Dario Zeo
Passages

This book is an artist book, not a philosophical essay. This book is a philosophical essay, not only an artist book. This book is an artist book containing a philosophical and political enquiry. This book is a philosophical and political enquiry containing statements about aesthetics and art. This book is a book of theory discussing practice. This book pertains to a form of artistic practice which involves theory.

Dario Zeo (*1986) is an artist who lives and works in Basel and Bern. He is active in the fields of conceptual art and language art, digital literature as well as visual poetry. Text is Zeo's primary medium. He understands text as context, as part of a cultural environment that we participate in shaping. More: www.dariozeo.com

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edition—V.I.B. 001

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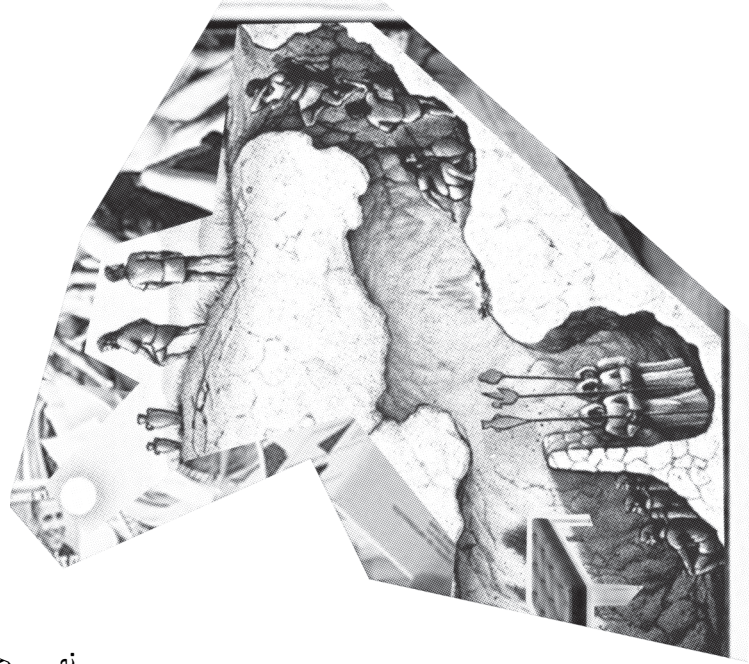
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Dario,

Thanks for Passing the Ingredients!

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Claims like these could appear contradictory, but they all apply to Dario Zeo's *Passages*, not only because this work embraces contradiction, not only because it is at once a theory book and an artist book, a little philosophical-political treatise and a poetics essay, but also, and more profoundly, because it aims at circumscribing a mobile notion of truth by exposing it to the instability of artistic practice. As the author explains, the difference between science and art is that art can at any time redefine its laws or, as Zeo puts it, the rules of its own game—a keyword in this book's vocabulary, that the author openly borrows

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from Wittgenstein, with all the implications readers of Wittgenstein are aware of, and that are reminded here especially at the beginning of the text. Zeo explores contingency, and the contingency of truth(s), through a varied and articulated reflection upon the limits of language, which then also impacts, towards the end, our understanding of the artistic canon and of the social and political roles of art institutions and market patterns.

Passages: a Benjaminian term, as the author (or should we say the passeur, as transmitter of content) does not fail to remind us. The passage, here too, is to be intended both in geographical and textual senses. Dario takes us through some of his favourite quotes, and while doing so he also explores mental as much as physical places. But a passage is also a non-place, or rather a place that is not fixed, where the conceptual and methodological productive instability that is proper to this book can be staged and realised. The passage is where ideas and considerations come and go, where art meets theory, practice meets politics, where heterogeneous points of view shake hands before departing again in

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different directions. In the passages important, albeit ephemeral, events occur; events that are bound to the passage of time, to the beauty of the contingency and the uncertainty toward which this book courageously takes us, inviting us to enter the passages themselves without prejudices, to be open to the unexpected encounters one can make in the backstreets of thought, where things are dimmer and less clear, yet as such more open to interpretation and possibility.

This is what the present book actually does: it opens possibilities for thought and action, therefore also from this perspective it can be experienced as an artwork, almost as an interactive installation, or as a thought experiment or, why not, a conceptual game— inasmuch as it passes its passages to us as the slabs are passed in Wittgenstein's emblematic passage of the *Philosophical Investigations*, representing the philosopher's constructivist conception of the language game as a form of life. In other words we, as readers, are requested to do something with these passages, to build something, to cook something for our minds. The building, nonetheless, can be open and unstable, when not dysfunctional: Zeo's textual material is

freely organised, so much that when talking with Dario about his project the gesture of kneading dough came up as a possible description of his way of proceeding. This gesture, I believe, shows the productive chaotic patterns of quotation and argumentation in which this book/piece engages, on top of its constructivist behaviour.

To this extent, *Passages* proposes a renewal of conceptual and relational art through the encounter between theory and artistic practice, an approach that is distinctive of Dario's work and also dear to the author of this foreword. Theory is redefined by art, it is not a sequence of logical and falsifiable claims, but an open investigation of truth, where truth becomes in the process of being sought and thought, rather than being fixed in an autonomous conceptual apparatus. The theory that is practised in this artist book is exposed to the multiplicity of contingency, it is 'dirtied' and destabilised by its own relation to practice, and yet the author doesn't give up looking for the best ingredients for his conceptual dough, he doesn't give up looking for forms of knowledge he knows he won't find in a static position, rather always passing by,

always moving in the passage, so quickly
that we can never definitely grasp them.

Concepts and ideas themselves are then
interwoven and kneaded in new ways by this
kind of approach, they are open to desire,
uncertainty, redefinition, possibility, they
oscillate and take unpredictable directions
in their passing, just like in the quantum
principle of entanglement, that is also men-
tioned in the book. The entanglement pre-
supposes that the relation among particles
is multiple and probabilistic, thus unpredict-
able until it is measured. The readers will
find back such multiplicity and unpredict-
ability in the articulation of the conceptual
framework that constitutes the unstable and
open architecture of Zeo's textual operation.
Textual, but also visual: the images engen-
der a break in the text, a series of visual pas-
sages whose effect is to provisionally inter-
rupt the flow of language, but also to guide
us in the understanding of the text itself
by adding some meaningful and revealing
toppings to the textual dough in which we
find ourselves, thus helping us to create our
own passages, tunnels, warpings in space-
time from which unexpected and, precisely,
unpredictable connections can rise.

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When we get to the end of this piece in the form of a book, there is a certain feeling of gratitude, stemming, as far as I am concerned, from the fact that our passeur was able to gather in a synthetic and passionate way so many different layers of thought, exploring crucial questions about our contemporary understanding of aesthetics, politics, history, and language; and also, and above all, from the confirmation this book gives us that writing is the product of collectiveness, that not a single book could ever be written without the participation of multiple communities that inhabit language and images, textuality and intertextualities. We, as a community, belong to this book, as much as it belongs to us, to the ever evolving possibilities of our linguistic and communicative processes. Once we overcome a rigid and individualistic conception of authorship and readership, as Dario Zeo's work brings us to do, we become all at once, and all together, passages and passeurs.

Alessandro De Francesco
August 2022

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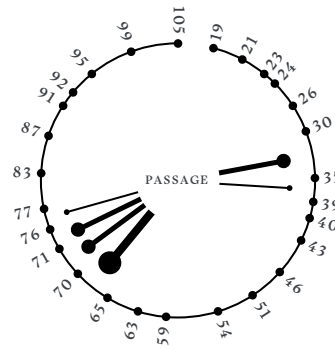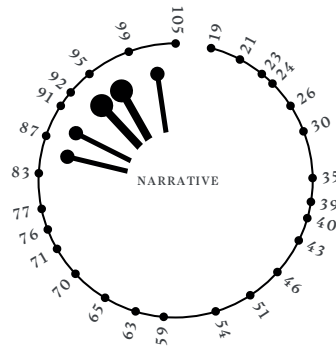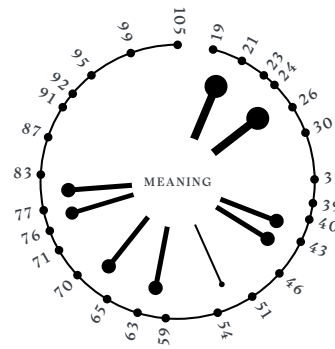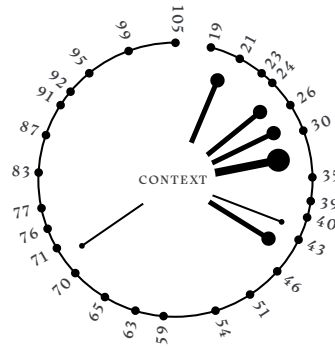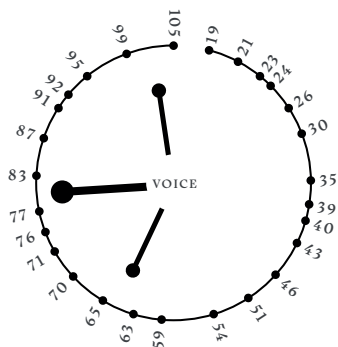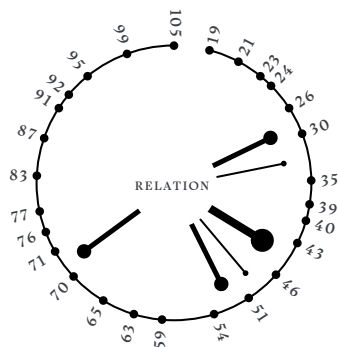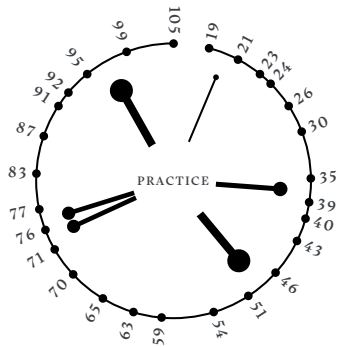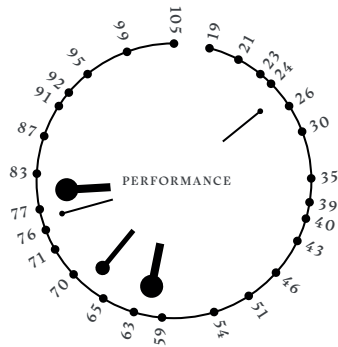
Introduction

Until now I have never come across a consistent universal explanation or theory that could explain all the phenomena of reality. And as an atheist, the ones available didn't convince me either. Anyway, I stumbled upon some non-structural, non-linear, non-hierarchic, non-metaphysical ideas—all concepts of *inconsistency* in a way. And these ideas have strongly influenced my thinking and working. Most of them conceive reality as a relational affair—in one word, it's about context, 'to weave together.'[1] Context means to me the (impossible) attempt to consider everything that *weaves*: every utterance, every sign, every scratch that's left behind. Text is a fabric of interwoven ideas encoded in language.

Of course, all the followed paths are related, they share common passages. But importantly, the text is not about *a message*. Despite *having linear* order of sorts, *Passages* is not required to be read from the first to the last page. Just like reading a newspaper you can set your own priorities on the articles. Although in this case there aren't any articles or chapters, only a bunch of passages. However, there is an index which should provide certain guidance and overview by its keywords.

It's about asking questions without expecting answers. The text is no *complete collection*, there are many more passages to be explored. I just keep following traces and try to interconnect thoughts to find some exciting *collisions*—it's not at all about universality. And I am aware that writing in English as a non-native speaker might give the impression that I'm in pursuit of some form of universality. But the decision was purely pragmatic: The access to texts as a writer and reader is easier in English, that's the only reason.

Oh, and speaking of sources: quoting *important works from important authors* can be problematic, I know that. In my opinion it's really about the thoughts themselves, not about who has uttered them—therefore I don't really need someone's authorisation and the authors were moved to the end of the book. This is based on my general understanding of writing: every text is an assemblage of other texts, nobody is writing *out of him or herself*— there is no ingenious author. That thought helped me to quote—oftentimes from dubious, privileged white Europeans, mostly patriarchal men. However, as mentioned, I tried to emphasise the thoughts, not the personalities. It is about what a thought means in today's context. In that sense the quoted authors just *happened* to be the writers of the texts that were useful to me. This applies similarly to the gender of described figures: the female author or the male artist for example are just placeholders to elaborate a thought; it is not about *this* figure, but about *a* figure.

The images work in parallel with the text; they are an attempt to tackle some thoughts from different directions. It is not a complete collection, many aspects are not covered and there are redundancies. Some of the images might make more sense than others, some are metaphors, some are just illustrations of a term from the text and, as with the texts, some pleasant collisions might happen while looking at them.

Sometimes the ice I am walking on is thin but I think in the arts we must expose ourselves to contribute to a discourse. Or seen from the reader's point of view, 'A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.'[2]

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Passages

I want to talk about the notion of MEANING. In *Philosophical Investigations*[3] we find a remarkable shift in perspective from MEANING *being given* to *being the use*—an idea that mainly emphasises the actual playing (moving) of the players within the GAME (of language). It's the application, the actual uttering that's considered to be the MEANING *of things*. It might seem a little strange at first sight, but nonetheless let's have a look at this nice example: 'Let us imagine a language [that] is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones [...] A calls them [the stones] out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. [...] is the call *Slab!* [...] a sentence or a word? If a word, surely it has not the same MEANING as the like-sounding word of our ordinary language, for in [the example above] it is a call. [...] you can call *Slab!* a word and also a sentence; [...] Because if you shout *Slab!* you really mean: *Bring me a slab!*. But how do you do this: how do you mean [!] that while you say *Slab!*? Do you say the unshortened sentence to yourself? And why should I [as addressee] translate the call *Slab!* into a different expression in order to say [to myself] what someone means by it? [...] But now it looks as if when someone says *Bring me a slab!* he could mean this expression as one long word corresponding to the single word *Slab!*. Then can one mean it sometimes as one word and sometimes as four? And how does one usually mean it?'[4]

An understanding exterior to words themselves seems to be going on there. I think we could find an explanation for that in hermeneutics: There seems to be some kind of *overlapping horizons*—an understanding based on similar personal experiences. So in the example above, B seems to understand A's command

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Slab! as the full sentence *Bring me a Slab!* But maybe that's too simple: B understands that A expects him to lift that object (the Slab), using his body, and transport it from its current place closer to A—so A does not have to do it himself. And the understanding of the whole situation (not only the words) is based on B's working experience, that is: work can be broken down into separate steps (transporting and placing the slab) executed by different people. But crucially, that CONTEXTUAL knowledge and the full MEANING of A's command is not *included* within the simple command *Slab!* but it is presupposed. Maybe one could say it is an understanding based on a similar cultural experience—triggered by words—rather than an understanding directly evoked by the use of words. By *culture* I mean a CONTEXTUAL agreement/understanding in a very broad sense PRACTISED by people (players).

For example the culture of construction (professional culture), the culture of shared language, the culture of being human, et cetera. 'Someone who did not understand our language [...], who had fairly often heard someone giving the order: *Bring me a slab!*, might believe that this whole series of sounds was one word corresponding perhaps to the word for *building-stone* in his language. [...] Either the same thing [*Bring me a slab!*] may go on in him, or something different. For what goes on in you when you give such an order? Are you conscious of its consisting of four words while you are uttering it? [...] one might object here: *You grant that the shortened and the unshortened sentence have the same sense. What is this sense, then? Isn't there a verbal expression for this sense?*'[5] If there is apparently such a struggle to find words, doesn't that simply prove that the MEANING does not *lie within* them?

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In the same text we find an open question that really gets to the point: 'In Russian one says *stone red* instead of *the stone is red*; do they feel the copula to be missing in the sense, or attach it in thought?'[6] This moment of CONTEXTUAL shift (from English to Russian) clearly shows that the different languages are simply not the same GAME. Although being similar GAMES, it seems that they are locally embedded. Their legitimacy, their rules, their MEANING is not absolute. There is no universal *gameness*. Of course, different GAMES are related but there is no common origin, no *original* GAME (of languages). So when we think about notions like GAMES (and *actual* GAMES of course), MEANING, language and culture, we talk about things that do not just *appear on earth*. They are not *given* but developed and PRACTISED by people as rule-based social interactions. One language is not better than another, neither *purer* or *more genuine* because there is no common origin. There is no universal root, there is no God.

———

Let's talk about GAMES—GAMES in a very broad sense. How do they work? First there need to be rules. The rules of a GAME, however, do not legitimate themselves as rules, but the legitimation is an agreement of the players who are willing to play this GAME. The players do not necessarily invent the rules but they generally stick to them. If there are no rules, there is no GAME. It is that simple. The slightest modification of a rule alters the nature of the *original* GAME and therefore the whole GAME itself.[7] And we have this simple but crucial thought: 'Every utterance should be thought of as a *move* in a GAME.'[8] So we look at a modular, artificial

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system (the GAME) with rules, tokens and strategies, but actually it is all about the players who play. The rules are not sacrosanct, they are not *just there* but made by the players. Here we have this situation with empowered actors and no metaphysical law. The functions of the GAME (board GAME, card GAME, ball GAME…) are synthetic. Even the *place* of the GAME is based on an artificial distinction: there is the decision from the start (by separation) what should be part of the GAME and what not? We agree to isolate a certain aspect of reality as *one system* (the GAME). We decide to play it, to understand it, to compare it to other GAMES et cetera. Of course, we know that the separation of a GAME from the rest of reality is an illusion. Yet it is precisely this awareness of artificiality that allows us a certain kind of thought. And I would like to change the example here, to one where the same thought applies.

It is the assumption that linguistic signs in a broad sense (among others) do not *contain* stable information to *represent* an absolute value outside of themselves. The same applies in *actual* GAMES. As the *value* of the jack of spades is relevant only within card GAMES. Otherwise it is just a picture on a card. And in different card GAMES the jack has different roles, values et cetera. With this (post-structuralist) idea of instability in mind we can understand language as a dynamic tool of communication between its users (PERFORMERS), rather than a rigid network for the transmission of denotative information with stable signs and fixed values. Of course this is not a new idea but I believe it to be crucial for the arts. And that is because the very moment we consider a referential system to be artificially created, a huge number of possibilities arise. This *space of uncertainty* is where artistic potential lies.

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There is no 'passing of tokens from hand to hand'[9] but only a CONTEXTUAL, conflictual and endlessly complex RELATIONSHIP between players with interests. The token's function is defined by the rules of the GAME, it is not given. And these rules are based on the agreement of the players. Let's assume a group of players agree on the rules of a GAME and on how this GAME is played—the so-called unwritten rules or habits. We could call this a culture of play. All values, functions and rules regarding this GAME and the tokens are valid only within this specific setup of play. So obviously all values, on which we base our thinking and acting (within the GAME) are completely artificial, not predefined. I am not saying these artificial values are worthless or have no effect in reality, far from that. I'm just saying that they haven't always been there. Our GAME, literally and metaphorically, is part of reality. Most importantly it forms reality by having real consequences. The point is that there is no pre-existing metaphysical law or structure defining the reality we live in. And since there is no fundamental set of rules underneath our local culture (of playing), there can be no God—neither in a teleological nor in a theological sense. There is no universalism—at least not one that we would be able to understand.

So at the end of the day the foundation we base our moves on is synthetic and, therefore, changeable. And I think at this point art comes into play. Art has strongly dealt with this fundamental questioning of *rules* (in the broadest sense) most evidently in the twentieth century. Especially because art is also about MEANING. What can a book, a work of art, a simple

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word mean if the *values* an utterance *is based on* are
completely artificial? Or otherwise, how can one speak
if there are no fixed references? And more importantly:
How are these unsteady references influenced or altered?

———

Let's go back to the idea of 'the MEANING being the use.'[10]
On a material level it seems to contradict other assump-
tions mentioned in this text. Doesn't this idea some-
how reject the material properties of signs in general?
In this regard I found an interesting PASSAGE about
conceptual art, 'the subject matter of conceptual in-
vestigations is the MEANING of certain words and
expressions—and not the things and states of affairs
themselves about which we talk when using those words
and expressions.'[11] The aesthetic qualities of signs used
in conceptual art are usually regarded as unimportant,
'the object's existence or functioning in an art CONTEXT
is irrelevant to the aesthetic judgment.'[12] And the func-
tioning (the use of the signs) is exactly the place of
interest in conceptual art. That consequently means
that the aesthetic properties of a work of art are simply
a matter of taste.[13] I tend to disagree on such strict
separation of materiality and MEANING. Because *one*
aspect simply cannot exist without *the other*.

  At this point I must clarify some terms for myself:
1) I don't think that MEANING is the same as *represen-
tationalism*. *Provoking* something outside of itself
(a thought) is not the same as representing. Represen-
tation means to substitute a *fact of reality* with a sign.
It could also mean to attribute to a sign the power
to *undoubtedly identify* a bombproof fact of reality
outside the sign itself. Separating representation from

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MEANING does solve the problem in my case, sort of.
2) I do see the term material in a broader sense than
just *actual matter*. A spoken word is also a kind of
material. A gesture, a noise, light and a thought are all
material too. And yes, material has aesthetic properties,
I agree with that. But my artistic interest lies not in
some sort of material fetish or taste. This leads me to
my next point. 3) I have a feeling that *inevitable* aesthetic
properties of an object/sign (the *sheer material*) and
aesthetic design beyond functionality are not the same
thing. I don't think the text above talks about general
physical attributes but about design for the sake of
design—or taste in the arts. 4) Materiality and MEANING
do not correspond to the old dispute about form versus
content in my mind. Because that distinction only
works in a representational mindset which we can
easily leave behind us. However, I think there are many
interesting *hidden layers* in aesthetics. Aesthetics always
talk about a certain CONTEXT and time they exist in.
And their physical presence, their *appearance* is what
we are confronted with. Or to put it otherwise, the
material aspect of signs is everything we have as a
starting point. We PERFORM (with) it. In that sense
yes, the MEANING *is the use*, I agree. But also *without
materiality no thought* I'd say. And when I think of
aesthetics I do not mean the *pleasure of senses* but
aesthetics as an inevitable part of materialisation. A
piece is simply not conceivable without material expres-
sion. Ideas do not get transferred from one head into
another without any kind of materialisation in between,
it just doesn't work like that. MEANING is of course not
found *within the sign itself* but in the interaction with
it. So signs have this ambiguous and exciting existence
of materiality and unsteady, immaterial MEANING.

<center>*23*</center>

Interesting art encourages us to interact, to PERFORM it, to get carried away, to expose ourselves to it.

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'The illusion of desire has been lost in the ambient pornography and contemporary art has lost the desire of illusion. In porn, nothing is left to desire [...] in the sense that it now has nothing to do with the illusion of desire, only with the hyperreality of the image. The same is true for art, which has also lost the desire for illusion, and instead raises everything to aesthetic banality.'[14] Signs no longer point to something beyond themselves. What's left is absolute transparency. That's how hyperreal signs exist as objects of reality—they don't serve representational purposes but only are themselves. Unlike abstract representational forms (like cubism for example), hyperreal signs are completely void of illusion. There is no RELATION between the sign and reality. The energy of difference—that is RELA-TION—is lost and so is poetic potential.[15] But without RELATIONS, without poetry, the hyperreal sign is simply another economic object generating capital without necessarily offering any intellectual use. It is just enter-taining for a while. These contextless signs rule out the work of CONTEXTUALISATION—the audience's job. The hyperreal sign is a useless obscenity. It's like hang-ing an *art print*—a cheap reproduction of an extremely popular motive—above my couch just to cover the empty wall.

At least there is something there now one might say. I disagree. The empty wall was better because it would allow me to imagine something being there, which is in a way a creative act. Instead, staring at something

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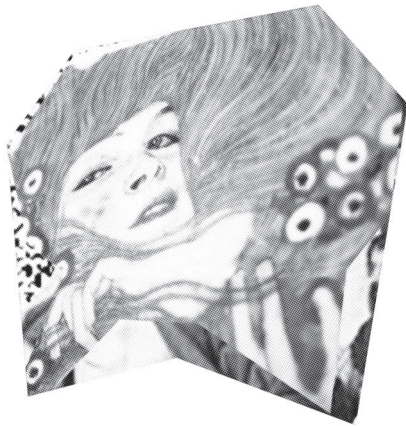
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completely void of significance doesn't even allow me to project my thoughts, it just makes me feel numb. 'In this unreality of porn, in this insignificance of art, is there a negative enigma, a mysterious thread [...]? If everything becomes too obvious to be true, maybe there still is a chance for illusion. [...] [And] what could art possibly mean in a world that has already become hyperrealist, cool, transparent, marketable?'[16]

Of course it's not about representationalism. It is the quest for artistic signs like letters, sounds, colours, lines that can speculate about reality. Speculation is an active process. It's not me on the one hand and a mute economical product on the other. Speculation is creation, it's about building realities. Signs should make me catch a glimpse of some unknown CONTEXTUAL areas; they should make me relate. Glimpsing means to connect; it means to put into perspective—a perspective that is somehow specific yet wobbly at the same time. This moment can be created by a piece of art. It can be reached by reading a book et cetera.

There is no metaphysical truth and no way of reaching it through signs—of course there isn't because there never has been. But that doesn't mean things are meaningless. On the contrary. It is our perception and intellectual work, our RELATIONS, which generate... sense. Sense does not *lie within signs*, sense is created in the interaction with them—signs that are related to a differentiated perception of reality. And what we develop out of these interactions as artists might be speculative, not factual. Nonetheless, it inscribes itself into life.

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I'd like to address the issue of understanding—understanding in the sense of passing knowledge from one person to another through signs. My general idea of signs is that they are neither *containers* for things nor *representations* of things. So there must be something else, some kind of basic (cultural) precondition to understand each other. Imagine people talking to each other in completely different languages—it has happened to me more than once. In such a situation it is still possible to somehow communicate (of course) by referring to other systems of signs than spoken language. One could use numbers, forms, colours, pointing gestures and other mimetic acts for example. I will make a little excursion into hermeneutics. Hermeneutics claim that unconsciously there is already an understanding at work even when we talk about the most *obvious* signs like a red traffic light, for instance. The information, *stop*, does not *lie within* the red bulb itself. But it is part of the common social agreement on traffic lights. The sign is just the trigger for a more complex, CONTEXTUAL knowledge that makes my particular understanding in that situation (and flowing traffic) possible.[17] In hermeneutics there is a distinction between knowledge and understanding. Knowledge (facts) is seen as mere information that can be *passed on* through signs—an idea that makes me raise at least one eyebrow, but let's stick to it for now. Understanding instead is considered a kind of knowledge in a *more fundamental* sense: it's not just grasping sheer factual information, it is the integration of facts into a meaningful (CONTEXTUAL) whole. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek term *hermeneuein*, which means *to utter* or *to explain*. Interestingly the Latin equivalent *interpretari* means, no surprise, *to understand* in spoken or written

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communication. And already we are into interpretation and the PERFORMATIVE role of the receiver (listener, viewer, …). But that's not all. In the Greek term the transmission of knowledge is considered a type of activity: understanding as an act of PASSAGE between parties. It is unclear whether the term *hermeneutics* actually refers to the figure of Hermes in Greek mythology. However, Hermes' symbolic role as the messenger between the gods and the people is a great image: he passes mysterious messages that had to be deciphered and interpreted by the humans. So we have the CONTEXT of the gods and the CONTEXT of humanity. And in between there is common ground (understanding), symbolised by the figure of Hermes. In this way the people in Greek mythology tried to make sense out of information coming from another world. And *to make sense*, or to interpret, simply meant to *confront* one's human experience and knowledge with the cryptic divine information. To find mutual ground in order to understand, that is the hermeneutic take.[18]

There is a famous quote from Aristotle in this regard: 'The true difference [between history and poetry] is that one relates [to] what has happened, the other [to] what may happen. Poetry [art], therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.'[19] I don't think poetry should be considered *higher* than history. However, there is an appealing thought when we combine *understanding* and *the universal* (poetry) as described: the universal can be reached only by interpretation. And interpretation is an activity that involves an interpreter, not a passive *being confronted* with information. To interpret means to mirror and integrate one's experience (of life) into art, for example.

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Hermeneutically speaking, when I approach information (facts) and integrate them into *a whole*, I can understand its MEANING and hence make sense of it. I want to add a funny example from *Incidences*,[20] one of my favourite books:

> The Red-Haired Man
> There was a red-haired man who had no eyes
> or ears.
> Neither did he have any hair, so he was called
> red-haired theoretically.
> He couldn't speak, since he didn't have a mouth.
> Neither did he have a nose.
> He didn't even have any arms or legs. He had no
> stomach and he had no back
> and he had no spine and he had no innards
> whatsoever. He had nothing at all!
> Therefore there's no knowing whom we are
> even talking about.
> In fact it's better that we don't say any more
> about him.[21]

Knowing just the one fact that this writing was done in the 1920s in the Soviet Union by a critical mind who was oppressed and persecuted by the regime, my understanding of the text completely changes. What didn't make much sense in the first place now integrates into *a whole*. But it's not about understanding history. It is not about getting to *the one* interpretation either. It's about the CONTEXTUALISATION—the RELATION to the here and now—that allows some relevant conclusions. Spontaneously thoughts cross my mind like *what is the value of a human life in a dictatorship?* Or *politics really matters*. That wasn't *actually* written in the text, right? But the fact that the author was prosecuted and not one of his texts has been published during his lifetime is

a strong indication that there is a political aspect to the text. What I find interesting regarding this example and art in general, is that hermeneutics stresses the practical aspect of understanding. And that reminds me of the fact that communication can use other systems than language in which the (sensing, thinking, living, …) body is always part of knowledge production. I am convinced that the role of the spectator, reader, listener and so on is an active (and crucial) one. Artistic works can have impact only in RELATION to personal and collective experience. If nobody engages with a piece, it's just dead. 'Interpretation is not an occasional luxury but our fundamental way of being in the world. We are *interpreting animals*.'[22]

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'The world is given to us already interpreted through language.'[23] As I stated elsewhere, signs like words do not represent things. They might refer to things. But since the world does not only consist of *things*, words need to have other characteristics too. Language can create abstract knowledge that is detached from physical objects. There are objects we call *chairs* but no one can point at *freedom* for example, and neither can a word. There exist *symbols of freedom*, sure. Just like the word *freedom*, these symbols are *placeholders* for a way bigger and more abstract idea. Such concepts, together with our habits, ethics, NARRATIVES, history et cetera, are passed on as a culture.[24] And since all cultural aspects resound in our PRACTISED language, I would agree with the idea that the world is already interpreted. Let me try to rephrase it. I would say that language (any system of signs) is a

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PRACTISED affair with traditional but evolving rules. And this PRACTICE is constantly *interpreting* the world; in the hermeneutic sense of integrating (knowledge) into a whole—the *whole* being, the CONTEXTUAL body of a community.

In *Philosophical Investigations* we can find a similar approach regarding abstract concepts (like *freedom*), 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.'[25] Abstract (ideal/metaphysical) ideas are considered a major problem of (language) philosophy in *Philosophical Investigations*. A philosopher does not find her way out of the problem by philosophising. She will always try to find the way out of a problem (puzzle) by turning it into another philosophical notion. A possible approach to *resolve* the problem of abstraction is to emphasise *ordinary* language. *Ordinary* in that case simply means words of an actual discursive field—terms that are PRACTISED and connected to life. In that sense I'd say yes, it is possible to *approach* abstract ideas, but only in their constant adaptation (use).

Even *distinct* words are always discursive. They sometimes belong to different sets of rules: *chair* has a different MEANING when we refer to the congress or our living room. And the *same word* has different equivalents in different languages with different implications. The form and the function of chairs are not the same in Japan as in Central Europe for instance. That is because we have different cultures of sitting. In this example, a passed-on interpretation (precondition) is already present in the use of language.

An important artwork that directly addresses the issue of abstraction (and even this particular object) mentioned above is *One and Three Chairs* from 1965

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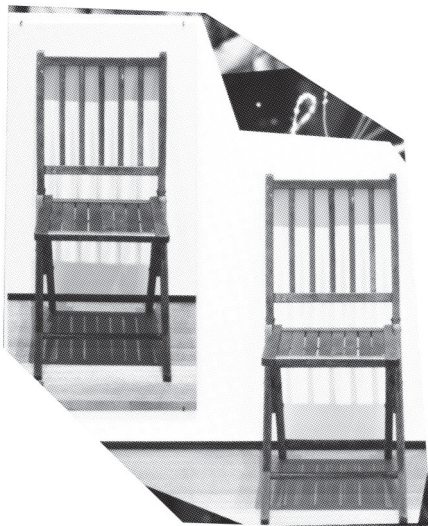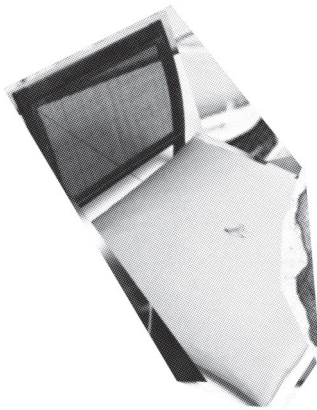
by Joseph Kosuth. I believe that the *trinity* of chairs is a direct reference (critique) to semiotics. And I'm sure we can think of *many more chairs* than these three.

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The following statements were made by an astrophysicist regarding the *edges* of a black hole. Studying the phenomena around a black hole allows some conclusions about the black hole itself. Scientists compare these phenomena to similar phenomena, which are not influenced by a black hole. So by knowing *regularity* and comparing it to *irregularity* they can speculate about the *force* that affects the changes. In the example below the scientist refers to the metaphor of a *sentence, whose words became mixed up* in describing the effect of the black hole. By knowing the common syntactic rules, one can reconstruct the *original* sentence. And then, conclusions about the *encryption process* (the effect of the black hole) can be made—how the sentence got mixed up. 'So we can take that string of meaningless symbols and reverse that encryption process and go back to the [...] MEANING of the sentence. So that is what it means to get out information of a black hole [...] If you don't know the encryption process you think you've lost information but once you know the laws [...] you can recover the *original* information.'[26] With artistic speculation, a similar process is going on. As a spectator I deal with what I have in front of me and I apply the cultural and social rules of CONTEXTUALISATION (reverse the encryption) to gain more information. More importantly, there seems to be the overall assumption beforehand that signs can tell us something *beyond themselves*, something about the

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encryption processes. But there is another interesting correspondence between art and black holes: There is never a complete revelation (of the unknown, the unseen, the unspoken, et cetera) only a processual approach.

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'A book exists only through the outside and on the outside.'[27] We might be looking at a similar thought here as described by hermeneutics: the MEANING of a sign always lies in its RELATIONAL outside. And this outside, the CON-TEXT, is a local (not universal) cultural embedding. '[W]hen one writes, the only question is which other machine [CONTEXT] the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into to work [make sense]. Kleist and a mad war machine, Kafka and a most extraordinary bureaucratic machine [...] Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology.'[28] Ideology is a very interesting term here, 'Philosophy of the mind which derives knowledge from the senses.'[29] The old Greek interpretation of ideology emphasises the study of ideas as an activity that directly involves the body. In that sense I would argue that literature (signs) has a lot to do with ideology. As from this perspective, ideology could be that *outside*, the CONTEXT—in the sense that MEANING can only unfold by connecting to an environment (through our senses). This thought is, I believe, a strong contrast to the statement from *A Thousand Plateaus*, where I assume that ideology refers to a 'systematic set of ideas or a political doctrine,'[30] a more recent adaptation.

I would like to differentiate two aspects regarding the contemporary interpretation of the term *ideology*:
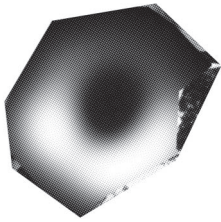
1) I believe, that a text itself, its ideas and words can never be ideological; they do not *derive from one ideological, dogmatic source* but from many different VOICES. 2) On the other hand I think that in its function a text can of course be ideological: it can be related to an ideological, dogmatic environment. And political ideologies very much rely on texts that (allegedly) legitimise their power. In this case the text simply becomes a tool of instrumentalisation.

Therefore it highly depends on how one defines the term *ideology*, from what angle it is seen. There is always a reality, that gives a word its MEANING. For example, I can think of an ideological regime that oppresses people right now. But I can also, from a mainly historical and theoretical standpoint, think of the etymological MEANING of *ideology* in Greece many centuries ago. These two *situations of ideology* couldn't be more different. The great discrepancy (gap) is a potential that lies in language—and it can be used in artistic PRACTICE.

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Talking about gaps, I'd like to address a classical philosophical problem. One of the most fundamental philosophical gestures, which is to 'open up a radical gap in the very edifice of the universe, the *ontological difference*, the gap between the empirical and the transcendental.'[31] If we stick to this idea for a moment, we there have the world of factual scientific statements on the one hand, based on (repeatable) experiments. These statements claim to be extremely factual and objective since they don't rely on people's opinion but upon *impersonal* measurements. On the other hand there is the transcendental

horizon, the world experienced through human perception. Philosophy ensures that these two areas never fully correspond to each other; neither is reality *solely created in our minds* (within the transcendental horizon) nor can we approach facts in any other way than through our senses and intellect. There is always that gap.[32] I think art often has similar tactics to philosophy regarding these two areas, that is to make sure that there is always a gap between experience and *the thing behind*. Or to use semiotic terms, to separate the sign from the referent. The idea of the world consisting of signs and referents does not satisfy me at all but that's not the point here. I think it's about the simple thought that *there is something more*—not necessarily *a thing behind* but *another level* of existence that I'd like to explore.

However artificial a gap might be, it is that tension which fuels philosophical and artistic questioning alike. And if I say gaps I think (in a general sense) of the tension between different aspects[33]/positions: the non-congruent as a fundamental state. I'll try to make a banal example: while looking at a portrait photo such as the one found in our passports, it's hard to argue that it is *just digital pixels printed on paper*. Sure, there is a layer of experienced materiality, but at the same time we will always and inevitably think and talk about someone, the *represented* but absent person. I'm convinced there are way more interesting questions to ask instead of *what does something represent?* I'd suggest others: *what are the ongoing ontological, political and cultural mechanisms related to that sign? What are the real consequences of a sign* (being an economical product for example) *regardless of how I relate to this sign on a very personal level?* This will certainly lead to a more complex answer, if to any at all. It will open up a discourse and

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connect to other aspects of life. Generally we could say that it is all about CONTEXTUALISING. CONTEXT, literally and metaphorically speaking, means to consider things being embedded in complex RELATIONSHIPS.

There is the endless discussion whether a distinction between sign and referent even exists (outside thinking and language). For that matter I'd like to address the fashionable notion of *entanglement*. It's a term that derives from quantum physics. Talking about gaps, we should have a short look into this field. In quantum physics there is the idea that the two sides of a coin, *facts* and *appearances*, cannot be separated from each other. Or more precisely, they are simply considered different aspects of the same existence. There is the famous experiment in quantum physics where particles behave as matter or waves, depending on whether we (humans/a machine) attend the experiment or not. The very *being* of these particles is fundamentally RELATIONAL (entangled); I, as an observer, am part of the existence of those particles and vice versa. So in that sense it seems impossible to isolate a sole aspect from reality and to look at it without CONTEXT—to separate matter from thought.[34]

I don't necessarily think the philosophical and the physical explanations described above talk about the same thing. But there might be a common assumption. Which would mean to see the world as a place where words and objects are not separate entities. It certainly leads to interesting thoughts, conceiving reality as a complex web of *different expressions of existence* with gaps and dynamic RELATIONS.

Generally speaking it is about the idea that MEANING, *values* and *facts* are not separately conceivable from *appearances*, *signs* and *bodies*. To *open up the gap* might

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just mean being aware of the RELATIONS *between every-thing*, to consider existence being a RELATIONAL affair.

Interestingly, we handle many situations of every-day life with words. And words themselves are unstable, CONTEXTUAL and RELATIONAL affairs—so there are always many gaps around. Maybe that's not true for the arts at first glance. But also in the arts, in one way or another (think of exhibition texts, reviews, discussions, interviews, …), words are involved. The philosophical gap can always be found.

And spontaneously I return to the assumption that *the use of the sign is the* MEANING—depending on the situation. Reconsidering the notion of GAMES, a GAME being an artificial system with a specific ruleset and played by the players, maybe philosophy is a GAME. And art could be a GAME as well. So in the whole sce-nario described above we could say: we play a GAME of gaps. Where we agree not to ever allow different aspects to fully converge. You might ask, *how come and which aspects are you talking about?* Well, I'd say the GAME of gaps *itself* is just a metaphor for what many artists (and theorists too, I guess) are doing all day long: taking two or more aspects of whatever subject one likes. Declare them incongruent. Then begin to carefully explore their RELATIONS, interactions and consequences. You'll most likely find a deep rabbit hole: that is the GAME of gaps.

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Let's imagine there was a *definition* GAME. The player's goal in the GAME would be to find incontestable, stable and distinct definitions for, let's say, a simple term like *apple*. A player could achieve that by finding compelling arguments that convince all the other players. How could
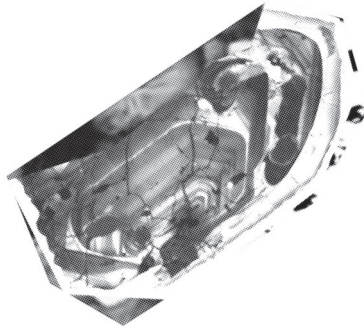
one ever achieve this? How could one's arguments ever stand on solid ground since there is no primary law, no solid foundation, no God? And to find a conclusive argument, some kind of *stable ground* would need to be established, an unquestionable ground that all players would have to agree on. Once such ground should be found (which of course is impossible) the active player would need to create a difference (gap)—a difference between the ground and the specific term. If I wanted to argue for the term *apple* I would probably base my arguments on the *solid ground of growing nature*. There is earth on which a tree grows and, eventually, apples will hang from the branches of that tree. So far so good. But there is a problem with the presupposition of *growing nature*: earth, sunlight, oxygen, water (conditions for growing) are not universal facts. Most probably there will never be an apple tree growing on the moon and so on. *Yes but obviously we are talking about conditions on earth*, you might say. And I would answer with a cheeky reply: *Then you should have said that beforehand, which particular part of the universe we are talking about.* It is impossible to define which *aspects* of the universe we are talking about and which ones we are not talking about, since we don't know the whole universe and all of its conditions. The definition GAME just changed its focus: we zoomed out to the biggest imaginable dimension. And we are not even talking about the apple yet. Alright, let's assume that we somehow managed to establish a universal presupposition—despite this being impossible. Then there would remain the problem of the gap between growing nature (the absolute) and the apple (the specific). How could I ever find a sound argument to clearly *separate* the apple from the tree? Isn't the apple itself an integral part of the tree? And

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isn't the tree inseparable from the earth it stands on? For instance, a raindrop that fell on the ground made its way through the roots of the tree and into the apple. And this apple mainly consists of water. Is the water that fell from the sky, therefore, the same as the fruit's main substance? And if so, why is it called *rain* first and *apple* later? What sounds quite hippiesque is just a thought experiment, a simple attempt in logic, doomed to failure. I'm not trying to say that *all is one*. And I don't think it is just a problem of language (being imprecise). I'm just trying to underline the difficulty to find distinct definitions. Things and words don't really have boarders. The definition GAME is very tricky—tricky but rich. We have to artificially disconnect and *stabilise terms* to negotiate them, knowing that (in reality) they are inseparable hubs of endlessly complicated RELATIONS. And our thoughts and languages cannot keep up with those RELATIONS.

Let's try the definition GAME again. Even before playing it we must admit that the artificial framework of the GAME itself is erratic. Regarding art however I see this as a potential, not a problem. The fundamental conditions of the GAME of art is that the set of rules are made to be altered. Artistic PRACTICE can continue, develop and connect with other ways of thinking, new ways of playing, new CONTEXTS. Art has the freedom to abandon tradition. Maybe that's the real benefit of PRACTISING art: to understand that there is always another GAME lying underneath or beside, ready to be played. Or in other words, the realisation that the structure of the GAME we play is itself part of a GAME. In fact, we could call that one (the meta-GAME) the definition GAME. Maybe the *true* definition GAME is the one where the foundations for all playing are defined.

Clearly, the definition GAME is one of my favourites. It is all about a certain mindset. The fact that I as an artist am constantly deciding what an aspect (token) is, what action I want to PERFORM (move) or which aspect of the setup (rules) needs to be changed, makes the definition GAME so attractive. Of course, all of this applies similarly to collective artistic works, not only to solo activities. And it does as well within other discursive groups, not only in the arts. In these cases we may use words like *agreement*, *culture*, *trend* or *vogue* to describe the definition GAME.

One more point I'd like to address: compared to science, artistic PRACTICE is much less *bound* to an overall institutional system of *primary rules* (methods, structures, tradition, …). Although every artistic work could be seen, categorised and embedded within the legacy of art history (and/or the art market) in some way, which is of course in some ways an institutional system. But I believe, that artistic PRACTICE is not primarily dominated by history, institutions, the market or trends. Artistic PRACTICE should be unpredictable and eager to play the definition GAME.

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One of the things that gets me thinking the most is of course the unsteadiness of so-called referents. Allegedly stable concepts like *the real*, *facts*, MEANING et cetera, are ambiguous—and that's why they're so compelling. Maybe words have looked the same (same order of letters) for a long time. In that sense yes, they might be stable. And dictionaries surely want to make us believe that they *are* in fact stable. However, words are constantly stuffed with different (CONTEXTUAL) MEANINGS.

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Let's have a look at two interesting terms that are traditionally opposed and regarded as incompatible: *the real* versus *the virtual*. 'Virtual Reality in itself is a rather miserable idea: that of imitating reality, of re-producing its [human] experience in an artificial me-dium. The reality of the Virtual, on the other hand, stands for the reality of the Virtual as such, for its real effects and consequences.'[35] You might say *well, that's just a word* GAME, and to some extent that might be the case. But to focus on the RELATIONSHIP of seem-ingly *opposed* terms as interdependent couples helps to undermine their authority and focus on the good stuff, the things going on in-between. It's not about *this is this* and *that is that*—having everything nicely separated, end of the story, no. It is about the mutual RELATION, about *opposed* terms just being the edges of the same thing.

Let's go back to the example above. The virtual is relevant as it has real consequences. Many aspects of daily life have digital avatars in order to handle things more efficiently. For example our *money* in online banking, the multiple avatars of ourselves on social media, sending emails and using the university intranet. Most purchasable products and every scene ever photo-graphed and published have multiple digital copies. These are just facts we are all familiar with. Again, it is not to highlight a distinction between the *real* and our *virtual bodies*. The interesting thing is that we base many relevant decisions—relevant to our *bodily* lives—on the virtual. Let's assume we buy a random product online. When we do so we most probably base our choice on a (probably modified) digital picture. And we are guided by a description where *someone* reviewed the product—who that VOICE is and what it stands for,

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that we don't know. Will our *real experience* with the real product be as we imagined beforehand while dealing with its avatar? We simply don't know. I'm not saying all the virtual clones of things are bad, that's not the point. I wanted to stress the fact that *the virtual* and *the real* in this example are two inseparable aspects of the same, very real action, an online purchase which leads to a real shipment. It is not *the appearance* on the one hand and the *the being* on the other.

Returning to art: the separation of content versus form still does not work since material always *inscribes content* and content always *requests materiality*. 'This brings us to the constitutive ambiguity of the RELATIONSHIP between actual and virtual: the human eye reduces the perception of light; it actualises light in a certain way [...], a rose in a different way, a bat in a different way... The flow of light *in itself* is nothing actual, but, rather, the pure virtuality [...]; on the other hand, the human eye expands perception—it inscribes [!] what it *really sees* into the intricate network of memories and anticipations.'[36] I want to add something here. Yes, the *flow of light* could be seen as purely virtual. To illustrate this more clearly, let's go one step further. We can think of frequencies of light which we cannot perceive as humans—the ones we can only experience when *translated* by tools. However, we agree on their existence. And as soon as we approach them with an instrument things start to change—the now visible frequencies of light (the translation) start having their own existence in *our* reality. So there is a mutual PER-FORMATIVE interaction between me, the spectator, and the *thing out there*. But it is not that clear any-more what is *out there* and what is *in here*. The posi-tions seem to oscillate. Hence, distinctions like *object*

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versus subject or *the virtual versus the real* get quite dubious—and that's where the fun starts.

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Looking at the RELATION between virtuality and reality and the real consequences of the virtual, we inevitably stumble upon *Simulacra and Simulation.*[37] To make a long story short: according to the text, late 20th-century society became so reliant on maps and models of reality that we completely lost contact with the *real world*. In fact, we substituted the real by its signs—the simulacra. That's kind of the baseline of the text.[38] 'The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory [...] that engenders the territory.'[39] To depict these phenomena, there are three different orders of simulacra described: 1) The first order we could describe as the pre-modern (before industrial revolution) simulacrum, it sticks to the questionable dichotomy of *the one reality* and *its signs*. A relatively simple mimetic sign of the real, a placeholder, that is recognisable as just an illusionary counterpart of reality—a landscape painting for example. 2) The second order simulacrum is associated with the industrial revolution period and the invention of the copy. We are talking about a time of mass production and re-production, photographs for example, where the copy started *claiming its own reality*. Potentially an infinite number of copies of everything could be produced. The distinction between a *referent/original* and its reproduction started to be more and more irrelevant. Or to put it otherwise, it was not about the copy pointing at something outside itself anymore. The copies themselves
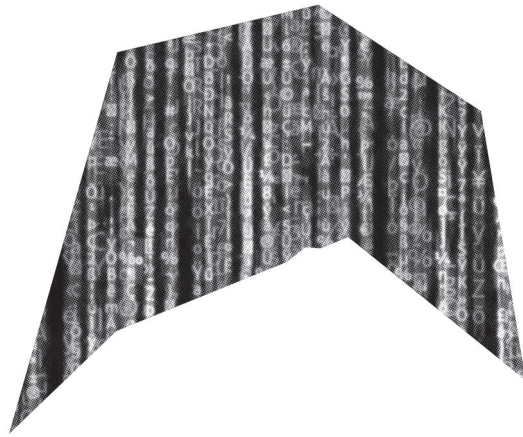
gained importance since they heavily influenced daily life, like newspapers; what is written in the newspapers has a big effect on reality, regardless of whether it *really* represents reality (outside the newspapers) or not. However, with critical thinking a distinction between sign and reality (if we stick to the image of *the one reality*) could still be made, regarding this second order type of simulacrum. 3) The most interesting, third order (postmodern) simulacrum, precedes and determines the real. But what does *precede* mean in that case? It means that signs point to nothing but other signs (and so on) which *represent*... nothing other than themselves. No *origin* can be found simply because there never was one. The sign does not *lead* to anything. There is no territory the map could point to. The map *is* the territory that *it supposedly represents*: there is only the simulacrum.[40]

Interestingly the order of simulacra does not seem to be a chronologically and linear affair through time; there wasn't the first order simulacrum first, then the second order a few centuries later and so on. *Simulacra and Simulation* claims it was the Catholic Church that established a system of third order simulacra early on. '[O]ne can say that the icon worshipers [the clerics] were the most modern minds, the most adventurous, because, in the guise of having God become apparent in the mirror of images, they were already enacting his death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations (which, perhaps, they already knew no longer represented anything, that they were purely a GAME, but that it was therein the great GAME lay— knowing also that it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them).'[41]

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Having quoted that I think it is important to talk about power. Let's stick to the example of the Catholic Church: a complex system of third order simulacra (referred to as hyperreality/simulation in the text). Such a setup is particularly problematic because it allowed economically or/and ideologically motivated parties to act in power in an uncontrollable way for a long, long time. And they could do so because there were no legal boundaries and controlling bodies. The only *controlling body* (God) itself is a third order simulacrum existing within the very simulation the church proclaimed and based its power on. In that way we could say that it is the perfect example of a perfectly executed hyperreality, a *closed system* based on third level simulacra. In the same text we find a (rather abstract) paragraph on the issue of power and control: '[I]t is as hyperreal events, no longer with a specific content or end, but indefinitely refracted by each other [...], it is in this sense that they cannot be controlled by an order that can only exert itself on the real and the rational, on causes and ends [the law], [...] but that cannot do anything against this indefinite recurrence of simulation, against this nebula whose weight no longer obeys the laws of gravitation of the real, power itself ends by being dismantled in this space and becoming a simulation of power [...].'[42] I wouldn't necessarily see things the same (rather pessimistic) way as described above. What I take from it, however, is the critical thought that the parties in charge might not be political parties we vote for. So we might not be involved in the process of decisionmaking (power) the way we should be.

Perhaps the following is too much of a digression, but I can think of a few actual subjects off the top of my head—issues such as information processing and

data collecting by Google just to name the obvious here. I do not believe that Google is an *evil company that spies on all of us to control us like puppets*. But I find it problematic that there is no global controlling body or authority—directly related to the public—to control such companies. I am one of a few billion users of Google services and like almost all the others I have no idea what's going on with my data behind the nice-looking interface of my smartphone calendar. And I have no way to access the algorithm, I can only deal with an assemblage of sophisticated third order simulacra.

Briefly returning to the term of simulation in a very literal way. I would like to recommend the feature film *The Matrix*.[43] Probably all of us have seen it and if not, please do so. The film is directly based on these ideas of simulation (the matrix) and governing systems (algorithms, machines), that are not controlled by humans. Interesting sidenote here, *Simulacra and Simulation* was mandatory reading for all the actors involved in the movie.

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In *Against Interpretation*[44] we find an interesting critique on the omnipresent need for interpretation in the art criticism of the 60s. Although I really think most of it is still valid today. The text blames art criticism for strictly repeating Plato's distinction between *the real* versus *the virtual*; The virtual (enlightenment) being the level of existence we should strive for, not the least through mimesis—the shadows. Even regarding abstract art forms, Susan Sontag heavily criticises the constant attempt to *reach the thing behind*, the MEANING of the

piece, the artist's *intention*, *expression* et cetera. So it's
again the same old story of form versus content just
like in the *Allegory of the Cave* with the idea of a
hidden, sunny though unreachable world somewhere
outside the cave.[45] '[T]he project of interpretation is
largely reactionary, stifling. [...] [T]he effusion of inter-
pretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. [...]
To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in
order to set up a shadow world of MEANINGS. It is to
turn the world into this world. (*This world*! As if there
were any other.) The world, our world, is depleted,
impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates of it,
until we again experience more immediately what
we have.'[46] Generally speaking I agree with this idea,
certainly if we talk about the aspect of mimesis (refe-
rential painting for example) in visual art today. The
most important aspect I take from the above critique
is that the PERFORMATIVITY of a piece is somehow
neglected. I'll come back to that.

There were also artists whose works emphasised
a more *materialistic* approach. A famous one would have
to be Jackson Pollock. He was an artist, who clearly
subverted the conceptual distinction between *the piece*
and *the MEANING of the piece* with his action paintings.
In a gesture of *pure becoming* (dripping and splashing
the paint), traditional or even reactionary terms like
MEANING, *the artist's intention* et cetera, are taken to
absurdity.[47] '[T]he impersonal-unconscious life energy,
[...], this field of pure intensities with no MEANING to
be unearthed by interpretation? [F]ar from *expressing*
his personality, his works *sublate* or cancel it.'[48] Much
like the 'writer being the person who writes'[49] (men-
tioned elsewhere in this book) instead of the iconic,
ingenious (authoritarian) author, the painter is simply

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the person who paints. I don't want to focus on *the unconscious* too much here as it would be off-topic. In my opinion it is all about the very shift in perspective, focusing on the direct material level of the piece itself.

That's not to say it is about materialism: again, I would like to stress the term PERFORMATIVITY here. What does a painting, text, sculpture, movement et cetera, actually do with me? *With me*—it is not a one-way street. It is not a situation where the audience (spectator, reader, listener, …) is supposed to face a work of art and *reach* somewhere *behind* the surface. It's not about transcending the material level of things in order to get out of the famous Greek cave. It is about the very interaction. It's the PERFORMATIVE aspect (I am PERFORMING by relating to the piece) of reading, watching, opposing, listening, smelling and so on. The PERFORMATIVE encounter is instant play. To put it otherwise: the PERFORMATIVE approach to a work of art is not *to reach* but *being part* of the work itself. *Facing* becomes *entangling*.

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Let's stay with the concept of *entanglement* for a moment. It is a term I stumbled upon a few times in the last years. Coming from quantum physics, it found its way into the arts. 'Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.'[50] I think this is a fundamental paradigm shift. Serious ontological questions are raised on how we understand ourselves as individuals in a space of (separate) objects and subjects.

To begin with, what does this finding imply on a linguistic level? How could we possibly stick to the idea that an object is sort of an independent physical entity with given properties and a given name (a term)? And how can we still think of terms that themselves are *containers* of MEANING or pointers toward particular objects, but somehow to all objects of *that kind*? For most of my life I was educated to relate single elements/aspects to single words. And in many cases, things seem to be handled according to exactly that logic of clear separation: an apple in the supermarket has a price tag with its name and a price—*one* fruit has *one* name and that name is given *one* price. But at the same time we are familiar with homonyms—*identical* words which designate completely different things. *Bark* is a tree's out layer but also the sound a dog makes. Similarly, we might know several people bearing the same name without the name losing its function of addressing them.[51]

Of course, all this is a long story made very short in an unsatisfactory way. Nonetheless, the rethinking of the concept of *independently existing entities* and *distinctive terms*, an idea that is based on separation, is worth consideration. This thought is certainly not limited to quantum physics but has implications in other areas such as the arts and of course philosophy.

To understand *things*, *objects* and *subjects* as inseparable aspects of a wider and more complex system of entangled processes means to go back to the very basic question of how to perceive/conceive the world. We are zooming out from the distinction between me and the apple to a *bigger picture*. The bigger picture does not mean to reintroduce a metaphysical law—God is still dead. To me, the bigger picture has a web-like

structure, rather than a tree-like setup. The tree is in fact a hierarchical construction with implications like *tradition*, *direction*, *purpose*, *progress* and other kinds of problematic notions in fact. Unsurprisingly, I would like to quote a PASSAGE from *A Thousand Plateaus* at this point: 'A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their RELATIONS. It is to fabricate a beneficent God [...]. In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation [...]; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization [...].'[52] The analogy in the text could be applied to many aspects of life. The book, as a metaphor, is not a *container* of a VOICE but a hub, a place where many VOICES of many times meet, including the VOICE *of the reader* of the book itself. I think that's the important take.

To understand the world as an assemblage of such entangled hubs of VOICES is fundamentally different from how I was educated. Regarding language there is a lovely sentence from *Meeting The Universe Halfway* I'd like to add here: '[T]he PRACTICE of writing is an iterative and mutually constitutive working out, and reworking, of *book* and *author*.'[53] So it is more about becoming, rather than being. Or maybe *being* simply means *constantly becoming*. Apparently, 'Everything flows, nothing stands still.'[54] That sounds like a very familiar, old idea to me.

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'A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of RELATIONS that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. [A] person is

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always located at *nodal points* of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be.'[55] Each one of us is located at a PASSAGE or hub, where many types of messages pass by. And we all interact with these messages by interfering and changing them slightly. We influence MEANING, which is… power. Of course we are not solely responsible for the MEANING of signs (words). But as sender, addressee and referent of messages we inevitably intervene. And, within certain limits, changes to the messages (inscriptions) are tolerated. Whether these interventions are conscious or not, that's another question.

Let's look at the example of the fairy tale. No one tells the *same* fairy tale with exactly the same words, nor with the same intonation or expression. So every time the story is told, its MEANING, its *accent* and some connotations are slightly different. In each regard, these changes are related to the PERFORMATIVITY of the narrator/passer, but not only. At this point we might also talk about GAMES again. GAMES have a certain characteristic I want to mention: to prevent a GAME from disappearing it must constantly adapt to the development of the discursive field (culture) within which it is embedded. So the gameness, the storyness in our case, is a continuously changing body of slippery material. As soon as someone makes an unexpected move, the rules of the GAME might slightly change. Maybe a part of the community of players split and set up another GAME with different rules. There is not only the PERFORMATIVITY of the single player on the structure/culture of the GAME. The ongoing existence of the structure itself is based on PERFORMATIVITY too—it is played, evolved, adapted.[56]

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There is the *Passagen-Werk* (English title: *The Arcades Project*[57]) which I would like to mention. The book talks about the city life of Paris. But more importantly, it's about socio-political structures and changes—using the PASSAGES of Paris (mainly the glass arcades where people would stroll or shop) as a metaphor. These PASSAGES are hubs where many people meet in various situations. The PASSAGES function as a *miniature city*, a role model for the author's cultural criticism. Interestingly, the book literally consists (to a great extent) of PASSAGES from many different writers—the book is an enormous collection of quotes. 'The word PASSAGES describes the collection of quotations of other books [...] The idea that there is some truth behind the displacements drives the displacements, but again and again one discovers only the nothing that is there. [...] The central nothing is the navel of the dream of representing the world. Going back to it is the only way to keep discovering that nothing, that world, that language. It is not that the world does not exist. [...] But the closer you get to it, the more it dissolves into the technologies of representation.'[58] Regarding the term PASSAGE as I described it earlier, I want to highlight one aspect: a PASSAGE (a hub) *itself* cannot be grasped. It has no *materiality* (it is *nothing*) in the sense that it is the nodal point where a constant flow passes through, a flow that points in many different directions. Conceptually the PASSAGE is the crossroad, not the vehicle passing it. One could recall every vehicle that ever passed the crossroad but that would not explain the crossroad's *nature*. However, the PASSAGE leaves a trace on what passes through; the people of Paris are leaving the arcades with a different set of experience. The vehicle that passes

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the crossroad changes its direction. The words that pass through my mouth take on a certain *flavour*.

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We are passers of information sitting at the hub of RELATIONSHIPS. These RELATIONS are unstable. And our own position is in motion too. Every PASSAGE means a slight shift in position. In *The Postmodern Condition* we find that: 'Each language partner, when a *move* pertaining to him is made, undergoes a *displacement*, an alteration of some kind that not only affects him in his capacity as addressee and referent, but also as sender.'[59] To be constantly *altered by others* doesn't seem a very appealing outlook. But there is another aspect to look at: '[I]t is important to increase displacement in the GAMES, and even to disorient it, in such a way as to make an unexpected *move* (a new statement).'[60]

Displacement* is power. Every move/PASSAGE impacts the whole GAME. I think it's important to consider ourselves empowered passers in the PASSAGE GAME— not *lost particles in the open water*. Yes, the RELATIONSHIPS with others (social, economic, political, ...) have a substantial impact on us. And yes, we are RELATIONAL subjects and our positions are not rock-solid but constantly moving/adapting. But now that we know that, it also means we need to be aware of the power we all have. As active hubs, the nodal points of messages in the language GAME[61], we do have influence. And with our small adaptions we do have an impact on the whole GAME itself. I'm wondering whether that's one of the most important aspects of artistic PRACTICE: to consciously be influenced and to influence our

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CONTEXTUAL environment at the same time. And we must be aware of our power of PASSAGE.

'All communication [...] means wanting to influence[:] language as a collective phenomenon where intention is central [...] [L]anguage changes all the time without its speakers intending any change.'[62] Certainly all of these ideas apply to other CONTEXTS as well, not just art or language. For me, the idea of working on/as hubs of information is equal to thinking. It's talking and writing and feeling. Just like in an inspiring discussion, the conversation partners agree on listening, arguing, convincing, being convinced, questioning perspectives and accepting different points of view... Of course the described dynamic lies within the specific setting of a discussion with its particular catalogue of rules. Interfering for instance, is part of this GAME. In a different setup, the rules might be different. In church it is less appropriate to have the same kind of intense conversation or argument. And at a business meeting it might seem a bit odd to kneel and quietly pray. The crucial point here is, whatever (institutional) setting we operate in, there's always a margin for intervention, however small it might be. There is always the possibility to think beyond the rulebook, in fact, to create new rules and new GAMES. And that's important to remember. An artistic gesture, a slight adaption of rules, is power.

For me the most important thing in art is doing art. I know that sounds trivial. But I don't necessarily mean *doing art* as a *pure end in itself* or just a form of self-therapy. I want to stress that the activity of doing art is what raises many fundamental questions. And it's the same

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process where some of these questions can be answered. Surely though, by answering one, more questions will arise. However, the ongoing process, the acting, researching, raising questions, answering some of them, putting things into perspective, all the doubts, the discussions, these are the important things at the end of the day. There will never be a *final answer* and no *solution*, but the ongoing pursuit is an experience. And the more diverse our experiences, the better we can look at things; we see more shades of grey instead of black and white, just to use a cheesy phrase.

I see artistic PRACTICE as one single, ongoing act, constantly changing, altering its rules and including new inputs. So far so good, but there is a problem. Or rather, I see a problem here: in my opinion the common *image of the artist*—the way artists want to be seen—still sticks too much to ideas like subjectivity, exclusivity and brilliance. And that's certainly not the way I think art should be PRACTISED. Because we, as subjects, are highly related to our (educative) environment. And our knowledge is very much the fusion of collective knowledge and learning. How could an artist ever seriously claim *individuality*? When we try to examine our *individuality* as artists, *our* ideas simply disperse into smaller and smaller snippets of ideas from... others. Paradoxically the institutional art world with its galleries, museums, art schools, the art market et cetera, is fundamentally based on the idea of individuality; all comes down to *one* subject (or one group), *one* name, *one* CV, *one* brand, *one* value and so on. That is no coincidence. Exclusivity means rarity and rarity is one of the most fundamental values of economy. A rare item—being rare or being *made* rare is actually the same—achieves a higher price than a widely accessible item. And since I think art

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TOTALLY FINE TO DO THIS

Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
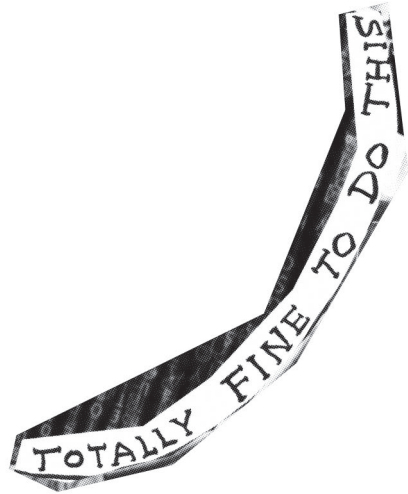
should not be *just another* sector in global capitalism, I do not support these tendencies. I emphasise becoming (including) instead of being (excluding). The quality of becoming over the power of origin! The important thing is to remember our PERFORMATIVITY here. We influence every bit of information and material, every thought that passes our artistic PRACTICE. We play the GAME. We constitute it. We change it and we keep it going. The PASSAGE GAME is played in our society. It's the small thoughts, the subtle changes in perspectives, that's what we can do as artists. Therefore I claim the artistic working to be the artwork, not just the *final pieces*. Because it is the act of doing, the PASSAGE, that's powerful and of importance.

The process of doing art is *self-conscious* of the fact that its being (its influence) is unsteady and constantly changing. Instead, *stable (classical) art pieces* can't adapt—they are somehow frozen historical artefacts. I'm not saying, artworks like classical paintings or classical marble sculptures for example have no power. On the contrary, historically speaking they were oftentimes *symbols* of power—and they are still very powerful today, just in a different way. And I'm not saying that such pieces cannot under no circumstances be connected to an actual (open) discourse either. Nonetheless, I struggle with one particular aspect regarding established, classical art works. It could be a wild generalisation and unjustified accusation but, nevertheless, I must get rid of it here: for my taste, *classical* art pieces far too often tell the very boring story of some lonely, genius artist being inspired by whatever (a spirit). And then, he (!) is generously sharing his ingenious thoughts with the world and so on and so forth. I think art should no longer be PRACTISED this way. But unfortunately, we

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(art institutions, the art market) often stick to that old idea somehow—for obvious economic reasons.

That's why I consider the concept and the processual MEANING to be the important message, not the exhibited art piece itself (the material) so much. Of course, to communicate with an audience we need physical signs, I am aware of that. But let's not get too excited by them, they're just tools. For me doing art is active thinking, which is connecting sources and processing information. And exhibiting is publishing in the sense of making-it-public which is an interaction, a new PASSAGE...

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'Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency [...], of justice and/or happiness [...], of the beauty of a sound or color [...], etc.'⁶³ Let's stick to the term of knowledge as an *applied consequence*. At the same time I'd like to keep our position as passers of MEANING in mind when referring to the structure of language. These two assumptions leave us with a question: what to do with all that awareness? How to use it instead of feeling restricted by it? The assumption that knowledge is not a reference to *solid truth behind things*, but rather an applied PRACTICE (with/of language) somehow resounds: it means to contribute to existing discourses and form new ones to *PRACTISE knowledge* (instead of *knowing*) in a participative way.

Important side note: the *origin* of a statement doesn't matter too much—it doesn't matter which dis-

course a word *belonged to*. The moment it is consciously PERFORMED (uttered), it can be *de-stigmatised*. And that's how *established* knowledge can contribute to a current discourse—a discourse that creates MEANING in/for the very moment of PRACTICE; like a PASSAGE of a text, written fifty years ago, can contribute to this very book you are reading for example. That awareness is important in art. 'It is not [about] a competence relative to a particular class of statements [*representing* a certain status] to the exclusion of all others. On the contrary, it makes *good* [fruitful, meaningful] PERFORMANCES in RELATION to a variety of objects of discourse possible [by interaction].'⁶⁴

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In the following section I write about writing. But the thoughts on *writing* can easily be attributed to other PRACTICES. Having said that, I'd like to pick up an old but important idea: the liberation of the writer from the author. In particular, it's about the independence of the text (material) and the special attention on the reader's participation (PERFORMANCE) in the writing process. I really think that these aspects are as relevant today as they were in the sixties for example. So I'd consider *writing* to be any artistic activity where readers inscribe themselves. I am sure the mechanisms in the different artistic fields and media are similar; it's often about referring to, quoting, playing with, repeating, organising, opposing, negating, claiming... 'All writing is itself this special VOICE, consisting of several indiscernible VOICES, and that literature [art in general] is precisely the invention of this VOICE, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite,

that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.'[65]

So the main idea is to question the solid connection (or identity even) between the author and *her* work by a simple thought: the author cannot be the genuine source of her ideas—she does not *give birth* to the text and therefore is no genius—but rather the (re-) organiser of knowledge at a hub of different VOICES, temporarily finding together. From this point of view the writer is much more considered to be some sort of mediator or speaker. Of course, while PERFORMING (writing, singing, acting, painting, …) she adds to the material, inscribes herself. And this inscription is a powerful PASSAGE. But there was already something there prior to her PERFORMANCE. That's why we should evaluate an artist's accomplishments in terms of organisation, not creation. How fine, how precise and how witty did the artist compose a piece? Did she manage to reach an audience and contribute to the actual discourse. Does she make people think? That's the kind of question we should ask about *writing*. 'It is the language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preexisting impersonality [...] that point where language alone acts, PERFORMS, and not *oneself*: [...] suppressing the author for the sake of the writing ([is] to restore the status of the reader.)'[66]

The writer is a junction of ideas. In fact, the writer only exists as a fusion of knowledge during the PERFORMATIVE act of writing (and reading). '[The] writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, [...] there is no other time than that of the utterance [...]. This is because [...] to

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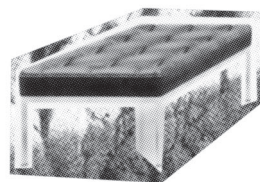
write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, [...] but rather what the linguisticians [...] call a PERFORMATIVE, a rare verbal form [...], in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered [...] [T]he modern [second half of the 20th century] writer, having buried the Author, [...] his hand, detached from any VOICE, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin.'[67] Not only does a writer exist (as a writer) in the very moment of PERFORMING, it's also about the idea that the writing consists of multiple writings, which derive from other writings and so on and so forth. All these different writings enter a dialogue with each other in the very text. But there is no single source or root, neither on the level of the writer nor on the material level.

In that regard I want to address a famous and obvious example: the Bible. It was not written by God or a prophet, nor by a single person. It is a rather wild assemblage/anthology of ideas from many people throughout a long period of time. And that's the case in every text. Nobody is speaking, but there are countless VOICES. This is not to say that a text doesn't mean anything. A text can *speak* to us and it can have an impact on reality (but only through *us*, the readers). If otherwise, that would expose this very text you are reading as totally obsolete for example.

But back to our previous train of thought. It is about the idea of speaking out and the MEANING being RELATIONAL affairs. Following a statement, there are countless links to an infinite number of other utterances with no end in sight. 'We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a

single *theological* MEANING (the *message* of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture.'[68]

So instead of asking *who wrote down that idea?* we should ask *what does it mean to me?* It's this kind of question, that allows us to open things up, to connect and interconnect knowledge. '[T]here is no underlying ground; the space of the writing is to be traversed, not penetrated: writing ceaselessly posits MEANING but always in order to evaporate it: [...] to refuse to arrest MEANING is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law.'[69] There is no final truth to be found. And in search for an explanation, we are just raising more and more questions. But how can we even communicate with each other then? This leads us to the equally interesting role of the reader. '[N]o one [...] utters it: its source, its VOICE is not to be located; and yet it is perfectly read; this is because the true locus of writing is reading.'[70] There is one place where all connections, all the MEANINGS come together and that's the reader. The reader, much like the writer, exists as a reader only during/in the PERFORMATIVE act of reading.

Let's imagine two people: a reader and a writer with similar cultural understanding (they don't necessarily share the same background though). Some writing was done in a language the two would understand. To connect, to find some common ground of understanding with the writer, the reader links all her CONTEXTUAL experience to the signs in front of her. In fact, it's her PERFORMANCE that writes the text. '[T]he unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination.'[71]

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I mentioned *freedom* in the arts and the loss of master NARRATIVES. Considering this, what are artistic claims and conclusions based on, what are they referring to? What is the significance of an artistic claim, only referring to *itself* or a cloud of questionable references? What if there is no authority *approving* a work? There is no need for authorisation, but it makes me think. In comparison, science does feel the urge to legitimise and stick to *established* NARRATIVES. Although over time, most of the NARRATIVES were proven wrong—the alteration of referents is also inherent to the system. That is quite interesting—one must refer to authorities/ dogmas, which are regularly replaced. By its nature, science 'is [constantly] obliged to legitimate the rules of its own GAME.'[72] So by its constitution, science requests legitimation—based on NARRATIVES from the world of science itself. Science's dogmas are considered to be true only as long as there is no *more advanced and truer* truth or until proven wrong respectively. I feel art can speak more freely about the fact that NARRATIVES (dogmas) are... dubious or even arbitrary.

I'd like to make a comparison with acting or role-playing GAMES here. The casting of a role is part of the GAME—there is a *role to be played* and someone must play it. There is no myth of *the role preexisting the play*— the artificial nature of the role is evident. There is this role with its specific purpose. And the actor's job is to PERFORM the function of this role. It's a GAME and every-body knows. Excellent acting can fool us though, we might confuse role and actor. And a well-played figure finds its way into reality, it becomes its own, *new reality*. But nobody seriously believes the role preexisted its

being played. It is not about that kind of truth. Like in a board GAME, the role (function of a token) has been created. And this for good reason. For fun, morals, exercise, education et cetera—which are values of reality *outside* the GAME.

More generally speaking, I would say in all of the arts, like in GAMES, the *creation of roles* is literally part of the GAME. People agree on the rules, on tokens and their functions and on the way the GAME is played. And these agreements are voluntary, artificial and without *classical* master NARRATIVES. We are free to join or leave the GAME—at least in an ideal world. There is no obligation in telling the truth either. Art can be speculative and it does not have to constantly legitimate itself. In contrast to science, art can easily live with contradictions and missing links. Art can alter its rules at any time. The rather dogmatic art history can willingly be ignored. And it should be ignored when an artwork's goal is to open a new discourse, instead of a simple act of repetition. I experience art like a powerful starting point for negotiation, a free thought rather than a *statement of truth*. By all means, artistic statements may also tell *the truth*. Again, it is about choice. It is about not being forced to subordinate to a dogma in the first place. Having said that, I am well aware that the art world is far away from that ideal world of choice I just described; the often incomprehensible (mostly economically driven) structures in the arts and the art market still rule. It's no coincidence who is exhibiting at an *important* institution and no coincidence either, who is a *relevant* artist et cetera. Without any money one cannot do art, that's the sad truth. Nevertheless, artists have the incredible freedom of choice of what they want to work on. There is no predefined script and it is crucial to keep that condition.
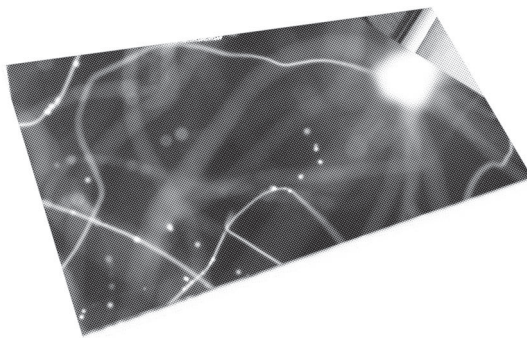
To me, as already stated, the overall explanation, the metaphysical law is gone. So there is no *general* explanation anymore. *Truth* (factual or imaginary) as a point of reference has *become* temporally bound to a greater degree. Facticity applies to local groups, playing the same local GAME. '[T]he vitality of small NARRATIVE units at work everywhere locally in the present social system, are accompanied by something like a more global or totalizing *crisis* in the NARRATIVE function in general, since, as we have seen, the older master-NARRATIVES of legitimation no longer function [...] (e.g., we no longer believe in political or historical teleologies, or in the great *actors* and *subjects* of history—the nation-state, the proletariat, the party, the West etc.).'[73] There is no universal (or *Western*, let's say) utopia, no paradise. Although I think marketing-wise, there seems to be an image created for a consumer utopia, but it is not universal or *carved in stone. Be successful, make money, be humble, be educated, be loyal, follow the latest trends, buy the newest phone...* et cetera. Yes I would say that exists. But these values seem to constantly adapt, accompanying purely opportunistic economic strategies.

Reconsidering the loss of the metaphysical law: from an artist's perspective I'd say the loss is a great opportunity rather than a problem. Simply put, there are now many *truths* to be explored and negotiated, so much foundational ground to base thoughts on. That is not to say that anything goes or that there is no need for (universal?) ethics for example. But the fields of interest opened and regarding art this is relevant as the number of NARRATIVES also increased—supported

by the improved accessibility of information. The big dogmas—to name the elephant in the room: God—are gone. At least, they have lost their extensive power by simply being *possible* explanations among many others. Or have the *ruling NARRATIVES* just shifted to a less detectible place? Without slipping into conspiracy theory, one might argue here, y*es, it's true, God is dead. But what about global capitalist structures? Are they not way more powerful (and dangerous) as master-NARRATIVES, since they control everything but try to hide their omnipresence?* Possibly, yes. And one could even argue, that at the end of the day it is the art market that controls every aspect of art production.

However, I think that many of the big NARRATIVES have been eliminated or seriously challenged regarding art: the hierarchy and categorisation of media, the classical from-master-to-student-relationship, most taboos, *beauty*, style, materiality, (monetary) value and others. Art may have become more... free? I'm not sure about that. But art certainly became more dynamic. At the same time things have gotten more complicated due to the lack of orientation (point of reference). If the GAMES are more diversified than ever, it's much harder to play and to find others who want to play with me. Either I find a local community I want to play in, or I set up my own GAME and try to find new allies. But then again orientation is difficult since there are so many people playing so many different GAMES... This *freedom* can certainly feel like a heavy burden.

PRACTISING art, at least in my opinion, is not about finding *the one thing* (truth). But it's about finding an interesting and meaningful aspect in this open field that's worth working on. And somehow I feel it's crucial to refuse the *pressure of art's freedom*, explained above.

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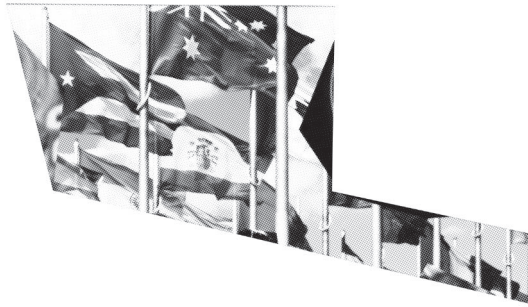
For example, the fact that something has been done before, that others are more successful, that science examines phenomena in more detail, that intellectuals write better than most artists, all that shouldn't prevent a possible attempt. The important take from the death of the big NARRATIVES is the refusal of hierarchy. Therefore, I prioritise choice because that is what we have for sure. '[A] code cannot be destroyed, it can only be *played with*.'[74] And we should play fearlessly, as all the possible *authorities* in the field are also just players.

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Postmodern knowledge (here: late 20th century) obliges us to overcome our striving for a universal explanation.[75] That of course is just my understanding of the term, regarding the topics I address in this book. But I will stick to it. Postmodern knowledge also forces us to be critical thinkers. Much like playing a GAME, we must stay open-minded, we must adapt and take concrete decisions, regarding concrete challenges—based on rules that are not beyond doubt.[76] But are we really free within the GAME we *choose* to play? The following statement, made in the mid-eighties, addresses—in almost a prophetic manner—an important point: 'Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?'[77] The statement is about power and responsibility. In the age of information it is unclear who/what sets the rules of the GAME. One could say it's the algorithms. Or maybe it's the companies that develop the algorithms. Or is it the global economy that obliges the companies to do so? Again, my intention isn't to deviate into conspiracy theory: there is no 'plotting of evil', or 'unlawful design'[78] going on. But we

simply do not know exactly where and how knowledge (which is in fact power) is produced and how it's related to (economic, political, …) interest et cetera. To give an obvious example: I don't know how a Google search works. How are all the decisions—on the way to my search result—made and where lies the power?

This question reminds me of another one: who makes the NARRATIVES? In my experience, there is no simple and comfortable answer to that. To finish, let me briefly add two more concerns here without answers. 1) Is one of the major problems simply the fact that capitalism is too complex and too quickly changing to be understood and handled by politics? 2) Did we ever really agree on the rules of the GAME?

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What about 'NARRATIVE in the interests of simplicity?'[79] Straightforward NARRATIVES allow us to deal with immediate questions. For example, believing in the label *organic* printed on my cereals helps me manage my everyday life: I can safely leave my ecological concerns with the little label on the packaging—a label that stands for a complex concept of agriculture. And I happily do so because the reflection on economic dynamics, based on exploitation, would make my breakfast way too exhausting. Of course, the connotation and the structures behind the label *organic* are themselves questionable. But that's not the point here. This NARRATIVE in the interest of simplicity is what keeps me from standing in front of the cereals in the supermarket for half an hour, reflecting upon global capitalism. So I would say that the big NARRATIVES (God) have been substituted by more specific NARRATIVES in search for legitimacy.

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Organic, although being a global movement, is just one of many concepts (NARRATIVES). And there is no common superstructure organising all the different concepts.

But not only are the big master-NARRATIVES gone. Together with them, we have lost the great heroes, the thrilling stories about danger, morals, salvation and not least, goals.[80] Everything's dispersed into more local GAMES, with their own stories, prescriptions, descriptions and truths. Dispersed in kind of local cultures. Each of those cultures has its catalogue of rules, values and functions, more or less specific to that community. And because the (ideological) concepts are more local, we all live at the intersection of many of these cultures, each of them with their specific language.[81] 'However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations [regarding different local languages], and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable. Thus [our] society [...] falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language GAMES—a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions in patches—local determinism.'[82] Thus, *to be a human being* seems much more like a schizophrenic patchwork existence than a determined, purposeful plot with a clear direction.

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I'd like to compare religion and art regarding the actual act of religious/artistic experience. Prayer, just like experiencing art, allows people to put aside their struggles for a moment and *imagine a bigger picture*. It means

to put our rather limited self (compared to human history, the whole universe, God...) into perspective. It is about *facing something outside ourselves*. Although approached by our senses and thoughts, the faced concept importantly remains somehow distant. The goal of the approach is to transcend our physicality and find comfort. So in their function, art and religion work similarly: both depict an unreachable world that allows us to find our place in the physical world. We can try to be better humans by being thoughtful, humble and so on.

Art exhibitions take religious institutions—with their iconic framework—as a role model. Both institutions can provide hope, even if we are somehow convinced that there is none. It's not mainly an intellectual thing though, it's about feelings. Leaving an art museum, we might feel better or inspired as if 'communicated to by divine or supernatural powers.'[83] Even if we didn't *get it*, we might feel more connected and embedded in an outside. 'Through time spent in museums [...] we experience comparable feelings of communing with something greater than ourselves and of being separated from the compromised and profane world beyond. We [...] emerge with a sense that we have, in a variety of indeterminate ways, become slightly better people.'[84] Secular institutions like the museum, the university, the theatre and the sports stadium try to fill the gap left by the loss of faith. They can provide MEANING (in the form of a NARRATIVE) in life and a feeling of shelter. It doesn't matter whether the ideologies at those places are actually *true* or not. It is all about their function: it's the ritual of being part of something bigger, in a community of others.

Secular art pieces are not to be confused with religious artworks or religious craftsmanship though.

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For example, nobody should pray in front of a painting. However, like the church, a museum tells a big, self-referring logic: the NARRATIVE of art history (including contemporary art of course). But there are also major differences between the two. Although the museum might provide us with *shelter* and *delight*, the secular institution lacks a clear message or direction. It does not teach us what to do to be better humans (and avoid hell). It does not say how to care about each other or how to cure our emotional imbalances. 'While exposing us to objects of genuine importance, [the museums] nevertheless seem incapable of adequately linking these to the needs of our souls. [...] The fundamental question which the modern [institution] has unusual but telling difficulty in answering is why [the arts] should matter. It vociferously insists on art's significance and rallies governments, donors and visitors accordingly. But it subsequently retreats into a curious, institutional silence about what this importance might be based on. We are left feeling as though we must have missed out on crucial stages of an argument which the museum has in reality never made, beyond trailing a tautological contention that art should matter to us because it is so important.'[85]

The museum does not provide the answers we would need and neither is there a universal message. In fact, there are so many contradictory concepts in the arts, it is impossible to keep track. When people who have studied art for several years struggle to under-stand exhibitions, there might be a problem with the concept. Or maybe it's just a simple rhetorical trick from the institutions to stick to the incomprehensible, to cover up the fact that there is no *message* and no *solution*. 'And we think to ourselves that only an idiot

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or a reactionary would dare to ask what all this could mean. [...] [W]all texts are kept to a minimum; catalogues are enigmatically written. It would take a brave soul to raise a hand.'[86] The museum seems just happy showing us what has been done so far in art history. *This is an important artwork, it refers to this and that movement, the concept behind it is such and such...* Yes, but other concepts that are not shown, for instance, might be equally interesting and important. We are just shown a random variety of things that pretends to give a NARRATIVE. But this NARRATIVE claim has no proper foundation, I think that is the problem. Picasso was not the only modern painter and I don't want to see his paintings over and over again. Apparently, he has been chosen as *the modern painter* by art history, as a kind of Messiah. And with that ignored most of the other (e.g. female) artists of that time.

In contrast to the church's big storyline there is no hope of salvation in art history, not even as an illusion. There's nothing to strive for, it seems, no bigger purpose, which would give us the needed power to deal with our daily struggle. There is no paradise in the arts. 'Christianity, by contrast, never leaves us in any doubt about what art [religious art] is for [a clear purpose]: it is a medium to remind us about what matters. It exists to guide us to what we should worship and revile if we wish to be sane, good people in possession of well-ordered souls.'[87] Art can't teach us to live a good life. Many contemporary artworks try to remind us what *not* to do, what to overcome as a global society: climate change, capitalism, colonialism, post-colonialism, sexism, racism and a bunch of other isms too. But there is no common message in the arts, what to achieve exactly. There is no utopia and that's what leaves

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me with many unanswered questions as a spectator. We don't need a big, metaphysical NARRATIVE again. I strongly believe in the freedom (freedom of choice, of thought, of *expression*, ...) of the arts.

I'd summarise the problem as follows: considering the powerful Christian NARRATIVE has nearly disappeared, art promised some relief within the big, chaotic disorientation, but that promise turned out to be a delusion. But maybe that is too much of a spectator's perspective. And maybe we are looking at the problem from the wrong side. Perhaps one should look at art from the artist's perspective—without the expectation that a work of art actually *speaks* to us. Maybe it's about doing art as a form of everyday philosophical PRACTICE. Actively PRACTISING art, in what-ever form, could be what allows us to deal with the big questions of life. While concentrating on artistic PRACTICE we may even forget about the idea of a paradise. And couldn't we even say then, facing an artwork in a museum is an artistic PRACTICE too? Why shouldn't the activity of *exposing* ourselves to a piece and raising questions be a possible solution—simply ignoring institutional NARRATIVES? I think it should.

———

I want to go back to the idea that every text, in fact every sort of utterance always has many sources. Countless VOICES *speak* a single VOICE et cetera. So why do art pieces not take into consideration that very assumption—at least in most cases? A book is *written* by one author. A film is *directed* by one director. A piece of music is *composed* by a single person, the composer and so on and so forth. Even if those pieces were made by

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several people (e.g. a group), conceptually, the work points to a single source, a root and does not consider that the material (text, scores, images, …) always points to a multitude of sources. This is because, as I pointed out previously, it is all about the NARRATIVE of the individual, or polemically speaking, the genius author. *The great individual*—a white western male in most cases—*is inspired* ('infused with […] supernatural influence'[88]) *and shares his ingenious thoughts*. The only concessions he makes in his work is to relate to other geniuses (like him). That's the NARRATIVE. The discursive fields a person lives in, *through which he or she speaks*, are largely ignored.

In the following section I would like to address two great examples, which conceptually and formally deal with this issue. Both examples are books, a very classical form—one that traditionally is directly related to the NARRATIVE described above. But crucially both works question the dubious tradition of the book as media. They consider that a NARRATIVE is never a straight plot, but rather a complex web of threads with many loose ends and *knots*, of which it is impossible to pull out just a single string.

The first one is *Reality Hunger*[89], a book that purely consists of quotes, collected and arranged (composed) by the *author*. Structurally, it rather resembles Hip-Hop music—a form that is mostly composed of snippets of previously released music—than of a literary text. So here *writing* is obviously an organising process. That doesn't mean there is no *direction*, general MEANING or *personal touch* to the book. On the contrary. The text manages to speak about issues and it negotiates different perspectives in a very precise way. It is a serious book that is meant to be read. It's not at all

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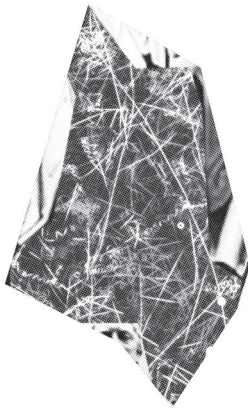
a purely conceptual gesture of *proving that a book could also be done in such fashion*. It is exceptionally well structured/set. And more importantly it does not lack a VOICE. The work deals with issues like reality, fiction, fact, uttering, writing, NARRATIVES, power, agency, memory and more—which is very smart, regarding its conception. So *form* and *content* (let's pretend for a moment), both *reflect* the *author*'s concept and unify it in a common gesture: a strategy that might be more prevalent in visual arts in form of the ready-made and in conceptual art. Let's enjoy some of the PASSAGES from *Reality Hunger* which deal with the issue of memory:

> 164. Human memory, driven by emotional self-interest, goes to extraordinary lengths to provide evidence to back up whatever understanding of the world we have our hearts set on—however removed that may be from reality. [...]
> 172. [...] Autobiographical memory is a recollection of events or episodes, which we remember with great detail. What's stored in that memory isn't the actual events, but how those events made sense to us and fit into our experience. [...]
> 175. [...] The images we store in our memories are not exact replicas of what we experienced; they're what our minds turn them into. They are what we need to re-create [in the moment of recollection] the story, which is the full experience the image represents.[90]

As you can see, the book consists of separate paragraphs, approaching a topic from different angles in form of different VOICES. Conceptually, and that's where things get really interesting, there is a fundamental shift from the writer to the reader: it's the *I*, the reader, who actually *writes* the text. As a reader

I connect the different threads from the different sources to make sense of it—to give it a VOICE. In a PERFORMA- TIVE act I connect myself (my personal experience) to the text, I inscribe myself into it. I quoted elsewhere that *the true locus of writing is reading*. So what traditionally is considered the task of the author is in fact the reader's job. Admittedly, the *author* is of course involved in the whole process, but rather as an organiser and the reader *writes* the piece.

The second example I want to mention is the book *Knots*.[91] It contains a series of quite unusual and un- expected dialogue scenarios. These texts can be read as short plays or poems, each of them complete in itself:

My mother loves me.
   I feel good.
I feel good because she loves me.
I am good because I feel good
I feel good because I am good
My mother loves me because I am good.
My mother does not love me.
   I feel bad.
I feel bad because she does not love me
   I am bad because I feel bad
I feel bad because I am bad
I am bad because she does not love me
She does not love me because I am bad.[92]

In *Knots* we find many examples of (disordered) human communication and complex RELATIONSHIPS. Crucially, the text does not *describe* those psychological issues from *an external perspective*, but rather PERFORMS them *from the inside* in this series of astonishing dialogues. Through sheer endless repetition and variation the distinction between *the self* and *the world*, the *I* and *the other(s)* becomes lost. It is unclear who is speaking to whom.

In the end it is again the *I*—me speaking to myself as a reader. It is me writing the text, RELATING to it with all my experience.

———
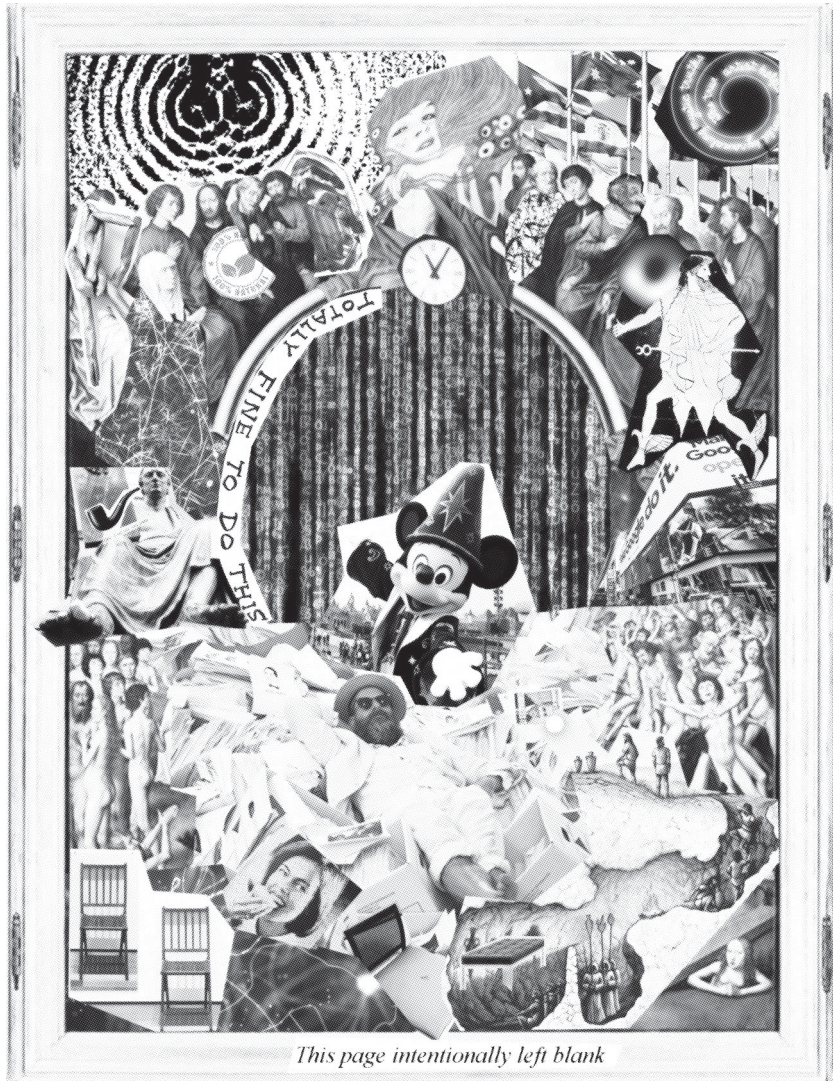
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Notes

1   Online Etymology Dictionary, *context*
2   Kafka 1904
3   Wittgenstein 1953
4   Wittgenstein 1953, p. 3, 8-10
5   Wittgenstein 1953, p. 3, 8-10
6   Wittgenstein 1953, p. 3, 8-10
7   Lyotard 1984, p. 10
8   Lyotard 1984, p. 10
9   Jameson, Frederic as cited in Lyotard 1984, p. xi
10   Wittgenstein, Ludwig as cited in Kosuth 1969
11   Von Wright, G.H as cited in Kosuth 1969
12   Von Wright, G.H as cited in Kosuth 1969
13   Kosuth 1969
14   Baudrillard 1996, p. 25
15   Baudrillard 1996, p. 25
16   Baudrillard 1996, p. 26
17   Zimmermann 2015, p. 23
18   Zimmermann 2015, p. 23-24
19   Aristotle
20   Kharms 1939
21   Kharms in: Classic Poetry Series
22   Zimmermann 2015, p. 29
23   Zimmermann 2015, p. 29
24   Zimmermann 2015, p. 29
25   Wittgenstein 1953, p. 48
26   youtube.com, Maldacena
27   Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 4
28   Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 4
29   Online Etymology Dictionary, *ideology*
30   Online Etymology Dictionary, *ideology*
31   Žižek 2004, p. 23
32   Žižek 2004, p. 23

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33   Regarding the term *aspect* and its implications,
      I mainly refer to the symposium *Atlas of Aspect
      Change*. The event negotiated the idea of *aspect
      change*, made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein.
34   Barad 2007, p. 71-97
35   Žižek 2004, p. 27
36   Žižek 2004, p. 28
37   Baudrillard 1994
38   Felluga
39   Baudrillard 1994. p. 1
40   Felluga
41   Baudrillard 1994, p. 5
42   Baudrillard 1994, p. 21
43   The Wachowskis 1999
44   Sontag 1961
45   Sontag 1961, p. 11-13
46   Sontag 1961, p. 15-16
47   Žižek 2004, p. 28-29
48   Žižek 2004, p. 29
49   Barthes 1968
50   Barad 2007, p. ix
51   Melzer 2016, p. 133
52   Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 4
53   Barad 2007, p. x
54   Heraclitus 501 b.c.
55   Lyotard 1984, p. 15
56   Lyotard 1984, p. 15
57   Benjamin 1982
58   Hanssen 2006, p. 84
59   Lyotard 1984, p. 16
60   Lyotard 1984, p. 16
61   The term *language game* is heavily influenced
      by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investgations*.

62   Keller, Rudi as cited in Melzer 2016, p. 190

63   Lyotard 1984, p. 18

64   Lyotard 1984, p. 18

65   Barthes 1968

66   Barthes 1968

67   Barthes 1968

68   Barthes 1968

69   Barthes 1968

70   Balzac as cited in Barthes 1968

71   Barthes 1968

72   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiii

73   Jameson, Frederic in Lyotard 1984, p. xi-xii

74   Barthes 1968

75   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv-xxv

76   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv-xxv

77   Lyotard 1984, p. 9

78   Online Etymology Dictionary, *conspiracy*

79   Lyotard 1984, p. 7

80   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv

81   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv

82   Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv

83   Online Etymology Dictionary, *inspired*

84   de Botton 2012, p. 156

85   de Botton 2012, p. 157

86   de Botton 2012, p. 162

87   de Botton 2012, p. 162

88   Online Etymology Dictionary, *inspired*

89   Shields 2010

90   Shields 2010, p. 64-67

91   Laing 1970

92   Laing 1970, p. 9

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List of Images

All images by Dario Zeo.

The two points of disturbance in the ripple tank and the caused waves are inseparable aspects of the same phenomena. 'This image clearly shows distinct regions of enhancement (constructive interference) and diminishment (destructive interference) caused by the overlapping waves. (The cone shapes that seem to radiate outward are places where the component waves cancel one another out.)' [Barad, 2007, p. 77]

There is more to chairness than classical semiotics wants us to believe.

This supermassive black hole can be observed only by visualising (it's not an actual photograph) some light phenomena around it. The thing itself remains invisible because all light gets absorbed by it.

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p. 47/2   ref. Cathodoluminescence image of a 400-μm zircon.

A zircon is a mineral found in rocks. Due to its incredible robustness and linear uranium decomposition, reliable statements, for instance about time, can be made. Zircons are considered the oldest material on earth, formed more than 4 billion years ago—a period long before first life emerged on the planet. In speculative philosophy, the zircon became a symbol of proof for the (non-metaphysical) absolute: a factual, non-correlational (because no living creature was there to correlate with) statement. In that sense, the zircon is the impossible object, the alien, the universal mathematical referent and so on. But without the matter, words and pictures (made with a microscope), without any kind of relation, how could one conceive the absolute?

p. 55/1   ref. Matrix rain.

p. 55/2   ref. Disneyland.

Disneyland is a great example of a world (a simulation), consisting of third-order simulacra: The person in the costume plays Mickey Mouse, a figure originally existing only as a cartoon character. So even the original figure itself didn't refer to anything outside its imagination. But Disneyland does. Disneyland pretends to be the world pre-existing the cartoon somehow—but this again only as an image. There are different Disneylands in the USA and Europe referring to this world. Hence, the *real* figure of Mickey Mouse (the non-cartoon one) can only be played in the real real. So the real Mickey preexists reality—it will always be there, played by a different actor in different places.

p. 61/1   ref. Statue of David Hume.

Statue rubbing is a form of superstition that is believed to bring good luck—an idea found in religious contexts too. The act of touching (the statue, the relic, …)

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is believed to establish a connection to a higher power. David Hume, the famous rationalist, may be turning in his grave.

p. 61/2   ref. Plato's Cave.

p. 67/1   ref. The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths. Naumann, Bruce.

p. 67/2   ref. New York Time Square Billboards.

p. 73/1   ref. From: Unconventional Bubbles. Shrigley, David.

p. 73/2   ref. La trahison des images. Magritte, René.

p. 79/1   ref. Printing out the Internet. Goldsmith, Kenneth.

p. 79/2   ref. Endless White Cube. Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix.

The White Cube itself was conceived as a de-contextualised exhibition space, a neutral surface for art—but as with language, isolating the environment is impossible.

p. 85/1   ref. Number 32. Pollock, Jackson.

p. 85/2   ref. Neuron's Network.

Artificial neural networks are computing systems inspired by biological neural networks (like in our brains). When I mentioned hubs, passages or web regarding text and other sign systems, I had images such as this one in mind.

p. 89/1   ref. National flags of the member states of the UN.

A flag is a sign of a concept of de-contextualised, primary values (e.g. a nation). This concept talks of filiation, roots (not rhizomes), autonomy and authority.

p. 89/2   ref. The Last Judgment. Memling, Hans.

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p. 93/1 ref. Unknown. Frau Mit Butterbrot. Polke, Sigmar.

Pop art and (in this case) the so called Capitalist Realism took up ideas such as reproduction and idealisation from advertising and the print media.

p. 93/2 ref. Organic label.

p. 101/1 ref. Selbstturm. Roth, Dieter.

These sculptures of chocolate and sugar decompose, crumble, develop strange smells. They also change shape and colour over time. Like life, says the artist, the art work must constantly change, be exposed to the rhythm of time.

p. 101/2 ref. Allover (Genesis, Travis Tritt, and others). Marclay, Christian.

p. 107   Found footage collage by Dario Zeo.

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001
Passages

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Dario Zeo (*1986) is an artist who lives and works in Basel and Bern. He is active in the fields of conceptual art and language art, digital literature as well as visual poetry. Text is Zeo's primary medium. He understands text as con-text, as part of a cultural environment that we participate in shaping.