

**Clairvoyant Practices for the Designed World  
(The Job of the Artist is to De-Design)**

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## Abstract

### **Clairvoyant Practices for the Designed World (The Job of the Artist is to De-Design)**

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This thesis uses the concept ‘designed world’ to designate an envelope that contains what is usually understood as public space, including the social and material engagements that take place there. I ask how certain experimental artistic practices can make apparent, from within, the nature of this designed world as our evolving everyday (our human-oriented real). It also asserts that the space between the fields of art and design is one area where the vital importance of such investigations comes into view. A range of concepts – coping, critical spatial practice, de-design, imagination, strange tools, clairvoyance, complicity, real and virtual spaces, the shaping of time, format, design fiction, counter-factual event, and analogy – are introduced to describe how art practices can unsettle or open the designed world to scrutiny. Vito Acconci’s term ‘de-design’ is used as an initial step in addressing the kinds of questions that artworks ask of the designed world. Theodore Schatzki’s use of the word ‘art’ to designate ‘clairvoyant practices’ (the singular quality of certain practices to make change evident) and Jane Rendell’s term ‘critical spatial practice’ (embedded artistic interventions in urban space) enlarge the scope of these questions. Bernard Stiegler’s idea of the ‘amateur’ contributes to a critical examination of a contemporary ideology of innovation. Art practice is associated with a fundamental formulation of imagination via Hannah Arendt. This radical idea of imagination is nuanced through David Summer’s spatio-temporal inquiry into form, format, and the virtual, as a critical stand that is then turned towards contemporary digital representation and its manipulation.

The thesis examines several artworks, films, performances, choreographies and designed things as ‘clairvoyant’ and able to reflect on the designed world on multiple registers, including a spatio-temporal one. It focuses in detail on two contemporary practices that ‘cope’ in a generative manner with the designed world from a position of self-reflexive complicity: Hito Steyerl (in the space of digital practice) and Theaster Gates (in the space of material practice). The thesis concludes with a situated description of my own work, including the studio components of this thesis – the public installation *Paraguayan Sea* (with Erin Moure) and the video installation *The Machine Stops*, set in Le Corbusier’s Capitol Complex, Chandigarh.

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*Design means, among other things, fate... This process of asking questions is the collective attempt to seize hold of fate and, collectively, to shape it.*

Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things, A Philosophy of Design* (107)

## Introduction

**1. This is not a project about art or design in public space.** This is not an inclusive survey of exceptional examples of contemporary visual or performance art in what is generally accepted to be public space.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it a cataloguing of the ethical questions and cultural potentials of what is now called ‘social practice art.’<sup>2</sup> This project is about some potential social connection or embedding of art, focusing on thinking and making which evades both the definition of ‘artworks’ and ‘public space’ as static terms of reference.<sup>3</sup> It is about how specific and singular experimental practices of art can have an impact from within a ‘designed world,’ which has become our everyday. It is also about the necessity of recognizing a crossover space between the professional fields and practices of art and design as a new, fertile, and contested space for a reflection on the dynamics of the designed world, and the design inhabiting our concept of nature, with specific examples of practices in the art/design crossover that seem to articulate the ‘designed world,’ or its conceptual armature, at a fundamental level. Crucially, I argue, this project is about how the ‘designed world’ is a vital and explicit concern for art practices, as the space where art takes place.

This project takes a well-explored idea of a contested public space from twentieth century Western cultural studies, what Hannah Arendt defines as a ‘public sphere’ contested between those who produce a space *versus* those who act in it (Arendt, *Thinking* 170), as a critique widely

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1. Such as Claire Doherty’s *Public Art (Now): Out of Time, Out of Place* (2015).

2. Such as Tom Finkelpearl’s *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (2013).

3. Single quotes are used to denote a) provisional or ‘so-called,’ b) isolating an author’s specific use of a more general term in a discussion of it, c) specific terms (mine or other author’s) that I will use consistently throughout this project – once such terms are defined and in ongoing use I stop using single quotes.

manifested in critical art and art theory practices since the 1970s by Rosalyn Deutsche and others. In a humanist rendering of the idea of public space, Arendt proposed, in 1957, that, “the public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents us from falling over each other” (Arendt, *Human* 52). Arendt continues by describing alienation in mass society, in a premonition of this project’s concern with a contemporary culture of consumerism and information:

...what makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible (53).

The nature of this metaphorical table as common public space hints at one aspect of what is at stake for this project. The other aspect is the ontological window or opening that art creates through imagination (which will shortly lead us back to another side of Arendt). One is a metaphor of common social ground conceived as space; the other is an analogical opening, through imagination, to that which is not yet cemented into symbolic meaning.

This project suggests that, in a contemporary setting, it is less useful to define what public space is, or what happens in it, than it is to understand the ‘designed world’ in which that space has become enclosed. And it asks if this enclosure is so pervasive that we may very soon not be able to imagine that such a thing as public space exists or, inversely, that there is only one homogenous, branded, public space. The exploration of the possibility for art practices to see themselves as implicated in a designed world and, from that embedding, to open up a deep critical play from within is the main gambit of this project. In order to illustrate this possibility I elaborate a working definition of what practices are, and what distinguishes specific kinds of practice that we might call art practices. Lastly, I conjecture how we might recognize (and therefore cultivate) such practices within other fields, for example, art within what seems to be the field of design.

Along the way, I give examples of specific artworks related to dance and performance on film which are exemplary of this nature of art practice as a singular kind of clairvoyant

spatial/temporal practice (Babette Mangolte/Trisha Brown and Steve McQueen). However, the main discussion is of the work of two artists – (Hito Steyerl and Theaster Gates) – whose practices are, to me, fully within the crossover space between art and design and whose aspiration is to articulate and contest the terms of the designed world (or at least I propose them as candidates for this lofty aspiration in order to see where they succeed and fail). If living in a designed world is our fate as technologically embedded beings (as Vilém Flusser suggests in the introductory citation), what kinds of practice have the ‘clairvoyance’ to reveal that fate, while at the same time, in however small or singular a way, alter its unfolding.

‘Clairvoyance,’ is a term adapted from practice theorist Theodor Schatzki’s description of art as practices whose vocation is to make change apparent and where “art provides a particularly clairvoyant site to observe ... features of social change” (Schatzki, “Art” 31). Throughout this thesis I will explore several comparable terms in order to deepen or vary this sense of the singularity of art practice and to reinforce an idea of art as a fluid, potentially pervasive or seeping practice rather than a mere class of object- or artifact- making or a syntax of communication. ‘De-design,’ is a term derived from an off-hand comment by poet and performance artist become architect Vito Acconci, describing the potentially subversive role of public art (as noted by architecture critic Anthony Vidler, who discusses the term as the playful redefining of the architectural program). I align Acconci’s de-design with a more fundamental clairvoyance. ‘Coping’ is an everyday term, partially appropriated from Hubert Dreyfus (and obliquely, from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus). It is inflected with a more contradictory and everyday sense of the anxiety of fitting in, or not fitting in with professionalized or institutionalized concepts of ‘the social’ and of ‘public space.’ ‘Imagination’ is taken from Arendt’s interpretation of Immanuel Kant, as a condition of possibility both for art and for politics. The discussion of ‘format’ as well as ‘virtual’ and ‘real spaces’ is inspired by art historian David Summers’ examination of representation and artifacts as things which draw up a certain sense of time and space around themselves. ‘Strange tools’ is how philosopher Alva Noë describes the singular utilities of art, the embodied thinking of choreography in particular. Collectively these terms are a provisional bag of tools for describing art as a practice embedded in the world of our making at the same time as it is fundamentally preoccupied with understanding what is *not* included in that world. In terms of writing method, I test the robustness of these provisional terms to distinguish a critical play of art-like practices in the

designed world using the same sense of stumbling, or play, as contemporary sculptor Tony Cragg articulates about his own material practice:

Cutting up material, turning it round, changing the contours, the surfaces and the volumes time and time again. Watching as the changes accumulate taking one far away from the starting point, through passages where one notices that the changes are not just taking place in the material. Making sculpture involves not only changing the form and the meaning of the material but also, oneself. Your feelings and your thoughts about what you see change constantly. (Cragg)<sup>4</sup>

I am artist and a writer whose practice involves experiments in how artistic strategies or practices can help us cope with the designed world in which we live. Imagining art in the space of design is more precipitous and compelling than imagining design in the space of art. The field of contemporary art, in both its aesthetic and managerial aspects, is increasingly designed and professionalized, especially in the university. Artists have learned to cope with entrepreneurial culture by reproducing it in their art practices. This turns art into a reductive and hermetic discourse. It is better to move the other way, if one can discern what the other way is, and take up or problematize the space of design, or what I will call the ‘designed world.’ By ‘better’ I mean that agitation in the space of design is a vital social criticality, a precipitous vocation for art.

**2. What does ‘coping’ with the designed world mean?** In day-to-day language coping is a psychologically and socially loaded term for action often construed as inaction (inaction in the sense of being a subjective defense rather than outward *telos*). Typically, if one is just coping, one’s credentials as a successful human may be in question. In this project, I use the term coping in two slightly more specific and complementary ways. Firstly, there is successful coping as a mastering of know-how in the world as given. This is a kind of coping (Hubert Dreyfus’ individual being-in-the-world) or habit-making (Pierre Bourdieu’s internalization of the social) that is human development or growth that lets us fall into to the flow, adapt to change, and make-do successfully (this could be on the scale of learning a particular skill, like singing, or on the

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4. <http://www.tony-cragg.com/texte/Cutting%20up%20Material.pdf>. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

temporal scale of a career or a lifetime, or, within the breadth of a complex of social relations).<sup>5</sup> Secondly, there is the specific kind of coping that interests me as a component or condition of art practices which takes up this same relation to know-how, or getting the hang of things, but extends coping to be an active manifestation of a kind of discomfort in the continuous flow of the everyday, extending Theodor Schatzki's sense of art as a clairvoyant practice (a practice that makes change manifest), discussed below, to become an idea of coping as an active response to the terms of the designed world from actors within that world. The relationship of coping as bodily know-how, in this sense, becomes a metaphorical one in which failure and disturbance of the flow become counterpoints, openings to a non-discursive substrate underlying the everyday. If we take Vilém Flusser at his word when he suggests that design means 'fate,' then coping is actually an exemplary attitude. Rather than inaction, coping implies a kind of provisional parsing of invisible forces at play. Not coping, in this sense, is traumatic – it can lead to the collapse of social or personal order. So coping as an un-forgetting or making-visible (or, more rudimentarily, making-do badly) is a form of action. This implies that such a coping is a dealing with a *status quo* that, if the coping is good, might result in a better world either by altering the situation itself or altering the subjective or collective outlook on that situation.<sup>6</sup> As such, this artistic coping is a positive and implicated social action.

**3. Vilém Flusser on Design.** Vilém Flusser's notion of design as fate can help evoke a working definition of 'designed world.' Flusser was a linguist and media essayist who gained popularity in the 1980s through his short, adventurous essays on telematics, the ascendancy of the image over writing in the digital age, the technical image of photography, and the forming of matter as design. These provocative essays were subsequently gathered into longer publications such as *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), and

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5. Pierre Bourdieu's 'habitus,' as internalization of the social, is one cornerstone of his version of practice theory. Hubert Dreyfus' 'coping' is a more individual take on human development in the world. Dreyfus in his reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* uses 'coping' to signify "skillful absorbed coping" as a non-conceptual interaction with the world (analogous to Heidegger's 'care' or Merleau-Ponty's 'embodied intentionality'). Also, this concept of coping is part of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus' model of human skills acquisition, where the highest level of expertise is a kind of bodily know-how as coping or intuition without rule following, often applied and contested in the fields of behavioral science and artificial intelligence. Given that two Hubert Dreyfus-influenced scholars are referenced below (Alva Noë and Theodore Schatzki), it should be noted that I am using 'coping' in a quite idiosyncratic, but related, sense.

6. As anthropologist Sherry Ortner, another practice theorist, suggests, "the idea that the world is 'made' – also meant that it could be unmade and remade." See p. 45.

*The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (1993).<sup>7</sup> *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* begins with an etymology of the word design, tracing a hylomorphic sense of design or *facture* as the forming of matter into things, be they ordinary things like a table, or “high energy” things like electromagnetically stored information (according to Flusser, our consideration is not limited to macroscopic, so called real, things) (Flusser 24).

Flusser’s take on information as immaterial “non-thing” is useful. If there was always information as a factor in the form of things, there is now immaterial information, where “the material basis of new-style information is negligible from an existential point of view” (87). The immaterial may be impossible to get a hold of as things, nevertheless this new-style information is as fundamentally formed by design as material things are. What information does do, if it does not manifest as form, is manifest materially as junk. We, as *homo faber* (human maker), evolving to *homo ludens* (human player), says Flusser, live not in a binary of nature and the artificial, but in a new three-part order of nature, information, and junk.<sup>8</sup> This idea will come up in Chapter 4 when we consider Hito Steyerl’s hyperbolic “junk-time” a concept she pulls out of architect Rem Koolhaas’ invention of the term junk-space. Flusser’s suggestion is that, though form may sublimate from the material to the immaterial, it is a meaning given form nonetheless – it is design. The appearance of de-natured, de-informationed junk, or waste form, belies the purity of information as non-form (witness the environmental and ethical impact of cryptocurrency transaction, such as that of Bitcoin).

To extrapolate from Flusser’s intuition, I contend that any strict dividing or naming between digital and material practices is a largely entrepreneurial rather than philosophical gambit, though we do have to be as attentive to the differences, as Flusser was, and to the serious ethical questions that this particular entrepreneurial/ontological distinction raises.<sup>9</sup> This quasi-separation guides my choice of two case-studies as art practices coping with, on the one hand, the

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7. Dates in parentheses are publication dates in the original language throughout. See Bibliography/Works Cited for complete bibliographical information.

8. *Homo faber* as humankind the (tool) maker is a term also used by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958). See also Chapter 2 below.

9. This is analogous to the distinction between the Bauhaus ethos of designer as cultured social choreographer and Herbert Simon’s science of information-management (a choreography of information) which collide and combine in post WW2 America, as discussed in Chapter 2.

immaterial real of information culture (Hito Steyerl) and, on the other, the relation of meaning to buildings and artifacts in the material world (Theaster Gates), as essentially related (as the focus of critical practices of coping in the ‘designed world’). The purpose of case studies examining both digital and material culture is to understand their related tangibility in the ‘designed world,’ rather than seeing them as separable. Big data has a form – it is not independent of its making.

Returning to Flusser, this intervention of the hand and the concept into the matter of nature *is* design. Form is the opposite of matter, and design is how form takes shape. Art as *techne* is at its root the slight of hand of artifice, hence ours is an artificial world (18). In this sense all human making is part of a manipulation or trickery played on nature. So if design is the state of our human-made things, ideas and culture, there is no outside to this world. To study design is to study how the human-made world is articulated, from the inside. Design, then, is a present state – it is our “fate.” To think about design (to design or to de-design) is an attempt, as Flusser says, to alter that state – “a process of asking questions is the collective attempt to seize hold of fate”(107). This is the beginning of Flusser’s peripatetic inquisition into the meaning of things: of levers and submarines, of factories and typewriter clicks, of bare walls and telematic images. For Flusser, writing from the threshold of the digital age, the proper and truly profound vocation of the field of design is to understand this human relation to nature as the imprint of imagination on matter, beginning at the primordial juncture of matter, memory, and meaning. If design is the word that describes a world of being we have co-made with our artifice, then the field or the study of design is the ideal place for a self-reflexive examination of the designed world.

How do we anchor in the present-day Flusser’s seemingly radically (or absurdly) retroactive etymology of the word design, so extreme that it feels like the invention of a kind of philosophical science fiction,<sup>10</sup> which would seem to include everything humans do in its dystopian scope. Philosopher Bernard Stiegler draws some of these threads together. In *Technics and Time* (1994) he argues that what is human and what is technical are co-original, that these two ontological domains – the human and the technical – co-constitute each other from the beginning, and that without our technically inscribed memory systems we would not exist *in* time. Our externalized artifice as technology is what enables us to exist outside of a perpetual

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10. As observed by Martin Pawley in his introduction to *The Shape of Things*, Flusser’s writing seems to invent a new written form of philosophical science fiction, exemplified by the chapter “The Submarine” which Pawley suggests is like “a parable for the coming transformation of materialistic civilization” (Flusser, *Shape* 16).

present. This ‘technicity,’ (the grain of our “organized inorganic matter,” as Stiegler calls it) determines how we experience time and space (Stiegler, *Technics* 174). Bruno Latour makes similar points about technologies as ‘actors’ that mediate our doings and constitute relations for themselves (while negatively characterizing Stiegler’s position as a determinism) (Introna). In Stiegler’s non-philosophical essays and lectures, a particular technicity belonging to the era of information technology and neoliberalism is constitutive of a contemporary creative economy model, where the designer or ‘creative’ is defined as an innovator and entrepreneur (a definition described positively by contemporary innovation gurus Richard Florida and John Howkins, discussed in Chapter 3). Stiegler’s project in reaction to this perceived abyss is to develop an idea of the creative amateur as an antidote to this particular technicity.<sup>11</sup>

The point of drawing Flusser and Stiegler’s meditations together is to hint at a resonance or analogical relationship between Flusser’s deep etymology of design in the mid-twentieth century and the current conditions of innovation capitalism that worry Stiegler. From Stiegler we learn that delving more deeply into what are generally considered to be philosophical or ontological questions is a vital component of coping in the creative economy. For example, if our sense of time and space is co-constituted by the memory systems inherent in the creative economy of information technology and neoliberalism, how do we unpack and exceed that? Echoing this, I am suggesting that some art practices (such as Hito Steyerl’s and Theaster Gates’) make an attempt to contend with these current conditions through such a delving. The space in which these conditions occur is the ever-evolving perpetually present state that I am calling the ‘designed world.’ I extend the claim, mentioned above in the context of Flusser, that the proper vocation of art practice in the designed world is to understand the imprint of imagination on matter, beginning at the primordial juncture of matter, memory, and meaning (including the new virtuality of information culture), and that artistic practices of making are, by their explicit nature, prepared to bridge between this register and that of the everyday.

Flusser is not discussed further in this project. I use him in this introduction to set up the idea of design, and the word design, in a specific way. His writing is significant, partly for this strange etymology of design, technology, and the questioning of things and non-things at the cusp of digital immateriality (where immateriality is not the opposite of materiality and

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11. Ars Industrialis web site: <http://arsindustrialis.org/amateur-english-version>. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.



information as data still draws meaning in the same mode of design that other material things do). It is also significant because Flusser's writing style itself, which has a close connection to art practice (it places thinking about things and situations first, and history of philosophy or theory in a descriptive role – the correct arrangement for art practice and criticism) *and* for the connection of his philosophical science fiction as 'design fiction,' a way of speaking the designed world differently that is resonant of practices or artworks discussed below, for example in Vito Acconci's de-design, Steyerl's *montage*, Gates' musical improvisation as building, and (in relation to my own work) E.M. Forster's proto-science-fiction (in his novella, *The Machine Stops*, 1909).

The term 'designed world,' as I am using it, will evolve as a working definition but for now I propose that the designed world is a surround or environment that is: a) human-made or devised; b) preoccupied with a constructed idea of 'nature' conceived as a sustainable environment for us and our practices (and occasionally preoccupied with the semantic breakdown of that binary); c) preoccupied with an idea of human creativity as a source of innovation; d) conceived in a 'making-real-by-making' of new futures conjectured in imagination and fabrication as a field called design; e) and that it is homogenous and normative rather than singular – it is systematic and progressive in nature. We are all contending with the designed world, even those of us who embrace it wholeheartedly (they may actually be contending best).<sup>12</sup> Coping, in the special sense of art practice, queries elements of this definition as its explicit or implicit vocation.

**4. To reflect on design may be the vocation of art.** The designed world is both the stuff that we navigate everyday (what we perceive as outside of our subjective selves) and our toolkit for getting on with living (our apparent skills). This pervasive idea of design can surface to take form in the making of new objects, things and materials, new biological arrangements, new ways of thinking or new modes of intelligibility, even new conceptions of the human and the self

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12. Another voice not included in this project is that of Derrida's discussion of *bricolage* (and deconstruction in general). Art constantly reconstructs a problematic between metaphor/representation and analogy (as an indirect versus direct access to the real). As Derrida puts it (in discussing the *bricoleur* in *Writing and Difference*) this may be a theological exercise: "the engineer ... should be one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon ... the engineer who had supposedly broken with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea; and since Levi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*" (Derrida 286). These two related thoughts (of Flusser's problematized design and Derrida's theological engineer) could be a re-framing of this thesis. See also notes 96 and 108.

created by the reorganization of the body and its interface with the environment (both the natural environment and the evolving new environment of our growing substrate of data). To probe this pervasive nexus of modes of world-making in such a way that we can speak critically about the designed world is, to some extent, an attempt to stand across the flow of something that exists at every articulation of our everyday, such that many progressive and decent fields of human work might seem impossible or nihilistic without the powerful and purposeful armature of ‘design’ underlying them, saying, “we humans can.” Such an investigation may, on the other hand, reveal practices free from the prejudice that the prevailing armature is immutable, or at least show themselves as ‘strange practices,’ implicated in a fruitful conversation with it.

My conjecture is that some art practices manifest this particular kind of re-understanding. We can begin by looking at specific art practices as examples of this re-understanding or ‘de-design,’ to use Vito Acconci’s phrase, and with this acuity we may recognize emerging practices, not yet named as art, by their capacity to help us step outside the modes of operation of the designed world. This aspect of art practice can emerge almost anywhere as a singular manifestation within the discourse of a particular field or more broadly manifest in, or as, what is called public space. That is to say that this singular idea/modality of art practice may turn up within the field called design, or within many other practices. We can look to known artistic practices for exemplars of nodes of creative resistance, intransigence, etc. (of works of which nothing can yet be said),<sup>13</sup> and consequently we might also recognize such actions of coping in other situations.

In this project the art school/university field of design becomes a parallel object of attention because of its historical intertwining with the field of art. It is art’s closest mirror. Since the early twentieth century art and design have worked away in the same school buildings and workshops, used the same technology and techniques, drawn on the same toolkit of freed imagination and plastic play, and a similar (though contested) set-up of subject and object, thing and idea, viewer and artwork, even end-user and product. In the early twenty-first century much may have

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13. ‘Works of which nothing can yet be said’ paraphrases Maurice Blanchot’s definition of art as a singular event in *The Space of Literature* (1968). e.g.: “The work makes what disappears in the object appear...” and “...the work brings neither certitude nor clarity. It assures us of nothing, nor does it shed any light upon itself. It is not solid, it does not furnish us with anything indestructible or indubitable upon which to brace ourselves. These values belong to Descartes and to the world where we succeed in living. Just as every strong work abducts us from ourselves, from our accustomed strength, makes us weak and as if annihilated, so the work is not strong with respect to what it is ... because it designates a region where impossibility is no longer deprivation, but affirmation” (Blanchot 222-3).

changed in the specifics of craft (for example, Flusser tells us form has been displaced by information) but, even in the radically de-materialized turn towards the digital and the algorithmic of information culture, the two fields remain in a reciprocal relationship, such that the apparently alien terms of one often make the practitioners of the other squirm. Art still asserts its philosophical or critical autonomy, even from deep within a hyperactive capitalist marketplace. Design shapes itself as a future-oriented problem-solving ally of progress, currently dressed in the upstanding uniform of sustainability.

The field of design has an intertwined history with the artistic avant-garde that first coalesced at post-WW1 European art schools such as the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany (where painter Paul Klee encounters architect Mies van der Rohe) and the Vitebsk art school in the Soviet Union (where Suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich encounters Constructivist typographer El Lissitzky). These emblematic encounters are the meeting point between the artistic avant-garde, tapping into imagination as if it was a first discovery, and the constructive industrial intelligence of modernity that constituted the Western twentieth century. Throughout this Bauhaus century (1919-2019) we see practitioners place avant-garde art practice alongside avant-garde practices of ‘gainful’ design for the everyday world (where gain can be financial or social). To use contemporary terminology for this perennial appropriation of art for social use, design implicates high art in a planned or instrumental purposing of making as a skill-set directed toward either social change or capitalist innovation and profit (and often, of course, both). In the neoliberal era design is informed by a particular idea of the everyday, dominated by a creative economy/entrepreneurial innovation model. This design everyday, then, is the most appropriate place for working through *other* possible modes of creativity in practice. This makes of art practice a potential framework for understanding design (naming both the professional field and a social condition) from close-up and for re-setting its course with a different compass.

This embedded reflection on design may be the true vocation of art, I will argue. Conversely, art cordoned-off in its own institutional space (the museum or university art department, for example) represents a primordial failure to engage with the designed world as the world as we live it – our everyday. This is the failure of the poet, or the visual artist, conversing uniquely with other poets, or visual artists. They assume that the engagement of their practices do not extend beyond their specific fields. When art practices do make an expeditionary engagement beyond self-prescribed boundaries they deliberately risk their own status as a

coherent practice, a practice that is named. This risking may be a determining definition of the nature of art practices or art-like elements of any practice: that they are constantly in conversation with *that which they are not* and may sublimate at any moment to take a new form as a result. In part this is also art's specific engagement with so-called 'interdisciplinarity' in the university milieu. That is, a field like art is *only* interesting at the boundaries where it comes into friction, as a radically alternative practice of knowledge, with other more durationally specific and instrumental fields.

**5. Fiction.** A sub-theme that runs through this project is the idea of art as a 'fictioned real,' or a 'realed fiction,' on the part of artists acting, directly or indirectly, in relation to an idea of the 'designed world.' Vilém Flusser's practice of writing hints at a philosophical science fiction or a design fiction as a critical practice. This has a resonance in Jane Rendell's feminist 'site writing,' also discussed below. An imaginative form, the fictive runs through the history of the confluence of art and design in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from Le Corbusier's futuristic *Radiant City*, to Archigram's or Cedric Price's collaged anti-brutalist proposals (which turned out to be real, in Renzo Piano's *Beaubourg* in Paris), to Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby's 'speculative fiction,' to the performance of an artistic persona in the making of a radical ethical space (of art) by Joseph Beuys, Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci, and a myriad of other artists (including, I will argue, Hito Steyerl and Theaster Gates). In the fictioned-real, an imagined space and temporality is draped over the world we have normalized in such a way that it is made strange. A realead-fiction is the inverse, taking elements the present-day real as props in a fictional rearrangement. Some artistic practice uses the very syntax of the designed world as its material or medium. This is particularly evident in Steyerl's and Gates' practices because their very clever syntactical clumsiness marks a division between normative institutional ways of making and these very real, fictive conjectures in the *same* spaces.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Critic Frederic Jameson calls this science-fictional operation a 'singularity' as an antidote to post-modern late-capitalist presentism. Jameson states: "An ontology of the present is a science-fictional operation, in which a cosmonaut lands on a planet full of sentient, intelligent, alien beings. He tries to understand their peculiar habits: for example, their philosophers are obsessed by numerology and the being of the one and the two, while their novelists write complex narratives about the impossibility of narrating anything; their politicians meanwhile, all drawn from the wealthiest classes, publicly debate the problem of making more money by reducing the spending of the poor. It is a world which does not require a Brechtian V-effect since it is already objectively estranged" (Jameson 101).

**6. Analogy.** Another sub-theme, or maybe more accurately, an inflection, in this project is a distinction that evolves between metaphor and representation, on the one hand, and analogy on the other. Analogical thinking is the recognition of a pattern or characteristic in quite different things, which is constitutive of a connection between them at some level or scale. Many artistic practices rely on some kind of analogy rising out of intuition or improvisation as a beginning point, a hatching of movement. Certainly, Theaster Gates makes use of ‘artistic’ intuition as a polemic counterpoint or resistance to procedures of instrumental knowledge. For example, Gates uses the material-temporal process of ceramics making to talk about how to reform public institutions, or musical improvisation to initiate the deconstruction and rebuilding of physical architecture. It is interesting to be attentive to where these gestures of thought are analogical (i.e. referring to something really and tangibly in common between two apparently disparate situations, possibly requiring an embodied practice in order to be brought to the surface) or are metaphorical (i.e. a representational literary trope fully embedded in symbolic language, that is, in human design and information management). An analogical relation is pre-symbolic whereas a metaphor, as a language trope, is fully enclosed in discursive (human) meaning. The analogical is a bridge or an opening, which spans between meaning and matter (which is a concern of new materialism as much as it is of phenomenology).

As such, the analogical is a key to understanding how artistic practices operate and reveal in the designed world (especially with regard to its temporality and spatiality – an area discussed through art historian David Summers, below). In the delirious cross-talking cacophony of polemic-hyperbolic-metaphorical gestures, which make up many artistic practices (like Gates’ and Steyerl’s) an attentiveness to the analogical is an opening to deeper, one could say ontological, questioning. In this writing, for reasons of space, further elaboration of this idea is relegated to a footnote in the chapter on Theaster Gates. However, considering the place of the analogical, as a two-way opening (not an observer’s window) connecting the real with another real, can help in understanding the articulation of coping practices of art in relation to the ‘designed world.’<sup>15</sup>

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15. One elaboration of analogy is Kaja Silverman’s history of photography *The Miracle of Analogy* (2015). She names several different types of analogy *against* an idea of photography as representation: “Every analogy contains both similarity and difference. Similarity is the connector, what holds two things together, and difference is what prevents them from being collapsed into one. In some analogies these qualities are balanced, but in others similarity far outweighs difference, or difference,

**7. The Top 100.** I ask myself, why am I writing about Hito Steyerl and Theaster Gates, artists who are among the top one hundred art “influencers” according to the online publication *Art Review*’s annual list of the 2019 “Power 100” of the art world?<sup>16</sup> This is not an irrelevant question when one is considering socially implicated practices, public space, and the designed world at a time of evident crisis. What could be ‘socially implicated’ or embedded about work that appears before us at the apex institutions of the art business such as White Cube, Gagosian, Documenta or Sculpture Project Münster? To make an equation with personal reflection, it is as if we want to talk about something vitally and personally important but instead we end up talking about how some character or other behaves in a popular movie. These canonical players form a virtual-reality art world that takes up most of the space of discourse, displacing the myriad of other real actors. Their polyvalence binds them to multiple issues of contemporary art discourse. If such works are very good they *exceed* this fulfillment of known critical valence. This is my contention about the works of Steyerl and Gates, discussed below. One might be tempted to reject the art stars in favour of strictly ‘local’ practices. On the other hand, there is the possibility that they can be provocative placeholders in a discourse which opens and legitimates a conversation about lesser-known practices – mine, or yours, or ours. We can hang our discussion onto these internationally known common denominators, draped over their shoulders and heads, or stuffed into their pockets, or purely imagined just nearby. In the case of Steyerl and Gates, I will show that aspects of their practices connect them both to a conversation with the history of contemporary artistic practices and to a critical social understanding of the ‘designed world.’ They are practices that, while they overlap the hyperactive capitalism of the art market, are also sitting on some important fault lines for this discussion and are exemplary of potential modes of practice.

What we are after (what I am after in this project) is art-workings that operate in a primordial relationship to imagination because this is where a critical relationship to the designed world, which we might tentatively name as de-design, can begin. This practice of reflection about the designed world in the philosophical mode of art practice is a critical collision of two

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similarity. One of the most miraculous features of an analogy is its ability to operate in the face of these imbalances: to maintain the ‘two-in-one’ principle even when there is only a narrow margin of difference, or a sliver of similarity” (Silverman 37).

16. See *ArtReview*’s “The 2019 Power 100”: [https://artreview.com/power\\_100/](https://artreview.com/power_100/). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

intimately related material practices, art and design. It can occur in the presentational or critical space of design practice or that of art practice. This practice of reflection requires a patience for things that appear not-yet-made or incomplete in their integration into wider social instrumentality. A Steyerl or a Gates, as part of a well-documented contemporary canon, certainly feel like they fit the discourse just a little too smoothly. Have we arrived a moment too late? This is the relationship of stable to unstable discourses and practices. We are left to reconstruct moments prior to (or outside of) the corny theoretical pastiche hinted at by the “Power 100”. We step back through their practices to a real or, quite possibly, totally imaginary point where the incisiveness of this work signals a change in how practice can be done.

One could call this looking for ‘the moves.’ Steyerl’s hermeneutical critical theory as science fiction and Gate’s refusal of the purity of critical distance (previously understood as so crucial to the deconstruction of visibility in conceptual art) in favour of an improvised entrepreneurial making at the boundary of art and design, are two such ‘moves’ for me. It is important to note the difference between this virtual-reality which allows us to discuss certain issues with clarity and what constitutes an actual performed experimental practice, here and now. Internationally successful artworks can sometimes be both. This is by far the more nourishing potential in this work, and for this writing.

## **8. Synopsis**

*Chapter 1.* Art critic Rosalyn Deutsche’s *Evictions: Art and Spatial Practice* (1998) and architecture critic Jane Rendell’s *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (2007) are used to situate this project in relation to art theory and design theory discourse about critical practices that use concepts of public space as a key rhetorical tool. Deutsche (from the 1980s on) demands that high-art practice account for, and react to, the social construction of its own (public) space as the implicit or explicit politics of art and in the process deconstructs connected regimes of visibility. Rendell subsequently (in the 2000s) asks how art can interact with a field of design (architecture and urbanism) in the space of the city as a compound critical practice. Both these theoreticians implicitly emphasize artworks and practices as the prime source of theoretical movement (it is the work that does the work, not the theory) and their studies provide a useful temporal arc of actual artwork and practices to think through. The situation and contextualization of artworks in what is supposed to be the field of design has been rigorously mapped by Rendell

in *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. Artistic practice need not necessarily take place in the physical context of public spaces (as Deutsche asserted in the late 1980s), but rather, it is defined by its engagement with the abstract concept of public or what I am calling ‘designed world,’ wherever the ‘working of the work’ might manifest itself. This project, on one register, can be seen as an attempt to extrapolate from this interdisciplinary category of ‘critical spatial practice’ (Rendell’s term) of art *in* public spaces (in architecture, in the city, in the landscape, etc.) towards an evocation of art *about* the current conditions of public space as enfolded in the designed world. Deutsche and Rendell tell us that space is a constructed ‘real’ and that critical spatial practices can open up that construction. If the idea that a certain temporality and spatiality are conditions of the designed world, then art has the possibility to uncover these specificities. This chapter includes descriptions of art practices relevant to Deutsche and Rendell’s respective claims, firstly, from the 1982 exhibition *Public Vision* that Deutsche writes about in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Practice* (Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman) and, secondly, an example of Rendell’s ‘site-writing’ (“From, in and with Anne Tallentire,” 2018). The chapter serves to paint a background of conventional approaches to critical and spatial practices in art criticism and theory, in particular the idea of a geographic and urban spatiality as public space derived from the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau and subsequent social geographers. This sets up several puzzles related to art practice, to be clarified in Chapters 2 and 3, about how to exceed or update these particular ideas of social spatiality, reassess definitions of public space, and perhaps even question if temporality, not just spatiality, should be part of an ontology of the designed world. Through the play of art-like practices in a world made by design, is it possible that we can *at least ask* the designed world to respond to the conditions of its existence on multiple registers?

*Chapter 2.* In the diverse models discussed in this chapter, art practice becomes an experimental gambit of de-design. Vito Acconci’s casual designation of his own public art as ‘de-design’ is elaborated as an active and critical relationship to an idea of the space of the city and to the designed world. I then use Theodore Schatzki’s practice theory, firstly to outline an idea of human practice as the radiating “doings and sayings” of a particular field, integrating human and non-human elements and action and, secondly, to explore how practices of art represent a particular category of ‘clairvoyant practice,’ that is a practice which, as part of its ‘doings and



sayings,' manifests how change happens. I suggest that art practices risk their status or standing as coherent or recognized practice (as part of a discipline) and that inhabiting this volatile boundary is one defining condition of art practice. For Schatzki, in *The Site of the Social* (2002), practices are non-discursive in their beginnings as the nexus between individuals, material networks, and the social as a "practical understanding" (Schatzki, *Practice* 17). Practices are "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity" (11). If there is an active body constituted within practices there is also a "timespace" constituted as the "dimensionality of human activity" (Schatzki, *Timespace* xi). Art practices actively experiment with that timespace and art is the ideal site to observe such "change features" in the bundles and constellations of a practice ("Art" 30). Schatzki uses the examples of pottery-making and improvised music, a useful counterpoint to Theaster Gates' connection to these same practices. Schatzki's elaboration of a theory of practice is situated in relation to connected thinkers including Bourdieu, Ortner, Butler, and Latour. This introduction to practice theory is followed by a short discussion of Hannah Arendt's interpretation of the primacy of imagination in Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*. The purpose of this is twofold – firstly, to further emphasize the non-discursive origins of practice, discussed previously via Schatzki and, secondly, to foreground Arendt's emphasis on the place of imagination as the principal forerunner of freedom as a political and social syntax. This section also includes a discussion of Ewa Ziarek's interpretation of modernist feminist literature as counter-factual event (where art's ability to stand, as fiction, both inside and outside of discourse, is its criticality, an "aesthetics of potentiality"). At this point I bring in art historian David Summers, who suggests that the visual arts should more accurately be named 'spatial arts' because the action of artworks is to draw real spaces around them and to 'shape time' in a specific way. To study any artifact is to attempt to understand not what they mean in our temporal and spatial reality, but, in Summer's term, the 'real spaces' which they make, the 'shaping of time' implicit to those spaces, and the 'formats' by which form, space, and time are organized. A key point for this thesis project follows from this: many art practices carry out the basic critical task of exposing our representational and conceptual systems, but some extraordinary practices *also* look beyond socially constructed visibility to a juncture where meaning arises and space and time are shaped. This second kind of work, or this aspect of some art practices, has a vital role to play in coping with the designed world. Such exemplary practices of art approach both a social-ideological deconstruction *and* also how we make meaning from

our surround or ‘nature’ as intertwined concerns. Extending this double-vocation, I make a connection between Acconci’s term ‘de-design’ and philosopher Alva Noë’s notion of choreographic ‘strange tools.’ This section concludes with a discussion of two artworks which exemplify the clairvoyance of art practices (as Schatzki has named it) in revealing the spaces and temporal shaping in contemporary movement practices (performance): Babette Mangolte’s film of Trisha Brown’s *Watermotor* (1978) and Steve McQueen’s *Catch* (1997).

*Chapter 3.* In this chapter, I close in on an historical definition of ‘designed world’ by looking at some specific art, design and critical practices. Jane Rendell’s reading of architect Le Corbusier as a utopian futurist leads to one definition of design, or the persona of the designer, as the building of possible futures in a *tabula rasa* gesture of artistic genius. 1960’s American designer George Nelson’s film *How to Kill People* (1960) is juxtaposed to Hito Steyerl’s essay of the same name and her installation, *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2017)<sup>17</sup> to suggest a dynamic of resistance by fiction. Herbert Simon, an American pioneer of Artificial Intelligence (AI) devised a ‘science of the artificial’ as an information-processing approach to design problem solving (which I call a choreography of information) which completely rejects the Bauhaus-derived image of the designer as the cultured artisan (which I call a choreography of form). The field of design is defined by the conflation or collision of these two conceptions of the persona of the designer. Contemporary design historian Victor Margolin, in his *Politics of the Artificial* (2002) attempts to square Simon’s view, along with the idea that the artificial or designed world is our real human world, while dealing with the collapse of nature from the standpoint of the field of design. This necessitates an entirely new field called ‘design studies’ as a place from which to reflect on the genesis of problems caused by problem solving. Next, the present-day reality of the innovation-based creative economy is traced out as sixty years of innovation from Adorno’s “Culture Industry” to Tony Blair’s “Creative Economy.” “Disruptive innovation,” writes historian Jill Lepore, “is competitive strategy for an age seized by terror” (Lepore 31). Philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who characterises this neoliberal innovation as “social Viagra” proposes the antidote to the creative economy in the amateur and a sense of the everyday in

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17. A video fly-through of the Münster version of *HellYeahWeFuckDie*, 2017: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWw7CPczmU0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWw7CPczmU0). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

which *savoir-faire* and *savoir-vivre* is recovered from commercial fidelity and addiction (Stiegler, “Age” 12). Stiegler’s polemic asserts that experimentations around the idea of the everyday can establish creative territories that are an antidote to a technocratic, planned and flattened world (and, possibly, I suggest, a flattened conception of nature).

*Chapter 4.* This chapter looks at the work of two artists, Hito Steyerl and Theaster Gates, and positions their practices fully within the cross-over space between art and design, where the aspiration is to articulate and contest the terms of the designed world (or, as I said above, at least I propose them as candidates for this to see where they succeed and fail). Steyerl’s work is taken as a fictive montage of data and image, where the work is active in the gaps in the virtual surfaces of digital culture. Its intention is to seek the breakdown points of the flow of digital image in surveillance-globalism. Her idea of ‘depth’ and ‘surface’ is compared to David Summers’ discussion of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ spaces as well as Steyerl’s riffing on Erwin Panofsky’s *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927). I assert that Steyerl’s art is not confined to her exhibition practice (which I treat as props in the professional art world), but is in a hybrid fictive space generated between her exhibition work, her work on the web, lectures and performances, and fictive-critical texts. Here she establishes a new artistic space in the junk-space and junk-time of digital culture. Theaster Gates’ practices of experimental building as a material making, and institution-making as a resistance to instrumental knowledge is framed against both in its general purpose to support radically different ways of making, rising out of a specific place where the work is primarily by and for its local participants, and very specifically in Gates’ use of musical improvisation as part of a method for devising approaches to building (and buildings) in urban space. I interleave this musical interest with a brief history of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, a cooperative of experimental musicians founded in Chicago in the 1960s. This sets up a lineage, both of artists facilitating their own practice by creating a cooperative entity entirely outside of institutional frameworks and an ethos where the purpose of such a formation is not just to create community but to create a community in support of radical experimental practices. Gates’ practice is taken as an independent participation in, rather than an observational critique of the designed world in the style of critical theory. Gates’ work is practices of making at the border between art and design where an idea of un-making and re-making reconstitute design both as a practice in the public sphere and a critical reflection

on the designed world.

*Chapter 5.* The closing chapter reflects on my own art practice, approaching it in the light of the ideas discussed in this thesis. I introduce three works: *Cinéma* (2005), a performance in a public square along with the related video installation, *Duet* (2006); *Paraguayan Sea/Mer Paraguayenne* (2017), an urban text piece in Montreal, in collaboration with poet Erín Moure; and *The Machine Stops* (2019), a video fiction set in Le Corbusier's *Capitol Complex*, in Chandigarh, India. These last two works are the practice component of this thesis. The chapter situates a conclusion of sorts in the unfolding contradictions and complexities of practice, for which the previous chapters function as conceptual description. The chapter also outlines some art and design-studies investigation in higher-education, first drawing on furniture-maker David Pye, writing about making in the 1960s and then turning to more recent debates about 'speculative design' (devised by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby) at the Royal College of Art in London and, most recently, the exploration of 'strange design' by Emanuele Quinz and Jehanne Dautrey at the EnsadLab at the École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. This conclusion also brings up some unanswered questions about nature which come up as an undertow to this discussion of the 'designed world,' as an invocation from the inside of a conception of nature as outside.

*...all proponents of public space and nearly all advocates of “public” things in general—public parks, public buildings and, most relevant here, public art—present themselves as defenders of democracy. The term “public” has democratic connotations. It implies “openness,” “accessibility,” “participation,” “inclusion” and “accountability” to “the people.” Discourse about public art is, then, not only a site of deployment of the term public space but, more broadly, of the term democracy. For example, when arts administrators draft guidelines for putting art in public places, they use a vocabulary that invokes the tenets of direct and representative democracy, asking: “Are the artworks for the people? Do they encourage participation? Do they serve their constituencies?” Public art terminology also alludes to a general democratic spirit of egalitarianism: Do the works avoid “elitism?” Are they “accessible?”*

Rosalyn Deutsche, “Art and Public Space” (34)

*Utopian design visions have often addressed social problems by attempting to solve them. Modernism had it that new designs and spaces could determine new forms of social relation. Architecture, as Le Corbusier was keen to point out, was the alternative to social revolution.*

Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture* (61)

## **Chapter 1: Public Spaces**

Rosalyn Deutsche’s writing about the role of art in thinking about public space in the United States from the 1980s on was pivotal in defining the terms of art criticism and artistic practices which examine and problematize public space and underlying regimes of visibility, specifically how cultural practice manifests and participates in a particular build of public space *or* how such practices can disturb established or conventional structures of ‘public’ and related notions of democracy, participation, and accessibility. British architecture theorist Jane Rendell updates Deutsche’s take on spatial practices and politics as being a permission to assert a more art-like participation on the part of designers and architects as what she calls ‘critical spatial practice’ (Rendell). Deutsche’s analytic, drawing on critical theory and critical geography, makes a place for critical thinking about power and visibility by artists thinking about public space. This criticality is predominantly a mode of reflection and commentary. Her examples are artworks which are analytic of forces at play in public space, but whose space of argument is within the discourse of art theory and the institutional framing of contemporary art exhibition practice

(what we will identify as art's 'doings and sayings' in the next chapter). This is a high-art detachment that is strategically different from the entrepreneurial participation or embedding we will soon explore in the practice of Theaster Gates, which seems to operate not only within the 'doings and sayings' of art criticism but in several other real spaces as well.

Rendell, in contrast to Deutsche, asserts that some contemporary design and architectural practices can become 'critical spatial practices' in the built environment as a result of a cross-disciplinary heeding of these same discourses of critical theory and deconstruction of visibility in conjunction with an understanding of the spatial lessons of feminist art practices. For Rendell, the goal of these material practices is to make a critical place in the fabric of the city as a kind of embedded making and thinking. Rendell suggests that this is what the field of architecture needs to learn from the theoretical analysis of Deutsche and others coming from art theory, and from art itself as a spatial practice. For Rendell, the applied fields of design and architecture must respond to the spatial critique that has found its way into the substance of these fields, originally as an inquiry into the materiality and spatiality of these practices, and now as a broader ethical conversation in shared urban space. Rendell's critical spatial practices may take place in the frame of art, or of urbanism or architecture, but they are decidedly not isolated as a conversation taking place solely within art discourse or a theoretical conversation within academic social science or political theory. They are relevant to, and part of, urban practices of making, building and inhabiting spaces. This is a shift in relationship of theory to practice – or, more precisely, of theory to singular manifestations of art and design practice.

**1. Rosalyn Deutsche's Critique of Spatiality and Visuality.** Does art sustain its own politics? By extension, can high-art operate from outside of the problem solving instrumentality of design or of political discourse, but in direct relation to their contexts and to the idea of 'public' embedded there-in? In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Theodor Adorno asserts, art is "the social antithesis of society," both autonomous and implicated (Adorno 8). For Rosalyn Deutsche, writing about art taking place in public space, the social politics to which art stand in antithesis is a politics of spatiality. In Deutsche's defense of specific 1980's art practices, in the face of both the art establishment and a "left-art" nostalgia for a mythical unified public sphere (a term she explicitly draws from Jurgen Habermas), it is a politics not confined inside the container of an absolute idea of 'public space,' but a politics of spatiality as an active agent in the reconstruction

of the terms of public space itself. Deutsche asserts that certain art practices can do this. Her examples are artists working in the 1980s in post-expressionist, post-minimalist institutional critique such as Hans Haacke and Krzysztof Wodiczko and in the context of a feminist critique of visibility – such as Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Sheri Levine, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and Louise Lawler. They re-assert art's publicness and an approach to the idea of public space not as a territory to be claimed or abandoned but as a gendered, ideological construction where new art practices emerge to test the boundaries between public and private as constructed markers of legitimate and illegitimate discourse.

These new kinds of practice make the public sphere into a space of conflict or contestation rather than one of administratively enforced harmony, inclusion or social responsibility (disguised as democracy, whether liberal or conservative) (Deutsche, *Evictions* xiv). What is at stake for Deutsche is not only defending certain art practices whose public legitimacy is questioned, but also asserting that re-conceiving the spatiality of public space is a legitimate goal of artistic practice *and* a part of any real democratic process (importantly, the public space where this takes place can equally be inside or outside the museum). So, for Deutsche, public space is dramatic flux of inclusion and exclusion, exploitation and desire. This spatiality itself is the 'material' of the critical art practices she explores.

In *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) Deutsche outlines the philosophical and social science sources for the terms she uses when analyzing the social production of space. She examines the politics of this unfolding of public space and democracy through specific artworks such as Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection* (1986) (fig. 1), an exhibition of feminist works on visibility entitled *Public Vision* (1982), and public controversies surrounding artworks such as the one around the removal of Richard Serra's public sculpture, *Tilted Arc* from the Federal Plaza in New York in 1989 (fig. 2). She signals a concern "not only with the struggles taking place inside these spaces but with the less visible and therefore more pressing struggles that ... produce and maintain all spaces" through her own inquiry that is itself working from "a particular interdisciplinary space – a discourse that combines ideas about art, architecture, and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other" (xi).

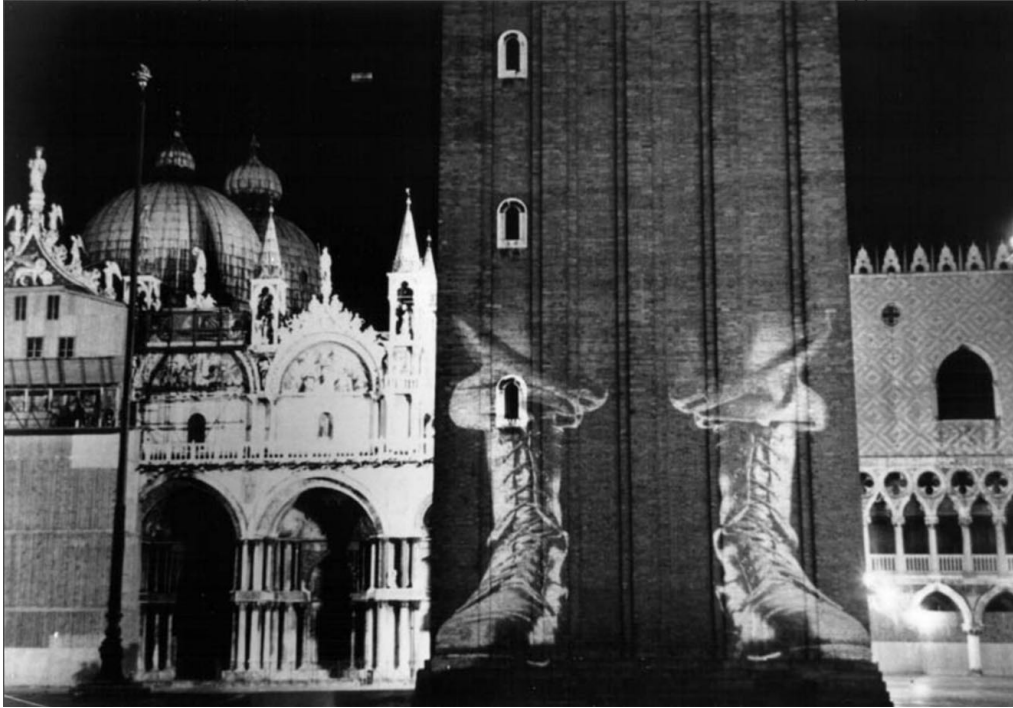


Fig. 1. Krzysztof Wodiczko. *Projection* (1986, Venice Biennale) (photo: Jerzy Borowski)  
<https://vimeo.com/108408764> link to 2014 recreation for the Biennale de Montréal



Fig. 2. Richard Serra. *Tilted Arc*, 1981 (unknown web)



Deutsche charts her own conceptual interdisciplinarity back to sociologist Henri Lefebvre's "analysis of spatial contradictions and his critique of urban planning to argue that a genuinely responsible public art must, in Lefebvre's words, 'appropriate' space from its domination by capitalist and state power." She suggests that "Lefebvre's appropriation of space is similar to the reorganizations of space undertaken by certain site-specific artists. For both, public space is not a pre-constituted entity created for users; it arises only from a practice (or counter-practice) of use by those groups excluded from dominated space" (xvi). Urban sociologist Raymond Ledrut sharpens what Lefebvre calls "spaces of difference" (53). Ledrut describes "the city as a social form rather than as a collection and organization of neutral physical objects [which] implicitly affirms the right of currently excluded groups to have access to the city – to make decisions about the spaces they use, to be attached to the places where they live, to refuse marginalization" (53). According to Ledrut, "the city is an environment formed by the interaction and the integration of different practices" (52). Deutsche uses the work of sociologist, urban planner, and communications scholar Manuel Castells to deepen this case and to draw out the idea that "urban meaning" is defined by "the inscription of political battles in space [in a] process of conflict, domination and resistance to domination [where] the conflict over the assignment of certain goals to certain spatial forms will be one of the fundamental mechanisms of domination and counter domination in the social structure" (53). Here, Deutsche focuses two key points about art practice and opens two consequent questions: 1) that the art practices she is concerned with reproduce the same productive counter-dynamic in social space that Lefebvre's sociology describes; 2) that a practice rooted in difference or the outsider can be key to understanding or reforming space.

These questions are partially answered in Deutsche's foundational outline in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* where she points to the critical geography of David Harvey and Edward Soja as contributing to an "urban-aesthetic interdisciplinarity," anticipated in cultural theorist Fredric Jameson's 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (xviii). Jameson's particular culture/sociology interdisciplinarity is flawed, she says, in that it focuses on theories of the social production of space yet identifies "politicized spatial discourse to define postmodern art forms as an escape from politics" (xviii). This criticism is pivotal for Deutsche as an identification of a failing in critical urban geography (at least in how it is taken up by cultural critics like Jameson and T. J. Clark) as a masculinist shunting aside of feminist social analysis

and art practice, a problem which she regards as a structural rather than incidental (ie. related to the single-polarity of this type of Marxist critique towards class). In countervailing Jameson and Clark, Deutsche describes feminist theories treating “visual images as themselves social relations – representations producing meanings and constructing identities for viewing subjects” and suggests that “the image of a coherent social space perpetuated in the new urban-aesthetic discourse is a fantasy that harbors its own spatial politics” (xix).

This critical-feminist take on such spatial politics informs “Agoraphobia,” the best known essay in *Evictions*, which serves as a coda of sorts. Earlier in the book Deutsche articulates a specific regret with regards to the (widely discussed) debate over the removal of Richard Serra’s public sculpture *Tilted Arc* (fig. 2) from an urban plaza in New York in 1987 on the supposed grounds of public outcry. Her regret was that, in defending the artistic value of the piece and the status of Serra against what was perceived as a conservative or populist onslaught, few interveners opposing the removal took up the very questions of democracy, public art and public space. Instead they relied “on myths of the ‘great artist’ – now reincarnated as ‘the exemplary political artist’ – and its continuing attachment to vanguardist attitudes” (xxii). Though Deutsche does not articulate it precisely, this failure to engage questions of the meaning of democracy, public art and public space might also be seen as a failing (or ageing) of Serra’s *Tilted Arc* itself, as an art work. In “Agoraphobia” Deutsche “takes up this question, placing aesthetic debates about public space within the context of broader struggles over the meaning of democracy” by examining how some artworks, on their own terms, do make this engagement (xxii):

Over the last decade, radical cultural critics have counteracted neutralizing conceptions of the public by defining public space as a public sphere – an arena in which citizens engage in political activity – and by redefining public art as work that enters or helps create such a space. But the question of the meaning of the public is not settled by equating public space with political space. Rather, a new question arises: Which politics? (xxii)

“Agoraphobia” asks key questions in defining a politics properly belonging to art in public:

What is publicness? How do images of public space create the public identities they seem merely to depict? How do they constitute the viewer into these identities? How, that is, do they invite viewers to take up a position that then

defines them as public beings? How do these images create a “we,” a public, and who do we imagine ourselves to be when we occupy the prescribed site? ... whose identity, in the present, is produced and reinforced by an image of public space tied to the traditional spaces of perspectival representation? (286).

If we adopt Habermas’ definition of ‘public sphere as a “lost democratic ideal” – “a set of institutions ... through which the bourgeoisie could exercise control over the actions of the state while renouncing the claim to rule ... a sphere in principle open and accessible to all” what are we to do with the “homogenizing tendency” and supposition of a “rational – noncoercive – consensus” (287)? What kind of (consensual and agreeable) public art goes along with this model? (288). An alternate, more radically democratic, possibility is one where public art “can be viewed as an instrument that either helps produce a public space or questions a dominated space that has been officially ordained as public” (288). Following the discourse analysis of political theorist Chantal Mouffe, Deutsche suggests that such practices are about the constitution of political community and about the “spatializing operations that produce a space of politics” (289):

When feminist critiques established a constitutive link between hierarchies of vision and hierarchies of sexual difference, they made it clear that images *per se* are neither private nor politically neutral. As a result, we can no longer take it for granted that art institutions are secure interiors, isolated from social space. The intimate relationship between vision and sexual politics shows that this isolation is a fiction. Far from nourishing the institutional frame, work on the sexual politics of the image undermines the boundaries that supposedly sequester the inside of the institution from its outside, the private from the public (315).

**2. A Feminist Critique of Visuality: Deutsche on *Public Vision*.** In “Agoraphobia” the key example and, for Deutsche, manifesto-like articulation of this practice of feminist spatial critique as part of a “a richly agonistic public life” is the group exhibition entitled “Public Vision” at an artist-run space in New York in 1982 (292). The artists of “Public Vision” are associated with a “feminist critique of visual representation” (294). *Public Vision* was organized by Gretchen Bender, Nancy Dwyer, and Cindy Sherman, and presented at the artist-run space White Columns,

in New York in 1982, with work by Gretchen Bender, Jennifer Bolande, Diane Buckler, Ellen Carey, Nancy Dwyer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Diane Shea, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, and Peggy Yunque. Deutsche stresses that the exhibition was “small, brief and undocumented,” and also did not take place in a conventional public art milieu (for example, an outdoor public space) but rather in an artist-run gallery, that is, a conventional type of art presentation within an unconventional artist-run venture, not invested in the structures of authentication of the art world (294). Consequently, it is this artist-run venture and the critical qualities of the works themselves which redefine a boundary between public and private spatiality, challenging “the official modernist doctrine that vision is a superior means of access to authentic and universal truths because it is supposedly detached from its objects” (294). These “critical images” refuse systematic visual detachment “disrupting and reconfiguring the traditional space of aesthetic vision” as political, social, and public (296).

An exploration of two of the works in *Public Vision*, following Deutsche’s descriptions in “Agoraphobia,” is useful here to give a sense of the form of their critique of vision. Sherrie Levine’s *After Egon Schiele* (1982) (fig. 3) is noted by Deutsche as being the exhibition’s “keynote” (297). *After Egon Schiele* is composed of framed copies of photographs of the Viennese expressionist’s sexually explicit or erotic drawings. As such, Deutsche suggests, they critique the pre-existing autonomous self of expressionism represented as a heroic male victory over social alienation (297). By transposing these drawings from the 1920s to the 1980s and by re-mediating this painterly expression through the neutral guise of photographic documentation without changing the work except in changing our ability to accept it as direct and authentic expression – by mediating its gendered authorship, its scale and tactility – Levine asks us to stand away from the immediacy of the original work (and all that it claims), to read it differently and critically, literally to re-objectify its purported subjectivity. Levine’s use of this critical strategy of appropriation continued in subsequent years with, most enigmatically, copies of the celebrated 1930s photographs of Walker Evans. This critical strategy of ‘appropriation’ (a critical re-milling and amplification of Duchamp’s readymade) in itself she suggests became a widely appropriated critical device in itself in subsequent years.

Artist Cindy Sherman’s contribution to *Public Vision* was a photographic work from her *Untitled Film Stills* series begun in the 1970s (fig. 4). In these images the artist, made-up and costumed, poses in stereotypical female roles either duplicating or reminiscent of postwar



Fig. 3. Sherrie Levine. *After Egon Schiele*, 1982 (Art Institute of Chicago)



Fig. 4. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*. 1970 (MOMA, New York)

melodramatic movies. Deutsche focuses on the interpretive opacity of these images. They are not semantically transparent or directly expressive images. They confound this type of visuality by questioning identities and frustrating “the viewer’s search for an inner, hidden truth of a character to which the viewer might penetrate, an essential identity around which the meaning of the image might reach closure” (299). They read only as props and poses, lighting and other techniques for fabricating meaning in the cinema and mass media. Deutsche cites Rosalind Krauss’ observation that the hermeneutic idea of art turns the female body into a metaphor. She suggests that Sherman’s photographs “thwart this interpretive grasp” (299). We can see in these two works (from a present-day vantage point) some tropes of critical art practice from this period that now seem characteristic, for example that they take place using conventional presentation strategies, using the gallery as an apparatus of critical distancing, and that they have a radically alternate hermeneutic of their own which includes both a reliance on and a critique of visuality and framing (a criticality of which Deutsche’s practice is a significant part). These are radical works intended, once their ‘refusals’ are accepted to be part of the work, to be read and interpreted. There is embodied here a conception of what constitutes an alternative space of critical artistic practice in public space that we will see evolve, quite drastically, through the works discussed throughout this project.

**3. Jane Rendell: Critical Spatial Practice.** In the field of contemporary architecture, historian and theoretician Jane Rendell has done much to map the territory that I point to above as a contested zone between art and design (*Critical Architecture*, 2007; *Art and Architecture-A Place Between*, 2007; *Site-Writing*, 2011). Rendell’s mapping includes defining a feminist critical spatial practice as a “place between” art and architecture, theory and practice, writing and making; developing a concept of ‘public art’ as occupying a theoretical space between art and architecture; and pointing to an interdisciplinarity (following Mieke Bal, Julia Kristeva, and others) as a key concept for a movement of thinking and writing between and across disciplines in, to use Kristeva’s term, a ‘diagonal axis.’ This sustaining of the anxiety of questioning one’s discipline (the anxiety of the interdisciplinary) is the catalyst for opening up new relationships between theory, art, and architectural practices (Rendell, *Art and Architecture* 29). This space of anxiety which Rendell identifies as a ‘critical spatial practice’ is in a contested zone between art as a practice and the ‘designed world’ where new art-like practices, reaching beyond an

economic model, can be articulated:

When art is located outside the gallery, the parameters that define it are called into question and all sorts of new possibilities for thinking about the relationship between art and architecture are opened up. Art has to engage with the kinds of restraints and controls to which only architecture is usually subject. In many public projects, art is expected to take on “functions” in the way that architecture does, for example to alleviate social problems, comply with health and safety requirements, or be accessible to diverse audiences and groups of users (16).

This space of anxiety, then, lives between the functional and instrumental development program proposed as the goal of a particular project and the engaging of a criticality that may be at odds with those goals, either practically or on the level of underlying ideology:

...in other sites and situations art can adopt ... critical functions ... and works can be positioned in ways that make it possible to question the terms of engagement of the projects themselves. This type of public art practice is critically engaged; it works in relation to dominant ideologies yet at the same time questions them; and it explores the operations of particular disciplinary procedures – art and architecture – while also drawing attention to wider social and political problems; it might best be called critical spatial practice (16).

With ‘critical spatial practice’ Rendell delineates a space between theory and practice, specifically a written critical practice whose theoretical nature is determined by specific practices and works of art and architecture that she considers to be both critical and spatial in themselves (so both the practices and the writing as reflection are part of a critical spatial practice). In art terms, Rendell suggests, these have been described in broad categories as contextual practice, site-specific and public art, and in architecture they have been framed as conceptual design or urban intervention (Rendell 12). In general, these expanded practices reflect an interest in the city as a place of practise, thinking, and living which is drawn into conversation with ideas of the spatial and feminist theorists from which she draws – Walter Benjamin, Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Edward Soja, Luce Irigaray, Doreen Massey, and Rosi Braidotti – as an interdisciplinary terrain involving geography, anthropology, cultural studies, feminist criticism and art and architecture theory (Rendell 12). Rendell suggests that “architecture’s curiosity about

contemporary art is connected with the perception of art as a potentially subversive activity relatively free from economic pressures and social demands; while art's current interest in architectural sites and processes may be related to architecture's so-called purposefulness" leading to an opening towards "the 'other,' whether the feminine, the subaltern, the unconscious, the margin, the between or any other 'other,' is manifest and could be characterized as a fascination with who, where or what we are 'not'"(15). In this architectural story-telling "art is functional in providing certain kinds of tools of self-reflection, critical thinking and social change" (15). This instrumental 'political' or 'critical' telling is paralleled by Rendell with the inclusion of a more fundamentally generative and poetic voice brought out of a reading of Walter Benjamin's concepts of allegory, montage, the ruin and the dialectical image.

In delineating this architectural/instrumental territory and establishing this reciprocal influence of art and architecture on each other's (critical-poetic) self-definition as critical spatial practice which can stand as its own critical amalgam, apart from the more general terms of the fields of contemporary art and architecture, Rendell situates some key interdisciplinary terminology drawn from geography, anthropology, cultural studies and art theory practice which is useful here. These are critical definitions of place, space, site, and location (from Lefebvre, Soja, and de Certeau); site, non-site, off site (from artist Robert Smithson); public versus private space (from Deutsche and others); the expanded field in sculpture (Krauss); unfixing, and montage (Benjamin); and nomadism (Braidotti).

For Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) "in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization" (de Certeau in Rendell, 70). As with Deutsche, Rendell makes use of de Certeau's "space as a practiced place" and suggests that artworks, in the practice of specific places, produce critical spaces (as part of a critical spatial practice) – akin to how Deutsche's public art can produce public space. For de Certeau, place (*lieu*) is the order "in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence." Place is a temporal "snapshot" of positionings. By these rules two things can't be in the same location. Space (*espace*), on the other hand, "takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables"(37). These mobile elements are deployed such that space occurs "as an effect produced by the operations that orient it" (37). This is the space-making practice of critical spatial practice. Henri Lefebvre's formulation (in *The Production of Space*, 1974) is that space is produced by three interrelated modes: a) spatial



practices; b) representations of space; and c) spaces of representation. This becomes the template or model used by cultural geographers and many art and architecture theorists to define critical study of the social in a spatial field, particularly the city (34). Geographers including Edward Soja and David Harvey “argued for the importance of space in producing social relations...” (33). Drawing from Deutsche’s critique of Harvey and Soja, Rendell reiterates that it is not enough to “add gender as one of the categories of social relations...[but that] gender difference is a specific kind of difference ... produced in very particular kinds of spaces” (35). The unfolding of this difference, as critical spatial practice, is an important function of art practices that Rendell wishes to bring into productive friction with architecture. To an extent, this means that these gendered spaces are not only ideological but also material and physical, an interface between the builder, the architect and the designer, and those that inhabit the space.

Rendell takes de Certeau’s “space as a practiced place” as a concept to apply to site-specific sculpture of the 1960s and 70s (first critically assessed by Rosalind Krauss in “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 1979), where artworks, by generating specific places “produce critical spaces” (37). For both Krauss and Rendell, Robert Smithson’s work is a key artistic practice, giving us the terms ‘site,’ and ‘non-site.’ For Krauss, “the expanded field which characterizes this domain of postmodernism possesses two features ... one of these concerns the practice of individual artists; the other has to do with the question of medium [and] at both these points the bounded conditions of modernism have suffered a logically determined rupture” (Krauss 42). For Smithson site and non-site exist in a conversation where a ‘non-site’ such as an exhibition in a gallery, upholding the institutional boundaries, and relationships of power are in contrast to the work in the landscape which is the site, perhaps remote, and somehow existing at a distance, in implicit resistance to and ultimately expanding, the terms or conditions of the ‘non-site.’ That is to say that the aesthetic gambit of the ‘site’ operates to expand the space and practice of sculpture. In this sense it performs art’s own politics.

Rendell’s prime interest is to extend Smithson’s site/non-site relationship (the site is generally remote, belonging to a construction of wilderness in relation to the cultured space of the city where the non-site is located) to more contemporary urban constructions of art-in-public and urban-architectural practice. This happens where artists are responding to curatorial initiatives to work in urban space, or architecture professionals are adopting art-like approaches to what ‘building’ might mean, especially in the context of landscape. She suggests that art

moves in the city are perhaps better conceived through a third term: ‘off-site’ – that is, taking place in a novel location but still bound to the physical and ideological fabric of the gallery, as many site-specific works are now programmed by institutions without radically disturbing our definition of art (that is, that the expanded field becomes part of curatorial practice and that it is now normal to situate art-like practices anywhere in the city) (47). When art occupies the off site of landscape and architecture (their urban and social space, as well as their space of instrumental functionality) it becomes a “form of critical spatial practice, hold[ing] a special potential for transforming places into spaces of social critique.”(13). In this interdisciplinarity, “definitions and categorizations of art are occurring across multiple disciplines rather than within one, requiring new terms and modes of thinking that allow us to identify the particularities and differences of the various related practices in ways that go beyond opposition”<sup>18</sup> (58). Art practices, then, inhabit other sites constructed in other fields and in doing so are “within, at the edge of, between and across different disciplinary territories, for example, art, architecture, design and landscape, then they do so by adopting methods that call into question disciplinary procedures” (58).

In Rendell’s analysis, architects who make this conceptual move into landscape include Rem Koolhaas and many others. Such architectural approaches go beyond the art-influenced speculative architecture of the 1960s and 70s, best exemplified by the British collective Archigram, where outcomes were primarily exhibitions, models, drawings, and zine-like publications (fig. 5). A new generation of art-influenced architects (like Koolhaas) is building for the real world and manifesting conceptual proposals in the same built environment as more conventional architecture, including work that challenges the materiality of architecture. Rendell wonders how this architecture engages critical spatial practice, asking if “by performing practices, art can focus attention on the critical possibilities of a site or place, encapsulated in a particular moment in time or set of activities, do similar processes operate in architecture?” (79). Rem Koolhaas and Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) serve as an example response of how architecture can “bring out [of] the contradictions of modernity ... the tension between

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18. This is contrary to Hal Foster’s assertion: “Hal Foster has more recently suggested that the expanded field described by Krauss has ‘imploded’ and that the categories are no longer held in ‘productive contradiction’. I wonder if this is the case because it seems to me that the field has exploded rather than imploded and that it is for this reason that the categories are no longer held in tension” (Rendell 58).

celebrating the advantages of advanced consumer capitalism and critiquing the social injustice this has produced” (80). Architecture and design have an ambiguous implication in this tension (a tension that art often claims to stand outside of). Koolhaas’ research practice allows him to critique (shopping, for example) while at the same time delivering the architectural container for such activity. In *Design and Crime* (2002), Hal Foster characterizes Koolhaas’ gambit as producing more of a “Disney Space” than “alternative space” [and] “that the problem with Koolhaas’ practice is that it innovates but without any purpose” (Rendell 81). This is an abiding question we can ask of design work that attempts to deconstruct its own implication in capitalism. On the other hand, this kind of implication may be purposeful in providing an encounter with a space of action perceived as lacking in art practices. There are examples like the Palais de Tokyo (renovated in 2001) where architects Lacaton + Vassal in concert with curator Nicholas Bourriaud conspired to strip out a defunct museum to create a space of cultural action with minimal design intervention. The result is a play on the ruin and the incomplete to create a shell for a hugely eclectic set of interventions and activities, a kind of contemporary Beaubourg/Pompidou Centre without the design, or where ‘no design’ is the signature design.

For Rendell, a key component of critical spatial practice is a kind of poetics drawn out a reading of Walter Benjamin’s concepts of allegory, montage and the ruin. Far from a simple critique of “the tension between celebrating the advantages of advanced consumer capitalism and critiquing the social injustice this has produced” in the evolving terms of critical theory inspired discourse, critical spatial practice also opens up a space of intuition, reflection, and incompleteness where:

...it may not be appropriate to produce a condition of shock in order to politicize the viewer, but rather to produce works that combine optical and tactile registers, visual and aural components, to be experienced emotionally and physically, as well as intellectually, over time and through space, prompting critical reflection alongside a more subjective engagement ... we, as Howard Caygill argues of Walter Benjamin’s later work, are ‘sensitive to the incompleteness of a work and the negotiability of its formal limits [and are] dedicated to revealing the unrealized futures inherent in the work.’ (131)

#### **4. From Deutsche to Rendell: Moving Critical Spatial Practice Into the City.** Deutsche

represents a critical theory/discourse analysis reading of the place of art practice in relation to hierarchically defined definitions of public space from within the currents of 1980s North American art theory (exemplified by *October*, the preeminent New York theory journal of the period). This work signals an important appropriation of critical theory, critical geography and social theory into cultural battles over expanded definitions of social art practice, particularly in relation to what became known as ‘institutional critique’ and what Deutsche names as a ‘feminist critique of visual representation.’ She situates feminist practices (such as the work in the exhibition *Public Vision*) as a crucial example, one could say a manifesto, of how artworks work to re-define public space. Specifically, they operate from outside received definitions of private and public space (spatialities) *and* traditional definitions of how artworks work (visualities). In this process they remake public space and, simply by being what they are where they are, they redefine art practice itself.

One limitation of the critical place for art that Deutsche sets up (or that 1980s New York art theory sets up) is that, though she proposes art practice as a primary and singular source in the development of spatial critique, the arguments are made in the terms of critical theory, critical geography and discourse analysis. This means that the scope of the ‘work’ of the art work is limited to the boundaries determined by, or at least framed by, the modalities of this, albeit rich, social-science prime material. This is an effect of the critical text and its reception and propagation rather than a description of the real limits of the works of art, which may (or must) exceed such framing (this is crucial to the arguments in this thesis). One limitation of the use of critical theory, critical geography and discourse analysis sources is the apparent predominance given to an analysis of spatiality and the lack of discussion of temporality. Consequently while Deutsche’s unpacking of visuality is rich in its discussion of spatiality, temporality is sidelined as a factor.<sup>19</sup> Also, in Deutsche’s position, art as a practice is limited by its framing as a discipline in the specific context the American neo-avant-garde, and the art market and critical culture associated with it. This leaves it, in spite of its critical rigorousness, less than open to cultural and interdisciplinary crossovers, especially crossovers with the fundamentally compromised field of design.

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19. Spatiality is reconnected to temporality in chapter 2, below, through the writing of Theodore Schatzki on the ‘doings and sayings’ of practice and David Summers on ‘real spaces’ and ‘the virtual.’

As mentioned in the following discussion of the entrepreneurial, embedded practice of Theaster Gates, we can be curious about how the kind of theoretically rigorous critical-practice articulated by Deutsche seems to stay in the disciplinary safe-house of art practice and theory, where the artworks function predominantly as a critical reflection or litmus. They are artistic propositions which seem to happen and then stop (one could say, they pose, or are staged, or are conceived as single critical gestures), waiting to be incorporated into art discourse, rather than being an ongoing, self-generating form of action in a wider scope. Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections (fig. 1) and vehicles for the homeless seem a particularly good (or bad) example of this; works placed explicitly in public, and then withdrawn, for the purpose of generating a discourse almost entirely for the consumption of the art world (granted, at a time when it was possible, and perceived to be important, to shake up the high-culture world).<sup>20</sup> This is a trope now repeated explicitly and *ad nauseum* in a contemporary art world where there is little, if any, shaking up left to do.<sup>21</sup>

Built into Deutsche's radical discourse for art (where art practice provides a opening for another way of seeing by its presence in a situation and, at its most rigorous, is also a reflection on conditions outside the field of art) is both a valuable space for discourse *and*, conversely, a conceptual art hermeticism or purity. This provokes a subsequent generation of artists and theoreticians to seek a hybrid solution in inclusive art practice formulations of participation and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud), currently referred to as 'social practice art' (by Tom Finkelpearl and many others: see note 2). These practices often repeat this same pseudo-populist mistake, summed up with abundant irony by architect/conceptual artist Dan Graham: "All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art" (Bishop, 178). A more positive and important question to ask is how the rigorous, theoretically and historically informed inquiry of these art practices concerned with the condition of public space can evolve to reflect on new conditions which demand a different kind of implication or embedding in an evolved 'public space' which has metamorphosed through a post-capitalism

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20. Krzysztof Wodiczko's politically provocative outdoor projections began in the early 1980s (see fig. 1). One famous gesture is the projection of a swastika onto the facade of South Africa House in London at the height of debate about UK state support of South Africa's apartheid regime. His *Homeless Vehicle* (1988) was a one-person portable dwelling proposed for the streets of New York. Wodiczko teaches at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

21. For example, Montreal artist Raphael Lozano-Hemmer who updates Wodiczko's tropes in terms of technology but not in terms of the changed dynamics of the relation of the work as product in the art world or as action in public space.

formed around our hyper information-based consumer culture. These are hidden conditions of the designed world.

Rendell's critical spatial practice makes just this kind of assertion of disciplinary cross-over. Art remains a unique and vital social antithesis to society, echoing Adorno's formulation of art's autonomy, but, unlike art-world practices loosely grouped around the term relational aesthetics, she says critical practice must operate in an interdisciplinary zone implicated in the fields of design that shape the built environment (and consequently our ideological, political and economic environments). For Rendell, this space is in the field of architecture and architectural pedagogy. That she teaches feminist practice, art theory and ethics in a school of architecture (Bartlett School of Architecture, London) is an indication of the value she puts on the necessity of embedding the critical practice of art in ethically fraught professional and academic institutions. In this context Rendell has implicated herself as a leader in generating models for ethical debates as "critical spatial practice," for example, through the Bartlett's Ethics Commission review of the funding of University College London (the parent institution of the Bartlett School of Architecture) from the mining conglomerate BHP Billiton, and her work investigating the regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate in London.<sup>22</sup>

In both cases, this work on ethics-implicated artistic strategies of reflection and 'site writing' as a counterbalance to debates institutionally normalised in the terms of information and communication management strategies. This ethical strategy insists on the space, for example, for a reflection inspired by a poetics based in visual art practices and writing. Through reflection on such actions and by thinking through art-like projects both in the built urban fabric and in the art milieu, Rendell refines a space of practice both inside the space of art and embedded as a player in the human-made environment, be it commercial or institutional. This builds on and extends Deutsche's discourse on public space as a tool for redefining the discourse of design as a spatial practice comprising "acts that intervene into sites in order to reveal power relations at work" (Rendell, *Art and Architecture*).

Just as literary theorist Ewa Ziarek (see below in the context of Arendt and imagination) points to a play of aesthetics in modernist literature by women (Virginia Woolf and Nella

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22. The Bartlett's Ethics Commission – Ethics in the built environment: [www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/about-us/our-values/ethics-built-environment](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/about-us/our-values/ethics-built-environment). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

Larsen), as the “daring counterfactual possibility of aesthetic invention” (Ziarek 3), Rendell asserts that moving a discourse to a deeper critical register cannot take place from the outside. We are acting in a transformational way from the inside of language and from the inside of material practice. If art practices “intervene into sites in order to reveal power relations at work” on the everyday level of the meaning or politics of the built environment or public space, they do so by delving below that specific concretization of meaning to a place where other meanings, which are already there in potential, arise. For the development of the terms of this thesis writing, Rendell’s project suggests to me that both the substance of discourse (language) and the meaning-full material substrate of the designed environment are both at play in any artistic or spatial practice.

Art in this context is not a productive discourse, but rather, a “counterfactual” practice as an opening of an experimental territory of the imagination, a formal re-invention which reveals and reflects unresolved contradictions from the boundary areas of normative and instrumental meaning-making, and practices thereof. A ‘factual possibility’ is the meaning that language can already mean and the meaning than material (and critical) practices have already made. A ‘counterfactual possibility’ takes up the potential of imagination at the point where meaning takes form. It should not be surprising that there is in feminist artistic practices, an embodiment of ‘counterfactual possibility’ that both seeks to reveal power relations at work and dives deeper into the space where meaning takes form (where nature and concept resolve). It is there by necessity of movement. It also exists in many other artistic practices, indeed may be a definition of what they do. With her site writing Rendell hints at what Ziarek, in a different context, calls an “aesthetics of potentiality.” I, in turn, extrapolate that this can equally exist at an analogous ‘contested boundary’ where art meets design, where a performative making and thinking-through-making allows a pervasive designed world, as a normative centering of all experience, to become visible and be coped with.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Writing about the English author Virginia Woolfe and the African American writer Nella Larson, Ewa Ziarek sees a dynamic tension between the muteness of the silenced or marginalized voice as loss and illegitimate literary innovation which she draws from Hannah Arendt’s formulation of a dynamic between revolt and melancholia. This dynamic is an “aesthetics of potentiality” necessitating the invention of new experimental forms reflecting unresolved contradictions (Ziarek 3). Ziarek juxtaposes this play to the “impatient” desire to politicize and instrumentalize art as an abiding tension between the urgency of the struggle and the autonomy of art where art must risk losing singular signification in order to have some particular instrumental force (an important conundrum for design, constantly faced with a public perception of its outcomes-oriented instrumentality). In this way a feminist

**5. Some Practices of Critical Spatial Practice – I Love to You.** What kinds of practice satisfy Rendell’s definition of critical spatial practice other than the ‘starchitects,’ like Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Diller and Scofidio, or Lacaton + Vassal who she uses as signs in constructing a scholarly argument extending Rosalind Krauss’ reading of Robert Smithson into contemporary architecture and design theory? In particular, what design practices embedded in the built environment might be named as feminist design practices, in Rendell’s terms? Rendell writes about art and performance practices which question issues of urban lived space but also about specific professional architecture practices which touch on these same spatial issues.<sup>24</sup> Muf Architects is a UK based all-women firm who respond to design calls and competitions for urban space. These responses include “new feminist approaches” whose “way of working is itself a critique of architectural design methodologies that emphasise form and object making ... for Muf, the design process is not an activity that leads to the making of a product [or buildings], but is rather the location of the work itself.” (Rendell 2018). An early project involved a brief to create a barrier against illegal automobile traffic in an urban area. Muf’s response was to rewrite the brief to reflect a desire to create a safer and more social environment (in this case, installing benches with decorative motifs based on local history of ceramics manufacture) (fig. 6). Such consultative and socially participatory design processes are not necessarily feminist but do represent a pushback against some normative modes of urban control. While this work does not seem strongly critical on a theoretical level, it is at least inventive and socially engaged on the level of material design practice (which is, after all, where it operates), offering hints of subtly radical ways of preparing for and engaging practices of making, not in the art gallery but ‘out in the field’ as architecture.<sup>25</sup>

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aesthetics is struggling both against the hegemony of modernist aesthetics and hegemonic forces of power, citizenship, and commodity.

24. For an overview, see Jane Rendell’s article “Only resist: a feminist approach to critical spatial practice” in *The Architecture Review*, March 2018. See: [www.architectural-review.com/essays/only-resist-a-feminist-approach-to-critical-spatial-practice/10028246.article](http://www.architectural-review.com/essays/only-resist-a-feminist-approach-to-critical-spatial-practice/10028246.article). This is a summary and updating of her contribution to several publications including: “Tendencies and Trajectories: Feminist Approaches in Architecture” in Stephen Cairns, Greig Crysler, Hilde Heynen and Gwendolyn Wright (eds) *Architectural Theory Handbook* (2011); “Critical Spatial Practices: Setting Out a Feminist Approach to Some Modes and What Matters in Architecture” in Lori Brown (ed) *Feminist Practices* (2011) and *Gender, Space, Architecture*, co-edited with Iain Borden and Barbara Penner (1999). article link here: [www.architectural-review.com/essays/only-resist-a-feminist-approach-to-critical-spatial-practice/10028246.article](http://www.architectural-review.com/essays/only-resist-a-feminist-approach-to-critical-spatial-practice/10028246.article). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

25. Other design practices that Rendell points to as being feminist are architects Sarah Wigglesworth (who built a DIY straw-bale house in London) and Ruth Morrow (who uses unorthodox textile forms for casting concrete). See: [www.architectural-](http://www.architectural-)



In *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (2011) Rendell extends the idea of critical spatial practice to the spatiality of criticism and commentary. Here the full scope of Rendell's particular feminist stand on spatial criticality is evident. This re-imagination of critical writing practice includes the performative act of writing and mark-making as "critical citational practices



Fig. 5. Archigram/Peter Cook. *Instant City Visits Bournemouth*. 1968 (Collection Frac Centre / Philippe Magnon)



Fig. 6. Muf Architects. *Pleasure Garden of the Utilities*, Stoke, UK 1998 (Muf Architects)

... where the relationship to the production of art and academic writing can be altered” (Rendell, *Site-Writing* 25). This is not a critical spatial practice operating from an analytical observers’ outside observation point (a critical distance) but a mode of what I call thinking-through-writing that asserts that material, indexical matter, and meaning can be turned in a free play, inverting the spatial sense of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ in critical practice (where the critic is stuck as outside observer). In *Site-Writing*, Rendell describes an attitude of “situated criticism” exemplified by (new-materialist feminist scholar) Rosi Braidotti as a nomadic subject in a spatial state of movement and in an “epistemological condition, a kind of knowingness (or unknowingness) that refuses fixity,” while examining the construction of subjects and the politics of location (2).

What, then, is a spatial practice of critical writing? Rendell answers that criticism has a spatial potential and the critic occupies a situated position (4). Loosely, one could say that this situated position is normally a ‘critical distance,’ or the illusion of a position *outside* of the work or the situation. Following performance studies scholars (such as Peggy Phelan and Amelia Jones) whose criticism and writing practices suggest that the interpreter of performance cannot be neutral, indeed must be immanent to the affective potential of the situation, Rendell suggests that the critic can wander from the artificial space of critical distance in order to interpret or translate an event for others *from the inside* (5). Critic Irit Rogoff and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha suggest that this wandering, as a rewriting of the space of power, has to do with a re-aligning of the structure of narrative through shifts in prepositions. That is, we can move from speaking *about* an object to speaking *to* or *with* or *as*. Each performs a real shift in spatial conception. Luce Irigaray changes “I love you” to “I love to you” and the spatial arrangement is immediately and radically different (6). Rendell takes this narrative strategy and inflects it with ideas from psychoanalysis (Lacan, Laplanche and Winnicott) in order to clarify that spatiality is acquired and is changeable. For Rendell, Donald Winnicott’s ‘transitional object,’ both internal and external for an infant, becomes, ‘transitional space’ which defines the threshold between subject and object – “this ability to keep inner and outer realities separate yet interrelated results in and intermediate area of experience, or ‘potential space’...”(24).<sup>26</sup> We can, as adults, work with

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26. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s idea of play as the crucial hinge activity between imagination and environment (and the development of self) through transitional objects contributes to the sense in which I use the word ‘play’ as an important part of my descriptions of art practices throughout this writing (see, for example: *Playing and Reality*, 1971). Art and design ‘play’

‘potential space’ and write space differently (this is an action between symbolic and pre-symbolic described in the context of practice theory, below). This spatial practice is the key to Rendell’s site-writing. A similar criticality about space and time, in broader relation to artifacts, will come up in Chapter 2 with David Summers’ discussion of ‘real spaces’ and the virtual.

“From, In and With Anne Tallentire” (2018) is an example of Rendell’s site-writing. In this publication Rendell develops a specific way of generating a dialogue with the art practice of Anne Tallentire, demonstrating the importance of situated critical practice.<sup>27</sup> Anne Tallentire is a contemporary Irish-British artist whose sculpture and video work involves performative/sculptural interventions in dialogue with abject public spaces.<sup>28</sup> *From, In and With* is a 2013–2015 collaborative work by Tallentire (fig. 7). *From, In and With Anne Tallentire* is Rendell’s site-writing responding to *From, In and With* in the form of a digital publication. It follows the left-right page structure of a print publication (spreads) (fig. 8). The right-hand pages contain a reproduction of Tallentire’s photographic work translated into a graphic and typographic form. The left-hand pages are a site-writing by Rendell which is a range of textual responses, directions to the designer for how to accomplish the graphic translation of the work on the facing page, and photographic images of Tallentire’s original installation work. This section is followed by a continuation of the textual response in the form of a dense text in two columns where Rendell plays with the conventional citational structure and typography of a critical/scholarly essay. The result is an experimental text, somewhat like a musical score, overlapping the scope of the original work with the scope of Rendell’s scholarly reading and sub-reading in a generous and readable way. This hybrid ‘content’ deals with the materiality and precarity of women’s work, focusing on descriptions and translation of (unseen) images of spaces near the site of a strike at a biscuit factory in Dublin in 1913 (now the National Archive of Ireland). Where the original work attempted to re-invent the spatiality of a site of labour trauma through its translation into non-discursive (or at least non-linguistic and non-photographic) material forms, Rendell’s essay takes care not to simply re-anchor this ‘content’ in textual

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between inside and outside, for example: the primordial opposites of matter and thing (as Flusser would have it). Art make this play between imagination and environment into a vocation and a critical source.

27. “From, in and with Anne Tallentire” in *Field Journal* vol.7 Issue: *Becoming a Feminist Architect*, [www.field-journal.org](http://www.field-journal.org). The full work is available here: [field-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-Jane-Rendell-From-in-and-with-Anne-Tallentire.pdf](http://field-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-Jane-Rendell-From-in-and-with-Anne-Tallentire.pdf).

28. See: [www.afterall.org/online/artists-at-work-anne-tallentire](http://www.afterall.org/online/artists-at-work-anne-tallentire) and [www.annetallentire.info](http://www.annetallentire.info) for a description of Tallentire’s work.

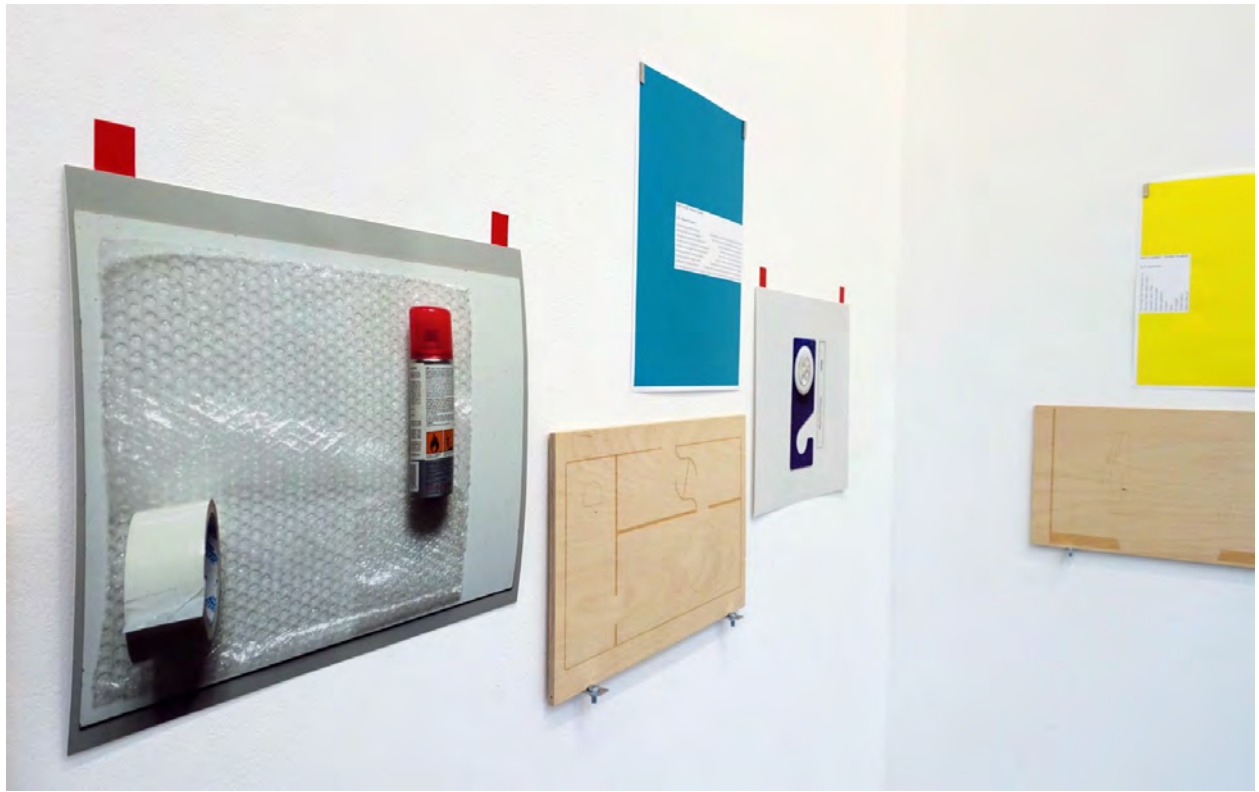


Fig. 7. Anne Tallentire. *From, in and with* (detail), 2018 (Jane Rendell/Field Journal)



Fig. 8. Jane Rendell. *From, In and With Anne Tallentire* (page detail), 2018 (Jane Rendell/Field Journal)

information. It continues the spatial/material transformation by taking the elements of language and citation as components in a plastic, poetic and inclusive process rather than an authoritative interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

**6. Critical Distance versus Critical Situation?** Between Deutsche's presentation of critical art practices in *Public Vision* and Jane Rendell's elaboration of an implicit overlap between professional design practices in public space and experimental art and writing as meta-practices, there is an evolution both in the location and bounding of the art object and in the situation of critical writing practice. This is an evolution in the spatiality of art practice, the where and how of its occurrence. It is also an evolution or experiment in the placement and form of critical reflection. The artworks discussed by Deutsche exist at a critical distance, housed in the discursively safe space of the art gallery and the theory journal. Rendell suggests that we can also find this criticality embedded in professional practices of urban design, mixed-up with its instrumentality (a mix which, I suggest, offers what are often frustratingly simple, but nevertheless palpable, gestures). She also suggests that critical writing has a place in 'writing' more challenging practices (like that of Anne Tallentire) *into* the discourse of everyday practice, which habitually exclude it. The idea is that we can make robust demands of practices in public space through practices of art and that in doing so we are thinking about how the space of those practices changes. This idea will continue to evolve in this project through the discussion of the work of Hito Steyerl (in digital space) and Theaster Gates (in the built space of the city).

This chapter has served, in part, to paint a background of known approaches to critical and spatial practices in art criticism and theory, in particular the idea of a geographic and urban spatiality as public space derived from the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau and subsequent social geographers. Via Rendell it also hints at a new kind of interdisciplinarity. The subtle evolution of the location for critical action from Deutsche to Rendell, from art to design practice, sets up several puzzles for art practice, to be clarified in Chapters 2 and 3, about how to exceed or update these particular ideas of social spatiality, reassess definitions of public space,

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29. Rendell refers at length to discussions of citational practices in academia by Sara Ahmed and Ramia Maizé, among others, in assessing the "perceived need to theorize personal experience" and the problematic of citational practices in general as analogous to the idea of the lock-out in the labour dispute discussed in the piece (when a discourse is locked, who is locked-out?) (Rendell "Resist" 26). Parenthetically, this is a very useful essay for its discussing of citation in relation to research-creation in general and also the place of improvisation, riffing, and risk-taking that crosses over from artistic to scholarly practices.

and perhaps even how questions of temporality, not just spatiality, should be part of an ontology of the designed world, as the play of art-like practices in a world made by design. This implies that we can *at least ask* the designed world to respond to the conditions of its own existence on more than one register.

**7. What does ‘designed world’ mean?** This last statement brings me to the terminological gambit that I use in this writing – that of replacing the term ‘public space’ with ‘designed world.’ If the critical discourse exemplified by Deutsche and Rendell is focused on the idea of public space, I propose an experimental revision by using the term ‘designed world,’ as a way to shake out these arguments differently. Perhaps this re-naming is timely because the idea of public space seems a little quaint in our hyper-commercialized, data manipulated, democratically challenged times, inflected as the concept is with a very European notion of rational freedom and discourse (Deutsche’s “richly agonistic public life”). Perhaps it is because the idea of design needs some of these same counterfactual pressures to deepen its critical credentials. Perhaps it is also to say that in addressing the fields of architecture and design as specific disciplines connected to the meaning-making of the built or material environment and of our newer digital/information substrate we need to understand that the very idea of design is something that enfolds us all and that *design has become our public space*, not just that design is the designator or the toolkit for a specialist group of professions. An important point of this terminological conceit is to say that the ‘designed world’ is a larger surround than the world we imagine, even if we imagine ourselves in free connection to an apparently outside nature. If, above, I suggested that Deutsche’s role for art seems as if art could stand as a critical outsider or observer, then that imagined position is no longer viable. We are inside the designed world and any practice of “daring counterfactual possibility of aesthetic invention” (Ziarek) takes place from within, burrowing through the floors, walls and ceiling to understand the modes with which we surround ourselves with meaning, and embed ourselves in its movement. Art practice must have autonomy, its own politics, but it has that autonomy within a pervasive human-made and designed world. This makes of art, in its relationship to, or possible embedding in, the field of design, an important counterfactual counterpoint to the urgency to politicize or instrumentalize material practices – design’s normal innovative outcomes-oriented (instru)mentality.

Most contemporary art and design practices operate within the narrow scope of such a

factually informed, goal-oriented practice when they approach the urgency of contemporary crises. Some practices (and it matters little in the determination whether they operate under the field-designation of art or of design) approach crises in a way which echoes the desire for an “aesthetics of potentiality” described above. *This comes before, during, and embedded in, the corresponding urgent desire to politicize and instrumentalize the things we do.* The exploration of different practices in this writing is intended to draw out some ways in which this happens in explicit reference to the designed world. We face an actual global crisis with the drastically partial fix of designed outcomes. In what space are we to articulate a relationship between the power of the factually known and what is known only to the imagination? If art practices are in conversation with that which they are not, then this is a conversation from within an expanded public space we are now calling the designed world.

*Imagination dead imagine... No trace anywhere of life, you say...*

Samuel Beckett, "Imagination Dead Imagine," 1965 (63)

## Chapter 2: Practice

To use one conventional expression of art as a philosophical practice, this project is about art in the space of design as an un-forgetting of underlying conditions.<sup>30</sup> Historically, there are many descriptions of art as a singular practice of uncovering or revealing (that I hint at in the introduction by way of Arendt's metaphor of the table). Such descriptions do vary in terms of what world and values, even what crisis, they suppose themselves to be situated in. For this project, we can ask what traces of such underlying conditions are continually erased and smoothed over by the momentum of the designed world. These include changing conditions of temporality and spatiality. What, then, are some modes of practice that cope with the designed world by revealing it? What do they do to be remarkable as such? As outlined in the introduction, art practice cordoned-off in its own institutional space (the museum, the gallery or the art department) may represent a primordial failure to engage the designed world as the world as we live it – our everyday. When art practices do make such expeditionary engagements beyond their prescribed boundaries they risk their own status as a coherent or recognised practice (as a discipline or a field). My intuition is that most art practices that I have noted as remarkable take this risk on one register or another. This risking may be a determining definition of the nature of art practices or the 'art' of any practice – that they are in conversation with *that which they are not* and may take on new forms as a result (or, equally possibly, disappear). By 'status' I mean art's standing in relation to its own history, academic canon, and its place relative to other fields which confer value onto it as part of what Theodore Schatzki calls "practices and bundles of

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30. One such conventional naming of art is Martin Heidegger's *aletheia* in *Being and Time*, an idea of unconcealedness or disclosure, revived from the pre-Socratics. Another useful description of art as something like unforgetting is Elizabeth Grosz's "...opening up of both nature and culture to unrecognized and open-ended forces" derived from Deleuze and Guattari and Luce Irigaray in *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2013) (Grosz 2). Theodore Schatzki's characterization of art practices as 'clairvoyant' in this chapter is another. The point here (ignoring specificities of philosophical position) is that there are many definitions that set aside the word 'art' as defining singular and particular practices. So we can take it as a consistent, if not conventional, attempt at naming such practices (and that there is a distinct nature of practice to be named).



practices” (Schatzki, 2014 17). This risking of status is analogous to Bernard Stiegler’s notion of “the amateur,” to Vito Acconci’s term “de-design,” to Alva Noë’s “strange tools,” or to Ewa Ziarek’s feminist “aesthetics of potentiality.”

A field like art, then, is most interesting at its boundaries where it comes into friction, *as a radically alternative practice*, with other more time-determined and instrumental fields. In a sense, inhabiting this boundary *is* the practice of art. Art is always on the verge of not being a practice because art operates in and with the trauma of the breakdown of meaning (so, then, is design *always* a practice?). For example, if, by necessity of explaining the inexplicable, a poet takes a single word out of the bounds of meaning and then returns it to language re-tuned or re-sensed, this is a similar boundary play, a practice of conversation with that which is not, of space which is not, of time which is not – which in turn creates the possibility of those things for others. The same game can be engaged with form – a form can be taken to the boundary of its meaningfulness, to the ‘formless,’ as Georges Bataille would have it (see also David Summers’ elaboration of the idea of ‘format,’ below).<sup>31</sup> This is a play of the sense of imagination explored by Hannah Arendt.<sup>32</sup> If I suggest that art is a practice with such a special nature, rather than the more conventional view that art is a discipline oriented around the production of artifacts, or that art is the art object itself, then we need a definition of what practice means as a human or non-human activity. In order to show where this sense of practice arises as the day-to-day working of an artist, I will begin with Vito Acconci’s rudimentary definition of public art as an action or performance of de-design.

**1. Vito Acconci: De-design and Complicity:** Artist Vito Acconci shifted his practice from performance art to artwork in public space in the 1970s. He subsequently, and deliberately, distanced himself from the art world by forming Acconci Studio as a quasi-architecture office, claiming, polemically, to be more interested to what people sat on rather than what they looked at

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31. See: Georges Bataille, “Formless,” in *Vision of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, (1985) and also Yves-Alain Bois, and Rosalind Krauss *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997) (text for the exhibition of the same title, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1996).

32. What is play? See note 26 (p. 42) on Winnicott’s concept of play.

in the museum (Forster, *Public Spaces*).<sup>33</sup> This was less of a rupture than it was an extension or displacement of an ongoing artistic strategy from one public space to another, from the museum to the city street. One of the best-known projects of this period of transition is his collaboration with architect Steve Holl in designing the *Storefront for Art & Architecture*, in New York (1993). In an appropriation of design as an intentional strategy of ‘de-design,’ Acconci asserted, “the function of public art is to de-design” (quoted in Vidler, *Warped Space* 141). This was a suggestion that art did not belong just in the art world, but that one might encounter it by turning a street corner, without overt institutional or commercial framing – an event without an institutionalized prelude.

Acconci’s designation of his own public art as ‘de-design’ came up in conversation with architecture theorist Anthony Vidler, and was a casual comment, not a theoretical statement. Perhaps it was a reaction to a question about Acconci’s public work, a question like “Is it design?” Perhaps Acconci responded with a poets’ generative gambit, “...no, maybe its de-design,” as a way of suggesting a new category of gesture, a glib tightening of a contradiction for the purposes of slipping out of the knot. This is imagined. Acconci’s own practice is rooted in language. Language spoken or written, whether as articulate phrases, fragmentary streams of consciousness, litanies or individual words, is part of a process for engaging the culture of real things and relations, like a vine or a root infiltrating itself through a human-made architecture. Acconci emerged from graduate studies in writing with sensibilities attuned to contemporary American poetry. He published the poetry journal *0 to 9* with Bernadette Mayer in the late 1960s, including poets like John Giorno, Ted Berrigan, and Jerome Rothenberg, alongside artists like Robert Smithson, Adrian Piper and Yvonne Rainer (Dworkin 100). Language has consistently been a central part of his process – as he states, “really, what I know how to do is use language ... probably the grounding of all my stuff, I think, [is that] I like playing with words” (Forster 148). If I suggest that Acconci’s naming of his own practice as de-design was a casual, non-theoretical, gesture, that does not mean that we should not take this negation, hyphenation and folding back of the word ‘design’ seriously, but that this is not a scholarly labeling. For Acconci words are constantly coaxed out of their representational mode to become spatial facts. De-

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33. An interview between myself and Vito Acconci in 2012 transcribed as an appendix in *Public Spaces – The Architecture and Landscape Architecture of Vito Acconci: Critical Motion between Art & Design* (MA thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, 2013).

design is such a gesture. We can look for its sense of action in the artist's concrete practice.

Acconci's move towards public art and architecture projects is an echo of his earlier shift from poetry to urban performance in the late 1960s where, as an extension of his poetry practice, Acconci (inspired by Jasper John's letter and number paintings) thought words might become 'fact' – trajectories on the page wandering out to become trajectories in the city, in what Richard Dworkin called a "continuation of poetry by other means" (Dworkin 99). Acconci asserts that art can make a different kind of 'real' encounter in the public spaces of the city. For Vidler, Acconci's idea of 'de-design' is a questioning of the limits of the architectural 'program' (the program is the client's design brief or compendium of specification to which an architect designs a response) taken to its furthest extreme, where typological elements are jumbled as if "taken by an unruly child and scattered on the floor" in order to provoke new uses (Vidler 140).

Acconci takes modernist design's originary myth of *form follows function*, coined by the inventor of the skyscraper, architect Louis Sullivan,<sup>34</sup> subsequently repeated and adapted in so many design statements and manifestos, and twists its words poetically back on themselves, declaring that the function of the encounter of art with design should be to de-design; that the program is to de-program or multiply program, to disturb the seamlessness of designed space and time. For Acconci, *form un-follows function*, not in order to engage in gratuitous expression, but rather to question or thicken the threshold between personal and public space, between inside and outside, between the user and the thing. Form (be it a word or a thing) is liberated from repeatable and predictable function, but still provokes meaning, new every time – as a counter-function.

In 1976 Acconci presented an art installation entitled *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)* at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York City (fig. 9), emblematic of his aspirations for art to move into public space. He extended a long boardroom table out the window several stories above the street below. An audio recording, in mock corporate meeting language, enticed viewers to engage in a game of musical chairs around the table, implying that the only way out of this managerial conundrum is to turn the institution inside-out and flee out the window into vertiginous public space. *The Storefront for Art and Architecture*, designed in 1993 with architect Steven Holl, punctures and animates the facade (the membrane that separates a building or a

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34. In "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (1896).

room from its outside) and takes this basic signifier of private/public place as precisely the thing to be brought into play (fig. 10a-b). *Storefront* was the beginning of a spatial strategy that continues through most later work, where floors and wall turn into seats and tables, where gardens go vertical, ceilings become ground, where paths wander *hors-scene* and civic space floats away from shore. Acconci's strategy of disturbance and evocation of absence has a greater affinity to Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett than Le Corbusier. The slapstick mechanics of *Storefront* are reminiscent of Buster Keaton's house in the film *One Week*, 1920 (fig. 11). For *Storefront* founder Kyong Park, the project was a "participation wall ... when the wall is open there is no wall, no barrier, no inside, no space, no building, no place, no institution, no art, no architecture, no Holl, no Acconci, no storefront" (Grima).<sup>35</sup> One could ask what connection there is between this extreme formal opening that may or may not be wholly art or design, and what these works have to tell us about the designed world.

*Courtyard in the Wind* (completed in 1997) was an elaborate public art project for the City of Munich's Technisches Rathaus, a civic administration building (fig. 12a-d). On one corner there is a round office tower of sixteen floors, with the rest of the building around the courtyard being seven floors. The courtyard provides access to the building for city employees and also a neighbourhood shortcut to the nearby train station. Acconci Studio's proposal involved a vertical 40-kilowatt wind turbine with 8-metre rotor blades installed on top of the office tower. In the courtyard below a 22-metre diameter ring is inset into the ground. This ring rotates slowly, driven by motors powered by electricity from the turbine. The ring itself intersects the diagonal path that crosses the courtyard, a section of lawn with ornamental bushes, and another section of the courtyard with pavers, benches and trees. When the ring rotates it displaces a section of the path off-axis, along with two of the trees, a lamp post, some benches and some of the ornamental bushes. Sitting on the bench on the ring you would see the buildings surrounding the courtyard gradually turn about you. Sitting in your office overlooking the courtyard you would see the trees, bench, and path in their normal position and then look up later to see everything displaced, the fragment of path going nowhere, disjointed from the rest of its trajectory.

In this courtyard, nature is a representation. The earth does not go down to the 'real' earth.

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35. Information and citations in this description are taken from Joseph Grima interviewing Holl and Acconci for the Architecture Foundation, London (Architecture + Art : Crossover and Collaboration series), 11 June, 2009, Tate Modern, London [<https://vimeo.com/6306520>].

As in any urban public space there is a vast amount of infrastructure (drainage, electricity, foundations, etc.), and who knows what layers of detritus, beneath any composed area of ‘nature.’ *Courtyard* plays on the visuality of romantic landscape, where any contrivance is permissible if the visual (or sensorial) effect is right for the romantic viewing subject. Here in Munich the trees move with the wind. Nothing could be more romantic. Yet they don’t move in the wind-blown way. They move cinematically, driven by motor and turbine, horizontally across our visual field while we are distracted. In *Courtyard* the aesthetic purity is compromised by the mechanical slapstick of achieving it and the two form a whole that, in this case, is the *work* of this art. If architecture needs to be resisted, perforated, even collapsed, it is in order to have a conversation with landscape, not as nature, but as built public space.<sup>36</sup>

Architect Bernard Tschumi says, “A program is never neutral. The people who draft it are full of preconceptions. The first thing an architect needs to do is to dismantle that program and redirect it” (Koolhaas 8). His response reflects the authoritative position of the master builder who would always prefer the *tabula rasa*. Is the brief or program a technical demand to be shrugged off? This is a reaction not to the program as a specific case (and those “people who draft it”) but to the rich complex that is the architecture’s dialogue with technicity. Architect Jean Nouvel’s statement about complicity goes further:

You’ve said you prefer complicity to complexity ... it reflects a real problem in architecture ... only through this complicity do we achieve a certain degree of complexity, which isn’t an end in itself ... Complicity is the only guarantee that we’ll be able to push the boundaries. If this complicity is established, it means that something more than simple comprehension is going on between people, a shared meaning, mutual assistance ... There has to be a shared dynamic, one that’s often unspoken but translated into actions. (Baudrillard and Nouvel 77)

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36. In part, *Courtyard in the Wind* is a meditation on seventeenth- to nineteenth- century formal gardens with their hyper-designed vistas and trajectories. One famous garden of this genre is located in the same city as *Courtyard in the Wind*; the Baroque Nymphenburg Palace with its formal French garden and *grande parterre*. In reference to this site, Acconci refers to Alain Resnais’ *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) as an important influence on his artistic development after he returned to New York in the 1960’s, that Resnais’ film and Robbe-Grillet’s writing respectively helped changed the way he thought about time and the image (especially in relationship to architecture) and the nature of language as non-representational (Forster 127). Nymphenburg Palace was one of the locations for *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* and the film’s long shot down the *parterre* is one of the most reproduced images of French New Wave cinema (fig. 13). Either unconsciously or intentionally, the embedded ring and transecting path in Acconci’s *Courtyard* resembles the path-ringed pool in the centre of the *parterre* at Nymphenburg. Formal similarities aside, *Courtyard in the Wind* interrogates the ‘designedness’ of human-made nature, normally the domain of the field of landscape architecture.

Acconci thickens the plot (as he liked to say),

...what interests us in responding to a program, is that the program, I don't know if this is true, but what I was going to say, the program usually involves something that people are going to use. So the idea, we do think of a peopled space, so that we can take hints from the program ... we like to double the program, or multiply the program... (Forster, *Public Spaces* 147)

Where an architect might begin with a formal mapping of the program, Acconci begins with words; twisting and playing with meaning. Yet the program remains as a source against which is played the question, “what can we do there, what can people do?” (150). As Nouvel indicates, there is no complexity without complicity and the program, however divergently understood, is the hinge of that complicity. It is a point where the technicity of planning can be encountered. The goal should not be to throw out the program (to be replaced by the unconscious ideology of the designer) but rather to seek a complicity with potential points of opening that turn the power of the program towards non-power. Acconci's de-design, then, is intimately connected to ‘the program’ but attempts to play it differently from the beginning, rather than performing an analytic reading. This point of departure, for artworks acting from within the syntax of design, is an unravelling of that syntax in line with Acconci's material play of language – an antidote to the *telos* of design as habit formation, repetition and prediction. Take Sullivan's ‘form follows function,’ then free the form and multiply the function. “Thicken the plot” of that joining word ‘follows’ as a bridge between inner desire and outer world, between lived and lived-in, as a perpetual reaching rather than a conventional following.

This is also connected to architect Nouvel's complicity, where the play within boundaries allows the investigation of those same boundaries as a vocation, as part of the embedding of unorthodox formal and critical practices in the world of design. De-design, to use one of Acconci's expressions, “thickens the plot” through a poet's play of language as form in reciprocal relation to matter. It is a practice of serious play (in the sense of experimenting with inside and outside as the definition of subjectivity) whose objective is to find the play (in the sense of mechanical looseness) in the designed world. If such a dual sense of play is to be called a practice we need an enriched set of ideas to about ‘practice,’ and possibly a distinction of how

art-like practice can be named. In social science, ‘practice theory’ in general seems to tackle the ongoing social interaction of humans and things over time and, in Theodore Schatzki’s rendition of practice theory, a definition of art practice, as a kind of practice that risks making change evident, begins to show up.



Fig. 9. Vito Acconci. *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)*, 1976 (Acconci Studio)



Fig. 10 a-b. Acconci Studio. *The Storefront for Art and Architecture*, New York, 1993. Post-2008 reconstruction. (A. Forster)

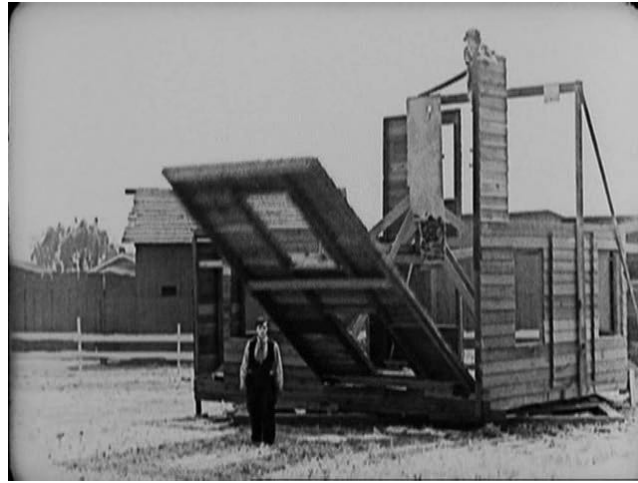


Fig. 11. Buster Keaton. *One Week*, 1920. Film still. (Web)

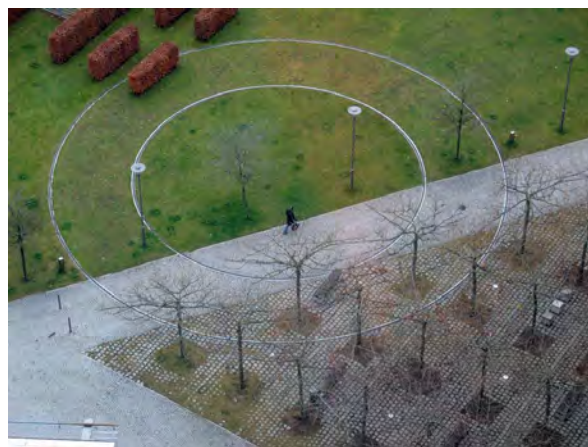


Fig. 12a-b. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind*, Munich, Germany, 1997 (A. Forster)





Fig. 12c-d. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind*, Munich, Germany, 1997. Tower, turbine and courtyard. (A. Forster)



Fig. 13. *Grande parterre* at Nymphenburg Palace, Munich, Germany. Film still from Alain Resnais, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961. (Web). See note 36.

**2. Doings and Sayings: Art as a Clairvoyant Practice.** In this description of art as a social practice I borrow some terms from the practice theory of Theodore Schatzki as the basis for deriving a description of art practice. Sherri Ortner, Pierre Bourdieu and Bernard Latour are other thinkers who have situated some key boundaries of a very non-cohesive field of social theory called practice theory. Bourdieu has been important for the concepts of ‘habitus’ as ingrained (bodily) disposition and ‘field’ as setting or structure, and Latour for a corrective emphasis on material agency linking his actor-network sociology to new materialism in philosophy. I take Schatzki’s Wittgenstein-influenced and phenomenology-inflected version of practice theory and use it to suggest that art is a singular practice in which the risking of its own disciplinary status is one implicit, constitutive, condition. Schatzki gives some key vocabulary that I use throughout this writing. For Schatzki, “human coexistence transpires as part of bundles of practices and material arrangements ...practices are organized, spatio-temporal nexuses of doings and sayings.” Art practice has a particular significance among practices in that it makes the nature of change visible, what Schatzki calls its “clairvoyance” (Schatzki, *Art Bundles* 17).<sup>37</sup>

Practice theory developed out of anthropology and sociology beginning in the 1970s as an approach to human and bodily actions, routines and engagements in social space. Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) is a key text in sociology, which introduced the terms ‘habitus’ (a personal complex of internalized social behaviours and know-how that generates practical organization) and *doxa* (the field or universe of possible discourses). However, thinkers as diverse as Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, Harold Garfinkel, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour, Charles Taylor, Sherry Ortner and Schatzki can all be drawn together loosely by way of enveloping human practices as culturally specific ‘ways of doing’ involving human individuals in a (Judith Butler-like) “performance of practices ... [a performativity] not limited to the bodies and minds of the performing individuals” (Epstein). Sherry Ortner (in *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*, 2006) adds Max Weber and Clifford Geertz to the mix of antecedents of practice theory and articulates a turn in social thought where practice theory comes into being by way of overcoming a *structure-agency* opposition in sociology and anthropology – a balancing of the view that

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37. Practices can take place in the normal register of the social present (where we do things with one another in what we think of as ‘real time’) or they can take place in a longer temporal register (one can react to a text from the past with a text written to be read in the future, for example) – a social practice and present-tense sociality are not the same thing (Schatzki, *Art Bundles* 17).

human behaviour is regulated by external forces, structures and formations like culture, mental structures, or capitalism, versus a kind of subjectivist micro-sociology (informed, for Ortner, by Geertz's interpretive anthropology). Practice theory "restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action" (Ortner 2). In Ortner's reading, Foucault contributes to this theory of practice "in locating the production of power, less in macro-institutions like the state and more in micro-interactions ... looking at ground-level sources of larger formations" (8). Bourdieu is close to Foucault "in that his notion of habitus is one of a deeply internalized structure, powerfully controlling and largely inaccessible to consciousness" (7). For Ortner, though, thinking through a Geertzian or Lefebvre-like "production of subjectivities" is more compelling than Bourdieu's more categorical or rigid habitus as internalized structure. It also allows for a direct political implication:

...the production of the world through human practice seemed new and very powerful, providing a dialectical synthesis of the opposition between "structure" (or the social world as constituted) and "agency" (or the interested practices of real people) that had not previously been achieved. Moreover, the idea that the world is "made" – also meant that it could be unmade and remade. That is, practice theory had immediate political implications... . (Ortner 17)

Theodore Schatzki refers to Bourdieu's concept of habitus in order to point to the human body as the (non-discursive) nexus between individuals, material networks, and the social as a "practical understanding" or skilling (Schatzki, *Practice* 17). This "embodied understanding is rooted in the realization that the body is the meeting points both of mind and activity and of individual activity and social manifold" (17).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, concerning embodiment, practices are "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding ... bodies are 'constituted' within practices" (11). If there is an active body constituted within practices, there is also a "timespace" constituted as the "dimensionality of human activity" where "timespace neither accrues nor is built up through activity ... [rather it is] a central constitutive feature of human activity" (Schatzki, *Timespace* xi). Constitutive as

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38. See also Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (2015): "So the habitus here is a medium of expression of certain human meanings, defining a certain social world with its constitutive sense of what is important. It is also what integrates me into this social world, and makes those meanings manifest and real for me, as a child growing up" (116).

opposed to causal or dependent relationships are central to Schatzki's practice theory. "Constitutive" suggests that 'body' and 'timespace' exist neither independently of human practice or the social, as an outside structure. Nor can what is constitutive be extracted from human practice (or the social) – that is to say that they are constituent of a coherence or process.

If, for Schatzki, "human coexistence transpires as part of bundles of practices and material arrangements" and "practices are organized, spatio-temporal nexuses of doings and sayings" then what is the relationship of material and material arrangements to this "doing and saying" (Schatzki, *Art* 17)? What does it mean for practices to be "materially mediated nexuses of activity" (Schatzki, *Timespace* 20)? Schatzki highlights "how bundled [human] activities interweave with ordered constellations of nonhuman entities" (Schatzki, *Practice* 12). This seems to open an area of overlap with Latour's actor-network theory. In *The Site of the Social* (2002) he makes a distinction between what he calls "theories of arrangements" (e.g., Latour, Callon, Foucault, Deleuze/Guattari) and "practice theories" (e.g., Bourdieu, Taylor, Dreyfus, Giddens) (Schatzki, *Site* xii). "Arrangements" is an expression gathering the concepts *dispositifs* (Foucault), *agencements* (Deleuze and Guattari), and *réseaux*/networks (Latour and Callon) (xiii). "Arrangements" signifies mutually effecting, transforming and emerging configurations of things as a "setting" for human and other phenomena which are determinate of one another – "extensive arrangements that determine as well as bind together their characters and fates" (xiii).

In making this distinction Schatzki draws a sketch of a contemporary humanist/post-humanist divide (xiv). In *The Site of the Social* he proposes to grapple with a problematic "agential humanism" contending that the assertion of "the nonhuman as compatriots in social life, is an important intellectual development" and that "the lines and interface between humans and other entities form a key axis of investigation." At the same time he argues, "that post-humanists are wrong to debunk the integrity, unique richness, and significance of human agency" (xv). While non-human elements are constitutive of human sociality (sociality is not *only* relations between people), "the skilled body commands attention in practice theory as the common meeting point of mind and activity and of individual activity and society ... practice theory also joins a variety of 'materialist' approaches in highlighting how bundled activities interweave with ordered constellations of nonhuman entities" (12).

Schatzki resists a theoretical globalizing in favour of seeing patterns rising from specific examples, examined in detail. In *The Site of the Social* these examples are the dynamics of a

medicinal herb business in a Shaker community in New York State and the activities of Nasdaq stock market day-traders. His account of theory as description seems unorthodox:

‘Theory’ means, simply, general and abstract account ... Systems of generalizations (of universal statements) that back explanations, predictions, and research strategies are theories. But so, too, for example, are typologies of social phenomena; models of social affairs; accounts of what social things (e.g., practices, institutions) are; conceptual framework [etc.] ... although practice thinkers fashion theories of this sort, they are generally suspicious of ‘theories’ that deliver general explanations of why social life is as it is. (13)

He defines his own scholarly practice as an unfolding of a social ontology, which he defends “through descriptions of empirical phenomena that illustrate and lend it plausibility” (xvii). The abstract account is only validated as plausible description of specific practices. More numerous (and less detailed) examples do not increase the validity of a theoretical proposition:

An ontology is compatible with social life when it can describe social phenomena in its own terms. Different ontologies, however, can usually supply descriptions of the same phenomenon. Consequently, compatibility (the ability to handle particular examples) can only confer plausibility. It cannot provide evidence for or confirm or prove an ontology. This does not imply, however, that empirical illustration is an insignificant task. (xvii)

In “Art Bundles” (contained in an anthology of practice-oriented studies of art, *Artistic Practices: Social Interactions and Cultural Dynamics*, 2014) Schatzki focuses on two specific artistic practices and examines the different ‘art’ and temporality of each and discusses what makes art practice, in its development and change, a “clairvoyant site” for observing features of social change (Schatzki, *Art* 31). One is the performance of music and the other is the making of pottery. Importantly, it is the activity of performance and the performance of making that are under examination here and, further emphasized, it is “in treating art as not just artifact or performance, but also as the activities, or rather, practices by means of which such works are created or consumed” (18).

In “Art Bundles” Schatzki begins by stating that all “human activity rests on something that cannot be fully put into words” – that within this activity is something non-propositional or pre-linguistic (a characteristic of Dreyfus’ ‘skills’ and Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’) and that the “tutored

body” is central to social being (18). Art, as a particular set of activities, is a social practice with a non-propositional basis that extends beyond both artifact and performance to include the overall “enterprise of art” as “components of organized activity nexuses resting on embodied know-how” (18). In this sense art is not an individual activity but a social one, the “features” of which are features of constellations of human-material relationships (which he calls bundles) not relationships of minds (29).

Practices are nested within other practices.<sup>39</sup> In the world of music these can include not simply the act of making (of creating an artifact or performing a piece of music, for example) but also: the practices which allow works to be created and consumed; the physical know-how and conventions of playing together (like the nod of a head to cue a solo, or the convention of introductions, or the audience knowledge of when it is appropriate to applaud); the way gear needs to be arranged; the electrical flow through the cables linking performers; and so on. Conventions form one layer of the practical understanding of a bundle of practices such as, for example, the improvised music world (and Schatzki emphasizes that such conventions are not normative but rather have a heuristic purpose – we are doing “what makes sense”) (22). A teleological frame (that everything has an end) is another convention (23). Finally there is a spatiality and temporality, which Schatzki calls the ‘timespace’ that is proper to a practice (24). He asks us to consider the temporality of the ‘doings and sayings’ of a solo in a rock concert compared to that of shaping a bowl in pottery, in particular how the density of doings relative to duration in each is constitutive of a particular temporality and teleological framing of creative parts of practice. Such creative parts of a practice have a “thin” teleological framing and an elaborate practical understanding (bodily knowledge). Inversely, the professional aspects of the music or art world have a ‘thick’ teleological framing and a very different practical

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39. To clarify Schatzki’s vocabulary of meaningful action as practice, a ‘bundle’ is, very loosely, a world in which an ‘activity’ takes place. Activities are bundled. As it is connected to such a world of bundled activity, equipment (things, systems, physical forces, material, e.g. cables and the electricity that runs in them) come together or are organized as ‘arrangements’. Arrangements connect to other arrangements, to bodies, artifacts, organisms and things (*Art Bundles 19*). ‘Practices’ are human initiated or human-centric and are linked to arrangements of things in the physical world. These are bundles. Relationships exist or arise between practices and arrangements, between practices and other practices, and also between arrangements and other arrangements. They form patterns that are temporally transient or lasting, dense or thin (19). These relationships coalesce as “thickets.” So, for example, a rock concert is a thicket, a temporally dense coming together of some practices and material arrangements (19). These thickets of relations are dense bundles (like a rock concert) or wider constellations (like the rock music world). Practice is an organized spatio-temporal nexus of doings and sayings (19). These actions (doings and sayings) can be outwardly performative acts, like playing music or throwing a pot on the wheel, or internal mental actions like listening, thinking, or imagining. Ultimately, “bundles and constellations form one immense plenum of practices and arrangements” (20).

understanding (24).

These more teleologically thick areas of art practices constitute their institutional framing and social breadth (and their funding system). I suggest that this is where, when art practices make engagements beyond their expected boundaries, art practices risk their own status as coherent practice – as I outline in the introductory paragraph of this chapter. So, practices that have been complementarily nested in the sense Schatzki describes, as bundles and constellations (this means that they are institutionally safe), can loosen or escape from their relationship, leaving a space for their redefinition or transposition. To extend Schatzki’s music and pottery examples, if a practice of music-making involving collective improvisation evolves to become one of uniquely physical gesture with no sound, or the potter abandons clay to take the syntax of hand-to-material meditation implicit to her craft and asks it to function (or dis-function) in another institutional space, then we are seeing the doings and sayings of one practice migrating elsewhere to make new art practices. The risking of established status becomes an extension of the art’s practice and an active coping across contradictory teleologies.

In “Art Bundles” Schatzki is adamant that art practices (like improvised music or pottery) are social rather than individual practices (whatever the temporal performativity of that social – i.e. it may be in conversation with the future or the past, not necessarily live and present) and that they embody non-propositional thinking as a constitutive element (21, 18). Artistic change *is* social change and the activities of individuals are parts of changes in practice/arrangement bundles (30). The learning of art is the learning of bodily knowing and practical understanding (25). Improvisation is part of all performance (e.g., the musician’s or the potter’s). Practical understanding (*phronesis*) is an everyday sense of how to do something and how to shape that doing over time: “unlike cognitive judgments, practical judgments bear a well known tenuous relationship to the use of language” (26).

While Schatzki suggests that art is a “clairvoyant” example, making apparent how change takes place, he never suggests that art is structurally different from other practices, bundles or constellations. For Schatzki, art is the ideal site to observe ‘change features’ of these bundles/worlds of practices and arrangements (30). But he does imply that part of the meaning of art is that it plays with or reveals the timespace of practices, and is able to abide in the non-propositional. In his version of the social, art makes visible a self-reflexive singularity of practices and arrangements and is a site for observing the typical dynamics of change.

If art practice involves a revealing of timespace and a play with the non-propositional or pre-linguistic (in the way that Acconci's poetic invention of de-design plays with language and shuttles back-and-forth across the threshold between matter and symbolic language), we are dealing with something resembling ontological practices in the everyday. These everyday art practices, seemingly dealing with present-tense things and practical know-how, are also, in their bodily and material involvements, implicitly holding (for example) a curiosity about temporality and spatiality close to the surface of practical understanding. These everyday practices, as social and political 'critical spatial practices' (thinking back to Jane Rendell) may have a deeper, non-instrumental, critical potential because of their capacity to engage imagination in this fundamental way. Hanna Arendt takes such a deep sense of imagination to be fundamental to a viable politics.

**3. Arendt and Kant's Imagination: Daring Counterfactual Possibilities of Aesthetic Invention.** Hanna Arendt's consideration of imagination as a significant, even primordial, 'condition of possibility' for action and judgment is outlined in an essay entitled "Imagination" in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1989): "Imagination, Kant says, is the faculty of making present what is absent... [it is] the faculty of perception in the absence of an object" (Arendt *Thinking* 388). Imagination is, for Kant, the necessary condition, of memory (388). The image I have in my mind may be something absent that I have experienced, something involving memory – this is "reproductive" imagination. The creative faculty that produces something that I have not seen or that I have not yet seen is "productive" imagination – "both are faculties of 'association' that is, of connecting the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' with the present... 'they serve to connect perceptions in time'" (388). Arendt continues, "...to put this differently, by looking at appearances, which are given to intuition in Kant, you become aware, catch a glimpse of something that does not appear." Imagination "does not need to be led by... temporal association; it can make present at will whatever it chooses." (388). What is it to glimpse, experiment with, or play with something that has yet to appear, or merely to play near something that may never appear? Arendt suggests that "Parmenides called it *nous*, by which he meant that true *Being* is not what is present, does not present itself to the senses" (388).

Imagination as a faculty allows us to "have present in the mind what is absent from sense perception" (388). From imagination comes access to being itself, according to Arendt's reading



of Kant, and “from it [Being] comes metaphysics, the discipline that treats what lies beyond physical reality; and then... what is given in the mind as the nonappearance in the appearances, becomes ontology, the science of Being” (389). Imagination performs a dual role, it provides the *schemata* for cognition and provides *examples* for judgement – the *intuition* of perception and *concepts* for understanding: “if I say ‘this table,’ it is as though intuition says ‘this’ and understanding says ‘table.’” (389). “This” is specific to the moment of directed perception (here and now) and “table,” as a kind of image or concept anchors the object in a world: “imagination produces this synthesis by ‘providing the image for a concept.’” (389). The image is the schema, in Kant’s terminology.

Arendt makes the point that without a schema (the ‘image’ of imagination) one simply could not recognize anything and one could never make a judgment (at the register of basic survival, or more complex constructions of beauty, ethics, or politics). Reflective judgments, which derive the ‘universal’ from particular cases, rely on a recognition of sameness or likeness (that this is *like* that – the root of analogical thinking), and are the “condition of all knowledge, especially of all experience ... imagination ... inheres in all sense perceptions.” (393). This is the crux of an “objectivity of the world – that it can be known” and the “possibility of communication – that we can talk about it” (393). Imagination, crudely put, deals with ‘here,’ ‘not here,’ and ‘there,’ sustaining a formalization of past and not past as time and a formalization of movement as space.

What is the relationship of imagination to things that are seemingly not there, or to a ‘nature’ that is not fully present to the senses? This is perhaps something that the artists mentioned in this project know through their practices, without a theoretical framework to fix the object of study. For example, as described briefly below, in Chapter 4 (in the context of Theaster Gates’ use of musical improvisation as a form-building method), the so-called ‘free jazz’ musicians of Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) ignored the norms of the music business, as they knew it, to build a self-supporting community in Chicago in the 1960s. This community was the armature for pure experimentation in music, or of music as an improvised experiment in time and space. One could say that they built that armature or organization (which entailed an everyday and radical social politics) in order to engage the potential of imagination, in the sense that Arendt describes. Since the form of this experimentation is sound and music, and it is outside the grid of language, it is difficult to make a direct corollary, but it is not ridiculous to suggest that these musicians are playing for “the

nonappearance in the appearances” which is analogous to an ontological investigation. Having living access to this sense of imagination, is the crux of a practice which reverberates onto many registers of the social and the political in the lives of these artists. The politics of this art is rooted in this sense of imagination.

In the Introduction (p. 4) I take up Arendt’s metaphor, in *The Human Condition*, of the missing table standing for alienation in the context of mass culture. The nature of the metaphorical table as common public space hints at one aspect of what is at stake here. It is the metaphor of community like the one actually built by the AACM. Another aspect, I suggested in the Introduction, is the ontological window or opening that art creates through imagination (which Arendt has just described as a quite different “this / table” as the hinge between intuition and image or concept). This is the play of time and space (before time and space) in the music of AACM founding member Muhal Richard Abrams, for example. One is a metaphor of common social ground. The other is an analogical opening, through imagination, to that which is not yet cemented into symbolic form, practices that (repeating two phrases already used to describe experimental practices) are in conversation with that which they are not, or, of which nothing can yet be said. As likely as there are other exemplary grand gestures such as the AACM’s building of a place for experimentation, there is a swarm of individual gestures that make up the everyday grain of practices constructed in the social at the service of imagination.

How do we connect this sense of imagination to the risk of disciplinary status, which at the beginning of this chapter I proposed is a determining definition of the nature of art practices? In *Kant After Duchamp* (1996) Marcel Duchamp scholar Thierry de Duve suggests that we can replace Kant’s eighteenth century questions about the judgment of taste or “what is beauty” with a more modernist question, “What is art?” Paraphrasing Kant’s antinomy in the *Critique of Judgment*, he replaces the word ‘beauty’ with the word ‘art’: “Thesis: Art is not a concept / Antithesis: Art is a concept” (de Duve 304).<sup>40</sup> According to de Duve, the populist dismissal of many modernist works in the nineteenth century (his examples include Courbet, Flaubert, Manet, Baudelaire, Picasso, Stravinsky, Joyce) by gatekeepers of taste such as salon judges or journalists, was to declare of the painting or writing in question that “this is not art” (de Duve,

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40. Kant’s antinomy: “Thesis. The judgment of taste is not based upon concepts; for, if it were, it would be open to dispute (decision by means of proofs). Antithesis. The judgment of taste is based upon concepts; for otherwise, despite diversity of judgment, there could be no room even for contention in the matter (a claim to the necessary agreement of others with this judgment)” (Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* cited in de Duve, 301).

303). This de-naming excludes the work from aesthetic judgment and from a place in the conversation. The criticality of modernist work (Duchamp's readymades are de Duve's key example) is in their ability to sustain this de-naming and fold it back into art as a primary aesthetic condition and meditation on the nature of modernity itself. Duchamp's readymades invert the statement "this is not art" as a radical gesture of "this is art" which initiates that philosophical, linguistic, and political implications of this naming are central to the (philosophical) definition and action of the practice called art.<sup>41</sup> Having established this modernist/postmodernist nominalism (that naming something 'art' is what is at stake) de Duve goes on to describe how the contradiction/antinomy of art is resolved. Firstly, the resolution is not by maintaining 'art as idea' (according to conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth) or 'art as empirical matter' (Clement Greenberg's teleological lineage of painting). Rather, it is by suggesting, following Kant's resolution of the antinomy of taste, that art stands outside of *both* schema and nature as given.<sup>42</sup> Art stands both inside and outside the world of concepts.

I propose that this is analogous to literary critic Ewa Ziarek's description of how modernist women writers generate in their writing what she calls a "singular counterfactual event." Ziarek is informed by Arendt's reading of the *Critique of Judgement* and concept of melancholy. In Ziarek's reading of Arendt, melancholy is a Modernist *échec* (64).<sup>43</sup> It is a private rather than social outcome – a turning and returning of the imagination inwards, away from possibility. Melancholy is *not* coping, in the sense that I describe above. For Arendt, "the melancholic condition [crisis] of modernity reveals the [self] destructive misinterpretation of the multiplicity of political conflicts" (69). According to Theodor Adorno, the work of art may move beyond the melancholic, because art contests subjective originality and imagination where "the violence of the new, for which the name 'experimental' was adopted, is not to be attributed to subjective convictions... when impulse can no longer find pre-established security in forms or content,

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41. This does not mean 'everything is art' or 'everyone is an artist' – for de Duve this is Joseph Beuys' crucially flawed idea.

42. de Duve suggests, "Greenberg has never disavowed his Kantianism, but he never understood Kant either. He was too much of an empiricist to see that art opens up a transcendental field which "we must indeed occupy with Ideas." He was an extremely fine phenomenologist, but for that very reason, his aesthetics is empiriocriticist and not Kantian at all. As far as I know, most critics of Greenberg, from the conceptualists on, have taken his reading of Kant for granted and have rejected the Kantian aesthetics along with its Greenbergian misreading." (de Duve 322).

43. Echoing Kristeva's sense of melancholia as a "symptom of the disturbance of the pre-oedipal, preverbal, violent and precarious process of separation from the maternal body" (Ziarek 64).

productive artists are objectively compelled to experiment” (Ziarek, 46). The radical resource of ‘the experimental’ is categorically outside of the subjective, even if momentarily.

For Hannah Arendt politics rises from the faculty of imagination rather than from will or reason. In a simple sense this is an idea that it must be possible, in day-to-day consciousness, to imagine states other than those that exist in reality, at present. In the more thorough sense of her reading of Kant, imagination occupies a special place quite apart from instrumental projects of politics, but vital to them. This foundational sense of imagination opens up a critical space analogous to the one I am describing as a radical critical horizon realized by practices of art embedded in the designed world. In critical discussions of modernist art practices (such as de Duve’s) this is part of a familiar lineage linking Kantian aesthetics to a politics of art passing through Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*.

As mentioned above, Ewa Ziarek juxtaposes this imaginative play of an aesthetics of potentiality to a more impatient desire to politicize and instrumentalize art, in order to reflect on the abiding tension between the urgency of social struggle and an autonomy of art. In this tension between the instrumental and the aesthetic, art repeats a pattern of risking the loss of its singularity in order to have some specific and temporary instrumental (political) force (Ziarek 4).<sup>44</sup> If we read de Duve in parallel to Ziarek, art also risks its status or naming as art in order to show itself. This is a different risk. In one, art risks its experimental state in order to act effectively in the designed world. In the other, art risks being un-named in order to reveal the deeper organization of meaning that is the designed world. The practices of art discussed here oscillate, sometimes carefully, sometime clumsily, between these two poles.

Why is Arendt, a social and political thinker, deeply concerned with the ethical dimension of the state and of human action and responsibility in society, so interested by the grain of imagination in perception and concept at the threshold of being? For Arendt, imagination is the root of the social and of politics: “freedom appears [in Kant]... as a predicate of the imagination, not of the will, and the imagination is most intimately related to that ‘enlarged mentality’ which

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44. Ewa Ziarek’s cogent use of this model is useful for this study in that it clarifies divergent ideas of difference and change in the space between aesthetic invention and instrumental action. In *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (2012) she makes use of Arendt’s aesthetic formulations in writing on modernist-feminist aesthetic practice in literature (on Virginia Woolf and Nella Larsen). She points to the important role of a singular feminist aesthetics that is not only a critique of historical and institutional conditions but sets up the “daring counterfactual possibility of aesthetic invention” in an “aesthetics of potentiality” which is the invention of new experimental forms reflecting unresolved contradictions (Ziarek 3).

is the political way of thinking” (Arendt, *Thinking* 235). In this sense the expansion of the place of imagination is the forerunner of freedom as a political and social syntax. Likewise a thinking-through of the grounds for imagination, the ground of a construction of a knowing and a nature, of how meaning arises in our material surround, is vital to understanding how being can ‘be’ differently from how it is in the present tense. This ground is analogous to the timespace to which Schatzki refers, above, as the originating conditions of embodied social practices.

In my clumsy use of free jazz as an example of experimental practice related to Arendt’s imagination and in Schatzki’s assertion in the previous section, that there is a spatiality and temporality, a timespace, that is proper to any practice – and that art practices may have a self-reflexive clairvoyance in revealing changes in that timespace – I have opened up some questions about form and its relationship to time and space. Does the designed world have a typical time and space associated to it (that it makes, or that makes it)? Flusser told us (in the Introduction) that form is the opposite of matter. How do forms, like designed things, paintings, or songs, which hold this multiple capacity to be both experientially (materially), and conceptually present to us (the terms of Arendt’s imagination), sustain such a load. The apprenticeship of form-making is at the heart of art and design education. Is form subject to failure, like Arendt’s disappearing table as common ground? Art historian David Summers explores the form of the artifact, the idea of ‘format’ as culturally typical forms (like a canvas or a cantata), and discusses the role of artifacts in both real and virtual spaces, echoing the intuitive/conceptual play of the imagination, permitting an idea of failure, or discontinuity which seems contrary to the continuity and self-sufficiency of the designed world.

**4. The Spatial Arts: David Summers.** The proposition that visual art should more properly be named ‘spatial art’ as a range of spatial practices is thoroughly explored by David Summers in *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003). I align this conjecture to Jane Rendell’s definition of a ‘critical spatial practice’ (in Chapter 1, above) and will also discuss it in connection to Hito Steyerl’s ‘junkspace’ (in Chapter 3, below). The driver for Summers’ renaming is that in the study of the visual arts we are preoccupied by visibility or ‘virtual space’ – not by the place of seeing and the other senses in being, but by what something is a representation *of*, in a planar dimensionality (a surface) as the basis for a symbolic system of representation. To confine the study of artifacts or the dynamic of art practice to the visual and

the virtual is to attend to only a tiny fragment of the performance of made things. Summers juxtaposes a concept of ‘real spaces’ to that of ‘virtual space’ as a way of considering a more primordial relationship of real space to pictorial imagination in the mind, and of virtual representation on surfaces (paintings, drawings, walls, projection screens, computer monitors, etc.). He suggests rejecting the term ‘visual arts’ wholesale in favour of ‘spatial arts’ in order to get at the vast part of the nature of art and artifact that is not exclusively representational (and to update the dossier, in advance of discussing Hito Steyerl’s exploration of the ‘digital virtual,’ not exclusively informational or data-driven either): “real space is the space we find ourselves sharing with other people and things; virtual space is the space represented on a surface, space we ‘seem to see’” (Summers 38).

Summers allows, even celebrates, that within any virtual representation other spatialities can be manifest, including real spaces. There can be spatial investigations and places nested within or across the representational or planar (here he uses the example of a small landscape drawing by Rembrandt which is both a representation of a countryside and a gathering of human gesture as marks on a hand-held piece of paper in real space). A spatial art or practice engages real spaces as contributing to a shaping of time in those real (lived, contextualized) spaces asking, “how are the shapes of time to be related to iconographic tradition” (Summers 16)?<sup>45</sup> For Summers, real spaces and their associated temporalities are always plural. There is no one real space. To study any historical artifact is to attempt to understand not what it means in *our* temporal and spatial reality but, in Summer’s term, the “real spaces” which they make and the shaping of time implicit to those spaces. For us, in our space and time:

The certainties arising from our having walked (and not just talked) among things and people, of having moved ourselves and things, of finding ourselves to have such-and-such capacities in relation to people and things, to be like and unlike them, all these experiential certainties and more, although ‘thoughtless’ in the normal conduct of our affairs, are the foundation for the more basic meanings we

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45. Summers draws this formulation from George Kubler’s *Shape of Time* (1962) saying that there is no one development or chronology in which all art belongs but we have ‘shapes of time’ constituted in each case by local interactions (16). This, in 1962, was, in part, a reaction to Panofsky’s method of iconography described in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955). Summers asks, questioning the continuities of meaning proposed by iconography “how are the shapes of time to be related to iconographic traditions?” (Summers 16).

give to space (and inseparable time). (Summers 38)

Though Summers is not an explicit reference for Jane Rendell (as far as I know) there is a useful conceptual parallel here which helps deepen an understanding of what she calls ‘critical spatial practice’ in the previous chapter. This same useful parallel will come up (below) in the discussion of Hito Steyerl’s essay “In Free Fall – A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective” which is an updated riffing on Erwin Panofsky’s 1927 essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form* for the digital era. Summer’s planar, or virtual, space as the space of human representation includes Renaissance perspective but is not limited to a binary juxtaposition of Western Cartesian space to some ‘other’ space (as Panofsky contends), but rather is virtual space linked to an infinite set of possible (real and virtual) spaces and temporalities that artifacts draw up around themselves. Things that are made (artifacts for Summers, designed form for Flusser) contribute to the making of their own proper time and space.

A key point in the next few pages, that carries back to my reading of Deutsche and Rendell, is that if art practice deconstructs ‘regimes of visibility’ (to paraphrase Martin Jay),<sup>46</sup> it can also go beyond a rational replacing of one hegemonic scopic regime with another, possibly more egalitarian one (certainly a good thing). Many art practices and critical practices do this primary work of exposing our representational/conceptual systems very thoroughly. Some *also* look beyond this socially constructed visibility (the meaning that Panofsky would parse through iconology and that critical theory would analyse in terms of social power) to a more fundamental set of conditions where meaning arises. I would say that art practices that do the former are analytically finite and art practices that do both this primary work *and* a more primordial conjecture are practices which unfold continuously, rejigging time, space and meaning as they go. It should be clear by now that the latter are the practices that I find compelling, and which seem to me to have the greatest role to play in coping with the designed world. One articulation of this difference is clarified in Arendt’s discussion of Kant’s aesthetics, summarized above. Arendt’s Kantian imagination is the precursor to her ethics and politics – it is its ‘necessary condition.’ To have a politics, one has to understand the turn of imagination around meaning. Summers’ imagination as having plural real spatialities and temporalities in relation to the virtual

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46. See Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” (2013).

seems informed by a similar interpretation.

To return for a moment to the place and time of the merging of avant-garde art and design as related practices, at the Bauhaus in Weimar Germany we can see this juxtaposition in the unfolding of contemporaneous philosophical discussions in nearby Hamburg. There is a significant and important contrast between Arendt's reading of Kant and that of early twentieth-century neo-Kantians like Ernst Cassirer (the "last philosopher of culture"<sup>47</sup>), who was so influential for Erwin Panofsky and Aby Warburg, on iconography and the field of art history in general. Cassirer, Panofsky and Warburg worked together at the Warburg Library for Cultural Science, based in Hamburg until 1933. They were far more interested in the cultural layering of human meaning-making (especially in its residual material artifacts) as being the primary building blocks of culture (as an assumed universality with a sub-category of specificity). Their neo-Kantianism is a thinking about significance already formed, as a symbolic hierarchy of meaning, in language and in culture (in an assumed universal space/time updating Kant's Newtonian model with the mathematics of relativity). For art history, this shakes down as iconography, a method for reading meaning as symbolic form in artworks, which is one foundation of art-historical method in the twentieth century. Iconography, as a reading and classification of already formed meaning is a neo-Kantian project.

David Summers is fundamentally at odds with the iconographers, and is preoccupied explicitly by the non-universality of any artifact, that is, the specificity of time and space in real spaces and the evolving specificity of what he calls the singular "formats" of artworks (a format is an altarpiece, a canvas, a drawing – the culturally specific staging of meaning in things) (18). Art theory in the twentieth century grapples with the implications of this contrast between primary and primordial, the epistemic and the epistemological and the elusive possibility (or conflict) of attempting to perform both investigations in the same practice.<sup>48</sup> What I describe as a

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47. From the title of Ernst Skidelski's biography of Cassirer, *Ernst Cassirer: The Last Philosopher of Culture* (2008).

48. On a quite different theoretical register, Bruno Latour's actor network theory seems to proceed from a somewhat similar objection in relationship to the social sciences as an already constructed meaning, a set of *post facto* human reasons for how things are that are misunderstood as sources in a teleology. In "Why has Critique Run out of Steam" he suggests that the sociological analysis of critical theory needs to give way to a more primal tracing of the patterns, networks and relations of things and events. This stance attempts to undo the mistakes he identifies as arising in interpretations of Kant's transcendental idealism and concretizing in twentieth-century social theory. Of course, Latour's objection has different and complex contemporary implications relative to, for example, Rendell and Deutsche but, for the purposes of thinking through the art and design practices in this project, it does help identify a common dissatisfaction with sociology perceived as the ground of cultural critique, and culture perceived as an organization of symbolic information. Theodor Schatzki's practice theory, outlined above, attempts to



divide between a critique of socially constructed visibility, versus a concern with a more fundamental set of conditions where meaning arises in art practices, is in some ways an example of this divide sparked by Cassirer's neo-Kantianism.

Form, format and the virtual become key terms for Summers in a critique of form and pictorial imagination: "works of art, especially those preselected as aesthetically interesting by display in museums, may provide unique and interesting experiences ... [but] it does not follow ... that there must be a symmetry between our feelings in the face of a work of art and the significance it might have had for its makers and users" (33).<sup>49</sup> "The idea of form," as a systematic and universalizing categorization, Summers says, "arose together with Western modernism... [and] has proved to be an unreliable means of engaging the art of cultures outside the European tradition and tributaries" (28). However, thinking about format rather than form, lets us step back to witness how time and space envelop an artifact. Formats are culturally specific. A canvas is a wooden frame stretched with linen fabric. On one side is an image, a spatial representation painted with oil paint. But what is the meaning of this thing?

As obvious as this seems, such a specific format, as both a thing and a carrier of representation, is "more or less precisely locatable, culturally and historically, and define(s) the equally specific and literal context within which other culturally specific changes occur" (28). The format also determines the relationship between the real space of this material object, the virtual space of representation and the sense of temporality it builds. This relationship of real to virtual space is a specific, spatiality and temporality (and also implicated in embodied practices, as Schatzki tells us). Thinking through such a nexus of relationships, as a culturally specific phenomenon, can help think about this century's virtual spaces in the format of the pixel-based screen, which not only contains visual representations of real spaces (through images) but also represents the processing of information as data as if in real time. To investigate this sense of the

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reconcile this gap between the network of material forces at play in a practice and the human temporality or spatiality in which they are intertwined.

49. Summers' aim in the introduction to *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003) is to sort out the relationship of form, representation, and imagination (as pictorial imagination) in Western art history as a Eurocentric dilution of Kantian aesthetics, a universalizing formalism essentially isolating artifacts from practices, temporalities, and spatialities. He says that such pictorial imagination, "contributed to the idea of a uniquely 'visual language,' to be discerned (and taught) through the formal analysis of works of art of quality, and applied (and taught) through principles of design," all of which can easily "provide an essentialist basis for nationalism and racism" (Summers 34). This leads to a rejection of formalist art history in favour of a contextualist art history. Rather than parsing through this history of art historical aesthetics (which is far from the point of this project) my goal here is simply to hijack the concepts of format and virtual/real spaces as descriptors of a kind of meta-investigation through experimental practices in the designed world.

virtual is an extension of what Summers calls a “depictorialization of imagination” (30).

Formats are a key materiality and embodiment of the doings and sayings of a world. Inventing and adjusting new forms of visual representation and information-management (or idea-management) is the primary manner of creation in the designed world. Examining how the formats of the designed world manifest themselves, or come into being, extends the idea of clairvoyant practices of coping in that world. We will see this in Steyerl’s search for gaps in the surface of represented data and in Gates’ re-building of material formats. What is an example of an art that is in a state of constant embodied experiment with its own format? Alva Noë proposes that contemporary choreography is such an exemplary practice.

**6. The Importance of Choreography: Alva Noë’s *Strange Tools*.** We have seen what critical theory has had to say about the practice of art as radical social experiment. We have seen what practice theory has had to say about the practice of art as clairvoyant. What Schatzki calls change is intimate to Arendt’s imagination, which occupies a special place quite apart from instrumental projects of politics, but vital to them. Through Summers’ un-forming of the artifact, we see extension of art’s clairvoyant coping to include the singularity of format, real/virtual spaces and temporality. What are explicit cases of art practice, beyond Schatzki’s general examples of music and ceramics, in which such a broadened clairvoyance is more self-conscious?

Philosopher Alva Noë defines art by suggesting that lives are “structured by organization” and that “art is a practice for bringing our organization into view; in doing this, art reorganizes us” (Noë 29). This practice is analogous to Summers’ unfolding of format. Choreography may be one example that shows clearly the vocation of an artistic practice to the unfolding or revealing of temporal and spatial conditions of the real. Noë’s description of the organizational looping of meaning as embodied know-how in dance practice, draws on traditional phenomenology as well as neuroscience (29).<sup>50</sup> He is inspired to consider art as much by his profession as a scholar of philosophy as by growing up in an artistic family in the company of the ‘doings and sayings’ surrounding the practice of art at the heart of the American neo-avant-garde in 1960s Greenwich Village, New York (his father was a student of sculptor Tony Smith and took the famous night-

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50. Alva Noë is a philosopher who studies neuroscience and perception who, like Theodore Schatzki was a student of Hubert Dreyfus, an American Heidegger and phenomenology scholar, popularly know for his critical take on AI in *What Computers Can't Do* (1972).

time car ride along an unopened, unlit and unmarked freeway that became a pivotal image in Michael Fried's famous text on experiential minimalism "Art and Objecthood," 1967).<sup>51</sup> *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (2015) was written explicitly as a meditation on choreography in conversation with contemporary choreographer William Forsythe and members of the Forsythe Company, and other dancers and dance-thinkers including Judson Dance Theater founding member, Deborah Hay (Noë, 208). So while it attempts to say something about art practice in general (with a biographically inevitable slant towards the visual art of the American neo-avant-garde) its particular and practical focus is dance as an embodied practice of art. He suggests three ideas: that art is not a technological practice but rather a practice that tries to understand how our technologies organize us; that art is philosophical in the sense of trying to understand the nature of such organization; and that art and philosophy are practices "bent on the invention of writing" (xiii).

For Noë, dance is grounded in biological and neurological phenomena and choreography's vocation is to understand how we are organized by movement. This understanding takes place, or is revealed, in the formal investigation of choreography (15). Movement such as dance is natural rather than cultural. If, in a biological sense, any living organism is organized around self-maintenance from a cellular level – living processes are in movement towards their own self-organization and in doing and examining that movement-organization "choreography makes manifest something about ourselves that is hidden from view because it is the spontaneous structure of our engaged activity" (16). Our cells obey somewhat less the laws described by physics and somewhat more the sense of life. Choreography is a kind of inquiry analogous to philosophy's preoccupation with how concepts organize us, where choreography is preoccupied with how we are organized by movement (17). By extension a primary vocation of art practices in general is to "expose the concealed way we are organized by the things we do," including those things over which we cannot claim authorship (18).

"Technologies carry a deep cognitive load" and are themselves evolving patterns of our organization (25). Our thinking and being is dispersed into the organizational patterns of

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51. Fried's text critiqued the idea of 'experiential' in minimalism (and in Smith's transformative car ride) as a theatricality ignoring the framed-ness of art. Says Noë of Fried's essay: "To reject pictoriality – or articulateness, or meaning – is, Fried thinks, to give up on art itself. In this book I have sought to frame a conception of art that vindicates Smith's discovery but without repudiating Fried's conviction that art happens in the domain of the meaningful" (Noë 262).

technology (including language) as much as it is drawn out of the motive qualities of our cells as an accumulation of movement. We live in massively complex patterns of organization (28). Art and its various practices of making have a special place in the spectrum of our thinking and are “not just more organization” (28). Art practices are “investigations of the way our lives are organized by the technologies of picture-making, and the other relevant technologies of manufacture” (28). For Noë, this practice fulfills a vital need. It is not an external analytic or abstract examination of organization, it takes place within an activity, embedded in it, and the need has something to do with making sense of where we are, in an existential sense (31). Art loops down from the level of more practical actions. It disables tools in order to make strange tools that allow us to recognize the patterns in our own making and moving (30). Writing is an example of such ‘looping’ when it allows us to examine speech – to represent language to ourselves, to play with the norms of language, serving “to change and reorganize the way we speak in the first place” (32). So art plays with the ideas of habit and know-how (that is, culture, and in the critical concoction of this thesis, the designed world), taking habitual patterns (whether patterns of the body, the hand or of society) and making them strange. The choreographer’s relation to movement and dance replicates such a looping-down infiltrating the level of pure know-how or habit to make organization apparent such that it can be bent into new forms, or simply such that it intensifies or enlivens the experience of the taught surface that we suppose we move upon, or the room that we suppose we move through.

We understand that the movement of living bodies comes from and carries through the supposed boundary between body and nature. The articulation of this is the performance part of dance (and one preoccupation of the scholarly field of Performance Studies). In this sense, when the language convention that uses the word ‘embodied’ comes into play (as with Schatzki’s idea of embodied practices), curiously, perhaps the word ‘de-bodied’ can help us deepen what this really means, or what meaning lies across this articulation of body and space.

This is easiest understood by looking at two artworks, representations of actual choreographies, that takes technology and the moving body into their range: Babette Mangolte and Trisha Brown’s *Watermotor*; and Steve McQueen’s *Catch* (figs. 9. & 10.). In 1978 filmmaker Babette Mangolte filmed choreographer Trisha Brown’s solo dance piece

*Watermotor*.<sup>52</sup> *Watermotor*, the film, situates both a tuning-towards and tuning-away from the Euclidean space of photography projected outwards into the image by the spatial technology of the camera (literally, the little room). Mangolte's film is an example of a now quite typical type of art-performance documentation, but it is also a performance in itself, one in which this Euclidean 'camera-room' is in rich reciprocal or, to use Noë's term, looping, play with the movement of the body.

### **7. Jumping Through the Floor: Unboxing Trisha Brown's *Watermotor* in Camera.**

*Watermotor* consists of two black-and-white takes of a solo choreography, one in a normal time signature and one filmed in slow motion (fig. 14, also video link). The full-speed take is about two and a half minutes in duration and the slow motion one twice that. Each fades in from black onto a stationary performer (Brown) who is still for a few seconds, then suddenly in motion. The piece is filmed in a studio with a dark curtained backdrop and even lighting. No side-walls are evident. The camera pans (pivots) to follow the movement allowing Brown to lead away from image-centre before the camera frame gently catches up with her lateral motion. The overall sensation that one has is that the camera is not interfering, that its movements are gentle enough that one might not notice them and focus solely on the dancer in motion. Likewise the even light and the uniform dark backdrop and dance floor all contribute to a sense of neutrality where the intention seems to be that we focus on this body in movement as if the space around was a kind of plastic infinity. By and large this is what happens.

If I choose to see it, Brown's dance is here for me in its sheer velocity, a travelling body, a long-limbed climber of space and time, as the dancer traverses back-and-forth in this un-gridded space. Without any landmarks it is difficult to sense the distance travelled. It could be vast, especially in the version of the film that is now in my memory. The artifice of the filmmaker, then, manifests in her desire to film a space, a place, activated solely by the dance. We are to be with the dancer as she shapes a place extending from within her body to the outside. This shaping of an ever-changing space/body/time boundary is the threshold performed in this dance.

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52. Babette Mangolte film of Trisha Brown's solo dance piece *Watermotor*; see: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FALHd5Viz4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FALHd5Viz4). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.



Fig. 14. Babette Mangolte. *Trisha Brown: Watermotor*, 1978 (Babette Mangolte/Centre Pompidou)

Link to video of film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FALHd5Viz4>

Side by side retiming of the full speed and slow-motion takes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Cz6Lx8ASnc>

But there is another space at play here. The first time I viewed this film what I saw, or felt I saw, was a woman dancing in a box. She is framed, as the video projection was, on the vertical screen in front of me. It is as if the box of the camera, now the projector, has systematically layered out the coordinates of its space into my world. The front of the box is the picture plane. The back is the studio backdrop. More specifically, I saw Brown moving over the smooth impenetrable, apparently permanent, surface of the floor. She is bouncing on it, agitating with, from and against this surface that will never give way (we are quite sure). This room, this space, in its permanence, emanates from the camera. It is a projection through the aperture of the apparatus of the room or the box-shaped interior of the camera, out into the world we see. The two-dimensional *image* captured by a camera is a reduction of this three-dimensional boxed world of light as a flat image of Euclidean coordinates, optical perspective and so on. The *space*, however, is real in the sense that architectural space, a room with four walls, a ceiling and a floor is real. The light inside the 'room' of the camera is the same light as on the other side of the lens on the

stage. It is real optical space, measurable and finite. The black box of the theatre stage is also an optical apparatus just like the camera. A theatre is a room constructed to house the imagination of the infinite and to engage memory within architectural space. From our forward-facing seats we stare into its illusion of abyss while the true abyss is *behind* us, beyond the back wall that is, as in a dream of absence, simply missing.

So here I am sketching something about my fascination with the dancer bouncing on the taut surface of the floor in *Watermotor*. We are like children bouncing on the bed, assured that down always lands and that up never escapes entirely. Is the dance a reflection of child's play itself. The exuberance, outstretched arms, bouncing, jumping, the going around in a circle – all of these 'dance moves' are, literally, the gestures children make as they test their physical limits and possibilities. Is this presence (which could be called architectural space) and this absence (which could be called processional or performance space) more evident because we are looking at an image mediated through the camera? Probably the camera, with its single point of view, amplifies and simplifies the architectural space as visual information, but both kinds of space are still there when we sit in the theatre for a live performance. This style of experiment via the camera (Brown/Mangolte's bouncing) may cause this disjuncture as interval to be more evident, in its simultaneous complicity and resistance to representation in the unique space of performance. The membrane/floor upon which Trisha Brown performs is integral to this unique unfolding of the performance of space.

This performance of/for camera shows the collision and intermingling of this originary space with the descriptive or rational space that follows on to map it and coordinate it, to organize it, as Noë would say. If we look at *Watermotor* we can see a gap made evident as a kind of absence between the space or architecture of the camera and the space drawn up around the body in performance (its own space and time). In some ways the film, while depleting the live-ness or the immediacy of the performance allows for the collision of these two spaces in a productive revealing – a revealing of the organization in which we are complicit. On screen we have the unique opportunity to see the fragile trace of gesture in interaction with the multiplicity of spaces it begins to inhabit even as it simultaneously begins to fade. The specific fragility of the trace of gesture in space is in part what is amplified on film or video, where it must live nested with the objective or rational space of the camera. It seems possible for this originating gesture to simply disappear, engulfed in the architectural self-amplification of the camera with its obsession with

the visual. In the face of this disappearance or absence, this work stages different agitations.

*Watermotor*, the film, asks the surround to disappear so that we can see *Watermotor*, the dance, and in ironic consequence amplifies the technological projection of the camera's Cartesian planes. This makes Mangolte's film into a 'strange tool' in which two time-spaces are brought into revealing collision – the embodied space of the dancer and the technological organization and representation of the camera. That the collision is not smoothed over or made invisible to make a 'proper' documentary is what makes *Watermotor*, the film, an extraordinary document of its own practice while simultaneously revealing the equally extraordinary practice of the dancer. Together Mangolte and Brown constitute a practice of choreography, as Noë describes it. By dealing (intuitively) with the format of the cinema camera as the porter of virtual space, while at the same time attempting to access the real embodied space generated in the dance, this short film accomplishes in the simplest way what it has taken pages to point to, above.

**8. Steve McQueen: *Catch*.** It does seem, though, that there can be a risk of falling completely into a seamless format of representation drawn from commercial cinema's sleight of hand in creating an 'authentic' representation of space as a receptacle for conventional narrative structures. Here the evolution of the work of Steve McQueen comes to mind. Writing in the Guardian newspaper on McQueen's film *12 Years a Slave*, art critic Jonathan Jones suggests that the film is proof of video art's cultural irrelevance: "it turns out that video art is just a training ground that can prepare you to make proper films" (Jones). No doubt McQueen's films are great examples of contemporary filmmaking, but the question may not be one of an evolution from art to cinema but in the evolution of both toward a mainstream notion of representation composed uniquely of information (where information cannot accommodate absence).

In an article exploring McQueen's 2002 work *Western Deep* as art video in relation to mainstream documentary form, T. J. Demos suggests that work such as McQueen's is "developing a new model of documentary form ... that unleashes an uncertain relation to time, uproots any secure material site, and opens onto a multiplicity of meanings" (Demos 65). McQueen works on "both sides of the projected image," the work concerning itself "with that liminal area between the two spaces, virtual and actual, and draws on the power of the interval between them for critical purposes ... resisting the audiences' passive immersion into new forms of technology" (66).



Demos charts the origin of this strategy back to experimental art video of the 1970s (Dan Graham is the example he uses) that explore the limits of what the camera can index. He describes an early video by McQueen called *Catch* (1997, fig. 15) as recalling this kind of experimental exploration but, importantly, as also marking (as absence) “what cannot be shown” (67).



Fig. 15. Steve McQueen. *Catch*, 1997. 3 stills from film/installation, original in colour (Thomas Dane Gallery)

In *Catch* McQueen implicates the camera in a performance. A rolling camera, capturing images, is tossed between two people. At the moment it is caught the holder momentarily points

the camera at the other, before returning the toss in a rhythmic alternation of representation and failure. In this game we are throwing that little room, the camera, around. The room as Euclidean space projected through the camera lens can form only momentarily when the camera is stationary and pointed properly. The rest of the time we are caught in the failure or experiment of the camera propelled through time, striving to catch up to its own mode of representing space. In *Catch* the dance is one that implicates both the human body and the heft of the camera. The room itself is ‘tossed.’ In this vertiginous sea the players achieve stability in fits. In documentation of early dance and performance the camera is not often drawn into the game, but sits immobile, or gently panning (as if not to intrude), staring at the performed action. But the stability of the ‘room,’ as multiple representations of space and time, is no less at stake. It is activated by the performance itself. What space is represented in the resulting video?

*Catch*, like *Watermotor* confounds the format. It catches it at the limits of what it can do, thus revealing those limits. It too is a choreography in Noë’s terms, but one more explicitly tuned to cinematic space, bringing our organization into view, and changing our organization in the process. It is also a metaphorical commentary on how much we strive to stay ‘in the picture’ and in tune with the norms of representation. In this most clumsy way it is evidence of a clairvoyant practice. Returning to Vito Acconci’s quip that the job of public art is to de-design we see in these two choreographic works the potential complexity of this gesture of engagement. Far from being gestures that simply undermine or subvert a particular format (a slapstick pulling of the rug) there is in these practices an embrace of absence or what is excluded from the frame (or the format), allowing for a discontinuity which seems contrary to the continuity and self-sufficiency of the designed world, an ontological opening that art allows through imagination.

**9. Coda: Describing Practice.** What follows (in Chapter 4) are examples of art practice operating in the space of design that set the stage to use the naming ‘art’ as a special category of practice or practices which has the specific vocation to break ontological ground. The preceding is an outline of a few theoretical models and vocabularies, both suitable and inadequate, to describing those practices. As we have seen, what Schatzki calls the ‘doings and sayings’ of a practice include its evolving social codes and goals, human gestures, speech and embodied know-how, and the drawing together of the forces of a range of non-human material and arrangements. These are made things and environments or materiality, in the broadest sense of a

rudimentary bifurcation between the stuff of the designed world and the matter of the natural worlds. In my own experience, one of the conundrums of socially or politically active art practices is that they are often not particularly radical as art, specifically in experimenting with the ideas represented by the terms developed in this chapter. In my sharpest sorting, they are not art at its most experimental but design at its most instrumental. They borrow or receive aesthetic and communication conventions and tricks from art and design as much as they borrow social and political models and strategies from the social sciences.

If we are to understand how art practice can stand in a radically contingent relationship to the ‘designed world’ we need to understand how art plays at the ontological boundaries of meaningfulness. This is where Arendt’s situation of imagination comes in handy, alongside the conceptual articulations of practice borrowed from Noë, Summers, Ziarek, and Schatzki. Acconci, Duchamp, Mangolte, Brown and McQueen hint at the range of manifestations of practice that feed such descriptions by playing, implicitly or explicitly, with boundaries and formats of meaningfulness. Dot-com capitalist tropes like creative economy, innovation, or ‘the creative’ as a professional persona, have, at best, only a metaphorical relationship to such practices. At worst, of course, they are a branding seeking authenticity. Examples where aesthetic experiment is embedded in practices or ‘doings and sayings’ which make it indispensable to new social configurations, however short-lived they might be – or temporally longitudinal (a conversation with the past or the future, as Schatzki suggests any practice might be, not just the hyper-present tense of social practice art). These serve as models for the critical place of art practice in relation to the designed world and also within the study and radical practice of design itself.

The multiple registers and temporalities in which a practice takes its place, if we follow Schatzki’s practice theory model, suggest a contingent coming together of material conditions and human embodiments. What are the ontological boundaries of meaning that some experimental art practices touch upon? Are they a necessary condition to a common definition of art? Does radical experimentation *necessarily* engender shifts in other registers, that we call the political or the social? Both these ideas seem unlikely and utopian. The majority of objects or events made for the purpose of participating in the art-world do not delve under the communicative surface of meaningfulness. But some extraordinary work does. Much of this extraordinary work does not deliberately or accidentally shift a collective social or political

register. But some does (and, again, perhaps not always in a synchronous timeframe). When this happens the potential is not merely for a practice that is ‘innovative’ in a commonplace sense but one that can suggest new ways of being in the world. Such practices implicitly challenge institutionally flattened notions of creativity where art is isolated as an educational instrument, outcome-generator of social policy, or funding gambit. To point to some practices that do succeed in this temporally contingent radicalness is to suggest that, even if they are often obscured by instrumental institutional framings, such practices are still possible and desirable – even essential.

Vito Acconci’s term ‘de-design’ and Alva Noë’s description of art as a ‘strange tool,’ give us a first clue to this naming of viable clairvoyant practices in the designed world. Literary theorist Ewa Ziarek’s ‘aesthetics of potentiality’ in relation to avant-garde writing gives us an example of a critique of the historical and institutional conditions of women’s literary production as the imagination of a new and distinct feminist aesthetics as ‘counter-factual invention’ (Ziarek 3). Bernard Stiegler’s notion of ‘the amateur’ (discussed in the next chapter) gives a specific formulation of political/creative identifier for differentiating, or at least naming, nascent radical practices not presently identifiable or validated as art practice in the context of a creative economy. The following chapter attempts to outline some conditions of the designed world as a particular contemporary condition through explicit shifts in the idea and field of design (for example, from design as choreography of form to design as choreography of information) and the invention of the creative economy, which attaches the words ‘design’ and ‘world’ together.

*Utopian design visions have often addressed social problems by attempting to solve them. Modernism had it that new designs and spaces could determine new forms of social relation. Architecture, as Le Corbusier was keen to point out, was the alternative to social revolution.*

Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture, A Place Between* (61)

*I saw the future. It was empty. A clean slate, flat, designed through and through.*

Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (9)

### **Chapter 3: What is a Designed World?**

In Chapter 1 I contend that the term ‘designed world’ might enclose the idea of public space as used by Rosalyn Deutsche, in the context of late twentieth-century critical art practices, and Jane Rendell, in the context of an interdisciplinary approach to the built environment. If Deutsche, already in the 1980s, was contesting an idea of public space as a physical location – even a physical location with ideological character – in favour of an understanding of a conceptual space structured by articulations of power whose deep armature could be deconstructed or revealed through artistic gestures and practices, then why do we need a nesting of this idea of public space within another concept, ‘designed world?’ Maybe in the encounter with design itself (with architectural space as an example) we can see how much a flow of power works its way back through practices of making and building to structure the world we live in, such that a greater understanding of this culture of design might be helpful. A concept of a designed world can help us escape what may be the red herrings of public art and public space that become so problematically mixed up with “democratic connotations” of “openness,” “accessibility,” “participation,” and “inclusion” in institutional mission statements and calls to publicness, as Deutsche bleakly but accurately points out in 1992 in the citation that opens Chapter 1.<sup>53</sup> Is it

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53. This is now, sadly, part of an absolute conflation of critical ideas of ‘public space’ with an epidemic of ‘public inclusion’ in art institutions, using interpretive guidance statistics to quantify the relevance of the institution for funding purposes. You can’t walk into an artist-run centre in Canada without someone approaching you to assist in your ‘user experience,’ recruiting you into a new and completely institutional idea of public, which has nothing to do with Deutsche’s or Rendell’s spatial criticality, except

possible to release the resistant power of art practices within a broader context of the designed world, or in the field of design itself? The question is, how? One could (without irony) replace the words ‘public art’ (in this citation of Deutsche) with the word ‘design.’ If we then suppose that ‘public space’ is circumscribed by a ‘designed world’ (that designed world is the condition or surround of publicness), then public space, with its troubled ‘*demos*’ and notions of ‘inclusion,’ can be visualized as including back rooms and exclusions, data bases and algorithms, and more.

**1. The Choreographers of Form.** Jane Rendell’s read of Le Corbusier, at the beginning of this chapter, suggests a kind of utopian futurism as a *making-real-by-making* of new futures conjectured in thought, imagination, and building, which is superseded for Rendell by critical spatial practices. Rendell’s is only a very cursory reference to Le Corbusier in context, but it is worth teasing out. There is certainly a deep (and masculinist) trope of creativity that underlies much postwar avant-gardism. It says, given a blank page, a new world can be created to solve the problems we either perceive or project. Such a utopia is built on a *tabula rasa* generated by the clean-sweep of destruction – metaphorical, spiritual, or by war, if need be. Le Corbusier was certainly a master draftsman and *neo-plasticien*, a kind of romantic modernist whose most immobile position (the one never subject to the avant-guardist clean sweep) is this image of the artist-hero itself. Le Corbusier could serve as the model for the humanist utopian artist-designer – the problem-solving ‘great man.’<sup>54</sup> To this modernist utopia Rendell juxtaposes artists intervening in architectural space who expose this problematic position of the problem-solver as voyeur, that “it is in this sense that art can offer architecture and design a chance to think critically about their recent history and present aspirations” (Rendell, *Architecture* 61).

In the introductory citation could we substitute “designed world” for “architecture,” where a designed world has become the alternative to revolution? To extend from a twentieth century

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that it has stolen its terminology. This is a flow to which high-art practices are not at all immune – art careers seem like design practices with artist responding in a managerial or problem-solving fashion to institutional agendas, calls for proposals and funding initiatives. In this sense contemporary art practice has become a practice of design and the degree to which the artist understands this contradiction is the degree to which the working of the art work remains something other, as a reflection on this dilemma.

54. In the Le Corbusier designed Government Museum of Art at Chandigarh, India framed black and white photos of the other great men of the 1950’s line the walls of the library - the trope of the great problem-solver becomes both frame and content and conditions the idea of progress in postwar design-modernity (Fig. 16).

notion of a social or political revolution, could we not also imagine another upheaval, a collapse of the natural environment that the designed world must muffle within its discourses of problem solving? Here, the idea of social revolution (or environmental collapse) is enfolded within the shape of ‘designed world’ as a component of a whole to which solutions must be applied. As the romantic-modernist artist-designer (in the persona of Le Corbusier) deferred social revolution to bask in a personal revolution of the *tabula rasa* as a genius problem-solver, might we not notice the hint of an analogous problematic or pit-fall: that design as a contemporary institutional mode has a similar relationship to the impending ‘revolution’ of environmental collapse. We are in a mode of repair in which we must ‘innovate’ to survive (and who is the ‘we,’ in terms of institutions)?



Fig. 16. Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Manmohan Nath Sharma, and Shiv Dutt Sharma (architects). *Government Museum and Art Gallery*, Chandigarh, India, 1967. Library interior. (A. Forster)

Le Corbusier’s very real historical empathy with a technophilic Futurism is attenuated in his later, more humble projects for habitations but he remains, to amplify Rendell’s suggestion, a useful emblem of the avant-guardist hero-architect, an emblem which achieves accelerated neo-

futurist dimensions in the era of the pixel-based iconography and algorithmic surveillance of our visual surround, twitter-populism, and the drone. The branding of the persona of the artist-hero can probably be dispensed with, as the effect is now internalized in our systems as the radical sameness of an ethos of disruptive innovation, where Le Corbusier has become Steve Jobs.

**2. The Artificial.** Post World War II America offered a contrasting concept to the humanist, architecture-dominated idea of a heroic design as a sophisticated choreography of form, proposing, in its place, a mode of design one could call a choreography of information. In Europe, if we can take the Bauhaus and the Vitebsk art schools as emblematic of the choreography of form in the evolution of the amalgamation of art and design as architecture, then the Bauhaus' postwar offspring, the Ulm School of Design (*Ulm Hochschule Für Gestaltung*, Ulm, Germany, 1953–1968) with its emphasis on semiotics and design theory, is emblematic of the friction between form and information, and conflicted relation between design and postwar consumerism.<sup>55</sup> Much postwar design in America is a likewise a strange creature influenced by both the choreography of form and the choreography of information (in the context of a previously unimaginable corporate and consumer prosperity). In Herbert A. Simon's *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969) the American pioneer of artificial intelligence suggests, "everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon 111). In the field of design studies in higher education, Simon's *The Sciences of the Artificial*, and this statement in particular have become a touch-point in defining design and in outlining an evolving discourse, not of how to do design but how to understand what design means. D. J. Huppertz, writing retrospectively on Simon's science of design, poses a bluntly socio-political query in reference to this definition of design: "who determines the 'courses of action' and whose 'preferred situations' are we to design?" (Huppertz 40). The unfolding of this question can be seen as one of the key preoccupations of design studies (and the key ethical question of any client-designer relationship).

Herbert Simon studied political science at the University of Chicago in the 1930s in a department "founded on the idea that scientific method could solve problems of social research"

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55. See: Paul Betts, "Science, Semiotics, and Society: The Ulm Hochschule Für Gestaltung in Retrospect." In *The Designed World: Images, Objects, Environments* (2010).



(40).<sup>56</sup> He went on to apply such mathematical quantitative procedures to the interdisciplinary study and development of information collection and decision making processes in management and administration, which were ultimately applied to computing and “simulations of cognitive processes” (Simon 109). He was associated with the group around Marvin Minsky at Dartmouth College in the 1950s, who coined the term ‘artificial intelligence’ (hence the ‘artificial’ of the title *The Sciences of the Artificial*),<sup>57</sup> and he later worked with computational mathematician John von Neumann (known for his earlier coordinating roles at the Institute for Advanced Study and the Manhattan Project) and others at the RAND Corporation on research with both corporate and military applications. This pedigree tells us that this particular definition of design as a problem solving process grounded in engineering, the analysis of pattern-formation in statistics, aligning innovation to administrative outcomes and a socially normative idea of progress, has a rich and problematic history in postwar American intellectual, scientific and corporate culture. It is an image of design as rational problem solving quite separate from the image of the designer as humanist architect or choreographer of form, as I put it, exemplified by Le Corbusier or the Bauhaus model of the culturally sophisticated artist-designer. These two ‘personas’ of the designer intertwine in design education, in more or less conscious ways, to this day.

As Huppertz puts it, “for design research and education, Simon’s ‘science of design’ – with its focus on problem solving – remains appealing as an opposing model to a ‘crafts’-oriented image of the designer ... a shift from [Bauhaus inspired] studio practice to laboratory research” (35). It is this understanding of design as a problem solving and information management process, related to engineering, that reverberates to this day in the unfolding of ethical and social questions around cognitive computing as well as, more generally, in a tension between the critical preoccupations of design studies and the diverse professional practices it studies. In *The Sciences of the Artificial* Simon articulates an idea of the artificial as being human made, as produced by artifice rather than by nature, where “synthetic or artificial objects – and more specifically prospective artificial objects having desired properties – are the central objective of

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56. The same school’s related quantitative and statistical approach to the free market lead by Milton Friedman is known in the history of economics as the Chicago School. Simon studied with logical positivist philosopher Rudolph Carnap and economist Henry Schultz, founder of econometrics.

57. Though in computation Simon preferred phrases like “complex information processing” and “simulation of cognitive processes” to artificial intelligence (Simon 107).

engineering activity and skill” (Simon, “Understanding” 106).

**3. Reconciling Design.** In an essay entitled *Politics of the Artificial* (1995), design historian and theorist Victor Margolin takes on the multiple valences of this assertion as part of an articulation of meaning in design and as one of the founding questions of an independent field of design studies (independent, importantly, both from art and from the industry of design).<sup>58</sup> Margolin suggests that if we accept a definition of design as “the ‘conception and planning of the artificial,’ a definition [Margolin] developed with colleague Richard Buchanan, then its scope and boundaries are intimately entwined with our understanding of the artificial’s limits” (Margolin *Politics* 349). The designed world is the world of the artificial. In re-understanding the limits of the artificial we can no longer “accept Simon’s assumption that either ‘nature’ or ‘science’ hold uncontested claims to truth” even though Simon’s delineation of the natural and the artificial is important” the equation of ‘nature’ and ‘real’ cannot be assumed (355).

Margolin invokes William Gibson’s 1984 novel *Neuromancer* to illustrate an extreme vision of the disappearance of any threshold between the ‘real’ and the artificial. In this Baudrillardian simulation where virtual reality blurs with fleshly life there is an extreme relativism (an erased boundary or interface) akin to that described by Donna Haraway in her *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985); a nihilism of postmodern culture. Simon’s ‘nature’ (as the object of science, of natural facts) slips away leaving only the artificial as a space with no outside: “*Neuromancer* offers us a scenario of design triumphant in a world where the real is no longer a point of reference” (350). In this vision of the designed world we are living “a moment where the real cannot be taken for granted but must be wrestled from the artificial” (354). Whose job is it to wrestle back the real, or to define what might possibly be a nature outside of the artificial?

Margolin proposes that in “considering its place in our reflections on the artificial, we can raise questions about design and technology that would otherwise go unasked” and this “empowers us to stake out different territory for design, one that does not attempt to completely replace the natural but moves instead to complement it” (354). For Margolin, “the various

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58. Initially a scholar of Soviet avant-garde graphic design (Rodchenko, Lissitzky, and Moholy-Nagy) Margolin, with Richard Buchanan, was a founding editor, in 1984, of *Design Issues* “the first American academic journal to examine design history, theory, and criticism,” according to the journal’s web site. Margolin is also author of the two-volume *World History of Design* (2015), a curriculum re-defining survey that challenges many canonical narratives, giving significant place to the inclusion of design from outside of Europe and the US.

critiques of positivism, the deconstruction of scientific discourse, and the multiple new voices that now fill the space of social debate are all part of a different situation within which the artificial must be rethought” (355). How can design reunite “the two contested terms ‘meaning’ and ‘reality’ in a way that resists their collapse” (355)? This is a pervasive desire from within the field of design. To this end, design, now far from being only a discourse about craft or objects imbued with value, or of problem solving innovation, must reach towards radically different modes of organization and questioning of the boundaries of the artificial than those of Simon’s instrumental reason. Margolin (in 1995) suggests, for example, a questioning of design founded in Lovelockean ecology, ecofeminism, the poetics of Native-American writer Paula Gunn Allen, and perhaps a meta-narrative of the divine inspired by the spiritual-scientific cross-over of Teilhard de Chardin.

This hopeful and idealistic exploration of potential limits to the artificial comes not from some dystopian outlier but from a prominent design scholar and historian, author of the recent multi-volume canonical survey *A World History of Design* (2015). One of his prime concerns is the place of design and design studies, not as a normative force or canonical inventory in the academy, but as a response to real-world social, ethical and environmental crisis. How does design (or design studies) speak back to the dynamics of a designed world, in the wide sense of the “conception and planning of the artificial”? We can see that questions about the makeup and purpose of design’s ‘problem solving’ are close to the centre of reflections on design thinking in higher education, as design studies, and certainly they provoke questions in design practices themselves. The test is how both the world of practice and design studies responds to such questions. How does design studies propose that this response should be embedded in practice, rather than being a field of study which looks at design as a symptom (or as Theodore Schatzki might put it, how the ‘doings and sayings’ of design practice would naturally include a ‘design studies’ reflection)? My contention is that there are practices in the field of design as well as practices in the field of art that have this special clairvoyance.

**4. How to Kill People.** To jump to the present, in the other citation heading this chapter, German film maker/visual artist Hito Steyerl outlines the apocalyptic endgame of design as a *tabula rasa* practice in her essay “How to Kill People: A Problem of Design.” The title of the essay is self-consciously stolen from American designer George Nelson’s 1960s film and article of the same

title (discussed in detail in the section on Steyerl, below). Steyerl's essay deals with counter-insurgency as design, specifically the destruction of Sur, the old quarter of the Turkish-Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, beginning in 2015, displacing up to 30,000 people in the form of ethnic cleansing by urban renewal in the aftermath, or as a continuation of, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.<sup>59</sup> This history is also part of the subject matter of her 2016–17 video installation *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*. In Steyerl's telling of the story, a whole neighbourhood is physically erased from the city and replaced by a digitally-rendered quarter of "happy playgrounds and Haussmannized walkways" where design is a "permanent coup against the non-compliant part of the people" disguised as urban renewal under the pretext of engaging the tourist economy (Steyerl 12). Steyerl names this effect "creative destruction" and extrapolates from the specific events at Sur to encompass the global digital present in the ominous form of design as disruptive innovation (15). Steyerl's quasi-fictional collaged history belies the practical problem solving vocation of grand-design and suggests a dynamic of resistance by fiction. Steyerl juxtaposes the two problematic areas described above, firstly, that of democracy conceived as radically depleted public space (depleted by design) and, secondly, that of the institutional reification of design as problem solving – or, to use the contemporary corporate term: innovation. There is a relevance to understanding art as intertwined with the field of design, where 'to art' is to understanding the grounds of the idea of design from within. To re-envelope the problem: the role of this kind of practice is to query the designed world and its myth of problem solving. This involves coming to terms with the evolution of the idea of innovation.

**2. Sixty Years of Innovation: From Theodore Adorno's Culture Industry to Tony Blair's Creative Economy:** In *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (2000) Benjamin Buchloh describes how, in 1939, exiled Bauhaus artist and designer László Moholy-Nagy received the patronage of Walter Paepeke, president of the Container Corporation of America, in reviving a New Bauhaus (later to become the Institute of Design – home to, amongst many illustrious faculty members, Buckminster Fuller), transposing the idea of the Weimar-era Bauhaus from Germany to Chicago. Benjamin Buchloh asserts that mid-twentieth century design in America coalesced around the idea that mass culture and high art could be reconciled:

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59. See [www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/09/destruction-sur-turkey-historic-district-gentrification-kurdish](http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/09/destruction-sur-turkey-historic-district-gentrification-kurdish). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

...that mass culture and high art could be reconciled in a radically commercialized Bauhaus venture. But in his [Walter Paepke's] vision, as in that of many others, the reconciliation was purged of all political and ideological implications concerning artistic intervention in collective social progress. The cognitive and perceptual devices of modernity simply would have to be deployed for the development of a new commodity aesthetic (product design, packaging, and advertising). The fabrication of that aesthetic would, in fact, become one of the most powerful and important industries in postwar America and Europe, without, however, resolving the contradictions of Modernism. (Buchloh, "Neo-Avant-Garde" 467)

This is the evolution Moholy-Nagy and Mies van der Rohe (head of the architecture school of the Armour Institute of Technology, later, along with Nagy's Institute of Design, merged into the Illinois Institute of Technology) envisioned in Chicago, but at a dramatic cost. For Buchloh, when the Bauhaus ethos in the incarnation of van der Rohe and Moholy-Nagy (and many of their Bauhaus colleagues) come to America, design separates itself more completely than ever from its avant-garde roots and the potential of an instrumental left-radical social project. For Buchloh this mid-century conception of design (in the era of Herbert Simon's *The Sciences of the Artificial*) is an end point, an *échec*, a last innovation (others, such as fellow *October* journal critic Hal Foster are less apocalyptic, allowing the potential of architecture to play a genuinely critical role).

Roger Smith, in the outsider context of the business journal *Research-Technology Management*, somewhat more simplistically (and blurring a strict definition of 'disruptive innovation'; see below) gives us a contemporary popular version of the trope of the artist/innovator in a re-framing of Andy Warhol as a template for corporate creativity. That the meme of radical creativity or innovation of contemporary art would serve the goals and agendas of state or of the corporation should not be surprising.<sup>60</sup> Innovation and the 'creative' (signifying both a characteristic and also a new class of person) have become free-floating signifiers of institutional sustainability in the digital age:

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60. Meme: "Central to the modern Innovation Industry – and by extension the Innovation Agenda in the Arts – is the creation, introduction and diffusion of memes, a word coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 ... the fabrication, replication and dissemination of memes can be as much a shell game and mechanism for creating value in the Information Age as it is a legitimate component of non-hierarchical, distributive discourse; to understand the seduction of the innovation agenda, it is necessary to understand the meme as a unit of currency in what I call the 'ideas economy'" (Horwitz).

Warhol was a disruptive innovator, in every sense of the word. He worked across accepted industrial boundaries. His creations – work that those in power in the art world initially regarded with disdain – ultimately redefined art and shook the art world to its foundations. The gatekeepers could not ignore Warhol’s message about society, a message they themselves had missed and did not have the tools to deliver in any case. ... We are in a similarly cataclysmic time now, as the rapid advances of technology – from smartphones to cloud computing to 3D printing – bring changes in business, in culture, in society similar in scope and impact to those that occurred in the decade after WWII ... This chaotic environment has given rise to a generation of business artists, thinkers developing methods to explain, harness, and benefit from these changes. (Smith 59)

In a *New Yorker* magazine article, Harvard historian Jill Lepore compares the situation to asymmetrical warfare, with twentieth-century corporations functioning as ‘nation-states’ and start-ups functioning as ‘stateless insurgents.’ “Disruptive innovation,” she writes, “is competitive strategy for an age seized by terror” (Lepore 31). The term ‘disruptive innovation’ was introduced by Clayton Christensen and Joseph Bower in a 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article. In 1997 Christensen wrote *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, which described disruptive innovation in terms of a technological leap, and later in the *The Innovator’s Solution* (with M. Raynor, 2003) he shifts to a change in “how and to whom value is delivered in the marketplace” – i.e. a strategy which might have no technological innovation – a business gambit where a new player captures a previously untouched low-margin market, of no interest to higher margin established players, and eventually threatens those players (Gobble 66). Now disruption is everywhere, “Christensen himself has encouraged the application of the idea to other contexts, with books focused on disruption in healthcare, education, and higher education” – all highly institutionalized areas of public interest (Gobble 66).

The *New Yorker* article, and the ensuing public debate between Lepore and Christensen, was mostly around the distinction between Christensen’s supposedly scientifically predictive tool versus its popularization as a piece of business jargon championing a kind of avant-gardist aura

of innovation in the service of profit.<sup>61</sup> Lepore dismisses the idea that the model might be predictive in any way (Christensen's main business/social science interest) suggesting that it is only descriptive, and selectively so, with the goal of proposing that innovation is the winning play that almost always will displace the incumbent – a kind of self-actualizing propaganda strategy. Her real fear is the threat posed to the structure of higher education and other institutions such as newspapers serving the public interest (Lepore is a Harvard University-based historian, Christensen works for the same university's business school). In his *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (2008), Christensen describes the advent of online higher learning as an ideal case of disruptive innovation. Lepore sees this particular disruptive strategy as contributing to “a frenzy for Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs, at colleges and universities across the country” and a headlong rush, perhaps driven by a fear of being left behind, to build innovative educational structures, as a self-applied destruction (equivalent perhaps to a corporate buyout and breakup strategy) rather than a positive disruption (Lepore). For Lepore (to interpret slightly the folksy smartness of her journalistic prose versus the ‘common sense’ populism of the business jargon she hates), the transposition of the disruptive start-up threat from enterprise to educational institutions is part of an ideological shakedown, a free market challenge to public and private institutions where business interests are in conflict with the “public interest”(Lepore).

American performance critic Andy Horwitz takes this same scepticism about the innovation agenda to U.S. non-profit arts sector in “Questioning the Innovation Agenda: A Critique of Innovation in the Arts” (2013), (a series of six essays on his performance site *Culturebot*).<sup>62</sup> Why do we need innovation, he asks:

Conventional wisdom holds that the arts in America are in crisis. The arts as we know it

61. Gobble makes the point that much that is popularly labeled as disruptive (Zipcar, Airbnb, Uber, Waze) does not, in fact, conform to Christensen's original definition of disruptive innovation which involves offering a ‘lower end’ product as a way to capture previously excluded or under-accessed consumers (startups do this better than ‘incumbents’). MOOCs in higher education may be an exception (bringing a product to a whole new audience with a completely different cost structure). This is the subject of Christensen's *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (2008). Christensen uses Uber as the main example of what is not disruptive innovation: “Initially, the theory of disruptive innovation was simply a statement about correlation. Empirical findings showed that incumbents outperformed entrants in a sustaining innovation context but underperformed in a disruptive innovation context” (Christensen et al 47).

62. See: [www.culturebot.org/2013/10/19493/questioning-the-innovation-agenda/](http://www.culturebot.org/2013/10/19493/questioning-the-innovation-agenda/). There are six essays, only five of which are on the web site: “Questioning the Innovation Agenda” (Oct. 2013); “The Appearance of Innovation” (Oct. 2013); “Corporate Influence and the Innovation Agenda” (Oct. 2013); “Business as Usual in the Innovation Industry” (Oct. 2013); “Invention, Innovation & Creating Real Change” (Oct. 2013). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

are in decline. The arts are losing cultural relevance as quickly as they are losing audience, legacy institutions are hemorrhaging money as they fail to adapt to changing social structures and demographics. All the reliable, well-known structural support for the old economic models are failing and nothing new is coming to take their place. The sky is falling! (Horwitz)

Horwitz proposes that this crisis, in fact, does not exist. This need for renewal through innovation is an agenda rather than a crisis. It is an agenda where philanthropically and state-funded areas of the arts are being subjected to, or colonized by, a corporate business model:

While the deleterious effects of pervasive corporate values in the arts sector is nothing new, the Innovation Agenda has provided a new and increasingly insidious challenge. The pursuit of innovation and its attendant vocabularies are incredibly effective in creating the *appearance* of change, of supporting our perception of ourselves as “change agents” even as we perpetuate systemic dysfunction ... The persistent invasive creep of corporate innovation language into the arts poses an almost existential threat to our enterprise, which is, at its core, the creation of meaning. (Horwitz)

Not far away from this non-profit arts sector in its beleaguered institutional safe houses is design, the embedded art. An art with no building of its own, it hangs out near the flow of capital and technological change and it trains its practitioners in the art, design and architecture school. Design as a field is an articulation of practices in the everyday dominated by a creative economy/entrepreneurial model in which innovation (as described above) is one of the key themes. Any other model of ‘applied’ creativity is an interloper. This makes the field of design one of the most appropriate places for working through contrasting modes of creativity in practice as a self-referential examination of the nexus of forces that animate the designed world. This is in part because we can focus less on defending ‘legacy’ institutional structures, which, in the mainstream arts, is often conflated with individual art practices as part of the same ethical/creative debate (as Horwitz does, above) and more on the nature of the practice itself. Expanding on Vilém Flusser’s image of design as a mediator between art, technology and science, we can say that design is *the* functional space of the encounter between art, technology and (adding the contemporary term) innovation (Flusser, *Design* 19).



Philosopher Bernard Stiegler defines “creative industry” in academic and commercial culture as an entrenchment of consumerism, and he looks to definitions of practice as apparently disparate as the historical avant-gardes and hacker culture as examples for unfolding new practices that have the potential to constitute new publics in the contemporary context (Stiegler *Age 11*). Stiegler discusses the creative economy model based originally on the ideas of John Howkins and Richard Florida who claimed, simply, that value is generated from human creativity. Stiegler wonders how such creativity *seemingly* suggests the possibility of what he calls ‘de-proletarianisation.’ This vocabulary around value and creative innovation has been cemented into our cultural reality through the cultural and political tropes of “creative economy” and “creative industries” invented by Tony Blair’s New Labour government, in the late 1990s in Great Britain (the Labour Party held power in the UK from 1997 to 2010). Blair’s post-Thatcher “Third Way” conceived a neoliberal economy with components of creative sectors (art, film, music, etc. – in short, content creation) dedicated to marketing a social and economic new world order with creativity and human ‘creatives’ as key resources.<sup>63</sup>

Concepts such as creative economy, creative cluster, creative sector, and creative innovation hybridise a neoliberal economy with high value components of arts skill sets, with creativity and innovation at the centre of the ‘brand.’ One UK policy document defined creative industries as “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Flew 9). Prime Minister Blair suggested in 1999 that the aim was “to create a nation where the creative talents of all the people are used to build a true enterprise economy for the twenty-first century – where we compete on brains, not brawn” (10). Flew goes on to describe,

...an emergent academic and policy literature on the ‘new’ or ‘weightless’ economy, promoted by policy think-tanks such as DEMOS and Comedia, which was identifying creativity as being at the cornerstone of success for post-industrial cities, regions and nations in the globalised economy. One influential book from this period was Charles Leadbeater’s *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*, which pointed to a ‘new economy’ and a ‘knowledge society’ driven by globalisation and information technology, but also

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63. This chronology is well documented by Terry Flew in *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy* (2011) and in Justin O’Connor’s *The Cultural and Creative Industries: A Literature Review* (2007), both referenced by Stiegler.

by individual creativity, social and cultural entrepreneurship, and a meritocratic spirit.  
(Flew 14)

When we stand in the hybrid university or the ‘creative cluster’ of today, where disciplines amalgamate in the name of a generalized creativity and innovation we are dealing with both conceptual and funding structures inherited from the ‘creative economy’ model and tropes of creativity drawn less from avant-garde disruption or deconstruction than the history of technological invention.<sup>64</sup> Justin O’Connor in his 2010 Arts Council of England literature review *The Cultural and Creative Industries* frames the chronicle of the ‘creative economy’ as a “sixty year trip from ‘The Culture Industry,’ through the ‘cultural industries,’ ending at the ‘creative industry’ ... [whose] main theme is the tension between culture and economics which lies at the heart of this terminology” (O’Connor 9). He begins with Adorno and Horkheimer’s invention of the term in the 1947 essay “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”: “Adorno’s Culture Industry was ... not primarily about the commodification of culture; it was about the organisation of cultural commodity production on a mass industrial scale [where] the complex play between art as commodity and as autonomous form collapsed as the independent artist gave way to the culture factory” of mass cultural production (14). For Adorno a “utopian promise of art” as an autonomous aesthetics was always present and critical in the “...role of aesthetics in shaping ideas of modern subjectivity and the relationship between individual and society, the particular and the universal that [today] is at the heart of debates around the cultural and creative industries” (15):

What was that space of autonomy whose loss Adorno saw as a catastrophe? [Raymond] Williams, for example, was clear that art was not a ‘sacred’ transhistorical category, but it did represent a fundamental human need... In its search for an intrinsic value as ‘art’ it represented a site of contestation with capitalism – not simply as a site of ideological and political struggle of representation but as a symbolic assertion of an ‘authentic’ meaning that should be, though for Williams was not, part of everyday, ordinary culture. We saw

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64. In a presentation I juxtaposed images of the inventor-entrepreneurs Thomas Edison (whose Menlo Park was the first ‘R&D campus’), Jon von Neuman (whose hybrid math and engineering lab at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton was instrumental in the development of modern computing) and Steve Jobs (whose idea of design as technology / technology as design we all live with) who are all tropes of creativity and innovation, all using the word ‘lab,’ now a signifier of the science-art creative space. Does a creative economy model bring these images together by erasing their differences?

that this formed a crucial part of the notion of aesthetic theory; that art should be separate from the everyday (and thus critical of it) yet always carry the promise that it might one day be an authentic part of it. For others in cultural studies the aesthetic tradition, as a form of bourgeois ideology, is simply an illusion to be overcome, a trap to be avoided.... (O'Connor 29)

Continuing his chronology, O'Connor places Adorno's *Culture Industry* as a critique of the commodification of culture in parallel with the rise of post-WW II state interventions like arts councils and other agencies (the National Film Board of Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts are local examples) whose purpose was to engage in a "renegotiation of the relationship between the State and culture" as principally (and in parallel with other possible national agendas) a resistance to commerce as the sole engine of cultural production (17). At the other end of the chronology, in the 1980s artists had become 'cultural producers' (as reported in a 1981 account entitled *Culture* by Raymond Williams) and were leaving the patronage model of state agencies, moving more completely from a "direct artisanal production for the market to a post-artisanal phase" ultimately to a corporate professional identity which Williams connects to the rise of the new media sector (25). O'Connor notes that though there was this shift in revenue sources and orientation towards commercial new media, 'creative labour' remained very much about freelancers, short term contracts and flexible working hours (25). In this sense the culture industries' main innovation is to borrow the cost-effective labour model of the arts, the so-called gig-economy. This second stage – the morphing to a plural 'cultural industries' – in the 1980s showed that the culture industry "could no longer be characterised simply as the 'other' to authentic art," and that furthermore a more broadly sociological version of culture as "the production and circulation of symbolic forms" could itself be brought "within the orbit of cultural policy" (26).

Urban planner Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (2002) and creative cluster guru John Howkins' *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas* (2001) are emblematic in the third phase that O'Connor describes as the "rediscovery of the city" in the 1980s and 1990s, where urban transformation and its negative shadow, gentrification, went hand in hand in creating a networked environment where smaller producers had greater economic impact under labels like

DIY, innovative milieu, etc. (41).<sup>65</sup> Here, “the cultural industry agenda is joined explicitly with that of culture-led urban regeneration” epitomised in Florida’s idea of the ‘creative class’ attracted to an urban setting by the ‘creative feel’ and ‘quality of life’ of a city (47). The shift in the Blair’s New Labour terminology from ‘cultural industries’ to ‘creative industries’ involved “the identification of the creative industries with a ‘new economy’ driven by ‘digital’ technologies and closely related to the ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ economy... [where] the creative industries were those which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (51).

**3. Bernard Stiegler’s Amateur.** From Bernard Stiegler we learn that delving more deeply into what are generally considered to be philosophical or ontological questions is a vital component of coping in the creative economy. For example, if our sense of time and space is co-constituted by the memory systems inherent in the creative economy of information technology and neoliberalism, how do we unpack and exceed that? In *Technics and Time* (1994) he argues that what is human and what is technical is co-original, that these two ontological domains (the human and the technical) co-constitute each other from the beginning and that without our technically inscribed memory systems we would not exist *in time* (Introna). Our externalized artifice as technology is what enables us to exist outside of a perpetual present. The character of this technicity, our “organized inorganic matter,” as Stiegler calls our thing-world (Stiegler, *Technics* 174), determines how we experience time and space. In Stiegler’s non-philosophical essays and lectures, a particular technicity belonging to the era of information technology and neoliberalism is constitutive of a contemporary creative economy model, where the designer or ‘creative’ is defined as an innovator and entrepreneur. Stiegler counters this perceived abyss with the idea of the creative amateur, an antidote to this particular technicity.

The vocation of *Ars Industrialis*, an association of which Stiegler was one of the

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65. Richard Florida was (until 2019) Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and (currently) Professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, home of the dramatically named Creative Destruction Lab: “Creative Destruction Lab’s exciting project promises to unleash a new wave of start-up innovation across Canada, creating thousands of middle-class jobs and further securing Canada’s position as a world leader in the AI field.” – Navdeep Bains, Federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, speaking at the lab in 2018. See: [www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-founded-creative-destruction-lab-receives-25-million-canadian-government](http://www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-founded-creative-destruction-lab-receives-25-million-canadian-government).

founders, is to propose new territories of creativity and “hyper learning” guided by an “economy of contribution.” Instead of the creative economy they proposes a new context involving a renaissance of the symbolic and bidirectional social relations (or dialogue) towards which artists, cultural institutions, publics, social and economic actors need to work.<sup>66</sup> Stiegler uses the image of Bartok’s admonition that one must only listen to music while following the score. This is an antidote to the “mechanical turn” in perception; that made it possible to consume music without knowing music. Glen Gould, he says, clarifies this by enabling the listener to control the parameters of the performance, thus to become a participant who is put into motion by the work. The work is the potential of the movement it may trigger. This is how he describes the ‘amateur’ who should replace the ‘client’ or ‘consumer’ of the creative economy:

The figure of the amateur is the ideal type for the economy of contribution because the amateur is the one who builds him- or herself a sustainable libidinal economy and does not expect industrial society to put it in place. In this regard, the hacker is a subversive figure in his or her ability to appropriate the technological and industrial situation without conforming to its requisite prescriptions, from marketing through to plans for industrial development. Hackers are neither consumers nor clients or users: they are practitioners – that is to say, amateurs of the world in the age of its numerization. (Stiegler, “Amateur”)

This is the point where Stiegler sees the potential to regain *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* because forms of knowledge as held by audiences and publics are being reconstituted. It is an opportunity for new avant-gardes to form, ones that constitute new publics. The definition of a (new) avant-garde (as opposed to a nostalgia for the historical art avant-garde or neo-avant-garde of mid-twentieth century) is that it can constitute such new publics in a contemporary context where “digital technologies result in a massive transfer of professional competences toward larger and larger segments of the public” (18). This is as easily a realm of a new dependence or

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66. It is useful to compare this desire for a transformation of the everyday into an “economy of contribution” to architect Jean Nouvel’s idea of complicity, touched on above in discussing Vito Acconci’s de-design (Chapter 2): “You’ve said you prefer complicity to complexity ...it reflects a real problem in architecture ...only through this complicity do we achieve a certain degree of complexity, which isn’t an end in itself... complicity is the only guarantee that we’ll be able to push the boundaries. If this complicity is established, it means that something more than simple comprehension is going on between people, a shared meaning, mutual assistance... (Baudrillard and Nouvel 77).

addiction to fragmentation – Katherine Hayles’ hyper-attention – as it is the operating space of new forms of knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, there is in Stiegler’s positioning *vis-à-vis* this aspect of the designed world a distinction of something that is blurred by terminology like ‘creative economy’ or ‘research-creation’ (the creative economy’s academic partner). The obvious opposite of the amateur might be the professional. ‘Professional’ implicates a level of skill and expertise it also signifies a gatekeeping of what can be named as valid (if we think back to de Duve’s Duchampian/Kantian nominalism in Chapter 2). Amateur connotes an expertise without that gatekeeping preoccupation (even the opposite preoccupation). I imagine that Stiegler is trying to un-blur that line (and focus the difference) by way of creating an actual shift in practices and ways of thinking (though he offers few real examples). The relation of ‘creative’ and ‘economy’ deserves to be pulled apart rather than amalgamated in a professionalization of all fields under the banner of the creative economy. Likewise, instead of professionalizing creation as an attribute of research, creation might be an amateur kind of ‘de-skilling,’ something that puts the knowledge-making format of research to the test.

My suggestion that the term ‘designed world’ could supplant or extend the critical question of public space (that Deutsche targets as the real space of critical practices of art and, in Rendell’s disciplinary reconfiguration, design) is intended to enlarge the scope of questioning that is possible in (or by) the unique nature of such practices, in their ‘doings and sayings,’ as Schatzki has named the radiating nature of material-human practice. This is to say that as we are doing (in the designed world) we are also coping (with the designed world). To ‘do’ is to make the expected moves in the flow and to ‘cope’ is to disturb that flow, even by standing still to think. Acconci’s ‘de-design’ and Rendell’s articulation of a ‘critical spatial practice’ in design and critical writing is one form of this coping, imagined as a non-conformist participation in public space. Margolin’s aside from within the flow of academic design studies is also such a pause, imagined more specifically in the professional field. Margolin asks how design itself copes with the designed world, in which design, as a field, is a principal and conscious factor.

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67. In *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008) Hayles defines hyper-attention as “a craving for continuously varying stimuli, a low threshold for boredom, the ability to process multiple information streams simultaneously, and a quick intuitive grasp of algorithmic procedures that underlie and generate surface complexity” as opposed to a more normalized ‘deep attention’ (Hayles 117).

How do designers de-design? More combatively, Stiegler's amateur, updating and sharpening Flusser's phenomenology of technical things, in the context of the creative economy, is an examination of the foundational DNA of our culture of innovation and a turning towards practices potentially labeled as art as an antidote to the designed world, a way to re-expand the horizon.

This is a provisional definition of an evolving kind of critical practice embedded in the designed world, one which risks its own standing as validated practice in order to stand (or sit, or lie, or flounder) across the flow. If the construction of knowledge in the university assumes that we are all involved in the same moving-forward, and all practices contribute to the same growing body of instrumental knowledge moving into the future, then what are practices that operate at a tangent to such an administrative sense of common project? We could call such a potentially fundamental engagements with imagination, art practice. This idea is informed by David Summer's spatio-temporal inquiry into form/format and Schatzki's clairvoyance regarding change, and informed also by a more practical evaluation of the evolution of the format of innovation in the creative economy (which seems to make critical theory into a component rather than a critique) through Stiegler and others. In terms of practices themselves, as generators of situations that might be described through these ideas, we have already encountered some artworks that, by their implication in a relationship between embodied practice and image technology, are enacting a performance of space and time. The following chapter looks at some examples of art as clairvoyant and spatial practices coping with the designed world from within, that is whose connection with an inquiry into the designed world is explicit and a matter of amateur complicity (following Acconci and Nouvel, see Chapter 2).

*...we could talk in this case about “Design zum Tode,” or a type of design in which death is the all-encompassing horizon... what is the opposite design, a type of creation... a process that doesn't grow via destruction but very literally de-grows constructively...*

Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (14)

*Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, And human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect...*

E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, 1910

*In 1943, I found myself looking through a pile of 8×10 glossy photographs, air views of the centers of cities in the 150,000 to 250,000 range. I have forgotten why I was doing this.*

George Nelson, *The Human Element in Design* (Harwood 97)

#### **Chapter 4: Two Clairvoyant Practices for the Designed World**

In 1909, a decade before the Bauhaus school was founded, integrating modernist aesthetic experiment with the world of industrial production, E. M. Forster wrote a dystopian science fiction story entitled “The Machine Stops.” “The Machine Stops” creates a fictional world that might seem to us a very contemporary one, where people live in isolation with their only tangible connection being through electronic devices. The surface of the earth is no longer habitable. The air is poisonous. Humanity has gone into a high-tech underground and lives in a massive network of individual habitation pods connected to a central machine, which provides for all human needs, both biological and social. A communication network allows the inhabitants to fulfill their intellectual imaginings (to attend and give lectures, listen to music, etc.), all without the necessity of actual physical proximity or contact. Hand-held screens transmit murky but adequate images and listening tubes distribute sound. Should real travel be desirable, consultation via the screen and the keyboard with The Machine allows the scheduling of voyages within the city by train or between the underground cities via a network of airships travelling high above the devastated surface of this re-imagined earth. Kuno, the protagonist, makes contact with his mother, Vashti.



He has broken the rules. He has gone to the surface on a quest for authentic life and he has now been condemned. Kuno is desperate to connect through direct experience. He has been caught and now must pay the cost. Vashti understands nothing of this desire. Only that transgression has ruined her son's possibility for fulfillment. At some point the machine that makes this world possible slowly begins to fail. The air becomes noxious. The food lacks texture. Machines behave erratically. The schedules break down. Kuno's struggle for 'authentic' life seems prophetic. The world collapses. Everything collapses. For a twenty-first century reader Forster's romantic theme of spiritual and visceral connection as humanism ("man is the measure of man," says Kuno) is the most anachronistic element in the story. What could possibly replace it as a more realistic, post-humanist trope of crisis?

**1. Example Hito Steyerl: Only Connect in Junktime.** *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016–17) (figs. 17a-h) was artist Hito Steyerl's commissioned contribution to Sculpture Project Münster, an international exhibition-event of urban-embedded sculpture that has taken place every ten years (since 1977) in interior and exterior public spaces of the German city of Münster. If E. M. Forster's trope of the breakdown of mechanically moving parts opens the brackets at the beginning of the Bauhaus century, what are we to make of the machine now? How will the brackets close? In *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, the breakdowns have migrated into the digital substrate of the machine's functions, indeed into the digital substrate of our function. The amalgamated visual texture of programming code superimposed onto that of 'broken' digitized images, subjected to the algorithmic machine-reading of surveillance technology, and the run-and-gun anti-cinema style of activist journalism all become the very prominent aesthetic of Hito Steyerl's montaged video and installation work.

An apparent similarity between the techniques of analysis of digital images via artificial intelligence (AI) and the analytic techniques of twentieth-century art history (e.g. art historian Erwin Panofsky's iconography) seems to inhabit Hito Steyerl's critique of the surface and form of digital reality. Our tools of critical analysis have been co-opted, flattened and taken up by the other side. They belong to the machine, or to machine learning. Meaning has become managed data. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* is a title that Steyerl suggests is based on the top five recurring words in English-language pop music (on *Billboard's* music charts, her promotional material

claims).<sup>68</sup> This may or may not be true. I would have thought this top five would have included “you,” “girl,” “love,” and “baby” – but we are not fact-checking here. We are in the place of a fictional scrim draped over the real – the topological wireframe of a new culture. The title of the work is also strangely resonant of T. S. Elliot’s fatalist masculine epigram, “Birth, copulation and death ... that’s all the facts when you come to brass tacks.”<sup>69</sup> This thoroughly ‘strange’ title (in the sense of Noë’s ‘strange tools’), then, is made of potentially fictional bits of fact and cultural fragment made concrete, literally made of cement, as typographic light boxes sitting at angles across the gallery floor, blocking or guiding the viewer’s circulation. Steyerl is often careful to set the viewer up in some kind of apparatus for viewing that makes us aware of our position in relation to the multiple screens that carry the bulk of content of her works.

True to the information economy that *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* proposes to deal with, the thickness (as opposed to depth) of this work is made up of layer after layer of information. One layer is too thin. Another layer of information begins to bulk-up the experience. Ten or twenty or a hundred layers give that virtual substance that is a familiar signifier of value in the designed world. As mentioned at the end of Chapter 3, a key video and audio layer of this work deals with the destruction of Sur (the old quarter in the Turkish-Kurdish city of Diyarbakir), in the form of ethnic cleansing by urban renewal, as a continuation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.<sup>70</sup> In Steyerl’s telling of the story, the old city is erased and replaced by a rendering of “happy playgrounds and Haussmannized walkways” where design is a “permanent coup against the non-compliant part of the people” (Steyerl *Duty Free* 12). Haussmann’s plan for rebuilding Paris was in large part about replacing narrow streets and creating sightlines that a modern military could use to control the populace. In her analysis of the Turkish regime’s promotional video for the Sur project, Steyerl points out that a Brechtian transition of the cinematic ‘wipe’ is a metaphor for the impending physical destruction and the disposability of a people (as a culture and as individuals) (13). Steyerl names this wipe effect, transferred to the real world using the term “creative

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68. Thompson Arts Centre at Park Avenue Armory, exhibition pamphlet for *Drill: Hito Steyerl* (June 20-July 21, 2019), Park Avenue Armory, New York. 2019.

69. In T. S. Elliot, *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932).

70. See: [www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/09/destruction-sur-turkey-historic-district-gentrification-kurdish](http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/09/destruction-sur-turkey-historic-district-gentrification-kurdish). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

destruction” (first coined in the 1940s by economist Joseph Schumpeter),<sup>71</sup> and then extrapolates from the events at Sur to encompass the global digital present in the form of its contemporary analogue, creative disruption or disruptive innovation. These are key tropes of design, which create “antisocial tech monopolies ... fuelled by automation and cybernetic control, [running] in parallel with an age of political fragmentation” (15). Steyerl’s quasi-fictional (or ‘counter-factual,’ to refer back to Ewa Ziarek’s formulation in Chapter 2) collaged history suggests a dynamic of resistance by fiction.

Video clips of the destruction of Diyarbakir include residents evacuating with their possessions, streets blocked with plastic tarps to prevent journalistic camera documentation (reminiscent, in a compelling inversion, of the technique used by citizens to hide from being targeted by urban sniper fire in neighbouring Syria), children playing with trashed computer equipment found in the rubble, and people recounting fragments from the history of the city. This last layer makes reference to this specific place as part of the history of the very technology that seems to have run amok in a fit of disruptive innovation. Diyarbakir was the home of the 12th century Kurdish scholar and engineer Al-Jazari, who devised an array of humanoid automata as entertainments, as well as water pumps, timepieces and other programmable machines (10). As Steyerl points out, the very place where these innovations in robotics and programming were devised is now the place being destroyed by the same automation (10). Automation seems to have turned on its makers, as if reliving a familiar trope of classic science fiction. In fact the technology in this situation is not a machine or an algorithm, it is in the very human form or social technology of ‘creative disruption,’ using the political and social fragmentation characteristic of populism to “destroy a horizon of common understanding, replacing it by narrow, parallel, top-down, trimmed and bleached artificial histories” where the “present feels as if it is constituted by emptying out the future to sustain a looping version of a past that never existed” (17).

Two other layers complete the installation of *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*. Firstly, there are documentary videos of contemporary robots which mimic animal or human body movement (a particular form that must be an infinitesimally tiny fragment of all robotics) being tested for

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71. In Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942). Cited in an article by John Harwood on designer George Nelson (“The Wound Man: George Nelson and the ‘End of Architecture’”: Grey Room 31).

movement and balance in lab facilities. The tests involve a robot carrying out a task like moving an object or negotiating stairs while an operator creates interference, (e.g., by pushing the robot with a stick or kicking it when it is in a precarious position), to see if it can reset its position. The process is similar to training a machine-learning controlled device. These stresses or interferences are incorporated by the AI into its processing as potential conditions so that the machine can react correctly if the circumstance repeats. These kinds of video are widely available on the internet, for example videos from the DARPA-funded robotics firm Boston Dynamics which produces experimental humanoid robots and a four-legged variety called Big Dog, whose best trick is regaining its footing after slipping on ice (fig. 18).<sup>72</sup> These videos have a pathetic quality reminiscent of the silent cinema slapstick of Buster Keaton. Following the affective tropes of this silent film tradition, it often seems as if the human operator is bullying the unfortunate robot. We perceive the robot's slips and falls as misfortune, and at the same time we find them comical and endearing. One of the videos shown as part of the installation depicts two people in body suits, joined at the head, mimicking the comic dance of Big Dog.

These representations of the idea of robotics, including their ominous military aspect, all rely on pop-culture representations and comic book anthropomorphisms, much as the precursor humanoid automata made by Al-Jazari in Diyarbakir must have done. We are being charmed by the signifiers of the animate: hesitant qualities of movement, expressive faces, emotive poses, etc. Youtube is full of this stuff (in the form of kittens and robots). Lastly, in the exhibition installation there are two material models of the most rudimentary humanoid robot forms made of rectilinear slabs of blue foam, posed in apparent relation to each other. They are reminiscent of Joel Shapiro sculptures, often used as high-art public branding outside American embassies and consulates (fig. 19). They have precisely the same hints of the animate in the inanimate as much of Shapiro's work does. One is larger, about adult size. It is sprawled across the floor, face down, in the pose of an accident, like a slapstick pratfall. The other, a child sized version, is standing by, its head-block-shape tilted down in seeming empathetic response.<sup>73</sup> Are we the victims of our

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72. See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNZPRsrwumQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNZPRsrwumQ) for some Boston Dynamics generated video of testing Big Dog. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

73. In the 2019 exhibition of this work at the Park Avenue Armory, New York the elements of *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, originally not separated, are listed as separate works with the addition of the titles: *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016) - the title light boxes and robot testing videos; *Robots Today* (2016) - the Diyarbakir/Al-Jazari video; *Prototype 1.0 and 1.1* (2017) - the foam robot pair.

own comic book fears, bathos and anthropomorphism gone global and made cool by cutting-edge information processing?

Steyerl's layering of information as thickening of meaning should remind us of the cinematic technique of *montage* articulated by the Russian pioneers of cinema such as Sergei Eisenstein. Steyerl's background is in film studies. She studied at the Japan Institute of the Moving Image, at the University of Television and Film in Munich, as well as with filmmaker Harun Farocki.<sup>74</sup> *Montage* juxtaposes images in non-narrative sequence as a mechanism of colliding elements of disparate meaning in order to generate new meanings, meanings that are not necessarily premeditated or scripted. It is a device for generating new meaning from existing meaning clusters through physical juxtaposition of images, a temporally linear collage. In Steyerl's transposition of the technique of *montage* (as the colliding of information/meaning) from film (a temporally linear event, in terms of experience) to contemporary exhibition (a spatial and informational event) one could say that in film the montage is horizontal and in Steyerl's exhibitions the montage is vertical or in layers of information. Unlike a linear montage, in this layering of information all is temporally transparent – we can experience whatever layers we wish simultaneously or consecutively. Since the work is not temporally or spatially finite the generation of meaning by layering information can go on and on. By playing off this cinematic strategy Steyerl is also mirroring one of the prime information mechanisms of the designed world. So this layering of information is a ubiquitous procedure in the designed world, but also, in this work, an aspiration to provoking uncustomary or de-normalized alignments of meaning.

This provocation in the face of the designed world as information economy attempts, by the *montage* of layered information, something conceptually akin to a combination of Ziarek's 'counterfactual possibilities' and Acconci's 'de-design.' For Ziarek's modernist literature (and for Rendell in *From, In and With Anne Tallentire*) this takes form in the imaginative leap of the destabilisation of meaning in language. For Acconci 'de-design' manifests in the placement of singular and discreet artworks in urban space, disrupting the smooth experience of that space. Steyerl, on the other hand, dives into the surface of digitized information-space and the profligate image and language production of consumer culture and political media. Diving into the surface of an image, as Steyerl points out in the last chapter of *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary*

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74. See Wikipedia biography of Hito Steyerl: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hito\\_Steyerl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hito_Steyerl). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

*Civil War* (2017) titled “Ripping Reality: Blind spots and Wrecked Data in 3D,” does not lead us into depth but into an ever extending point cloud where the folding topological surface has no underlying body or bone (Steyerl 201). A 3D model is still an image even if it constructs the space for war. This is the conundrum of virtual space, a confounding of the artificial constructions or armature of the visual for the real, or rather, the idealistic aspiration that the deconstruction of that visually-based virtual form will lead us back into real spaces.

Steyerl seems to be wondering if there is any way out of virtual/real we might call ‘current events,’ and begins the search by taking apart and re-collaging what ‘current events’ seem to be made of as surface, in the hope of offering a how-to manual for a practical “art in the age of planetary civil war.” By ignoring the boundaries between fact and fiction (the traditional boundaries of news or documentary, or discourse theory and scholarship in general, which deal with establishing versions or interpretations of the real) Steyerl concocts a fiction made of a wild layering of information: activist political documentary; pop-culture takes on robotics, automation and technology; critical theory deconstruction of visibility and subjectivity; commentary on a possibly new power dynamic of visibility, with its algorithmic reduction of life to image as pixel-map by surveillance technology; comic book robots; slapstick film; a glitchy video aesthetic; and on and on. Is Steyerl suggesting there is no source of meaning beneath these surfaces, no real spaces in the face of virtual space (in David Summers’ terms of real spaces and virtual representations)? Is it possible, she seems to be asking, to counteract the finiteness of the information economy with ‘extra’ information from near that economy’s boundaries – not from outside the envelope of being that is the designed world, but from its fragmented edges?

A significant question arises in looking at Steyerl’s work: What are the limits of this work as art practice? Leaving the exhibition space one might conclude that there is no reason to return, having understood the setup and noted the information sourced for the *montage*. The referenced material can all be found elsewhere. But perhaps the material in the exhibition is not the limit of the artwork. Steyerl’s practice includes performance-lectures (many available online), critical essays and other manifestations all of which, like her approach to the conventions of contemporary art installation, gently or explicitly play with the mode of knowledge production involved. As much as her critical writing provides a theoretical gloss on the references in the work, at times it also furthers the fictional premise in her work, moving the location of the art practice from the gallery to somewhere floating in between the text, the performance and the

artwork. El Putnam, in her review of Steyerl's *Duty Free Art*, points out how in this apparently conventional scholarly text invents citations that suit her rhetorical purposes:

Steyerl pushes the limits of Peter Osborne's definition of contemporary art by presenting a fictitious conversation with him in a dream. A quote Steyerl attributes to Osborne – though she wrote it herself – describes contemporary art as “a proxy, a stand-in ... which pretends that everything is still ok” as people cope with the noise, chaos, and confusion that are “completely dismantling and rewiring the sensory apparatus and potentially also human faculties of reasoning and understanding.” Osborne becomes a proxy for validating Steyerl's ideas, illustrating the conceptual implications of proxies through the practice of her writing. (Putnam 179)

In the passage cited, Steyerl identifies contemporary art as a proxy activity (like a dream) in coping with a process of the contemporary rewiring of human faculties of knowledge of the world. The real Osborne, author of *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (2010) in which he suggests that, in the work of artist Walid Raad's fictional collective The Atlas Group, the ‘fictional’ is a defining characteristic of the contemporary as a critical category.<sup>75</sup> So Osborne is an apt candidate to be fictionalised himself as a character and folded back into Steyerl's critical-fiction writing. Steyerl's writing, for example the texts gathered in the anthology *Duty Free Art*, contribute to her own meta-fiction as a critical category.

If one accepts that Steyerl is not confined to the art-like set of props and cinematic fragments displayed in the gallery (fulfilling the conventional manner of participation in the art world and its market), nor to the apparently scholarly nature of her essays and lectures, then possibly we should see them all as contributing to her art/film practice, in part as what they separately pretend to be (artworks, theoretical essays, lectures) and in part as components in a broader fiction-*montage*. This meta-*montage*, as an imperfect whole, seems to play on the questions of truth and fiction that arise in documentary film practice encountering the

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75. “The Atlas Group is most productively understood as a construction/expression of the fiction of the contemporary in the specific form of the speculative collectivity of the globally transnational. This claim has five main conceptual components: 1. the contemporary as idea, problem and fiction; 2. the globally transnational character of the contemporary today; 3. art as construction/expression of the contemporary; 4. the fictionalization of artistic authority; 5. the collectivization of artistic fictions.” (from the synopsis of a talk “The Fiction of Contemporary: Speculative Collectivity and the Global Transnational,” Peter Osborne, 2010, *Pavilion Journal*: <https://vimeo.com/9087032>).

contemporary technological capacity for hegemonic processing of digital images. This is an encounter of two kinds of meaning-making, which is emblematic of the encounter of (modernist and post-modernist cultural tropes) with the almost infinite capacity of current technology to deal with meaning as pure data.

At this point, it is useful to look at some texts by Steyerl that relate to *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*: “In Free Fall – A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective”; “Ripping Reality: Blind Spots and wrecked Data in 3D”; and “How to Kill People: A Problem of Design.” The first text is about the apparent paradigm shift of the stable subject of Renaissance pictorial perspective towards an unstable perspective of “free fall” in the electronic virtual, as resistance to a “radicalized class war from above” (Steyerl *Free Fall* np). The last is a gloss which details and extends the specific informational layering of *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* through an apocalyptic rendering of design as destructive innovation using the a film of the same title (or rather *A Problem of Design: How to Kill People?*) by postwar American designer George Nelson, broadcast on television in 1960 (fig. 21).

In “In Free Fall – A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective” Steyerl equates the loss of horizon and emphasis on surface/image in the digital present to something tangibly and abruptly new (but not completely, as we shall see): “...Google maps and surveillance panoramas do not actually portray a stable ground – Instead they create a supposition that it exists in the first place ... an imaginary observer and an imaginary stable ground” (Steyerl, *FreeFall* n.p). So there is a shift from one visual paradigm (of fixed horizon and fixed observer) to another visual paradigm of infinitely mobile all-seeing avatar (without changing in the idea that meaning is a visual condition). For Steyerl, this paradigm shift disturbs the horizon but still has a continuation of the idea of a singular visuality as truth, where a immobilized Renaissance viewer defined as subject by horizon, vanishing point and point of view is replaced by the hegemonic assertion of vertical view – the mapping view or the drone view – and a mobile subject and object, essentially a re-tooling by updated technology in which one perspective is replaced by another in a continuation and amplification of control by Cartesian coordinates in the digital era of “an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground” (Steyerl). ‘Free fall’ is the antidote to this fictional and hegemonic reconstruction of perspective through information technology, image analysis and surveillance hardware. ‘Falling’ is a “new representational freedom” exemplified, according to Steyerl, in some 3D animation technologies, multi-screen projections, and in an evolved



cinematic space that has merged its indexical photographic space with graphic design, collage, and drawing.



Fig. 17a-b. Hito Steyerl. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die / Robots Today*. video installation, Munster, 2016. (T.Michel).  
Video link (some robot video content –Thomas Michel): <https://vimeo.com/227460444>

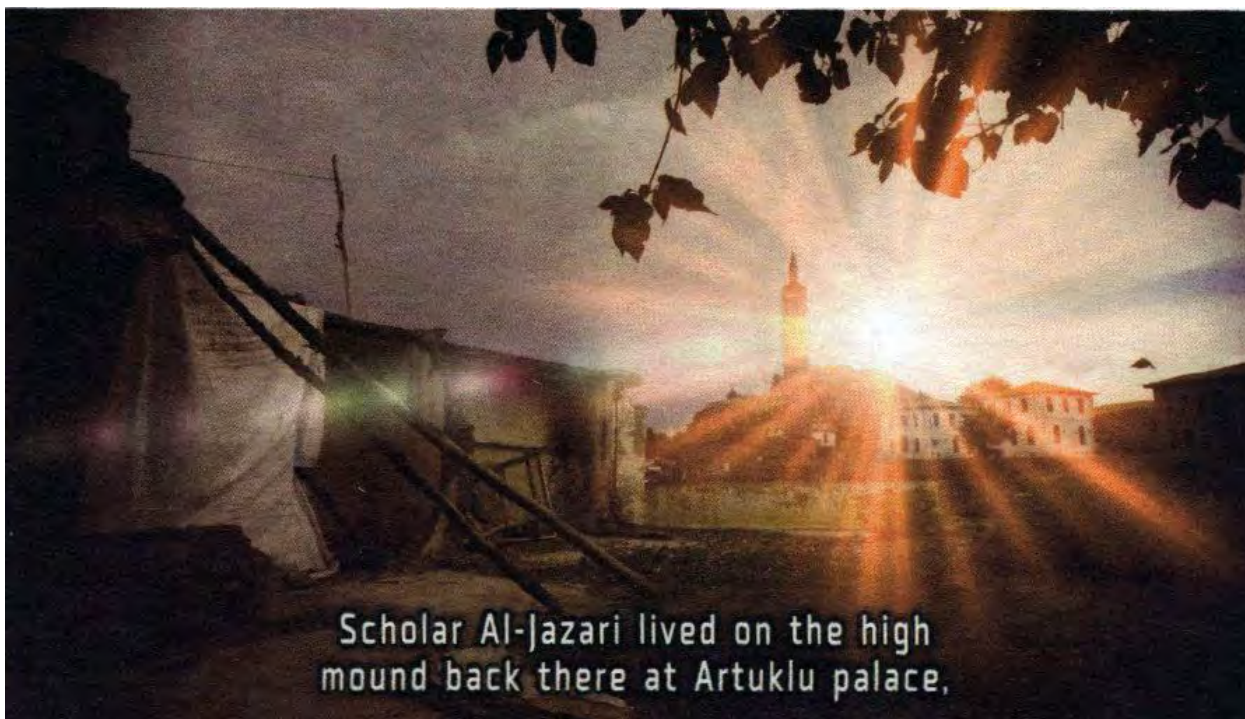


Fig. 17c/d. Hito Steyerl. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die/Robots Today*. Stills from Diyarbakir/Al Jazari video, Munster, 2016. (Skulptur Projekte Münster 2017, catalogue).



Fig. 17e/f. Hito Steyerl. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die/Robots Today*. Stills from Diyarbakir/Al Jazari video, Munster, 2016. (Skulptur Projekte Münster 2017, catalogue).



Fig. 17g. Hito Steyerl. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die/Robots Today*. video installation, 2016. Installation at Park Ave. Armory, summer NYC, 2019 (Art in America).

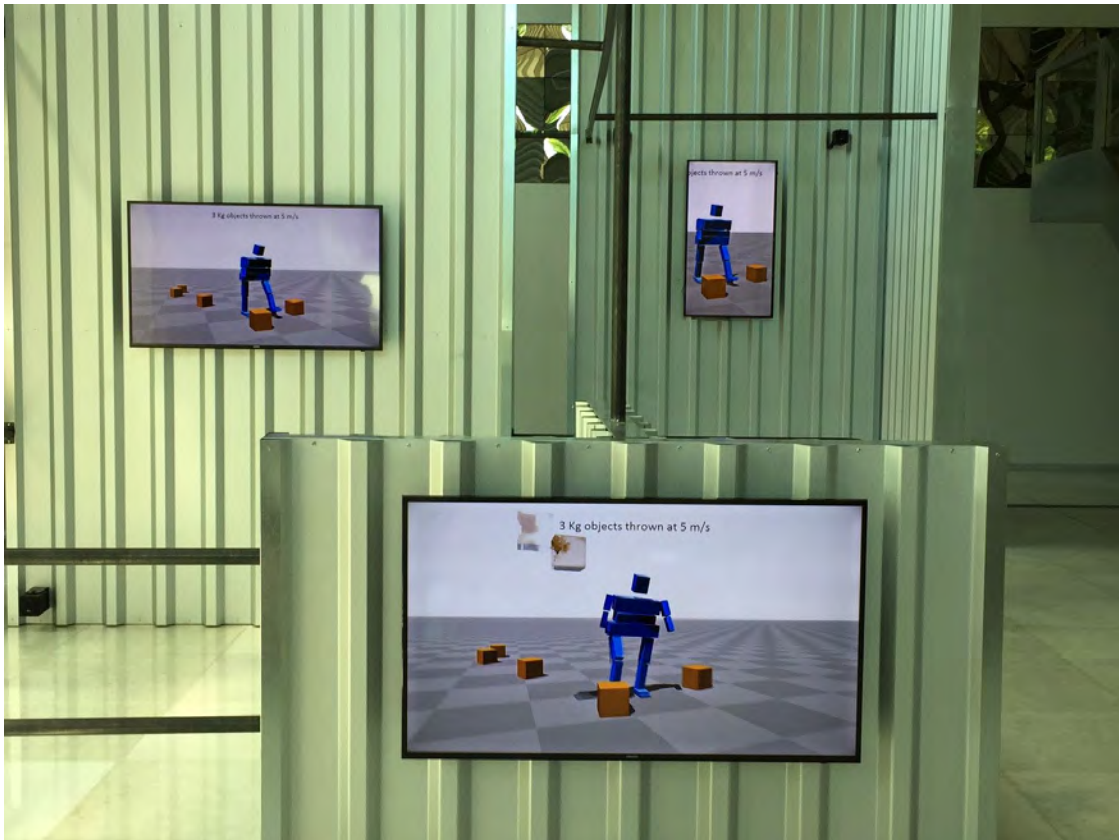


Fig. 17h. Hito Steyerl. *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die/Robots Today*. video installation, Munster, 2016 (Thomas Michel)



Fig. 18. Boston Dynamics - testing Big Dog robot, 2004 (Boston Dynamics)



Fig. 19. Joel Shapiro. *Individual Spirit*, US Consulate, Guangzhou, 2012 (Shapiro/Artist's Rights Society)

The suggested political radicality of ‘free fall’ as groundlessness in modernism is illustrated by William Turner’s famous 1840 painting, *The Slave Ship* (fig 20). Turner’s painting represents an historical event in which the captain of a slave trading ship throws African captives overboard to drown after understanding that his insurance policy covered loss of cargo at sea but not loss on board due to disease. Steyerl takes Turner’s image of a storm-tossed ship with no distinguishing line between sea and sky as the dissolving of space into mayhem and as a blurring or de-anchoring of the horizon, freeing it from its (linear perspectival) dominance of vision (n.p.). Likewise, in the contemporary frame, she discusses architect Eyal Weizman, who, through his agency Forensic Architecture “analyses verticality in political architecture” in the planning of urban space and architecture in Israeli-occupied Palestine. And also, the experience of Steyerl’s installation practice, one presumes.



Fig. 20. J.M.W. Turner. *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying – Typhoon coming on (The Slave Ship)*. 1840. Oil Paint on Canvas. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

If critical viewers are no longer unified in a single gaze but navigate from within a *montage* of visual techniques and perspectives, then gaps and abysses in perspectival ordering of space become apparent. Steyerl cites Theodor Adorno: “...the vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inclusiveness, the negative as [that] which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is true for untruth only” (n.p.). Finally, says Steyerl, the possibility of free fall “towards objects without reservation, embracing a world of forces and matter ... a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing and always already unknown ...

the perspective of free fall teaches us to consider a social and political dreamscape of radicalized class war from above, one that throws jaw-dropping social inequalities into sharp focus ... falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place” (np). This is Steyerl’s manifesto of speculative fiction as dreamscape operating in the data gaps of information culture as radical critique.

In a story about 3D images, “Ripping Reality: Blind Spots and wrecked Data in 3D” Steyerl extends this idea of fiction as operating in the gaps or blind spots of visual/virtual representation. A 3D image, which might become a rapid-prototyped object or part of a fly through map of real terrain, is an image nonetheless. An image is all surface. It is an image in which a point cloud of Cartesian coordinates forms a virtual undulating (topological) surface upon which is mapped simple 2D images as texture. If the mapping is correct we have a virtual 3D space or object (space or object, depending on where the view point is). The perceived sense of approximate or accurate resemblance when viewing such a 3D virtual space is entirely controlled by the resolution capacity of the apparatus recording the point cloud or the 2D skin, or the coding synching them together, which, in turn, is strictly a matter of cost.

Connecting this virtual format to Erwin Panofsky’s canonical text *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1924), Steyerl makes the connection to Renaissance linear perspective explicit. In these virtual representations of space there is a linear armature making a surface and an illusionary surface texture. These are the same effects in different formats (see the definition of format in the discussion of David Summers, in Chapter 2). The sense of “wow that looks so real” of a C15 viewer in front of an effective representation of a cityscape must have been quite similar to that of a contemporary viewer in 3D goggles today. We are surprised that our senses perceive something as if on the cusp of real without being in the real place at this moment (that is, our experience is that of being temporally displaced).

To make this connection even more clear, Steyerl rolls out an ubiquitous image from art history survey courses, Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533), with its anamorphic illusions (its two points of view). Steyerl’s fiction woven into this history combines a discussion of high resolution 3D terrain mapping used by the American military during the Bosnian civil war as better-than-real in peace negotiations (and airstrike coordination) and a single kiss between two people, a militia kidnapper and a black captive, during the same conflict which has simply disappeared from the record (if it was not something completely invented by the artist) (Steyerl,

*Duty Free* 195). This event is a blind spot, a blank in the recorded information, now rebuilt by Steyerl in fiction. 3D space, within its own format, has similar gaps. A 3D image, to be complete, requires data of every point recorded from all directions. Most 3D images are, in fact, 2.5D, a fractional space between 2D and 3D (197). In this approximation there are unrecorded areas, the bottom of objects or unseen folds, for example, which the constructing code simply fills in. In the midst of the virtual space or form there are blanks, simple planes filled with extrapolated colour, which mean nothing except to fill the void of missing data. These blanks are the (metaphorically, or real) gaps or abysses, yet another non-place for ‘free fall’ in Steyerl’s speculative fiction. Counteracting the information economy uses not only ‘extra’ information adjacent to the digital economy’s real fragmented edges, but also from the gaps at the centre of its virtual representations.

Above, I suggested that “In Free Fall – A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective” is Hito Steyerl’s updating riff on Erwin Panofsky’s 1927 essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. Panofsky’s text not only outlines the canonical story of the evolution of Renaissance pictorial perspective from Euclid and Alhazen through Brunelleschi’s drawn linear perspective to Descartes’ calculus and coordinate space (and hence the space of the digital 3D), but also qualifies it as a scientific or modern way of seeing not previously known. For Panofsky, Renaissance perspective is a symbolic form rather than a fact of nature (following Ernst Cassirer’s neo-Kantian hierarchy of cultural symbolic forms) which conditions our experience of space and defines our subjectivity as beings located in an “homogeneous space [which] is never given space [nature, or pure materiality, depending where you come from], but space produced by construction; and indeed the geometrical concept of homogeneity can be expressed by the postulate that from every point in space it must be possible to draw similar figures in all directions and magnitudes” (Cassirer in Panofsky 30).

Space, in this schema, is simply the void conceptual container for the absolute relative location of all things (objects, atoms, etc.). One of Panofsky’s points is that there are other ways of seeing and other conceptions of space associated with them, the aggregate pictorial space of the pre-Renaissance, for example. There is nothing universal about coordinate space. The conjecture that the vanishing point of linear perspective and the corresponding static and monocular point-of-view are homologous, in a coordinate space that extends infinitely and calculably is one foundational query of a ‘critique’ of visuality and power that has preoccupied



the scholarly analysis of visual culture over the past century. Panofsky's symbolic form evolves and thickens into terms like Jonathan Crary's 'techniques of the observer' and Martin Jay's 'scopic regimes of modernity' and also as part of Deutsche's critique of public space, discussed above. The first point to be made here is that Steyerl's riff on perspectival space, far from being a view from a radical new position, is working from the very centre of the canon of art history and moving image critique in the twentieth century and, secondly, that her polemical characterization of a paradigm shift between Renaissance visuality and the vertical perspective of the mobile horizon/viewpoint of the digital virtual is actually a relatively minor adjustment in format considering what remains in common (subjectivities, hierarchies of power, and centrality of the visual as meaning, coordinate space, etc.). This does not diminish the relevance of Steyerl's work, but it does calibrate some of its more hyperbolic assertions.

The notion of free fall as a side-step into other constructions of space, as a way to evade hegemonic power, be those spaces fictional or real, is entirely consistent with Panofsky's 1927 analysis. If, as Cassirer's neo-Kantianism claims, we collectively construct a meaningful cultural world by moving from pre-rational imagination to concepts and schemata, then we can also reverse this process and by looking at cultural artifacts we can unpack the layers of concepts and understand the meaning of these things to the individuals or cultures that made them. This is Panofsky's contribution to the toolkit of art history as iconography, for which his examination of the symbolic artifact of the Renaissance in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* was a test-case. Almost a hundred years later, Steyerl is doing her own iconographic reading, constructing a speculative fiction from the bones of art history and critical theory combined in the overflowing horizon of contemporary image production, now in a "junkspace" and "junktime" in which space and time have come unpinned (Steyerl, *Art Monthly* 4).<sup>76</sup>

In the present, where the word 'artifact' has become the name for glitchy or imprecise pixels generated by digital image compression codecs,<sup>77</sup> the meaning of artifact (in an art historical sense) is compromised. Iconography, in the end, may be Panofsky's contribution to effective digital image-based surveillance, allowing images as artifacts to be parsed as pure information. Another critical voice in this fiction of artifacts, though un-noted in Steyerl's text, is art historian

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76. In the Kantian terms that Summers follows, time and space are part of intuition, rather than a attribute of nature as given.

77. In the JPEG image things, like edges, backgrounds, or subtleties of colour, that are deemed to be of marginal interest, whose complexity of data may expediently be down-sampled out of existence – these are akin to Steyerl's blind-spots in digital surfaces.

David Summers, previously mentioned for outlining a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ spaces, and for the vital substitution of a more deeply enabling (less formal) term of ‘spatial arts’ in the place of ‘visual arts.’ In *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003) Summers’ project (as a scholar of ancient art and artifacts) is to exceed the limitations of an analysis of art either as a continuous formal/stylistic evolution, psychology of visual perception (Gombrich), or iconographic decoding of meaning (Panofsky, Warburg). He wants to contextualize artifacts in real spaces and to leave behind false continuities generated by the demands of academic disciplines, especially when contextualizing artifacts not produced in the framework of Western modernity (16).

These are methodological questions for art history and material culture studies. In the context of this reflection on Steyerl’s “Free Fall,” David Summers articulates some key points that clarify the limitation of an iconographic reading of artifacts as too limited to the symbolic mode of language (in this we see the shadow of Cassirer in Panofsky). Cassirer’s symbolic turn in comprehending social space is resisted by Summers through a process of trying to understand the singular contextual spatialities and temporalities of which artifacts are a part. Relevant aspects of Summers’ method are: using the term format; defining a pertinent concept of ‘planarity’ in relation to virtual spaces; and inflecting the discussion of space and surface with a deeper (more primordial, he would say) concern with the ‘shape of time’ as the principal thing that artifacts determine.

For Summers a format is a conventional arrangement or embedding of form and meaning. A canvas or an altarpiece is a structural format; linear perspective in painting, used to depict cityscapes is a format; a 3D digital mapping of a geography is a format. We can ask, in addition to thinking about the symbolic purposes of a particular artifact, why does a particular format come about? Formats are culturally specific. They come and go. We can understand that linear perspective and 3D mapping are different formats that rely on a Cartesian construction of space. In that, they may evidence the same Western pictorial imagination at different stages (28).<sup>78</sup> But they might also have different temporalities. Artifacts and formats are part of a shaping of time. They do not exist in a single development or chronology from pre-history to the present; they are an active part of the formation of a spatio-temporal real space to which they belong (18). This is

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78. Summers’ formats are, in a basic sense, comparable to Latour’s assemblages, or Schatzki’s bundles.

something that cannot be explained by the unpacking method of iconography, partly because a format is not about such a linguistic reading of the specificities of meaning, and partly because that kind of reading assumes a continuous unified temporality (the temporality of the social research).

Summer suggests that instead of asking what some artifact means, or how some forms express a meaning, instead we could also ask why did people continue (or not) to make this or that kind of thing in some particular format. A canvas as a format, for example, is a real physical thing (a frame structure and a woven surface) with a virtual presentation on one side. Such a planarity is “conditional for vast, pervasive and multilayered institutions of the presentation of images and information, as well as a social spatial order and practice” (25). We could discuss the 3D wireframe in the same way. Such planarities in specific formats are not just the ‘visible’ arts or art about visibleness, where meaning is to be read from the virtual surface. They are what make the real space and time on which the virtual space occurs and by which humans calibrate experience. If art operates in the imagination *and* out there in material and real forms, it is a spatial not a visual art. Artifacts help articulate human space and time. The meaning is not about visibility or visuality, but about spatiality (41). The crux of spatiality is temporality. A question we can ask of Steyerl’s polemics of de-design is, in light of Summer’s more subtle distinction between format and iconography, does Steyerl’s polemic limit itself to a conventional iconographic reading?

Though we are now able to work in a 3D virtual space of topographic information-bearing surfaces, we may still be in the same or a similar space of Western pictorial imagination that is Panofsky’s world of perspective born in the Renaissance. It is also possible that we are experiencing a shift in temporality, which makes this experience different. If Steyerl insists that an apocalyptic paradigm implosion has happened in the digital phase of late capitalism, that we are exiled to a surface-being of data, sampling from and never exceeding iconographic meaning drawn glibly from cultural artifacts of the near-past (from cinema and art history) and from which there is no escape (or only a virtual escape in free fall), then Summers seems to differ from Steyerl. For Summers, planarity has always been a structuring condition (one could call it a proto-format) of: the organization of information *as* and *in* virtual space; and the investigation of real spaces through virtual space. Steyerl’s digital surfaces are a continuation of what could be referred to as topographic planarities. It is only different in the contemporary mode by virtue of

an evolution of format. In engaging the more basic matter of shifting temporalities of real spaces Summer resists the notion that the linguistic constancy of information (via iconography) is the only possible ground, and he returns us to a space where the things we make, make the time and space we live. The information-economy's faith in the constancy of information may be part of the problem. Steyerl's reliance on reading images (at the same time as critiquing the machine version of the same) is an echo of a problematic of iconography inserted into art history by Panofsky.

Is Steyerl's polemic that everything has imploded and we need more humanity as an antidote to an information economy whose surfaces are collapsing in on us? Or that we can cope with the designed world by understanding more rigorously how the things we make shift space and time? Steyerl seems to riff on both possibilities. The first is a mirroring of E. M. Forster's romantic pessimism as a venerable science fiction motif: "What is the opposite design, a type of creation that ... can be comprehended as part of a shared humanity," the artist asks at the conclusion of "How to Kill People" (Steyerl *Duty* 18). The second is something less burdened with heroic/utopian, i.e. modernist humanisms. Steyerl's speculative fiction, rather than performing the scholarly investigation Summers articulates, opens a new fictive environment through the form (and format) of atemporal *montage*, in the junkspace and junktime of the depleted artifact (the artifact that does not know if it is self-generated pixel remnant of the virtual or part of a real space).<sup>79</sup> She takes the artist's option to be both romantic hero and post-human realist (to paint like Turner and to hijack the tropes of post-humanism).

"I saw the future ... it was empty ... a clean slate, flat, designed through and through" is the first line of Steyerl's text "How to Kill People: A Problem of Design" (Steyerl, *Duty* 9). The text details and extends the informational layering of the installation *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* and its

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79. Junkspace is the post-post-modern term coined by architect Rem Koolhaas: "If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet. The built ... product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace." (Koolhaas, "Junkspace" 175). Junktime is a term Steyerl uses in an interview with Jennifer Thatcher in *Art Monthly* as "epitomised by these microloops, by a lack of duration, lack of attention, things go on simultaneously all the time," citing contemporary art historian Sven Lütticken. (Steyerl "No solution" 3). Or, as Frederic Jameson puts it in "The Aesthetics of Singularity": "[At the] heart of any account of postmodernity or late capitalism, there is to be found the historically strange and unique phenomenon of a volatilization of temporality, a dissolution of past and future alike, a kind of contemporary imprisonment in the present—reduction to the body as I call it elsewhere—an existential but also collective loss of historicity in such a way that the future fades away as unthinkable or unimaginable, while the past itself turns into dusty images and Hollywood-type pictures of actors in wigs and the like. Clearly, this is a political diagnosis as well as an existential or phenomenological one, since it is intended to indict our current political paralysis and inability to imagine, let alone to organize, the future and future change" (Jameson 120).

demonstration of “creative destruction” in Diyarbakir, in part through an apocalyptic rendering of design as destructive/disruptive innovation using American designer George Nelson’s film of the same title (or rather *A Problem of Design: How to Kill People?*) (fig. 21) broadcast on TV in 1960 (14). George Nelson was a key player in post-WWII American design. As well as being one of the inventors of the neo-avant-garde style now called ‘mid-century modern’ (in its contemporary commercial revival as a result of exposure on the TV series *Mad Men*) with his ‘atomic’ ball clocks, wall units, office chairs and desks, marketed through the Herman Miller Company. He also initiated the fantastically successful *Action Office*, the first modular office cubicle system, an act for which he later apologized.<sup>80</sup> In parallel, Nelson was a student and critic of design process and practice, who floated the idea of the end of architecture. As such, he ranged from being editor of the journal *Architectural Forum*, to working on real-time computation systems and organisation analysis (Nelson was part of the team designing the Sabre airlines reservation system) (Harwood 97).<sup>81</sup> This connects him in a critical capacity, in the role of a practitioner-critic, both to a generation of postwar industrial and designers of consumer products (Serge Chermayeff, Ray and Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, etc.), and to the ethos of design of Herbert A. Simon’s ‘sciences of the artificial’ and the rise of the first generation of machine-learning in America in the 1950s (see Chapter 3 above) and the later evolution of ‘design thinking’ and ‘design process’ as a vocabulary for problem-solving in design.<sup>82</sup>

The twenty-minute film *A Problem of Design: How to Kill People?* was made for broadcast on CBS television. In it George Nelson gives a concise history of ‘design for killing’ in a typical television documentary style for the era (the anthropomorphic and teleological narration style of the very popular wildlife show, *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom*, broadcast from the early

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80. Or, at least, Nelson criticized its subsequent development. In a letter to the chairman of Herman Miller Company in 1970, Nelson said: “One does not have to be an especially perceptive critic to realize that AO II [Action Office II] is definitely not a system which produces an environment gratifying for people in general. But it is admirable for planners looking for ways of cramming in a maximum number of bodies, for ‘employees’ (as against individuals), for ‘personnel,’ corporate zombies, the walking dead, the silent majority. A large market.” (Abercrombie 35).

81. See the excellent reflection on Nelson’s writing and lectures including a discussion of *How to Kill People* in “The Wound Man: George Nelson and the ‘End of Architecture’” by John Harwood: “Abercrombie [Nelson’s biographer] accounts for this strange self-destructive tendency by identifying Nelson as what one might call a metadesigner, arguing that his object of study and practice was neither the building nor the product but rather the process of design itself” (Harwood 92).

82. See: “Wicked Problems in Design Thinking” by Richard Buchanan in *Design Issues* (1992), and Richard Buchanan “Systems Thinking and Design Thinking: The Search for Principles in the World We Are Making” *she ji: The Journal of Design* (2019).

1960s to the 1980s, for example), holding up and discussing objects for killing, from rocks, to swords, to guns, to missiles. They are presented as being part of the same design history and aesthetic processes we use in designing any other useful thing. He celebrates the fact that weapons design is one of the only places where budget is not an issue, meaning the design itself is less subject to economic compromise, consequently more pure (where form truly does follow function rather than market forces, to invoke the modernist cliché coined by architect Louis Sullivan at the turn of the century). Free from economic restrictions, this is one of the most advantageous parts of the field for the designer to work in, an opportunity to exercise the true practice of design.



Fig. 21. George Nelson. *A Problem of Design: How to Kill People*. film still, 1960 (CBS)

It does seem unclear to some commentators whether this film is a horrifyingly straight ‘part of the problem’ or an explicitly ironic take on ethics-free capitalist design thinking. This, in itself, speaks to the historically ambiguous place of self-reflection or critical thinking about ‘design thinking’ in the commercial field of design at the time, a reflection on design of which George Nelson was an early originator through his work with *Architectural Forum*. Writing for the catalogue of a recent online project and exhibition called *Design and Violence* at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, begun in 2013, design critic Alice Rawthorn, perhaps naively missing Nelson’s irony, critiques the film, seeing Nelson as so “...dazzled by the colossal investment in the design of military gizmos that he assumes everyone else is too ... [that] he fails dismally to address one of the most important, albeit tortuous aspects of the design of weaponry or anything else: the designer’s moral responsibility towards the outcome of his or

her work” (Antonelli, 85).<sup>83</sup>

Hito Steyerl takes the anomaly that is Nelson’s film and reinserts it into an art/design discourse as a succinct description of destructive innovation as pure teleological intention, a template for the advent of an information-capitalist future (and, of course, a decidedly evocative title). Interestingly, she does not ascribe an ethical position or failing to Nelson as author of the film. She seems to accept that this work is at play in the field of design, embedded much like her work is, in a space in which it is not the prime actor. It is the nature of the gaps in this embedding that is of interest in this thesis, and we might assume, for Steyerl as well. As D. J. Huppertz asked, writing on Herbert A. Simon’s science of design, “who determines the ‘courses of action’ and whose ‘preferred situations’ are we to design” in a scenario where design is explicitly, obediently and expediently a mechanism pointing towards desired outcomes (Huppertz 40)?

Steyerl’s version of this question in *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, first and foremost recognises that this is a question in the terms of design that can only be unpacked in the terms of art. It also recognises that the desired outcomes may be something other than what is visible on the surface. She suggests we look at Schumpeter’s ‘creative destruction,’ which looks at 1940s Europe to find the meaning of the contemporary design jargon of “creative disruption” that we have difficulty recognizing in Diyarbakir (14). It is hardly recognizable because “disaffection is part of the overall design structure ... this place seems to be designed as a unique case that follows its own rules ... not included in the horizon of shared humanity” (13).<sup>84</sup> Steyerl’s reference to Schumpeter’s ‘creative destruction’ in discussing Diyarbakir comes directly from Nelson, who frequently used Schumpeter’s theory in lectures on design as an antidote to the more positive ‘creative building’ (*Baukunst*) espoused by former Bauhaus teachers working in America (Harwood 94).<sup>85</sup> Is the ‘art’ of Steyerl’s practice which hovers between the gallery work and the

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83. Alice Rawsthorn in *Design and Violence*, MOMA/DAP, NYC 2015. Catalogue for the exhibition of the same name organized by Paola Antonelli. [www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/designandviolence/how-to-kill-people-george-nelson/](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/designandviolence/how-to-kill-people-george-nelson/). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

84. In a note Steyerl refers to both Peter Hallward’s definition of singular versus generic situations in *Absolutely Postcolonial* (Manchester University Press, 2001) and to Frederic Jameson’s concept of singularity – that this apparent singularity eliminates the temporal – in “the aesthetics of singularity.”

textual gloss of her montaged essays (between the doings and sayings of her practice, we can now say) an attempt to re-anchor the singular atemporalized event by rebuilding a fiction around it? Steyerl suggests that in “modernist science fiction the worst kind of governments used to be imagined as single artificial intelligence” (15). Today this menace has been dumbed down to “decentralized artificial stupidity” (16). Here the narrative moral fable against a semi-sentient (or ethically non-sentient, or even malevolent) all-controlling machine of traditional science fiction is diffused into a cloud of efficient, but utterly dumb, micro-processes. The ensuing creative disruption, she says (borrowing hyperbole from Schumpeter *via* Nelson), is not just the wrecking of these here buildings, it is “the wrecking of a horizon of common understanding” and “emptying out the future to sustain a looping version of a past that never existed” (17). The question is, is Steyerl’s art practice embedded in a performance of information (in what seems to be quite the same manner as George Nelson’s *How to Kill People*), such that we can’t ascertain if it is ironic critique or not.

Is it rescued from being merely more layers of information by the new version of speculative fiction framed by Steyerl’s writing and performance? Steyerl calls this the work’s singularity, a term she appropriates from critic Frederic Jameson: “Today therefore we consume, not the work, but the idea of the work, as in [Stanislaw] Lem’s imaginary book reviews; and the work itself, if we can still call it that, is a mixture of theory and singularity.” (Jameson 113).<sup>86</sup> This singularity is equally the strategy of the designer of ‘disruptive innovations’ who create, according to “How To Kill People” “...a unique case that just follows its own rules ... it is not included in the horizon of shared humanity; it is designed as a singular case, a small-scale singularity” (Steyerl 13). Steyerl’s diffuse *montage* practice is a critique that is in and of what it purports to critique. How does such a practice of speculative fiction not slip into its own

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85. Harwood again: “Nelson absorbed Schumpeter’s lessons on competition entirely, and recapitulated them ceaselessly in his articles on his and others’ various corporate design consultancies. This point of view alienated him early in his career from the émigrés from the Werkbund and Bauhaus, who had after World War II achieved a certain détente with industry that had eluded them in Europe. As he argued in a lecture at Serge Chermayeff’s Chicago Institute of Design that, according to Nelson, ‘precipitated a near riot,’ true design consisted not of Baukunst but rather of ‘creative destruction’: [Nelson says]: the creation-destruction polarity is at the core of the whole design process. Seen in this way, the familiar notion that creation is ‘good while destruction is ‘bad’ turns out to have no meaning whatever... Evolution and revolution, creation and destruction, are different names for the same thing. We use one or the other depending on our choice of a frame of reference” (Harwood 10).

86. According to Jameson, Lem’s reviews are a series of book reviews of books that do not exist... the citation continues... “It is not material – we consume it as an idea rather than a sensory presence—and it is not subject to aesthetic universalism, insofar as each of these artifacts reinvents the very idea of art in a new and non-universalizable form, so that it is in that sense even doubtful whether we should use the general term art at all for such singularity-events” (Jameson 114).



informational singularity?

I have reflected on three speculative fictions in this section: E. M. Forster's early twentieth century prototype ("The Machine Stops," 1919); George Nelson's mid-century modern (*A Problem of Design: How to Kill People?*, 1963); and Hito Steyerl's hyper-attention update (*Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, 2016). They have more similarities than differences, but the similarities and differences are telling. Each is a dystopian parable of the potential destruction of humanity (or at least, of what is perceived to matter in humanity within its designed world). The destructive force is our technicity, our capacity to design running ahead of our capacity to reflect. In each, this is amplified or simplified to the mythic register of a design fiction. For Forster the fundamental conflict is between physical and spiritual human connection and the mechanical machines that humans have made into interfaces and interpreters of their animal freedom and experience. The real world has been inhabited and mediated by the machine. For Nelson the conflict is between humanity and humanity's own concept of a regulating design, the *tabula rasa* of Le Corbusier's modernist ideal desperately lost in its own logic. For Steyerl the machine is no longer mechanical but digital, no longer an entity but a space made of algorithmically devised surfaces. It is a dispersed reality rather than a coherent entity. The real world may be the surface.

Tropes of redemption are part of all three stories. In "The Machine" it is the promise of physical and spiritual contact sparked by a heroic journey to the surface, to a nature beyond the scope of the machine. In *How to Kill*, we must imagine that it is each one of us, the designer, as actor/observer of the world who must be shocked into a state of reflection and responsibility. We should apologise for our aesthetically elegant office systems and their by-product of weaponry. In *Hell Yeah* Steyerl turns the tables. 'We' is not the designer responsible for the carnage, but the citizens of Diyarbakir, subject to disruptive innovation. We die. How are *we* – all of us, not only some lucky science fiction hero – to escape? Is it through our realisation of the hegemony of vertical perspective? Are there, in 'free fall' through the gaps in the surface, the glitches in the wireframe, breaks in the formatting of space? In this latest science fiction there is a "dimension of time that is no longer accessible to humans, but only to networked so-called control systems that produce flash crashes and high frequency trading scams ... in short the present feels as if it is constituted by emptying out the future to sustain a looping version of a past that never existed" (16). Creative disruption wrecks the horizon of common understanding. In the junk space and junk time that is left over, in a reassuring *montage* of image and hyper-layered information

(reassuring because it is the texture of how we know), Steyerl makes artwork of the future. It is a junktime characterized by “a lack of duration, lack of attention, things going on simultaneously all the time” (Steyerl *Art Monthly* 375). And in this new space, do we now merely repeat, “Only connect ... and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect...” (E. M. Forster, *Howard’s End* 160)?<sup>87</sup> Or is there something else to say?

Design fiction, or science fiction, or speculative fiction seems adept at transmitting the surface texture of the anxiety of an age by speaking of the present through a fictional future as a way of making the present appear strange but familiar enough to recognize. Because it deals in surfaces and images, it is less adept at parsing the temporal and spatial preconceptions embedded in what David Summers calls ‘the format.’ Above, I suggested that Steyerl’s analysis is somewhat caught up in the same iconography of visual representation (via Panofsky) that informs the algorithmic all-seeing eye of surveillance culture.<sup>88</sup> If we stop at the analysis of the image in coordinate space and then temper this with an analysis of power derived from critical theory, we are only going part of the way. As Summers says, visuality and the virtual are “conditional for vast, pervasive and multilayered institutions of the presentation of images and information, as well as a social spatial order and practice” (25). Specific formats are not just where meaning is to be read from the virtual surface. They are what make the real spaces and temporal conditions on which the virtual spaces occur and by which humans calibrate experience.

I conjecture, above, that Hito Steyerl’s art practice is not just the objects and video *montage* used in exhibitions but a fruitful space of practice located between those exhibition props, her lectures, and her writing. To extend this observation into a design fiction of my own, there is an artist whose work I would truly like to see: *Mummer Steylson*. They are an amalgam of the three thinkers discussed above, namely Steyerl, Nelson and Summers. This colossus would satisfy the double criteria opened up through Hannah Arendt’s reflection on imagination; far from being gestures that engage a simple subversion of a particular form or revealing the explicit politics of

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87. There is an interesting investigation to be made comparing Hito Steyerl’s *montage* style of video production to the seamless narrative style of Merchant-Ivory film productions of Forster’s literature. It would start with how each seems to aim at creating very different envelopes of comfort for the viewer, which are ultimately similar in goal but for different audiences.

88. In the same way that cognitive computing has absorbed, and possibly made obsolete, the critique of Hubert Dreyfus in *What Computers Can’t do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (1972).

visuality implicit to design, there is a potential to engage what is excluded from the frame (or the format), allowing for a discontinuity which seems contrary to the continuity and self-sufficiency of the designed world. This extends Summer's inquiry about real spaces and the virtual of artifacts<sup>89</sup> into a zone examining our own real and virtual spaces, the formats that reveal our own designed world. This is a vital set of questions about images, their digital substrates, and how they have become real spaces for us. In addition to Arendt's forceful humanist query about alienation in public space (the metaphor of the table, see Introduction), we also have a very contemporary analogical opening, through imagination, into that which is not yet cemented into symbolic meaning. It is quite unlikely, though, that *Mummer Steylson* will make art's Power 100.

**2. Example Theaster Gates: Un-Building in the City.** Scholar of African-American improvised music, George Lewis suggests, during a panel discussion that included Theaster Gates, that the mutual interdependence of experimental aesthetic practice and a solidarity in the face of normative social and cultural power is *the* significant marker of a particular set of artistic doings and sayings that is experimental music in Chicago, begun in the 1960s by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM):

This was the moment when collectives were being formed because you needed that kind of solidarity, that kind of shared sense of purpose, the sense that power comes through interaction. There was this strong and, I think, justified belief that focusing on doing the music of their dreams and desires and hopes would give them the power they needed to confront all these forces. In fact, there was no point in confronting these forces if you weren't going to bet on yourself. (Lewis, "Questions" 57)

Each aspect (playing the music of one's dreams and confronting social forces) is the condition of the other; each is the other's singular 'structural need' (my term). Speaking about public practice with British scholar and curator Claire Doherty, Theaster Gates refers to an exemplary experimental musician of this period, Ornette Coleman as being able to hold time still as a way of accumulating ideas:

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89. Possibly both the artifact as object of cultural production and the junk or excess artifact (as by-product) are infiltrating, or acting as filler within, the digital image.

If we were to think about the way Ornette Coleman plays saxophone, that there could be a melodic structure that represents time, maybe even form. And then Ornette Coleman is making decisions to accumulate ideas, over and over again, so that even though time is moving forward, because the melody is playing itself over and over, time is also standing still, and as time stands still, Ornette Coleman can accumulate ideas, musical ideas. I think that way of thinking about how materials, histories conflate, because we keep reliving the same things over and over. It feels like in some ways there was a 1920s moment that turned into a 1960s moment that turned into a Ferguson moment, let's say. The fact that we have to keep living civil rights means that I can make a thing, I can riff a thing and it will seem like time has stood still. That's not always a good thing when you think about certain politics, but I feel like in some ways, the work is asking questions about how materials accumulate, how a place accumulates; how time is actually something that is not as linear as we imagine, and that a thing that's from the 17th century might be as relevant, if not more relevant, in terms of an ideology as it is today. (Doherty 66)

Gates deliberately weaves this temporal and spatial experimentalism into a holding of the temporality of struggle for black rights in America (including the aftermath of the murder of Michael Brown Jr. at Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014)<sup>90</sup> as the 'structural need' in his own material practice centering on "how materials accumulate, how a place accumulates, how time is actually something that is not as linear as we imagine" (Gates in Doherty). In the discussion of Hito Steyerl, above, David Summers' definition of art as a spatial practice deeply entwined with temporality, marks a key boundary between experimental practices that articulate new or displaced real spaces and the increasingly normative space of culture as the hegemonic arrangement and re-arrangement of information. Summers suggests that there are spatial and temporal practices well beyond the framings of 'Western' and 'contemporary.' One could extend this, now, to 'beyond' the global information flow. It is useful to draw a connecting line between

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90. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown Jr., an 18-year-old black man, was fatally shot by 28-year-old white police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking wide protest and political action connected to the already active Black Lives Matter movement.

Gates' and Summers' ways of seeing material practice as a 'shaping of time,' (to repeat Summers' turn of phrase).<sup>91</sup> In Gates' practice a shaping of time moves not through the non-linear history of artifacts which Summers strives to disconnect from canonical timelines, nor, as in Steyerl's practice, in the gaps in the surfaces of the digital virtual, but across the disciplinary register between music, art and politics in the real spaces of the city.

In his naming of public art as de-design Vito Acconci challenges art practice to be an impromptu encounter that disturbs the flow in the space of the city, side-stepping the highly premeditated, pre-conceived, and predominantly visual viewer/viewed relationship of the museum or gallery. Jane Rendell, in her demanding theoretical and pedagogical positioning for the architecture school, suggests that critical spatial practice, embedded in professional design fields and in civic dynamics, is a vital component in reflecting upon otherwise uncontested urban development as spatial control. Claire Doherty, a British curator of art in urban space, whose conversation with Theaster Gates is cited above, suggests that if "we understand the studio as a place of imagination ... then perhaps we should not be encouraging artists to exit the studio, but rather that the studio [be] immersed in the situation of place." The role of art in public space (in the designed world, in my terminology) is "not one that necessarily restores a sense of belonging or offers up a moment of resolution, but [one that] will shatter the fictions of a stable sense of place" (Doherty *Situations* 11).<sup>92</sup> Doherty's comment is (hopefully) less intended to suggest that "shattering" is art's sole vocation than it is intended to reinforce the qualities of the studio 'mind' as emblematic of singular imagination, which needs to be preserved in an encounter 'out' in the designed world, an encounter which literally builds or creates new situations. Steyerl has given us a version of urban space (Sur, Diyaakir), ironically one where 'by design' the state is shattering an existing complexity of place, where the practice of the artist is to make this process

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91. See Chapter 2.

92. Doherty, as director of Situations, a Bristol, UK-based public art commissioning organisation, presented Theaster Gates' Sanctum project, a twenty four day performative "collaboration with the City" in a disused church. See: [www.situations.org.uk/projects/sanctum/](http://www.situations.org.uk/projects/sanctum/). Doherty also writes: "Daniel Buren once said that all his work proceeded from the extinction of the studio. If, we understand the studio as a space of imagination, rather than the locus of creative activity prior to the presentation of the work, then perhaps we should not be encouraging the artist to exit the studio, but rather that the studio is immersed in the situation of place. For me the most effecting and remarkable projects in public space emerge through an engagement (be it fleeting, or long term) which recognises the instability of our deterritorialised, but bordered world, of contemporaneity, as Terry Smith has suggested. The experience of art is not one in my opinion that necessarily restores a sense of belonging or offers up a moment of resolution, but if truly place responsive, situation specific and contemporary that work of art will shatter the fictions of a stable sense of place, will intervene in the status quo and literally shift the ground beneath your feet" (Doherty, *Situations* 11).

visible (since it is camouflaged inside the dynamic of innovation and information).

Theaster Gate's work, on the surface, is certainly more about improvising new formal, spatial and social configurations, than it is about critiquing or "shattering" existing ones. This may be a key distinction in relation to the artistic practices of the 1980s, to which Rosalyn Deutsche refers, which can be seen as a distanced critique of visibility *versus* Gates' improvised material practice embedding in the everyday life of the city. Also, while one aspect of Gates' practice as an artist (and as a fundraiser) implicates him in the same viewer/viewed relationship of institutional visual arts that Acconci rejected via his move into architecture, Gates' core practice is much less conceived for 'viewers' or for a 'public' than it is for those implicated in the situation, the fellow makers, participants and occupiers of the urban spatial play he brings into being. This marks a significant and explicit contrast with much public art, including some of the performative public practices that Doherty catalogues, which seems to be designed by artists as an experience for a designated art public, in a designated context.<sup>93</sup>

How is art a clairvoyant site? In the practice theory of Theodore Schatzki (see Chapter 2) social interaction is part of practices and their networked material arrangements ("practices are organized, spatio-temporal nexuses of doings and sayings"), and art practice has a particular significance among all practices in explicitly making the nature of (spatio-temporal) change visible (Schatzki "Art" 17). In "Art Bundles" Schatzki examines temporality and "non-propositional" performativity, a basis of human activity that cannot be put into words (similar to what Hubert Dreyfus characterises as *skills*, or Pierre Bourdieu as *habitus*), by focusing on two specific artistic practices and discusses what makes art practice, in its development and change, a 'clairvoyant site' for observing the nature of social change (18, 31). One practice Schatzki discusses is the performance of music and the other is the making of pottery. Importantly, one is an activity of performance and the other a performance of material making. Both are meaning-making, but in different registers of time and expectations of discursiveness. In Schatzki's scrutiny of these two practices he is trying to differentiate artistic practice from other social practices. The practise or performance of art is "treating art as not just artifact or performance, but also as the activities, or rather, practices by means of which such works are created or

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93. See: Doherty, Claire. *Out of Time, Out of Space: Public Art (Now)* (2015), a catalogue of performative art projects in public space.

consumed” (18). These are the bundles of “doings and sayings” (23) that radiate out from the core know-how of a practice, its “shaping of time,” to use Summers’ terminology (Summers 25).

In Schatzki’s defining of clairvoyant practices, pottery/clay work represents a temporal and plastic know-how in which the unique application of skills (e.g., making a bowl) can take place over a significant period of time, involving a myriad of physical involvements and gestures, thoughtful reflection, and the embracing of gestural and material-determined changes (accidents, perhaps). Music, on the other hand, has a component that is more conventionally performance and collectively oriented, which Schatzki describes as a twofold looping of experience. In the playing, the musician “projects lines of relevance that inform the progression of the experience as they act” in an “attentive and unusual state of readiness” (Schatzki, “Art” 28). Music calls for response in the moment. According to Schatzki, art practices are “clairvoyant” in that they are sensitive to this unfolding experience as potential, and can show social changes right back to this non-propositional register. Music and pottery show us two distinct ways this can happen.

It is a compelling coincidence that Schatzki identifies these two fields as exemplary of art practice, and that Theaster Gates’ training as a maker and performer includes pottery and improvised music as key parts of his artistic development (alongside his studies of urban planning). Gates consistently refers to the doings and sayings of both his ceramics and musical experience in building metaphors to deepen interpretations of his more recent work, which involves pushing around materials and meaning in the built urban environment, or improvising in opening up institutional space to different socio-political configurations. Ceramics practice and improvised music exemplify a sense of improvised play to which Gates consistently returns in sourcing and articulating strategies (such as his reference to Ornette Coleman, above) for dealing with new and broader institutional challenges, far beyond the scale of individual craft or musical performance: “Clay and its metaphor of transformation allowed me to imagine cities differently, [that I] as an artist had the capacity to change zoning policies, building codes that hadn’t been looked at in a hundred years” (McGraw 94). This is a nice congruity for this thesis that is possibly not accidental at all. At least it is a perfect fictive coincidence or resonance in this story, which exemplifies the non-propositional “lines of relevance” of improvised practice (28).

The practice of musician, potter, urban planner, builder (as he describes himself) and

“social practice artist” or “real estate artist” (according to the hype),<sup>94</sup> Theaster Gates plays out both in the art world and in the city. Gates’ work is a contemporary practice operating at the horizon between artistic practices and the designed environment, and between art and instrumental culture, engaging and activating various institutional situations and dynamics in an explicit reformulation of the idea of institution itself. An African-American artist based in Chicago, Gates has training in contemporary art, ceramics and urban planning, and embraces a building technique or artistic method based on improvised music and material-sculptural practices. These doings and sayings often take place in abandoned or reclaimed buildings, such that the style of the intervention (the performance of un-building and building, of unmaking and remaking) is as much part of the meaning (the doings and sayings) of the practice as is the final outcome. This separates his practice from more outcome-oriented modes of urban renewal or social work as part of government initiatives, institutional policies, and the like.

In 2006 Gates, after being hired by the University of Chicago, purchased a devalued residential property and former candy store on South Dorchester Street in Chicago (a sign of the impending subprime mortgage crisis in the American banking system).<sup>95</sup> Instead of burrowing into a typical new professor’s comfortable home-owning lifestyle, this was the beginning of a somewhat wilder renovation initiative he ultimately named the *Dorchester Projects*, a multi-building arts and community centre including a library, record collection, lantern-slide archive and performance space (fig. 22a-c). This project has since become one of the most widely discussed examples of ‘social practice art’ of the past decade in academia, the art press and the mainstream media. In a process of improvised rebuilding and adapting (similar, except in scale, to the *bricolage* of any artist or low-income resident)<sup>96</sup> this store became “a rehearsal space, a

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94. “Social practice artist” is from Gate’s Wikipedia entry; “real estate artist” is from Kunst Museum Basel web material for *The Black Madonna* exhibition (2018). See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theaster\\_Gates/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theaster_Gates/) and <https://kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/exhibitions/2018/gates>. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

95. Chronological information is drawn from: Claire Doherty’s *Out of Time, Out of Space: Public Art (Now)*, Hesse McGraw’s “Theaster Gates: Radical Reform with Everyday Tools,” and Gates’ personal website - [www.theastergates.com](http://www.theastergates.com).

96. *Bricolage*, in philosophical terms, is central to anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’ idea of mythical thinking, attempting to re-use available materials to solve new problems (*The Savage Mind*, 1966) and to Derrida’s extrapolation of Levi-Strauss in *Writing and Difference* which suggests that “If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one’s concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*... the engineer, whom Levi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon.” *Bricolage* as both a mythopoetical counterpoint to Cartesian thinking where the “engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*,” says Derrida, and a



residency and a communal kitchen for the expanding numbers of artists, performers and designers that Gates invited” (McGraw 92). Gates salvaged materials and matter from the substrate of Chicago’s ever-changing built environment: for example bowling-lane floors and boards from the Wrigley chewing gum factory (92).



Fig. 22a-c. Theaster Gates. *The Dorchester Projects*. Chicago, 2006. (Gates)

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kind of everyday urban ‘making do,’ may be an ideal descriptive term for Gate’s procedures and purposes, though not expanded upon in this thesis (Derrida 360).

In 2009, at the height of the subprime mortgage crisis, he was able to purchase the three-storey house next door to the candy store and began, with a team of artists, musicians and builders to repurpose it, inside and out. It almost immediately evolved into a kind of archive when Gates accepted the gift of the University of Chicago Art History Department's technologically obsolete glass-slide collection of images of artifacts. So to the collection of locally meaningful material-architectural fragments that made up the first phase of the project was added a new layer of "bodies of knowledge" from the Western canon of art study (92). To this collection was added 14,000 art and architecture books from a Chicago bookshop and 8,000 vinyl LPs from Dr. Wax, a closed-out local record store. This assemblage of meaningful, only just obsolete, materials became the core of a public archive and community space. A third building across the street was acquired and repurposed as a screening and event space. Together, under the collective name *Dorchester Projects*, the *Archive House*, the *Listening House*, and the *Black Cinema House* served Gates' immediate community and neighbourhood and served Gates as a model for the un-building and building of structures, the un-making and remaking of meaning that reverberates in subsequent projects at many different scales.

In the rebuilding process of the *Dorchester Projects* Gates invented the Soul Manufacturing Corporation by gathering a skilled and unskilled group of builders, carpenters, musicians and artists for an improvised process of deconstruction and reconstruction, as a kind of thinking-through of building and potential purpose – a kind of un-making and making think tank. The musical ensemble of which Gates is a member, the *Black Monks of Mississippi* (with Yaw Agyeman, Mikel Avery, Justin Dillard, Ben Lamar Gay, and Kiara Lanier), has been an integral part of this improvised performance of building that is part of Gates' method of spatial intervention. Often group musical improvisation is part of the 'planning' phase of new projects, a way of beginning the occupation and reimagining the occupations of buildings.

The renown of the *Dorchester Projects* as a culturally implicated urban self-renewal experiment in Chicago's south side, and the Rebuild Foundation associated with it, made Gates a key figure in both the international contemporary art and architecture worlds and a powerful mover in initiatives for urban renewal in south Chicago. Subsequent projects which manifest variations on the process and attitudes of the *Dorchester Projects* include: the work *12 Ballads for a Huguenot House* (2012) at the Documenta 13 art exhibition in Kassel, Germany in which an abandoned house in Kassel, historically used by displaced Huguenots, was rebuilt and

repurposed as an inhabited working and performance site using building materials from a demolished church in Chicago, shipped to Germany in containers (fig. 23a-c); the renovation of the decrepit Stony Island Savings Bank, purchased from the City of Chicago for one dollar in 2013, and re-devised as a cultural space to house the book collection of John H. Johnson (founder of Johnson Publishing, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines) and the record collection of Frankie Knuckles (an originator of house music); *Sanctum*, in Bristol, UK in 2015 (fig. 24) was a temporary structure built in the ruins of a 14th century church, as the venue for a continuous 552 hour performance (by Gates and many local artists) involving spoken word, music and sound. *How to Build a House Museum* was an exhibition of sculptural objects, potential anti-monuments of architectural manifestations of African American culture in Chicago, staged at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2016 (fig. 25a-b).



Fig. 23a-b. Theaster Gates. *12 Ballads for a Huguenot House*, 2012. (Gates)

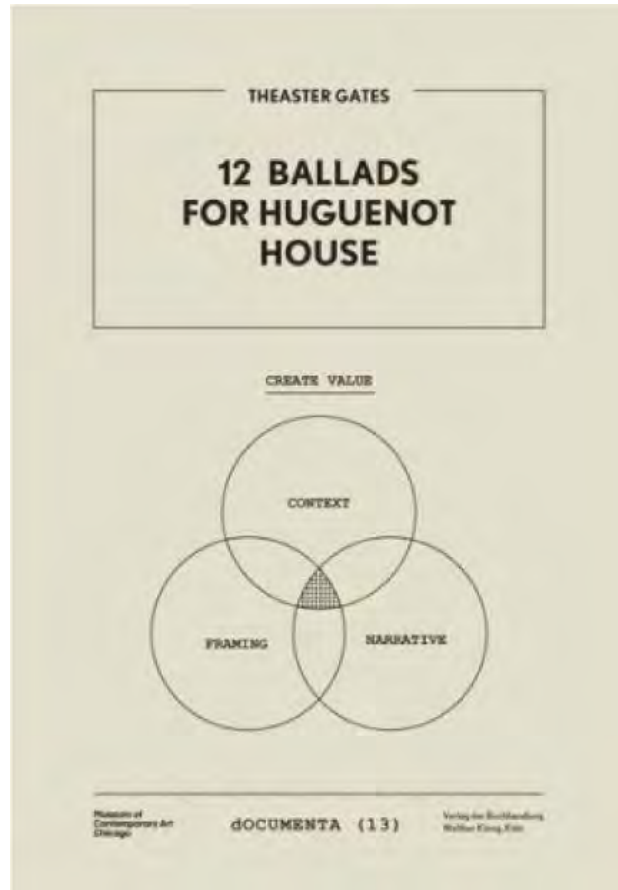


Fig. 23c. Theaster Gates. *12 Ballads for a Huguenot House: Poster*. 2012. (Gates)



Fig. 24. Theaster Gates. *Sanctum*. Bristol, UK, 2015. (Gates)

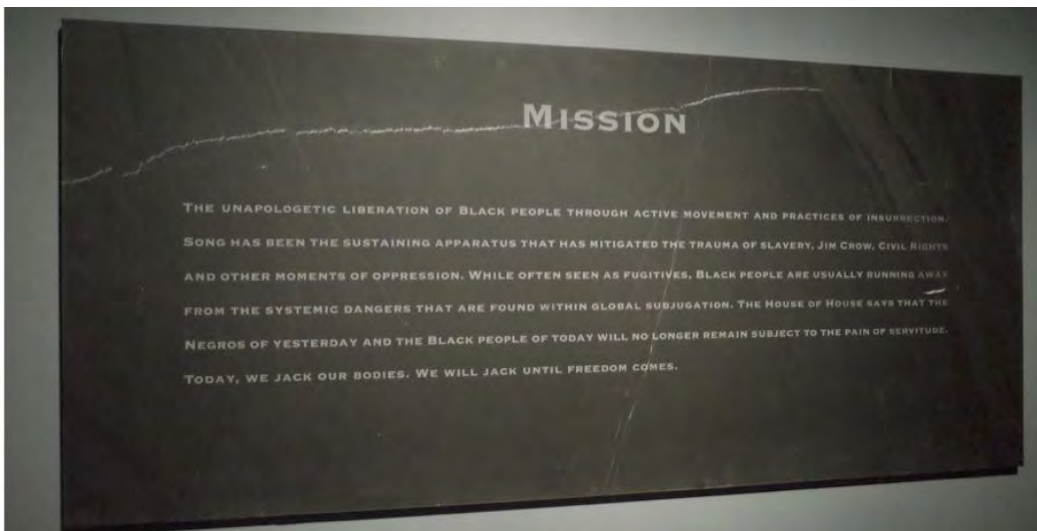
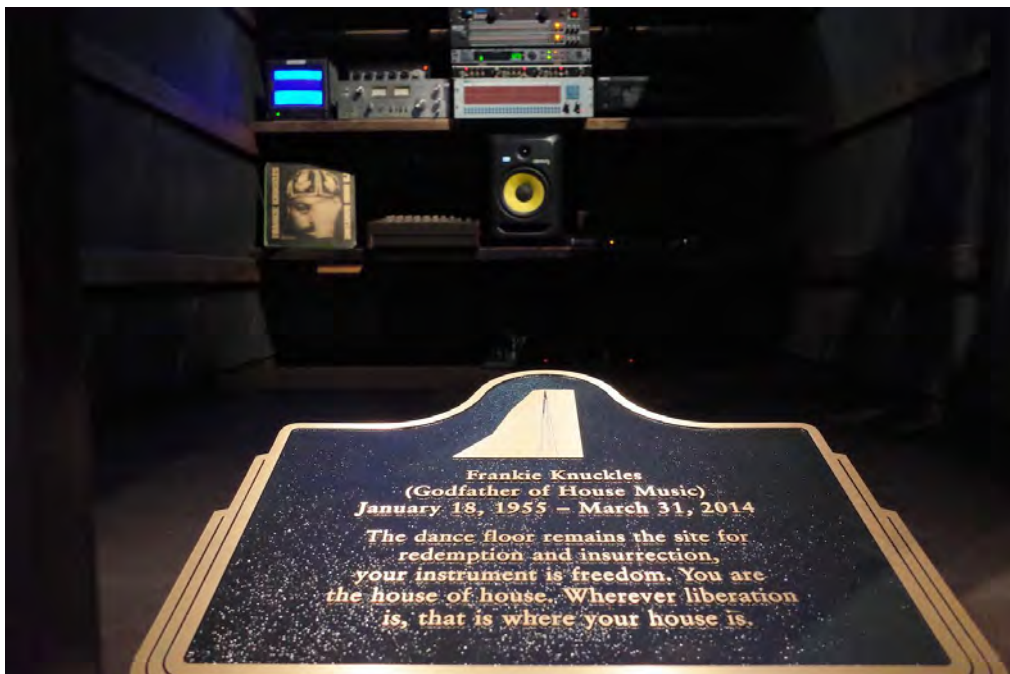


Fig. 25a-b. Theaster Gates. *How to Build a House Museum*. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2016. (A. Forster)

*Dorchester Art and Housing Collaborative* represents a non-art, social enterprise, continuation of the *Dorchester Projects*, a real real-estate development project for thirty-two units of affordable housing incorporating high quality working spaces for theatre and dance artists. Gates' institutional implication includes the University of Chicago Arts and Public Life Initiative and the Place Lab (at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies, University of

Chicago), discussed in more detail below.<sup>97</sup> In what follows, I will take an artist talk/performance by Gates leading up to two exhibitions in 2018 and 2019 (*Black Madonna* and *The Black Image Corporation*) (figs. 26, 27), the museum exhibit *How to Build a House Museum*, and The Place Lab (fig. 28), an institution-building initiative, as examples of Gates' performance of the idea of improvised art practice, in different institutional frameworks and on different scales.

Theaster Gates' 2018 exhibition *Black Madonna* at Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland<sup>98</sup> takes as a starting point a 17th century painting or altarpiece Polish Catholic Black Madonna in an exploration of visual representations of black women. The work in the exhibition explores different images representing black women from the black Madonnas in the Catholic tradition to the photographic archives of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines from Chicago (the Johnson Publishing Company archive), to which Gates had exclusive access. In 2019 a different exhibition, *The Black Image Corporation* based exclusively around reprints of the same photographic archive took place at the Gropius Bau in Berlin. Where the first exhibition is a manifestation of what Gates sees as sourced in intuitive or improvised art practice (it is a Theaster Gates exhibition), the second takes a museological form (it is an exhibition in which Gates performs a curatorial role), re-presenting, re-contextualizing, and exploring the visual-politics of identity by transferring images from the Johnson Publishing archive in the space of institutional culture. The archive features "more than four million images, that have contributed to shape the aesthetic and cultural languages of African American identity" (according to the exhibition promotional material).<sup>99</sup>

The primary photographer represented in this archive (and in both exhibitions) is Moneta Sleet Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist who's work, apart from his commercial studio work for *Ebony* and *Jet*, involved travelling with Martin Luther King Jr., documenting the black civil rights movement. The two positions or personas of Gates in these two exhibitions (the artist in one, the curator in the other) illustrate how the doings and sayings of his practice inhabits not only the meaning-space of singular studio practice but also inhabits the complex institutional

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97. For the Place Lab's "principles of ethical redevelopment," see: <https://placelab.uchicago.edu/ethical-redevelopment>. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

98. Kunstmuseum Basel, June to October, 2018, Dr. Josef Helfenstein, Søren Grammel, curators.

99. Further information on *The Black Image Corporation* exhibition, see: [www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail\\_281749.html](http://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_281749.html). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

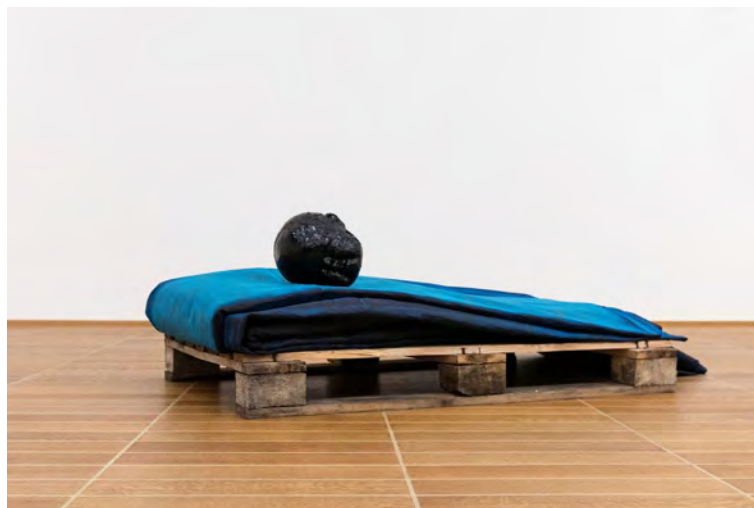


Fig. 26a-c. Theaster Gates. *Black Madonna*. Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel 2018. (Gates)

spaces of culture and education which are each destabilized with analogous, but formally very different and transformative approaches (a creative process which he has framed, as cited above, as “clay and its metaphor of transformation”).

In a public lecture at DHC Foundation, Montreal, which took place in the period leading up to the Basel exhibition, Gates described his working process, implicating this archival material in terms of artistic improvisation, intuition and play – a refusal of premeditated outcomes.<sup>100</sup> He unapologetically asserts that this open-ended artistic intuition is a key part of his practice, whether it be destined for art spaces or social practice in the city or the institutional space of the university: “I may be a little rusty trying to talk about art ... so I’ll talk a little bit about the way my brain works ... how I would choose a subject or ideas that I could endure, to go, over time, from something that is immaterial to material.”<sup>101</sup> This artist’s talk had the feeling of a Joseph Beuys performance piece, with Gates taking on a particular polemic role and artistic persona, which he sustained for the duration.

Every artist’s presentation is, in part, a performance of the idea of being an artist in public. This particular talk seems to benefit from a reading as a (fictive) performance about the nature of the performance of art practice. Joseph Beuys’ self-mythologizing performances, objects, and actions from the mid-sixties through the 1980s were highly influential in mapping a space for art practice as participatory social sculpture, a “social organism as a work of art” (Beuys 48). One aspect of Beuys’ performance practice was talks on art and politics at art schools and museums in which, dressed in the attire he invented for his artistic persona – jeans, fishing vest and felt homburg hat – he discussed his ideas about social sculpture, the green movement, and grassroots democracy while performing blackboard chalk-talks (fig. 27). The blackboards themselves were preserved as (highly sought after) art objects, aura-filled memoirs of the event. Such a talk, then, can be a performance of the artist as example, asserting a particular version of “this is what an artist does.”

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100. *The Black Madonna*, a talk by the artist Theaster Gates: Montreal Museum of Fine arts, March 20th, 2018 sponsored by Art Speaks, presented by DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montreal. Citations and ideas attributed to Gates in this section are transcribed or paraphrased by myself from this documentation. Thanks to Cheryl Sim for providing access to the video documentation of the talk. Also discussed is Gates’ subsequent exhibition: *The Black Image Corporation*, Gropius Bau, Berlin, April 25 – July 28, 2019. Conceived by Theaster Gates with associate curators: Mario Mainetti and Daisy Desrosiers: [www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail\\_281749.html](http://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_281749.html). Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

101. From the video-recording of the DHC presentation by Gates, transcribed and paraphrased for sense in print by the author.





format images for the museum. Secondly, a “new black library” is created, to be viewed only as their outward facing spines, imprinted with fragments of poetic text by Gates, improvising from titles of books in his own collection, as the 2500 spine-titles: *When We March; Come Out Smokin; Cloaks of Invisibility; Giants We Wonder; Spooks by Doors; Martyrs When Necessary; From Slave Shacks to Ghettos; March for the Living; With Mary as our Captain; Saints at the Table; Moving on Up; Telling Her Story; So Hard to Leave But She Left; Mother do You Remember Me; God Bless the Marys*; etc. In the talk, this list of titles was read out, shouted out, by Gates in full voice, as if an incantation. Likewise, Gates breaks from the discursive format of the talk by singing the *Ave Maria*, and goes on to suggest that her divinity is that men are absent, the male God is absent and that “the Johnson stuff helped the world know black Mary.” “It is a kind of ‘conjuring,’” he says, “to slick-up and rearrange these images.”

But to what end, one could wonder, are these images being rearranged? And so Gates also wonders. The hard work of the art practice, says Gates, is setting up the pre-conditions where something might happen. How does one dislodge sense and let it slide? He began this process with his friend, co-*Black Monk*, Yaw Agyeman, improvising live on the lyric of *Ave Maria* (shown as a video in the talk). According to Gates, moments in that musical improvisation still resonate in the piece. In parallel, Gates has a deep interest in what is to become of the Johnson archive’s collection of *Ebony* and *Jet* (the archive was up for sale at this time, so this was a critical moment for the preservation of this important record of black American culture). In response to a question, Gates attempts to answer what all this conjuring is for, by wondering how these images might be “in service.” If they are sold to Google, they will be doing one kind of service. If they are turned over to the Getty Foundation, they will serve in another way. If they are turned over to the Museum of African American Art, they will serve in another way.

One has to consider deeply the “context making in relationship to the images.” Gates asks. Should they be on bath towels, t-shirts, coasters, along with other museum merchandise, he wonders? Or do we have a greater obligation to these images, in terms of their potential service. There is a balance of dissemination and re-thinking the image to be achieved. In gaining access to these images, Gates suggests that he wished to demonstrate how they might be in service in a new and present way, and also how that service can work with the terms that the holder of the archive (millionaire publishing executive Linda Johnson-Rice, on behalf of the Johnson Publishing Company, who is also an independent director on the board of Tesla Corporation – to

demonstrate the high-rolling corporate echelon Gates is playing in) can be seen as serving the various bottom line needs she serves (in terms of both financial and cultural legacy).<sup>102</sup>

Here Gates offers the distinction that this new conjuring is not *only* for an art audience, or at least that that is the easier part of reimagining the service of these images. It is also operating in the context of the commercial, corporate, and social interests and dynamics that own and control the archive of twentieth-century African American culture (and the Johnson archive). The stakes are higher than this improvised play for a Swiss museum would suggest. Gates uses the analogy of a cafe in his South Chicago neighbourhood. If it's just an art project, it doesn't have to succeed as a cafe. It is just a stand-in. But that's not the point. The point is to demonstrate that something can succeed here, in this neighbourhood, on its own terms. If it is a success, then it demonstrates that success is possible, here in this place. This half-complicit, half critical embrace of the market would not have occurred to the artists contextualized by Rosalyn Deutsche in the 1980s – or, it seems, they would not have understood that the market and the social space it constructs is, in part, *the raw material* of the practice.

Gates, finishing the talk by returning to his opening one-liner – that he doesn't normally give artists talks, that he doesn't know at all what he is doing here. Effectively, he has just proven that he knows exactly what he is doing here, as an artist working with the framing of the designed world. The 'there' (of Gates' social/political embedding) could not exist without the foil of 'here' – 'here' being a conceptualization of art practice that opens up the ground for work that "is asking questions about how materials accumulate, how a place accumulates" (Doherty *Sanctum*).

This is where the Beuys performance comparison rings true. The studio game of formal or plastic play, of turning and folding material (as described by Tony Cragg, in the introduction) is vital. "Its dope," says Gates, but in the embedding of that way of working in other layers of being he is showing how its apparent fictional 'moves' can contribute to understanding "the immaterial world through things, like print furniture, type faces, details ... [as] trying to understand the complexities of the histories of this world ... the world is interested not only in

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102. In July of 2019 the Johnson Publishing Company archive was jointly purchased by the Ford Foundation, The J. Paul Getty Trust, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for \$US 30 million, to be housed at Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Getty Research Institute. See: [www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-07-25/ebony-photo-archive-auction-foundations](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-07-25/ebony-photo-archive-auction-foundations).

the images but in the stories – that is what I want to convince Linda Johnson-Rice [owner of the archive] ... one believes in things, one has to start somewhere, this is the beginning of a long foray into the black image” (DHC talk). The first two forays into the black image are the *Black Madonna* at Kunstmuseum Basel, and *The Black Image Corporation*, at the Gropius Bau, Berlin (earlier at the Fondazione Prada, Milan) (fig. 28). The first feels like Gates’ manifesto for the way art practice can play with matter as meaning, drawing permissively from all of these sources to rebuild a new poetics of meaning.



Fig. 28. Theaster Gates. *The Black Image Corporation*. Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2019. (Sisto Legnani/Marco Cappelletti)

The second, based around reprints of the same photographic archive, some of which gallery-goers can browse through, is a deeper foray into the designed world as the administrative structure of our visual reality, one where the traditional signifiers of an experimental art seem to have disappeared. Gates broadens the viewing experience with wooden cabinets presenting mounted images that viewers can hold in their hands, look at in detail, and then leave for others to see. It is difficult to see this exhibition as different from any elegant, ultimately interesting, exhibition of photography history found on Europe’s summer circuit of easy to digest photo-art events. If one understands Gates’ second gambit, then success in context is exactly what is required, though *The Black Image Corporation* seems of less interest as experimental artistic inquiry, or as artistic “clairvoyant site,” as Schatzki’s practice theory would put it.

*How to Build a House Museum* was an exhibition of sculptural objects, potential anti-

monuments of architectural manifestations of African American culture in Chicago, staged at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2016, again using DJ and record producer, Frankie Knuckles, an originator of house music, as a central cultural symbol.<sup>103</sup> The title describes two branches of potential content: building a “how to build a house” museum as a series of potential monuments to a practice of building as identity-making *or* building a museum contextualising the origins of “house,” the musical genre. The exhibition’s opening room contains what seem to be abstract paintings reminiscent of Constructivism or de Stijl, a seemingly anachronistic reference to high modernist social/spiritual experiment through abstraction. Their graphic source actually pre-dates these movements. Only in the subsequent room do we find the source of these “paintings”: statistical graphic representations of African American social progress, designed as information graphics by W. E. B. Du Bois at the turn of the century (presented in this exhibition as framed panels, they were a series of graphic representations of sociological data, part of a presentation on black emancipation at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900) (fig. 29).<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 29. Theaster Gates. *How to Build a House Museum*. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2016. Detail: information graphics by W. E. B. Du Bois. (A. Forster)

Gates has taken Du Bois’ images, stripped them of their textual references to social data and

103. This brief sketch of *How to Build a House Museum* leaves out many elements of the exhibition in order to focus on particular connections.

104. See: *W.E.B. Du Bois’s Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America* (2018).

painted them big. Up-scaled, they look like contemporary abstract painting, stylistically reminiscent of Constructivism. In the information presented in the next room we find that they are neither (or both). This over-determination repeats Gates' gambit of the studio, discussed in the context of *The Black Madonna*, of working with layers of meaning, offering how fictional 'moves' can contribute to understanding "the immaterial world" through mining and manipulating layered accretion of meaning in material things. In this case, Du Bois' historically significant graphics are seemingly decontextualized or *mistreated* in order to extract and amplify a more primary aspect of their presence, their song. This pre-linguistic presence is accessible by partially unmaking the binding between material and textual meaning (in this case by separating them into different rooms).

That song can be a form of institution un-building and building is a theme carried through the exhibition, and throughout Gates' practice. The exhibition is organized into "houses," referencing Gates' many house-building projects, as well as the concept of 'house' as cultural home or home-base. In the first room, *The House of House*, we find stone plaques that seem as if they have been displaced from an austere institutional architecture, upon which is inscribed a fictional, corporate-style mission statement for *The House of House* (fig. 25b). There are also blank stone panels with the inscriptions "Founders," "Trustees," "Patrons." Are we to read that this institution has no founders, trustees or patrons? Or that it is awaiting them? The mission statement reads:

MISSION: The unapologetic liberation of Black people through active movement and practices of insurrection. Song has been the sustaining apparatus that has mitigated the trauma of slavery, Jim Crow, civil rights and other moments of oppression. While often seen as fugitives, black people are usually running from the systemic dangers that are found within global subjugation. *The House of House* says that the Negroes of yesterday and the Black people of today will no longer remain subject to the pain of servitude. Today we jack our bodies. We will jack until freedom comes.

This leads to a gallery room with the Du Bois abstract paintings and the *Reel House*, a kind of shrine/DJ booth structure made from recovered church remnants, complete with historic plaque, dedicated to Frankie Knuckles, "The Godfather of House" (fig. 25a). It plays the song

“Its a Cold World” through its sound system. Elsewhere are Knuckles’ persona-defining ball-caps and, on another floor in the museum, not part of this exhibition, Knuckles’ reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorder is inserted into the museum collections, in exchange for two Baroque sculptures of dancing figures sitting up with the ball-caps. The *House of Muddy Watters* refers to the home and rehearsal space of the legendary Chicago blues musician, a meaningful part of Chicago’s musical heritage, badly in need of repair. The *George Black House* refers to another part of African American history, the C19 brickyard of George Black whose hand-made bricks were used to build institutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Some of these very bricks now inhabit this room dedicated to Black, piled in the form of minimalist sculptures; an amplification of the contrast between a role of contributing labour to the institutions of capitalist post-slavery in the last century, and making, creating and building institutions for oneself as an art practice in this one. The exhibition culminates in the *Progress Palace*, a large darkened exhibition space, the largest in the exhibition, essentially empty except for a video of *House Heads Liberation Training* (with members of the Black Monks of Mississippi), seemingly a dance training session. High up one wall is a reproduction of one of Du Bois’ graphics in the form of a neon sign, and on an otherwise empty floor a rotating geometric sculpture, surfaced like a mirror ball, sends flecks of light around the gallery. When I visited, a single patron was dancing in this empty, consequently potential filled, space.

Both Gates’ urban interventions and his museum-based practice can be used to explore the relationship of practices of art to the designed world. These are practices of making at the border between art and design; more specifically they elaborate an idea of un-making as a critical strategy in relation to the everyday. Strategies of un-making and making re-constitute design, both as a practice in the public sphere and as a critical reflection on the designed world. In a sense, they begin where Vito Acconci’s idea of de-design leaves off. The work of Theaster Gates takes place in many contexts, including self-generated urban renewal projects, museum exhibitions, public interventions, musical performance, and in the elaboration of novel institutional frameworks designed to support and extend this work, all of which extend the idea of song as both a real and metaphorical tool of rooting and building, as so strongly exemplified in *How to Build a House Museum*. Gates’ un-building operates not only in the hermetic world of art but is also explicitly enacted as a design practice in what is traditionally the territory of urban design, architecture and landscape architecture. As such, it is a contemporary practice operating

at the horizon between artistic practices and the designed world – between art and instrumental culture. Gates engages and activates, as an artistic practice, various institutional situations in a reformulation of the very idea of institution, be it on the scale of throwing a pot or bending a major institution to new purposes.

The actions of improvised making, performing and institution-building in which Gates is engaged add up to a singular practice of making material things but also the re-making of a discourse when he places that un-making or de-design (which could be referred to as a subtractive strategy) in one institutional context or another. Gates' practice challenges an entrepreneurial "creative economy" on philosophical grounds, by proposing a transformative relationship to everyday conditions that can be related to what philosopher Bernard Stiegler describes as regaining *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* as forms of knowledge held by audiences and reconstituted publics (Stiegler *Art Futures*, 11). We can also say that Gates, in the temporal trajectory of his work – from installation works, to collective architectural interventions, to his most recent contributions to institution-building at the Place Lab for "ethical redevelopment" at the University of Chicago – is operating not within the framework of cultural institutions, which to some degree protect and nurture an idea of singular art practice, but in a much broader network of power structures where such singular art-like practices seem fragile in the face of more systematic outcome-oriented procedures (i.e. they can easily be dismissed by institutional gatekeepers as flaky, un-planned, unprofitable, or without material or institutional durability).

One key to Gate's gambit is that the singularity of the 'move' of subtractive strategies is self-consciously tuned to the non-art environment of the institution, such that it is the institution itself that is the material at play – it is the raw material for Gates' art. These are no longer questions about placing art in public space or even designing public space, itself. They are questions about making art *with* the everyday of social or institutional space as material, that is, it about the complex questions generated by art-like practices taking place in the public sphere in relation to the designed world. The artistic procedure of this intervention involves an improvised play (akin to improvised music) and a loosening of the binding between material and meaning (and between time and spaces) that such play requires. Gates is at play with the format, in Summers' terms. Whereas an additive practice of design or knowledge-building seeks to coalesce information around a pre-planned program and predictable outcomes, a subtractive process need not know where it is going in order to begin.



This unmaking and making process of built experimentation in houses, such as the *Dorchester Projects* or *12 Ballads for Huguenot House* can be seen as analogous to improvisation in music and indeed musical performance is consistently integrated into the process of Gates' work. Above all, Gates seems to consider works such as the *Dorchester Projects* as generative artistic practice in public space and that the new territory that is opened up is a venue for such free creativity. That is to say, they are experimental. As such, the practice is quite distinct from more rational models of urban planning or social renewal and has a transformative relationship to everyday conditions, including to the institutions that normally frame such gestures. Certainly these projects result in some permanent institutional structures (*The Dorchester Projects* and the Place Lab, for example) but the gestures or performance of their coming into being have an equally important polemic relation to the idea of institution.

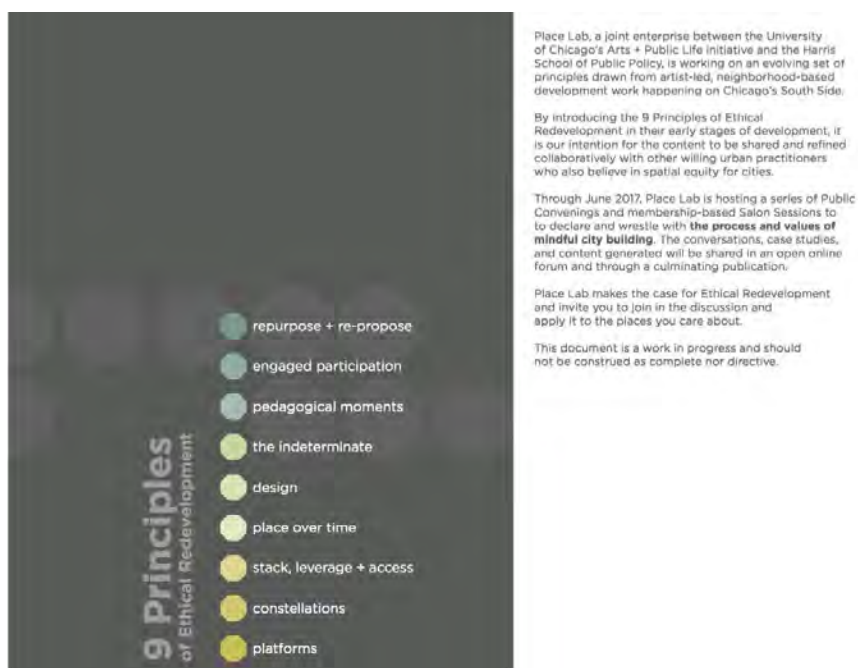


Fig. 30. Theaster Gates. The Place Lab, University of Chicago: Mission Statement. (web) see: <https://placelab.uchicago.edu/ethical-redevelopment>

What Theaster Gates 'makes' (apart from installations, spaces for gathering, music, etc.) is an experimental re-formation of the idea of the institution. This is subject to the variables of 'success' that true experiment entails (that outcomes-oriented funding streams audit and fret over). We could say, in the contemporary context, that there is art-based social enterprise that operates from within an institutional dynamic of the creative economy (things that are often

called social initiatives and innovations), that arises from within a culture of outcomes management, and there is Gates' art-based social enterprise (which Gates is now, in the context of the Place Lab, calling "Ethical Redevelopment") in which the deconstruction and reconstruction of the idea of institution is fundamental – it could not take place without an un-making prior to the making (Gates 2016,) (fig. 30). The expansion of Gate's practice into one of its current forms as the Place Lab at the University of Chicago is an ecosystem of "a diverse group of artists, art collectors, arts administrators, community leaders, funders, staff, personal, and professional associates" whose *9 Principles of Ethical Redevelopment* includes the highly 'amateur' notion of "The Indeterminate," where:

The variable of the unknown is built into Ethical Redevelopment, into the programming and the acquisition of resources. Use faith and intuition to guide methodology, a process that is left undetermined, undefined, or slowly revealed, allowing for a fluidity, dynamism, and creativity that respond to developments in the moment and change direction as needed. [...] Part of the unorthodoxy of Ethical Redevelopment is that while it is vision-driven, the route to achieve the vision is open-ended. Believe in your project but resist believing there is only one path to achieve it. You can begin without a clear understanding of your end game – your intuition is just as powerful as a well designed strategic plan. [...] This open approach allows for opportunity – people, objects, and buildings are able present themselves. A more exacting or precise strategy could eliminate possibility and hamper imaginative uses or solutions to challenges. By operating in the realm of the indefinite, multiple questions are posed and reframed, and observation, imagination, and reworking enable ideas to be thoroughly wrestled. [...] Interventions need time to gestate – work is not finite but durational, requiring time to develop a presence and either recalibrate, adapt, stay the course, or phase itself out. Leave room for the unexpected and unanticipated. It may be the best part of the work. (Gates 2016,)

This is promotional or programmatic language (used in the official web site of the organization) that describes an un-programmatic process to articulate a vision that is counter to a managerial or outcomes-based strategy. Its syntax belies its content. It is useful to compare this heavily funded institutional initiative to the founding charter of The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians AACM) in the 1960s (discussed above), with, possibly not at all

coincidentally, its own “nine purposes.” That charter was written in a fundamentally different syntax to that of the Place Lab (Lewis 116). The AACM was a collective founded in South Side Chicago in 1965 by post-jazz musicians (pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, pianist Jodie Christian, drummer Steve McCall, and composer Phil Cohran).<sup>105</sup> A key characteristic of the AACM collective was the combination of community building (in the form of music classes, study groups, concert presentations, etc.), a radical politics of black cultural independence and, above all, an uncompromising commitment to musical experiment that ultimately brought worldwide renown to some of its members.<sup>106</sup>

The nine-point charter of the AACM, developed in the early meetings, not only included outward facing goals of creating “music of the highest artistic level for the general public,” but also included community-building goals: to maintain a workshop for bringing talented musicians together; to have free music training programs; to provide a source of employment for “worthy creative musicians”; to “uplift the public image of creative musicians”; to foster more respectful

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105. Historical information in this section is taken from Lewis, George E., *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, University of Chicago Press, 2008. Lewis’ history is based on his own experience as a member of the AACM and extensive interviews with the principal members. On “post-jazz”: Lewis and many commentators as well as members of the AACM itself tended away from the label jazz, even ‘free jazz’ preferring ‘experimental’ ‘avant-garde,’ ‘original,’ ‘creative,’ ‘improvised’ or ‘Great Black Music.’ Certainly AACM musicians were absorbing the improvisation of Coltrane and Coleman but they, polemically, reserved the right not to be pigeon-holed into a particular history of jazz which Lewis characterizes as being corporatized and reduced (for example by the PBS/ Ken Burns’ 2001 series *History of Jazz*) – “We’re not really jazz musicians,” said AACM founder Muhal Richard Abrams - (in Lewis, xi). Lewis, in his history is clear to emphasize this distinction as well as to situate this musical experimentation in the context of other streams of experimental music including, Cage, Stockhausen and “pan-European” improvisation (including violinist Malcolm Goldstein, now living in Montreal) - as being (in Lewis’ narrative) both a separate and originary part of “new histories in experimentalism in music” as being a forerunner to a distinct American lineage of experimental and electronic experimental music (xviii). See also: *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958* by John Litweiler (1984) and *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music from 1965 to Now* (2016) catalogue for the exhibition of the same title at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

106. These members included Muhal Richard Abrams himself, the Art Ensemble of Chicago (Lester Bowie, Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Malachi Favors, Don Moye), Henry Threadgill and Anthony Braxton. The primary goal of the group, from its inception in May 1965, was to empower and generate for this group of African-American musicians the practical circumstances to improvise. As one member, Jacques Attali, made explicit, in counter-point to the working world of the jazz musician at the time: “...he’ll bring it from within himself. And this is what you and I want. You and I want to create an organization that will give us such power that we can sit around and do as we please” (Lewis 97). Presiding over the inaugural meeting of the AACM, Muhal Richard Abrams insisted, “first of all, number one, there’s original music only...” (98). Lewis points out that the AACM also attempted to manifest an alternative to an artistic trope of the singular artist hero, suggesting that the AACM from *within* its dedication to new and original music and from *within* a political stance of black empowerment “provides a successful example of collective working-class self help and self-determination; encouragement of difference in viewpoint, aesthetics, ideology, spirituality and methodologies, and the promulgation of new cooperative, rather than competitive, relationships between artist” (xi). The AACM School of Music opened in 1967, in fulfillment of one of the original nine goals. With Muhal Richard Abrams teaching composition, Lester Bowie teaching brass and Anthony Braxton teaching harmony, the school represented the brain trust of American experimental music. One AACM member, John Shenoy Jackson, said of the school that it was part of the “50 percent social uplift” that was the vocation of the AACM alongside the music (179). Yet the school was not a transplanted form of social work based on an outside (institutional) agenda or curriculum. It taught the knowledge and background appropriate to playing as “sitting around and doing as we pleased.”

relations with the live music business (agents, promoters, etc.); to uphold past musical traditions; and to “stimulate spiritual growth in creative artists through recitals, concerts, etc. [and] through participation in programs” (116). Improvisation as radical practice, like sending a probe out from the known into unknown nature, was the *raison d’être* for the structure, the school and the political position of the AACM. This inversion of instrumental purpose (of design) is the revised ‘normal’ that the AACM was able to create through collective action.<sup>107</sup> A key characteristic of the AACM was the combination of community involvement in the form of music schools and other programs, an uncompromising politics of independence, and equally uncompromising commitment to ground-breaking musical experiment. The Place Lab may seem far away from the AACM’s stated purpose of “sitting around and doing as we please,” but shares with it an idea of adopting an institutional structure in order to turn it to other purposes (Lewis 97). This radical space of musical improvisation as aesthetic method seem crucial when we discuss Theaster Gates’ use of improvisation as cultural lever, especially because the AACM is a significant part of the cultural history of the city where Gates, in a subsequent generation, would make his urban improvised practice.

Like the fictive, corporate style mission statements of *The House of House*, the Place Lab’s nine principles invent a fictional institution as a way of making a different, and real, one arise. Reading through the Place Lab profile, one finds a desire for open-endedness as process that seems more suited to the art school than to conventions of urban redevelopment and ‘social initiatives’ in a major academic and research institution. This is where a strategy of un-making and re-making meaning meets the scaling-up of institution building. While presented as a smooth and unified vision in the Place Lab’s web-site, no doubt there is in reality a constant coping with the institution as it resists entropic procedures meant to make a place for art-like interventions.

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107. Many other experimental assemblages existed in America in this period that generated a community of practice, of ‘doings and sayings,’ out of the strength of uncompromising experimentation. Judson Church (Judson Dance Theater, 1962-4; Grand Union; Dance Theater Workshop) in Greenwich Village, NY is another example from the same fruitful neo-avant-garde period. Judson was a remarkable crucible not only for dance but for, musicians, filmmakers, and visual artists (Judith Dunn; Yvonne Rainer; Lucinda Childs; Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Robert Rauschenberg, Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, Malcolm Goldstein, etc.). Judson was one vital hub of America’s other avant-garde (one characterized by George Lewis, in order to distinguish it from black culture, as pan-European rather than American). For this writing the AACM gives us a particular example of a collective social effort by experimental musicians that unifies an uncompromising aesthetic/musical ambition with an uncompromising multi-register scope of social self-help and community building and a equally uncompromising polemic stance in relation to black culture in/not-in white America. The lively history of the AACM, evident in Lewis’ chronicle, also shows an initial and ongoing self-awareness and self-critical reflection about the fluctuating ability of these multiple registers to co-exist and endure under an avant-gardist artistic ethos.

If we look at Gates' earlier collective works such as the improvised architectural-material-musical interventions of the *Dorchester Projects* or *12 Ballads for Huguenot House* we see the shaping of material/strategic techniques that now seek to take a place in the field of institutional politics, in the context of a development think-tank within a university. The building, the floor, the sound, all the material stuff, plus the human relationships and the relationship to institutions could be pulled apart and pushed around into new configurations as the doings and sayings of a new practice. Gates' polemic performance-talk leading up to *The Black Madonna* and *The Black Image Corporation* exhibitions, and the explicit play with the idea of institution and monument in *How to Build a House Museum*, both clarify how Gates unbinds the components of material and meaning that make up a cannon or an institution in order to make other meanings come to the surface, not as a gesture of critique but as one of creation. It is clear that in the new, much amplified project, the very shell of the institutional or managerial edifice itself should be deconstructed and rebuilt in the flux of improvisation. The risk, of course, is that there will be no movement at all, that the practice will simply be colonized by the institution, or that the practice is simply colonizing (rebranding) its own prior successes. It will be interesting to follow how this improvisation precipitates into structure and institution.

At its best, Theaster Gates' work presents a compelling example of a creative strategy where a normalized (everyday) expectation for art and design is removed in order to make other possibilities arise, proposing the everyday as a public space that art must occupy, but on its own terms. This is an embedding of art practice in the designed world. This can be seen as analogous to Stiegler's "new publics" rising from the avant-garde everyday. In this, there is a desire to articulate a different mode of knowledge that is proper to the productive encounter between art and design. As Stiegler notes, these are singular gestures and this singularity is part of the nature of these particular instances of practice – they are not part of an additive or cumulative process (Stiegler, *Age 12*). What they have in common is quite elusive when compared to the systematic outcome-oriented innovation in the creative economy model, but in a quest for profound or real innovation in the space of both design and art it is precisely these singularities that need to be mapped. A self-determined and singular idea of where and how to act is a key gambit in these practices. Figuring out over and over again, what 'art into life' or 'art and the everyday' might possibly mean seems to be a necessary condition for practices arising at the art/design boundary and for thinking about a design implicated in a re-imagining of the everyday. This is the zone

where art practice and the designed world come into contact and the zone that Gates' practices demonstrate how to activate in both a polemic and real way.

What is the place of intuitive practice and analogical thinking in relation to the designed world or the fields that make a claim to design the world? This is a background question here, one which implicates these questions into the day-to-day surface of things, as a conjecture about what kinds of actions can operate in real counter-current to future-thinking and design-thinking as persistent representations and re-presentations of an idea of problem solving from the outside. Gates' intuition is, in part, a polemic version of intuition, one intended to expose holes in the edifice of instrumental knowledge, while at the same time claiming another kind of social instrumentality.

In other art practices intuition can be a less polemic position, in fact not a position or proposition at all. Intuition is the practice. It goes on. Gates' practice takes a polemic position in relation to other institutions of knowledge.<sup>108</sup> In proposing some kind of art making in the designed world as an 'un-making,' the risk, as always, is that the field or discipline won't hold, that in loosening of a binding between meaning and matter the whole field will evaporate into meaninglessness and irrelevance. The strength of art practice is that in each venture it can risk *not* existing as a practice. This defines art. It is clairvoyant to its own shaping of time, as

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108. I associate Theaster Gate's polemic about intuition for public practice with an idea of analogical thinking as a resistance to a utilitarian fixing or building – an un-making. The frailness of such intuition as a method (in an everyday 'artistic' sense of intuition, as feeling out, or improvising), in the face of institutional/managerial practices of outcomes-oriented innovation should be evident. However, one could also say that Gates' is a polemical version of intuition, one intended to expose holes in the edifice of instrumental knowledge, while at the same time playing a double-game of claiming a different kind of social instrumentality. These are sometimes representations of intuition, posing the 'brand' of intuition against outcomes-oriented problem solving as a method of resistance. In other practices intuition is not a polemic position, in fact it is not a position or proposition at all - it is the practice - a kind of improvised *bricolage*, as mentioned in note 96. Improvisation is fluid pre-linguistic elements of a practice, something that Schatzki's Wittgensteinian 'practice theory' helps us see. A polemic is primarily a metaphorical argument, a practical and instrumental use of language. Analogy is not. When Gates uses pottery-making as a promotional argument for something that should happen in another field (as he did in his DHC talk), the argument is metaphorical. But if, in the process or practice of working in pottery one recognizes a pattern or a property in another material or in no material at all (song, for example) as analogous, this is quite different. Analogy, as recognizing and enacting a pattern or a difference from somewhere to somewhere else, is something that a dancer would be very familiar with as a key, and very simple, element of practice. It is a faculty that is to some extent neurological and embodied (in the way the Schatzki suggests practices are embodied and pre-linguistic in their roots). One could say that analogies move easily between fields, even that *analogical thinking is a significant cross-disciplinary bridge or vehicle*. Interestingly, Gates often refers to developing metaphors, between the creativity of ceramics and social practices, for example, in communicating about his practice. An analogical relation is pre-symbolic whereas a metaphor, as a language trope, is part of discursive meaning. Maybe, in practice, some of Gates' metaphors are really analogies. This is an important distinction. The test is in what sense the likeness rises. When mid-century artists such as Richard Serra, Yvonne Rainer, or John Cage insist that art is not representational or metaphorical (that 'it is' rather than 'it is of'), this is in part a resistance to the idea of art as symbolically readable, directly rooted in Cassirer's neo-Kantian symbolic form. There are many new versions of this old argument about art, which repeatedly reconstructs a problematic between metaphor/representation (as symbolic) and analogy (as an opening to the real). It is possible, though, that the exploration of the analogical is something that art asks clumsily, both of itself, and of the designed world.

Schatzki has pointed out. The most interesting art abides on this verge of non-sense (Schatzki's non-propositional space). Instrumental practices can't take this particular risk; they must preserve the line that leads to the future with which they anticipate continuity. Gates' practice, in its success or failure, is most provocative when it pushes this risk to the surface. This is the art of Gates' design practice. It risks its status as coherent practice. Or, better put for this thesis, the art in *any* practice occurs when it is able to risk resigning its own (temporal and spatial) credentials.

*Everything's the same yet, subtly, all is altered. The event pokes holes in our habits, and in the rhythms of the cosmos.*

Nestor Perlongher, introduction to Wilson Bueno's *Paraguayan Sea* (Bueno 9)

### **Chapter 5: Andrew Forster – *Cinéma; Duet; Paraguayan Sea; The Machine Stops* / Afterthoughts and Bridges**

This chapter reflects on my own art practice in the light of the ideas discussed in this thesis. It also presents, in conclusion, a reflection on some of the bridges that this project has attempted to make. I begin by looking at four works made over a period of ten years or more: 1) *Cinéma* (2005), a performance in a public plaza; 2) a related video installation entitled *Duet* (2006); 3) *Paraguayan Sea / Mer Paraguayenne* (2017), an urban text-based work, in collaboration with poet Erin Moure; and 4) *The Machine Stops* (2018–19), a video-fiction or performance-video set in Le Corbusier's *Capitol Complex*, in Chandigarh, India. The last two works – *Paraguayan Sea* and *The Machine Stops* – are the practice component of this thesis. The chapter situates a conclusion in the unfolding contradictions and complexity of my own practice as I experience it, for which the previous chapters function as conceptual description. Such contradictions, complexities, and instabilities are the real fabric of practice, often glossed over in the presentational mode of professionalized practice, and also in works smoothed out to fit educational purposes. In a sense, this is a description of what is missing in the image of art practice represented by the “Power 100” mentioned in the Introduction. This chapter also touches on some positions and works in the art/design crossover in higher-education, what we can now call ‘design studies:’ furniture maker David Pye, writing about making in the 1960s; ‘speculative design’ devised by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby at the Royal College of Art in London; and the recent exploration of ‘strange design’ at the EnsadLab at the École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. This conclusion also brings up some unanswered questions or perspectives on ‘nature’ which have arisen as an undertow to this discussion of the designed world, an invocation from the inside of a conception of nature as ‘outside.’

One aspect of art practice that has been explored in this project is the idea of fictive repetition in art, that artwork is not an act of pure imagination, that there are gestures in art



practice which repeat, redraw or reimagine the designed world, that is, the world as we find it. They do this by way of creating an altered scenario or setting, one which takes some critical aspect of the world (a word, or a thing, or a complex of meaning) and attempts to take it back to where, as Maurice Blanchot suggests, “the work makes what disappears in the object appear” (Blanchot 222).<sup>109</sup> In Hito Steyerl we have seen this in a process of the fictional *montage* of the factual as layers of information ultimately seeking, not a seamless solidity of meaning, but rather gaps or glitches in the informatic surface of culture, where ‘free fall’ will bring us back to ground. But what ground? In Theaster Gates we have seen it in a strategy of un-making and quasi-musical improvisation as an indeterminate or anti-top-down method of rebuilding urban spaces, and re-inventing social spaces and public institutions. In the Introduction, I note that thinking along with artists from the “Power 100” has the disadvantage of looking at ‘branded’ moves; that the work can (almost) only be read as a positioning in relation to a fully-developed full-fledged set of critical issues and reified professional trajectories. They are representations of moves, immediately folded into a discourse, before we get there. That is, they become metaphorical examples in relation to our lived everyday, and our questioning.

I have encountered studio art students who, upon being shown such examples, say that in no way do they aspire to such professionalism (in the art world and in academia). On many levels I agree. My relationship to my own artwork is quite different from my relation to work I survey as a matter of professional keeping-up. Can artwork maintain this opening to the appearance of what disappears in the object (Blanchot), not just to represent the idea of it? This fluctuation between the metaphorical (representing the idea) and the analogical (the appearance of what disappears) is what the doings and sayings of art attempt to maintain. This is a more complex play of de-design than simply reading one set of meanings and proposing another. Failures are as compelling as good moves. The detail of the unfolding of a situation changes, and never stops changing, what comes next. There is always something that the work is *about* that is not what one thought it would, or should, be about. It is never captured by the known facts. It unfolds or harbours something other than the everyday ‘real.’ This is clairvoyance in the sense that Theodore Schatzki describes. Clairvoyant also means that it has the possibility to engage others with this layer of change and the upwelling of meaning or appearance. This can show up or not

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109. See note 13, p. 10..

show up in the final artwork, in the immediate temporality of the piece, but the ongoing practice persistently holds this possibility. The work is not simply the sum of information, researched and presented. Each work, no matter what issues it seems to approach directly, is dragging up a substrate of the pre-linguistic, or of ‘nature’ (as a contestable term) or, in its most humanist description, ‘song’ (as I described Gates’ analogical drive to find the song beneath the surface in *How to Build a House Museum*). And it does this within the frame of the designed world, responding to the formats (in Summers’ terms) that the designed world provides. This is a criticality and clairvoyance that can be part of many kinds of practice, part of many doings and sayings. They are experiments from within where practice refuses to become a purely representative position *or* a purely subjective version of coping.

**1. *Cinéma and Duet.*** *Cinéma* was a multi-night performance in a public square in Montreal in 2004 (fig. 31a-b). No documentation of the complete performance exists. It is reconstructed here as a set of fragments leading to a discussion of a later work (the video piece *Duet*, 2006). *Cinéma* was a performance that took place over three days in the space of the Société des art technologique (SAT) in Montreal. An audience is seated indoors in constructed theatre seating, facing out through a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows towards an active public square (*Place de la Paix*). The window functions like a screen when viewed from the inside, creating a safe way for viewers to observe the outside urban world. From the outside looking in, the space appears as a theatre viewed from the front of the stage (the audience is illuminated at the end of the performance, so they are highly visible from the plaza). By adjusting the lights, participants become viewers to being looked at. A curtain of water flows down the windows as the audience is seated, separating the audience from the public space. When the flow stops the plaza is visible. This is the camera-like apparatus that gives the piece its title.

The performance in the plaza involves a series of ambient actions by eight performers, repeated on varying cycles for approximately two hours. These actions were hardly discernible from the “normal” events going on in the park (passers by, drug-dealing, skate-boarding, people hanging out), except that the actions occasionally reset and are repeated: a man swept up garbage with a broom and dustpan; another arrived on a bicycle, locks it and runs away; a couple re-enact the gestures of a Palestinian suicide bomber as he disarms himself at gunpoint; a musician plays kalimba on a bench while chatting with a policeman, a couple walks arm in arm. Each night a

sound mix for the seated audience was generated on the fly using material recorded in the park at other times, mixed with live material picked up in microphones in the park (predominantly the sound of sweeping picked up by a microphone on the sweeper's broom). These performed actions were often interrupted by the users of the park interacting with the performers, or by the police arriving, or by changes in the weather. This amplified the involuntary voyeuristic complicity of the audience, an aspect of the piece that provoked much reflection on my part.



Fig. 31a-b. Andrew Forster. *Cinéma*. Performance. Société de art technologiques, Montreal, 2004. (A. Forster)

This first version of *Cinéma* (a sequel was planned but never took place) was so complex that I hardly had time to understand the rapid unfolding of events on each night. What was planned as a live mix of sound and performance implicating an audience in a public space became significantly more challenging and revealing than I thought it would be. The real social dynamics of the situation were provocative and overwhelming, both for the audience and for people outside in the plaza-become-setting. I learned much about the complex dynamics of performance in so-called public space, and far more about what an idea of public space might mean. The question became who is it that decides the publicness of any space, or what is to be gained by calling any space (or any art) public? Art in public space, especially performance, is fraught with these questions, and the act of performing a work in public necessarily implicates the performer in how that space is constructed dynamically, not only by the city, but also by their actions. In some ways they cannot choose which construction they ally themselves to by preference because they become complicit in the whole.

In reality, *Place de la paix* is not a fully free or democratic public space at all. Not as a built urban space, nor as a temporarily constructed space of performance. In the first sense, it manifests as a downtown urban plaza controlled by the city as part of Montreal's *Quartier des spectacles* entertainment district, in which the use of the space alternates between a public visiting for entertainment, and a variety of "others," not accounted for in the urban plan (people engaged in a far wider and less socially-acceptable range of entertainments and needs, often people whose privacy, in public, is constantly under threat). In the second sense, it manifests as the performance space I devised – as an apparatus that hinged on the boundary of looking versus acting, of public and private, of 'surveillor' and 'surveilled.' Is the unblinking eye of the camera or the *camera obscura* – the cinematic eye, an adequate metaphor for looking out on the world (and the people) that surrounds us? Is it an adequate metaphor for being implicated in the world? The work plays with the idea of the screen and the window as simultaneously alienating and revealing, as the divider of public from private space. Or, rather, in dividing two very different kinds of public space, in terms of privilege and distanced observation, the very definition of audience – that other idea of public dear to the self-promotion of cultural institutions which has nothing to do with the 'public' discussed by Hannah Arendt, Rosalyn Deutsch, or Jane Rendell.

Fifteen years after *Cinéma*, in the era of mass acquiescence to ubiquitous surveillance, from cameras on the street or in the sky, and information surveillance through the digital marketplace,

to the consolidating of our data trails, my questions, transgressions, and mistakes in *Cinéma* seem naïve. The hegemonic technological surveillance and invisible transactions of state power alluded to in Hito Steyerl's fictive device for the unpacking of 'urban renewal' in Diyarbakir is already present, in its full complexity, in *Cinéma*, in analogue form. Both audience, maker and 'public' are implicated in a situation or dynamic in which liberty and control are far from what we think them to be, and our measured or wary complicity does not necessarily give us the role we would desire. For art to assume that it automatically resides on the right side of this line is a significant assumption. Steyerl's penchant for hip spectacle may occasionally slip into such an assumption.

*Cinéma* was not only a spectacle of ubiquitous every-day activities as a mix of the everyday and the impromptu human and traffic flow through a particular public space. Within the public space of *Cinéma* is another public space, also a designed or controlled space, which leads to the next work to be discussed. On March 24, 2004 television news audiences watched tape of a young Palestinian boy, Hassam Abdo, as he cut off the explosive vest he was wearing, following instructions shouted by Israeli soldiers. Abdo had approached an Israeli checkpoint near Nablus in the occupied territories (a checkpoint where Palestinians line up for access to other parts of the territory or to Israel). For some reason, he decided not to carry out the intended act, for which his body had been made into a bomb. For some reason the soldiers took pity on the youth and did not shoot him. What followed was a delicate choreography at gunpoint. Over a significant period of time Abdo stood with his hands in the air, isolated in a wide-open space, while he followed shouted instructions to defuse and remove the explosive vest and then his clothing, using tools sent out to him by robot. This event was recorded on video by cameras in the soldiers' positions, that is, from the viewpoint of authority. These videos that were later released to the press for public relations purposes. Abdo spent a decade in prison and now runs a coffee stand in Nablus market.<sup>110</sup>

In *Cinéma*, a male performer in a business suit and a female minder carefully reproduce the sequence of Hassam Abdo's gestures, disarming and undressing, over and over, in different locations in the *Place de la paix*. Two real spaces (a plaza in Montreal and the no-man's land

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110. See this 2019 'update' article (a version from an Israeli media outlet, extending the narrative of the original news coverage): [www.israeltoday.co.il/read/14-year-old-palestinian-suicide-bomber-tells-all/](http://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/14-year-old-palestinian-suicide-bomber-tells-all/).

surrounded by Jersey barriers in front of an army checkpoint in Nablus) are layered or conflated in a hybrid fiction, an imagination of a different space. The cinematic eye of the camera and the audience overlap – *we* are in the soldier’s position, the position of power. Contexts and subject positions are put into flux while holding deeper aspects of the gestural manifestation intact. This news footage was relatively recent at the time, part of the unending stream of violent footage from the boundary areas of Western control. These gestures and the idea of the suicide bomber are already here in this Canadian space (everywhere, in fact), but distanced through the news media. The belted suicide bomber was beginning to become a ubiquitous and highly manipulated trope of terror in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Yet here is a bomber who survives, who comes back, with a human back-story, and the gestural presence, on tape it seems, of any frustrated teen. The gesture of retuning him to this public space in Montreal was an attempt to understand both the spectacle of safe and unsafe which is the bedrock of right-wing populism and of the privilege of the gaze in its most absolute form (we are always safe on this side of the screen). In the *Place de la paix* there is nothing to tell us that there is a bomber in our midst. Neither audience nor passer-by has any information to tell them where the manically repeated gestures of these two performers come from. Except there is one hidden clue, another performer in the park wears a white t-shirt with an image of Hassam Abdo, wearing his bomb, arms held up in surrender – a gesture being repeated *ad infinitum* nearby.



Fig. 32a. Andrew Forster. *Duet*. Performance-video, installation. 2008. (A. Forster)



Fig. 32b-c. Andrew Forster. *Duet*. Performance-video, installation. 2008. (A. Forster)

This core element of *Cinéma* became *Duet*, a video installation piece of the following year (fig. 32a-c). Anja Bock suggests that *Duet* repeats and reorders the elements of a trauma, trauma itself being a repetition:

...the repetition of gestures ... impresses upon the viewer: the incessant repetition

of trauma. I do not refer to Hassam Abdo directly but rather to the trauma produced by the subsequent release and circulation of his image, which functions as an event in its own right. Traumatic events, by definition, cannot be integrated into the narrative structures that we have at our disposal and for that reason exceed comprehension. Abdo's gestures are re-enacted in Montreal and in London [in a subsequent performance entitled *Moat*] as if trying to break through into representation. (Bock 26)

To disconnect or un-make the connection between the bodily meaning and the ideologically predetermined informational news event, is not to sensationalize or deplete the relevance of the event itself, or the trauma embedded in it. The intention is the opposite. In some gallery presentations of *Duet* the original Israeli army video footage was present on a separate screen. In other presentations, it was not. This reorders the immediacy of the experience. "What is it?" becomes a different kind of question when the 'source' is not available, one that reaches under the surface of the event to touch and give place to a more primordial armature of the event. In screenings where the news footage was not available, viewers connected to the trauma or disturbance in the performance even more viscerally. Perhaps without the information layer of the newsfeed present, the relationship to body, the looping choreographic relationship, as access to a pre-linguistic space, that Alva Noë describes through the term 'strange tools,' becomes more tangible, as it did for the performers recreating the sequence of gestures.

**2. On *Paraguayan Sea*.** *Paraguayan Sea / Mer Paraguayenne* was a 2017 collaboration with Montreal poet Erin Moure (fig. 33a-c). It is a typographic work inserted into public space at street level on Montreal's principal commercial artery, rue Sainte-Catherine. *Paraguayan Sea / Mer Paraguayenne* is a material and linguistic engagement across the glass boundary/surface between an institution (a university building housing Engineering and Fine Arts faculties and the street), between an idea of 'inside' and an idea of 'outside' (perhaps a similar gesture to *Cinéma*'s screen). The source text, *Mar Paraguayo* (1992) is by Brazilian author Wilson Bueno, originally written in Portunol (a Spanish-Portuguese hybrid common to overlapping areas of Spanish and Portuguese colonization in South America) and Guaraní (the most widely spoken indigenous language of the Americas, an official language of Paraguay). Erin Moure translated *Mar paraguay* in 2017 into a Montrealer's hybrid mix of French and English or Frenghish. In this



new work for urban space, Moure's *Bueno* becomes seven lines of black text on a bright yellow band, five feet high and a several hundred feet long wrapping around the glass facade, crossing windows, service areas and entrance doors of this contemporary institutional building on Sainte-Catherine Street in downtown Montreal. This text is set in a typeface called *Iguana*, that I designed for the project; a spiny, spiky distortion of the font Times New Roman (the typeface you are reading right now).

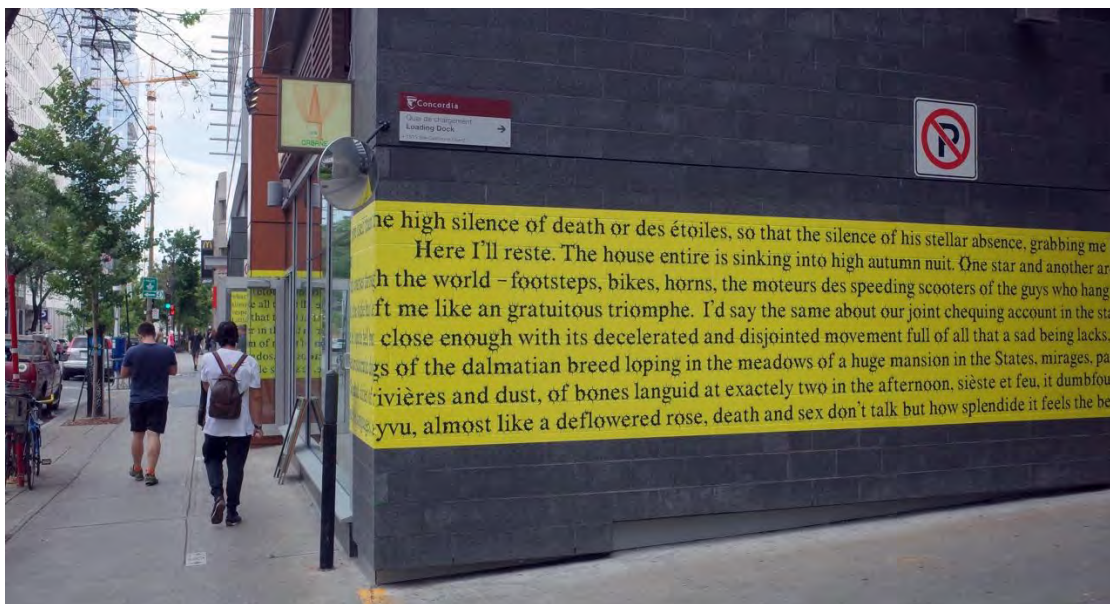


Fig. 33a-b. Andrew Forster, Erin Moure. *Paraguayan Sea*. Outdoor typographical installation, Montreal, 2017-2018. (A. Forster)

one dusk après une autre I sit ici on this sofa diagonal to  
 better fabric than the spiderweb of the leaves tissées to  
 ñandutí: opacité of feeling: je m'assois: je m'sens: ñandutí  
 hair and ligne: slowly announcing the fleur of flower mo  
 further lacing: the ever repeated gesture of conducting t  
 their profond cœur: ñandutí: so light are your ties and k  
 whoever stabs justice even if it's trop lent: a stitch of fine  
 their honorable venom: des millions s'échangent the eggs

Fig. 33c. Andrew Forster, Erin Moure. *Paraguayan Sea*. Outdoor typographical installation, Montreal, 2017-2018. (A. Forster)

In this hybrid of twos, Erin Moure has left Wilson Bueno's weaving-in, or upwelling, of Guaraní voice in place. Guaraní is the indigenous language of the Paráná basin that infiltrates Bueno's Portunol in the original *Mar Paraguayo*. Moure does not translate the Guaraní, but rather leaves it in place, where she found it, infiltrating the Portunol. It is the phonemic stitch in the newly written material, holding it to itself, as a pre-Columbian *sense*, permeating up as a no-longer everyday, a forgotten or silenced substrate. 'No longer' because we are no longer there, in the region of the Rio Paráná, where interjections of these very old words and very old colours are perfectly in place and, in spite of all the history of conquest, are still part of the everyday. They flow naturally into *Mar Paraguayo*. This Guaraní is now a refugee in the Frenglish, displaced from one set of colonizers to another (the French and English instead of the Spanish and Portuguese). And if the Frenglish is hard of hearing, or completely deaf, in relation to its four-hundred year Iroquoian surround, this Guaraní is a living emissary to a place where many fewer words from *our* river and its surround (Kaniatarowanenneh, lately the Saint Lawrence River) permeate up to inhabit the poly-linguistic language-scape of present-day Quebec.

This new language-field with its outlandish watery sources and bumpy syntax is stretched around this university building at street level as a bright yellow band conforming to the shape and texture of the building underneath. It is a plastic, undulating surface adhering, in both a physical and metaphoric sense, to the building's material makeup, turning around corners, across

doors, and down alleys. For these reasons it is impossible to read in a conventional way. To follow a sentence is to trace it around the corner of a city block. To pick up the continuation of a line is to walk, mid-sentence, back around the entire building, in order to re-join the narrative thread. It is typeset in a peculiar font, designed for this work. This is distorted in the digital process of drawing the letterforms, by pulling out the vector points that make up Times New Roman, like pulling out the threads of a fabric. The distorted version of the letter is layered on top of the original, making a typeface whose letters are quite legible from a distance but strange or clunky from up close.

During a presentation, seeking to describe the typographic font, I used the word ‘burr’ as an analogy. In the plant world, a burr is a closed form, curving over on itself to make a hook. The burr hooks our clothing, fur, feathers, as the case may be, as a purely inanimate mechanism of locomotion or dispersal. In this typographic graphic language, the burr catches and trips up the eye – it is a form that arrests movement and permits the hitchhiking of meaning. What is it to encounter this multi-authored, pluri-syntactical work that constantly leads us away from typical sense of coherence or communication? As one commentator remarked, it invokes a process of “reading against proper meaning”:

These two artists have collaboratively posed a “participatory” event, one that does not merely propose an idea, concept or thought but instead, an event that “happens.” They propose a challenge to the dominance of “proper meanings,” undertaken by way of a performative reconfiguration of our relationship with a public space that is a participatory action, an action that while saying is actualizing or doing what it is saying. (Horne *Rumble*)<sup>111</sup>

This reading away from proper meaning is not an undermining, though. It is not an absurdist pulling of the rug, an expressive cancelling of meaning – a *tabula rasa*. It is an opening up of the grain of permissions in language and in matter so that what has disappeared in the object can appear. Part of this reading *away* from proper meaning, as Horne puts it, is an encounter with surface, in many senses of the word. There is an arrest and release of the movement of the eye governed by the typography. Also, the textual and material surface either slackens or emphasizes

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111. Stephen Horne, *A Rumble of Thread Set Free* unpublished, 2017. Courtesy Stephen Horne.

the divide between the interior and exterior of the building, between institutional and public space, between single voice and polyphony. The ‘burr’ analogy I made to describe the font (which I find much more sustaining than the truly dumb digital move at its origin as a manipulation of the glyphs – which I see simply as a form of permissive graphic play), draws the ‘burr’ up a dimension into 3D everyday space and associates it with characteristics of these seed carriers and hitchhikers. The play of a real burr is to rearrange itself in space and time. In a way, this is also the point of the artwork. In conversation, the idea of ‘burr’ becomes a narrative-building metaphor. But for a moment, perhaps the analogy rests in the manner of intuition, in between something ‘real’ and the metaphor.

Sherry Simon, author of *Cities in Translation* (2012), discussed Erin Moure’s writing and “translations” as it is self-consciously inserted into the city, says:

The strangeness is intensified by the presence of Guaraní, the haunting repetition of words, the unusual accents adding to the visual disturbance – and reminding us here, if need ever there was, that language is a force forever shaping our being, that the city is a creation of language, because to read its structures – its buildings, the circulation of things within it – we need a language or maybe even two or three. The city does not look the same, depending on which language is used to read it. Or perhaps, we need to create special mixed languages to enter into the always-changing vocabulary of the city itself. Erin Mouré specializes, I would say, in the creation of such languages – not just mining the particular resources of the dialogue between French and English that exercises us in this city but bringing in other histories from that other language border ... [it] falls somewhere between writing and translation, using the gap between languages as a space of creativity. And exploiting our particular Montreal affinity for the kinds of insights you can gain as you stumble on the uneven pavement of language in this city, the illuminations that come in the moment when you feel the ground shift, and see things differently. (Simon)<sup>112</sup>

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112. Sherry Simon, notes from a panel discussion about *Paraguayan Sea* with Erin Moure and Andrew Forster, FOFA Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal. November 9, 2017. Courtesy Sherry Simon.

This “uneven pavement” of sense resonates strongly. What is the surface of meaning we walk on everyday, from which we draw the sense of limits and security? For me, *Paraguayan Sea / Mer Paraguayenne* is such a taut surface of sense, stretched between something like the machinery of knowledge (the university) and something like impure public space. Its sense exists at multiple levels: from the polyphonic language, which allows something else to burble up through the liquid surface of words, like the resurgence of a Guaraní river inside this other river, here in Montreal; to the play between institutional and public space; to the play between commercial and non-commercial words in public space. This work begins to understand the complex play of inside and outside, of seeing and being seen, of the confusion of audience and public, of idea and reality, that *Cinéma* collided with so abruptly many years earlier in the very same urban space.



Fig. 34a. Andrew Forster. *The Machine Stops*. Video installation. 2019-2020. (A. Forster)

**3. The machine is stopping.** *The Machine Stops* is a speculative fiction in the form of an installation (fig. 34a-b). Chandigarh, India is a city ‘invented’ in the 1950s out of an ideal of art and design as socially transformational event. At independence the Punjab was split by British decree and shared between two countries. The city of Lahore, previously the capital of Punjab,

became part of Pakistan. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned a new and symbolically modern and international city to replace it as capital of the state of Punjab (and later the states of Punjab and Haryana after a subsequent re-division of Punjab). Indian and western architects, most famously Le Corbusier, came together to design a utopian city, with residential areas for most levels of workers and functionaries, government and public buildings (schools, museums, universities), and a complex consisting of the Assembly, High Court and Secretariat buildings, all from scratch.<sup>113</sup> The Capitol Complex, designed by Le Corbusier is considered a landmark of twentieth-century architecture and design (it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site). *The Machine Stops* uses the Capitol Complex site and other public buildings in Chandigarh as the location for a performance-video that is an exploration of the conceptual and aesthetic space of this postcolonial modernism. A choreographic element of the work has a single actor walking purposefully through the plaza spaces and ramps of the Capitol Complex, articulating architectural space with movement. This character never stops moving through this designed form as landscape, linking both to the architectural space and a narrated element of the piece (the voice-over). This moving human body is the narrative thread of the piece. This cinematic convention of a perambulatory journey as narrative device is central to the work. The site of this perambulation is both a real space, the seat of government of the states of Haryana and Punjab, and also an iconic image or artifact in the cannon of modern art and architecture history. Images of Le Corbusier's High Court and Assembly Building are present in most academic survey texts on modern architecture and art.

The narrated element juxtaposed to this choreographically activated site includes texts

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113. Construction of Chandigarh was begun in the early 1950s. For comparison, Brasilia, that other purpose-built modernist-utopian capital, was begun in 1956. Original concepts for Chandigarh prepared by civil service planners invoked the inspiration of English-style 'garden city' new towns. In the late 1940s (Partition and Indian independence took place in 1947) a team consisting of American planner Albert Mayer and Polish architect Matthew Nowicki worked on a master plan for Nehru, evolving, with some influence from Lewis Mumford, from garden city ideas to a plan of large quiet quadrants of habitation with traffic and cycle paths segregated onto intersecting avenues. Each block had green spaces and public amenities and the whole plan was crossed with long irrigated parks of the connected green spaces. Nowicki died in an airplane crash in 1950 and subsequently Mayer dropped the project. The local administrators of the project (P. N. Thapar and P. L. Verma) travelled to Europe to seek replacements and engaged the team of architects, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew. Drew persuaded Le Corbusier, then at the apex of his fame, and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, to join the project. This group moved to Chandigarh to design and build the city and also to train Indian architects. Within the foreign team, Le Corbusier (obliged to be on site one month out of each year) designed the signature buildings, such as the Capitol Complex, and adjusted Meyer's urban plan, while Fry, Drew, and Jeanneret remained in Chandigarh on three-year renewable contracts along with the first generation of Indian post-Partition architects (including Manmohan Sharma, Shivdatt Sharma, J. K. Choudhury, Aditya Prakash, Harbinder Chopra, Jeet Malhotra, Eulie Chowdhury, and many others) to design housing types and public buildings and to supervise the implementation of the plan over two decades. Pierre Jeanneret lived in Chandigarh for 15 years (Prakash 8).

written by myself, combined with excerpts from Le Corbusier, and a significant portion of a short story by E. M. Forster. In Futurist enthusiasm, Le Corbusier called the modernist dwelling a “machine for living” in his foundational architectural polemic *Towards a New Architecture* (*Vers une architecture*, 1923). The title *The Machine Stops* is taken from Forster’s 1919 science fiction story, which describes a world where people live underground in technologically supported isolation. The setting for this story is like an abandoned city, at once familiar and strange, through this insertion into a fiction. The work becomes a meditation on techno-utopias of the 1950s and 60s (Brasilia, Chandigarh, Expo 67 in Montreal) and a reflection on our designed world and the ubiquitous culture of the framed ‘outcomes’ in which we live. As discussed above, citing Jane Rendell, Le Corbusier can be seen as representing a *tabula rasa* approach to design. He is a choreographer of form. The ‘machine for living’ is a concept for behaviour. Empty space. Build the concept. Re-admit the people, and new forms of behaviour, of dwelling, will result. It takes the idea of a problem as a challenge to be solved in a single gesture of conceptualization or building on a temporal and spatial background conceived as a blank, *tabula rasa*. Time and space begin at its inception. In Theaster Gates we have encountered a practice that is quite different in its relation to time and space, and the way imagination materializes in the city. In Gates’ world everything is made already. To make new meanings requires some dismantling, some ‘un-building.’ Un-building is a living process in which improvisation is a key resource, permitting an emptying which is not the void of the *tabula rasa* but an opening to that which is there but has disappeared.

E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” story is anachronistic in relation to the real place that is Chandigarh – the modernist monument and the surprisingly habitable city of today. It was written in 1909, thirty years before the design of Chandigarh began, but only a few years before Le Corbusier’s polemic of “machines for living” in *L’Esprit nouveau*, “The Machine Stops” is a dystopian warning about technologically-alienated humanity written by a romantic author who perceived himself as an outsider to the colonial system that gave him such an intimate involvement with British India. Forster worked in Shimla, the summer capital of British India, in the mountains very close to present-day Chandigarh. In “The Machine Stops,” Shimla is written into the story in a view from an airship, as it passes over the imaginary terrain where Chandigarh

was later built.<sup>114</sup>

The imaginary world of E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" could seem to us a very contemporary world, where people live in machine-regulated isolation with their only connection being through electronic devices. The surface of the earth is not habitable. Humanity lives in a high-tech underground, a network of individual habitations connected to The Machine, which provides for all needs. A communication network allows the inhabitants to fulfill their intellectual imaginations, to attend and give lectures, without the necessity of physical proximity. Hand-held screens transmit adequate images for communication and tubes distribute sound. Should real travel be desirable, consultation via the screen with the Machine allows the scheduling for voyages by airships travelling high above the devastated surface. Kuno, the protagonist, makes contact with his mother, Vashti. He has broken the rules. He has gone to the surface on a quest for authentic life and he has been condemned for attempting to leave the machine without permission. Soon The Machine itself begins to fail. The machine air becomes poisonous. The schedules break down. Kuno's struggle for 'authentic' life seems prophetic. The world ends in a dramatic single moment of catastrophe. Forster's romantic theme of visceral connection and humanism ("man is the measure" he says in "The Machine Stops") seems an anachronous element in the story (Forster, "Machine" 142). Earlier, I suggested that Hito Steyerl's fictive practice in the breakdown of digital surfaces might propose an alternative to this romanticism as a critical relationship to the designed world. Is her 'free fall' seeking the same ground? Are we doomed to repeat this trope?

This new video installation entitled *The Machine Stops* updates this science-fiction parable for the post-human age (exactly one hundred years later, in 2019) and meditates on the peculiar thought that, as humans, we are destined to design better worlds. Le Corbusier's celebrated utopia becomes the setting for a dystopian speculative fiction told in non-linear fragments of language, image and movement. This isn't a BBC-style production – the video itself is a decayed digital landscape, distinctly amateur. It is relatively badly filmed, by media standards – it is like a glitched Merchant-Ivory production colliding with a nostalgic Hito Steyerl (I do think of Steyerl's apocalypics as also quite nostalgic in its 'free fall' romanticism, and highly marketable

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114. A foreshadowing of Hito Steyerl's "vertical perspective" – the pictorial anti-perspectival view from the air so loved by modernist designers, architects, and artists.



in its glitch-stylings – at the same time, I think her practice sits right on an important fault line in the designed world, hence its relevance to this piece). If part of art practice in the designed world entails the fictive reproduction or re-making of real spaces, images and narratives, reproducing them in such a way that unseen layers of ‘the real’ come to the surface, or unseen possibilities become real, then my new *The Machine Stops* opens up spaces in all its component narratives, drawn as they are, both intentionally and inadvertently, from many sources.

Fawas Ameer Hamsa (the performer who carries the narrative through the spaces of the Capitol Complex) walks through the landscape of design, simultaneously conceived as a *tabula rasa* new environment (a designed world with no other-world or underworld beneath the surface) and as an archaeological ruin (as if Le Corbusier, in a dream, designed this place to be excavated in a thousand years – it was designed as artifact, this is one implication of modernist design – certainly one that David Summers might find intriguing as a ‘format’ holding the ‘virtual’ on its surface). There is no ‘there’ or ‘beyond’ outside of this narrative to escape to. E. M. Forster’s surface-world as a poisoned vestige of the garden, where escape is redemption through individual bodily experience, may not exist. Nature seems always to be framed as the outside of design, or an outside of the artificial. Le Corbusier’s pre-planned archaeological ruin (if we accept that this is the fate of the ‘radiant city’) is part of the same story, not an alternative ending. It was built this way, all the way up from nothing. Once again, as with *Paraguayan Sea / Mer Paraguayenne*, *The Machine Stops* seems to play on such surfaces as the threshold where what disappears as the object appears.

**3. Afterthoughts and Bridges.** This project attempts to extend a bridge from what I have called philosophical or ontological practices towards the mundane or everyday world of production, politics, enterprise, education and crisis. I have called the former, in their guise as material or creative practices of engagement with imagination, ‘art practices.’ I have called the latter everyday world of action, in its contemporary manifestation, ‘the designed world.’ I have suggested that there are two special things art-like practices do, via Hannah Arendt’s ‘table-between-us’ as public space and ‘this/table’ as the hinge to imagination. Firstly, that art can investigate such things as the politics of public space conceived in constructed terms of spatiality and visibility; and secondly, as an ontological opening, art can be a conversation with that which it is not, or that of which nothing can yet be said, making appear what has disappeared in the

object.

There are so many rich descriptions and elaborations of art as this kind of ontological opening (Alva Noë's or Elizabeth Grosz' being only recent examples) that it seems silly, even anachronistic, to repeat them as a poetic justification for the field of art, in an art school or anywhere else. But, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2, such descriptions *do* vary in terms of what world and values, even what crisis, they suppose themselves to be situated in. Ours, for example, could be the crisis of the designed world and the conception of nature embedded in it. What is useful to repeat is what is implicit to some of these elaborations; that this vocation of art is not merely a subjective or expressive turning inwards (a very normal criticism of art practice as subjectivist) but it is also an important opening to understanding how our social and material world of practices is composed and recomposed. The exploration of the possibility for art practices, implicated in a designed world, to open up such a deep critical play, is the kind of coping that this project takes as its 'big picture.' At a more detailed grain, this project touches on, for example, this kind of play as a thinking-through of how the designed world in its spatial and temporal particularity is constituted, and is an investigation of the sense of the virtual in an extension of a project that David Summers calls a "depictorialization of imagination" (Summers 30). The big picture, made up of such detailed elements, is the bridge that potentially links art, as a practice of opening to imagination, to the designed world.

This is an optimistically clumsy project, at least in my hands, but the useful point is that without some aspects of the former (an ontological opening), or at least an awareness of it, one cannot understand the potential of real change in the latter (the crisis of the designed world). It is clumsy because refined fields already exist for such questions, and to ask these questions outside of those fields puts one in an interdisciplinary zone of discussion where one must (but cannot) distil practice down in order to provide succinct key words and action items. Or, even, that the first order of action must be the unpacking and undoing of the transparent skills of a field. This is the exact fate of art-like questions in the field of design, for example (as a specific sub-set of art practices in the designed world). This project uses the term designed world to provoke critical questions about public space, to ask if public space is now not just another virtual space. Or, maybe it asks under what conditions could this *not* be the case? It explores concepts of coping, critical spatial practice, de-design, imagination, strange tools, clairvoyance, complicity, real and virtual spaces, the shaping of time, format, design fiction, counter-factual event, analogy and

appearance, as potential descriptors of aspects of such art questions for the designed world. They each describe things that the designed world makes disappear, that certain practices and singular instances of practices can make apparent. That is a first bridge.

I have implied that theoretical and philosophical elements have a descriptive role in relation to clairvoyant practices of art. As Theodor Schatzki suggests, theories are abstract accounts, and it is in opening up the phenomena that things get truly complex and revealing (Schatzki, *Site* 13). Instead of illustrating a theoretical position, the practices that have been described above open up a detailed universe, for which theoretical language is needed to make some of their complexity apparent. This is not to say that philosophical or theoretical ‘doings and sayings’ are not potentially clairvoyant and profound in themselves as practices of thinking and writing. They certainly can be, and I learn from engaging with them, on their terms. But in *this* telling of the place of clairvoyant practices of meaning-making, the first bridge is one between art practice and the designed world. There is also a second bridge for clumsy crossing which is getting a relationship of ‘doings and sayings’ between art and theory, at least provisionally, right.

The dynamics for which one needs such a rich descriptive language are things that are already going on in the practices. The components of the designed world can be made apparent in the same very simple thinking and making processes that are the everyday human/non-human intersection of art practices. The descriptive language may be complex but where it is happening, in the practice, there is a simplicity of event that makes it self-evident. This is apparent in the quotation from sculptor Tony Cragg in the Introduction where he describes a process of design or of making, as turning and folding a thing, “changing the form and the meaning of the material but also, oneself” (Cragg). The thing we are looking for, the thing that disappears in the object, is there, apparent, in the making. Ewa Ziarek gives a deepening of this in her thinking through experiment of narrative as a format (in Summers’ sense of ‘format’) in certain feminist literature. She follows Hannah Arendt in suggesting that the force of imagination makes present what is absent (what is no longer or is yet to be). In breaking and remaking the format of narrative, the singularity of the narrative gesture becomes a political act, one that cannot be reduced to instrumental rationality. This is the contingency of making; one can build a narrative in the known way, or one can fold it differently.

Lastly, Alva Noë’s articulation of choreography as a strange tool hints at the profound simplicity of an enquiry, already embodied in movement as “a practice for bringing our

organization into view” (Noë 29). This is a recognition that the philosophical (or ontological, or Winnicottian) play is already there in the practice. It is in the complex of doings and sayings of *this* particular practice, in *this* particular time and space. The articulation of this special vocation for understanding our self-organization is the primary bridge to be made between art practices and the everyday in the designed world. Art practices have an aptness to test the boundaries of the pre-linguistic, to wander ever so precipitously out of the structures of meaning and to return. Is every artwork obliged to explicitly test such boundaries of meaning or being? Certainly not (even, mostly not), but the possibility is embedded in the practise as its primary resource, as its simplest move. Other kinds of de-instituting (of politics, of visuality, of innovation) may be the daily grind of cultural practices, but, as Arendt hints, the connection of politics to imagination is a fundamental one.

**4. Clairvoyant Design?** While this project seems to me to be primarily a polemic about how art practices must engage the designed world, and about how the cross-over space between art and a designed life is the only space for art practice to take place, it is also, in parallel, about how art thinking, this philosophical know-how, belongs, however uncomfortably or strangely, in the field of design and the university field of design studies. Three examples of such practices are useful – two are contemporary and one is from the 1960s. David Pye was a maker of wooden bowls and furniture and a teacher of furniture making at the Royal College of Art, London, from 1964 to 1974. He wrote two short books: *The Nature of Design* (1964) and *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1968).<sup>115</sup> These two books, about design as a theory of making, predict some of Tim Ingold’s ideas around the relation between the flow of materials and the intervention of the hand. Pye is a useful addition to this discussion because he presents an alternative to Ingold’s simplification that we either make by thinking (design) or think by making (art) (Ingold 6).<sup>116</sup>

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115. Pye’s *The Nature of Design* was revised as *The Nature and Aesthetics of Design* in 1978.

116. Tim Ingold says: “We cannot make the furniture... without thinking it. What is the relation between thinking and making? To this, the theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that one makes through thinking and the other thinks through making... The theorist does his thinking in his head, and only applies the forms of thought to the substance of the material world. The way of the craftsman... is to allow knowledge to grow from... our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us. This is to practice what I would like to call an art of inquiry” (Ingold 6). In many ways Pye and Ingold are complementary but in some fundamental ways they are not. Ingold’s romanticism (akin to E. M. Forster’s) is his claim that making *is* thinking, a conjuring of a pre-modern ideal. In fact, if we follow along with David Pye, it may be the thinking about making, thinking making, not-thinking making, reflecting on making, etc. all as the ‘doings and sayings’ of a practice that arises from an engagement with a particular

Pye's writing, even though it describes his own experiences, does not romanticize making in quite the same way that Ingold's aggregating view does. Pye's is a theoretical and embodied reflection on making, and an attempt to define the practice of design.

He rejects any conception of designed form as coming from function (Louis Sullivan's 'form follows function') by asking three questions: 1) how do you determine what the thing you are going to design "has got to do?" (answer: these are always choices); 2) having done this, how does this determine its form (answer: it only contributes); and, 3) does "purely functional" mean anything at all (Pye 8)? Through this line of questions, he determines that most human activity engaged with making useful things is, strictly speaking, useless or excess: "Design, to many who practice it, must mean, simply and solely, useless work ... nothing [the designers] do is concerned with the requirements of use, economy, and access" (Pye 19). It is this useless or excess activity (for example, why do we take the trouble to make ceilings flat?), and the idea that function is not *in* things, that Pye thinks are the most humanly compelling and valuable parts of the practice. The woodworker's jig and the corresponding made object have a particular relationship for the craftsman. When they are experienced together they make apparent Maurice Blanchot's "what is hidden in the object"<sup>117</sup> or Noë's looping revelation of human organization. It is also reasonable to connect this to Theaster Gates' un-making in the built environment. Pye's bowls, chairs and boxes, all beautiful things, may be of interest in and of themselves but they become clairvoyant in the conversation generated by these two little books about making things. They are components in the 'doings and sayings' of this particular and singular practice.

Two contemporary approaches to design practice in design schools embrace this same sense of fundamental inquiry into the limits of the functional and the instrumental. In both cases they

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social field (design). Ingold could be seen as embracing a version of a Heideggerian implication in the world (that *dasein* is both being and world, not separable into a Cartesian subject-object), one updated by drawing in Deleuze, Sheets-Johnstone, Sennet, Merleau-Ponty, process philosophy, actor network theory, etc. into a kind of hybrid ontology. As seductive as Ingold's dialogue between emergence (from Deleuze) and the hand (from Heidegger) is for artists, in its valorizing of making as thinking, this manifesto of making has limitations, e.g. that it cannot account for the dematerialized knowledge world of the digital and that it does not make an affordance for new practices (the 'new publics' that Bernard Stiegler envisions). Ingold's baskets, shaped stones and clay blobs seem tragically mute as art objects intended to engage outwardly. They are wonderful but they are not clairvoyant. In "Materiality: An Introduction" (2005) anthropologist Daniel Miller poses two relevant questions. Are all issues of materiality to be reduced to ourselves (the subject, social relations, society)? If we can resolve a subject/object dualism in abstraction through philosophy is it possible to employ this abstraction in relation to specific and changing situations in the everyday?

117. See note 13, p. 10.

involve the coining of special terms to describe design practices that reflect on functionality rather than carry it out. The term ‘speculative design’ was invented by Fiona Raby and Anthony Dunne, working in the Design Interaction Department, Royal College of Art, London (2005–2015).<sup>118</sup> It has become a name for a formulation of critical design. In *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (2013) they propose using design to explore social relations and ethical implications around new technologies and discursive, speculative fiction processes. The proposals and prototypes often involve repurposed or glitched technologies, in a style that would be very familiar to viewers of Hito Steyerl. This melding of odd technological implementations and science fiction proposals with the style of product design prototypes seems like a hybrid of the fantastic speculations of the architecture collective Archigram in the 1970s (see fig. 5) with the more rigorous desire to pull artistic critical strategies into thinking about the built environment of Jane Rendell’s ‘critical spatial practice.’ The work has similar strengths and weaknesses to Steyerl’s practice. One weakness is a naive reliance on science fiction or the speculative as trope of uniqueness, which can fail in its criticality when it becomes a stylized form of anti-marketing (as some work used to illustrate speculative design seems to do).

A new concept of ‘strange design’ comes out of current research and creation initiatives at the EnsadLab, the art and design research lab at the École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in collaboration with École nationale supérieure d’art et de design, Nancy, led by Emanuele Quinz and Jehanne Dautrey. In “Disquieting Strangeness: A New Design Concept”<sup>119</sup> Dautrey outlines a ‘strange design’ approach which is adamantly neither fantastic nor speculative. Rather than leaving the real world for an imagined or potential one, “the strange does not imply that we lose contact with the world, but rather, that we find it” (Dautrey & Quinz 366). Like David Pye, fifty years earlier, Dautrey focuses design thinking on the false imperatives of functionality. Where art can always exercise the option of veering towards the psychological, strange design must only “move away from functionality ... by exploring the atypical, subversive, and unexplained dimensions of functionality” (349). Form and function are what needs to be un-made and re-made. Borrowing from both a Freudian *Unheimliche* and

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118. Dunne and Raby currently teach at Parsons School of Design in New York City.

119. In *Strange Design: from Objects to Behaviours* (2015), an anthology edited by Quinz and Dautrey.

Georges Bataille's *informe* (formlessness),<sup>120</sup> Dautrey suggests that reassessing form and function are what is at play in practices hoping to re-find the world. This preoccupation with form echoes Vilém Flusser's opposition of matter and thing (described in the Introduction). Dautrey incites that "being functional does not necessarily have a subservient relationship with this requirement, and the most important thing is to understand the purpose of this perturbation ... functional disobedience arises from a process of reflection about function" (354). The designed object may be designed with a use in mind, but it also fulfills other uses where the form and the sense diverge.

**5. Nature: A Question.** Re-finding the world (riffing from Jehanne Dautrey, above) involves re-understanding the place of nature in relation to the designed world. If clairvoyant practices of art (in the fields of art and design) could have a practical vocation in relation to present-day crisis – literally, that they could be of service – it may be in understanding the sense in which we use the idea of nature to connote a surround to our designed world. What is the form and function of nature, to borrow strange design's disquieting orientation? How does nature crop up in the designed world? What would a phenomenology of nature be?<sup>121</sup> Summers, in his opening-up of format as the armature of the virtual suggests that real spaces must always be considered as a plural. There is no singular real space but there are many real spaces drawn up around artifacts, forms, and formats. Bruno Latour, in *The Politics of Nature* (2004) insists that the same is true of nature. We must only speak of *natures* in the plural, in the same way we speak of a plurality of cultures (Latour, *Politics* 8). Summers' and Latour's demands are related. Nature is not a world unifying singular, not at all the natural juxtaposed to the artificial that Herbert Simon proposed as the surround of a designed world, and that Victor Margolin tries to reconcile through a truce with ecology (see Chapter 3). Bernard Stiegler says our thing-world of "organized inorganic matter," determines how we experience time and space (Stiegler, *Technics* 174). Is this time and space our

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120. See note 31, p. 49.

121. David Morris elaborates a 'phenomenology of nature' as working "to suspend our urge to directly describe nature, as reflecting ideas we bring to the table, and instead lets us be oriented by nature as challenging our conceptual and descriptive proclivities. Nature thus clues us in to critiques of our idea of Nature" (Morris, *Developmental* 121). Radically simple clairvoyant practices of art may incorporate this same 'orientation by nature.' This final conjectural paragraph suggests that my sense of affinity to this figuring out how nature 'crops-up,' both as a rich philosophical line of enquiry and in its importance for deepening an understanding of how political institutions like universities represent nature.

nature among a plurality of natures, a place among places? Focusing the practices of art in the designed world can be a making apparent of nature. Some clairvoyant practices, adept in parsing form and function, will be able to make what disappears in form appear, as a service to our knowledge of the designed world and of nature. This may be an introduction to that project.



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