

**15.07.2006 - 21.04.1976 - 19.01.2012**  
**A Collection of Writings as a Critical Reflection on an Artistic Research**



**Pedro Gómez-Egaña**  
**2012**

Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme  
Bergen National Academy of Arts

Project's Initial Title: Calligraphies  
Supervisors: Anke Bangma, Jeremy Welsh  
Advisor: Bojana Bauer

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## Contents

### **List of Texts**

*The End*

*About This Collection of Texts: An Introduction*

*A String of Apparitions*

*The Temporalities of TV (video in the USB card)*

*The Exploded TV*

*The Machine and The Embodiment*

*The Reflective Membrane*

*Conclusion*

*The Return*

### **Appendixes**

*Script for The Temporalities of Television*

*The Train, The Pulse, The Ghost, The Pulse, The Train*

*Commissioned Texts*

### **Media Files (On the accompanying USB card)**

*The Temporalities of Television*

*Videos of the Artworks Mentioned in The Texts*

*Extra Images of The Artworks (Including Images of the Process and Details)*

## The End

Five years ago, curiosity and chance took me to Bergen for the first time. It was summer and the warmest and clearest day I can remember experiencing in this city. It looked stunning. I had lived away from my native Colombia for years, but being in a place so drastically different overlapped my memory. I felt like I had flown straight from Bogotá; that I had left my city for the first time. This is what the edge of the world looks like: a random accumulation of distances, clinging to a mountain like houses.

I set out to discover the small streets of what I later came to know as Sandviken; Bergen's sun-facing hill. I remember being surprised by the amount of people that were out. And I remember they all were wearing brand new clothes in bright colours. It was like a silent celebration of everyone being able to wear what they had especially prepared for the day. It was a different kind of chaos.

After climbing a little hill I sat on a rock in the shade in between some houses to catch my breath.

Suddenly, the most overwhelming sound pierced through the entire atmosphere: a dissonant, arrogant sentence. It was abrupt and sustained, and loud. Too loud. I heard sirens that were new to my ears – they were the sounds of films maybe, or elementary school lessons. My heart skipped a beat. I remember imagining the end of the world. It was finally here. And the end came as images that I could not really recognise. I imagined the sky framed ominously from the street of a grey city, and people in winter clothes running desperately.

How ironic, that having grown up in one of the most violent decades of Colombia, I would face the end of the world with a borrowed history.

When, after the dreadful seconds of loudness, the sirens finally stopped, everything I was imagining stopped as well. If the sirens felt like the end of the world, the long echo that clung to the mountain afterwards felt like the end of time. And just like that, Bergen was a void. It was a terrifying abandonment, but it was also dignified, like a meditation.

This morning, I sat down in my flat in Oslo to write this. Today is one of those dark, snowy winter days when the sky is grey and the ground is white. There is more light coming from underneath than from above, so there is no need to look up for comfort. The edge of the world comes with many similar inversions that I have grown accustomed to.

I went to the living room and went through all the motions that by now have become habit: I organised my drafts, laid out my pens, connected my laptop, made coffee.

As I sat down to write this, it happened again. The sirens. My heart stopped as I faced the end, only this time the end was a patch of sun over the asphalt.

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## ***About this Collection of Texts : An Introduction***

The collection of writings that I put forward here are a personal interpretation of what a critical reflection, in a practice-based artistic research project, can be. They represent an attempt to evidence the learning process that I have undergone during the last three years, in particular to illuminate the relationships between some of the terminology that I have encountered, and the artworks that have been associated with them.

Since I have engaged with different reflective angles and different reflective strategies at different stages in the process, I have decided to submit a collection of texts, and one video, instead of a unified research paper. As is the case with many of my colleagues in this programme, I have found it challenging to navigate the tensions and doubts concerning the form, language and tone this critical reflection should use. There is always the risk of being too academic, or too anecdotic. There is also the risk of favouring an evaluation based on personal growth beyond the ambiguous, but no less significant, standards of the “art world.” As an artist without training in art history, art theory or philosophy, it can also be difficult to ensure that some of the more complex ideas are embedded with the rigour and historical awareness that their traditions demand.

At the same time, however, there is something about the exercise of making narratives about ones own work that is undoubtedly delightful. It reveals, not only how one makes work and how one chooses to contextualise it, but also how one hopes it to be understood by other people. It is almost an exercise in anatomically exploring the desires behind making art. It is also a way of mapping out what one has learned, and the habits one has developed, in what otherwise would seem a hazy entanglement of information, opinions and procedures.



It is in the spirit of the latter, more so than in the fears of the former, that I have engaged with the task of making this collection of texts.

Although these writings tackle different ideas in different ways, there will be instances when a piece or a process is studied more than once. These re-visitations respond to the layered nature of the processes, as well as to the fact that this project gravitated around the production of two main artistic projects, which were finished during the second and third year of research.

I have been fortunate in this process to have engaged in discussions surrounding a few specific texts, references, and concepts with a selected group of colleagues and supervisors. These instances of discussion and learning represent the most clearly evidenced influences on my artworks, the production of which also became a part of the assimilation of new knowledge. As a result, these documents favour broad historical and theoretical overviews over punctual references.

## **The Contents**

This research began with an exploration of the relation between motion and states of alert. The practical and reflective explorations undertaken, however, have shifted and refined the crucial issues and questions, as well as my own awareness of my practice. For the present collection of texts I will thus say that this research has led to the statement that **my work is influenced by, and responds to the temporal structures that surround us, specifically those associated with states of anxiety and alert.** The central cultural reference will be media culture, television being the main example and metaphor. In terms of how these ideas

translate into practical artistic instances, I will discuss some interrelated issues of theatricality, the machine, and temporality as a performative strategy.

***A String of Apparitions*** will draw a chronological overview of the development of the project's main ideas and artworks. This text responds in part to the need to clarify how the terminology used to present this research relates to the works of art themselves. As such, it serves as an introductory view of the process and some of its methodologies. The video entitled ***The Temporalities of TV*** is a practical exercise that I did to explore and teach myself some notions of particular significance, especially those included in Mary Ann Doane's essay: *Information, Crisis, Catastrophe*. It comes across as a parodic exercise in televisual modes of presenting information, but in spite of this – or perhaps aided by this – it touches on some of the most influential ideas I have encountered in terms of the importance of temporality in our culture. This video is followed by a text, ***The Exploded TV***, which discusses how the televisual may exist beyond the technological boundaries of the medium.

***The Machine and The Embodiment*** seeks to study the role played by the mechanic in my work, and how this relates to the role that temporality plays in my practice. It also points to theoretical and artistic references that mark a relationship between the machine and broader cultural understandings of time. ***The Reflective Membrane*** centres on the question of what the inside of a performance is, and reflects on spectatorship in relation to the particular components of a piece, as well as on the environment devised for viewing.



## ***A String of Apparitions - An Evolution of Ideas in this Research***

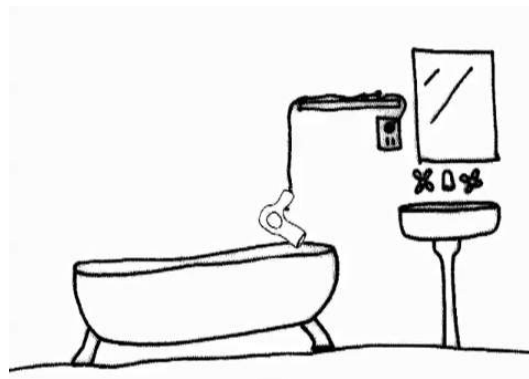
Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face?

G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

## From Disaster, to Anxiety, to Alert

The body of work I developed prior to this project was made as a means to explore disaster as an anticipated, and potentially threatening part of everyday life. It was a way of entering the imagination of an anxious person who is asking himself: “What if my house catches on fire? What if I fall down the stairs? What if a rock falls on my head?” and so on. I found this state of anxiety – or *what if-ness* – interesting in that it resonates with broader collective states of anticipatory dread (over events such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters – threats that could manifest somewhere, sometime) that lead to measures like “preventive wars” and constant surveillance of public spaces.

Still from *Avenires* (2006)



The predominant motor behind these works is the notion of anxiety. Anxiety is related to fear and our “fight or flight” reflex. This reflex has an important role to play in survival: It helps the mind to organise itself and think quickly in moments of confrontation, and helps the body to act in the event of an imminent threat. While this makes anxiety relate strongly to what we associate with the feeling of fear, there is one important distinction:

The word fear is used to refer to an immediate, objective threat, while anxiety refers to an anticipated, subjective threat. Anxiety is described as a more generalised state, while fear is more specific and immediate. The ‘danger object’ seems to be in front of us in fear states, while in anxiety states the individual is not consciously aware of what endangers him or her (Bourke 2005: 189).

Anxiety... is often a response to an imprecise or unknown threat... These sensations are caused by anxiety that is related to *possibility*...not the result of a known or specific threat. Rather it comes from your mind's vision of the possible dangers... Fear [on the other hand] is an emotional response to a known or definite threat (Kaplan 1998).

Anxiety will make a person feel that his surroundings are potential harbours of harm, and will subsequently produce a heightened sense of observation and awareness. I have in fact experienced this myself, as a sufferer of generalised anxiety in my early twenties. At its worst, the condition reveals itself in feelings of fear, which can be sparked by any thought or series of thoughts. In my case, situations that led to an anxiety attack were very different and interchangeable. Many times, the attacks were triggered by thoughts of the *what if* variety: "What if the driver of this taxi falls asleep? What if I pass out in the metro? What if I have a brain tumour? What if someone notices that I am freaking out? What if I can't stop thinking about this? What if..." Sometimes, however, the lines of thought leading to the fearful emotions could not so easily be traced. Anxiety would be the result of an experience that was not entirely rationalised or conscious. This is why the condition was said to be "generalised" – because it could happen "anywhere," as the result of unspecific situations and sensations.

People who suffer with GAD [Generalised Anxiety Disorder] often describe themselves as suffering with 'free floating anxiety...GAD is a particularly difficult disorder to live with as it is constantly on the sufferers mind – there is no respite as the anxiety is not tied to a specific situation or event (Anxiety UK)

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) go through the day filled with exaggerated worry and tension, even though there is little or nothing to provoke it. They anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about health issues, money, family

problems, or difficulties at work. Sometimes just the thought of getting through the day produces anxiety (US National Institute of Mental Health).

The characteristic effect of anxiety to place the sufferer in intense anticipation of future events is an important aspect of the condition, and one that relates to how I deploy it in my work. In *Fear: The Spectrum Said* (2005), Brian Massumi describes a similar process in relation to how we are activated by undefined, fearful events triggered by post 9-11 governmental strategies of alert. He marks an important distinction between a situation and a *futurity*. A situation corresponds to when the specifics of a threat are known. As such, a situation – a person walking towards you with a gun in his hand, for instance – allows for a focused and rational range of reactions: I can run or I can hide, or I can stay still... etc. A *futurity*, on the other hand, is something anticipated to happen in the future, and activates a person in preparation for action but remains “contentless.”

A threat is only a threat if it retains an indeterminacy. If it has a form, it is not a substantial form, but a time form: a *futurity*. The threat as such is nothing yet -just a looming. It is a form of *futurity* yet has the capacity to fill the present without presenting itself. Its future looming casts a present shadow, and that shadow is *fear* (Massumi 2005:35).

Like with anxiety, the feeling associated with a *futurity* is that of “fight or flight”; a neurological and physical reflex that activates the body in moments of threat. And, similar to an anxiety condition, a *futurity* elicits a feeling that is generalised, and thereby prevents the body from taking concrete action. A *futurity* prompts a state of intense and sustained preparedness or, as Massumi calls it, an *activation* (Massumi 2005: 36). An activation can thus be the result of a variety of situations, from real threats to completely harmless situations, and even unconscious impulses.

A doctor once said to me that generalised anxiety is “the condition of our time.” He suggested it could be a manifestation of what is being experienced at a broader, societal level: “We are all collectively afraid of what the future may bring, and we sometimes even take active measures to avoid these threats. But we don’t know what we are afraid of! Or if what we are afraid of is something harmful at all...” Although I am not necessarily interested in theorising a link between anxiety as a pathology and current society, I do find the characteristics of the disorder to be evocative of the circumstances increasingly experienced on a collective level. Of particular interest to me is the intrinsic relationship between temporal features and a variety of sensations and emotions.

I make artworks that rely strongly on their unfolding as events in time, and thus find it important to look at the way temporality affects us. I am curious as to how temporality is understood and experienced, especially in relation to anxiety. If anxiety is based on an anticipation of an indeterminate future, then I wonder: what is it about “our time” that generates it?

As a dimension of society that inserts temporal models into everyday life, media culture has become a central component of my studies, with television as my main point of focus. This is not to say that media culture alone produces anxiety and alert, but I am interested in how media and culture enter a kind of alignment whereby these temporal modes are shared, and how this occurrence, in turn, can influence my own artistic practice.



## What If This Image Has a Rhythm

Some of my pieces are derived from a desire to represent the nature of anxiety as means of exploring the relationships between a condition that is experienced individually or collectively and one that resonates within media culture. The video *Anytime Now* (2008/9), filmed from a balcony in Rabat, Morocco, while a political demonstration unfolds in the background, is one such exercise.



Stills from *Anytime Now*

In the piece, I perform in front of the camera, the static frame suggestive of a “reporter-on-location” scenario, and present many kinds of situations that end in disaster, all enacted through paper cut-outs. The work follows my desire to explore diverse *what if* scenarios: What if there’s a car crash? What if there’s an earthquake? What if a bridge falls? What if a snake bites me? What if a rock falls on my head? The absurdity and diversity of the representations are emphasised through an insistent and repetitive manner. The drawings crash into each other over and over again and, regardless of the scenario, are always reduced to crumpled paper as a childish “phwshh” sound is heard. This video stresses how an

engagement with futurities affects present behaviour: a demonstration, transpiring live in the background, grows in intensity and is almost missed by my character in the video; a man who is too occupied with his string of *what if's* to notice the actual events nearby. Consumed by anxiety, I am so busy with my projections of the future that I become distracted and disengaged with my immediate surroundings. The *what if's* come in an intensity that seemingly overpowers the nature of the projections themselves. It is as if the repetition itself is what makes the *what if's* effective.

This significance of the repetitive action in this work prompts a reflective divide between the *what* and the *how* within the representations of disaster. The *what* is the imagery, while the *how* is the nature of its appearance within a given moment in time. The compulsive repetitions explored in *Anytime Now* is reminiscent of the way TV news broadcasts catastrophe after catastrophe. Applied to the action of the paper drawings, the compulsive repetition strives to generate a dynamic that somehow goes beyond the iconographic material presented. It marks *how* images are charged with meaning through deliberate forms of temporal representation.

Making this split between the *what* and the *how* (the iconographic and the temporal) has been a crucial strategy throughout this project, as it allows me to consider the characteristics of motion as bearers of meaning. It also allows a less illustrative use of iconographic material that, in the case of catastrophe, can easily be overpowering. My particular interest in the *how* also resonates strongly in relation to my training and experience as a composer, since the task of a composer is essentially to create an experience of order and intensity through events that unfold in time. Applied to the domain of media culture, the reflective split between *what* and *how* emphasises the questions: Are the images of catastrophe and disaster a result of their iconography? Or is it a case of *how* they appear in time?

## **Catastrophe as a Temporal Figure**

One of the first steps in my exploration of catastrophe and temporality was to study Mary Ann Doane's *Information, Crisis, Catastrophe*. For Doane, catastrophe is the shocking punctuation of time that happens amongst a steady flow of information. This dynamic is best exemplified in television, where breaking news interrupts regular programming and captures the audience's attention in order to deliver a story. These stories, however, are not always catastrophic and do not always require this kind of interruption. The temporal model of breaking the regularity of a flow of information grants television the ability to modulate the attention and affective charge of a great number of viewers at any given time. It generates an exciting sense of connectedness to the world, even if what one is actually connecting to is a series of witness reports, speculations or, increasingly, advertising ploys. I have taken this model of catastrophe as a starting point in a series of observations, conversations and practical explorations surrounding our relationship with the temporal structures that we experience in everyday life, and I often employ it when constructing the image sequences in my own work. I often ask myself: If the temporal fabric found in our culture includes cultural mediations of images and information that manipulate time and alter the way we prioritise information, then in what way is this temporality-driven, meaning production useful as a notion in making art?

## **The Two Sides of Alert**

The process of carrying out these explorations has been based on the idea that anxiety and alert are derived from temporal models present in media culture. This has led to an understanding that the element of media that produces anxiety is an equation with two sides: On the one side is the varying scale of shock (the sudden punctuations described in Mary Ann Doane's catastrophic model that are either expected or surprising, and, on the other side

is the iconography of imminent disaster – the face of a dreadful possibility. I have attempted to work with different combinations of these two sides by, for instance, using imagery that is closely associated with disaster but changing its conventional qualities of motion. Such was the case for the performance *Campo de Fuerzas* (2009), in which a rocket is dragged slowly across a field until it reaches a monument that the city of Mexico was trying to revitalise after years of neglect (Gonzalo Fonsca's *Torre de los Vientos*).

Still from the documentation  
of *Campo de Fuerzas*



Gonzalo Fonseca's  
*Torre de Los Vientos*



While working on the piece, I remember thinking about the 2003 bombardment of Bagdad's museum by American troops (Burns 2003), and how it immediately ignited discussions on the invaluable collection that was looted, destroyed and damaged by the attack. I found it interesting that a bombardment, ironically, became a way of pointing to the importance of a place precisely at the moment of its destruction. In *Campo de Fuerzas*, I wanted to make a similar gesture while treating the rocket with a different character and behaviour than that of a destructive missile. The tired, moribund icon of destruction moves towards its destination not to destroy it, but to enter it, as if it was returning home. The performance is accompanied by Franz Liszt's *Pensée des Morts* (*Thoughts of the Dead*) played backwards. The music accentuates the affective reversal of the action, as if the dead suggested in its title, as well as the forgotten monument, were summoned back to life through the performance.

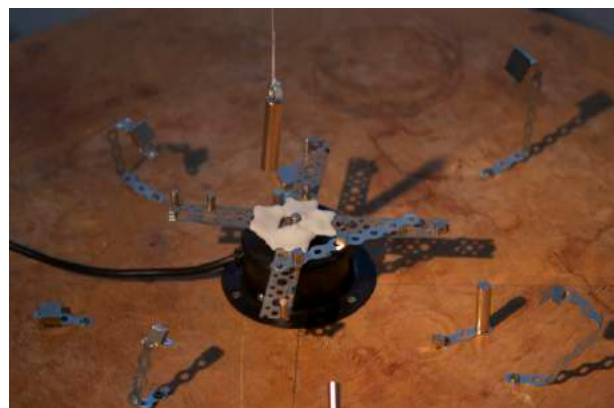
During this time, I also engaged in a series of studio experiments involving magnets. I am interested in how these objects produce invisible forces and how this can metaphorically relate to the temporal forces that influence us. One of these experiments became the kinetic sculpture *The Enchanted* (2009), which also evidences the exploration of the space between iconography and temporality. As opposed to *Anytime Now*, this piece does not focus on the fantasies of possible future threats, but on the behaviour of a subject conjuring these fantasies. As a representation of a situation of alert, *The Enchanted* attempts to closely render both the iconographic content (a lonely man with a gun in a lonely forest), and the temporal qualities (hesitant and paranoid motion) of a subject in anxiety. The man with the gun prepares for action in fear of what could be hiding behind the trees of a forest, his movements the result of a choreographic arrangement of magnets, whose force amount to the small figure's behaviour.

*The Enchanted*



The simplicity of this sculpture, its mechanisms and its straightforward illustrative qualities, made it the least sophisticated work in this project. However, making *The Enchanted* led to a clarity of questions within my process: Am I seeking to represent a subject in a state of alert (a paranoid man with a gun, for instance)? Or do I want to represent the images that haunt this subject's imagination – the threats, the futurities (the *what if's*)? Also, in considering the arrangement of magnets and the the idea of composing with moving objects, I wondered: In using mechanisms for motion, and focusing on situations that perform, could it be that I am seeking to produce representations of time itself – time as a mechanical construct? Furthermore, when it comes to the audience of my works, do I want them to witness behaviours associated with anxiety and alert? Or do I wish to generate actual feelings of anxiety within the viewer as part of the experience of the work?

Arrangement of magnets on a motor for the *The Enchanted*



These questions, which activated the practical exercise of *The Enchanted*, led to many of the operations carried out in the works developed through the rest of the project. It became clear that my aim was not to incite a state of anxiety in an audience. The temporal characteristic of my pieces would henceforth not be a heightened state of anticipation, or a charged, fearful expectation. Quite the opposite, I would seek to develop a very dense and diluted sense of time, including repetitions, circularities, temporal dislocations, and “lostness.” In short, the temporal models I have been discussing so far, mainly those of information and shock, would not be present in my work. I felt more inspired by the emotional environment of lostness and circularity of *Birds*, a video I created in 2008, than by the immediacy and illustrative force of *The Enchanted*. It also became important to actively embody the role of the mechanical components of future works, and find out how to assume the presence of these motion-generating components.

These decisions meant that the question of iconography was now needed to be addressed in a very different way. The idea of time derived by motion would now be the central motor of my work. I was inspired by the definition of dramaturgy that I discovered through past involvement with contemporary dance productions. In much of contemporary dance, dramaturgy is a practice of actively reading and finding meaning in the explorations and improvisations carried out by dancers following the instructions of a choreographer. It results in a dialogue between choreographer and dramaturge that produces a pool of knowledge, which may even lead to intuitive tasks and decisions. It is also the job of the dramaturge to put forward points of tension, as well as to bring forward references that may question or support that which is being experimented with in the studio. One of the main tasks of the dramaturge is to examine what emerges from the way motion is conceived and exercised during the process of creation. As such, dramaturgy could be described as an engineering of

time – a way of devising the tensions and interactions between moving parts in order to assess the meanings that emerge in the process of creation.

Inspired by this practice, I developed a close dialogue with the dramaturge Bojana Bauer, with whom many ideas were shared and discussed, especially ideas surrounding the mechanical and its relationship to anxiety and alert. The question that remained was: If I am focusing on a mechanical and dramaturgical aspect of my work, how can I still claim notions of anxiety, alert and the catastrophic to be so central?

### **A Site of Exception**

The two main works made towards the end of this project, *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010) and *The Kinetoscope of Time* (2011), are examples of how anxiety, alert and the catastrophic remained influential in my work.

*Domain of Things and Other Histories*  
photo: Alexander Stav



*The Kinetoscope of Time*





While developing both of these performances, I set out to create neither a representation nor an instigation of these themes, but instead worked towards an experience that avoids the temporality of media culture rather than replicates it. This meant the experience of shock could give way to other kinds of temporal structures, while the catastrophic iconography could give way to a more suggestive imagery, that nonetheless still relates to fantasies of future disaster. The operation could be summarised as a drastic shift in temporality and a metaphoric shift in iconography, which serve to dislocate the conventional anxiety-inducing strategies of media culture. I would come to call this a “site of exception.”

It was clear to me that a performative situation would be the way to create this site. If temporality is what defines anxiety, then I had to work not just on the temporal layers of a piece, but also on the conditions for experiencing this temporal dimension, in order to subvert it. This subversion would greatly rely on a situation whereby the audience could engage with a sequence of events in a specific manner. In this sense, the aim was a performative work that, in spite of being part of a practice housed within the visual arts, could resonate strongly with a theatrical practice. I was interested in operating within a genre of performance that is not tied to the history of happenings and action performance but functions rather as a semantic experience; a work that is read by the viewer as it unfolds.<sup>1</sup>

The protocols and spatial claims of *Domain of Things and Other Histories* and *The Kinetoscope of Time* mark a clear desire towards committing the audience to a particular kind of space for viewing. The theatricality reinforces the idea of a “site of exception,” especially as a strategy within the gallery space, as I find that museums and galleries are

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense these works relate to Richard Schechner’s definition of theatricality as they include characteristics that he assigns to the theatre: as a special ordering of time, the need of an audience, a symbolic reality, and the fact that it is scripted (Schechner1988:16).

increasingly difficult to detach from the very rhythms and intensities of everyday life that I wish to subvert.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Ghost**

As mentioned above, the later works in this project correspond to an interest in exploring a different set of relations between the iconography and temporality of art from that found in media culture. Consequently, I began looking for cultural referents in which disasters are made manifest by way of a dynamic other than shock and catastrophe. A concept I developed in this process is the “ghostly,” which was partly spawned in response to Freud’s *The Uncanny* (1919), as well as Walter Benjamin’s *The Storyteller* (1936).

Freud’s text formulates the uncanny as being “undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror... it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general.” (Freud 2010:1)

Freud provides an analysis of how the uncanny may be generated by a variety of circumstances and feelings. At the centre of the uncanny is a blurring of what is familiar and what is unknown, as suggested by the varying meanings of the German word *unheimlich* itself. Freud proceeds to analyse the circumstances that may lead to a feeling of uncanniness, which include certain doublings and repetitions. The uncanny is also related to a certain animism whereby beings or objects could be either dead or alive, as in the case of wax dolls

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<sup>2</sup> I remember having a conversation on the subject with the director of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, Charles Esche. He discussed one recent strategy taken on by his museum as a way of inserting theatrical strategies in order to motivate the audience to invest in the works exhibited in a more engaged way. His deployment of characterisations for the audience (visitors were invited to take on the character of the Pilgrim, the Tourist, the Flaneur, and the Worker, and followed a role in viewing the exhibition) These strategies are indications of how art viewing, perhaps as the result of the hegemony of big scale fairs and bienales, is increasingly shaped by the modes of consumption that we engage with outside the art space. Broadly speaking audiences invest little time and attention to pieces that are not immediately seductive or controversial, just as it happens while zapping through channels or navigating a shopping mall.

and automata. Freud links the uncanny not just to phenomena and occurrences, but also to a category of behaviours and emotional states such as “helplessness,” and the “compulsion to repeat” (Freud 2010:10), as well as disorientation, alienation, and a sense of being threatened. The many principles of the uncanny served as guidelines for determining the characteristics of *the ghostly*; a concept that became a directing force in my work.

As I reflected on the uncanny, I also read Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller* and *Some Motifs on Baudelaire*, which address how modern life's increased technological intensity and its introduction of industrialised temporalities led to a new category of experience, one with a reduced sense of depth. For Benjamin, environments inundated with shock lead to a subsequent loss of content. In modern life, the everyday is experienced as a string of impulses, and he calls this kind of experience *Erlebnis*. In a way, Benjamin's theory is reminiscent of Doane's catastrophic model, in which fear changes cognition in periods of anxiety.

The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience... Perhaps the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents (Benjamin 1999:159).

For Benjamin, this immediacy, intensity and superficiality of modern life – *Erlebnis* – goes hand in hand with a redefinition of death. While death used to be a part of everyday life, and a part of domestic existence, it is now sterilised and removed from sight. However, for Benjamin it is precisely the moment of death that confers a person with the authority that is at the heart of storytelling,

...a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life -and this is the stuff that stories are made of- first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end - unfolding views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it- suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story...Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell (Benjamin 1999:93).

Benjamin's emphasis on the importance of death as part of storytelling is, amongst other things, a critique of industrialised culture's compulsion with seizing immediacy. I am reminded of a recent slogan used in Latin America by the credit corporation Visa that reads: "Visa: because life is now."



The text reads, "You will enjoy life with your family. Visa, because life is now".

This slogan connects the consumer with a vitality that increasingly fades as you focus further into the future. This sets a cycle whereby you will always have an excuse for prioritising the present instant. This is the nature of credit: get satisfaction now, and worry about it later. But when "later" comes it will of course be "now" – the now of life. In short, Visa suggests that the best way to keep death away is by indulging in the present. Nothing could be more

different to Benjamin's suggestions of a temporal experience that resonates with sustained labour and an acknowledgement of death as a passing of knowledge, and also as the core of a cumulative, meaningful experience (*Erfahrung*), and the very source of storytelling.

The confrontations between categories of fear and death as found in *The Uncanny* and *The Storyteller* have fuelled my own way of defining *the ghostly* as a re-inserted manifestation of death into the present moment, as a presence that breaks the linear gravity of mortality by simultaneously inhabiting the *before* as well as the *after* of death. It is a ghost of doublings that resides in the existential territories between life and death, the unknown and the familiar, the mechanical and the human. Seen from the perspective of my earlier "two sides of the equation of alert," the ghost begins to suggest not just an iconography related to doubles, uncanny beings and temporal operations such as repetition, suspension and dislocation, but also a kind of affective environment derived from these ideas that holds the potential to translate to a performance format. The making of *Domain of Things and Other Histories* was an active way of exploring how this environment could be achieved.

### **Domain of Things and Other Histories**

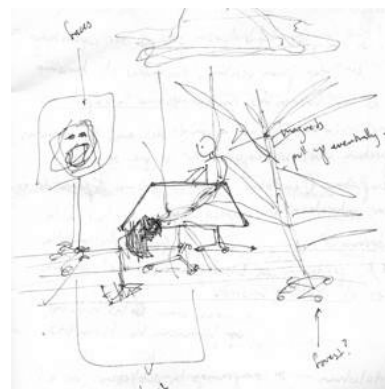
*Domain of Things and Other Histories* started with two paths of exploration. The first had to do with a wish to develop the iconography of *The Enchanted*, in which I deployed a forest to match the more familiar idea of a "haunted forest" – a place of mystery and an eerie environment. Secondly, I wanted to develop the dolly-like mechanism used to make scenographic structures move smoothly and slowly in *Birds*. I was inspired by Tarkovsky's film *The Sacrifice* (1986). In this film's last scene, for instance, a very long dolly shot travels back and forth, following the destruction of a house and a car, as well as the breakdown of several of the characters.



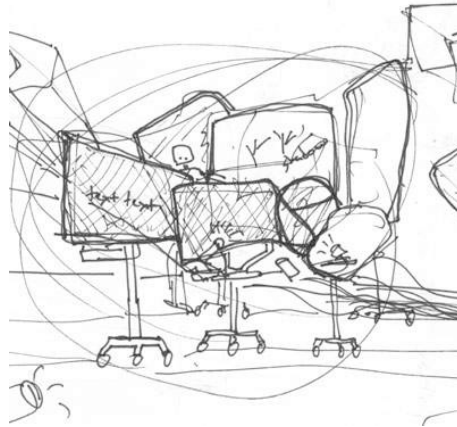
Still from Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*

Tarkovsky's cinematic images of destruction and distress are coloured by the quality of motion achieved through the filming technique. I set out to research dolly mechanisms as a way to achieve a smooth movement, one that is neither angular nor punctured, but rather feels as effortless as a frictionless drift. I decided to use the dolly as a scenographic mechanism in and of itself, so that instead of it existing at the source of the captured action, it becomes what is seen. The dolly is transformed into a mechanical embodiment of the very effect it is instrumental in producing within a cinematic image.

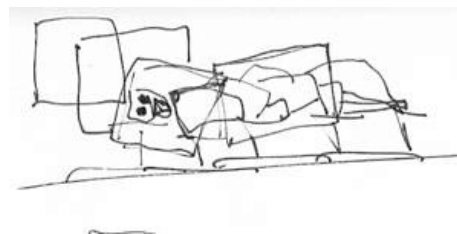
While sketching the possible shape and look of dollies as trees within a "haunted forest," I made a drawing in which a performer *inhabited* the mechanical dollies as they moved.



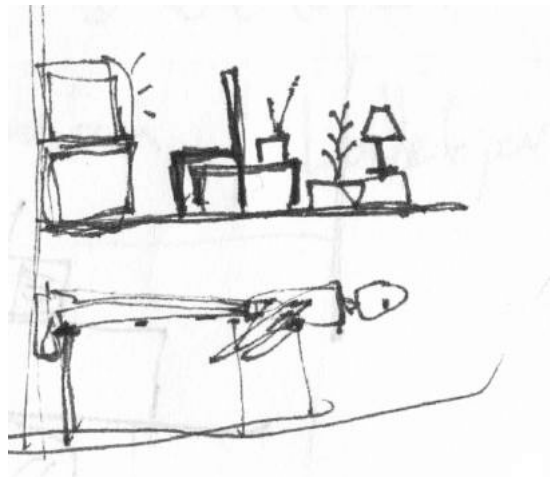
Soon the idea of someone inside the dollies – which were previously thought to be used as trees – took off, and the forest was left behind. I made several sketches of different combinations of body-inside-machine situations.



This possibility was very intriguing, as it composed a relationship between a person and a machine that resonates with ideas of *The Uncanny*. I continued by sketching a drawing of a corpse lying on top of the dollies and other similar representations.



Since the forest was now gone, and I still wanted to work with the idea of a ghostly, haunted situation, the dominant questions were: What is being haunted? From where is it being haunted? While addressing these issues I made a drawing that was to become the central image of *Domain of Things and Other Histories*: A man lying underneath his own house – he may be alive or already dead, he may be a ghost – connected to the very structures that support the room he has abandoned.



I remember thinking of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, in which a murderer can't stop hearing the beating heart of the victim he has hidden underneath his own house.



Illustration of Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*  
from [playersink.com](http://playersink.com)



I found the idea of an underground fascinating. Since it is associated with death and burial, I felt that employing an “underground” could help create a kind of ghost: someone who is buried and at the same time somehow alive. This image also resonated strongly with post-apocalyptic scenarios from science fiction films and literature. These associations prompted me to read Gabriel Tarde’s *Fragments d’une Histoire Future* (1974) (*Underground Man* in its English translation), in which the underground is linked to a post-apocalyptic culture, just as it is in many other stories and films. In Tarde’s science fiction, people seek refuge from a cataclysmic event and evolve into a complex underground society where aesthetics and art become a developed kind of currency and a way of adapting to a new environment.

In *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, the room above ground appears both lived-in and abandoned, and is supported by planks of flooring that distend and threaten to break apart. We are also able to see the space underneath this living room, in which a physical relationship between a man and the machine that structures the space and that allows it to move forward is enacted. One of the ways this character “haunts” is by destabilising the living room as he moves forward. This motion is as literal as it is metaphoric: the man is on the move, seeking a place or a destination. This destination, however, is not established as a point of arrival but as an alignment.

*The ghostly* has much to do with this sense of alignment, as a ghost appears only when a set of conditions are present. In *Domain of Things*, the alignment is represented spatially. Once the performer and the machine arrive to a specific point, things begin to happen: the lamp switches on, music plays on the radio, the floor dismembers. The radio appears as an analogy, since it is a device that itself requires an alignment between an apparatus and a proximity to a frequency or actual physical space. The radio refers also to its historical association with the paranormal and the ghostly, as a device that picks up voices from

midair, and that is able to transmit these voices across great distances (Byrne 2011). The notion of alignment was further used in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* as an approach to issues of location and displacement, and as a dramaturgical directive for the motion of the sculptural construction.

### **From Site of Exception to Trauma**

The process of creation, production and performance for *Domain of Things and Other Histories* offered me many layers to reflect on. A particularly influential reflection emerged in considering the idea of a “site of exception” and evaluating the work according to this initial directive. As I mentioned earlier, I had been trying to find a way to make a performative work that could be an alternative experience to the logics of shock as found on television and within media culture in general. I wanted to create a different relationship with time whilst maintaining an iconographic relationship to fear and catastrophe. Looking back at *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, I realised that although the performance seemed to effectively avoid the temporalities of shock by achieving a sense of ghostliness, it was also possible to reflect on the work in a way that did not altogether make it an “exception” from the temporal and iconographic nature of media culture. In using the ghost as a paradigm, I found a reflective notion that challenges the opposition I had established between media culture and the ghost. This notion was trauma.

The link to trauma came to me while reading Thomas Elsaesser’s essay *Too Late, Too Soon, Too Much: From Melodrama to Noir and Neo-Noir to Postmortem and Trauma* (2003/7). Here, Elsaesser looks at Walter Benjamin’s critique of how experience has been modulated by the increased rhythms of modern life, and examines the cumulative, profound experience of *Erfahrung* versus the superficial experience of *Erlebnis*. Elsaesser suggests that as a rich

experience (Erfahrung) breaks down towards the superficial *Erlebnis*, a limit is established that is itself a new kind of experience. This is characterised by a sense of detachment, a navigation of events in a removed way, and a transformation into a “drive creature” (Elsaesser 2003/7:14). Elsaesser suggests that this kind of experience is symbolically present in some cinematic forms, and particularly embodied in the figure of the *neo-noir* film hero.

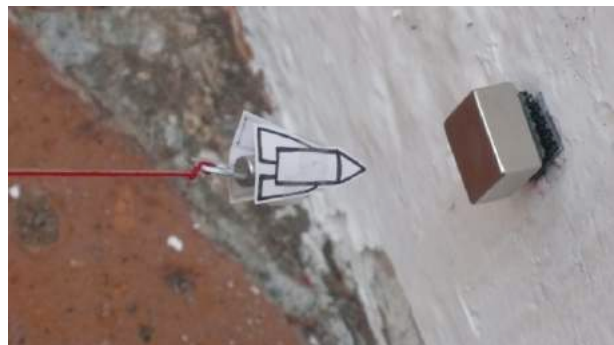
These protagonists are ‘dead men’...they have, psychoanalytically speaking, fallen out of the symbolic order of desire and lack, and have become ‘drive creatures’, psychic automatons or zombies, whose narrative goal is less aimed at regaining their ability to ‘desire’ than it is their need to restore their (consciousness of) mortality (in order for there to be closure)...in these films, we can say that the classic *noir* hero has merged with the Vampire figure, but not as the bloody-lusty predator, and rather as the melancholy un-dead Dracula, haunted as much a haunting. The privileged body of *neo-noir* is therefore indeed the corpse (Elsaesser 2003/7:14).

This description of the *neo-noir* hero reminds me of the underground character in *Domain of Things and Other Histories*: the un-dead man with no clear sense of objective or agency, who is moving but not really acting. He is presented as a figure amidst a situation that suspends him, and as being manipulated by the mechanism that he also fuels. This sustained physical quality, in turn, constructs a sense of time, which in itself is the narrative core of the piece. In other ways as well, the character in *Domain of Things* relates very closely to the qualities associated with Elsaesser’s *neo-noir* hero:

...not only is he helpless to act. He no longer even feels the impulse to act, however catastrophic the wound. Thus rather than speaking of an experience of failure, as in classical *noir*, we would have to speak of the very failure of experience: no words, no action, no memory can recreate a coherent sequence of events or restore the cause

and effect chain of a chrono-logic...The name for this 'failure of experience' in contemporary culture is trauma (Elsaesser 2003/7:14).

I can retrospectively identify that several of my other works also include qualities that echo this definition of trauma. The performer in *Anytime Now*, so busy with his compulsive ideations, fails to notice the reality of a nearby threat. In *Birds*, a constant "lostness" and inability to wake up pervades the series of anecdotes projected on the walls of a warehouse. The magnetically suspended rocket of *Might Arrives* (2009) simultaneously suggests the imminence and the impossibility of a resolution.



Magnetic suspension tests for *Might Arrives*

Confronting my ideas on "sites of exception" by positing that I am not subverting "the ghost," but rather linking it to characteristics of trauma found in media culture, has been an exciting prospect with which I worked towards my final piece, *The Kinetoscope of Time*, and one that leaves many open questions to take on as a further continuation of this research.

## **Towards a Redefinition of Trauma**

I find it important to mention that the definition of trauma I have been working on does not relate to specific events. Like the afore-mentioned catastrophic model, which is treated predominantly as a temporal figure, allowing for me to study it in isolation of its iconographic material, trauma is also treated in relation to its dynamic dimension. When I speak of trauma, I am essentially relating to Allen Meek's distinction between a traumatic event, and the effect on memory of historical trauma:

...historical trauma not only in terms of bearing witness to specific events and experiences, but also as an ongoing struggle over representations of the past (Meek 2010:1).

The representations of the past of a traumatised subject may be specific or metaphoric, but my focus is on how a set of temporal components inherent to trauma – repetition, compulsion, historical displacements, non-linear events – relate it to the experience associated with media culture, and how, as such, consolidate a set of preferences when I make artworks.

The notion of trauma appeared towards the end of a reflective and practical journey that, in three years, has moved between anxiety, alert, the catastrophic, and the ghostly. This journey has seen a shift in an iconographic material, from concrete imaginations of future disasters to suggestive scenarios of empty homes, empty warehouses, mysterious spectacles and lost, suspended characters. As an incipient idea, trauma points to much learning and exploration to come, but it has nonetheless already shown me that there are many different ways in which media culture, as a manifestation of our desire to represent the world, influences how we relate to and define various emotional instances.

I often feel that I am studying media culture in order to avoid its mechanisms, as I find that we are overwhelmed by them, and I see in art an opportunity to exercise alternatives to this part of everyday life. But sometimes I also feel like I am unpacking less-evident layers of the same culture, and that what I consider to be an alternative is just as much a part of what we find in television, cinema, the internet and the host of devices with which we interact on a daily basis. More than confusion though, this feeling prompts a curiosity, a sense that our cultures are not decipherable or illustrated in straightforward gestures, and that by confronting audiences with my time-dependent compositions, I may be contributing to keeping certain questions open.

To be deeply interested in the anxiety that catastrophe produces, and to purposefully keep a distance from representing it directly, is as much a risk as it is a responsibility. By attempting complexity, I run the risk of simplification, and by relying heavily on poetics to address issues that exist very presently in our lives and that call for direct action, I also run the risk of undertaking a distanced practice. However, I do feel that my work reflects on many referents, none of which are articulated as prescriptions. In a milieu full of opinions aimed at direct action, I feel that my work begs for pauses and re-considerations. And when my pieces, with their generalised topics and layered components, find themselves in conflict with discourses of media and catastrophe that inevitably befall them as introductions, explanations, or contextualisations, I try to keep emergent tension within a domain of evocation, and not that of assertion. This may mean that my practice does not contribute to an indexical illustration of the problems it is inspired by, but it also calls upon the importance of cultural elements that are less tangible, such as temporality, to be taken into consideration within the discussion of how we relate to the mediations and emotions of our everyday lives.

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## ***The Temporalities of Television***

Because we're suffering from brain fade. We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information.

From Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

### ***The Temporalities of Television - Video***

For this video, please refer to the file “The Temporalities of Television” included in the USB media card which is playable in various digital platforms.

## ***The Exploded TV***

### ***Annotations to the Previous Video Section and a Dialogue with Johan Grimonprez***

The previous video focuses on television as defined by the shows, ads, broadcasts, and other programming that happen within the specific technological boundary of a screen, antenna, group of cables, and enclosure that make up what we understand as a TV set. Since the idea of television entered this project, however, I have become increasingly interested in an expanded understanding of the medium that exceeds the physical device. I believe the temporal nature of television is one that exists in other media and has thus effectively spread to many other aspects of everyday life.

In the autumn of 2011, I met Brussels-based artist Johan Grimonprez, with whom I undertook an in-depth discussion on television and temporality. Grimonprez is a highly acclaimed artist whose best-known work uses archival television footage as a source for films that comment on the medium of TV itself. My first contact with his work was the film *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*; a powerful work addressing the connection between airplane hijackings and live television. *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* has become a near-prophetic piece of work, as it was completed and screened before the 9/11 attacks, when the possibility of a televised terrorist attack involving airplanes was not yet a prominent cultural referent.



Still from *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*

I saw Grimonprez's more recent film *Double Take* at the 2010 *Catastrophe* biennale in Quebec City, Canada. *Double Take* is a sophisticated interweaving of archival TV footage from the cold war with advertisement clips and material from the oeuvre of Alfred Hitchcock. The film centres on Tom McCarthy's<sup>1</sup> adaptation of Jorge Luis Borges' "August 25th, 1983" in which the character of Alfred Hitchcock meets his future self and enters a discussion as to how one of them should die as a result of this encounter. The story is presented as a parallel to the cold war relations between President John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union, as tensions were building up in the 1950's and 60's. *Double Take* also presents an actual Hitchcock double, Ron Burrage; the man that stood in for Hitchcock after his death, and who passed away toward the end of *Double Take's* editing process, eerily echoing the film's central line: "If you meet your double you should kill him."

My interest in Grimonprez was initially related to his take on television as the dominant medium for defining catastrophe, but in further familiarising myself with his work, I became captivated by the dialogue he composes between TV, literary and fictional material, and music. By establishing a strong poetic axis to his films (quotes from Don De Lillo's *Mao II* in *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, and McCarthy's adaptation of Jorge Luis Borges in *Double Take*), and by using specific music to accompany the archival material, Grimonprez *fictionalises* television. The contraposition of the TV clips, the voice of the narrator, the stories, and the poetry manages to drastically shift the affective charge. The result is dislocating: Through his films we relate cinematically to images that we know to be from real broadcasts. This operation makes a powerful comment on television by evidencing the extent to which TV iconography depends on certain temporal operations to gain veracity. By displacing the "live and direct" affect conventionally attached to the moving images, truth and fiction are effectively blurred, and TV-archive material becomes an illustration of poetic and fictional narratives. TV is

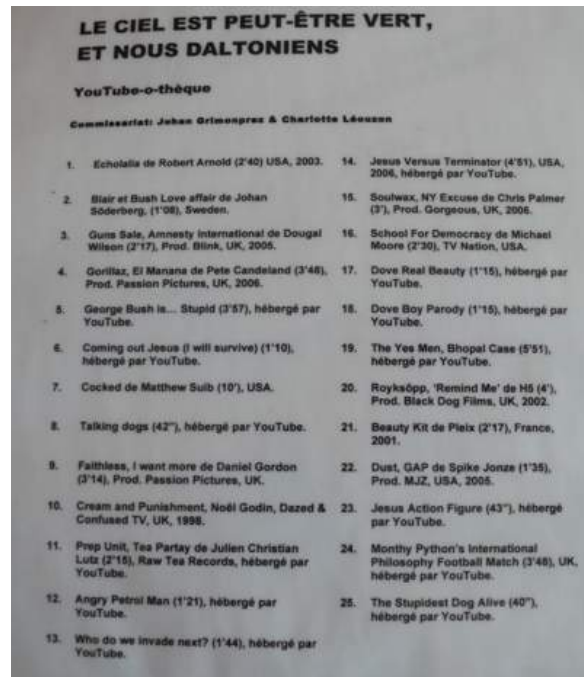
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<sup>1</sup> Tom McCarthy is a London based writer whose recent works include *Tintin and The Secret of Literature* and *Men in Space*.

stripped of its temporality and the hegemony of its televisual authenticity is thrown into question.

Using Hitchcock as the central figure in *Double Take*, simultaneously as fictional and historical axes, strikes me as a most appropriate choice. The film seems to underline a relationship between the operations of television and film (specifically the works of suspense so famously mastered by Hitchcock), pointing to the fact that these dramatic strategies are not exclusive to fiction, but that through television, the temporal structures have become part of the way we relate to everyday reality. By engaging with suspenseful dramatisations of real life events, the content of news stories is overpowered by an economy of tensions and shocks that constitute a central component of the televisual domain.

In addition to *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* and *Double Take*, Grimonprez has made other artworks that I find important to mention, such as *Dorothy Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *Maybe the Sky is Green*, and *We are Colourblind*. These works are collections of YouTube clips made available to exhibition audiences by way of monitors and projections. The videos are chosen by Grimonprez, usually in collaboration with another artist. A playlist is often made available as a printout, and sometimes the audience will be invited to contribute their own YouTube clips. This kind of operation reinforces Grimonprez's suggestion that YouTube is the contemporary replacement of the remote control – an opinion that I find to be of utmost relevance in my research, in that it effectively positions television beyond the limits of what we physically and technologically understand the medium to be.



A section from the list of videos from Grimonprez's *YouTube-o-tèque* Quebec Biennial, 2010

In considering this postulation, I am subsequently led to a series of reflections that resist the argument of television itself as a source of anxiety. After all, if we say that our definition of the catastrophic is derived from television, and that collective states of alert and anxiety are a response to our exposure to it, then finding “televisual” dynamics in other media may mean that TV is not simply a cause, but more of a catalyst, and a representational agent of broader temporal logics. To understand television as a phenomenon that is not bound to the technological device of the TV-box is to resist reducing the problem of the catastrophic to one that politicises the medium of television alone.

### Zapping Inwards

For Grimonprez, the appearance of the remote control marks a crucial turning point in the history of television. The device initially appeared as a way to mute or skip commercial breaks. In the 1980’s and 90’s, with the appearance of more channels and cable technology, the remote control’s function as channel-shifter was established, and the device in fact

became one of the most important of its time. So central to domestic life it was, that people like Howard Markman, head of marital studies at the University of Denver, argued channel surfing as one of two major sources of marital unrest at the time (Grimonprez 2011:47). In our conversation, I put to Grimonprez my belief that zapping, which is supposed to offer diversity and escape from unwanted TV shows or ads, in fact serves to “dig oneself” further into the temporal fabric of the medium. While zapping offers the possibility of finding something that suits us better at a given time, it also commits us to this type of compulsive search. Grimonprez related this idea to what he calls an “info-dystopia,” in which the variety of options available – and our engagement with them through watching and zapping – is actively shielding important information that is purposefully withheld (national security information for instance)<sup>2</sup>.

In my view, the disinformation effect of television may not only be due to a lack of variety in content, or to content control. Just as television can make anything catastrophic, television can also make important information indistinguishable from entertainment or other kinds of less vital information. The temporal characteristics of the medium, and its interactive extension found in the remote control’s promise of finding “something better elsewhere,” can lead to a banalisation of information. This banalisation in itself represents another kind of information dystopia – one that is perhaps more dangerous than that suggested by Grimonprez – as the information is broadcasted but downplayed, simultaneously consumed and discarded by television’s constant presentness.

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<sup>2</sup> This “shielded information” may even include “unexplainable” phenomena such as UFO sightings, which Grimonprez claims were actively played down in spite of multiple reports that validated their sightings in the U.S.

## **The Break of Now**

Just as the temporality of the television itself is based on a promise of catastrophe zapping extends this temporality to the search for catastrophe between channels. If we look at Mary Ann Doane's temporal categories – information, crisis and catastrophe – we can draw a parallel to zapping whereby the seconds (or even the fragments of a second) viewed on any one channel is *information*, and the punctual shock of the zap/channel shift acts as a kind of catastrophe. In most televisions, in fact, the physical and technical act of changing the channel introduces a break-in-the-order of the machine: the screen goes black, it blinks and readjusts. Sometimes – as with some cable operators – the menus reload before the next channel's image and sound appear. Changing the channel introduces a punctual moment of crisis on the television device, a catastrophe, and as such not only relates directly to the Information-Catastrophe paradigm, but also actively implicates the viewer by offering a “catastrophe-on-demand” interaction.

Why do we, as viewers, engage with this kind of interaction? And why so compulsively? Patricia Mellencamp's study of television adds a psychoanalytical angle to that of Mary Ann Doane and is helpful in pondering such questions. Mellencamp suggests a masochistic relationship with televisual catastrophe. We watch TV in anxious anticipation of an indeterminate future event. TV is the promise of catastrophe; the promise of a moment that provides us with a sense of presence. When the eventual catastrophic broadcast is aired, it delivers to this anticipation.

Catastrophe coverage, 'the time of the now', is represented as a moment when thinking stops, a moment of danger that might portend change, which paradoxically is both a thrill and preclusion (Mellencamp 1990:248).



Mellencamp's definition of catastrophe, as a thrilling moment of change, relates precisely to the notion of zapping. She argues that compulsive repetition is fundamental to catastrophe (the repeated broadcasts of the Challenger accident, or 9/11 attacks for example) and is linked to *fort-da-like*<sup>3</sup> behavioural patterns. It may be that zapping, with its active insertion of a break and shift, and due to its repetitive nature, becomes a highly accessible cycle of pleasure, the satisfaction of which has as much to do with the "break" than with the actual broadcast options. The "nowness" of television is embodied as much in the "zap" as it is in the live broadcast of a terrorist attack.

But what about now? With televisions, computers and mobile devices increasingly pushing the limits of presentness, how do we align ourselves with this nowness? My discussion with Grimonprez surrounding YouTube gives me some clues, specifically with regard his aforementioned argument that YouTube is the current incarnation of the remote control. (Britt 2011)

## **Zap O'Tube**

Navigating the Net not only redefined, but also magnified our addiction to channel surfing, where the ubiquity of push button technology enabled endless clicking and ceaseless pop-ups (Grimonprez 2011:56).

YouTube allows the viewer to skip through a vast amount of material at will. When Grimonprez uses YouTube for his "YouToubé'o'teques" (video libraries), he is interested in the viewers becoming their "own curators" as they choose between the selection he has prepared for them. I think, however, that even before clicking through videos, the visual

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<sup>3</sup> *Fort-da* comes from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud coined the term after watching his grandson repeatedly throw an object away from him, and applies it within his theory of compulsion (Mellencamp 1992:258).

platform of YouTube incorporates a default zapping experience: while watching, you also have within close visual range a variety of layers that shift either the meaning of the video you are watching, or other possibilities.



A YouTube page, including advertisements, related videos, comments, ratings, duration, etc.

There is the list of “related videos” indexed in a column to the right of the video you are currently watching. These options contextualise what you are seeing by making it part of a network of similar posts. There is a timeline at the bottom of the video, which I find to be a crucial part of the viewing experience, as it indicates the video’s remaining time and thereby frames your temporal investment. Then there are “tags”: keywords that also relate the central video to other ideas or trends. The comments added by other viewers also have the ability to colour the way we watch by pointing to different aspects that you may have missed or that can be re-read, often providing a “bookmark” so that you can jump directly to the moment in question. The number of viewers at the bottom of the frame gives the video a popularity ranking, which also shifts the way in which the material is perceived. These and many other

advertising, textual and design features generate shifts in what we see while we see it. This is a zapping without need for the push-button interface. To shift the content of what is being broadcasted, this new form of zapping requires a mere glance across the computer screen. The dynamics of a television broadcast, and even those of the remote control's "catastrophe by demand," are laid out non-linearly on the web page.

### **Waiting for Like**

It is not difficult to find related platforms and technologies that act in a similar way to YouTube. The culture of "likes" and "comments" on the social network Facebook, for instance, inserts a series of impulses that act similarly to the interruptive shifts I have been discussing. On Facebook, people can post a short text or a link and, while this is clearly motivated by a desire to share information, it is also a way to devise an anticipatory dialogue with the responses the post produces. The responses vary from written comments to plus signs, to a number next to a "thumbs up" icon.



Like with TV ratings, the universal objective of posting on platforms like Facebook or Twitter is arguably to reach the largest audience possible, and the posts' responses, however abstract, are the evidence of just that. Responses confirm the post has been viewed and approved by others, and are evidenced through a feedback system whereby every time someone adds their approval or opinion to a post, a notification appears on the posting person's profile. In fact, there is a culture of accumulating these signs of approval (friendship confirmations, likes, comments, etc) that acts very much as a social currency (according to the website All Things D, "like my status" was in fact the fastest growing status message in

2011). In order to see if he has gained any responses, the author of a post must reload his Facebook page. With every reload, an extra sign on the notifications logo might appear, indicating the author has acquired a response.

Facebook notification



The “reload” action on the screen represents the possibility of gaining gratification, which manifests itself as a small red sign on a logo. Nowadays, many internet-based platforms use “push” internet protocols, which present evidences of approval automatically. This is similar to an SMS dynamic, whereby a message is “pushed” through to the receiving party (and announced with an automatic notification). Much like receiving SMS messages, push protocols mean that the impulses of updated information come in a polyphonic daily stream to the different devices fitted to receive them (mobiles, laptops, desktops, tablets, etc).

During the first day of this year, I had the interesting experience of receiving no device-based notifications. No SMS messages, no emails, no red dots or alarms...nothing. It was almost eerie to recognise the lack of beeps. It felt like an abandonment, characterised by a lack of small, inbound sparks, and by a lack of punctuation. I caught myself reloading my Gmail account a few times just in case I had lost my internet connection... Just as Doane and Mellencamp suggest that we look to television in hopes of a shock, I sat in front of my laptop, tapping on the keyboard shortcuts that help me navigate between applications and windows in hopes of finding little red numbers and signs. Facebook-Mail-Facebook...Mail-Gmail...reload...Any new SMS’s on my phone?... Any notifications from Word-feud?<sup>4</sup>...

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<sup>4</sup> Word-feud is the mobile game version of Scrabble, in which you can play several games with random opponents (including anonymous ones). There is a time span of seventy-two hours between plays. This means that each player can make their move within a timeframe of three days, and henceforth continue for the duration of the game. Opponents are notified of each other’s moves with an icon similar to the notifications used on Facebook.

Gmail... Five minutes of despair passed before I realised that it was in fact a delicious situation.

It wasn't long of course before I thought to check the news websites and their ever-updating pages. And soon an SMS appeared on my phone, and someone made a move on Word-feud. Someone else posted a YouTube link on Facebook...that I liked.

Media technologies foster a condition in which the impulse of a notification activates the receiver more than – or in spite of – its content. This landscape of impulses that we experience and expect, the beeps, red dots, and alarms, are mobile and prosthetic zappings of nowness. If we accept catastrophe as a temporal break amidst a constant flow of information (as suggested by Doane and Mellencamp), and if catastrophe is indeed made manifest in the zappings experienced while navigating the layers of perception and projection offered in the wide host of media platforms available, then it seems fair to assume we live in a televisual everyday.

As suggested by practices such as that of Grimonprez, however, this is not to say that shock and catastrophe are all around us. There are other effects of our alignment with the televisual. I find it interesting to note that, within an artistic practice that seeks to comment on the relationship between media and its effects on our everyday life, the works of Johan Grimonprez often generate an affective realm that is not necessarily one of televisual shock and anticipation. To experience a film by Grimonprez is to experience a sense of loss. Rather than create suspense, it creates a *suspension*. *Double Take*, particularly, is a labyrinthian spiral brought about by the Borgian narrative and by the very composition of the material. The film is told through a language of cinema and TV, yet a Benjaminian sense of storytelling emerges from the experience of watching it.

Walter Benjamin argued for a storytelling that recognises death, and that relies on the craft and knowledge that trickles through generations. He believed experience could be enriched through an infusion of layers of historicity. For him, this enrichment of experience is specifically what modern technologies destroy. Grimonprez's films suggest there is something within the mediums of TV and cinema that includes both sides of this equation. His films use the televisual and the cinematic as confronted personae, and much like the two Hitchcocks in *Double Take*, they meet their own reflections as a way to conjure the suspension and anxiety also present within the viewers that witness their interwoven sense of time.

Still from Grimonprez's  
*Double Take*



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*The Machine and The Embodiment*

The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of life.  
It is really part of human life, perhaps the very soul.

Francis Picabia

## **The Machine and The Embodiment**

This text will use the process of developing sculptural mechanisms for motion in my work as a way to comment on how I see the machine as an embodiment of time. I will deal with the way some of my pieces have developed in response to an interest in mechanical operations and interactions, and how these relate to ideas of the cyborg and to the dynamics of information. I will also explore how the operational and dramaturgical mechanisms in my pieces establish a theatricality that is based on the unfolding of sculptural images, and as an experience that develops in time that the viewer engages with semantically.

## **Sitting on a Looking Train**

Many of my works start with a mechanical fascination. There are two ways in which this fascination appears. The first has to do with the witnessing of a machine that I find particularly interesting in its aesthetics and in the way it moves. An example of this is the retractable arm of some crane trucks, which led to the piece *Might Arrives* (2009). The crane in question includes a complex series of parts that interlace and juxtapose in order for its extended arm – which can sometimes reach up to eighty meters in length – to extend in an anthropomorphic dance of wonderful precision.

Stills from video documentation of  
*Might Arrives*  
Video: Are Hauffen



The other kind of fascination I can identify is with the experience of motion as associated with a machine. An example is the sensation of flying inside an airplane, as it descends onto a landscape on a turbulence-free day. The fascination here is not just with the smooth drift of flying, or the almost imperceptible descent. It is the awareness that this sensation is the result of a highly intricate, and often dangerous, mechanism. It is amazing to me that so much violence can lead to such a delightful motion. I am very seduced by this contradiction.

During the last three years of work, I've been involved in a process of experimentation with ideas surrounding the mechanical, in a way that corresponds to both of the interests mentioned above. One such process has focused on the camera dolly.<sup>1</sup> In essence, a camera dolly is a platform on wheels – usually rolling on tracks – that produces the smooth motion of a camera shot. Dollies have evolved over the years to include hydraulics, automation, and special materials that give them a wide range of use. But the central aim of this tool is still to produce a very controlled and steady motion for filming.



Camera dolly mechanisms on their rails before becoming the structure for *Domain of Things and Other Histories*

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, the camera dolly is more an apparatus than a machine. However, since my interest has to do with it as a mechanical component in performances – in which the definition of “mechanical” is broader than that in engineering – I refer to it as a machine.

Consider un-aided human vision as a filmic resource. Traveling by train then, becomes the anatomical equivalent of the camera dolly – perhaps explaining why people so often refer to train rides as “cinematic.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense, I believe that a dolly shot is much an experience as it is a mechanised process. Just as being inside an airplane gives you the smoothness of flight, watching cinema is arguably an experience of travelling within a camera.

I first identified my interest in the dolly whilst watching the opening scene of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. This scene includes an eight-minute-long dolly shot of a child, a tree, and a man telling a story.



Still sequence from the first scene of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*

Tarkovsky, in opposition to other legendary Russian filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925), greatly emphasises the way cinematic time is defined according to the characteristics of the actual moment of shooting the film, and not only as part of an editing process. For Tarkovsky, time is the main element in film.

Cinema . . . is able to record time in outward and visible signs, recognisable to the feelings. And so time becomes the very foundation of cinema (Totaro 2000).

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<sup>2</sup> In fact it has been broadly argued by theorists like Paul Virilio (*Open Sky* 1997, *Speed and Politics* 1986) that the train window constitutes a cinematic mediation for the passenger, framing and staging the landscape.

For Tarkovsky, the process of shooting engenders a sense of time that has to be maintained or moulded through the editing process. The organic quality of this time, as it builds through shots and sequences, is worked through by way of a notion he calls “time-pressure” (Menard 2003). Tarkovsky argues that, similar to how water flows and varies its intensity and speed organically through different segments of tubing, time develops through segments of film.

These inner rhythms are related to the flow of time, the direct perception of time that exists and emanates from the shots; and as with any dynamic continuum, the flow of time carries a temporal mass or momentum (idem).

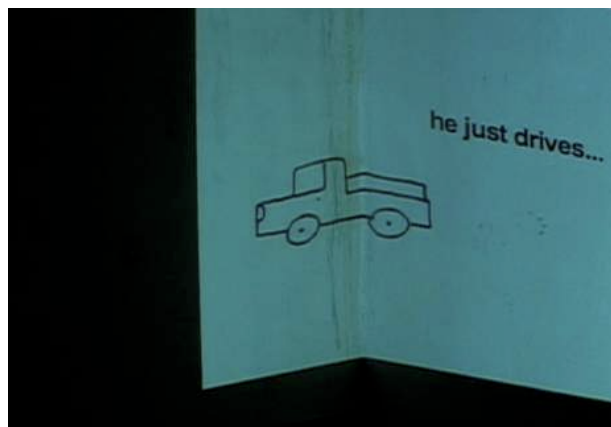
The dolly shots, like the one at the opening of *The Sacrifice*, are carefully choreographed so that Tarkovsky’s time-pressure is constructed and maintained. This determined focus on the temporal quality of a shot has led to interpretations that argue it is within the *time*, more so than in the narrative elements of his films, that Tarkovsky is effectively producing meaning,

When Tarkovsky organizes the various cinematic elements of the film, he allows different aspects of time to interact with each other; for instance, he treats the mobility of the tracking camera with regards to the movement within the shot and the temporal chromaticity of the image. In effect, the camera interacts with the *time-thrust* that pierces through the frame-to-frame structure of the shot, evoking emotionally visceral responses from the viewer rather than conceptual attitudes about history and society (Menard 2003).

Tarkovsky’s interest in establishing meaning through time becomes manifest in the tools and resources he uses for shooting a scene. This relation between composition and tools in filmmaking motivated me to experiment with the construction of camera dollies, leading to the making of the video *Birds*.

## Observing Vision

In *Birds*, a series of simple camera dollies each support a projector and a video camera. The projectors play a series of anecdotes about people getting lost or falling asleep, as well as drawings of cars and volcanoes. The dollies move in circles inside a warehouse, and while the anecdotes and drawings are being projected on to the uneven walls, the cameras – moving in circles within the space – record the projections. The footage is later edited into the final video.



Images from the making of *Birds*  
Photo: Ane Szefer Karlsen

The dollies represent planets in a solar system – each anecdote is titled after a planet. At the end of the video, one camera is detached from its dolly and hoisted up to capture the warehouse from above, and a general view of the overall logic is revealed.



View from the last perspective of *Birds*  
Photo: Ane Szefer Karlsen

The performance of the dollies in this video follows the constant motion of an orbiting planet, so that the quality of motion resonates with the smooth drift associated with stellar bodies. The dollies mostly perform in accordance to their instrumental function as filmic resources, but the last shot shifts their status from objects that project and capture their own motion to objects that are observed. Within the piece, it was important for the dolly to appear as the cinematic technology it is, since the moment of revelation unveils the cinematic strategy, as well as the logic of a planetary system that metaphorically carries the piece. This work also prompts questions on the usage of similar mechanisms that abandon their function as cinematic supports and exist as moving objects to be looked at themselves. The question is: Can dollies incorporate the quality of motion they are instrumental in capturing? In other words, can the dolly be an embodiment of the dolly shot?

This potential transformation led to the performance *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010), in which a dolly becomes part of a sculptural construction that seeks to incorporate a particular quality of movement. The construction includes a living room and a performer

lying horizontally on the space beneath it. The structure lies on wheeled tracks similar to those used for camera dollies. The challenge here was preserving the essence of the camera dolly, as a cinematic quality of motion, through its deployment as a mechanical presence.

### **The Tactile Cyborg**

The dolly-inspired mechanisms in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* claim different associations at different points in the performance. At one point, the pieces of metal and wood that make up the simultaneous spaces of the living room and the underground, begin to break apart and move across the space. This is where the smooth, steady drift of the dolly-shot appears most clearly as a structural and mechanical precedent. However, the performance begins with a fifteen-minute-long section in which the performer moves the construction forward in a slow “crawl”.



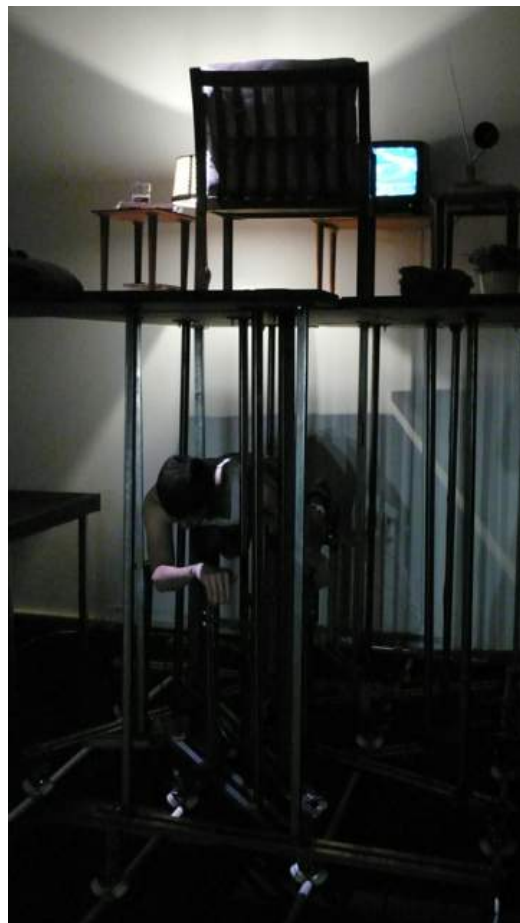
Still from the documentation video  
of *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010)  
Video: Are Hauffen

Here, the conventional movement of the dolly is mostly lost, giving way to a situation where the mechanisms act as extensions of the performer’s body, pointing to a particular blurring between the mechanical and the anatomical. Although in its materiality and function the construction being moved is in fact an analogue mechanism activated by the performer, its presence as a symbolic element has made it possible for me to explore the body-machine interaction in relation to Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991). Haraway’s text explores the cyborg



as a metaphor for the political positioning of women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, it presents a series of definitions that challenge paradigms of the mechanical and technological, which are useful both within and beyond feminist politics. Haraway's cyborg is based on an interaction between human and machine that is not based on a coupling of one and the other, but on a hybrid integration. The cyborg also marks an integration of human and animal, as well as fiction and reality.

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction... Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted... By the late twentieth century, our time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism: in short, we are all cyborgs (Haraway 1991: 150-1).



Still from the video documentation of *Domain of Things and Other Histories* video: Are Hauffen

This idea of hybrids played an important role in the process of making *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, especially in light of the fundamental issue of motion. More than addressing the technical mobility of the construction – which had its own host of challenges – the task was to define the quality and character of movement that the human-machine interaction would produce.

A further question emerged from this challenge: Is the machine moving the performer or is the performer being moved by the machine?

I made the final decision to be the performer in the piece, as it allowed me to research the possibilities of interaction with the object first-hand, and gave me the chance to experience how the sense of time was being developed from within the piece. I made use of my past experience in performance and engaged in special training in order to withstand the physically demanding sections of the work. Most interesting was how the associations with the cyborg triggered a process of deploying perceptual approaches to movement material, in order to integrate the machine as a part of the performer's body – and vice versa. This was developed in conversation with the contemporary dance dramaturge Bojana Bauer.

The exercises carried out with Bojana consisted of shifting the awareness of movement and tactility to different parts of the body. An example is to walk barefoot, back and forth, and to focus on the surface of the floor as it meets the feet. Once inside the sculptural construction of the piece, I imagined a situation in which my extremities did not end at my hands, but somehow continued into the metallic parts of the structure. The focus on this tactile experience immediately changed the movement quality of the body as a whole and gave it a different kind of intensity and presence. I also gave myself instructions to move with an attitude of curiosity, activating the tactile awareness that also resonates with that of someone

who needs to move and function in the dark. An image that emerged was that of a spider with a very strong centre, which emanated the energy for motion through the extremities, which were also feeding back tactile information to the centre. The pulls and shifts of my arms began to feel, rather than prosthetic, like organic extensions of my own body.

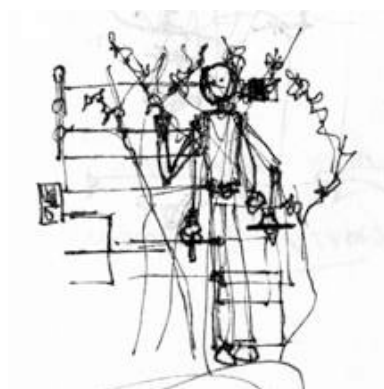
Another exercise that contributed to the character of movement in the performance had to do with building a sense of direction and momentum. Since the physical condition of the performer was horizontal, a sense of direction built on the gaze was impossible to obtain. I engaged in a series of exercises seeking to activate the top of my head as a projection of momentum. I spent a good deal of time executing simple actions like sitting and standing, or shifting the weight of the body, all while concentrating on a mental image that provided a sense of direction (imagining lines, speed and inertia within the body as I moved). These exercises are reminiscent of the *Alexander Technique* that I studied as a violinist. In the *Alexander Technique*, what is paramount is not to do movements in a particular way, but to keep a certain awareness of a bodily alignment as you do everyday activities. This knowledge contributed to the overall approach of building mental imagery and perceptual states as a performer, with the final ambition of producing and maintaining a particular presence that integrates the physical and the mechanical: a cyborg-like condition.



Drawing from the process of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*

During a series of tests, onlookers noticed a clear difference in the tone of the work when I focused on the tactile experience I was having – as opposed to when I focused on the execution of motions – even though the speed and sequence of movements followed the same choreography in either case. The team and guest audiences spoke of a different “vibration” or “intensity” being perceivable, making the movement more engaging to look at. This encouraged the decision to maintain a very dense and long first section (the fifteen-minute-long crawl at the beginning) that gave the audience time to move visually through the construction’s layers and perceive the subtleties of the music, and also established an overall temporal territory that is very different to the rhythms of the outside world. This decision reminds me again of Tarkovsky, and the way he established a temporal sense for his films that emanates from the moment of shooting, directly affecting the compositional and editing process of the film as a whole. Through a long process of construction and devising, the camera dolly that initially inspired me mutated into a very different set of mechanisms and signifiers, but the essence of deploying a cinematic tool for motion as a central agent in the overall sculpting of time remained intact within *Domain of Things and Other Histories*.

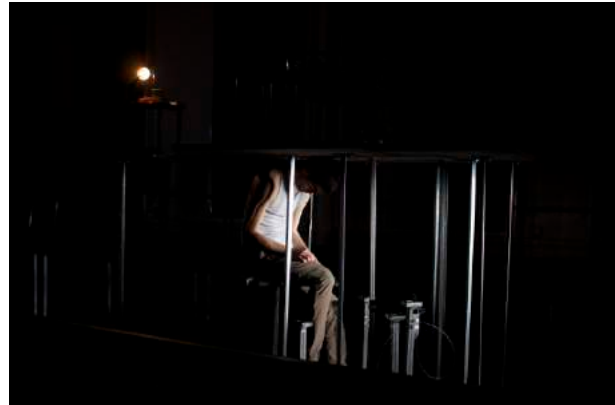
Drawing from the process of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*



## The Limit of the Cyborg

All of the material, physical and interactive components of *Domain of Things* were aimed at establishing an organic hybrid condition for motion. However, the machine in this piece is never completely a cyborg. After the initial fifteen-minute “crawl”, the hind sections of the construction break and move away from the performer, leaving him suspended. Here he shifts to his anatomical body in order to hold the horizontal position. The suggestion of a cyborg is broken – the support-less, muscled horizontality marks a transition from a single integrated hybrid into two distinct things: a man and an architecture. Further marking the completion of this metamorphosis, the performer then recognises gravity, lowers his legs, and moves into a position that completely renounces the logic established thus far: he sits down. This position is absurd and awkward in the context of the mechanism, it retrospectively naturalises the horizontality of the crawl, which seems comfortable in comparison.

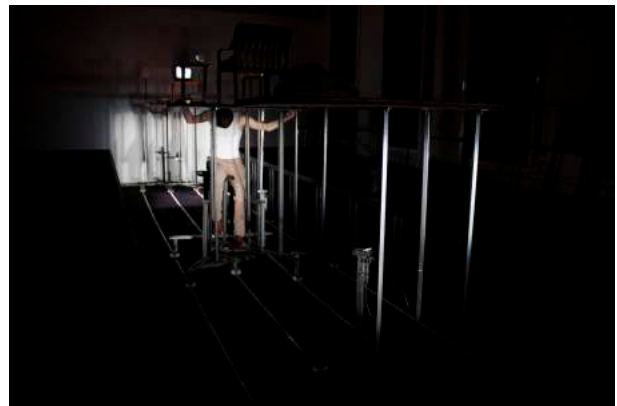
Sitting inside the structure of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories* -  
photo: Alexander Stav



I relate this transition to a sitting position to what Haraway calls a “pre-cybernetic” machine (Haraway 1991:153). Pre-cybernetic machines include the presence of a motoring or triggering agent, and, as with early automata and other production technologies, there is an owner, an operator, or a guide who sets the machine in action and oversees its operations. As such, pre-cybernetic beings, in spite of being automatic, depend on a degree of human interaction, or human “haunting” as Haraway puts it (idem). The performer and the machine

in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* exist at the boundary between the idea of an owned, dependent machine, and an independent, self-developing cyborg. The motion is designed in relation to the mechanical parts of the construction; the action moves fluidly between bone, flesh, and metal. At the same time though, the construction is also a vehicle that contains a human who authors its motion.

For Haraway, the cyborg resists the possibility of a human as a ghost, and a machine as haunted. The integration means the cyborg is self-sufficient and self-generating as both machine and human (Haraway 1991:153). If this is so, then it is only when the character of *Domain of Things* splits from the machine that he can become a ghost. And so, from his sitting position, he touches the materials of the construction that has just mutated from extremity to architecture, from body to shell, and he begins to haunt.



Still from the video documentation of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*  
video: Are Hauffen

### **The Destructions: the Animal, the Cyborg, the Metronome and the Eye**

While *Domain of Things and Other Histories* relates to notions of the cyborg in a way that blurs the mechanical and the human, the performance *The Destruction of One Someone*, presented at *Kunstnernes Hus- W17* in September 2011, relates to Haraway's suggestion of the cyborg as a blurring of the human and the animal.

Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange (Haraway 1991:153).

*The Destruction of One Someone* was a collaborative performance made with the Amsterdam-based artist Milena Bonilla, with whom I have often collaborated.



Drawing of *Destruction of One someone*  
by Milena Bonilla

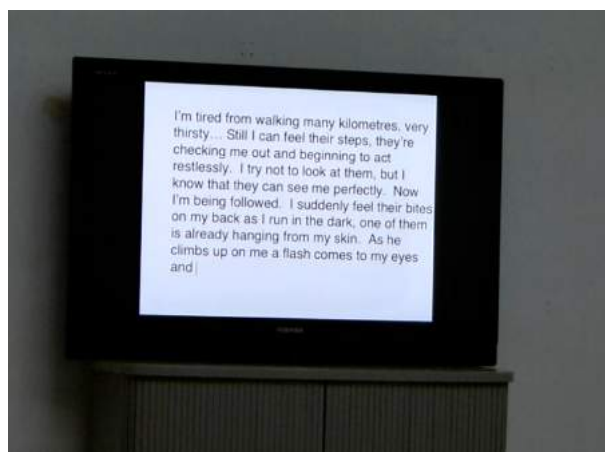
For the performance, Milena and I sit in a studio with a camera pointing to the back of my head, the image of which appears on a vertically-positioned screen in front of us. When the audience walks into the space, they see the elements of the performance organised in a line that goes from the camera to Milena and myself sitting at a table, and then to the image of the back of my head on the monitor in front of us.



Still from the video documentation of  
*The Destruction of One Someone*  
video: Yamile Calderón

The performance itself consists of us typing a series of short texts, which are subsequently shown on a second monitor beside us. The texts are first-person accounts of animals being attacked.

I am sleeping and suddenly something hits me with great force, a whole being just jumped on me, I can't breathe and I can't make out what is up or down anymore, I am being turned and trying to fight. I need to shift my body, I need to get out of this and run. But I am completely trapped in this mass of muscle and teeth. I close my eyes and I hear the sound of my skull against teeth.



Still from the video documentation of *The Destruction of One Someone* video: Yamile Calderón

A track of music is played after each text is typed, and the text is shown on the screen for the track's duration. The music consists mainly of classical works that could be described as having a cinematic drive. The scenes described are similar to the situations depicted on natural history programmes, and the music is reminiscent of the way soundtracks are used in these kinds of programmes. However, while in animal documentaries the music is timed to match the action (thereby enhancing the narrative), in this performance the musical track is left to play in its entirety.<sup>3</sup> This means the music may or may not synchronise with the audience's reading of the texts. Each time a spectator reads a given text, he will mostly likely

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of symphonies or multi-section works, the entirety of a movement or section is played.



land in a different section of the accompanying musical piece, and multiple relationships emerge between the music and the stories. The performance treats a moment that is generally sharp and shocking –the instant of an attack – in a way that is stretched and suspended.

The technical devise of the piece is a combination of a fixed camera, tripod, cables, screens, computers, speakers, and other pieces of equipment that produce the sense of a self-contained organic system. A physical motion, like typing, has a direct effect on the behaviour of the entire contraption. A physical movement, turning my head for instance, disrupts the image being captured by the video camera and compromises the visual stability of the entire devise. It is worth noting here that in discussing the machine from a Haraway-cyborg point of view, the differentiation between the words “device” and “devise” also blur: Devise is a term appropriated by the performing arts to refer to an event and the way it is composed, which includes material, physical, conceptual and temporal components. A “device,” on the other hand, refers to technological or mechanical equipment (Oxford English Ditionary).

A complex organism, *The Destruction of One Someone* is also a battlefield. The organs of this monster are at war and in dialogue with each other. Instead of harmonising, the music and the texts engage in a three-way battle: the insinuations of speed and shock within the stories are counteracted by the paced speed with which the texts are typed out, and by the pace at which the audience reads them. Also, the affectively misaligned music means that the scenes and the soundtrack are also in combat. The animalistic component of this is piece is transferred from a representation of the stories to an embodiment of the relations mentioned above. However, the conflicts do not destabilise the integrity of the devise as such – this is a closed circuit of conflicts, a tight organism of syncopation.

The devise of *The Destruction of One Someone*, including the equipment, the space, the performers, and their conjunct operation, constitutes a body: a body that is made out of a series of interdependent, dynamic relations across different categories and platforms of action. The performers interact with mechanical and technological elements but not as separate agents – the performance is approached as an organism made from human and mechanical components. At the same time, this idea of a network made of technological and human “nodes,” also relates this performance to the discussion on the way machines have shaped concepts of the natural world and our place within it.

In the documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011), Adam Curtis discusses how notions of “ecosystem” and “network” have in the past few decades been used to suggest that humanity and the natural world behave much like computerised systems.

...we have come to believe that the old hierarchies of power can be replaced by self organising networks. From internet utopianism to the global economic system and above all the ecosystems of the natural world. Today we dream of systems that balance and stabilise themselves without the intervention of authoritarian power. But in reality this is the dream of the machines. It reflects how they are organised. It has nothing to do with nature. And as a model for human society and politics, is wholly inadequate in the face of the dynamic forces that really dominate the world today (Curtis 2011).

Curtis argues that there is a culture surrounding the idea of networks of people, animals, plants and machines working together organically, promising a certain balance in the world. Recent postulations in the field of genetics have encouraged this thinking by putting forward a machine-like idea whereby genetic code acts as a software, running its host body in order to replicate and maintain itself. Information is the main currency in these theories. Curtis

argues that these conceptualisations foster the idea of nature as a self-regulating system, where feedback produced by the different “nodes” abolishes hierarchical power and gives way to democratic and free societies. These mechanised ideations of the natural world, however, are in reality contributing towards very opposite ideals than those of challenging the hegemony of powerful political and economic minorities. By oversimplifying nature, and by pairing it to mechanical operations, this image of society bypasses the fact that the natural world, including human existence, is fundamentally based on highly complex and unstable processes. For Curtis, the simplification of nature in favour of mechanistic concepts of balance benefits those already in power by maintaining the structures that support their position, and lessens the possibility for political change.

At the same time, the TV programmes that showcase the natural world often latch onto these narratives of “balance” as a given quality of nature. In these shows, nature is seen as a stable domain where punctual moments of shock are part of a dynamic of stabilisation. The music, editing, and other dramatic strategies applied to these programmes enhance the idea of oppositions: a steady everyday life on the one hand, and shocking moments of disturbance on the other. It is this notion of balance as a given quality of nature that is questioned in Curtis’s argument – for him there is no such thing as a balance-seeking ecosystem.

I find it interesting to look at *The Destruction of One Someone* with Curtis’ perspective in mind. In this performance, destruction is not a disturbing counterpart to a steady ecosystem, but a sustained and shockless quality that does not evolve. Unlike the narrative evolutions proposed and expected by media temporalities and mechanistic logics, the experience here is that of a destruction that is stuck in its happening, going nowhere: the closed circuit filming of the back of my head, the playback of music into the space, the typing onto the screen. These interplays do not seek to replicate the apparatus but to exhaust it. The

suspended performance resists the dynamic opposition of balance and disruption. It is a self-contained trap of information, a dissolution of shock in a system that produces an unable body, a ghost, a machine that does not produce, an organism that does not replicate, and an ecosystem that builds disappearance.

### **The Eye and the Time**

The notion of a self-contained mechanical device that is also a formula for self-destruction reminds me of Man Ray's *Object to Be Destroyed*, conceived and presented as a series of objects between 1923 and 1964.



image 1

The works all consisted of a metronome and a cut-out picture of an eye attached to its pendulum, representing a relationship between time, the mechanical and the performative that I recognise in *The Destruction of One Someone*, and also in many other of my works. Within my practice, this relationship can be found within the use of the mechanical as aesthetic material, and exists at the limit between the machine as a presence and the machine as a dramaturgical notion.

The first version of Man Ray's metronome piece (1923) was an attempt by the artist to produce a companion to have in his studio. As a kind of automaton of observance, the piece was later made public along with a textual instruction:

Cut out the eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more.  
Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow (Cork 2002).

After being abandoned by his lover, Lee Miller, Man Ray made a new version of the piece and replaced the original eye with an image of hers. He now called it *Object of Destruction*. Decades later, during an exhibition in Paris in 1957, a group of protesting students took it to themselves to carry out the text's demands and destroyed the work. Man Ray –after receiving the insurance money– reproduced the piece one hundred times, changing the name of the piece once again: *Indestructible Object*.

There are many layers of mechanisation and embodiment that I find fascinating in this work. By placing an eye on the pendulum of the metronome, Ray fabricated a physical presence with a temporal essence. Even when the pendular action is not engaged, the sheer positioning of the eye on the temporal axis of the machine acts as an animating gesture. In this way, the cut-out eye claims life by claiming time. More than a gesture of anthropomorphism, I would call this an *anthropo-chronological* gesture: an association of the object with a temporal logic in order to infuse it with a sense of mortality. The pendular motion accentuates the vitality-mortality dynamic within this gesture, as each swing is effectively the result of a mechanical triumph over the natural forces of gravity. Each tick is a

token of vitality that includes both the relentlessness of gravity and the pendulum's determinate effort for survival. The fact that the metronome's vitality is the result of a mechanical device, colours the *anthropo-chronology* of Man Ray's studio companion with a subtext that acknowledges the mechanical as a vehicle for defining time in relation to life. I wonder: Does the work represent a desire for the image of the observant lover to be erased in all its vitality, or is it a romantic turn against the machinations of a world that makes time an enemy of life and love?

The historical evolution of *Object to be Destroyed* is also an interesting window into other mechanical layers. As a piece that underwent various processes of replication, this *Object of Destruction* represents the promise of technological process. The piece becomes, in effect, an *Indestructible Object* by virtue of its own reproducibility. Furthermore, the fact that it is made out of readymade metronomes and photographic prints means that the piece can be reproduced infinitely – the mechanical becomes a means to achieve eternity.



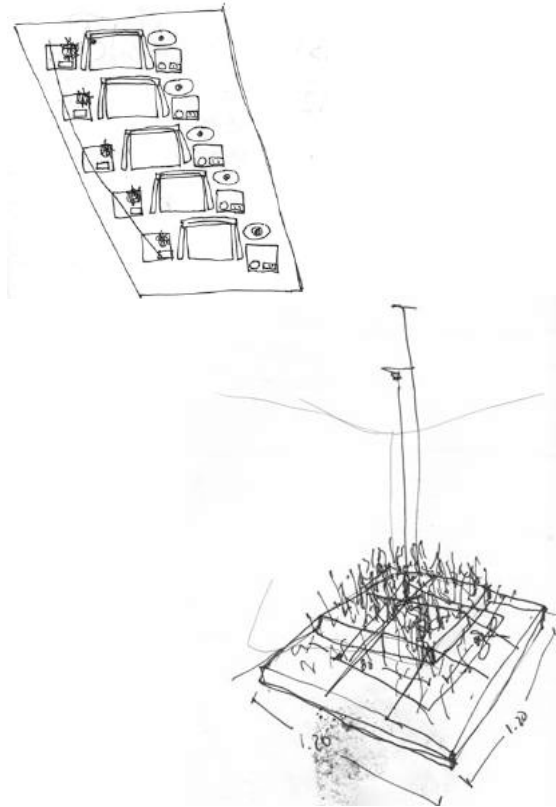
Man Ray's sculpture is an instance of how a work emerges as an embodiment of the dynamics that surrounded an artists' everyday, and is presented as a mechanical, or a mechanically motivated, construction. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Man Ray first produced his *Object to be Destroyed*, the mechanical was indeed a general means to comment on the state of time as a cultural notion. This period was marked by a strong shift in

the way temporality was being defined, felt and organised. Following the first synchronisations of international time, the world agreed on a standard from where geographical and territorial dimensions were established. This period also saw the widespread adoption of wrist watches, reflecting the industrialised preference for a time that is standardised, which opposes the temporality of agrarian production that depended on less stable biological, animal and meteorological variants (Doane 2002 : 7).

These shifts in the perception and instrumentalisation of time at the beginning of the 20th century became a theme and a means for artists who, like Man Ray, developed their work as a way of making sense of, and commenting on their historical circumstances.

### **The Theatrical Object**

An artwork's relationship to time goes beyond the way it relates to social and cultural contexts. There is also a temporal dimension to the way works of art develop and are activated by a viewer. In my practice, this temporal layer usually has as a central point: the setting in motion of an image. As opposed to conventional theatre in which a storyline or dramatic evolution plays a key role, I take an idea or a drawing and work towards realising it three-dimensionally in a way that develops over time. In the video *Birds* for instance, I started with the image of a solar system with dollies as planets. *The Enchanted* came from an image of a paranoid man in a forest, and *Domain of Things and Other Histories* started with the image of a man underneath a living room. In all three cases, the images were developed as artworks that reveal themselves over time.



Sketches from the process of  
*The Kinetoscope of Time, and*  
*The Enchanted*

In this sense, many of my works seek to exist as constructions that are theatrical as sculptures, rather than as theatres of sequential and dramatic narratives. In order to further investigate the sense of theatricality that I recognise in my work, I will look to Michael Fried's seminal essay *Art and Objecthood* (1967). Although I am not dealing with Fried's main argument,<sup>4</sup> I find it useful to isolate some of the definitions offered in Fried's text in order to locate the theatrical impulse found in my work, and how it may operate within the visual arts.

I remember seeing Robert Morris's *Untitled 1965/71* at an exhibition of Tate Modern's permanent collection in London in 2002. The work consists of four cubes with mirrored sides standing in the gallery space, simultaneously reflecting the spectators and the other cubes.

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<sup>4</sup> A negative judgement of minimalist sculpture in the particular historical context of high modernism in America.



image 2



As a viewer, one inadvertently begins to explore the sculpture from different points of view and angles. It indeed feels like a “situation;” the name Morris gives to his compositions (Alley 1981:545). Upon encountering the work, my gaze interacted with the cubes, which revealed different images and dimensions and prompted a playful relationship to my position in the space. Sometimes, my gaze and that of another spectator would unwillingly find each other reflected on a surface. I remember feeling that *Untitled 1965/71* was clearly an interactive work, one that activates me as a viewer.

I also remember the experience of seeing Donald Judd’s *Untitled 1973*; a hollow copper cube with an intense, red coating of its interior.

image 3



From a distance the object looks like a complete cube, but, as one comes closer, the lush inside begins to trigger a sensation of discovery and wonder. This points to a characteristic of minimalist artists brought forward in Fried's text: their interest in working based on human proportions so that the viewer can feel reflected in the formal presence of the artwork. For Fried, the anthropomorphic qualities produced in the work as a result of this tendency establish a particular distance between the viewer and the object, which is not so big as to be monumental, but not so small as to be intimate (Fried 2011:839). This distance establishes the sculpture as *object* and the viewer as the subject in a stage-like situation. For Fried, my walking around Morris's and Judd's sculptures, exploring their surfaces and their insides makes me a theatrical audience. In this theatre the sculptures act and, as Morris himself says, "exist as unfixed variables that find their specific definition in the particular space and light and physical viewpoint of the spectator" (Ünsal 2010).

It is interesting to me that Fried's assessment of these works is based, on the one hand, on a fundamental interactivity, one that gives the sculpture a duration as the viewer explores the object (Fried 2011:843-4). On the other hand, Fried acknowledges the autonomy and independence of these pieces; the sculptures remain at a distance, not too far and not too close. This distance also means that the experience of the pieces is semantic – a concept I relate strongly to the compositions I produce, since the viewer reads them as the materialisation of an image, and from that reading the experience of the work, the space and the situation is derived. Even if we assume vision as a kind of touch, experience is not dependent on a tactile, immersive dialogue between an object and a person: "The experience and the situation belong to the viewer" (Ünsal 2010).

The objectifying power of minimalist sculpture resides in its ability to be an independent object that nonetheless points to the environment it has established. It is this independence

as object, yet dependence from the audience's reading, that lies at the heart of Fried's definition of the theatricality of sculpture.

I relate this definition to the work *Might Arrives*, which I presented as a solo exhibition at Hordaland Art Centre, Norway in 2009 . *Might Arrives's* variety of components included the outside of the art space's building, the inside of one of its rooms, and the trajectory from one space to the other.



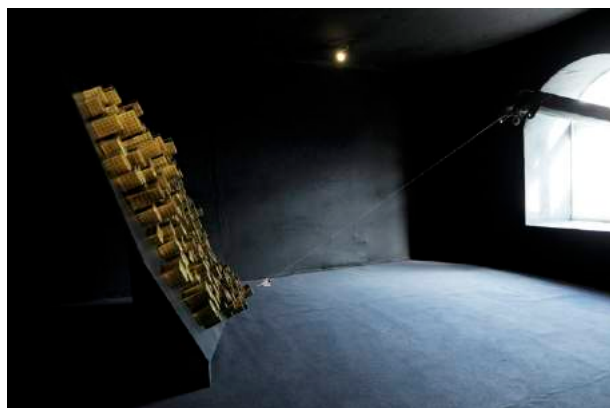
Still from video documentation of  
*Might Arrives*  
Video: Are Hauffen

Every day at exactly 1pm over the course of the exhibition, a crane truck arrived, parked, and slowly extended its crane “arm” into one of the windows on the upper storey of the building. Although this performative segment of the work – lasting approximately ten minutes – was offered to the audience as part of the piece, the truck stayed parked in a motionless position through the remaining exhibition hours, meaning that many visitors encountered the truck with its crane inserted into the window as a “still” image. Whether bearing witness to the performance or not, however, viewers were invited to explore the “continuation” of the truck’s arm as they walked into and through the art centre towards the small, dark room the crane had entered. The room – one of the art centre’s offices (the main exhibition space remained closed) – held a cardboard maquette of a city in its centre. Attached to the end of the crane inside the room was a thin string. On the end of the string was a strong neodyme magnet reaching towards the maquette, where another magnet – hidden inside a miniature

cardboard building – was attracting it. On the exposed magnet was a simple drawing of a rocket, held in suspension by the magnets’ mutual attraction. It is by way of these various components that the viewer could piece the image together; an image in which a truck holds a rocket suspended a mere instant before hitting a city.

To unravel the work, the audience must actively navigate it, generating the kind of “theatricality” described by Fried. The whole situation is presented as a self-contained construction: A mechanism for a particular suspension that begins with the truck parked outside and stretches to the rocket and the maquette.

Although the proportions of this work are at odds with the anthropomorphic qualities Fried assigns to minimalist sculpture, proportion is nonetheless crucial in *Might Arrives*. From the monumentality of the truck outside to the small scale of the maquette, there is a journey of proportion experienced by the viewer within the space of the art centre. The small gap between the two magnets – seven centimetres of force – encapsulate a proportional shift from the real to the fictional, from the possible to the imminent. This gap is the same suspended space that exists in a state of anxiety; the negative space between the possibility of catastrophe and its realisation.



*Might Arrives*  
photo: Chloe Lewis

## **The Mechanical Object**

Like much of my work, *Might Arrives* is a realisation of an image defined by the viewer's journey of exploration, and points to the environment and the situation it generates and inhabits. However, not all my works literally involve the viewer walking through them. In many of my pieces the theatrical element is not so much a case of the viewer revealing the work, but of the work being revealed *for* the viewer. In *Birds*, the video journeys to a perspective from where the structural nature of a solar system becomes evident, and, in *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, the structure breaks, shifts, and distends for the audience. *The Kinetoscope of Time* also includes a situation where the audience travels through the layers of the work by way of the very layout of the piece, as a performing scenario. These works relate to Fried in that they are explorations of durational images that result in a situation belonging to the viewer as it is he who reads and navigates the pieces. These situations are constructed as theatrical objects, and are read as they unfold.

While not all of my works involve a navigation of the space, the idea of a self-contained composition that is interacted with semantically remains as a key element throughout my practice. Even when the piece/performance has a beginning and an end, it centres on the temporal unpacking of an object that is itself a mechanical and dramaturgical whole, one that may have a sequence and an order of events, like machines do, but that does not necessarily demand a story or narrative reading. These machines are based on a series of dynamic relationships between materials and actions, and between bodies and materials. They respond to a desire for particular kinds of motion, while questioning the limits of the temporal, ideological and physical resources associated with these motions. These machines question how temporal notions are culturally understood and generated and in turn, these machines produce themselves in the viewer as materialised compositions of tension and duration, as embodiments of time.

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## Images

Image 1: Object to be destroyed, taken from "Art History / About.com" [http://arthistory.about.com/od/dada/ig/DadaatMoMAParis/dada\\_paris\\_06.htm](http://arthistory.about.com/od/dada/ig/DadaatMoMAParis/dada_paris_06.htm)

Image 2: Robert Morris's *Untitled 1965/71*, taken from "Collection / Tate" <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=10317&roomid=3669>

Image 3: Donald Judd's *Untitled 1972*, taken from "Collection / Tate" <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=20344&searchid=9496>





*The Reflective Membrane*

It is strange to dream, and to have mirrors  
Where the commonplace, worn-out repertory  
Of every day may include the illusory  
Profound globe that reflections scheme.

Jorge Luis Borges in *Mirrors*

## ***The Reflective Membrane***

For some time during this research project I believed that some of my works, the performances especially, with their suspended and uncanny qualities, worked towards providing a “site of exception” and an alternative to media culture. Towards the end of the three years of research however, I begin to see that I am not so much providing an alternative as I am representing another layer of our cultural temporal landscape. In both cases, the interest in creating a “site” has to do with devising a space for the reading of a piece; a space that is not just a container for the audience and the performance, but is also defined by the artwork itself. In this text I am asking: How is the relationship between the work of art, the circumstance for viewing, and the role of the spectator being articulated? And how does it establish an environment? In order to develop answers, I have been using the evocative image of “bubble of time.” However clichéd, this image suggests to me that there is an inside to any environment, different from the outside, and that the two are separated by a delicate, flexible layer. This layer has consequently seized much of my interest as it puts forward questions regarding the limit of experience in a performance: Where does it stop? Is it a physical territory? How do the elements of the performance, as well as the memory and anticipation of the spectator, play into its construction? I have therefore also adopted the metaphor of a reflective membrane. The membrane as a border is a surface that engages the viewer by fostering a mental infolding of its perceptual layers. A reflective membrane is a limit of a performance, but also a way into all that makes and supports the experience.

I will mostly use *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010) as a case study in exploring these concepts, as well as my newer work *The Kinetoscope of Time* (2011). The descriptions of *Domain of Things and Other Histories* used in this text are fragments from a text written by

Liliana Coutinho,<sup>1</sup> an art theoretician who I invited to document the piece in written form. The idea of including a written account of the performance as part of the documentation responds to several considerations: For one, the horizontal extension of the work's *mise en scene* generates a visual field that is a fundamental part of the spectator's experience but very difficult to capture on video. There is also an interest in exploring different forms of documentation, to go beyond representing the formal aspects of the piece and attempt to capture one spectator's engagement.

Liliana travelled to Bergen to be part of the audience, and composed a document describing her experience. The question of a subjective rendition as documentation is a relevant and complex issue in and of itself. It generates questions on the possibility of an objective account, as well as the impossibility of producing a translation of experience. Liliana addressed some of these issues in her text – attached as an appendix to this critical reflection – but for the time being I will focus on her description as an account of how the different elements in the performance were perceived by someone who did not participate in the work's production.

### **Zoom: Optical Learnings**

When I was producing *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, I knew I wanted to make “small apparitions.” I wanted the performance to have small episodes of moving objects that could easily be missed by the audience. The visibility of these small events, however, was not entirely left to chance. A good deal of attention and thought was paid to directing the audience's attention towards the next “apparition.” The balance between a slow performance with small things happening here and there, and one that is too busy or too didactic in terms

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<sup>1</sup> Liliana Coutinho is a writer, critic and curator based in Paris and Lisbon. Will present her Phd in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art "Pour un discours sensible - sur la capacité cognitive du corps dans l'expérience de l'art" at Université Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, in 2012

of guiding the audience's vision, was part of the work's challenge. This need for balance led to the introduction of a choreographic layer that included the spectator's gaze as part of its composition. The work aimed to create an immersive environment of active spectatorship, rather than a literal immersion of the audience into the space of the action. It constituted a specific environment that is different to a conventional theatrical setting, but nonetheless maintained primordial spectator-performer codes and conventions. Liliana Coutinho describes it:

The scenic display has been specifically conceived for the piece. Two rows of chairs for spectators, each facing the other, create a corridor as the central area of action. The chairs are placed on an elevated structure, and we climb a short staircase to reach our seats. At one end of the corridor is a wall of lights. In the other, a television seizes my attention, subtly foreshadowing the experience to come by presenting a spiraling, endless and continuous movement... The television, suspended on the wall, is part of a living room composed of an armchair, a radio, a lamp, and books strewn on all over the place: on a small table, on the floor, on a small bookcase. The small table lamp next to the TV set illuminates the chair and the artist's arm (Coutinho 2011).

Coutinho is participating in the work through discovering its details, and thereby engaging in what I see as a kind of motion. This motion, of course, is not a physical displacement, but rather a projection of her visual field in order to focus on a particular action. It is like the *zoom* of a camera, in which an optical bias is exercised to summon attention towards a single moment.

Why these books? I try to read their titles... For me, these details are part of the piece....

There is an ashtray, a glass of water... There is a table lamp, with an articulated arm, next to an armchair. Its bulb, a single incandescent filament, is dim. Not strong enough to illuminate much, it rather announces an electrical presence (Coutinho 2011).

This operation of motion could be described in photographic terms whereby a zoomed-in frame encourages a preference for focal, as opposed to peripheral, vision, which creates an object of perception and purposefully neglects the space around it. It also inserts a type of “depth of field” differentiation, whereby a background is effectively “blurred” in order to better appreciate a certain object.



Objects in the living room of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*

If, as Liliana suggests, a literal proximity to the piece is impossible, and not an obvious proposition of the theatrical device itself, then the action of closing-in to an object or body by this attitude of *zoom* is a prominent way of engaging both in motion and within the fixed position of a conventionally placed spectator. The *zoom* is a way to find the events and objects in the performance and, in doing so, build a rhythm of optical engagement. The accumulation of *zooms* by a spectator generates an experience of time, meaning that although the actions in the piece are not generous in number, proportion, or speed, they still render the performance as “busy.” The audience member continuously zooms into actions and objects, and is guided by the light, the music, or perhaps their own curiosity, to other actions, moments and images that are there to be found.

## **The Lion and the Schoolmaster: A Performance Environment**

When thinking of *zoom* as a way to acknowledge the audience member's reading of the piece as a fundamental part of building its performative dynamics and, therefore, its meaning, I am reminded of the ideas explored by Jacques Ranciere in *The Emancipated Spectator*. In his book, Ranciere problematises the role of the spectator by challenging certain conventional opinions, particularly those that consider the act of viewing to be passive. In conventional theatrical situations, the audience sits in fixed chairs and observes the actions that develop on stage. During the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, new performative practices sought to subvert this inactivity of the spectator by inciting physical immersion and participation, thus breaking down the theatrical apparatus itself. For Ranciere, however, the idea of associating traditional spectatorship with passivity is a misconception, since looking itself is a form of active participation. Emancipation, he says, "begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting." (Ranciere 2009:9)

For Ranciere, an active spectatorship is not defined by the degree of physical immersion into a piece, but by the way the spectator is activated by the work. One form of activation is intellectual; Ranciere builds upon ideas from his earlier text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) to suggest that the knowledge of a performance is built through comparisons and relationships between what we have learned before and whatever is presented to us as new information (Ranciere 2009:9). We all come to a situation of learning with our own host of facts, memories and experiences, and when we are confronted by a new situation we apply active comparisons between these in order to produce new knowledge. Spectatorship, like learning, is also based on these kinds of comparison, and it is up to the performance to be the schoolmaster who, instead of teaching what the spectator doesn't know, facilitates a journey of discovering the distance between what one knows and what one doesn't.

What she lacks, what the pupil will always lack... is *knowledge of ignorance* – a knowledge of the exact distance separating knowledge from ignorance (Ranciere 2009:10-1).

A performance then should find a way to delineate how knowledge is to be found within itself. From my perspective as a maker of theatrical situations, I take on this challenge by engaging with the construction of environments in which the spectator interacts and thus aligns herself with the pace and dynamics of the work. The environments I'm referring to can be described as conditions provided for reading the work so that it can be discovered in accordance to its own components. This is to say that this experience of discovering *is* the knowledge of a performance.

An example of one such environment can be found in *The Kinetoscope of Time* (2011). In this work there is a specially devised room: dark, with limited seating arranged in a way that forces a particular point of view upon the staged objects. Tickets are pre-issued with specific performance times, and an ushering of viewers in and out of the room occurs at precisely timed intervals. These conventions aim to incite an excitement and attention that is usual in venues that implement such protocols (cinemas, theatres, magic shows), and are deployed in a way that is particular to the piece. The seating, for instance, allows the audience members to see the action of the work (a sequence of repeated scenarios) by way of a direct perspective (a *mise en abyme* effect), without having to look around.



*The Kinetoscope of Time*

Beyond shaping the physical and contextual characteristics of the work, devising moments that encourage a *zooming* from the audience also builds an environment. The cumulative series of proportions, intensities and speeds of events, suggest the frequency by which these *zooming* opportunities appear. A simple exercise I use to elucidate this concept is to think of a lion. If you see a lion walking around, you focus on how he is moving as a whole. You notice the mass of his body, the speed of his actions, his stature and his overall presence. If he was lying down, and if he remained lying for long enough, you might start noticing other aspects: the way his whiskers move as he breathes, the small twitches of his paws, the shades of colour in his fur. You might notice the way his eyelids move and the way his ribs are visible through the side of his torso. These two different states of the lion determine two different environments for observing him. The way the animal presents himself to us establishes the type of interaction we can have with the components that embody him. I find that a similar kind of visual interaction applies to a performance.

My interest in developing environments that allow an audience read an artwork has led to many decisions in the production of my performances. But a question remains: If the experience of a performance is its knowledge, what kind of knowledge is it? I would like to think the knowledge lies in the relationship between the iconography of these performances and their temporal fabric, and I find this to be an important reflection when it comes to answering what my work is “about.” I believe that the “aboutness” of my works lies predominantly in the experience of them, and as such resists a concrete linguistic representation. I can say that *Domain of things* is about a man who has escaped his own home to go underground, and I can say that *The Kinetoscope of Time* is an installation presented as a kinetoscopic projection. I can even say that my works are about the temporal structures that surround us and make us anxious – this is the indexical aboutness of the

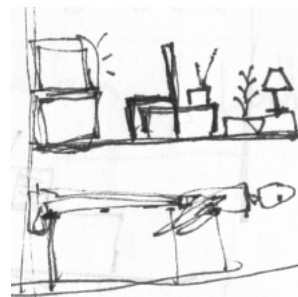


works. But as artworks, the pieces are about what emerges within a crafted environment whereby the viewer is presented with a series of articulated images<sup>2</sup> to be read in time. In this line of thought, I will return to *Domain of Things and Other Histories* in order to explore a special case in which the environment of the performance presents a temporal fabric that includes not only a pace, a rhythm, and an intensity of events, but also a simultaneous co-existence of different temporal ontologies.

### **Mise-en-Abyme: An Environment of Times**

The central sculptural construction in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* is made out of “overground” – a living room – and underground spaces. These are interlocked by a series of materials and mechanisms that, powered by the actions of the performer, move forward as one segmented whole. However, between the above and underground spaces of this construction a particular temporal split occurs.

Drawing made during the process of  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*



The living room section has the components of a normal TV room: a chair, a coffee table, books, keys, a glass with leftover whiskey, a plant... In contrast, the underground space is made of metallic beams, as well as grips, wheels, and supports for the body of the performer who lies horizontally in the structure. It would be difficult to identify the collection of metallic parts as an underground environment if it weren't for its location in relation to the

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<sup>2</sup> I am assuming sound and music to be acoustic images as well.

living room. (The effect is similar to the bathroom photograph from Gregory Crewdson's *Twilight* series. In this piece, Crewdson stages a dissection of a house in order to simultaneously reveal the domestic space -the bathroom-, and what is underneath it. By placing the viewer in the vantage point from where these two sections can be viewed, he activates an awareness of the interrelations that are normally impossible to perceive.

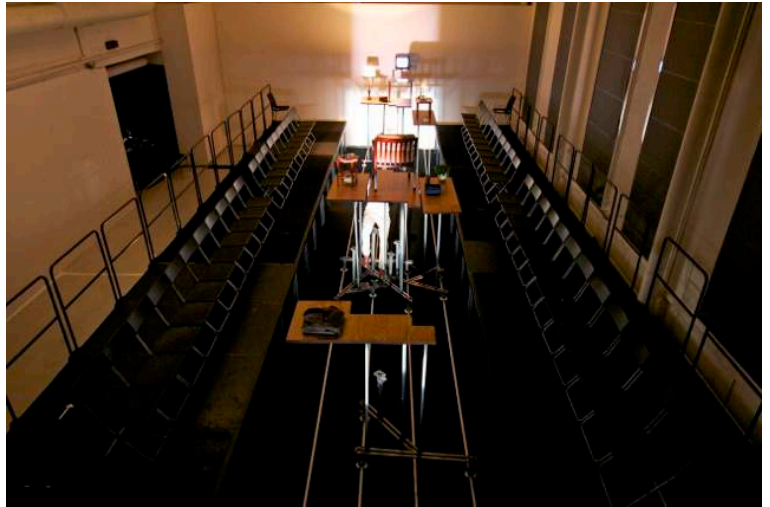


Image 1

In *Doman of Things and Other Histories* the audience is similarly placed so that the over and underground can be seen and recognised. However, the representational differences between the two spaces cause the audience to immediately identify a living room on top, while the underground environment calls for a different kind of inspection. Once the performance begins, and as the construction moves and advances, the representational layers of both spaces continually separate. However, although the entire space moves and is articulated by the mechanics of the structure, the “overground” situation, from the perspective of the audience, remains somewhat constant.

The living room distends through the space without ever arriving at a point of disintegration. The object of our attention is changing before our eyes, but a sense of unity is nevertheless preserved. The identity of the space is not disrupted... My mind creates correlations between the objects and their former selves; I associate them with the images of the initial, ordinary living room that

I hold in my memory. I am looking for continuity, inscribing each moment in a history and making the room appear whole (Coutinho 2011)

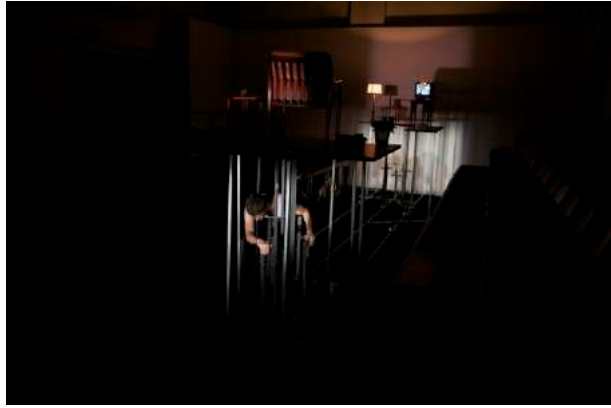


*Domain of Things and Other Histories*

Even though it is broken, the living room remains intact as a presence and as a memory throughout the piece. Audience comments confirm that although it is the space with the most objects, the “aboveground” holds the least of the spectator’s attention through the performance. On the other hand, the underground space acquires different meanings as it moves forward. This is where the motion is generated, so this is the space of the mechanical and physical activity. The many vertical and diagonal metallic beams allow for a shifting perception of the architectural mass, making it a constantly mutating space.

The *zoom*, which takes place between the books, clothes, plants, keys, and other things in the living room area, also makes these objects concrete. The underground space, on the other hand, with its limited variety of materials, is of a less concrete representational nature, meaning that the spectator may still be *zooming*, but more so than finding objects, she is deciphering spaces and actions. Every time the viewer returns to the above-ground, she is revisiting the living room, as a memory, as a place that remains. Every time she looks down to the underground area, she finds something in a state of present progress.

The moment when the structure fragments  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*



While reflecting on the division between a memory and a present found in *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, I have found it helpful to look into Gilles Deleuze's notions of time and motion as explored in his books on cinema. In these books, Deleuze uses cinema as a vehicle for deriving a philosophy whereby time is defined as a constant dynamic differentiation. This means that time is a dynamic splitting between past and present.

Time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogenous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past (Deleuze C2 2005:79)

This split is the basis of one of the crucial concepts of the cinema books: *the crystal of time*. The crystal of time is when cinema manages to make time exist in its purest state, as pure differentiation. Deleuze uses the optical illusion of a *mise en abyme* as a metaphor to illustrate this temporal fragmentation. A *mise en abyme* is the optical phenomenon that occurs when two mirrors are placed in front of each other. The image of an object placed between the mirrors will bounce off both surfaces indefinitely and is thus never realised: "It is a perpetual self-distinguishing, a distinction in the process of being produced" (Deleuze C2:79). When an image's fragmentation is visible as a constant coexistence of its own past and present, then the image is a *crystal of time* (idem). Deleuze offers examples of films that

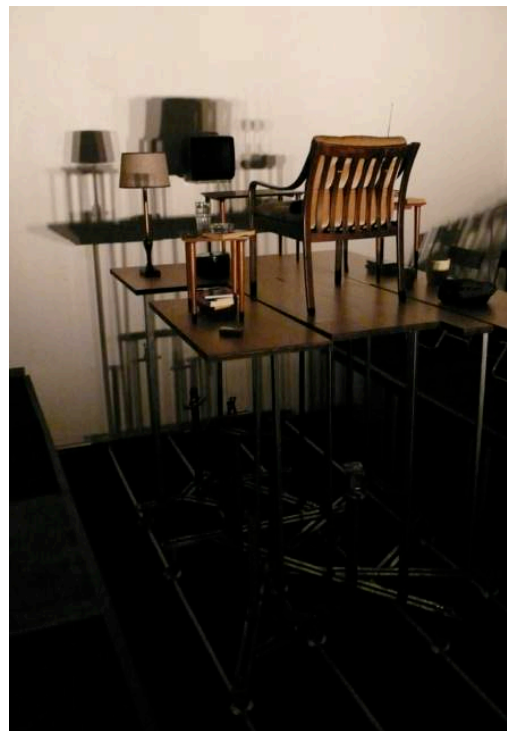
to him constitute examples of this notion, suggesting the *crystal of time* exists as a possibility within the technical framework of cinema.

Beyond film, I have found this discussion of time to suggest an image that contains different temporal layers. I like thinking that the central construction in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* relates to the idea of one such image. It is a structural whole that incorporates two very different temporal layers: The living room as a memory, and the underground as an ever-evolving present. This line of thought is all the more influential given the fact that the construction is not a still object. Like cinema, it is effectively *built* in time. It is when the construction advances, and develops in the chronological space of the performance, that it begins to reveal itself in two “heterogenous [temporal] directions”(Deleuze C2 2005:79). The status of the construction as an image is thus that of a continuous differentiation.

...the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time...the past does not follow the present that is no longer, it coexists with the present it was (Deleuze C2 2005:77).

It is in this sense that I find that the central construction in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* to be a sculpture with a temporal substance. It needs motion in order to exist, and also carries within itself a dynamic fragmentation, a *mise en abyme* that is not optical but temporal. A refraction occurs as the image expands, and, as though trapped between two mirrors the image also implodes; it doubles and re-doubles in a constant interiorisation. I would like to believe that the sculptural construction of *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, in its temporal substance, maintains the status of an image in an inward flux: an interiorised refraction of histories.

The imploding dynamic of the performance relates back to the discussion of the *zoom* as a mode of spectatorship. If the refracting temporalities of the construction define the image in its becoming, then the perceptual interplay of the spectator with the different statuses of the objects and events at the performance's interior is fundamental to the construction of the work as well. This is not to abide by the argument that an object exists only if it is being perceived. What I am saying is that the construction in *Domain of Things* exists in that it is an experience in time. As such, it resists its objectuality in favour of its performativity. The moving sculpture depends, structurally, on the viewer's differentiating actions as it moves. The process of this differentiation, in turn, is constructing an environment for the experience that is the piece itself.

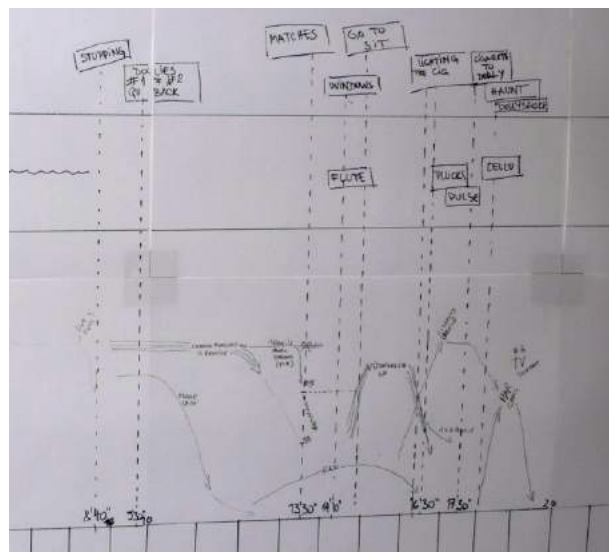


View of the over and underground in  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*

The understanding of the central construction in *Domain of Things and Other Histories* as part of an environment is aided by the fact that it has a physical mass presented as a sculptural whole. But, as I will now discuss, there are other environment-building strategies, such as the use of music and sound, that are also at work in this and other of my performances.

## Another Kind of Spectre

Music has been a prominent element in all the works throughout this project, and my practice in general, and yet I have only mentioned it briefly in this critical reflection. A reason for this could be that, having a life-long training in music and composition, musicality is an aspect of my work that goes well beyond actual sounding elements. I can recognise a musical thinking in much of what I do, and thus the way I make art seems in line with my evolution within music as well.



Music, actions and lighting score for  
*Domain of Things and Other Histories*

The origin of this broad definition of musicality may have started when a sudden injury incurred as a violinist prompted me to question the status of the body in music making. These reflections progressed and formalised during my bachelor training, for which my dissertation focused on the discussion of how physical and visual events could come to be incorporated as part of a compositional thinking. The work I presented to graduate as composer was a piece without instruments, without music and without a written score, and was presented as part of a performance art festival. It really looked more like a choreographic piece than a musical composition. This kind of interest in developing a musical practice beyond sounds and instruments, as well as my frequent collaborations with dance and performance artists, causes me to think of my current performative work as being inherently compositional. I still

feel very driven by the craft of organising events in time – a skill derived from my musical training. Indeed, the present research project, and its focus on temporality, is yet another manifestation of this interest.

However, in my recent artworks, music is not just a case of organising events in time. Actual songs, orchestral pieces, soundscapes, and phonographic material, appear as entities that contribute to the overall experience. I will here make mention of some aspects of the music and sound components in some of my works, in the spirit of elaborating further on the being within the environment of a performance (or artwork). I would like to explore this from the notion that in my work, music acts in a cinematic way. This is perhaps easiest to see in my videos, but even if we look at live works like *Campo de Fuerzas* (2009), *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010), and *The Kinetoscope of Time* (2011), I find the reflective category of “film music” to be a useful given the way the sound components operate within them.

The American composer Aaron Copland once pointed out that film music creates atmosphere, acts as a background filler, builds continuity, and sustains a tension followed by a sense of closure (Donnelly 2005:10). In this sense, film music can be divided into two aspects: one that has to do with an atmosphere, and one that has to do with aiding the narrative drive of the film. Both of these aspects are present in my work. The building of an atmosphere relates closely to the ideas of an environment I have been developing in this text. Sound’s natural ability to envelop an audience can be used as a tool to effectively mark a territory of action in terms of the space, and can also encourage degrees of physical interaction with a work (a low volume calls the attention in, while a big sound suggests a certain distance, etc.). Furthermore, music also delineates the territory of a performance in terms of time. An example is a musical track being made to match a piece, thus signalling its beginning or end.



Another more subtle temporal designation can be a soundtrack's intensity, which shapes the perception of time for an audience. The rhythmic structure of a piece of music is a kind of dynamic clock, which suggests not just the distance from beat to beat, but the importance of particular passages and sections. Music impregnates the audience with these dynamics, shaping the waves and rhythms of emotional responses as viewers are immersed in its aural space. In this sense, music can also make it easier for a spectator to invest in a work. Once you are “hooked” within the rhythmic and harmonic progression of music, you are naturally inclined to follow it through, thus guaranteeing an attention towards the accompanying images. This connection with music can happen at a conscious or unconscious level, and in fact, the unconscious, “hidden,” quality of music in films may be a desirable status for it, in light of its potential manipulative power. Philipp Tagg says:

...the unwanted modification of our behaviour as listeners -our manipulation by music, so to speak – is far more likely to occur if we remain unaware, not just of the mere fact *that* we respond competently to music on an everyday basis but also how that competence is used to influence our emotional judgement of phenomena associated with the music (Donnelly 2005:4).

Evidence that “unnoticed” music has a direct, manipulative effect on people can be found in the strategy of the Muzak Corporation. This is a company dedicated to the creation of background music, especially designed for use by commercial businesses in manipulating their customers and increasing sales. The official Muzak webpage says:

At Muzak, we're passionate about the experiences we create and how they impact your business. Your customer experience is a business opportunity. Muzak can partner with you in strategic and creative ways to maximize this opportunity and ensure that every aspect of the customer experience works for you (Muzak webpage).

In films, music is also generally used as a background, mostly unnoticed, layer that encourages emotional responses and temporal frameworks. However, although film music may benefit from being in the background, it sometimes claims more of a presence. In horror and suspense films, for instance, music often comes to the fore and shapes the scaling intensity of an action as it evolves to a climax. It can also trick the audience by highlighting a moment when nothing particular is happening, thus maintaining the nervous energy of the viewer on edge. My video *Birds* includes a similar musical presence. Gustav Holst's music pushes through from the background – where it gives pace and an emotional colour through most of the video – to the foreground at the final revelatory moment. The shift in music from background to foreground is actually somewhat of a jest: the grandiose quality of Holst's orchestral work, *The Planets* (1916), matches the implicit idea of space exploration, but not the actual technologies used for this particular "launch."

The shift in the presence of the music operates as a way of colouring not just the emotional charge of the narrative moment in the film, but also the perception of the viewer who is simultaneously confronted with the pomposity of the sound and the simple technologies revealed in the video.

Final camera-perspective for  
*Birds*



In his book *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television*, Kevin Donnelly takes an interesting approach to film music; one that I find particularly useful in the light of my own work. He begins with a differentiation between diegetic and non-diegetic film sound. Diegetic film sound is the one that corresponds to the space and action that the film is presenting. This also applies to the sounds that are not literally captured while shooting the film, and that are added during the editing process, but that are nonetheless natural to the illusion of the scene being presented (Donnelly 2005:12). For instance, in bar scene, the diegetic sounds would be the glasses, the overall rumble, the sounds of people talking, and also the background music that is playing. Non-diegetic sound is layered onto the scene and that does not naturally belong to it. This could be the voice of a narrator, or music used as a transition between scenes.

Donnelly argues that non-diegetic sounds act as a ghostly presence; something that enters the film from another dimension and haunts it with emotional charge and temporal structures. This haunting may also be interpreted as a layer that comes from within the film; an alternate truth that is hidden from the images and scenarios presented, but that is nonetheless fundamental.

...non-diegetic music acts as a 'supernatural' element within the worlds constructed by cinema, and also manifests an emotional passion and irrational force in films – rather than simply being functional or consistently and reassuringly tame (Donnelly 2005:22-3).

The ability of non-diegetic sound to be a spectral presence is one of the motoring elements in my performance *The Kinetoscope of Time*. This performance literally deploys the journeys and transitions of sound and music from diegetic to non-diegetic as an exercise in the generation of a spectral circumstance.

*The Kinetoscope of Time* begins with an actor lip-syncing a pre-recorded story voiced by a different actor months before the performance. The actor in the performance embodies a voice that was captured in the past. The synchronicity of the execution represents an alignment between the two bodies, and also between three different temporal domains: the recording, the actor who lip-syncs, and the character in the story (a man in the late 1800s). This alignment, however, is just an initial spectral manifestation of sound in this piece.



The Kinetoscope of Time

As the curtain is drawn, the sound elements engage in a series of journeys and splits: The voice that had been embodied diegetically by the actor (although it does not come from the actor, the voice supports the illusion of this particular *mise en scene*) begins to fade as the actor disappears from the stage. The voice then continues to tell a story, which is projected through the main speakers in the room. With time, as the actor remains invisible, the voice acquires more of a radio quality, or a film-narration that could also be a memory of a previously uttered story: a non-diegetic presence.

As this happens, the musical layer that plays in the main speakers (*Miroirs* by Henry Dutilleux) moves to small radio speakers inside the installation. The transition is not just from one technical support to another, but also from non-diegetic to diegetic. The music that had

been a background layer to the performance is now part of the scenographic illusionary world; music coming out of a radio in a living room. The opening of the curtain corresponds to a journey of the music and voice that are travelling simultaneously, and inversely, between their diegetic statuses: from embodied voice to disembodied narration, and from ambient music to scenographic component.



*The Kinetoscope of Time*

The spectral activity of the sound continues as the piece evolves, not due to shifts in the sound source, but as a result of the story being told by the voice itself: the narrator describes the room and the fact that in spite of it being empty, there is a presence felt. Then the second character in the story appears: the owner of the Kinetoscope who, in the story, speaks from within the room that the audience can see replicated (but uninhabited). This character is no longer the person seen at the beginning so, when he speaks, a completely disembodied voice becomes present in the space. When the actor reappears and closes the curtain at the end of the piece, the text he lip-syncs is from the second character. As a second embodiment, the status of the actor as a narrator, or as either of the characters, is left undefined. As a body without a persona, the actor becomes, not the embodiment of a voice, but a vehicle for different “possessions.”

The spectral quality of the sound and music in *The Kinetoscope of Time* is echoed by the physical installation of the piece. The scene revealed behind the curtain suggests a *mirage* of repeated objects that seek to represent a fraction of time in a particular place. As discussed by Deleuze, this *mise en abyme* is a manifestation of a time that is compulsively fragmenting. More than an accumulation, the repetition of these objects is a dynamic consolidation of one moment. This is why when the music is played by the radios in this installation, it does not claim a specific source. The music belongs to dynamic refraction, to the *mise en abyme*, to time as fragmentation, and not to a particular radio within the series. However, while the objects and images of this performance are either repeating or disappearing, the sound elements, in spite of travelling from source to source, never lose their integrity. As opposed to the living room and the physical presence of the actor, the music and voice are un-fractured and uninterrupted. While the actor and the scenographic installation represent vanishing presences, it is the sound that has an integral body.

I would like to explore one more dimension to the way music haunts the images in my work. The music I use responds to the temporal and emotional environment, as well as the attention, that I am seeking to summon for an audience, but I also pay close attention to the titles of these musical pieces. This is a more subtle use of music, but it nonetheless exercises a relation – or a tension – between sound and image. The title of a piece of music can act as a comment or a hint to layers of meaning within the work. It also points to an extension of the perceptual space and time of the performance, since the titles are often given within the programme notes or other related literature that a spectator may read before or after the actual viewing of the work. Offering the titles inserts an interaction that acts either as a preparation or a memory. An example is the title of the orchestral work in *Domain of Things, A Whole World Distant (Tout en Monde Lontain)* by the French composer Henry Dutilleux.

This title colours the circumstance suggested by the performer who may have escaped to the underground. Furthermore, the movement *Mirroirs* used in *Domain of Things* is the same movement used in *The Kinetoscope of Time* (produced one year later). Its title emphasises the fact that the two performances, both centred on the notion of a place as a refracting moment, are also mirroring each other.

Sometimes the relationship between the title and the piece is not just something that is activated as the audience reads the programme notes or other printed material. In *Campo de Fuerzas*, for instance, the title of the accompanying music actually shaped the way the sound was included in the performance. The slowly dragged rocket is not an agent of destruction, but a pathetic character seeking refuge. Its motion is accompanied by the piece *Pensée des Morts* (*Thoughts of the Dead*) by Franz Liszt. In order to indicate a revival of the dead – or perhaps even a ‘forgetting of the dead’ – the music was played backwards. I am reminded of the popular myth, from the time of vinyl records, that if you play certain albums backwards, voices of spirits or dangerous subliminal messages can be heard. The sound of backwards-playing music has also been used in suspense films and TV series, notably David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (1990). In *Campo de Fuerzas* the reversed sound of Liszt’s composition did not sound demonic at all, in fact the inversion of the piece made the composition even more modal, and modal music is generally associated with cinematic sequences of cosmic travel.



*Campo de Fuerzas*

## The Reflective Membrane

The strategies mentioned above are, of course, not immediately perceivable by an audience at the performance. I do, however, appreciate an implementation of titles as a way to construct layers of meaning that exist beyond the space of the performance itself. This operation points to how malleable the experiential territory of an artwork can be. If, as argued earlier, a space like the aboveground living room in *Domain of Things* exists like a memory after breaking apart during the performance, then it should be possible to assume that memory is a way of extending the effect of an artwork.

In *The Kinetoscope of Time*, the first thing that the audience sees upon leaving the theatrical space is yet another version of the small living room they had just seen repeated in the performance. This time, the physical and contextual environment has shifted dramatically: the objects are laid out to be looked at up close, and the visitor can walk around and inspect the titles of the books and every detail at his own pace.

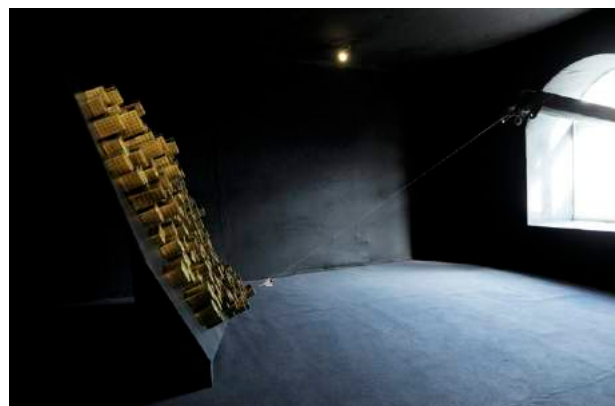


Installation view of  
*The Kinetoscope of Time*



The performance is somehow activated retrospectively as a memory that shapes this new encounter. Could this be thought of as an extension of the performance, one that journeys from the theatrical to the exhibition space? The conditions for the spectator at the gallery are drastically different to the theatre: there is more noise, the space is lit, and the viewer is free to navigate between the works displayed. If the knowledge of the performance relies on the experience of time and imagery – an experience that is facilitated by a carefully composed environment – is the substance of the piece lost in this transition?

Another example is *Might Arrives*, the piece with the truck parked outside the art centre and the maquette and suspended rocket inside the building. The audience is initially confronted with the image of a truck, then they pass through the building until finally reaching the room that holds a maquette. This room is fitted with sound-absorbing fabrics and special lighting. The effect is very theatrical indeed, but it is clear that one cannot reduce the environment of this artwork to any one portion of the spectator's journey. Where does the piece belong to?



Outside and inside portions of *Might Arrives*

An example, outside my own practice, of an artwork that similarly challenges the definition of an environment for its perception can be found in Linsay Seer's work *It Has to be This Way-2*, which I saw at the National Gallery of Denmark. This work is a part-documentary and part-fictional account of Seers' search for her lost stepsister, who developed memory loss after an accident in Rome. Fragmented pieces of photographic evidence, performative re-enactments, and testimonials are offered on different platforms, ranging from freestanding video monitors to an immersive projection room in the shape of a military fortress. As one journeys through these elements, one pieces together possible stories that cover several layers of geographic, historical and emotional content.



Image 2 and 3 from Linsay Seer's  
*It Has To Be This Way 2*

I found it to be particularly interesting how the publication acted in relation to the components of the exhibition. The publication is a novella written by Anthony Penwill, which is based on the archival images surrounding the project. This book, made freely available to the visitors of the exhibition, offers yet another way of piecing together the elements of Seers' search. As a novella, this text does not pretend to be an ultimate truth, or an explanation.

When re-read, the publication activates and confronts the reader's own memory of the exhibition and the narratives found within it. Going through this text is like inhabiting once again the environment established by Seers for her exhibition.

I find that the instances in which the physical territory of an artwork is not marked by a single architectural space point again to the importance of the spectator's active reading as a fundamental building block of a work's environment. A heterogeneous experience in terms of a context for perception (theatrical, exhibition, public space, etc.) means that the integrity of the piece resides in the spectator's accumulation of perceptual input to form an environment. This means that as the spectator gathers images, signs, rhythms and sounds, she is also constructing memories that act as references to other layers within the piece. These sensations and memories begin to build a space that is distinguishable from the rest of an exhibition or the outside world. This space is held by a kind of membrane, transparent, malleable and with substance. This membrane divides the environment of the performance and everyday life. On the outside of this membrane are the beeps, shocks and alarms of our media-influenced everyday life. On the inside of this membrane is an environment of zooming, fragmentation, and suspension. As the viewer engages with the particular semantics of a performance, the membrane is further activated and reflects inwardly. It becomes inhabited by an indexical catalogue of signs, actions and sensations that prolong the experience beyond the physical logic of the territories that call it into being.

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## List of Images:

image 1: image taken from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/denisdee/384551284/>, originally published in: Crewdson, Gregory. *Twilight*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002. Print.

image 2 and 3: taken from a text by Ole Hagen, found online at the Goldsmiths College website <http://www.gold.ac.uk/art/research/staff/lis/01/>



## ***Conclusion***

Human history becomes more and more  
a race between education and catastrophe.

H.G. Wells

## **Conclusion**

This collection of texts has been an exercise in exploring some aspects of importance in the work I have carried out in the last three years under this research project. It has looked at the crucial relationship between the terminology of the research and the artworks produced in reference to them.

One important aspect of this project has been to realise that temporal structures found in media culture are an effective means of generating anxiety and alert. It is this idea that has led to me to experiment with the creation of works in which I focus on the way time is composed, as a way of making situations that steer away from the logics of media. The confidence that this could be possible marks a belief in the power of affect. In fact, affect has been a concept that I have encountered throughout this research and that supports many of the arguments I have studied.

## **Affect**

Affect is a complex idea that has useful implications in the study of how emotions exist and are shared. However, affect is not an emotion in itself. It can be thought of as the intensity of an emotion before it is identified as an emotion. In simple terms, affect can be understood as a kind of “volume dial,” granting a spectrum of intensity to a feeling,

For the adult affect is what makes feelings feel. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all) (Schouse 2005:1).

When Mary Anne Doane argues that television empties the content of the events in favour of the dynamics of information vs. shock, and that it is these dynamics that generate a



catastrophe, she's alluding to affect (Doane 1999). And when Brian Massumi says that a "red-alert" has the ability of activating a person to act, in spite of what the alert actually represents, it is affect that is at work (Massumi 2005). Likewise, the beeps, alarms, notifications, and punctuations of everyday life shape our emotions by relating directly to our body's potential for activation, rather than our intellect. The affective landscape of the temporal structures of our every day life is what makes these structures so influential over us.

Due to my interest in affect, the ambition of my works has shifted: my wish to transmit concrete information has given way to a desire to create environments. The *ghostly* that has inspired me so greatly is indeed an affective space. It is an empty organism of intensities, made from historical dislocations and a certain sense of place.

At work here is a conception of art, not as aiming to reproduce the world... but as registering and producing affect; affect, not as opposed to or distinct from thought, but as a means by which a kind of understanding is produced (Bennett 2005:36).

This "kind of understanding" is what has been at the heart of my artistic impulses. If the most immediate affective experience of our media-influenced every day has to do with a steady flow of disengagement and shocking punctuations in various devices and platforms, then I have been attempting a "kind of understanding" triggered by environments that allude to places and characters in a time that is stretched, doubled, and diluted. I don't necessarily claim to be subverting the affective landscape of media culture, but the awareness of this landscape motivates to work on a circumstance that shifts the qualities of the media's intensity.

Maybe this is why cinema figures so prominently as a referent in this project. Cinema envelops the audience and produces an experience where affective modulation is central. The solitude of the dark theatre and the enveloping music allow us to give ourselves over to a suspended space that is completely different to what lies outside. Furthermore, and as Deleuze argues, film evidences how time itself is constructed (Deleuze C1 2005:7). The cinematic machine is a conduit for becoming affected by the production of time.

Employing the cinematic as a framework for analysis is one example of the way cultural objects can be studied from the perspective of affect. In fact, the possibility of establishing similar reflective operations, make of affect one of the most important legacies of this project in terms of opening up ideas for future research. Affect provides a potential for conceptualising some of the less tangible aspects of my work, and offers novel ways of looking at culture. It is a way of acknowledging dynamics that have an effect in the world, but that resist simplification. I look forward to delving further into this dimension of study, and am grateful to this project for bringing this to light.

### **A Self Evaluation**

As I have mentioned before, one of the most exciting moments in this research came when I realised that while I thought I was subverting the temporalities of media culture, I may, in fact, have been merely representing another side of its equation. I have found that television, for instance, with its broadcasts and re-broadcasts, and in its archival nature, is also trapped in a history that is not linear and that is lost and traumatised. Also the internet, in its overwhelming, constant feedback, acts as a mass of reflections: a network of mirrors where everything is in motion and nothing is stable. I have come to appreciate the artworks I have

produced in this research period that suggest to me a variety of reflective dimensions and re-considerations on matters such as these.

In terms of the experience of the process and its outcomes, I feel *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, and *The Kinetoscope of Time* have been quite successful. These works included big scale constructions and the collective efforts of a group of people in order to make them happen, and consolidated a series of important lessons and case studies. I also believe that in these works I managed to work through the idea of the ghostly and the uncanny in a way that was layered and suggestive. I also appreciate the way the mechanics of these works were generators of movement, as well as sculptural and dramaturgical presences in and of themselves. However, I do feel that there is something about the use of a domestic space that needs further development. I appreciate the fact that I was able to give the “living room” a greater narrative significance in *The Kinetoscope of Time* as it became a central part of the story. Still, after focusing so much on the motions and dynamics of these works I believe that I need to return to the iconographic part of the equation and give it more attention. This, nonetheless, does not mean that I will seek to represent catastrophe more literally. I believe that there is a possibility of finding material, such Brander Matthew’s story *The Kinetoscope of Time*, that represents a degree of distance and kinship to the catastrophic, which could enrich the artworks and the way they are read in light of the topics that influence their production. I have tentatively been thinking already of historical myths or legends that are themselves sources of social anxieties that become manifest in culture, without being direct illustrations. I begin to be interested in the idea of the ritual as a cultural manifestation based on temporal figures that are often related to anxieties of what the future could hold. This could lead to more concrete iconographic vehicles for the temporal operations I believe in so much.

The challenge remains however, that in spite of the potential for future work including degrees of staging and theatricality, I am under much pressure to create works that are easier – and more economical – to build, transport and put together. It has been in response to this pressure that I have experimented during the project with smaller scale works, most of which have been interesting as experiments, but less effective as artworks. Such the case with the pieces I have done with magnets. I have been quite disappointed with how unsuccessful these works have been, despite the fact that I find magnetism to be a beautiful metaphor for the concerns that fuel my interests. For some reason, in spite of embodying crucial questions with a welcome clarity, these works have been the most illustrative, direct and lacking in layers. While I could not reduce the issue to one of scale, by arguing that the works that include immersive environments for viewing favour the development of more complex temporal-image relationships, there is room for exploring how performative works and videos that activate possibilities for temporal fabrics and environments for viewing could be somehow translated to smaller scale works. In this sense, I am still very interested in video as a way of creating staged performative situations that can be shown in a variety of contexts. In exhibiting works as videos, however, I would like to emphasise the conditions for viewing more so than I have so far. I believe that the dramaturgy of screenings is something that, in my case at least, deserves more attention.

When it comes to the issues of media culture in relation to anxiety, there is one realisation that has recently stimulated my thinking very much: the rupture of a consequential narrative in relation to media and our emotions whereby we are the victims of media. What I mean here is that, while it is conventionally accepted that media culture *does* things to us, it may instead be that, more than being victims, we are reflected and in dialogue with the media's platforms and structures. I like the realisation that television and cinema also incorporate characteristics that echo the states, and even the pathologies, that we experience in our time.

Television, for instance, is perhaps in tense anticipation of the next catastrophe, and that as an excitable medium, includes a nervous and anxious relationship to the world.

Furthermore, media culture may in fact represent the attitudes that we need to engage with in order to navigate the impulses of modern life. The huge archive of “moments in time” found in TV and cinema is a way of ensuring that history exists as an indexical body. If it is true that what Benjamin condemned as a loss of a rich and meaningful experience (*Erfahrung*) is due to the amount of information that we have to deal with all the time (Benjamin 1999), then this archivability could be seen as a way of preserving events and experiences. Through technological memory and reproducibility, media promises to salvage a history that can constantly be re-written.

Lately I have been thinking of how, perhaps incongruously, the increasingly popular practice of “meditation” resonates with these ideas. The main point of meditation is to enter a state in which thoughts enter and leave our mind, and are observed without apprehension. As we sit in stillness, images drift, and a collection of sensations from memories and our present state overlap and disintegrate. In this state, existence becomes an abstraction, and impulses that flow through us call for no engagement. I wonder if the widespread nature of these ancient practices has something to do with the fact that we live in a dynamic that calls for the very attitude it demands. This is a time when we need to be able to surf and glide through massive amounts of information and respond to emerging patterns of impulses and modulations. The way we compensate for a lack of attention is by having a strong archival culture, in which the acts of saving and retrieving are crucial parts of a sense of presentness based on mappings of the past.

What these ideas might mean for my artistic practice I have yet to discover. But again, I feel reassured in the importance and relevance of reacting to the temporal structures that surround us, and developing instances that relate to them as affective dimensions of a world and a culture that mysteriously folds and moves between multiple domains of experience.

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## ***The Return***

On June 12, 2006 I set out on a journey from Bogotá to Bergen, Norway. The transatlantic trip that, including layovers, was supposed to last eighteen hours was met by a series of delays and broken engines that translated into days and days of gates, waiting rooms, hallways, shuttle buses, and escalators. It was a torture. I remember waiting in line at every airport. When I finally reached the counter, the airline staff person would come up with a new way of arriving to my distant destination: Bogotá-Madrid: delayed, Madrid-Barcelona: broken engine, Barcelona-Paris: delayed, Paris-Copenhagen: bad weather.

As someone with a fear of flying, this was specially upsetting. Each obstacle announced a new dreadful possibility. How can so many things go wrong?

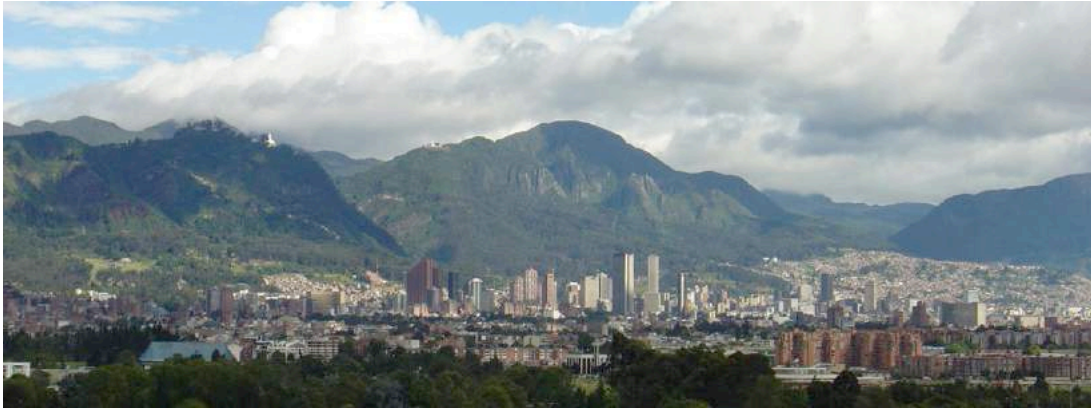
After a while, I stopped knowing how long I had been on the trip, and as I moved northwards, the confusion grew larger; the sun was no longer a reference for day and night. I wasn't hungry. I was tired of being nowhere.

At one point, I looked out through the airplane window on a patch of cloudy turbulence. I was so tired and so scared that it was almost like dreaming with my eyes open. Finally the airplane sunk beneath the clouds as it approached the land.

There was a sunrise or sunset, or both. But something was still not right.

The one thing I remember before crashing was the image of beautiful, but ominous mountains. Could it be? I always knew that the end would be related to mountains: a landslide, an eruption, an earthquake. I grew up looking at them with the amazement and respect that one intuitively develops towards things that can kill.

The plane jolted loudly, and everyone was very quiet. The machine was speaking for us, and it was shaking us too. It was the kind of shake you feel when someone tries to wake you up, or when someone wants to keep you from forgetting.



Bogotá, Colombia





## ***Appendixes***

**Script for: *The Temporalities of Television***  
*Video included in the media card*

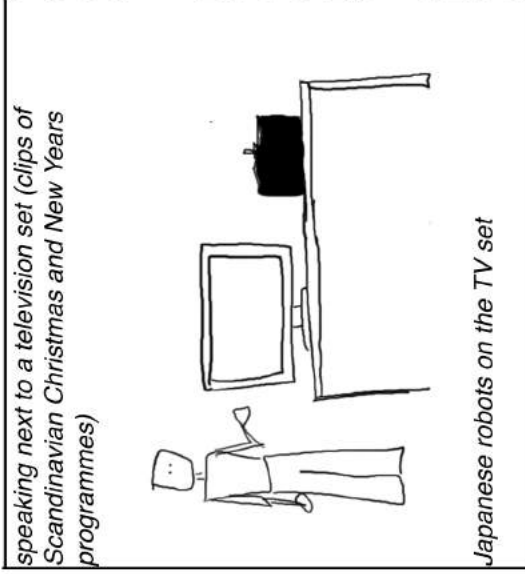
***The Train, The Pulse, The Ghost, The Pulse, The Train***  
*Final exhibition text for en abyme*

### ***Commissioned Texts***

1. Bojana Bauer: *Of Mechanics of The Soul*
2. Liliana Coutinho: *Writing on the Experience of Domain of Things and Other Histories*
3. Luis Orozco: *Deadline The End of the World in Time and Form*
4. Chloe Lewis: *Some Thoughts on the Inefficient Machine*

*Script for : The Temporalities of Television*

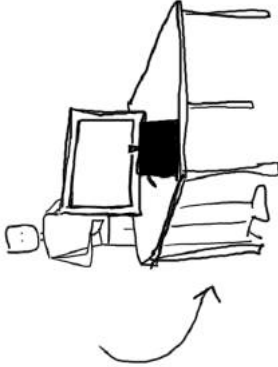


Script for The Temporalities of Television: A reference copy of the script as it was used for the video.






Television has become a very common presence in our every day life. We are used to it being a source of information and entertainment. TV has actually become very prevalent during specific times such as Christmas or New Year's eve when rituals involving food and drinks are also accompanied by a particular series of television programmes that people expect to see.

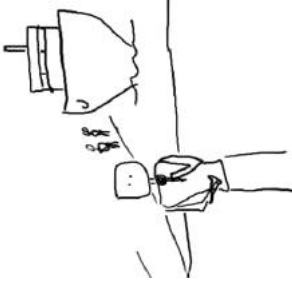


In fact, sometimes the time for different stages of the celebration to take place is determined by the beginning or end of a television programme: when the choir boys sing it is time to set the table, the sound of bells on the TV announces the time to start christmas dinner...in Denmark, for instance, the New Year's celebration begins with the Queen's televised speech at exactly 5pm which is watched by the great majority of Danish people. The countdown towards the new year is, in many countries, a televised phenomenon. Family and friends gather around television sets and public screens across the city to see the "official" countdown.

As a child I knew that saturday mornings were the time for japanese cartoons. Lunchtime on saturday was right after the show with the big robots. While on regular week-days the time to sit down with mum for tea time was at the start of Sesame Street. I'm not sure what time sesame street was actually shown at, but I am sure that it signalled the time for that daily ritual.

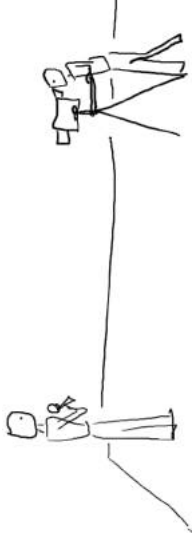

<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b>
<p>Pan to show the box-motor + TV set</p> 	<p><b>on the screen citation</b></p> <p>Perhaps the reason why television can become a reference of time is because it is a medium that relies on a constant state of presence. A bit like a clock that doesn't stop in order to contemplate a particular moment in time. It just keeps going, just as television keeps replacing one image with another.</p>
<p>(TV sounds)</p>	<p>.....</p>
<p>Text appears on the TV screen on top of the clips:</p> 	<p>The media theorist Mary Ann Doane, whose theory of TV temporality we will look at in this chapter, defines Television as a medium that inhabits an insistent present-ness.</p> <p><i>"The temporal dimension of television [she says]... would seem to be that of an insistent "present-ness" - a "this is going on" rather than a "that has been," a celebration of the instantaneous."</i></p> <p>Mary Ann Doane</p>
<p>cut to Pedro's face</p>	<p>The philosopher Brian Massumi also mentions how because of this present-ness television has become the preferred medium for tapping into moments of crisis, when we need to connect to events that are happening right now.</p>
<p>Text appears on the TV screen on top of the clips: [fade in clips of 9. 11 broadcasts]</p>	<p><i>"Any ground television may have lost to the Web as an information source and as the pivot point for family entertainment was recouped in its resurgent role as the privileged channel for collective affect modulation, in real time, at socially critical turning points"</i></p>
<p>pan and zoom from TV set to Pedro + box</p> 	<p>So: when we need to connect to whatever is happening right now, we turn to television.</p> <p>Mary Ann Doane has written a text that is actually titled after the 3 temporal modes of television that we will look at now:</p> <p>Information, Crisis and Catastrophe.</p>



<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b> <b>on the screen citation</b>
zooming in to the box	Let's continue using this machine as an analogy for television and let's look at what these 3 temporalities mean.
	<p>Information is the steady stream of events that make up most of television's time. It is that drone that makes us feel constantly "in touch". The content changes regularly but does not call for special attention. It is not shocking or surprising, it just flows.</p> <p>In this box, information would be the turning of this motor: Constant, with some variants but all together steady.</p>
fade in sound of TV noise (mix of 2 or 3 TV shows at the same time)	That's TV information: reliably steady and ever changing.
<i>as the camera stays with the motor, the sound clears from 3 to just one TV show...</i>	But sometimes this steadiness swells into a Crisis. A Crisis is when information develops greater intensity to a point when it calls for human agency. This is the temporality of, for example, Political entanglements. Here facts and figures appear more and more frequently, experts are consulted, opposing views address the issues...
a piece of thread tangles on the machine, Pedro helps it	Crisis builds up, calls for intervention and resolves, [to the camera] and in doing so it condenses temporality into a specific duration.
cut to Pedro's face	The last and most extreme mode of television's temporality for Mary Ann Doane is Catastrophe.
	Catastrophe is a temporal punctuation in the broadcast, a break in the flow of information.
cut to box: Snap!	Like the snapping of this nail, its different sound, and sudden intensity, catastrophe stands out amidst the otherwise steady flow....And, unlike Crisis, here there is no call for human agency, catastrophe is so sudden that there is nothing anyone can do. We can only witness it.
text on screen and slowly zoom out to Pedro and the box	<p>...moments when information bristles, when its greatest value is its shock value... These are moments when one stops simply watching television in order to stare, transfixed - moments of catastrophe.</p> <p>Mary Ann Doane</p>

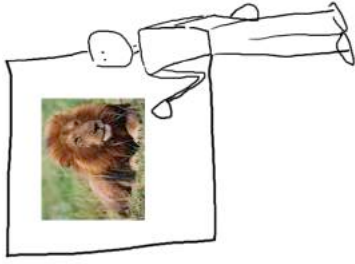

<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b>
	<p><b>on the screen citation</b></p> <p>But interestingly, with both this machine and television, the catastrophic event is <i>not</i> entirely unexpected.</p>
	<p>In this machine we expect the nail to be pulled out. We know it is a fundamental part of the entire contraption, we also know that it is hard to know exactly when it will happen. But when it happens, we understand that there would be no machine without those sudden, shocking punctuations.</p>
	<p>Television thrives and depends on the fact that it's steady flow of information may and <i>will</i> at some point be punctured by moments of shock. Catastrophe is fundamental to television, in fact, television <i>needs</i> catastrophe.</p>
<p>Pedro walks over to the next section, in front of a projection with rhythmical sequences of silent images.</p>	<p>.....</p>
	<p>But a shocking punctuation is not all there is to a catastrophe: these fundamental breaks in information still happen within television's natural characteristic to make whatever is on at any given moment vanish in order to make way for something new. The same constant present-ness that satisfies our need to feel in touch, also has a levelling effect whereby everything is relevant only for a moment. This means that the punctuations in the flow of time alone are not enough to mark a difference that will capture the viewers attention. A break in the rhythm of the broadcast is not enough to translate into a state of shock. This is why, Mary Ann Doane also says, televisual catastrophe is generally accompanied by a series of dramatic strategies that fight back the numbing effect of this "insistent present-ness" and colour it with a call for enhanced attention.</p>
<p>pan swiftly and shake, then zoom very fast out through one of the windows as if searching for something a voice says something like:</p>	<p>This is the difference between interrupting a show to offer breaking news, and... wait...something's going on, what's going on? something happened at the harbour, let's see what happened at the harbour...</p>

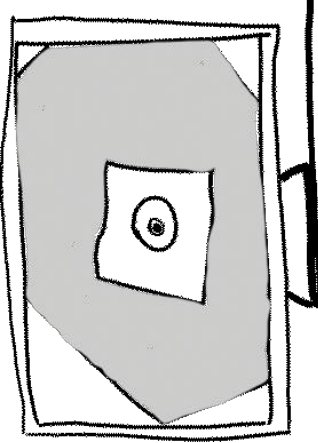
<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b>
<p>Pedro [at the harbour]</p> 	<p><b>on the screen citation</b></p> <p>Hi, yes I'm here at the harbour just a few meters away from the place where a massive ship is about to dock. You can see it moving at a high speed in this precise direction and I think it will only be seconds before it makes contact. Some people step back and move away, and some people try to get a little bit closer, it's hard to tell exactly what can happen here...(continues)</p>
<p>Cut back to Pedro in the studio standing next to a TV screen showing the scene at the harbour:</p> 	<p>This interruption is a punctuation in television's rhythm that gains a dramatised urgency by promising to connect me directly with something that appears to be happening, as the viewing takes place. This is television's definition of catastrophe.</p>
<p>split screen on the TV set:</p> 	<p>But notice that the dramatisations deployed in catastrophe often refer to temporal qualities themselves, most insert a sense of alarm and directness.</p> <p>So it is important to see how temporal shifts can be understood not only as a change in the linear rhythm of the broadcast, but also a change of quality that a temporal sense confers. This dramatic, heightened sense of time may be composed through the directness of a live connection between and anchor-person and a reporter on location, a series of subtitles in fonts and colours that convey alert, or cutting to amateur footage of the events.</p>



<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b>	<b>on the screen citation</b>
<p>At the harbour: as this is said (in voice-over), a hand-held camera pans the harbour and finds the camera crew:</p> 	<p>This general understanding of television as a window into urgent present events points to how a TV set or a TV crew can sometimes itself become a sign of the catastrophic.</p>	
<p>this image is observed. The hand-held camera anxiously goes back and forth between the boat and the camera crew...</p>		
<p>back to Pedro at the studio [same place as before?] holding a copy of the DVD for this film:</p>	<p>I recently found an example of this. Of how a camera crew is used to signify catastrophe. I saw the film "The Day After Tomorrow", a typical hollywood disaster film. Much of the urgency in it is accentuated by the presence of TV cameras or television broadcasts. The characters relate constantly to TV sets, and the scenes of destruction always include a correspondent reporting from somewhere as part of the sequence.</p>	
<p>cut to sequences of the film cut to Pedro next to the a screen showing scenes of the film.</p> 	<p>It is interesting to note that the channel that the characters in this film choose to view in order to stay in touch with the disastrous events is the Weather Channel. This is not too surprising as the film is the story of a sudden ice age taking over the entire northern hemisphere. More interesting is that the real corporation "The Weather Channel" was one of the investors behind this film, thus associating itself with action-packed catastrophic reportage. The appearance of this channel's and name logo repeatedly throughout the film, is a classic product placement strategy, and what can be understood as part of the channel's competition for ratings against other entertainment networks.</p>	

<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b> <b>on the screen citation</b>
<p>still speaking next to the screen, but now it shows clips of The Weather Channel.</p> 	<p>If we look at the way the Weather Channel was when it began in the 80's, it is clear to see that it was meant to run a series of updates on local and global weather. It was more of a reference channel. Now this network has a set of programmes such as "It Could Happen Tomorrow", "Full Force Nature", "When weather changes History", "Raw" and "Storm Watch" that seem to deploy a notion of constant vigilance and a certain inevitability of catastrophe as part of their narrative makeup. Most of these shows actually uses home-made clips where the low quality and hand-held camera act as parts of the dramatisation I spoke about before.</p>
<p>the hand-held camera at the harbour shows a shaky sequence of images. A voice-over says:</p> <p>cut to the studio as this harbour shaky-camera view is shown on the TV set next to him</p> 	<p>A hand-held camera provides a sense of dynamics, nervousness and raw reality to shots. This shakyness seems to work because it says something about the condition of the person who is holding the camera. Maybe this person has to move fast, maybe he is even running, or cannot afford to stand still or set up a tripod..</p> <p>...And sure enough, this kind of images seems to feed right into the definition of catastrophe that sparks attention in TV audiences. A catastrophe that is a break in a rhythmical flow of information, and that is enhanced with strategies of dramatisation such as this one.</p>
<p>walks away and the shaky image continues...</p>	<p>...</p>

<i>image / effect / comment</i>	<b>dialogue</b> <b>on the screen citation</b>
<p>walking back to the projection ,showing clips of titles and shows mentioned&gt;</p> 	<p>But in looking at TV beyond news and weather we find other channels that were traditionally driven by a contemplation of the natural world, which also seem to introduce temporal breaks and dramatisations in their stories in order to gain and maintain the audience in a quest for compelling shows. With names such as “seconds to disaster”, “situation critical”, “Destroyed in seconds” and “Untamed and Uncut” the National Geographic and Animal Planet channels are also examples of this.</p>
<p>Pedro leaves the projection while images continue.</p> <p>cut/pan to Pedro walking back to black box.</p> 	<p>.....</p> <p>So we find that television is constantly discarding whatever is on at any given time in order to make room for something new. It is a medium of the present and this means that it is always moving and changing. But within this constant motion it uses temporal variations in order to modulate the state of attention in the viewer so that an image can be read as information, or crisis, or so that it calls for a maximum state of attention, and becomes catastrophe. These temporal strategies are based on rhythmical punctuations, as in the interruption of a scheduled programme, but are also propelled by dramatic resources that emphasise urgency in order to accentuate these breaks.</p>
<p>A TV set with this images from the harbour: now the hand-held camera pointed at Pedro next to the boat:</p> <p>clips from broadcasts of financial crisis (CNBC etc.)</p>	<p>If it is these temporal and dramatic strategies, and not the events themselves that are generating a sense of crisis or a catastrophe amidst the flow of information, is it then possible that some events be broadcasted as catastrophic even when they naturally belong to other temporal dimensions?</p> <p>Well, according to what I have outlined in this chapter the answer is yes. It is possible to present almost any kind of image or any kind of event as a catastrophe. Mary Ann Doane herself uses a financial crisis as an example of an phenomenon that, because it calls for human agency and develops over time, is actually a crisis. But it often gets broadcasted as an event that is out of people's hands: a catastrophe.</p>

<i>image / effect / comment</i>	dialogue	on the screen citation
<p>on a TV set: the box turning on top of a TV with flickering shades of grey. insert end music. Voice over:</p> 	<p>Stories are covered and presented on television, both in news programmes and documentary shows, and they reach us as modulations of a constant flow we connect ourselves to by viewing. These modulations take the shape, or rather the time, of a stream of information, condensed waves of crisis, and shocking attention-demanding catastrophes. All of these generated by the televisual mechanism itself.</p> <p>But crisis and catastrophes do exist, indeed television is greatly made up of events that do happen in the world. What this medium is doing however, is not only to present these images and sounds to us, but to also shape our response them; and it often does so in no particular relation to the nature of the events it uses as material.</p> <p>The reason for this is that television's strategies correspond more to a logic of attention grabbing, of attracting viewership, than one of informing or educating. And modulating temporality is an effective way of earning just this. It is not by chance that TV's main currency lies in the number of viewers it manages to attract. "Rating" is television's capital and catastrophe is its bait. Even if a catastrophe is not happening at the moment when you are watching, the promise of one is in the very nature of the medium. It is a promise to be a witness of the expected extraordinary, of the syncopation. To be televisual is to inhabit the compulsive, self-vanishing present that happens between catastrophes.</p>	

## ***The Train, The Pulse, The Ghost, The Pulse, The Train.***

### **The Train**

We live in a time when trains are scheduled to arrive at, for instance, 8:23. And they often do. So, we set our alarms the night before, and then we wake up, make coffee, make breakfast, listen to the news on the radio, walk to the station, and stand with everyone else by the side of the horizontal void until the great machine slows down carefully and precisely in front of us. The doors slide open and it is 8:23.

Time has always been a subject of fascination. People have observed the cosmic efforts of the sun as it travels from one horizon to the next. People have observed the circular motions of plants as they grow, and the rhythms of people's insides. People have also made precise machines that partition these observations into very regular intervals so that everything can fit into an hour, a minute, or a second. These partitions are so powerful as a concept that they have come to be what we understand as time itself: a set of measurables that can be worn around the wrist for whenever we need a glance of reassurance. There is a certain empowerment that comes with saying that it is 8:23, and that it is so for everyone around us.

During the early 1800s British trains moved out of the coal mines and began to travel between places with different times. There was no such a thing as national synchronisation so every town would actually have its own "time of day" and this meant that the great machine was also, in a way, a very clumsy one. Calibrating time became a way to increase productivity and efficiency in transport, translating minutes, a little used concept before the industrial revolution, into power and capital. Likewise, having precise clockwork at sea meant being able to draw lines across the earth. Longitude became the

maritime measurement of colonisation and when Greenwich Mean Time was established, it was clear that the British was an empire of time: London became the centre of the world.

Abstracted from the variable cycles of nature, the turning dials of clocks evidenced the mechanical governance of rotation. Towards the end of the 1800s the circulations that allowed clocks to measure time led to the development of devices that would attempt to capture it. Recording and archiving moments in photographs, zoetropes, kinetoscopes, praxinoscopes and picture cameras permitted the observation of events removed from their original place and time. The promise of these machines was both spectacular and unsettling: A dead person could be seen alive. This opened many questions with respect to the capabilities of technology in general, after all, if there was now a machine that could capture a time that had already passed, what else could machines be capable of?

As something measurable, standardised and archivable, time also became instrumental in making physical labour more productive. Towards the end of the 1800's several studies and observations were conducted in order to assess workers' actions leading to propositions for making these more efficient. With their ability to make documents out of moments, photo and film cameras contributed to the period known as "Taylorism", named after its most prominent figure, the American engineer Frederick Taylor. One of these experiments included placing a worker in a special room with a grid as backdrop, and a chronometer in sight. The worker would be fitted with small lights on his extremities. Then, a camera with special exposure times was pointed at him as he carried on with his work. On the photographic plate paths of light would emerge, a map of his habits and deviations, a document for improvement: a *chronocyclegraph*.

The choreographic solutions proposed by these kinds of studies were informed by a notion of labour reliability that challenged personal idiosyncrasies: it is the worker who should now adapt to the temporality of the machine. As Karl Marx points out, “the worker does not make use of the working conditions. The working conditions make use of the worker; but it takes machinery to give this reversal a technically concrete form. In working with machines, workers learn to co-ordinate their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Pulse**

The temporal standards deployed at the workplace in order to maximise production were also echoed by the kinds of modulation found in aspects of society that had to do with consumption. Time became the grid against which most market-based activities were devised: opening hours, holiday periods, academic years, coffee breaks, happy hours, breakfast times, news hours, local trains, 8:23’s...As a society based on the rhythms of industrialisation, most aspects of everyday life have increasingly been touched by temporal regulation. A particular indication of this is the advance and spread of information.

For Walter Benjamin information was one of the most prominent agents in a process whereby the rhythms of modernity reduced the value and depth of experience. In *The Storyteller* he writes that information presents itself with a directness, simplicity and instant veracity that eliminates the possibility of engaging with eventualities in a rich and layered way<sup>2</sup>. The intensity of the industrialised world churns out facts at a rate that leaves the

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<sup>1</sup> (Benjamin: 171)

<sup>2</sup> (Benjamin: 88)

populace unable to relate to them beyond the short-lived heightened attention that a piece of news demands: information is reduced to impulse.

This kind of dynamic described by Benjamin persists today in a vast host of mediatic devices. In our media culture, temporality directly invades the individual, bringing it into the heart of people's homes, as with television and internet, or as a prosthetic device in mobile technology. Media relies on being a producer of presentness: one bit of information is readily displaced by the next. This *nowness* is in fact a condensation of temporality that we find epitomised in Television. TV makes everything it broadcasts an event of the "now": something that has already happened, or that is expected to happen in the future, will become a present event by way of its broadcasting. A recent example may be the series of reportages surrounding the hurricane *Irma* in the U.S. Internet sites, on-line newspapers and TV broadcasters produced almost constant notifications with no more than reiterations of information in anticipation, or in realisation, of the hurricane's underwhelming passage.

These constant notifications point to how a crucial element in the temporal model of contemporary media culture is the actual break of an established regularity in order to gain affective power at a given moment. As with Taylorism, the regulated temporality of mechanical steadiness also poses the problem of causing a kind of numbness, or levelling out of experience. Different events are reacted to without major differences or inflections. This leads to a diminished attention span of a worker or, in the case of media, an audience. The model of industrial regularity needs to include a series of modulations in order to sustain the engagement of an individual. Television is an example of this: an orderly and predictable flow in time is established in the way of systematic, 30 minute long intervals, as well as predictable narrative curves in shows and general programming. But built into television's structure is also its ability to rupture this steadiness in a way best



evidenced by “breaking news”. The cultural theorist Mary Ann Doane calls this kind of rupture in time Catastrophe.

Catastrophe gives the nowness of media a heightened intensity, and one that allows it to summon attention and influence over a greater audience. As a de-stabilising agent, in a rhythmic sense, catastrophe doesn't need a real disaster to give it substance because the temporal break itself is what grants it intensity. For the media, a cat on a tree can be just as catastrophic as an earthquake, and a probable event can be just as catastrophic as an event that has really happened. It all relies on the way this information is delivered in relation to the overall “uniformly constant” temporal landscape. As media expands through the digital revolution and newer technologies, similar strategies appear in the shape of instant messaging, pop-up windows, notifications, push-software, etc. As a foundational strategy for punctuating and intensifying its constant present, temporal catastrophe is crucial for media.

### **The Ghost**

Media's implosion of temporality, where past and anticipated events are mapped into a permanent, imploded present, becomes a model of how -and when- individuals engage affectively with the world. This is not just a narrative outside us, but an active dialogue with our most personal, even neurological, selves. Our interaction with these temporal structures shapes our behaviours and emotions: punctuations, compulsions, repetitions, inability to affect the course of events, impossibility of reliving events of the past, and constant anticipation of the future are all characteristics of the way we navigate everyday life. Interestingly, these are also characteristics of what is psychologically defined as trauma.

Trauma is conventionally understood as what happens when witnessing or experiencing shocking events. But for contemporary theorists the witnessing of an event is only a part of what consolidates the traumatic condition. It is the struggle with representing shocking events of the past<sup>3</sup>, or possible events from the future, that is essential. Trauma is the repeated attempt to draw experience from history. In trauma, the conjuring up of events is a promise to deal with them, as well as the coinciding inability to do so. Like in media culture, the past and the possible future are compulsively brought into the here and now, and like a ghost, the intensity of these projections and memories emerge as a present manifestation of what Hal Foster calls an “experience that is not experienced”<sup>4</sup>.

Maybe that is why the ghost has no body, because its substance is that of pure non-chronological time. While fundamentally related to death, the ghost nonetheless escapes the gravitational pull of mortality by simultaneously inhabiting the before and the after. The ghost is suspended, witnessing but unable, lost in a constant search for a moment that is perceivable but that cannot be touched. The ghost sleepwalks while dreaming of himself and, like being asleep, a ghost is protected by not being there at the precise moment of presence.

We are ghosts, much in the way of Baudelaire’s *Flaneur*, we are city dwellers that dwell in trauma as a way to effectively navigate the bombarding impulses of a modern landscape that has spilled from the factory onto the streets and into virtual and affective territories. In a culture of saturation trauma emerges as a dialogue with catastrophe: the redemption of experience as a machine of history.

Pedro Gómez-Egaña, Bergen Sept. 26, 2011

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<sup>3</sup> as defined by Allen Meek in [Trauma and Media](#)

<sup>4</sup> (Elsaesser:15)

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***Commissioned Texts***

## 1. Of Mechanics of the Soul - Bojana Bauer

*Bojana Bauer is a dramaturge and dance theoretician based in Paris. Apart from having worked extensively with choreographers like Vera Mantero and Latifa Laabissi, and written for Réprés, Dance Zone and Performance Research amongst others, she is also carrying out a PhD in performing arts aesthetics at the University Paris 8. Bojana and I met whilst working on the a project with the Norwegian dancer Brynjar Bandlien at Oslo's Dansenshus. Since then we have been engaged in a variety of discussions surrounding issues that interest us both. This text, produced for the exhibition of Might Arrives (2009) became a first attempt at formalising these discussions. Bojana was also the dramaturge and advisor for Domain of Things and Other Histories (2010) proving again to be a valuable influence and collaborator throughout this project.*

Accidents and machines could easily be designated as central subjects of Pedro Gómez-Egaña's art. Indeed, machines, mostly familiar ones from our daily lives, inhabit his pieces, represented mostly through drawn sketches. More hidden mechanisms constitute the backbone of narrative layers, as they appear as stage devices, or dramaturgical principles. Yet, mechanics is interwoven with the irrationality of the accident. Accidents happen as accidents do. From accidental encounters, to tragedies and catastrophes, people, things and words collide, as it seems, without warning. Is it that accidents happen to machines, or machines emerge from accidents? This remains ambiguous. The rather eventful world with its underlying drama produced by Egaña, conveys a sense of marvel at the big world, its largeness being carried through each singular event.

The formal structuring of most of Egaña's works shapes simple images out of, at times, improbable encounters. These encounters concern as much materials the artist uses: text, drawings, music, as the series of references those materials produce. Drawings, that are recurrent and central in the work as they constitute both the figural and the abstract foundation, are reduced to basics; they are an almost cartoonish typological representation of images, objects, people. They are sometime principal actors of the piece: flat, pictorial objects, become characters in Anytime Now (2008), or a full skeletal structure

of an installation staging a mobile dinosaur in *Swimming sideways* (2008). In the piece *Birds* (2007), they constitute an animated film projected onstage. Again in *Birds*, drawings come to life when appearing shaped into paper maquettes of animated objects.

Machines such as cars, airplanes and helicopters are recurrent “characters” of Egaña’s settings. They are traced in single black line on white paper, making figures of pure contour, without thickness. Their figuration is so reduced and lacking bodily dimensions that they immediately make us think about the function they exercise in the overall dispositif. They move, and carry movement. But it leaves us perplexed on whether they are agents of their own actions, and according to what logic they are being moved.

Aesthetically proposing lightness, with its depurated lines, minimised scenographic elements and overall simplicity, these scenes unapologetically do not accomplish the contained finish of minimalist aesthetic. Quite the opposite: Egaña’s figures are shaky and fragile, suspended in the moment that they do not own. Drawings appear in the whiteness of the background in the time of (often tragic) events, to be then brushed off or faded out of the viewer’s sight. The sense of fragility may be a result of the uncertainty transpiring the black trace, as would a drawing that discovers the world while it’s tracing it. The iconic lightness becomes a matter-of-fact fragility embarking on the laborious task of setting things in motion.

For this seems to be the question: how do things move? What makes them move? What moves this world? Does the world run itself? These questions might appear as child-like, just as Egaña’s drawings. Yet, in those simple animations, wobbly, slow moving cars and helicopters, buildings and mountains, people and dinosaurs, one can recognise two key concepts running through most of modern art: those of machine and of life.

The discussion concerning the mechanic and the organic, the calculable matter and the soul, the technical and the natural is evidently more ancient than the last century's race for technological progress. But let us stay for now with more specific artistic doings such as it appears in Egaña's pieces: the figure of the machine isn't only content of a pictorial representation. Mechanics appear as a conceptual and organisational element, for it is the mechanics of the staging that is both used and brought into question. Here we can also say that the artists take on theatrical (or dramaturgical) construction is reflecting his conception of the world (something that all theatre does off course). This is to say that although not set explicitly for theatre, with the exception of one piece (*Birds*, 2007), most of Egaña's works can be said to explore aspects of theatricality, its narratives, rhythms, movement.

In *Anytime Now* the question of how an artist runs the show is performed to be closely linked to the anatomy of the (re)presentational machine. Although *Anytime now* is a video piece, the camera frame is referencing the box-theatre. In a single frame, the camera is registering the torso of a man whose face above the mouth does not fit in the image. He is bringing paper cut-outs of people and objects into the frame to then simulate their crash, by simply shaking them and squashing them in his hands. A panoply of these figures comes in the frame to meet the fatal moment and disappearance led by the artists hands.

Egaña often refers to the figure of puppeteer in his position of setting in motion and arranging this somewhat falsely apocalyptic world he creates. This reference is interesting since it echoes the turn of the century fascination with mechanical, artificial bodies and automatons. If we go back to this pivotal period, we'll find, as R. Herbert suggests, that after an initial antagonism to serial and uniform character of industrial production, modern(ist) artists adopted the machine as the sign of progress and future. They did this both by depicting the machinery and by using it as means of production of art works. This

is how, following the romantic concept of the creative genius who's in touch with nature, the artists-constructor or artists-engineer appears. The machine becomes the image of speed and movement: exemplified by constructivist approaches of Malévitch, or such musical scores as Ballet Mécanique. In this context of literature, theatre and film, series of marionettes, robots and automatons are produced, bringing to the forefront both an idealised as well as menacing image of meeting between nature and artifice.

For example, in his somewhat infamous theory of new theatre, Gordon Craig went as far as to substitute the actor entirely with the marionette, symbolising, according to Craig, timelessness beyond life. Weather represented in fear of the machine, reminiscent of romantic stigmatisation of mechanics, lifeless shell and its strange universes of robots, golems and homunculus, or conciliating nature and artifice to create new entities, artistic doings were busy trying to understand and analyse the mixity between natural and artificial. Now, these efforts can be seen in the succession of paradigms that all try to "penetrate the secrets movements of the organism" (Plassard 1992:22). They also can be directly linked to Cartesian meditations establishing the flow between the mechanic and the organic. Regardless the evident disparities between phantastic and those more rational expressions, they above all point out the erosion of the perfectly oiled Cartesian machine as it manifestly failed to explain the unification of the body and the soul. As Descartes eradicated the life principle from the functions of the soul, to leave it with purely intellectual properties, he indeed created a modern body: the one of mind coordinated with the biologically and mathematically transparent organism.

Watching the swan's song of the carefully articulated paper dinosaur skeleton in *Swimming Sideways*, it is difficult not to recognise in it a penchant for revisiting these questions. The beast is surely composed of inanimate matter, held up by cables that are tied to a rotational device. When the machine starts coiling the cables, attachments snap, making



different parts of animal's body drop. The release of tension produces movement, movement of very short breath, as the beast gradually settles on the floor to rest. The architecture of the installation is carefully calculated, balanced out and structured, as well as the functioning and the timing of the motorised part of the sculpture. Seeing the fall of the dinosaur puppet is also quite an emotional experience as one cannot help but personify the dying beast. It however isn't simply the matter of seeing an allegory as hermeneutic answer to this piece. The "humanisation" of the creature doesn't intervene simply as a consequence of emotional identification. It is rather the logic of movement itself that operates as a conductor of what for now could be named the "soul" of the dinosaur. Curiously, the complete exposure of the machinery that enables the sculpture's movement doesn't seem to provide the expected sense of transparency and analytic satisfaction. The whole set-up is of course a school-level demonstration of force/gravity/mass equations, yet it still does nothing to the impression that some unknown force has its fingers in it. With ones gaze drawn into its movement, one might even perceive expressive "quality" in it, comparable to the singularity of breathing and weight distribution of human movement. Needless to say that assigning such characteristics to flesh-less, life-less, paper structure, moved by a rudimentary motor coil, radically blurs the line between animate and inanimate. But it is the aforementioned logic of movement that requires our attention, providing that it carries the sign of spontaneous movement. This paradoxically directs us back to platonic principles that run through Egaña's work despite the described calculated construction.

The piece Birds might bring us some answers to this apparently impossible conjuncture. The piece is structured along parallel tracks, where one follows the simple suite of tableaux of its musical score (Gustav Holst's Planets) while the other, slotted into the this basic structure consist of a hypertext-like broken narratives of daily life episodes,

observation and fake scientific affirmations. These narratives are carried through projected text, drawings, film excerpts. Things that appear in these narratives don't have much in common. They are dramaturgically linked precisely by their disparity and randomness of their encounter. What allows them to be in the same time and space of the performance and enter our, the viewers', time and space go beyond the fact that almost anything could be shuffled into a chance driven encounter. There is a vague sense of belonging to a vaster entity. It rings, I mentioned earlier, as an underlining neoplatonism, best illustrated by Plato himself: "...this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related." (Plato, Timeus, 29/30)

Does it mean that the artist is longing for a harmonious unifying principle, "principle" being understood etymologically, as movement before any other movement? Quite certainly not; it is the paradoxical meeting between the "mechanic" and "soul" paradigms that should require our attention and not either of the concepts individually. Egaña's work by no means advocates a return to the "soul of the world" metaphysics, nor does he present any unifying theory of the world for that matter. If anything, the self-generating movement represented by the work's dramaturgy is immanent to any given action, but that is a whole new question that won't be our subject here.

The sense of marvel at the world, be it presented in the "life principle" or in the concept of mechanical organism, refers above all to the complex reading of the world, between its reality (our reality) and the theory of it.

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## 2. *Writing on the Experience of Domain of Things and Other Histories - Liliana Coutinho*

*Liliana Coutinho is a writer, critic and curator based in Paris and Lisbon. She finished her Phd in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art "Pour un discours sensible - sur la capacité cognitive du corps dans l'expérience de l'art" at Université Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, at the end of 2011. Having not previously seen my work she was invited to travel to Bergen for the performance of Domain of Things and Other Histories, and make a literary description of her experience, as a way of documenting the piece. Her text evidences many of the challenges faced when documenting work that relies so much on the relationship between the spectator and the temporal evolution of a work. I find her juggling of memories, perceptions and expectations particularly evocative. Her comments on the written part of the performance (small booklet of texts) triggered questions on the limits of a performance environment explored in The Reflective Membrane.*

### Booklet: Part 1

Water pulls hard from the sky. I've never been under such a curtain of rain. I breathe water. I enter the building of the Kunstakademiet (art academy) in Bergen and, upon presenting my ticket, receive a small booklet of texts. I don't read it immediately. In fact, I almost forget it, as I always do. Normally I read leaflets only after the show.

This is my first live experience with a piece by Pedro Gomez-Egana. Pedro has challenged me to share my experience of *Domain of Things & Other Histories* in a text, but other than that, I know very little about it. I haven't wanted to know anything prior to my actual contact with the piece. Not that the accounts of others could exhaust the experience of it. It is more of a self-imposed attitude; a state of mind that allows me to be as open as possible to what is about to be presented between the four walls of the theatre. What I don't know, is that by the conclusion of *Domain of Things & Other Histories*, those four walls, as well as that which happens beyond them, will also constitute part of this *theatre*.

## Entrance

“It’s a problematic elevator,” says the woman at the commands, as though the elevator has a social life. Going up can often be problematic. Along with other spectators, I am taken to the eighth floor, and there we stand, waiting for the piece to begin. (I would return to see the piece twice more, and would therefore experience the eighth floor on three occasions. Once I came early and hung around with the performance team. On another evening, I found some people to talk with. On my final visit, I watched the rain outside.) A door opens and we finally receive the indication to take our places. The public descends a spiral staircase, carefully, as not to tumble down. Some people voice the opinion that the organization has been careless about safety. Someone says: “What happens if there’s a fire, or a bomb? We couldn’t climb these stairs easily.” It is a problematic stairway. This space is not a neutral space.

*Domain of Things & Other Histories* belongs to the program of Bergen's dance festival. The public has bought tickets, waited patiently for the right time to sit, and will perhaps head out afterwards to discuss the work over a few drinks. But despite these gestures that validate the work within the institutional field of the performing arts, the spectators are immediately challenged by the conditions of the theatrical space itself. It is not a space where institutional conventions are fully respected, and this fact has a strong impact on the reception of the work. But before I elaborate on this, let’s enter the work itself.

## Whilst there

The scenic display has been specifically conceived for the piece. Two rows of chairs for spectators, each facing the other, create a corridor as the central area of action. The

chairs are placed on an elevated structure, and we climb a short staircase to reach our seats. At one end of the corridor is a wall of lights. In the other, a television seizes my attention, subtly foreshadowing the experience to come by presenting a spiraling, endless and continuous movement. The spiral is a road, encircling and descending a green hill, animated by the automobiles passing by. The television, suspended on the wall, is part of a living room composed of an armchair, a radio, a lamp, and books strewn on all over the place: on a small table, on the floor, on a small bookcase. The small table lamp next to the TV set illuminates the chair and the artist's arm. Pedro's body lies in a metallic mechanism, underneath the structure on which the living room is enacted. He moves and the living room begins moving in front of us.

All the living room is moving, displacing itself slowly in a straight line. It moves like a slow parade, directing our focus throughout the entire forty-minute duration of the piece. The movement of Pedro's body disposes the environment, originates the movement and organizes the relationships between the objects. The floor of the living room is composed of separate boards, each moving independently to create lags between objects and changes of perspective. The living room distends through space without ever arriving at a point of disintegration. The object of our attention is changing before our eyes, but a sense of unity is nevertheless preserved. The identity of the space is not disrupted. What makes this continuity possible?—What allows for the survival, the persistence of this living room? The pulse of the movement is crucial to this outcome, as is my own perception. My mind creates correlations between the objects and their former selves; I associate them with the images of the initial, ordinary living room that I hold in my memory. I am looking for continuity, inscribing each moment in a history and making the room appear whole.

I also hear the sound of the body displacing the living room. At the beginning of the piece, there was silence, mixed with a kind of static I couldn't identify. Did it belong to the

soundtrack? Perhaps it was not a sound at all, but rather a kind of touch, allowing me a closer intimacy with that which I was seeing. The sounds involve me. I become embedded in a kinesthetic dynamic, part of a generalized *legato* that correlated much more than sounds.

But nevertheless, the tempo of the piece, the absence of a plot other than the action of the each individual moment, doesn't allow me to forget myself for a moment. Without the opportunity of sympathetically fusing myself with what is happening on the "stage" (such as what one might experience in the presence of a Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*), I am becoming part of the same matter that allows the movement of the objects, part of the same matter that constitutes the environment to which I am also a witness.

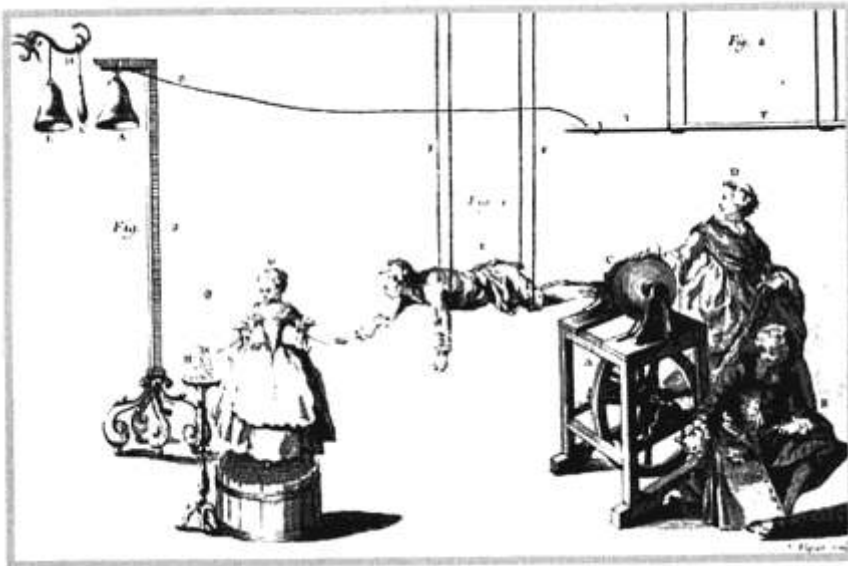
The precision in which the composition's elements are arranged create the sense of continuity I am experiencing. All the senses are summoned. There is a fluid quality to the movement, as though the objects are suddenly impregnated by liquid, or powered by an electric, dynamic centre that does not allow them to stay in any fixed place. There is an ashtray, a glass of water... There is a table lamp, with an articulated arm, next to an armchair. Its bulb, a single incandescent filament, is dim. Not strong enough to illuminate much, it rather announces an electrical presence. Perhaps the static I hear is an expression of this feverish field.

The body catalyzes all movement. It is not enough to say that the body is animating the space, although mechanically this is true. Movement is overtaking the objects and the space, to which the body also belongs. A line of action traverses both body and objects, immaterial and material, and produces the total experience. Everything is impregnated with life. Can we call to this discussion an anthropological perspective and resurrect an animistic conception of the world, in which all living beings and objects share the same

mental, symbolic and spiritual matter, and are capable of acting in the sensible world? Or would it be more useful to speak of *autopoiesis*<sup>5</sup>, a concept derived from biology and informed by a phenomenological approach that sees the living being as a system that is both independent and profoundly coupled with its environment? Embodied in a flux within which it specifies its own laws in order to conserve and develop itself, the living being stipulates the order of things, and creates its own reality.

Some time later, Bojana Bauer, dramaturge of *Domain of Things & Other Histories*, shows me an email sent to Pedro by an audience member who has made an analogy between the piece and the history of “the Electricians” at the turn of XVII century. Attached to the email is this image:

*Date: October 28, 2010 3:52:38 PM GMT+02:00*



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<sup>5</sup> For a better understanding of the concept of Autopoiesis, see, Maturana, Humberto and Varela, Francisco, *Tree of Knowledge*, Shambhala Ed., Boston & London, 1992.



As bizarre as it looks, scenes like this were regular appearances in the drawing rooms and fairgrounds of the mid-seventeenth century. They were the special effects of Enlightenment popular culture. In this case, a young boy suspended in the air with silk ropes is positively charged by a machine that generates static electricity. First the boy's hair spikes up. Then, as the onlookers gasp in amazement, he reaches to touch a small girl, and sparks shoot between their fingertips. Willing volunteers were regularly pulled out of the audience to experience the voltage firsthand. The early explorers into this magical realm, scientists and showmen alike, were known by a name that also persists to the present day, though it has a somewhat different connotation now. They were called the Electricians.

There is a radio, some books... Why the living room? Why these books? I try to read their titles. The person next to me smiles. For me, these details are part of the piece. We are too accustomed to keeping a good distance of the stage, even after the many years of avant-garde and post avant-garde focus on spectatorship participation. In *Domain of Things & Other Histories*, I feel the work necessitates participation. Not that it demands explicit interaction, or summons the spectator to legitimize the artwork on a level of interpretation by extracting referentiality from its experience. Susan Sontag, at the end of her essay *Against Interpretation*, pays justice to the kind of participation and availability this work is claiming: "In art, we don't need a hermeneutic, but an awakening of the senses."<sup>6</sup>

Pedro's previous pieces come to mind: the falling that disrupts the dinosaur's body in *Swimming Sideways*, the magnetic and uneasy flux of the figure moving in a magnetic forest in *The Enchanted*, the unexpected, but extensively prepared, event of *Might Arrives*, the circular and transformative movement of *Birds Nowhere*. In what seems to me a dive into the continuous movement in which form is generated and destroyed, lies one possible

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<sup>6</sup>« Nous n'avons pas, en art, besoin d'une herméneutique, mais d'un éveil des sens. », Sontag, Susan, « Contre l'interprétation », in Sontag, Susan, *L'œuvre parle*, Christian Bourgois Editeur, Paris, (1961), 2010. p.30

answer to the question *why the living room?* My answer forms another question: how to grasp the fragile event that opens the threshold of creative potential residing at the core of our ordinary life? We know, if not from experience then from myth and literature, that all movement of creation beginnings with a fall. A fall in which I, as a sensitive living being, am implicated.

*Domain of Things & Other Histories* is not a spectacle from which I can detach myself, or of which I can forget small details. The work demands an active participation that is not simply offered, but for which I need to embody the role of active viewer: to scan but also to *touch*, to make contact and become involved with what was, at the beginning, simply put before me. The slow, slow, path of the living room allows me to pay attention to everything, and to accustom myself to all that is happening. The details make up the richness of my experience. The piece is a trigger for perceptive transformation. The experience of focusing on small details, such as the titles of the books, allows me to enter a space of heightened sensitivity. *The Dark Sun, The Dark of the Sun, Heat and Dust, The fog, Milk Glass Moon, The Echo, Cold Moons, Under a thin Moon, The Moon is Down, The Chorus of History, Dead Air.* Images of the universe come into my head and I feel at the same time quite present, reading those lines, and corporally belonging to the same space in which the history of the creation and destruction of the stars is occurring. I am here, sitting in this room, but the space of the theatre enlarges itself beyond its actual walls, beyond the actual time in which *Domain of Things & Other Histories* is taking place.

The body moves slowly and the sound is continuous. The light becomes brighter. It focuses on the body. The sound is amplified and we hear a bass rhythm. The electricity augments and becomes stronger. I hear the gentle sound of a metallic wind tunnel. The living room is still moving. The TV, alone on the wall, still shows the same image. The lamp and the table move away from Pedro's body. His legs are suspended horizontally.



A high-pitched flute can be heard (shall we follow?), and a fan of light reveals the exterior. Something is passing, interfering with the central scene, reminding us of the larger space in which the event is taking place.-

The structure and the performer are in the middle of the living room. Pedro changes position, he rests, seated with his head curved, and lights a cigarette. He places it in front of him, the smoke traveling a path that otherwise would have remained uncrossed. I listen to the polarities of low sounds and sharp strings. A fragile spotlight illuminates the cigarette and the smoke, and a cello plays. I don't recognize the music. Only later do I discover that it is Henri Dutilleux's *Cello Concerto - Tout en Monde Lointain*, a fragment of the movement entitled *Miroirs (lent et extatique)*. There is no longer an image on the television, only a white light. At the opposite end of the corridor, behind a grid-like wall, a blue light comes on, signaling an exterior, almost immaterial space. There is a body climbing in this blue space. She climbs slowly and then freezes, mid-motion. There is no staircase. The climbing looks more like mountaineering, or a sensual, slow and carnal merging with the colour blue. I hear music: violoncellos or violins? Violins, I believe. No. I later check with Pedro. It is a fragment of *Regard (Extremement Calme)* from the cello concerto by Henri Dutilleux.

The music is now high-pitched. There is rhythm and the sound of water. The small table lamp switches on. The radio starts to search for a frequency whilst moving towards its initial position. The radio sits on the top of the books – those same books whose titles I have already mentioned. Its antenna is searching, moving in circles, and the lamp's golden reflection follows like a firefly in a pleasurable, circular dance of rise and fall. The heightened sensitivity I felt while reading the books' titles becomes more concrete. The antenna is looking for something in that same invisible space of perception. The shadow of the assemblage of objects – lamp, books, radio and antenna – projects itself on the wall,

next to the television set – the other source of light present in the space. First I thought about *construction*. Now it's the word *transmission* that comes to my mind. Different levels of perception and sensation, different echelons of existence are converging in this *theatron*<sup>8</sup>. Let us see it falling down.

The female body is still there, on the wall, but there is no longer a blue light. The television's white light vibrates in the opposite end of the room. The radio is now tuned and we arrive to the end. We hear, from Russian composer Alfred Schnittke, shadows and mirages of other spaces. After the piece, someone, a Russian woman, comes to speak to the performance team about the fourth dimension. Is she referring to an esoteric and mysterious unknown dimension? Or is she thinking of another space, better known yet equally unresolved in our everyday experience; the mathematical representation of time that expresses its plasticity? All the room is animated and there is a mathematical line of composition designing its entirety.

Nothing is done at random in this composition. It is demanding and calls upon all senses. The sense of continuity that intermingles spectator and event, actual and imaginary spaces and times, is made possible when the performance is done in a precise and accurate way – like a classical musician who needs to have his instrument exquisitely tuned. Everything – light, sound, and most importantly, the continuous movement of the body – needs to agree in order to create this fragile but rewarding unity. *Domain of Things & Other Histories* has something to do with harmony, the way a synchronous frequency allows us to feel ourselves belonging to the flux in which things happen and transform themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> The place from where to see

## Booklet: Part 2 (Reading)

As I mentioned at the beginning of this text, I didn't want to know anything about the piece prior to my actual encounter with it. Upon receiving the booklet, I assumed it would contain a short description of the work, as many leaflets given out at performances do. I assumed the booklet would serve only its most prosaic use. Yet, I was wrong. Only after the performance, and after starting to write this text, did I finally read the booklet of *Domain of Things & Other Histories* and realize that it was part of its experience. The same line of continuity that united the work's elements had in fact begun before the doors were opened, and continued, at least in my case, long after the doors were closed. Where does the domain of things end? Where does the experience belong?

I remember the day I packed my bags for Bergen. I was in Paris, my mind on the Contemporary Art Fair of Paris (FIAC), as I needed to write about it for a magazine. I was particularly interested in the flux between the art market and the art institutions of the city, so I went to see a performance at Jeu de Paume by Tomo Savic-Gecan, which constituted part of FIAC's program. Savic-Gecan was in fact presenting two concurrent exhibitions – one at Jeu de Paume and one at Bergen's Kunstahll – that connected the two institutions. Twin rooms interacted with each other from a distance, as visitors entering the space in Paris influenced the size of the room in Bergen, and vice-versa. The central interest of curator Elena Filipovic, who superficially evoked notions of chaos theory, was the loss of control over an artwork's totality of experience. The performance consisted of serving drinks with ice cubes, nothing more. We were then informed that the ice had been made with water from Bergen. Through the presence of this water, our bodies became symbolically and physically connected to a distant place – not unlike an act of communion. It is the same water that falls (and falls) in Bergen, the same embodied fluidity of *Domain of Things & Other Histories* that constantly involves all the domain of things and that, like a

spiral, like time, advances and changes while repeating itself. As I experienced it, the opening and closing of the doors of the temporary theatre created within the Bergen Kunstakademiet did not necessarily signal the beginning and the end of the show. The piece resonates in the world, with the world, through my experience, and through the creative analogies it allows me to make in its presence.

Let's go back to the booklet. It holds three texts written by Pedro Gomez-Egana and Bojana Bauer. They act as continuations of the piece, active traces of the scheduled performance, "fragments of a future history," as the opportune title of the first text indicates. Within the texts I find a concentrated form of many things I experienced during the performance, such as the idea of a flow of images and sounds – "...you'll absorb the sound of it without knowing that your body is doing it..." – that correlates our embodied self with the world that is "in front of a chair." Our chair. The chair in which we are seated, reading the texts. Reading the booklet while seated in my place, waiting for the piece to start, could have had an interesting effect: creating, through the act of reading, the corporeal predisposition to receive the work that was to be presented. The first text starts with the phrase, "You continue still, so deeply sunk in your seat that if you got up the trace of your body would be clearly marked in the fabric." It situates us immediately in our own physical, temporal, and historical, position. If the distant world is embedded within us – the stars are stars to my regard – it is also from this position whereby the body, the biological living being, remains a zone of reference and perceptive potential. From this position, the larger space of action is possible to grasp, and it becomes possible to act in the *outer* world. As Yves Klein once said, "the space will be conquered by sensible impregnation, and not by rockets or spacecrafts." <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> « Ni les missiles, ni les fusées, ni les spoutniks ne feront de l'homme le "conquistador" de l'espace. Ces moyens-là ne relèvent que de la fantasmagorie des savants d'aujourd'hui qui sont toujours animés de l'esprit romantique et sentimental qui était celui du XIXe siècle. L'homme ne parviendra à prendre possession de l'espace qu'à travers les forces terrifiantes, quoiqu'empreintes de paix, de la sensibilité. Il ne pourra vraiment conquérir l'espace – ce qui est certainement son plus cher désir qu'après avoir réalisé l'imprégnation de l'espace par sa propre sensibilité. », Yves Klein, Le Manifeste de l'hôtel Chelsea 1961.

## Addendum: Other considerations about space

The question as to where the piece belongs needs to be addressed on a different level. *Domain of Things & Other Histories* emerged from the dance and performative arts competences of all the participants (Pedro, but also the dramaturge and the lighting designer), and from Pedro's background in visual arts and music. This created a piece that is informed, at the roots of its conception, by the historicity of all the practices mentioned above. The work's composition makes this clear, and its interdisciplinary nature is consequential to its reception. *Domain of Things & Other Histories* was presented in a dance festival,<sup>10</sup> where one expects to see dance, but it could have also been fruitfully presented in a gallery or a museum, or perhaps as a performative installation.

Within the recent history of dance, particularly since the sixties, a large scope of possibility has opened for dance to exist in what concerns spaces, gestures, techniques and subjects, and to collaborate with other art forms. So a dance festival may indeed be a fitting context for *Domain of Things & Other Histories*. But since the work holds such pronounced visual and auditory dimensions, appealing to an exploratory awareness of the space even though the spectator does not physically move during the piece, an interesting exercise in its future life could be to program it in a different context.

To consider different institutional venues – a theatre, a museum, a gallery, a context related to music – or to insist on a specific environment, such as the room at the Bergen Kunstakademiet, is to deal with the expectations by which the work will be confronted. Every venue functions as an anchor, a territory of reference for the reception and the perception of a work. A performance space is never neutral – each place is embedded with habits of perception and behavior that inevitably shape the experience of the work. These habits are forged by a larger attitude towards the social and active places to which we

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<sup>10</sup> *Domain of Things & Other Histories* was presented in the OktoberDans festival, at the Kunstakademiet in Bergen (October 27th, 28th and 29th 2010)



assign aesthetic experience, and each work presented within a place performs an action of shaping it. Since *Domain of Things & Other Histories* is not *about* perception, but functions precisely to activate our perception, it would be interesting to see it further explore the mutual action that work and venue can perform in each other.

### **3. Deadline: *The End of The World in Time and Form* - Luis Orozco**

*Luis Orozco is the curator of MUCA-Roma in Mexico City. He invited me to participate in the project of reviving the 1968 Olympic sculpture trail of the city in what became my performance Campo de Fuerzas. What no one could have guessed is that the swine-flu outbreak would also take place on the very days of the performance. An obvious challenge to the show became nonetheless an interesting coincidence given the nature and interest of my research. It propelled questions surrounding the visibility of the terminology that I claim to work with and what the pieces themselves put forward as experiences. In this case, Luis not only connects to the event of this performance as a "hideaway" from all the pandemic panic, but also as an echo of space exploration.*

April is, generally, one of the sunniest and quietest months in México City, there is enough wind blowing to help clear away the usual contamination of the air. This allows the contemplation of the mountains and volcanos that surround the city. Alongside the absence of rain, April is the perfect time to host outdoor events. But April of 2009 became, for many days, the perfect scenario to represent the end of the world.

Quiet, luminous and desolating, one imagines the end to be different, the immediate reference can only be taken from the movies, that allude to aliens or prophecies, all of which has structured the unconscious of the Western collective as a sort of prelude to the end of the world.

In a few days, the menace of a pandemic transformed the city into a desert, from the moment the government "suggested" the closing down of schools and offices to prevent the spreading of the disease, the people that circulated the streets used masks given out by soldiers. The images were, of course, like those in the movies. The megapolis in pause, its rhythm completely disrupted and, as a soundtrack, the recommendations and preventive hygienic routines, being recited over and over in every possible media. For a couple of weeks, we were the people with the cleanest hands.

In these two weeks, México was pointed out as a nest of infection and as the source of a new lethal, contagious and unnameable disease.

It seems natural to see our tranquility disappear when we are faced with something of which we don't know much, our first system of authority in the world consists of the ability to name things, and that is how it worked; when the scandalous speculations about the origin of the swine flu derived in measures to control it, these included a new vocabulary that for some reason, calmed us all a little bit.

I remember a similar feeling when I witnessed on tv, along with millions of people around the world, the most broadcasted terrorist attack in history. Another perfect scenario for the end of the world, widely exploited by the movie industry: New York City. If the world was to come to an end, it had to begin there, or at least, that is the image that has been inscribed in our minds.

At that moment, in México in April, I had the strange feeling that I could effectively be witnessing what might be the beginning of the end.

At that time also, the source of evil was left to be identified and named, in order to be controlled.

Campo de Fuerzas (Field of Forces) by Pedro Gómez-Egaña was produced in that context, at the Torre de los vientos (Tower of the Winds), a functional sculpture by the Uruguayan artist Gonzalo Fonseca, part of the Ruta de la Amistad (route of friendship), in

the southern part of México City. This space is used for interventions, which are generally one-day events, due in part to the limited access to the place. The sculpture is placed on a triangular terrain on the side of the most important highway of the city. Pedro's work was part of a series of interventions that were programmed on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the route. It was with this principle that Pedro began the process that would lead to the realisation of the Campo de Fuerzas performance.

The preparations for the performance developed through long-distance communications, and Pedro did not even know the space or had even the city before.

One of the things that interested me the most was the way in which he composed the work, in the broadest sense of the word, bringing the elements that he uses as a composer to a sculptural ground. It is important to note that Pedro combines his music and visual art experience since his beginnings as a visual artist.

As an artist and a curator I consider that the piece was structured from all the elements that made it possible, from the initial communications, the trips around the city looking for materials and the fact that the Tower of the Winds was always the axis.

Pedro composed a piece that turned the tower into a target, hit in its centre by a rocket that was to slowly disappear in its interior.

Curiously, the tower could formally be what Pedro laid out in his piece and then become the destiny of an inoffensive bullet that seemed to calm down the big city, sick of fear and paranoia.

The series of associations that can be made around the piece is very curious, I am convinced that a live action like Campo de Fuerzas, as I mentioned before, integrates in its structure everything that surrounds it, in the real time of its execution as in its context, which for Pedro and myself, was and still is, determinant.

I cannot help associating the surrounding landscape of the tower: a ground of endemic vegetation that grows on volcanic rock, the result of a series of eruptions of the Xitle. And a significant fact that occurred 40 years ago: the landing of a man on the Moon. The tower of the winds seemed in this context like a primitive observatory, amidst a Moon landscape, similar to the images that were working material for many artists such as Smithson, Long or Heizer, who, decades before, proposed connections between controlled accidents and neolithic monuments.

The 60s were, among other things, a decade when the modern men made amends with the “primitive” men, through anthropology and art. The concept of “progress” went on to be part of a cyclic scheme, represented by many artists who worked with landscape. They went from minimal modifications done on video and photography up to undertaking of big ephemeral projects. These pretended to represent little analysed prehistorical monuments, which, for that same condition, had kept up to that moment, a significant charge of mystery, capitalised by these artists as an added value to their own works.

We live, nowadays, in a different stage of the cycle, where we again value the remains and documents of a recent past, where nostalgia and ruins become the new monuments. Time goes by faster and the revisionist urge doesn't go too far in the timeline. Our end of the

world connects with an immediately previous one, a big part of the current art production is still somehow affected by a global consciousness that awoke with the bombs of 45 in Japan, memories now sold as souvenirs, like the Berlin wall fragments at their moment. Stones now speak a different language, the mystery of the primitive monoliths is being substituted by disaster simulations, by debris.

Having recuperated the immediate context as well as the possible historical records of the space, I will now centre in what Campo de Fuerzas was for myself and in Pedro's process in México, in general.

Time is, undoubtedly, the most important element in Pedro's work, real and linear time; the immediate context of the action and the place opened a very interesting dialogue.

During the stage of long-distance communication, I received a series of drawings that illustrated very clearly the development of the action and the elements involved in it: a paper rocket, a tree and a thread. The play of the elements and its dimensions reminded me of children's tales, as these are always structured in a very clear, schematic, illustrative and attractive way, easily memorable.

That was the initial approach and that is how the action unfolded. Somehow the idea of Pedro's own trip, the way in which that rocket would arrive to its final destination, the backing soundtrack (Liszt's *Vía Crucis*, played backwards) and the transformation of the elements, (produced by its dimension and perception of them) also implied relating the macro and the micro.

We assumed that the world is small, because we had gotten there from different places, because our plans were becoming real and because the rocket was there, 100 meters

away from the tower, laid on the terrain where it would be dragged by a red thread, which, because of the time when the action happened, would be invisible. The disappearance of the motor that moved the rocket (Pedro himself) and the thread, gave the piece a life of its own, so it would move, slowly and distressingly, towards the tower, its final destination and place of transformation. Campo de Fuerzas was in a way similar to the game we all play when we have a map of the world at hand and we spin it, to point a random spot in it with our finger and then imagine a trip to that (known or unknown) place.

The same day of the action, the sanitary siege of the city began. Many public events, concerts, cinema and other shows were cancelled. We were “brave” to continue in spite of the recommendations to drop everything and leave. As the hours passed by, the sound of the cars around us went from intense to non-existent, the sky darkened, rain started falling and a strong wind blew. Given the strange context, all this seemed like a sign to continue or to otherwise, abandon. Nonetheless, minutes before starting the last trip to the tower, the rain stopped falling and the wind stopped blowing. With a few people as an audience and a spotlight, the rocket began its slow journey, accompanied by the music that emanated from the interior of the tower. Barely moving, this paper arrow disappeared in the shadow that was drawn by the tower. More than agony, that action represented hope, everything that happened around it transformed that simple and extravagant action into a path of thought through the rocky terrain and the evidently absurd reality of the context. To come to the end of the piece, we had to believe in the disappearing of the ship, in its return or its take-off at the inside of a lit white space. This space was still filled with music and with the image of a miniature tree, that was connected by one of its branches with a red thread to a miniature replica of the suspended ship in a corner, firmly held by the action of a magnetic force field.

We could imagine that a process that was apparently so connected to that specific context, couldn't be duplicated. One of the characteristics of Pedro's actions would be this refusal to repeat. Nonetheless, as we begin again the game with the spinning map of the world, we come up in a new process, in a different place but with a similar principle to Campo de Fuerzas. The physical tension of the elements and the symbolic tension of the displays can be reconstructed. The principle of nostalgia and ruin is a motor that is reloaded when relocated, it generates things all over again, with the simple rules that apply when someone stands in front of a random wall in a new city and questions him/herself about the history of it. The piece feeds itself from this constant interrogation, from the traveling of the artist, his doubts and the same road proposing solutions. The questions exposed by such a piece bring hope because in the end, the reflection implies a recognition of oneself in the other. As persons and as artists, by producing an art that belongs to its immediate space and time, we become reviewers of a world that forgets easily.

We, the few witness of Campo de Fuerzas, were able to sense for some minutes that the end of the world could simply imply a new beginning.

Luis A. Orozco

México City, october of 2009.

Translated from Spanish by: Natalia Valencia



#### 4. *Some Thoughts on the Inefficient Machine - Chloe Lewis*

Chloe is a Canadian artist who recently finished her Masters at the Bergen Academy of Arts. This text responds to a series of talks I had with her on the topic of the machine. I had been curious on her ideas on inefficiency as I had a wish to find different perspectives on the questions of the mechanical that I had been exploring myself. I also appreciate Chloe's knowledge of art history which introduced me to some important bibliography and references. This text also points to a crucial relationship between mechanisation and capital, a point that is only touched upon lightly in my writings, but one that, as an overwhelming implication, I look forward to exploring in more depth.

My dear friend Pedro,

In growing to know you as an artist over the last three years, experiencing your work has rekindled my longstanding, yet all-too-seldom revisited, interest in the politics – or perhaps more accurately, the *poetics* – of inefficiency.

My interest in the subject was first sparked when, as young art student many moons ago, I came across the photographic undertakings of a rather dubious character by the name of Frederick Winslow Taylor. A father of the Efficiency Movement<sup>11</sup> in America, Taylor sought to improve factory workflow during the industrial revolution through a system of scientific management now eponymously referred to as Taylorism. With the goal of eliminating all unnecessary gestures on the assembly line, Taylor set about recording and studying the motion of factory production. He attached small light bulbs to workers' hands and, through the use of long exposures and stopwatches, photographed the traces of their movements.<sup>12</sup>

The resulting "time-motion studies" are unsettlingly beautiful, their gentle and ethereal nature utterly at odds with their purpose: to "visually fragment the body of the worker into a series of quantifiable motions, [enabling] the machine logic of efficiency to operate from within the body,

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<sup>11</sup> An influential movement in America and Europe during the early twentieth century that strove to eliminate economic and social waste

<sup>12</sup> Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) 147.

thereby totalizing capitalism's control over the worker."<sup>13</sup> Whereas Marx proposed that labour was fundamentally *human* in that it presupposes intelligence,<sup>14</sup> the worker under Taylorism was stripped of all skills and reduced to a drone-like, machine state. "In progressive stages, through detailed division of labor and subsequently through the disciplinary apparatus of scientific management, capitalism alienated labor from its own potential creativity."<sup>15</sup>

The alienation precipitated by the division of labour came to pre-occupy a substantial number of twentieth century leftist thinkers. For Theodor Adorno, "the split between consciousness and social life-processes which Marx saw as a deleterious effect of capitalism also paradoxically empowers a singularly positive form of political critique, even if it is predicated on the eventual obliteration of the conditions which make it possible. So the reduction of the labourer to mere spectatorship, mere *contemplation* of his own estranged activity and that of his fellows, for example, which is considered to be such a negative reifying effect of capitalism, is repeated in a more positive form in the critical distance, which provides the basis for... [the] analysis of capitalist society. Thus alienation can be transformed in into a determinate irreconcilability that provides the dissonant basis for critique."<sup>16</sup>

Adorno's theory of alienation recalls the logic of his contemporary and fellow German mastermind, the playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht. "As [Walter] Benjamin explains, Brechtian theatre abandons long complex plots in favour of 'situations' that interrupt the narrative through a disruptive element, such as song. Through this technique of montage and juxtaposition, audiences were led to break their identification with the protagonists on stage and be incited to critical distance. Rather than presenting the illusion of action on stage and filling the audiences with sentiment, Berchtian theatre

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<sup>13</sup> Lalvani, 167.

<sup>14</sup> Lalvani, 139.

<sup>15</sup> Lalvani, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Young, Torn halves: political conflict in literary and cultural theory. (UK: Manchester University Press, 1996) 22.

compels the spectator to take up a position towards this action.”<sup>17</sup>

Liliana Coutinho’s recent text on your performance piece *Domain of Things and Other Histories* (2010) suggests a Brechtian reading of the work. She writes: “The tempo of the piece, the absence of a plot other than the action of the each individual moment, doesn’t allow me to forget myself for a moment... The work demands an active participation that is not simply offered, but for which I need to embody the role of active viewer: to scan but also to touch, to make contact and become involved with what was, at the beginning, simply put before me.”<sup>18</sup> Within *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, one could say that Brecht meets Adorno in an orgy of activated criticality, brought about through a fragmentation of the worker/performer’s body and of the theatrical structure itself.

Forgive me! A mere six paragraphs in and I find myself digressing from Taylor. Suffice it to say that the foundations for creating critical distance remain complex and debatable – and would make for a much longer conversation.<sup>19</sup> Certain forms of alienation may indeed spawn intellectual processes, but one aspect of Taylorism is diabolically clear: Within his system, humanity is sacrificed for efficiency.

Efficiency is the promise of progress; an Enlightenment concept so deeply engrained within our current system of advanced capitalism as to be largely taken for granted. And progress, as our mutual friend, the curator Juan Gaitan, delineates in his the introductory text for *The End of Money* (a recent group exhibition at Witte de With, Rotterdam), has become synonymous with humanity’s potential to move forward into a liberated and malleable future, free from the trappings of cyclical time. He writes: “The fear of eternal recurrence – the gloomy thought that things will have to be endured over and over again – is the emotion that keeps societies focused on ideas of progress

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<sup>17</sup> Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers.” *Participation*. (Whitechapel/MIT press, 2006) 11.

<sup>18</sup> Liliana Coutinho, “Writing on the experience of *Domain of Things & Other Histories* by Pedro Gómez-Egaña – a subjective account.” (2011)

<sup>19</sup> Discourse on Minimalism, for instance, reinvigorates Adorno’s theory, while Frederic Jameson sees postmodernism as a fundamental end to critical distance through the elimination of a vantage point outside the dominant structure, and so on.

and development, the quintessential concepts of modernity.”

As we can see, the stakes are high – high enough to invoke Nietzsche (!) whose conception of eternal recurrence,<sup>20</sup> the idea that the universe and its events have already occurred and will recur ad infinitum, lies at the very heart of modern melancholy. As purveyors of progress however, Taylorism, efficiency, and capitalism itself are mythologized as liberating forces from this woe of existential despair. Given the human consequences of capitalist efficiency, however, it stands to reason that subsequent to the industrial revolution, attempting to deconstruct this mythology became a dominant *raison d'être* for many generations of artists to come.

Taylorism's peak of influence came in the 1910's, in direct parallel to the rise of the avant-garde movement in art. Perhaps with the sole exception of the Italian Futurists, whose work glorified machines and “new sensations of twentieth-century life, sensations resulting from the proliferation of new forms of transportation, factory productions, and power,”<sup>21</sup> the avant-garde of the twentieth century positioned itself in firm opposition to the mechanization of capitalist labour and production.

And as with so many things in our art-steeped lives, it makes sense to begin with Marcel Duchamp. Not unlike Taylor's photographs, Duchamp's infamous painting *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912) depicts the mechanistic, fractured, and superimposed<sup>22</sup> movements of a human form. “What he has done is to describe the nude – a highly revered artistic convention – as an interconnected panoply of planes and pelvic bones, reducing her to the status of machine... By mechanizing the nude in this manner, Duchamp... achieves a multi-leveled social commentary on the depersonalizing power of machines.”<sup>23</sup> Interpretation, however, is never quite so

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<sup>20</sup> For more on Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal return (otherwise known as eternal recurrence) see Nietzsche's seminal text *The Gay Science* (1882), or perhaps better yet, Milan Kundera's beautiful, tragic and wonderfully philosophical novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, written exactly one hundred years later.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Beth Zabel, *Assembling art: the machine and the American avant-garde*. (USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) 28.

<sup>22</sup> This superimposition furthermore invokes the mechanics of motion picture cinema.

<sup>23</sup> Zabel, 29.

straightforward, especially where Duchamp is concerned, and once again, Adorno seems apt. While *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* clearly critiques mechanization, it also evokes it as a strategy in removing the hand of the artist from the artwork, thus recalling the Adorno's "positive form" of alienation.

It has been postulated that "the most complete and complex model of the machine"<sup>24</sup> within contemporary is found in Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (also known as *The Large Glass*), which he created between 1915 and 1923. Not unlike the torture apparatus<sup>25</sup> in Franz Kafka's *The Penal Colony* (written, rather significantly, at precisely the same historical moment that produced *The Bride*) Duchamp's piece consists of two distinct realms. Comprised of large, suspended glass panels and disparate materials such as lead foil, wire and dust, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Eve* reveals an ambiguous encounter between the bride, in the upper panel, and her nine bachelors below. Like his *Nude* of 1912, Duchamp's *Bride* is highly mechanized, reduced to a collection of monochromatic, geometric forms. The bachelors, in the bottom panel, appear tangled in a web of gadgetry – an elaborated contraption of man and machine.<sup>26</sup>

Duchamp referred to this bottom panel as "the bachelor apparatus" or "the bachelor machine," a term that has come to identify a lineage of contemporary artworks characterized, as outlined by Rosalind Krauss in her 2000 book *Bachelors*, by elements of perpetual motion, autoeroticism, and self-enclosure.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, "the bachelor machine's operations are basically non-productive, they consist of conjunctions, repetitions, breakdowns... The bachelor machine is the artist's vehicle

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<sup>24</sup> Adam Budak, "An Incantation of Seraphim."\* *The End: Ragnar Kjartansson*. Ed. Christian Schoen. (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009) 20

\* I recommend having a look at this essay, not only for its elaboration of the bachelor machine but also for its explication of Deleuzian time (a subject I know to be of particular relevance to your research), in relation to the Icelandic performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson.

<sup>25</sup> In *Machines célibataires* (1954), Michel Carrouges identifies striking structural similarities between *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* and Kafka's apparatus, which strikes me as a crucial reference for *Domain of Things and Other Histories*.

<sup>26</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*. (1915–1923. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Philadelphia, USA)

<sup>27</sup> Budak, 20.

to explore the uncanny and some of its symptoms, such as confusion between life and death, a tireless return of repressed desires or phantasmic scenes, a compulsion to repeat as the only possible action."<sup>28</sup>

The deliberate exaggeration and emphasis of uselessness remain a prime concern within the avant-garde project; the inefficient machine resurfaces and re-invents itself again and again. Martin Kippenberger's *Metro-Net* project (1993-97) – a series of subway entrance leading nowhere, constructed in various world cities – comes to mind, as do the "pointless but precise"<sup>29</sup> constructions of Martin Creed, whose Turner Prize-winning *Work No. 227: the lights going on and off* (2001) amounted to nothing more than – as one may well intuit – lights going on and off, as well as Yoko Ono's *Play It by Trust* (first conceived in 1966 and subsequently re-imagined and re-presented throughout the artist's career); a series of immaculately constructed white tables displaying chessboards comprised of uniformly white squares and pieces.

And, in following the mention of chess, one must not forget the great Samuel Beckett, one of my all-time favourite proponents of inefficiency. Chess was Beckett's great passion, and he is known to have played against many legendary artists of his time, including the aforementioned Marcel Duchamp, who was well known as a chess aficionado. "Do nothing!" was Beckett's motto, and when Duchamp proved to be an unconquerable adversary, Beckett devised a strategy to avoid the obliteration of his own army: refusing to move the pieces at all.<sup>30</sup> As though whiling away the hours playing chess isn't useless enough, Beckett finds a way to render it all the more inefficient.

These gestures share a collapse of purpose, collectively embrace the eternal return, and "give visibility to actions which hardly resolve themselves into a stable form."<sup>31</sup> Labour has no end

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<sup>28</sup> Budak, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Prince. "Feint Art: Martin Creed, Ceal Floyer, Sergej Jensen, Michael Krebber, Paul, Pfeiffer." *Failure* (Ed. Lisa Le Feuvre. Whitechapel Gallery/ MIT press, 2010) page unknown.

<sup>30</sup> Gijs Van Tuyl, "Human Condition/Human Body: Bruce Nauman and Samuel Beckett." *Bruce Nauman* (London: The Hayward Gallery, 1998) 61.

<sup>31</sup> Prince, page unknown.

product; production is rendered unproductive – phenomena that are perhaps no more sharply and consistently epitomized than in the work of Belgian-born Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs. *A Story of Deception* (2006), in which the artist drives fruitlessly toward a mirage, underscores the unfulfilled promise of capitalism and an existence cheated by the failed dreams of modernism. Moreover, the vicious cycle of pursuing such dreams is emphasized: It is the *advancement toward* the duplicitous mirage that triggers its life. As the artist has said, it is through the "obstinacy of our intent" that the mirage comes into being.<sup>32</sup>

A beautiful example of Taylorism in reverse can be found in Alÿs's *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2000), for which the artist recruited dozens of unpaid workers to voluntarily waste their energy on the manual relocation (by a negligible distance) of a Peruvian sand dune that, inevitably, would only be blown away again in the coming winds. Maximum effort is exerted for minimal results.<sup>33</sup> In stark contrast to Taylor, Alÿs's "time-motion study" depicts a heightened form of non-productive expenditure.

In the book on Alÿs that you leant me last summer (which I promise to one day return), Mark Godfrey draws a parallel between the artist's work and the economic theory of French writer George Bataille: "As George Bataille argued in *The Accursed Share* (1949), though Western economic discourse has always privileged production and efficiency, the problem for what he termed 'the general economy' has always been expenditure: taken together, all life forms produce more energy than they can use, and so ways have to be found to expend wealth and energy."<sup>34</sup> Thus, according to Bataille, this excess energy, what Taylor and his fellow architects of the Efficiency Movement would certainly term "waste," materializes as indulgence, as violent revolution, or as art – always as something that poses a threat to the prevailing system.

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Godfrey, "Politics/poetics: The work of Francis Alÿs." *Francis Alÿs: A Story of Deception* Ed. Mark Godfrey, Klaus Kiesenbach and Kerry Greenberg. (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) 20.

<sup>33</sup> Godfrey, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Godfrey, 19.

Oscar Wilde once proclaimed: "All art is quite useless!" Earlier still, Flaubert asserted that art is the very pursuit of uselessness, and in 1967, Robert Smithson concurred: "Utility and art don't mix."<sup>35</sup> I see your work in a lineage with history of the inefficient machine, traces of which are particularly prominent within the works *Tell me exactly what you saw and what you think it means*, *Domain of Things and Other Histories*, and *Might Arrives*. In all three cases, precision and labour yield mechanical redundancy and cyclical time, the artworks thereby contesting the insidious principles of capitalist efficiency and progress.

In light of this, two questions come to mind. First, what role can the inefficient machine play given the ever-looming machine that constitutes the art institution and the market? In an all-too-obvious statement, Allan Kaprow once remarked that artists' "involvement with 'exhibition people,' however well-meant they are, is bound to defeat whatever position you take regarding the non-value of your activity."<sup>36</sup> Just as Taylorism came with a promise of progress, the inefficient machine of art comes with the underlying dream of unalienated labour, a counter-value of capitalism, for which it ironically fetches ever-inflating prices. The inefficient machine then, paradoxically, becomes the promise of capital, the very promise at the root of fractured labour and alienation.

Secondly, what is the face of mechanization today? In what twenty-first century condition does it surface? Last month, I found myself in Oslo on the terrible day that saw a fundamentalist right-wing lunatic murder seventy-seven people. The explosion literally shook my windows and drew me outside and toward the city centre in search of its source. Chaos and confusion flooded the street, as did a sea of on comers navigating their way through the city, newly fragmented by detours. From what I could see, each and every person was holding a mobile phone — a thousand bodies and a thousand mobile phones; a species united by tragedy and divided through technology.

You once remarked that with every new piece of personally acquired technology comes new and

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<sup>35</sup> Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, "What Is a Museum?" *Voids*. (Centre Pompidou, 2009) 204.

<sup>36</sup> Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, 205.



heightened anxiety – an insight that has stuck with me for several years, as I continue to resist the acquisition of a personal mobile phone, much to the chagrin and bemusement of those around me, yourself included.

I also remember a story you told me: It was raining in Bergen, and you headed out to a meeting at an unfamiliar address. You hadn't checked a map – why bother? Surely the GPS on your iPhone would lead you to your destination. But your iPhone technology, of course, relies on yet another technology – that of digital cartography – and this particular section of Bergen had not yet been scrupulously enough mapped to feed your telephone the information it needed to guide you. A temporal rift occurs: One technology, by virtue of its suspended evolution, foils another.

Clearly, the promise of progress persists, and as we stand lost in the rain, Nietzsche smugly whispers *eternal return* into the wind, and, like a creeping reminder of the unwavering human condition, inefficiency prevails.

I look forward to reading your thoughts on this matter, and many others, in the months to come.

With fond admiration and affection,

- Chloe

August 16, 2011

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