

Porous emerald

The taxi

Jago stirs: something is strange. Ice-cold wind streams from the aircon and relentless chatter from the radio: "...it would not be without reason to deem it a ghost or a phantom formed by the brain..."¹ Reality blurs: yes, he must have drifted off. Yes, the taxi, but no, why have we stopped? What time is it? He breathes in heavily through the nose. Fog lifting: yes. The guest lecture at the Uni, voices of those students still lashing the insides his skull. Jago searches a foothold for memory. Faint whiff of tiare, plumeria: airport posters with not-so-secret voluptuous bodies. Why is he alone? Or, not exactly alone.

"Got jam, yessir, very heavy traffic, always at this time *leh*." Thick accent, yet the voice is soothing.

A silent second, then the radio continues. "And not in any way doubt the veridicity of such things, if after having called on senses, memory, understanding..."

A plate above the front passenger seat: Mr Toh Ma Khun. Early 60s, thick spectacles, high forehead, thick lips. Someone's uncle.

"I'm really late. How long did I sleep?"

"No worries. Got another way soon, just opened. New, sir, you want to try?"

Cold wind, radio chatter, condensation building. Jago needs air, some fresh hot air. Grins and rolls down the window: a change of perspective. In a moderate temperature with no wind, the mind regards the air as a mere nothing.² He gulps the fresh hot air.

The canopy is a porous emerald. Strange animal shapes, calls echoing from trunk to trunk. For an eternal moment, Jago's consciousness is blank, yet alert: overwhelmed by multiple sensory streams.

Roll up window, fade in radio chatter: "...exigencies of action often oblige us to make up our minds before having leisure to examine matters carefully..." while Jago becomes aware of the response cooked up by a precognitive part of his brain.

"Okay, try the other route." Glances at the watch, at the taxi meter. No Mr Uber: yes Uncle Khun. "Will we make it in time? Do you know how... how long?"

¹ Descartes 1647, ending

² Descartes 1644, 1:71

Cast

Jago: as himself;

Uncle Khun / Toh Ma Khun:
Thomas Kuhn;

DC / Emeritus Demócritos
Tonkartón: René Descartes;

Dave / Associate David Scott:
David Hume;

Emma / Assistant Emma Brink:
Immanuel Kant;

Zach / Professor Zachariah
Triturus: Isaac Newton;

Sandy / Xia Su Pei: Charles
Sanders Peirce;

Han Zi: Hans Reichenbach;

Poppy: Karl Popper;

Baasa: Baas van Fraassen;

Arul: Larry Laudan;

and last, but not least, the
Ludwigs: Wittgenstein and van
Beethoven.

A Duchenne smile, driver seems elated. “No *lah*, never drive it. New construction, so how, holy cow? Hehe. No worries, now the first bit bumpy for sure, soon others will come around, smooth sailing. For a while. Then people might find things strange. *Liddat lor*, new questions always on repeat. Never same puzzle, always same pattern. No way to compare different road one *lah*.”³

³ Kuhn 1962/1970

Jago’s mind is blank. What about the first drop-off? How could he have missed it! A sense of sweet and sour disappointment. That’s life. “So let’s go.”

Who is to blame for what happened next? A mesh of events, strange as each may seem in isolation, is created mail by mail. Khun, euphoric, switches off the radio, throws in a low gear, accelerates with a daring turn onto a side road. Jago bounces at every pothole; he tries to ignore the patchy tarmac and keep his lunch down.

“Me, I’m a driver. My taxi got all I need to know. Finding the best way from pickup point to drop-off point. Once set off, driving is like solving a puzzle. That’s all what. Question why there is this puzzle, why these rules? Nooo need! Let me tell you: each ride got its own reason *lah*, got its own reality, got its own logic.”

Each journey becomes exemplary. The driver’s hand: a flicker of two contrasting shades. His own: palm and back in a completely uniform colour. Palm less hirsute, thankfully.

Sudden large bump: “Ouch...! My whole journey here is an experiment, really. The Uni invited me – where you picked me up – for a guest lecture. You know, they have a very renowned department, research in embodied sensation. That’s why I came to this place.”

Jago had sensed puzzlement among the professors – some misunderstanding? The impressively articulate Emma, the older colleague, what’s his name? And professor Triturus, who studied with the master himself. The big Uni’s motto, like a compass: ‘Eastern Wisdom, Northern Technique, Western Finance, Southern Vision.’ Grand, all capitals.

Taxi slows down for a roundabout: how come there’s no traffic here? Jago sees a bird lift from a branch: flash of blue. Emerging from the canopy: *angsana*, or maybe *tembusu*.

“The students posed good questions. Yeah, not easy to answer at all! Scrutinised the grounds for what I lectured upon, it really provoked in me a sense of –” Jago interrupted by another pothole. Sense of crisis: yes, no? He hesitates, the word is too strong. Vivication? Road getting more uncomfortable.

“In this world, nothing is easy. I share this taxi with my nephew Arul. He tells me *orredi* taking a customer from point A to point B got three kinds of problem. One. I can see the way, but the road is not built yet. So how? Cannot drive *lor*, must go round, or build first, right? Hehe. Two. I hear got another road, many cars, like everybody go again and again. But I can’t find it. So I don’t waste time any more. There is a third one. Know where it is, no traffic. But damn *suay*, you know means ‘bad luck’, my car *lao ya*, engine too weak! Then better off walking, taxi cannot help.”⁴

⁴ Laudan 1981, p 17

Jago’s stomach is like a laundromat. “So which kind of road are we travelling on now?”

“This one? Never tried before. Very bumpy right!” Uncle Khun speaks slower, speeds up the car. Another large bump, ka-boom! Hit something big, something indubitable.⁵ Jago in the backseat bouncing like a ball in Newton’s cradle.

⁵ Descartes 1647; see also Kuhn 1962/1970

“So sorry, can *dahan*? Maybe you try ignore. I drive many years, got used to bumps. Let me tell you. Push on a bit, can learn from it, den you strike it big one day.”

Left hand gesticulating; for each syllable: drawing a short line in the air. Rhetoric graffiti, starts humming. Jago wants him to hold the wheel with two hands. Drivers deal every day with anomalies and recalcitrant evidence. The tune is vaguely comforting to Jago. Yes: a ’60s hit. Can’t recall the words. Yes, now he can: love, of course: *Love me do*. Hums along, soundlessly: he prefers the later albums.

Earlier at the lecture, what Jago had claimed: “We are limited to an incomplete understanding of the world, even if it is simple at the core. In order for us to understand it, the world must be a certain way.” The Uni as in a dream: he imagined moving, rousing; but action: impossible. The body a prison: or maybe he was nervous? “When imagination is indistinguishable from memory, when we’re at the vertex of an unfolding strangeness, action becomes necessary. Writing music demands musical thinking.”

Grad student audience really active, he liked them, the way they asked questions. Yeah... Big brown eyes, is she a bit cross-eyed? “Doctor, thank you so much for the talk... I’m Su Pei, call me Sandy. Hrm... you said in your talk...” She flips the pages of his printout. Then her notebook, emerald green, with an elastic strap across. Take your time. A conceptual rhyme between her T-shirt slogan and his talk’s subtitle: knowledge is power, strangeness unfolds. Rhyme? Why does he think it rhymes?

“Sorry! ...eh you compared belief to music, and I quote: ‘Belief is a half-cadence in the symphony of our intellectual life.’ Very pretty, haha. But is it revealing? I’ve three questions. Firstly: do you mean that music can make us aware of the limitations of our knowledge? Secondly, can any analogy, no matter how pretty, really appease the irritation of doubt? Thirdly, aren’t we better off focussing on action, rather than getting stuck at belief?”⁶

⁶ Peirce 1878, part II

Go-getter. Music the context of discovery, musicology the context of justification. Between seeking and describing, what’s the link? Connecting observation and theory is explanation, the ‘is’ is the link. So big eyes, notebook again. Jago excited, no time building an argument: time running out. Most of the wonderful complexity and exciting controversy skipped over, his response is “like a stone thrown to bounce a couple of times on the water’s skin.” Is he badly prepared? Snap out of it old boy; this is home turf. Go for your intellectual quest, let’em spin! “I dream about finding sufficient grounds by which to distinguish dream from wake. But when I awake I can’t find any.”

And yes, they rewarded him: approving giggles, right on cue. Fruit machine optimal play.

Jago’s unseeing eyes turn away from the multi-coloured flowers of the canopy; they meet Uncle Khun’s big brown eyes in the mirror.

“Mister, you ask why every stone must sink. Ah-hah, but how do you learn every stone can sure sink one? Seeing one, den next, den next, go on and on. Can, but still is never enough, you cannot know. Unless seeing patterns.” Left hand makes a large circle in the air.

Beyond simple enumeration: identifying through observation some characteristics that could take the form of general laws.⁷ Another student, round face; whole appearance rotund. Tricky comments, tight-lipped, thin voice like a straight line.

⁷ Russell 1961, p 526-30

“Every event is preceded by a cause which partly determines it, but the event is also partly determined by a universal law. To deduce the occurrence of a phenomenon from a general law is to attribute a cause to it. To explain a phenomenon is to say what caused it. My supervisor, prof Emma, says this principle is ‘transcendental’ since causality is itself unobservable. The universal is a point of departure, necessary for the very possibility of the event, of our empirical observation of it, and thus our knowledge.”⁸

⁸ Glymour & Eberhardt 2014

In response, Jago relaxes the larynx, increases sub-glottal pressure. His vocal centroid sinks: alpha male signal. “The classic top-down: formalised guesswork, mind over matter. The method: make a bold general statement; then: laborious particular observations; finally: hold, nudge, and verify. Like clockwork, *finito, basta*. For sure, it’s a mistake to treat the Greeks with superstitious reverence.”⁹ Aiming for big streak, but darn. No prize this time.

⁹ Russell 1961, p 57-58

“No sir, my approach is more like boot-strapping, bottom-up. The ascension from sense data to individual things to scientific theories. Sandy and I are working on probability and action. Togethurr.

But Poppy very *hiao*, she will go down her own path.”

“*Diam lah*, Han Zi... I’m not a loner meh.”

“*Wah piang* you are, what! But at least you don’t throw bricks around!” Sandy slaps him on the chubby wrist. The students laugh: bickering, not feuding. They all agree on the fundamentals.

The committee

Jago standing outside the office of the department head, looking at the plaque: ‘Zachariah Triturus, MA. Professor of Embodied Philosophy.’ “Take a seat please.” Thank you. Jago familiar with the early work on anemometry, the tales of fighting, fruit farming, alchemy. Innumerable granted projects, publications, patents, secret societies, royal connections. Triturus’ rise from humble beginnings to the highest echelons of the Uni had been uniform: a straight line. Unkind voices whispered of unprincipled borrowings from a teacher but no one seriously questioned his eminence. In fact, the professor’s position at the Uni was so solid, that, seemingly, all that remained for younger colleagues to do, was fill in the details.

Inside the office, Professor Zach, as he likes to be called, has gathered the search committee for the new faculty position: associate David Scott,

area coordinator of the college of materialistic sciences, and assistant Emma Brink, specialist in transcendental communication. With the fourth member, flamboyant emeritus Demócritos Tonkartón away on outreach – some radio talk show – the others breathe calmly. But the professor is perturbed.

“I’m puzzled by the candidate. Could he have – misunderstood – my invitation letter? He seems too relaxed! Does he not know that the lecture – with the students – is evaluated according to a most strict protocol – implementing mathematical formulae – as part of the hiring procedures?”

“Zach, you’re the one with the experience to tell.”

“Yes. Yes, I should have – thought – so. The word ‘thought’ – as you know – covers everything that we are aware of as happening within us, and it counts as ‘thought’ because we – are – aware of – it.¹⁰ But in this case ‘instinct’ might be called for, and much as I know it will dismay you – Dave, in particular – and Emma – my dear – perhaps you will be prepared to go along with – gut feel?”

¹⁰ Descartes 1644, part 1:9

Dave crossing his legs, Emma straightening up, saying: “Certainly. I always consider my very first judgment, even if it is merely a product of perception: nonetheless it stays with me; but with me alone. At some later point, a more consequential form of judgement might be created by attributing perception to an object with the assumption that the judgement will extend its validity to the public realm: to all times and for everyone else.”

“Excellent. Excellent, as you say, our experienced judgement – determines – the world.”¹¹ The fewest assumptions – or greatest simplicity – is preferable. We need no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances.”¹²

¹¹ Kant 1783, part 2:18

¹² Newton 1687, regula 1

Dave, eager to move on. “Axiomatic. I heard a knocking mand. Shall we let him in?”

The forest

Two Uni colleagues longing to leave the search committee meeting: Dave’s mood clouded, Emma legs sleeping. To vivificate, they head for the lowland equatorial evergreen rainforest.

“Good of you to interrupt my dogmatic slumber and suggest a walking meeting. We can talk plenty about the search matters. Oh, I love this trail, I find the uniformity of the canopy – its colours and shapes – so... comforting, really. Did you know I walk here every day at exactly the same hour? We could reach the tower before sunset, if we choose to go that deep in. Dave, what say you? Some fresh hot air might have a positive effect on us.” The last sentence intended to taunt her elder colleague: successful.

“Emma, I don’t believe for a moment it could do us any good. Not anything bad either. We’re just as fine without trying to establish what air, fresh or hot, might do to us. Your idea of fundamental ideas is getting to your head again.”

She produces a sound like a bad cough, but Dave knows it's laughter. They have had this exchange many times, with the smallest of variations, ever since becoming colleagues. He knows Emma's obsession with schedules; she knows his thirst for fame.¹³

¹³ Murr 2014; Gottlieb 2016

"I just thought of the two Ludwigs in the lab: the one can't stop talking at our walking meetings, while the other, refusing all company, takes silent walks in the rain." Coughing-laughter again.

She's funny: his clouds are lifting. "Emma, you aren't half as sick as you are trying to make it sound. Granted, your humour is drier than your throat." He snickers. "Now-now, having heard the guest lecture with the students, how would you judge our candidate?"

"Well... at least he's a good listener."

"Lame... and you're avoiding the key question: is he fit or not? At job interviews, we put them through tasks: theoretical, empirical, practical. We observe them and figure out if their performance correlates with their CV: observation and theory. Ah, we look into crystal bowls, fish guts, or worse, seeking to establish their future suitability." Dave shakes his head. "We've done this many times before and it seems a natural process to gain knowledge; yet there's something in me that objects to generalisation."

"Professor Zach requested a prediction: will the candidate be as good an employee as he was a performer at that single lecture? Dave, you know him better than I do, how could he ask us that? Knowing full well that particular observation is disjunct from universal truth, and quality is hostage to quantity. Yet Uni mands an apodictic judgement: yes or no."

Dave halts, Emma continues at a slower pace. He could not in her voice, decipher any trace of passion, and now he cannot see her face. Words so clear themselves do not suffice for meaning.

"Our judgement must be tempered by our previous experience; reasoning is based on analogy, and analogy is what leads us to expect from any cause the same events, which we have observed to result from similar causes."

Her back towards him still. "True. Yet analogies can be more or less perfect, leading to inferences whose conclusiveness is proportional to their degree of similarity and resemblance."

"Well, that's my point."

He meanders down the slope towards her. The path: covered with dense vegetation. An emerald tunnel. Dave intones: "The under-canopy forms a false ceiling. The path we follow reaches uniformly into dimmed distance; should we stand firm, the path is time, and thence continues uniformly into dulled future. While this is what my senses show me, it does not mean that I must hold eternal sameness true."¹⁴

¹⁴ Hume 1748, part 9

Emma turns, revealing empathy. "You're such a grumpy sceptic! What if we distinguished judgements of perception of the lecture from judgement of experience of candidates in general? The latter have objective validity because they are reflected upon and shared. The former obviously have mere subjective validity; yet both are powerful, since either justifies action."¹⁵

¹⁵ Kant 1783, sect 2:18

"I'm not a sceptic: on the contrary I take comfort in there being absolutely no effect whatsoever of my action. Whether I tick the box to support – tic – or not – tac – or the last option, where it says that I cannot evaluate the quality of the candidate solely on the basis of presented evidence – toe – I will not in any way influence the final outcome."

"Prof Zach would not agree. He counts each vote, then calculates the average. He was first to do it that way, you know. And absolutely all Uni followed. Even the students. But they're not blank slates, written upon. Rather, it is their own minds that create reason, and it is reason that gives ground for judgement. Empirical judgments are always self-made."¹⁶

¹⁶ Kant 1783, preamble to sect 2

"Emma my dear: it's impossible to explain, or even to experience, causal relations; such experiences are merely figments of our imagination. My teacher recommended common knowledge: that is truth which clear is and distinct for all to see. *Id est*: public."

"Well, this afternoon, your own student demonstrated – in public, yes – a clean-cut separation of observation and theory. Not bad, actually. She defines our actions according to context: it's either justification or discovery."

"Poppy, my poppet... Yes, she is very committed to matters of objectivity and empiricism. Different contexts? I like it... a dichotomy that explicitates! Better than splitting the world into cause and effect, innit?"

Dave hops happily along, humming turning into singing. "No–no–no such thing in nah–nah–nature. Co–co–causation, ain't much like self or substance, no–no–no." Pieces of gravel bounce rhythmically on the path, into the grass. Emma shakes her head, Dave is decidedly on a phlogiston free-flow. "Looook at this tree, this forest. Hear the animals call, echo–echo, from trunk to trunk... Experience! Even the most ignorant, brute beasts can improve by experience, and learn the qualities of natural objects, by observing the effects which result from them."¹⁷

¹⁷ Hume 1748, part 4b

Dave out of sight, ululating in the forest. "I see the uniform blue–brown–mauve–red, I hear the uniform bleat–chirp–hoot–click... co–co–constantly co–co–conjoined. My mind is determined by custom to infer the ooh–one from the appearance of the ooh–other. Circumstances form the whah–whole of that necessity. Beyond the co–co–constant co–co–conjunction of similar objects, and the co–co–consequent inference from one to the other, we have no–no–no, nah–nah–nah, no–no–no–notion of any–nanny ne–necessity or connexy–sexy co–connection whatsoeverimostedly..."¹⁸

¹⁸ Hume 1748, part 8a

Dave's phone signals short message service: slows down and trawls his pockets. Realises he's standing in front of an enormous tree, like a giant's arm with 30 fingers stuck into the soil. An emergent tree: *angsana* or *tembusu*? Light sprinkles past its wisest branches, plays upon its physical trunk, and reaches finally its fundament, the twisted roots above the forest floor.

Emma, catching up. "Nice jingle, you feral man-child. Who's the message from?"

"You-know-whom. Apparently just finished that radio interview and now desperate to share some leftover remarks with us." He probably posts to a huge group of recalcitrant receivers.

“Such as you. I don’t even have a handphone. May I read it?”

“Sure...”

“Well, he writes: ‘I am seeing, therefore I exist. I am walking, therefore I exist.’ Good old DC, same old refrain. Not quite there yet, is he. Should know that if those words connote bodily activities, then neither inference is secure, because he might be dreaming; he might not even have a body at all! Might be just like a radio voice. However, if the same words were labels for the actual sense of seeing, and the actual awareness of walking, then both inferences would be perfectly secure, because they don’t go beyond the mind, which senses or thinks that it is seeing or walking.”¹⁹

19 Descartes 1644, 1:9

Dave is transfixed by a kingfisher: a piece of food in its long beak, a fruit or a shell, perhaps a snail. It juggles the bait, bites it repeatedly. Suddenly throwing it to the back of the throat; then vigorously shaking the head. When calm: looks around, proudly sated.

Emma, reconciliatory. “You speak of brute beasts in a forest, but I think of life therein much like of knowledge itself – all parts belonging: growing together. The forest is architectonic: an artwork disguised as a system of many various cognitions bound in one. Not an aggregate of unconnected thoughts, because knowledge grows organically from within, like the limbs of an animal body, and not by external additions.”²⁰

20 Kant 1781, ch 3

“If the forest is our human reason, our mind, then the animals are our thoughts. Is this the core of your analogy?”

“I say that human reason is by its nature architectonic... the interest of reason, which requires a unity – not empirical, but initial and self-made – forms a natural recommendation for believing in reality.”²¹

21 Kant 1781, SS 6. sect. III

“Ah, I recognise the core of your argument... but the world is constituted by empirical objects and entities of which we can share subjective judgements, and unify knowledge of a public realm of empirical objects.”

“Yet the source of necessity for these shared objects originates in the mind of the knowing subject, not in objects themselves: existence springs from the mind.”²² And I recall it was your student who said – Baasa, the exchange student I mean, not Han Zi – that it exactly is in this sense that objective knowledge is possible: even science. So far so good. But then he questioned your cherished notion of analogy...”

22 Kant 1781, ch 7:7

“Yes, I was taken aback. He actually said, at the queue-and-aye, that our mental representation of the world does not necessarily resemble the world. Claimed that representation is a social convention, something that depends on usage. Unheard of! That there is no such thing as representation except in the sense that ‘some things are used, made, or taken, to represent some things as thus or so.’ I was totally shocked. Were you not stirred, at the very least?”

“Not really. Totality is nothing else but plurality contemplated as unity; limitation is merely reality conjoined with negation; community is the causality of a substance, reciprocally determining, and determined by other substances; and finally, necessity is nothing but existence, which is given through the possibility itself.”²³

23 *ibid.*

“I think he is bashful; youth is leading him astray. A gulf separates us!”

"Ah Dave, you're painting yourself into a corner, your empiricism is limiting you! Bridge the gulf by negating negation. So what if you cannot sense the totality of the world and thus cannot know the totality of the world! Reason is the human ability of making inferences about the true existence of the world, escaping inductive regression."

Her arms extended, wrists twisted, fingers strained at unusual angles. "Reason begins by persuading itself of the existence of some necessary being... of... of..."

"... unconditioned existence?" Dave plays along, he knows she thrives on antimony.

"Yes, the unlimited all is an absolute unity, and is conceived by the mind as a being... being..."

"...above?"

Release: a new pose. "Exactly, and thus reason concludes that the peerless, as the primal basis of all things, possesses an existence which is absolutely necessary."²⁴

24 Kant 1781, ch 3:2

"Here we go again: the leap of faith. I'm not buying into it, Emma. Your reliance on intuition borders on mysticism, and it includes an unprovable proposition."

"No it doesn't! At least try to see my point, and without invoking the negation of evil!"

"I'll be delighted to." Bow and scrape: a balance act between humour and haughtiness: "Let's imagine that your 'self-made first step' is a stepping stone. Might it be reinterpreted, later, in a rationalist framework of explanation?"

"Aww Dave, my idea eludes you..." Her arms drop.

"Emma, I'm not criticising you; in fact, it's rather the other way around! I'm in no position to claim knowing exactly why good and evil appear so unjustly distributed. I can't. Then you were the one rejecting my conviction that knowledge of the world exists prior to humans sensing it – pure knowledge!"

"Okay, okay, okay... I accept that causality cannot be proven by experience. But I can show that experience is impossible without the existence of previous knowledge in the world. If this stepping stone, as you call it, is a piece of knowledge, then it's a minimal –but necessary! – requirement for knowledge. It springs out from how the mind is organised and how representations are constituted."²⁵ I know this beguiling proposition is close to being circular and that I might never be able to prove in itself but only in reference to things as objects of possible experience.²⁶ The problem of reason is so real... it's despairing. Yet I hope that one day you can see that objective experience is only possible of particular events, and that our knowledge of the causal relations among events are simultaneously constructed. They are one and all parts of a unified and uniform experience of nature in space and time."²⁷

25 Kant 1781, ch 3

26 Kant 1783, part 3, 1:47

27 Pierris & Friedman 2013

They walk in silence, Emma's exasperation receding with each step. Unusual bird calls, Dave fantasises they might mean something. Dave's handphone receiving.

"Beep, beep, black sleep... gotta be DC again. What's up this time?"

"Let me see... Ah, you'll like this one, he writes that each moving thing, if left to itself, moves in a straight line. The reason is the unchangingness and simplicity of the operation by which God preserves motion in matter, et cetera, et cetera..."²⁸

28 Descartes 1644, 2:39

"The fearless peerless."

"Wait wait, it continues... the same amount of motion and rest in the material universe as he put there in the beginning."

"Aww again, what's this now about 'amount of motion'? We understand amounts of cheese or of water or of any other kind of substance... but he's the one who insisted that motion is not a substance but merely a mode of a substance, a way of being that the substance has. Am I not right?"²⁹

29 Descartes 1644, 2:36

The tower

From a distance, the tower appears round.³⁰ As they approach, they realise that it is in fact square. Through her binoculars, Emma is obsessively counting the levels, the number of steps to reach the top. From the Parnassum, the unbroken horizon will be theirs to behold, and the world no longer a cave or a tunnel, but an emerald disc: flat as a stone skipping across water.

30 Blending the ideas of 'ivory tower' and 'tree of knowledge' (Descartes 1644).

"Let's climb it, shall we? See – there are five levels." Meanwhile, Dave inspects the forest floor with a magnifying lens. There is a garden with ceramic sculptures. On a brownish, deep purple blob crawls a snail: the Maserati of snails, 10 centimetres per minute. Slender, its muscular body stretching ahead and behind the low, tiny, barrel-shaped shell. Leaves a patchy trail in the same brownish, deep purple as the ceramic surface of the ceramic blob.

Emma leads on. "It's plain to see the first level is easily accessible – Dave, you're standing on it! – No thinking required there. But we will only get to the second floor through careful observation, using all the senses, avoiding being pricked by the shrub. And the floor after that, interestingly, necessitates the attention of both of us – hellooo, Dave! – and to take turns, in a dialogic fashion, so as to constitute the steps we climb on – good thing I brought you along then!"

Dave grumbles, yet he cannot not be smitten by her enthusiasm. A new balance act, between tempering and encouraging. "So far you are absolutely right, my dear. But to reach the levels constructed further up, no talk is called for: only a map, and our careful reading of its good instructions. That's the canopy, and frankly speaking, beyond that, few emerge."

"I've got the map! See, apparently the Learning Path runs in the opposite direction to the Ontological Path. The tower is right in the middle. Which one do you think we should follow?"

“Emma, we’ve been here many times, and every time we’ve found the tower. The map hasn’t changed at all, and the start of every track looks the same. Yet it is not safe to assume we will get to our destination today.”

“Despite this uncertainty, we have to decide. We are compelled to go where the track leads us.”

“But to trust the map? Unacceptable!”

“Shh! Keep your voice down, I heard something.”

“A shadow? The madman!?”

“Calm now. This map, and our memories of previous walks, make it probable, at the very least, that we will reach the top of the tower – daylight lingers longer on upper levels, while lower ones are mersed in darkness. I’ll let you go first. Age before beauty!”

What is to blame for what happened next? A mesh of events, strange as each may seem in isolation, is created mail by mail. Dave suddenly loses his sense of footing; misses a step; puts the left foot into empty space. The term ‘empty’ in its ordinary use does not refer to a place or space in which there is absolutely nothing at all, but simply to a place in which there are none of the things we think ought to be there.³¹ The net force on his body parts is no longer zero. To regain mechanical equilibrium, he reflexively twists the torso to the right and extends the left leg to stop a free-fall. Already before his foot hits the ground he knows the effect will be like the lash of a whip, cracking ligaments and tendons.

31 Descartes 1644, 2:17

He cries out and breathes heavily; soon he will be lying across the steps of the stairs of the tower, his head on Emma’s thigh. “I hurt my foot. The pain has barely started to crawl in, but already it scares me: slowly it gnaws at first, then takes larger bites, each time growing longer fangs and daring deeper digs. The clear awareness that pain comes to me quite unexpectedly implies that one particular body is more closely conjoined with my mind than any other body.”³²

32 Descartes 1644, 2:2

“It is dark, you didn’t see the root above the ground from that tree, your foot was in action and hit the root, which was at rest. Your foot contains fluids, the corpuscles are displaced in unknown relationship, without meaning. It is painful, your brain projects the pain back onto the limb. The sensation of pain is existing not purely in your mind but also in the foot.”

“Is it the same tree as before? The same root? An unfortunate asymmetry: the root at rest, my foot in motion: impact, yet the root appears free of damage. How could I blame the root for my pain?” Gulps for air, contorts his face, moans. “There is an asymmetry in representation that resemblance does not have, so resemblance is not the right criterion for representation.”³³

33 Fraassen 2008a p 9, p 15

“Rest now, Dave. I am not talking here about the action that is understood to exist in the body that starts or stops the motion, but simply about the transfer of a body, and with the absence of a transfer, that is, rest. This transfer can’t exist outside the moving body; and when there’s a transfer of motion, the body is in a different state from when there is no transfer, that is, when it is at rest.”

"All that talk about rules of hard bodies hitting each other, going off in various directions. For me, all the while fluids are rushing to my ankle so that the whole foot will soon be spherical, but soft, hot, pained. Our hands are very soft, more like water than like nails..."

"You must rest! Motion and rest are just two modes of a body."³⁴

34 Descartes 1644, 2:27

"Now, if one body x collides with a hard body y that it cannot push aside, y 's resistance provides an obvious reason why x 's motion will not continue in the same direction that it had before the collision."³⁵

35 Descartes 1644, 2:41

"Please Dave, be silent."

It gets late, so the sun sets and night rises. Dave gets another short message service. "Read it to me, Emma."

"Here we go... oh, it's a long one, you don't want to hear it all... rambling about his childhood, how bad it was. Like this: 'The prejudices of childhood are the chief causes of error. I can't forget them.' Gee, I wonder, DC... are you onto something or are you on something?"

"Poor DC, alone in a bar, riding out a storm of emotions. Did you know that he was the supervisor of Zach's eff-why-pee, his first year project?"

"No kidding!"

"Before he joined the bright side. Hhhh...!" Coughing-laughter echoes through the forest, from trunk to trunk.

Eventually, batteries run out; they speak less. Emma reflects on action, Dave on simultaneity. They marvel at the Uni and at the stars, which, like stellar professor Zach, they fundamentally agree, exist. Their marvels, being sensations, are likely also to exist, though neither can be certain, as they have not yet formed a public experience. Neither thinks of the candidate.

Because the light coming from the stars appears no brighter than the meagre glow produced by the liquid crystal display of Dave's handphone, they do not imagine any star as being any bigger than this. Because they do not observe that the earth turns on its axis, or that its surface is curved to form a globe, they are apt to suppose that the earth is immobile and its surface flat. Right from infancy Dave and Emma had been swamped with a thousand such prejudices; and in later childhood, forgetting how little basis there had been for adopting them, they came to regard them as known by the senses, or implanted by nature, and accepted them as utterly true and utterly obvious.³⁶

36 Descartes 1644, 1:71

"Because my foot was awkwardly placed, the pain is felt as in the foot, and meaning is naturally deceived; because the same movement in the brain couldn't cause in the mind the same feeling, and this feeling more often roused by a cause that hurts the foot, than by an external other. It is more reasonable that it brings to the mind the pain of the foot than that of any other part."³⁷

37 Descartes 1641

"Shhh... Everything of which we have sensory awareness is subject to this same kind of mistake: be it titillations or pain. We don't suppose that pleasure and agony exist outside us, but we do think of them as existing not purely in our mind."³⁸

38 Descartes 1644, 1:67

The cab

It gets late. Because the earth turns, the Uni – buildings, trees, roads, and all – conceals the straight line drawn between Zachariah Triturus and the Sun. Seeing light as though it were in the Sun makes other people think that the light exists outside them, but for the department head of embodied philosophy this belief is a mere carry-over from early childhood.³⁹ Not being able to enjoy daylight for another several hours, he decides to call it a day. A cab will bring him from work to home: a little luxury he at certain times affords himself. Besides, there is no reason to expect any complications at this particular occasion.

39 *ibid.*

Stepping out of the Uni building that houses his offices, having texted for a taxi cab, prof Zach munches on a persimmon, a fairly common fruit at these longitudes and a taste he much prefers to apples these days. Good, here's the cab. Diodes emitting red light in dotted patterns: on call.

He squeezes into the back seat. "Carlton House Terrace – please... ouch!" Could use a reupholstery. Cab smells of cheap perfume; thankfully, the air is extremely cold.

Professor Zach can explain – that is, justify the splashing out of department expenses on this taxi cab ride – as a result of either of two causes, or their combination. One: he is pushed from the tedium of his office; thanks to professional efficiency, today's tasks have been successfully completed. Two: he is pulled towards the tranquillity of his home; for Zach, finality is the very definition of home, a place demanding minimal amounts of judgements to make and of actions to take.⁴⁰

40 Efficient, final, and other causes, defined by Aristoteles

"Howdy sir, put on your sitting britches, because we never travel the same taxi twice."

"I beg your pardon?" The strangest of dialects. In the mirror: bobbing bushy eyebrows framed by spaniel earlobes.

"Change is in the air, Arul takes the night shift. My uncle needed time off. He's so busy you might think he was twins."

"I see."

"Route must change if driver gets stuck in a blind alley."⁴¹ Happened today but my uncle got out of it, smart as a whip he is. Sir, how about some entertainment?"

41 Russell 1961 p 85

The absence of an answer implies consent: Arul turns the radio on. Zach is not much for listening. He scans the streetlights, hurled towards him in the darkness of a cab dashing downtown. Radio spouts a jingle, or a commercial, or something equally vulgar. Simply awful. The voice is processed to sound more threatening, more seductive. "Nature teaches you pain, hunger, thirst. You are lodged in your body, as a pilot in his ship. You are so mixed up with it that you feel as one with it." Unnatural gobby irritates Zach; yet he cannot not hear it.

Professor Zachariah blocks out the moronic chatter and focuses. The candidate. The faculty position. The decision which is his to make. Well, after due consultation with Dave and Emma, of course, but he is the one who makes the first and final calls. The emeritus need only sign the

documents. No room for complexity. Nature is simple and superfluous things do not thrive therein.⁴²

42 Newton 1687, regula 1

Blather forcing itself into Zach's mind: "But you are a thing that thinks! All your feelings of hunger, thirst, pain are nothing but confused modes of thinking, which come from and depend on the mixture of mind and body. Voluptas has the cure. Get your mix now, let Voluptas fix it for you. Dial one eight hundred five five..."⁴³

43 Descartes 1641, ending

Zach squirming visibly: Arul turns off the radio. Mercy killed the goby. Zach relaxes: saved by the grace. Gratias. I am full of grate. The ensuing silence soothes them both, and wraps them in a quilt of quiescence.

Zach meditates on justified true belief: whether it counts as knowledge or not. He feels compelled to come to a decision for the case at hand, even though no adequate theoretical or empirical grounds for any decision exist, for even to do nothing is still a decision.⁴⁴ A mild titillation as he ponders the possibility of making a correct decision for the wrong reasons. A person's belief of what will happen can coincidentally be correct without him having the actual knowledge to base it on. Then, unexpectedly: a flash of green in the darkness, near his left foot.

44 Russell 1961, p 769

Who, or what, is to blame for what happened next? A mesh of events, strange as each may seem in isolation, is created mail by mail. It is clear that Zach could not have seen the notebook, had Jago not dropped it. The relationship is logically true, in all likelihood. But as it is non-commutative it doesn't explain everything, far from it, so pointing it out might unfortunately not much help you, dear reader, get to the bottom of this story.

The notebook is lying on the floor. Emerald green, with an elastic band across. Puzzled, Zach flips the pages, which are full of annotations, sketches, diagrams, and hand-drawn maps. And then, in a fold towards the end but not the last, embracing a small pencil: a name, in large capitals. He breathes in heavily through the nose. There's plenty more to read on the page, but to be able to do so, he needs better light.

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The Feminine Art School

I'm shy about what I'm going to tell you: I believe the only way to 'challenge' an art school today is to change everything so that it becomes 'feminine'. This came to me as a revelation, so I'm still thinking about what it might mean. It is about a transformation of the learning process, but not a feminist one. It is not about introducing a quota, or claiming a certain discourse/ideology, even if my idea of the 'feminine' school includes a large number of women who teach and learn. Many artists I know — women — share the concern about the incapacity of our institutions and our institutionalised artists and curators to surpass the structures and the language used to express social, aesthetic, and technological change. Convinced and unconvinced at the same time that a revolution against the post-Fordist-male-capitalist order is possible, we all reunite our voices, incite our critical thinking, and turn our minds towards an awareness that will be embodied in an eternal denouncement of all inequalities. I fail to see this 'method' as helping women get to the place they deserve to be — because the logic and language that have historically developed to promote leadership in small groups of interests depends on money, and women do not "move" enough money to have significant relevance in the capitalist contra.

This is not a lament; it is a call for different logics and discourses that may be more open, or at least more able, because these have not yet taken the form, or reached the mature state, to be able to introduce a mind that contests, which could construct a realm of roads for all of us to follow. I mean 'all of us' because I believe what is good for women is great for men, but not vice versa. I know the notion of the 'feminine' might make you shiver. It is the last thing I want to be or to become, a result of my feeling that men, the system, institutions, parents even, desired me to become, and once I did, I was reduced — like police reduce their suspects — and placed in a spot that was small and local and full of others like me and not large and bright like the spacious universes that men have concocted for them to inhabit. I am only now discovering that the force of the notion 'feminine' is to name a way to sense the question of experience from a completely different angle.

Why do I want a 'feminine' school? Because the 'feminine' is another name for attributes, and I believe education is the word we use for acquiring traits. Traits that not only modify behaviour but also the experience of behaviour. Traits are also the visible markers of what we may or may not have in common; they represent the possibility of communality or radical impossibility. As much as I can envision a 'feminine' school of art, I foresee that not many would like to embark on this. This may be a good thing because it means we have to quickly

learn to advertise other traits that are better than the ones the 'feminine' represents. The school of masters, the school of media, the creative school, the school of interdisciplinary matters: all these simply represent a will to expand the possibilities, but they, however, follow the old script of art practice and worse, the idea that art practitioners are all the same type of people with a few exceptions. When these exceptions become the norm, even if only in small numbers, their traits must be introduced into the DNA of our understanding of art practice.

It is fundamental to see that the way we educate students of art is wrong, and I'm not talking only about women. To put it like that is simplistic, but simplicity might help us produce an image that can further articulate more complex arguments. The feminine school is and has always been about gender, and I would extend that to race too. I'd also like to introduce the idea of religion but it is far too complex to argue at this point why I think it can be positive to address the question of belief, a fundamental question in the history of art that manifests itself in many important ways, and that still determines the values we think we need to defend. Of course, a feminine school today — one that makes you 'see' gender and race, that makes you feel it and sense it as the core material of art's interaction with the social, with the senses, with capital and other forms of production — is about much more than the manners of gender identity. We've been taught many manners, and they do not work. Quotas are manners, ways of good public behaviour that ignore the changes below the surface. Our current democratic systems are sick with these tics, which cohabit far too well with the rise of the ruthless, with the fascists who we see more and more in every country of Europe.

This feminine school is not a delicate programme. An urgent matter that has been expressed many times before but which has never taken place; it is a different type of understanding of all the principles that we defend. And once we live them, we do not need to thematise or defend them anymore. It is difficult to do but we've known how to do it already for a very long time. Referencing differently, reading different, collaborating differently, scaling differently, addressing matter differently, presenting work differently, using the terms differently... Differently is not synonymous with critically. The feminine makes no point to thematise gender, and to conflate it with race is uncomfortable. It irritates the whole social tissue and transforms the very ideas of experience, taste, and value that we've historically inherited from art. Not because of how we talk about it but because of what we do not know about it.

I could have used a different notion, but I think the feminine represents a challenge. Everyone seems to know what it means, yet its historical significance is emptied out today. It is this emptied notion that we can occupy. We can reload it with a debate about what the questions are that constitute art's ambition today.

Questions surrounding politics, the social, identity, as well as the blunt servers of the market actually fall short of challenging how gender functions in our world. The fact that women still do not play an essential role in the governance of our societies is not "merely a question of time." It is a question of the system, a system that one day may not depend on the logic of either/or but that may instead resist this logic. We are very far from this kind of revolution. All of our political ideas and images depend so much on the Platonic logic of reversal and on the more recent Foucauldian socio-political affirmations of agency. Therefore, to claim that we should create a feminine art school is to claim a "will to power,"

to use Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of the notion coined by Friedrich Nietzsche: to be able to name those elements that are genealogical in the different forces that participate in producing a feeling of increased strength and fullness. In other words, we can say that feminine forces — excluded from all modern and capitalist definitions of power, leadership, and even sexuality — are the traits that we need to deepen in order to gain an unprecedented meaning, pushing the “main features” of a traditional understanding of art and the role gender plays in it to the fore.

In this process of becoming a woman, art and art practice will be able to discover not only new words, new notions of experience, but also new relationships to science and technology. It might all seem radical or impossible, but that's only because we — men and women — are still closed off from the true process of transgenering not only our bodies, but also our notions of knowledge, culture and time.

This might be read as fantasy, or just an irritating speculation about a transformation that has at its core ideas of gender far too wild for you to see how it can all be applied. I believe in the importance of art, but not because it provides our society with different experiences, especially since we aren't able to name the strength of such an experience. The strength is in the knowledge that art has been accumulating a gender by and of itself; art is not merely a locus or a place to talk about or thematise a subject-matter. Art is a gender that has been accumulating an incredible knowledge about a type of making that is different from labour. Art is a gender that has been approaching the form and structure of ignorance just as much as it has been contributing to the conditions of knowledge. Art is a gender that is permanently distracted, and from this, it gains a complex understanding of how intelligence functions. Art is an innocent gender that enables rigour. It is innocent because it is inseparable from the particular and identifiable entities that we call the real, yet it always remains a non-identifiable element that allows for identification and interpretation.

Labour

Over the last decade, I have spent a fair amount of time thinking and talking about labour. In the early years of democracy in Spain, labour structured the possibility of imagining art and artmaking as not only a way to pivot between conceptual premises, allowing the maker and the viewer to reach another conception of taste, but also to gain relevance by surpassing existing language. Art is a reflection of the conditions that make life, a working life, possible. A working life means a life determined by production, subject to the power relations of capital and its logic in the aftermath of a de-industrialised world, which keeps on growing and expanding the same logic all over, inch by inch. Labour names a life that needs to do in order to be able to survive. Labour is repetitious and, like prayer, a practice that legitimises the existence of those who labour. Art is also now trying to be part of this legitimisation of machine of labour. This, after centuries of apparent exclusion, and suffering from that feeling of being a class without the burdens of payroll conditions. A fiction, since artists have always tested the limits of labour... However, the revolution of conceptualism lays in its linking not only seeing with thinking, but also doing with a more regulated form of making.

Procrastination

The first stage of my thinking on writing and making was procrastination. True, one of my most admired friends, the writer Enrique Vila-Matas, has dedicated a large part of his oeuvre to the subject. He wrote a beautiful novel about it in the year 2000: *Bartleby y compañía* (Anagrama), translated four years later by Jonathan Dunne as *Bartleby & Co* (New Directions). Another friend, the poet Kenneth Goldsmith, has been rehearsing the matter of procrastination and our relation to the internet. Procrastination has a bad reputation. It mirrors the good traits of labour in a negative way. However, in seeing the rise of a new and fresh interest in research expressed by institutions dealing with art, it seemed just right to introduce the enemy notion as a way of producing a more complete picture of what artistic research could be or is. A few years ago I wrote¹:

In answering the question “what is reality,” Anton Zeilinger says: “That which we cannot agree on. We need to undertake a thorough reconstruction of the basic concepts that we use every day — reality, time, matter, space, light — so that we can use them to define new situations both inside and outside the laboratory. We live our lives immersed in categories. If we want to use those categories to interrogate reality, just as a lawyer interrogates a witness, we must understand what they mean at each moment. And that’s where philosophy comes in; it is what best explains the historical dramatisation of those categories.”

Artists, like scientists, are pioneers when it comes to creating new forms of connectivity between worlds that seem to have nothing in common. Artists embark on writing novels, conceiving treatises, discovering archives, devising therapies, and choreographing bodies; they set out on the endless study of everything that contributes to different formulations of what we call reality. It would be banal to describe all that as mere play. Rather, we find ourselves before a strange form of research that is charged more than ever with an awareness of the parallel between producing art and understanding the world. Since Marcel Duchamp, and perhaps much earlier — indeed, perhaps forever — art has been eager to house a knowledge different than that of academia, and to provide the ultimate reason for modifying that academic knowledge. Much of contemporary art attempts to develop works and situations that make it possible to read the past freely, to take flight and approach the unknown.

Those words have since been interpreted as a defense of artistic research in an academic context, under an academic form. However, I had also intended to say that in making, a form of inquiry that is closer to procrastination is inscribed, a productive way to activate thinking, a thinking that is loose and needs to stay loose.

Loose

Gregory Bateson wrote somewhere in his 1949 essay *Experiments in Thinking About Observed Ethnological Material*:

I want to emphasise that whenever we pride ourselves upon finding a newer, stricter way of thought or exposition; whenever we start insisting too hard upon “operationalism”

¹ *Clandestine Happiness. What Do We Mean by Artistic Research?*
Originally published by the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) at ÍNDEX number 0, Autumn 2010.

or symbolic logic or any other of these very essential systems of tram lines, we lose something of the ability to think new thoughts. And equally, of course, whenever we rebel against the sterile rigidity of formal thought and exposition and let our ideas run wild, we likewise lose. As I see it, the advances in scientific thought come from a combination of loose and strict thinking, and this combination is the most precious tool of science. My mystical view of phenomena contributed specifically to build up this double habit of mind—it led me into wild “hunches” and, at the same time, compelled more formal thinking about those hunches. It encouraged looseness of thought and then immediately insisted that that looseness be measured up against a rigid concreteness. The point is that the first hunch from analogy is wild, and then, the moment I begin to work out the analogy, I am brought up against the rigid formulations which have been devised in the field from which I borrow the analogy.

I started reading Bateson again. When I arrived at the Institut Kunst, I relapsed into my old habit of programming with a discursive coherence. During the years leading up to dOCUMENTA (13), I thought I was cured of piling theories onto making in order to reach a ‘better’ understanding of art. But I was wrong. Faced with the task of reflecting upon the curricula, my first instinct was to identify important material and put it in order. Then I realised my acquired academic idea of order corresponds with neither artistic practice nor the new order introduced by reading as scanning through texts. Also, this kind of reading was there — in the past — not only to present relevant arguments and to teach how thinking thinks, but also to induce similar ways of writing. I have always thought the way certain academic traditions train people to write is a problem, and if there has been a revolution in finding one’s own voice in text it has happened because of texting (emailing as well). Of course, the last thing one should do is to adapt to the new situation and create a customised set of tools for easy learning. Yet this has already been done in the millions of existing textbooks that students of all disciplines need to absorb in no time, which is not that different from wiki-screening the Western canon of references and thinking logics. The task is actually so complex it cannot be strategised. We cannot impose this mission upon ourselves, to find out how to deal with the necessity of challenging the old discourses, without even knowing them, of reading less or in a radical different way, and of acquiring the skills that address in a new language — of words or of matter — core questions about gender comprehension, technology, power structures, and perception/ experience in the fields of culture. When I say we cannot, I also say we cannot avoid trying to do so. But if we try hard with our minds, we may just end up becoming lazy and critical of the current situation. Being lazy is just being tight. A tightness I identify not only as a quality of a certain way of obliging thinking to take a direction, to be oriented towards a point on the horizon or just a goal, but also as a way to name a tension that is now more than ever present in our bodies, in our institutions, in our social DNA.

I like the way Gregory Bateson describes the relationship between tightness and looseness. Thinking and working, like the cardiac cycles of contraction and relaxation, on the importance of looseness, of all the impulses and energies that are not directed, planned, or strategised, but lived. Without these energies, thinking — and more importantly, novel thinking — is not possible. Risk-taking is the process of learning how this interplay affects our intelligence, our comprehension of the world.

Art is not the only discipline in which these ideas are constantly present, but it is surely the one that sincerely expresses an interest in undertaking constant research on the future of the possible in relation to experience. We are conditioned to be aware of life more through function and labour than through other aspects like our gender or the place we are in, or our curiosity towards how others live their lives. This is probably why these non-labour parameters are gaining space, because they suggest an understanding of life that cannot be reduced to the same instrumental framework. The tension between the labour-oriented worldview and aspects of life outside of this labour has increased. 'Revolution,' if one may use this term, lies not only in the energy we invest in contesting the 'patron' or the logic of the economy, but also increasingly, in the collective energy we invest in producing new realities that do not adapt easily to the old ones. The revolution of tomorrow will not be in the form of a riot, but in very large numbers of people 'defining' their gender, creating even more complex and intense networks, relating to nature and technology in a more psychological and less tool-like way... To break old habits or create a hole in systems is innovation. It is so radical and novel that it scares us, a little. In order to be ready and to train, art is there.

Innocence

The question of writing is linked to the exercise of criticality. Central to the inquiry into knowledge has always been the principle of scepticism. Unlike ancient scepticism, which was based on the variety of sensible appearances, modern scepticism — at least since Michel de Montaigne and David Hume — has revolved around the status of relations inside understanding: the need not only to understand what passes through understanding but also what forbids understanding by withdrawing sense. Here, a new interest in the non-transparency of language appears, in its incapacity to fulfil the task of expression and communication. And this produces a paradox: the relevance of grasping the reverse of knowledge, and the role played by humour as well as fiction as practitioners of (non)sense. To not only ask how knowledge is produced, but what supports the myth of a language capable of expressing this, is one of the possible tasks of a different way to conceive theory, one in which genres are inextricably mixed with their opposites, where the strong perlocutionary effect of the 'innocence' is ascribed to a strong affect: the need to understand. To inquire into knowledge implies the effort to formulate — through logics and languages that surpass disciplines — how inextricable relations among things, language, matter, form, sense, are possible. It means to account for the terms, the possibilities as well as the circumstances, in which the principles that associate the animate with the inanimate, or objects with memory, or animals with other animals, or seeds with art, or theory with the logics of politics, or poetry with knowledge, occur. And therefore it cannot come as a surprise that imagination is a central principle in the invention of the knowledge that takes place in art — a task that does not mimic an activity of academia, but that, in an excessive and subversive way, produces time and space for it, constituting a new 'culture.'

The main trait of fiction and imagination is their potential failure. They do not serve as solid ground for a speech act; they are an interference in the logic of an intentional assertion of meaning. Art has retained this inversion of the relationship between meaning and saying as a way

to overcome the traps of consciousness, the transcendental principle that rules the modern conception of the individual, that defines the political as an unambiguous text marked by intention of meaning and able to produce and reproduce a very definite sense of empathy. This exercise of accepting the riddle of ambiguity, the constant alteration of the relations between matter and words, time and meaning, defines a research manner that calls for a radical reconsideration of the role of language, of straightforward conceptions of how things interact, as well as the inventory of monologues produced by serious forms of meaning.

And this is how the term innocence comes into play. Innocence is a non-concept; it is a modifier. It denotes the attempt to introduce a difference into the relations that define knowledge, the limits of language and the event of thinking in art. At first sight, it could be mistaken for a noun, indicating disenchantment, a relativist position. Yet soon, positivity creeps back in; innocence is the verbal expression of a movement. It names a tension, a state of imagination aiming toward the potential reorganisation of the structure of the known and those who think they know. The “maybe” is the emblem of attention, a positive form of privation — the privation of certainty, of the statement that forms a conclusion — that introduces not only fiction but a dimension of theatricality, since it puts all elements into play. So rather than a quest for the void, the dance introduced by innocence can be taken as a journey that introduces us into the realm of artistic research as an active reconsideration of certain representations of knowledge in the context of art. By asking “What is the reverse of the known?” the form of inquiry that takes place in art amounts to an intuitive grasp of a philosophical and political problematic that not only defines what culture is but what it may be in the future.

Innocence, yes. It has nothing to do with morality here, but it helps us to get ready to address another very complex and challenging task: the inquiry into the structure of ignorance.

Ignorance

That is where I am now. I think the many multiple and different futures that come from all sides are dependent on us to interpret ignorance and its structure. There is not much I can say about it yet, but the notion does not express a negative nature. Enlightenment, modernity... our culture has invested a great deal in avoiding darkness, in filling the void — ignorance — with knowledge. However, in the future I would like to invest some time trying to see ignorance as a force that has agency, and not only a negative one; as a logic that is alive in science, in computation, in technology. I would like to see ignorance as a force that structures the way we are moving, away from the timeline, the alphabetic code, the certainties acquired through the stability provided by judgements. If there is something an art institution can do, it is allowing us to understand how to trust art in the complex play between ignorance and that something else outside of ignorance. Making art is a radical contribution to a form of experience that long ago abandoned the aesthetic of surprise.

SILKE SCHMICKL

Oneiric speculations

I am intrigued by the notion of 'fictive dreams.' I dream constantly, remembering in colour, fluid, animated and always cinematographic. My dreams are full of details, tangible stories and fiction. Some of them delivered the script and mood for personal filmic productions. The last decade of my life has been a dream, driven by an inexplicable flow of energies that brought me to places and people, made me discover the world, myself and others. The more I live, the more dreams become reality, and vice versa. Multiple realities intertwine, spaces cross, and time overlaps. Rational systems are questioned, conventions challenged, intuition privileged. So how can a dream not be fictive, is a question I may ask.

Yet I am drawn to this wordplay and its provocative assumption. Its suggestion of multi-layered projections, the doubling of imaginative potentials, the eulogy of hypothetical and creative sensibilities. Three of my fetish authors in recent years come to my mind – Paul Valéry, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Umberto Eco. Quoting these authors whose intellectual achievements were groundbreaking the 20th century might seem anachronistic for a contribution to *Tropical Lab 10** – a project that deals with the very contemporary and that has the purpose of discovering emerging talents of the future. Much has been written on these theories since their publication and the scientific discourse has significantly evolved. However, following the logic of dreams and fiction, these cherished territories of freedom, my thoughts follow a rather intuitive logic of association than the accuracy of a history of thought. It's my personal experience and interest in the interrelation of sensibility, perception and art's fragmentary, open character that echoed with the idea of 'fictive dreams' and spontaneously brought these references to my mind.

Paul Valéry's *The Outlook for Intelligence*, written in 1935, defends the idea that sensibility – which is mistakenly contrasted with intelligence – is an actual vector of knowledge and an essential element in the production of human intelligence. In this short essay, Valéry formulates in an almost visionary manner what has come to pass during the previous century – the modification of modern man's habits and thinking patterns due to new living conditions in an era of industrial and technological progress. Valéry related this fundamental change to a reduced sensibility of man towards the world, and stressed the therefore inherent risk for a loss of intelligence. If his analysis refers to the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th and early 20th century, we might add that the Internet Revolution at the end of the last century has had an even greater impact. A new space was brought to us, the virtual, which nowadays hosts and conditions a large portion of our actions, including artistic productions. New forms of sensibilities and (artificial) intelligence appeared in this territory in which we navigate almost like in our dreams. We travel from one site to another, encounter fragments of stories and people, unconsciously leaving tracks and personal histories. It is a somehow fictional space that encourages the projection of speculative dreams and horror scenarios, the invention of new personalities and lives. Yet coming back to Valéry's thoughts, it is his insistence on the importance of the sensible that interests me and that has lost none of its pertinence. Dreams, such as art, offer a space that is subjected to the logic of sensibility, independent from worldly events, yet capable of carrying collective and individual memories and visions that inform us about the state of society.

The particular sensorial experience we retain from dreams makes me think of perception and the unique perspective dreams offer in order to examine ourselves and the world. In this, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *Eye and Mind* (1961) emerge as significant. In these essays, Merleau-Ponty investigated whether consciousness, defined as intentional, is an adequate tool to think of a notion of perception. He suggested, such as Valéry, to widen the spectrum and look into sensible, bodily experiences to understand human's perceptive nature. According to him, perception can be understood as the self-revelation of the sense of a world in and through a being which is itself a part of the world. Seeing is therefore being drawn into a dimension of Being, a tissue of sensible being to which the perceiving body is not foreign. 'Fictive dreams,' I would like to add, is what I see and dream with my body, which actually knows before knowing. The visceral impressions of dreams recall immersive aesthetical sensations I might experience when looking at art.

Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962) is the third text that inspires my thoughts and adds to these speculative reflexions on sensibility and perception. It explores the particular role of art in an age of instability and crisis, where senselessness and disorder have become an holistic experience of the contemporary world. Eco's powerful concept of 'openness,' rooted in an artist's decision to leave arrangements of some constituents of a work to the viewer, reminds me of the fragmentary and ambiguous character of dreams in which the allusive narrative is constantly disrupted. A desire of awareness, involvement and active change awakens.

Dreams and fiction are indeed a favourable terrain for peaceful yet powerful resistances through artistic imagination and sensible approaches. If they are not directly subordinated to social, political and economical realities, they have the capacity to unveil drawbacks of current events in personal and collective contexts. The fictive dreams I am interested in do not escape from reality but rather interact with it, and initiate, just like particular forms of art, a call to action. They function as mirrors unveiling blindspots, or spotlights that shed light on hidden aspects of human nature. Dreams are often sparked by unfulfilled desires, imperfections and urgencies of change. They are the spaces where our subconsciousness become visible and tangible, where reality and our own position in the world is critically reframed. This shift of perspective may be uncomfortable and uncanny, or may even be a beautiful prevision of a state yet to come.

The ambiguous, plural and undetermined character of things has now been an accepted category of knowledge for a long time, and is particularly perceptible in current contemporary art trends. Artists' convocation of surreal, unconscious forces, the imagination of sci-fi scenarios, hyperreal worlds and immersive experiences offer undoubtedly unlimited possibilities for these dreamlike fictions. In celebration of the 10th anniversary of *Tropical Lab 10*, the following selection of images introduce artworks by 10 international artists with whom I have been working with for many years. My choice is motivated by their capacity to develop speculative strategies, change conventional perspectives, and transgress codes of representation and media. I have witnessed outstanding manifestations of intelligence rooted in the sensible and personal works of these artists who articulate precisely this passage from reality to fiction, and explore fragile cultural, social and political interstices.

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*Footnote

Tropical Lab is an international arts residency for student-artists from around the world. Organised by LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore, Tropical Lab is in its 10th year. Tropical Lab remains the key inspiration to ISSUE. Each year's ISSUE shapes the theme for the residency.

YOKO FUKUSHIMA
Born in Gumma, Japan. Lives and works in Paris, France.



Swinging Humming, 2016
synthetic hair, synthetic flowers, wood, nylon thread
200 x 60 x 10 cm (overall)
Courtesy of the artist



Freedom no Freedom, 2016
stuffed bird (Eurasian jay), nylon thread, bells, chain, painted cage
85 x 20 x 10 cm (overall)
Courtesy of the artist

BARBARA HLALI

Born in Dortmund. Lives and works in Dortmund, Germany.

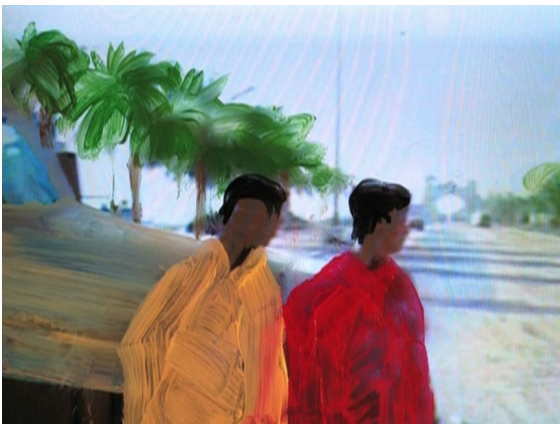


Tower of Babel, Coin Frottage no. 49, 2015

pencil on paper

42 x 29.7 cm

Courtesy of the artist

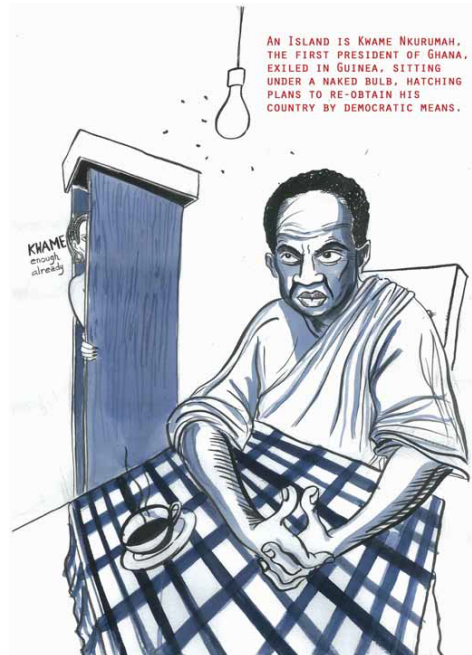
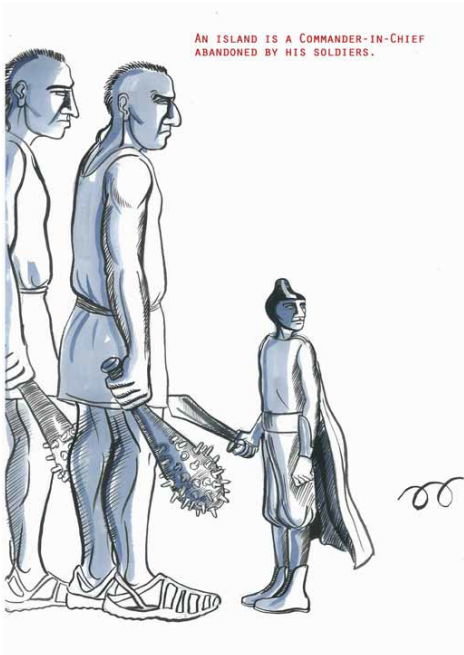
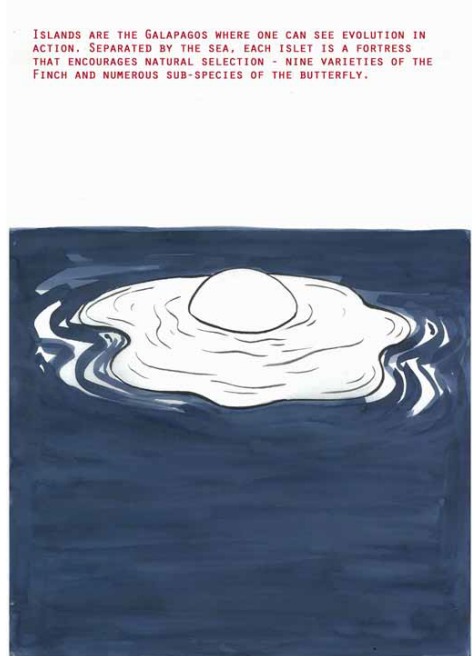
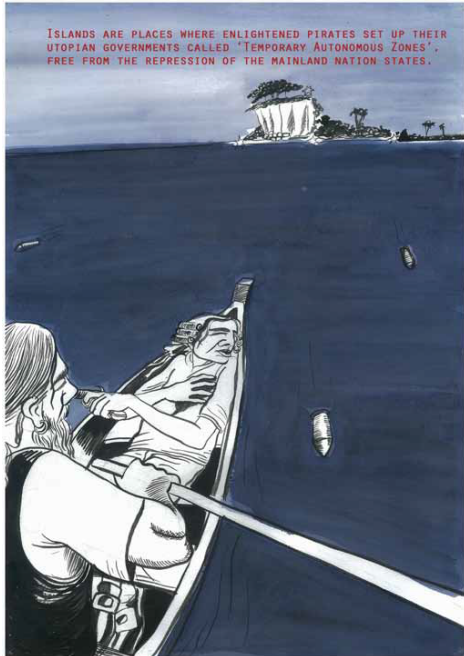


Media reports show the wall around the Shiite district in Baghdad being painted with beautiful landscapes: aesthetic designs are used to cover military measures and the effects of war. In this film, Barbara Hlali applies a similar technique with regard to the overall situation by painting over this TV footage with a layer of gouache. The act of painting unmask the painted-over situation, demonstrating how the war constantly comes to the fore below the surface of sugar-coating.

Painting Paradise, 2008
gouache on TV screen, digital video
5:30 min
Courtesy of the artist

SARNATH BANERJEE

Born in Calcutta, India. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

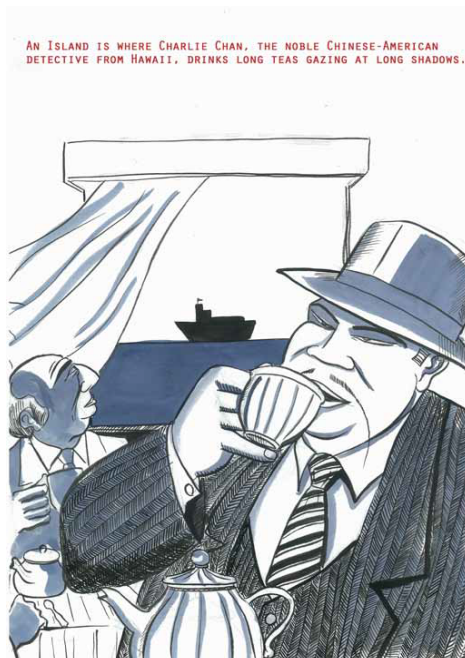
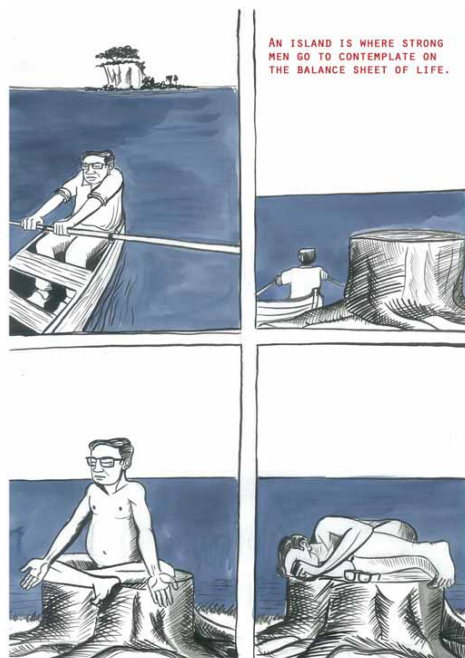
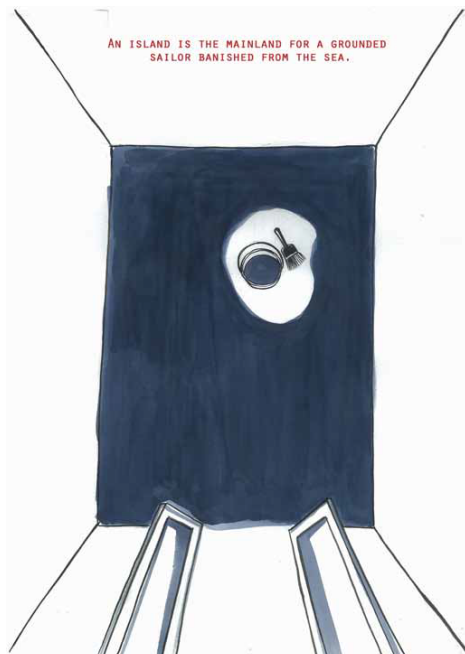


Temporary Autonomous Zones, 2012

ink and brush on paper

16.5 x 28 cm each

Courtesy of Project 88 and the artist



TAYSIR BATNIJI

Born in Gaza, Palestine. Lives and works in Paris, France.



By naming his series of images *Interface*, Taysir Batniji plays on the meaning of a word commonly used in the disciplines of geography and computing. Interface is also a reference to the place itself, Bahrain, that translates literally to 'two seas.' Thus, the photo series appears as a documentation of shapes that are often the contact of two distinct spaces within the landscape.

For Batniji, sand and water are recurring elements that become common vectors throughout his images for *Interface*. Together, land and sea symbolise the shore, the border and the threshold. The sand is a metaphor for the continuous state of metamorphosis that the landscape of Bahrain is experiencing. The artist perceives the country to be in a state of perpetual transformation, reclaiming land from the sea to expand its borders, where sand connotes a work-in-progress. *Interface* produces, as its computing meaning suggests, a system of illusions – nearly virtual – of these model-like architectures, of their volumes, in a country that vacillates between reality and fiction while it metamorphoses. (Alexandre Castant)



Interface, 2014
inkjet on paper
80 x 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist



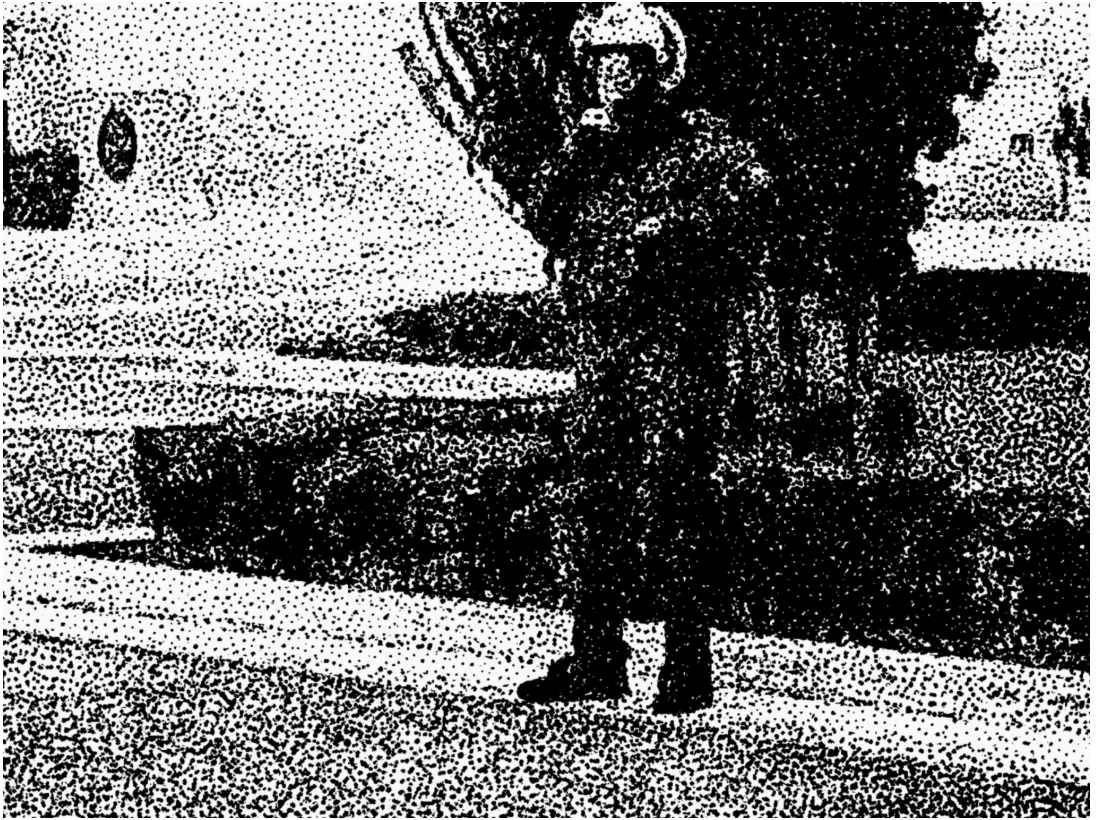
Interface, 2014
inkjet on paper
80 x 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Interface, 2014
inkjet on paper
80 x 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist

ALEXANDER SCHELLOW

Born in Berlin, Germany. Lives and works in Cologne, Germany.



The construction of the Kifissias freeway begun in the 1970s and was finally completed for the Athens Olympics in 2004. The Kifissos river, which has historically served as the formative axis of the cities development, has since been nearly entirely covered over within the city perimeter. In a series of drawings and animations, *NERO* reconstructs the flow of the river through the perceptions and practices that preserve it as an urban reality and unpacks the river's material and imaginary 'presence' in daily life along with related strategies of remembering, forgetting and actualising. The research along the Kifissos and in conversations with residents, city planners, politicians, ecologists and archaeologists intends to reveal the concrete effects had on the way people in Athens orient and position themselves, as well as the polemics, projections and social realities ignited by the 'Kifissos issue.'



NERO, 2012-2016 (ongoing)

approximately 2000 drawings, partial reprints in books and animation loops, and ink on tracing paper
37 x 28 cm

Courtesy of the artist and MELD (Paris/Athens)

DEBBIE DING

Born in Singapore. Lives and works in London, UK.

**A SPECIAL HERITAGE
ZONE IS TO BE
DESIGNATED FOR THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF
FORMER URBAN
ARCHITECTURES.
IN ALL OTHER AREAS,
HISTORIC BUILDINGS
DO NOT NEED SPECIAL
PERMISSIONS TO BE
DEMOLISHED OR
ALTERED**

**COMPULSORY
TWO-YEAR
NATIONAL
INTERMENT
SERVICE MUST BE
POSTHUMOUSLY
SERVED BY
ALL CITIZENS AND
PERMANENT
RESIDENTS WITHIN
MUNICIPAL
CEMETERIES**

**PUBLIC USE OF
PRIVATISED GREEN
AREAS IS PERMITTED
FOR ALL THOSE
WEARING FULL FACE
AND FULL BODY
CAMOUFLAGE
SUITS**

**THE DEMOLITION OF
BUILDINGS IS TO BE
MARKED BY
CEREMONIAL
BURNING OF
ARCHITECTURAL
MODEL REPLICAS**

Rules for the Expression of Architectural Desires by Debbie Ding presents a selection of speculative rules, schemes, devices and instruments for the urban and social design of a city.

The time is neither future nor past. The place is neither East nor West. The design of our built environments begin with ideas, and these ideas are articulated in ways which may be conceptual, fuzzy, or imprecise. What we find is that the material of a city is immaterial at its very core. Our attempts to define rules for society precede every action, motion or change in our urban environment, and our urban experiences can be altered when we change the manner in which we define a city.

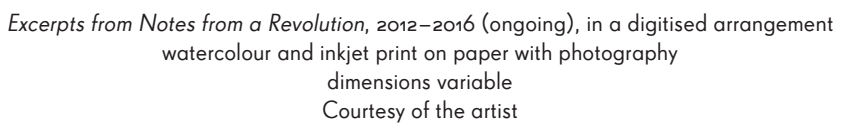
**ALL STUDENTS MUST
SIT FOR GEOGRAPHIC
PLACEMENT EXAMS.
STUDENTS WHO FALL
BELOW THE NATIONAL
STANDARD WILL BE
POSTED TO SCHOOLS
FURTHER FROM THEIR
HOMES SO THAT THEY
WILL FAMILIARISE
THEMSELVES WITH
MORE OF THE CITY**

**AFTER EVERY
GENERAL ELECTION,
ELECTORAL
BOUNDARY LINES ARE
TO BE REDRAWN INTO
NEW DIVISIONS OF
EQUAL SIZE AND
ASSIGNED NEW
NAMES THROUGH AN
AUTOMATIC
COMPUTERISED
SYSTEM**

**ARTIFICIAL OFFSHORE
ISLANDS ARE TO BE
DEVELOPED INTO
SITES FOR LUXURY
"ESCAPE ISLAND"
GAMES WHERE YOU
CAN EXPERIENCE
BEING MAROONED
FOR YOUR OWN
ENTERTAINMENT**

**GRAFFITI WITHOUT
CREATIVE MERIT OR
CULTURAL MEANING
IS CRIMINALISED
UNDER THE
PRESERVATION OF
CULTURAL
PROPERTIES ACT**

Born in Singapore. Lives and works in Singapore.





The Temasek Review
Like This Page · 3 minutes ago · 13

Caption: protest.
Like · Comment · Share



These are the last known images of the Speakers' Corner
the pushed in to get up their blockade this afternoon. As we have
media and communications blackout in the area surrounding the
site and internet links cut off. We are desperately trying to get



16 detained under ISA
for inciting unrest

Singapore
well-prepared
to handle
disturbances

Deputy Prime Minister



The Ministry published the swift response of police in last month's arrest of 16
locals and foreign nationals involved in an unlawful assembly and 'hacking' at Orchard



BREAKING reports of unauthorised
mass demonstration for SAPP &
Thailand's Union ahead of PMO
PMO reinforce labor holiday
SAPP to they come
10/10/15

LARISSA SANSOUR

Born in Jerusalem, Israel. Lives and works in London, UK.



The *Nation Estate* project consists of a nine-minute sci-fi short film and a photo series offering a clinically dystopian, yet humorous approach to the deadlock in the Middle East.

With its glossy mixture of computer-generated imagery, live actors and an Arabesque electronica soundtrack, the *Nation Estate* film explores a vertical solution to Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian State comes in the form of a single skyscraper: the Nation Estate. This one colossal high-rise houses the entire Palestinian population – now finally living the high life.

Nation Estate Poster, 2012

paper print

100 x 150 cm

Courtesy of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery/Sabrina Amrani Gallery and the artist

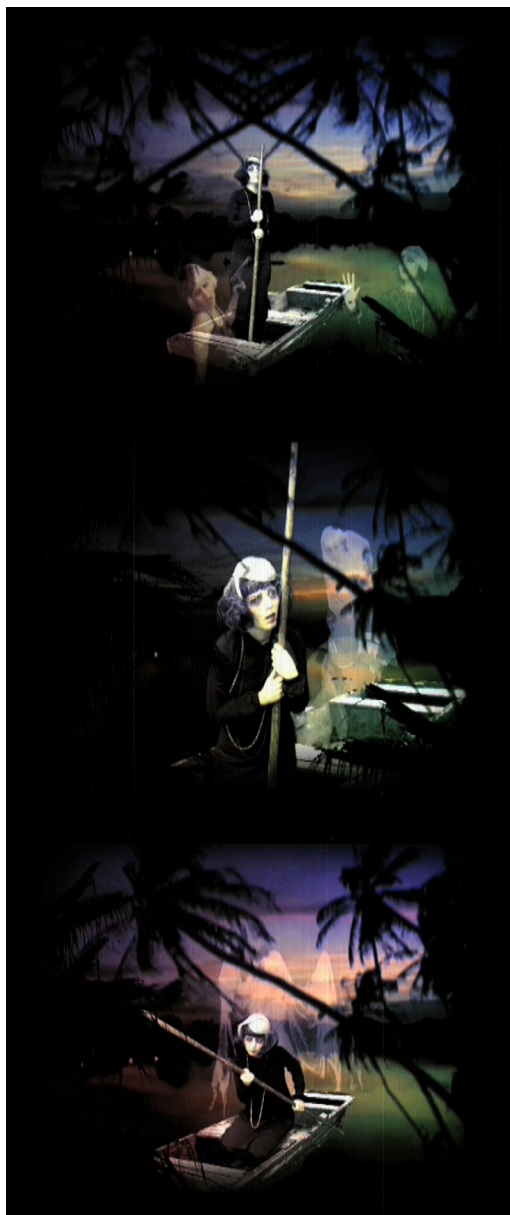


Nation Estate, 2012
 high-definition digital video, cinemascope (1:2.35) , colour, sound
 9:02 min
 Courtesy of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery/Sabrina Amrani Gallery and the artist

PATRICIA REINHART
Born in Vienna, Austria. Lives and works in Paris, France.



Die Hochzeitsgesellschaft, 2011
C-print
50 x 70 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Kirkirerland, 2008
ciné collage, colour
1:05 min
Courtesy of the artist

Nocturne in Schwarz, 2008
ciné collage, colour, sound
3:22 min
Courtesy of the artist

SOOKOON ANG
Born in Singapore. Lives and works in Paris, France and Singapore.



Exorcize Me is a photography, videography and live performance project addressing coming-of-age anxiety, teenage alienation and the confusing phase between childhood and adulthood. The title, *Exorcize Me*, speaks about the unease within one's own skin and the yearning to get rid of new-fangled fears and unfamiliar emotions. The goth makeup, baby language, school setting and uniforms are juxtapositions of reality and fiction, interior world brought out to the exterior.

Exorcize Me III, 2013
ultra chrome ink on archival paper
120 x 80 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Exorcize Me IV, 2013
ultra chrome ink on archival paper
120 x 80 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Exorcize Me V, 2013
ultra chrome ink on archival paper
120 x 80 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Exorcize Me VI, 2013
ultra chrome ink on archival paper
120 x 80 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Steve Dixon (b. England, UK) is President of LASALLE College of the Arts. His research focuses on the use of technologies in arts and performance, and he is Co-director of the Digital Performance Archive, and Co-founder and Advisory Editor of the *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* (Routledge). His 800-page book *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art and Installation* (2007, MIT Press) has won two international awards. Steve is an interdisciplinary artist working across theatre, performance art, video, installation and new media. Recent works include collaborations with media artist Paul Sermon, an interactive Internet 'soap opera' starring Rik Mayall, a one-man multimedia theatre performance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and a gallery exhibition, *Strangers in the Day*, with his wife Prue Dixon.

Tony Godfrey (b. England, UK) has been writing on contemporary art for over 35 years and to date has published more than 130 articles and 300 short pieces. His 1998 book, *Conceptual Art* was the first publication to see Conceptual Art as a global phenomenon. Eighteen years on it continues to be in print and has since been translated into six languages. From 1989 to 2008, Godfrey worked for the Sotheby's institute, London where he was Director of the MA in Contemporary Art. He was also professor of Fine Art at the University of Plymouth before moving to Singapore in 2009. Since then he has worked as a writer and curator with artists from Southeast Asia and China. Godfrey's books include *New Image in Painting* (1986); *Drawing Today* (1991); *Conceptual Art* (1998); and *Painting Today* (2009). He has recently co-authored the book *Contemporary Photography in Asia*, and is currently writing two books including one on Contemporary Indonesian painting.

Peter Hill (b. Scotland) is an Australian artist, writer, and independent curator. As an artist he creates *Superfictions*, artworks that exist in the gap between installation art and literary fiction. This methodology can be extended to link the visual

arts with any human activity. As a writer, he has contributed to *Times Higher Education* (London); *Artpress* (Paris); *ARTnews* (New York) and *The London Review of Books*. He won the Latimer Award for Painting at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1983, and the Saltire Award at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, for his book *Stargazing: Memoirs of a Young Lighthouse Keeper*.

PerMagnus Lindborg (b. Sweden) is a composer, sound artist and psychoacoustician, researching sound perception and design in multimodal environments. He has published in *IRCAM-Delatour* (2008), *Applied Acoustics* (2015, 2016), *PLoS ONE* (2015), *eContact* (2014), and numerous conference proceedings. Sonic artwork includes prizes from Stavanger Symphony Orchestra (2002) and Montreal Forum (1996); commissions from Centre Pompidou (2002) and Ultima Festival (2006); sound installations at WocMAT (Taiwan 2012), Onassis Cultural Centre (Athens 2014), Singapore's National Design Centre (2015), ArtScience Museum (2015), Esplanade Recital Hall (2008, 2010, 2013), and National Gallery (Dec 2015). With collaborator Joyce Beetuan Koh, he designed *On the String* (2010) and *The Canopy* (2011, 2013); with Freq_Out collective, exhibited at Museum of Modern Art (Stockholm 2012), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam 2013), and Tonspur (Vienna 2016). Lindborg chaired Si15 Soundislands Festival (<http://soundislands.com>) and serves as board member of ICMC. When not working at the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University, PerMagnus enjoys walking in the rainforest or swimming along coral reefs. (<http://permagnus.org>)

Chus Martínez (b. Spain) has a background in philosophy and art history. Currently, Martínez is the Head of the Institute of Art of the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design in Basel, Switzerland. She has been the Chief Curator at El Museo Del Barrio, New York. She was dOCUMENTA (13) Head of Department, and Member of Core Agent Group. Previously she was Chief Curator at MACBA, Barcelona (2008-2011);

Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein (2005-2008); and Artistic Director of Sala Rekalde, Bilbao (2002-2005). For the 56th La Biennale di Venezia (2015), Martínez curated the National Pavilion of Catalonia, with a solo project of filmmaker Albert Serra, and for the 51st edition the Cyprus National Pavilion (2005). In 2014/15 she served as curatorial 'alliance' for the current edition of the Istanbul Biennial (2015); in 2008 served as a Curatorial Advisor for the Carnegie International and in 2010 for the 29th Bienal de São Paulo. Martínez lectures and writes regularly for numerous catalogue texts and critical essays, and is a regular contributor to *Artforum* among other international journals.

Björn Melhus (b. Germany) is an internationally renowned artist and a professor for visual arts (virtual realities) at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. His award-winning films, videos and installations have been exhibited worldwide as part of museum shows, festivals or art biennials. He is based in Berlin and Kassel.

Charles Merewether (b. Scotland) is Curator of Contemporary Art Gallery in Tbilisi, part of the National Museum of Art, Georgia. He is an art historian, author and curator who has worked in Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas. He was Collections Curator at the Getty Center in Los Angeles (1994-2004); Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research, Australian National University (2004 -2006); Artistic Director and Curator of the Biennale of Sydney (2006); Deputy Director, Cultural District for the Tourist Development and Investment Company, Abu Dhabi (2007-2008). In 2009, he was Visiting Fellow at ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany. Merewether served as Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore (2010-2013); Visiting Professor, Nanyang Technology University, Singapore (2014); and Visiting Research Fellow at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art. Merewether is currently a Visiting Professor at the Baptist University in Hong Kong. He is the author of many articles about contemporary art and his recent books include *After Memory: The Art of Milenko Prvački, 40 Years*; a co-edited volume of essays *After the Event*, by Manchester University Press (2010); *Under Construction: Ai Weiwei* (2008); and editor of both *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950-1970* (2007); and *The Archive* (2006).

Rubén de la Nuez (b. Cuba) is an art theorist, art critic and academic specialising in contemporary art and new media. He is currently a Lecturer at the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He holds an MA in Art History from the School of Arts and Letters, University of Havana. He was a UNESCO Research Fellow at the Theory Department, Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, the Netherlands. He has

taught in graduate and post-graduate programmes in a number of academic institutions, including the School of Arts and Letters, University of Havana; the Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China; the Dutch Art Institute, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands; and the Sotheby's Institute of Art, Singapore. Nuez has researched, published and lectured on a broad range of issues related to history and theory of art and new media. He is particularly interested in matters concerning translation and contamination across cultural and artistic paradigms, including post-colonial studies, art in diaspora, trans-cultural curating, international art blockbuster exhibitions, and the restoration of Modern aesthetics within New Media.

Isabel de Sena (b. 1982) is an independent curator and writer currently based in Berlin. She obtained an MA in Art History (Hons.) from Leiden University in the Netherlands, specialising in Modern and Contemporary Art and Philosophical Aesthetics. She is a publishing author and editor for several academic journals and exhibition catalogues. Her curatorial work includes exhibitions in Germany and the Netherlands.

Jovana Stokic (b. Belgrade) is a New York-based art historian and curator. She holds a PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Her dissertation, *The Body Beautiful: Feminine Self-Representations 1970-2007*, analyses works of several women artists – Marina Abramović, Martha Rosler, Joan Jonas – since the 1970s, particularly focusing on the notions of self-representation and beauty. Stokic has curated several thematic exhibitions and performance events in the United States, Italy, Spain, and Serbia. Her essay, *The Art of Marina Abramovic: Leaving the Balkans, Entering the Other Side*, appeared in the catalogue for *The Artist Is Present* (2010) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Stokic was a fellow at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; a researcher at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the curator of the Kimmel Center Galleries, New York University; and the performance curator at Location One, New York. She has taught art history at New York University, Fashion Institute of Technology, and is also on the faculty of the MFA Art Practice at the School of Visual Arts.

Silke Schmickl (b. Germany) is a curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the arts, and the co-founder of the curatorial platform *Lowave*. She studied Art History, French Literature and International Communications in Munich and Paris where she graduated from Panthéon-Sorbonne University. A specialist in contemporary photography and video art, she has been a researcher at the German Art History Centre for 15 years and has published over 60 art DVDs for *Lowave*. She has initiated and directed various research projects dedicated to emerging art scenes including the Middle East, Africa, India, Turkey and

Singapore. Since 2008, she has curated contemporary art exhibitions in partnerships with museums and biennials in Singapore, Paris, Guangzhou, Beirut and Düsseldorf. Parallel to her curatorial activities, Schmickl occasionally teaches in universities and art schools and writes articles on cinema and contemporary art.

Milenko Prvački (b.1951, (former) Yugoslavia) graduated with a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Institutul de Arte Plastice “Nicolae Grigorescu” in Bucharest, Romania. He is one of the Singapore’s foremost artist and art educators, having taught at LASALLE College of the Arts since 1994. The founder of Tropical Lab, an annual international art camp for graduate students, Prvački was Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts for 10 years, and is currently Senior Fellow, Office of the President at the College. He has exhibited extensively in Europe since 1971, and in Singapore and the region since 1993 and had participated in major exhibitions, most notably the Biennale of Sydney in 2006. He has also participated in numerous symposiums and art workshops worldwide, and acted as visiting professor at Musashino Art University in Japan; Sabanci University in Turkey; and University of Washington School of Art, USA. He is Adjunct Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. He was awarded the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 2011, and Singapore’s Cultural Medallion for Visual Arts in 2012.

Venka Purushothaman (b. Singapore) is an art writer, academic, and arts and cultural manager. He is currently Vice-President (Academic) and Provost at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. He has researched and written extensively on visual arts, performing arts and arts management with an interest in contemporary art. He has written essays on numerous artists including Pierre & Gilles (France), Nathalie Junod Ponsard (France), Parvati Nayar (India), Salleh Japar (Singapore). His artist monographs include: *The Art of Sukumar Bose: Reflections on South and Southeast Asia* (2013); *Dance Me through the Dark: The Photography of Tan Ngiap Heng* (2008); and *Salleh Japar: Gurindam dan Igauan* (2004). His books on arts and culture include *Making Visible the Invisible: Three Decades of the Singapore Arts Festival* (2007) and *Narratives: Notes on a Cultural Journey, Cultural Medallion Recipients, 1979-2002* (2002).

Susie Wong (b. Singapore) is an art writer, curator and artist. She contributes to several publications in Singapore: she was a regular art reviewer in the 1990s for *The Straits Times*, *Life! Singapore*; and a regular art feature writer for magazines such as *The Arts Magazine* (publ. The Esplanade); *ID*; and *d+a* in architecture and design, and has also contributed to various artists’ monographs. She has written for publications such as *Southeast Asia Today* (publ. Roeder, 1995), *Liu Kang: Colourful Modernist* (publ. The National Art Gallery Singapore, 2011); *Histories, Practices, Interventions: A reader in Singapore Contemporary Art* (publ Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, 2016). She is a member of AICA (International Association of Art Critics - Singapore Chapter). She has published two special edition art books: *Trace* (2008) and *Tracing Land* (2014). In 2014, she also edited and published *[The Machine] Contemplating the Body* after a group exhibition she curated at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) Museum.

