On a good day one feels empowered by one's own refined taste and ability to gracefully walk amongst the racks and shelves and pull out a designer coat or stoneware pottery. This feeling is the one that plants the seed of ever returning, the remembrance of that one time when that one rare object was plucked from the gradually shifting river swell of otherwise items of negligible worth.

Simone Weil wrote 'A squirrel turning in its cage and the rotation of the celestial sphere—extreme misery and extreme grandeur'.¹ Her comparison articulates the vertigo-inducing swinging of perception that can occur amongst the shelves of used goods. Attempts at categorization are where the intangible charge of objects in relation to one another is most acute. One example is the bagged section at Value Village. Items are repackaged into new plastic bags, a practical way to amalgamate the most minor of things for sale. The new packaging also

FrameWork 11/15

subtly increases their value by separating them out from the bog of the rest of the store. Being put with like things preserves the integrity of the category. A bag of polyester yarn or a half used packet of fancy paper napkins; kept together, one can imagine their use being revived. Then there are the bags that arrive as donations at the back door *already* bagged. These are the most penurious forms—miscellany that defies all accepted notions of value and use. An old bread bag filled with used batteries and soap ends or a plastic shopping bag with a wig and some cutlery inside. At the sight of these bags, I experience a piercing form of interruption that is much larger than the objects that I am looking at. My fortitude bottoms out.

This interruption causes a fissure in the categorical integrity of things. The feeling provoked isn't dependent on mood; it's beyond the temperament of any given day. It is also not exclusive to thrift stores. I've gotten it looking at art. Robert Gober's *Long Haired Cheese* (1992-93), where long, black human hairs are combed back over the hump of an anaemic wedge of Swiss cheese. I've also had it looking at Rosemarie Trockel's *Replave Me*, (2011), where the vagina of Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866) is replaced with a velvet black tarantula.



Liz once showed me a box that she had been given decades ago. Lying delicately inside were more than a dozen resplendent birds that had not yet been mounted; stuffed with cotton, they were soft and pliant as they lay against each other. They were of course beautiful, but having been organised with others of their ilk they were merely beautiful, like a relic. These are the same birds that have since been annexed from their elementary allure and come to rest in her new sculptures. Value is perpetually deflating and inflating in equal measure in these works. This barometric activity is produced by the sculptural logic of the armature of categorizations applied across each work in varying combinations of box, sheaf, glove and object. The birds of *Gold Box*, *Speckled Veil*, and *Pink Shimmer* are now shrouded in the decorative bags that are typically used to raise the value of retail goods. Here those same bags deplete the fine-grained complexity of the surface of feathers that make such birds inexplicably captivating. Amongst *Pearl Pet* and *Glow Pet* the birds have become just another thing from the world, as drained as the second-hand soft toys that hold their same position. As the birds go down in value, the soft toys rise. The grimy creature of *Glow Pet* has become a reclining golden sphinx, while the lumpy dachshund of *Pearl Pet* is elevated to an opalescent Bernini. This ascension is only momentary, as their beds of bubble and sponge wrapping draw them again downwards. The boxes push up in their newly found grandeur, only to slump back down, exhausted. These exertions produced by the rub of categorization are ceaseless, none can hold fast to either their misery or their grandeur. They are both the squirrel and the celestial sphere.

¹ Simon Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180.