

Keith Allan
Philip G. Douglas Barrett
Philip G. Owen Gurrey
Johnny Herbert
Victo Boye Julebäk
Kevin Malcolm Sukaina Kubba
Sandra Mujinga
David Pocknee
Apichaya Wanthiang

Writing and Indifference



TEXT

The written language, or more clearly text, has long been a basis for education, communication and expression, abstract signs and symbols capable of metering the profundity of thought. Intentionality of thought in language, specifically within the arts, is dangerously nullifying language as a creative vehicle of exploratory impulses. With exponential information dissemination, we find ourselves sifting through a swamp of preconceived art discourse unable to commit to the inherent nature of languages possibilities allowing for continual renewed expression. An idea is a point of departure alone, only until it is worked, in this case with the concise parameters of languages indices, are we to gain anything of genuine intrigue. This then is a call to arms.

For those reading, we have decided to gather a number of you to write something – working together or individually – in response to what the predominantly homogenous output of current writing emanating from within art and by artists. More vitally, the coddled nature of work often avoiding any purposeful assertions that could refute any others within art, or, heaven forbid, criticize others directly, needs to be put aside indefinitely.

What we are asking for is the re-appropriation of the gesture of theorizing and writing by artists. To break with the institutionalized and often stifling forms of theoretical conjecture evident in so much art discourse. These texts can, by those who choose to, be something not seen separately from work. Perhaps mitigated by the very same structures pertaining to ones non-written investigations, these language explorations are invited to live in the very same manner.

Thus, we open this space to you to respond to this exposition. We invite you to criticize the here and above, but that this is done without recourse to only critical tools, that a certain element of (re-) construction is also attempted.



Writing and Indifference



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Notes On Writing:

2+2 = > 4

By Apichaya Wanthiang
Bergen, Norway 2013

If for every thought in process you fill a jar with stones, and keep filling and forcing it in, the jar will break at one point and that is a good thing, isn't it?

All aesthetic judgments is really cultural evaluation¹
-S. Sontag

A to do list (note to myself - possibly helpful to you):

1. Read a lot - focus on canon writers - keep a list of book you should/ want to read in the future and which one you have read.
2. Find inspiring text by less known authors that according to you should be in the canon and find out why, be argumentative!
3. Write obsessively and without censoring yourselves.

¹ Sontag Susan, Reborn Early Diaries 1947-1963, 2008, Penguin Books, London

4. Eliminate repetitions and keep note of them - they might turn out to be key to finding your voice.
5. Find a voice that is your own, let others read your work - take their critical remarks seriously.
6. Makes notes on hindsight, interesting thoughts, illuminations and random talk that catches your eyes and ears - anything and everything that you think might come in handy at some point.
7. Re-read books and re-read your own writing, as much as is needed for it to become clear - i.e. so you know/feel sure about the following step.
8. Reconsider your strategy or to do list at regular intervals.

Why do we need to write about art at all? How should writing on art be different than writing novels, articles, etc? Education through exemplary practices, how does it work?

Lets make a thinking exercise for I require you to accept some generalizations on my part. I would argue that art could be anything. Main characteristics I would ascribe to it are: it is either chosen or produced by men. It is remarkable just for being chosen or made - but what makes it exemplary - is its repercussions in reality and through history - very often on a subconscious educational level. The knowledge required through this kind of education through transference is not linear - but I am convinced - more effective and lasting over a longer period of time. Good writings about art can be based on the same premises: it can transfer stylistic and subjective knowledge that will affect the reader and affect the readers taste, judgments and production.

Artworks do not need writings to exist - it is as simple as that - however we do relate to art history and to art theory. With the coming of the Bologna Accord, artistic writings have been pushed towards an academic or university style of writing. Of major concern throughout discussions on this topic was: how can we judge if an art practice is valid - in relation to academic research-this validity showed itself through argumentation and writing and so we were

asked to do the same.

I remember having a discussion with my professor at the art academy in Brussels five years ago. He asked if I could hand in my sketchbooks so they could be stored for research and administration. Also, if I could start some kind of 'art diary' to explain my process a little more. I felt that this would be an extremely wrong thing to do: I felt strongly that the final works in the exhibition space were already talking about their process and origin in a manner more fitting to their cause. We ended having a long discussion if this is a right way to 'represent' or validate art. Food for thought is still: how complicated this link is between art and education. Are art practices educational? In which way can writing on art contribute to art and further on contribute to education or progress? What can writings on art teach art or vice versa?

Notes on writing

Few days ago I came across a man on the street. He was dressed in black and wore on his face a grimace that made me slightly uncomfortable. As I was walking home alone at three at night, I felt an extreme awareness of being followed. He was obviously drunk and was talking to himself, I wondered if he was addressing part of his tirade also to me. While dragging his numbed body along, he was throwing empty beer bottles left and right. I almost felt that the breaking of the glass left a mark in my womb. Usually the nights are still in Bergen, at least during weekdays: a certain silence covers the street and I feel like everything familiar becomes my companion, random encounters and random friends. At that specific moment, I was taken by angst and felt sure he was dangerous, although he gave me no reason for this conclusion.

I am writing you this in hope to detour what has been asked of me. We are used to certain parameters and they become restrictions as to how we see, write, make and love. Do you feel that I am jumping from one thing to the next? Writing about art should not only be a language locked up in a box of 'how to'. I cannot stress enough the importance of redrawing these prescriptions, to stress the meaningfulness of detour and minutiae details. It is in our attempt at redrawing these prescriptions that a greater good is passed on.

Last night I dreamt about being back home. Only people in the dream weren't attached anymore to the place I have ascribed to them. Instead they were floating through the air like filtered sun through high pine trees. The colors were pink and green and yellow and I thought how strange they have come to inhabit my paintings and where am I in all of this, I wonder.

How does one event relate to the next? How does writing about art relate to art? I am not sure what it should be, but it cannot be an illustration. It cannot be art's excuse. Maybe their connection can be more or less deduced to soil and what grows out of it. Only I would argue that art can be soil just as writing can be so too. This connection implies a chronological link: a thing that inspires and feeds the other. Like mother and daughter they are linked: sometimes we only get to know one and forget about the other. Like mother and daughter sometimes they become more empowered when the decisions made are independent from each other - when dependency is not linear or needed but more sought or chosen for.

What should writings on art do?

Writing about art can be used for a number of different purposes: to promote, to explain, to contextualize etc. I would like to propose that it should always try to do one thing - though many might disagree - that is to try to expand the borders of writing. Like art making: the work can talk about endless different subject matters but, it should aim while doing so to enlarge the scope of its field. I am here not arguing for 'the newer the better', but more or less that we makers or writers should calculate in the possibility of expansion by pushing at the outer edges of what we do. This expanding of the mediums border is the main factor contributing to education, evolution and history. No matter how small this contribution is.

Some exemplary practices throughout history
Many were exemplary in educating and changing the course of writing - I will only mention two. Franz Kafka, in his way of writing reconsidered the format of a novel. Much has been written about him and his work, and I do not know enough to contest the theories proposed by figures like Walter Benjamin and pre-eminent psychoanalysts. I do however want to refer to the Kafka Effect,

mentioned by Reda Bensmaia, in his introduction to Deleuzes and Guattari's book towards a minor Literature. Bensmaia points to the Kafka Effect. The Kafka effect is according to Deleuze and Guattari related to a 'deterritorialization' and this follows the idea of a minor literature. A minor literature shows itself - if I have understood correctly - through the machine producing effects. Following Jana Evans Braziel's² summation - the characteristics of a minor language is - a language that originates from a minority within a major language - the mother tongue. Minor Literature is inherently political, since it carries within its personal writing collective repercussions, and the underlying political narrative cannot but shine through. Thirdly, following previous points, it has collective value, since it is necessarily political even if others might not agree. It moves the topological center of a major literature and therefore it is 'deterritorializing'.

'The machine producing effects is not used metaphorically or symbolically but always in the most concrete sense. In his *Dialogues* with Claire Parinet, Deleuze makes it more precise: « Machine, machinism, *machinic* »: it is neither mechanical nor organic. The mechanical is a system of gradual connections between dependent terms. The machine, on the other hand, is a clustered « proximity » between independent terms (topological proximity is itself independent of distance or contiguity). A machine assemblage is defined by the displacement of a center of gravity onto an abstract line.'³

Kafka's stories were about life, bureaucratic structures, repetition and I would argue beauty, for in their structure I see an argument for life. But my point is, and I see a likewise argument in Deleuze and Guattari's *Towards a Minor Literature*, is that what makes Kafka's writing exceptional is not necessarily his subject matter or the fact that it can be interpreted in many ways but that it demands to be interpreted and considered as a whole: the love letters he wrote to Felice, the letters to his father and all the unfinished manuscripts. It

² Evans Braziel, Jana, Notes on 'What is a minor literature' from Kafka : Towards a minor Language, <http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/janadele.htm>

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka Towards a Minor Literature*, 1986, The university of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, Bensmaia Reda, Foreword *The Kafka Effect*.

should not be interpreted in a singular way, metaphorically, symbolically or allegorically. What really counts according to Deleuze and Guattari is the *gestus* that is generated in us the readers - that are the feelings instilled and generated within us - the subject he writes about are generating similar affects within us while reading. To touch upon a oversimplified point: many critics have deemed Kafkas writing devoid of politics or devoid of much reference to his Jewish origins. Deleuze and Guattari argue however that through the use of a minor literature his writing cannot be but political and cannot but enlighten us - through affect - about society which he lived in. I wholeheartedly agree.

In the last chapter - what can the artist do in the world of today? - Albert Camus in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus* touched upon the core of what I am getting at:

'He is not asked either to write about co-operatives or, conversely, to lull to sleep in himself the sufferings endured by others throughout history. And since you have asked me to speak personally, I am going to do so as simply as I can. Considered as artist, we perhaps have no need to interfere in the affairs of the world. But considered as men, yes. The miner who is exploited or shot down, the slaves in the camps, those in the colonies, the legions of persecuted throughout the world - they need all those who can speak to communicate their silence and to keep in touch with them. I have not written, day after day, fighting articles and texts, I have not taken part in the common struggle because I desire the world to be covered with Greek statues and masterpieces. The man who has such a desire does exist in me. Except that he has something better to do in trying to instill life into creatures of his imagination. But from my first articles to my latest book I have written so much, and perhaps too much, only because I cannot keep from being drawn towards everyday life, towards those, whomever they may be, who are humiliated and debased. They need to hope, (...) this does not mean, however, that we must sacrifice our artist's nature to some social preaching or other. I have said elsewhere why the artist was more than ever necessary. But if we intervene as men, that experience will have an effect upon our language. And if we are not artists in our language first of all, what

sort of artists are we?⁴

⁴ Camus, Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942, Libraire Gallimard, Gallimard

PRECONCEIVED OF SWAMP

~~Instigated is writing of re-inspiration a for striving necessarily of gesture vital the, herinafter. Garnered texts the of collection the in-submissions other the to texts individual your in respond to opportunity the offer will we, thus. (All at any to if) book the within texts other to only directly referring texts the, collection textual self-referential a be could book the that is thinking our. Attempted also is (re-)construction of element certain a that, tools critical only to recourse without done is this that but, above and here the criticize to you invite we.~~

~~Exposition this to respond to, you to space this open we, thus. Manner similar a in live to invited are explorations language these, investigations non-written one's to pertain which structures same very the by. 'Practice' working their from separately seen not something be, partake to choose who those by, can Texts Artist these. Discovery of stage prior a as theory of aware whilst rigor To committed fundamentally; artists by writing of gesture the of re-appropriation the is initiate to want we what.~~

~~Indefinitely aside put be to needs, directly others criticize forbid heaven or, art within others any refuting assertions purposeful any avoiding often work of nature coddled the, vitally more. Artists by and art within from emanating writing 'theoretical' quasi and strategic, institutionalized predominantly the readdress to incitation an as — individually or together working — something write to you of number a gather to decided have we, reading those for.~~

~~Arms to call a is then this. Intrigue genuine of anything gain to we are, indices language's of parameters concise the with case this in, worked is it until only; alone departure of point a is idea an. Expression renewed continually engendering possibilities infinite language's of nature inherent the to commit to unable discourse art-preconceived of swamp a through sifting ourselves find we, dissemination informational exponential with. Impulses exploratory of vehicle creative a as nullified dangerously being is, arts the within specifically, writing of gesture the of force the. Thought of profundity the metering~~

~~of capable symbols and signs abstract; expression and education
for basis a been long has form written it's in language.~~

Style And Markets

In the booklet of a group installation I worked on a few years ago, I facetiously suggested that the entirety of the discussion should be carried out in Welsh, despite having no knowledge of the language:

“...I don’t know if I would describe our culture as “returning to a state in which language only signifies economic value, as I’m not convinced this aspect ever really went away...For instance, the European languages that are today seen as the most “beautiful”, come from the countries which were the most economically successful in the 19th Century – I don’t think this is a coincidence¹. Our perception of “beauty” is very much based on economic factors, for instance, when we talk about a “beautiful tone” on a violin, we often find that the level of “beauty” is directly proportional to the value of the instrument... Language and economics are interlinked to such an extent that I would even claim that we do ourselves and our art a disservice by discussing it in English – which is really one of the key tools of contemporary capitalism (and no doubt a language whose future “beauty” is now assured). I’m pushing for all art to be discussed in a language as disconnected from economic concerns as possible (in an ideal world these questions and answers would be in Welsh...)”²

Although attention-seeking jokes and profound insight are rarely synonymous, the quip does highlight the dendritic network of connections between language, style and economics that affect art and the way we discuss it.

Recently, the publication of Alix Rule and David Levine’s article on “International Art English” takes the thesis above to even further, experimentally verifiable, extremes:

“The internationalized art world relies on a unique language. Its purest articulation is found in the digital press release. This language has everything to do with English, but it is emphatically not English. It is largely an export of the Anglophone world and can thank the global dominance of English for its current reach. But what really matters for this language—what ultimately makes it a language—is the pointed distance from English that it has always cultivated.”³

International Art English (IAE) is not just a technical vocabulary for discussing visual art, but has its own “lexical, grammatical and stylistic features”⁴.

The stylistic features of International Art English are what give it its value, as Rule and Levine point out:

“If IAE were simply the set of expressions required to address a professional subject matter, we would hardly be justified in calling it a language. IAE would be at best a technical vocabulary, a sort of specialized English no different than the language a car mechanic uses when he discusses harmonic balancers or popper valves. But by referring to an obscure car part, a mechanic probably isn’t interpellating you as a member of a common world—as a fellow citizen, or as the case may be, a fellow traveler. He isn’t identifying you as someone who does or does not get it.”¹

This “getting it”, that Levine and Rule refer to, is essential to IAE’s role as a stylistic signifier of economic value.

...

Style coalesces at the point at which pastiche becomes possible.

In this parodistic moment of ossification - that second in which style becomes locked into a crowbarproof rictusgrin - an intense devalorization of content occurs:

“... stylistic or technical coherence always occurs at the expense of the material itself. Once a style or technique becomes settled, the material utilized becomes interchangeable with any other type of material, and thus, to introduce the concept of an economic view of material, loses its value by violating the economics of scarcity. If a Bach fugue can be created out of a Nokia ring-tone or a Britney Spears melody, then it makes precious difference what material is utilized in it – this material becomes worthless, simply for the fact that it loses the scarcity that gave it value in the first place.”²

It is then, after the annihilation of its content’s value, that style activates its secondary mode of value accretion, what Rule and Levine refer to as “authority”.

IAE is a battleworn language, scarred by the fractured and contorted English translations of the French Post-Structuralists, blurred and blotched, like a photocopy of a photocopy:

“Based on so many idiosyncrasies of translation, the language that art writing developed during the *October* era was alienating in large part because it was legitimately alien. It alienated the English reader as such, but it distanced you less the more of it you could find familiar. Those who could recognize the standard feints were literate. Those comfortable with the more esoteric contortions likely had prolonged contact with French in translation or, at least, theory that could pass for having been

translated. So art writing distinguished readers. And it allowed some writers to sound more authoritative than others.”¹

This “authority” and the “distinguishing of readers”, are key ways in which style gains value in the face of its gutted content. The displacement of content by the “authority” of style can be seen clearly in IAE writing, as well as the artworks whose stylistic mannerisms fascistically crush their content, rather than acquiesce to the demands of the ranks of lumpen material.

The IAE-written digital press-release provides a fine example of style usurping content, the patter of the language can obscure either the lack of anything to say, or a conceptual nonsense, assembled from the multiplicity of perceptual realms and projected transversally onto the space of the page.

...

It is not what you say it's how you say it.

It is not content that gives value to an artwork, but the ability to use a style. IAE, as a language, is not “French”, it is “High-School-French”, and your use of it is nothing but a French Oral Exam designed to check, not your mastery of a language well beyond your abilities, but that you have been listening. That the requisite amount of labour-hours have been spent in study. A test to more accurately separate the genius from piss-artist, in this age of inverted aesthetics that play perilously close to parody. To placate the investors.

Whilst IAE infects the visual art world, the world of music composition displays an equally stylistically-fixated, but less studied, approach to the titling of pieces and the accompanying drivel of the “programme note”, from the *(lr)ri[tat]ing (or)IHo[GRAPH]y O(f) [Tl(T)le]s* over the last 30 years, to the currently *...in vogue...* double-ellipsis of the evocative quotation, accompanied with a good deal of mentions of quantum physics, chaos theory and microbiology, the works themselves musically articulating these scientific profundities in the most intellectually insipid manners imaginable. Here too, style rules, although lack of linguistic-codification and the attempt at projecting a book-devouring colossus implies that the reason for these stylistic choices may be more influenced by psychological factors than economic ones.

Psychological insecurity frequently plays a role in the adoption of unique styles by artists. Since the abandonment of the Romantic ideals of art as a mediator of the universal sublime, it has been increasingly seen as a form of “self-expression”, with all the attendant difficulties that this brings with it. Art provides a useful outlet for presenting to the world a coherent version of “self” – using style as a way to highlight the uniqueness of the individual and project characteristics that amplify a positive and simplistic self-image, shorn of conflict, out into the marketplace.

...

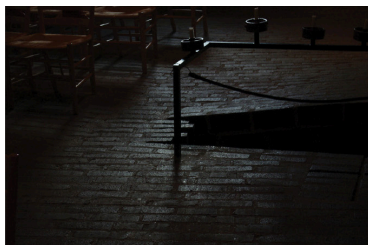
Despite the claims for the aesthetocratic nature of artistic success, economic models still dictate much of the value placed on a work. Key among these is the idea of the Marxian labour-hour. When an artwork places “the money on stage”, as Musical Theatre financiers say (i.e. a highly-trained skill is being visibly or audibly displayed), or a large number of labour-hours have been directly and visibly invested in the creation of a work, this reduces the risk of investment and increases saleability. As most economies base value on some form of labour-hours, objective monetary value is built into the work so, irrespective of the aesthetic nature of the work, a baseline of value is guaranteed. This explains why YBA-variety “Conceptual Art”, has such high production values despite the strength of a concept being little affected by the skilfulness of its articulation. The idea of embedded labour-hours also explains why, in the music community, orchestral works of long durations are artistically admired.

It is easier and less controversial to admire the expert craft of a received skill-set than an aesthetic – and markets love consensus!

...

If an artist continually uses the same style, the purchase of each consecutive work allows the buyer to invest not only in the work itself, but in the amassed technical skill and expertise from the previous works in the stylistic series (an abstracted form of amassed labour-hours). This expertise might manifest itself as stylistic “refinement” – a move towards the clearest and highest-quality articulation of a stylistic feature, a factor which proportionally increases the work’s value in relation to others antecedent in the series.

A long-running stylistic series can also help to ensure potential investors that aspects that might otherwise be treated as mistakes or a lack of skill, indicating a poor quality artwork, are intentional choices by the artist.



The Feeling of Space On Phenomenological Surveying

1

You enter the space through a deep reveal walking along a coarse brick wall. As you gently make your way in the darkness over an uneven, slightly sloping brick floor, you sense an earthy scent in the air. It is a quiet cavernous space and the sound of your footsteps make you aware of your conduct. In the darkness the only thing that you are able to clearly perceive are an array of warm golden lights suspended from the ceiling in a web of wires. As your eyes slowly adjust to the dim light, the space reveals itself to be larger and more detailed than you first assumed.

Freestanding chairs are organised in rows around a single weathered steel column, resembling a Tao cross or a large tree. It carries a waving, arched brick ceiling that continues the material vocabulary of the walls and floor. Masonry of hand made coal-fired browns and umbra's laid in expressive, roughly tooled flush cement mortar joints. The dense tectonic feeling of the background is emphasised by the slender and upright character of the fine lacquered wooden chairs.

Everything is revealed, nothing is hidden and when you try to grasp the entire space as a whole, the saturation of tactile qualities is overwhelming. You are compelled to sit silently reading one motif at a time composing a clearer image. The space is not a crude attempt of radical reinvention; it is a deeply felt space, based on a lifetime of experiences and with an extent knowledge of the classical vocabulary, material qualities and sensuous possibilities.

2

Arriving via a series of courtyards, through a shaded portico you are instinctively drawn to the large softly illuminated openings. They sit in deep gun slit shaped niches holding an undistracted view of the horizon over the sea.

The only sound emerging from the complete silence is the baritone of the breakers hitting the coast. Large enough to occupy, the niches are held in a modest high-ceilinged space sculpted in a yellow sandstone ashlar with soft pink hues. Subtle sidelight introduces new qualities to the coarse stone and reveals that it retains depressions from the manufacturing process, in which the lime mortar unevenly settles. The homogeneous character of the space is balanced by a whitewashed ceiling of tiled vaults suspended between slender concrete beams. Waxed woodwork designates objects with a bond to the hand and a generous in situ built sandstone sofa invites you to occupy it in an informal way. The quality of the space feels familiar to the cultural landscape and on closer inspection the materials used are of a commonplace character available in the local hardware shop. Analogous to the refinement of the everyday materials in the construct, the space encloses everyday life and enriches it as a collection of ritualized events. Nothing is incidental in this space, yet it has a relaxed atmosphere of intimacy and tranquility.

3

Growing from the landscape, the space sits beneath a large granite shoulder negotiating the gently sloping terrain through a series of modest levels and shifts. The exterior lends to the interior creating a condition of ambiguity, offering a feeling of great intimacy between the two.

As you enter the space your experience is heightened by having a sense of expectation. The atmosphere evokes memories of gatherings with family and friends and you intuitively know this space as though informed by an emotional sensibility. There is an identifiable feeling of familiarity to the simple dignified detailing and the scale of the space. The plain everyday vocabulary of wood, stone and pigments in soft grey hues are reminiscent of the local building tradition, as an adaption rather than an imitation. The essential quality and character found in these materials bring

you closer to the setting and give you a sense of where you are in the world. Discreet paneling and a deep bench create a comfortable enclosure that draws you in and invites you to occupy it in a casual manner. The space represents a continuity of an inherent culture and tradition in a modern way. It elevates everyday life and offers a sense of connection to a place, a time and a history that makes you feel at home, as if you belong to the world.

Surveying

"A...poet is a discoverer rather than an inventor." - Jorge Luis Borges

The world is not general it is specific. Defined by properties that are much more nuanced and complex than one would immediately assume. Only through careful observation do we become aware of its substantial richness and subtle imperfections. As an architect I am interested in what is and how it has been constructed, for construction is to the architect what words are to a poet.

Commonly the architect employs two tools when reading construction: architectural surveying and spatial representation.

Architectural surveying is the technical process of geometrically documenting a building and its components such as doors, panels and windows. It registers the form in two-dimensional plans, sections and elevations or in three-dimensional computer generated models. Spatial representation methodologically records the phenomenological aspects we associate with space. Light, shadow, texture and colour are portrayed through drawing, photography or model.

When experiencing architecture these instruments are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of space, but somewhere between them and me there is an evasive notion. Although

entirely subjected to material conditions certain spaces feel like they consist of more than the syntactical arrangement and connection of elements. They speak to our entire body of knowledge and emotional sensibility.

Cultivating these impressions and developing a sensitivity to spaces through their particularities, invites us to be in them rather than to look at them. It engenders a distinct architectural vocabulary that in tri-part with the technical and phenomenological surveying documents the specific and the inherent emotional qualities it offers.

The Value of Excitement

The dark film goes on general release.
 Floodlights rake the low cloud base
 above the scratchy London planes
 and iron palings of Leicester Square.

Unrated dark, two hours long.
 we wonder where the film was shot:
 the *Night Mail* stopped, or *Empire State*
 caught midway through a power cut,

or if they'd left the lens cap on
 and gone with it, declared it 'art',
 or if this were a film at all
 or leader-tape blocking the light.

But something happens to the print
 the further on into its run,
 the further out each reel sent:
 audiences start seeing things.¹

What do the audience begin to see? I hope you understand why I've only offered the first half of Paul Farley's poem 'The Dark Film'. The break after that fourth stanza is tantalizing, what's going to happen next? Does this affect me or everybody? Tell me what it is I can see.

Look again.

If you've played along this far then you may be asking what right have I to muscle in on Farley's carefully omitted break. What right do I have to claim the whiteness? It's as if someone has come in to your room and unplugged your television, drawn back the curtains and told you to go outside and play. There'll be more on Farley later.

¹ Paul Farley, 'The Dark Film', from *The Dark Film* (London: Picador, 2012), p.29

When the lights of the cinema come up and the credits end so too does your status as participant yet passive observer. What you have seen is already slipping away from you, beyond your control as the images blur, dissipate, and stand in for each other. The film which happened to your senses gets to work lodging itself in your existing structures of mind. By the time you reach the exit and the cool expansive atrium you may have no control over your first thought or response, you may be on to your eighteenth thought. It may not have anything to do with the film, don't flatter yourself in to thinking it must. Maybe you're thinking of dinner, or how you'll get home. You have witnessed the staging of a man being beaten to death, a fatal car crash, a moving love scene, a family torn apart, and you have a vague notion of what the American mid-west is supposed to look like. So far as this interiorization of apparently heinous and devastating 'acts' of human suffering and experience are working you, you feel strangely uplifted, and having remembered that you bought something nice for dinner all is well as you leave the car park.

The sociology of emotional restraint is of crucial importance in this episode. Yet such a sociology is the modern component here, not the staging of the drama. In Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning's text, 'The Quest for Excitement', the authors want to explore this privatization of emotion: 'Great fear, great joy, great hatred and great love have to be whittled away in outward appearance...to be rated as normal, adults brought up in societies such as ours are expected to check the rising upsurge of their excitement in good time.'² What the authors are claiming is that a certain degree of control is exercised in the observation of such codes of behaviour or restraint. But this control has become in a sense automatic, part of an 'in-built personality structure'. It might be the unconscious way we look at the world and have no choice over the frame of observation. It is clear this is what forms part of their wider thesis on the *civilizing process*. They want to show that now such a degree of control over nature means that we are no longer subjected to extremes of emotion over matters of survival and subsistence. There exists in advanced industrial societies an insulation from the threats to existence which acts as a regulator of the limits of states of enthusiasm, excitement, anger and outrage. If there is

² Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, 'The Quest for Excitement in Leisure', in *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p.64

nothing at stake, if my needs are seemingly met this poses a great risk to the validity of claiming anything to be authentic. As such I must insert 'like' in to my sentences for fear of claiming anything concretely. What Elias and Dunning are pointing towards is a critique of an enlightened tolerance, a world of galloping pluralism where nothing is certain except uncertainty.

What is crucial to understand is that simply in finding our place in modern industrial societies requires a highly complex interpellation in to a symbolic order which governs the extent to which our emotions can surface in response to being cast in to this world. For Elias and Dunning, this civilizing process is likened to a kind of deadening of the spirit and they seek a reappraisal of the value of all our activities in a schema that doesn't simply split life in to two components of work and leisure. What poetry can do is nothing short of an assault on the acts of mind that construct our mental universe. Poetry can trick ideas out of the shadows; it can unify sense through rhyme, metre, patterned speech, form, and the careful balancing of prosody with content. Poetry is mnemonic and is the only art form that can be kept completely intact in ones' head. Farley's poem is no exception, it wants to lodge itself in to your brain – it wants to become the dark film, it wants the audience to seize it for themselves and carry that meaning out in to the world – to renew the acts of mind that govern our responses to the daily quotidian events that punctuate our days. It is also a warning: *Act now before the fire comes* could be a recurrent motif in Farley's work.

So we are talking about excitement, about passion, commitment, and emotion, but above all, this is about *feeling*. The feeling of existence is a huge philosophical question and one could do worse than start from Aristotle through to Rousseau and then to Nietzsche to chip away at the concept. But we are not in the library, we have been arrested during the dark film and there's no light frame anymore. You have to make it up yourself. Do you have it in you, to conjure up excitement for yourself? Can I really experience excitement for myself or shall I wait for the film that will not come?

Now we've come to the quick of Farley's poetic gift. He wants you to use your imagination, there is an invitation to indulge in the archetypes that frequent his poems that make violent interventions in to the world you have constructed: 'Now look around your tiny room / and tell me that you haven't got the power.'

Farley address the reader caught in the cross-hairs of jumbled up memories, nostalgic hankerings, the steeped-in history of post-industrial cities (Farley is a Liverpudlian), and the creeping awareness that ‘everything is happening all at once’ which makes him sound just a little bit Hegelian. As he zooms in on ‘Google Earth’ elsewhere in the collection, the feeling is one of incredulity at being able to hone-in on something that *should* be blocked from view. It’s the ambiguity of ways of seeing that is so important to Farley’s vision. The poet trained as a painter and one does get the sense that he is experimenting with the frame of vision by inviting the reader to play a part in the uncovering of the pleasure of the imagination. It is this unseating of the imagination which Elias and Dunning are so moved to explore, to find the locus of a primal relation to excitement in our digitised post-everything universe.

As the subject has been microscoped beyond recognition in our post-enlightenment world of the individual so ironically has the mass grown ever larger. Since Guy Debord, society is our inner condition of knowledge and arbiter of faith. It is the dark film, we feel it but it is not known. There are groups, there are also crowds; there’s the mass, the spectacle, and now perhaps the swarm; there’s the Harlem Shake or Gangnam Style, or the next instalment of the Star Wars Franchise. We’re back at the cinema and we’re still in search of that feeling of excitement.

The location for excitement cannot be reduced to falling somewhere in the overused distinction between work and leisure. We must carefully consider Kant’s reasoning that duty, if pleasurable, ceases to be moral in that it divides the two unfairly. Work is toil; leisure, pleasure. This is misleading and it reduces the classification of sparetime activities in to falsely elevated categories of superfluity. What Kant overlooked was the importance of our bodies in claiming validity to experience. For Kant, the world is something we construct in our minds, previously the notion that held sway was more given – nature is there to be discovered – in a sense it is already out there. Then came Hegel who added the crucial element of embodiment. We are embodied by society, by language, by circumstance, culture, history, inheritance *et cetera*. Now we’re getting somewhere. To claim experience is to attribute that experience is a concept known to all. Yet in the claiming of experience all we have is language that somehow must be retroactively applied to account for such an experiential happening. So the hermeneutic circle ‘as it is known’ is on hand to provide evidence for the statement of

truth. Truth – what really happened in the film – is worked out by the telling of the story. The story cannot aim to tell a truth that is already there, it must be created in the telling of the story – the embodiment. This is where you come in. What do you see in the dark film?

As public spectacles – the dark film goes on general release - continue to dominate the narratives of mass society, there is something in the consciousness of the crowd or mass or swarm that is a representation of a ‘becoming’. It is a societal force and it *needs* to be a political force if it is to be a phenomenon of mass feeling. If only a politician could arouse as much excitement from a speech as a Saturday afternoon crowd at a football match. Were western politicians jealous of the populism of the late Hugo Chavez? Do atheists secretly admire the thronging crowds awaiting the billowing white from the Vatican smokestack? Is this Max Weber’s charismatic leader or is this about mass sentiment? With so much ideology wielding its persuasive rhetoric it may be that a weakening of the value of feeling is responsible for the political disinterestedness that lies at the heart of the problem for today’s representative democracies.

You were not alone in the cinema. You were not a group. A group I would crudely say in psychological terminology is 3-20 people. They know each other and have interactions, there is a clear difference to the mass in that there is first and second person relation. The mass on the other hand is much bigger, not just physically but also in the scope and range of its identity and possible identities. It is then, by its very nature or occurrence, a potentiality. Since the ‘I’s’ are not communicating they are at the mercy of being perceived as the ‘we’ by those involved and as the ‘them’ by those not involved. What then would we suppose to constitute a swarm? I’m already picturing locusts and the red-billed quelea birds, you may be thinking of kids in tracksuits stealing televisions. They move together and consume as a totality. There is a mentality but it is reflexive and determined by the source which is finite. There are those who arrive first who could claim prestige, but ownership is engulfed as the swarm takes place and is driven by its own ends and desires that have found an articulated object to satisfy that desire. The ‘I’ in the mass and the swarm share the distinct feature of disappearance and there is a renunciation or abandonment of the ‘I’ in becoming the mass or swarm. But they differ in as much as the swarm is more reflexive, impulsive, threatening, and reactionary. The mass however is now a common feature of the

organization of a connected culture- the crowd, the audience, the commuters, the Lowry matchsticks writ large. What makes these processes occur lies beyond the individual cognition, it is a feeling that I exist and participation can fortify the self. If participation is observed repeatedly or to a pattern as in the case of the football fan, it can be a never-ending ritual akin to a belief in unity of the 'we' as destiny of the 'I'.

Any activity that is a bringing together of people requires a name. Collective nouns often evoke the meaning of togetherness and unity, they often define a multitude as potentiality, as a meeting of minds wielding ideology. Yet the individual always stands as the maker of that universal idea and the relinquishing of the 'I' for the greater good of the 'we' is then an observable phenomena that skews the location of truth to any consensual agreement: 'We two, if two, can only half exist' writes Don Paterson, Farley's editor at Picador.³ If you still don't believe in the power of imagination you may be still in the cinema, staring at the rolling black, suspended over the nothingness waiting for something to happen. Don't you see, it's up to you. If you want to read the rest of Farley's poem you won't find it here. Try the internet. Or dare I say it, buy the book and see if the fire comes.

³ Don Paterson, 'Two', Uncollected. 2012

For the question was not how to elude the order-word but how to prevent escape from veering into the imaginary or falling into a black hole.

—Deleuze and Guattari

Scores are a kind of art metawriting. Not the presentation of an argument per se, but an “order-word” nevertheless. *Do this*, they say, or face a little “death sentence.” Thus, I offer the following text score, a freedom march.

Tactical Freedom Band Study

Two groups of young music students, age 8-12 years, are gathered together for a performance in a large open space, e.g. field, auditorium, etc.

The groups must contrast sharply in terms of the general socio-economic makeup of its members (e.g. Group A is taken from an upper-middle class district, while Group B is comprised of children of parents from an adjacent working-class immigrant community). Each group should contain musicians performing a diverse set of instruments, for example, snare drum, clarinet, tuba.

The performance begins with the groups on either side of the space and poised to face the opposite side. At a marching pace, Group A perform scales, and rudiments in the case of percussion instrumentalists; beginning at the same time, Group B perform and repeat L’Internationale at the same tempo.

Each individual performer from Group A advances a step toward the opposite side, while Group B advances a step *as a group* with each iteration of L’Internationale. The students continue to advance until they have successfully moved to the opposite side of the space—or collide somewhere along the way. When and if students eventually “collide,” they should do so in a calm and gentle manner, falling gracefully to the floor or ground.

L'INTERNATIONALE

Musique de Degeyter

Paroles d'Eugène Pottier

De - bout, les domnés de la ter - re De -
 - bout, les forçats de la faim. La rai - son, lonne en son tra -
 - le - re, c'est l'é - rup - tion de la fin. Du pas - se,
 çai sons la - ble ra - se. Foule es - clave, de - bout, de -
 - bout! Le mon - de va chan - ger, de ba se, nous ne som
 mes rier, Soy - ons tout, C'est la lut - le fi - na -
 - le. Groupes - nous, et de - main l'In - ter - na - tio -
 na - le se - ra le genre hu - main. C'est la lut -
 - le fi - na - le. Groupes - nous et de - main l'In - ter -
 - na - tio - na - a - a - le se - ra le genre hu - main.

(23.02.13 – 17:25)

We need to stop quoting theory and start making it.

Starting for the fourth time, I will try once again to move away from the contradictions of a theoretical performance. Instead of working *through* writing, I was working towards a self-demanded scenario *by* writing.

A rigorous writing would be a writing of terse concision but would also have a certain violence of *forcing* writing to cohere where it is alienated; to *commune* between icons. To commune through writing here is to think of an ethics of refusal and urgency over one of shared 'ideals' – refusal of an inherited situation and an urgency of needing to work out through it. This ethics I consider to be constitutive of many working with art. A forceful gesture of writing by those hereto could then be an antagonistic interaction rendering spontaneous logics to be necessarily overwritten and undermined subsequently. A call for "rigor" here is a call for an idiosyncratic exactitude under continuous recalibration.

Thinking such a rigorous paradoxical writing of insularity and reflexivity is for me also thinking work put forth as 'art', wherein we have the possibility to extemporize a logic of a situation, both in the responding and making. To repeatedly extemporize a logic demands a certain refusal of given information – a perpetual extracting out – and an urgency of needing to face the potentialities of a specific situation. For artists, then, a writing as the forced communion of a spontaneous logic can be seen as congenital to a working ethics of refusal and urgency, the two are self-similar and issue forth from the same constellation.

If we imagine a proliferation of such writing, we encourage the very activity by others as the demand of reading and responding to writing and art-making is exacerbated by the radically idiosyncratic logics put forth. An initial alienation presents those encountering with an imposition to actively engage, not in decoding the logic, but in refusing it and

What are the repercussions of artists writing in a way correlating to

Resituating of authorship?
Infallibility of the arguments?

However, is not our call for “rigor” a call for a certain method of refined logic and argument-development practiced by academics? How to think a different rigorous thought?

Rigorous thought, let alone writing, is not a practicable method, I would like to assert. Like my beginning presentation here, rigor in thought

‘Theory’ has differing uses and connotations in different disciplines. However, I would like to propose a definition for the purposes of attempting to outline a situation in which art-making and writing by artists are no longer mutually exclusive categories, being both essentially *theoretical*.

Theory, as I would like to think through it here, would be *a view speculating as to the potential nature of reality*. Within art-making, art theory is made mostly by non-artists; artist ‘practice’ art, writers/theorists ‘theorize’ art. This division is perpetuated within art education – theory, usually taught by specialists hired into the department, is presented as the necessary ‘method’ to contextualize one’s ‘practice’ with relevant ‘contemporary’ references. Thus, the prevalence of ‘art practice’ as denoting one’s art-making activity (be it, sculpture, research, activism, writing, reading...etc) can be seen as the result of this partitioning.

Art practice (‘practice’ as a *carrying out*) ignores the initial viewing of a potential a certain amount of theorizing may afford – one must *carry out* something. But is not this ignoring the fact that art-making never just ‘carries out’? The work *itself* presents further accusations (whether intended or not).

Unlike most scientific work, the ‘practice’ of art-making is one not providing rigorous proof of a theory, or evidencing of an initial accusation – the work *itself* presents further accusations (whether ‘intended’ or not). Even work in which an attempt at conceptual rigor is presented, one is still able to ask the question: ‘why am I being shown conceptual-

rigor-as art?’ This is the reflexivity of art-making differentiating it from most scientific enquiry.

In art-making, the use of ‘practice’ (as a *carrying out*) seems to be a contraction from the more fitting, but seldom used ‘praxis’ (a *doing*). However, can we reassert the theory-practice binary on a supra-structural level and think a possible writing by artists through the perspective of writing and art-making as integrated *theoretical* praxes? The relatively recent prevalence of ‘theoretical’ sub disciplines in other fields, such as theoretical physics and theoretical mathematics present models for praxes emphasizing not only the prior stage of discovery of theoretical work – the accusation of something within reality being different – but the *perpetually* speculative nature of the work therein. Another discipline constellated with art-making is philosophy – both have reflexive fundamentals, philosophy being the praxis (and it *should* be a praxis) of thinking about thinking. Whilst philosophy (and occasionally art-making) have been bound to notions of truth, it is the use of writing as a way of philosophizing that is of note here, not the

Whilst both art making have been bound to notions of truth, I want to consider here the use of writing as a way to perpetually speculate.

Philosophers may deal with much-argued historical territories, but

the processual, ‘worked’ basis of writing’s asymptotic core,

Examination of the *ways of thinking* in conjunction with a commitment to rigor should be propagated *in lieu* of direct referencing to other thinkers and their inherited concepts and an alination with the requirements of institutions.

However, a further examination of the stakes and consequences of such an activity being facilitated are important in order for us to actually imagine an environment where Artist-Writing existed. I will try to expand on some of these thoughts in the space below.

(17.03.13 - 16:40)

Stuck.

Sandra Mujinga

Just one question, is it swagged up? Like, you know what I mean, no emo artist here. Could the artist be an American Idol host? No room for Askew. Ryan Seacrest, sorry, red mark under spelling, I meant Seacrest, functions as a perfect template. Not only because his annual salary is 65 million¹ and that there is this enormous praise and distaste for him online, but because he can be the lifesaver and the death bringer. What kind of art would he make? And the more important question, is there a game character modelled after him?

I am never synchronized with America, the results are already there, but I still have the urge to pretend as if my saying (since I can't vote) has an importance. The transparency in American Idol 2013 is something that I have never experienced in the show before, where all of the judges are honest and say that some of the contestants are only good looking, salable and marketable. It is this thin line between being authentic, and the contestants being the judges first person characters, with combat attributes, ready to collect anything necessary to win a game that makes me cry also Keith Urban. One does not see the desks of the judges, sometimes they scribble, but I frankly would not get surprised if the game got expanded, and 3D polygon monsters were included.

Right now it is 9:00 am in Las Vegas, and the participants in American Idol are hopefully awake and motivated for the continuous long journey ahead of them. Standard time. The thought that after seeing an one hour and 4 minutes episode, progressive, high-end HDTV, my eyes haven't perceived the 32 minutes of blackness, (persistence of vision indeed), is not easy to deselect. Like Sherlock Holmes, building a useful and hardcore hard drive, where it is necessary to forget useless things. What remains has to have a purpose. The higher the frame rate the more darkness we conquer, we make it invisible, we make darkness invisible.

There has to be a parallel discourse. Dj Sprinkles says in a beautiful interview conducted by San Francisco Bay Gurdian (SFBG), that we in our 20's are all about sharing, but there are some things that we have to strategically keep away from the web²She worries, I worry too, I share my worries, I give I give. We continuously dig up treasures, and now we should worry about the hiding spot. The sample you have laid out will be there to be used, whether you are aware of it or not. Finding hiding spots.

1. <http://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/actors/ryan-seacrest-net-worth/>
2. <http://www.sfbg.com/noise/2013/02/21/nite-trax-lost-mix-dj-sprinkles>

It is not the "everything has been done" thing, it is the exercise thing, stop watching American Idol and getting out of the couch, believing that by getting out of the house the sun will shine. And when it does you will experience true beauty, not art, where art shares the ground on which you stand³. Beauty that you would never want to change, beauty with no 5 mistakes you have to find, and get a prize. This reconfiguration of the relationship between the self and the sun, hopefully fundamentally changes only you and not the sun.

Digital media which is gradually replacing the live within the cultural economy⁴. I can't help but think of the time, the seconds and minutes I use to type a sentence while thinking it.

As you have probably noticed, on facebook chat the other person can see that you have read the message and that you are typing "...". She is typing "...", and the sense of time is lost in this too, where the other person keeps on erasing the sentence, or when you for instance get : "hi!" and it has taken ages for the person to write this. Being on the other side, is of course different: you try to write fast, aware that you are still typing... There is no distinction between mediatized forms and liveness. Not sure if you are still writing or facebook got stuck.⁵

Overflowing the boundaries, the meaning of governing. Could our birth as human beings be accidental, is it really a condition merely of time?⁶ It all begins enthusiastically, I buy you a cup of coffee and we part our ways. Feedback, and input, and the placements and the positioning. **Still typing.** It all would have been so easy if Zoanette Johnson went on. She could have continued to carry the struggle, and I would always be late, cry when it all had passed. Now the tone has changed drastically. Yet again, what's love got to do with it?

Moments of synchronization, civil disobedience. I am writing this on wednesday the 6th of march the day after Hugo Chavez died (is it the same time in Venezuela?) I keep looking at footage of him on youtube, and I think he was a funny man. The funny man who probably also had sleepless nights. And I can't help but think, that if he permitted himself to be funny, I can be funny too, I can make a laugh, I can make funny art, and this is ok, because I will continue to be taken seriously as an artist..⁷

3. Manuela Ammer The pedestal problem, <http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/features/das-sockelproblem/?lang=en>

4. So 90's

5. Meme generator, <http://memegenerator.net/instance/36022885>

6. Kevin Warwick, from Cyborg 1.0, 1998

7. Musicvideo for De La Soul by Deborah Schamoni with Judith Hopf, Ninja Pleasure, Max Sens, Roman Zulac Kamera : Micah Magee
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxwjnrQt4Q>

'Parallax'

As a creative practitioner one tumbles through the ever-present mediation of reality, forced to consider oneself open, hypothetically, to the symptoms of one's *presencing*. A paradoxical symptom of creative practice today leaves man caught; to be transfixed by the whirring wheels of contemporary thinking/looking/debating/deliberating forever riding the crest of a wave of current issues. Is one alienated, by proxy, from forcing/working/doing/forging/digging? Or does ones commitment to continuous, unrestricted, radical making, deprive 'us' of the space or conditions needed for thorough reflection?

The blur that is the mediated *present age* is the result of unrestricted capital-controlled gain. This has left a public drowning in a miasma of never ending *opportunity*. This paradox fits an age consumed by suspended realism, where money has become the perfect analogy for life; a meaningless substitution, always at one remove from content, substance and matter.

Life's remarkable natural course has proved and will prove again that the pendulum will swing. With it we will see the triumph of the *carnal*, forcing man face to face with the concrete, the necessary contact with the physical. Unromantic, unrelenting, almost intangible encounters with the real. At times so subtle and profound, so fantastically profane, we will wonder how we have only just begun to see.

An idea, given body in the world by my committing it to paper, more, or less, permanent? Anchored yes, to specific words, ~~my words~~. Yet the idea, the imagined, impenetrable thing remaining free.

Language of want

- who has seen a vehicle dangerously metering in to the preconceived swamp

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Dear Phil,

I regret to inform you that I have not been able to produce anything for the publication deadline for "Writing and Indifference". I aimed to set aside some time when I was in Scotland but the trip became too busy (I should really have know that would happen). I made a few attempts in the past week but it became clear that I was forcing some words out because a deadline was fast approaching. Indeed, it seemed as if I was perpetrating the dubious sort of writing that this very publication hopes to provide an alternative to. Namely the 'exhibition text', which remarkably always fits on one side of A4, stands in a pile at the opening and was likely written hurriedly at some point during the previous 48hrs. I just couldn't do it, it felt like a sham and would certainly not have been worthy of inclusion in what I think will be a great book. I offer my apologies and hope that you understand that it is not out of indifference to your project but rather due to a sincere interest in it that I have failed to produce a piece of writing for it.

Best regards,

Kevin



Keith Allan	www.keithallan.info
G. Douglas Barrett	www.gdouglasbarrett.com
Owen Gurrey	o.gurrey@jacobs-university.de
Philip Gurrey	www.philipgurrey.com
Johnny Herbert	www.johnny-herbert.com
Victor Boye Julebæk	www.victorjulebaek.dk
Sukaina Kubba	www.sukainakubba.com
Kevin Malcolm	www.kevinmalcolm.com
Sandra Mujinga	s.mujinga@gmail.com
David Pocknee	www.davidpocknee.com
Apichaya Wanthiang	piyamake@hotmail.com
