



das SUPER PAPER

32

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On Return and What Remains

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Bonita Ely
Harun Farocki
Omer Fast
Richard Mosse
Baden Pailthorpe
Curator: Mark Feary



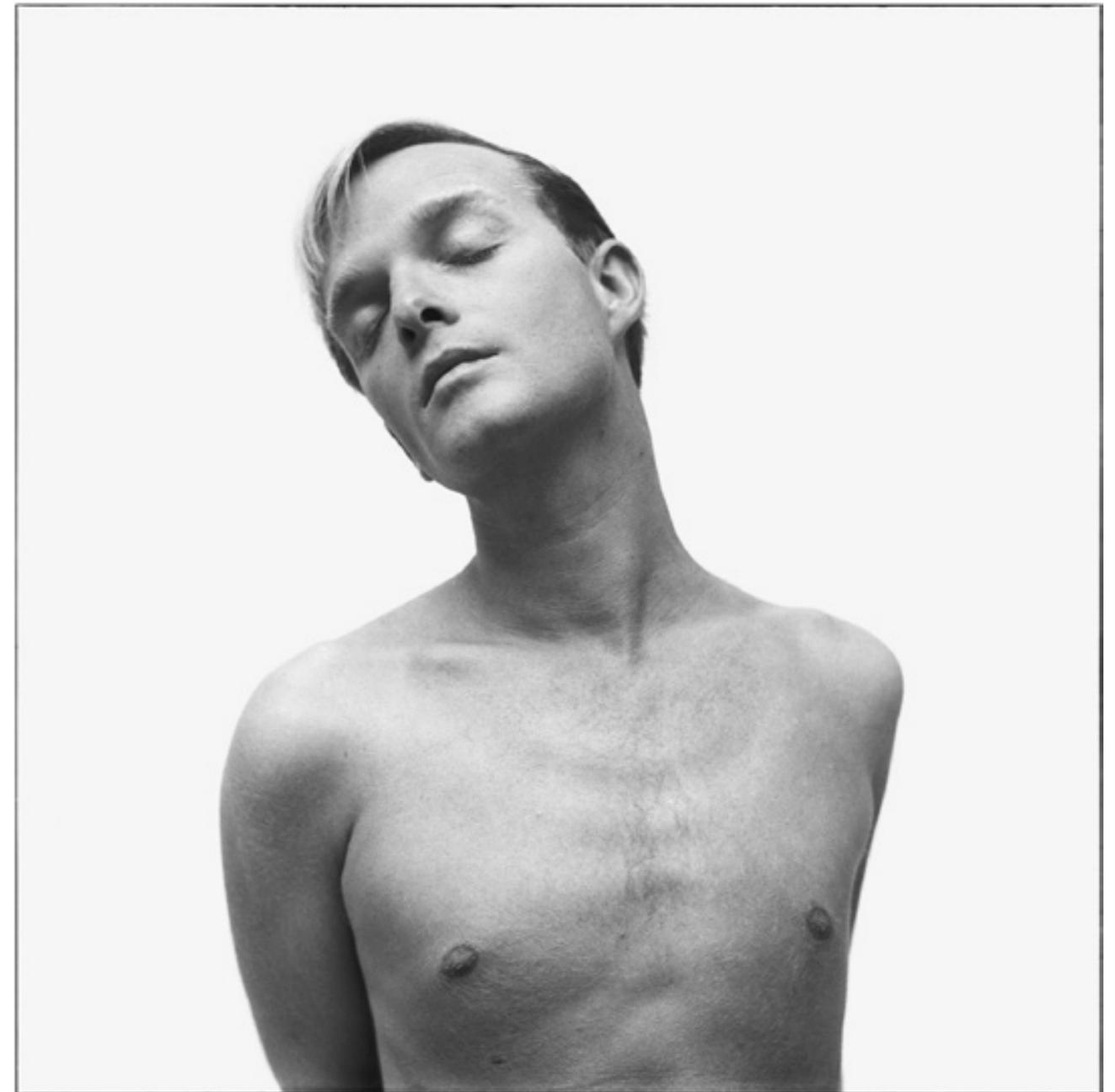
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Image: Omer Fast, *Continuity*, 2012, still from digital film, courtesy of the artist; Arratia Beer, Berlin; and gb agency, Paris.



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Truman Capote, writer, *New York, May 6, 1957*. Photograph by Richard Avedon © The Richard Avedon Foundation.
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Naomi Oliver's studio 2014. Photo Alex Wisser.

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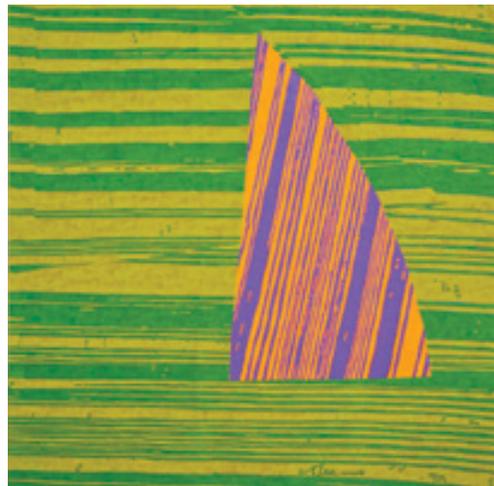
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PETER MALONEY - *Siren Song*, 2013, 161cm x 120cm, acrylic on polyester



LOUISE PARAMOR - *Supermodels* (Installation View) 2014

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Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Issue 32

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THANKS

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THANK ALL CONTRIBUTING WRITERS,
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COVER

JAN DAVIDSZ. DE HEEM
STILL LIFE WITH FLOWERS IN A GLASS VASE
(1650-1683)
OIL ON COPPER
54.5 X 36.5CM
COLLECTION OF THE RIJKSMUSEUM,
AMSTERDAM

BACK COVER

ADRIAEN VAN UTRECHT
BANQUET STILL LIFE (1644)
OIL ON CANVAS
185 x 242.5CM
COLLECTION OF THE RIJKSMUSEUM,
AMSTERDAM

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BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS

Issue 31 of Das Superpaper contained
an article written by Elizabeth Newman.
Unfortunately, the article published was
a draft and not intended for publication. The
correct version of the article has been inserted
into the online edition. The guest-editors of
that issue sincerely apologise for this error
and regret any harm caused. The publishers
of Das Superpaper would like to add their
commiserations for any upset caused.

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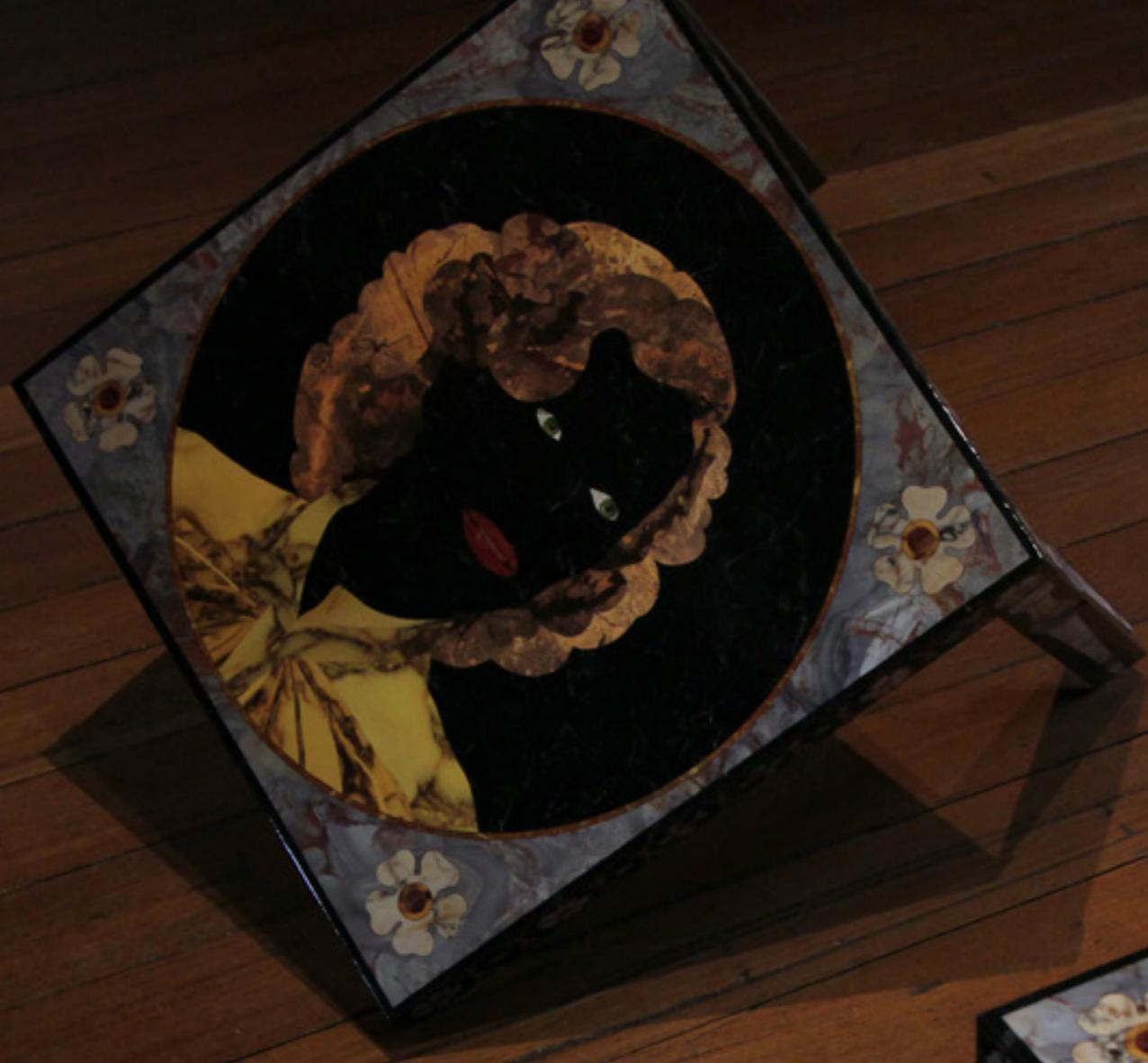


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Acid/ Gothic









Foreword

Acid connotes the fragmentation of experience and dislocation of meaning due to un-structuring effects on thought patterns.

H.C. Reitveld on Acid House

Gothic – traditionally a response to the classical – could be said to remain non-, anti- and counter- by definition, always asserting that the conventional values of life and enlightenment are actually less instructive than darkness and death... with classical broadly replaced by all that is newly conservative in art as in politics and society at large.

Gilda Williams on Gothic Art in the Contemporary

This issue of *Das Superpaper*, *Acid/Gothic*, accompanies an exhibition that was filmed in Sydney's Elizabeth Bay House at the end of May and held at Galerie pompom in August 2014. The premise of the title came about from a consideration of *Acid* (or psychedelia) and *Gothic* as cultural strategies that have reappeared throughout Western history in response to authoritarian or highly structured theoretical regimes. These strategies, when placed next to each other, became a lens through which to view the world. These last decades become a kind of torrid cheese dream, a nightmare had by someone who awoke in the Middle Ages and passed out sometime towards the end of the 20th century.

At its core, this project is concerned with pairing things, with saying 'these things go together, if only just for a moment'. The pairs in this project, spiralling out from the initial connection of *Acid* and *Gothic*, don't exist as stark absolute binaries; they don't exert the guiding influence of north/south, the moral influence of right/wrong, nor the scientific absolutism of true/false. A world of absolutes is not representative of how I navigate (here/there), how I remember (now/then) or how I relate (you/me), nor is it representative of a world I would want to live in.

The formal pairings born from the conjunction of *Acid* and *Gothic* form relationships that are ambivalent, unclear, distorted, at times romantic and often

consciously uncertain. Rather than existing as coherent, independent entities, they have blurred edges, they seep into each other, merge and shimmer. In this way the pairings exist as iterations of themselves, as might a shadow or an echo or a memory.

...

The formal qualities and history of cinema have been key to the development of this project – in particular, through a consideration of the influence of cinema on the way that we form memories. Cinematic moments act to graphically and textually associate disparate events, works and lines of thinking. In 1993, *Jurassic Park*'s dashboard cups rumbled not only with the coming of the T-Rex but on a personal scale, with my own coming consciousness and on a grander scale, with the approach of the new millennium, the Internet and hyper-connectivity. In the exhibition these two rippling cups, stuck on repeat, become quotation marks that, alongside the glasses of W. C. Heda's *Still Life With Ham* (1635), mark out on one hand the journey of Enlightenment and on the other the journeys of the Gothic and of psychedelia.

If the cinematic is a central subject of *Acid/Gothic*, it has been equally important to its production as an object. On entering the gallery, passing through a hall, the main space is empty but for two screens facing each other and a Persian rug aligned between them. The two video channels show different points in a 20-minute loop that walks through an exhibition installed at Elizabeth Bay House. The loop is shot from the perspective of a traveller walking through the historic home, stopping to look at the various artworks and the architecture.

At times we see the traveller from later in the loop enter the frame; the viewer becomes the viewed and, across the two channels, the artworks can be viewed from two different perspectives and from two points in time. The score for the journey the camera takes through the space was choreographed, in response to the show and the architecture, by Jess Olivieri. The camera loops around the house's

famously striking elliptical saloon staircase, along the banisters of the upper arcade and throughout the rooms. The presentation across two channels becomes, in part, a jerky appreciation of *Russian Ark* and *The Shining*.

...

Elizabeth Bay House was built by Alexander Macleay between 1835 and 1839 from designs interpreted by the colonial architect John Verge and was often introduced as 'the finest house in the colony'. In situating *Acid/Gothic* in this Greek Revival (or rather Greek Revival Revival) mansion, the central saloon acts like an iris or vortex, analogous perhaps also to the cinematic spool. It exists as a cultural site both associatively, through its form, rhythm and proportion, its lighting and furnishings, and geographically within the physical and historical landscape of Sydney and Australia more broadly.

The house has its own Revival pairing in Vaucluse House, the Wentworth family's unfinished Gothic mansion several kilometres away in Vaucluse. Indeed, the story goes that William Wentworth had on occasion ended up drunk at the steps of Elizabeth Bay House hurling abuse at Macleay, forever tying the two houses in some half-forgotten affected landscape. Perhaps though, Elizabeth Bay House would be more appropriately situated against Harry Seidler's Grosvenor Place in Sydney's CBD. Opened in 1988, the bicentennial year of Europe's grasp on the continent, the curved skyscraper enjoys a simple rhyme with the finest house in the colony.

There are formal and poetic resonances between the two buildings' plans and locations: both were built around an elliptical core, one with a square frame, the other framed by a pair of segments of a circle, and in true Sydney fashion, both floor plans were designed to make the most of the view. Both buildings pivot off the same reference point, the same hinge; like the same pendulum 150 years apart, they are attached to the same anchor, the same vanishing point that lies between the heads of Port Jackson. In setting their sights on the heads the buildings gaze

not only toward the rising sun but outward, away from Australia, as though yearning.

In taking *Acid* and *Gothic* as cultural trajectories that can be followed and intertwined, *Acid/Gothic* tries to imagine alternate realities; it traverses time and space and promotes a world where relationships, ideas and social and cultural frameworks exist on an expanded plane, in multiple dimensions and careening off in multiple directions. This issue of *Das Superpaper* looks to emotional, experiential and, above all, uncertain stances on existence, the cultural fabric and the eternal task of living with each other.

Nick Garner



•
Henry Fuseli
The Nightmare (1781)
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127cm
Detroit Institute of Arts

Works

ACID/GOTHIC
20 AUGUST-14 SEPTEMBER 2014
MOP PROJECTS
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WORKS

Gary Carsley
D. 105 To become another is to die as yourself. Romantic Artists 1 Cate as Kate, 2013/14
C type print applied to IKEA LACK TABLES.
55 x 55x 45 cms
A/P (edition of 5)
Courtesy of Thatcher Projects, New York and TORCH Gallery, Amsterdam.
[see page 17, 18-19]

Pia van Gelder
Apparition Apparatus, 2012
No-input set-up: Panasonic WJ MX-12 Video Mixer, Sony Trinitron CRT monitor, powered speaker
Courtesy of the artist

Tracey Moffatt
Laudanum #15 and #19, 1998
Set of 19 images
Toned photogravure print on rag paper,
76 x 57cm
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
[see page 17, 35-36]

Sarah Mosca
Untitled walk # 1 (absent gesture) and Untitled walk # 2 (vague silence), 2013
C-type photographs,
80 x 65cm (framed), 2013
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie pompom, Sydney
[see page 16]

Tomislav Nikolic
1 - 3: Always stretching time But it's never long enough and 4 - 7: Turning minutes into hours..., 2012
glass, museum glass, acrylic & marble dust, citron gold leaf, platin gold leaf, on canvas & wood 2 parts:
66.5 x 85.5 x 8 cm & 69.5 x 78.5 x 11cm
Courtesy of the artist and Jensen Gallery, Sydney
[see page 91]

Giselle Stanborough
The Lonely Tail, 2012
Four-channel video
(exhibited: *holezits* and *holebody*, not exhibited: *holefood* and *holeshots*)
Commissioned for *There's a Hole in the Sky*, curated by Tom Polo at Campbelltown Arts Centre.
Courtesy of the artist.

Peter Weibel
Vulkanologie der Emotionen, (Vulcanology of Emotions) 1971/1973,
16 monitors, video, 7:20 min
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Anita Beckers, Frankfurt
[see page 20-21]

Willem Claeszoon Heda
Stilleben mit Schinken (Still Life with Ham), 1635/2014. Oil on wood, 58 x 78cm
copy hand-painted by a factory artist from FuZhou, Fujian Province, China original at the Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
[see page 90]

Jurassic Park, 1993, (127 min)
Directed by Steven Spielberg.
8 seconds from Scene 61 looped.

The Hudsucker Proxy, 1994, (111 min)
Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen.
8 seconds from Scene 15 looped.
[see page 15]

CURATOR
Nick Garner

CHOREOGRAPHY
Jess Olivieri

EXHIBITION FILMING
DOP: David Barker
Camera Assist: Jani Hakli
Install Tech: Dara Gill

EDITING
Nick Garner and Marianne Khoo

LOCATION
Filmed at Elizabeth Bay House, courtesy of Sydney Living Museums.
Installation photography by Nick Garner

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Ron and George Adams, Samantha Ferris and the MOP Projects board; Jan Conti and Angela Sanfilippo (Sydney Living Museums); Anita Beckers and Idis Hartmann (ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe); nova Milne; Andrew Jensen; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery; flat screens loaned by Performance Space and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.

Contributors

MONIKA BEHRENS is a Sydney based artist and researcher currently undertaking a PhD at Art and Design, UNSW. She is currently researching how objects relate to each other, within a painted space. Her works have been exhibited at the MCA, Art Gallery of NSW, and Artspace and BreenSpace.

BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS co-founded Das Platforms and was the editor of Das Superpaper issues 1-22. In 2013-14, she completed a post-graduate research year in CuratorLab at Konstfack, at the University College of Arts, Craft and Design in Stockholm. Her research focused on processes of adaptation and poetics, specifically of the 1916 poem, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', by T.S Eliot. *Act Three: Till Human Voices Wake Us* is presented both as artist pages in this issue of *Das Superpaper* and as an associated performance at Index - The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, Stockholm in August 2014.
www.cargocollective.com/prufrockproject.

NICK GARNER is an artist, producer and co-founder of Das Platforms.

ROGER K GREEN is a professor at Metropolitan State University of Denver, where he teaches English and songwriting. He has published with the Psychedelic Press UK and Telos Press. For more writing and information, his blog is at www.thoughtsandmusic.wordpress.com.

RICHARD GRAYSON is an artist and curator based in London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Nothing Can Stop Us Now*, Dilston Grove, London 2014 and *The Golden Space City of God*, Matt's Gallery, London 2010. Group exhibitions include the 2012 Kiev Biennale and the 2010 Sydney Biennale. He was curator of the 2002 Sydney Biennale (*The World May Be*) *Fantastic and Worlds In Collision*, the Adelaide International 2014.

WES HILL is a lecturer in art theory at Southern Cross University and is based in the Byron Bay region of Northern NSW. He is a regular contributor to *Frieze*, *Artforum* and *Broadsheet*. His current project is a book about hipster taste in relation to contemporary post-critical art.

ANDREA JURANOVSKY is a PhD student at Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary. Her main academic interests include American literature, Gothic aesthetics, as well as trauma and gender studies. She has published several articles on topics such as modern Gothic literature, multiculturalism and the Gothic, and American fiction.

ISOBEL PARKER PHILIP is a curator, photographer and writer from Sydney. She was the recipient of the 2013 Firstdraft Curatorial Grant and has organised exhibitions at The Paper Mill, Breezblock and the Villa Alba Museum, Melbourne (in association with Reverie Projects). She has forthcoming exhibitions at UTS Gallery, MOP and Sydney Guild. An archive of selected written work can be found at www.isobelparkerphilip.com.

CHRIS RUDGE is a writer and researcher and teaches in the Department of English at the University of Sydney. Animated by that most obscured of intimate relations between an author's body and their body of work, Chris' recently submitted doctoral research examines the biopolitics of mind-altering drugs in the works and lives of 20th century authors Aldous Huxley and Philip K. Dick. A store of Chris' writing may be found at www.rudge.tv.

SUPERKALEIDOSCOPE is a collective founded by Australian visual artists and curators Kim Fasher & Sarah Mosca. Collaborating since 2010 they have curated projects in Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne.

The Atrocious Eternal Return: on Aesthetic Repetition and the Reiterative Gestures of Gothic Form.

Isobel Parker Philip

Art historian Wilhelm Worringer's treatise on gothic form is a study of compulsion. In his 1911 text *Formprobleme der Gotik (Form in Gothic)*, Worringer describes the gothic as an aesthetic scheme that is mobilised (and animated) by impulse. According to Worringer, gothic form is not shaped by cognition or rational thought. It ruptures the sensuous and organic temperament of classical art. Symmetry and balance collapse. Gothic form does not seek a compositional equilibrium. It possesses a structure and a vitality that transcends (that shatters) the classical order. If the classical line embraces proportion and fixed ratios, the gothic line perverts them. It is a "linear fantasy which, in the terminology of the materialistic theory of art, is described as interlaced ribbon or plaited ornament".¹ Gothic lines are entwined and enmeshed. Knotted into one another.

Worringer extends the allegory. In attempting to elucidate this distinction between the gothic line and the classical line, Worringer presents a speculative case study by tracing the different gestures of a hand that fulfils the dictates of classical form and a hand that gives shape to the gothic.

Supposing we were to play the part of the hand that arouses the gothic line,

The will of our wrist will certainly not be consulted: the pencil will move wildly and violently over the paper and instead of the beautiful, round, organically tempered curves, there will be a hard, angular, ceaselessly interrupted, jagged line, of the most powerful vehemence of expression. It is not the wrist which spontaneously creates the lines, but our violent will for expression which imperiously compels the wrist movement. Once the initial impulse for motion has set in, it cannot be allowed to follow its natural tendency to run out of its own accord, but must always merge into a renewed impulse for movement. We have an impression that we are being coerced by some alien, imperious will. We are made aware of all the processes of suppression of the natural tendency for movement. At every break, at every change of direction, we feel how the forces suddenly checked in their natural course are blocked; how, after this instant's arrest, they pursue, with a momentum increased by the obstruction, a new direction of movement.²

This imagined scene of metaphoric draughtsmanship exposes an important characteristic of the gothic aesthetic scheme. Implicit in the compositional logic of the gothic form – as enacted by Worringer's disembodied hand – is its reliance on a "renewed impulse for movement". The gothic line is not simply defined by its angular propulsion and erratic geometry, it is defined by its repetitive resurgence. In other words, gothic form emerges out of repeated impulse-based gestures. It speaks through spasm.

... The fact that gothic form depends on perpetuated gestures resonates with the intrinsic formal properties of the gothic line. As Worringer asserts, the gothic line plays out the linear fantasy of the "interlaced ribbon or plaited ornament". In a plait, lines entwine and snake around each other. They embrace but never collide. Their endpoints never meet. Like a double helix or a spiral staircase, plaited lines extend outwards in opposing directions. Unless interrupted, they carry on in this manner ad infinitum. Theirs is not a linear trajectory but a tidal one. It ebbs and flows, forever alternating between decline and ascent. And so it is with the cultural reiteration of gothic form itself. Since the proliferation of gothic art and architecture in the 12th century, gothic form has been resuscitated in different guises across the timeline of aesthetic evolution. A victim of "renewed movement", gothic form transcends the temporal specificity of its art historical context.

... Of these periodic reassertions of gothic form, few hold as much cultural cachet as the neo-gothic revival that was German expressionist cinema. In the inter-war years UFA, Germany's national film production company, rivalled Hollywood in the calibre and volume of its output. The silent films produced in this era repopulated gothic castles and turned medieval motifs into overtly stylised visual tropes.

This thematic tangent is indebted to film scholar Laleen Jayamanne. It is her work on German expressionist cinema that draws attention to the resonance of Worringer's analysis of the gothic form and its convulsive genesis within the fictive construct and formal mannerisms of these films. What follows rearticulates her line of inquiry, disseminated during her time as a lecturer at the University of Sydney, so that further tangents may be woven (or plaited) into the investigation.

Through German expressionist cinema, the gothic ornament attained mobility. It was no longer confined to the stasis of the art object or the architectural form. Cinema gave gothic form a new means of gesticulation.

Having already been narrativised, thanks to 19th-century literature and the cultivation of the horror genre, the gothic ornament was encrypted within the villainous and monstrous personas that terrorised these films. One need only think of the hunchbacked Count Orlock creeping up the stairs in FW Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu*, with his outstretched fingers and elongated limbs made all the more sinister by the exaggerated shadows that preceded him. Orlock is the gothic line made corporeally manifest. His physique is hyperbolically angular.

The gothic villain has been acculturated and absorbed into the archive of the easily recognisable cultural trope. However, it is the women in these films who exhibit a more potent gestural translation of gothic form, as Jayamanne has argued. Preyed upon by the villains, these women are inert and denied narrative agency. Their subjugation is often not simply a consequence of base gender dynamics but is precipitated by supernatural forces. Induced into trance-like and semi-hypnotic states, these women are routinely suspended in stupor. Their narrative inertia is filtered through their physical inertia.

As semi-conscious agents of the transcendental and the occult, these women relinquish control over their bodies. In their disembodied state, they metaphorically re-enact the gothic impulse according to Worringer's allegorical analysis. The hand that gives shape to the gothic line is – you will remember – "coerced by some alien, imperious will". Its impulsive movement is governed by a non-tangible force. It stems from, as Worringer phrases it, "a psychical, spiritual activity of will, far removed from any connection or conformity with the complexes of organic sensation"³ The trance that enfolds the women in German expressionist cinema is a localised (and literalised) synecdochic proxy of the gothic "will to form"⁴

...

That the gothic "will to form" finds itself reanimated in the gestures of these filmic bodies is fitting. For if gothic line is premised upon convulsively reiterative gestures, it is an inherently cinematic phenomenon. Inscribed on the looped celluloid of the film reel or the

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Nosferatu (1922)

Directed by F.W. Murnau with Max Schreck as Nosferatu and Greta Schröder as Ellen Hutter.

concentric grooves of the DVD (or, if we are being honest, the labyrinthine matrix of 1s and 0s in the computer) are gestures and movements that repeat themselves again and again. Each time a film is played, the bodies that populate its scenes perform the same routine. The trance begins anew. And just as the gothic aesthetic has been reiterated and remixed throughout cultural and art history, the women in German expressionist cinema have been duplicated and mimetically resurrected in other films. The possessed girl in *The Exorcist* with her semi-transparent nightgown and her projectile vomit is perhaps the bluntest restaging of this entranced persona.

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Worringer extends his study of the gothic ornament to an analysis of gothic architecture. The pivot turns on the gothic cathedral with its sinuous spires that propel themselves upwards on such severe inclines:

If we cast a glance at the Gothic cathedral, we see only a kind of petrified, vertical movement from which every law of gravity seems to be eliminated. We see only an enormously strong upward movement of energies in opposition to the natural downward weight of the stone. This is an architecture of propulsion – of force – rather than matter.⁵

Gothic architecture embraces the acute angle. Classical architecture, with architraves and pediments that obey the dictates of geometric refinement, affirms the solidity of the stone that it is composed of. Its thickset columns valorise the pedestals on which they stand. Weight and material presence; these buildings exalt their foundations. Not so the gothic cathedral. Here, architectural form pushes against the material reality of the stone. It reaches upwards and out of its substructure. The stone of a gothic cathedral is “entirely released from its material weight, (such) that it is only the vehicle of a non-sensuous, incorporeal expression, in short, here it has become dematerialized”⁶

Just as those hypnotised and entranced women relinquish control over their physical bodies, so does the gothic cathedral. In both, movement and form exists in spite of physical materiality. The women renounce control over their limbs as the cathedral renounces the weight of its stone. Disembodied/dematerialised.

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Architecture: a lock with gothic ornament.

Wood engraving by [E. H.].

Wellcome Library no. 44361i

The sight of a Gothic cathedral does not impress our minds as being a display of structural processes but as an outburst of transcendental longing expressed in stone. A movement of superhuman force carries us up with it into the intoxication of an endless willing and craving: we lose the feeling of our earthly bonds, we merge into an infinite movement which annihilates all finite consciousness.⁷

An intoxicated unconscious: a trance.

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French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot was instrumental in shaping and defining the clinical discourse that encased studies of female hysteria in the 19th century. Charcot was responsible for revising the classification of hysteria as a physiological condition unique to women (a gendered handicap) and promoting its status as a psychological disorder, effectively opening the door to the theory of the unconscious (Freud was, in fact, his student). Working with the hysteric patients at the Salpêtrière institution in Paris from 1862 onwards, Charcot focused his attention on the postures and gestures that are mobilised during a hysteric fit. His research methodology was a mode of sustained observation.

I am not in the habit of advancing things that aren't experimentally demonstrable... I am nothing more than a photographer; I inscribe what I see.⁸

In analysing the modulation of the hysteric's body as it convulsed, Charcot sought to anatomise the condition and decode its mannerisms. His studies were facilitated by the camera. Not only was Charcot a metaphoric photographer, inscribing his observations, but he enlisted photography as a scientific collaborator. The photographs taken under Charcot's direction at the Salpêtrière are haunting. Their subjects – women in institutional care – are the objectified victims of a kind of medico-voyeurism. Writhing in tangled sheets, their bedclothes loose around their bodies, they are sexualised in the midst of their malady.

As Georges Didi-Huberman acknowledges, the spasms recorded by the camera were semi-performative gestures that satiated and surrendered themselves to instances

of “provoked observation.”⁹ The fits were staged – induced through hypnosis so they could be photographed on cue. These are scenes of “synthesized hysteria” and “simulacra, nothing more”.¹⁰ Charcot himself admits as much:

The hypnotic state is but an artificial or experimental nervous state, the multiple manifestations of which appear or vanish according to the needs of the study, as the observer fancies.¹¹

Through hypnosis, Charcot would re-create the hysteric seizure so that each gesture could be codified. The body of the hysteric possessed an “incredible *plastic submission*”¹² that “allowed the hypnotic phenomenon itself to be truly made into a *tableau*, in the exact image of the model that had been fabricated to account for the hysterical attack”.¹³ The hysteric is made to perform her own neuroses for the clinician. Her body becomes a puppet.

...

Charcot's methodological strategy was designed to deliver a systematised catalogue of the hysteric's movements. He was accruing an alphabet of physiology. Photography allowed Charcot to break the dance of the seizure down into its constituent parts (or poses) like the sequential frames on a strip of celluloid. The images would then be grouped and arranged in grids. The seizure was compartmentalised yet also inscribed with proto-cinematic movement in the manner of an Eadweard Muybridge locomotion study. Charcot used these photographs to draw up diagrams and charts that delineated each posture. His project relied on the presumption that the gestures of hysteria were not unique or unpredictable but repetitive and choreographed.

Like the bodies of the women in German expressionist film (or, for that matter, any cinematic body), Charcot's patients were expected to perform the same routine again and again. In their induced and hypnotised state – enveloped in “a symbolic dance, almost a trance”¹⁴ – these hysteric women also reanimate the gothic form. Their clenched and contracting hands are the metaphoric compatriots of those hands that coax the gothic line into being.

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These women were condemned to repetition

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Anne Ferran

Untitled (no. 2) from

I am the rehearsal master, 1989

127 x 74.5 cm

gelatin silver photographs

Courtesy of the artist and

Stills Gallery, Sydney

not just while in the throes of an ‘attack’ but within the ongoing power dynamics of the hospital. As Didi-Huberman notes, their sexualisation within the context of medical study had very real consequences. Many of these women seduced their doctors. The symptoms of hysteria were often provoked by repressed sexual desire and any illicit interaction between patient and clinician reignited the trauma.¹⁵ The cycle would start again.

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In Adolfo Bioy Casares' 1940 novella *The Invention of Morel* we find another kind of cyclical desire loop.¹⁶ The Argentinian writer, a collaborator and close friend of Jorge Luis Borges (who wrote the novella's preface), reinvigorated the genre of ‘fantastic’ literature. With a genealogy that moves through Robert Louis Stevenson and Cervantes (and sidesteps most Modernist prose), ‘fantastic’ literature, as Borges defined it, allowed for the interjection of the magical and the metaphysical into otherwise linear storylines. While narratives may be derailed by preternatural elements, the logic of causation remains intact.

The Invention of Morel centres on the plight of a self-exiled protagonist seeking refuge on a secluded island to escape imprisonment for an unspecified crime. The island is unoccupied, as its terrain is allegedly infected with a virus that eats human skin. Undeterred, the protagonist makes himself at home. But the island isn't uninhabited. A group of people, dressed as if they were living in the 1920s, appear suddenly one day and populate the once empty buildings. “Tea for Two” is played on the record player over and over again as the insipid backdrop to their seemingly endless garden party.

At first, the protagonist hides and observes these unexpected compatriots from afar. He notices a woman – Faustine – who returns each evening to a rocky outcrop to watch the sunset. He falls in love with her.

When the protagonist finally plucks up the courage to introduce himself she looks straight through him. They all do. None of his island companions can see him. They cohabit the same space but not the same time. Their worlds do not bleed into one another. He does not exist in their narrative.

We soon learn the mechanics of this temporal intransigence. His fellow island

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Tracey Moffatt

Laudanum #15 [Left] and

Laudanum #19 [Right], 1998

Set of 19 images

Toned photogravure print on rag paper,

76 x 57cm

Courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

dwellers do not possess corporeal bodies. They are mere projections.

Many years ago, Morel – a scientist and one of the inhabitants of the island also infatuated with Faustine – developed a recording device capable of transcribing sensory data *in its totality*. It is a camera that also records tactile form and olfactory output.

With my machine a person or an animal or a thing is like the station that broadcasts the concert you hear on the radio. If you turn the dial for the olfactory waves, you will smell the jasmine perfume on Madeleine's throat, without seeing her. By turning the dial of the tactile waves, you will be able to stroke her soft, invisible hair and learn, like the blind, to know things by your hands. But if you turn all the dials at once, Madeleine will be reproduced completely, and she will appear exactly as she is... sounds, tactile sensations, flavors, odors, temperatures, all synchronized perfectly.¹⁷

Years ago, Morel lured his group of friends to the island and secretly recorded their activities for a week. Ever since, their simulacral counterparts have been re-enacting these events on a loop. Our protagonist, the interloper, is thrown into their projected reality.

Morel never discloses the fact that his recording device is a death-trap. Once a subject has had their ‘image’ immortalised, their body begins to erode and eat itself. In sacrificing his friends, Morel ensured that he could spend eternity with Faustine.

She, like all her companions, is trapped in a purgatory of repetitive gestures. Like the cyclical trauma of the hysteric, her perpetual performance is fuelled and consumed by the male gaze. She has no control over her body – no agency – but is trapped in a pseudo-cinematic trance. Her life has become a loop of celluloid caught in a projector. It is a fictive reiteration of gothic form.

I began to realize that the words and movements of Faustine and the bearded man coincided with those of a week ago. The atrocious eternal return.¹⁸

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The novella was inspired by Bioy Casares' obsession with the silent movie star Louise Brooks. An American, Brooks spent most of her career working in Europe, specifically Germany.

She starred in GW Pabst's films *Pandora's Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl* (both 1929) – two milestones of German expressionist cinema. She was Bioy Casares' Faustine. In this embedded cultural reference we witness another reassertion of the densely knotted lineage of the gothic form.

The large building that is populated by Morel's projections is consistently referred to as ‘the museum’. This label is perplexing. There are no display cabinets or exhibition hangs. It confuses the protagonist, who freely admits that “it could be a fine hotel for about fifty people, or a sanatorium”.¹⁹ We eventually discover that it is Morel who is responsible for this ambiguous nomenclature.

The word *museum*, which I use to designate this house, is a survival of the time when I was working on plans for my invention, without knowing how it would eventually turn out. At that time I thought I would build large albums or museums, both public and private, filled with these images.²⁰

Of course. The museum.

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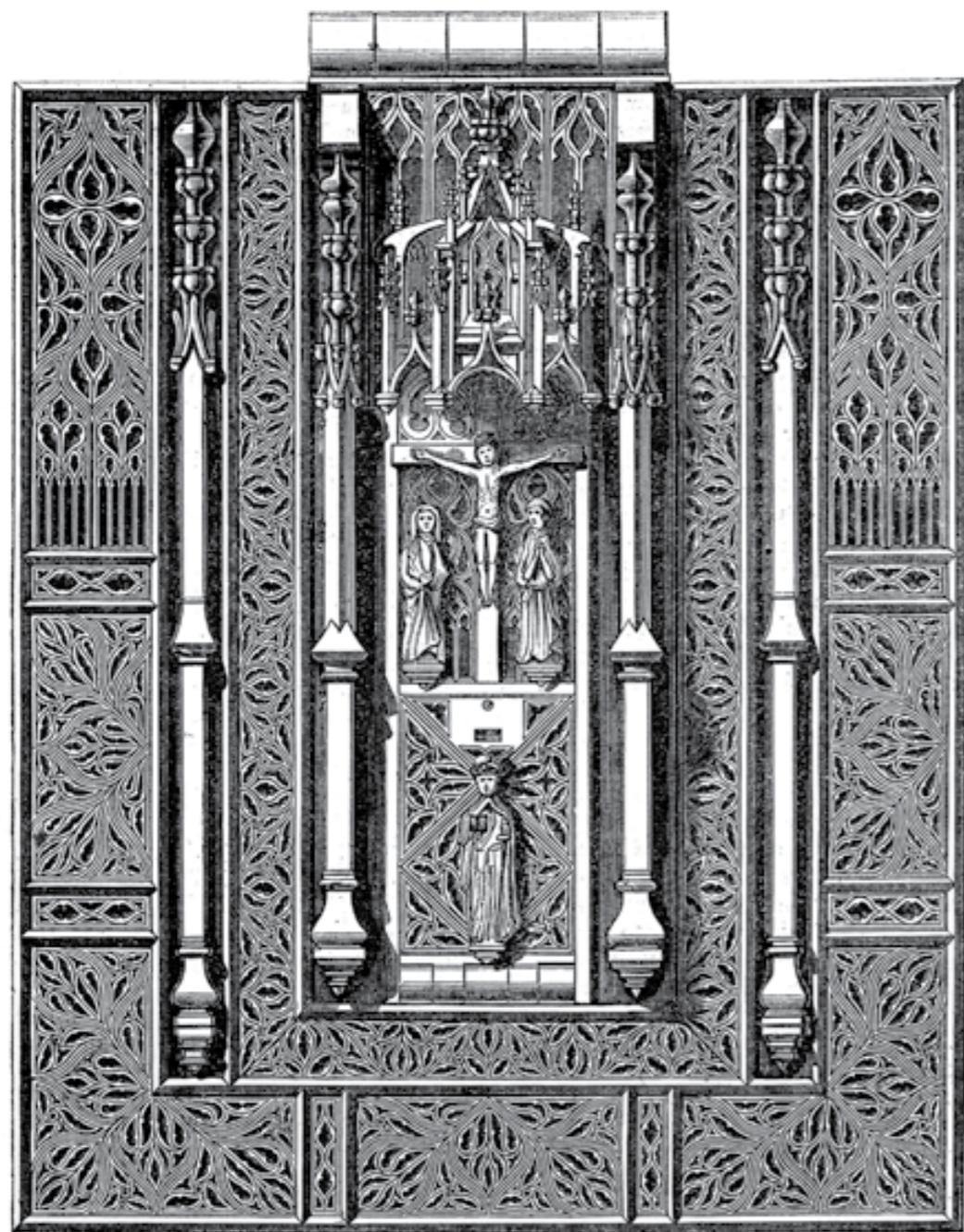
A museum is the natural repository of the gothic form. It is a place where temporal chronologies can be perverted and cultural trajectories can be intertwined. A place for the convulsive resurgence of aesthetic schemes that perpetuate themselves. The site of the *atrocious eternal return*.

It is here that the projections play out the vicissitudes of the gothic line, fulfilling Worringer's thesis through the ceaseless (and perverse) pattern of their performance – replaying that final week over and over again.

When once the natural barriers of organic movement have been overthrown, there is no more holding back: again and again the line is broken, again and again it is forcibly prevented from peacefully ending its course again and again diverted into fresh complications of expression.²¹

The gesture restages itself. The knot gets denser.

ANCIENT WROUGHT STEEL LOCK.



1. Worringer, Wilhelm (trans. Sir Herbert Read). *Form in Gothic*. New York: Schocken Books. 1964 p. 40
 2. *ibid* p. 42-3
 3. *ibid* p. 43
 4. *ibid* p. 38
 5. *ibid* p. 106
 6. *ibid* p. 106
 7. *ibid* p. 108
 8. Quoted in: Didi-Huberman, Georges (trans Alisa Hartz). *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 2003. p. 29

9. *ibid* p. 19
 10. *ibid* p. 185
 11. Quoted in: *ibid* p. 185
 12. *ibid* p. 192
 13. *ibid* p. 194
 14. *ibid* p. 223
 15. *ibid* p. 175
 16. Bioy Casares, Adolfo (trans. Ruth LC Simms). *The Invention of Morel*. New York: New York Review of Books. 2003
 17. *ibid* p. 70
 18. *ibid* p. 41

19. *ibid* p. 14
 20. *ibid* p. 76
 21. Worringer op.cit. p. 41





Associates: an Interview with Damiano Bertoli

Wes Hill

The work of Melbourne-based artist Damiano Bertoli refers to the concept and medium of collage, often staging unexpected historical associations through assemblages of existing cultural tropes. His recent exhibition *Associates* at Melbourne's Neon Parc gallery consisted of hand-drawn colour posters which combine the iconic 1980s aesthetics of the Italian Memphis Group with texts drawn from *Autonomia*, an Italian post-Marxist political movement that began in the 1960s. To find out more about this new body of work and its relation to his overall practice, I asked Bertoli some questions, beginning with the origins of his interest in postmodern Italian design.

Wes Hill: The drawings in *Associates* are from your participation in the *Radio Alice* exhibition at Margaret Lawrence Gallery in 2012, which examined the politics and innovations of an independent radio station operating out of Bologna, Italy, in the 1970s. Your work focuses on the distinctive graphic sensibility of the Memphis Group – an Italian design collective that had its origins in the tumultuous politics of late 70s Italy, before becoming regarded as an archetype of Postmodern design. Have you always been interested in the Memphis Group or did this recent body of work emerge more from research into the countercultural politics of post-WW II Italy?

Damiano Bertoli: My connection to Memphis began through various points of exposure during the mid-80s as a teenager, when one is particularly porous to the way visual environments and contexts are constructed and what they signify. But it was primarily through seeing Ettore Sottsass' iconic Carlton room divider at an NGV *New Acquisitions* exhibition, perhaps around 1985. Memphis' relationship to the Radical Design period, and to the wider context of extra parliamentary politics in Italy in the 70s became apparent a little later, but the discovery of this relationship, and its development as an idea through speculative designs or propositions, is consistent with much of my work.

The title of your *Continuous Moment* series is appropriated from a project by the Italian anti-design group Superstudio, who made photo-collages and exhibitions of impractical and impossible projects in the 1960s. How would you describe the relationship between

Memphis Group and Superstudio?

I've used the title 'Continuous Moment' for most of my exhibitions, over many years. It's amended from the title of a series of speculative works in which Superstudio proposed the covering of public space with a homogenous grid, simultaneously denying the proliferation of superfluous architecture and articulating a 'democratised supersurface' which offered an equal allocation of space and amenities for a population liberated from labour and possessions. Clearly a vehicle for poetic commentary and discourse, these collages present an image of ambivalence: they both critique the post-war industrial sprawl and the rise of more progressive lifestyles, and describe the 'illogical conclusion' of both. The title and this image of a receding Cartesian grid have become standardised forms which represent many of the ongoing ideas that shape my practice, such as multiplicity, historical continuity, and the manipulation of time. Superstudio and Ettore Sottsass, the Memphis Group founder, were members of Global Tools, which was a loose collective of designers and architects united in a Marxist-led opposition to the manufacturing and design industry, favouring an anthropologically driven critique based on 'utopianism'. Both Superstudio and Memphis foregrounded the capacity for design to be operative as a language beyond functionalism, while also recognising its value as a discursive tool.

In addition to Superstudio, your previous work has made overt references to Pablo Picasso's 1941 play *Le Désir attrapé par la Queue* [Desire caught by the Tail]. How do you see those works in relation to *Associates*? I'm thinking here that your drawings at Neon Parc display a considerable amount of restraint, in comparison to, say, *Continuous Moment: Le Desir* (2010), which, like many of your installations, has quite a sprawling sensibility.

I think both bodies of work try to establish a connection between related moments across time. *Continuous Moment: Le Desir*, which was written during the Paris Occupation, only existed as a 'reading' that took place amongst Picasso's friends from the Parisian intellectual elite. It wasn't performed as a fully staged production until 1967, by Jean-Jacques Lebel. So the project involves the combination and comparison of two very different iterations of

the same form, which occurred in very different cultural contexts. *Associates*, I think, negotiates the relationship between a particular design language and the larger socio-political context from which it originated. Memphis was borne from the expanded political context of the early 1970s, but it has long been seen as emblematic of the aesthetic and consumer excess of the 1980s – an icon of over-determined interiors and new money, rather than a critique of the post-war Italian social landscape. *Associates* compresses the points in time which describe the founding of Memphis as an ideology-based design group and its eventual position as a symbol of challenging yet collectible high-end design. So the methodologies which produce these two projects are very similar: they are essentially an expansion and compression of the same mechanism. The difference rests in the way the works occupy space, in both a physical and discursive sense. *Continuous Moment: Le Desir* proceeds outwards in multiple directions from two defined points, and can adopt almost any form, from performance and sound to painting and publications. In a sense the project is about questioning what the parameters of a project can be. In *Associates* I take two historical 'bookends' and collapse them into a single point and surface, which is fixed. Any sense of indeterminacy and movement comes from the optical confusion that results from the texts having been embedded into an unrelated visual field. Both projects could be understood as articulating a form of montage, where multiple spaces and times can co-exist.

Did the focus on Picasso in *Continuous Moment: Le Desir* stem from an interest in the history of assemblage-based practices? Could you speak a bit about your use of collage? In working this way, do you ever consider yourself as a type of curator of the historical avant-garde?

My projects take shape far too organically and involve too much indulgence and intuition to be considered 'curating' in any sense. I think of the documents that I use as source material which can be manipulated in the same way as traditional art materials. *Continuous Moment: Le Desir* evolved from researching Soft Machine – a band I've listened to for years – and learning that they were enlisted to play the accompanying soundtrack to the premiere

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Damiano Bertoli**Installation view - Neon Parc****Left: Paola (2014); right: Claudio (2013)**

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Damiano Bertoli**Installation view - Neon Parc****Left to right: Renato (2013); Pippo (2012);****Gulliver (2012); Mara (2013)**

performance of Picasso's play in 1967. Until then I knew Picasso had written poetry and some small works for theatre but I knew nothing about their content. The fact that this work had been written during the Second World War but was never performed until the late 1960s provided a kind of readymade project for me: an existing circumstance that returned and repeated itself, within an artistic form – theatre – that is designed to be repeated and endlessly transformed without its original authorship being challenged. In this respect, it could have been a Matisse or a Cocteau play and I would have approached it in a similar way. The fact that Picasso and Jean-Jacques Lebel, who was known in Europe for his social agitation and transgressive Happenings, shared common ground as appropriators and libertines became apparent much later through researching the project, along with other coincidences that ultimately added to the intricacies of the work. This play, with its multiple signs in a shared, simultaneous space, and the re-purposing of existing material, are all evidence of a collage-based process, and I think of my practice as an expanded form of collage – although I think 'montage' is a more accurate term. The standard 'paper and glue' view of collage seems to associate it with an art of memory, based around the salvaging of discarded or ephemeral materials. I prefer to think of my projects in terms of montage because they try to enable time and movement. 'Montage' suggests no descriptive association to materials, process, nostalgia or history, just to a space where more than one source of information can exist, created through the proximity, or overlap, of a variety of forms.

In a review of *Associates for Art and Australia* magazine, Melbourne writer Dylan Rainforth noted: "It is unlikely, perhaps, and it is certainly unnecessary, that the lucky purchasers of Bertoli's ravishing images will have either the Italian to read these texts or possess the political views to accord with the Autonomia movement of all those years ago." Could you talk a bit about how you see the critical and commercial aspects of your practice in relation to each other? The notion that 'aesthetic appeal' has political agency is a long-held concern of yours, isn't it?

For me, one of the crucial properties of art is its capacity to contain and enable contradiction

All works pencil on BFK Rieves 320 gsm**119.5 x 84.5 cm****Images courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne.**

and uncertainty. Where other cultural forms are predicated on the clear and direct communication of language as information, art seems more concerned with articulating the poetic. Art negotiates what the poet Adrienne Rich calls a 'radical complexity', and is able to engage a far richer and more complex range of responses than the forms it shares the world with. One of the things I've always loved about Memphis design is how it is able to be simultaneously high and low, terrible and at the same time amazing. The passing of time only complicates this further. Memphis grew out of concern for a certain democracy of design, of cheap laminates and suburban surface, of children's toys and vulgar colours, yet at the same time these objects signify wealth, and museum-sanctioned design history. The process of returning Memphis design to its politicised origins could be seen as some form of 'adjustment' but I'm more interested in extending the paradox. The slogans and headlines I used were reformatted into a typeface designed for Memphis by Christoph Radl, and they are written in a kind of stylised 'news speak', so they represent a stylised and nuanced form of speech, which I see as adding another layer of meaning, beyond the prescriptive or the didactic, and beyond simplistic categories of political definition.

You have an Italian background; I wonder if you could speak a bit about your relationship to Italian contemporary art and design? Are there personal connections with Radical Design practice which you have referenced in your work?

Being part of two cultures, or negotiating the presence of one within another, means being aware of a constant overlap of parallel energies and perspectives; an awareness that situations can be experienced in multiple ways. My relationship to Italian art is connected to my interest in periods where historical time undergoes acceleration or compression, and its effects on the social landscape. The deep spread of time is always apparent in Italy, as the residue of antiquity. The contemporary society which sits upon it is in continuous dialogue with this history, and is often in conflict. Public debate in Italy is both overly rhetorical and resolutely formal; it's simultaneously a utopia and dystopia, often arriving at such positions through ritualised

processes of articulation. Italy's problematic rush towards modernity in the late 60s and the consequences of this through the 70s were accompanied and largely defined by a substantial discourse produced by artists, theorists and public intellectuals. In demonstrating how forms could be re-appropriated and re-connected to history, such experimental practices asserted autonomy and difference. The Global Tools collective is representative of this moment of defiance, rejecting the trajectory that European classicism had taken towards global industrialisation.



If the Corridor were Narrower: an Interview with Mika Rottenberg.

Nick Garner

The title of this issue and its companion exhibition, *Acid/Gothic*, is a pairing that came to me while walking through *Sneeze to Squeeze*, an exhibition by Mika Rottenberg at Magasin 3, Stockholm (February–June 2013). I was drawn to her use of texture – the plaster, the sweat, the visceral sense of flesh – and the depiction of production at its most macabre. I spoke to Mika about her practice, and in particular her new exhibition *Bowls Balls Souls Holes*, at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York (May–June 2014).

Your works have been described as dreamlike. Like in a dream, events and actions in your work vividly follow on, one from the next but when we ask ourselves what has happened it's seems impossible to say. To describe your works as surreal though, as simply being a weird mix, would be to undermine their cogency – the actions in your works are governed by a logic, a logic that is at first established within the videos and then reinforced within their installation as sculptures within the gallery. Perhaps in a process of asking the dreamcaster to retell the dream, could you describe the universe you have created in your latest work *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* (2014)?

I don't really see it as dream logic because I think dream logic is something that's personal, and only makes sense to an individual. Dreams are saturated with your own psychological baggage, whereas I want my work to be read according to real logic. I always get kind of turned off when I think about dream logic. More and more, I'm interested in mixing reality into my work. But I know what you mean – the work does have its own evolving logic. Actually, maybe that's the point of difference – in a dream you can have one kind of logic and then it suddenly turns and becomes something else, whereas I try to keep to a core logic, which needs to make sense in a continuous manner. If anything, it might be described as nightmarish.

What differentiates the sense of logic in *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* to the sense of logic in your previous works?

The other works are very much rooted in space – the narrative develops through time and the works develop through space. In *Bowls Balls Souls Holes*, there's a mix. It starts to develop in

time: the character wakes up, she goes out, and then there's a development in space, moving into the bingo hall. There's a mixture of vertical (space-based) and horizontal (time-based) movement. The connections are a little more metaphysical: there's a type of logic but things don't necessarily have to be physically connected. This is a little bit of relief from actually having everything connected spatially; the connections can come from a psychological or spiritual source. I trusted that things are connected and that they don't necessarily have to be completely tied spatially.

In that respect it does feel like an evolution because in your previous works, the narrative sequence was based on a process of production.

Yes, and I'm trying to break from that bit, although it's still very much in the core of my thinking. I'm still very interested in space and tying things together spatially, and in creating huge architectural/psychological structures that fictionalise that process.

Why are you trying to move away from it?

At some point it becomes too familiar. It's not so much that I want to break away from it, more that I want to push it in a new direction. It's really hard for me to allow my characters to move. There's an oppression in all the spaces in my works. Often the characters sit in very specific spaces, and they don't move. They might move with their minds: in *Squeeze*, the central character effects some change, so the space around her moves, but she stays in the same place. In *Bowls Balls...* the central character moves a little bit. She drives. It's really hard for me to get a character to walk. If characters are stationary, the space becomes more active.

Beyond a specific logic, your work is bound by a process of production. At its simplest the body produces sweat and that sweat sizzles on a hot pan (*Fried Sweat*, 2008). In *Sneeze* (2012), with the curl of a toe, beautifully bulbous noses magic up rabbits and t-bone steaks. *Squeeze* (2010) is more complex, rhythmic and lurid – lettuce, rubber and makeup are cut, dribbled, squirted, trampled, sprayed, scraped and squeezed into a cube. You've said that *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* is concerned with the production of luck. How do

you think about production and how has your thinking on production evolved through your practice?

My earliest work that dealt with production was *Tropical Breeze*, where the narrative is concerned with the manufacturing of a fictional product (moist tissues). The next work, *Mary's cherries*, was based on a real product but created a whole fiction around it. Then *Dough* was about creating a unit of measurement rather than a product. *Cheese* is about a real product but it's historical, and in *Squeeze*, it's more self-reflexive – it's about the production of value. More and more, my work is about the production of value, rather than objects. *Squeeze* is about the production of an art piece, and how it is that a bunch of trash suddenly becomes worth a lot of money. The way that the work was sold reflected this: it was an edition of six, and besides the actual video that shows the production of this cube, there was a photograph of Mary Boone (my gallerist at the time) who was holding the cube like she was advertising it, and there were also seven shares in the cube, so whoever owns the video and the installation also owns a share of the object. The object itself is in the Cayman Islands in storage. Because there are seven shares (I own one), no-one can completely own the piece, so it stays in storage forever. By removing the object from its production process, it becomes more dematerialised and ungraspable.

In *Bowls Balls...* I thought about what would happen if there was no object at all and it was just about the production of luck – which of course doesn't really make sense. I mean, there's a kind of sense, I think – the basis of a game like bingo relies on producing and selling luck. But on a deeper kind of level I was thinking about whether we really believe that our actions have consequences. Sometimes it can be easy to believe that you can control luck, but hard to believe that you can control something like global warming. Even though you know that there's a connection between your actions and the planet, it's really hard to accept. There are just certain phenomena that you believe, but don't live as though they're true. But people do live as though they control luck.

Is there an environmental aspect to the work then?

My work always plays off a cause-and-effect structure, and I'm more and more interested in looking at the globe as my set, and in creating the cause-and-effect relationship on a grand level. There's a melting glacier in one scene, and a dripping water in another, and of course they connect. A lot of the work is about making processes that are invisible, visible. It's also about taking things like luck that you can't really package, and trying to package them and seeing how that would look.

The work also references the dichotomy of expansion/contraction, which is such a basic movement of life: it echoes throughout everything from how the universe was created to how you breathe, there's always that movement of expansion, contraction. The dichotomy of hot and cold is similar, and this features in the work too – the glaciers are cold, the bingo room hot. But it's more psychological than physical; it's more about how you perceive global warming than actually about global warming.

Physicality and a love of objects are strong components in both your videos and their installations. Smear plaster and walls thick with plaster are in a constant counterbalance with flesh and often with glossy sweat, sweat that exists both as a product and as an embodied commercial sheen. How have you developed this relationship with surface and texture?

Through thinking about skin as a surface, and as an external space. My use of it in the works is again intended to evoke a psychological effect, a heightened awareness of the spaces that you're in. Maybe sometimes they become oppressive or seductive (or maybe that's the same thing). It's creating what I call a 'surface tension' - which I know has a different meaning, but I like it in this context. It's about drawing active attention to the space, and to the limits of space. I always think about the rooms that I make as an extension of the person in them, almost like clothing - the spaces are always very specifically fitted to their occupants. In that sense it is a little dream-like, because it's as though the occupant of the room not only controls the environment but actually is the environment - the room is simply an expression of an internal state.

Architecture is a key element of the Gothic. Beyond the style we know from cathedrals, horror films and expensive postcodes, architecture, often in the form of elaborate mazes of interconnecting tunnels, is a device of Gothic narrative as important and reliable as the mad recluse, the supernatural and stormy weather. Buildings come alive and are charged with intent and often define the affective landscape of a story. Indeed *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* at Andrea Rosen Gallery has its very own spinning wall; part bingo machine, part shiny constellation of foil and chewing gum, it exemplifies a repeated strategy of embedding the viewer within the formal and theoretical armature of your work. What keeps on bringing you back to architecture?

I start from space and spatial movement, and I love using video because of that, because of the way you can control and create your own spaces - you can create a space without gravity or whatever. I want to think of myself as an architect that doesn't have to adhere to physical laws. Architecture affects so much of the way we behave and move that it's oppressive in a way, dictating the way in which we act. Maybe it's a psychological fantasy of sorts, to think that you can alter architecture or move it around in some sense. And the sculptural aspects are interesting too, I think: to create spaces and see what happens. I've been more and more interested in combining real spaces with my own invented spaces. The bingo scene that's in *Bowls Balls* is real documentary footage, for example. And I made a replica of part of the bingo hall in my studio, so I could easily move between this real space and this invented space.

What was the decision-making process that led to the spinning door in the gallery?

It was at least in part an exploration of yet another simple dichotomy, that of front and back. I like the idea that you come into the space and you see the back of the air-conditioner and so on. It's a reference to the idea of the hidden back-end, the systems and logic and mechanisms that operate behind the scenes. Again, it's less about the actual back-end as it is about people's perception of what that is. Anytime you enter an installation

you become more aware of your body and its movement in space. Take a corridor, for example. It's such a simple architectural element, but if you just make it a little narrower or a little higher or something, then you become aware of it as an architectural element. The same is true of the revolving door that's in the installation. But the door is also a reference to the circular movements that permeate the video itself – the bingo balls, the moon, the planetary movements and so on, all these rotating circles within circles within circles – so it seemed perfect that the door itself would rotate.

In addition to the Gothic vocabulary we see in *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* – such as the derelict hotel, the misty moon, the overarching focus on chance – there is a cosmic element. What is going on with the sun, moon and stars?

I'm interested in the manifestations of things on both a micro and macro level, in going into the tiniest of spaces and observing things that then expand onto a universal scale (again, referencing that notion of expansion and contraction). Going into a bingo hall, you see the randomness and chaos of the numbers harnessed and translated into an organised grid, a system of sorts. Somehow, that made me think of planets. In the bingo hall, I thought of the announcer as the sun, the sleepy lady as the moon, and the players as the planets, and I thought about their movement in relation to one another in that way.

It's so absurd, isn't it? It's like our version of the universe, where we have this utterly arbitrary set of conditions and we somehow organise it into a system.

Yes. And these arbitrary systems form the basis of capitalism and the basis of my work: this idea that you take these things that are formless and shapeless and you try to contain them, package them. People actually market and sell things like happiness. On a grander level it's just an instinct or impulse to take things and translate them into a simple grid or logic. But then once you study it you realise there is no logic, or that the logic is unobtainable.

| • • //

Mika Rottenberg

Bowls Balls Souls Holes (Bingo), 2014
(installation view)

Video and sculpture installation

Video duration: 27 minutes and 54 seconds

Variant 2 of 6 with one artist's variant

© Mika Rottenberg

Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

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Mika Rottenberg

Bowls Balls Souls Holes (Bingo), 2014
(still)

Video and sculpture installation

Video duration: 27 minutes and 54 seconds

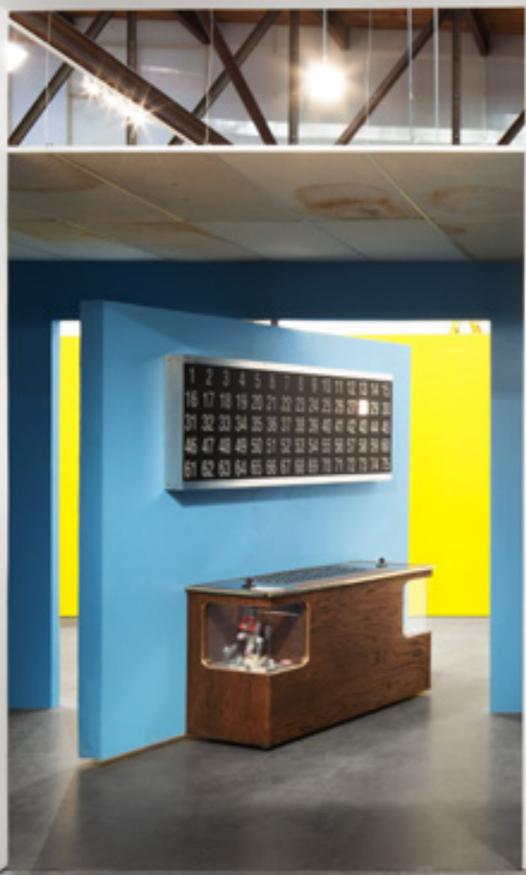
Variant 2 of 6 with one artist's variant

© Mika Rottenberg

Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York







Whither is Fled the Visionary Gleam?

Roger K Green

Aldous Huxley is best known for *Brave New World*, a book set in a distant future that by the end of his life no longer appeared so distant. Dig a bit deeper into his life and you quickly discover his fascination with the emergent psychedelic research of the 1950s, a fascination that led to the conviction that psychedelics could be used to democratise mystical experience. Soma, the anaesthetising drug of *Brave New World*, became moksha, the liberating drug of *Island*, Huxley's utopian last novel. As early as 1953, Huxley wrote to Dr Humphry Osmond – the man who would later coin the term 'psychedelic' in a letter to Huxley – regarding the potential of drug experiences for education. Huxley said “it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to ‘taste and see’ what they have learned about at second hand, or directly but at a lower level of intensity, in the writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters and musicians.” A decade later, on the morning of the Kennedy assassination, Huxley lay dying. His wife Laura gave him LSD and watched him drift away. The scene could have come out of one of his novels.

Recounting Huxley's death, Laura Huxley wrote: “Aldous was appalled, I think (and certainly I am), at the fact that what he wrote in *Island* was not taken seriously. It was treated as a work of science fiction, when it was not fiction, because each one of the ways of living he described in *Island* was not a product of his fantasy, but something that had been tried in one place or another, some of them in our own everyday life.” *Island* is not set in the distant future but on a fictional island contemporaneous to the authoring of the book. Overshadowed by the success of *Brave New World*, *Island's* updating of its central issues and offering of a “third way” between soulless oppression and madness, has nevertheless had political consequences.

In his recent book, *Neuropsychodelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research Since the Decade of the Brain*, Nicolas Langlitz recounts appeals made by members of President George W Bush's Council on Bioethics on the dangers of technology and psychopharmacology, in which references to *Brave New World* featured. Langlitz points out that in referencing it, neoconservatives ignored the critique of state control in *Brave New World*, as well as Huxley's later work and its treatment

of psychedelics. He writes that *Island* “conjures up a contemporary alternative rather than a foreshadowing of sociotechnical developments to come, located on a faraway island instead of a distant future. Thereby Huxley suggested that, in principle, the idyllic society of Pala was already possible without any science-fiction technologies.” The neoconservatives' selective reading of Huxley and their connecting of soma to drugs like Prozac afforded an extension of a 'War on Drugs' mentality: regulating legitimate research into psychedelics while perpetuating black markets and narcissistic self-exploration as protest.

The Council on Bioethics included political economist Francis Fukuyama, who had written of the end of the Cold War as perhaps being the “end of history”, a Hegelian concept that Fukuyama incorporated into an essay heralding liberal democracy as the “final form” of government. In 1989, he claimed: “In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical world for some time to come.” Fukuyama cited *Brave New World* in *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) claiming “Huxley was right...the most significant threat posed by biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a 'posthuman' stage of history.” Couched in these statements is Fukuyama's own concern that psychedelic research – or at least the rhetoric around it – risks “restarting” history as an alteration of human nature or something “transhuman”. According to Fukuyama, human nature, along with religion, shapes values: and so the perception of an overly secularised world is a worry.

One is led to wonder what Fukuyama and thinkers like him might make of Langlitz's ethnographies of laboratories in the United States and Switzerland that test psychedelics on willing human subjects. One of Langlitz's most compelling claims is that even in the most sterile and unsentimental of settings, the question of spirituality consistently arose – among both scientists and subjects. He ends his book suggesting what he calls “fieldwork in the perennial”, the continually recurring.

The extension of human consciousness beyond the body, transhumanism, has long been a feature of psychedelic aesthetics, meeting in the virtual temporalities of science fiction. Transhumanism is anathema to Fukuyama because it introduces a change to 'human nature' by way of a flawed human desire to affect the evolution of the species: the Frankenstein argument. Beside Huxley's science fiction, Arthur C Clarke's *Childhood's End* and Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead Game* both figure ideas of reincarnation and expanded consciousness. The ego death and return in *The Bardo Thotol* informs the classic model expressed in Timothy Leary's *Psychedelic Experience* – a translation inspired by Huxley himself. It is just this meshing of the spiritual and scientific that Langlitz's research finds in more recent psychedelic testing. But recent psychedelic studies stay away from attempts to measure spiritual insight (unlike Leary's famous 'Good Friday Experiment' at Harvard in the early 1960s).

According to Langlitz, however outrageous Leary and his cohorts were, they were onto something by linking spirituality and psychedelic research. As the US government ramped up the pressure on them, their enthusiasm articulated itself in passionate appeals to the political right that emphasised the need to protect religious freedom and the First Amendment. We can read Art Kleps and Allen Ginsberg testifying in court with appeals to spiritual freedom. Huxley, despite being the grandson of Darwin's fiercest defender, the man who coined the term 'agnostic', grew throughout his life to be more and more concerned both with issues of spirituality and its role in relation to the state. It is especially curious that Huxley's last novel sets itself on the fictional island of Pala, not in the distant future but in the pregnant present of the early 1960s, adhering much more strictly to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).

In *Island*, Pala appears to have benefited from all scientific discoveries of the Western industrialised world without having been subject to the environmental devastation that accompanied it. Its citizens regularly use the psychedelic moksha to liberate consciousness and actualise human potential. But the idyllic society is threatened with imminent invasion by a neighbouring dictatorship with its eyes on Pala's rich and underexploited oil reserves. It is also threatened directly by the main character,

David McDiarmid
Don't forget to remember
 (from the suite *Rainbow aphorism*), 1994
 colour xerox print mounted on craftboard
 38.7 x 28.5 x 1.3 cm
 © David McDiarmid, 1994.
 Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney
 Courtesy of the Art Gallery
 of New South Wales

William Asquith Farnaby, a reporter working surreptitiously for an English oilman. Will, who is dealing with loads of religious and psychological baggage, comes to learn much about the island. He talks with the inhabitants. As he reads *Notes on What's What*, a small volume espousing the cultural values of the place (a mix between Western liberalism and Eastern thought indigenous to the country), Will slowly becomes enamoured with the place.

The island is further threatened by the fact that its young and warlike prince, Murugan, is about to become sovereign. Murugan is swayed by the crass consumerism of the modernised West on one hand and a tyrannically theosophical mother appearing as a kind of South-East Asian Helena Blavatsky on the other. The book culminates with Will Farnaby's psychedelic trip taking place as tanks are moving into the country and enacting a state of emergency that is itself a kind of atemporality.

Only as the island society is collapsing does Will recognise its value. At first his experience is isolating: "This dark little inspissated clot that one called 'I' was capable of suffering to infinity and, in spite of death, the suffering would go on forever. The pains of living and the pains of dying, the routine of successive agonies in the bargain basement and the final crucifixion in a blaze of tin and plastic vulgarity – reverberating, continuously amplified, they would always be there. And the pains were incommunicable, the isolation complete. The awareness that one existed was an awareness that one was always alone." But as he emerges from his psychedelic state, he also becomes aware of the need for attention to compassion, "karuna". Attention to the Void alone is not enough, as Will's guide Susila tells him, "Greedy contemplatives want to possess themselves of the light without bothering about compassion. Merely good people try to be compassionate and refuse to bother about the light." Huxley's emphasis on attention to now performs itself in the setting of the book in the fictional present. The attention to now, however, is not an overcoming of history.

If we attend to our now, what does reading Huxley tell us about the present? In the 21st century the question of overcoming the human certainly remains important. It saturates

Western fictional media. The issue of being a human or a monster or a hybrid of the two recurs. It was Aldous Huxley's brother, Julian, the first director of UNESCO, who coined the term 'transhumanism', saying, "I believe in transhumanism: once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Peking man. It will at last be consciously fulfilling its real destiny." Transhumanists are nostalgic for the future; a political thinker like Fukuyama is nostalgic for history.

Nostalgia and homesickness are characterised by temporal and spatial displacement. Nostalgia is itself deterritorialised. As so much contemporary Western (especially American) culture – in both media and law – fascinates itself with the violent collapse of human and monster, with a nostalgic mythological adherence to vampires and werewolves and ghosts, it simultaneously denies its own mortality by ravaging the world. I believe one must be careful not to be seduced by any re-enchanting critique that remains merely a dialectical consubstantiation to reaffirm one body. To get at what humanity is – the "end of humanity" as Gerald Bruns puts it in *On Ceasing to Be Human* – is to move beyond spatiality, beyond coordination and beyond negation or anarchic decentralisation. It is to get to an obliteration of will without willing or intending. It is not the experience itself of ecstasy, not a cancelling out, but a capacity to be obliterated. This is fully illustrated by our technology of destruction that exhibits this capacity. However, I do not think such appeals to our capacity ought to be employed in order to somehow achieve a 'fuller' humanity, because it also seems that only an individual can 'achieve' in this sense.

Much interest in psychedelics, however, posits a naïve return to a pre-political state of nature and ends up as uncritical nostalgia. Notions like Terrence McKenna's "archaic revival" may be more sophisticated, but the privileged rhetorical and social spaces inhabited by current seekers is so embedded in liberal privilege that it risks maintaining oppressive apparatuses. Only the community as obliteration of self – a justice observable not by one human lifetime but only over many

generations, even if it is a justice of their own creation – performs any such 'achievement'. We need the ability to read literarily what Will and other Huxley characters encounter at various points – being as instances of a succession of states. But even well-intentioned appeals to the transhuman emphasise the apparatus rather than the attention to care for each successive state. As we see the deregulation of psychedelic substances through appeals to health and human potential, a continued denial of the spiritual will remain costly, but perhaps it is more costly to confuse the potential to become more compassionate with the exigency to simply do so now.

**DON'T
FORGET
TO
REMEMBER**

Back to the Kia: Thinking about a Rock Opera about Austin Osman Spare.

Richard Grayson

I'm thinking about a Rock Opera about Austin Osman Spare. This is meant pretty exactly, the *thinking about* bit: a Rock Opera about Austin Osman Spare does not yet exist. It may. One day. Up to this future point however, it exists only in thought rather than in record racks or in the collections of obsessives who collect 70s arcana, although of course, in the imaginary realm it manifests in all these forms. The original gatefold double vinyl album sells for a fortune in the rare records section of Amoeba Music in San Francisco, and the recent re-issue on CD with additional tracks and demos is widely written about as a lost masterpiece in the pages of *Uncut* and *Mojo* and across the internet.

But right now it exists only in the abstract. An area where it is likely to stay for a while, given I was recently told that a grant application to develop the piece as a film/video installation has been knocked back by the British Film and Video funding programme 'Flamin'. Which is annoying.

Austin Osman Spare was born in 1886. He was the son of a policeman and spent his early childhood in Kennington, a poor borough of South London. From an early age he displayed an extraordinary ability in drawing. He left school at the age of 13 to work in a stained glass factory and attend evening classes at the Lambeth School of Art. In 1904 his father proudly submitted drawings his son had done at the age of 14 to the committee of the Royal Academy, bringing the young Spare considerable fame. Hailed as one of the youngest ever exhibitors that the Academy had ever shown, his home was doorstepped by journalists. Writers were fascinated by this seeming genius from the rough streets of London. And it was not only newspapers. *Chums* – one of the comic books of the day – ran an illustrated feature on the artist (photographed standing in front of an easel in his bedroom – strangely, with his eyes closed) for the entertainment of their young readers. Spare became the Edwardian version of a media star. In 1905 he published his first book and in 1907 his debut exhibition at the Bruton Gallery was met with outrage and acclaim. *The World* commented that "his inventive faculty is stupendous and terrifying in its creative flow of impossible horrors", and *The Observer* stated that "Mr. Spare's art is abnormal, unhealthy, wildly fantastic and unintelligible". A leading

art journal of the time wrote "who is interested in art who has not heard of Austin Spare?" For the next five years he enjoyed considerable celebrity in the London art world, up until the outbreak of the First World War. In the years following the armistice he was increasingly unable to maintain critics' interest, his exhibitions received fewer reviews and he left Bloomsbury and retreated to a series of rented rooms and boarding houses in South London. He continued to make paintings, pastels and drawings at a furious pace, exhibiting them in local libraries and pubs as well as turning his lodgings into a salon where he sold them for small sums. He died alone surrounded by cats in 1956 in the Elephant and Castle. The only echo of his former notoriety was an obituary in the London *Times*, which described him as a "dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions, he had that complete other-worldliness so often depicted in romantic fiction and so rarely found in real life. Money meant nothing to him. With his talents as a figure draughtsman he might easily have commanded a four-figure income in portraiture but he elected to live quietly and humbly, rarely going out, painting what he wished to paint, and selling his works at three or four guineas each. Even in outward aspect he conformed to type – with his untidy shock of hair, small imperial, and a scarf instead of a collar. But for most of his life he did not mix in what are called 'artistic circles'. Not Chelsea, Fitzroy Street, Bloomsbury or Hampstead claimed him, but for years a little flat 'in the south suburbs by the Elephant' far removed from the coterie, deep-set in the ordinary life of the people."

But this retreat into the 'ordinary life of the people' was not a withdrawal from the world of agency and influence – for Spare it was the place where he had learned how he might manipulate the extraordinary and the numinous to exercise powers unknown to most people. When he was a child in Kennington, an elderly neighbour called Mrs Patterson had seduced him, as well as introducing him to the arts of divination using cards. According to Spare – and it may be that Mrs Patterson only existed in his narratives, as he was an energetic fabulist, claiming amongst other things that his war experience had taken him to Egypt where he had encountered the secrets of the hieroglyphs, when in fact he had been stationed in Blackpool and London – she was a witch

who claimed direct descent from the Salem witches that Cotton Mather had tried to wipe out. He said that Mrs Patterson could transform herself from an ancient woman into a beautiful and erotic one and materially manifest objects into the physical world from her thoughts. He described her as having become his second mother, his witch mother. She initiated him into an erotic universe of occluded forces and arcane knowledge that he was to map, turning his work into a magical practice as much as an artistic one. He explored automatic drawing as a means of communication between different spheres of being, where images could become tools of the artist's will. Spare developed a mystical ontology which came to be known as the Zos-Kias Cultus, which is as complex and opaque as that of Blake.

The early years of the 20th century were febrile with occult and spiritual movements and organisations, and for a time Spare associated with Alistair Crowley and his organisation the A.:A.: (*Astron Argon*, or Silver Star). Crowley was drawn to the young man's work, which he saw as a message from the divine, seeking him out and publishing his drawings in his magazine *Equinox*. Spare never rose to become a full member of the order as he had a falling out with Crowley, disliking his emphasis on hierarchy and developing an increasing disdain for the structures and practices of ceremonial magic. Crowley in turn claimed that he had prevented Spare from gaining full initiation as the artist was interested only in black magic.

Spare was fascinated by the 'sigil'. This is a drawn symbol that, according to some theories of magic, can be used for summoning demons. Spare developed sigils to be used in more individualistic and subjective ways, where the words of a statement of intent are, through a process of redrafting and abstraction, resolved into a design, which can then be used to make manifest the will of the sigil's creator. He described his development and activation of his sigil magic in his *Book of Pleasure* (1913) as an antidote to ineffectual ceremonial magic. The completed sigil is then to be stripped of conscious association, and carried back into the 'Kia' (the universal mind, or power) by its author achieving 'the death posture', a state of total exhaustion and movement beyond self, where everything apart from an awareness of

the sigil has faded. This apparently is most effective at times of despair. Spare's rejection of the mainstream esoteric tradition as exemplified by Crowley had led him to an interest in Freud (who he claimed had written him an admiring letter) and Nietzsche and psychic automatism – interests that mapped surrealist obsessions before the surrealists had started obsessing about them. For Spare, sigil magic was a creative autosuggestion, and the intense trance state of the 'death posture' was a rejection of received structures and meaning to move beyond into the chaos of creation itself, with the sigil becoming, as Erik Davis has written "a graven image of energy, a frozen imprint of physical desire that has a material life of its own".

On YouTube, C Sampo has posted a video of a track called 'Austin Osman Spare' by The Bulldog Breed, a record that was released in the UK on Deram label in 1969. The text accompanying the clip has the intriguing line "There are very few instances of Spare's work influencing musicians before 1970, but Bulldog Breed was one such example." And indeed the track epitomises a certain type of spooky British pop psychedelia, with a distorted flanged voice chanting: "Austin Osman Spare, lived in nightmares" and asking "Is he in Heaven? Or come back from Hell?" This band's interest in Spare was through a direct South London family link – the guitarist's grandmother had known Spare and owned a number of his drawings and paintings, which became the guitarist's introduction to the world of art when he was a child.

Even after 1970 I have found it hard identify that many actual songs or tracks that directly reference Spare. But 1970 did mark a return of the artist into the public consciousness – ironically, given Spare's personal history with Crowley – through Kenneth Grant, who had been Crowley's personal secretary and proclaimed himself his successor after Crowley's death in 1947. Grant befriended Spare during the 1950s, and both he and his wife were the subject of his portraits. On Spare's death, Grant acted as his executor. In the late 1960s Grant was asked to be an advisor for a new magazine series called *Man, Myth and Magic*. This publication was to be an encyclopaedia published in instalments, and it was sold in newsagents and shops throughout the UK. With its emphasis on the uncanny and the

strong probability that any issue might also feature nudity, its launch in 1970 had a massive public impact, particularly for those animated by an interest in new or hidden ways of seeing the world, informed by the counterculture, devotees of Hammer House of Horror movies, Tolkien fiends and suburban adolescents in search of illicit thrills. The cover of the heavily promoted first issue featured a full-colour reproduction of a glowering goat/human head by Spare, and other images by him featured heavily throughout the publishing run. This helped lodge Spare's work in the imagination of the public and feed it, however obliquely, into the world in a way that had eluded him in his lifetime.

The social, spiritual and psychedelic experiments of the 1960s helped reignite an interest in occultism, which, amongst other belief systems from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* to astrology, *Man, Myth and Magic* fed into. Not only did the cover of *Sergeant Pepper* by the Beatles feature the glowering face of the 'Great Beast' Aleister Crowley among the assembled masses, but in the melange of writers, hipsters, crooks and mystics who helped shape events and attitudes that constituted the counterculture were many individuals who had direct links to Crowley. The dominant expression of the culture – rock music – seemed to offer new modes of transcendence and models of power, and in this context ideas of magic, the occult desire for action and influence at a distance, and the potentials of transformative states took on fresh resonance. Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin had a fascination with Crowley, and at one time bought Boleskin House on the shores of Loch Ness where Crowley had lived between 1899 and 1913. Page was a collector of Austin Osman Spare's art works, and if Erik Davis in his book on Led Zeppelin is right, his interest in Spare's graphic productions embraced the sigils.

The symbols used as representations of the band on the gatefold cover of the unnamed album that was the band's fourth release have long held the attention of fans, and Davis links the design with Page in particular to the approaches of Spare. "The most revealing thing Page ever said about the sigil he told to Ritchie Yorke: 'A lot of people mistook it for a word – Zoso – which is a pity because it wasn't supposed to be a word at all, but something entirely different.'" This suggests something

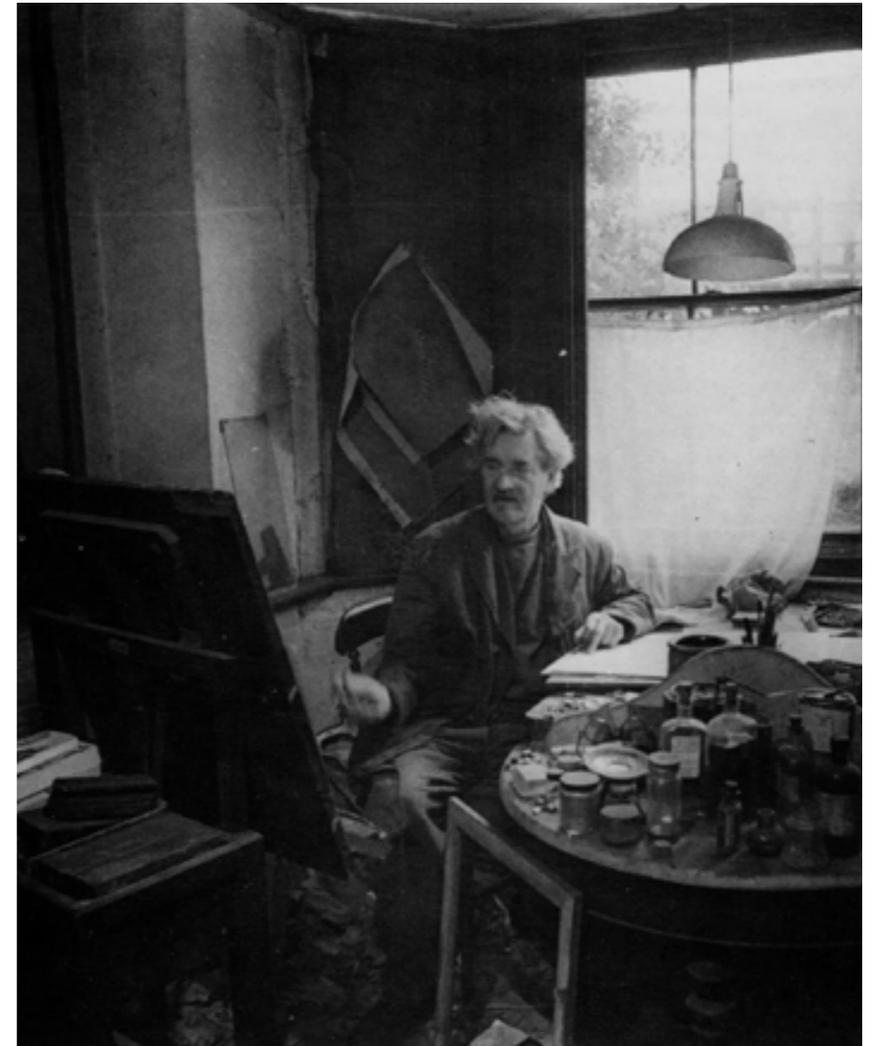
more unusual than a tarted up astrological glyph, and I believe that the answer lies in another connection noted by Zep kabbalists: the similarity of (the symbol) to Zos, the magical name of the British artist and magus Austin Osman Spare."

The sigil and the world of magic as imagined by Spare later become central to Chaos Magick, and his approaches number among the few constants in what is otherwise a loose amalgamation of borrowings from diverse belief systems. It is founded on the concept that belief itself has agency – as Spare had it in the *Book of Pleasure*, "Will formulates Desire which promulgates Belief". It playfully filters and combines kaleidoscopic fragments of practice in a postmodern search for Gnosis and illumination. Given the practitioners' interest in technologies and rituals it is not surprising that it has found expression in the post-punk areas of cultural activity that link filmmaker Derek Jarman, industrialism and freak folk, the music and performance groups Throbbing Gristle, Coil, Current 93, Genesis P-Orridge and Psychic TV, and most directly in Thee Temple ov Psychic Youth, the artistic and magic collective founded by Genesis P-Orridge in 1981. According to TOPY's Wikipedia entry, it "is dedicated to the manifestation of magical concepts lacking or the worship of gods. The group focuses on the psychic and magical aspects of mysticism and the human brain linked with 'guiltless sexuality'. TOPY's research has covered ritual, magic and elements of psychology, art and music. Brion Gysin, the Process Church of the Final Judgement, William S Burroughs, Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare stand out as major influences. On the 23rd hour (11pm) of the 23rd day of each month, TOPY members were encouraged to make magical sigils. If an individual chose to do so, they were invited to mail their sigils to a central location where the magical energy in them could be used to enhance others."

There is something both interesting and disturbing in the way that artists such as Genesis P-Orridge embraced the occult, as if turning away from the possibilities of political and social transformation as imagined by social revolutionaries and parts of the historical avant-garde and searching instead for another sort of power and influence, less

determined by the quotidian world. This may echo John Gray's contention that the transformative political agendas of Modernism are aspects of drives that previously found expression in millennialist religious forms. Certainly it could parallel drives within Spare himself, where his lack of effect on the world of art is counterbalanced by an increasing range of activity in magical thinking. And the search for these arcane powers seems to speak of powerlessness, in both Spare and for others. But it also speaks of a desire to move beyond the realms of what may be considered possible in the establishment constructions of art and the fashionable salons of culture. At the very least, as graphic novelist Alan Moore has pointed out, magic gives the artist a new way of looking at their consciousness. It also suggests an optimism: that there is somehow more than that which we are given.

Which is one of the reasons I want to make a Rock Opera that talks of Spare, which suggests and fabulates and unpacks influences and echoes of him through media and movements: art, the 60s and 70s, the counterculture, the techno-occult, the psychonauts and voyagers – all that have attempted transformation, and transcendence, and all which have failed in this attempt, but where the desire for the possibility of some sort of 'another' still finds expression. Which seems admirable and necessary at a time when it is hard to even imagine such a desire beyond a formless and inchoate yearning. But to achieve my outcome I may first have to find a way of expressing my intention in the complex graphic filigrees of a sigil design and find my own ways to return it to the Kia.



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Austin Osman Spare in his studio, 1956.

A Delay in Time: The Political Still Life.

Monika Behrens

Still-life painting presents both the painter and viewer with a fresh new reality of objects. You'll find that the genre far exceeds the 'yawn fest' of formal conservative painting classes from the past. Deceptively subtle, still-life painting slowly, yet radically, performs the trick of politicising even the tamest of object to image relations.

Traditionally art historians and theorists proposed that still-life paintings communicate through the use of symbols, icons and metaphors. In contemporary society, however, language has changed and so has the meaning attached to these symbols. These interpretations are now lost and/or largely irrelevant. But still-life painting continues to do something beyond these initial symbolic readings. Still-life paintings are capable of conveying political content through the relation of time, space and composition, without being didactic.

Like all forms of art, still-life paintings have not always taken the form we recognise today. They were born out of the *parerga* (by-works) of the narrative painting tradition.¹ A *parerga* was an arrangement of objects in a grand history painting that gave regional context and mood to the narrative. This was a rough start for the genre of still life as these segments were usually painted by apprentices and regarded as the painting's 'filler'.

Still life didn't boom as an independent art form until it was embraced by the strongest and wealthiest art market: the Dutch. This happened for two main reasons. Firstly, there was an abundance of new objects entering the Netherlands through the colonisation and pillaging committed by the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch desired a way to represent and celebrate new flavours, delicacies and objects that brought a ridiculous amount of wealth to the nation. Secondly, it was a time when Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church. It was now necessary for religious subject matter to be conveyed through symbols and metaphors rather than traditional Christ and Madonna figures.

Surprisingly, it has been only 30 years since still life was first examined as a critical form of painting. Before then art historians and theorists had successfully focused the viewers attention on iconography, metaphors and symbols within paintings. They did this with the intention of deciphering the artist's political or religious affirmations. I think that

these interpretations have taken the contemporary viewer's attention away from the painting and forced them to think about abstract ideas, language and objects in the material world. To my mind, these readings have butchered the 'thingness' of still-life painting, taking the attention away from the painting itself. Still-life artists have always been more than simple message couriers; they were aware that truth is assumed from fiction and that they had the power of working with a medium that performs fiction.

Traditional Dutch still-life paintings are dark, seductive, eerie and composed of dimly lit tables dressed with objects in a slowed down version of regular time. Art historian Hanneke Grootenboer recently said that still-life painting is similar to a freeze frame in film. She states that the paintings produce a moment of reflection in the spectator, which, in turn, removes the spectator from their regular flow of movement.² I am interested in the idea that still-life painting is not completely still. I want to think of the paintings as having agency – as if the objects are temporally paused, mid-interaction.

A wheel of cheese, herrings, beer, cross-seasonal flowers, reflective decorative surfaces and freshly pressed tablecloths are engaged in visual object relations. The objects in still-life paintings contain a 'stilling' that provides viewers with contemplative moments for altered observation. Moments devoid of humans, but staged directly for the consumption of human thought.

The stilling of objects is a political act in itself. Objects can be permanently paused in the painting by capturing objects in their time of melting, the process of dying, restricting, binding or shadowing other objects. Through my own painting practice I question this stillness by capturing varying intensities of a paused object. Heidegger thinks that stilling is political because it is actually about motion. He said that "the stilling of stillness, rest, conceived strictly, is always more in motion and always more restlessly active than any agitation."³ If still objects are already in motion, painting stills them again. So, the still-life painter may perform an act of stilling the stillness, which in itself is an activity of compressing motion.

We don't have to think that hard to understand in the contemporary political environment why

stopping movement is a political act. Just think of shifting international borders, unwelcome intrusions or the mobility of immigration. The act of stilling relates directly to political power structures. There's potential for this power structure to be alluded to through object-to-object relations and compositional devices within still-life painting.

The grammar of the composition presents direction to the comprehension of objects within a painting. This grammar is just as important as the type of objects selected as it gives a voice to the ways in which the painted objects can relate to each other. While researching still-life paintings I have realised that subgenres of still life observe diverse aspects of object relations, light and scale. Each of the still life subgenres has its own attributes that give each mode its identity.

In 'Breakfast' still lifes, objects are composed side by side in a shallow space and posed in front of a void to focus the eye on the object relations (for example: *Still Life with a Gilt Cup, Willem Claesz Heda, 1635*). 'Vanitas' and 'Bodegon' paintings combine small groupings and couplings of objects (e.g. *Still Life with Asparagus, Adriaen Coorte, 1697*). 'Floral' still life, however, works with the trickery and forgery of the medium, combining out-of-season flowers in impossible arrangements (e.g. *Stilleven met bloemen in een glazen vaas, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, 1650–1683*). Finally, 'Pronk' paintings are blatantly all up in your face (see *Banquet Still Life, Adriaen van Utrecht, 1644*).

While it is true that objects selected for Pronk paintings celebrated the boom of wealth in Dutch Golden Age, I think it's even more interesting that these works became objects of wealth themselves. The paintings as objects are powerful and almost threatening. Within the painting every object contains equal amounts of high intensity paintwork – so intense that the objects within the works can be difficult to focus on. Each object is visually competitive with force, painted to be a direct challenge to the visual value of the neighbouring object. The eye practically vibrates from one object to another. In this sense, the vibration is a way of seeing that quickly modulates varying values, creating an aesthetic overload. The objects are arranged in colour channels so that from a distance the painting as a whole can be compositionally comprehended.

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Willem Claeszoon Heda*Still life with oysters, a rummer, a lemon and a silver bowl (1634)*

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Only the most skilful (and arrogant) of Dutch painters were able to succeed in this style.

My own painting practice continues a political movement that has historical roots. Not because I paint lobsters, delicate cups and arrangements of foodstuffs, but because I work with compositions that have light intensities similar to traditional paintings. Both paintings *A Bright Lights Cinema* and *Look at Those Cavemen Go I* began as foil sculptures with projected alternating coloured lights from different directions. Under the lights the foil objects completely change their intensity. Currently I am working on a highly detailed foil model of a Pronk painting, in which there are foil reconstructions of a lobster, oysters, elaborate vases and other culinary items. When the model is ready I will project coloured light beams in a similar way to the composed colour channels in traditional Pronk paintings. This model will then be painted on a large canvas

that will take on a similar object presence to the original Pronk paintings.

The political potential of still life opens up a time-space for contemplation between the viewer and the painting object. There is a moment of interaction between viewer and painting which opens a durational slowing of thought. This time-space can be an alternative site for knowledge, a place where speculative ideas can emerge. The paintings provoke thought that sits alongside language but can never be completely linguistic as a whole. As awareness of the painting broadens, the viewer becomes more conscious of the time-space contemplation, and, I believe, more susceptible to the political undertones slowly emerging from within the painted space.

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Monika Behrens*Look at those Cavemen Go I, 2014*

oil on polyester, 76 x 92cm

© and courtesy of the artist



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 Monika Behrens
A Bright Lights Cinema, 2014
 oil on polyester, 52 x 76cm
 © and courtesy of the artist



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 Adriaen Coorte
Still Life with Asparagus (1697)
 Oil on paper on panel
 25 x 20.5cm
 Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Darkness and Delusion: Tripping the Acid/Gothic Syntagm.

By Chris Rudge

How are we to understand the terms ‘acid’ and ‘gothic’, metonyms whose valences reach across a rich historical territory, dispersing denotations like so many scalar potentials? And what are we to make of this yoking together of the terms in ‘acid/gothic’, where, separated by this pendulous virgule – the forward slash whose own discreet status incites in us barely a whispering silence – the distinct words weave a twilight, neological waltz? Drawing our attention to the effects of this tenebrous forward slash, French sign specialist Roland Barthes described the “panic function” of the virgule. It functions like a “slash of censure”, he wrote, performing as though it were the “surface of the mirror” or a “wall of hallucination”, and ushering us directly to “the verge of antithesis”.¹ Barthes detected in the symbol its installation of a recursive indeterminacy that might wound or alarm us, and proposes that one of the ways the virgule intensifies what is already language’s extraordinary power to append and suture symbols, colliding words at a microscale, and in microseconds. Rushing into vast relief a huddled dualism that had been hitherto invisible, the virgule inaugurates a kind of mathematical compactification, compressing the vastness of language into a fraction of signs, and emblematising language’s reductionism itself.

Contemporary internet traffickings of the acid/gothic syntagm offer something akin to this hallucinating wall, echoing the virgule’s binary logic of invention through apposition, panic through conjunction. To google the ‘acid/gothic’ metatag, for instance, is to encounter myriad curated image archives devoted to a similar kind of operation. Mapping a range of exemplary combinatorial vestimentary procedures and fashion ensembles, the conjunction of acid and gothic is shown to privilege a queered or hallucinal logic of aesthetic delusion. Apparalled in the ultra-violet pinks and luminous lemon-greens of the RGB colour spectrum, and in an efflorescence of rainbowed, spiraloid materials, the avatars of acid/gothic are the organic synecdoches for the screen-surfaces their bodies inhabit. Miming the combustible pixilation of the internet interface itself, the textiles induce a doubly virtual narcosis, first as fashion trope, second as hypermedia simulation. Giving sense to the gothic side of the keyword equation, these RGB referents of psychedelia and screen are backstaged

by a bipolar horizon of light and dark, a dichromatic tracing of the empty blacks and anaemic whites that have long itinerated in the gothic landscape. In the pale pigment of an alabaster face or the blackness of mascara (mask), the base shades of the acid/gothic creature gesture darkly at the surreal and stroboscopic destratification of ordinary perception.

A delusional aesthetic rarely evident in the landscapes of nature, the imagistic zone of the acid/gothic readily affiliates itself with the kinds of innerscapes associated with drug-induced psychosis, dreams and death. Of course, if among fashion’s amorously striated typologies such a definitive creature as the ‘acid/gothic’ can ever be demarcated, pointed to and named, then its features, like the signifiers of ‘anti-fashion’ or even ‘anti-consumption’, must, at their moment of recognition, also come under erasure. Just as the exuberances that constituted the 1960s counterculture and its maniacal lines of flight had ultimately, like the lacunose indeterminate signification of the virgule, to be denuded of its privileges (some parts – the drugs – outlawed, other parts – the fashion – reassembled and vended in so many mundane recommodifications and simulacra), so must all apparelled codifications of the body disintegrate, transmogrify, reform.

But if it is, as Deleuze and Guattari say, under the schizophrenic and inculcating snatch of late capitalism’s “schizzes and flows” – its volatility indexes and restructurings – that the performativity of the body and colour is brought into order, then these forces only echo the voraciousness for colour control exuded within the formal studies of optical physics.² Transmitting only so much colour as light doesn’t scatter, electromagnetic waves, we learn, both constitute and contaminate chromatic particles, demarcating not simply a glossary of social codes (red for the political leftist, blue for those on the right), but a daily-visible crucible of physical data. Thus conceived of as a vector – or virgule – of radiation, colour qua light demarcates a topology of molecular affiliations across so many optical – and interpretative – fields.

It was the Apollonian German writer Goethe, one of modern history’s early heterodox opticists, who offered, while composing *Faust*, an analysis of colour that emphasised its relation to the

nature of the eye. In his 1810 *Theory of Colours*, Goethe averred that “we avoid looking at those appearances that dazzle sight”, suggesting a tendency to darkness and an aversion to light that is also so richly metonymised by Heinrich Faust’s supplication to Mephistopheles (the devil) and the dark arts. Where the “unexcited retina” shrinks, Goethe said, it “is drawn together, and occupies a less space than its active state, produced by the excitement of light”.³ But if the gothic or Goethian tendency to darkness signals a yearning to put the organic retina into quiet repose, it also promises to reduce optical experience, a disavowal of the contaminated radiation of colour, and the undue excitation characteristic of the light-giving world. And while far from eliciting the expansively dazzling optics of, say, the phosphorescent LCD screen, it is perhaps in precisely this darkness that a more enlightened vision is apprehensible.

Such was the thinking of neuroscientist and physician John C Lilly, who conceived the isolation floatation tank, undertaking a series of experiments in sensory deprivation by immersing himself in water and absolute darkness. Here, Lilly’s strange investigative operation begins to formally configure what had always been among the gothic project’s aims. Acting on the impulse to consciously encounter the Faustian darkness of the utterly empty crypt, Lilly would attempt to reach, as he came to call it, the “absolute zero point”.⁴ Ingesting both acid (LSD) and ketamine before submerging himself in body-temperature water, Lilly sought to locate and transgress the borderlines of body and mind, seeking precisely to discover that “these limits are [merely] beliefs to be transcended”. It was in this hyper-compacted imitation of Nietzsche’s lifelong solitude – a super-solitary and sensorial confinement – that Lilly prepared to identify the transhuman within.

But if Lilly’s isolation project represents anything like a Nietzschean will to power, then it might also be partly related, by some temporally toxic spillover, to the abhorrent experiments that occurred at the Dachau concentration camp, a little more than a decade earlier. It was there that Nazi SS scientists would submerge their prisoners in freezing water, and surreptitiously administer to others the hallucinogenic compound mescaline, which they trialled as a truth serum.⁵ Here a surrogate

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David McDiarmid
Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Die Alone
 (from the suite *Rainbow aphorism*), 1994
 colour xerox print mounted on craftboard
 38.7 x 28.5 x 1.3 cm
 © David McDiarmid, 1994.
 Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney
 Courtesy of the Art Gallery
 of New South Wales

acid is dispensed as hallucinogenic poison, and turned into a gothically unspeakable evil, supplying an ur-horror-story in biological warfare's history that haunts and marks all those who, like Lilly, undertake remotely orthogonal inquiries. But Lilly's float-tank research was, for reasons distinct from this oblique genealogy, when not altogether ignored by the scientific establishment, dismissed outright as fringe research, its far-out exploits proving too peculiar for medicine's Hippocratic formula. Remaining only to constitute the stuff of science-fiction, Ken Russell dramatised Lilly's work in the hokey horror film *Altered States* (1980), which, despite all of its failings, exemplifies a preoccupation long characteristic of the acid/gothic avocation: to know darkness as an adjunct to the study of light, and to reduce exteriority to a minimum.

The paradoxical procedure in which darkness and light are recombined to illuminate or elicit a truth has what is perhaps an altogether more virtuous technical analogue in the recent invention of a dark physical matter that might revivify the stars. The "blackest substance known" is a material that is currently registered under the trademark 'vantablack'⁶. Absorbing nearly all of the optical light that strikes it, the aphotic material climactically functions as the gothic imaginary's sublime apotheosis, the acme of its fixation with utter and infinite darkness. Invented by a Surrey nanotechnology firm, and descending from a NASA antecedent, the material, when it coats an object, occults the very folds and fissures that define its spatial topology, cloaking and enshrouding all of those three dimensions we visually impute to a thing (through light) in an umbraic and impenetrable virtual flat plane of darkness. Harvested as it is from a dense array of nanoparticles, this powerful, vision-changing material can exist, as with the 1938 chemical synthesis of LSD, only by means of a precise and procedural manipulation of materials at the molecular scale. What is striking, however, is the scalar and structural inversion by which this nanoscale material now promises to minimise light reflectivity in telescopic instruments. If, as its creators predict, this sublimely black material can absorb most if not all the stray photons – the visual noise signals that currently mar the lucidity of celestial observation – it will have reified the gothic dream of enhancing vision

through darkness, perversely subverting what is now legible as present and absent, re-enchancing the visible and invisible, the near and far.

Of course, if vantablack may be described as a capsule technology for the acid/gothic syntagm, it gets by only on a technicality. The altered visions heralded by the substance are not psychotomimetic – do not offer any structural delusion – but inhere as the hoped-for and *enhanced* vision of a techno-utopic state: a future in which we shall increasingly apprehend many more light years into space. Likewise, the gothic darkness of the material, far from a dark power or adjuvant in itself, operates only as *supplement* to what is another light-receiving instrument: the virtualised retina of the telescope. Predestined, it seems, to a lowly delegation in this Latourian network of technical actors, the black substance must thus ably but obsequiously play deputy to the telescope, remaining only ever its delegated agent.

What then, might typify the acid/gothic? On the one hand, one may be tempted to declare, with Michel Foucault, that LSD itself, which (in his words) "no sooner eliminates the supremacy of categories than it tears away the ground of its indifference", epitomises this syntagmatic collision.⁷ If the acid/gothic always draws attention to the sameness within ostensible category distinctions, calling forth a doubling, then perhaps the hallucinogenic drug, as a kind of epistemological technic that inaugurates arborescence, repetition, flashbacks, and so on, is the conjunction's nearest and most 'formal' real-world analogue. And yet, on the other hand, this is perhaps altogether too cerebral – and too easy – since this acid/gothic collision is itself, in its (a) grammaticality, riven by the dis-ease of difference. It is as much a figure for the disaffiliation and trauma – of *antitheticality* – as for the repetition of an uncanny sameness. In his 1798 novel *Wieland*, American gothicist Charles Brockden Brown coined the term 'biloquism' to signify the protagonist Carwin's ability to make his voice appear to sing, or to emerge, from whichever spatialised point of origin he so intended. As a hallucination-inducer *avant la lettre*, Carwin the biloquist disturbs the other characters in the novel, who know not when, whence, or how, he speaks.⁸ Displaced in so many ways – sonically,

historically, diegetically – we can conceive of Carwin's *biloquism*, with its sonic echoes of biliousness and queasiness, in its fictionality, and as a coinage, seemingly *ex nihilo*, as an axiomatic node in acid/gothic's history.⁹ Emblematising the synaesthetic plurality to which the acid/gothic reaches, Brockden Brown's plurally novel and imaginary device seems distinctly apt to embody its valency.

1. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 107.
2. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004 [1972]), 262.
3. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, tr. Charles Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840 [1810]), 7.
4. See John C. Lilly, *The Centre of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space* (New York: The Julian Press, 1972), 37.
5. On the Dachau atrocities see notably Paul Weindling, *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118-19; and Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 5-6.
6. See, for instance, <http://www.surreynanosystems.com/>
7. Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. and tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 191.
8. Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland, or The Transformation* (London: H. Colburn, 1811 [1798]); Carwin, *The Biloquist* (London: H. Colburn, 1822 [1803-5]).
9. "Biloquism," of course, is related to "ventriloquism," although there is no recorded usage of the former word before Brown's.

DON'T
 ASK,
 DON'T
 TELL,
 DIE
 ALONE

Trauma Re-enactment in the Gothic Loop: A Study on Structures of Circularity in Gothic Fiction.

Andrea Juranovszky

Gothic Fiction as a Narrative of Retrospection

Ever since its original emergence, Gothic fiction has been shaped by a unique narrative direction that is often described by scholars and readers alike as retrospective, repetitive or circular in nature. Gothic texts progress as if through a series of flashbacks, always reviving deeds of the past in order to point out a problem, which, however strongly rooted in some ancient heritage, prevails in the present and calls for immediate resolution. David B. Morris defines the typically Gothic vision of history as one where “the past interpenetrates the present time, as if events were never entirely the unique and unrepeated product of human choices, but rather the replication of an unknown or buried pattern”. A similar view on progression is depicted, quite visually, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in which the very pattern chosen for the famous tapestry follows a similarly transgressive, circular direction, as described by the narrator of the tale:

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The curious dynamism that Gilman’s narrator points out here matches the narrative pattern, as well as the historical perspective, one may find in most Gothic tales. This unique discursive tendency, which is characterised by literary ‘back-somersaults’ and which could be referred to as ‘the Gothic loop,’ has become a key feature of the Gothic tradition and is perhaps one of the most underlying structural principles any Gothic text relies upon in its rendering of fictional events.

The Gothic narrative loop—as it could be termed—is thus curved by a forceful intrusion of past events into the protagonist’s present-day reality. Its emergence carries several literary functions, the most crucial being the evocation of a highly active, even dramatic form of melancholy reverie. Through that, the past—often presented as a site burdened with historical and/or personal crisis—not only regains its sense of immediacy and relevance, but also acquires a revised perspective. This intellectually fruitful effect of the temporal

loop has been rediscovered by several authors of the Gothic convention who frequently utilise the retrospective direction of Gothic narratives for a particularly interesting purpose, that of personal and socio-cultural trauma re-enactments. By considering the novel *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler from a Gothic perspective, it is my goal to discuss the nature of the Gothic loop, with a special focus on its potential to reshape cultural and historical identities (especially ones having been subject to historical traumas) through a series of literary revisitations. I would also like to suggest that once identifying the temporal loop as a structure able to encompass the central problematic of the traditional Gothic tale, it becomes possible, and even necessary, to re-evaluate the heavily criticised and frequently devalued repetitiveness of Gothic texts.

As it appears then, the Gothic loop could be defined as a discursive element, a fictional time and space of various suspensions when/where certain past or present traumas must be continuously re-experienced and finally resolved—with horror and suffering involved on the part of the protagonists—in order to produce an improved (re)starting point in the narrative. Within the frame of the Gothic loop a previously repressed event of the past suddenly imposes itself upon the present and refuses to leave in an attempt to haunt the minds of the protagonists until they submit to face the challenge which the processing of that past memory has to offer.

Consider how, for instance, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* the past literally walks into the protagonists’ present time, in the form of an incarnated ghost (not coincidentally arriving at the time of the carnival season), bringing a host of unwelcome memories with herself that neither main character Sethe, nor her family are, at first, ready to resolve. Their home, Bluestone Road 124, is described as a space condemned to an eternal state of temporal suspension, with its inhabitants unable to move forward in their lives due to the repetitively haunting presence of former events.

The act of moving becomes a crucial, recurrent motif of the novel and also a seemingly impossible aim for the characters themselves. When Sethe proposes the idea of leaving the house behind, the answer she receives from Baby Suggs formulates the central crisis of

their story: “What’d be the point?” Baby Suggs replies, “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby”. Moving in a physical sense does not provide a solution to the kind of haunting Morrison’s characters experience. What is really required is a form of psychological movement; a liberation of one’s identity from a past whose unresolved matters deprive the self from its own legitimacy within the present time. Sethe has memories, even re-memories of her past (a concept that refers not merely to a repetition of memory, but to a practice of extremely involved re-experiencing), but she is unable to conceive of a future as long as her character is defined by an ever-returning, aggressively present personal history. Thus, Morrison’s characters decide to turn to the past, and the more their story evolves in the course of the novel, the further they venture back in time to the heart of their present-day problems.

While often found as an underlying narrative direction, the Gothic loop can also be recognised in the Gothic tendency of repetitions. The Gothic genre itself progresses in a looping pattern, periodically reviving itself and returning to its previous concerns whose resolution seems to call for constant and numerous reiterations. Since imagery, character stereotypes, settings and even plotlines tend to imitate each other in Gothic discourse, the genre, especially its early form, has gained a negative fame for being too predictable and static, the kind of popular literature that could be summarised on the basis of an inventory of necessary tropes. While the Gothic literary style has, without doubt, adopted a habit of self-repetition, it is important to point out that whatever is being continuously refrained by Gothic narratives in such a compulsive manner is repeated not simply for the sake of mere entertainment, but for a more complex, generic reason.

In my analysis I want to focus primarily on narrative loops, disregarding other forms of repetition, such as repetitions of character types or other frequent tropes. One of my main concerns is to consider the various factors that differentiate Gothic loops from similar narrative structures present in other literary traditions. In other words, it is crucial to find the specifically Gothic aspect of such temporal narrative loops in order to account for their

recurrent use in Gothic discourse. Additionally, this study also endeavors to examine one particularly significant feature of the Gothic loop, namely, its potential ability to provide a literary space for trauma re-enactments and dramatic performances of one’s historical, cultural and personal identity.

Narrative Repetitions in Gothic Literature

Repetition plays an undeniably distinctive role in Gothic discourse, as it has been noted by several scholars who marked it as one of the most relevant interests of Gothic fiction. DeLamotte refers to repetition as “the major persistent preoccupation of the Gothic”, but others, such as Dani Cavallaro, Punter & Byron or Catherine Spooner, also discuss repetition in terms of its powerful presence in Gothic tales. In fact, most recent studies tend to suggest that the Gothic mode is best described not by a list of its diverse individual tendencies or subgenres, but by the all-encompassing term that refers to it as ‘the art of haunting.’

On the other hand, studies on Gothic repetitiveness frequently raise the question of what exactly makes this tendency unique in the case of Gothic discourse as opposed to the wide spectrum of other literary genres where repetitions of certain patterns can just as easily be found as in the Gothic tradition. Speculating on the generically restrictive aspect of Gothic repetition, David Punter and Glennis Byron state that while “repetition is at the heart of all writing,” Gothic forms of repetition are characterised by a “sense of imminent doom,” that is, a sense of predestination whose menacingly haunting presence results in a “specifically Gothic inflection” as it leads to a “foreknowledge of [one’s] own future”. That sense of doom can be considered as one of the factors that separate Gothic repetitions from those found in other literary genres. Repetition in the Gothic is presented as a cosmic force, unleashing itself on a preordained line of endlessness. When entering the course of that line, the subject is caught helplessly within a state that continuously reproduces a moment, and obstructs, if only momentarily, the possibility of a future outside of the frame of repetitions.

Perhaps the best literary instances of such endless loops are ghost stories in which the spectre is suffering from a kind of ghostly

repetition compulsion, a nightly re-enactment of the past trauma that resulted in his or her unwilling post-presence in the world of the living. However, one might also consider the looping pattern that characterises the first archetype of the literary Gothic, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. In Walpole’s tale, Manfred’s every potential step towards his goals is sabotaged by the compulsive reappearance of late ancestors. Manfred’s false claim to the castle is destined to fail, from the very beginning, because of the unwritten, cosmic laws of inheritance that deny him the right to own a wrongly acquired possession. Similarly to other tales, in *Otranto* the past claims its voice within the present and demands a return to ancient matters in exchange for a possible, but continuously withheld entering into the future.

Often compared with Gothic literature are fairy tales and folk tales whose structural similarities carry a potential of being assimilated into the archetypal Gothic narrative. As opposed to these genres however, where the repetitive pattern usually serves as the main progressive factor of the narrative, the Gothic loop tends to pull its subject back to a seemingly static, binding position. By doing so, it creates a state of suspense, or, in some cases, a form of tiresome progress so frustrating that its representation often involves the image of temporal, physical or intellectual imprisonment. The result of this sense of not going forward is that which DeLamotte in one of her analyses refers to as the “double terror of boundedness and boundlessness, claustrophobia and vertigo”, that is, the frightening realisation of being trapped in a series of never-ending circles. The Gothic narrative is, at its heart, a narrative of breaking the infinite cycle: a desperate attempt on the part of the protagonist to escape from the loop.

In her analysis DeLamotte examines the controversial effect of “boundedness and boundlessness” in terms of its architectural representations within Gothic narratives, but later she also defines that double terror as a particular state of mind expressed both spatially and temporally in Gothic writing. She explains the difference between architectural and non-architectural depictions of Gothic repetition through the following passages:

Much of the feeling of claustrophobia

derives from this sense of infinity: the sense that one will never come to an ultimate boundary dividing this place from some other place. Through other kinds of repetition, nonarchitectural Gothic romances ... render the double terror of boundedness and boundlessness as a state of mind. They describe the anxiety of the obsessed wanderer, lost in the universe, but trapped by ‘a sense of ... universal persecution’.

DeLamotte identifies a second, generically restrictive, nature of Gothic repetitions, namely, their extreme quality which differentiates them from other kinds of repetitive structures. As she says, “the repetition of the Gothic romance is not merely that of an adventurer in transit from one peril to another, but of life in extremis. There is a sense of excess and hysteria, of events escaping from their ordinary temporal bounds”. This idea is partially supported by Morris who places exaggeration and repetition side by side as the “two dominant figures of speech which shape Walpole’s narrative in *The Castle of Otranto*”. Morris’s suggestion is to link the extremity of the Gothic mode to its aspirations towards the sublime aesthetic. While Morris does not describe extremity as a quality found in repetitive structures, he nevertheless proposes that repetition and exaggeration both share a key function in the Gothic, that of endowing terror with a further sense of eerie strangeness.

A similar tendency of extreme temporal repetitiveness is recognised by Christine Berthin when she states that the Gothic narrative establishes a “distortion of chronology” where “haunting undermines the idea of succession because the ghostly past that inhabits the present taints and blurs its limits”. In fact, what Berthin adds as a crucial point is that it is exactly this ‘temporal confusion’ in the Gothic that becomes a major threat for the protagonist’s subjectivity. As she claims, subjects caught within this temporal confusion of the Gothic are “haunted and do not belong to themselves. They are not contemporary with themselves, and perform actions that only make sense beyond the frame of the present where they find themselves ungrounded”.

While highlighting certain key features of Gothic repetition, these descriptions also

suggest that the temporal loop and the repeated events it contains may be held responsible for many of the characteristically generic features of Gothic writing, including its destabilising effects on subjectivity, its produced sense of prisonlike, claustrophobic enclosure and its reliance on fear arising from terror. What differentiates the Gothic loop from other narrative structures based on repetitions, such as successive stages, is its tendency to insist on a certain moment, a state of suspense as opposed to promoting future progress. The Gothic loop is not a tool of progress, but of anti-progress, and what it presents are not mere obstacles in the way of succession, but déjà vu-like events that, on the one hand, prevent the arrival of the future, and on the other hand, evoke the impression that whatever is happening at a particular moment of the narrative is not simply ‘happening,’ but ‘happening again.’ To break the cycle, the subject is forced to return to the space and time marked by crisis, most commonly a personal disaster that proves to be highly influential on the subject’s present identity.

The last and perhaps most interesting generic aspect of the Gothic loop is its organic, perhaps even grotesque nature. The Gothic loop—regardless of whether the narrative works with only one or with several loops—is a site of various transformations, but it itself can also be subject to transformation as the tale evolves. Such a transformation is especially likely to emerge once, within the Gothic tale, the subject engages in any kind of an escape plan to subvert the trancelike trap of endless repetitions. The Gothic loop often turns tighter as the narrative approaches its final resolution, and it also presents new and gradually worsening challenges to its subject. That is how the Gothic loop, although functioning as an “anticlockwise” mechanism, is actually producing some sort of a progress, which, however, is hardly ever perceived as progress due to the inclination of the Gothic tale towards constant returns.

One scholar whose overall definition of the Gothic as a literary as well as cultural discourse is centred around the idea of what could be called ‘transformative self-repetition’ is Catherine Spooner. Her proposal is to consider the notion of constant revival as one of the most central and inherent characteristics of

Gothic discourse, metaphorically comparing the Gothic tradition and its seemingly self-revisionary historical phases to the living-dead creatures it produces.

Spooner’s account also marks the notion of transformation within the line of generic repetitions as a crucial factor so that in her analysis the successive loops of Gothic literature are seen not as identical copies of one another, but as revised and readapted versions of their earlier states. “The notion of revival,” as defined by Spooner, “can be seen to imply a reappropriation and reinvention of previous forms rather than a straightforward repetition”. While at this point Spooner does not extend her analysis of revival to the works themselves, she nevertheless identifies that generic tendency of successive rise-and-fall—similar in effect to the Gothic loop—as perhaps the most relevant structural element of Gothic fiction.

A New Perspective on Trauma: An Ever-Present Reality

Michelle A. Massé in her study on Gothic repetition makes an important point when, along with a number of other scholars, such as Dani Cavallaro, links the repetitive pattern found in Gothic discourse to Freud’s description of repetition compulsion as described in his study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As Cavallaro summarises the Gothic-wise most relevant points,

Freud relates repetition to a compulsive tendency to re-enact traumatic experiences, largely repressed, in an attempt to bind their energies and reach a state of balance or even entropy. At the same time, repetitive behavior points to a desire to compensate for a deep-seated sense of lack. Narratives of darkness that hinge on the phenomenon of haunting comment on both facets of repetition. The recursive appearance of ghosts often articulates both the return of the repressed and the longing (having allowed the repressed to surface).

Not being entirely satisfied with the resolutions and viewpoints proposed by psychoanalytic interpretations of repression, however, Massé calls for a reconsideration of the original psychoanalytic approach,

especially in cases when it is applied to women characters or women’s perspectives within the Gothic tale.

She constructs an alternate theory of the final narrative closure instead of the one suggested by traditional psychological interpretations. Mainly, her problem with psychoanalytic readings of Gothic female trauma is the fact that following Freud’s usual practice, these interpretations tend to offer a resolution that is based on marriage, blaming autonomy, seen as a form of female transgression of a woman’s socially constructed space, as a major cause of anxiety and confusion. Such a resolution, as Massé reveals, provides a reinforcement of women’s suppressed position within society, presenting women’s dependence on male family members as a more rational and natural state (falling within the realm of the “real” as opposed to the “pleasure” principle) than the dilemma-filled, anxious phase of female autonomy. Massé states that “repression-based analyses thus construct a critical fiction that reassures us that most of the heroine’s fears are not ‘real’, while those that are will be erased by the transition from unjust to just authority, by the move from father’s house to husband’s”.

When based on such psychoanalytic interpretations, most Gothic tales imply the illusion of a positive closure with the appearance of a male lover or husband-to-be who appears to bring liberation to the heroine after freeing her from the oppressive rule of the father. When reflecting on how in the genre of ‘marital Gothic’ the successive stage is to start the tale exactly where the previous closed, that is, with husbands serving as sources of the same kind of oppression, Massé points out that such a positive closure believed to be ‘working’ in psychoanalytic readings does not really exist. For, as she claims, the “originating trauma” present in the narrative is not a single past event that could, with a closure, be dealt with, but rather it is “the prohibition of female autonomy in the Gothic, in the families that people it, and in the society that reads it. History, both individual and societal, is the nightmare from which the protagonist cannot awaken and whose inexorable logic must be followed”. What Massé suggests here can easily be understood as an extended definition of the notion of trauma, since she considers the term

not simply as a single past cause resulting in certain post-effects, but rather as a pervasive force that may remain ever-present and thus, may continue affecting its subject.

Massé marks Freud's theory of repetition compulsion as a useful starting point in the study of Gothic repetitions, but later diverts from traditional psychoanalytic suggestions in favour of an interpretation that is without any relaxing closure, but which is instead characterised by an emphasis on the constant reappearance of the same nightmarish situation. A much truer vision of the Gothic tale can thus be achieved if one realises that the seemingly 'convenient' closure of the narrative is not a final point of status, but only the beginning of the next loop of Gothic repetitions, a loop that is ready to bring forth a modified instance of the same, earlier experienced, situation. That is where the real terror of the literary Gothic arises from, the realisation of what Massé referred to as "waking from a dream of trauma to find it re-presented in the real world". The Gothic present can only be imagined in terms of an endless repetition of the same traumatic moment within which the future (and its implied resolution of the trauma) is always represented as necessarily outside of the subject's reach.

Trauma in Massé's analysis of the Gothic, then, is not restricted to a single, former atrocity, but may take the form of an ever-affecting state: "the heroine of marital Gothic ... will always reawaken to the still-present actuality of her trauma because the gender expectations that deny her identity are woven into the very fabric of her culture, which perpetuates her trauma while denying its existence". Massé later offers an analysis of Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* in which she outlines how that revised theory of repetitions and trauma re-enactment operates in case of one particular example of the Gothic tradition.

This is the point where I hope to extend Massé's theory by considering the issue of trauma re-enactment within Gothic discourse not only as a gender-specific aspect influencing aspects of female identity or the female Gothic, but as an underlying interest of Gothic fiction encompassing a vast range of cultural and social sites. Representing trauma, regardless of whose or what kind of trauma that is, appears to be one of the chief goals of the Gothic literary convention. Using the

Gothic loop as a structural form of representation, the Gothic tale talks of the past in order to revise perspectives, reform identities and vindicate a possible future for its subject. While Massé's main focus in her study is on the constant trauma of feminine identity, she nevertheless also links trauma re-enactments to the Gothic tendency of repetitions when she states that "repetition in the Gothic functions as it does for certain other traumas: the reactivation of trauma is an attempt to recognise, not relish, the incredible and unspeakable that nonetheless happened"

My aim here would be to return to Massé's analysis, but suggest an extension of it that would consider the looping pattern of the Gothic tradition as a significant structural and representational tool of trauma literature, regardless of the traumatic event or cultural/social environment that generated the work in question. Thus, while Gilman's short story, analysed by Massé, is preoccupied mainly with women's position, its looping pattern can easily be recognised in case of other literary representations, specifically those concerned with traumatic historical events or with the constant sense of trauma associated with marginalised social and cultural groups.

This applies especially to the case of the American Gothic tradition whose main interest centers around history and social criticism as opposed to a more fantastic turn. Justin D. Edwards confirms that the American Gothic "has always engaged itself in the national predilection for self-reflection, but from its own position as a voice of the marginals: women, gays, people of color, Americans". The structure of the Gothic loop allows for such a self-reflection exactly because it creates a literary space for examining the relation between past and present through a hypothetical, experimental "what if" scenario where both present-day cultural identities and societies can be brought parallel with their past or even their non-existent, fictional counterparts. That experimental frame of the Gothic loop is a constructive space of trauma re-enactments as well, since it calls for a reconsideration (even re-dramatisation) of certain historical events or personal memories.

The Return of History in Butler's *Kindred*

Octavia E. Butler's novel titled *Kindred* was first published in 1979, and it is a tale that places the notion of time travel into an African-American historical and supernatural context. While many other stories by Butler rely on science fiction as an underlying genre, in case of *Kindred* time travel occurs without any scientific explanation, so that its presence is suggested to be a supernatural phenomenon rather than a result of some futuristic innovation.

The narrative is centered around its present-day black protagonist, Dana, who is forced to re-experience the lives of African-American slaves during the antebellum period as she is repeatedly pulled back to the American past by some inexplicable supernatural force. Travelling in time is not a choice she makes; rather, it is imposed upon her by the bond that exists between her and Rufus Weylin, son of a white plantation owner, who is revealed to be one of her ancestors. Whenever Rufus is in need of help, Dana is drawn back to a historical era when and where she is immediately identified as a slave and is treated accordingly. Later on, Dana's white husband called Kevin also joins her in her exploration of antebellum history, and the journey they share probes their present-day relationship as well.

The number of Dana's time travels grows as the narrative progresses, and with each journey she spends more time back in the past. After several time travels she realises that she no longer feels present in her real present as the past begins to transform her identity, also separating her from her husband whose vision of history differs, to a great extent, from Dana's due to his different social status as a white man. Eventually the past becomes so strong that Dana finds it almost impossible to return, and although she manages to escape from her own family history, she loses an arm which merges into a wall during her last travel. This last accident, foreshadowed by the prologue of the novel, leaves a lifetime mark on her, a constant physical reminder of the antebellum years.

Already from the structure of the narrative it becomes clear that *Kindred* works extensively with the kind of Gothic loop described in this study. The novel uses the notion of time travel to achieve a literal, unwanted and compulsively repeated return to the past. Structurally, the novel is arranged as one gigantic loop as it

starts out with a prologue that actually reveals the end of the tale. Thus, *Kindred* ends exactly where it begins, and its plotline creates a sense of circularity of historical events. The chapters themselves are presented as stages in Dana's journey, during which she is travelling both inward towards an examination of her identity and outward towards her family history, but they also carry an atmosphere of repetition due to the similarity of the conflicts they project. As Christine Levecq notes, "the titles of the chapters (...) evoke through their parallelism the idea of repeated confrontations with an all-encompassing force presenting itself under slightly different guises".

Therefore, the stages presented by Butler's novel are not purely stages, but "waves of the same endlessly recurring conflict" whose presence can be felt not only in the historical past, but in Dana's present as well. That is where the notion of that ever-present trauma described by Massé's analysis emerges in the form of constant Gothic loops in Butler's *Kindred*, except that in this case, temporal repetition works in order to reveal not only the social trauma of oppressed femininity, but also that of African-American identity and history. With the disappearance of the boundaries of past and present, *Kindred* shows how certain conflicts repressed by society and falsely believed to be resolved are actually still very much alive in Butler's present-day American society, and how, by forcing oneself back to the past, these can easily be brought to the surface. David LaCroix also recognises that tendency in the novel when he states that *Kindred* "dramatizes the overlapping oppressions all too common to the experience of black American women" by establishing an "unstable and even threatening relationship between contemporary individuals and prior versions of the world".

Similarly to ghost stories where the protagonist is forced to return to certain past traumas in order to ensure his or her own progression, in case of *Kindred* the main character, chosen by some blind, grim fate, is required to face the traumatic reality of slavery and racism that characterised the antebellum years in order to reassure her own present existence. In *Kindred* the task of resolving a particular past matter works with what one could call 'belated blaming,' in the sense that it is assigned to a character whose present is completely detached from the time

of the original event and who thus cannot, directly, be held responsible for the initial situation. This device is also often used by ghost stories in which protagonists inherit past traumas that seemingly have little to do with their lives. Yet, as the tale of *Kindred* progresses, one finds that Dana's present-day life shares a number of features with her past, so that her status of being the 'chosen one' is slowly revealed to be not simply a coincidence, but rather a very conscious, preordained decision.

As the tale evolves, Dana's stays in the past become longer and more difficult in terms of the challenges that they offer, which exemplifies how recurrent Gothic loops tend to tighten and transform with each repetition. The greatest loop of the narrative is Dana's own identity, which needs to be saved before it would be erased from history. However, while doing so, she also has to accept the risk of dying in her own ancestral past, taking on an identity that could have been hers, had she been born back then.

This threat of being swallowed by one's ancestral past also holds the risk that Dana's future (and not only her present) will similarly be possessed by the history she comes from. The promise of any revised future can only be granted if Dana manages to resolve all the past events that haunt her identity. On a personal level, these events are related to her direct ancestry line, while on an extended level they suggest the pervasive trauma of black identity in American history. In the end, Dana is given no other choice but to return and support her ancestors in a cyclical, repetitive manner until her past (and her present) is secured.

While doing so, she not only has to accept the past as it happened, resisting the urge to change certain events in history, but she also has to consider her present-day position in society in terms of her rights and possibilities as an African-American woman. Just like in case of other Gothic loops, the future is outside of the frame of the narrative and is only signalled by Dana's present decisions in the same way as Dana's present is shown to be a direct result of certain past events.

Butler's novel works with an extremely active way of remembering where the past literally comes alive in order to present a lesson to the contemporary present. This literary tendency that has been referred to

as "exorcising the past" or "raising the dead" is often characteristic of the American Gothic tradition (one notable example could be Toni Morrison's *Beloved*) and it is a highly suitable form of trauma re-enactment and collective remembrance. This technique is able to transform the past—frequently thought of as something distant and closed—into a relevant, modern reality whose prevailing influence on society can be identified. Rushdy in a study on Butler's novel claims that "Dana's act of memory (...) is a performance of history, a performance of such potency that it incorporates her into the past, leaving 'no distance at all' between her and the remembered events". Such a powerful form of remembering can only be possible in a somewhat fictional, hypothetical site, such as the one provided by the Gothic loop, where the past can gain control over, as well as legitimacy within, the present. In *Kindred* the era of slavery returns, but not in order to repeat itself; rather it interferes in order to help the present, seen as a collective state, acquire a different perspective on its own ancestry.

That influence of the past on the present becomes especially crucial in case of cultural identities or social groups whose view of history has, for a long time, been suppressed by society in favor of another, more dominant historical narrative. Sarah Wood confirms that in Butler's novel, "Dana's journeys into the past expose how, even in the wake of the black protest movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the hidden histories and experience of slavery throw into question the grounds upon which a contemporary black woman is able to construct her sense of self".

Further Considerations

Gothic temporal loops play a key part in the genre's endeavours to establish literary sites of trauma re-enactment. Whether trauma is understood as an ever-present state originating from one's oppressed identity or as a traumatic past event with certain post-effects, Gothic literature aims at capturing it with the technique of confusing the timeline of the narrative. The aim of such a temporal confusion is to evoke a disturbing sense of backward-pointing progress, one which allows for a reconsideration as well as a resolution

of the past. Butler's *Kindred*, similarly to other novels born out of the same attempt to examine history in an exploration of social and cultural progress, is one example of a successful reliance on the structural form of the Gothic loop which, with its critical and re-evaluating tendencies, calls for a revision of history and, consequently, that of the present as well.

At the end of her paper Massé refers to an idea echoed by many scholars of the Gothic, regarding the possibility to bring the genre (or mode) of literary Gothic to an end. What she claims is the strong belief that as long as pervading collective traumas, such as those having to do with cultural or social identity, are preserved in society, the Gothic as a literary genre will remain a relevant form of cultural warning, repeatedly and compulsively pointing towards its literary revisions of traumatic events until they are finally resolved. As Steven Bruhm explains, "the Gothic continually confronts us with real, historical traumas that we in the west have created but that also continue to control how we think about ourselves as a nation". While repetition within the Gothic is often claimed to be a disadvantageous, shallow feature of the genre, it is in fact a structural aspect carrying a surprisingly strong potential. Repetition in the Gothic suggests not a lack of imagination or an inclination toward a set of clichés; rather what it points to is the significance of making visible certain cultural phenomena—historical traumas, identities on the social margins—that society constantly and repeatedly represses and which the Gothic mode, with its experimental sites provided by the structure of loops, can effectively and powerfully bring to public attention.

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David McDiarmid
**Miss thing, our labour and skills are
 indispensable to the advancement
 of civilisation**
 (from the suite *Rainbow aphorism*), 1994
 colour xerox print mounted on craftboard
 38.7 x 28.5 x 1.3 cm
 © David McDiarmid, 1994.
 Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney
 Courtesy of the Art Gallery
 of New South Wales

**MISS THING,
 OUR LABOUR
 AND SKILLS
 ARE INDISPENSIBLE
 TO THE
 ADVANCEMENT
 OF
 CIVILIZATION**

Sorrow found me when I was young: An interview with Ragnar Kjartansson.

SuperKaleidoscope

When Polish composer Frédéric Chopin died in 1849, his body laid to rest in Cimetière du Père Lachaise in Paris (alongside Oscar Wilde, Marcel Marceau, Marcel Proust and Jim Morrison). His heart however was removed before burial upon his request. As the story goes, it was smuggled back to his native Poland by his sister Ludwika Jędrzejewicz, concealed under her winter coat. Supposedly Chopin's heart was larger than a normal heart. Medical professionals claim perhaps this is due to the fact that he suffered and died from cystic fibrosis and not tuberculosis as is widely known. (I like this idea of an enlarged heart.) It now rests at Holy Cross Church in Warsaw concealed in a shrine with the engraved caption "HERE RESTS THE HEART OF FREDERICK CHOPIN". In 1926 Antoni Słagowski intoned, "All our past sings in him, all our slavery cries in him, the beating heart of the nation, the great king of sorrows." When I read the comment made by Słagowski about Chopin I thought what a beautiful title to be given and also that it seemed to be a fitting description of you.

What is it about sorrow that you find so compelling?

I find the emotional depth of sorrow compelling. Especially the artistic sorrow, or melancholy which is more of a joyous feeling. The joy of being sad. There is this human string in melancholy which I guess most artists like to work with. Shelley said: "our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought".

Where would you like to be buried?

Hmm... I have to start thinking about that. I think in the local cemetery called Gufuneskirkjugarður, it is a depressing place, but to be buried around my generation when we all go, one by one, is a nice thought. Then the lone prairie is always nice.

You collaborated with the band The National in 2013 when you asked them to perform live, singing their track 'Sorrow' on repeat 100 times. The first line of this song is "sorrow found me when I was young" – so poetic and full of melancholy. (It reminds me of Prince's track Purple Rain which opens with, "I never meant to cause you any sorrow").

When did you first begin making work about sorrow? I read somewhere that your father said

one Christmas, "it is sad and beautiful to be a human being". Was this where it all began?

It started before that. I remember always trying to do drawings as a teenager that would capture sorrow and beauty. I think it all began when I saw a theatre adaptation with my father of the novel *World Light*, by Halldór Laxness.

After hearing this comment your father made I became so curious about what happens at a Kjartansson family Christmas. You come from a family of artful thespians. How have your relationships with your family influenced and informed your work?

Growing up in the theatre is the basis of my work. All the flamboyant lovely people telling stories and playing someone else. What a lovely bunch. Then the whole relationship with my parents is a constant source of inspiration. They both are some of the strangest people I have ever met.

Much of your work is about the quandaries of the heart. Using humour, irony, drama, hopelessness, romance, loss and fantasy you play out these trials, but you have also made work about death. Take for example *Death and the Children* (2002), where you took on the personae of death, the 'grim ripper'. You appear from a tomb on a summer's day holding a paper scythe proclaiming "I am death". It is a humorous piece. (My favourite part is when you call the little children following you through the cemetery "small and ugly"). The improvised dialogue with them offers a sense of jovialness as you act like a court jester or pied piper and they follow you through the tombstones laughing and screaming but willing to challenge your theatrical incarnation of 'death'.

What do you really think about death or endings and is it true that you believe in ghosts?

I think death is final. Sadly I don't believe in ghosts or the afterlife. We just have to use those hours on earth to love each other. That is depressing and sad. There is so little mystery around us.

Often your works take the form of durational performance or the loop. They have been described as having a lyrical gloom. Repeat, repeat. Is this sense of repetition that you invoke a reference to Sisyphus?

Hell yes! Greek mythology somehow had the whole idea vocabulary of humans mapped out way back.

Many of your projects attempt to erase the line between theatrical and real space. There is an apparent exchange between reality and fantasy. Can you talk a little further about this relationship and is it difficult to find the 'real' in real life when you are so often performing or re-enacting fantasy?

I think fantasy is reality. All stories are about some reality, emotional one etc. It sometimes makes me a bit claustrophobic that there exists no fantasy, only reality. It sort of reminds me of how fantasy is always limited. Think about fantasy movies. All the same, a different kind of Sisyphus.

(I like the idea of describing you as the Don Juan of Scandinavian Pain).

I like that very much too!!

Take me here by the dishwasher: A Memorial for Marriage (2014) is a work that stays with you. I saw it at the New Museum earlier this year, surrounded by ten dreamy musicians strumming their guitars, serenading me and the other viewers with their absurd and lovesick words, "This is it. Is this it?", "I'm desperate," they sing, "Take off my clothes!", "Take me, take me, take me here by the dishwasher ..." again on repeat. Upon encountering the scene I was engulfed by their harmonies and completely seduced. In the gloomy romantic light there was also a projection on the far wall resembling a fantasy love scene between a woman and a plumber shot through a vaseline lens. (I now know that these characters are actually your real parents and that you were conceived the night after this fortuitous meeting on the set of Iceland's first feature film *Morðsaga* (1977).) Massimiliano Gioni, the associate director and curator of the New Museum commented: "Ragnar uses music as a manifestation of emotion and seduction, it's the idea of spectacle, a way to get to the viewer more sensually."

Do you see your work an act of seduction?

Yes. I think the power of an artwork most often has something to do with seduction. An artwork, if it works, creates intimacy between your idea and a complete stranger.

- | Ragnar Kjartansson
Death and the Children, 2002
Video (still), 4 minutes 54 seconds

You have mentioned the term nihilism on occasion in reference to your ‘theatrical romanticism’ and ‘the artist’s pursuit’, stating that sometimes you feel like you are faking it. You have also talked about nihilism in reference to your work *Scandinavian Pain* (2013) in which you reconstructed a barn originally located in a misty Nordic landscape and installed it in the Moderna Museet Malmö in Sweden as an ode to Edvard Munch, the King of Scandinavian Pain. You hung his paintings inside the barn and later performed on the rooftop the ABBA song *The Winner Takes It All*. It seems evident you share a poetic melancholy with Munch, influenced by both the isolation of the Nordic landscape, the tortured artist’s occupation and perhaps a mutual existential crisis. You’ve said that through theatricality “you are taking deep emotions and dark pain and turning it into nothing”.

Can you elaborate on this comment, the influence of Edvard Munch and how your feelings about nihilism enter into your work?

It is so depressing to elaborate on this. It is a dangerous zone for the mind to go. I guess that’s why I am an artist but not a philosopher. I think I am just in awe of nothing. Do you know that great Townes Van Zandt song *Nothin* Best song ever about nothing. “Sorrow and solitude, these are the only words that are worth remembering”.

In *The Visitors* (2012) you gathered a set of musical friends and lived together in a mansion for a while in upstate New York, playing music, eating and drinking together, sharing the day to day and a common goal. Together you compiled a musical score and the project resulted in a video installation. The lyrics begin: “The stars are exploding around you and there is nothing you can do”. From here we begin a tragic tale about loss, separation and the inevitability of uselessness, all embedded in the final outcome. I have heard you say in reference to this work: “we are all solo performers, fragile and alone, together, apart”. You’ve said the project is about a period in one’s life ending and a common defeat. (I like this description of common defeat.)

How do you create a sense of togetherness when you are singing about being alone and such personal experiences?

I think that is the strongest togetherness. When we all unite in our weakness. Like an AA meeting.

- /
Ragnar Kjartansson
Scandinavian Pain (2006-2012)
Neon, Dimensions variable -
from 7ft to 40ft Performance
Momentum 4th Nordic Festival
of Contemporary Art, Moss, Norway

In one of your more recent projects *The Palace of the Summerland* (2014), based on Halldór Laxness’ *World Light*, you re-enact and retell a tale of the pursuit of a man with a dream. Travelling through experiences of adversity, indifference and contempt, the man is aided only by his faith in destiny, his idea of divinity, beauty and love, and his quest to one day become a great poet. You’ve described it as “a hymn to the survival of the artistic spirit under the most inhospitable circumstances”.

Many artists will recognise the ‘artist pursuit’ being a difficult path. Do you find it a challenge to be an artist?

No, I find it the only way to happy really. I think I would suffocate without it. It’s like the poet in *World Light*: everything is bearable if you feel the revelations of deity in nature and have this longing to express it.

You have described the character’s pursuit in *The Palace of the Summerland* as “a hopeless task, a true disaster”. It made me think of the story regarding Swedish balloonist S. A. Andrée who led an expedition to reach the North Pole at the turn of the 19th Century in a hot air balloon made of black satin. The photographs that document this journey are reminiscent of a dream or some kind of surreal fantasy: the image of a black satin balloon floating through the white abyss attempting to push the boundaries of masculinity, optimism and patriotism. Sadly, the balloon crashed after only two days into their journey, landing on packed ice in the far north Arctic sea. Andrée and his companions perished in the snow, their bodies only to be found 30 years later. Similar to the character in *Palace of the Summerland*, I don’t see Andrée’s pursuit as a hopeless task, but rather a one full of hope and optimism.

Can you describe the relationship between optimism and failure in your own work?

I believe in optimism and failure. I try to seek for the poetic in the imperfection. There is a tension between the two that I love. Always hoping, then there is the disappointment. Instead of letting it get me down I embrace it.

What is it about these pursuits of human solitude and the survival of the artistic spirit that fascinate you?

It’s just refusing to back down from the sublime.

- /
Ragnar Kjartansson
The Visitors (2012)
Still - Nine channel HD video projection,
64 minutes
Photos: Elisabet Davids; sound: Chris
McDonald; video: Tómas Örn Tómasson

In *The Palace of the Summerland* you also create an environment where the spectator becomes privy to the deconstruction of cinema, allowing the audience to become aware of the cinematic methods in making the film, again breaking down the barriers of the real and the fantasy. Is this a technique you have used before?

No not really. I used a similar open studio in *The End*, at the 2009 Venice Biennale. I had an open studio where I was painting my friend. But in this work I added the cinematic element. The two works were driven by my tendency to find process more interesting than product – the process becomes the artwork. In *Palace of the Summerland* I used the cinema to create a focus in having 20 people filling up the studio recreating a story on the longing for beauty.

You construct environments that have all the trappings of a romantic novella: heightened romanticism, fantasy and synthesised intimacy. You have an ability to pluck the most poetic, often sorrowful components of your influences and then theatrically exaggerate their meanings. Whether you are sitting in a bath strumming your guitar longing for a lost love, constantly drinking, smoking and making oil paintings, or singing an ode to Satan, there is sadness yet also an imagined lightness within your propositions. Perhaps we can finish by talking about lightness and darkness. It’s commonly assumed we cannot have one without the other. (American poet and feminist activist Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote, “Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely.”)

Do you think sorrow conquers happiness or is it the other way around? Is it difficult to balance the lightness and the darkness when both are fraught with such complexities?

Yes, there is always the yin/yang tension. I feel I am a pretty light character and I truly enjoy life. I have so often been scolded for smiling and laughing too much... then slowly I found myself making these pieces.

“I truly wish you joy and happiness but most of all, I wish you love”.



- / •
Ragnar Kjartansson and The National
A Lot of Sorrow (2013)
Six hour performance by The National
of their song Sorrow
A Lot of Sorrow by Ragnar Kjartansson took
place at MoMA PS1, as part of Sunday Sessions.
Sunday Sessions is organized by Jenny
Schlenzka, Associate Curator with Mike
Skinner, Producer and Alex Sloane, VW Fellow.
Photographs: Elisabet Davids
© Ragnar Kjartansson and The National

- / •
Ragnar Kjartansson and friends
The Palace of the Summerland (2014)
Performance and film of an adaptation
of *World Light* by Halldór Laxness
Screenplay by Halldór Halldórsson,
Ragnar Kjartansson & Ragnar Helgi Ólafsson
Photographs: Elisabet Davids
Commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza
Art Contemporary, Vienna and co-produced
with Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo,
Mexico City
The performance took place at Thyssen-
Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna,
April 2014



ACT 3: TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE US
AS PART OF *PRUFROCK (IN THREE ACTS)*

BRONWYN BAILEY CHARTERIS

1 PRUFROCK'S HOME, MIAMI

Interior

Lady Prufrock pours another cup of tea, misses her cup and continues to pour tea onto the floor.

Lady Prufrock:

FRIENDS, YOU DRANK SOME DARKNESS

Gaston Bachelard:

THE POETIC IMAGE IS A SUDDEN SALIENCE
ON THE SURFACE OF THE PSYCHE

2 BRONWYN'S HOUSE, STOCKHOLM

Bronwyn:

YOU CAN FIND A RECORDING OF T. S ELIOT
READING THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK ONLINE. IN THE
FINAL LINE OF THE POEM, MOST OTHER READERS END WITH THE
USUAL DOWNWARD SOUNDS THAT ACCOMPANY THE END OF A SENTENCE
OR TEXT. IN ELIOT'S RECORDING THE FINAL WORD, 'DROWN' IS
PRONOUNCED WITH AN UPWARD SOUND, INDICATING THAT THE POEM
ENDS BUT DOES NOT FINISH.

Lady Prufrock:

INDEED. BUT WILL THERE BE TIME?

Adrian Poole:

STEALING!

Lady Prufrock:

I SHALL WEAR THE BOTTOM OF MY TROUSERS
ROLLED. I SHALL WEAR WHITE FLANNEL TROUSERS AND WALK ALONG
THE BEACH.

Adrian Poole:

TRAVESTY! ALLUSION!

T. S Eliot:

THE TENDENCY IS TO INSIST, WHEN WE
PRAISE A POET, UPON THOSE ASPECTS OF HER WORK IN WHICH SHE
LEAST RESEMBLES ANYONE ELSE

(Lost at sea)

3 PRUFROCK'S HOME, SYDNEY

Lady Prufrock sat reading the morning paper. The fire crackled and she sipped her lukewarm black tea. Out the window she saw a red-bottomed woodpecker, the first of the spring. She hoped the snow would soon be melted in Folkensparken. Would she miss winter now it had passed?

Lady Prufrock:

MY BREASTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THERE,
ARRIVING EARLY AND PLUMP, THEY HAVE FOLLOWED ME AROUND,
BUT NOW I SEE THAT THEY THEMSELVES HAVE ALMOST BEEN
FORGOTTEN TOO. THEY ARE ALMOST IN THE WAY.

4 SPENCER ALLEY'S HOME, CALIFORNIA

Blogger Spencer Alley sits at her computer, in front of a blank whiteboard, in a room filled with peaches.

Spencer Alley:

I WAS SURPRISED TO SEE A NEGATIVE
REVIEW OF THE LINCOLN CENTER
PERFORMANCE IN THE NEW YORK
TIMES. FULLY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT
THE PARIS OPERA BALLET HAD DANCED
SPLENDIDLY, THE CRITIC WENT AFTER
DEAD PINA BAUSCH HERSELF. SHE HAD
DISTORTED GLUCK'S LIBRETTO. THAT
SEEMED TO BE THE CRIME.
MELODRAMATIC TABLEAUX VIVANTS
RATHER THAN A COHERENT STORY.
EVEN AFTER FORTY YEARS THE
NEO-EXPRESSIONIST TANZTHEATER
STILL CAN RECEIVE THIS SORT OF
AGGRESSIVELY IGNORANT RECEPTION,
ESPECIALLY IN AMERICA, LAND OF THE
LITERAL.

5 DANIEL BIRNBAUM'S HOUSE, STOCKHOLM

Two men speak as one, walking together through certain half-deserted streets.

Daniel Birnbaum and Anders
Olsson:

AS IS SO OFTEN THE CASE, IT IS THE
POETS, AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT THE PHILOSOPHERS, WHO LEAD
US DEEPER INTO THE LABYRINTH OF HUNGER. 'AS A WEASEL SUCKS
EGGS, AN ESSAY ON MELANCHOLY AND CANNIBALISM'

Lady Prufrock:

One of the best things here is the way the snow lands.
It's beautiful as it falls,

bouncing about in the wind, thick and romantic. But the best thing is the way it lands. It finds spots to settle. The usual suspects - trees and branches, roofs, staircases, bicycles. And then the less expected, small window frames, handrails, kids play equipment, a top bins. Any tiny groove will collect snow, like rain, a little might be collected in hard to reach places. However, snow gathers and collects and mounts far more pleasantly than rain. Bronze sculptures litter the park and they too have delicate mounds of snow gathering on them, dressing the naked figures in jackets, scarfs, hats. One bronze chap has snow gathering on his gilded package, gently forming a small covering of the fresh powder, suggesting an imposed modesty. A bronze lady who dances (or fights) with him has snowed gathered in her eyes - forming masks. Another bronze cast bust of a senior Stockholm official has snowed gathered as a hat, and a small scarf around his shoulders. It's snowing again now.

6 TOMAS TRANSTROMER'S HOME, SYDNEY

Tomas speaks clearly into a microphone, placed on the middle of an empty table, on a bare stage.

Tomas Transtromer:

ELEGY

I OPEN THE FIRST DOOR.

IT IS A LARGE SUNLIT ROOM.

A HEAVY CAR PASSES OUTSIDE

AND MAKES THE CHINA QUIVER.

I OPEN DOOR NUMBER TWO.

FRIENDS! YOU DRANK SOME DARKNESS

AND BECAME VISIBLE.
DOOR NUMBER THREE. A NARROW HOTEL
ROOM.
VIEW ON THE ALLEY.
ONE LAMPOST SHINES ON THE ASPHALT.
EXPERIENCE, ITS BEAUTIFUL SLAG.
TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER
FROM MORKERSEENDE (NIGHT VISION), 1970
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BLY

7 FOLKENSPARKEN, ADELAIDE
Gaston Bachelard:

THE IMAGE OFFERED US BY READING
THE POEM NOW BECOMES REALLY OUR
OWN. IT TAKES ROOT IN US. IT HAS
BEEN GIVEN US BY ANOTHER, BUT WE
BEGIN TO HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT
WE COULD HAVE CREATED IT, THAT WE
SHOULD HAVE CREATED IT.

Lady Prufrock:

BUT WILL THERE BE TIME? I HAVE
HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING AND I
DO NOT THINK THEY WILL SING TO
ME.

Gaston Bachelard:

IT BECOMES A NEW BEING IN OUR
LANGUAGE, EXPRESSING US BY MAKING
US WHAT IT EXPRESSES; IN OTHER
WORDS, IT IS AT ONCE A BECOMING
EXPRESSION, AND A BECOMING OF OUR
BEING. HERE EXPRESSION CREATES
BEING.

T.S Eliot:

This is the way the world ends
THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS
THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS

Not with a bang but with a
whimper.



•
Titian
Salome with the head of John the Baptist (ca. 1550)
Oil on canvas, 87 x 80 cm
Prado museum



•|•
Blue Velvet (1986)
Written/Directed by David Lynch
Scene 35



