

2017

# Laughter, inframince and cybernetics - Exploring the Curatorial as Creative Act

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/10382>

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.24382/908>

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**Laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics**  
Exploring The Curatorial as Creative Act

by

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A thesis submitted to Plymouth University  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Transtechnology Research

Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
School of Art and Media

January 2017

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## **Contents**

Copyright statement - 2

Author's declaration and word count - 2

**Abstract - 5**

**Acknowledgements - 7**

**Illustration - 10**

Marcel Duchamp, Door: 11, Rue Larrey (Porte: 11, Rue Larrey), 1927

**Introduction - 11**

The approach of this thesis - 12

Chapter structure - 13

Some keywords - 19

Use of own writing - 20

Use of current literature - 21

Contribution - 22

**1. Wat vooraf gaat (The foregoing) - 23**

1.1. The permeable membrane - 23

1.2. Confusion and conundrum - 25

1.3. Further literature on the curatorial - 32

1.4. Curating in the non-human world - 33

**2. Method – The Opaque Lens - 36**

2.1. An imaginative leap – Whitehead and Stein - 37

2.2. Notions of rhythm - 39

2.3. Avoiding bifurcation - 45

2.4. Stein and Duchamp - 48

2.5. Ways of organising - 51

2.6. Diffraction - 56

**3. Laughter - [Reasons to be Cheerful, Part Three] - 62**

3.1. Laughter and messiness - 63

3.2. Studies of laughter - 66

3.3. Taxonomy of laughter - 73

3.4. Laughter at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - 76

3.5. Jarry, Dada and laughter - 81

3.6. Laughter and knowledge transfer - 85

#### **4. *Inframince* - The Observed Unobserved - 89**

- 4.1. Minor vs major - 89
- 4.2. 'Ontstaansgeschiedenis' of the *inframince* - 93
- 4.3. The *inframince* notes - 96
- 4.4. Smoke and mirrors - 99
- 4.5. *Inframince* in critical literature - 101
- 4.6. Most recent contributions on the *inframince* - 112

#### **5. Cybernetics – Fluid Networks - 117**

- 5.1. Bateson, Duchamp and cybernetics - 118
- 5.2. Oulipo and cybernetics - 124
- 5.3. From cybernetics to affect - 128
- 5.4. Cybernetics and becoming - 131
- 5.5. Cybernetics and time - 139

#### **6. The Creative Act – *Inframince* as operative tool - 142**

- 6.1. *Inframince* and the minor - 142
- 6.2. *Inframince* and affordance - 144
- 6.3. *Inframince* and a practical application - 147
- 6.4. Narrative medicine - 150
- 6.5. Media studies and 'togetherness' - 152

#### **7. The *inframince* in action - 155**

- 7.1. Preamble – Wunderkammer model and Warburg - 156
- 7.2. A literal presence of the *inframince* – Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* - 160
- 7.3. Duchamp as curator - 161
- 7.4. Fluxus and other examples of playfulness - 163
- 7.5. Learning from artists – Wolfgang Tillmans - 170
- 7.6. Own practice – case study "in action" - 172
- 7.7. The importance of conversation - 176
- 7.8. Spot On, Platform P at the Duke and others - 180

#### **Conclusion - 189**

- Contribution - 191
- Further research - 195

#### **Bibliography - 196**

#### **Appendix - 214**

- Overview of presentations, seminars, exhibitions 2010-2017 - 215
- Overview essays and reviews 2010-2017 - 218
- Essays - 220
- Reviews - 239

## Abstract

This thesis identifies and responds to a contemporary impasse in the curatorial, which is thought of as the realm that encompasses curating as a complex action and interaction; a verb that includes the conceiving, organising and executing of exhibitions as well as critical thinking around curation as a discipline. The current impasse in curation the thesis responds to is caused, on the one hand, through its rapid expansion since the late 1980s and, on the other, through its mainstream and populist appropriation, which confuses understandings of it.

The thesis proposes a strategy for the recovery for curating's most basic work of 'taking care' and situates the curatorial as a creative act. It adopts Duchamp's *inframince* as an artistic concept, and uses it as a lens to reveal the role of the speculative, poetic and absurd, the personal and subjective and the instant of emergence of creativity in curatorial practice.

This facilitates an essentially diffractive methodology as well as a textual method of 'an imaginative leap' through friction, rhythm and repetition, building on Whitehead and Barad, (among others) to connect ideas of non-linearity and relay in (art) history. Opening up this rich meshwork thus allows for a reconnection of the curatorial to its original provenance and connoisseurship. The poetic investigation of an invisible force, the *inframince*, which is seen as instrumental to the curatorial and meaning making in general, is underpinned by the investigation of two other major, intertwining narratives – laughter and cybernetics. This liberates the *inframince*'s versatility and makes it potentially an operative tool, following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming minor and O'Sullivan's interpretation, within a wider trans-disciplinary framework of art-science collaborations. Through this discussion, the thesis then reaffirms the curatorial (as it is intended here) as a practice that shapes the collaboration between specific human and nonhuman elements: the curator, and the artist (and/or scientist) and texts, artefacts, spaces and time.



## Acknowledgements

Phew, this has been quite a ride! Little did I know what this PhD process would actually entail when I decided to move to Plymouth from Belgium in 2010 to join Transtechnology Research. I had been in touch with Prof. Dr. Michael Punt since about the beginning of 2009 when I was working on a major research and exhibition project for the University of Leuven on the collaboration between artists and scientists that I had called *Parallelepiped*. Part of this three year long project was a conference and I was advised by Jan Baetens of Literary Theory and Cultural Studies at the University of Leuven to invite Michael as the keynote speaker as he was editor in chief of *Leonardo Reviews* and convenor of *Transtechnology Research* at Plymouth University. And so I did invite him and he luckily said yes and with that started our exchange. I told him about my longheld desire to start a PhD in order to properly reflect on some aspects of the curatorial process and my practice. And he was, together with the late and sadly missed Dr. Martha Blassnigg, interested in my proposal. They invited me over to Plymouth to attend and contribute to one of their seminars and I sensed that I had found what I was looking for – a group that did not specialise in the curatorial but instead in the transdisciplinary, a wonderful mix of people, disciplines and interests. When not much later my job and my home came to an unexpected end I decided to jump and move. Little did I know...

It was, however, not so much the research and the writing that caused the anxiety over the years. If anything that was exactly what pulled me through while trying to survive as a self-funded part-time student in a foreign country, dealing with the adventure of sustaining myself and my studies through various jobs. The unexpected illness and subsequent death of my father Kees Graaf halfway during my research track left me without an important intellectual sparring partner. Sadly I cannot physically show him the fruit of our endless conversations.

The final year turned out to be extra challenging when in January 2016 I suddenly had to move house after more than five years, right at the start of my writing up process,



and had to pack up all my carefully laid out research and books. To this day I still haven't been able to unpack my full library and find the box containing catalogues that I published or contributed to over the years. The EU referendum of 2016 did not help either to make this writing up process a quiet one. It saddens me more than anything to have witnessed the vote to leave the EU as this thesis is very much about a strong believe in 'togetherness' and openness. The new American presidency forms in this respect another challenge.

Which in the end made it all worthwhile was the research, reading and writing over the past six years that are now drawn together in this thesis to form exactly the kind of reflection that I so dearly sought. I count myself extremely lucky to have found such an excellent intellectual home in Transtechnology Research with Prof. Dr. Michael Punt to support me throughout it all. So thanks in the first place to him and Martha for taking me on board, and for the great in-depth discussions that not only always brought me back on track, but which also led to new insights. The way Michael is capable of compactly summarising what my research was actually about was always both confrontational and mind-blowing. The 'early' Transtech group I stepped into also gave me the wonderful companionship of Martyn Woodward, Claudy Op den Kamp, and Rita Cachao, who through conversations, excursions and meals also made me feel I had chosen the right path. Sadly our paths don't cross each other anymore.

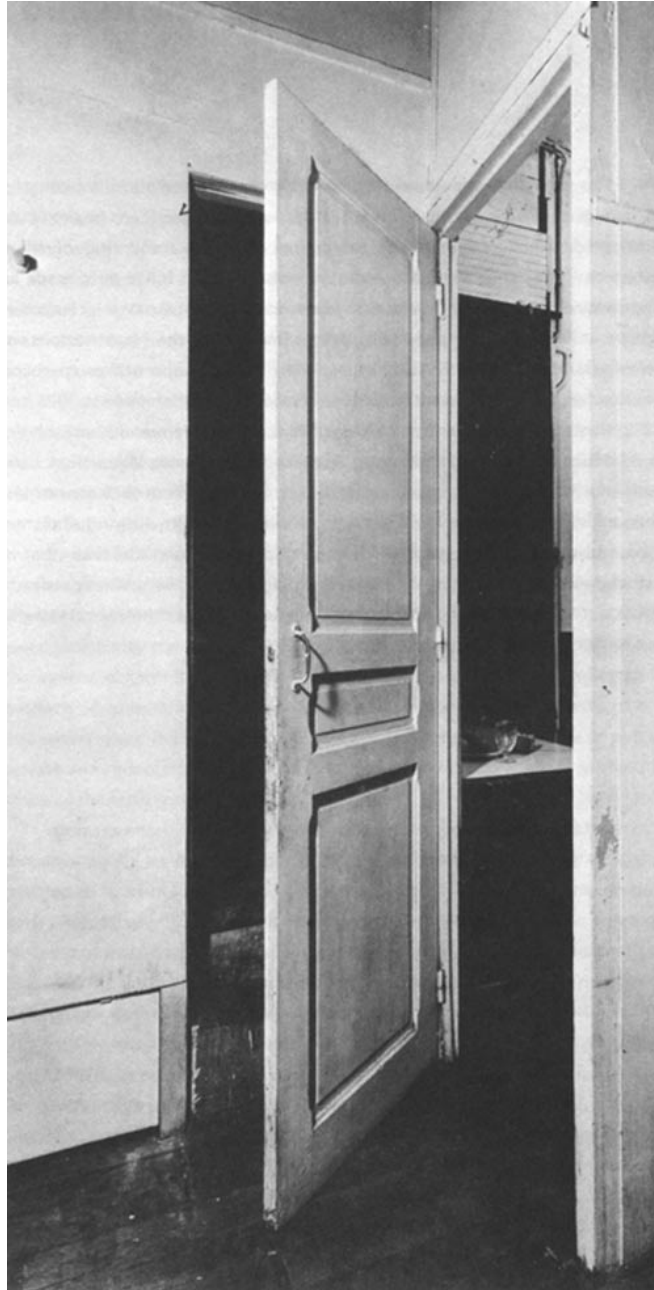
To support the financial challenge of my research I developed at one point a tongue-in-cheek scheme of support by issuing shares. Although in the end this was not really successful, it was nevertheless a fun undertaking and for which I have to thank Sara Bomans for the design and production of the shares in the first place and also those who bought shares to show their support for me. Unfortunately, I have lost the list of all who did, but from memory:

Remco Roes, Antoon Van den Braembussche, Claudy Op den Kamp, Martyn Woodward, Jennifer Kanary Nikolova, R. Wouda, Marcio Rocha, Flavia Amadeu and anyone who's name went missing – thank you for believing in the project. A very special thanks needs to go to Rachel Ara and Laura Hudson for helping me out in particularly dire times.

A special thanks also needs to go to Dr. Hannah Drayson who partly took over Martha's role and has been a stern editor of my text. Extra special thanks must go however to my great friend and research colleague Jane Hutchinson who was such a huge help in proofreading this thesis, but also as an endless supplier of chocolate and other goodies to keep me going. I will definitely be there to support your further research journey when you need it.

And as this thesis is amongst others about the collaboration between the human and non-human, special thanks also needs to go to my dear cat Lulu who has taught me a lot about this collaboration, such as that my flat is actually not mine but hers, that a laptop should not be in ones lap, as that is her spot, and that there is actually such a thing as non-human laughter, or at least a kind of giggle.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Reggie Doove and Kees Graaf, without whose mental support, imaginative and subversive thinking, endless conversations and adventures, this research would not have happened in the first place.



Marcel Duchamp, Door: 11, Rue Larrey (Porte: 11, Rue Larrey), 1927. Three-dimensional pun: a door that permanently opens and shuts at the same time, made by a carpenter after Duchamp's design, 86 5/8 x 24 11/16 in. Collection Arman, New York. Courtesy of Arturo Schwarz. (Judovitz, 1995, Fig 78, p 231).

## Introduction: The curatorial as creative act

This thesis identifies and responds to an impasse that the author perceives in the curatorial, the realm that encompasses curating as a verb in terms conceiving, organising and executing exhibitions as well as thinking around this discipline. This impasse is caused on the one hand through its rapid expansion since the late 1980s, and on the other hand through its mainstream appropriation, which leaves it altogether in a confused state. The thesis proposes a strategy of recovery of its most basic working methods by explicitly returning to its original etymological meaning of ‘taking care’ as well as regarding the curatorial as a creative act. This is done by locating the curatorial in the collaboration and interaction between both human and human, and human and nonhuman actors: curators, artists, scientists, text, artefacts, space, time and nonhuman animals. A poetic investigation of an invisible force that is seen as instrumental in the curatorial and meaning making in general, is underpinned by investigating a set of three major, intersecting ideas or intertwining narratives: laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics. The identification and combination of these specific narratives is inspired by my recognition of laughter as an essential element in collaboration, while the *inframince* (a concept by the artist Marcel Duchamp) functions as an indicator of small differences that might normally stay unobserved but which can lead to new knowledge and through this to mirth. Cybernetics, as a system of thought to study complexities in communication, also leads this thesis to explore the potential of unexpected dynamics within the curatorial process. Although this trio seems to make an odd gang the thesis will show how they actively interact, and how, with the *inframince* acting as an operational tool, they could be an answer for the impasse in the curatorial. For this purpose, the *inframince* is eventually detached from its origin and is allocated a wide range of disguises that confirm its versatility as a concept.

This introduction will proceed with a short discussion of the approach of this thesis followed by an overview of the chapter structure, the use of literature and a selection of key words to end with a suggestion of the contribution of the thesis.

### *The approach of this thesis*

This thesis responds to the perceived impasse in the curatorial through a ‘*pataphysic*’<sup>1</sup> (serious, but at times also healthily tongue-in-cheek) strategy of recovery of its most basic elements, especially those of wonder and display in the realms of meaning making and knowledge production. The thesis is based upon conclusions drawn from many years of experience as a professional curator. It initially and explicitly detaches itself from the practice of curating by concentrating on a poetic and philosophical exploration that will form a solid foundation for its practical application. Curatorial models from the past form an important starting point for this exploration. The *Kunstkammer* or cabinet of curiosities is a well-known early example of the curatorial in a usually private display that forms, in more than one sense, a model for the way this thesis works. Described in the context of Mark Dion’s contemporary displays in cabinets, The Tate gives the following description that connects well to the proposals set out in this thesis:

Wunderkammer or curiosity cabinets were collections of rare, valuable, historically important or unusual objects, which generally were compiled by a single person, normally a scholar or nobleman, for study and/or entertainment. The Renaissance wunderkammer, like the modern museum, were subject to preservation and interpretation. However, they differed from the modern museum in some fundamental aspects of purpose and meaning. Renaissance wunderkammer were private spaces, created and formed around a deeply held belief that all things were linked to one another *through either visible or invisible similarities*. People believed that by detecting those visible and invisible signs and by recognizing the similarities between objects, they would be brought to an understanding of how the world functioned, and what humanity’s place in it was (*History of the Wunderkammern (cabinet of curiosities)*, n.d., my italics in the text).

The thesis thus is built on identifying these “visible or invisible similarities” between various entities that have become lost in history, or, as Pamela Lee puts it, to retrieve “a buried history of reception” (Lee, 2001, p.49), which is further discussed in section 4.5 on cybernetics and time.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Pataphysics was invented by the French writer Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) and defined by him as “the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments” (Jarry, 1996 [1965], p. 22 and is extensively discussed throughout the thesis and explicitly in chapter 4.

In line with this approach the thesis is informed by various sources related to modernist literature, philosophy and art history, as well as popular literature and radio programmes. This mixing of sources is at times combined with a mixture of languages where this is thought to be more suitable.

### *Chapter structure*

The thesis is developed through seven chapters that interplay with each other to develop new knowledge.

**Chapter 1, ‘Wat vooraf gaat’ (The Foregoing)** In this first chapter I discuss my personal background as a curator. My upbringing in a specific geographical situation – close to easily negotiable borders – and the strong influence of my parents’ activities within the local sixties culture were instrumental in the development of my practice. Further influential elements in a career that began in 1987, include a long period of teaching on Dada and Surrealism. This coincided with the accelerated development of the curatorial during that period. However, as my career progressed I became increasingly irritated with the rhetoric surrounding the curatorial and this eventually led to the development of the thesis presented here. In this chapter I present examples of this rhetoric drawn from recent publications, internet forums and radio programmes, including a reflection upon curating in the nonhuman world by birds.

In **chapter 2, Method – The Opaque Lens** the thesis discusses the use of what can be called a predominantly diffractive methodology, in which opacity, friction and rhythm play a significant role. It does this through an exploration of the work of, amongst others, Whitehead, Stein and Barad, while also connecting to ideas of non-linearity and relay in (art) history as expressed by Warburg, Kubler, Serres and Green. These discussions and connections allow for scanning possible indications or signals from the past that are useful today. The thesis thus tries to find new knowledge in the interstices in time, literature and between disciplines. In anticipation of this chapter on method, it is worthwhile to mention Isabelle Stengers who in her constructivist reading of *Process and Reality* quotes Whitehead, on life that “lurks in the interstices of every cell” and interprets this as “the interstices, where the possibility of original, new lures for feeling lurked” (Stengers, 2015, pp. 60-61). For the artist Renée Green

(2014) the term ‘relay’ “suggest[s] ways of thinking about [her] work” occurring “in different and overlapping forms and tak[ing] place over time and in multiple locations” (Green, 2014, p. 388). *Relay* and other projects at the time focused “on the relationality and tensions arising in and between locations, movement, and passages of time” (Green, 2014, p. 389). Green makes her intention clear by quoting Kubler from *The Shape of Time*: “Historical recall never can be complete nor can it be even entirely correct, because of the successive relays that deform the message” (Kubler in Green, 2014, p.389).

In her contribution to the publication *Arts of Living on A Damaged Planet* (2017), which is discussed more extensively in chapter 7, Barad gives an extensive explanation of the workings of quantum physics and inseparability in which “matter is understood to agential” (Barad, 2017, pp. G110) and in which she stresses the importance of entanglement that is also underpinning the concerns of this thesis:

On the contrary, agential realism understands the very nature of matter and the very matter of nature as (iteratively re-) constituted through a (n iteratively reconfigured) multiplicity of force relations. This by no means invalidates notions such as entity, force, time, scale, boundary, resistance, or resilience. Rather, the point is to get underneath as it were, to have an analytical frame for asking a set of *prior questions* about how to understand such notions in their materiality and to ask how such things come into existence, rather than starting the analysis after they’ve arrived on the scene. Entities, space, and time exist only within and through their specific *intra-actions*; this is not to say that they are mere transient and fleeting effects but rather that they are specifically materially constituted. On this account *quantum entanglements* are not mere contrivances, nor simply the outcome of highly technical laboratory practices, but rather the core of this relational ontology. Entanglements are not the mere intertwinings of, or linkages between, separate events or entities or simply forms of interdependence that point to the interconnectedness of all being as one. *Entanglements are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies* (Barad, 2017, pp. G110-111, her italics).

Laughter, which is the subject of **chapter 3 Laughter – [Reasons to be Cheerful, Part Three]**, is not discussed as an involuntary act, about which a substantial amount of literature in the context of cognition already can be found. Instead, it is recognized as specifically significant, both as a catalyst and carrier of meaning within the context of collaboration between both human and nonhuman elements. Initially, through a focus upon the formalist or structural side of laughter as a social and cultural

construction in Europe during the wider turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, laughter is discussed as being directly related to the appearance of cross-disciplinary expressions in the arts around that period. It is also brought into an immediate relation to what Michael Bahktin would define as the *chronotope* or time-frame within literature (Bahktin, 1981, pp. 84-85). The application of this concept within the context of the curatorial is substantiated by the fact that “the notion of the ‘curatorial’ has come to subsume techniques, formats, and aesthetics – not unlike the function of the concepts of the cinematic or the literary” (von Bismarck, Schaffaff and Weski, 2012, p. 8). In line with the chronotopes that Bakhtin analysed, such as those of the encounter, the road, and the threshold (Lorino, 2012), this thesis views the chronotope of laughter as a specific creative moment within the context of curatorial organisation that takes place in and through laughter. This understanding draws from and builds upon the work of, amongst others, Arthur Koestler, David Bohm and Philippe Lorino, whose research relates to creativity and organisation theory. The thesis thus concentrates upon the hermeneutics of laughter, especially its ability to change frames, with in that sense its sound not being unlike the rattling of a train when it changes tracks. This shifting of tracks or frames is itself seen as an example of the necessity of making mistakes that Bohm calls for when after a true perception of the new and different and which is thus situated in a creative moment (Bohm, 1998, p. 4).

This thesis subsequently adopts an artistic concept in **chapter 4 *Inframine* – The Observed Unobserved**. Marcel Duchamp’s *inframine*<sup>2</sup>, is explored as a product of its time to be used as a lens to look specifically at the role of the speculative, poetic and absurd, the personal and subjective as well as the instant of emergence of creativity. In this respect, it overlaps with the notion of laughter described above and chimes with Duchamp’s application of a refined ‘knowing’ kind of laughter throughout his career. The versatility of the *inframine* makes it potentially a useful tool within a wider trans-disciplinary framework of new media practices and art-science collaborations. This notion is inspired by an observed occurrence in the ‘traditional’ curatorial, exhibition making process of a relative minimal shift or

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout various sources, including Duchamp’s own notes and publications, a variety of writing styles for the *inframine* and its translation *infrathin* occur. I follow the notation as used for the title of the chapter in the first French edition of the published notes dedicated to the *inframine* and consequently use in its translation the notation *infrathin*. When quoting sources I use the style employed by its author.



moment of transfer from one state to another. At this observed moment things (temporarily) fall into place through the collaboration between curator, artist, artwork and surroundings and in which laughter can play a decisive role.

This chapter suggests that the use of Duchamp's concept as a lens to understand this minimal but important shift proves the existence of an opaque network between actor (e.g. curator, artist, writer or translator) and actants (e.g. art works, space, text or words), which is also supported by Bahktin's chronotope. Interestingly, Bahktin establishes an art-science connection through his adoption of the term chronotope from mathematics, following Einstein, who introduced it as part of the theory of relativity (Bahktin, 1981). Just like Duchamp never gave a concise definition of *inframince*, it is intriguing that, as Morson and Emerson point out in their study (1990), Bahktin did not concisely define the chronotope either. As a way of understanding experience, which is again not dissimilar of the *inframince*, the chronotope essay can, in Morson and Emerson's view, be seen as a further development of Bahktin's earlier concern with the 'act' as demonstrated in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Morson and Emerson, 1990, pp. 366-367). This in itself gives occasion for this thesis to draw comparisons between Duchamp's address and paper *The Creative Act*, written for the Convention of the American Federation of the Arts, in Houston (1957), and Koestler's *The Act of Creation* (1964). Furthermore, it allows for the curatorial to be considered as a creative act. The curatorial is in essence thus seen as a performance that creates the new (Panzner, 2015, p. 11 and Lind, 2012).

The *inframince* is situated in a wider (art) historical and literary context, ranging from proto-Dadaists such as Rabelais, Jarry, Allais and the Fumistes, Gertrude Stein and the later Oulipo-movement. It is informed by philosophical and scientific approaches such as pragmatism, cybernetics, diffraction and entanglement. While there has been thorough and wide-ranging research into the 'non-perceptible' (Henderson, 1998), the 'potential' (Gamboni), and the 'immaterial' (Blackman, 2012), it appears that the *inframince* has escaped attention. By adopting a (seemingly) individual, subjective and by all means in terms of scale, minimal moment or contribution to an artist's oeuvre as a lens this thesis recognizes an art historical approach such as that suggested by Warburg, via an analysis of the instant rather than the evolutionary (Davila, 2010, p. 25). In this sense it takes its inspiration also from Edmonds' and

Eidinow's *Wittgenstein's Poker* (2001) in which a relatively small instant comparable to the *inframince*, namely the famous altercation between Wittgenstein and Popper, is developed into a wider context. At the same time this lens looks both ways, which is not unlike the working of Duchamp's *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour* (1918).<sup>3</sup> The thesis recognizes the event of the *inframince* moment as a returning part of the historical de-linear flow that is suggested by Serres.

As for the connection to cybernetics, which is discussed in **chapter 5 Cybernetics – Fluid Networks**, it is important to regard the curatorial just like laughter and the *inframince*, as a highly dynamic process. The development of exhibitions or presentations typically result in only temporary static moments, limited in time, either through the duration of the exhibition or through the influence of 'fashion' in longer lasting (museum) displays. Or as Lorino observes within his study of business organisations, a process view of organisation as a social and human process involves a specific

“triadic” agency which involves sensemaking and interpretive perspectives (Peirce 8/328). This type of process, which intertwines transforming the world and sense of the world, is an *inquiry* in the pragmatic sense (Dewey 1938/1980). It involves multiple sensemaking agents, with a plurality of interpretive perspectives which make sense of situations through dialogical interactions (Tsoukas 2009). The organizing process is mediated by systems of signs, languages and tooling, which allow reflexivity and dialogue, and it is also mediating: it permanently re-creates those mediations (language and tools) by engaging them in action (Lorino, 2012).

Cybernetics is predominantly discussed in respect of its rather more poetic, interdisciplinary second phase, that allows for connections to literature via the so-called Oulipo group.

Following O'Sullivan's suggestion of the minor as operational tool **chapter 6 The Creative Act - *inframince* as operative tool** sets out to turn the *inframince* into this tool within a curatorial context. It does this by exploring a becoming minor as an essential strategy and looks further into the specific affordance of the *inframince* via

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/78993>

the definition by the psychologist John Pickering. This leads to an exploration of the different disguises of the *inframince* before a practical application within the curatorial is suggested, which is further elaborated in chapter 7. However, due to the versatility of the concept, the *inframince* also allows for its application in other fields. As a consequence of the fact that this thesis largely builds on a context of literature and (play with) language, a connection was found to an emerging field of science, namely that of *narrative medicine*. This link between literature and medicine was developed through the work of Ria Felski, who is currently Niels Bohr Professor at the Department for the Study of Culture at the University of Southern Denmark, where she leads research into Literature and Narrative Medicine. In Felski's introduction to the New Literary History volume, *Recomposing the Humanities – with Bruno Latour*, she provides a further link by identifying curating as one of four terms, alongside conveying, criticizing and composing, that can be used in the multidimensional defense of the humanities (Felski, 2016, p. 216). Felski uses the wider context in which curating is applied, but she also returns to its origins in the sense “of guarding, protecting, conserving, caretaking, and looking after” (Felski, 2016, p.217).

**Chapter 7 The *inframince* in action** provides the content that can be used in an educational context as suggested in chapter 6. This chapter is divided into 3 parts to discuss a series of important precursors in which playfulness has a specific role, connecting to what I call the *Wunderkammer*- and Warburg model. It then briefly considers the work of the German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans to demonstrate the importance of his practice for a curatorial application as it seems to connect strongly to the *inframince*. Finally, in order to demonstrate as far as possible, the whole process in action, the chapter presents an extensive discussion of a series of exhibitions and proposals that I curated during recent years. This leads to a connection to emergent literature on the interaction between the human and nonhuman and speculates about the potential for a wider application of the *inframince*.

*Some keywords*

**Curator, curating, curation and the curatorial** or in other words “the exhausted **c-word[s]**” (see above), are terms that float throughout the thesis and have been touched briefly upon at the beginning of this introduction, but for clarity will be explained here. Following Judah’s critique, the curator can basically be seen as an organiser of sorts. Within an art context this can entail quite a wide range of responsibilities, such as (in random order) the negotiation with a venue for an exhibition, negotiation with the artists who form part of it, the development of a concept, the actual making of the exhibition, the follow up on practical issues like transport, travel, insurance, writing of the press release and follow up of press contacts, writing of and production of a catalogue etc. Curating usually only relates to the making of an exhibition, but outside of an art context also relates to making a certain selection. The curatorial usually encompasses all of the above plus the thinking about the discipline of curating.

In this non-statistical approach, history naturally becomes a ‘game to be played’ (Punt, 2008) or to be played with. **Play** - with concepts, space, objects, language, and limits of many sorts – forms thus an integral element of this thesis, both as subject matter and method of problem solving. Through Duchamp’s connection with a systematic approach of play (and the art world) via his interest in chess and his membership of the Oulipo-group, a selective investigation of system theory via Le Lionnais, Bateson and Serres almost becomes inevitable.

Within a generally playful approach, **laughter**, either internally or bursting out loud, is seen as one of those “important forces, energies and intensities” suggested by Coole and Frost in their introduction to *New Materialisms*, that connects to “complex, even random processes [that] have become the new currency” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p.13). This is used to break open all too out-dated, linear and compartmentalised visions of **art history** in which the individual artist is at times made larger than life, as in the case of Marcel Duchamp. Coole and Frost state that scientific theories cannot simply be imported into philosophy, but that the tropes and rhythms they suggest can transform theoretical discourses (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 13). However, where Coole and Frost connect self-organizing properties mainly to “nature, planetary ecosystem, weather patterns, social movements, health and crime” (Coole and Frost,

2010, pp. 13-14), this thesis suggests the notion is also applied to the arts and art history, so connecting it with Deleuze's idea of a constant becoming, including meaning. This idea is stressed by the title of Green's introductory essay 'Other Planes, Different Phases, My Geometry, Times, Movements: Becomings Ongoing' and resonates throughout her book *Other Planes of There* (2014). It is one of those instances in which an investigative play with language becomes important. (Art) history is thus more viewed as nonlinear and process-based.

In response to Kubler's statement on the "unexpected potentialities as a predictive science" of art history (Kubler, 2008, p. 55) this thesis states that art practices and the curatorial as part of art history could potentially be seen as predictive, contributing to a (re-)elevation of art and science to the same level. With this goal in mind this thesis suggests that the curatorial is a form of creative activity resonating with the world via language, art or other forms of expression, of which the *inframince* could potentially be seen as indicative, and one of the "new paths for the wedding of scientific and cultural theory" alluded to by Massumi in his *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002).

This thesis thus investigates the dynamics of **collaboration and conversation** within a wider application of the curatorial and recognizes its physical ephemerality, evidence of which is not, cannot, and should not always be recorded. The thesis builds a rich meshwork while looking specifically at the role of the speculative, poetic and absurd, the personal and subjective, as well as the instant of emergence. This will enable an original reconnection of the current broad interest in, and ubiquity of curation, that extends beyond a purely art historical framework into a wider everyday application, and to its provenance and connoisseurship.

#### *Use of own writing*

While undertaking research for this PhD a series of essays and reviews were written, which were instrumental in the development of this thesis. They have, in part, been included in the text where they present key ideas and contribute to the argument. They can be found in their entirety in the appendix. The essays, specifically *Exploring the Curatorial as Creative Act Part II: The Artist as Found System* (2013) and *Poet as Machine, on Calvino's Cybernetics and Ghosts* (2014), have an explicit experimental

character that makes use of a ‘pataphysical, pragmatist approach, exploring the realm between fiction and reality, and trying to apply Duchamp’s *inframince* in order to develop a system(atic) thinking about the artist(ic).

### *Use of current literature*

During this research and especially in the last two years, several books have been published that relate to the subject of this thesis. This can be interpreted as a sign of the timeliness of the research. Some came hauntingly close to the subject of this thesis and were therefore turned into inspirational sparring partners, in this way making use of the power of interstices that Whitehead and Stengers allude to above. In particular, the following four books should be acknowledged here. Astrid Loranges’ *How Reading Is Written* (2014), which I reviewed for *Leonardo Reviews*, was especially influential and formed initially the basis for my Transtechnology Research seminar *The Opaque Lens: Affect and Subversion in Media Practices* (Plymouth, 18 February 2015). Its discussion of opaqueness, friction and rhythm became quite important for the methodology used in this thesis (as discussed in chapter 1).

During the writing up stage of this thesis Elena Filipovic published her book *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (October 2016). It was developed from her PhD thesis, which she submitted in 2013. She concentrates in her book, and as the title indicates, on activities that can be described as marginal, but turn out to be substantial if not essential to Duchamp’s artistry. Although this comes close to my use of the notion of ‘minor’ and its importance to the curatorial she misses the point by marginalising the *inframince* in her discourse. Although the focus of our respective research projects is decidedly different, hers, Duchamp as curator, mine, the potential of Duchamp’s concept of the *inframince* as a curatorial tool, inevitably some of our arguments and references overlap.

Jean-Michel Rabaté in *The Pathos of Distance* (2016) puts the *inframince* at the heart of its argument but, as the title of his book indicates, is concerned with its relationship to pathos. Without directly mentioning narrative medicine he nevertheless touches on this discipline through his discussion of Siri Hustvedt’s novel *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) in which she narrates the effect of history on a family. It led me to consider the application of the *inframince* outside of the field of the curatorial.

James Housefield's *Playing with Earth and Sky – Astronomy, Geography and the Art of Marcel Duchamp* (2016), although sometimes its statements are very questionable, nevertheless also led to or confirmed certain insights concerning the *inframince*.

Housefield does not once mention the word, although he describes in detail the cover of the magazine *View* (1945) in which Duchamp first introduced his concept.

Finally, two specific publications, Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) and *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2016) with articles by, amongst others, Haraway and Karen Barad, made it clear that an exploration of the *inframince* is more than timely and can play an essential role in our dealings with the nonhuman.

### *Contribution*

Where this thesis makes a contribution is in its poetic investigation of an invisible force that is seen as instrumental in the curatorial and meaning making in general. In order to define this force, the thesis identifies and investigates three major and intersecting narratives, to which the three central chapters of this study are dedicated: laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics. Laughter is considered as an essential element in collaboration and a moment of knowledge transfer, the *inframince* (a concept by the artist Marcel Duchamp) as an indicator of small differences, and cybernetics as a system of thought to study complexities in communication. Through an interdisciplinary, historical, and philosophical exploration of these themes, and spanning a wide time frame from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day, the thesis develops the *inframince* as an operational tool within a curatorial context. While turning to the most basic workings of the curatorial this thesis regards it as a 'creative act', with an explicit nod to Duchamp's paper *The Creative Act* from 1957. This allows in the end for a wider application of the *inframince* and a recognition of the curatorial as a basic element of the 'process that is the world' (Panzner, 2015).

The timeliness of this thesis seems to be confirmed by recent developments such as this year's conference of the LUMA Foundation, which moves away from a global view and a new approach by the educational program De Appel in Amsterdam, which focusses on so-called 'de- universalisation'. I will return to these developments in the conclusion of this thesis.

## 1. Wat vooraf gaat (The foregoing)

This chapter sketches the scene in which this thesis came about and was further developed. It first discusses my personal background as a curator, a career that I developed over a period of about 30 years. The chapter subsequently discusses the peculiar curatorial development during this period, which caused me an increasing irritation with the rhetoric surrounding it and which directly led to the subject of this thesis. To open up the discussion and to further connect to a personal fascination, the chapter ends with a short exploration of curating in the nonhuman world.

The Dutch title of this chapter, “wat vooraf gaat”, is used because it gives a particular indication of what goes afore..

### *1.1. The permeable membrane*

This research is largely informed by my fascination with borders of all sorts, and the crossing of them. This started no doubt, with my upbringing in the Southern Dutch town of Maastricht, where I literally lived within walking distance from the border with Belgium. Although at the time borders between European countries were still closed, firmly indicated on maps, and demanding for passports at regular border crossings, it was equally possible to cross those so-called ‘stern divisions’ by just taking other routes and walking through the fields. Borders thus (in my experience), turned out to be only a virtual demarcation and easily passible if one so desired. I am firmly convinced that this background was to be informative for my later interest in arts collaborations, and indeed anything cross-disciplinary and/or trans-disciplinary. Growing up in an artists’ family that was very active within the context of the Southern version of so-called Provo, a Dutch counterculture movement, which proclaimed that anything was possible, certainly contributed as well. In her anthology *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 196X to 197X* (2010) Beatrice Colomina includes a section on the little magazine *Ontbijt op Bed* (*Breakfast in Bed*) that was edited and designed by my father, the screen printer Kees Graaf (p. 99) as well as an interview with the co-editor Hans Mol (pp. 414-416). These describe well the imaginative approach that also was prevalent in Provo



Maastricht and in the follow up magazine, the equally little *Zondagmorgen zonder zorgen* (*Sunday morning without sorrows*), which my parents would hand deliver to the subscribers in and around Maastricht, with us in the back of the car. In these surroundings borders became permeable membranes.

A certain healthy disrespect for borders or anything ‘boxed in’ led me, in my subsequent curatorial and art critical practice, to become interested in the fluidity of identities, specifically those of artist and curator. The quality of collaboration, dialogue and exchange became equally important. I started my curatorial practice in Antwerp more or less by accident in 1987, the same year that the first curatorial course opened at the (still existing) Le Magasin in Grenoble. I was blissfully ignorant of this fact, when having moved to Antwerp while still studying Art History at the University of Leiden, I started to make exhibitions in my extended apartment. The impetus for my work was the need to engage with living artists, of whom there was an absolute lack at the university, but certainly not in the burgeoning art scene of ‘het Zuid’ (the South) in Antwerp. This was where the MUHKA (Museum of Contemporary Art) had just opened its doors, exciting galleries like Zeno X and Micheline Szwajcer had relocated and housing was still affordable. My six years of making explicitly non-commercial shows under the heading of Parbleu (an exclamation of surprise and a French confirmative play of words suggested by one of my collaborators) constituted in a way my own personal curatorial course. It formed the start of 30 years of mostly freelance curating of exhibitions in various circumstances, but in which the quality of collaboration was, for me, always at the core of the matter.

My interest in Dada and Surrealism was aroused during a six year period of work as a lecturer for a course on these subjects for the Flemish educational organisation Amarant. Not only did this course allow me to gain a good knowledge of Flanders and its various cultural centres, locations in which Amarant’s courses were given, I was also confronted with the various Flemish dialects and the beautiful flowery quality of the language. This influence upon my work is clear, as the potential for creativity through ‘play’ with language is at the core of this thesis. Teaching the course for Amarant also allowed me to develop an in-depth knowledge of Dada and Surrealism and especially an admiration for the work of Marcel Duchamp. His

concept of the *inframince*, that plays such a central part in this thesis, inspired me over the years and was integral to the concepts for exhibitions I made. These included the shows *inbetween/tussenin* (MDD, Deurle, 1998), *3ness* (MDD, Deurle, 2000) and *A Riddle for Zoersel* (Zoersel, 2002). The *inframince* indicated in these instances a dynamic, creative and undefined state of in-betweenness that could lead to new meaning making.

In the exhibition *3ness* my co-curators (the artist-curators Dike Blair and Jimmie Dams) and I all chose a text, a sound piece and an image as parameters for our choice of, in total 27 artists. The combination of tongue-in-cheekness and seriousness in the way we chose the artists, as well as our collaboration with them, is still an important influence upon me. I opted for a text by Duchamp on the *inframince*, a photo of Anders Edström of two people sitting very close to each other, and a loop of Bob Dylan's false start of his song *115<sup>th</sup> Dream* in which he bursts out in laughter. Little did I know at that point that I would end up in Plymouth (to which Dylan indirectly refers in his text, via his allusion to the Mayflower), let alone that he would win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, but it all seems to fall seamlessly together now. This show was particularly instrumental because of its notion of collaboration, closeness and laughter, which have informed my further career as a curator as well as this thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout my career, I observed an important network of inter-subjectivity between curator, artist, space and artwork that could be activated by the notion of laughter and mutual respect. Quite explicitly I included so-called non-conscious or nonhuman elements as I gathered that they played an equally important role in the equation. This understanding, combined with an increasing irritation with the rhetoric surrounding the practice of the curatorial, led to the need for the reflective exploration demonstrated in this thesis.

### *1.2. Confusion and conundrum*

With the publication of *Curationism – How Curating Took over the Art World and Everything Else* (2015) David Balzer added yet another layer to the corruption of the

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<sup>4</sup> For a full overview of my curatorial practice view  
<https://edithdoove.wordpress.com/projects/overview-exhibitions-projects/>

language surrounding curatorial practice. This corruption is characterised by an interesting phenomenon, namely the permeation of popular culture at the turn of the millennium by the buzzword ‘curate’. Balzer analyses this phenomenon by writing “the biography of the curator, the curated, the curatorial and curation – a story for our times” (Balzer, 2015, p. 6), but despite his accurate, although somewhat populist analysis he does not give a solution to the impasse, instead, he adds yet another layer to the confusion. The book is only one of many that have been published on the subject of curating and the curatorial in recent years. Ever since the first curatorial training school, the Ecole du Magasin in Grenoble, “... the first international curatorial studies program in Europe ... set up to provide a professional environment for a rigorous combination of research and practice”<sup>5</sup>, opened its door in 1987, the number of schools, conferences and symposia on the curatorial and curating has markedly increased, and with them the literature connected to it. A whole new industry has emerged to support a new, seemingly ever-expanding generation of curators, through both face-to-face and online training of conceptual and practical skills. An example is, amongst others, the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Founded in 1990 it has offered a graduate programme in curatorial studies since 1994. As part of its mission it states an intention

... to provide practical training and experience in a museum setting and an intensive course of study in the history of the contemporary visual arts, the institutions and practices of exhibition making, and the theory and criticism of the visual arts. ...

and

... to encourage and explore experimental approaches to the presentation of contemporary visual arts, particularly approaches that reflect the Center’s commitment to the multidisciplinary study of art and culture (*CCS Bard | Mission*, 2016).

At the other end of the spectrum one can place the Node Center for Curatorial Studies. Founded in 2009 as “the first e-learning program for curators and art

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<sup>5</sup> See amongst others <http://www.artandeducation.net/announcement/ecole-du-magasin-curatorial-training-program/>

professionals” it offers so-called practical tools such as “how to make a contract, assemble an art publication, write critically about art etc.” (*Node Center*, 2016).

Despite this growing ‘success’ of the profession, the permeation of its terminology into everyday life coincides however with a certain tiredness or impasse surrounding the practice of curating. This is demonstrated in the recent publication *The Curatorial Conundrum* (2016) that to some extent identifies the confusing state in which the curatorial finds itself. This state is not only caused by the appropriation of the curatorial by popular culture, but is also due to the fact that the curatorial scene, after a rapid expansion since the 1990s, seems to have lost itself. The book epitomizes and even emphasizes the conundrum, by posing in bold black lettering against an orangey background three desperate questions “What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?”

*The Curatorial Conundrum* is the follow up of a symposium at Bard College in November 2014. In their introductory essay the editors, Paul O’Neill (who has become the Center’s director of the graduate program in the meantime), Mick Wilson and Lucy Steeds, identify, in a problematically dense and jargon-heavy use of language, three important developments that frame the critical essays in this volume. First, they see the rapid and global expansion of curatorial educational programs and platforms since the late 1980s and early 1990s as not only creating a need for the publication of this volume, but also contributing to the problem as a consequence of a Eurocentric professionalization of practice that still prevails, and which tends to generate canonical understandings. Second, they identify a “re-setting of the tension between curating-as-display-making (the exhibitionary) and curating-as-expanded-practice (the curatorial)” (O’Neill, Wilson and Steeds, 2016, p. 7) over the years, to a less dichotomous situation of interchange. Third, the editors point to an “inflated art system ... entangled with dispersed and divergent critical fronts that contest the hegemonic construction of ‘the contemporary’ exclusively in terms of globalizing capital, and (Eurocentric) normative ‘development’ narratives” (O’Neill, Wilson and Steeds, 2016, p.8).

In short: an over-inflation of educational programs, an increasingly blurred distinction or self-inflicted confusion between curating and the curatorial, plus the hegemony of

an art market, in combination does not allow for what the editors call ‘alterity’, but for what could just be called a recognition or freedom of creative thinking and practice.

Whereas this forms a more than apt analysis of the current state of affairs in the realm of the curatorial related to exhibition making, there is also however, the inflation of the word ‘curate’ to consider. With everything from books, to clothes and menus nowadays being curated, it is no wonder that Rebecca Gowers recently mentioned the verb ‘to curate’ under the Q of qualms in a selection of her *Horrible Words* (2016). As an example of its use she quoted a phrase found in *The Guardian*: “We live a life of many dinners, many haircuts, many nappy changes. You can’t narrate them all ... You (in the unlovely vernacular of our time) curate” (Gowers, 2016). In an article written in 2014 for *The Independent*, Ian Burrell stated “They used to be known as DJs but now it is the “curators” who compile online playlists who are as crucial to the future of the music industry as the artists themselves” (Burrell, 2014, p.13). In the same article Gennerao Castaldo of the British Phonographic Industry says: “Curation is becoming increasingly important” (Burrell, 2014, p.13).

This development of the specific made ordinary or more widely accepted outside of its original premise, evokes a comparison with how royal styles of furniture and indoor decoration eventually ended up being common and everyday household items, Louis XIV for everyone. The comparison is less far-fetched than it seems, as curators have developed an unlikely stardom ever since the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann introduced the independent version of the profession in the sixties, by developing large-scale exhibitions outside of institutions. Since then, it is especially Hans Ulrich Obrist, now the curator at The Serpentine Gallery in London, and frequently only indicated with his initials HUO, who has gained the reputation of absolute star curator. This led Balzer to incorporate Bill Burns’ *Study for Tate Modern Sign* (2012), which states ‘Hans Ulrich Obrist Priez pour nous’ (HUO Pray for us) on the inside of the front cover of his book. He also dedicated the prologue to Obrist. While this kind of stardom and the museum as potential replacement of the church<sup>6</sup>, might explain the attraction of the profession for thousands of aspirant curators attending today’s various MA’s, symposia and conferences or online courses all over the world, the general

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<sup>6</sup> *Curating Worship* (2010), published by the London based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, seems to try and balance this phenomenon, introducing the notion of ‘worship curator’.

uneasiness with a profession whose principle activity is that of ‘putting together’ might also explain its mainstream appropriation.

Most recently Hettie Judah in an online article for *artnet news net* (2016) puts it even more bluntly. Under the title ‘Has the Art World Had Enough of ‘Curators’?’ her article, that tellingly has a large photographic portrait of Obrist as a headline image, suggests that new terms such as organizers, directors and agents should take over the “exhausted c-word”. Judah begins her discussion by asking “After years of curated socks, cheese, and bookshelves, are certain quarters of the art world finally starting to distance themselves from the term?” (2016). And thus curators prefer to return to a terminology that was more in vogue around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Judah cleverly tracks the use of “organizing” back to the time Kenneth Clark “co-organized” rather than “co-curated” his influential show on Italian Art at London’s Royal Academy in 1930. Jens Hoffman keeps it to a simple “by” for his show ‘Animality’ at the Marian Goodman Gallery (2016), which reminds Judah of the time when Harald Szeemann (generally seen as the first ‘Uber-Curator’) used “directed by” for his influential role in developing the equally influential exhibition and accompanying catalogue ‘Live in Your Head: When Attitude Becomes Form’ in 1969 at the Berner Kunsthalle.

Where Judah suspects in these moves the art’s world’s “response to the promiscuous adoption of the term outside of the art world” (2016) and wonders what happens to librarians when bookshelves become curated, her tale becomes hilarious via her description of the response by comic Stewart Lee on being described by the satirical magazine *Private Eye* as having “curated” a music festival. Judah calls his response in the *Observer*, in which Lee pretends to be ‘acting curator’ of the imaginary International Curatorship of Curators, as “frankly Dadaist” (Judah, 2016). In his usually absurdist tone Lee seamlessly moves from the fact that his granddad, a sales rep for Colman’s Mustard, who would have to call himself today “a mustard compound retail opportunity curator” (Lee, 2016), to the fact that this all figures within political correctness gone mad, ‘logically’ followed by the exclamation “The cattery wouldn’t take Robin’s cat because they said it looked like Hitler!!!!!!” (Lee, 2016). Lee admits to having curated “over six things, from a weekend at the Southbank Centre to the order of all the pens on my desk” as well as the “boutique music film festival *All Tomorrow’s Parties*, at Prestatyn Pontins” of which *Private*

*Eye* ‘accused’ him of being the ‘curator’ (in inverted commas). Lee is prompted to consult Obrist’s *Ways of Curating* but this leaves him none the wiser, so he ‘curates’ himself into a visionary state, and along the way comes to the conclusion that he’s a better ‘curator’ than Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Lee concludes

Fictional bands “curated” by a fictional “curator” who doesn’t exist! It’s time to take “curating” to the next level, where the act of “curating” becomes a comment on the very idea of “curating”. We haven’t even begun to explore what “curating” could mean. “Curating” will eat itself! Then, and only then, you may use your inverted commas (Lee, 2016).

Lee’s brilliant riposte, which is just like Judah’s article headed by a portrait of Obrist, was, ironically cited approvingly on the occasion of Obrist’s top ranking in the *Art Review*’s Power 100 list, which suggests that Obrist “was now synonymous with the term “curator” in the popular imagination” (Judah, 2016).

Finally, while writing up this thesis on the last day of 2016, BBC Radio 4’s programme ‘The New Curators: Who Decides What’s Culturally Important?’ tellingly discussed the role of the curator today and what curation actually means, introducing ‘curation’ as “a kind of buzz word in our new digital age” (further referenced as BBC Radio 4, 2016). The use of the curator and of curation was interestingly discussed in the context of our ‘age of superabundance’, which probably is also the reason why this programme was broadcast at the last day of the year, just before we make our usual New Year Resolutions, one of which might be de-cluttering. Given the fact that we are encouraged to make our own selections via a multitude of online apps, the question was raised whether we are still in need of expert advice, which of course links into the current general critique on experts. Discussing the subject were (there he is again!) Hans Ulrich Obrist as director of the Serpentine Gallery, London; Tasneem Zakaria Mehta as director of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum, and Michael Bhaskar, digital publisher and writer of the book *Curation – The Power of Selection in a World of Excess* (2016). Asked to define the notion of curator by Bridget Kendall who led the discussion, Zakaria Mehta highlighted aspects such as: unpacking ideas, new possibilities, hidden histories, and discussion of critical meaning, while in a museum context showing what’s new in contemporary art within an historical environment. Obrist saw historically (and typically, given his general

approach), four essential functions: that of preservation; the selection of new work to contribute to a legacy; a scholarly one that contributes to art history, and finally display, or the making of exhibitions. For Bhaskar, the main definition of curation in its new context outside of the museum mainly comes down to “selecting and arranging to add value” (BBC Radio 4, 2016). This obviously links in with the contents of his new book in which he presents his interests in an “introduction of new and different things” within a commercial context or retail “when we don’t know what we want” (Bhaskar, 2016). In Bhaskar’s view as expressed during the radio programme ‘curation’ should displace ‘creation’ with the latter being “lionised” and backfiring in its overproduction. Although his call for what is ‘distinctive’ is perhaps in some way praiseworthy, there is also an underlying danger. Equalizing creativity with material production ignores the fact that creativity is also related to thought and intellectual development.

To this idea of ‘creativity as myth’ Zakaria Mehta sensibly objects that the ‘filtering through a world of excess’ that Bhaskar advocates, seems “very elitist from an Indian perspective and reductive” (BBC Radio 4, 2016). For Mehta, curation is in the first place about deeply thinking of possible junctions between not only objects, but also ideas, an aspect of a curators’ practice brought into the discussion by Obrist. The curation of a wine list is, in Mehta’s view, simply not comparable to the extensive work she put into re-curating her museum to highlight hidden histories. Although Bhaskar is not arguing against the need for experts, he explicitly situates his notion of curating within a commercial context. To this discussion Obrist brings the fact that the inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, intended the Web to be used primarily for research purposes and abhors the fact that it now largely has an overt connection to consumption. Obrist points to the limit of growth in relation to the notion of overabundance and refers to the ‘locked-in syndrome’ where today the web is not so much an ‘inquiry zone’, or, a place for the flaneur of information, but a place that presents us with ideas we already believe in, instead of those with which we disagree. Rather than coming to a homogenized and, as this thesis suggests, a desensitized presentation, Obrist follows the example of the writer, philosopher and literary critic, Edouard Glissant, with his call for mixing various backgrounds, also called creolization, and the need for archipelago versus continental visions. One could translate this as ‘identity via diversity’ as symbolised in the image of an archipelago



as an extensive group of islands. Zakaria Mehta added to this discussion her uneasiness with the power of the curator versus that of artists and her reluctance to advertise herself as such, preferring to blend in the curatorial process as opposed to taking a hierarchical role. In this respect, Obrist sees the art curator as, in the first place, an enabler. This is an aspect that I very much relate to as a curator, and that has and still informs my way of collaborating with artists when making exhibitions. It is in fact a major impetus for the research behind this thesis.

The way that curation was discussed in this programme and in Bhaskar's book connects to a trend where it is seen as in general 'narrowing down' or simplifying. Bhaskar, both in the programme and in his book, stresses the notion of 'overabundance', not only of things but also of data. In that sense he locates the origin of the new use of the word in the Silicon Valley of the 1990s, which in its working lay at the basis of this super-growth of available data. He explains in the radio programme that in this context "choice becomes the really critical thing". It is therefore not surprising to find a review of Marie Kondo's follow-up book to *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying* (2014) (which sold 5m copies), in the Saturday 31 December 2016 Review section of *The Guardian* (Williams, 2016). Kondo's new book, *Spark Joy* is, according to reviewer Zoe Williams, basically "the same, with pictures" as its predecessor. One can certainly question this tidying trend in a wider, political perspective, in the sense of a drive to get rid of everything that is potentially subversive and thus harmful for a reigning order. This thesis does not discuss this specific aspect, but subversively contributes to this trend by going back to basics and (re-) discovering the tiniest component that is seen as being of the utmost importance for the future of curation. By doing so the thesis also returns to its etymologist origin, namely that of *curare* or 'taking care of'. But in line with Obrist's and Glissants call for mixing and Zakaria Mehta's uneasiness with the power relation associated with the curator, I strongly believe in the need for subversive friction in knowledge production, which is exemplified by a perhaps initially confusing, mixing together of laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics.

### *1.3 Further literature on the curatorial*

There has been extensive work on and in-depth analyses of the curatorial, as described above and, for example, also by Lind in *Performing the Curatorial Within*

*and Beyond Art* and von Bismarck, Schaffaff, and Weski in their *Cultures of the Curatorial*. Significantly, both were published in the same year (2012), by Sternberg Press. Obrist, who not only published *Ways of Curating* (2014) mentioned by Lee, but also *A Brief History of Curating* (2008) and an impressive number of interviews with artists, curators and scientists, should not be dismissed too quickly, due to his wealth of experience and historical information gathering on curating. Yet, despite the available analyses there still is room for a different perspective.

This thesis relocates the curatorial at its most basic level in the collaboration between both human and nonhuman elements – the curator, artist and/or scientist versus artefact, space and time. It does this in order to find a resolve for the identified impasse. Connecting the curatorial to the nonhuman is in itself not a novel undertaking. This is demonstrated by Obrist in *Ways of Curating* when he discusses the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou in 1985 that “changed the landscape not only for exhibition makers, philosophers and scientists, but for artists as well” (2014, p. 160). Obrist’s own interdisciplinary exhibition project *Laboratorium* that took place in Antwerp in 1999 (and that the author of this thesis was happy to attend), set up a confrontation between the scientific laboratory and the artist’s studio. Although the outcome was not entirely successful, Obrist rightfully points out in *Ways of Curating* that the project “brought the philosopher and historian of science Bruno Latour to the exhibition format” (2014, p. 164), while the philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers was also invited to curate a space. Obrist refers to the philosopher Michel Serres at the end of his discussion of *Les Immatériaux* who stated that “part of today’s fundamental evolution of art could be to open oneself up to living species, to open up to life and that of nature (Serres in Obrist, 2014, p. 162).

#### *1.4. Curating in the nonhuman world*

In her essay *The Exhibition as Collective* von Bismarck (2012) gives an important example of registering the importance of the nonhuman figure when she relates the arrangement of a (group) exhibition to Latour’s *actant*. The actant is a nonhuman entity that is in a position to activate subjects, and as such is a reading of Serres’ concepts of ‘quasi-subject’ and ‘quasi-object’. As von Bismarck explains

By means of delegation ... those who were involved as objects or subjects in the artifact in question are perhaps absent at the actual moment in time but are present in the quasi-subject. Because of this presence, the artifact that exists as an actant possesses qualities that are otherwise attributed only to subjects. In the delegation, Latour explains, it is “that an action, long past, of an actor, long disappeared, is still active here, today, on me. I live in the midst of technical delegates; I am folded into nonhumans” (Latour cited in von Bismarck, 2012, p. 296).

It is in this respect apt to point out that curating is not restricted to the human world but also seems to happen in the nonhuman world. Birds, especially when aiming to entice a mate, seem to be prone to activities that come extremely close to what we call curating. In the recent *Planet Earth II* series by David Attenborough (2016), this behaviour was demonstrated by the Wilson’s bird of paradise who not only cleans a patch of jungle ground of dead leaves and other debris, but also picks fresh green leaves from bushes that it seems to consider as being competitive to its own bright colours. The great bowerbird first builds a structure, the so-called bower, out of branches and then decorates it with all kinds of colourful materials, not hesitating to include human waste materials such as plastics. In the documentary it seemed to have a particular preference for the colour red. As John Endler et al. suggest, the great bowerbird actually builds a kind of theatre “with forced perspective when seen by their audience” (2010, p. 1679), explaining that bowerbirds, together with ravens and jays are renowned for their cognitive abilities. Although Endler et al. don’t use the ‘c-word’, in my opinion the bird’s activity can be attributed to the same realm, namely the curatorial.

Convinced that the great bowerbird and its extraordinary behaviour was first brought to my attention through the Dutch television series *Of Beauty and Consolation (Van de schoonheid en de troost)* by Dutch documentary maker Wim Kayzer, I returned to it in the context of this current research. First broadcast in 1999, then, due to overwhelming success, broadcast again in 2013, the interdisciplinary series, (now available to download), comprised of 27 episodes. Each episode included an hour long interview with a writer, scientist, philosopher, artist, or musician in which the guest was asked what made life worthwhile. Among the guests were Jane Goodall, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty, Simon Schama, George Stein and Edward Witten. Of particular relevance is the episode in which Germaine Greer discussed the life of her biologist sister, through a home movie made in the southwest of Western

Australia where the great bowerbird also resides (*Of Beauty and Consolation Episode 25 Germaine Greer*, 2014). The episode, in which Greer featured, together with the rest of the series and its interdisciplinary character, must have made a great subconscious impression upon me. In its discussion of the disappearing flora of southwest Australia it certainly appealed to my interest in biology and especially that of plants, as I had wanted to study botany. The great bowerbird does not appear in this film, however, this episode in particular must have planted a seed of an idea, which grew into an interest in the crossover between science and humanities, and in the communication between the human and nonhuman. Most importantly, these interests would also influence my curatorial practice. In her episode, Greer visits Utopia Station, an Aboriginal homeland 350 km northeast of Alice Springs in Central Australia. She discusses Aboriginal Art and explains that it is a process-based art. Interestingly enough, Hans Ulrich Obrist co-curated the project ‘Utopia Station’ in 2003 for the Venice Biennial, (although with no reference to the origin of the place name and its meaning), together with artists and theoreticians including Molly Nesbit and Rirkrit Tiravanija. According to the exhibition’s press release, it was meant to be “nothing more and nothing less than a way station, a place to stop, to look, to talk and refresh the route. Utopia itself, an idea with a long history and many fixed ideologies, has loosened up to become a catalyst first, or the no-place it always was, a hope for the better future” (Haupt and Pat, n.d.). It is probably unlikely that Obrist was aware of Greer’s film and visit to the original Utopia Station at the time, but the coming together of these strings is illustrative for the many “visible or invisible similarities” (*History of the Wunderkammern (cabinet of curiosities)*, n.d.), that inspire and permeate this thesis.

## 2. Method – The Opaque Lens

This chapter introduces the opaque lens as the main methodology used in this thesis. The discussion will supply a starting point for the investigation of the three main narratives of the thesis, laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics, with the aim of turning the *inframince* into an operational tool within curatorial practice. Using the notion of a poetic science offers a way to undertake a trans-disciplinary exploration of hidden similarities between various artistic and scientific actors and apply a diffractive methodology that connects art and science in their investigations in which considerations such as friction, rhythm and opacity play a significant role along with writing and (non-linear) narrative.

The chapter starts with an exploration of the ‘poetic science’ of (initial) experimental psychologist and poet Gertrude Stein and how it can be understood as a way of focusing upon language as an affective medium through which perception is re-trained (Lorange, 2014). The discussion will build on the insights of Meyer (2001) and Lorange on the writing of Stein and Alfred North Whitehead – specifically with regards to the explicit use that they both made of complexity of style and concept in their work.

Using this method allows us to consider opacity in research, both in creative and scientific endeavours, as an affective driver. In this context John Berger tells us in his book *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos* (1984) under the heading ‘Once through a lens’ about its specific subjectivity:

Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story, ground between the temporal and the timeless. ... in our brief mortal lives, we are grinders of these lenses (Berger, 1984, p.31)

For Berger, the lens is a subjective one and colours whatever history we try to tell. The thesis takes this further in the notion that it can also lead to new insights when looking at elements that seemingly disappear in the undercurrents. The idea of the

subjective as specifically informative will be further discussed in chapter 6 when the *inframince* as operative tool is explored.

Related to this exploration of the poetic science and its opaque lens, is a discussion of friction and rhythm, again via the work of Whitehead and Stein. This leads on to a subsequent discussion of bifurcation and non-linearity. Underpinning these kinds of discussions and related to the curatorial are notions of the relationship between the human and nonhuman. It is therefore important to discuss not only the personal relation between Stein and Duchamp, but also that around their use of language and concepts as well as ways of organising. For the latter the methods of Warburg and Koestler are discussed. All of this leads finally to a discussion of the diffractive method as introduced by Haraway and further developed by Barad, but already announced in the work of Whitehead and Stein.

### *2.1. An imaginative leap – Whitehead and Stein*

In her constructivist reading of Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, Isabelle Stengers calls "the kind of achievement that Whitehead aimed at [was] a maximization of friction, recovering what has been obscured by specialized selection ... in order to produce both a restraint upon specialists and an enlargement of their imagination" (Stengers, 2014, p.47 and 53). With its complex structure and seemingly contrasting if not contradictory statements *Process and Reality* does just that. Through its 'dance of agency' it invites its readers into taking a leap of imagination and to be lured into feeling 'something that matters'. Stengers refers to Pickering for the terminology of 'dance of agency', "... with the practitioner tentatively constructing a device, then adopting a passive role in order to follow the consequences of its functioning, then intervening again" (Stengers, 2014, p. 49).

In an earlier version of her text that she presented during the workshop "Whitehead, Invention and Social Process" at the Centre for the Study of Invention and Social Process at Goldsmiths College, London in 2004 Stengers wrote that:

For Whitehead abstract propositions, be them propositions relating a perception or philosophical propositions are not something, which would be abstracted from what would be more concrete. They are first and foremost interesting, eliciting interest, and more precisely a variation of interest. In

*Modes of Thought*, Whitehead wrote that the basic expression of this value is – “*Have a care, here is something that matters! Yes – that is the best phrase – the primary glimmering of consciousness reveals, something that matters.*” (MT, 116). Abstract propositions are asking for, and prompting to, a “leap of imagination”, they act as a lure for feeling, for feeling “something that matters” (Stengers, 2004, p. 2).

In the later version Stengers however converts this to a somewhat less passionate “Each abstraction is mutely appealing for an imaginative leap, and it is this very leap that cannot be abstracted from its relevance to other abstractions that are also calling for an imaginative leap” (Stengers, 2014, p.63).

However phrased this entails a process of tuning for which Stengers thus refers to Andrew Pickering’s *The Mangle of Practice* (1995) and the development of a new form of trust “that suffuses the thinker, namely, that he or she will be able to produce new, relevant propositions” (Stengers, 2014, p. 58). The tuning or dance is that between agency and affordance – what is it that the text (or concept) affords us to do and where do we discover our own agency in developing new propositions or ideas? The terminology of affordance might seem displaced as it is usually applied as being “the possibility of an action on an object or environment” or as Eleanor J. Gibson et al defined it – “... a resource or support that the environment offers an animal; the animal in turn must possess the capabilities to perceive and use it” (Wilson and Keil, 1999). It is however exactly this latter part of the definition “the capabilities to perceive and use it” that makes it in my view also applicable to a text or concept, which in its turn could thus be defined as environment. The use of affordance here in relation to text or concept also allows returning to it in the context of curation and when discussing the *inframince* as operational tool in chapter 6. Pickering talks about a “*dialectic of resistance and accommodation*”, which basically comes down to the same thing but then specifically applied to the notion of the machine – “where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency in practice, and accommodation an active human strategy of response to resistance” (Pickering, 1995, p.2, his italics). Where he talks about scientists constructing a new *machine*, adopting a passive role and observe its possible agency, Stengers however tellingly talks about a *device*, which even more than a machine could be seen as an indication of a text and which she thus also applies as such when discussing Whitehead. It becomes clear that the latent agency is incited most when confronted with puzzles. As an introduction to

his text Pickering quotes Deleuze and Parnet from their *Dialogues* on desire to which he unfortunately does not return. Desire, they say, only exists when assembled or machined – the desire to unravel, reconstruct and invent is aroused by the intricate construction it resides in (Pickering, 1995, p.1).

As Stengers makes clear in her review of *Process and Reality*, and every attempt to read Whitehead's book confirms, the kind of writing that Whitehead applied in it definitely does not make for an easy read. His experimental way of using "writing and the increased powers of thought, of analysis, of recollection, and of conjecture" (Stengers, 2014, p.63) in an explicitly non-linear manner leads to an - at first sight rather unlikely - connection to the American writer Gertrude Stein and the "disruptive or *diffractive* nature of [her] writing" (Meyer, 2001, p. 52, my italics).

Whitehead and Stein were first introduced during a dinner party in Cambridge early July 1914 followed by an invitation to visit the Whiteheads in their country home in Lockeridge later that month. During that period the war broke out and Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas were unable to return to their hometown Paris until mid-October. During the extended time they were to spend at Lockeridge Stein and Whitehead would "[w]alk endlessly around the country, talking about all things" as well as "philosophy and history" (Meyer, 2001, p. 167). In Meyer's account of Whitehead and Stein's extended encounter the notion of rhythm plays a recurring theme. Meyer labels them both as single-substance realists (p. 177) and sees a parallel in their development towards a "theory of organic mechanism" and thus a shared "appreciation of the essential role of irregular aperiodic rhythms in life" (p. 201). The difference as Meyer sees it is that Stein mainly focused on human beings in *The Making of Americans* in which she stated this insight whereas Whitehead "aimed for a more complete cosmology" (p.178). When looking at her oeuvre as a whole, with its many components highlighting diverse aspects of life and society, it could however be argued that Stein did just the same.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. *Notions of rhythm*

Whitehead dedicated the closing chapter of his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles*

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed undertaking of this analysis falls outside the scope of this thesis.



of *Natural Knowledge* to rhythm. As Meyer indicates, published in 1919, the book had been “thought out and written amid the sound of guns”, quoting Whitehead (p.178). What Meyer leaves out at this point is that the book is dedicated to Whitehead’s youngest son Eric who was killed in action in March 1918. As the dedication mentions “The music of his life was without discord, perfect in its beauty” (Whitehead, 1919, p. 2). This puts the chapter on rhythms, which ends the part IV of the book on ‘the Theory of Objects’, in quite a different perspective. Quite tellingly rhythm is associated with life: “[l]ife is the rhythm as such” and “is the causal counterpart of life; namely, that wherever there is some rhythm, there is some life, only perceptible to us when the analogies are sufficiently close” (Whitehead, 1919, 197). Tellingly Whitehead ends this chapter and thus also the whole book with poetry, although not by Stein. Instead he states that “[s]o far as direct observation is concerned all that we know of the essential relations of life in nature is stated in two short poetic phrases”, quoting subsequently Tennyson and Wordsworth. Whitehead mentions Tennyson’s poetic phrase as “[t]he obvious aspect ... [n]amely Bergson’s élan vital and its relapse into matter”, whereas Wordsworth has “more depth” and is also referred by him in other publications such as *Science and the Modern World*. In the context of this thesis and this chapter in particular, Tennyson’s “Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying, - And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying” versus Wordsworth’s “The music in my heart I bore, - Long after it was heard no more” holds however a stronger argument, especially because of its repetitious, staccato rhythm. Although the word ‘rhythm’ in itself has a smooth sound and apparition, it is clear that it can also indicate friction and *diffraction*, to which this chapter will return later.

Meyer suggests that Whitehead’s ideas on rhythm might have been nascent during the time that Stein and Whitehead met and that these would have struck a ‘resonant chord’ in her (Meyer, 2001, p. 180). In his discussion of “Gertrude Stein’s Machinery of Perception” Murphet (2003) remarks in this context on the fact that Bergson published his ideas on cinema in Paris in 1907, right at the time when Stein was writing her epic novel *Making of Americans*. As Bergson developed “a perception that ‘manages to solidify into discontinuous images the fluid continuity of the real’” and thus seems to hint at an integral cinematic apparatus “reifying our worldly perceptions into frozen and inert fragments that are only ‘artificially reanimated by the apparatus’”

(Murphet, 2003, p.69), Stein simultaneously developed a parallel literary method.

Murphet quotes Stein from her *Lectures in America* in which she stated;

[...] in *The Making of Americans*, I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing. ...

I of course did not think of it in terms of the cinema, in fact I doubt whether at that time I had ever seen a cinema but, and I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing (cited in Murphet, 2003, p.70).

Lang (2015) picks up this same quote in her discussion of 'Stein and Cinematic Identity' and confronts this with Walter Benjamin's observation that

...technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of perception in the film (Lang, 2015, n.p.; Benjamin, 2007, p.175).

Where Lang uses this observation as a way of situating Stein mainly in sync with the rhythm of the 1920s it is telling that Benjamin's observation forms part of an analysis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century crowd via Baudelaire and the way it responds to new "haptic experiences" such as "...the invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century [that] brought forth a number of inventions which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps" (Benjamin, 2007, p. 174). It is this new rhythm that Stein taps into and which finds its origin midway the 19<sup>th</sup> century with ripples on either side, as indicated in Whitehead's famous quote that is also used by Meyer (2001, p.170):

A thought is a tremendous mode of excitement. Like a stone thrown into a pond it disturbs the whole surface of our being. But this image is inadequate. For we should conceive the ripples as effective in the creation of the plunge of the stone into the water. The ripples release the thought, and the thought augments and distorts the ripples. In order to understand the essence of thought we must study its relations to the ripples amid which it emerges (Whitehead, 1938, p. 50-51).

The rhythm of Stein's time, or the perception of it, is thus certainly not fluid, but built up of fragments that move along in shocks and friction. Murphet connects Stein's use of her 'cinematographical mechanism' with her psychology studies at Harvard from 1893 under William James and specifically the influence that Hugo Münsterberg, who led the labs, exerted on her. Stein's remark that she doubted whether she had "ever seen a cinema" at the time of writing *The Making of Americans* is in that sense at least questionable. Her study on 'Motor Automatism' would lead her in Murphet's view to "the singular aesthetic of *The Making of Americans*" (Murphet, 2003, p.71), especially in the notion of repetition to which was added, as Murphet suggests, Stein's awareness of Etienne-Jules Marey's work on animal and human movement in the 1890s. Her enduring love for "repeating to getting completed understanding" coincided with "a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating" as Murphet quotes from *The Making of Americans*, is an aspect to which this thesis will return later in this chapter when discussing Stein's connection to Duchamp – who was equally influenced by Marey's movement studies in his so-called cubist-futurist paintings. To stress the working of Stein's technique it is however worthwhile to quote extensively from her text at this point, revealing the extensive variations of (the concept of) repeating to gain understanding and her deliberate play with language and its syntaxes while doing so. The following is a typical excerpt, which demonstrates a variation on a theme or mantra that can be found throughout a larger section of her book. To give a clear impression of this continuous 'sound' that leads to an insight in a being it is necessary to give an extensive quote, which nevertheless only partially does justice to what Stein achieves in *The Making of Americans*:

Always from the beginning there was to me all living as repeating. This is now a description of my feeling. As I was saying listening to repeating is often irritating, always repeating is all of living, everything in a being is always repeating, more and more listening to repeating gives to me completed understanding. Each one slowly comes to be a whole one in me. Soon then it commences to sound through my ears and eyes and feelings the repeating that is always coming out from each one, that is them, that makes then slowly of each one of them a whole one. Repeating then comes slowly then to be to one who has it to have loving repeating as natural being comes to be a full sound telling all the being in each one such a one is ever knowing. Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating that is that one gets to be a steady sounding to the hearing of one who has it as a natural being to love repeating that slowly comes out of every one. Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating in that one comes to be a

clear history of such a one. Natures are sometimes so mixed up in some one that steady repeating in them is mixed up with changing. Soon then there will be a completed history of each one. Sometimes it is difficult to know it in some, for what these are saying is repeating in them is not the real repeating of them, is not the complete repeating for them. Sometimes many years of knowing some one pass before repeating of all being in them comes out clearly from them. As I was saying it is often irritating to listen to the repeating they are doing, always then that one that has it as being to love repeating that is the whole history of each one, such a one has it then that this irritation passes over into patient completed understanding. Love repeating is one way of being. This is now a description of such feeling (Stein, 1907, p. 291).

In Murphet's view, when Stein wrote *The Making of Americans* she was nevertheless "not yet capable of making the transition from static sections of movement to mobile ones" but was later able to make this leap in *Tender Buttons* (Murphet, 2003, p.78).

Here

Stein brought her crucial observation about narrative down ... to the molecular level of syntax itself. The uncanny and nonsensical style of this work is best explained as an adamant refusal to allow the sentence-form to relax into any convenient or familiar structure (Murphet, 2003, p.79).

Murphet sees Stein's "desire to express the rhythm of the visible world" in the context of mass production "where each species of item consists of virtually identical series of products" and where "untold speeds and rhythms ... had both [been] unleashed and then occluded through repetition" (Murphet, 2003, p.79).

Even more key is his observation that her descriptions are not those of 'series production' but that "she has abstracted a certain stylistic rhythm from the dynamism of the modern world of speed and series production, and grafted it on to this older object-world of nineteenth-century provincial French domesticity", a suggestion supported by Stein's own statement "that if you are way ahead with your head you naturally are old fashioned and regular in your daily life" (Murphet, 2003, p.79). It is therefore possibly unnecessary to talk diminishingly about a *provincial* domesticity, but of quite a natural internal holding back against the dynamics of one's time.

In 1922 Stein's collection *Geography and Plays* was described on the paper jacket by her publisher as "translat[ing] the rhythm of the spoken personality as directly as

possible, using every form that she can invent to translate the repeated story of everybody doing that, what they are being” (Meyer, 2001, p.180). The text ‘Mrs. Whitehead’ included in this collection seems possibly to be the closest we can get to the kind of conversations she had with ‘Mr. Whitehead’ (Stein, 1922, p.154-156). Rather puzzling Meyer again sees this as differing from the portraits in *Tender Buttons* as they are not of persons per se. The divide between the human and nonhuman that can be observed in this observation seems to be rather artificial especially as Meyer adds; “yet in either case her writing was to be understood as an expression of rhythm” (Meyer, 2001, p. 180). This opposition is repeated when Meyer states that

Stein differed from [Whitehead] only to the extent that, instead of limiting herself to formal analysis of the properties of process, or transition, she sought to “*translate* the rhythm of the spoken personality” and “to *express* the rhythm of the visible world” (Meyer, 2001, p. 184).

Where Meyer opposes “elucidating the general patterns of rhythm” of Whitehead to Stein’s “express[ing] the particular rhythms that she experienced around her”, (Meyer, 2001, p. 184) clearly this has to be seen as a parallel effort, both in result and in timing when one considers their writing and dates of publication. As illustrated Meyer thus keeps a surprising divide between art and science even though his overall subject is “the complex interweaving of writing and science in [Stein’s] compositional practices (Meyer, 2001, p. xvi). In a response to Susanne Langer’s view that the artist creates images and the scientist models, without overlap, Meyer states: “Obviously, the premise of the present study is that a middle ground does exist, along the lines of Stein bridging Picasso and Whitehead, and that in some works, such as the experimental writing Stein composed between 1912 and 1932, the distinction between portraying “how something appears” and investigating “how [it] works” can’t be made so readily” (Meyer, 2001, p. 366, note 35). While maintaining a somewhat patronizing language when it comes to describing Stein’s practice compared to Whitehead’s he nevertheless states

[e]ven so, accurate portrayal of *rhythms* required close attention to *patterns*; and as Stein observed of herself in the *Autobiography*, “her work [was] often ... compared to that of mathematicians” on account of the “intellectual”, and hence “pure,” “passion for exactitude” that she shared with those who, like

Whitehead, practice the science of patterns (Meyer, 2001, p. 184).

### 2.3. *Avoiding bifurcation*

What Meyer does not consider is Whitehead's view on the bifurcation of nature, which might be of use in clarifying the relation between arts and science as presented in his work. In her introduction to *How Reading Is Written – A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* (2014) Astrid Lorange addresses this issue as “particularly important to the conceptual thrust” (p. 25) of her book. As she indicates

[f]or Whitehead, nature is bifurcated whenever the world is thought to be composed of two different sets of things: primary and secondary qualities, the former constituted by matter and the latter that which is added on to matter by the perceiving mind in order to make sense of material reality (Lorange, 2014, p. 25).

As quoted by Lorange, in *The Concept of Nature* Whitehead therefore calls for “all-embracing relations” to avoid explaining the two factors “as being respectively the cause and the mind's reaction to the cause”. Lorange uses this image of the bifurcation of nature to tackle “the habits and tendencies of literary criticism” (p. 25) specifically with regard to the overall work of Stein the study of which is divided into seeing meaning as either intrinsic or extrinsic to language. Instead;

[w]hat is necessary, following Whitehead, is a critical approach that considers the “all-embracing relations” between language and meaning, signification and representation, materiality and sociality. This means constructing a methodology for thinking, reading and writing that focuses on relations (Lorange, 2014, p. 26).

In terms of the thus equally necessary complexity, friction and rhythm that results from this methodology of relations Lorange uses a quote from Stein's *Tender Buttons*, as a very apt introduction to her own book: “The use of this is manifold”. Alluding to the multiple meanings of manifold the book is meant to be non-linear, a flexible object, a book to work with. Lorange regards the index as instrumental for this kind of use stating that as a *paratext* it is auxiliary and derivative. The index, although weirdly enough *How Reading Is Written* unfortunately lacks a proper one, can also be seen as a kind of translation in Lorange's view, presenting, as it were, a book within a book.

This notion of translation, of creating a parallel text alongside the original, is of importance for the methodology used within this thesis. It connects to the curatorial practice in the sense that a curator ideally ‘translates’ the work of an artist into an exhibition, possibly also accompanied by a text for a catalogue or for use in the exhibition that does something similar. Translation obviously also alludes to the literal translation between different languages which in some instances turns out to be an impossibility and calls for introducing a word from another language to better relate a certain meaning. For this reason this thesis occasionally introduces a word from another language that better describes a certain aspect than its English counterpart, while Duchamp’s invention and introduction of the *infrathin* or *inframince* to describe his concept can be seen in the same vein.

This kind of agile use of language is also applied by Lorange who sees an important necessity for an approach to Stein’s writing that acknowledges a different quality which comes down to a reading ‘with’, ‘alongside’, and ‘giving in to’ the endurance of what reading Gertrude Stein actually is. Stein’s writing is usually either approached as hermetic, difficult, stubborn and nonsensical or made the subject for extended searches for hidden meanings. These kinds of approaches are however limiting the text’s meaning as they either resort to intrinsic meaning or pure nothingness. Lorange argues therefore for an alternative mode in which the compositional practices of reading and writing are to be seen as constructive experiences that produce and investigate the contexts and relations of language in a specific occasion (Lorange, 2014, p.10). The so-called obscurity or opaque, a terminology Lorange adopts from Steven Meyer, of Stein’s writing is thus seen as a positive, a “philosophical and constructive attitude” that leads to the contemplation on what is endured in a proper engagement with a text and what happens in the time of reading as this is exactly what Stein seemed to aim at.

Quoting Michael Davidson’s essay ‘On Reading Stein’, Lorange’s argument is therefore to support the imperative to learn “to read writing, not read meanings, (...) to interrogate the spaces around words as much as the words themselves; (...) discover language as an active ‘exchange’ of meaning rather than a static paradigm of rules and features. The question is not ‘what’ she meant but ‘how’”(Lorange, 2014,

p.12). In the ten sections that follow the introduction Lorange thus not so much tries to dissect Stein as to read alongside her. The sections are organized alphabetically but as stand alone essays can thus also be read in any order with, analogous to Stengers' analysis of *Process and Reality* to which Lorange explicitly refers, having to

zigzag, using the index, being lured to come back to something you recollect but that had remained mute and now takes on a new importance, taking the leap that you have just felt is possible. And it may also be why Whitehead's writing zigzagged as well, why he abstained from a careful rewriting of the whole text each time he redesigned his own concepts. ... And it may be, finally that the very fact that his text does not run smoothly like a steam engine that has to avoid clashes or bumps is as important as the content of the book (Stengers, 2014, p.63).

Whitehead's writing has to be *endured* in a similar way as Stein's to activate imagination and insight, although a reading of Stein's *Tender Buttons* while seated in a train *with* all its "bumps" actually led the author of this thesis to a better understanding of her writing. This traversing of a landscape by train while reading, generating understanding through friction, connects well to Stein's vision on her plays. She regarded these as a kind of landscapes in which she explored the idea of nervousness as a (desperately) going faster or slower to get audience and action together on the same emotional level. Lorange suggests that Stein's collection *Geography and Plays* in that sense "... can be read as a study of the relation between two distinct but affiliated modalities: The landscape, which frames the rhythms of the relation of space and time; and the play, which frames the rhythms of language in space and time" (Lorange, 2014, p.163).

Lorange's strong affinity with Whitehead, and therefore also with Stengers' maximization of friction, clearly seeps all through her book. In the introduction Lorange makes clear that she follows Whitehead in taking

... meaning as a vagueness and knowledge as approximation. And, from Whitehead, I approach Stein's poetics as an attempt ... to get at a theory of "rhythm", where rhythm is a kind of aesthetic mode of accounting for, and emphasizing, the temporality of experience, and where experience is not limited to or even exemplified by human consciousness, but rather describes the mode of perception by which a world perceives itself (Lorange, 2014, p.27).



It is exactly this mode of perception that is also used in the methodology for this thesis. Frictions can in this context be seen as uncomfortable but the uneasiness they initially cause usually also leads to new insights.

#### 2.4. *Stein and Duchamp*

Working with Lorange's "methodology for thinking, reading and writing that focuses on *relations*" (Lorange, 2014, p. 26, my italics) it is useful to highlight the relation between Stein and Marcel Duchamp. In her collection *Geography and Plays* Stein not only included her portrait of Mrs. Whitehead but also a text titled 'Next. Life and Letters of Marcel Duchamp'. Opaque as any of her portraits there are nevertheless clear allusions to chess and the fourth dimension which both occupied Duchamp immensely and that in Stein's view specifically defined him as she highlights these (Stein, 1922, pp. 405-406).

Of interest for the current thesis is especially the mention of 'thinness' in this text, which possibly relates to Duchamp's early ideas about the *inframince* or *infrathin*: "How easily I feel thin. Birds do not. So I replace birds with tin-foil. Silver is thin" (Stein, 1922, pp. 405). However difficult to literally interpret, these sentences could nevertheless be an indication for the subjects Stein and Duchamp might have discussed, amongst which an early testing out of the latter's concept.

Stein and Duchamp first met in 1913 in New York where that winter the Armory Show took place that showcased Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, which shows a strong influence of Marey's earlier mentioned movement studies. The meeting, which took place during a dinner at the Picabia's, is documented in Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933, p.146) in which she also testifies about Duchamp's popularity:

I remember going to dinner at the Picabias and a pleasant dinner it was, Gabrielle Picabia full of life and gaiety, Picabia dark and lively, and Marcel Duchamp looking like a young norman crusader.  
I was always perfectly able to understand the enthusiasm that Marcel Duchamp aroused in New York when he went there in the early years of the war. ... Everybody loved him. So much so that it was a joke in Paris that when any American arrived in Paris the first he said was, and how is Marcel.

An indication for how Stein and Duchamp connected is rendered by Stein's friend Arnold Rönnebeck who, in commenting on her unique style of writing, stated in a commemorative text how it is

... very difficult to imitate convincingly Gertrude Stein because her style is her *meaning* and you can't imitate meaning if it is not your own. Gertrude Stein *does* write the way she talks and she always did that thing that way. There is the same photographic rendering of an impact of a reaction as we see it in her old friend Marcel Duchamp's famous painting "Nude Descending a Staircase" (Rönnebeck, 1945, p. 7).

Marjorie Perloff not only sees a counterpart for Duchamp's critique of the retinal in Stein's writing but also calls Duchamp the pivotal figure in relation to "the influence ... of Stein's verbal composition on the visual artwork of her contemporaries" (Perloff, 2012, n.p.). She links the 'Next' in the title of Stein's portrait of Duchamp as a hint to his alter ego Rose Selavy that he introduced in the year that it was written (1920) and even suggests that the name Rose might be influenced by Stein's famous 'A rose is a rose is a rose'. Although her argument is persuasive it is however more likely in my view that the play with words went both ways. Perloff assumes that Duchamp knew Stein's ten-page (!) poem 'Sacred Emily' that was originally composed in 1913 and included in the collection *Geography and Plays* published in 1922. As Decimo mentions in his intriguing book *La bibliothèque de Marcel Duchamp, peut-être* (The Possible Library of Marcel Duchamp), that although interested in books Duchamp was not really an ardent reader (Decimo, 2002, p.10). And although there are several books by Stein in his collection, the poem is not one of them.

Perloff only briefly mentions via Pierre Cabanne that Duchamp added the extra R as a pun on the noun 'arroser' or 'watering' (amongst others). The link to common French wordplay as it comes for instance afore in the famous French short black and white film comedy *L'Arroseur Arrosé* (1895) by Louise Lumière, also known as *The Waterer Watered* or *The Sprinkler Sprinkled*, is however more likely to have been known to Duchamp than Stein's long poem.

I would argue that a mutual influence took place on a rather more intellectual level that influenced both their art and that it was in that sense comparable with the

relationship between Stein and Whitehead. Duchamp and Stein would stay in touch throughout the twenties and when Stein was asked to write a preface for Picabia's exhibition of drawings at the Galerie Rosenberg in Paris in 1932, Duchamp delivered the translation, which is another indication of the exchange in terms of language (Perloff, 2012, n.p.).

Stein's and Duchamp's mutual understanding seems to have circled around ideas of difference and delay, as these are recurrent in both their work. It is for instance interesting to read (or listen to) Stein's ideas about repetition and difference in amongst others her text 'Portraits and Repetition', published in *Lectures in America* (1935). Although Stein's texts seem to be just repetitious the introduction of slight differences in those repetitions makes for a continuous movement of her portrayed, which is not unlike Duchamp's portrait of a *Sad Young Man in a Train* (1911) or the aforementioned *Nude Descending a Staircase*. At the beginning of her text Stein comments that "... the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something ..." (Stein, 2001, p. 287) and thus stressing the importance of the metaphor of the train and friction in relation to meaning making. Stein further questions this statement but connected to it, and connecting her to Duchamp is their mutual idea of being in sync with time and the delay in appreciation, which was brought up earlier in this chapter when introducing Murphet's view on Stein and her connection to cinema. Lorange discusses this aspect of being in sync from Stein's point of view under the heading of 'Contemporaneity', using Stein's lecture 'Composition as Explanation' as the main driver, although by paraphrasing it she loses as she admits herself the "accumulative rhythm of argumentation" of this text. It is therefore useful to look directly at this lecture, which Stein first delivered in Cambridge and Oxford before it was published in 1926 and quote a specific passage from the beginning of the text that makes the point about being in time:

No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept. And they refuse to accept it for a very simple reason and that is that they do not have to accept it for any reason. They themselves that is everybody in their entering the modern composition and they do enter it, if they do not enter it they are not so to speak in it they are out of it and so they do enter it; but in as you may say the non-competitive efforts where if you are

not in it nothing is lost except nothing at all except what is not had, there are naturally all the refusals, and the things refused are only important if unexpectedly somebody happens to need them. In the case of the arts it is very definite (Stein, 1926, p.454).

It is however especially when Stein makes use of the notion of little differences that the association with Duchamp and his *inframince* becomes most apparent, for instance when using these in the composition of her portraits. It also occurs in her famous collection *Tender Buttons*, published in 1914, under the heading 'A Substance in a Cushion' in the very first section 'Objects': "The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared" (Stein, 1991, p.9), which could almost be mistaken for one of Duchamp's notes on the *inframince*.

### 2.5. *Ways of organising*

Following on this discussion of the relation between Stein and Duchamp it is important to further discuss the relationship between human and nonhuman elements via the way these are organised. Related to the notion of opacity and hidden relations mentioned before, the opacity of history and the hidden relations between visual images was the main subject for art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). Warburg's working methods clearly resembled an artistic and curatorial approach, so much so that today he is quite widely seen as one of the first modern and creative curators. The material that he used for constructing his *Mnemosyne Atlas* consisted of images from both high and low culture, ranging from reproductions of art works to advertisements or images from newspaper articles. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Warburg researched the legacy of antiquity in the imagery of later epochs, from the Renaissance and the Baroque to the early 20th century. During this time he started collecting books and images in his library that would eventually be incorporated into the Warburg Institute, which after its move from Hamburg to London became part of the University of London and which would continue to research cultural history.<sup>8</sup>

Organising, in a revolutionary, dynamic and ever changing, creative fashion was at the core of both Warburg's library and atlas. As Michaud has suggested, Warburg's constant movements during his organisational working sessions in his library, could

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<sup>8</sup> View <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/home/>

be compared with the so-called “danced causalities” Warburg had witnessed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century while visiting the Hopi and Pueblo Indians, “and the collection of books as a whole was both the objectification of his thought and an allegory of the world and the bodies moving in it” (Michaud, 1998, p.235). It would however equally be possible to refer to the earlier mentioned ‘dance of agency’ used by Stengers via Pickering (as discussed).

While organising his library, Warburg made use of what he called the ‘law of the good neighbour’ or *contiguity* in which ‘the state of bordering or being in contact with’ each other assumes a relation. Saxl described this law as “[t]he book of which one knew was in most cases not the book which one needed. The unknown neighbour on the shelf contained the vital information, although from its title one might not have guessed this.” (Saxl in Gombrich, 1986 (1970), p.327). This in practice means that when ordering a book to study in the library one would therefore also get the neighbouring ones. Years later Arthur Koestler would make a similar observation when he introduced his notion of the “library angel” to describe frequently experienced meaningful coincidences in which the right book or reference suddenly presents itself at a moment of need. (Koestler, 1973, pp.161 a.f.)

Warburg also made use of his ‘law of the good neighbour’ in the organisation of the material on the panels of his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. His choice of an atlas as a way to organise and express his research into the legacy of antiquity might seem strange but actually fits in a widespread use of the scientific atlas to objectify knowledge that was especially prolific during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both in relation to its large size and focus on images. As Daston and Gallison have pointed out, illustrations are “...the *raison d’être* of the atlas. To call atlas images “illustrations” at all is to belie their primacy ... [I]n most atlases from the eighteenth century on, pictures are the alpha and the omega of the genre” (Daston and Gallison, 2007, p.32).

The term ‘atlas’ while deriving from Gerardus Mercator’s 1595 world map *Atlas, or Cosmographical Meditations on the Fabric of the World*, “...spread to astronomical maps by the early eighteenth century ...” which seems to tie in with Warburg’s interest in astronomy (Daston and Gallison, 2007, pp.22-23; p.421 nt. 5). Without

referring to the wider trend of the scientific atlas, according to Gombrich there was even one specific atlas that might have inspired Warburg to develop his idea for a picture atlas, namely that by the ethnologist Adolf Bastian, with whose work Warburg was familiar, and who “had accompanied one of his most theoretical books ... with an ‘ethnological picture-book’ in the form of an ‘atlas’.” (Gombrich, 1970, p.285). Michaud however finds the importance that Gombrich grants to Bastian exaggerated (Michaud, 1998, p.369, nt. 26). And although the size of Warburg’s atlas might seem unusual as well, this also fits the trend with the term ‘atlas’

apparently transferred to all illustrated scientific works in the mid-nineteenth century, when figures were printed separately from explanatory texts, in large-format supplements – hence “atlases,” deriving from their size: for example: text volume in octo, accompanying atlas in folio (Daston and Gallison, 2007, p.421 nt. 5).

The big difference is that Warburg tried to objectify material that was highly subjective in its combination, to convey new knowledge through their small mutual differences. This practice in that sense is related to the working of the *inframince* as will become clear in its further discussion in this thesis. Also in contrast to the average atlas the *Mnemosyne Atlas* was presented as images pinned on to a series of large panels, rather than as a book. This stresses the ephemeral and fleeting nature of their constitution that could easily be adjusted at will. The images are not presented in a way that is similar for all panels but that is adjusted according to the subject of each and leaving more or less open spaces between them accordingly. This leads to Warburg’s interest for “an iconology of intervals” to which he alluded in his journal of 1929 (Gombrich, 1970, p.253; Michaud, 1998, p.252). As Michaud states

[t]his iconology is based not on the meaning of the figures – the foundation of interpretation for Warburg’s disciples, beginning with Panofsky – but of the *interrelationships* between the figures in their complex, autonomous arrangement, which cannot be reduced to discourse (Michaud, 1998, p.252, my italics).

The emphasis thus lies less on the objects than on an immaterial in-between space that constitutes the meaning of the objects on either side. It was the space between the images in Warburg’s atlas, but also that between the books in his library, alluding to their neighbourliness, “... the distance between the images, which tends to invert the

parameters of time and space, produces tensions between the objects depicted and, inductively, between the levels of reality from which these objects proceed” (Michaud, 1998, p.253).

Contiguity thus leads to an active space in which new meanings can be developed. In his extensive essay for the catalogue *Atlas – How to Carry the World on One’s Back* (2010) that examines the work of Warburg in relation to contemporary art, George Didi-Huberman sees a parallel between the working of the *Mnemosyne* panels and the ‘nomad science’ of Deleuze and Guattari in their *Mille Plateaux*: “It is a knowledge that is ‘problematic’ and not ‘axiomatic’, founded on a ‘model of becoming and of heterogeneity that contrasts with the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant” (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p.54).

The way Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* is organised (as in principle a collection of images), makes it tempting to see a connection with the practice of the collage and montage used by Cubists and Dadaists. The connection between Warburg and Dada is however not situated in an actual meeting or interest in each other’s work, but rather in a shared *Zeitgeist* or frame of mind, more or less similar to his choice of the atlas as a means for communication. What seems to connect Warburg with the practice of Berlin Dadaists such as Georg Grosz, is the widespread use of newspaper clippings collections in the 1920s. As Anke te Heesen states “[s]ince the Renaissance, “cutting and pasting” has been part and parcel of an active (philological) relation to a textual tradition” (2008, p. 298). Warburg’s use of *Zettelkästen* to collect newspaper clippings and other materials for his research fitted in fact within a tradition in which “[n]umerous scientists, artists, and writers took part in collecting newspaper articles around 1900” (te Heesen, 2008, p.298-299). Although te Heesen does not mention Warburg, she gives several examples of other scientists such as Franz Maria Feldhaus, an historian of technology, who, starting in 1904, collected everything available on the history of technology. Equally a writer as Alfred Döblin made extensive use of newspaper clippings when writing his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. As te Heesen remarks “[t]he collages of [Dadaists] Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch would be inconceivable without newspaper and journals cuttings” (2008, p.299). They thus connect to a general trend in which

[f]or Grosz and Heartfield, clipping newspapers and magazines provided a realistic picture of social and political conditions of the time. Like Tzara in his instructions for making a Dadaist poem, they were convinced that everyone could take a newspaper and scissors and make a collage. Everyone could be an artist because reality and its material fragments are available everywhere and can be assembled as in a factory (Te Heesen, 2008, p.319).

Grosz held a very systematic newspaper collection “with prefabricated and machine-produced elements” (Te Heesen, 2008, p.321) from which he could assemble his montages or collages like a mechanic. The scientist Anton Gehrcke at the same time held a large collection solely on Albert Einstein to gather evidence against his theory of relativity. Gehrcke glued his clippings on pieces of scrap paper, possibly in the order in which he obtained them. (2008, p.306). Sometimes this makes unwillingly for artistic encounters as on a page with several images of the Einsteinturm in Potsdam (2008, p.309, fig. 8.2). In fact, one could state that Warburg’s idea of the good neighbour is also at work here. Warburg himself had been collecting newspaper clippings from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a noteworthy period from 1914 when he and his assistants collected anything on the political and military happenings of the time, as Theiss-Abendroth states, in an attempt to “dissipate” the war (Theiss-Abendroth, 2010, pp.28-29).

The way Warburg assembled the panels prefigures contemporary curatorial working methods. In the press release for the exhibition *Atlas – How to Carry the World on One’s Back* (2010), Didi-Hubermann states: “To make an atlas is to reconfigure space, to redistribute it, in short, to redirect it: to dismantle it where we thought it was continuous; to reunite it where we thought there were boundaries” (*Afterall • Online • Atlas: How to Carry the World on One’s Back?*, 2016).

This crossing of the boundaries between scientist and artist and reuniting them, is made in a possibly much more conscious way by Alfred Jarry and his pseudoscientific ‘Pataphysics. In the posthumously published *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* or *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1911) Jarry interestingly introduced the idea of paired books, prefiguring Warburg’s ‘law of the good neighbour’ and Koestler’s ‘library angel’, when describing the (ideal) library of Dr. Faustroll that consists of only 27 books, ranging from canonic symbolic works (Mallarmé, Verlaine, Poe translated by Baudelaire), books by friends of Jarry and big names of the magazines of that period (Rachilde, Gustave Kahn, Léon Bloy), as well



as books that could be considered as children's reading (a story by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *Mille et Une Nuits*, *The Theater of Florian*), or texts that fall outside of any category (works by Rabelais, Gospel of Luke, Chants de Maldoror). (Schuh, 2008, own translation). Schuh stresses in his discussion of the paired books the fact that their seemingly inequality becomes equal through a shared logic that resides in the individuality of the person that has brought them together and thus forms, through his course or route of reader a unique library (Schuh, 2008, p.7). This consequently leads in the *Exploits* to various chance meetings and possible insights between and into the elements that form part of this unique mix.

In addition to the previously mentioned library angel, Arthur Koestler introduced the concept of the so-called *bisociative act* which "... connects previously unconnected matrices of experience; it makes us understand what is to be awake, to be living on several planes at once" (to quote T.S. Eliot, somewhat out of context)" (Koestler, 1964, p.45).

The bisociative act thus seems to be an answer to Whitehead's call to avoid bifurcation, but equally to his use of viewpoints in that are put into friction to generate new ideas. According to Koestler the creative act always operates on more than one plane, being "a double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed". (Koestler, 1964, pp.35-36). This now not only comes very close to what Duchamp seemed to intend with his *inframince*, but also connects to Jarry's paired books, Warburg's good neighbour and obviously Koestler's own library angel.

## 2.6. Diffraction

Connecting to the element of surprise that is used by Whitehead, Stein, Duchamp, Jarry, Warburg, and Koestler it is useful to quote Benedict Anderson who at the end of his chapter 'Frameworks of Comparison', as part of his memoir *Life beyond Boundaries* (2016), states "The point being that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences" (Anderson, 2016, p. 132). One of his earlier points was "... that within the limits of plausible argument, the most instructive comparisons (whether of difference or similarity) are those that surprise"

(Anderson, 2016, p. 130). Anderson uses the example of language to illustrate this moment of surprise that leads to insight:

Often it starts with words. Indonesian, for example has a special word, *gurih*, for the taste of rice ('deliciously pungent', according to one dictionary). If you come from England, you are then startled to realize that the taste of rice can't be described with a designated English word. ...

Such a period of struggling with a new language is especially good for training oneself to be seriously comparative, because there is not yet any automatic lovely translation of foreign words into the language in your head (Anderson, 2016, p. 132).

This notion of a different use of language connects well with this thesis and is at times used directly when introducing the odd Dutch word that in certain situations is able to express better what is meant. Anderson's account of his development of comparative studies through nationalism also chimes well with the argument that Federica Timeto makes in her book *Diffractional Technospaces* (2015), especially in its equal stressing of the importance of being open to strangeness, crossing boundaries and dealing with location. Timeto links this openness explicitly to feminism to discuss mediations of space and representation, as these issues have always been its main concerns.

*Diffractional Technospaces* is both a complex and a straightforward book. It is complex in its use of a dense, intricate language and terminology that often seemingly contradicts the flow it advocates. It certainly calls for re-reading and re-visiting, which per se is actually demonstrative of the richness of its material and connects to the notion of opacity as discussed earlier in this chapter. Timeto's book is however equally very straightforward in its underlying message about how it is precisely this flow that connects our being in space and time and permeates through it. Using Donna Haraway's concept of *diffraction* and Karen Barad's interpretation and application of it extensively at the heart of her argument, Timeto's first concern is to move away from any restricting binary visions. She does so in four densely packed chapters discussing respectively space and representation; reconceiving representation; location, mobility, perspectives; and finally diffracting technoscience. An extensive and insightful introduction and a conclusion that is tellingly called 'Opening Conclusions: Performing Represent-Actions', wrap up this rich and intriguing project. The main point of Timeto's book that is repeated in various ways and illustrated through extensive case studies from the arts and sciences is that there is no longer a

valid argument for an understanding of our being in the world as standing outside of it. Space and place pervade through us, we are an integral part of it and new technologies such as VR (virtual reality) and certainly AR (augmented reality) are clear demonstrations (or illustrations) of this understanding. As stated Haraway's concept of *diffraction* and Barad's later application of it permeate throughout the book also thanks to Timeto's helpful *repetitive* explanations and applications in various circumstances. *Diffraction* is in the first place an optical phenomenon that "...literally [...] describes the interference of waves when they encounter an obstacle, such as when light passes through a slit" (Timeto, 2015, p.2). It is thus used by Haraway "... to show the entangled performativity of reality and representation and the generative power of visual practices ..." (Timeto, 2015, p.12). Barad has extended this understanding to how we are implicated in every measurement or observation,

... we do not have an outside from which to measure, so that observed differences are not so much inherent in the physical states of the observed objects but only a further extension of the entanglement, one that includes the measuring action inside the measured entanglements (Timeto, 2015, p.12).

Although this insight was also already voiced in a certain way by Whitehead and Bateson the diffractive methodology thus becomes, as Timeto states, also a different theory of mediations, which follows the co-implications of the observer and the observed and their intra-active relations (Timeto, 2015, p.159). Bateson had already stated during the Western Round Table of 1949, and which is further discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, that "the scientist is part of the thing which he studies, as much as the artist" (*The Western Round Table on Modern Art (1949)*, 2016). By moving away from a binary vision of the world, which chimes with Whitehead's aversion of bifurcation, from us looking at it, observing and trying to get to grips with it from a distance, to being logically fully integrated and immersed in it, Timeto automatically comes to the idea of performing space or as she calls it 'performing represent-actions' that these days lie at the heart of our use of implementation in technospaces. An extensive quote from the conclusion seems fitting to demonstrate Timeto's point:

Indeed, when figurations of space are not delinked from the processes of spatialisation, as when information is not separated from 'mattering' matter, representations can be grounded in the lived spatio-temporal realities with

which they engage and whose boundaries they also perform in mutable configurations. This brings to the fore the generative forces that realign the practice of representing spaces and the practice of situating representation inside a topology of variations, in which continuous represent-actions take place. [...]

A simultaneously displacing and diffracting move is required, so that the space of one's own situatedness and the representation of one's own space leaves room for the other that is already within, but is impossible to perceive or figure from the Subject position. The openness to alterity and heterogeneity that the proposed performative relation of space and representation positively confounds also allows for the adoption of a recombinant perspective in which the mediations inside and among human and non-human beings in technospaces leave room for the creative potential of un-predetermined joints, functions and actions (Timeto, 2015, pp.160-161).

As Timeto further states “connectivity is an abused word when talking about technospaces” but “in a context of shared agency and diffused relationality between heterogeneous beings, connectivity becomes an ethical and political issue because it requires an ability to actively engage with differences in respectful companionship” (Timeto, 2015, p.161). In advocating a continuous non-static, creative approach to our surroundings and the way we handle and act in them, thus implying also a clear ethico-political stand partly inspired by Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, Timeto obviously cannot be boxed in by boundaries of any kind that become rather porous. Finishing with ‘Open Conclusions’ is therefore symbolic in many respects, and especially with regard to this thesis, which aims amongst others to open up further implications and discussions about this new perspective.

In her essay ‘Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together Apart’ (2014) Karen Barad explicitly brings up the notion of ‘re-turning’ in relation to the method of diffraction. Not only does this notion relate to that of repetition as used by Gertrude Stein as a way to get to grips with her subject, but through its inherent temporality it also stresses a connection with history and time. Barad explains “... re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns” (2014, p.168). She also makes clear that the notion of difference lies at the heart of diffraction, which again connects to the practice of Stein and Duchamp as described above. The explicit non-linearity of diffraction is expressed by Barad who states “...there is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is

nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new” (2014, p.168). This connects well with the premise of this thesis and the philosophy of Michel Serres on non-linearity that feeds into it and which is discussed extensively in chapter 5. Although by putting the concept of a male artist at the heart of this thesis the feminist aspect of diffraction is seemingly thrown overboard, it should be stressed that this artist in adopting a female alter-ego, in his oeuvre as a whole and even in his practice of chess-playing was constantly researching notions of difference that explicitly moved away from classic dichotomies and binaries, using more often than once smoke as a way or a screen to obscure these. When Barad in her text cruises back and forth between the development of feminist theory by Trinh Minh-ha and Donna Haraway in the 1980s and diffraction experiments by Francesco Grimaldi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century she is playing a similar game. Or as she puts it when referring to her conversations with Gloria Anzaldúa: “Gloria and I talk about quantum physics, the two-slit diffraction experiment, waves and particles and *mita’ y mita’*. We are happily making diffraction patterns” (Barad, 2014, p.173).

*Mita’ y mita’* means, in Anzaldúa’s words, literally half and half “... neither one nor the other [neither male nor female] but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted” (Barad, 2014, p.173). The horror that Anzaldúa alludes to is rather the discomfort that the majority of people feel with that which is “neither one nor the other” and can thus not be clearly categorized. But it is exactly this discomfort that can also lead to new *insights*. In this context, it is useful to briefly return to Warburg’s *Atlas* and its workings as described by Didi-Hubermann. Under the heading of ‘The Inexhaustible, or Knowledge Through *Re-Montage*’ Didi-Hubermann discusses Warburg’s ability to link images to their causal relations, leading to the “experience of *insight*”. This however does not happen in a straightforward way. Every panel of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* seems to give a clear *overview*, but Didi-Hubermann points to the double meaning of the German *Übersicht* and the connected noun *übersehen*: on the one hand it is “... certainly *to oversee* with a surveying gaze ... but it is also *to overlook*, not to grasp everything, not to remark everything, to omit something which, in the insight itself, *jumps* or escapes us in the depths of the un-known” (Didi-Hubermann, 2011, p.177).

At the same time that what *jumps* away, escapes in a *frictious* move, leads us to want

to grasp it, thus making for “the inexhaustible” alluded to by Didi-Hubermann, or leads to the revealing of “a buried history of reception” (Lee, 2001, p.49) which will be further unpacked in chapter 5 of this thesis. In relation to the method used in this thesis it becomes clear that the method is the subject and vice versa. Notions of opaqueness, rhythm, friction and diffraction are applied throughout to construct a narrative that leads to new insights, conclusions and openings. The closeness that is implied in all of these notions, whether briefly or enduring, in congruity or embracing mangle, in friendship and exchange between the human and the nonhuman, lies at the heart of this thesis and is its main driver.

### 3. Laughter – [Reasons to be Cheerful, Part Three]

As one of the three major, intersecting narratives investigated in this thesis laughter is recognized as specifically significant and provocative, both as a catalyst and carrier or instigator of meaning in the context of collaboration between the human and nonhuman that is part of the curatorial process. As such it is seen as creative moment in which knowledge transfer takes place. There is much literature on laughter that derives from the disciplines of psychology, biology and philosophy, which tends to regard laughter as an involuntary act. In contrast this chapter, in keeping with the main claim of the thesis, will focus on laughter as a social construction. Identifying laughter as inherently messy, in line with the notion of friction as discussed in chapter 2 on method, it proceeds to set the scene in which the *inframince* can come into existence by focussing on the formalist or structural side of laughter during the wider turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The discussion in this chapter explores how laughter was directly related to the appearance of cross-disciplinary expressions in the arts around that period.

Laughter is brought into immediate relation to what Michael Bahktin would define as the *chronotope* or time-space within literature (Bahktin, 1981, pp. 84-85) by a discussion of his book on Rabelais. Stressing the intrinsic generic significance of the chronotope, Bahktin sees it as precisely defining genre and genre distinctions via time and space. In line with the different chronotopes that he analysed, such as that of the encounter, the road and the threshold, this thesis views the chronotope of laughter as a specific creative moment within the context of curatorial organisation that takes place in and through laughter. In this sense, it is building on the work of amongst others Arthur Koestler and David Bohm within creativity and organisation theory. Following a discussion of various studies of laughter and its taxonomy, this chapter will its connection to knowledge transfer.

### 3.1. *Laughter and messiness*

Within the context of the hermeneutics of laughter, especially its catalytic ability or even function to change frames of thinking and/or understanding, this shifting of tracks or frames can itself be seen as exemplary of Bohm's discussion of the mistake when he states: "One thing that prevents us from ... giving primary emphasis to the perception what is new and different is that we are afraid to make *mistakes*" (Bohm, 1998, p. 4, his italics).

When equalling laughter with this mistake this thesis suggests it can thus be regarded as a creative moment. Laughter as a 'messy', disruptive, creative moment and thus necessary 'mis-take' is indicated in the title of this chapter, which is both a description of its subject and (with the addition of the text between the square brackets), the title of a song by Ian Dury and the Blockheads from 1979. Dury's phrase can be seen as symptomatic of the currency of laughter used as a vehicle for public criticism. According to one source<sup>9</sup> this song was a bonus track on the Demon edition of the group's second studio album called 'Laughter', which would have been too good to be true but seems questionable. The lyrics of the song 'Reasons to be cheerful – part three' sum up various reasons for cheerfulness that seem however to be completely unrelated, thus constituting a *frictious* whole:

(...)  
Health service glasses, gigolos and brasses  
Round or skinny bottoms  
Take your mum to Paris, lighting up a chalice  
Wee Willie Harris  
Bantu Steven Biko, listening to Reko  
Harpo Groucho Chico  
[...]

Dury's lyrics are in this sense not unlike Borges' famous Chinese encyclopaedia from his essay *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins* in which animals are divided into:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et*

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<sup>9</sup> Compare [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reasons\\_to\\_be\\_Cheerful,\\_Part\\_3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reasons_to_be_Cheerful,_Part_3) and <http://www.demonmusicgroup.co.uk/catalogue/releases/laughter-2/>



*cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies (cited in Foucault, 1994, p. xv).

Michel Foucault, who uses this Borges quote in his introduction to *The Order of Things*, comments: “In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*” (Foucault, 1994, p. xv.).

Inadvertently, both Dury’s and Borges’ texts lead to laughter due to the absurdness of their inordinately messy listings. It is this very ‘messiness’ that thus causes the uneasy feeling Foucault alludes to. The laughter is engendered by a combination of initial disbelief, disquietude and recognition, depending on the reader’s inclination, leading possibly to new discoveries or insights, having been confronted with these unusual possibilities. Ian Dury was initially an art student, studying with Peter Blake who was an important representative of British Pop Art, which was strongly influenced by Dada. The wavelike influence of Dada throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century had one of its peak appearances starting at the end of the fifties and throughout the sixties with not only a connection to Pop Art but equally to the Oulipo movement and the thinking and practice of musician John Cage. This thesis will return to the connection between Dada and laughter further on in this chapter.

The connection made between chaos or *messiness* and creativity is quite common. Kathleen D. Vohs et al. put this ‘urban myth’ to the test in a number of experiments in relation to a situational level and confirm it in their research report ‘Physical Order Produces Healthy Choices, Generosity, and Conventionality, Whereas Disorder Produces Creativity’ (2013) published in *Psychological Science*. As they indicate, earlier research suggests that “individuals at ease with disorder can tolerate ambiguity and place high value on freedom” and that “disorder is linked with deviation and taboo”. Vohs’ experiments confirm, “disorderly environments ... encourage people to seek novelty and unconventional routes” (Vohs, Redden and Rahinel, 2013, p. 1860). In their conclusion Vohs et al. quote Einstein, who apparently preferred a messy work environment and observed, “If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?” (Vohs, Redden and Rahinel, 2013, p. 1866). Vohs et

al. finally conclude, “disorderly environments stimulate creativity, which has widespread importance for culture, business, and the arts” (Vohs, Redden and Rahinel, 2013, p. 1866) to which they should clearly also have added science.

This thesis suggests that laughter is an intellectual and affective moment of *messiness* or disorderliness that can be public, collaborative and shared, but also private, personal and intimate. One can thus imagine that creating their texts caused Dury and Borges themselves to laugh. In his commemorative text on Gertrude Stein, Arnold Rönnebeck recounts for instance how she “... herself was always giggling, an intellectual silver giggle, over her own stuff” (Rönnebeck, 1945, p. 4). He also mentions how Alfred Stieglitz in his editorial to the Matisse-Picasso issue of *Camera Work* in which he published two of Stein’s abstract word portraits, commented “We wish you the pleasure of a hearty laugh at them upon first reading. Yet we confidently commend them to your subsequent and critical attention”, thus insinuating how laughter could lead to insight in the nature of the text. This is more or less confirmed by Rönnebeck when he comments on Stein’s written portrait of Matisse, “With slight subtle juggling of nouns and adjectives and conjunctives these lines repeat over three pages. And suddenly you seem to recal [*sic*] a Matisse painting seen at Wildenstein’s in New York or at Durand-Ruelle’s in Paris” (Rönnebeck, 1945, p. 4), indicating the kind of insight her seemingly laughable writing actually leads to. Although he somewhat dismissively (albeit unintentionally) describes Stein and Picasso sharing a similar attitude in using ‘words for words’ sake” versus “forms for forms’ sake” Rönnebeck also states: “The meaning of both forms of expression are first understandable only to the creators while the public laughs them off as absurdities. It is amazing, however, how quickly the public caught on to all this apparent unintelligibility in painting and writing” (Rönnebeck, 1945, p. 5).

One can certainly differ on the quickness with which the public caught on, but it is an interesting statement when it comes to the difference between the laughter of the author or creator versus that of the audience. In this there seems to be a form of delay in the sense it has been alluded to by Duchamp and Stein of being in sync with time and the delay in appreciation (see chapter 2 on methodology).

### 3.2. *Studies of laughter*

In itself, this kind of attention for laughter as a phenomenon worth studying is nothing new. No doubt the main reason why laughter has been the subject of so many studies originates from its many conflicting properties, or again in its inherent *messiness*. For many the first known study is probably that of Aristotle in which he introduced his so-called ‘classical theory of laughter’ and famously, the notion of man as the animal that laughs. However Mary Beard, recently and convincingly unravelled this problematic statement, which has influenced a considerable number of studies into laughter, by putting it in a broader context in her book *Laughter in Ancient Rome* (Beard, 2014). More or less coinciding with Beard’s study, Albrecht Classen shines his light extensively on laughter in his *Laughter in the Middle Ages and early modern times* (Classen, 2010), joining other texts including *Laughter – Notes on a Passion* by Anca Parvulescu (2010) and *Inside Jokes – Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*, edited by Matthew M. Hurley, Daniel C. Dennett, and Reginald B. Adams, Jr. (2011) both published by MIT which can be seen as symptomatic of the reach of the discussion of laughter. This seemingly increasing number of studies into laughter in the past decade is interestingly mirrored with that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while going hand-in-hand with a proliferation of stand-up comedy at our end of the spectrum and that of cabarets and cartoons in short-lived magazines at the other.

The fact that there is a more or less comparable profusion of interest in laughter and related subjects around the turn of the 19th century as well as the current one is worth considering further. An explanation can possibly be found in the assertion by Arthur Koestler who in his book *Insight and Outlook – An inquiry into the common foundations of science, art and social ethics* (1949) states “The humour of a given historical period reflects its mentality and is, in a way, even more typical of that mentality than the works of art and philosophy which grow out of it.” (Koestler, 1949, p. 29). Humour and laughter play an important role in his theory on creativity and invention or, as he calls it in the preface to *Insight and Outlook*, “humour, art and discovery” (Koestler, 1949, p. vii). Both *Insight and Outlook* and the later, more extensive *Act of Creation* (1964) dedicate the first part to them. Whereas in *Insight and Outlook*, this part is simply called ‘The Comic’, discussing various aspects of laughter and the comic in a fairly condensed way, *Act of Creation* is more complicated in its discussion. The book is divided in three separate sections of which

the first is dedicated to ‘The Art of Discovery and the Discoveries of Art’. In this section the first part, under the heading of ‘The Jester’ discusses respectively, ‘The Logic of Laughter’, ‘Laughter and Emotion’, ‘Varieties of Humour’ and the route ‘From Humour to Discovery’. Koestler argues that “(a)s the bizarre symptoms of hysteria yielded an unexpected clue to the interrelation of psyche and soma in general, so the puzzling phenomena of laughter may serve as a backdoor approach to the creative mental functions” (Koestler, 1949, p. vii).

What is however central within his theory, and which makes laughter effective in its relation to creativity, is Koestler’s concept of the *bisociative act*. Although this has already been introduced in chapter 2 of this thesis, it is nevertheless important to return to it within the context of the current chapter. Situated by Koestler as part of this *bisociative act* laughter basically “connects previously unconnected matrices of experience; it makes us understand what it is to be awake, to be living on several planes at once (to quote T.S. Eliot, somewhat out of context)” (Koestler, 1964, p. 45). According to Koestler the creative act always operates on more than one plane, being “a double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed” (Koestler, 1964, pp. 35-36). Koestler interestingly observes how laughter “does not derive from a consummatory act which satisfies some specific need. On the contrary: laughter prevents the satisfaction of biological drives, it makes a man equally incapable of killing or copulating; it deflates anger, apprehension, and pride” (Koestler, 1964, p. 51). More importantly in the context of this study, Koestler, who subscribes to Aristotle’s questionable idea of the laughing animal, states that “... laughter rings the bell of man’s departure from the rails of instinct; it signals his rebellion against the singlemindedness of his biological urges, his refusal to remain a creature of habit, governed by a single set of ‘rules of the game’”(Koestler, 1964, p. 63).

Described by Koestler as “perceiving a situation or event in two habitually incompatible associative contexts” (Koestler, 1964, p. 95) and as such also referred to by Bohm in his discussion of creativity and metaphors (Bohm, 2000, p. 35), the *bisociative act* in fact acts as a *hinge* between two normally separate fields. Following Bohm’s interpretation it can thus be read as a *mistake* that could lead to disastrous

consequences but equally to insight. In Koestler's version the *creative act* that accompanies laughter and the *bisociative act*, moves away from habits, which

are the indispensable core of stability and ordered behaviour; they also have the tendency to become mechanized and to reduce man to the status of a conditioned automaton. The creative act, by connecting previously unrelated dimensions of experience, enables him to attain to a higher level of mental evolution. It is an act of liberation – the defeat of habit by originality (Koestler, 1964, p. 96).

Although Koestler takes a very specific point of view by connecting laughter to discovery and invention, which is the most important in terms of this thesis, his is just one of many examples of studies on laughter. Each one approaches laughter from a specific standpoint, ranging from laughter as a mechanic reflex (Bergson, 1901), laughter and the subconscious (Freud, 1905 and Grotjahn, 1957), carnival (Bakhtin, 1968), and the Dickensian novel (Kincaid, 1971). In terms of the amount of existing research into laughter, Koestler mentions in *Insight and Outlook* that “[t]he bibliography of J.Y.T. Greig's *Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*, published in 1923, comprises three hundred and sixty-three titles of works bearing partly or entirely on the subject.” (Koestler, 1949, p. 4). In this short overview of studies on laughter it is certainly also of interest to return to Aby Warburg and consider his interest in laughter within his research of the legacy of antiquity in imagery of later epochs. In 2014, The Warburg Library explored his interest in their exhibition and online resource ‘A Display of Books on Laughing Matters Following the Classification Scheme of the Warburg Library’. Although Warburg did not dedicate a specific panel to laughter in his famous *Mnemosyne Atlas*, he nevertheless was highly interested in this subject, leading to, as the Warburg Library's online guide to laughter indicates

... various sections pertaining to the theme of laughter in subject areas as varied as Christian iconography, the iconography of death, caricature, Dutch and Flemish art, Literature and literary theory, religion, philosophy, psychology, festivals, music and rhetoric. These subject areas highlight the character of the Warburg Library as a library of problems rather than as a mere collection of books.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> View <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/library/guides/laughter/>

A search in the Warburg Library's online catalogue leads to 80 (mostly recent) titles specifically on the subject of laughter and 7644 matches when searching for 'Warburg on laughter'.<sup>11</sup> To choose but one of the entries, the British psychologists' James Sully's *An Essay on Laughter – Its Forms, Its Causes, Its Development and Its Value* from 1902 states in its preface to be "... *the first attempt* to treat on a considerable scale the whole subject of Laughter, under its various aspects, and in its connections with our serious activities and interests" (Sully, 1902, p. vii, my italics). Parts of this volume were already published in other publications as early as 1897. Sully's is an interesting claim when bearing in mind that Laurent Joubert had published his extensive *Traité du Ris* or *Treatise on Laughter* in 1560, and especially if considered in the context of the writings of Bergson and Freud, who were Sully's contemporaries. Sully, who studied in Germany, had his *Illusions* from 1881 recommended by Freud and Wundt while his *Outlines of Psychology* from 1884 were adopted as a class text by William James (Valentine, 2001) so an influence of Sully on Freud might be possible. A discussion of this falls however outside the scope of this thesis.

Since Koestler's count of "three hundred and sixty-three titles" on laughter and related subjects around the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of studies has at least quadrupled. Beard (2014) mentions in her recent study of laughter in Ancient Rome, that apart from "an even wider array of specialist articles and papers investigating yet more aspects of the subject, in ever finer detail"

My own university library holds around 150 books with *Laughter* somewhere in the title, published in English in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Leaving aside assorted memoirs, novels, and collections of poetry that managed to squeeze the word on to their title page ... these books range from popular psychology and self-help manuals through the philosophy of humour and the anatomy of the joke to the history of the chuckle, the chortle, the snigger, and the giggle in almost any period or place you can imagine (right back to the origins of laughter in the caves of primitive humans) (Beard, 2015, p. 36).

To narrow the subject down to a useful tool, in accordance with Beard and other authors like Classen and Kincaid, a "necessary distinction between laughter and

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<sup>11</sup> Accessed on 13 March 2016.

comedy” (Kincaid, 1971) is called for. Kincaid mentions the fact that there is “apparently no necessary or absolute tie between the genre and the effect” and quotes professor in English and writer on art history Wylie Sypher on how comedy might not bring laughter at all whereas tragedy can cause hysterical laughter. Similarly Beard in her research into human laughter, as opposed to animal laughter, stresses that she looks primarily at laughter, “... not humor, wit, emotion, satire, epigram, or comedy ...” (Beard, 2015, p. 5). To make the distinction clearer, Classen quotes Elizabeth Arend from her *Lachen und Komik in Giovanni Boccaccios Decameron* (in his translation):

Laughter does not have to be associated with the comical. We can rather determine the following correlation: Laughter is always the most important indicator of the comical...but it is not limited to this function. To formulate it more poignantly: there is no comical without implied laughter, but there can certainly be laughter without the comical (Classen, 2010, p. 28).

Anca Parvelescu's approach in her *Laughter – Notes on a Passion* (2010) is extremely comprehensive and, at times, somewhat convulsive. The scope of the book ranges from laughing as incantation, the matter of laughing at, passion, the mouth, the last avant-gardes, woman, and finally the archive of laughter. As a consequence of her wide ranging interest, the author touches on so many intriguing aspects of laughter that there is an almost irresistible temptation for her to stray into domains that distract from the subject rather than add to it. However, Parvelescu's main intention is to return to the materiality of laughter itself. In this regard the image of a laughing puppet on the cover of her book summarizes its key discussion which is not so much the ‘why’ and ‘what about’ of laughter as the ‘how’ and ‘where’. The book’s five chapters discuss respectively the civilizing of laughter; modernism - or an extravagance of laughter; the philosophical avant-gardes - or the community of laughers; feminism - or "she's beautiful and she's laughing" and finally cinema - or the laughing gas party. It is a narrow spectrum of the topic and can hardly be said to deliver an objective archive of laughter but perhaps that is not the intention, although it immediately draws attention to what is left out. Starting the book with the civilization of laughter this chapter also delivers an extensive overview on how society tried to deal with 'the savage' and kill it so to speak by restricting laughter. In the discussion of laughter by the philosophical avant-garde or feminists, the central figures (Bataille and Cixous) connect laughter with death as does the chapter on

cinema in which most of the laughter discussed by Parvulescu is produced by actors that have died a long time ago. Perhaps this morbid fascination should be expected since in opening with Nietzsche's, "It is the past - the longest, deepest, hardest of pasts - that seems to surge up whenever we turn serious", Parvulescu of course sets the tone of a book which is very explicitly about laughter in the past tense. As a consequence it necessarily lacks as an archive of laughter the immediate aspects of the actual act of laughter - even in an historic context. This could have been recovered with perhaps a broader brush to include the impact of laughter on art, for example Zürich Dada's highly influential reinstatement of laughter in Modernism (which is discussed in this book mainly in terms of Afro-American culture). This creative insistence on the what, how and effect of laughter is perhaps the 'dog that does not bark' in this book. However fascinating as an (partial) archive of laughter, history (and the medium of the book) *Laughter - Notes on a Passion* apparently leaves no place for actual laughter, which seems almost perverse given the subtitle. But to its great credit it places a key topic on the agenda for those interested in art and culture (and for that matter the sciences and technology), which is that although it is a largely private and apparently unpredictable reaction, it has great resonance with where we are and how we view the world as a cultural habitat. Parvelescu says as much in her introduction: "Drawing on its musical overtones, the teacher writes "notes", around which she and her students improvise. Crucial in any note-writing exercise is the interval, the energetic white space between the islands of writing, where the interesting swimming happens" (Parvelescu, 2010, p. xx). With her allusion to the interval, or that which is normally not observed, she inadvertently connects the subject of laughter to the *inframince*.

Although there are some inevitable overlaps with Parvulescu's book, *Inside Jokes – Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* (2010) by Hurley, Dennett and Adams, is a very different book. Where Parvelescu concentrates on the actual phenomenon of laughter, Hurley et al state in the preface of their book that they will explain "why humor exists, how it works in the brain, and why comedy is an art" (Hurley et al, 2010, p. x) and thus different from science. While they admit that theirs "is an unabashedly eclectic theory, drawing heavily on existing work on humor" (Hurley et al, 2010, p. 7) their extensive bibliography does not include Parvelescu, possibly because it was published too late to do so. The book represents the "proper account of



laughter” (and amusement) that “moves beyond pure phenomenology” which was first called for more fully by Dennett in his *Consciousness Explained* (Dennett, 1991, pp. 64-66). However, there is a significant deviation from the original call by Dennett, which was that “[a] proper account of laughter must leave out the presumed intrinsic hilarity, the zest, the funniness, because their presence would merely postpone the attempt to answer the question” (Dennett, 1991, p. 64). *Inside Jokes – Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* however explicitly includes these notions by literally looking *inside* jokes and at how humour can be used “to reverse-engineer the mind” as its subtitle suggests. With this Hurley et al. mean that humour is used as a rewarding tool by our brains for the continuous analysis of our immediate surroundings and its possible effects on us. Or as they state it

Our brains are engaged full time in real-time (risky) heuristic search, generating presumptions about what will be experienced next in every domain. This time-pressured, unsupervised generation process has necessarily lenient standards and introduces content – not all of which can be properly checked for truth – into our mental spaces. If left unexamined, the inevitable errors in these vestibules of consciousness would ultimately continue on to contaminate our world knowledge store. So there has to be a policy of double-checking these candidate beliefs and surmisings, and the discovery and resolution of these at breakneck speed is maintained by a powerful reward system – the feeling of humor; mirth – that must support this activity in competition with all the other things you could be thinking about (Hurley et al., 2010, pp. 12-13).

In other words, once a mistake is deducted we automatically find it funny. While this thesis in a way also seeks to ‘reverse-engineer’ the mind through the application of the *inframine* to make it more aware of small differences, the way Hurley et al. deliver their message turns out to be a risky business. Their book namely both *delivers* inside jokes and *uses* humour to reverse-engineer the mind, and while humour might be a universal phenomenon, the appreciation of it, as the authors indicate themselves, is not necessarily so. This leads to some fairly weak jokes at the start of the book, a feature that is also reflected in the title of the book and unfortunately continued throughout.

The most interesting question this book poses and tries to answer, however, is why humour exists in the first place. It appears to be very prominent in our lives, and maybe more so than ever before given the profusion of stand-up comedy in recent

times. In order to answer this and other ‘why?’ questions, Hurley et al. declare that they want “to provide a preliminary sketch of not just a cognitive model, but an emotional and *computational* model of humor” (Hurley et al, 2010, p. 3). Additionally, they want to work “toward a theory that would allow humor (...) to be computed and experienced by a nonhuman agent (...) that not only can make jokes but that can truly be said to have “a sense of humor” much like the human sense” (Hurley et al, 2010, p. 4). In order to do this, they argue that humour “depends on *thought*” requiring that their “book must sketch a theory of the kind of general intelligence that could support a genuine sense of humor” (Hurley et al, 2010, p. 5). In the process they introduce some ‘key novelties’ such as “a new evolutionary explanation of the origin of humour; an ecologically motivated theory of the emotional component of mirth; and a cognitive theory of humor and laughter” (Hurley et al, 2010, p. 6).

The question remains, what is humour for? From a biologically determinist position there is a possible, and seemingly logical, connection to fitness where “females use sense of humor (in males) as a hard-to-fake advertisement of intelligence and power” (Hurley et al, 2010, p.11). But Hurley, Dennett and Adams regard humour more as the “powerful reward system” mentioned above. It thus becomes clear that humour and laughter are connected to insight and lead to mirth as we crack the puzzle, or, for that matter, the joke. In a way we all seem to be cast as fulltime detectives, constantly solving problems and delighted when we do so. Apart from solving problems we come across automatically as we go through daily life, we also enjoy inventing them and jokes are in this sense puzzles, mathematical problems, or detective stories. Our laughter comes from the pleasure of discovery and surprise as Dennett explained in an interview about *Inside Jokes* (Draulans, 2010, p. 68). This connects back to Koestler’s findings earlier discussed in this chapter in which he connected humour and discovery as well as identified “the puzzling phenomena of laughter ... as a backdoor approach to the creative mental functions (Koestler, 1949, p. vii).

### 3.3. *Taxonomy of laughter*

Maybe one of the most intriguing aspects of laughter is that it does not need any translation to have effect. This is demonstrated by ‘The Laughing Song’, first recorded in 1902 by the Gramophone Company's chief producer Fred Gaisberg,

which was not only a hit in America but was exported to India, China, Africa and Japan where it proved to be equally successful, even though it only consisted of very contagious laughter.<sup>12</sup>

The sheer range of onomatopoeia associated with laughter: chuckling, chortling, guffawing, giggling, tittering, sniggering, howling, or convulsions and fits, contribute in a rather poetic way to the confusion surrounding the subject, than giving clear insight. At this point a brief return to Joubert's already mentioned *Treatise on Laughter* of 1560 via Bahktin's influential book on Joubert's contemporary Rabelais is called for. It will be helpful to achieve an understanding of the particular kind of laughter that is important for the current research and that can be found in the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Fumistes* and their 20<sup>th</sup> century successors the Dadaists and Marcel Duchamp. Bahktin stresses the importance of Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare in the history of laughter as they, in his opinion, clearly mark the dividing line between the Renaissance, and the seventeenth century and the period that followed. Bahktin defines Renaissance laughter as having a deep philosophical meaning as opposed to the seventeenth century and the years after when it was moved to the so-called 'lower genres' and became "(...) a light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons" (Bahktin, 1968, p. 67). During the Renaissance however, laughter:

... [was] one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter (Bahktin, 1968, p. 66).

Joubert taught as a physician at the Montpellier Medical School that had also been attended by Rabelais and where there was great interest in the therapeutic power of laughter based upon the learnings of Hippocrates and Democritus. Joubert wrote his *Traité du Ris*, 'a treatise on laughter, containing its essence, causes and wondrous effects curiously studied, discussed and observed', in 1560. This was followed in

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<sup>12</sup> BBC. (2015). *Laughter & Novelty, His Master's Voices - BBC Radio 4*. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06qnx0l> [Accessed 28 Mar. 2016].

1579 by *La Cause Morale de Ris*, which according to Bahktin, was basically a French version of the last part of the ‘Hippocratic novel’ by Democritus. Bahktin does not extensively discuss the contents of this treatise but states that although published after Rabelais’ death “... it was a belated echo of the thoughts and discussions that were current in Montpellier at the time when Rabelais attended this school and that determined his concept of the therapeutic power of laughter and of the ‘gay physician’” (Bahktin, 1968, p. 68).

Joubert observed no less than eleven types of laughter and Nietzsche suggested in *Beyond Good and Evil* to order “philosophers according to the rank of their laughter – right up to those who are capable of *golden* laughter” (Horstmann et al., 2001, p. 175). Mary Beard in *Laughter in Ancient Rome* (2014) helpfully narrows it all down to the three dominant theories of laughter that have influenced the research into this subject matter. The first or *superiority* theory is related to Aristotle who regarded laughter as a prerequisite of the human or “the animal that laughs” (Beard, 2014, p. 29). Laughter is seen as a form of derision or mockery and therefore always has a victim. Evolutionary biology relates to this superiority theory by indicating laughter as a form of triumph or that the laugh and smile originate from an aggressive baring of the teeth (Beard, 2015, p. 37).

The second or *incongruity* theory is particularly interesting in the context of this thesis as it explains laughter as a response to the illogical or the unexpected. Aristotle provides the example where one laughs because of a mistake in the use of a word (Beard, 2014, p. 38), but a more recent example is that of Bergson and his ideas of the mechanic where the living organism becomes comical when it unexpectedly behaves like and automaton. The third theory on laughter that Beard mentions is the so-called *relief* theory, which can be mainly associated with Sigmund Freud, but was already known before as dealing with laughter “as the physical sign of the release of nervous energy or repressed emotion” or as “the emotional equivalent of a safety valve” (Beard, 2014, p. 38). Freud’s *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* was originally published in German in 1905 and interestingly first appeared in a French translation in the special issue on surrealism of the Belgian magazine *Variétés* in June 1929. In his text Freud complicates the relief theory by regarding laughter “not [as] the energy of the repressed emotion itself ... but [as] the psychic energy that would

have been used to repress the thoughts or feelings if the joke had not allowed them to enter our conscious minds.” Beard gives the example of a joke about an undertaker that would allow our fear of death to be expressed (Beard, 2015, pp. 38-39). It is therefore not surprising that Freud’s text would first be translated in a surrealist context, as this was exactly the kind of humour that would appeal to the likes of Breton, Dali and Magritte. It is demonstrated amongst others in the film *Un Chien Andalou*, ‘coincidentally’ also released in June 1929, or the even earlier short silent film *Entr’acte* (1924) by René Clair in which a hearse actually escapes and is pursued by the mourners.

Although delightfully compact, Beard also sees the problem of her concise summing up of the main theories of laughter, as they, in her view, do not tackle laughter in its widest sense: “They may try to explain why we laugh at jokes, but they do not address the question of why we laugh when we are tickled. Nor do they explore the social, conventional, domesticated laughter that punctuates so much of human interaction ...” (Beard, 2015, p. 39).

What she points to in these lacunae is a view of laughter as a way of communicating knowledge or meaning and its role in collaborations.

### 3.4. *Laughter at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

In 19<sup>th</sup> century France, seemingly under the enduring influence of Rabelais, there was a strong tradition of revues and cabarets in which absurd humour and laughter played an important role. This tradition was supported by the so-called *Fumistes*. In the introduction of their anthology of *Fumistes* writings and other texts, Daniel Grojnowski and Bernard Sarrazin set out how they see a relationship between our turn of the century and that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that is influenced by the use of the term *fin de siècle* itself. It establishes in their view a fiction of degeneration, which affects individuals in their organism and psychic life, but also culture in all its components (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 9).

Until fairly recently, history has brushed aside many of these subversive 19<sup>th</sup> century art practices connected to humour and laughter in favour of more marketable art forms such as impressionism, as these not only formed a less serious threat to the

established order, but actually enhanced it. Grojnowski and Sarrazin paint a different picture, in which a decadent imagination leads at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the upswing of important writer-artists like Alphonse Allais and Alfred Jarry. Alongside the more traditional comic theatre with the kind of fairly innocent humour that still is the public's favourite today, and that in all respects played more to the official rules, a considerably more subversive version developed in the Paris Theatres de la Foire, des Funambules and in the puppet theatre of, amongst others, Jarry (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 11). The Theatre des Funambules tellingly would later be the central location in the film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) by Marcel Carne and Jacques Prévert, set in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and in which the audience in the rafters, the so-called '*enfants du Paradis*' are accorded a significant role. Initially painters and musicians, poets and writers, lovers of soirees, dance, games or politics met in private salons, but once the Republic was installed the new laws allowed for freedom of publication and gathering. Meetings of artists thus suddenly became public, amongst others in the famous *Chat Noir* in Montmartre (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 14). In their book on Montmartre, Gate and Shaw describe "the emergence of an art driven by literary-artistic collaboration" with "new, inexpensive photo-printing processes as catalyst". The Montmartre avant-garde developed a form of pre-conceptual art in which text and images were equally significant or co-dependent (Gate and Shaw, 1996, p. 73). Just like in the later Zürich Dada, every artist was welcomed, regardless of background or style.

The *Chat Noir* cabaret was quite a success story, developing over twenty years into a busy entertainment establishment. Between 1882 and 1895 *Chat Noir* was also the name of an extremely popular weekly magazine, which at its peak had an edition of several thousand copies (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 16).<sup>13</sup> Since the abolition of the privileges of theatres in 1867 all sorts of theatrical professions emerged, from "the speaker, to the dancing singer, the epileptic and the silly comic" (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 15, own translation). The evenings thus turned out to be a hotchpotch of all kinds of literary, musical and theatrical performances (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 15), true to the idea of the cabaret and again not unlike the later

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<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive description of the vibrant neighbourhood the Chat Noir was part of see 'From the Martyrs' Hill to the Artists' Hill' by Raphaële Martin-Pigalle in *Around the Chat Noir*, Museum de Montmartre, Paris, 2012, pp. 14-19.

Dada soirees that were clearly influenced by this kind of set up. Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings who were at the origin of the Dada Soirees, were also influenced by the German cabarets from Munich where both had worked previously.

As absurd as the evening's programmes at the *Chat Noir* and other establishments such as the Hôtel des Etrangers in Saint-Germain, were the (usually short-lived) groups' names that express a joy in wordplay and are not always easy translatable. The movement was first instigated by the literary group the *Hydropathes* (hydropath indicating an internal and external use of water to cure a disease which is in this context obviously to be seen ironically) who would be active from autumn 1878 until autumn 1881 when they changed their name into the *Hirsutes* (Hairy or Rough ones). Set up by poet Emile Goudeau, its members included amongst others Alphonse Allais and Eugène Bataille or Sapeck (Cate, 2012). The *Zutistes* (untranslatable but with members such as Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine) alternated with the *Jemenfoutists* (or Idontcarers) who also published the single-issue magazine *Le Jemenfoutiste, journal nécessaire et attendu d'ailleurs* (The Idontcarer, necessary journal expected elsewhere), all underpinned and united by a so-called *fumiste* spirit or attitude. Grojnowski and Sarrazin point to a new, 'modern' kind of humour that went along with this 'up in the air' attitude, "a new type of comics" which "... distinguishes itself from the farce or the satire with its clearly laid out trajectory and its ultimate goal to please the recipients. The "modern" comic however makes use of ambiguities to embarrass the audience for the fun of it" (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 20 – own translation).

A 'study' of the *Fumistes* movement was published in *L'Hydropathe* in May 1880 by Georges Fragerolle, in which he characterised it by "scepticism at the heart and pretentiousness at the surface" (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, p. 20 – own translation). The origin of this 'new type of comics' is just as ambiguous. According to scholarly studies of the time, this was a mixture of German and Anglo-Saxon influences that generated respectively a distanced anti-pathos and a flair for black humour, to which Grojnowski and Sarrazin add a pinch of Mark Twain and a return of a desperate carnival (Rabelaisian) spirit in a secular society (Grojnowski and Sarrazin, 1990, pp. 20-23; pp. 26-27). Phillip Dennis Cate indicates that the interior of

the *Chat Noir*, with its “... Louis XIII-style pseudo-Gothic furnishings, were an expression of the growing nostalgia for Rabelaisian France” (Cate, 2012, p. 23).

The so-called *Incohérents*, one of the *fumiste* groups that were active between 1882 and 1895, organised their first group show in 1882 in the tiny Left Bank apartment of former *Hydropathe* Jules Lévy. Amazingly this exhibition, consisting of work by both artists and non-artists and accompanied by a two-sided one page catalogue printed by *Le Chat Noir*, attracted no less than two thousand visitors during a period of just four hours. Amongst the visitors could be counted artists such as Manet, Renoir, Pissarro and Richard Wagner (Cate, 2012, p. 26). It is this huge popularity, which accounts for the movement's long lasting, if restrained influence. The members, who had very diverse backgrounds, organised exhibitions that tackled the art and morals of their time under the guise of humour, and which consisted of “[p]arodies of famous pieces of art, political and social satire, graphical puns (words interpreted on the first degree, homonymy or homophony), corruption of objects, monochromes” (*Musée d'Orsay: Incoherent Arts : Academy of the Derisory (1882-1893)*, 1992) that were thus hugely popular. Apart from this the *Incohérents* also organised costume balls and published illustrated catalogues. They made use of “[w]ell-orchestrated advertising campaigns, [while] a benevolent press, [and] cleverly chosen locations contributed to the success of these exhibitions-demonstrations and costume balls - which were meant to be antidotes for the surrounding seriousness and boredom” (*Musée d'Orsay: Incoherent Arts : Academy of the Derisory (1882-1893)*, 1992). These descriptions of their activities come from the announcement for the commemorative 1992 exhibition *Incoherent Arts: Academy of the Derisory* at the prestigious Musée d'Orsay in Paris. This exhibition was the culmination of recognition and somewhat ironic appropriation of this anarchist art movement by the official art world. In the introduction to the catalogue of the more recent exhibition *Autour du Chat Noir – Arts et plaisirs à Montmartre* at the Musée de Montmartre in 2012, curator Phillip Dennis Gate, gives a full history of the extensive work done towards this recognition.

Although the announcement for the exhibition is illustrated by a seemingly rather unrepresentative painting of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *The Poor Fisherman* (1881), this nevertheless does do justice to the movement's rebellious spirit as at the time it



was seen as radical in comparison to the conventions of its time.<sup>14</sup> The ‘monochroids’ mentioned in the announcement of the *Incoherent Arts* exhibition at Musée d’Orsay are however much more radical as this terminology was given to the monochromes produced by the *Incohérents* members Paul Bilhaud and Alphonse Allais. Bilhaud exhibited in 1882 a completely black painting to which he gave the title *Negroes Fighting in Tunnel*, while Allais created a series of monochromes amongst which an entirely white one called *First Communion of Anaemic Young Girls in the Snow* and a red *Tomato Harvest by Apopleptic Cardinals on the Shore of the Red Sea*. Bilhaud’s monochrome was included as *Negroes Fighting in a Cave at Night*. Allais published this series of monochromes with titles that affirmed their quality as visual puns together with the nine-page blank and thus silent music score for *Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf Man*, in his *Album Primo-Avrilesque* or *First of April Album* in 1897. The monochromes were ironically drawn as if presented in gilded frames, alluding to the official art world at the time (Allais, 1897). Significant for the relatively recent appreciation for the *Fumistes* movement and its importance for later art movements is the recent publication of the small comic book *Le Minimalisme* (2016) in which the art of Allais and his compatriots is seamlessly integrated in the pre-history of minimalism and the music of John Cage.

In 1883 another member of the *Incohérents*, Eugène Bataille better known as Sapeck, exhibited and later published a black and white print of a smoking Mona Lisa under the title *Le Rire*. It thus precedes Duchamp’s ‘assisted ready-made’ of the Mona Lisa or *LHOOQ* of 1919. Although Duchamp was not yet born in 1883 it is very unlikely he would not have known Sapeck’s version, given his interest in smoke and the Mona Lisa as well as the fact that his own ‘cartoons’ were published in the magazine *Le Rire* at the beginning of his career. The abundance of cheap and short-lived magazines such as *La Parodie*, *L’Assiette au beurre* and the eventually more established *Le Rire* all boosted what could be called cartoons or at least visual puns. This feature would give many artists a form of income well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Marcel Duchamp. The *Fumistes*’ “anarchic form of thumbing one’s nose at all things serious” leads Cate to announce Duchamp as its “most able inheritor and practitioner” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cate, 2012, p. 28).

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<sup>14</sup> See description of the work on the site of the Musée d’Orsay (*Musée d’Orsay: Pierre Puvis de Chavannes The Poor Fisherman*, n.d.)

### 3.5. Jarry, Dada and laughter

An important addition to this ‘messy’ mix, and which will allow eventually to make the connection between *inframince* and cybernetics, was Alfred Jarry’s absurd puppet theatre play with its famous *Ubu Roi* from 1896 and his development of the pseudoscience of ‘*pataphysics*, deliberately including the apostrophe at the beginning. In his *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1911), of which fragments were already published in the *Mercure de France* in 1895, Jarry defined ‘*pataphysics* as mentioned before as “the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments” (Jarry, 1996 [1965], p. 22). Although usually associated with the nonsensical and absurd, Jarry knew perfectly well what he was doing. He attended some of Bergson’s seminars on philosophy while attending the Lycée Henri IV in Paris in 1891 and took extensive notes, in “total more than 700 pages of close writing” (Brotchie, 2011, p. 29). Jarry “later recalled that Bergson, “in our presence – we adolescents just awakening to the serious – improvised his theory of humor.”” (Brotchie, 2011, p. 177), but this theory does unfortunately not feature in his copious notes, some of which, from early 1892, are missing. Brotchie goes on to sketch the problematic relation between Bergson’s theory of the comic and Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*, which Jarry had already started developing before and at the time of attending Bergson’s lectures. Bergson’s discussion of laughter as mechanistic certainly allows for a connection between Jarry’s love of cycling as well as Duchamp’s use of the wheel and rotating movements in general.

Jarry’s studied absurdism was not only to play an important influence on Duchamp but also on Dadaism in general, which rejuvenated laughter as a tool within an art context. The poet Hugo Ball, who together with Emmy Hennings initiated Dada with the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, already mentions the performance of work by Jarry during a French evening in the first Dadaist publication *Cabaret Voltaire* of 15<sup>th</sup> May 1916 (Richter, 1965, pp. 14-15). In his post-hoc account the Dadaist Hans Richter demonstrates the way laughter was encountered:

“Laughter is a reaction against rigidity.”

Possessed, as we were, of the ability to entrust ourselves to ‘chance’, to our conscious as well as our unconscious minds, we became a sort of public secret society.

We were known, to laymen and experts alike, more by our roars of laughter than by the things we were really doing. Raised far above the bourgeois world by the power of our inner and outer vision...we laughed and laughed.

We destroyed, we insulted, we despised – and we laughed. We laughed at everything. We laughed at ourselves just as we laughed at Emperor, King and Country, fat bellies and baby-pacifiers. We took our laughter seriously; laughter was the only guarantee of the seriousness with which, on our voyage of self-discovery, we practised anti-art (Richter, 1965, pp. 64-65).

As Richter indicates, laughter was a serious matter for the Dadaists who talked about fighting their fears about war and society through ‘Lach-Arbeit’ or the Labour of Laughter (Bergius, 1989, p. 12), a term that is a good indication for the seriousness with which they approached and applied it. Influenced by Nietzsche, who was quoted in the *Dada Almanac* as stating “even if nothing else today has any future, our laughter may yet have a future” (Huelsenbeck and Green, 1993, p. 12), the Dadaists laughter was often harsh and aggressive, but also, given the historical context, desperate. Where the French *Incohérents* fought the “surrounding seriousness and boredom” the artists that were to form Dadaism were confronted with the upheaval of the outbreak of the First World War. In order to flee it, independent Zürich promised to be a safe haven but also meant isolation from family and friends back in the war torn countries of Europe. As Richter indicates “[i]t is impossible to understand Dada without understanding the state of mental tension in which it grew up ...” (Richter, 1965, p. 13). In these circumstances laughter was not only a form of protest and a cure, but was also more obvious when fed by fear. The short silent film *The Laughter Cure* (c. 1914-18) is demonstrative of how laughter as a cure could also be instrumentalised at the time. It features a performance by two entertainers in front of wounded and convalescent soldiers who “are seen laughing and slapping their sides in mirth”.<sup>15</sup> The laughter of the Futurists who published their first manifesto in 1909 was in that sense of a very different nature as it actually celebrated war and destruction as a way forward and as a clear breach with the past.

It is significant that Richter starts his post-hoc statement above with a non-accredited quote, “Laughter is a reaction against rigidity”, which seems to be inspired by

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<sup>15</sup> View <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-laughter-cure/query/laughter+cure>

Bergson's study on laughter from 1901, *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (Laughter, an essay on the meaning of the comic). The essay first appeared as a series of three articles in the *Revue de Paris* on 1 and 15 February and 1 March 1899 and was then published as a book in 1900. In his study Bergson specifically looks at laughter as an antidote in a period that is ruled by the mechanistic and materialistic. Apart from stating that the sound of laughter is articulate, clear or well-defined but "is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain" to stress its need of an echo, Bergson also defines it as typical human but with an absence of feeling as triggered by a distanced view on the situation at hand (Bergson, Brereton and Rothwell, 1912, p. 4). Bergson was an important source for Futurism through his ideas of an *élan vital* or life force. As Ottinger states in the catalogue of the *Futurism* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris:

If there is a philosophical foundation for the *Manifesto of Futurism*, it lies somewhere in relation to Bergsonism. The doctrine of an *élan vital* [life force] ran like a thread through the *Manifesto*, just as it would permeate ensuing writings. ... It was from Henri Bergson that Marinetti borrowed his vitalist poetics, his conception of a perpetually changing ego and his lyricism which culminated in a dream of cosmic fusion (Ottinger, 2009, p.22).

Although Futurism was to be an important (visual) influence for Dadaism, Bergson's theory about laughter was clearly interpreted differently by both groups.

With the end of the war the Zürich Dadaists returned to their respective hometowns where they instigated their own local versions of Dada. Laughter became just as dispersed. The roaring, desperate kind of laughter as described by Richter was typical for *Club Dada* in Berlin that was set up by former Zürich Dada member Richard Huelsenbeck. The very diverse group of artists who joined included Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, Johannes Baader, George Grosz and John Heartfield with the latter two having anglicised their names out of protest against German politics from Georg Grosz and Helmut Herzfelde. The tone was strongly politicised and sharp, in performances and exhibitions, and personified amongst others by Hausmann's satirical 'Hurra!' cry<sup>16</sup>, Höch's montage *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the*

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<sup>16</sup> See Bergius, 1989, p. 118-119.

*Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919) and a general ironic play with dandyism. The tone of the Dada versions in other cities was very different and more subdued, although cutting as a tactic via collage and montage techniques was a general occurrence. Kurt Schwitters developed his very own *Merz*-version in Hannover as a reaction against *Berlin Dada* that thought he was too bourgeois, while Max Ernst was part of the short-lived absurdist Cologne *Fatagaga-Dada* movement. The latter made his connection to Surrealism already clear which was to be consolidated in the later years of *Paris Dada* by André Breton. Yet another approach was to be found in *New York Dada* with as its main members Francis Picabia, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. What is important is that laughter as a constructive practice formed part of every version of Dada and that this can be seen as a signifier for the inherent ‘messiness’ of the movement. If laughter is seen as a disruptive and creative moment this messiness shows itself in Dada’s cross-disciplinarity, the mixed use of styles, the development of collage techniques and its use of laughter as instrument, not unlike the tactics of the *Fumistes* art groups in 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris.

In 1945 André Breton would, after much delay, finally publish his *Anthologie de l’Humour Noir*. As Mark Polizzolti points out in his introduction to the English translation of 1997, Breton was in his theory strongly influenced by Freud’s *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Having Jonathan Swift “already listed in the 1924 *Manifesto* as being “Surrealist in malice”, Breton traces black humour back to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Swift as its “true initiator” (Polizzolti, 1997, pp. vi-vii). The First World War influenced Breton strongly in his appreciation of black humour, through, amongst others his acquaintance with the writer Jacques Vaché during his army service. Vaché taught him “a SENSE ... of the theatrical (and joyless) pointlessness of everything” (Polizzolti, 1997, pp. vii). Although basically finished by 1936 the publication was delayed by various problems of a financial nature. Breton hoped his *Anthology* would nevertheless be published during the Second World War as it would be more “situated”, “more pertinent in the wartime climate” and it “would have a considerable *tonic* effect” (Polizzolti, 1997, pp. ix), but was eventually faced with censorship under the new regime. Published after the war it hardly had the effect Breton intended and it was only shortly before his death in 1966 that a new edition received more attention. Polizzolti situates the *Anthology* by stating

Who today – in the wake not only of the Theatre of the Absurd, but even more so of the writings of Kurt Vonnegut, John Barth, et al., not to mention Monty Python's Flying Circus and its avatars, the films of David Lynch and the Coen Brothers, or even such mainstream television fare as *Saturday Night Live* – could fail to recognize the distinct timeliness in the dark, acidic humor of Sade's jovial Russian cannibal or Leonora Carrington's party-going hyena, or with the dismissive *whatever* echoing from the selections by Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Jacques Vaché (Polizzotti, 1997, pp. v).

Breton had certainly been well ahead of his time by also including the likes of Allais, Jarry and Roussel in his *Anthology* as well as adding examples of Duchamp's wordplay or his "canned chance" (Breton, 1997, p.279). Without referring to the *inframince*, as it was not yet known during the *Anthology*'s compilation, the following phrase that Breton included nevertheless seems to link into it: "Should one react against the laziness of the railway tracks between the passage of two trains?" (Duchamp, 1997, p. 281).

### 3.6. *Laughter and knowledge transfer*

From this historical and taxonomical overview, it is now possible to concentrate on a specific kind of laughter, namely that of the knowing smile, that will allow for the actual link between laughter and the *inframince*. In terms of Beard's synthesis of the many theories of laughter the knowing smile could in principle be counted as the first or *superior* kind of laughter as it seems to exclude those that don't understand its meaning. Its character is however not nearly as aggressive or negative as this kind of laughter. Instead it would be better to categorize it under the heading of collaboration. It also moves away from Bergson's statement that laughter is by definition a group activity as a single person can also execute this knowing smile as already noted at the beginning of this chapter. Early examples are included by Albrecht Classen in his overview of laughter in the Middle Ages explored through images of the 13<sup>th</sup> century statues of the smiling Reglindis in the Naumberg Cathedral and that of the equally smiling Adelheid of Burgundy in the Cathedral of nearby Meissen in Germany. In strong contrast to their husbands' rather distraught posture, the women look "happy, delightful and simply cheerful" (Classen, 2010, p. 72). Classen does not give a strong explanation for their self-assuredness and happiness other than possibly "anticipating the glory of God" (Classen, 2010, p. 71). Whatever the reason, they seem to have access to a particular knowledge their husbands have not. It is tempting to make a link

to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, as well as to Sapeck's and Duchamp's appropriations, which although several centuries later and in a different context, seem to have a similar knowing smile. In Duchamp's case the influence might actually rather be that of the Buddhist smile. Thomas Kasulis states that "... [a]ccording to tradition, Ch'an or Zen Buddhism began with a smile, a knowing smile." Sitting with his disciples to give a lecture the Buddha Sakyamuni did not speak but ... held up a flower, twirled it, and winked. Only one monk ... understood and smiled." (Kasulis, 1999, p. 24) And thus Zen Buddhism was born although the obvious question about what the monk knew and how he came to know it is leading us too far here. For now, we can suffice with the fact that the smile indicates a certain knowledge transfer. In *The Smile of the Buddha* (2005) Jacquelynn Baas discusses the influence of Eastern Philosophy and Buddhism on Western artists from Monet to today, including on Marcel Duchamp. Baas indicates how Buddhism influenced Duchamp amongst others in terms of a calm indifference towards life and his interest in movement and change, both in his work and his life. Baas interestingly does not connect the smile of the Buddha to Duchamp, although he was throughout his life known for his enigmatic smile and thus, as stated above, also appropriated Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* in 1919 as a so-called assisted ready-made, turning her smile as it were into a Buddhist one. Jean-Pierre Lassalle talks about a conversation he had with Duchamp, the latter talking very seriously, sometimes with a thin smile ("un mince sourire") or "as a notch in a pumpkin" ("comme une entaille dans une courge") quoting the writer San Antonio in that last instance (Décimo, 2002, p.162).

It is certainly not too far-fetched to connect Dadaism and Duchamp with Buddhism. In the *Dada Almanac* Richard Huelsenbeck states that "Dada is the American aspect of Buddhism; it blusters because it knows how to be quiet; it agitates because it is at peace." (Huelsenbeck and Green, 1993, p. 10.) Although somewhat speculatively Tosi Lee also discusses the possible influence of Buddhism on Duchamp in terms of his play with identities as demonstrated in his female alter ego Rrose Sélavy, which he saw as a way "to go from one religion to another" (Lee, 2004, p. 123). She confirms the interest of Dadaists in Buddhism by referring to Tzara, Arp and several German

Dadaists, as well as to Huelsenbeck's statement quoted above.<sup>17</sup> As Lee states, Asian influences in Duchamp's work have been identified by others such as Schwarz, Lebel and Paz, and she quotes John Cage as seeing a remark by Duchamp on his chess play ("Don't just play your side of the game, play both sides.") as "very Oriental advice". (Lee, 2004, p. 126). Lee suggests further that Duchamp could have been in contact with Asian culture via the collections of Buddhist art in the Musée Guimet in Paris and that he might also have seen a large exhibition of Asian art while in Munich in 1912 (Lee, 2004, p. 127). But a possible connection can also be found in Rönnebeck's earlier mentioned quote about Duchamp's friend Gertrude Stein who always giggled "over her own stuff, sitting like a very wise Bodhisatva, legs crossed" (Rönnebeck, 1945, p. 4). The most intriguing reference that Lee makes is to a poster that Duchamp designed for a retrospective exhibition of his work in Paris in 1967. The collage shows an out-facing hand that holds a cigar with the smoke taken from a photograph of the singer George Brassens smoking a pipe. Within Buddhist iconography the out-facing right hand is the hand gesture for granting fearlessness (Lee, 2004, p. 138).

Where *Fumiste*, Futurist and Dadaist laughter were initially carnival, Duchamp's laughter can best be described through Bakhtin's notion of *reduced laughter*. Although in essence *fumiste* and thus incorporating all its ambiguous and *messy* antics, the character of Duchamp's laughter has changed into its own specific genre. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson describe in *Mikhail Bakhtin – Creation of a Prosaics* his concept of *reduced laughter* within the context of literature. They quote Bakhtin from his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

Laughter is a specific aesthetic relationship to reality, but not one that can be translated into a logical language; that is, it is a specific means for artistically visualizing and comprehending reality and consequently, a specific means for structuring an artistic image, plot, or genre. Enormous creative, and therefore genre-shaping, power was possessed by ambivalent carnival laughter (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 463).

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<sup>17</sup> Her version via Richard Sheppard in his essay 'Dada and Mysticism: Influence and Affinities' reads slightly different: "Dada is the American side of Buddhism, it raves because it knows how to be silent, it acts because it is in a state of rest" (Lee, 2004, p. 126).



While written in relation to Dostoevsky, this analysis of laughter chimes well with the *fumiste* situation as described above, especially when laughter is further described by Bakhtin as being able to

... grasp and comprehend a phenomenon in the process of change and transition ... [and] fix in a phenomenon both poles of its evolution in their uninterrupted and creative changeability: in death, birth is foreseen and in birth, death, in victory, defeat and in defeat, victory... Carnival laughter does not permit a single one of these aspects to be or to congeal in one-sided seriousness” (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 464).

According to Morson and Emerson “[i]n *reduced laughter*, the form-shaping ideology still permeates the image or scene, but explicit humor provoking outright laughter is either absent or muffled” (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 464, my italics). The ambiguousness or *messiness* of carnival laughter is, as it were, internalised in reduced laughter and it does not ring out anymore, but it still has its genre-shaping capacity. When applied to Duchamp this can be said to eventually lead to the development of his concept of the *inframince*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Although one could say that Duchamp is, in using this kind of *reduced laughter*, mainly laughing to himself, one could also indicate it as being nevertheless a form of collaborative laughter. This can obviously take place between humans, but as this thesis argues, also between human and nonhuman elements, when new, that is against the habitual or usual, insights cause mirth. It is this aspect that can eventually be helpful in the curatorial process, which will be discussed in chapter 6.

## 4. *Inframince* - The Observed Unobserved

So far the thesis has identified a transfer of knowledge in the instant of laughter. It subsequently adopts an artistic concept, Marcel Duchamp's *inframince*, as the second narrative and as a lens to look specifically at the role of the speculative, poetic and absurd, and the personal and subjective, as well as the instant of emergence of creativity. It is situated explicitly between the chapters on laughter and cybernetics as it acts literally as a hinge, overlapping and interchanging with both. This chapter thickens the concept of the *inframince* by investigating its origin, its perception by a variety of critical theorists, and finally, its versatility as a potentially operative tool within a wider trans-disciplinary curatorial framework of new media practices and art-science collaborations.

### 4.1. *Minor vs major*

When looking at the *inframince*, a seemingly 'minor' part of an artist's oeuvre compared to the overwhelming role the artist has played and still plays within modern and contemporary art history, Steinbeck's advice from his *The Log of the Sea of Cortez* (1995 [1951], p. 179) seems apt. He suggests that "[it] is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again." If the tide pool is seen as the 'minor', mundane, and every-day, and the stars are seen as the major, or universal, Steinbeck's advice connects well to the overall strategy Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) applied throughout his career as he looked from the mundane, every-day or 'minor', to the overarching, 'major', and back. From his early impressionist paintings, depicting the surrounding landscape of his hometown like in *Landscape in Blainville* (1902) or his chess playing brothers in *The Chess Game* (1910), there is on the one hand this staying literally close to home, and on the other hand a slowly but surely connecting to a larger, overarching world or even universal view. This will also become clear in the following chapter on cybernetics. In his book *Playing with Earth and Sky – Astronomy, Geography and the Art of Marcel Duchamp* (2016) James Housefield puts this play between the two extremities in yet another different perspective. On the one hand he sees Duchamp as engaging with "ground truth" – a

geographical term – or “the visible reality of physical landscapes” such as that surrounding his hometown (Housefield, 2016, p. 60), and on the other hand, the possible influential role on the young Duchamp of a major French educational reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which geography and astronomy were given a central nationalistic role.

Although the allusion to astronomy and thus a universal context played an important role in Duchamp’s work, as Housefield convincingly underlines, the minor, as a subset of major, was reversed by Duchamp and brought to the foreground. By engaging with the major through subtracting the minor, his project was in that sense very different from the average modernist one in which he seemingly partook. The focus in the general appreciation of his work is usually upon the innovative aspect, mainly due to it causing public uproar as in the case of the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* (1912) (the work that made his name in America), and also through his introduction of the *readymade*. In the latter category it was especially *Fountain* (1917), a urinal bought at a hardware store and signed enigmatically ‘R. Mutt’ that caused a stir. It can however be argued that Duchamp grew increasingly wary to be part of any group or movement and wanted to be independent of any art historical development that was directed to a modernist, ‘original’ future. His concerns lay elsewhere, namely with the seemingly minor that he considered essential to contemplate if one wanted to engage with the major. When Duchamp thus moved through the various stages of impressionist, fauvist, cubist and finally a more ‘futurist’ approach in his painting, at its heart was still a simple *Coffee grinder* (1911) and the chessboard in which he observed abstract universal notions, respectively rotation and the meeting of opposites<sup>18</sup>. The ‘everyday’ was even more explicit in his *readymades*, such as the aforementioned *Fountain* and famous others, including the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) mounted on a stool, the *Bottle Rack* (1914), or the snow shovel with the enigmatic title *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915). Through these works Duchamp connected to the larger scheme of life by alluding to male-female opposites

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<sup>18</sup> Duchamp was fascinated by chess throughout his life, and played semi-professional chess from 1923 onwards causing the rumour he had given up art altogether. The ‘Synchronopticum’ in Hulten, P., Caumont, J. and Cough-Cooper, J. (1993) not only gives a good overview of the tournaments he played but also of his life in total. On [http://www.chessgames.com/player/marcel\\_duchamp.html](http://www.chessgames.com/player/marcel_duchamp.html) one can find an overview of his actual games. In the comments section a conversation unfolds about the fact that many posters on the site also are Duchampians. It is also worth seeing the conversations that unfold on the specific games such as that against Georges Koltanowski in 1929.

and exchanges for which he again found the basis in his beloved chess play, or in abstract religious contours and movements.

The photograph by Alfred Stieglitz of *Fountain* against the background of Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors* stresses for instance the feminine contour of the male urinal, causing the journalist, photographer and critic Carl Van Vechten to write at the time to Gertrude Stein that "the photographs make it look anything from a Madonna to a Buddha" (cited in Seigel, 1995, p. 137).<sup>19</sup> If one follows the link that Jaquelynn Baas suggests via Tosi Lee, the inherent movement of the bicycle wheel, just like that of the coffee grinder, could also be connected to that of the Buddhist Wheel of the Dharma. Lee sees a similarity between the placement of the Buddhist Wheel on top of a throne or pillar and that of Duchamp's wheel on top of a pillar-like stool. These works signify for her 'the commencement of Duchamp's new path in art as well of his 'teachings'.' (Baas, 2005, pp. 85-86). Although one can also observe *Bicycle Wheel* for its revolutionary merits as a sculpture, the bicycle wheel in itself could however equally well be seen as homage to Alfred Jarry who, as mentioned before, was a passionate cyclist and a big influence on Duchamp. Housefield makes an interesting link to the De Dion-Bouton factories that were located in Puteaux in the north of Paris, close to where Duchamp's brothers lived. Apart from pioneering "the design of the ubiquitous Parisian "arrosateur" or water-spraying, street-cleaning vehicles" (Housefield, 2016, p. 91) they were mainly known for the manufacture of amongst other things, bicycles. An advertising postcard from circa 1900 shows a bicycle independently riding away from its owner under the statement 'La De Dion-Bouton roule toute seule' – The De Dion-Bouton rolls on its own' (Housefield, 2016, pp 91-92). Apart from the explicit feminine connotation that Housefield does not notice, it is indeed not unthinkable that Duchamp could have seen this advertisement. However, as Duchamp himself commented in an interview with Arturo Schwarz in the 1960s:

In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves and having a sort of created atmosphere in a studio, an apartment where you live. Probably, to help your ideas come out of your head. To set the wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than material

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<sup>19</sup> See for a discussion of the positioning of *Fountain* in front of Marsden Hartley's painting and its consequent interpretation William A. Camfield's essay 'Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917' (1991). Although this is clearly a curatorial act Elena Filipovic does not make any mention of it within the context of her discussion of Duchamp as curator.

life of every day. I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoyed looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of flames (Schwarz, 1969, p.442).

Despite the numerous notes Duchamp wrote in relation to his work and that form in fact a work in itself, he did not exactly give these kind of connotations easily away as in a user manual, even though he indicated that in the case of *The Large Glass* (1915-23) he wanted his notes to eventually work “... like a Sears, Roebuck catalogue to accompany the glass and to be quite as important as the visual material.” (Kuh, 1960, p. 83).<sup>20</sup> This sort of anonymity of the commercial as well as Duchamp’s continuous play with identity, allows for a different view that moves away from the stress on the (larger-than-life) individual artist to a wider trans-disciplinary context. The continuous shifting to and fro between local and universal reveals an artist who did not want to be confined. As Duchamp stated on numerous occasions, he wanted to be independent of artist’s groups or of specific disciplines. Steinbeck’s quote, made in a quasi-scientific context while exploring the Sargosso Sea in the company of his friend the marine biologist Ed Ricketts, thus also connects with Duchamp’s interest in a quasi-scientific approach that offered to him one way of escaping this confinement. Duchamp’s interest in science was clearly of his time, indicated by the atlases and collections of newspaper clippings mentioned in chapter 2. His interest was fed by his admiration for Jarry and his concept of the pseudoscientific *‘pataphysics*, as well as through personal contact with the chemical engineer François Le Lionnais and the mathematician Maurice Princet. Le Lionnais would later become the first President of the Oulipo group and will be discussed further in chapter 5 on cybernetics. This interest and entourage meant that Duchamp was fairly well capable of tackling complicated mathematical and scientific issues. While in the company of his brothers at their atelier in Puteaux on the outskirts of Paris from about 1910 to 1914, conversations with other artists and scientists circled around the idea of the fourth

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<sup>20</sup> Adcock uses this quote as directly relating to the notes, but in fact Duchamp tells Kuh that the Green Box only held preliminary notes “and not in the final form”. See Adcock, 1983, p. 1 to compare. Duchamp uses the reference to catalogues also in various other places. Filipovic refers between brackets to “Sears Roebuck-like” without reference to Kuh but mentions an interview with Alain Jouffroy in an accompanying footnote in which Duchamp talks about “a catalogue like the *Armes et Cycles de Saint Etienne* (a contemporary French mail order company)”– see Filipovic, 2016, p. 68 and note 108.

dimension, non-Euclidean and  $n$ -dimensional geometry.<sup>21</sup> Popular science magazines abounded from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were hugely popular among artists such as Duchamp, who was a lifelong fan of *Science et Vie* or *Lectures pour Tous* in France and *Scientific American* once he moved to the States (Housefield, 2016, p. 19). He equally enjoyed reading the writings of Henri Poincaré such as *La Valeur de la Science* (1905) or *Science et méthode* (1908) and was an avid visitor of science museums such as the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers or the Palais de la Découverte in Paris (Henderson, 1998, p. 18).

That Duchamp did not want to be confined to one particular ‘brand’ was also substantiated by the fact that although he made numerous so-called ‘static’ art works, such as paintings, *readymades* and installations, the essence of his work can be brought back in general to notions of movement or the non-static, either physical or virtual. His concept of the *inframince* stresses this fact as all examples given under this denominator are non-static and could thus be seen as predictive of the current prevalence of ‘movement’ or process and event thinking in philosophy, to be discussed further in this chapter. So although it is inevitable that in this context the focus is upon Duchamp, it will be clear that this thesis is not specifically about him. In a different and more contemporary context Deleuze and Guattari have stressed the importance of the ‘minor’ “as a kind of operational tool, a way of thinking through what political or artistic strategy might involve” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 69). The potential for the deployment of the *inframince* in a curatorial context will be discussed further in chapter 6.

#### 4.2. ‘Ontstaansgeschiedenis’ of the *inframince*

Where this thesis deals amongst others with small differences in meaning and appearance, with puns that play with those differences, with an inadequacy of daily language that asks for the invention of words such as ‘*patafysics* or *inframince*, sometimes a word or phrase in another language just does the trick better. The Dutch word ‘ontstaansgeschiedenis’ thus is more explicit than its usual translation ‘history’ as it points not only to history but also to where something originates. The *inframince* is a neologism invented by Duchamp. An analysis of the term reveals various

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<sup>21</sup> See on the so-called Puteaux or Section d’Or group amongst others Dalrymple-Henderson, [1983] 2013, pp. 170-77.

indications for where it found its origin. To understand how the word possibly came into existence it is important to regard Duchamp's view on language, and for that matter any material, as a source for *readymades*, artworks that were literally already made and just needed to be selected by the artist. Just as is the case with the physical *readymades*, language could be put in a different context and thus engender new meaning. Objects and language were a 'given' for Duchamp that could be used in whatever way one felt fit. This playful attitude towards language puts him in a (French) tradition of wordplay that is largely influenced by Rabelais, and amongst others, prevalent in the work of the *Fumistes* as described in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Another direct influence in the development of Duchamp's work is the writer and chess enthusiast Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) who self-published *Impressions of Africa* in 1910, often described as a 'carnavalesque travelogue'. Duchamp mentions a performance of the play in 1912, which he attended with Apollinaire and Picabia, as specifically influential. It leads Marc Décimo in the preface to his *La bibliothèque de Marcel Duchamp, peut-être* (2002, pp. 22-23) to suggest that Duchamp, in his indecision about the extent of the seriousness or satire of the objects he introduced, might be considered in the same manner as writers such as Verlaine, Laforgue, Cros, Allais and Roussel. In this context it is certainly worth mentioning Roussel's posthumously published *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (How I Wrote Certain of My Books, 1935) in which he explains his fairly systematic working method of "the pairing of two words taken in different senses" (Sobelle, 2011). Making use of some basic techniques such as the metagram in which one letter is substituted for another in a word leading to a completely different meaning, it becomes clear that the surrealist outcome was the result of a very conscious but playful construction. As Timothy O'Leary states in his review of Foucault's book on Roussel *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* (1963), the revelation of these techniques demonstrated for Foucault "... the sense in which Roussel's work should be read, not as a series of flights of the imagination, but as an experiment that is carried out on language, in order to expose both the labyrinth that it constructs for us and the abyss on which it rests" (O'Leary, 2009, p. 145). Lyn Merrington in contrast to Perloff's claim (see chapter 2) argues that Roussel's influence on Duchamp explains the more than frequent occurrence of 'R's in his oeuvre, including in his alter ego Rose Selavy. She further explains Duchamp's

*Tonsure* (1919) in which he shaved a star on the back of his head, as a reverse reference to Roussel's later play *L'Etoile au Front* or *The Star on the Forehead*.<sup>22</sup> As Adcock (1983, p. 29) indicates, this kind of conscious playfulness was also extended to Duchamp's approach to physics, subsuming his scientific notes literally to a system he called "physique amusante (playful physics)".

In his interview with Katherine Kuh Duchamp expands on his love for puns or wordplay:

I like words in a poetic sense. Puns for me are like rhymes. The fact that 'Thaïs' rhymes with 'nice' is not exactly a pun but it's a play on words that can start a whole series of considerations, connotations and investigation. Just the sound of these words alone begins a chain reaction. For me, words are not merely a means of communication. You know, puns have always been considered a low form of wit, but I find them a source of stimulation both because of their actual sound and because of unexpected meanings attached to the interrelationships of disparate words. For me, this is an infinite field of joy – and it's always right at hand. Sometimes four or five different levels of meaning come through (Kuh, 1960, pp. 88-89).

The word *inframince* is thus a playful collage or contraction of the words 'infra' and 'mince'. 'Infra' is usually an indication in a written document as in 'further on, below, see note'. 'Mince' in French means 'thin', hence the general translation as *infrathin*, literally meaning below thin and thus ultra thin. The naming of this concept seems to be influenced by Jarry's previously mentioned concept of '*pataphysics*, which is a *paronym* or pun on the word metaphysics and indicates, according to Jarry "the science superinduced above metaphysics" (Jarry and Taylor, 1996, p. 21) or "the science of the particular, of laws governing exceptions" (Housefield, 2016, p. 76). So where Jarry indicates a science larger than life, Duchamp reverses this into attention for the utmost smallest, not unlike the 'reversal' of his bicycle wheel mounted on a stool and thus incapable of touching the ground, let alone going for a ride. Finally, in terms of a possible origin of the word *inframince*, Duchamp was well known for his love and study of proto-Dadaists such as Roussel and Jarry, but also of Alphonse Allais. Doug Skinner remarks in the context of his translation, that in the original version of Allais' *Coquelin Cadet*, a slice of bread exclaims 'mince', which is in

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<sup>22</sup> See [http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue\\_4/letters/merrington/merrington.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/letters/merrington/merrington.html), accessed 14 July 2016.



French a euphemism for ‘merde’ (Allais, 2014, p. 106). Skinner’s remark not only demonstrates a link to Allais but also to Jarry’s famous ‘Merdre!’ at the opening of his play *Ubu Roi* (Jarry, 1962, p. 33).

#### 4.3. *The inframince notes*

In the edition of notes on the *inframince* that Duchamp’s widow Teeny Duchamp instigated together with her son Pierre Matisse in 1976, and which was eventually published in 1980, the first of four sections is dedicated to the *inframince*. The order in which the notes appear is almost exactly the same as that in which Matisse found them in the envelopes or folders in which Duchamp had collected them. Matisse organised the notes into four sections and interestingly devoted the first section to the *inframince*. Why exactly Matisse decided to do this is not revealed in his preface to the publication, other than his agreeing with Duchamp that explanations don’t explain anything (Duchamp, 1999, p. 9). The section consists of 46 notes and is illustrated by some reproductions of the notes, such as the ones on the writing paper of the Hotel Kongen af Danmark in Copenhagen where Duchamp stayed during his visit in July 1937. The notes can be described as observations rather than strict definitions, moving between the everyday, the scientific and more philosophic. The very first note states that the possible is an *inframince*, giving as an example the possibility of several tubes of paint turning into a painting by Seurat. Whether this note was intended to be the first by Duchamp himself remains unclear, but it is a strong metaphor for his overall view on life and art. This versatile approach, in which something remains in the end undefined or at least open-ended, connects well to Duchamp’s aversion of a single identity. As Dalrymple-Henderson notes in relation to *The Large Glass*: “In it no image has a simple, single identity; rather, the visual evidence, together with Duchamp’s written notes, presents an inventive fusion of multiple forms and ideas, amplified by metaphor and metonymy.” (Dalrymple-Henderson, 1998, p.xxi).

The concept of the *inframince* was first introduced to a wider audience when used on the back of the 1945 issue of the American magazine *View* that was entirely dedicated to Duchamp. The poetic French statement published on the back of *View*, sometimes referred to as the poem *Espace*, used several fonts and thus seemed to allude to an

anonymous ransom note which could be related to Duchamp's use of equally 'anonymous' bonds as art works<sup>23</sup>. It reads as:

*Quand la fume de tabac  
sent aussi de la bouche  
qui l'exhale,  
les deux odeurs  
s'épousent par  
infra-mince*

When the tobacco smoke  
Also smells of the mouth  
That exhales it  
Both scents  
Marry each other through  
Infra-thin  
(Duchamp, [1999] 1980, p. 24, own translation).

Denis de Rougemont conducted an interview with Duchamp in 1945 that seemed to immediately respond to this publication, as he is the only one who ever asked Duchamp about the *inframince*. The interview was eventually only published in February 1968, six months before Duchamp's death in October of that year, as 'Marcel Duchamp, mine de rien' in the French magazine *Preuves*, number 204, pp. 45-46. 'Mine de rien' means literally 'casually' but also indicates 'playing innocent', as if nothing (had) happened. In the interview Duchamp explained that he "chose on purpose the word thin which is a word with human, affective connotations, and it is not an exact laboratory measure. The sound or music which corduroy trousers, like these, make when one moves, is pertinent to infra-thin." (Dalrymple-Henderson, 1983 [2013], p. 287). He also explained that it was impossible to give a clear definition and that one could only give examples of the *inframince*. With the text or poem published on the back of *View* Duchamp not only indicated an exchange zone, but also the active interlocutor that he described in the first published note in Matisse's collection (mentioned above) as the possible:

*Le possible est un infra mince.*

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<sup>23</sup> Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy created the so-called *Monte Carlo Bond* as a ready-made in 1924. It ironically fetched more than \$1m at a recent auction at Christies. See lot notes <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/prints-multiples/marcel-duchamp-monte-carlo-bond-5371694-details.aspx>

*La possibilité de plusieurs tubes de couleur de devenir un Seurat est  
« l'explication » concrète du possible comme infra mince.*

*Le possible impliquant le devenir – le passage de l'un à l'autre a lieu dans  
l'infra mince.*

*Allégorie sur l' « oublie »*

The possible is an infra thin.

The possibility of various tubes of paint to become a Seurat is the concrete  
“explanation” of the possible as infra mince.

The possible implicates the becoming – the passage from one to the other  
takes place in the infra thin.

Allegory on the “forgotten”  
(Duchamp, [1999] 1980, p. 21, own translation).

Duchamp's reference to ‘possibility’ and ‘becoming’ can be connected to current  
event-thinking, which will be developed further on in this chapter. The possible is  
notably also the subject of an individually published note by Duchamp from 1968  
included in a booklet edition of 30 by Pierre André Benoit (Adcock, 1983, pp. 15-16).  
This might be seen as an indication that just before his death Duchamp seemed to  
return to or be pre-occupied by this idea, and which might also account for Matisse's  
order in the publication of the notes. This later text reads as:

*La figuration d'un possible.  
(pas comme contraire d'impossible)  
ni comme relative à probable  
ni comme subordonné à vraisemblable)*

*le possible est seulement  
un « mordant » physique \* [\*genre vitriol]  
brûlant toute esthétique ou callistique.*

The figuration of a possible  
(not as the opposite of impossible)  
nor as related to probable  
nor as subordinate to likely.

the *possible* is only  
a *physical* ‘caustic’\* [\*vitriol type]  
that burns up all aesthetics or callistics.

This translation is partly based on that by Anders Kreuger, who used the quote as the starting point for his exhibition *Art of the Possible* together with an excerpt from Bergson's Nobel Prize lecture, *The Possible and the Real*, published in 1928 (Kreuger, 2014, p. 153, nt 8). It is interesting to note that the term 'callistique', which is difficult to translate, refers to the science of beauty as applied by Hegel. Without wanting to suggest that Duchamp actually read Hegel, the note in any case relates to his lifelong battle with the retinal or superfluous beauty.

#### 4.4. *Smoke and mirrors*

In relation to the first published *inframince* note, with its allusion to smoke both in the text and in the design for the front cover of *View*, it is of use to discuss this specific aspect of Duchamp's work. Housefield, in his discussion of *Bicycle Wheel* suggests that Duchamp got his example of the flickering fire from a very unlikely close reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Although Kant wrote his master thesis on the subject of fire (*Brief Outline of Some Reflections Concerning Fire*, 1755) no such reference can be found in his *Critique*. A possible influence and source of information on German philosophy could certainly have been Frantisek Kupka who read "the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche" (Tattersall, 2013, p. 65) and was a neighbour of Duchamp's brothers in Puteaux. Wanting to burn all aesthetics and situating this in the possible, as indicated in the above note, in any case relates to Marcel Duchamp's long-term engagement to smoke. This leads us to the front cover of *View*, on the back of which the first *inframince* note was published. Housefield uses the image as an introduction to his book because of its "playful embrace of earth and sky" and identifies it interestingly as a self-portrait by Duchamp that engages "moments from across the artist's career" (Housefield, 2016, pp. 1-3). Against a starry sky that evokes the Milky Way, an empty wine bottle floats off into outer space, emitting a puff of smoke that disperses into the ether. The label on the bottle has, as Peter Lindamood indicates in his introductory note in the *View* issue, "nothing to do with wine snobbery but is really Duchamp's Livret Militaire (Service Record)" (Lindamood, 1991, p.120). Housefield reads the smoking bottle "as a substitute for the pipe-smoking artist himself" and sees it weirdly as "an element to "complete" Duchamp's first ready made sculpture, the *Bicycle Wheel* (1912)" (Housefield, 2016, p. 3). It would however obviously make more sense to link the bottle to the later readymade *Bottle Rack* (1914).

The observation that the cover could be a self-portrait is interesting, as a quick glance almost seems to reveal the outlines of Duchamp's profile in between the puffs of smoke. In his recurrent use of smoke, Duchamp not only seems to refer back to the *Fumistes* discussed in the last chapter, but also to the practice of the *phantasmagoria* in which images would be projected via magic lanterns on amongst other mediums, smoke. The title for this section, 'smoke and mirrors', refers to the related magician's trick to let objects appear or disappear with the use of mirrors and smoke. But it also allows for a connection to Duchamp's engagement with film stars through his female alter ego Rose Sélavy and the photographic portraits that Man Ray made of 'her'. As Housefield points out, the French dictionary *Petit Larousse illustré*, connects the word *astre* or star with exceptional beauty, comparing a woman literarily to a glittering star (Housefield, 2016, p.131). It is clear that in this aspect of his work, Duchamp again tackled the issue of superfluous or retinal beauty, which is apparent in, amongst other examples, the *flo* or fuzzy portrait by Ray of Sélavy. His apparent analysis of the film stars of his day as elusive in this part of his artistic output, is confirmed by his overall tendency to create his own persona. One, which as Rose or himself, was utterly slippery, enveloped by elusive puffs or clouds of smoke, unable to be labelled or boxed in. This is epitomized accidentally (or not) in the BBC Arena documentary 'Screen Goddesses' (2012), which portrays Hollywood stars such as Theda Bara, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich or Ava Gardner surrounded by sumptuous clouds of (cigarette) smoke, while the Arena introductory credits boast a floating bottle on water under a misty moonlit sky.

It is possible that Duchamp also played in his final design for the cover of *View* with the expression 'esprit-de-vin', literally 'wine-spirit' as a chemical indication for ethyl alcohol, or possibly even Cassio's "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!" in Shakespeare's *Othello* (*Othello: Entire Play*, 2016). What the *View* cover however indicates in the first place is the fleeting nature of the *inframince*. It is 'under one's nose' so to the speak, as the examples Duchamp gives are of an everyday quality, but hard to grasp if one is not open to noticing it. This aspect is reminiscent of René Daumal's pataphysical, unfinished novel *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* that was published in 1952 and for the first time

translated into English by Roger Shattuck in 1959. In Daumal's story, a company of eight adventurers sets sail on the yacht *Impossible* to search for the enigmatic Mount Analogue, about which the narrator states:

For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue, *its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible* to human beings as nature made them. It must be unique and it must exist geographically. The gateway to the invisible must be visible (Daumal [2010], 1952, p.32).

The peak of Mount Analogue is hidden or invisible as it is continuously surrounded by clouds. The *inframince* equally has the tendency to stay out of reach.

#### 4.5. *Inframince* in critical literature

After the publication of *View* in 1945 the word *inframince* seemingly disappeared from Duchamp's vocabulary, neither did it appear in any texts about him until the publication of de Rougemont's interview in 1968. From its first publication in 1980 and its translation in 1983, the posthumous *Notes* attracted attention from a wide variety of scholars, mainly in France and the US, who tried to get to grips with the puzzling concept of the *inframince*. Although in recent years there has been a growing interest in the *inframince*, for most of the time commentators stick to just mentioning it without any in-depth analysis. In their contribution to Bruno Latour's catalogue for his project *Reset Modernity* (2016), Allen, Mareis and Bruder state, for instance: "Still, we conceive of knowledge production as the swing of an imagined pendulum in this way, as we try to render explicit an *inframince* distance between analysis and synthesis, research and development, backstage and the stage itself" (p. 497). A footnote refers to the fact that this *notion* developed by Duchamp indicates "an inseparable duality or intimate closeness, a kind of infinitely close separation or "unmediation" (Allen, Mareis and Bruder, 2016, note 1).

In the following section, an overview of the most important literature dedicated to more in-depth analyses of the *inframince* is discussed. This overview uses Thierry Davila's *De l'inframince – Brève histoire de l'imperceptible, de Marcel Duchamp à nos jours* (2010) as a framework. Contrary to the indication of brevity in its title, this is a rather extensive, well-documented research into the influence and history of the imperceptible, connecting the *inframince* to a wide range of contemporary artists.

Davila also refers to several other researchers and writers on the *inframince*. Building on previous research, he makes for instance, a strong case for an early development of the concept when Duchamp was collaborating with Walter Arensberg in 1916 on the poem *Concept of Nothing*, which according to Davila “... emblematises ... his fascination for small bits of reality” (Davila, 2010, p. 114, own translation). Following Robert Lebel, Davila thus agrees that the actual notes on the *inframince* probably originate from the mid-thirties, and that they were finished in the mid-forties when the word appeared for the first time on the back cover of the aforementioned magazine *View*. But Davila claims that the (mental) preparation for the notes took already part in the first decade of the century when Duchamp read the works by Poincaré and Jouffret and must have come across the indication of an “*espace infiniment mince*” (infinitely thin space) (Davila, 2010, pp. 101-102).

#### *Adcock*

The fact that Duchamp read Poincaré and Jouffret had already been extensively discussed in Craig E. Adcock’s 1981 thesis, published in 1983 as *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass: An N-Dimensional Analysis*, which is in several aspects a unique publication. It is to date still often referred to by various authors on Duchamp, due to its in-depth analysis of the *inframince* and other notes. Its seemingly completeness might well be the reason why the *inframince* has not since been tackled in any depth, with the exception of Davila who mentions Adcock extensively, albeit critically. At the time of writing his thesis Duchamp’s posthumous *Notes* had only just been published and, as a consequence Adcock was the first to thoroughly analyse them. He had the added benefit of being able to consult both Pierre Matisse and Alexina ‘Teeny’ Duchamp who were still alive at the time.

Interestingly, Adcock chose to give the chapters of his book French titles, alluding to texts by Duchamp. He quotes the *Notes* only in French and refers to Sanouillet’s and Peterson’s *Salt Seller* (1975) for translations into English, possibly because Matisse’s translation was not yet available. The first chapter, ‘Un Dedale Illogique’, gives an introduction to all published notes, including the *Box* of 1914, the *Green Box*, individually published notes, the *A l’Infinitif* collection and the posthumously published *Notes*. The mathematician Espirit Jouffret (1837-1904) was, according to

Adcock, an important source for Duchamp on the fourth dimension and his concept of the *inframince*, which, he states

... is apparently derived from Jouffret's discussions of the 'sections' that exist between continua of different dimension. ... From the point of view of the fourth dimension, normal 3-D space forms an *infinitely thin* layer (un couche infiniment mince) between these two regions. 'Infra-mince' was something that Duchamp used to relate intangibles (Adcock, 1983, p. 37).

Jouffret published his *Traité élémentaire de géométrie à quatre dimensions et introduction à la géométrie à n dimensions* in 1903 and Duchamp was, according to Dalrymple-Henderson, probably introduced to this publication by Maurice Princet (Dalrymple-Henderson, 2013, p. 173).

Adcock specifically looks at the *inframince* notes under the title 'Un Porteur d'Ombre' or 'Shadow-caster', which is also the beginning of note 3.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter Adcock connects Duchamp's use of shadows, mirror images, ready-mades and castings as *inframince* separations in and of his work specifically to Jouffret's n-dimensional geometrics. He bases this on a close reading of the *Notes* and the general assertion, also used by Duchamp, that "... if a three-dimensional object casts a two-dimensional shadow, then by *analogy* a four-dimensional object might cast a three-dimensional shadow." (Adcock, 1983, p. 48). Possibility, chance, and ready-made, in a very quick move and following Rene Clair without any discussion, are stated as connected concepts and equally placed in the *inframince*, "a region beyond time and place that confounds conventional aesthetics" (Adcock, 1983, p. 53). The idea of mirror images is by Adcock mainly connected to its visual use, especially in connection to the complicated 'painting' *Tu m'* (1918) that consisted of several painted projections and attached objects including a bottle brush and safety pins that also added their respective shadows. Duchamp's use of mirror-like, Rousselian reversals, as in his alter ego Rose Selavy, the shaved star and more explicitly the naming of the *inframince*, are however not discussed. Apart from being rather technical, Adcock's text also seems to suffer from a lack of distance in time and reflection that cause these kind of quick conclusions.

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<sup>24</sup> Adcock throughout his book uses a different numbering of the notes according to the chronology in which he uses them. Note 3 thus becomes 39 in his version (Adcock, 1983, 54).



As previously mentioned, Davila is very critical about Adcock, especially when it comes to his analysis of Duchamp's last 'painting' *Tu m'* and the statement that the *inframince* is "a region beyond time and space" (Adcock, 1983, p. 53). To this Davila argues that the *inframince* is not a logical and mathematical elaborated abstraction but a material and sensory extension of the manifestation of appearances, similar to shadows and however invisible very much situated in the here and now (Davila, 2010, p. 115). This thesis follows Davila's argument and states that it is through this realisation that the *inframince* can be connected directly to Bakhtin's notion of the *chronotope* (see chapter 2). Davila's further strongpoint is in the first place his stressing of the connection of the *inframince* to the imperceptible, as indicated in the subtitle of his book, and Duchamp's fascination for the notion of 'almost disappearance' or quasi-presence (Davila, 2010, 84-86). In this context Davila also specifically identifies objects that can be seen as incarnations of the *inframince* within Duchamp's oeuvre, such as *55 cc Air de Paris* (1919) that was made for Walter Arensberg and *Belle Haleine – Eau de Voilette* (1921) that was produced by and carried an image of Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy. Both works come into being through and by indicating a slight difference: the ampoule that seemingly contains nothing and the eau de toilette that in its title plays with breath and voile, two equally hardly perceivable and changeable 'identities' or 'intangibles'. Another aspect that Davila specifically raises in his discussion of the *inframince* is the notion of *retard* or *delay*, amongst others in relation to Duchamp's engagement with early *inframince* thinking, the conceptualisation of it only thirty years later and the publication and subsequent reception of it yet another twenty years further on.

#### *Dalrymple-Henderson*

In his general discourse Davila mentions the following authors of texts concerned with the *inframince* only briefly, consigns them to footnotes, or does not mention them at all. Nevertheless, Linda Dalrymple-Henderson had already, if only briefly, discussed the *inframince* in her *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* of 1983 in which she sees the concept as "[p]erhaps the major thread of continuity with his earlier preoccupation with dimensionality" (Dalrymple-Henderson, 1983 [2013], p. 286) at the same time alluding to Duchamp's interest in the fourth dimension. Like Adcock she indicates how the *inframince* has been related

to Jouffret's discussion of a *tranche infiniment mince* (an infinitely thin slice) but stresses the fact that its significance moves well beyond the geometrical, quoting the text on the back of *View* as evidence (see above).

### *De Duve*

Thierry De Duve was quick to 'claim' the *inframince* after the first publication of the *Notes* in 1980 and its subsequent translation in 1983, in his 1984 publication *Nominalisme Pictural: Marcel Duchamp, La Peinture et La Modernité*.<sup>25</sup> In this "extensive re-examination of the oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp" De Duve devoted a short section of the chapter 'The Readymade and Abstraction' to the 'infra-thin', stating "... a profound affinity between the infra-thin and aesthetic judgment" (De Duve, 1984, p. 159). The *inframince* is in his view in the first place "undecidable" and suspended between the statements "this is painting/this is not painting" (De Duve, 1984, p. 160). In his somewhat elusive style De Duve dismisses the *inframince* as a concept since Duchamp could only give examples. De Duve quotes only a few of these examples after which he somewhat contemptuously concludes "And so on" (De Duve, 1984, p. 160). He points to the *inframince*'s effectiveness when distinguishing 'the same' from 'the same' and when alluding to "an indifferent difference, or a differential identity". But in the first place, he stresses it as an aesthetic judgment "... that calls out simultaneously for yes and no (and) is nothing else than the arrow of time and the reaction that makes it feed back on itself, the interval that makes the haste of the artists and the delay of the viewers simultaneous to each other" (De Duve, 1984, p. 160). This is the somewhat circumspect interpretation of part of note 9 that he quotes to support it: "Subway gates – the people who go through at the very last moment infra thin -> The convention of the arrow sign produces an infra thin reaction on the sense of displacement agreed to (De Duve, 1984, p. 160).

De Duve wavers between taking Duchamp's writing very directly and interpreting it freely, denying the status of the *inframince* as a name because Duchamp states in note 5 that it's not a noun and that it is never to be used as a substantive. Above all, De

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<sup>25</sup> This was translated as *Pictorial Nominalism – On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* and published as Volume 51 of *Theory and History of Literature* in 1991. See bibliography.

Duve's interpretation mainly discusses the *inframince* in relation to the indecision between painting and non-painting or readymade.

### *Tono*

The article 'Duchamp and Infra-mince' by the Japanese art critic Yoshiaki Tono is quite different. He wrote it for the catalogue of the exhibition *Duchamp* that took place in Barcelona in 1984 and later that year travelled to Cologne. Tono had organised an exhibition of Duchamp in Japan in 1981 and was, during the preparations in 1980, confronted with the publication of the *Notes*. This was unfortunately too late for him to consider their implications in the concept and planning of the exhibition and catalogue, but he could nevertheless appreciate this as a posthumous trick by Duchamp, who had always warned against holding on to just one view (Tono, 1984, 55). Tono wondered in his article why Duchamp never decided to publish these notes during his lifetime. He also indicates that for Duchamp language was just as important as the visual and that it is therefore crucial to get to the exact meaning of this new word (Tono, 1984, p. 56). He put high hopes in the *Notes* and was convinced that they would play a central role in a new deciphering of Duchamp's oeuvre and specifically the readymades. Tono is quite original in his choice of *inframince* quotes compared to other critics, starting with note 10 that De Duve alludes to between the lines of his text but fails to quote:

The exchange between what one puts on view the whole setting up to put on view (all areas) and the glacial regard of the public (which sees and forgets immediately). Very often this exchange has the value of an infra thin separation meaning that the more a thing is admired and looked at the less there is an inf.t. sep. [*sic*]<sup>26</sup>

Tono reads the notes that allude to warmth or friction as having an erotic meaning and even implies that the one that wears the corduroy trousers that make a noise when walking or rubbing the legs should be a woman (Tono, 1984, p. 57). Tono is one of the few commentators that actually engages directly with the *inframince* and makes a visual response by illustrating his text with two of his own underwater photos. In

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<sup>26</sup> I am quoting from Matisse's translation leaving out the dividing marks (Matisse, 1983, Infra-thin note 10). In Tono's text from the Cologne catalogue the quote in German leaves out 'all areas' and interprets the abbreviations at the end as 'infra thin separation' (inframince-Trennung [*sic*]). (Tonno, 1984, 56).

these he indicates that the water surface, especially seen from underwater, seems to be a perfect example of an *inframince* (Tono, 1984, pp. 57-58). Tono's original visual response might be due to his particular stance as an art critic. In 1957 he was part of the *Society of Documentary Arts* that issued a manifesto in which they called for trans-disciplinary practices and proclaimed that the "documentary spirit militates against the hardening of art by destroying aesthetic conventions to constantly open up new artistic territory and to revolutionize, reorganize, and expand the very strategy of art" (*Tono Yoshiaki |post*, n.d.). This clearly seems to have influenced Tono's writing and curating later on.<sup>27</sup>

### *Judovitz*

Dalia Judovitz discusses the "infrathin" quite extensively in her *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (1995) but is mainly referred to by Davila in relation to her interest in repetition in Duchamp's work. She does however elaborate strongly on the notion of difference in mass production that Duchamp identified and discusses his inscribing of a temporal dimension or delay. Davila seems to me to be more indebted to the work of Judovitz than he admits. Judovitz equally points to the fact that the "double allusion to gender in the guise of masculinity and femininity in the case of *Fountain* can be seen as an instance of infrathin". She surprisingly links this to the smell that can be associated with a urinal, while commenting: "The invisible inscription of this olfactory dimension follows the logic of the infrathin: "smells more infrathin / than colors" (*Notes*, 37)" (Judovitz, 1995, p.131). From here it is of course just one step to Rrose Selavy's empty perfume bottle *Beautiful Breath, Veil Water* that Davila mentions as well. Judovitz continues to explore the *inframince* in connection to *Fountain* and in relation to notions of 'dry' and 'wet'. She mentions in this context Duchamp's exploration of the notion of modality, quoting his note "... mode: the active state and not the/ result—the active state giving/ no interest to the result—the result/ being different if the same/ active/ state is repeated. / mode: experiments.—the result not/ to be kept—not presenting any/ interest" (Judovitz, 1995, p. 134). She also discusses Duchamp's rendering of a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* in his 'assisted' readymade *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) as "devaluation ... a minute, almost imperceptible

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<sup>27</sup> View for quote and more information on Tono Post.at.moma.org. (2016). *Tono Yoshiaki |post*. [online] Available at: <http://post.at.moma.org/profiles/51-tono-yoshiaki> [Accessed 13 Aug. 2016].

event, obeying the logic of the ‘infrathin’” (Judovitz, 1995, p. 172). Finally, she sees how Duchamp’s exploration of the *inframince* interval between original and copy enables him “to overcome the opposition between art and nonart” (Judovitz, 1995, p. 192).

### Nesbit

A different approach can be found in Molly Nesbit’s text *Last Words (Rilke, Wittgenstein) (Duchamp)* (1998) in which she indicates that Duchamp “... came to use the *infra-mince* to explore those immeasurable transitions *between* one thing and another. This between was not nothing. The gaps were physical, to be crossed but strangely, with echoes, no plank board. He crossed once on a bridge of smoke” (Nesbit, 1998, p.547). This quote underlines Nesbit’s more poetic approach in finding a possible meaning for the *inframince*. The “bridge of smoke” might be alluding to the issue of *View* and the puff of smoke emanating from the bottle of wine against a starry sky but this remains guess work. Nesbit defines the *inframince* in the first place however as

... a kind of cut that he had been mulling since at least 1937, a cut pulling the idea of the mathematical cut out into the physical world, to the world of surface sensations and the five senses, but this is right away a world understood through cuts of separation, as physical separations, colour separations, textile separations, testicular separations (Nesbit, 1998, p.547).

The problem with Nesbit’s text is that she tends to put things rather in the absolute, such as where she connects the *inframince* to Duchamp’s interest in the erotic and states

[t]here was an erotics passing through this and all material, an erotics that need not proceed straight from sight or the genital, an erotics that was endowing the carcass with a strange kind of life. His idea, like the erotics, was not being left to exist as an idea, not quoted or cited, but made to reveal itself as only material, in matter as matter, not to be spoken didactically in words, if mouthed, not drunk, only breathed. To breathe the world is not to know it” (Nesbit, 1998, p. 549).

While suggesting in this text that the concept of the *inframince* was possibly developed from 1937 onwards, we have seen that Davila (2010, p.83), as stated above, makes a very strong case for a development that can be dated much earlier when Duchamp was collaborating with Walter Arensberg on the ‘poem’ *Concept of Nothing* in 1916. Interestingly Nesbit in her rich but at times very hermetic if not

cryptic essay, written in collaboration with Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ‘Concept of Nothing: New Notes by Marcel Duchamp and Walter Arensberg’ (1996), comes awfully close to identifying the *inframince* in passages such as “This language would go down to a point and thin” or when she states “[f]or Marcel was interested to pull the word away from physical reference, even words having desire as their business, and to work with words that were abstract about the physical, i.e. abstract” (Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse, 1996, p. 133). When directly discussing *Concept of Nothing*, a poem based on chess-like rules that led to the title of the readymade *in Advance of the Broken Arm*, Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse talk about “A concept of nothing in the space between two imaginations” (1996, p. 148).

In this text Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse write extensively about the use of cryptic wordplay and notes by both Duchamp and Arensberg, often in collaboration or in response to others in their New York circle such as Gertrude Stein or Sophie Treadwell or in reference to the work of Jean-Pierre Brisset. The omission of a direct link to the *inframince* is therefore even more surprising.

#### *Von Graevenitz*

A more direct and extensive analysis of the *inframince* is that by Antje Von Graevenitz in the anthology *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall* (2010). As this book was published in the same year as Davila’s it is understandable that he did not include her very particular approach to the *inframince* in his overview. In her essay Von Graevenitz alludes to Duchamp as “Scientist, Artifex, and Semiotic Philosopher” and defines the *inframince* as

... the desert-like intermediate zone as interval in the interaction of two states ...; an almost nothingness that exists between two things, the in-between-ness of the infinitesimal tiny distance between two things that can arise between the seeming and the being” (Von Graevenitz, 2010, p. 216).

Von Graevenitz refers to Thibaut’s *Dictionary of the English and French Languages* (1897) in which ‘infra’ is indicated to mean ‘above’ and ‘mince’ ‘thin’, ‘narrow’ and ‘insignificant’. She further alludes to Henri Poincaré and his study of the ‘infinitesimal’ as a possible early precursor (Von Graevenitz, 2010, pp. 216-17). She also refers to the interview with Denis de Rougemont from 1945 in which Duchamp remarks that he “[has] chosen ‘fine’ deliberately because it is a human, emotional

word and not a precise laboratory measurement” of which he believes “... we can pass from the second to the third dimension through the *infra-mince*”. With Duchamp defining “... the marriage of extremely thin substances in the interval – not time, as is common, but the marriage – as a fourth dimension” Von Graevenitz concludes that the *inframince* was apparently chosen by him as a key notion in his oeuvre (Von Graevenitz, 2010, p. 220), a conclusion this thesis definitely follows. She proceeds however, with an attempt of a classification of the 46 notes, indicating in total five classes of definitions: abstract (including mathematical), natural, everyday, human and perceptual. To this Von Graevenitz adds four principles:

- I. The mixture of objects in a new union, as in the case of tobacco smell and the smell of breath and the sound of the rubbing of corduroy-pants legs.
- II. The connection of objects despite a very thin interval, as with a coming together, example tenderness.
- III. The coinciding of objects, although no direct mixture will result, as with the polish of wood or the reflection and the fleeting body warmth of a chair.
- IV. Differentiating sameness, similarities and differences, divisibility and indivisibility, as in Plato’s ‘Timaeus’ (34c-36c), which is broadened with the interval *infra-mince* here (Von Graevenitz, 2010, pp. 226-227).

The problem with this elaborate classification is that it actually does not clarify but rather confuses and over interprets, while the so-called classes and principles clearly overlap. Apart from an unclear use of numerical references, trying to classify the *inframince* in this way seems to run counter to Duchamp intentions of ultimate non-classification.

### *Perloff*

Marjorie Perloff, who again is not mentioned by Davila at all, has over the years mentioned the *inframince* in several of her publications. She does not so much analyse the concept but applies it. In her essay *Difference and Discipline: The Cage / Cunningham Aesthetic Revisited* she states speculatively “*Difference*, to begin with, is a concept Cage surely derived from Duchamp’s use of the term *infrathin* (*inframince*)—the smallest possible, indeed imperceptible difference between two seemingly identical phenomena or moments” (Perloff, 2012).

Further on Perloff indicates that while contemplating the difference in leaves on trees Cage (actively) adapts the *inframince*. This rather forcing approach also occurs earlier in ‘The Conceptual Poetics of Marcel Duchamp’, a chapter of her book *21st-Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics* (2002) where Perloff introduces the *inframince* more extensively, contrasting its notion of difference to Wittgenstein’s remark on the sameness of the same. From observing that “[t]he infrathin is the most minute of intervals or the slightest of differences or ... ‘delays’ to be perceived” she goes on to boldly state that Duchamp implies “[i]t is the role of the artist ... to beware there is no such thing as self-identity, for there will always be an infrathin” (Perloff, 2002, p.102). Perloff seems to base this interpretation on note 35 that discusses “Infra-thin separation” of which she quotes only part of the first section just before her statement:

All ‘identicals’ as / identical as they may be, (and / the more identical they are) / move toward this / infra thin separative difference. ‘Two men are not / an example of identity / and to the contrary / move away / from a determinable / infra thin difference—but (#35 recto) (Perloff, 2002, p.102).

Perloff follows the 1983 translation of Paul Matisse although her notation is slightly different. The full passage in French reads as

Tous les « identiques » aussi identiques qu’ils soient, (et plus ils sont identiques) se rapprochent de cette différence séparative infra mince.

Deux hommes ne sont pas un exemple d’identité et s’éloignent au contraire d’une différence évaluable infra mince – mais il existe la conception grossière du déjà vu qui mène du groupement générique (2 arbres, 2 bateaux) aux plus identiques « emboutis ». Il vaudrait mieux chercher à passer dans l’intervalle infra mince qui sépare 2 « identiques » qu’accepter commodément la généralisation verbale qui fait ressembler 2 jumelles à 2 gouttes d’eau.

Paul Matisse translates the rest of this note, dated Copenhagen 29 July 1937, as

(*verso*) there exists the crude conception / of the déjà vu which leads from / generic grouping / (2 trees, 2 boats) / to the most identical “castings” / It would be better / to try / to go / into the / infra thin / interval which separates / 2 “identicals” than / to conveniently accept / the verbal generalization / which makes / 2 twins look like 2 / drops of water.



The idea that the *inframince* would be the reason for the non-existence of self-identity is far-fetched. The notion of separation that Duchamp alludes to in this note clearly does not state a non-existence of self-identity nor that it is the role of the artist to be aware of this ‘fact’, but rather recognizes the occurrence of difference between two seemingly identical identities and how these are thus ‘*inframinceally*’ separated. Although Duchamp always was adamant about refusing to adhere to a fixed identity, through amongst others his *Five-Way Portrait* from 1917, or by creating his female alter ego Rose Sélavy, this is certainly not the same as denying self-identity, rather, it is the recognition of “the multifarious nature of identity” (National Portrait Gallery | Face to Face blog, 2009). Davila, who discusses the same note, talks about Duchamp’s stressing of the relevance of identity, which is a subtler notion than its sheer non-existence as suggested by Perloff (see above). Duchamp’s identity might not be absolute, but it is therefore not non-existent. There exists of course an important discussion about the individual (and thus a certain identity) as subordinate to the event. This discussion as developed by amongst others Cage and Deleuze, and comprehensively described by Joe Panzner in his *The Process That is The World – Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performance* (2015), but this is clearly not what Perloff alludes to.

#### 4.6. Most recent contributions on the *inframince*

As indicated at the beginning of section 4.5 there has been a noticeable growth of interest in the *inframince* in recent years. Jean-Michel Rabaté for instance makes the *inframince* an essential element in his *The Pathos of Distance – Affects of the Moderns* (2016), connecting it specifically to the notion of distance. He concludes his book with a discussion of the *inframince* under the heading ‘When is a Door Not a Door?’, connecting the concept specifically to the notion of distance through Duchamp’s notes on difference. However, before doing this he elaborates on a possible connection between Benjamin’s writing on *aura* and Duchamp’s *inframince* via their mutual connection to Denmark. Rabaté suggests that Duchamp’s holiday there in the summer of 1937 might have been the result of his meeting Benjamin in Paris earlier that year. Benjamin was an irregular visitor of Bertolt Brecht in Denmark who lived there in exile. The fact that both Benjamin and Duchamp “elaborated important theories in Copenhagen” clearly seems to Rabaté more than a historical coincidence (Rabaté, 2016, p. 183-84). We have seen however that there is a fairly

clear indication that Duchamp had developed his ideas more than twenty years earlier, although he had not yet framed them under the heading *inframince*. Rabaté questions whether this meeting between Benjamin and Duchamp actually took place but nevertheless continues to link their respective concepts. This leads him eventually to see the old wooden doors that form the gateway to Duchamp's installation *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage* ..., also known as *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* ... (1946-1966) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art as the ultimate representation of the *inframince*, situating the concept "in the very pathos of distance" (Rabaté, 2016, p. 186). Stained over the years by the grease of people's noses peeping through the holes in that door, it has attained a very specific smell, as the author of this thesis was to witness herself during a visit in the early 1990s. According to Rabaté "Duchamp, a skilled chess player, foresaw this aspect, calculating in advance the possibility of what might be called a "steatographic inscription", those infinitesimal layers, infra-thin deposits of human skin, sweat, stink and spores" (Rabaté, 2016, p. 187).

Rabaté sees this as "the ghostly signature of the artist" which both unites us with him but simultaneously keeps "an infra-thin distance" (Rabaté, 2016, p. 187). The door thus becomes not a door but a Face with the capital F that Rabaté assigns to it. This thought is then suddenly abandoned in the favour of the notion that a door is not a door when it is *ajar*:

A jar or an aquarium will hold the face looking back at us. The word "ajar" comes from the seventeenth century; it is made up of *a-* as "on" and of *char*, in Old English *cerr*, meaning "turn", or "return". Even if the door is closed and appears first like a stern barn gate, the ghostly auras that inhabit it do return and keep it ajar (Rabaté, 2016, pp. 187-188).

Elena Filipovic equally connects the *inframince* to the auratic but surprisingly only dedicates a short paragraph to the subject in her publication *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (2016). Given the title and subject of her thesis and subsequent publication on the curatorial activities of Duchamp this could be seen as an omission as the *inframince* can not only also be seen as 'apparently marginal' but, as this thesis argues, just as essential to his oeuvre as his curatorial activities and arguably even overlapping. Filipovic discusses the photographic reproduction of the

*Notes of Box of 1914*, *Green Box* (1934) and of *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1920), specifically in relation to aura and Walter Benjamin's writing about it in relation to Duchamp. She wonders why Benjamin, who initially seems to be very enthusiastic about Duchamp's work, did not include this text about him in his final version of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* that was published in 1936 (Filipovic, 2016, pp. 55-65). One could however consider that Benjamin realised at the time that Duchamp was not occupying himself with aura at all, rather than Filipovic's explanation that according to Benjamin art had to play a role in social cohesion, which he seemed to feel lacking from Duchamp's work (Filipovic, 2016, p. 296 – note 100). This thesis argues that the likeness and near inter-changeability between black and white on the chessboard, between man and woman (in his alter ego *Rose Sélavy*) and between artist and scientist, could simply be more about identity than aura. The fact that in his interview with Kuh (1960, p. 81) Duchamp named *Three Stoppages* (1913) as his most important work can be seen as indicative for this argument, as this work consists of three formal variations of a length of one metre, three times identical and yet not the same.<sup>28</sup> An interest in authenticity and copy does not lead explicitly to aura, if not to stress together with Francis Naumann that "[Duchamp] strove to eliminate the aura intrinsic to an original work of art" (Naumann, 1999, n.p.).

In his short essay *Afterthought: Ruminations on Duchamp and Walter Benjamin* Naumann admits to "A Perceived Shortcoming of Theory in a Book on Duchamp\* Discussed and Critiqued by its Author". His main argument is that Duchamp made use of several reproduction methods, such as the so-called *pochoir* process to make colour copies of his paintings to include in his *Valise* (1941), "...to operate in the fashion of a machine" and "...to wipe out the idea of the original" (Naumann, 1999, n.p.). Naumann does not question the meeting between Benjamin and Duchamp as this is mentioned in Benjamin's diary, but doubts that they would have discussed the readymades. Duchamp did however show Benjamin an early pochoir print of *Nude Descending a Staircase*, to which Benjamin commented that it was "...breathtakingly beautiful, maybe mention..." (Naumann, 1999, n.p.). In this exchange Naumann sees proof that Benjamin basically is wrong in asserting that the reproduction of an

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<sup>28</sup> The 'completion' of *The Large Glass* through the accidental breaking of the two panels causing almost identical breakages during a transport of the work could be seen in the same vein.

artwork diminishes its aura, which might be another reason why he did not include this reference to Duchamp in his essay. Naumann follows the reading by Jaquelynn Baas of Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* who comes to the conclusion that "The aura or perceived potency of presence of the art object is seemingly enhanced, not diminished, in 'the age of mechanical reproduction'" (Naumann, 1999, n.p.).

Although admittedly aura and identity could be seen as interchangeable, by shifting the attention from aura to identity the notion of difference that recurs continuously in the notes and in Duchamp's discourse is given centre place. It could be argued, as we have seen above, that the first development of thinking about the *inframince*, without yet contributing the name (or the crystallisation of the concept as Davila indicates), takes place around the same time, that is, when Duchamp also introduced his first readymade. His preoccupation with reproduction and the difference between two or more seemingly 'identicals', both in the readymades and in the notes of 1914, can be seen as a first instigation towards the development of the *inframince*. Although Duchamp's work around this time is thus usually brought into a relation with the notion of aura, it is more important to stress his interest in the slight difference in likeness. Judovitz traces a continuous use of a "halo" effect or aura from Duchamp's fauvist paintings *The Bush* (1910) and *Portrait of Dr. R. Dumouchel* (1910) throughout his later works

... either as an analogy to smell (in such works as *Fountain* [1917] and *Beautiful Breath, Veil Water* [*Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 1921], or as an analogy for electricity (in *Bec Auer* [a gas lamp circa 1902]; *The Large Glass* [1915-23]; *Given: 1) the waterfall, 2) the illuminating gas* [1946-66]; and in a set of prints entitled *The Bec Auer* [1968]) (Judovitz, 1995, pp. 25).

Judovitz goes on to state that Duchamp's later works deploy the 'aura' as a critique of painting as a visual event (Judovitz, 1995, pp. 25), but despite the many notes and interviews there is no evidence that Duchamp ever used the word aura himself. The fact that he plays with the halo in collaboration with Stieglitz when photographing the overturned *Fountain* in front of Hartley's painting could, rather than being associated with smell, be interpreted as a play with identity as well – something or someone is not always, or never, what it/he/she appears to be. This thesis thus suggests, maybe

somewhat controversially, that the focus in Duchamp's work is more on identity and its fuzzy relationship with its surroundings than on 'aura' per se.<sup>29</sup> This suggestion also allows for the equally controversial discussion on the 'almost but not exact likeness' of artist and curator as personified by Duchamp himself and elaborately demonstrated by Filipovic. Curators are today frequently accused of being more important than artists, but one could state that they can be alike, but just not the same, depending on the nature of their specific practice.

To return to Rabaté's door, however eloquent but also somewhat *pathetic* (to stay within the realm of his *pathos* related vocabulary) his move may be, he misses out on a door that is of much more importance in relation to the *inframince*. In 1927, while living in Paris, Duchamp had a door installed by a carpenter that both opens and shuts at the same time as it is serving two adjacent door openings (see image at beginning of this thesis). Although Duchamp *commissioned* this "three-dimensional pun" as Judovitz calls it (1995, p. 231), the door can be seen as a *found* readymade since this was seemingly a customary solution to economize on space.<sup>30</sup> What is important about this door in connection with the *inframince* is not only its double status of being simultaneously open and closed, but more specifically the dependence of this status on its hinges. The *inframince* in that sense can be seen as a specific '*hinge moment*' or in Dutch *scharniermoment* that would normally be translated as *turning point*. By focussing on the hinges, and thus shifting our attention to a seemingly minor but actually essential part of this door, the *inframince* in fact becomes the tool in relation to curation that we are looking for in this thesis – to open or close becomes a decisive moment. It is therefore important to first look into its dynamic properties via the notion of cybernetics.

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<sup>29</sup> See for a discussion of the positioning of *Fountain* in front of Marsden Hartley's painting and its consequent interpretation Camfield (1991). Although this is clearly a curatorial act Filipovic (2016) weirdly does not make any mention of it within the context of the curatorial activity of Duchamp.

<sup>30</sup> When living in Ghent, Belgium the author of this thesis had a similar door in her cellar that served two spaces and which seemed to have been installed as a practical solution rather than an artwork.

## 5. Cybernetics – Fluid Networks

In order to understand the dynamic and poetic workings of the *inframince* this chapter brings in the third narrative of the thesis, cybernetics. There are both associative and historical reasons to do so due to the nature of the *inframince* and the personal contacts that Duchamp had with leading figures from the field. Cybernetics as a discipline had been introduced during the so-called Macy conferences that took place between 1946 and 1953 in New York about which the announcement for the recently published complete transactions of the Macy conferences state that:

... the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation sponsored a series of conferences aiming to bring together a diverse, interdisciplinary community of scholars and researchers who would join forces to lay the groundwork for the new science of cybernetics. These conferences, known as the Macy conferences, constituted a landmark for the field. They were the first to grapple with new terms such as information and feedback and to develop a cohesive and broadly applicable theory of systems that would become equally applicable to living beings and machines, economic and cognitive processes, and many scholarly disciplines. The concepts that emerged from the conferences come to permeate thinking in many fields, including biology, neurology, sociology, ecology, economics, politics, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and computer science (*Cybernetics*, 2016).

The term cybernetics was coined by Norbert Wiener, ‘the father of cybernetics’, in 1948 “as the science of control and communication, in the animal and the machine” (Ashby, 1956, p.1). Wiener’s book *Cybernetics* “attempted to unify the study of biological and electromechanical systems through common principles of feedback, communication and control” (Hardesty, 2011). As Ross Ashby stated in his *An Introduction to Cybernetics*, it was essentially a trans-disciplinary science with its own rules as its “... materiality is irrelevant, and so is the holding or not of the ordinary laws of physics. ... The truths of cybernetics are not conditional on their being derived from some other branch of science. Cybernetics has its own foundations” (Ashby, 1956, p.1).

The goal of this chapter is to suggest a reading of the *inframince* with reference to similar ideas in cybernetics. Through a historical overview of unexpected

connections, it will become clear that there is strong mutual overlap between cybernetics and Duchamp's thinking that led to the development of the *inframince*. With an interest in the observation of the everyday and a view on the individual as part of a larger environment, there is on the one hand scope for developing a strong philosophical connection, without however losing hold of an equally strong *tongue-in-cheek* element that forms the link with the so-called Oulipo-group and its association with pataphysics. This will open the discussion to a wider perspective, including affect, becoming and time. Although Duchamp himself never specifically mentioned cybernetics, his lifelong occupation with chess is a good indication for his interest in systems thinking. He shared this interest with several others who were directly involved with cybernetics, including his friend François Le Lionnais. It is therefore not aiming too far to take Duchamp's own analogies with machinelike workings, such as those he used in his *Large Glass* (1915-23), a step further and to regard the *inframince* within a cybernetic framework as 'a little cloud of resistance' by comparing it with a governor that keeps the steam engine's irregularities at bay. Alfred Russel Wallace used this machine-related metaphor in his theory of natural selection in 1856 stating that "[t]he action of this principle is exactly like that of the centrifugal governor of the steam engine, which checks and corrects any irregularities almost before they become evident; ..." (Bateson, 1979, p. 43). Likewise, the *inframince* is a dynamic if tiny system that seeks homeostasis or a relatively stable equilibrium that is however, simultaneously disrupted and recognized by laughter to resist this stabilizing. Although minute, the *inframince* is a bundle of dynamic activity of becoming, and possibility or potential. It is in its indefinable state without clear boundaries, and with its transfer of energy (breath, warmth) in a *messy* state. When disrupted by laughter, which is thus inextricably linked to it, it evades 'sameness' and thus calls for difference, becoming and creativity. It is, however small, an event.

### 5.1. Bateson, Duchamp and cybernetics

For the cultural anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson who referred to Wallace in his book *Mind and Nature*, Wallace's insight was a possible precursor of "...the whole cybernetics movement which might have occurred 100 years earlier as a result of [his] comparison..." (Bateson, 1979, p.43). Bateson's involvement with cybernetics encompassed many subjects and eventually led him to develop the concept of 'mind' or more specifically 'ecology of mind' that consisted out of "... the

nature of information, the nature of mind and the nature of relationships between and among the two” (Ramage and Shipp, 2009, p. 13). In line with his concept of “the pattern that connects” (Ramage and Shipp, 2009, p.13) there are several intriguing links to be made between Bateson and Duchamp, one of which is the filmmaker Maya Deren who made the film *The Witch’s Cradle* with Duchamp in 1943 and studied with Bateson in 1947. Apart from this example of closeness in a fluid network of connections that pervades this chapter, Bateson and Duchamp both took part in two conferences, the 1949 Western Round Table on Modern Art and the American Federation of Arts or AFA Conference of 1957. The Western Round Table strangely has gone largely forgotten in (art) history and specifically in relation to Duchamp’s contributions, probably due to the fact that its proceedings were never published, with the exception of edited conversations in Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt’s *Modern Arts in America* from 1951. The Western Round Table and accompanying exhibition took place on 8-10 April 1949 in San Francisco. It was organised by Douglas MacAgy, then Director of the California School of Fine Arts. Three sessions respectively questioned the function of artists, critics and collections within the art world. The conference was extended with a fourth session to accommodate additional concerns of the participants. In addition to Bateson and Duchamp, the participants (who were all male) included amongst others, Arnold Schoenberg (via a written statement), Frank Lloyd Wright, Darius Milhaud and Mark Tobey.<sup>31</sup>

It becomes clear when studying the proceedings that Bateson and Duchamp were quite close in their understanding of some basic concepts that will be discussed in what follows. Arnold Schoenberg, who was ill and could not attend in person, sent a statement that was read out by the moderator George Boas, which in essence came down to the following:

I personally believe in laugh for laugh. In the creation of a work of art, nothing should interfere with the idea. A work of art must elaborate on its own idea and must follow the conditions which this idea establishes [...]. Is it not better if there are specialists, one writes for all, and the other writes for the few? (*The Western Round Table on Modern Art (1949)*, 2016, Transcript A, pp. 3-4).

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<sup>31</sup> The full proceedings are now available via <http://www.ubu.com/historical/wrtma/index.html>, curated by Colby Ford who specifically researched the connection between Bateson and Duchamp. His essay “proposing to create a work that might amplify this connection” mentioned on <http://www.ubu.com/historical/wrtma/about.htm> is however not available.



Bonnie Clearwater, in her analysis of the event, strangely skips Schoenberg's contribution altogether and attributes the introduction of the idea of 'art for the masses' or 'for the few' completely to Duchamp referring to a letter he wrote on 21 March 1949 to MacAgy:

Duchamp was the only participant to contribute an additional topic to the list: "Art for All or Art for the Few," – which, despite his concern that it might not be "modern enough", ended up dominating the first and third sessions to the extent that many of the original questions were never addressed (Clearwater, 1991, p. 51 and note 23).

However, when asked to respond to Arnold Schoenberg's statement on a possible need for a differentiation between art for the masses and art for the few, Duchamp stated:

... By "Art for All, or Art for the Few" we mean that everybody is welcome to look freely at all works of art and try to hear what I call an esthetic [sic] echo. We also imply that art cannot be understood through the intellect, but is felt through an emotion presenting some analogy with a religious faith or a sexual attraction – an esthetic echo. ... An important point is here to differentiate taste from the esthetic echo.

Taste gives a sensuous feeling, not an esthetic emotion. ...

Quite differently, the 'victim' of an esthetic echo is in a position comparable to that of a man in love, or of a believer, who dismisses automatically his demanding ego and, helpless, submits to *a pleasurable and mysterious constraint* [my italics]. While exercising his taste, he adopts a commanding attitude, when touched by the esthetic revelation, the same man, in an almost ecstatic mood, becomes receptive and humble (*The Western Round Table on Modern Art (1949)*, 2016, Transcript A, p.5).

With his statement Duchamp takes the appreciation of art into a wider realm that is not confined to educated connoisseurs who have acquired a certain taste but is literally open to 'all'. Being able to receive the 'esthetic echo' for Duchamp relates to a certain instinct or emotion comparable to "a religious faith or a sexual attraction" (Baas, 2004, p. 20). Bateson, (who makes it clear that he usually does not deal with Western modern art but rather with Indonesian art) picks up on Duchamp's idea of the aesthetic echo when he comments that this concept can nevertheless "be shared by a very large number of people in that [Indonesian] group." He reflects that art in the Western world seems to be governed by "... the esthetics of trying to resist the

change, feeling anxious about the change...” which he feels is due to a contemporary history of cultural change rather than contemporary society per se.

In general, the mutual understanding between Bateson and Duchamp can be found in a shared interest in minute differences. These are expressed by Bateson in his views on *creatura*, or ‘the living’ (1979, p.7) and in his remarks on the meaning of zero in that context.<sup>32</sup> In *Mind and Nature* (1979, p.98 ff) he states for instance that “[d]ifference, being of the nature of relationship, is not located in time or in space” simply because it has no location, and that “[i]nformation consists of differences that make a difference” (1979, p.99, his italics). Furthermore, he observes, “... *zero* differs from *one* and can therefore trigger a response (1979, p.100, his italics). In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* this insight is phrased as follows

The whole energy structure of the pleroma—the forces and impacts of the hard sciences—have flown out the window, so far as explanation within *creatura* is concerned. After all, zero differs from one, and zero therefore can be a cause, which is not admissible in hard science. The letter which you did not write can precipitate an angry reply, because zero can be one-half of the necessary bit of information. Even sameness can be a cause, because sameness differs from difference (Bateson, 1972, p. 487).

In making use of the recurring paradox in his writing and thinking, Bateson comes fairly close to some of Duchamp’s writing around the *inframince*, or for that matter the other way around. Equally one can observe certain anthropological correspondences between the ideas of the two men in terms of spectator-audience influence. Where Duchamp states that it is the viewer or audience that has the final say about the artwork, Bateson states that the observer always influences the end result. During the Western Round Table he disagreed with Wright on the position of the scientist, stating:

No, the scientist is not outside . . . The scientist is part of the thing which he studies, as much as the artist. And it is that move—the discovery that the observer is a significant part of the thing observed—that marks the change of epoch (*The Western Round Table on Modern Art* (1949), 2016, The Cultural Setting).

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<sup>32</sup> The exercise here is similar to Joe Panzner’s bringing together of the parallel thinking of John Cage and Gilles Deleuze in his *The Process That Is The World* (2015).

Bateson's involvement in the Macy conferences links him directly to cybernetics. In the Macy conference of 1952 he both presented and participated in a panel on 'The Position of Humour in Human Communication'. Other participants included neurologists, and cognitive and clinical psychologists, the cyberneticist W. Ross Ashby and the anthropologist Margaret Mead, who was Bateson's former wife and collaborator.<sup>33</sup> The discussion covered all backgrounds of the participants but came to no overall clear conclusion. Bateson introduced and led the discussion to which he contributed a theory of laughter based on Russell and Whitehead's work on paradoxes in the context of solving problems in mathematical logic (Sciama, 2016, p.5). He introduced laughter as one of three typical human convulsive phenomena or types of convulsion, the other two being grief and orgasm. He proposed that when telling a joke, the informational content is explicit while the other content forms are implicit in the background and continued: "When the point of a joke is reached, suddenly this background material is brought into attention and a paradox, or something like it is touched off. A circuit of contradictory notions is completed" (Bateson, 1952, p. 2).

It is at this point, after completing a circuit of paradoxes, that for Bateson forms "the prototypic paradigm for humor", that laughter occurs. He argues that "the implicit presence and acceptance of paradoxes" is "an important ingredient to comfortable human relations, humor, and psychotherapeutic change" (Bateson, 1952, p. 3).

Interestingly, he also observes that:

It appears that the patient (especially the Freudian analysand) makes progress via the mental flux, confusion, or entropy stirred up by paradox, that, passing through this state of inner disorder, he is partly *free to achieve a new affective organization of experience* or new premises for the codification of his thoughts (Bateson, 1952, p. 3, my italics).

Mead adds to the enfolding discussion, and in connection to Bateson's observation of laughter at the end of a series of paradoxes, that laughter acts as a safety valve, connecting in fact to Freud's view on laughter (Bateson, 1952, p. 9). She indicates that laughter has a protective capacity in communication "if all convulsive states could be regarded as having protective functions in breaking rising tension ... [and]

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<sup>33</sup> The other participants were Lawrence S. Kubie, J. Z. Young, John R. Bowman, Ralph W. Gerard, G. Evelyn Hutchinson, Walter Pitts, Henry Quastler, and Warren McCullough.

they could be differentiated in terms of how much need of protection one has” (Bateson, 1952, p. 12). Bateson himself is specifically interested in “the occurrence of laughter as an indicator, a sort of litmus paper”, which “would be helpful in studying the implicit content of communication” (Bateson, 1952, p. 14). He considers that humour is important as it gives persons in an exchange “an indirect clue to what sort of view of life they share or might share” (Bateson, 1952, p. 14).

Although there does not seem to have been any contact between Bateson and Duchamp in the years between the two conferences they took part in their presentations at the AFA Conference in Houston from 3-6 April 1957 again reflect their mutual understanding. Whereas the Western Round Table had almost been a private undertaking, the AFA Conference was hugely successful and drew an audience of more than fourteen hundred to listen to three days of talks by amongst others, Meyer Schapiro, Rudolf Arnheim, Stuart Davis, Bateson and Duchamp (Kaizen, 2008, p. 88). The conference has probably been more thoroughly discussed within Duchamp studies since he presented his one and only paper *The Creative Act*. Kaizen notes that whereas Duchamp’s paper was published separately and became well known, Bateson’s paper remained unpublished (Kaizen, 2008, p. 88, note 5). He further observes that the fact that Schapiro, Duchamp and Bateson originally presented their papers together has therefore been overlooked. Another reason why the focus was more on Duchamp than on Bateson was the fact that the conference was accompanied by the exhibition *Three Brothers* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, presenting work by Duchamp and his brothers Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon.

Although strictly still an emerging discipline, by this time thanks to the Macy Conferences, cybernetics had truly evolved in an accepted though still highly discussed science. The conference was clearly situated within its sphere of influence and focussed largely on communication and the arts. As Kaizen states in his report of the conference “[w]hile Schapiro and others equated communication with instrumentalization, a new understanding of ecology was beginning to emerge in papers presented by Duchamp and Bateson” (Kaizen, 2008, p.88). Duchamp in his paper presents the artist “... as a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing” (Duchamp, Sanouillet and Peterson,

1989, p. 138) and states furthermore that “... the creative act is not performed by the artists alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act” (Duchamp, Sanouillet and Peterson, 1989, p. 140).

As Kaizen observes “...Duchamp [thus] expands the field of artistic communication into a larger, contextual system of production and reception” and while “Duchamp’s argument was not cybernetic per se ... its implications are consonant with an understanding of communication that is much closer to that of Bateson...” (Kaizen, 2008, p. 92). Bateson’s short conference paper on ‘Creative Imagination’ discussed “the role of artistic creativity as a special means of communication and the ways in which it sheds light on communicative context.” (Kaizen, 2008, p. 92). Kaizen points to the fact that Bateson in his discussion of meta-communication connects back to his earlier work with Ruesch and their rethinking of the production of the self. In Bateson’s model “... mind moves beyond the confines of the individual ... Mind itself expands to become “immanent in the larger system [of] man plus environment” (Kaizen, 2008, p. 93). This insight again clearly explains the mutual understanding between Bateson and Duchamp on the notion of a mediumistic being as part of that wider environment.

## 5.2. *Cybernetics and Oulipo*

Duchamp’s observations in his paper *The Creative Act* on the artist as medium, and also his remark during the Western Round Table about “... a pleasurable and mysterious constraint” (*The Western Round Table on Modern Art (1949)*, 2016, Transcript A, p.5) allow for a detour via the so-called Oulipo group into which he was co-opted in 1962, to further stress the connection between laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics. Although his membership was in itself quite extraordinary for someone who did not like to be part of a group, it was preceded by Duchamp’s becoming a so-called ‘Transcendant Satrape’ of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique in 1952. The fact that both Oulipo and the Collège were (and are) not so much movements as experimental laboratories might partly explain Duchamp’s decision to join them. On their website the Collège confidently states how Pataphysics is still very much alive today:

The Science, to which Jarry dedicated his life, is practised unwittingly by all mankind. Human beings could more easily dispense with breathing than with Pataphysics. We find 'Pataphysics in the Exact and Inexact Sciences (though nobody admits it), in the Fine Arts and the Foul Arts, in every kind of Literary Activity. Open the newspaper, turn on the radio or television, explore the Internet, speak: Pataphysics!' Pataphysics is the very substance of this world.<sup>34</sup>

Oulipo or *Ouvroir de la littérature potentielle* was set up at the end of 1960 by Duchamp's long-term friends, the writer Raymond Queneau and the mathematician François Le Lionnais. It became almost immediately a subdivision of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, which had been founded in 1948 in honour of Alfred Jarry and his pseudoscience. The indication 'ouvroir' was chosen because of its meaning of 'workshop' or more specifically 'sewing room' and its association with collaborative work, something which most certainly would also have appealed to Duchamp. Oulipo would set about researching the possibilities of literature within certain constraints, such as the S+7 method that replaces each noun (or 'substantif' in French, hence the S) in a given text by the seventh noun that follows it in a dictionary.<sup>35</sup> The group however was and still is far from hindered by the small constraint of death as deceased members are merely excused from attending the monthly meetings on Thursdays. In other words, constraints were and are there to be overcome through creativity and can lead to creative solutions, hence the notion of potentiality or the unknown in the group's name.

The connection between Oulipo and cybernetics came about via Le Lionnais who in 1955 published an extensive essay 'Bases and Lines of Force in Cybernetics' in the journal *Diogenes*. Roger Caillois, former surrealist, writer and philosopher, founded this peer-reviewed journal in 1952. From the outset it was conceived as trans-disciplinary and multi-lingual. It still exists today.<sup>36</sup> Caillois would later develop an influential taxonomy of play in his book *Les Jeux et les Hommes* or *Man, Play and Games*, which was published in 1958 and translated in 1961, relating thus in his own

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<sup>34</sup> For an account of Duchamp and his membership of the Collège de 'Pataphysique see Décimo, 2002, pp.156-178, including pataphycist publications. For Collège de 'Pataphysique see their website <http://www.college-de-pataphysique.fr/>

<sup>35</sup> See <http://oulipo.net/fr/contraintes/s7>. For more information on Oulipo also see the catalogue *Oulipo* of the commemorative exhibition at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris 2014.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/journal/diogenes#aims-and-scope>.

way to systems thinking and cybernetics. His interpretation is however quite controversial in the context of Oulipo and cybernetics, especially when he states

A characteristic of play ... is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work of art [sic]. At the end of the game, all can and must start over again at the same point. Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued. Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money... (Caillois, 2001 [1961], pp. 5-6).

It is clear that this view runs counter to the basics of the Oulipo group who put the play with language at the heart of their activities. As this thesis argues, the play with language of amongst others, Jarry, Whitehead, Stein, Duchamp, and eventually also of the cyberneticist philosopher Michel Serres, might for some maybe not create ‘masterpieces’, but nevertheless create a certain ‘wealth’.

To however return first to the text by Le Lionnais, he begins by observing how “[c]ybernetics has fallen prey to snobs and journalists, who, in dealing with it, tend to mix myth with science” (Le Lionnais, 1955, p. 55). He sets out to “eliminate the element of fable” (Le Lionnais, 1955, p. 55) in a 27-page essay that discusses various aspects of information and communication theory. Prefiguring the later establishing of Oulipo he tellingly finishes his text by talking about the use of strategic games such as chess in communication theory and the usefulness of cybernetics in tackling issues such as memory and Gestalt. He also notes its inherent trans-disciplinary character but warns that cybernetics is not a solution for everything, especially since

...life is not a closed system; it is open on an environment ... paying to the surrounding inanimate world, with which it carries on exchanges of energy, this negative entropy which, to use Schrödinger’s expression, “it feeds on”, and which, as we first become aware of it, strikes us with wonder (Le Lionnais, 1955, p. 75).

Georges Perec, an eminent later Oulipo member, stressed the necessity of describing and thus remembering the everyday, as opposite to what usually makes the news, which tends to be the sensational, the scandalous, in the following quote:

What happens really, what we experience, all the rest, where is it? Which passes every day and returns every day, the banal, the everyday, the evident,

the common, the ordinary, the *infra-ordinary*, the underlying noise, the habitual, how to report it, how to question it, how to describe it? (Perec, 1989, p. 11; own translation and italics).

Perec thus makes a case for the ‘observed unobserved’ and in his allusion to the *infra-ordinaire* comes extremely close to Duchamp’s *inframince*, which is equally based on the observation of the everyday, used as a playful constraint. Perec was co-opted into Oulipo in 1967 in his absence, but during one of the rare meetings that Duchamp attended (Bénabou, 2008, p.82). It remains unclear whether the two actually ever met but Duchamp’s influence on Oulipo and Perec is evident. Perec’s first novel *Le Condottière* (translated as *Portrait of a Man*) is for instance built around the notion of original versus fake, which also permeates through Duchamp’s work. This influence seems to be further confirmed by the statement made by Blandine Chavanne and Anne Dary in their introduction to the catalogue “*Regarde de tous tes yeux, regarde*” – *l’art contemporain de Georges Perec* (2008). They propose that after the large modernist projects of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traumatism of the Second World War and the first atomic bomb, art directs itself to the translation of the *inframince* and concentrates upon micro-events that nevertheless often translate the universal. Chavanne and Dary observe how this attention to detail or the ‘almost nothing’ places visual artists on the same level as Perec who equally focussed his attention upon the banal and the everyday (Chavanne and Dary, 2008, p. 7). Although this is an intriguing observation made with the benefit of hindsight, it must also be stressed that artists in the sixties could hardly have been aware of the concept of the *inframince*. As discussed in chapter 4 on the *inframince* it was only published in the American magazine *View* in 1945, then not publicly accessible until the publication after Duchamp’s death in 1968 when the interview with Rougemont and the *Notes* were published. It is reasonable to consider that the *inframince* was (apparently) predictive of this noted interest in the banal, and that in this context, Duchamp’s influence was possibly of more importance through his introduction of everyday objects in his ‘readymades’ that were well-known by this time. According to Jacques Roubaud, the French writer, mathematician and Oulipien, the ‘readymade’ actually was an ironic anticipation of Oulipian potentiality, and so following his reasoning, the *inframince* could be seen as such as well (Bénabou, 2008, p. 75).



Yet another cybernetic, if rather more indirect link with Duchamp is provided by the lecture that Italo Calvino gave in 1967 in Turin and other Italian cities. This lecture was published later as the text 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' and in 1973 gave him sufficient credibility within the Oulipo group for them to invite him to become a member. In his text Calvino contemplates the possibility of the machine as a poet, but comes to the conclusion that the poet is a machine in the first place. In this observation he echoes Duchamp's remarks on the artist as a mediumistic being, as well as the artist's relation with the spectator who becomes the reader in Calvino's text. In the writer's attempt to arrive at the written page there is already a dissolving of the "I" of the author: "The so-called personality of the writer exists within the very act of writing: it is the product and the instrument of the writing process. (...) (Calvino, 1986, p. 15)." Just like any systematic and routinely working machine it is just a matter of finding the right road and taking short cuts. The reduction of the writing process to something 'discrete', a system or machine, provides security and a feeling of safety as opposed to "...what is countless, unclassifiable, in a state of flux ..." (Calvino, 1986, p. 17). It is how-ever the readers processes of interpretation through which "(t)he work will continue to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or constantly renewed (...)" (Calvino, 1986, p. 16). The author thus disappears to the background and is replaced by the reader.

### 5.3. *From cybernetics to affect*

In her fascinating lecture *Black Box Characters: Cybernetics and Affect from Silvan Tomkins to Virginia Woolf* (2015) Heather Love discusses the overlapping conceptual tools and lineages between literary modernism and cybernetics using the cybernetic tool of the black box to discuss how both Tomkins and Woolf use multiple, partial perspectives to build their respective theories on affect and character. For Tomkins, early cybernetic system thinking was instrumental in the development of his theory. Love relates the idea of the black box to that of the radio and Woolf's novel *The Waves* via Arnheim's 1936 extensive discussion of the wireless in his book *Radio*, and more specifically the chapter 'In Praise of Blindness'. In this text he poses that radio simultaneously and paradoxically lacks everything, while everything essential is there. This connects in Love's view to Tomkins' theory of affects and of words that form a thousand possibilities, a theory to which Woolf also subscribed and is apparent in the forming of her characters. Apart from establishing an interdisciplinary link

between cybernetics, psychology and literature, Love's lecture also stresses the importance of opacity (see chapter 2 of this thesis) as well as that of the paradox as advocated by Bateson in the development of knowledge production, and to which this thesis subscribes. Where the waves in Woolf's book thus not only relate to the 'radiation' between people's characters, but through Love's interpretation also to the wavelike emission of the radio, a similar move regarding Duchamp's idea of the artist as *medium* as suggested by John Haladyn is made possible.

In his discussion of *The Creative Act* for the Marcel Duchamp Studies online journal, *Tout Fait*, Haladyn notices a direct parallel between Barthes' view of the author as *scriptor* and Duchamp's idea of the artist as *medium*, that connects back to "a pre-nineteenth orientation that privileges the reader's relation to the text" or the reader as "a producer of a text" (Haladyn, 2015). According to Haladyn the difference in approach between Barthes and Duchamp lies however, in the fact that the former depersonalizes the role of the reader-spectator whereas the latter is specifically interested in his subjective abilities. This is exemplified in his proposal for "a dialogic artist-viewer relationship that is predicated on a psychological and affective *transference*" (Haladyn, 2015, his italics). The allusion of transference as an unconscious transfer or projection of feelings on the other, usually from patient to therapist, leads Haladyn down a psychoanalytical route this thesis tries to prevent. Central to Haladyn's approach is Duchamp's statement:

This phenomenon [which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art] is comparable to a *transference* from the artist to the spectator in the form of an esthetic [sic] osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble (Duchamp, Sanouillet and Peterson, 1989, p. 139; my italics)

This could however quite simply also be read as an indication of a transfer of information or a communication from one physical state to another. Rather than going as far as to psychoanalytically analyse Duchamp's text it is possibly more useful to stress its 'mathematical character' (Le Lionnais, 1955, p. 63) for instance when he discusses the personal 'art coefficient' as "an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed" (Duchamp, Sanouillet and Peterson, 1989, p. 139). There is no doubt this can lead to various interpretations,

but Duchamp's own objections to a psychoanalytical reading of his work became clear in his response to Michel Carrouges book *Les Machines Célibataires* (1954) in a letter to Breton:

No need to add that his findings, even if they form a coherent whole, were never conscious when I was working out my strategy because my subconscious is dumb like all subconsciences [sic] and that my strategy had more to do with the need to introduce some 'mirth' or at least humour into such a 'serious' subject (Duchamp, Naumann and Obalk, 2000, p.343).

From this, one can conclude that the affect of humour prevails or that of the affect cluster 'enjoyment-joy' if one is to follow the categorisation of affects by Tomkins. Duchamp clearly alludes to exchanges between the human and nonhuman in *The Creative Act* by concentrating on the affective aspects of the transference of information. The very first example of *inframince* found in Duchamp's observation of the marriage between breath and smoke is also an indication of this exchange or transference. Various other notes on the *inframince* support this connection to affect, for instance when he mentions the warmth of a seat that has just been left, the fact that he considers that smells are more *inframince* than colours, and through the perception of contact, caresses or 'just touching'. Note 26 verso and by extension note 27 specifically allude to notions of affect (Duchamp and Matisse, 1983, np):

Cutting (*noun*) – cutting (*adj.*) (guillotine, razor blades/sliding - / Drying – gluing, viscosity – (/breakage. / Burning / melting (in liquids with sugar for ex.) / Porosity – imbibition (blotting paper) Permeability /to water and air / (leather) / Pushing-in (nails, planting an arrow) / rubbing scratching - / adjusting registering - / repairing camouflage / invisible weaving – or mechanistical / reparation / Adhesion gluing - / starching – [note 27] filing – polishing – the infra thin file - / sandpaper – emery cloth / rubbing down lacquer / often these operations reach / the infrathin.

At the end of chapter 3 of this thesis, becoming was identified as a *trajectory of affective emancipation* (Karkov, 2016, p. 384, his italics). It is in this sense that the *inframince* not only seems to predict the strategy of *becoming minor* but simultaneously also predicts the *affective turn* that occurred from the mid-1990s onwards that “expresse[d] a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in cultural theory (...) that is necessary to theorizing the social”, building on the thinking of Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari (Clough and

Hadley, 2007, 2). Becoming minor is after all an integral part of affective emancipation. Massumi begins the introduction to his *Parables for the Virtual – Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), titled ‘Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn’t’, with a statement that can be associated with the *inframince* because of its reference to displacement and difference:

If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, the *slightest, most literal displacement* convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. *Qualitative difference*: immediately the issue is change. Felt and foreseen (Massumi, 2002, p.2, my italics).

Although in their respective books on affect, Massumi, and Clough and Halley look at its larger political, economical, and cultural consequences, this statement goes back to the basic essence of affect. When looking into how this qualitative difference can be brought about, it is useful to return to O’Sullivan’s discussion of minor art practices in which he refers to Spinoza’s advice about “organising good encounters, composing actual relations, forming powers, experimenting”, as “an affirmative and celebratory politics of friendship, of collaboration and collectivity” (O’Sullivan, 2006, 78-79). This certainly seems to have pervaded much of surrounding Duchamp’s activities, ranging from his early Dadaist years to his interactions with Surrealism, ‘Pataphysics and Oulipo. The *inframince* can in this context be seen as a concentrated moment or location of *affect* especially through Duchamp’s remark on the choice of the word ‘thin’ as “a word with human, *affective* connotations” (Dalrymple-Henderson, 2013 [1983], p. 287, my italics) and its attention for the banal or every-day. It is exactly the connection to affect that allows for a situating of laughter in the *inframince* and to eventually convert the *inframince* into the kind of operational tool O’Sullivan mentions in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the minor as further developed in chapter 6.

#### 5.4. Cybernetics and Becoming

In his discussion of cybernetics and contemporary art, Etan J. Ilfeld (2012) stresses the notion of information that Wiener and Shannon argued to be decontextualized or independent of the receiver’s frame of reference, and thus was conceptualized “as a

signal whose opposite is entropic and statistical noise” (Ilfeld, 2012, p. 57). This allows Ilfeld to make a connection between Duchamp and conceptual art with its prevalence of idea over matter. He further notes that conceptual artists of the fifties were well aware of the cybernetic debate and presents John Cage’s composition 4’33” as “a subversive deconstruction of Shannon’s information/noise binary” (Ilfeld, 2012, p.58), as its focus is more on the noise than on the signal. Cage, who was highly influenced by Duchamp, was included in the famous *Cybernetic Serendipity* exhibition at ICA (Institute for Contemporary Arts), London in 1968 because of his “notion of randomness” (*Cybernetic Serendipity*, n.d.). This links to Le Lionnais’s remark, in his text on cybernetics, about the fact that life is not a closed circuit. In *The Process That is The World – Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performances* (2015) Joe Panzner makes the connection between Cage and Deleuze based on their parallel views on embracing an ever-changing, non-static process-based world. For Cage an artwork by Duchamp was not a static form but rather a new experience (Panzner, 2015, p.18). This insight links back to Le Lionnais’ remark about the world feeding on its environment, as well as to Duchamp’s text on the creative process with the artist as medium. Panzner states that both Cage and Deleuze call for a necessary opening up to and being in sync with a process-based and thus ever changing world. The artist in particular, but in principal everyone, acts as a medium that is open to these changes both in the world and in his or her environment.

A recurrent theme in all of the observations above is the notion of *becoming*. If we want to discuss this notion further it is useful to look first at Faucher’s discussion of information and becoming specifically in relation to the “points of agreement and disagreement between the Deleuzian metaphysical project and that of cybernetics in its successive incarnations” (Faucher, 2013, p. xii). In his provisional statement at the beginning of his project, Faucher proposes that difference and information can be called synonymous and that “[i]nformation occupies and augments diffeomorphic space, and this by the rhizome it forms within and between matter (both formed and unformed) and energy” (Faucher, 2013, p. xii). This seems to provide an opening for the *inframince* which becomes more apparent when Faucher describes Deleuze’s ontology and states that his philosophy is “...one of *descriptive (not defined)* operations where each operation “makes” the difference by possibly rejecting probability models and embracing a robust and immanent model of unfolding

potentialities that are never exhausted, occurring on a continuous measure” (Faucher, 2013, pp. 55-56, my italics).

In relation to cybernetics there is a shared admiration between Deleuze and Norbert Wiener for Leibniz, whom Wiener even chose as a “patron saint for cybernetics out of the history of science” (Faucher, 2013, p. 205). For Deleuze it is primarily Leibniz’ event thinking that is of importance. Faucher considers Leibniz as ‘the shared starting point between Wiener and Deleuze from which [to] discuss the role of cybernetic systems and the role of chance.’ It is however useful to bear in mind, as Faucher points out, that although Deleuze did not seem to take cybernetics on directly, “his philosophical views ... are, by and large, incompatible with cybernetic views on time, becoming, communication, and noise” (Faucher, 2013, 207). If cybernetics is mainly seen as a system of control with an aim to hold back entropy via negentropy and feedback, this might hold true. As Faucher states:

In a Deleuzian ontology, noise and entropy are generative in that they decouple or subvert dialectical organization. Freed from regimes of restricted choice, that which becomes is liberated from patterns, and articulates its qualities through an affirmation of chance which makes radical deviation a source of internal difference (the process of counter-actualization). By breaking off and starting, or joining, a new series, intensity and speed determine the flow and direction of becoming. At this point, statistical probabilities cease to be reliable as such (Faucher, 2013, p.222).

Becoming is inherently related to chance and not knowing and thus seemingly contrary to cybernetics. And as Faucher further relates:

The will to control or regulate is synonymous with a will to vanquish opposing force, not affirm difference. Differences are to be either contained or internalized for regulatory purposes ... True affirmation of difference is to affirm the overrun or excess of choice, and cybernetics is committed to the restriction of choice and the control of all elements to prevent the unexpected from occurring (Faucher, 2013, p.222).

However, Deleuze sees obeying as a force itself, and furthermore, one that holds its own uniqueness in relation to the controlling force. When no third term of synthesis is produced Deleuze thus advocates the quality of difference as a result of the dialectic relation between controlling and obeying forces (Faucher, 2013, p.223). Integrated into Deleuze’s Being is “a pluralist empiricist joy and affirmation of a difference that cannot be reduced to a unity” (Faucher, 2013, p.225), which not only indicates a

connection to affect but equally to the non-individual or mediumistic approach that Duchamp advocates in *The Creative Act*. Where Faucher mainly seems to refer to first order cybernetics, this quality of difference is exactly the reconciling connection between Deleuze and cybernetics. As this thesis has pointed out earlier in this chapter the connection with cybernetics certainly did and does not withhold Oulipo from playful creativity. Although in principle cybernetics integrates mistakes and noise in the system to prevent as much as possible their future occurrences, within later second-order cybernetics there is wider scope for a different kind of integration and application, and for further development. This scope makes it possible to put the emphasis on *picking up* the noise or mistake rather than to integrate it in order to further avoid it. Instead it can thus be studied and made use of as a point of creativity. Oulipo does this by making use of (self-chosen) constraints. The *inframince* does it by intentionally playing many contradictory or paradoxical roles and by the assignation of the role of governor. But when disrupted by laughter, to which it is inextricably linked, it evades sameness and calls for difference, which in turn produces becoming and creativity.

This contradictory position leads us back to Serres who was briefly discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. Here the discussion is specifically concerned with a relationship between his views on the parasite and on the minor, and more importantly with the parasite as an inventor of cybernetics:

The parasite invents something new. He obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it with stories. Two ways of writing the new contract. He establishes an unjust pact; relative to the old type of balance, he builds a new one. He speaks in a logic considered irrational up to now, a new epistemology and new theory of equilibrium. He makes the order of things as well as the states of things – solid and gas – into diagonals. He evaluates information. Even better: he discovers information in his voice and good words; he discovers the Spirit in the wind and the breath of air. He invents cybernetics (Serres, 2007, p. 36).

As Cary Wolfe states in her introduction to *The Parasite*, (2007) by Serres, the post-human for Serres “precedes and subtends the human, both ontologically and epistemologically” (Serres, 2007, p. xii). Furthermore, Serres moves explicitly away from the unit or the individual and makes noise his main subject. This entails that he also moves away from clarity or “*struggles* against it” in a writing that is “... not

analytical, but experimental; not cumulative and aggregative but discursive; not linear but meandering, doubling back on itself to remind itself of stones unturned, details too readily smoothed over, conclusions too well-varnished” (Serres, 2007, p. xiii). It leads him amongst others to regard the writings of Zola and the paintings of Turner as indicative of thermodynamic models of the world since “... the human sciences, notably literature, painting, and philosophy, are not as far removed from the hard sciences, especially physics and mathematics, as the practitioners in one or the other of these disciplines might believe” (Serres, 2007, translator’s note, p. ix).

Wolfe points out that in French the word ‘parasite’ conveniently has a triple meaning. It not only indicates a biological parasite and a social parasite, but also static or interference – ‘noise’ in other words. This weaving of double meanings specifically related to (the French) language also returns in Serres’ view on time, expressed here in his conversation with Latour:

As we experience time – as much in our inner senses as externally in nature, as much as *le temps* of history as *le temps* of weather – it resembles this crumpled version [of the folded, crumpled, shredded handkerchief] more than the flat, overly simplified [ironed out] flat one (Serres and Latour, 1995, p. 60).

Jane Bennett and William Connolly critically reflect in their essay on the notion of the crumpled handkerchief of Serres and specifically “upon the tendency to privilege process over product within ontologies of Becoming” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 154). They observe how the metaphor of the crumpled handkerchief “shows how time readily accommodates heterogeneous objects as well as how each object can enclose within itself opposite or opposing modes” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 159). While they nevertheless explicitly subscribe to an ontology of Becoming as it simply confirms their “everyday experience of change as quite fundamental to life and of time proceeding ‘more like the flight of [a] ... wasp than along a line’” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p.154), (quoting Serres in that last instance), the aim of their text is in the first place “to think more actively about things hanging together in a world of Becoming” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 155). This thesis will return to this aim in the next chapter, when discussing *inframince* as operative tool in this process. At this stage their discussion of noise is of most interest. Serres describes noise as being both



a black absence and a superabundance of presence (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 156), knowingly or unknowingly linking back to Arnheim's remark on the qualities of radio discussed previously. This noise can, as Bennett and Connolly describe it via Serres "[express] 'a welter of aborted beginnings' ..., but sometimes noise burps out 'a tiny little cause, which, making its way through the intersections, tries its luck at living, heads to the left, tails to right ...'" (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 157). It seems yet another perfect description of the *inframince*.

As Bennett and Connolly point out *noise* is an archaic French word that is also used in the expression 'cherchez le noise' and which means

... to look for the murmuring messiness or inconsistency in the texture of a person, action or event, and then to do something (obliquely, indirectly) that exposes that static ... Cherchez le noise is to stir up a settled form, to foreground for a moment the sand in its gears (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 155).

According to Bennett and Connolly, Serres translates this notion of noise, into "the multiplicity of the possible [that] rustles in the midst of the forms that emerge from it" (Serres, 1995, cited in Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 155). In this context they also quote Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which provides insight into his understanding of forms: "The shapes arise! Shapes of doors giving many exists and entrances" (2013, p. 154). This not only links to Duchamp's *Door: 11, Rue Larrey* (1927, see fig.1) as described in chapter 4, but also, to Gertrude Stein's expression "half in doors and half out of doors", alluding to the appearance of Saint Therese in her opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, who is participating as Steven Meyer analyses in "the life of things" (Meyer, 2001, p. 186).

Connected to this creative *messiness* Wolfe mentions another double meaning around the French word *hôte*, used by Serres, that can be translated both as 'host' and 'guest'. Serres thus writes in *The Parasite* "The host, the guest: the same word: he gives and receives, offers and accepts, invites and is invited, master and passer-by" (Serres, 2007, pp. xvi and 15). This double meaning was interestingly already applied by Duchamp and taken one step further in the design for a candy wrapper on which he had printed "A Guest + A Host = A Ghost". Duchamp created this work for the

opening of William Copley's show in 1953 at Galerie Nina Dausset in Paris, where the candies were distributed at the entrance and not immediately recognized as miniature artworks (*Marcel DUCHAMP: A Guest + A Host = A Ghost. Self-Portrait in Profile. Cheminée anaglyphe.*, n.d.). It is tempting to make a further connection between Serres' crumpled handkerchief and Duchamp's inevitably crumpled candy wrapper, in the sense that it can also be seen as Serres' parasite, which is for him literally the third, the noise element, or the intruder in a successful dialogue. Wolfe quotes from Serres' book *Genesis* (1982) to indicate that this third is always present, however not as a negative jammer, but as "*productive* and creative: "noise, through its presence and absence, the intermittence of the signal, produces the new system" (Serres, 2007, p. xiii). This is for Wolfe a reason to connect Serres to Bateson and more specifically to the last sentence of Bateson's essay 'Cybernetic Explanation' (1967): "All that is not information, not redundancy, not form and not restraints – is noise, the only possible source of *new* patterns" (Serres, 2007, p. xiii).

The circle thus slowly but surely turns around. If we are to think further of the *inframince* as the parasite, with laughter as an integral part of it and (literally) as noise, we might possibly identify the *inframince* as one of Serres' 'operators' that are at the basis of a relation that can lead to a model. Brown (2002, p.3) names in this context Lucretius' *clinamen*, "a minimal deviation from a laminal flow", identified by Serres "as the operator that enables a model of physical processes which appears to link Roman atomism to the contemporary complexity sciences." The *clinamen* initiates turbulence through a tiny differentiation (Brown, 2002, p.14). Intriguingly the *clinamen* also connects back to Alfred Jarry and his 'pataphysics. Roger Shattuck, in his introduction to Jarry's *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll*, asserts that its "richest concepts ... arise within the area of scientific imagination" (Shattuck, [1996] 1965, p. xvii). Within this context the *clinamen* 'invoked by Lord Kelvin when he proposed his 'kinetic theory of matter' signified "[t]o Jarry in 1898 ... the very principle of creation, of reality as an exception rather than the rule" (Shattuck, [1996] 1965, p. xviii). Read as such it turns Serres, perhaps not surprisingly, into a contemporary 'pataphysian, confirming the co-existence of laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics.

In his book *‘Pataphysics – A Useless Guide* (2012) Andrew Hugill makes a similar link albeit not via the *clinamen* but rather via the *syzygy*. Originating from astronomy, “where it denotes a moment of alignment of three or more celestial bodies (Hugill, 2012, p.13), the word is also used “as a technical term in medicine, philosophy, mathematics, poetry, psychology, zoology and more, always denoting some kind of conjunction” (Hugill, 2012, p. 14). As ‘pataphysics is based on the laws of contradiction and exceptions it is not surprising that it also includes the notion of a “sygyzy of words” (Hugill, 2012, p. 14), a pun or play with words, that leads to laughter. Hugill proposes that “[t]he universe in its syzygistic movements and crystalline form, produces, as if by chance, unexpected alignments of fragments of meaning which, in pataphysics, are generally in opposition. It is the recognition of this that produces laughter” (2012, p. 14).

He goes on to observe how this kind of syzygy not only is present in the work of Roussel and the Oulipo, but also in “the critical theories of Jacques Derrida and Michel Serres” (Hugill, 2012, p. 14). I would suggest that in the case of the latter this leads to the kind of knowing laughter as discussed in chapter 3. Hugill views the *clinamen* as a pataphysical theme and so finds references to its “molecular swervings” throughout Duchamp’s oeuvre, for instance, although maybe somewhat too literally, in the *3 Standard Stoppages* (the three alternative shapes for the standard meter), and also in the *inframince* due to its “infinitely small difference between things, which nevertheless creates something new, albeit intangible and invisible (Hugill, 2012, pp. 162-163).

The parasite is a similar operator as the *clinamen* in that it causes havoc via a minor but important intervention. The parallel with the *inframince* becomes clear through its triple meaning that forms a ‘parasite logic’. This is summed up by Brown as “*analyse* (take but do not give), *paralyse* (interrupt usual functioning), *catalyse* (force the host to act differently)” (2002, p.16). Although the first meaning (taking but not giving) might be less apparent and might even be reversed (giving but not taking), the *inframince*, by calling attention to the minor, does interrupt normal functioning and is a force for acting differently and in that sense does *take*. Once being made aware of the minor it cannot be un-thought. It inevitably leads to the state of what Serres calls ‘white multiplicity’ caused by a minimal differentiation, which the *inframince* does

by calling attention. As in ‘white noise’, which is of equal intensity, white multiplicity “does not (yet) approach a clearly ordered form. It is a kind of in-between state, neither pure noise nor pure order, a third position ranged between the two” that has “maximum information value” (Brown, 2002, p.16) as long as one recognizes it. It is in other words a pure state of becoming.

It should be noted that apart from taking Hermes, the god of communication, of ‘boundaries and transitions’ as his lead figure<sup>37</sup>, Serres in the first place makes use of the ‘everyday’ as demonstrated in the earlier example of the crumpled handkerchief as an image of time, and also with reference to the image of the river that he got to know well through his father who was a fisherman. This analogy provides him with an image of occurrences and recurrences throughout time as they behave like the currents in a river that can also turn back on themselves and thus form the fluid networks alluded to by the title of this chapter. Serres prefers the journey upstream when it comes to understanding the emergence of something new in the world – such as the *inframince* – and to learn about its initial sources to realize that it has always been there:

The downstream course, the worn-out path, the slope, the chreod, run, from upstream confluences to downstream confluences, toward synthesis and the unitary. The upstream course, double doubt wavering to begin with, multiplies its bifurcations like a seven armed candelabrum, like a full bouquet, a bush, an arborescence, an head of hair, a refined network of veins and fibrils, an endless network of doubts, anxieties (Serres, [1982] 1995a: 17 cited in Brown, 2002, p.13).

### 5.5. *Cybernetics and time*

In her text “‘Ultramoderne’; Or, How George Kubler Stole the Time in Sixties Art’ Pamela Lee reveals “a buried history of reception” via Kubler, the artist Robert Smithson and Norbert Wiener (Lee, 2001, p.49). The link between Kubler and (first generation) cybernetics is introduced via Smithson’s text-collage or collage-text ‘Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space’ of 1966. Lee observes how on the same page Smithson quotes both Kubler and Wiener, the first regarding the “conventional notions used to describe [the] visible past [as] mainly biological”, the latter on

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<sup>37</sup> The definition of Hermes comes from a random web search but is quite apt in terms of his use by Serres who wrote between 1969 and 1980 five volumes under this title of which a selection was translated and published in 1982. See also Brown, 2002, p.12.

“mathematics ...as ... the most colossal metaphor imaginable”, and thus both alluding to “a problem of communication” (Lee, 2001, p. 57). Where Lee thus rightfully makes the link between Kubler and cybernetics she does however fail to note that in-between the quotes from Kubler and Wiener, Smithson has strategically placed Cage’s poem *Silence*. Due to its layout it is difficult to replicate here but provides yet another layer of the “buried history of reception” (Lee, 2001, p.49) that this thesis tries to reveal and that gives another, more poetic link to cybernetics through Cage’s (maybe somewhat indirect) engagement with it. However, in any form of communication there are moments of noise and silence, something that Smithson seems to allude to with this strategic placement.

When Kubler states in *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things* (1962) that “[m]any historical events, like astronomical bodies, also occur long before they appear, such as secret treaties; aide-memoires, or important works of art made for ruling personages” (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 17), he not only provides a useful framework for the methodology of this thesis but in its non-linearity also suggests a link to the cyberneticist Serres. Kubler develops from this quote a comparison between astronomers and historians as “both (being) concerned with appearances noted in the present but occurring in the past” (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 17). This resonates with the first image associated with Duchamp’s *inframince* – namely that of the bottle of wine against a starry sky releasing a puff of air mentioned previously. Moreover, Kubler states that

(t)he analogies between stars and works of art can profitably be pursued. However fragmentary its condition, any work of art is actually a portion of arrested happening, or an emanation of past time. It is a graph of an activity now stilled, but a graph made visible like an astronomical body, by a light that originated with the activity (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 17).

However, more important than this somewhat anecdotal connection is the fact that Kubler, throughout his book, restores artists and scientists as operators on the same level, indicating even that rather than the use of a biological language as a metaphor for the arts (birth, life, flowering, fading) it would be more important to look at the language of electrodynamics “... especially if we are dealing in art with the transmission of some kind of energy; with impulses, generating centers, and relay

points; with increments and losses in transit; with resistances and transformers in the circuit” (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 7-8).

This approach allows for an embedding of the *inframince* into a larger time frame than is usual and equally for its application to a wider, trans-disciplinary field. The notion of prediction that Kubler alludes to in his quote on the occurrence of historical events long before they appear (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 17) is in this thesis used to acknowledge the work and insight of artists in general. The work of art, in this case the artistic concept of Duchamp’s *inframince*, is in a Kublerian sense seen as a gateway (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 23), a ‘self-signal’ around which adherent signals paint the bigger picture and lead to a wider and deeper insight (Kubler, 2008 (1962), p. 21). Having gathered sufficient evidence for the cybernetic working of the *inframince*, entwined with laughter, we can now focus on its application as a curatorial operative tool.

## 6. The Creative Act – the *inframince* as operative tool

This chapter will specifically look at the potential of the *inframince* to be turned into an operative tool for which it will first briefly return to a discussion of the minor versus the major and the evasive character of the *inframince*. To complete this discussion, it is necessary to take account of the notion of affordance, which will be considered in the context of its interpretation by the psychologist John Pickering. This chapter will conclude with a proposal for the practical application of the *inframince* within the curatorial, which is further developed in chapter 7, and its potential application in other fields, such as narrative medicine.

### 6.1. *Inframince and the minor*

Although literature on the *inframince* so far has considered different aspects of this concept and its provenance, this thesis posits that there still remains room for another interpretation, and especially for its activation. This hypothesis is underlined and given authority by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the minor. Duchamp's *Note nr 34*: "Inhabitants of the infra-thin do-nothings" (Duchamp and Matisse, 1983, n.p.) is seemingly overlooked by those that have thus far studied and discussed the *inframince*. This reference to a state of 'not-doing' could potentially be problematic when exploring the potential of the *inframince* as a tool within the context of the curatorial. However, it is also clear that this is a playful terminology that allows room for equally playful interpretations. It is useful to bear in mind that when Duchamp famously had given up art in favour of playing chess or 'doing nothing', he was in fact actively working on *Given*, his last major art work. Unperturbed by the possible implications of *Note nr 34*, this thesis therefore continues to explore the *inframince*'s potential as a tool, and in doing so in the first place considers its relation with the minor as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari.

In his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2006) Simon O'Sullivan dedicates his third chapter partly to the notion of minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986). In their discussion they give three determining characteristics, which can be summarized as:

1. Minor literature should deterritorialise the major language;
2. In a minor language everything is political, and
3. Minor literature is collective (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 71).

Of these three characteristics the first is especially of interest when exploring the *inframince* as a potential tool. O'Sullivan thinks through all three of them in relation to contemporary art practices, but it is especially the deterritorialisation of a major language that is important within the context of this thesis. In relation to this aspect O'Sullivan follows Deleuze and Guattari who point(ed) out that a minor literature operates from within the major literature, "using the same elements as it were but in a different manner" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 71). In connection to this "it is not so much a question of the minor or of the major but of a *becoming* minor in the sense of producing movement from 'within' the major" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.71).

By suggesting what can be considered as major and minor within an art context O'Sullivan names, amongst others, so-called marginal and dissonant practices, such as Dada, "modernity's 'other voice' as it were ... which was nothing if not the making stammer, the stuttering, of language and art" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.72). Another example would be contemporary art as "a form derived from the international art market (and in particular the increasing presence of international biennales) – a kind of vehicular-referential 'global language' with a focus on the local as a minor practice acting from within (O'Sullivan, 2006, pp.72-73). Related to this latter example, this thesis proposes to take O'Sullivan's example one step further and name it specifically as 'global curatorial practice', with the *inframince* acting as 'a minor practice from within'. In connection to the deterritorialisation of language O'Sullivan mentions as an aside the use of "humour as a form of affirmative violence ... against typical signifying formations" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 73). This thesis situates the laughter connected to humour specifically within the *inframince*, as a potential tool in the becoming minor of a global curatorial practice.

As for the notion of 'becoming', in this context it is useful to define this as "a process of an increased affective potency (increased capacity to affect and to be affected)" (Karkov, 2016) and to situate it at what Deleuze and Guattari considered "the far side,



[where] we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, even becomings-imperceptible” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.248) with the last as “the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.279). As a *trajectory of affective emancipation* (Karkov, 2016, p. 384, his italics) becoming can be put to use in the way this thesis utilises the *inframince* as an operative tool. Resonating with the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, in terms of being or becoming minor and with the *inframince* as possible operative tool, yet another connection is to be made, namely with Michel Serres’ view on the minor. In his book *The Parasite* (1980) as discussed in the chapter on cybernetics in this thesis, he argues “that by being pests, minor groups can become major players in public dialogue – creating diversity and complexity vital to human life and thought.”<sup>38</sup>

As pointed out above, it is especially the *inframince*’s capability of drawing attention to the minor or seemingly unimportant that is crucial. Although Duchamp does not give specific spatial examples that could be of immediate use within a curatorial context, it is his capability of drawing attention to potentialities, differences, other solutions and *the world as process* that should make (awareness of) the *inframince* mandatory in any curatorial toolkit. Although embedded, as this thesis has shown, in a strong historical and philosophical context, the *inframince* clearly has the potential to be applied.

## 6.2. *Inframince and affordance*

This thesis suggests that “*becoming* minor in the sense of producing movement from ‘within’ the major” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p.71) is exactly what the *inframince* is capable of. It is what defines its *affordance*. The notion of affordance has already briefly been discussed in chapter 2 on methodology when discussing its relation with agency. In its further discussion this thesis follows the definition of the concept of affordance as used by the psychologist John Pickering as “a means to produce a theory of causation that embraces physical, natural and cultural levels of order” (Pickering, 2007, p. 64). His description of ‘Affordances as Signs’, also the title of the article that will be discussed extensively in the following section, is specifically useful in order to discuss affordance in relation to the *inframince* and the curatorial. Situated within a need “to [help] psychology forward, around the *impasse* of mechanistic metaphysics,

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<sup>38</sup> From the back flap of the 2007 edition of *The Parasite* published by Minnesota Press.

towards ... the more biologically plausible project of creating a natural history of meaning” (Pickering, 2007, p. 69), this thesis argues that Pickering’s approach can also beautifully be applied to the curatorial. It equally ties together some of the ideas and theories already introduced in this thesis and implemented by Pickering through his discussion of, amongst others, Whitehead and Bohm.

Pickering argues that “[e]mbodied cognition helps to take psychology on beyond the limitations of both Behaviourism and the computational metaphor” (Pickering, 2007, p. 69). He reaches this insight via a discussion of Peirce and Whitehead whom he sees as sharing “a common project: to restrict the over-extension of reductionism, to show how matter must be sensate and to create an ontology of process and subjectivity (Pickering, 2007, p. 64). Pickering sets the scene by starting with a quote from Peirce from his *Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism* (1906) that is worth repeating here as it explicitly opens up a discussion on non-human agency: “Thought is not necessarily connected with a brain. It appears in the work of bees, of crystals, and throughout the purely physical world ... But ... there cannot be thought without signs” (Peirce quoted in Pickering, 2007, p. 64).

Pickering sees the connection to Whitehead in Peirce’s idea of mental life as a universal organic order and Whitehead’s view of the universe as an organic process at all levels (Pickering, 2007, p. 64). He then makes the move towards a semiotic interaction via the physicist David Bohm who “suggested that even the minutest parts of physical systems interact via a form of semiosis” (Bohm in Pickering, 2007, p. 64), and von Uexküll who “viewed the interaction between animals and their surroundings as the detection of and response to signs” (Pickering, 2007, p. 64). The perceptual psychologist James Gibson made affordance a central concept of his influential book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979), but Pickering states that the idea was already introduced much earlier by von Uexküll’s contemporary Koffka who had an equally “strong preference for organic holism over mechanistic reduction” (Pickering, 2007, p. 65). It was however Gibson’s approach that extended it also to design objects. This allows Pickering to introduce “[c]ultural artifacts and the practices that go with them [as] a semiotic system” (Pickering, 2007, p. 65), the understanding of which calls for “a correspondingly powerful theory that can be applied uniformly to physical, biological and cultural phenomena” (Pickering, 2007,

p. 65). Pickering builds this theory subsequently on the basis of work by, amongst others, Peirce, Whitehead, and Gibson, which in its turn allows for an extension of his discussion to the practice of the curatorial and the *inframince*.

It is especially the notion of causation that is of importance in this discussion, which Pickering frames “from the physical through the biological to the cultural levels” (Pickering, 2007, p. 66). In relation to the curatorial, in which the focus lies usually in the handling of so-called ‘dead matter’ or cultural artefacts, it is of use to repeat part of Pickering’s quote from Peirce’s opinion of these materials:

... it would be a mistake to conceive of the psychical and the physical aspects of matter as two aspects absolutely distinct. Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relation of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness (Peirce in Pickering, 2007, p. 66).

Peirce connects this insight in particular to “nature's tendency to take habits” which can be seen as “generalization, and generalization is nothing but spreading of feelings” (Peirce in Pickering, 2007, p. 66). In relation to the *inframince* as an operative tool, it is exactly in the creation of a habit to spot the minor and thus to create an affective approach to the curatorial that Peirce’s insight is of use. Pickering points to the fact that Whitehead had a similar view on the problematic “treat[ing] matter as a dead abstraction from the organic flow of reality” and “proposed that the ultimate constituents of nature are subjects, not objects” with a focus on “meaningful events, not material particles” (Pickering, 2007, p. 67). This connects to this thesis’ stress on a process-based approach to the curatorial.

The semiotic exchange between the various strands described above is unavoidably connected to the idea of meaning making, which is, according to Pickering, inherently subjective. Subjectivity is usually not seen as compatible with an “objective, mechanistic worldview”, but excluding it, is in Pickering’s and this thesis’ view, to deny a truly useful method of “deal[ing] with the world in a meaningful way” (Pickering, 2007, p. 67). For Pickering, embodied cognition, which thus includes all strands of life, is the way forward. Again, this approach is in particular connected to the discipline of psychology, which Pickering sees as “returning to approaching

mental life, including conscious experience, as necessarily embodied in the actions of particular organisms and embedded in the contingencies of particular circumstances” (Pickering, 2007, p. 67). But it is clear that this notion of “actions of particular organisms and embedded in the contingencies of particular circumstances” can also be extended to curatorial practices, when, for example, translating ‘particular organisms’ to artists and curators, and ‘particular circumstances’ to places used for exhibitions. Pickering connects this notion back to Whitehead by stating that “[t]he embodied approach ... resembles Whitehead’s organic philosophy of process”, which per definition is “open and productive” (Pickering, 2007, p. 68). Productivity is subsequently connected by Pickering to Peirce who saw it as “aris[ing] from continual semiotic chaining, in which the meaning of thoughts and experiences constantly unfold to create the flow of experience” (Pickering, 2007, p. 68).

The *inframince* is similarly capable of engendering new, and thus subversive meaning, by drawing attention to the minor and other off-centre observations. Pickering rightfully states that “...[t]o neglect the actions and experience of other mental beings is to ignore the vast matrix of mutually evolved organic order from which the human social world and human mental life emerged only very recently” (Pickering, 2007, p. 69). He combines Whitehead, biosemiotics and embodied cognition to “create a correspondingly powerful theory to address this emergence ... strik[ing] a more even balance between human and non-human meanings” (Pickering, 2007, p. 69). It is clear that in this vision there is no room for boundaries of any kind. Pickering concludes that “[a]ffordances are behavioural meanings, they are signs to an organism that actions are possible” (Pickering, 2007, p. 72), alluding to both natural and culturally constructed objects. They can thus overcome any (even self-inflicted) boundaries if handled in a subversive, open-minded way. This is exactly where the *inframince* can be applied to precipitate a different approach to curating.

### 6.3. *Inframince and a practical application*

This thesis states that being aware of the *inframince* as concept and tool at all levels of the curatorial process will allow for better insights in how collaborations with and between artists, scientists, curators and audience can be made more effective. The application of the *inframince* can thus potentially give an answer to one of the problems that form part of the curatorial impasse. When, as indicated in chapter 1 via

curator Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, artists are critical about the overpowering attention for the curator that seems to run counter to the efforts they have put into their art production, something is deeply wrong. When searching for an answer to these and other aspects of the current curatorial impasse, this thesis suggests that an awareness of the *inframince* as part of curatorial education could potentially prevent this issue. Learning to recognize the *inframince* moment can be taught on a practical level by organising lectures, seminars and master classes to introduce the concept. These should include awareness training, addressing both spatial and collaborative practice concerning the human and non-human, which is directed in the first place to ‘the world as process’ as introduced by Whitehead and advocated by Cage and Deleuze.

To finally define the *inframince* as operative tool, it is useful to first dwell briefly on the many, often seemingly contradictory synonyms it has been accorded throughout this thesis. Ranging from Wallace’s ‘governor’ to an equivalent of Serres’ use of the ‘clinamen’ or Kubler’s ‘signal’, this fact connects to Duchamp’s claim that the concept cannot be defined and can only be alluded to through examples. This reveals its true ‘pataphysic nature, as ‘pataphysics is equally hard to define and stresses its versatile character, which allows it to be applied as a particularly performative tool within the curatorial as part of knowledge production or meaning making. Within that context curation is generally considered as an organisation of objects, regardless of their being ancient artefacts or contemporary art, but as Bennett and Connolly have indicated, and as discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, it is worthwhile to consider objects or products within ontologies of Becoming before we start rearranging them. How do things “hang” together in a world of Becoming as Bennett and Connolly ask (2013, p. 155)?

As Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito suggest in their book *Re-Collection – Art, New Media, and Social Memory* (2015) within the context of new media art, passion and memory can play an important role in the conservation of objects in a nonmaterial way, thus alluding to the continuous process of Becoming and subsequently fading away. Bennett and Connolly explain this as a ‘phasing out’ as part of the phase-states of Becoming. They refer to Serres in their discussion of the process of Becoming within the context of noise, in which ‘a tiny little cause’ such as “that ever-so-slightly-higher pitch of sound we sometimes hear above the background noise of the wind, or

that barely perceptible little dance of water that turns out to be a premonition of a swell” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 157) leads to a ‘surge’. This can lead to a fluctuation and a bifurcation (in a positive sense) and, as it is ‘noise’, to a ‘rhythm or cadence’. If this ‘tiny little cause’ persists, it can eventually turn into ‘turbulence’ that can spin out ‘phenomena’ or ‘invariances’ as Serres calls them, and of which he distinguishes three types: a “stupid, heavy, even, odd, standing there” kind “such as a statue or a sandbag”; the kind “that is the result of a more or less steady rate of motion, such as the spinning top or the revolving Earth” and finally a ‘more intelligent’ kind “that persists as movement itself” (Serres in Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 158). Of the latter, Serres gives examples such as the rivers that remain in equilibrium or the I that grows old while remaining young and resembling itself. Connected to his image of time as a crumpled handkerchief an object or a circumstance in this sense can be seen as “polychromic, multitemporal, and [revealing] a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats” (Serres in Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 159).

The *inframince* that has already been connected in chapter 4 on cybernetics, to the ‘tiny little cause’ described above, becomes effective as a performative tool when there is an openness to identifying the potential of the object or the circumstance. Within a curatorial context this includes for example, the art works, the people that collaborate, and the space. It is important to learn to notice “that ever-so-slightly-higher pitch of sound” or “that barely perceptible little dance of water” (Bennett and Connolly, 2013, p. 157) in order to unleash the full potential of the things at hand. It is finding an unusual and dynamic, even cybernetic solution for situations encountered while curating; a solution that unavoidably evokes laughter because of its ingenuousness. But in order to find this solution, one has thus to be attentive and open to ‘the process of the world’ as advocated by Whitehead, Deleuze and Cage, amongst others. True to its nature the *inframince* is thus not a clear cut operational tool, but one that calls for imagination and interpretation, depending on the situation at hand. It calls for an attentive looking, hearing and observing, before any curatorial concept is made, but is also applicable during the conceptualizing and installing of an exhibition. Only then can the curatorial really be seen as a creative act.

#### 6.4. Narrative medicine

Before doing so it is however useful to point out that due to its inherent versatility it is imaginable that the *inframince* could also be applied in a wider field than that of curation alone, especially when that field concerns transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary research. With this possibility in mind, the emerging science of *narrative medicine* seems specifically interesting because the *inframince* has a natural connection to language and interpretation. Narrative medicine and the curatorial are therefore not as disconnected as they may initially seem to be.

Dr. Rita Charon, a general internist and narratologist, founded the Program of Narrative Medicine at Columbia University in 2000. In its “recognition that experiencing and treating sickness are language-using events” narrative medicine tries to “[retrieve] things from formlessness with words” (Charon and DasGupta, 2011, p. vii). In doing so it “gives power to the viewer and to the representer to approach and perhaps to comprehend or at least to face the real, that which happens, that which matters despite all the forces that collude to keep them invisible” (Charon and DasGupta, 2011, p. vii). Charon proposes to use “[a] metaphor of the activated cellular membrane ... as a figure for the effective clinician/patient contact” (Charon, 2012, p. 342). These notions give a direct link to the concept of the *inframince* that draws attention to minimal differences.

With the appointment of Rita Felski as Niels Bohr Professor at the Department for the Study of Culture at the University of Southern Denmark for the period of 2016-2021 there is now also a European counterpart to the Columbia University Program. Felski however, is specifically looking at literature and Actor Network Theory in connection to narrative medicine.<sup>39</sup> She provides an interesting link to the subject of this thesis in her introduction to the volume on ‘Recomposing the Humanities – with Bruno Latour’ of the magazine *New Literary History* (2016). In her text, Felski identifies curating as one of four terms, alongside conveying, criticizing and composing, that can be used in the multidimensional defence of the humanities (Felski, 2016, p. 216). She uses the wider context in which curating is applied, but she also returns to its origins in the sense “of guarding, protecting, conserving, caretaking, and looking

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<sup>39</sup> [http://www.sdu.dk/en/om\\_sdu/institutter\\_centre/c\\_uol/rita+felski](http://www.sdu.dk/en/om_sdu/institutter_centre/c_uol/rita+felski)

after” (Felski, 2016, p.217). The notion of a border as a permeable membrane, as introduced in chapter 1 of this thesis, thus connects to “[a] metaphor of the activated cellular membrane ... as a figure for the effective clinician/patient contact” as introduced by Charon (Charon, 2012. p. 342). Where she uses this metaphor in a clinical situation it could also be transferred to a curatorial one with the clinician/patient contact replaced by a curator/artist or curator/artefact relation. Obviously this transfer should not be interpreted in a hierarchical way or in the sense that the curator is the one that makes everything better while the artist or the artefact are considered ill. Rather the membrane allows for an active and equal listening in to each other.

As discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, Jean-Michel Rabaté, in *The Pathos of Distance* (2016), puts the *inframince* at the heart of his argument but, as the title of his book indicates, in the context of pathos. This allows Rabaté to make a detour via various subjects such as Modernism, Affect and Traumatism, which in turn leads this thesis to link the *inframince* to narrative medicine. Although Rabaté does not mention narrative medicine directly, he dedicates a chapter to discuss The Pathos of History – Trauma in Siri Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American* (Rabaté, 2016, pp. 149 ff.). Hustvedt’s novel narrates the effect of history upon a family and tells how its individual members deal with the effect. In her acknowledgments, Hustvedt reveals how, in preparation for her novel, she sat in on Charon’s class for medical students and was subsequently included in the department for Narrative Medicine’s lecture series (Hustvedt, 2008, p. 305). In her non-fiction book *The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves* (2010) Hustvedt returns to her collaboration with Charon when discussing a disturbing episode in her life in which she started to shake as if having an epileptic fit while giving a speech to commemorate her deceased father. By analyzing her predicament and the various cures that are suggested to her, Hustvedt realizes that a placebo instead of the prescription drug given to her could have worked just as well.

It’s now known that simply believing that a pill will help you can release opioids in your brain that make you feel better; or, as the authors of one study put it; “cognitive factors (e.g., expectations of pain relief) are capable of modulating physical or emotional states.” *Ideas*, it seems, are powerful and can alter us (Hustvedt, 2010, p. 32).



‘The idea that cures’ seems to be the ultimate link to the *inframince*, which is in the end first and foremost an idea. Once it enters your head, its results cannot be unseen or un-thought anymore. This can, for instance, happen through the various examples that Duchamp gives, but once the mind is trained to see the differences he alludes to, this attention for things lateral or ‘off-centre’ can be applied on a daily basis. The *inframince* as a ‘hinge moment’ or ‘membrane’ to see the world, our direct environment or our circumstances, could thus not only be used in a curatorial context but could also function in the study of the interstices between narrative and medicine.

#### 6.5. Media studies and ‘togetherness’

In *The Postdigital Membrane – Imagination, Technology and Desire* Pepperell and Punt call for “[n]ew conceptual models [that] are required to describe the continuity between art, computing, philosophy and science that avoid binarism, determinism or reductionism” (Pepperell and Punt, 2002, p.2). They argue for more flexible metaphors than the binary codes of digital processing and propose using the biological membrane. Pepperell and Punt use the Chinese symbol for Yin and Yang as an example of a non-binary symbol “because each side carries something of the other – the opposites are not mutually exclusive, they are essentially analogue, and complementary”, (Pepperell and Punt, 2003, p. 165). However, some thirteen years later the Dublin Science Gallery used the symbol to posit exactly the opposite. For an event on coding they replaced the dots of the Yin and Yang symbol by a zero and a one and announced: “We hacked together a cool hangout that puts the real power of the internet and technology in the hands of the Irish youth. The true power of the net comes from coding, designing and having fun.”<sup>40</sup>

Apart from “hacking” the yin and yang symbol in such a way that its essence, as described by Pepperell and Punt, is radically thrown out the window in favour of so-called youth-attracting coolness, the announcement also introduces the currently all-pervasive notion of the need for fun. Two essential problems thus arise. The Dublin Science Gallery’s announcement demonstrated that there is clearly still, and maybe more than ever, not only a need for a new poetic membrane, but also a more critical stance when it comes to attracting audiences for art, science and technological

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<sup>40</sup> <https://dublin.sciencegallery.com/events/2015/03/coderdojo1>

collaborations and presentations. These have over the past twenty years clearly been institutionalized and seem to be highly successful at face value, attracting fairly large audiences and seemingly filling a ‘gap in the market’. But as Jan Baetens states in his review of *Art, Science, and Cultural Understanding* (2015)<sup>41</sup>, despite the fact that artistic and scientific research are no longer polarized “... the steadily growing dialogue between artists and scientists continues to suffer from a fundamental imbalance.” Although Baetens posits a greater degree of responsibility for the imbalance upon the scientists, in terms of lesser impact and benefit compared to that of the artists, it can be argued that the proliferation of the fun factor as a market model for attracting audiences to ArtScience collaborations seems to put art and the artist increasingly in the role of the jester. Where the jester could, in principle, be seen as a subversive character and thus related to the laughter-model this thesis suggests, the opposite seems to be the case in the majority of ArtScience presentations. This connects them with the impasse in the curatorial as identified in this thesis. However, the idea of fun rather in the sense of a tongue-in-cheek attitude, connected to absurdity, ambiguity and vagueness, can be connected to the call for a ‘messier’ model by Pepperell and Punt, and can also be seen to connect to this thesis’s consideration of the messy state of laughter (in chapter 3).

As this research into a ‘new membrane’ needs to be considered as ‘further research’, for now it might suffice to quote Serres who, coming from a mathematical background, introduces the “Logic of the Fuzzy” (Serres, 2007, p. 58) to connect science and humanities.

Between yes and no, between zero and one, an infinite number of values appear, and thus an infinite number of answers. Mathematicians call this new rigor “fuzzy”: fuzzy subsets, fuzzy topology. They should be thanked: we have needed this fuzziness for centuries. While waiting for it, we seemed to be playing the piano with boxing gloves on, in our world of stiff logic with our broad concepts. Our concepts can now be fine-tuned and in the process, increased in number (Serres, 2007, p. 57).

In addition to this quote from Serres’, Steven Meyer discusses the notion of ‘togetherness’ in his chapter in *The Lure of Whitehead* (2014), where he touches on an

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<sup>41</sup> <http://leonardo.info/reviews/jan2015/wilson-baetens.php>

aspect that relates well to the general premise of this thesis. Meyer sketches a situation in the nineteen-fifties in which the term ‘togetherness’ was close to being trademarked or ‘branded’ by the American women’s magazine *McCall’s* as an image of a kind of cosiness that safely holds the world together (Meyer, 2014, pp. 333-334). This situation seems to run parallel to the current commercial appropriation of the curatorial that coincides (perhaps not accidentally) with the appropriation of the so-called *hygge* phenomenon that equally promotes cosiness.<sup>42</sup> Both ‘togetherness’ and the curatorial have, in these specific circumstances, had their original meanings distorted in order that they can be applied to a rather bland format that stresses a fun and happiness factor. However, Meyer in his article draws attention to the initial discussion by James and Whitehead concerning the notion of ‘togetherness’ and thus is able to return it to its provenance and connoisseurship; just as this thesis has endeavoured to do with the curatorial.

Whitehead’s ‘togetherness’ is also important in another respect as it stresses the notion of equality and exchange, between both the human and non-human, in experience. Meyer quotes:

There is *a togetherness of the component elements in individual experience*. This “togetherness” has that special peculiar meaning of “togetherness in experience”. It is a togetherness of its own kind, explicable by reference to nothing else. For the purpose of this discussion it is indifferent whether we speak of a ‘stream’ of experience or of an ‘occasion’ of experience. With the former alternative there is togetherness in the stream, and with the latter alternative there is togetherness in the occasion. In either case, there is the unique “experiential togetherness” (Whitehead cited in Meyer, 2014, pp.334-335, italics by Meyer).

This ‘togetherness of the component elements in individual experience’ now seems to express exactly what Pepperell and Punt call for and which also lies at the heart of this thesis, with the *inframince* as a constant reminder of the need to look for it.

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<sup>42</sup> Without wanting to expand too much about this phenomenon at this stage see for instance <http://www.7x7.com/how-to-hygge-master-the-danish-art-of-being-cozy-with-these-bay-area-g-2198642456.html> and numerous other online sources. Needless to say there is also a whole industry of books on *hygge* such as *The Book of Hygge – The Danish Art of Living Well* (2016), *Hygge: The Danish Art of Happiness* (2016) and unavoidably *The Cosy Winter Hygge Colouring Book* (2016) that connects to another worrisome current trend.

## 7. The *inframince* in action

So far, this thesis has discussed the *inframince* mainly from a poetical and philosophical point of view. This chapter aims to provide a more practical approach which can be helpful in an educational context (as indicated in chapter 6). Although this thesis is the first to discuss the *inframince* as curatorial tool, the question can be asked whether there are exhibitions or other curatorial practices that might be identified as precursors? To answer this question this chapter is divided in three parts. In the first place, I will discuss a series of historical exhibitions that act as potential precursors of its application by specifically dealing with *the playful*. This discussion is followed by a brief excursion into the work of a contemporary artist, the German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, in order to demonstrate the importance of his practice for a curatorial application as it seems to connect strongly to the *inframince*. I then proceed to discuss a series of exhibitions and proposals as examples of my own practice as a curator over recent years to demonstrate as far as possible the whole process in action. This leads to a connection to emergent literature on the dealings between the human and nonhuman and a wider application of the *inframince*.

At this point it needs to be stressed that this thesis suggests that the *inframince* forms part of *the curatorial process that precedes* the actual exhibition as its smallest component that is capable to turn insights around. It thus informs certain choices and solutions that will define the end product - the exhibition, installation or event - but does not necessarily define these as it is difficult to put one's finger on the actual *inframince* influence or presence due to its inherently evasive character. This also means that while discussions of historical or recent exhibitions can be useful as post hoc narratives, it is difficult, if not impossible to trace the actual application of the *inframince* as tool retrospectively. The *inframince* therefore ideally needs to be experienced during the process of making an exhibition, presentation or event. Since this thesis is a poetic and philosophical exploration this is not provided within this context except in the sense of a reflective narrative, which shows the *inframince* in action via writing which is seen as equivalent to curating.

### 7.1. Preamble – *Wunderkammer* model and Warburg

The quality we are looking for in the potential curatorial precursors for the triadic curatorial model this thesis proposes, is in the first place a certain playfulness that is *'pataphysical* in the seriousness with which it questions existing systems and seeks new knowledge. This approach includes a certain awareness of how to engage with space, as well as an understanding of the interaction if not collaboration between the human and nonhuman, as well as that between the human and the human. This could also be described as a form of friendship amongst all actors, whether human or nonhuman, involved in the process of curating. This notion of friendship underpins the curatorial model and is illustrated in the examples that follow.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the *Wunderkammer* or Cabinet of Curiosities, with its linkage between various objects through “visible or invisible similarities” (*History of the Wunderkammern (cabinet of curiosities)*, n.d.) can be viewed as an early example of a curatorial activity and a precursor to the modern museum. It not only forms an important influence, but could also be paradigmatic for exhibitions that are potentially informed by the *inframince* and subsequently laughter and cybernetics, as is developed in this thesis.<sup>43</sup> The *Wunderkammer*'s formal influence is certainly evident in the layout of certain Dadaist exhibitions, especially the First International ‘Dada-Messe’ of 1920 in Berlin in which traditional exhibition methods were both merged with other models of visual argument and were questioned. For example, the hanging of a pig dressed in a policeman's clothes from the ceiling is thus both an original political and artistic statement as well as a reference to the hanging from the ceiling of a crocodile, which was a long-standing tradition in apothecaries and visible in certain illustrations of *Wunderkammern*.<sup>44</sup> The questioning that took place within the ‘Dada-Messe’ was however more political, than curatorial. The exhibition brought together more than 170 individual art works in the relatively small space of Dr. Otto Burchard's gallery, a converted three-room apartment. It could be viewed as a large-scale application of the montage and collage

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<sup>43</sup> For the benefit of the readability or flow of the text I will in the following mainly mention the *inframince*, implying that this automatically entails laughter and cybernetics as this coherence has already been extensively argued in this thesis.

<sup>44</sup> Marsh's Library in Dublin tweeted about an image illustrating the “crocodile-on-ceiling fashion” in a curiosity cabinet as recent as 22 July 2017 (*Marsh's Library on Twitter*, 2017).

techniques that also dominated the individual works. Through these works the artists commented upon the Weimar Republic and questioned the efficacy of art.

The *Wunderkammer* model was picked up later in the Fifties by the British Independent Group that curated, amongst others, the exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art – An Exhibition of Landscape, Science and Art* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London (1953). This exhibition in particular demonstrates a connection to the *Wunderkammer* as a curatorial model through the dynamic way in which it presented the different elements on show, including the use of both walls and ceilings. Just like in the original *Wunderkammer* “...the exhibition spanned science and art and created a total environment...” with the obvious difference that it consisted “...of a host of black and white images taken from a range of art and non-art sources. Curated by Reyner Banham, the show was polemical and controversial, the images shared an overall crudeness, vulgarity and rawness. This was not beautiful art, but processed images juxtaposed randomly” (Massey, 2007).

Going back to the origins of the *inframince* as discussed in this thesis it would be tempting to look at the exhibitions of the *Fumistes* for possible connections, but apart from the narratives surrounding them we unfortunately lack first hand visual evidence of these. The closest we can possibly get to an impression of what they must have looked like is via retrospective exhibitions such as *The Incohérents* at the Musée d’Orsay in 1992 (as mentioned in chapter 3.4 of this thesis) and the more recent *Around the Chat Noir – Arts and Pleasures in Bohemian Montmartre, 1880-1910* (2013) which deal with aspects of the *Fumistes* movement. The black and white catalogue of the first exhibition does however not give any visual indication of what the original exhibitions of *The Incohérents* looked like. Only an illustration by Jacques Gay of the ‘Musée des Arts incohérents ou l’enfant dans le forêt’ gives an indication of an event organised in Grenoble on 31 May and 1 June 1891, showing the exterior of the ‘baraque’ or shed where this show was held, decorated with “four large canvasses painted by us all”. Inside one could visit “an exhibition of very rare, if not to say unknown, trinkets” (Abélès and Charpin, p. 12, own translation).<sup>45</sup> The art works shown in the exhibitions by *The Incohérents* usually consisted of a mixture of

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<sup>45</sup> Like many of the manifestations organised by *Les Incohérents* between 1882 and 1896 in Paris, Brussels, Nantes and Lille, this event was organised as a benefit.

sculptures, drawings, paintings and assemblages that commented on the ‘high arts’ such as a copy of the Venus de Milo turned in to ‘La Vénus de mille eaux’, its legs covered with labels of brands of sourced water (Abélès and Charpin, p. 76-77). According to the catalogues that accompanied them the exhibitions included very large numbers of works, from 159 in 1882 to 437 in 1889 (Abélès and Charpin, p. 55). It is reckoned that in total 664 participants took part in the exhibitions, although this number is approximate as participants might change their pseudonym from one year to another or one pseudonym might refer to multiple participants (Abélès and Charpin, p. 36). Most of the art works and names are lost. *The Incohérents*, who presented themselves as a ‘contra-Salon parody’ didn’t select from the works submitted for their exhibitions (possibly explaining the high numbers included), and not only mixed genres but also the worlds of art and spectacle in their events (Abélès and Charpin, p.25). The places where they held their exhibitions could be quite diverse, from the apartment of Jules Levy in 1882, to the above mentioned ‘baraque’, a vacant shop (Galerie Vivienne) or the foyer of a theatre.

The exhibition *Around the Chat Noir – Arts and Pleasures in Bohemian Montmartre, 1880-1910*, presented at the Musée de Montmartre, was relatively classic in its presentation although its catalogue is in contrast to the one of *The Incohérents* quite extensive and in colour.<sup>46</sup> As in general usual it focusses however more on individual art works than on revealing the lay out of the original exhibitions. The revolutionary playfulness in both of these exhibitions (*The Incohérents* and *Around the Chat Noir*) is thus not so much situated in their presentation as in their content that was mainly playing on the absurd through, amongst other works, drawings by Jarry of his famous Père Ubu. Although these exhibitions thus potentially led to laughter, they are therefore not necessarily *avant la lettre* examples of the *inframince* in action, although they certainly form part of the lead up to it and a reference point for what it potentially can be.

To fully understand the concept, it is helpful to recall that the *inframince*, through the various examples that Duchamp gives of it in his *Notes* (1980), points to minor differences in our surroundings and behaviours that can lead to insightful laughter or merriment, but these are mostly stand-alone examples that however inspiring and

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<sup>46</sup> The exhibition ran initially from 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012 until 13<sup>th</sup> January 2013, but was extended. I visited the exhibition in April 2013.

important lack a coherent application. A better illustrative model is possibly that of organizing texts and images in the dynamic way that was demonstrated by Aby Warburg both in his library and his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (see 2.5. Ways of organizing in this thesis). The contiguity of materials, that is their state of bordering each other, both in the *Wunderkammern* and in Warburg's activities, leads to new insights and knowledge production. The constellation of images on the separate panels of the *Atlas* were meant to change with the ongoing research, following new insights and forming as Didi-Hubermann states: "*Disparates* of circular forms and frontal walls, fluid movements and tabular arrangements, horizontal confrontations and vertical falls" (2010, p. 120). The dynamics of Warburg's permanent re-arrangements are hard to document, as is the case with any exhibition, but two different versions of the *Atlas* (August 1928 and October 1929) which give an indication of the intended dynamics can be found on the website of the Warburg Institute (*Online BilderAtlas Mnemosyne* | *The Warburg Institute*, n.d.).

Didi-Hubermann's exhibition on Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, to which he gave the title *Atlas – How to Carry the World on One's Back* (2010) was discussed briefly in section 2.5 above. In a video registration of a guided tour Didi-Hubermann gave in the exhibition at the ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst in Karlsruhe, he explains how art history is not so much a history of things but of ghosts, and that imagination, following Baudelaire and Goethe, is a form of knowledge. It is a way to be sensible to the ways of nature and to make connections between them when these connections are not obvious – what Baudelaire called 'correspondances' and Goethe called '(elective) affinities' (Imaging Technologies, 2011). This approach clearly influences the way Didi-Hubermann chooses the artists represented in the exhibition and how he lets their work interplay with each other to reach new meaning.<sup>47</sup> This way of working has influenced the organization of this thesis, and both are examples of how an *inframince* quality can be achieved despite the constraints of a rather classic organization of the exhibition (or thesis). 'Playing' here takes place at both a visual and an intellectual level, in response to Warburg's methodology in which "he referred any formal singularity to the play – or the conflict – of corporeal, psychic and cultural

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<sup>47</sup> This sensitivity is also apparent in a talk Didi-Huberman gave on the notion of glimpses for The European Graduate School EGS in 2015 (European Graduate School, 2016).



movements” (Didi-Hubermann, 2010, p. 122), and in doing so opens up to specific sensitivities and affinities. As I make clear in the discussion of my own practice later in this chapter, these insist upon action and, to a degree, collapse the experience of an exhibition into the act of curation. In the handling of the diverse actors involved in the process, and following on from Didi-Hubermann’s description of Warburg’s methodology, curating is indeed like playing a game in which the rules and the action are indistinguishable, just as in Duchamp’s game of chess.

## 7.2. *A literal presence of the inframince – Lyotard’s Les Immatériaux*

In his exhibition *Les Immatériaux* (1985), a philosophical and artistic research project on change and sensibility, Jean-François Lyotard included a section on the *inframince* as an illustration in his

... labyrinthine theatre of the new (post-cinematic) ‘condition’ of information, ‘immateriality’ [that] was no longer conceived in terms of freeing concepts or ideas from all materials, but, on the contrary, of shifting the idea of ‘materiality’ away from that of ‘formed matter’ (including the ‘modernist’ distinction between form and content) and towards the ‘techno-sciences’ and the city (Rajchman, 2009, p. 3).

In the section Lyotard combined several of Duchamp’s elaborations on the notion of the *inframince* with work by Yves Klein, Giovanni Anselmo and Thierry Kuntzel. Of Yves Klein were shown “models, stubbs and cheques” for his project ‘Zones de sensibilité picturale immatérielle’ (Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Areas, own translation) from 1959, whereas Anselmo was represented by a projector and slide with the word ‘VISIBLE’ that could only be read when projected on a passer-by. Wanting to create an invisible art work Anselmo could only do so by using the visible (Lyotard, 1985, vol. 2, *Infra-Mince* section, np). Kuntzel showed a video projection of ‘La desserte blanche’ in which “[w]hitish, soundless images of a simple interior (a door, a sideboard) loom up and ebb away again. ... Small, almost imperceivable changes take place within this composition: in the interior, in the pose and movements of the woman...” (*La Desserte Blanche* | [www.li-ma.nl](http://www.li-ma.nl), n.d.). Regarding the problems of accessing past exhibitions Rajchman’s remark in relation to *Les Immatériaux* is important: “[d]ocumentation of this exhibition is now hard to come by; and even though I have held onto the catalogues and related materials from the press-kit for the review I wrote at the time, it still seems difficult to bring into focus what I saw then”

(2009, p.1). Even though its catalogue can now easily be found and downloaded, it is still difficult to get a full idea of what the exhibition looked and felt like, even for those who experienced it.<sup>48</sup>

### 7.3. Duchamp as curator

Although Lyotard's exhibition provides a unique example of an intentional presence of the *inframince*, when researching exhibitions that are possibly informed by the *inframince* as an instable entity, it raises the question of how the *inframince* might be detected in the curatorial activities of Duchamp. Much has already been done by Lewis Kachur in his *Displaying the Marvelous – Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (2001), and especially Elena Filipovic in her recent book *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (2017) that is specifically related to his curatorial work. However, they do not consider Duchamp's curatorial activities from the perspective of a possible influence or specific application of the *inframince* in his decision making.<sup>49</sup> There are specifically two curatorial interventions by Duchamp that are of interest in this context – his '1200 Coal Sacks' hanging just above the heads of the visitors and dispersing a fine coal dust on them as part of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Paris (1938), and 'Sixteen Miles of String' at the *First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition*, New York (1942). Kachur describes '1200 Coal Sacks' as "the largest 'piece' of the show" and quotes the surrealist artist Marcel Jean who also took part as saying that Duchamp "had succeeded in transforming the central hall into a space in which the marvellous coincided – at the level of humor...- with an essential disorientation, a fantastic metaphor in which the spectator found himself plunged, whether he wanted or not" (Kachur, 2001, p. 68). By combining the marvellous with disorientation Duchamp abided, according to Kachur, to two main Surrealist concepts.

His installation of 'Sixteen Miles of String' was according to Duchamp "...the cheapest form of attracting the attention of the public to Surrealist surroundings" (Kachur, 2001, p. 182). Duchamp also underplayed and thus in a way connected the

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<sup>48</sup> See for catalogue and other materials [https://monoskop.org/Les\\_Immat%C3%A9riaux](https://monoskop.org/Les_Immat%C3%A9riaux)

<sup>49</sup> Adam Jolles in his *The Curatorial Avant-Garde – Surrealism and Exhibition Practice in France 1925-1941* (2013) has also undertaken some work, but largely misses out on Duchamp's original contribution – see my review in Leonardo and in the appendix.

intervention to the minuteness of the *inframince*, by stating: “It was nothing. You can always see through a window, through a curtain, thick or not thick, you can see always [all the way?] through if you want to, same thing there” (Kachur, 2001, p. 183). A photo of the installation by John D. Schiff, who was asked by Duchamp to document the event, appeared later in the 1945 issue of *View* dedicated to Duchamp and in which he introduced the word *inframince* (also see section 4.3 *The inframince notes* of this thesis). Schiff’s photo forms part of an intricate fold-out collage by Fredrick J. Kiesler, called ‘Duchamp Triptych’ that hints at links to his work ‘3 Standard Stoppages’ (Ford, C., Neiman, C. and Nathan, P., 1992, pp. 140-141) and draws attention to Duchamp’s use of collaboration which has also been highlighted in other examples throughout this thesis. Kachur brings this notion up in relation to authorship. Although the installation was mentioned on the catalogue title page as “his twine”, several surrealists, amongst which André Breton and Max Ernst, helped install the twine “under Duchamp’s direction without benefit of explanation”, thus “undermin[ing] traditional notions of authorship” (Kachur, 2001, p. 183). The collaboration was further importantly extended to a group of children, sons and daughters of collectors and sponsors of the exhibition, to play ball, skipping rope, playing jacks and hopscotch during the opening. Duchamp, who as usual did not attend, had instructed them to continue playing no matter what. David Hopkins (2014) specifically discusses this event in his article ‘Duchamp, Childhood, Work and Play: The Vernissage for *First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942’ in which he brings up several possible influences. While Duchamp had always been interested in play, if only through his love of chess, and childhood formed a major interest within surrealism in any case, Hopkins focusses his attention on Duchamp’s close connection with the American surrealist artist Joseph Cornell in the run up to the show. His “object- or tableaux-filled boxes” not only “utilis[e] children’s playthings, [but] also pay close attention to modes of organisation and miniaturisation that might be seen to be characteristic both of children and the toys that they play with” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 3). While there is a clear exchange on the level of miniaturisation in the work of both artists, with “Cornell help[ing] Duchamp to construct six of his *boîtes-en-valise*” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 4) between June 1942 and early 1943, Hopkins also suggests that American surrealists such as Helen Levitt and Cornell focussed specifically “on the culture of childhood, and particularly the phenomena of childish games” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 6). He thus sees Duchamp’s intervention as connected to a

“more sociologically sensitive approach to childhood in American surrealist circles ... partly to be understood as a knowing nod to Levitt, Caillois and especially Cornell” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 7).<sup>50</sup> Overall, play becomes the “determining conceptual scheme” while “labour was the underlying but submerged thematic ingredient of the 1938 installation” in Paris (Hopkins, 2014, p. 9). Just like Kachur before him Hopkins likens the ‘mile of string’ installation to a “gigantic, beserk cat’s cradle” (Hopkins, 2014, p.9), an association in fact suggested by a review in the *Times* that, according to Kachur, inspired Maya Deren to create her (unfinished) film *Witch’s Cradle*. It was shot in the summer of 1943 with Duchamp as one of the two actors (Kachur, 2001, 191-192).

Hopkins argues that “Duchamp himself was habitually pledged to the notion that play is a necessarily rule-bound activity, as can be deduced from his commitment to chess” but “the games that were played during the 1942 vernissage ... trespassed into the domain of conventional adult social behaviour and became disruptive” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 10) despite the apparent conflict. Throughout his oeuvre and from the earliest instance Duchamp always questioned “the rules of the game”, whether those were the rules of art or those by which chess was played. The “structural testing of boundaries” that Hopkins sees as specific for the event in 1942 is thus rather an ongoing concern. That this event, as Hopkins suggests, “seems to presage some of the Fluxus performances and happenings of the early 1960s, in which the relation between performance and audience was eradicated” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 10) is of more importance. Especially as the audience eventually engaged in the children’s play (Kachur, 2001, p.196).

#### *7.4. Fluxus and other examples of playfulness*

Fluxus was founded in 1960 by the Lithuanian/American artist George Maciunas. Through its associations with Dada, Duchamp and the composer John Cage, it provides strong links with playfulness, but it would lead us too far astray to explore these fully in the context of the current chapter. Nevertheless, as an article in the *New York Times* at the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday suggested “[t]he idea of art (or life) as a

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<sup>50</sup> Hopkins suggests that Cornell would have been aware of an article by Caillois, ‘The Myth of Secret Treasures in Childhood’, “which was published in the 1942 issue of newly inaugurated New York-based surrealist magazine *VVV*” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 4). Also see section 5.2 of this thesis on Caillois and his writing of *Man, Play and Games*.

game in which the artist reconfigures the rules is central to Fluxus”. This was amongst others demonstrated through the exhibition of “chess sets that replace strategy and reason with absurdity and chance” (Schwendener, 2012), exactly as both Duchamp and Cage have done throughout their careers.<sup>51</sup>

This approach underpinned quite a few exhibitions in the 1960s that used playfulness, and thus “the structural testing of boundaries” (Hopkins, 2014, p.10), especially those of the institution of the museum. In these exhibitions, the relationship between the human and the nonhuman – artwork, space, artist and visitor – was negotiated in a completely new manner. The Swedish curator Pontus Hultén (1924-2006) was clearly influenced by Surrealist exhibitions and Duchamp in particular. As the first director of the Centre Pompidou in Paris (from 1974-1981) he published a special boxed edition of the *inframince* notes by Duchamp in 1980.<sup>52</sup> Hultén had however already made his name as a curator years before through two specific exhibitions. The first, *Bewogen Beweging (Movement in Art)* was developed in 1961 for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and would later travel to the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen. Described as the first ‘International Exhibition of Art in Motion’ it brought together 233 works by 83 artists from 18 countries, dealing with kinetic art, performance, happenings and film.<sup>53</sup> The exhibition featured Duchamp’s ‘Bicycle Wheel’, which was also shown on the cover of the originally designed, elongated catalogue. Other artists in the exhibition were, amongst others, Robert Rauschenberg, Alexander Calder, Jean Tinguely (with no less than 28 pieces), Roy Ascott, Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore. Documentation photos by the Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken show how the exhibition was rather classic in its set up, but surprising through the nature of the art works that invited the visitors to play.

In 1962, some of the artists of *Bewogen Beweging* returned in another exhibition, *Dylaby (Dynamic Labyrinth)* at the Stedelijk Museum at the invitation of the revolutionary museum director Willem Sandberg. He invited Tinguely and

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<sup>51</sup> For a full account on Fluxus see amongst others Ken Friedman, ed. (1998). *Fluxus Reader*. Chichester: Academic Editions.

<sup>52</sup> See [http://www.specificobject.com/objects/info.cfm?object\\_id=6889#.WX7ojdMrJE4](http://www.specificobject.com/objects/info.cfm?object_id=6889#.WX7ojdMrJE4)

<sup>53</sup> See for more information <https://www.henry-moore.org/archives-and-library/sculpture-research-library/special-collections/bewogen-beweging-stedelijk-museum-1961>

Rauschenberg to organise an exhibition in the museum that he wanted to turn “from a classic art temple into a modern and open meeting space” and gave them carte blanche (Broekers, 2017). They in turn invited Per Olof Ultvedt, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri and Tinguely’s partner Niki de Saint Phalle. As Flora Lysen states

(b)oth exhibitions have become established as milestones in the history of experimental exhibition-making; they have been canonized as the first shows that turned a museum into a participatory, playful environment for new engagements with a more diverse group of visitors. *Dylaby* (...) invited the visitor into a pitch-dark room, a shooting gallery, a room turned upside down, and a space filled with air blowers and balloons. One commentator described *Dylaby* as “one large dynamic thing, a chain reaction of poetic images materialized in three dimensions; not something to look at, but something to go into, to be a part of” (Lysen, nd).

That was also demonstrated by Martial Raysse’s contribution to *Dylaby*, ‘Raysse Beach’, which invited visitors to dance the twist.

The second important exhibition with which Hultén made his name was the group exhibition *Hon, en katedral* (*She - A Cathedral*) which took place at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1966 with three of the *Dylaby* artists: Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt. They did not have their separate rooms as in *Dylaby*, but instead created a true “labyrinthic Gesamtkunstwerk” (Broekers, 2017). The following extensive quote from an interview by Hans-Ulrich Obrist with Hultén gives a good insight in the working process:

In the early spring of '66, I finally managed to bring Jean Tinguely and Niki de St. Phalle to Stockholm to work with the Swedish artist Per Olof Ultvedt and myself. Martial Raysse withdrew at the last minute - he'd been selected for the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The idea was that there would be no preparation, nobody would have a particular project in mind. We spent the first day discussing how to put together a series of "stations," as in Stations of the Cross. The next day we started to build the station "Women Take Power." It didn't work. I was desperate. At lunch I suggested we build a woman lying on her back, inside of which would be several installations. You would enter through her sex. Everyone was very enthusiastic. We managed to finish her in five weeks, inside and outside. She was 28 meters long and about 8 meters high. Inside there was: a milk-bar, in the right breast; a planetarium showing the Milky Way, in the left breast; a mechanical man watching TV, in her heart; a movie-house showing a Greta Garbo film, in her arm; and an art gallery with fake old masters, in one leg. The day of the press preview, we were exhausted; the next day, there was nothing in the newspapers. Then Time

wrote a favorable piece and everybody liked her. As Marshall McLuhan said "art is anything you can get away with." The piece seemed to correspond to something in the air, to the much-vaunted "sexual liberation" of that time (Obrist, 1997).

Both *Dylaby* and *Hon* were the central feature of a recent two-day symposium at the Stedelijk Museum. *Lose Yourself! – A Symposium on Labyrinthine Exhibitions as Curatorial Model* took place in the context of the retrospective exhibition *Jean Tinguely – Machinespektakel* on 3 and 4 February 2017. In a feature article on the symposium for the Dutch art magazine *Metropolis M*, Debbie Broekers extensively discusses both exhibitions and the response to them by an international host of speakers such as Pamela M. Lee, Raqs Media Collective, Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.<sup>54</sup> They point to the social critical aspect (amongst others) of both exhibitions that was not necessarily recognised by the visitors who rather saw them as pure amusement. Janna Schoenberger of Amsterdam University College therefore concludes that playfulness stood in the way of a critical understanding. Pamela M. Lee makes the intriguing link with how the playfulness of these exhibitions, and especially the invitation to literally lie around in it, trained our lying bodies as potential platforms for production. While the reclining figure in *Hon* included different media and the playing children around it made an innocent impression, Lee makes the comparison with a contemporary ad in which, under the motto 'Collaborate in bed', a reclining female figure holds a tablet. And against the labyrinthine playfulness of the exhibition in combination with the title of the symposium *Lose yourself!*, Professor Mark Wigley commented "Why do we use the name labyrinth? If I know what it is, it is no longer the site of a loss of knowledge. I mean, how labyrinthine could a labyrinth be?" Broekers concludes that we don't really get lost in labyrinthine exhibitions, but we play that we get lost and therefore these exhibitions are "*testing-grounds* 'for getting lost, playing with disorientation'" (Broekers, 2017, own translation).

Tim Stott in his *Play and Participation in Contemporary Arts Practices* (2015) discussion of play and art practices takes a selective take that advances insight into the interaction although at the same time limiting the virtue of his work. He does for example not mention any of Hultén's exhibitions nor those of Duchamp. Instead he

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<sup>54</sup> [http://www.metropolism.com/en/features/30500\\_lose\\_yourself](http://www.metropolism.com/en/features/30500_lose_yourself)

concentrates on the participatory aspect in contemporary arts practices, relating these to second-order cybernetics. This allows him “to examine ... the complex, systematic organisation of the [participatory] works themselves and how these works also correlate with social systems of communication, exhibition, and governance” (Stott, 2015, p. 3). Stott discusses several art works that include ludic participation such as Maurizio Cattelan’s ‘Stadium’ (1991) or Gabriel Orozco’s ‘Oval Billiard Table’ (1996). As stand-alone artworks these don’t necessarily link into curating, but as this thesis also makes a connection to second-order cybernetics it is useful to briefly examine Stott’s argument. For instance, in relation to second-order cybernetics he states “[t]hat the study of complex systems ... allows us to think together, rather than in opposition, contingency and complexity, on the one hand, and systems, on the other, and even to think that these are, in fact, inseparable, and should be understood as a couple, ...” (Stott, 2015, p. 5). This thesis certainly subscribes to this statement and when Stott claims that “play’s openness, and the freedom of players in play, derives from the operation of constraints” (Stott, 2015, p.3), although he does not make the link, this is consistent with the achievements of the Oulipo group as discussed in this thesis (see section 5.2 above).

Stott’s view of ludic participation in art is prefaced by the general observation that “[w]ith the gradual collapse of High Modernism from the late 1950s onwards, diverse arts practices moved away from the studio-to-gallery model of artistic production and began to investigate more performance-based or event-based models, which allowed for participation, so-called “live” production and distributed authorship” (Stott, 2015, p. 16). He proceeds by introducing

two distinct arguments for how play and art meet. On the one hand, there is the humanist argument for play, for which play constitutes a gain in agency for an individual or a group and allows players to take pleasure in mastery, if only within the magic circle of their play. On the other hand, there is the posthumanist argument, for which the player is as much plaything as master of her play. In this case, to be in play is to be played (Stott, 2015, p. 16).

For this thesis, it is especially the example Stott uses to illustrate the second argument that is of importance, namely the exhibition *Play Orbit*, curated by Jasia Reichardt in 1969-70 at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, following on from her



exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* at ICA the previous year.<sup>55</sup> For Stott “[m]any of the toys, games, and puzzles exhibited in *Play Orbit* examine the human-machine and human-object interface, in the understanding that these are mutually productive” (Stott, 2015, p. 17). It is exactly because of this attention to the mutual interplay between human and nonhuman that this exhibition is of importance for this thesis and this chapter specifically. Stott observes how *Play Orbit* continued the premise that was already set out in *Cybernetic Serendipity*, by “in many ways ... [formalising and elaborating] upon the pleasurable and playful interactions that featured prominently in the first [exhibition]” (Stott, 2015, p. 22).

This observation was however already brought up some years earlier by Michael Punt, one of the exhibiting artists in *Play Orbit*, in his article ‘Play Orbit: a play on the history of play’ (2008). Punt further points to the important fact that

[b]y turning artists’ attention to toys ..., the categories of painting and sculpture dissolved and the Modernist imperative of the ‘enduring observation’ that had informed the arts and letters in a centred intellectual regime was seen for what it was: a colonial anachronism. The apologetic relativism of play and the provisional truths of games coalesced in *Play Orbit* as confrontations of the essentialist materialism of the prevailing orthodoxy (Punt, 2008, p. 135).

The availability of new materials and techniques at the time certainly invited for a playful and artistic exploration as had been demonstrated by, amongst others, the Fluxus artist Nam June Paik in his inventive appropriation of television and video techniques. Without making this specific link Punt observes how this given “displaced orthodoxies in the contemporary arts, which had become bound to an internal contradiction in which a fundamentally materialist practice made claims to metaphysical and transcendental concepts such as beauty, truth and essence” (Punt, 2008, p. 137). *Play Orbit* made use of this momentum “by extend[ing] the realm of art into those new territories that the increased availability of exotic materials ... had opened while retaining the core values and objectives of Modernism rooted in the restricted palette of tradition” (Punt, 2008, p. 137).

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<sup>55</sup> *Play Orbit* was first shown at Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales. See for *Cybernetic Serendipity* section 5.4 of this thesis and <http://cyberneticserendipity.net/>

The importance of “the playful nihilism of Dada and the reckless disregard for convention characteristic of surrealism” (Punt, 2008, p. 140), is largely ignored by Stott or taken too much for granted. Punt however recognizes how these are of importance in the lead up to *Play Orbit* that dealt with the investigation of “how, when, where and why do we play?” To try and answer this question Reichardt used the method of an open call for 100 artists, with the result of which she “[constructed] [o]n a curatorial scale, ... a collage of objects in the hope that, through their associative juxtaposition, an insight or even a spiritual dimension might emerge through ‘reader’ participation. In retrospect, *Play Orbit* can be viewed as both fun and a wide-ranging intervention into art, history and the history of art” (Punt, 2008, p. 140). The aspect of the visitor/viewer or ‘reader’ becoming participant/performer clearly relates to Duchamp’s approach as stated in his paper *The Creative Act*, which although it was discussed earlier in this thesis is worth repeating here: “... the creative act is not performed by the artists alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act” (Duchamp, Sanouillet and Peterson, 1989, p. 140).

One way in which Punt approaches the “reconceptualization of the significance of *Play Orbit* as a valiant attempt to *use* contemporary art and practising artists to advance thinking about matters of spirit and fulfilment” (Punt, 2008, p. 141) is through the work of Aby Warburg and specifically his *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a “method and system of thought” in which “[t]he provenance of collage ... was integral to the practices of art that followed as it insisted on an immaterial play of association between discontinuous forms ...”(Punt, 2008, p. 141-142). In this context Punt points to Warburg’s description of the *Atlas* as “a ghost story for adults” to which Didi-Hubermann clearly alludes as well when he talks of art history not so much being a history of things but of ghosts (see discussion in 7.1). Punt states that *Play Orbit* due to its “[scant] appearance in the art histories of the late 1960s ... may have become a ghost story for adults ...” (Punt, 2008, p. 144), but that its rich catalogue “provides an arena for contemplation and thought ... that can raise awkward questions about the engagement with games by artists today” (Punt, 2008, p. 144-145). Where Gene Baro, who introduced to Reichardt the idea of inviting artists to make toys,

... thought that an exhibition that encouraged ‘mixed media’ might offer some insight into what might be the essence of that as a discrete form ... Reichardt’s agenda was much more located in what artists do and what they can tell us by what they do: her brilliance was that she, like Warburg, also *had faith in the spaces between the artists’ utterances, in the ghost dance of the half said to show us what art can tell us* about play and toys ... (Punt, 2008, p. 145, my italics).

It is exactly this faith in the in-between and “the ghost dance of the half said” that is of essence here and which can also be applied within the wider context of a curatorial practice. This thesis therefore definitely picks up on Punt’s suggestion at the end of his essay about the role that “playful histories, untidy histories, counterfactual histories, public histories and even fraudulent histories” can play when

...reconnect[ing] with the political and historical enterprise of art, to engage with the political function of history as a contributory process through which the moment is understood. Perhaps it is in this enterprise that Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* might offer a systematic method for artists and theorists to play once again, to liberate some ghost stories through elective affinities and explore what other routes there were for art to take after Play Orbit (Punt, 2008, p. 147).<sup>56</sup>

### 7.5. Learning from artists – Wolfgang Tillmans

When extending Punt’s suggestion to a curatorial practice much can be learned from artists’ practices. As discussed in section 2.5 of this thesis, Warburg’s method was not only pre-curatorial, but also highly artistic and connecting to various collage and montage-related work within his time. That the *inframince* and thus an artist’s concept lies at the heart of this thesis is therefore also essential for an understanding of its dynamics. Within this context, a brief discussion of the work of a contemporary artist, the German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, as a case study is instrumental. For this I use the video that was made for his recent exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler in

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<sup>56</sup> There are many more examples of new and playful attitudes that arise in the 1960s, a discussion of which would however lead to far astray. A brief mention must be made of Harald Szeemann’s influential exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)* from 1969 in the Kunsthalle Bern, in which various new art forms such as conceptual, organic-matter or process art were brought together in an experiential way inside an outside of the exhibition space. View <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2013/09/when-attitudes-become-form-at-kunsthalle-bern-1969/> for images and Szeemann, H. (1969) *Live in your head*. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern. How a general playful attitude in art and performance also influenced more locally active artists’ groups in the sixties can be read in my master thesis *De Research Group – Illustratie van een Tijdsbeeld* (1989) on the Belgian Research Group (only available in Dutch).

Riehen on the outskirts of Basel in which he tells about hanging the show. Discussing his work, which consists of photographic portrayals of everyday life, both figurative and abstract, he states it is about "... looking at the world through open, fearless eyes while also taking the playful seriously" (Fondation Beyeler, 2017).<sup>57</sup> His hanging of the show, which is a non-chronological overview of 30 years of work, as an explicit curatorial activity, almost turns at times into a performance. Tillmans moves his pictures of different formats to and fro with the help of several assistants, until things fall into place. Although this might seem a normal way of hanging a show, in this case something else is at stake, both through the different formats and the non-chronological approach which makes that in this moving to and fro, in the play between the human and the nonhuman (and between humans as well), the *inframince* is in my view clearly at work, although Tillmans does not knowingly making use of it. The light and happy, but also serious mood that is apparent in the video is another indication. While Tillmans plans his show quite meticulously beforehand by using a model and in close collaboration with his assistants, he is also happy to change things around when actually experiencing the "feel of the rooms" (Fondation Beyeler, 2017). For instance, as a consequence of not realising beforehand that all the light in the exhibition rooms is provided by daylight, which makes everything looking extremely good, he considers that he might want to work against it. He is interested in the sound of the rooms, and their resonance. This is caused by the interplay of his works that have different formats, but in which the smallest picture can have more importance than a bigger one. At some point things fall together. This does not necessarily mean however that everything is in balance, but that there is a kind of tension. Tillmans also makes use of mistakes in the hanging, such as hanging a work higher than intended. Making active use of mistakes is a way, as indicated in this thesis in chapter 3, to access new knowledge and insights. Or as Tillmans comments in the video on hanging a large photo higher than planned: "I think it's a good mistake. Mistakes are often good things" (Fondation Beyeler, 2017).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See video, at 0:24.

<sup>58</sup> Idem from 08:52.

### 7.6. *Own practice – case study “in action”*

The framework that I have sketched above includes several elements that remain central to my practice as a curator. Having made the experiential aspect of curation a practice in action, in which the fusion of the processes is both evident and indistinguishable, the following will discuss a selection of exhibitions and exhibition proposals that I curated and that have been instrumental in the development of my thinking behind this thesis, and in particular, my thinking about the *inframince* as a portable concept. While curating these exhibitions and proposals the importance of laughter (especially its tongue-in-cheek variety) and its cybernetic dynamics became clear, culminating within the concept of the *inframince*. I discuss these exhibitions in sequence to draw out the process-like development that informs them. My practice as a curator might not be overly different from any other curator in that some basic elements are probably very similar such as the finding of a place to curate or the ongoing collaboration with a group of artists. The *inframince* quality can more be found in the way collaborations and concepts for exhibitions develop, with attention of combining lesser known, emerging artists with more established ones and a general attention for taking care. Throughout the following I have indicated as much as possible where this specific quality can be found and where there are links with what has been developed in this thesis. It must however be stressed that elements in the development of these exhibitions led to my thinking into this thesis, but that they are not necessarily to be seen as illustrations of it.

In chapter 1 ‘Wat vooraf ging (The foregoing)’ of this thesis, I alluded to several exhibitions that I made in which the *inframince* was a point of focus. These exhibitions, which took place between 1998 and 2000, were both an accumulation of aspects of my curatorial practice up to that point as well as instrumental for my further practice, including the research for this thesis. In 1998, I was invited as a guest-curator to realise the exhibition *tussenin/in-between* at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle (B).<sup>59</sup> I brought together six international artists and their work - Pierre Bismuth, Ricardo Brey, Peter Buggenhout, Jo Huybrechts, Ann Veronica Janssens and Kurt Ryslavy - around the notion of the in-between which I connected not only with Duchamp’s concept of the *inframince*, but also with ideas by Maurice

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<sup>59</sup> I would become the museum’s director-curator from autumn 1999-autumn 2004.

Blanchot on the fragmentary, the notion of involution in the work of Samuel Beckett as well as that of becoming in Deleuze. The importance of intense conversations with all artists involved about my proposed concept for the exhibition, as well as an openness to what they might contribute to the exhibition, is in my view specifically apparent in the following quote from the catalogue text where I comment upon the choice of artists:

It seems an unusual and maybe even impossible combination. Their works range from forceful, vigorous expression to more tentative, nearly invisible presence. It is about the transition from the one to the other and the tension this generates. Between one word and another to which it is translated. Between the position of the merchant/artist and the artist/merchant. Between one space and the other. Between inside and outside. Between here and there. Between curator and artist. It is about the synthesis in which odours are seen and colours tasted. It is about exhibition-making itself, for which we fax and phone each other using different languages. We negotiate (Doove, 1998, np).

This gives some insight into the production process that usually stays outside of the exhibition as the visitor experiences it, but which underpins each and every one of my exhibitions. I might be the one who develops an underlying concept, with certain works in mind, but the conversation with the artists and an openness to his or her suggestions, is in my view crucial. By explicitly not taking a hierarchical role in the curatorial process, but one on an even level with everyone involved, ideally a mutual respect is evolved and through that also a higher quality of the exhibition. Another glimpse of what this entails can be found in my text about the contribution of Ann Veronica Janssens. To produce a catalogue on time for the opening of an exhibition that wants to stay flexible (and in that sense playful) up until the very last minute, entails being speculative:

Behind Ryslavý's 'Tür', we shall find the work of Ann Veronica Janssens. What is in between things is unclear, blurred. An installation of Janssens in the MUHKA consisted of a roomful of mist. In the mist, from time to time, other visitors would loom up, come into focus, and then vanish again. [...]. In *Dialogues*, Deleuze and Parnet discuss the weeds that grow in between things, thereby supplying an image for their famous rhizome. They quote Henry Miller, but also Virginia Woolf, who says "like mist, I spread myself out BETWEEN the people I know best" while walking between taxis. Whether there will be anything to see and what it will be like, I cannot say at the moment of writing this text. Janssens is in Indonesia and her agreement to take part in this project was an exception. We communicate by fax and I shall carry

out her final proposal. As a curator, this makes me her assistant, a kind of intermediary between the artist and the work. I am, in a variation on the theme, the go-between. Just as I am, all things considered, a go-between for the other artists too (Doove, 1998, np).

Janssens would eventually instruct me to build a plaster wall that divided the room behind Ryslavy's 'Tür', and that was only partially finished, with blurring white paint between the finished and unfinished parts, suggesting the to and fro of the sea, a washing ashore of the water on a beach that was clearly influenced by her stay in Indonesia. The wall would obstruct entrance to the other half of the room, which could only be seen through the windows and revealed literally the construction "behind the scenes".

The basic set up of the exhibition that followed in 2000, called *3ness*, has already been described in chapter 1 of this thesis. The project resolved the contingencies of curation through laughter when a longer planned exhibition at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens unexpectedly fell through and the possibility arose to curate my own exhibition as the newly appointed director of the museum. For this I involved the artist-curators Dike Blair and Jimmie Dams and on instigation of Blair we developed a concept which would serve as a pretext to show our favourite artists. Blair came up with the tongue-in-cheek mathematical formula of 'three curators times three equals 27 artists', which would in principle produce a deliberate excessive amount of work for a relatively small museum. The result was nevertheless light and consisted of a combination of photo works, installations, sculptures, wall paintings as well as works from the museum's collection, which seemed to work effortlessly alongside each other. For this we also played with formats, with Tom Friedman's 'Air' (1999), consisting of a used Styrofoam coffee cup, a handmade ladybird and a figure made from straws, was both one of the most well-known and overlooked works due to its deliberate ephemerality.

The title *3ness* alluded to the dynamics as well as the togetherness of the project and the closeness of its collaborators. A relatively meaningless concept had led in all its playfulness nevertheless to a very rich and layered project. As part of the concept the curators all had to choose a text, a sound and an image to illustrate their way of working. Or as Dike Blair writes in his catalogue text:

... we (Jimi Dams, Edith Doove, and myself) decided on an organizing principle designed around the interplay of Image/Text/Sound. We employ this device for a number of reasons; one of which being that, just as the curators function as filters, we ourselves need filters to limit our own selections. Another reason this thematic approach appeals to me is because of the transparency of the view it allows into the curators' selections (Blair, Dams, Doove, 2000, p.17).

Blair opted for Hiroshige's 'Night Snow at Kambara' as his image, for his sound he chose 'Spiritual' by Tom Verlaine and his text was a passage from John MacDonald's *One Fearful Yellow Eye*.

Jimi Dams explains in his text:

It was a project in which absolutely anything could exist, something it continued to do even after the attention was turned to developing a structure for managing the discussion. ... Once the idea was on the table, we began e-mailing each other. It has to be said that sometimes we verged on the obsessive. It was a wild and intense experience, one I enjoyed very much (Blair, Dams, Doove, 2000, p.20).

Dams chose for his text, an excerpt from *Guide* by Dennis Cooper, his image was a film still from *Trust* by Hal Hartley and his sound, the song *No.2* by Bottom.

Apart from choosing notes from Duchamp on the *inframince* as text, the photo by Edström as image and the false start of Dylan's *115<sup>th</sup> Dream* as soundbite, my catalogue text evolved around the observation of the colour pink as an indefinite, 'wrong' colour "that is as rich as the colour grey" and that seemed to be very prevalent in society at the time (Doove, 2000, p. 22). What was important in this project was that all choices were based on friendship and personal appreciation of each other's work. The faxing between curator and artists of the former exhibition had by that time been replaced by extensive emailing as well as personal meetings in several cities. This in itself was not a novel aspect, as demonstrated for instance in Lyotard's first part of the catalogue for his and Thierry Chaput's exhibition *Les Immateriaux* called *Epreuves d'écriture* and which consists of extensive exchanges between several artists and philosophers such as Daniel Buren, Jacques Derrida, Bruno



Latour and Isabelle Stengers. In the case of *3ness* we didn't decide to publish our conversations but they formed an important part of the production process.

### *7.7. The importance of conversation*

Extended conversations and close exchanges with all elements involved would remain a crucial aspect of the exhibitions that followed on *3ness* both inside and outside the museum. The concept of the *inframince* as a personal curatorial tactic started slowly to develop, even if unmentioned or strictly invisible. The following discusses a choice of exhibitions in which the aspect of conversation was particularly important.

The group exhibition (*They say this is the*) *Place* for instance, which took place in Antwerp in 2001, focused on the problematics of a new build car park beneath a large public square – the St. Jansplein - in an area with a large influx of immigrants. Together with artists Peter Hulsmans, Ilona Rugg, Cel Crabeels, Jan Kempenaers, Lieve D'Hondt, Kurt D'Haeseleer, Els Opsomer, Marie-France & Patricia Martin, Lucy + Jorge Orta, Manon De Boer and Anne Daems we worked towards an openness and mutual respect amongst inhabitants of this specific area. This was done, amongst others, through one of the early so-called '70 x 7' Meal Acts by Lucy + Jorge Orta – an open artist dinner that is an on-going project to encourage people of all strands of life to engage with each other over a public meal and for which we produced one of the commemorative Royal Limoges porcelain plates that accompanied this project (Studio Orta, 2001).

The notion of meeting and exchange was especially apparent in exhibitions such as *Feb.3.2002* (Doove, Deurle, 2002) that I built on the concept of setting a date for a meeting and the exchange that takes place during such an event. The exhibition, explicitly set up as “a socially engaged exhibition that stands for a ‘politics without program’” (Doove, 2002, p.38), tried to give an answer to recent political events, such as the 9/11 attacks and the introduction of the Euro. It did this by discussing the notion of the meeting in an art historical context via the techniques of collage, montage and assemblage. The title of the show was a reference to the ‘Date Paintings’ of On Kawara in which a simple depiction of a date would be combined with a page of a newspaper of that specific date, thus alluding to the myriad associations that could be made with it. Other artists in the show were Alicia Framis, Dora Garcia, Dan

Graham, Koen Vanmechelen and Franz West. Of the latter, who I visited in Vienna in December 2001 and which gave an important insight in his practice working with assistants, we showed his installation 'Ordinary Language' (1995) in combination with 'Personale' from the same year. The twelve self-designed sofas of 'Ordinary Language' were covered with African fabrics and invited visitors to sit on them, watch video interviews of artist and curators and have conversations with each other. 'Personale' was a typical exchange work by West which existed of twelve works by artists with whom he had exchanged his own work.

We also showed Alicia Framis' 'BloodSushiBank', a so-called Remix Building consisting of a rotating platform with a blood bank and sushi bar, and ideally "7 nurses, 1 doctor and 1 waitress". As Framis describes it on her website the installation

is meant to show that the act of giving blood could be part of a daily decision, like the one about where to go to have dinner. Nowadays giving blood is generally connected with a suspicious feeling of illness or with the risk of infection. This makes us forget about the nature of the precious act of giving life to some anonymous person (Framis, 2002).

A series of his scale models for glass pavilions alluded to Dan Graham's practice of creating meeting places. Graham would visit Belgium frequently at the time and was very approachable. The mirroring panes of his pavilions, one of which (Belgian Funhouse) was initially designed for the above-mentioned St. Jansplein in Antwerp and now included in the Middelheimmuseum, invited to play with one's own and other visitors' reflections.<sup>60</sup>

Koen Vanmechelen, who in the meantime has become world renowned, showed an early version of his 'Cosmopolitan Chicken Project'. Vanmechelen cross-fertilizes national chickens from countries all over the world to question biocultural diversity and identity. Initiated in 1999, Vanmechelen at the time showed a crossing between the Belgian Mechelse Redcap and the American Jersey Giant, thus reuniting Belgium, France, England and America in one chicken through earlier crossings. In the meantime, he recently announced the 22nd generation of Cosmopolitan Chickens - a crossing between the Mechelse Danish and the Finish Suomalainen Maatiaiska while

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<sup>60</sup> View <http://www.middelheimmuseum.be/en/page/dan-graham-united-states>

having expanded his working with animals to many other species such as lama's and owls.<sup>61</sup> The presence of live chickens within a museum context was both challenging and exciting as it gave specific insights into their habits and ways of communication. The laying of an egg would for instance always be met by the joyful chattering of the other chickens, whereas Vanmechelen had to replace a rooster as it was not met with full approval by the 'ladies'.<sup>62</sup> He combined this live presence with a series of large-scale close up portraits of his chickens, thus stressing the importance of the nonhuman in relation to the human.

Various cross- or multidisciplinary exhibitions and projects followed, mostly involving groups of artists. One of these, *Hyperbolic*, at the art centre STUK in Leuven, Belgium (2006) is of particular importance within the context of this thesis. It addressed the notion of the collective and brought together work of amongst others Daina Taimina, okno, foAM, Agentschap and Stefaan Quix. Taimina is a Latvian mathematician and Adjunct Associate Professor at Cornell University who had taken to crocheting hyperboles to make them visually understandable for her students. Discovering her work formed one of the starting points of the exhibition, which worked around the following notion:

The collective departs from a bundling of forces, of individuals that not necessarily share a similar starting point except for a belief in the principle of 'strong together'. It rises in general from collaboration and exchange, and is interested in expanse and growth. A certain unpredictability, coincidence, meeting (between individuals, disciplines, styles, institutes), is important. Departing from the idea of the hyperbole, which starts small but can become excessively big, a couple of collectives move around each other in this project. In the exhibition room of STUK arises a hyperbolic grow, a living structure, in

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<sup>61</sup> From the press release for his recent exhibition "Vision of The Owl" at Galerie Valérie Bach, Brussels:

"The title proposes that this show can be perceived through the eyes of the owl whose vision is peripheral. Although it can only look forwards, the owl is able to turn its head nearly 360 degrees, which has led to a folklore belief that it has supernatural powers. Its ability to predict weather conditions has also inspired people to think that it can foretell the future or that when an owl is sighted it means a change is coming. In the context of this exhibition, the owl evokes associations with myth and magic but in a wider sense reflects the climate of uncertainty surrounding the current state of world affairs. 'Vision of the Owl' is about conflict and how our society is dealing with it, a theme that Koen Vanmechelen explores using metaphors he has drawn from his vast experience of working with the animal world."

<sup>62</sup> See for a full overview of The Cosmpolitan Chicken Project the website <http://www.ccrp.be/>. I would later include Vanmechelen in various other projects, amongst others *Super!*, *Parallelepipeda* and *wijheizijwei*.

a playful multiplicity of visual art, music, mathematical models and talks (Doove, 2006).

The concept of this exhibition, although not yet fully consciously integrating or acknowledging the nonhuman, nor specifically articulating the *inframince*, nevertheless prefigures what Donna Haraway calls a need for sympoiesis or ‘making-with’ in her latest publication *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) and in which she mentions Daina Taimina within the context of the project ‘Crochet Coral Reef’ by the twin sisters Margaret and Christine Wertheim for The Institute of Figuring (Haraway, 2016, p. 76). She repeats this reference in her contribution to the book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2016, p. M36). Both books will be mentioned more extensively below in the context of recent projects.

An exhibition in which I returned to the work of Deleuze and more specifically his book on Leibniz, *The Fold*, was the group exhibition *Multi/plier* at the Galerie Les filles du Calvaire, Brussels in the winter of 2007-8. Although organized in a commercial context no works were sold as we were given the ‘quiet’ period over Christmas to develop the project. In a combination of some artists I had worked with before and some artists specific to the gallery, we made a specific use of the two floors of the gallery with a combination of paintings, sculptures and installations. What was specific of this exhibition was the changes that we made halfway through: some works were moved from one floor to another, a wall behind some paintings was painted black, a poster that had hung on the wall was folded etc. We worked as a collective that discussed the implications of the fold and responded to all kinds of contingencies such as the fact that quite a lot of the newly conceived artworks turned out to be black and white without the artists or me knowing anything about that beforehand. We organized a public talk during the exhibition to discuss these kinds of elements with visitors, only a few of whom had witnessed the changes.<sup>63</sup>

Frustrations with certain aspects of large-scale, institutional projects, such as the research project and exhibition *Parallelepipeda* (Leuven, Belgium, 2007-10) on the

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<sup>63</sup> The artists involved were Elke Boon, Edith Dekyndt, Harrisson, Peter Hulsmans, Nathalie Hunter, Jimena Kato Murakami, Nurse, Sophie Nys, Benoit Platéus, Mira Sanders, Pieter Vermeersch, Emmanuelle Villard and Heidi Voet. The Brussels branch of the gallery does not exist anymore.

collaboration between artists and scientists, for which I was contacted as a curator only after certain collaborations had already been set up, led me to a further questioning of the curatorial and a need for reflection which led eventually to this thesis. However, the large-scale project *wijheizijwei* for the Belgian NGO Vredeseilanden (2009-10) set up different presentations throughout Flanders, and allowed for very precise and local collaborations between artists and farmers. In the case of Lucy + Jorge Orta this led to the development of work ('Milk', 2010) which turned out to be instrumental within their oeuvre.<sup>64</sup> The fact that I have worked with certain artists repeatedly over the years is in itself not uncommon in a curatorial practice. It is however also the build-up of a certain trust and of friendship along the way that allows for developing an ongoing body of work together.

#### *7.8. Spot On, Platform P at the Duke and others*

In parallel to developing this thesis, but not as an explicit part of it, I developed three exhibitions and two exhibition proposals which in hindsight (as a post hoc narrative) can be viewed as examples of the "*inframince* in action" in terms of collaboration, friendship, playfulness and attention for contingency.<sup>65</sup> Although continuously very hard to pinpoint, the *inframince* in these examples was situated in the collaboration between artists, curator, visitors and other people involved, as well as in how we interacted with the space and artworks, being extremely open to any kind of contingencies. The process was every time deliberately slow, concentrated and thus intense. The *inframince* cannot be rushed. After realising two large-scale projects in Belgium (the previously mentioned *Parallepiped* and *wijheizijwei*), which had ample financial and practical support, it was quite challenging to be offered a curatorial opportunity without any financial support and in the tiniest space possible. At the same time this answered my need to move away from large-scale projects and also fitted my interest in the tiniest aspect of any collaboration. With *Spot On* which took place in 2010-11, during my first year in Plymouth and as part of my contributing researcher position, I intended to respond to these conditions through

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<sup>64</sup> Conversation with Lucy Orta, Les Moulins, Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 – view <http://www.studio-orta.com/en/artwork/221/Milk>

<sup>65</sup> During this period, I also organised the exhibition *Thomas Nollet & Hilde Huyghe – Designing the Terraced House*, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, 24 February-11 March 2011, but this falls outside of the remit of this thesis.

both its title and content. The tiny exhibition space at the front of the Scott Building of the Faculty of Arts at Plymouth University was turned into a meeting spot and led to showing some of my personal research in the use of spots and circles in the corridors behind it. By opening the project on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 I was able to connect it to the worldwide celebration of the film ‘Powers of Ten’ by Charles & Ray Eames. Through this connection, I received a free copy of the film which was shown in the exhibition space behind a massive round MDF plate painted bright red in which was cut out a peephole to watch the film, thus connecting big and small. The exhibition was also included in the online map that was developed for the worldwide celebration, thus again connecting the tiny and local, with the massive and global, true to the content of the Eames’ movie. Further creative curating on a non-existent budget took place by including (with their permission) posters of the Amazon project that were produced for the show of Lucy + Jorge Orta at The Natural History Museum in London. It was all in all in more than one respect a very frustrating project that nevertheless led to inspiring conversations between artists and scientists during the meetings that were set up. The program that was intended to run for a year, but which had to be cut short for practical reasons, included amongst other activities, an exhibition and live conversation with artist Sue Austin.<sup>66</sup>

*Platform P at the Duke* was in 2011 the one and only public manifestation of Platform P, set up by curator Ray White and myself. The platform intended to be an experimental curatorial and collaborative platform for art in Plymouth. From our ‘manifesto’ at the time:

Platform P challenges – collaborates – dialogues

Platform P partners – infiltrates – imagines – plays

P is for Plymouth, people, places, partners, play, performance...

The two-day exhibition *Platform P at the Duke* took place in the Duke of Cornwall hotel in Plymouth during the weekend of 5-6<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and was set up as a fringe contribution to the British Art Show 7 that travelled to Plymouth that year. The

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<sup>66</sup> See [http://www.wearefreewheeling.org.uk/sue-austin-more-sue and](http://www.wearefreewheeling.org.uk/sue-austin-more-sue-and)  
<https://spotonedp.wordpress.com>

project allowed me to connect back to a group of artists I had worked with on several occasions before, such as during our contribution to the Trajector Art Fair at Hotel Bloom! in Brussels in Spring 2010, as well as with artists I had got to know in Plymouth. During the Trajector Art Fair I had also met the British artist Anna Francis and I subsequently invited her for a performance during the Platform P event. The *inframince* action here was mostly apparent in the renewed/continued collaboration with artists such as Nathalie Hunter, Sara Bomans and Alexandra Dementieva, while exploring for the first time a collaboration with the Plymouth artists' duo Driftingspace (Sally Hall and Jason Hirons). The exhibition took place in different rooms of the hotel, allowing for elaborate installations in rooms that were due to be renovated and more restrictive conditions in others. While the collaboration with my co-curator was relatively smooth we also realized that we had different interests that prevented a continuation of Platform P.<sup>67</sup>

I would continue working with several artists I had introduced in the Platform P project, for instance in the proposal *The Imminent, Becoming, Ever Changing* which I developed in 2013 as an answer to the invitation by online collective The Naked to respond to place and locality. Although not selected to be realised for an actual exhibition the project and all its proposals remained online for several years, but was unfortunately recently taken offline. The following text is taken from the proposal

How do we see a place? As fixed, with a certain identity, or as ever changing, with attention for its potency, its possibilities that can also be failures? As purely local or as part of a wider context? Part of these questions are answered by John Steinbeck who in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* states: "It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again." Being especially interested in the emerging artist, Steinbeck's statement has become an important credo for both my curatorial and research practice.

So if we look at Plymouth as the tide pool, in it I discovered or rather, met the three artists that I have selected for this project that I see as on-going. Sally Hall and Jason Hirons I initially met through their contextual work for Plymouth College of Art and collaborated with them for the project Platform P at the Duke in October 2011. I met Anne-Marie Culhane end of 2012 through her work for Take A Part and her project Shed on Wheels. Since then I invited

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<sup>67</sup> See for images of the project <https://platformp.wordpress.com/>

her as a visiting lecturer and later as respondent for the panel that I led during the Public Dialogues conference 2013 in Plymouth.

What the four of us share is an intense appreciation for the small and local that nevertheless connects to global issues – from the tide pool to the stars and back again. We concentrate on the small, that what we see while we are walking, thinking, teaching, writing, in order to be able to say something about the larger context which will then has the potential to feed back into the small again.

In their definition of (a) philosophy Deleuze and Guattari state that it has a history, that it has multiple points of departure to which it returns, which it critiques, with which it overlaps and takes into a future where it will receive a similar treatment by other philosophies. This definition connects well with their interest in the rhizome with its layeredness and interconnections. What is equally important is a high level of flexibility. We take these notions with us in our way of working, whether as artist or curator, and are curious to discover their outcome in any place we encounter.

Many of the artists I had worked with in these past projects would form the basis of my ‘international art management agency’ Bureau Doove, which I set up in August 2014. The following year we had the opportunity to contribute with a two-day exhibition at Devonport Guildhall to the first Plymouth Art Weekender. Since attempts to get funding by the Arts Council failed (who rather supported the overarching projects and some larger events as part of it) *Bureau Doove presents Ballard, Blow and Driftingspace* was largely dependent on the goodwill of all involved. The Guildhall gave their space for free as contribution to the Plymouth Art Weekender, while the weights needed for the work by Alison Ballard and Mike Blow were kindly lent by the Plymouth University Performing Arts Centre, The House. This project was specifically centred on the personal encounter between artists, curator and visitors, which due to the small scale of the project was extremely successful. A visit of a group of elderly people who had booked their visit to the Guildhall long beforehand not knowing of our project, resulted in some of them hugging the blue pods of the interactive sound installation by Ballard and Blow, saying they wished they could stay all day. The installation of these pods on a wooden floor produced an unexpected extra resonance which had an especially soothing effect. Driftingspace had created a salon to watch and discuss their film *Vellum* over coffee and cake from the below-stairs bakery. The interaction this enabled with



visitors, including the group mentioned above, was in Driftingspace's view particularly successful.<sup>68</sup>

Although no further exhibitions followed due to the combination of fulltime work with writing this thesis, Bureau Doove developed a strong online presence through an ongoing collaboration with fifteen international artists on the promotion of their self-developed activities. In the spring of 2017 a second exhibition proposal followed, this time for the Biennial of Anglet at the southwest coast of France, a well-known surfing community.<sup>69</sup> The concept was developed in close collaboration with Dominique Leroy, one of the Bureau Doove artists, building explicitly on my research surrounding the *inframince* and his experience as a practising surfer. The proposal included amongst others, Bureau Doove members such as Mike Blow, Driftingspace and Hantu<sup>70</sup> and can be viewed as an explicit application of the *inframince* concept in the way we communicated, developed and collaborated. It draws all of the other examples of my curating together and deliberately uses elements that have been discussed in this thesis, or used previously, such as the reference to Steinbeck. From the proposal text:

Like surfing, of which the principle rests on “entering into an existing wave” (to cite Deleuze commenting on new forms of sports)<sup>71</sup>, my curatorial project adopts this principle – composing from a context, its natural movements, its energy, its characteristics (sociological, urban, environmental, and so on). The artistic choice orientates itself on work of which the demarches develop from this process.

The title proposed for the 2018 edition of the biennial, SURFING, evokes thus at the same time an observation, interaction, and a response echoing the natural environment. The project evolves from the practice of surfing, an activity, an active posture. It's not only a method to negotiate the sea or the web, but also the environment in general, a being *alert* of the context of Anglet to which the proposals of the artists both respond and make react. Body, image, thinking, action and landscape interconnect.

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<sup>68</sup> See <https://edithdoove.wordpress.com/projects/bureau-doove-presents-ballard-blow-and-driftingspace/> for some images. Conversation with Sally Hall and Jason Hiron, Plymouth, 5 August 2017.

<sup>69</sup> See <https://www.anglet.fr/index.php> and <http://www.lalittorale.anglet.fr/>

<sup>70</sup> See <https://bureaudoove.wordpress.com/>

<sup>71</sup> Commenting on new sports in an interview in 1965, Deleuze said: “All the new sports – surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding – take the form of entering into an existing wave. There's no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit. The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘get into something’ instead of being the origin of an effort” (Deleuze, 1997, p.121).

In this inter-activity, the attention for micro-movements invites us to think of the universal movement as indicated by Steinbeck in his *The Log of the Sea of Cortez* (1951): c'est "advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again." This quote is particularly interesting to evoke the fragile ecology of the littoral of Anglet that remains an important aspect of this biennial: the observation of these issues through focus points as well as sensible and situated answers, lies at the heart of this project. The trajectory itself is thought as an ecological process in the relations between the work of the artists and the environment of Anglet – the city, the landscape, the territory, its residents, human as much as nonhuman, fauna and flora included.

In the further explanation of the project I also point to the importance of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming minor' within collaborations, as well as Donna Haraway's important new book *Staying with the Trouble – Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) in which she argues for a practice of sym-poiesis or 'making-with' to combat the negativity that surrounds the Anthropocene, which is reminiscent of Whitehead's 'togetherness' (see chapter 6 in this thesis).

Although in the highly competitive international curatorial world this proposal for the Biennial of Anglet was not selected, its development was nevertheless instrumental for my practice, and its basics will be used within the context of other upcoming projects. Developing a proposal is an intense intellectual activity in collaboration with artists and is thus in my view just as much a piece of work as a realised exhibition. Due to the slow build-up of our collaboration – I had last worked with Leroy when I had selected him for the Triennial *Super!* in Hasselt, Belgium in 2005 – there was an important notion of trust and generosity that fuelled this project. It made us also much more aware of *inframince* contingencies that needed to be followed. Bureau Doove will in the near future develop its projects by moving to Nantes St. Nazaire, where, along with other activities, it is to set up a research lab in collaboration with Transtechnology Research, as well as a programme of micro residencies in which a close collaboration with artists and scientists can be developed, and in which the *inframince* as curatorial tool will continue to play an important role.

Haraway's expression 'Staying with the Trouble' in the title of her book (Haraway, 2016), is a useful instrument to pull together the development of my curatorial practice in connection to the *inframince* and the examples given at the beginning of this chapter, more specifically the *Wunderkammer*-model and Warburg's method of

organizing. Although her book is written in view of “spiralling ecological devastation” (Haraway, 2016, backflap) Haraway’s ‘Staying with the Trouble’ is also a form of explicitly seeking the trouble or being open to what is unexpected, unusual or seemingly useless and nevertheless needs to be addressed. If Warburg had opted for a classic organisation of his library he would have avoided many practical issues, but he would not have come to the insights that are instrumental within his practice. Or as Haraway phrases it right at the beginning of her introduction:

*Trouble* is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning “to stir up”, “to make cloudy”, “to disturb”. We - all of us on Terra – live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response. ... Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. ... staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings (Haraway, 2016, p. 1).

And in the note connected to this quote she explains that ‘critters’ in her book “refers promiscuously to microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines (Haraway, 2016, p. 169, note 1). It is thus useful to adopt her phrase in the context of this thesis.

When brought into connection with the *Wunderkammer*-model and Warburg’s method of organizing, what may appear to some as sheer disorder is in fact a close connection and response to the interplay of the human and nonhuman. The *inframince*, and as demonstrated in this thesis, its inherent relation with laughter and cybernetics, serves as an indicator and a method, however hard to pinpoint. In connection to Haraway’s call, the reference to Serres’ parasite as the troublemaker is doubly apt (see chapter 5.4 of this thesis). In the examples of my own practice there is over time a growing recognition of the importance of a ‘making-with’, including all “critters” to thus use Haraway’s terminology. It is also the recognition that to answer her call this approach needs to be made effective in various strands of life and thus also in exhibition-making. The curatorial in its basic meaning and facility of taking care can actually play a crucial role. It might be that it works best in small-scale collaborations, as I increasingly prefer, as this provides the best opportunity for close

observation and qualitative collaboration, although an application on a larger scale does not have to be excluded.

Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble* is just one in a series of emergent literature which calls for a higher grade of empathy in the interaction between human and nonhuman actors, amongst others through storytelling. In that sense, it connects well with the suggestion in chapter 6 of this thesis that further research could for example lead into the realm of narrative medicine. Similar suggestions are indicated by titles such as *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017), which asks the question whether humans and other species can continue to inhabit the earth together with contributions by amongst others Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Ursula Le Guin.<sup>72</sup> A new title announced for autumn 2017, *Covert Plants: Vegetal Consciousness and Agency in an Anthropocentric World*, promises to contribute "to newly emerging discourses on the implications of vegetal life for the arts and culture. This stretches to changes in our perception of 'nature' and to the adapting roles of botany, evolutionary ecology, and environmental aesthetics in the humanities."<sup>73</sup>

In the development of a current curatorial project that connects to these emerging discourses the *inframince* might well be the mischievous agent that is able to shed a different light by pointing to small differences, contributing to Whitehead's "something that matters" (see chapter 2 of this thesis) and equally to Latour's call for "a realism dealing with...*matters of concern*...whose import then will no longer be to debunk but to protect and care, as Donna Haraway would put it?" (Latour, 2004, pp. 231-232). In Latour's reflection in this text on Heidegger's *things* like *gatherings*, he not only refers to their etymological origin, but also to a coming together as a matter of concern in many more folds than the four that Heidegger suggested ("earth, sky, divinities and mortals"). This view can also be useful in a curatorial context in which

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<sup>72</sup> Barad's contribution to this book, 'No Small Matter', stresses the importance of a diffractive methodology which she explains within the context of quantum physics and the notion of entangled 'spacetime-mattering' which connects well to my approach to curating: "...quantum physics ... holds that every bit of matter, every moment in time, every location ... is diffractively/differentially constituted; or more precisely, every "morsel" of spacetime-mattering is diffractively/differentially constituted, each "bit" specifically entangled within others. Spacetime-mattering is not a set of static points, coordinates of a void, but a dynamism of differencing (Barad, 2017, p. G110).

<sup>73</sup> See <https://punctumbooks.com/titles/covert-plants/>

we are dealing with so many ‘things’. Turning them in gatherings and matters of concern with the *inframine* as highlighter can be the way forward.

## Conclusion

This thesis originates from an identified impasse in the curatorial for which it wants to offer a possible solution. The impasse is caused on the one hand through its rapid expansion since the late 1980s and on the other hand through its mainstream appropriation, which leaves it altogether in a confused state. This period has also been one in which curatorial education flourished and the attention upon the curator increased. However, a repercussion of this success is the current mainstream appropriation of the terminology of curating, to the point that the curatorial is in danger of becoming increasingly associated with lifestyle applications related to organising, compiling or clearing out. While these activities may seem to relate to the origin of curating, *taking care*, which this thesis advocates to return to, they are in fact very far removed from it being completely impregnated by the commercial. The impasse in the curatorial has also been identified by the art curatorial community itself, as demonstrated for example, through the publication *The Curatorial Conundrum* (2016), but the solutions that have been proposed by this community of practitioners have been focussed so far mainly on the development of exhibition concepts and a pro-active ‘opening up’ to a wider, non-European field of intellectual and practical activity.

The thesis proposes a strategy of recovery of its most basic working and regarding the curatorial as a creative act. To actively return to and at the same time pave the way for an actualisation of *taking care* as a more grounded solution, this thesis proposes to follow three specific, interacting and partially overlapping narratives that are selected because they offer an in-depth interaction between the human and nonhuman that this thesis considers central to curatorial practice and human behaviour in general. These narratives - laughter, Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the *inframince*, and cybernetics – incorporate intrinsic notions of friction and rhythm that this thesis discusses via the writings and thinking of A.N. Whitehead and Gertrude Stein, using a decisively diffractive and entangled method. This method is explicitly connected to Donna Haraway’s concept of diffraction and Karen Barad’s interpretation and application, alluding to our being implicated in every measurement or observation we make, which is also made apparent through second order cybernetics.

While Whitehead and Stein both call for an ‘imaginative leap’ in their writing by making use of friction, rhythm and repetition, older curatorial models such as the *Wunderkammer* and Warburg’s organisation of his library and *Mnemosyne Atlas* are specifically considered as exemplary models of this approach that demonstrate how the importance of an openness to the unknown, incongruity and coincidence is an important catalyst for new insights and knowledge. For that reason, it is important to consider laughter as one of the three narratives, with its inherently subversive character and dynamics. The thesis explores these qualities in relation to art and more specifically to the counter movement of the *Fumistes* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Paris. This discussion is relevant to the later development (as described in chapter 5) of Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the *inframince* as it stresses laughter related to the mirth of discovery, or laughter as a response to initial disbelief. In both cases, it is related to a notion of knowledge transfer and thus of meaning making. Laughter is seen as a ‘messy moment’ or literal mistake, because laughter causes normal affairs to be disrupted and tracks of thought and insight can be changed. This leads to a parallel method, namely that of Alfred Jarry’s ‘pataphysics – working with seeming contradictions that are applied in a diffractive way, while its consequences are followed in relation to the development of cybernetics and Duchamp’s involvement in it. This leads to seeing the *inframince* as a specific moment of knowledge transfer, drawing attention to minor differences through so-called ‘off-centre’ observations related to certain everyday mundane actions, such as smoking and its relation to breath, or affective notions such as the warmth left behind when a sitter rises from a chair as Duchamp observes. The versatility of the concept in its many disguises, but especially in its connection to the possible, importantly allows it to be regarded as independent of Duchamp’s career as an artist. Via his view on the artist as medium Duchamp can namely be viewed as the (anonymous) conduit for the concept that can be allocated a much wider meaning and application.

In this thesis, the *inframince* has therefore been given a wide range of seemingly contradicting identities via the discussion of second-order cybernetics and its relation to poetic science, which as a methodology allows play with language to open up to new meanings. However, the *inframince* is above all identified as an important subversive game-changer within a context in which the world is considered as

process-based and constantly becoming, (as seen by Whitehead and further developed by, amongst others, Deleuze and Cage). In addition, through its attention to miniscule differences it allows for a connection to the concept of becoming minor as introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, but equally to Serres' concept of the parasite with its own particular form of messiness and relation to both pataphysics and cybernetics.

This thesis has situated laughter within the *inframince* due to laughter's ability to change tracks and see things differently. In their combined constellation laughter and the *inframince* are therefore seen as important factors within a curatorial context. The thesis thus suggests the chronotope of laughter as a specific creative moment within the context of curatorial organisation when it takes place in and through (insightful) laughter. The thesis in this context is building upon the work of, amongst others, Arthur Koestler and David Bohm's creativity and organisation theories.

By drawing upon the ideas discussed above and specifically by following Simon O'Sullivan's suggestion for the application of the becoming minor as operative tool, it becomes possible to use the *inframince* as a vehicle for this operation. This leads to a possible solution for the impasse in the curatorial. Not only does the application of the *inframince* allow for a better basic understanding of the dynamics of the curatorial process, as it is explicitly a view from the ground up, but it also enhances the quality of collaboration between the human and nonhuman through its attention to detail and its explicit openness to differences that lead to new insights.

While curating is currently and increasingly associated with an act of organising, or worse, clearing out, it is much more important to consider it in relation to the notion of knowledge transfer and our implication in it. While chapter 1 of this thesis specifically observed, and lamented the ubiquity of curation and its (commercial) appropriation, it has become clear that curation is an integral part of "the process that is the world" (Panzner, 2015). As an emerging "new new synthesis" Haraway, (2017, p. M28) makes clear the world does not need curating by us, but is constantly curating itself. We can potentially surf on the waves of this process, alert for and alerted by *inframince* differences we are asked to respond to and thus turning the curatorial in a creative act. The thesis suggests that to do so is a means by which we might solve the



impasse of the curatorial and restore its connection to its provenance and connoisseurship.

### *Contribution*

The thesis has formulated a possible solution to the impasse in the curatorial by asking for a ‘leap of imagination’ and a ‘dance of agency’ that lure us into Whitehead’s “something that matters” as indicated at the start of chapter 2 on method. By doing so it stresses the importance of “curation as a verb”, an activity rather than a culture whether in writing, conceptualising or actual exhibition making.

The contribution of this thesis is timely given the increased amount of literature on both the curatorial and the *inframince* during the development of the research. It opens up to in-depth discussions about how the appropriation of the curatorial by the commercial can be viewed as part of a wider phenomenon, as indicated at the end of chapter 6 which considers the *inframince* as a tool. The thesis equally coincides with emerging literature on a wider concern about our dealings with the nonhuman world. As indicated in chapter 7, Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) is just one of the recent publications that allows for a reconnection with Whitehead’s call for “something that matters” and opens it up to Latour’s “matters of concern”. In the light of a re-engineering of curation and the curatorial this thesis suggests a return to its etymological origins of ‘taking care’. Taking care means being attentive and empathic and in this process the *inframince*, with its inherent connection to laughter and cybernetics, can potentially play an important role by pointing to the small differences that can lead to mirth and new insights in the solution of curatorial and other problems.

As identified in the introduction the timeliness of this thesis is also demonstrated by some recent developments that seem to give cause for optimism. This year’s conference of the LUMA Foundation moves for instance away from a global view and has as its subject “Curating after the Global: Roadmaps for the Present”.<sup>74</sup> It aims to look at, respectively,

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<sup>74</sup> *The Curatorial Conundrum* was the outcome of the LUMA conference in 2014, “The Future Curatorial What Not and the Study What? Conundrum”. The conference of 2017 takes place in Arles from 14-16 September. At the time of writing the outcome was not yet available.

‘options’ in which routes for future globalisms are mapped out; ... ‘road blocks’ in the form of new physical, economic, and psychic nationalisms, and the apparent lack of alternative forms of international solidarity, specifically within the arts and as exemplified in some prominent curatorial practices[; and finally] ‘pathways’ for curating and instituting posited *after* the global, that is after the historical emergence and possible demise of a particular globalism (*"Curating after the Global: Roadmaps for the Present" - Announcements - e-flux*, 2017).

One of the major curatorial educational programmes, De Appel in Amsterdam, makes a strong statement by stating to be focusing on ‘de-universalisation’:

This curatorial *un*-method offers a conscious rejection of the increasing generalisation of curatorial practices and explores alternative ways of conceptualizing, developing and implementing exhibitions, performances, public programmes, gatherings and screenings. The Curatorial Programme responds firmly towards far-reaching standardisation of curatorial practices, which is increasingly learned in the internationally proliferating academic training programmes for curators. Another factor of standardisation is the flattening out of the autonomous art field, in which there often seems to be little difference in terms of exhibition models and artistic attention, between the institutional field of museums and of smaller art institutions and between the biennial circuit and that of art fairs (*De Appel*, 2017).

As part of its curatorial programme De Appel, who also explicitly took part in this year’s LUMA conference, further introduces this year three seminars that focus on the sub-themes of Slowness, Conflict and Joy which seems to further confirm some of the issues this thesis has discussed.

By drawing attention to the basic workings of the curatorial, namely its collaboration between the human and nonhuman, or as introduced in chapter 6, Whitehead’s

‘togetherness’ and Haraway’s ‘making-with’ in chapter 7, the thesis makes a case for a different approach within curation and curatorial education. It calls for a training in what the thesis has suggested are the basic elements of curation, namely, a heightened awareness of the environment in which the curatorial activity takes place, including all ‘critters’, based on the notion of taking care. It is therefore seen as important that before the development of any concept, aspirant curators first learn through the application of the *inframince*, how to engage with space and the collaboration between the human and nonhuman in it, including obviously, that between human and human, in a non-hierarchical way.

One of the drivers of this thesis is thus to contribute to educational training in the curatorial to which end chapter 7, The *inframince* in action, was specifically conceived. In this chapter, a framework is sketched, which is based on the *Wunderkammer* and Warburg model, and a range of exhibitions and proposals are revisited to demonstrate a consistency of personal interaction with the human and nonhuman that is not quantifiable, but in which the *inframince* is a constant. While not pretending to have an overly different approach to curating, this chapter nevertheless aims to focus on elements as slowness in development, openness and use of contingency as well as an in-depth working relation with artists and others with whom a friendship is developed that can lead to durable and inspirational collaborations. This approach offers the nutritional basis that leads to potentially original concepts for exhibitions and the qualitative execution of them. The consequence is that it is necessary to stay as far as possible away from the rat race that curating can be and rather concentrate on its essentials. Duchamp’s attitude towards his artist practice, which included a considerable amount of curating and which for a long time gave the impression he was no longer active as such, but merely chess playing, is in that sense an important example. The fact that he could develop a concept as the *inframince* that, as this thesis demonstrates, is highly versatile and can in principle exist totally independent of its inventor, is in that respect telling. This thesis asserts that the curatorial has an intrinsic important function in the world but not as part of a life style or overly career directed approach. It is an important way to learn how the world operates, if we know how to surf along.

### *Further research*

While the discussions found within this thesis offer the potential of practical application within curatorial studies, the versatility of the concept of the *inframince* also allows for a wider application in other fields. The thesis has shown how the *inframince* can be viewed as strongly embedded in a historical, scientific and philosophical context via a wide range of literature. The versatility of the concept means it is not only possible to disconnect it from its origins, but in addition, to actively apply it. This thesis has identified a relationship of the *inframince* with language, as a consequence of which the research suggests that there are also other possible avenues for application, for instance in narrative medicine and new media studies. When explored in relation to emerging literature discussing our dealings with the nonhuman and our damaged planet, the *inframince* can potentially play the mischievous jester that points to otherwise unnoticed elements that matter and require attention.

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## Appendix

## **Presentations at conferences and seminars, lectures 2010-2017**

- Transtechnology Research Seminar *Narrative medicine: Pathos and the inframince membrane*, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth, UK, 18 January 2017
- Transtechnology Research Seminar *Ephemeral Affections: Mobile Absolutes (or Absolute Mobiles)*, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth, UK, 16 December 2015
- Presentation *Slow/Networked Media Art and the Museum: Who Takes Care of Whom?* Renewable Futures Conference, RIXc, Riga, 9 October 2015
- Poster presentation at *Off the Lip – Transdisciplinary Approaches to Cognitive Innovation* conference, University of Plymouth, UK 9 September 2015
- Transtechnology Research Seminar *The Opaque Lens: Affect and Subversion in Media Practices*, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth, UK, 18 February 2015
- Transtechnology Research Conference *Public Dialogues – Dialogues at the Interlude: Between Body, Artefact and Discourse*, Session 6: ‘Artist, Territory, History’ – Chair: Edith Doove (Transtechnology Research) with Pascale Weber (University Paris 1), Jean Delsaux (Université d’Auvergne Clermont 1) and Claudia Loch (University of Brasilia), Plymouth Arts Centre, 13 July 2013
- Presentation *Territory Beyond the Frame*, Deleuze Conference, Lisbon, 10 July 2013
- Transtechnology Research Seminar *Categories of Partial Knowledge* with Martyn Woodward, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth, UK, 15 May 2013
- Research seminar *On dialogue and the nonsensical*, Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth, UK, 16 May 2012
- Transtechnology Research Seminar *On Translation*, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth, UK, 26 October 2011



- Lecture on Wolfgang Tillmans, British Art Show 7 Associated Artists events, Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth, UK, 20 October 2011
- Visiting lecturer for Sarah Bennett, MA students, University of Plymouth, UK, 2011
- Visiting lecturer for prof. Stephanie Pratt on curatorial practice, University of Plymouth, UK, 2010
- Conversation on curatorial practice – for MA Curatorial Practice students from University College Falmouth/Virginia Button, Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth, UK, 2 November 2010
- Debates on ‘Art & technology’ – two debates with a.o. Peter Beyls, Pieter-Paul Mortier, Angelo Vermeulen, Group T, Leuven, B, 19-20 May 2010
- Presentation *Exhibition Making as Research*, Conference Arts Research: Publics and purposes, GradCAM, Dublin, IRE, 19 February 2010
- PhDArts Conference *The Artist as Researcher* – moderator of parallel sessions, member of the plenary panel discussion, 5-6 February 2010, Royal Academy of the Arts, The Hague, NL

## Exhibitions

For full overview see <https://bureaudoove.wordpress.com/about-2/overview-exhibitions-and-projects/>

- Proposal ‘*Surfing*’ for Biennale d’Anglet, France, spring 2017
- *BUREAU DOOVE presents: Ballard, Blow & Driftingspace*, Devonport Guildhall, Plymouth, UK as part of the Plymouth Art Weekender, 25-26 September 2015
- Curatorial concept as participation in *The Theoretical Show*, instigated by EFA Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York, 14 November – 20 December 2014. Followed by setting up of independent blog to communicate to a wider audience – <https://theoreticalshow.wordpress.com>
- Online curating – proposal ‘*The Imminent, Becoming, Ever Changing*’ for The Naked on invitation – <http://www.thenaked.nl/contributors/edith-doove>, August 2013

- *Platform P at the Duke*, Duke of Cornwall Hotel, Plymouth, 4-6 November 2011 - <https://platformp.wordpress.com/>  
– *Spot ON, curatorial research project*, Faculty of Arts, Scott Building, University of Plymouth, 2010-2011 - <https://spotonedp.wordpress.com/>
- *wijheizijwei*, Several venues in Flanders, June-October 2010, for the Belgian ngo Vredeseilanden; on the collaboration of artists and farmers to highlight the discussion on foreign aid and culture with Berlinde De Bruyckere, Johan Creten, Nathalie Hunter, Lucy & Jorge Orta, Koenraad Tinel, Koen Vanmechelen
- *Parallellepiped* – *between art & science*, Museum M, Leuven, exhibition 28 January - 25 April 2010; on the collaboration between art and science for the City of Leuven in collaboration with K.U. Leuven with amongst others Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven, Ronny Delrue, Nick Ervinck, Koen Vanmechelen, professors Géry d'Ydewalle and Koen Van Laere

## Overview publications 2010-2017

### Essays

- Doove, E. (2014). Poet as Machine, on Calvino's Cybernetics and Ghosts. In: M. Punt and M. Blassnigg, ed., *Media Archaeology and Cognition - Transtechnology Research Reader 2014/15*, 1st ed. Plymouth: Transtechnology Research, pp.150-156.
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## **Essays**

## Exploring the Curatorial as Creative Act – Part I Hidden Similarities

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### Abstract

Curatorial practice is usually related to the organisation of the material, of art works and other objects, connecting it mostly to a managerial role. Shifting the focus to an immaterial in-between, an interval, the seemingly marginal or peripheral become constitutional elements for the curatorial as a creative act. Four, seemingly unconnected, antagonists are brought together in this first reflection on the curatorial act that takes the 2010-2011 Transtechnology Research seminar on Warburg as its starting point: Aby Warburg as an important advocate of the iconology of the interval and as curator *avant la lettre*, Alfred Jarry's introducing the idea of paired books, Marcel Duchamp as the inventor of the *inframince* or *infrathin*, and Arthur Koestler for his notion of the bisociative act. Warburg's working method behind his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (and library) is on the one hand contextualised by bringing it into relation with broader movements of his time such as the trend of the scientific atlas and the collecting of newspaper clippings, whereas on the other hand the linking to more specific insights as Koestler's library angel, Duchamp's use of the *infrathin* and Jarry's logic of the absurd, tries to define new ways of dealing with the curatorial. In looking for the 'hidden similarities' between these four this paper preliminarily tries to outline the territory in which further research into the dynamics behind the curatorial process will take place.

### Warburg - On Organisation and the Making of Meaning

The material Aby Warburg used for constructing his *Mnemosyne Atlas* existed of images coming from both high and low culture, ranging from reproductions of art works to advertisements or images from newspaper articles. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Warburg researched the legacy of antiquity in the imagery of later epochs, from the Renaissance and the Baroque to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time he started collecting books for what would eventually be known as the Warburg Library (<http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/home/>).

Organising, in a dynamic and ever-changing, creative fashion is at the core of both Warburg's library and Atlas. As Michaud has suggested Warburg's constant movements during his organisational working sessions in his library, could be compared with the so-called "danced causalities" Warburg had witnessed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century while visiting the Hopi and Pueblo Indians, "and the collection of books as a whole was both the objectification of his thought and an allegory of the world and the bodies moving in it" (1998, p. 235). While organising his library, Warburg made use of what he called the 'law of the good neighbour'. Saxl described this law as "[t]he book of which one knew was in most cases not the book which one needed. The unknown neighbour on the shelf contained the vital information, although from its title one might not have guessed this" (Saxl in Gombrich, 1986 [1970], p. 327). Years later Arthur Koestler would make a similar observation when he introduced his notion of the "library angel" as frequently experienced meaningful coincidences in which the right book or reference suddenly presents itself at a

moment of need (1973, pp. 161ff.).

Warburg also made use of his ‘law of the good neighbour’ in the organisation of the material on the panels of his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. His choice of an atlas as a way to organise and express his research into the legacy of antiquity might seem strange but actually fits in a widespread use of the scientific atlas to objectify knowledge that was especially prolific during the second half of the 19th century, both in relation to its large size and focus on images. As Daston and Gallison point out illustrations are “[...] the *raison d’être* of the atlas. To call atlas images “illustrations” at all is to belie their primacy [...]. [...] in most atlases from the eighteenth century on, pictures are the alpha and the omega of the genre” (2007, p. 32). Interestingly the term ‘atlas’ while deriving from Gerardus Mercator’s 1595 world map *Atlas, or Cosmographical Meditations on the Fabric of the World*, “[...] spread to astronomical maps by the early eighteenth century” which seems to tie in with Warburg’s interest in astronomy (Daston and Gallison, 2007, pp. 22-23; p. 421 nt 5). And although the size of Warburg’s Atlas might seem unusual as well, this also fits the trend. The big difference is that Warburg tried to objectify material that was highly subjective in its combination, to convey new knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Also in contrast with the average atlas the *Mnemosyne Atlas* was presented on separate panels with its images pinned onto these, rather than in a book. This stresses the ephemeral and fleeting nature of their constitution, which could easily be adjusted at will. The images are not presented in a way that is similar for all panels but that is adjusted according to the subject of each and leaving more or less open space between them accordingly. This leads to Warburg’s interest for “an iconology of intervals” to which he alluded in his journal of 1929 (Gombrich, 1970, p. 253; Michaud, 1998, p. 252). As Michaud states: ‘This iconology is based not on the meaning of the figures – the foundation of interpretation for Warburg’s disciples, beginning with Panofsky – but of the interrelationships between the figures in their complex, autonomous arrangement, which cannot be reduced to discourse’ (2004, p. 252). It thus alludes to an immaterial in-between space that constitutes the meaning of the objects on either side. It was the space between the images in Warburg’s Atlas, but also that between the books in his library, alluding to their neighbourliness, “the distance between the images, which tends to invert the parameters of time and space, produces tensions between the objects depicted and, inductively, between the levels of reality from which these objects proceed” (Michaud, p. 253). In his recent catalogue *Atlas* George Didi-Huberman sees a parallel with the ‘nomad science’ of Deleuze and Guattari in their *Mille Plateaux*:

“It is a knowledge that is ‘problematic’ and not ‘axiomatic’, founded on a ‘model of becoming and of heterogeneity that contrasts with the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant” [Didi-Hubermann, 2010, p. 54].

## Newspaper Clippings

The way Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* is organised (as in principle a collection of images), makes it tempting to see a connection with the practice of the collage and montage used by Cubists and Dadaists. The connection between Warburg and Dada is however not situated in an actual meeting or interest in each other's work, but rather in a shared *Zeitgeist* or frame of mind, more or less similar to his choice of the atlas. What seems to connect Warburg with the practice of Berlin Dadaists, such as Georg Grosz, is the widespread use of the newspaper clippings collections in the 1920s. As Anke te Heesen states: "Since the Renaissance, 'cutting and pasting' has been part and parcel of an active (philological) relation to a textual tradition" (2008, p. 298). Warburg's use of *Zettelkästen* to collect newspaper clippings and other materials for his research fitted in fact within a tradition in which "[n]umerous scientists, artists, and writers took part in collecting newspaper articles around 1900" (Heesen, 2008, p. 299). Although te Heesen does not mention Warburg, she gives several examples of other scientists such as Franz Maria Feldhaus, an historian of technology, who, starting in 1904, collected everything available on the history of technology. But also a writer as Alfred Döblin made extensive use of newspaper clippings when writing his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. As te Heesen remarks: "The collages of [Dadaists] Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch would be inconceivable without newspaper and journals cuttings" (2008, p. 299). And [f]or Grosz and Heartfield, clipping newspapers and magazines provided a realistic picture of social and political conditions of the time. Like Tzara in his instructions for making a Dadaist poem, they were convinced that everyone could take a newspaper and scissors and make a collage. Everyone could be an artist because reality and its material fragments are available everywhere and can be assembled as in a factory" (2008, p. 319).

Grosz held a very systematic newspaper collection "with prefabricated and machine-produced elements" (Heesen, 2008, p. 321) from which he could assemble his montages or collages like a mechanic. The scientist Anton Gehrcke at the same time held a large collection solely on Albert Einstein to gather evidence against his theory of relativity. Gehrcke glued his clippings on pieces of scrap paper, possibly in the order in which he obtained them (Heesen, 2008). Sometimes this makes unwillingly for artistic encounters as on a page with several images of the Einsteinturm in Potsdam (see for instance p. 309, fig. 8.2). In fact, one could state that Warburg's idea of the good neighbour is also at work here.

Warburg himself had been collecting newspaper clippings from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a noteworthy period from 1914 when he and his assistants collected anything on the political and military happenings of the time, as Theiss-Abendroth states, in an attempt to "dissipate" the war (2010, pp. 28-29). His *Mnemosyne Atlas* would eventually include reproductions of "art prints; newspaper clippings; leaflets; posters; stamps; photographs of sculptures, reliefs, frescoes, friezes, carpets and figurines; paintings; drawings; genealogical tables; sketches; illuminated manuscripts; and press photos" (<http://www.osaarchivum.org/galeria/catalogue/2008/warburg/index.html>).



### Jarry's Paired Books

Although Warburg in the first place is an art historian, his working methods clearly resemble an artistic and curatorial approach, so much so that today he's seen as one of the first (creative) curators. In the press release for his recent exhibition 'Atlas', which is based on the work of Warburg and his influence in contemporary art, Didi-Hubermann states: "To make an atlas is to reconfigure space, to redistribute it, in short, to redirect it: to dismantle it where we thought it was continuous; to reunite it where we thought there were boundaries" (<http://www.afterall.org/online/atlas-how-to-carry-the-world-on-one-s-back>).

This crossing of the boundaries between scientist and artist and reuniting them, is made in a much more conscious way by Alfred Jarry and his 'Pataphysics or pseudoscience'. In the posthumously published *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (1911) Jarry interestingly introduces the idea of paired books when describing the (ideal) library of Dr. Faustroll that consists of only 27 books, "ranging from canonic symbolic works (Mallarmé, Verlaine, Poe translated by Baudelaire); books by friends of Jarry and big names of the magazines of that period (Rachilde, Gustave Kahn, Léon Bloy), as well as books that could be considered as children's reading (a story by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Mille et une Nuits, The theater of Florian), or texts that fall outside of any category (works by Rabelais, Gospel of Luke, Chants de Maldoror)" (Schuh, 2008, author's translation). Schuh stresses the fact that these seemingly unequal books become equal through a shared logic that resides in the individuality of the person that has brought them together and thus forms, through his course or route of reader a unique library (2008). This consequently leads to various chance meetings and possible insights between and into the elements that are in this mix.

### Duchamp's Inframince

Marcel Duchamp flirts in his art production, texts and collaborations, almost continuously with pseudoscience. Although initially just regarded as a minor idea, the concept of the *inframince* or *infrathin* can be considered as a tongue-in-cheek scientific idea that essentially lies at the heart of his work. It cannot be clearly defined and only be demonstrated through examples given by Duchamp himself, such as the marriage between smoke and breath when someone smokes. It's a grey, undefined zone, full of potentiality that can well be brought into relation with Warburg's *Zwischenreich*. As Antje Von Graevenitz has recently demonstrated Duchamp in fact evolved several versions of *inframince*; "the desert-like intermediate zone as interval in the interaction of two states" (2010, p. 216). As von Graevenitz declares: "Duchamp does not define the hybrid notion *inframince* in any comprehensive and abstract way, but rather in forty-six different notes published only after his death", in which number 16 defines the *infra-mince* as an allegory on forgetting (2010, p. 219). Although the numbering of the notes is probably not Duchamp's work, the first note seems to express a kind of programme according to von Graevenitz, when it states that "Le possible est un *infra-mince*" (The possible is an *infra-mince*) (2010, p. 219).

This “desert-like intermediate” zone is continuously fed by Duchamp’s interest in a certain bipolarity and the way this can be negotiated. There is for instance his interest in the relation or opposition between man and woman that he negotiated through his female alter ego Rrose Selavy. This opposition found its clearest output in his love of chess that made him pursue a parallel career as chess master. It even led him to write *L’Opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées* (Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled), also known as corresponding squares, with chess master/theorist Vital Halberstadt which can easily be compared with a mathematical science book. No surprise that Duchamp was influenced by the absurdity of Alfred Jarry’s *patafysica* that the writer defined in his *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* as “the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments” (1996, p. 22).

### **Koestler and the Bisociative Act**

Apart from the earlier mentioned library angel, Arthur Koestler also introduced the concept of the so-called bisociative act which basically “connects previously unconnected matrices of experience; it makes us understand what is to be awake, to be living on several planes at once (to quote T.S. Eliot, somewhat out of context)” (Koestler, 1964, p. 45). According to Koestler the creative act always operates on more than one plane, being “a double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed” (1964, pp. 35-36). This now not only comes very close to what Duchamp seemed to intend with his *inframince* or *infrathin*, but also connects to Jarry’s paired books, Warburg’s good neighbour and obviously Koestler’s own library angel.

### **Conclusion**

In his introduction to his book *Cybernetics*, Norbert Wiener in 1948 observed how the boundary regions of science “offer the richest opportunities to the qualified investigator”. Researchers like Jarry, Warburg, Duchamp and Koestler himself all reside exactly in these boundary regions where unexpected connections and observations can be made. (Despite their different backgrounds it is exactly their adventurous and unconventional research that binds them.)

Warburg’s non-linear and non-chronological approach seems almost to be a precursor of the cybernetic approach. In further research, these notions will be investigated further, especially in view of Koestler’s connection between laughter and insight. The above can be seen as an exercise true to his view of the three domains of creativity: humour, discovery and art, in which the logical pattern “consists in the discovery of hidden similarities” (Koestler, 1964, p. 27).

### **Notes**

1 Because of the oversize format of these works, the word “atlas” came in the eighteenth century to designate a very large size [...] of drawing paper. [...] The term was apparently transferred to all illustrated scientific works in the mid-nineteenth century, when figures were printed separately from explanatory texts, in large-format supplements – hence “atlases,” deriving from their size: for example: text volume in octo, accompanying atlas in folio (Daston and Gallison, 2007, p. 421 nt. 5). Without

referring to this wider trend of the scientific atlas, according to Gombrich there was even one specific atlas that might have inspired Warburg to develop his idea for a picture atlas. “The ethnologist Adolf Bastian, with whose work Warburg had come into contact in his formative years, had accompanied one of his most theoretical books, *Die Welt in ihren Spiegelungen unter dem Wandel des Völkergedankens* (‘The World in its Reflections in the Changing Thoughts of the Peoples’), [in 1887] with an ‘ethnological picture-book’ in the form of an ‘atlas’” (Gombrich, 1970, p. 285). Michaud, however, finds the importance that Gombrich grants to Bastian exaggerated (1998, p. 369, nt. 26).

2 The allusion to the possible makes it tempting to connect this statement with the notion of quantum physics or theory, which will be investigated in further research.

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## **Exploring the Curatorial as Creative Act Part II: The Artist as Found System**

*Edith Doove*

### **Abstract**

This paper is intended as a thought experiment around the idea of the artist as found system, open-ended and in constant becoming, as an alternative and more flexible solution for the usual art historic conceptualizing of artists. Inspired by Daumal's Mount Analogue and the island of Mandelbrot it makes use of a pataphysical, pragmatist approach, exploring the realm between fiction and reality, and tries to apply Duchamp's *infra-mince* in order to develop a system(atic) thinking about the artist(ic).

The individual always interests me, more than movements which simply serve to group together young people. (Marcel Duchamp)<sup>1</sup>

### **The Artist and its frameworks**

Without wanting to dismiss the whole of art history, it has a tendency to confine art and artists in neat, grid-like movements. Although this was initially helpful in describing the history of art when the discipline itself first emerged, one can question whether today such historic labels as 'expressionism' or 'conceptual art', to name just two, really give an accurate view of reality or whether they mainly serve various other means, such as nationalism or marketing.

The act of confining, boxing in, 'gridding' in, is typically used when we are confronted with something wild, ungraspable, that we want to contain, understand and research. As Grosz (2008, p. 11) indicates, this seems to be intrinsic to the arts: "The emergence of the 'frame' is the condition of all the arts and is the particular contribution of architecture to the taming of the virtual, the territorialisation of the uncontrollable forces of the earth." She continues: "Framing is how chaos becomes territory. Framing is the means by which objects are delimited, qualities unleashed and art made possible." (2008, p. 17) However porous these frameworks may be, what they cannot do, and in a way also refuse to do, is to deal with the overlap, the transit zone, the unpredictable and unknowable. The infinitesimal smallness of this zone recalls Duchamp's *'infra-mince'*, a concept that he could only describe through examples or equivalences, all of which were inhibited by a certain friction, as in, for example, the marriage between breath and smoke when smoking, the warmth of a chair that is about to be left, but also just "the possible" (Duchamp, 1999, p. 10). It is this kind of openness to possible and maybe unusual solutions that this paper explores.

Although relatively recent developments in the world of art studies seem to take a more open approach, the focus stays mainly on the artefact, which is still framed, albeit now in wider contexts. This becomes especially problematic when discussing the artist, the one that makes art, the producer, who is inadvertently put into boxes where she does not necessarily belong. In order to overcome this problem, this paper looks at the possibility of seeing artists as 'found systems', taking the island as a metaphor, connecting it to the role islands play in the work of Benoît Mandelbrot, how this can be connected with art and 'pataphysics' (a science of imaginary

solutions in which everything is equivalent), and finally how out of all this we can distil the idea of the found system as a way to deal with the artist(ic). This could potentially contribute to the field of art studies, especially where it fails, for the time being, to address the issue of the individual, contemporary and lesser-known artist.

A way of approaching this issue is through cybernetics, the study of systems, that emerged in the 1940s in the work of Norbert Wiener, amongst others. Much scholarly work has already been done on the connection between so-called ‘second-order’ cybernetics and art, especially in the 1960s. Such work, however, has tended to comprise a history of cybernetic art, focusing on objects and installations made from a cybernetic point of view (Shanken, 2002, pp. 255-277). Although there is much in this approach that moves the focus away from the object and towards process, the emphasis is still largely on the art produced and less on the artist herself. In looking at the possibility of the artist as a found system, Stafford Beer’s notion of an “exceedingly complex system” that is “not fully knowable or adequately predictable” seems to be of better use (cited in Pickering, 2010, pp. 222-223). According to Beer, these systems can only have probabilistic forms. As examples he gives the economy, the brain and the company, a combination of which seems to fit the concept of the artist excellently. Connecting systems theory with art history is in itself not new. For instance, Halsall (2008), influenced by the work of Luhmann (2000), has extensively explored this connection. Halsall also makes use of the concept of the complex system in order to make a connection to the art world. As in the world of art studies, however, there is no room for the artist, only for the artwork, with the focus on its merits as a means of communication.<sup>1</sup>

### **On the importance of islands as found systems**

Although the connection between artists, islands and found systems might seem farfetched, it is well worth starting this investigation with an exploration of the latter two. Quite early on in the development of his fractal landscapes, Mandelbrot makes the somewhat surprising connection between these (and their mountainous landscapes) and the science-fiction world of H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896: 2012), thus alluding to a connection between the fictitious and the real. As Samuel (2012, p. 24) points out, “(t)he fictional Dr. Moreau had tried to create a new world with man-animal hybrids, and it was for similar purposes that Dr. Mandelbrot was using those mathematical hybrids from the nineteenth century”.<sup>2</sup> With the help of his fractals, Mandelbrot was indeed capable of creating completely plausible islands, just as ‘monstrous’ as the nineteenth century mathematician and philosopher of science Jules Henri Poincaré had indicated the new mathematical functions to be (Samuel, 2012, p. 24). This was mainly due to the fact that an island is, so to speak, a fairly simple system, as is described below.

Daumal (1952: 2010, p. 32), in his pataphysical, unfinished novel *Mount Analogue*, an account of a voyage to an imaginary island, says: “For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue, its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible to human beings as nature made them. It must be unique and it must exist geographically. The gateway to the invisible must be visible.” In Wells’s book, the island is clearly host to the invisible, or the preferably not-to-be-seen, the monstrous. And possibly that was also one of the factors that Mandelbrot alluded to as his fractals were/are both visible and invisible.

As with many islands that harbour some unfathomable secret, Wells’s island, just like

Daumal's, is situated somewhere in the Pacific. Thus, although it is fictitious, it exists geographically.

The island, which was of irregular outline and lay low upon the wide sea, had a total area, I suppose, of seven or eight square miles. It was volcanic in origin, and was now fringed on three sides by coral reefs. Some fumaroles to the northward, and a hot spring, were the only vestiges of the forces that had long since originated it. Now and then a faint quiver of earthquake would be sensible, and sometimes the ascent of the spire of smoke would be rendered tumultuous by gusts of steam. But that was all (Wells, 1896: 2012, p. 80).<sup>3</sup>

As for Daumal's island, this seems to have entered reality from the fictional and back again, with the recent find and subsequent 'undiscovery' of the so-called 'Google's Phantom Island', a non-existent island that somehow slipped into Google maps, images of which have more than a close resemblance to some of Mandelbrot's constructions. Slipping from the analogue into the digital, so to speak. The origins of this Phantom Island are said to lie in the nineteenth century. According to Shaun Higgins, librarian at the Auckland Museum, who has looked into the matter, Sandy Island was discovered by a whaler called the *Velocity* in 1876, and shows up in an admiralty chart dated 1908.<sup>4</sup> Following Daumal's instructions in *Mount Analogue* on how to find the island in his book, and viewing it ironically, missing Sandy Island might simply have been due to failing to approach it from the right angle.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, it was around this time that Alfred Jarry, the father of pataphysics, "the science of imaginary solutions" (1911: 1996, p. 22), also conceived a special interest in both Wells and islands. As Brotchie (2011, p. 229) declares in his biography of the surrealist author, in Jarry's *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll*, Pataphysician (1911: 1996), the succession of islands that are navigated by Faustroll, Bosse-de-Nage and Panmuphle "represent the imaginary worlds created by artists and writers associated with the Symbolists and hence with Jarry's life in Paris", and among "(t)hese miraculous lands, to be found amid the streets of the capital" was, for instance, the Isle of Bara, a reference to the Rue Bara, the address of Jarry's friend Gaston Danville in Paris (Brotchie, 2011, p. 227). Faustroll's collection of books, not surprisingly, contained *The Odyssey* and Jules Verne's *Voyage to the Centre of the Earth* (the entrance to which is famously located on Iceland). Amongst the "miraculous lands" that the Faustroll expedition visits are various islands: the Amorphous Isle, the Fragrant Isle, the Isle of Ptyx, the Isle of Her, the Isle of Cyril and the Ringing Isle. At the beginning of the voyage, Faustroll indicates, although maybe not very favourably for the general proposition of this paper, that...

... this dead body is not only an island but a man .... Only his brain – and the anterior motor centers of the medulla – are dead. And because of this inertia he is, on our navigator route, not a man but an island, and this is why ... I find him mentioned on my fluvial map as Isle of Cack (Jarry, 1911: 1996, p. 33).

### **Analogy and the act of translation**

While this analysis of real and fictitious islands, with its initial indication of an analogy between island and man, might appear to be failing to address the discussion of the artist as a found system, it is exactly the concept of 'analogy' that was both fundamental for Mandelbrot's thinking (Samuel, 2012, p. 34) and Jarry's pataphysics.

Jarry's analogous, tongue-in-cheek thinking and writing was influential for Duchamp's development of, amongst other things, his concept of the 'infra-mince'.

Analogy can, in a certain way, be seen as a form of translation, and in this context it is remarkable how much attention Jarry pays to the subject of the translation of texts. Of the twenty-seven 'equivalent' books in Faustroll's possession there is a volume of Baudelaire's translations of Poe, as well as "[a]n odd volume of *The Thousand and One Nights*, in the Galland translation" (Jarry, 1911: 1996, pp.10-11). Later, Faustroll conjures an element of each of these equivalents in the third dimension, including "[f]rom Baudelaire, E.A. Poe's *Silence*, taking care to retranslate Baudelaire's translation into Greek" (1911: 1996, p.17). Jarry translated several texts himself and was well acquainted with Henry-D. Davray, the translator of several of Wells's books into French, such as *The Time Machine* – a book that was particularly influential for Jarry. It led him to ...

...the idea of writing a paper which would explore the physics of such a machine, and show that it was theoretically possible. Or at least, he had the idea of writing a text that appeared to do this, since there is no reason to believe that Jarry saw his [essay], 'Commentary and Instructions for the Practical Construction of the Time Machine', as anything but a work of fiction, albeit one disguised as a scientific paper (Brotchie, 2011, p. 240).

In the realm of pataphysics, it makes sense that there is no real distinction between fiction and reality.<sup>6</sup> By thus connecting the concepts of analogy, translation and pataphysical equivalence, we can continue our journey.

Deleuze (2004, p. 9) begins his text 'Desert Islands' with the statement "Geographers say there are two kinds of islands. This is valuable information for the imagination because it confirms what the imagination already knew. Nor is it the only case where science makes mythology more concrete, and mythology makes science more vivid." Thus, it is an example of where fiction and reality meet, and where possibly the core to found systems lies. The kind of island referred to above is what Deleuze, or geographers in general, define as 'oceanic': "Oceanic islands are originary, essential islands" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 9), in contrast to continental islands that are accidental, derived. Both can be deserted, however. Further on in this text, Deleuze states:

To that question so dear to the old explorers – "which creatures live on deserted islands?" – one could only answer: human beings live there already, but uncommon humans, they are absolutely separate, absolute creators, in short, an Idea of humanity, a prototype, a man who would almost be a god, a woman who would be a goddess, a great Amnesiac, a pure Artist, a consciousness of Earth and Ocean, an enormous hurricane, a beautiful witch, a statue from the Easter Islands. There you have a human being who precedes itself. Such a creature on a deserted island would be the deserted island itself, insofar as it imagines and reflects itself in its first movement. (Deleuze, 2004, p. 11).<sup>7</sup>

But this "unity of the deserted island and its inhabitant is ... not actual, only imaginary .... This is to state once again that the essence of the deserted island is imaginary and not actual, mythological and not geographical" (2004,

pp.11-12). Let us nevertheless take this fiction seriously, or as Deleuze indicates, “get back to the movement of the imagination that makes the deserted island a model, a prototype of the collective soul” (2004, p. 13). Whether the island is deserted or inhabited, as in the case of Faustroll’s exploits, is of lesser importance.

### **The artist as a found system**

The above introduction to the island as a found system, that is to say, as a system of matter and immateriality, between fiction and reality, or between mythology and science, a seemingly simple but, at the same time, exceedingly complex system that is unpredictable and secretive, can now be used to explore its possible use when studying artists. In order to do so, it is important to return to Mandelbrot. Although Mandelbrot never considered his scientific images, hand-drawn or computer-printed, to be art, there is a constant underlying interest in bridging the gap between his science and art. He does this through his reference to Wells, by signing some of his drawings and prints, but even more explicitly through his article ‘Scalebound or scaling shapes: a useful distinction in the visual arts and the natural sciences’, published in *Leonardo* in 1981, and to which Samuel (2012) dedicates a whole chapter. In this article there is an attempt to apply his fractal sets to visual arts, indicated by author Juliet Koss as a possible “rough sketch for future analysis” (cited in Samuel, 2012, p. 153). Mandelbrot uses his idea of scalebound or scaling shapes for a discussion on architecture, but indicates it could have wider application. By using the metaphor of the island in Deleuze’s sense, as a model, we are able to identify the artist with an island, and via Mandelbrot’s fractals, with a found system that operates independently of the dimension we are looking at. The notion of the found system can therefore be of use for any artist whether well-known or emerging.<sup>8</sup>

Belgian artist Peter Beyls is an interesting test case, as his work closely relates to that of Mandelbrot. In principle any artist, or in any case, following Deleuze’s definition, “any separate, absolute creator”, could be seen as a found system. Beyls, however, a pioneer in computer art who, unlike Mandelbrot, has always indicated that he considers his computer or plotter drawings as art, talks about his excitement when visualising found systems.<sup>9</sup> But whereas Mandelbrot would not even touch a computer, Beyls constantly (re)programmes himself, leading to a seemingly endless repository of found systems. In contrast to the visualisations of Mandelbrot, that are often predictable, direct mappings of his algorithms, Beyls aims for an emergent and unpredictable complexity which links back to Beer’s notion of unknowability.<sup>10</sup> Beyls (2013) points out:

A fractal is a simple mathematical formula, a recursive expression that generates predictable results. It’s a closed formula and not a system and therefore can’t generate a non-anticipatable complexity. A confrontation can’t take place, as there are no dynamic affinities between a critical mass of interacting components. A fractal therefore is the antithesis of the idea of cybernetics (Beyls, 2013).<sup>11</sup>

The fractal is itself, however, the result of thinking of, and in, an exceedingly complex, unpredictable system, whereas this paper’s proposal mainly concentrates on its recurrence as islands and thus only on its visual aspect at different levels of perception.



## Conclusion

Navigating the various islands discussed above, whether in the physical or fictional world, inhabited, deserted or somewhere in-between, makes clear that a true understanding of their potentiality demands an individual approach. This is where they come in useful when trying to develop an analogy with the artist as a found system. From a distance, either islands or artists seem easily identifiable and classifiable, being a formation of land in the middle of a sea or ocean on the one hand, and a creative being on the other. A lot of information gets lost, however, when using only this form of categorisation. The close-up obviously provides different information. The visibility of the fractal islands and their connection to the so-called 'continent' caused Mandelbrot considerable problems during the development of his fractal system as they initially evaded the computer: "[I]t was technically impossible to draw the connecting lines, or filaments, with the existing graphic programs" (Samuel, 2012, p. 40). The moment this technical problem was overcome, however, it was clear there is a connection. Islands may seem to be isolated but are, as in Mandelbrot's case, always somehow connected to larger structures. In this context, Duchamp's 'infra-mince' can be seen as an indication of the dynamics between fiction and reality, between island and mainland, between science and art, a theatrical green room or waiting room for things to happen, to come into being, and possibly the core connection between art, science and found systems. Proposing the concept of the artist as a found system is therefore not intended to overthrow the whole of (world) art history, but rather to make it richer by pointing at this dynamics between the individual and the larger whole.

Although the connection between Mandelbrot and pataphysics is certainly not new and has been explored already, in some ways, by Baudrillard, it opens the possibility to truly apply his fractal system to the arts, albeit in another way than he had foreseen. It could possibly lead to the development of a cybernetic art history (as opposed to an art history of cybernetics) that would allow for a more flexible and adventurous approach to the artistic. For the moment, it seems that the method of excessive interviewing of artists by the curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist is the practical solution – as artist Timo Sehgal states, "his most important contribution, in my view, lies in the fact that he is ... searching for modalities that go beyond objecthood" (Obrist and Lamm, 2011, p. 11). Obrist's 'interview project', published in the Conversation Series, is inspired by two long interviews between Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, and David Sylvester and Francis Bacon. Obrist does not only interview artists, but also architects and philosophers.<sup>12</sup> Doug Aitken's recent project 'The Source' for the 2012 Liverpool Biennial, a quest for the source of creativity in the shape of a video installation consisting of a series of filmed conversations with artists, architects, musicians and actors, works along similar lines.<sup>13</sup> Both projects, with their specific focus on the creative individual, could be seen as illustrations of the idea of the artist as a found system, and represent a more interactive way of looking at art history.

## Notes

1 Franklin, P. (2012) 'Between Art and Life, Art as Life'. In: Basualdo, C. and Battle, E. eds. (2012) *Dancing around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Yale University Press, p.1.

2 See this author's review of Samuel's 'The Islands of Benoît Mandelbrot' in *Leonardo*, January 2013.

3 See introduction by Kitty Zijlmans in Hallsall, 2008, p. 12: “When artworks are regarded as communications, its not their materiality which is relevant, or its maker, but the work as a communicative act responded to by new communicative utterances, positive or negative, in the form of other works or as criticism.”

4 See my review of ‘The Islands of Benoît Mandelbrot’ in Leonardo Reviews, January 2013

5 There is an intriguing comparison to be made between such diverse islands as the ones in the television series *Lost*, the animation movie *The Incredibles* (note the close up of the island and its resemblance to the images of Google’s Phantom Island) or the animated puppet series *Thunderbirds*, not to mention the obvious Robinson Crusoe version or Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. Another ‘recent’ link is the tiny tropical and hard to find Ascension Island in the South Atlantic – initially “a barren volcanic edifice”, a cloud forest now forms a damp oasis on its highest peak after some botanical experimentation by Darwin some 180 years ago. Its success might now be the key to the future colonisation of Mars.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/scienceenvironment-11137903>

6 View <http://blog.aucklandmuseum.com/2012/11/the-mystery-of-an-island-that-isnt-there/> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/22/sandy-island-missing-google-earth>

7 “It was on one of those days that Sogol explained to us why we had to try and approach the invisible continent from the west at sunset, and not from the east at sunrise. It was because at that moment, just as in Benjamin Franklin’s experiment of the heated chamber, a current of cold sea air must rush towards the overheated lower levels of the atmosphere of Mount Analogue. Thus we would be sucked toward the interior; whereas at dawn, from the east, we would be violently repulsed” (Daumal, 1952, p. 70).

8 Although Brotchie does not literally come to this conclusion he hints at it when stating: “The final section, “Time as Seen from the Machine”, concludes with a new definition of duration, which Jarry then paraphrases as “The Becoming of Memory”. This connects what is an apparently theoretical text with the notions of nostalgia and the erotic in *Days and Nights*. As ever, his writings link together when one least expects it.” He then comments on “(...) how most of the physics employed by Jarry/Faustroll in this “Commentary” is taken from the French translation of Lord Kelvin’s *Popular Lectures and Addresses: the Constitution of Matter*, published in 1893, with Jarry even quoting an English footnote to give his text extra verisimilitude. (...) [H]e wrote a piece of fiction employing only the non-literary means of the scientific paper” (Brotchie, pp. 240-241).

9 In this same volume of texts Deleuze also discusses pataphysics in the context of a book review in the text ‘How Jarry’s Pataphysics Opened the Way to Phenomenology’.

10 In this context the notion of islands that are only visible at certain moments due to changing tides, or islands that play an important role in collective memory such as Atlantis or Simon & Garfunkels self-proclaimed “I am a rock. I am an island.” in their 1966 song ‘I am a rock’ spring to mind, connecting it back to Deleuze’s wish to return to the (deserted) island as a model or prototype of the collective soul, see above.

11 In talks with the artist during studio visits, Ghent, Belgium, October 2012. A longer text on Beyls is published in the catalogue for his upcoming exhibitions at Gallery DAM, Frankfurt, May 2013 and White Box, New York, autumn 2013, both as part of a research project in collaboration with LUCA School of Arts, Brussels.

12 Email from the artist, 9.11.2012 and 13.1.2013. hIn relation to programming Beyls states: “The physical act of programming produces a self-documenting result that is per definition an ‘in-between result’ on a long road of an endless number of dimensions of which the visible/perceivable ones only lie on the observable surface. The programmer is constantly being conditioned by his own thinking, formalised in software (...). The object of the thinking process is almost a side effect that speaks back to the programmer – a recursive process! That’s why programming also generates the illusion of power – or is it narcissism. The program reflects indeed in the most fundamental sense the belief system that is part of the identity of the programmer.”

13 Email from the artist, 20.1.2013

14 <http://www.artbook.com/huoconv.html>

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papers

## Poet as Machine, on Calvino's Cybernetics and Ghosts

*Edith Doove*

When thinking about mediation through language, Italo Calvino's text 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' (1967) offers a tool for exploration of the cognitive role of storyteller and reader. Calvino suggests replacing the poet and author by a machine, a suggestion based amongst others on his understanding of the activities of the so-called Oulipo group that unites authors and mathematicians.

The 'ghosts' in the title of Calvino's text allude to the notion of play, especially when mathematics meets literature "(...) under the banner of hoaxing and practical joking" (Calvino, 1986, p. 11). This is what defines Oulipo, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* founded in 1960 by the French writer Raymond Queneau and a number of mathematician friends. It finds its origin in the *Collège de Pataphysique* that in its turn was founded in memory of Alfred Jarry. Calvino calls it "a kind of academy of intellectual scorn" that is nevertheless rigorous in its research, whether it lingers on the absurd or not. He sees their connection with cybernetics amongst others in Queneau's *Cent Mille Millions de poèmes* that rather than being a book can be seen as a machine for making sonnets.<sup>1</sup>

The cybernetics mentioned in the title comes however first into play when Calvino notes Claude Lévi-Strauss' work on the myths of the Indians of Brazil as a system of logical operations between exchangeable terms that could be mathematically analyzed (Calvino, 1986, p. 6). Just as in mathematics narrative operations can be based on "(...) unlimited combinations, permutations and transformations." (Calvino, 1986, 151

p. 6). A similar approach can subsequently be found in the analysis of "literature in all its variety of forms and complexities" which Calvino finds in the work of the Russian formalists or the French structuralists such as the 'Tel Quel'-group. From this he observes how flow and continuity have made place for a so-called discrete approach. Discrete in the mathematical sense as a quantity made up of separate parts. But this seemingly mechanistic viewpoint is only a superfluous if not provocative one. The earlier observations of the unlimited combinations, permutations and transformations are already a hint in that direction as is Calvino's use of the analogy of our minds as "chessboards with hundreds of billions of pieces" that never would allow all possible plays. Despite the continuum discontinuity, divisibility, and combination thus triumph over flux. (Calvino, 1986, p. 9).

The unavoidable question Calvino raises out of all this is whether there could truly be a machine to replace the poet and author. Although Calvino in principle thinks it would be possible he immediately states it would not be worth the trouble to construct it. In any case the poetic-electronic machine would produce traditional works although in order to be a true literature machine it would also need to feel the need to produce disorder, as that is in Calvino's view a typical human need. In response to its traditionalism the poetic-electronic machine will thus automatically create avant-garde work from a given point onwards (Calvino, 1986, p. 13). While this is in itself a bold statement to make, in the second part of his lecture, Calvino takes this even a step further by provocatively arguing that the writer has in fact always been a machine which allows him to make a connection to the electronic brain. In the

writer's attempt to arrive at the written page there is already a dissolving of the "I" of the author: "The so-called personality of the writer exists within the very act of writing: it is the product and the instrument of the writing process. (...)." Just like any systematic and routinely working machine it is just a matter of finding the right road and taking short cuts (Calvino, 1986, p. 15). The reduction of the writing process to something 'discrete', a system or machine, gives security and a feeling of safety as opposed to "(...) what is countless, unclassifiable, in a state of flux (...)"(Calvino, 1986, p. 17). It is however the readers processes of interpretation through which "(t)he work will continue to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or constantly renewed (...)"(Calvino, 1986, p. 16). The author thus disappears to the background and is replaced by the reader.

In her article 'Calvino and the Oulipo: An Italian Ghost in the Combinatory Machine?' Anna Botta discusses the criticism of Calvino's later Oulipo related work. In particular Italian critics had a problem with this as they considered it not Italian. While this work came mainly into existence during Calvino's period in Paris and the criticism might thus be inspired by nationalistic sentiments, it is also directed to its experimental nature. Botta quotes extensively from 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' to counter this criticism but also brings in Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) to discuss Calvino's point of view.

Calvino was invited to join Oulipo as a foreign member in February 1973 as he had clearly demonstrated his affinities with the group, amongst others in his 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' lecture. Calvino would regularly attend the group's monthly meetings and Botta quotes one of the founding members, Marcel Bénabou, to stress the importance of this forum for Calvino: "For him (Calvino)...the Oulipo meetings and the absolutely unforeseeable exchanges they provoke, are first of all a laboratory for ideas, a test for the newest and boldest suggestions." (Botta, 1997, p. 82). These 'absolutely unforeseeable exchanges' are in my opinion the key to what Latour calls the a-moderns or hybrids that involve both nature and culture, brought forward by Botta. Although Calvino thus initially seems to suggest a mechanistic stance, Botta points out that "[i]n Oulipian experiments, science is not only used as source or inspiration, it in fact becomes the principle of organization of linguistic and narrative materials." (Botta, 1997, p. 82).

In 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' Calvino thus explores the possibility of the author to be replaced by a machine but also comes to the conclusion that literature continually strives to escape from the finite and safe.

Does it not continually attempt to say something it cannot say, some153 thing it does not know, and that no one could ever know? (...). To the point at which something not yet said, something as yet only darkly felt by presentiment, suddenly appears and seizes us and tears us to pieces, like the fangs of a man-eating witch." (Calvino, 1986, p. 18).

This saying of what is not yet said can be further developed in relation with Joan Richardson's account of the role of storytelling in the New World in which she focuses on the various writings of 17th century colonists trying to come to grips with "the perplexing juxtapositions of their world" in which "distortions in syntax and grammar are mimetic of feelings entertained, animal responses to what exists as

matter of fact, whether the facts be features of the natural environment or, as Locke had begun to inflect, the realization of language itself as fact.” (Richardson, 2007, 3; 10). Equally, if from a somewhat different angle, it is possible to establish a link with Vladimir Nabokov who points at the coming into existence of literature the moment a boy cries wolf, wolf and there is actually no wolf behind him, in other words making use of deception. (Popova, 2014)

Calvino’s ‘Ghosts’ lie thus not only in the notion of play but also in that what is as yet unexpressed and resides in the unconscious. For Calvino the as yet unexpressed can be freed by enlightenment, as well as by the automatic associations of words and images by the Surrealists (Calvino, 1986, 19-20). It is not so much a triumph of the irrational as rather a refusal of the category of the irrational and “(...) that anything in the world can be considered extraneous to the reason of things” (Calvino, 1986, 20), a total opening up of all possibilities. Wordplay reveals the processes of poetry and art according to Gombrich who is mentioned by Calvino for his essay on Freud and the psychology of art. Combinatorial games are crucial for the revealing of “an unexpected meaning or unforeseen effect” (Calvino, 1986, 21) and that is where both routes of Calvino’s argument come together. “The literature machine can perform all the permutations possible on a given material, but the poetic result will be the particular effect of one of these permutations on a man endowed with a consciousness and an unconscious, that is, an empirical and historical man.” (Calvino, 1986, p. 21).

Out of all these permutations, the “innocent little tales” and fables, only a few rise to mythic proportions. The two tensions of literature according to Elio Vittorini as mentioned by Calvino are: the one that keeps things as they are and the other that criticizes and is its true value. Literature comes to this point according to Calvino through “(...) combinatorial games that at a certain moment become charged with preconscious subject matter, and at last find a voice for these.” The instant of emergence, which is also a particular interest in my own research, is thus an instant of release, of freedom, quite often causing or accompanied by laughter. Or as Bachelard puts it: “(...) the creative act takes place at one stroke (...) every evolution - to the extent that it is decisive - is punctuated by creative instants.” (Bachelard, Lescure and Rizo-Patron, 2013, pp. 9-10).

‘Cybernetics and Ghosts’ ends with a reference to Hans Magnus Enzensberger and his research into labyrinthine narratives throughout history. Enzensberger observes an inherent need for disorientation, games of orientation that in turn are games for disorientation as a form of training for survival. For Calvino Enzensberger’s thesis that the game can work either as a challenge to understand the world or as dissuasion from understanding it, can be applied widely in literature and culture. After John von Neumann and the development of cybernetics everything can thus be seen as an ongoing combinatorial mathematical game. The boundary between challenge and dissuasion is according to Calvino not always clearly marked and it is again up to the reader to decide what is at stake.

Calvino’s work overall is determined by a constant questioning of reality and the force of fiction, an approach he even extended to his own life when practicing a fictional interpretation of his own biography. This approach in general allows for an open interpretation of reality that seems necessary for an ongoing creativity of both storyteller and reader and which can be extended to both a wider art practice as well

as an understanding of media and cognition. Rather than defining this process with the commonly used terminology of ‘magical powers’, Calvino calls for the use of ‘narrative powers’, “(...) potentialities contained in the word, in its ability to link itself to other words on the plane of discourse.” (Calvino, 1986, p. 5).

It is exactly that boundary between challenge and dissuasion that is at stake in this text. It looks at the ambiguity of the mathematical analysis versus the literary effect or affect, of finding the rules and overturning them. For media archeology and cognition it allows for an intangible, non-material approach that looks at the quality of mediation.

#### Notes:

- 1- Published in 1961 it consists of ten sonnets printed on pages in a book that are cut into their separate sentences that allow for combining them into new sonnets. (Couturier, 2011).

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## Reviews



**The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp** by Elena Filipovic

**Hardcover | £29.95 Trade** | 360 pp. | 7 x 10 in | 70 color illus., 80 b&w illus.

| November 2016 | ISBN: 9780262034821

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Elena Filipovic tellingly gives the introduction to her study the title ‘A History of Marcel Duchamp and Other Fictions’ indicating that his is a narrative like any other. What Filipovic makes clear is that the history of an artist like Marcel Duchamp is not only written by a discipline like art history, but also the art market and the appreciation of peers and critics. The difference in this case, as is widely known amongst Duchamp scholars but convincingly exemplified by Filipovic, is that Duchamp was rather instrumental in writing his own narrative. Anyone who is slightly familiar with that story knows the basic ingredients. As Filipovic sums them up at the beginning of her introduction this basically comes down to “a story of *things*: artworks invented or handmade, original or in copy, influential and in some cases revolutionizing” (Filipovic, 2016, p. 2).\*

While Duchamp made it sufficiently clear that he was at a certain point no longer interested in painting due to its ‘retinal’ qualities and therefore resorted to the selection of ‘readymades’ or as Filipovic succinctly puts it “nominating store-bought stuff as art”, he seems to have also been quite happy with the limited view of what an artist constitutes in the eyes of many. This bought him namely the freedom he was after. If there is one reason why Duchamp still fascinates then it is because of his elusiveness. What is clear, and further demonstrated by Filipovic, is that Duchamp was always eager to cross the boundaries of what an artist constitutes – not boxed in by style, discipline or activity. By focussing on “apparently marginal activities” Filipovic addresses the issue by which an artist is too much identified with certain of his or her *things* or art works, either through art history or the art market. In Duchamp’s case the emphasis has certainly been on his so-called readymades and more specifically his ‘urinal’ or *Fountain* (1917).

The “apparently marginal activities” that Filipovic however alludes to are the kind of activities that are usually not seen as being artistic or at least (still) not fully appreciated as such. In earlier publications and talks Filipovic has already done much to rectify this image such as in her talk during the 2012 conference ‘Artist as Curator’ organised by the magazine *Afterall* and the subsequent series of appendixes under the same denominator for the magazine *Mousse*. For those familiar with Duchamp’s work or with the realities of the activities of the average artist for that matter, the outcome of this book therefore not so much surprises as continues to put things in the right perspective for a wider audience.

That Duchamp from early on had an interest in a wider scope of activities than ‘just’ producing art, is amongst others demonstrated through his role in setting up the Society of Independent Artists in New York and being involved as head of the hanging committee for its inaugural exhibition in 1917. Even though the Society had promoted a jury-free set up and Duchamp subsequently a democratic hanging according to alphabet rather than subjective preference, the board of directors nevertheless famously refused to show his anonymously submitted readymade *Fountain*. Duchamp nevertheless became a sought-after curator, administrator and art dealer amongst fellow artists such as André Breton. Although Duchamp did not want to be reined in by the Surrealists as a member, did this not prevent him from collaborating with Breton and curate several exhibitions with him, making very clear that life does not come in the boxed entities of the art market or art history. Boxes, and especially the ways to escape them, nevertheless played a significant role in his work, either literally or figuratively. Starting with his lifelong love for chess and its black and white squares which could be seen as equal and thus interchangeable, his female alter ego Rose Selavy could also be regarded as a way of escaping too fixed boundaries.

Filipovic rightfully points in this context to the problem of canonisation of an artist who gets fixed in a certain view as to support the art market that is usually not open to artistic development and freedom. Especially in the case of an artist like Duchamp it is has turned out to be easy to pigeonhole him and not fully appreciate him in all his various aspects. Filipovic underlines how Duchamp’s interest in organising and exhibiting was thoroughly engrained in his work from the start, demonstrated

amongst others by his portable museum of miniature copies of his work in *Boite-en-valise* (1943), his extensive use and research of copies throughout his work (including his notes and the readymades), the organisation of various exhibitions and the extensive negotiations surrounding his final work *Etant donnés* or *Given : 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*. Filipovic describes how this installation in the Museum of Philadelphia was for a long time largely ignored by critics as it was regarded as redundant in comparison with the revolutionary introduction of the readymades. Duchamp worked on *Given* from 1946 to 1966 and managed to keep the production of it largely secret by pretending to no longer make art, demonstrated by a more public, ‘empty’ studio and by apparently concentrating on playing chess. When eventually installed and opened to the public *Given* was largely met with disappointment. Filipovic however regards it rightfully as an excellent example of institutional critique and questions why it has not been treated on the same level as the work of that other Marcel, the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers and his contemporaneous *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Brussels, 1968). Broodthaers had suggested that it should be seen as “a situation, a system defined by objects, by inscriptions, by various activities” (Filipovic, 2016, p. 263). With its “behind-the-scenes museum trustee meetings, elaboration of museum contracts, writing and construction of a *Manual of Instructions*, reorganization of a whole section of the museum’s contents and display, and even insertion of the work into the museum itself” (p. 263) *Given* is doing in fact exactly the same, but as Filipovic demonstrates, remained nevertheless largely ignored.

Duchamp was in all respects a true escape artist, making in every respect use of the art of smoke and mirrors for which he gave good indications by his use of smoke or clouds both in his persona as in several art works. He also was very aware how art was subject to a delay in appreciation, not only by a general audience but clearly also by fellow artists and critics. If Filipovic’s book demonstrates one thing than it is exactly this. Duchamp was regarded as somewhat passé at the end of the ‘60s while the likes of Broodthaers seemingly announced something new. As Filipovic however rightfully concludes “we might [want to] recognize how much Duchamp’s final work was not the “retardaire” lapse of an old man who “arrived a bit too late” but instead the neo-avant-garde gesture of an artist who never stopped articulating the terms of a

criticality that operates in, through, as well as against the institution of art, and who had found one last way to do so.” (p. 266).

\*Please note that this review was written based on an uncorrected proof copy. For exact quotations please refer to the final bound book.

## **The Curatorial Conundrum**

by Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson and Lucy Steeds, Editors

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016

352 pp., illus. 100 b/w. Paper, £24.95

ISBN: 9780262529105.

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*The Curatorial Conundrum* is in many ways a problematic book. On the one hand it identifies the state in which the curatorial finds itself, and on the other hand it epitomises if not enhances the conundrum by posing in bold black lettering against an orangey background three desperate questions "What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?" Put on their side and in three different fonts they stress the desperation. The back cover makes clear that these are however just sub-questions to an overarching one: "Given that curating has come to occupy a central critical, political, and practical space within the global 'contemporary', how will its unfolding futures be imagined and actualized, and what is to be done?" Either the graphic designer has done an excellent job or a terrible curatorial *faux pas* has been made.

In their introductory essay the editors Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds identify, in a problematically dense and jargon-heavy use of language, three important developments that frame the critical essays in this volume. First, they see the rapid and global expansion of curatorial educational programs and platforms since the late 1980s and early 1990s both allowing for the publication of this volume, but also as part of the problem as a Eurocentric professionalization of practices still prevails tending to generate canonical understandings. The editors further identify a "re-setting of the tension between curating-as-display-making (the exhibitionary) and curating-as-expanded-practice (the curatorial)" over the years to a less dichotomous situation of interchange. Thirdly the editors point to an "inflated art system (...) entangled with dispersed and divergent critical fronts that contest the hegemonic construction of 'the contemporary' exclusively in terms of globalizing capital and (Eurocentric) normative 'development' narratives." In short: an over-inflation of educational programs, an

increasingly blurred distinction or self-inflicted confusion between curating and the curatorial plus the hegemony of an art market in a combined effort don't allow for what the editors call 'alterity' but what also could just be called a recognition or freedom of creative thinking and practice.

Luckily many of the ensuing 22 essays from international contributors, both practitioners and theorists that try to answer the overarching question are more straightforward. Among them are some 'usual suspects' such as Hans Ulrich Obrist (on the importance of the past for future practices), Liam Gillick (on the incomplete curator) and Lucy Steeds (on the danger of canonization), but also many relatively new voices from around the globe. Many curators and artists such as Nikita Yingqian Cai (on the autonomy of art), Nancy Adajania (on the autodidact as researcher), Miguel A. Lopez (on Latin American exhibitions) or *eminence grise* Luis Camnitzer (on education), to name just a few, give long overdue thought provoking insights from a non-European perspective. Among the essays is a surprising amount of first person statements, discussing individual projects or experiences. Together with the somewhat arbitrary image section at the back of the book this might be due to the fact that the book is a follow up of the symposium with the same subject and largely the same contributors organised at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College in November 2014.

Overall the project is both praiseworthy and problematic for both identifying the conundrum and trying to find a way out, but also for digging it further in with so many more potentially canonical how-to declarations. The distinction between the three subdivisions is not always very clear as various contributions would equally well function in any of them, but the book will no doubt find its way as a useful and obligatory reader in one or several of the many curatorial educational programs and platforms mentioned before. Its ultimate success will however be highly dependent on whether or not it will truly engender new and inventive curatorial practices without falling in the pitfalls it identifies.

## **The Process That Is the World**

by Joe Panzner

Hardback | £59.40 | ISBN: 9781628925715 | 240 pp. | 2015

Also available as PDF or EPUB eBook

Reviewed by Edith Doove (<http://leonardo.info/reviews/jun2016/panzner-doove.php>)

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In *The Process That Is the World – Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performances* Joe Panzner develops an intriguing resonance between the thinking practices of John Cage and Gilles Deleuze. Although the affinities between both philosophers (one of which happens to use music or sound) might seem to be far-fetched Panzner builds a convincing and consistent evidence of this connection despite the fact that they never really met. The only occasion that brought them physically close to each other was during the Schizo-Culture Conference organised by Sylvaine Loring on 16-17 November 1975 at Columbia University when Cage functioned as a bridge between the European or French intelligentsia and that of the United States or more specifically New York. They never directly interacted after this.

In the five chapters following the introduction Panzner who is a well-respected composer, mastering engineer and musicologist and hints at performing Cage himself, organises his thesis under the headings of Works, Ethics, Encounters, Performances and Politics. Each chapter starts with two quotes, which turn out to be by respectively by Cage and Deleuze when one consults the footnotes but at first glance seem perfectly inter-changeable. These quotes alone thus already give good evidence of their parallel thinking. The starting and main reference point throughout remains Cage with concentrating on his thought and performance work from after his famous experience in the anechoic chamber and the composition of *4'33"* as this is the period in which the parallel with Deleuze is the most clear according to Panzner. True to Cage and Deleuze's shared believe it is however not about the individual or the object but about the event and the book develops much wider aspects their ideas tap into. Making reference to texts by Cage (*For the Birds*) and Deleuze (and Guattari,

especially *Difference and Repetition*), Panzner also alludes to specialists such as Massumi, DeLanda, Meillassoux and Kostelanetz to state his case. The wider perspective he thus develops becomes especially apparent in the ethics chapter when he discusses the issue of error and judgment that are part of morality as opposed to the ethics that Cage and Deleuze advocate. It is especially habit that is to blame as it leads to “the emergence of a constitutive stupidity” that also leads to the explicit misunderstanding of Cage’s work as described in the chapter on performances.

All in all it is a timely book now that we find ourselves in a clear impasse when it comes to art and politics. Cage and Deleuze’s call to be in sink with a process-based world is, although more than fifty years old, actually rather up-to-date. It is still just as difficult a message as it was back then as the essence is for moving away from “the familiar, the policed, the preferred and the goal-minded” in order to reach “a genuine creation and the manufacturing of new eyes, new minds and new people.” *The Process That is The World* is in that sense a real manifesto, which is as Panzner states certainly not meant as a critique and throughout on purpose affirmative. Provocative, because as he bluntly puts it basically cold and inhuman with its move away from the comfortable and comforting, but with the ultimate positive aim “to embrace the component of every situation, musical or political, that escapes the present bounds of understanding and explicate its consequences – to develop a sensibility that can detect the form of potential embedded in what escapes recognition”. This sensibility, or what Cage also described as discipline, is the way to true creativity and exactly what we are in need of today.



## **Diffractional Technospaces: A Feminist Approach to the Mediations of Space and Representation**

by Federica Timeto

Routledge Press, NY, NY, 2015 218 pp. Trade, \$109.95 ISBN: 978-1-4724-4545-2.

*Reviewed by Edith Doove, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth*  
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At the end of his essay 'Frameworks of Comparison', recently published as an extract of his upcoming memoir *Life beyond Boundaries*, finished just before his death on 13 December 2015, the scholar of nationalism Benedict Anderson states, "The point being that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences." One of the earlier points being "(...) that within the limits of plausible argument, the most instructive comparisons (whether of difference or similarity) are those that surprise." (Anderson, 2016). His account of his development of comparative studies through nationalism chimes well with the argument that Federica Timeto makes in her *Diffractional Technospaces* especially in its equal stressing of the importance of being open to strangeness, crossing boundaries and dealing with location. Timeto links this openness explicitly to feminism to discuss mediations of space and representation, as these issues have always been its main concerns. *Diffractional Technospaces* is both a complex and a straightforward book. It is complex in its use of a dense, intricate language and terminology that often seemingly contradict the flow it advocates. It certainly calls for re-reading and re-visiting which *per se* is actually demonstrative of the richness of its material and which a relatively concise review as this one can simply not do justice to. The book is however equally very straightforward in its underlying message about how it is precisely this flow that connects our being in space and time and permeates through it. Using Donna Haraway's concept of diffraction and Karen Barad's interpretation and application of it extensively at the heart of her argument, Timeto's first concern is to move away from any restricting binary visions. She does so in four densely packed chapters discussing respectively space and representation; reconceiving representation; location, mobility, perspectives; and finally diffracting technoscience.

An extensive and insightful introduction and a conclusion that is tellingly called 'Opening Conclusions: Performing Represent-Actions', wrap up this rich and intriguing project. The book equally benefits from an elaborate bibliography and index. The main point of Timeto's book that is repeated in various ways and illustrated through extensive case studies from the arts and sciences is that there is no longer a valid argument for an understanding of our being in the world as standing outside of it. Space and place pervade through us; we are an integral part of it, and new technologies such as VR and certainly AR are clear demonstrations (or illustrations) of this understanding. As stated Haraway's concept of diffraction and Barad's later application of it permeate throughout the book also thanks to Timeto's helpful repetitive explanation and application in various circumstances. Diffraction is in the first place an optical phenomenon that "(l)iterally (...) describes the interference of waves when they encounter an obstacle, such as when light passes through a slit" (Timeto, 2015, 2). It is thus used by Haraway "(...) to show the entangled performativity of reality and representation and the generative power of visual practices (...)" (Timeto, 2015, 12). Barad has extended this understanding to how we are implemented in every measurement or observation, "(...) we do not have an outside from which to measure, so that observed differences are not so much inherent in the physical states of the observed objects but only a further extension of the entanglement, one that includes the measuring action inside the measured entanglements" (Timeto, 2015, 12). The diffractive methodology thus becomes as Timeto states also a different theory of mediations, which follows the co-implications of the observer and the observed and their *intra*-active relations (Timeto, 2015, 159). By moving away from a binary vision of the world, from us looking at it, observing and trying to get to grips with it from a distance to being logically fully integrated and immersed in it, Timeto automatically comes to the idea of performing space or as she calls it 'performing represent-actions' that these days lie at the heart of our use of implementation in technospaces. An extensive quote from the 'conclusion' seems fitting to demonstrate Timeto's point: "Indeed, when figurations of space are not delinked from the processes of spatialisation, as when information is not separated from 'mattering' matter, representations can be grounded in the lived spatio-temporal realities with which they engage and whose boundaries they also perform in mutable configurations. This brings to the fore the generative forces that realign the practice of

representing spaces and the practice of situating representations inside a topology of variations, in which continuous *represent-actions* take place.(...) A simultaneously displacing and diffracting move is required, so that the space of one's own situatedness and the representation of one's own space leaves room for the other that is already within, but is impossible to perceive or figure from the Subject position. The openness to alterity and heterogeneity that the proposed performative relation of space and representation positively confounds also allows for the adoption of a recombinant perspective in which the mediations inside and among human and non-human beings in technospaces leave room for the creative potential of un-predetermined joints, functions and actions." (Timeto, 2015, 160-161). As Timeto further states "connectivity is an abused word when talking about technospaces" but "in a context of shared agency and diffused relationality between heterogeneous beings, connectivity becomes an ethical and political issue because it requires an ability to actively engage with differences in respectful companionship" (Timeto, 2015, 161). In advocating a continuous non-static, creative approach to our surroundings and the way we handle and act in them, thus implying also a clear ethico-political stand partly inspired by Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, Timeto obviously can not be boxed in by boundaries of any kind that rather become porous. Finishing with 'Open Conclusions' is therefore symbolic in many respects, in the first place of opening up further implications and discussions about this new perspective. Notes Anderson, B. (2016). Frameworks of Comparison. *London Review of Books*, [online] 38(2), pp.15-18. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n02/benedict-anderson/frameworks-of-comparison> [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016].

**Of Walking in Ice: Munich-Paris, 23 November-14 December 1974**

by Werner Herzog

University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2015

96 pp. Paper, \$19.95

ISBN: 978-0-8166-9732-8.

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For the author of such larger than life projects as *Fitzcarraldo*, *Grizzly Man*, or *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* this seems an unassumingly little book. The subject however is still larger than life. Upon hearing that his mentor and close friend, the iconic film historian and critic Lotte Eisner was seriously ill and possibly dying in Paris, Herzog decided in November 1974 in an almost shamanistic way to walk this fate away. Leaving from his then hometown Munich his epic walk took him through desolate villages, landscapes, and most of the time awful winter weather - hence the title *Of Walking in Ice*. Herzog seemed to survive mainly on milk and tangerines and broke most of the time into holiday homes, stables, and on one point a demonstration caravan to spend the night or find shelter. Although not very voluminous Herzog's account is nevertheless detailed and paints quite a vivid picture of the landscape he negotiates. Whoever has travelled in this German-French region will immediately be able to envision his surroundings and its desolateness. Herzog's use of language is poetic and at points touching on the delirious when fatigue seems to let his mind drift off to personal memories that border on filmic ideas. Although he hardly speaks of Eisner in these notes, it is possibly in this filmic approach that her mentorship is most clearly present, accounting for Herzog's despair that leads him to undertake such an endeavour in the first place. *Of Walking in Ice* thus almost reads like a film script, and it is almost impossible not to hear Herzog's recognizable voice with the thick German accent providing the voice-over. It is quite fascinating how his account builds an unexpected notion of wildness in the heart of Europe due to this persistence to walk (apart from the occasional short lift when weather or painful limbs become too bad). This clearly connects to his overall approach in his *oeuvre*. Despite the underlying seriousness, there is also a lightness of tone and a sense of humour, especially in the

account of the demonstration caravan that almost topples over when he enters it.

It is not entirely clear why there is this new re-publication after so many years. Eisner survived her illness at the time, thanks to Herzog's endeavour or not. This edition of his book includes for the first time Herzog's 1982 tribute to her upon the receipt of the Helmut Kaeutner Prize. Eisner would eventually die on November 25, 1983; almost nine years to the day when Herzog started his walk to prevent her from dying. All in all a must-read for all avid walkers and lovers of Herzog's personality and work.

## **Other Planes of There: Selected Writings**

by Renée Green

Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014

520 pp., illus. 249 col., 41 b/w. Trade, \$99.95; paper, \$29.95

ISBN: 978-0-8223-5692-9; ISBN: 978-0-8223-5703-2.

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When content pages read like a text in themselves, this must reveal something about the quality of the author of the book. This anthology of selected writings by Renée Green is certainly extremely rich and in a way a work of art in itself, which makes it hardly possible to write a concise review of it. Yvonne Rainer, herself a choreographer and filmmaker, describes Green's "far-reaching social and political interests" in her blurb on the back of the book as having "led her into taking on the roles of artist-curator-archivist-historian- exhibition designer and, perhaps most unusual, adventuress-traveler." This layered description of Green's activities gives a good indication of the scope of the book. Apart from introductory essays by Green herself as well as Gloria Sutton, the texts which span a period from 1981 to 2010, are divided in five sections: Genealogies, Circuits of Exchange, Encounters, Positions and the longest one, Operations. Even when read chronologically as I did, it still feels at all times refreshingly non-linear. What turns reading this encyclopaedic book into a dense exploratory adventure is the wide range of its subjects and the different styles of writing that Green administers, from deeply academic to storytelling or almost indexical.

The title 'Other Planes of There' not only alludes to this layered condition but is also the title of an exhibition and installation. This double use, or maybe better re-use or re-take of work, whether it is written or made, is a constant as Green clearly lives with her *oeuvre* and likes to revive its different components over the years in changing contexts to test out their on-going but also changing agency. The idea of the encounter and following from this interaction in all its disguises is thus central. It is exemplified in the importance of the idea of the Contact Zone that Green introduced in her 1994

symposium 'Negotiations in the Contact Zone' at The Drawing Center in New York. In her introductory essay Gloria Sutton discusses this "watershed" moment when Green organised a dialogue between cultural producers and cultural critics on the issue of art as theoretical critique and the similar but simultaneously different methodologies of both groups. This is just one example of how Green not only constantly questions and interrogates her own work, but also the conditions in which it is generated; when, where and with whom. Her critical engagement is amongst others apparent in her essay 'Why Reply?' (2007) on "(...) participation of any kind in relation to international cultural events (ICEs), as well as more generally (...) the question on why engage, discuss, respond, or question". Green poses a question that seems central to her work: "How to acknowledge the beauty and power of intellect, details, specificity, and precision in the aesthetic process rather than consider these aspects as extraneous?"

Sutton starts her essay with a quote from Green during the Contact Zone symposium on the importance of moving outside of someone's comfort zone and the knowledge of one or more other languages "to enable a rethinking of established notions". Green has certainly travelled and lived throughout the world, most notably extended periods in Vienna and Portugal, and speaks several languages as well as using myriad media ones. As Sutton states the book 'Other Planes of There' is in itself another 'contact zone' in which established notions are provoked and rethought by exposing them to different contexts.

While reading the book I remembered having run into Green's work on several occasions and in different places, to start with in Antwerp in 1993 when it was a Cultural Capital of Europe. Green took part in one of its central exhibitions 'On Taking a Normal Situation...' and republishes in this anthology the text she wrote for it under the section 'Operations'. She also muses in her introductory essay about the fact that the massive installation she made for this exhibition, 'Inventory of Clues', was mysteriously 'lost'. I realize I have 'lost' the catalogue of both that exhibition as well as the one of the exhibition that I visited in Firminy, 'Project UnitÃ©' in one of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. Green relates a harrowing account of her actually living in the half-deserted place right up to the opening of the exhibition. I still remember my visit vividly, and this account now adds to it. It is a shame I can't find

the catalogue. It might be hiding in one of my still unpacked boxes. Green mentions both exhibitions several times throughout her texts and it is interesting to see how these interventions resonate both for the artist and the 'perceiver' as she prefers to call the one that engages with her work.

This in its turn chimes well with two texts that follow each other in the 'Operations' section. 'Why Systems?' (2004) starts with an extensive definition of the word system from Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, demonstrating the many layers involved in its meaning. Green continues to discuss the "accretive process (...) that runs through all of (her) production" and how "the intersecting forms of these different elements affect how it is possible for a perceiver to engage". 'Relay' (2005) again starts with a definition, this time of the word relay that is equally very layered. For Green the term, which she used as a title for the exhibition this text was written for, "suggest(s) ways of thinking about (her) work", occurring "in different and overlapping forms and tak(ing) place over time and in multiple locations." *Relay* and other projects at the time focused "on the relationality and tensions arising in and between locations, movement, and passages of time." Green makes her intention clear by quoting Kubler from his *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962): "Historical recall never can be complete nor can it be even entirely correct, because of the successive relays that deform the message." That Green is simultaneously working with Deleuze's idea of a constant becoming, also of meaning, is stressed by the title of her introductory essay 'Other Planes, Different Phases, My Geometry, Times, Movements: Becomings Ongoing' which resonates throughout the book.

The precision of construction, a slow precise build-up over many years, consisting of the "combination of processes and questions" that Green uses in all of her work is not surprisingly also apparent in the structure of the book. Apart from the sections mentioned above, there are 142 plates in a separate section with colour illustrations of her artwork that allude to the in total 51 chapters. This section sits in a peculiar place, not neatly in the middle or at the end, but between chapters 47 and 48. This placement makes it the kind of counterpoint that Green applies throughout her *oeuvre* and which thus turns the entire book in an artwork or at least into an integral part of that *oeuvre*. The last four chapters also become something as an afterword through this positioning



after the pictorial interlude. These texts seem more reflexive, looking back in time, slightly more melancholic. The last text, 'Endless Dreams and Water Between', a semi-fictional text about a woman, Aria, who invites three of her friends to start writing each other letters and also physically meet in the so-called September Institute, is based on the idea of studying islands, referencing amongst others Deleuze and Gertrude Stein. Aria's interest lies in what is specific, what slips away in oblivion and is determinedly unfashionable. She leaves her friends with the following words inspired by Bergson and Deleuze that clearly reveal a lot about what Aria/Green tries to put her finger on:

"Why something rather than nothing, but why this rather than something else? Why this tension of duration? Why this speed rather than another? Why this proportion? And why will a perception evoke a given memory, or pick up certain frequencies rather than others? In other words, being is difference and not the immovable or the undifferentiated, nor is it contradiction, which is merely false movement. Being is the difference itself of the thing, what Bergson often calls the *nuance*."

Complete with an extensive Publishing History, Curriculum Vitae and Index that indicate clearly the rich scope of this anthology, this certainly is a beautiful example of what thinking through and with work can lead to.

## **How Reading Is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein**

by Astrid Lorange

Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 2014

269 pp., illus. 1 b/w. Trade, \$75.00; paper, \$24.95; eBook, \$19.99

ISBN: 978-0-8195-7511-1; 978-0-8195-7512-8; 978-0-8195-7513-5.

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*How Reading is Written*, which in its title alludes to the Gertrude Stein anthology *How Writing is Written*, is the result of Lorange's extended PhD research. At the very beginning she uses a quote from *Tender Buttons*, as a very apt introduction: "The use of this is manifold". Alluding to the multiple meanings of manifold the book is meant to be non-linear, a flexible object, a book to work with. Lorange regards the index as instrumental for this kind of use, stating that as a paratext it is auxiliary and derivative. The index can also be seen as a kind of translation in her view, presenting, as it were, a book within a book.

After the introduction on the use of the index, Lorange poses the question of her own preoccupation: 'Why Stein?' - which could just as well be 'Why *still* Stein?' as literature on her chosen subject is both vast and substantial. Her response to her own question is the necessity for a different approach that acknowledges a different quality in the writing and that comes down to a reading 'with', 'alongside', and 'giving in to' the endurance of what reading Gertrude Stein actually is. Stein's writing is usually either approached as hermetic, difficult, stubborn and nonsensical or made the subject for extended searches for hidden meanings. Both approaches are however limiting the text's meaning as they either resort to intrinsic meaning or pure nothingness. Lorange argues, therefore, an alternative mode in which the compositional practices of reading and writing are to be seen as constructive *experiences* that produce and investigate the contexts and relations of language in a specific occasion (Lorange 10). The so-called obscurity or opaqueness, a terminology Lorange gets from Steven Meyer [1] of Stein's writing is, thus, seen as a positive, a "philosophical and constructive attitude," that leads to the contemplation on what is endured in a proper engagement with a text

and what happens in the time of reading as this is exactly what Stein seemed to aim at.

Quoting Michael Davidson's essay 'On Reading Stein,' Lorange's argument is, therefore, to support the imperative to learn "to read *writing*, not read *meanings*, (...) to interrogate the spaces around words as much as the words themselves; (...) discover language as an active 'exchange' of meaning rather than a static paradigm of rules and features. The question is not 'what' she meant but 'how'" (Lorange 12).

In the 10 sections that follow the introduction, Lorange, thus, not so much tries to dissect Stein as to read alongside with her. The sections are organised alphabetically, but as stand alone essays can also be read in any order. Their mostly deceptively simple titles allude to the everyday language that Stein used from a democratic perspective: Bodies, Food, Grammar, Identity, Objects, Play. There are also more complex ones such as Contemporaneity, Queering, Repetition and USA, and these too have the same resonance. But every essay is taken well beyond its subject title by reading it from as many angles as possible. The section on 'Food' thus starts from the simple and almost too obvious observation that Stein clearly liked her food as affluently demonstrated in the second section *Tender Buttons* (starting with the famous 'Roastbeef' and followed by about 40 other food-related musings) but also in her impressive posture. Lorange takes her reading with and alongside Stein, however, to another level in this chapter when referring to the idea of appetite or the metaphysical concept of 'appetition,' which she arrives at via "Leibniz, James, and Whitehead by way of Isabelle Stengers, Joan Richardson, and Steven Shaviro" (Lorange 74). This leads her to a labyrinthine concoction of mental food that is sustained quite consistently throughout the book, circling around notions of affection and emergence with and of language in its 'manifold' meanings. Under 'Food' this gives, for instance, cause to allude also to Serres' parasite as well as Ngai's notion of cuteness.

The heading, 'Play,' alludes to the noun but also to the fact that Stein, indeed, wrote plays, which she regarded as landscapes and in which she explored the idea of nervousness as a going faster or slower to get together, of meaning, writer and audience. This notion of rhythm is further developed under the heading of

"Contemporaneity". Throughout the book the strong affinity with Whitehead seeps through as is also already made clear in the introduction. Overall the texts are rich in bringing together various sources that sometimes seem to stray away from the actual subject. As in any labyrinth it is easy to get lost, and Lorange tries to hint at possible throughways via links to other chapters in the marginal textbox. Sometimes however, one is left to wonder why the obvious ones are missing.

Lorange's argument to use the index as a format to approach Stein's writing is interesting. It results in a rich and layered book that invites to delve (and get lost) into the many references it makes. In a Coda Lorange states how Feyerabend's *Against Method* turned out to be quite instrumental and relates how Feyerabend wished he had chosen the word 'Dada' rather than 'anarchism' in relation to his proposed alternative for rationalism: "A Dadaist is prepared to initiate joyful experiments even in those domains where change and experimentation seem to be out of question (example: the basic function of language)" (*Against Method*, 21 nt 12; Lorange 247). I suppose that Lorange both hints at the joyful experiment of Stein's writing as well as her own undertaking. And it is joyful indeed, but having said that, it is also a real shame if not downright irritating that the book lacks a proper index, after all a book is a book. One that advertises it so explicitly in its title and set up begs for one. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the shortcoming is easily overcome, but having to use Google Books as a default search engine cannot have been the idea, certainly not for a proper Dadaist.

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### **Raqs Media Collective: Casebook**

by Michael Maranda, Editor Art Gallery of York University, NY, NY, 2014

300 pp., illus. 120 col. Paper, \$30.00

ISBN: 9780921972686.

*Reviewed by Edith Doove, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth*

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In trying to describe his appreciation for Raqs Media Collective's oeuvre curator Anders Kreuger names "its literary and literal qualities (its use of the object as text and text as object, to begin with), its credibility (as a voice audible above the art world murmur) and credentials (as an indispensable ingredient of the same murmur), and its coherence (enhanced and enlivened by heterogeneity, and its tone" (Maranda, p. 143). What this appreciation implies in the first place is a richness of the many layered aspects to which Kreuger returns in the rest of his text 'On Appreciation: The Case of Raqs' that is included in section 5: 'The Librarian's Lucid Dream (From Decomposition)' in *Raqs Media Collective: Casebook*. It also implies that 'whirling' that lies at the heart of Raqs' work or, as they explain, "Raqs is a word in Arabic, Turkish, Persian and our own Urdu that denotes a whirling, a dancing, a practice and cultivation of ecstatic contemplation founded in kinesis. So our name, our artistic signature, comes from the whirling Ð the Raqs Ð of whirling dervishesÉ" To which can be added that Raqs is also an acronym for "rarely asked questions" (Maranda, p. 21 Ð note 3). The whirling is also brought forth by their multiple roles as artists, curators and social researchers and an oeuvre that can not easily be defined, consisting of films, exhibitions, books and all kinds of other collaborations. It is the typical *oeuvre* that does not exist by the grace of its separate art works but rather by its accumulation and eventual interrelatedness.

*Raqs Media Collective: Casebook* presents 50 artworks and projects of the in New Delhi based collective consisting of Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, from the period of 2002 to 2012. The book functions as a (late) publication in conjunction with the exhibition 'Surjection' at the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto end of 2011, curated by Philip Monk. Divided into eight

sections, with an introduction by Monk, the fifth section brings together a range of essays and an interview, while the other sections are dedicated to several projects of Raqs Media Collective. The wide international range of critics, curators and writers that are brought together in the essay section to comment on Raqs' work from various perspectives are no doubt illustrative for what Kreuger calls their works' credibility and credentials. They include, amongst others, Svetlana Boym, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi, Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Olbricht and Cédric Vincent.

Despite its seemingly strict organization, the book invites to be read like *A Thousand Plateaus*, namely back and forth, weaving so many rhizomes through their work and commentary on the go, and this connects it to the whirling motifs mentioned at the start of this review. For this reason the texts are not organized in alphabetical order but respond to, and whirl around, each other. The project section carries poetic titles that usually refer to the first art work under its heading, but also contain other works that are sometimes seemingly unrelated. Consequently, reading this book thus means to wonder about possible connections or to just get happily lost in its labyrinth.

At the heart of Raqs' activities lies in fact another text, the *Mahabharata*, referred to by them as "deeply hypertextual É, every story contains the threads of many other stories" (Maranda, p. 130) that explains a lot about this Casebook's structure. In the interview with Olbricht Raqs Media Collective mentions how in the *Mahabharata* stories finish but also continue and flow back without it being clear whether something is the beginning or the ending of a story (Maranda, p. 139-140). With this interest it is not surprising that they see (art) products only as an articulation of process as Philip Monk indicates in his introduction. The artworks form, in Raqs' view, nodal points in a transversal scheme that is not end oriented. As described on their website, (which forms an excellent companion to the book), "Raqs follows its self-declared imperative of 'kinetic contemplation' to produce a trajectory that is restless in terms of the forms and methods that it deploys even as it achieves a consistency of speculative procedures" (<http://www.raqsmediacollective.net>)

For media-theorist Svetlana Boym Raqs' way of working connects to what she calls the 'off-modern' in which they follow the trajectory of the "lateral move of the knight in a game of chess" (Maranda, p. 127). Boym picks up on the fact that Raqs' recent

projects deal with the improbable texture of our time which makes "[t]he 'a' (as in arrhythmic), 'counter' (as in counterpoint), or off (as in off-modern)" more appropriate than postmodern, posthumanist or postcolonial if there needs to be a label to describe their activities. In their desire to fold time as a piece of paper Raqs Media Collective relates, according to Boym, to the ideas of Bergson, Mandelstam, Benjamin and later Deleuze, around imagination, memory and possibility. Raqs' work in that sense connects back to an inspirational past to build a critical but also playful view on the here and now as demonstrated in so many of their works.

This beautifully designed book, thus, connects well to this practice, giving an excellent insight and overview of the main projects of this enigmatic and inspiring collective. With questioning as one of their main occupations Raqs Media Collective manages to transfer this activity in an intelligent way to the reader, simultaneously contained and open-ended.

**The Curatorial Avant-Garde: Surrealism and Exhibition Practice in France, 1925–1941**

by Adam Jolles

Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2013 288 pp., illus. 25 col., 68 b/w. Trade, \$89.95 ISBN: 978-0-271-06415-4.

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The problem with this book starts with its title. In the series ‘Refiguring Modernism’, *The Curatorial Avant-Garde: Surrealism and Exhibition Practice in France, 1925-1941* “(...) considers surrealism as a historically contingent nexus of critical voices, images, and activities. It offers new insight into those figures who proved most instrumental in giving shape to surrealism’s curatorial vision.” The main problem lies here in the use of the word ‘*curatorial*’, which is a fairly recent terminology and certainly not used by the Surrealists. Calling them ‘The Curatorial Avant-Garde’ is presumably meant as a form of appreciation; however, simultaneously mentioning the “emergence of an *amateur* class of *curators* in France composed of writers and artists who actively sought to contribute to the current *curatorial discourse* despite possessing no formal training in or substantial exposure to either museum or gallery work” (italics in quotes throughout this review are mine) in my eyes isn’t. Jolles suggests possible other candidates for the celebratory title (“Herbert Bayer, Frederick Kiesler, and El Lissitzky, amongst others, immediately spring to mind”), but equally dismisses Dada as an important precursor. A more in-depth discussion of the First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920, which is only briefly mentioned in the introduction, would surely have solved quite a few of the ‘tenuous’ relations Jolles has with some elements in the Surrealist shows. The hanging pig dressed as a policeman in the Dada Fair that is mentioned and depicted is, for instance, a clear reference to the tradition of hanging crocodiles in churches, apothecaries, and various ‘Wunderkammer’, which were also a well-known reference for the Surrealists.

The bracketing of quite a specific period and place doesn’t help either. With concentrating on France between 1925 and 1941 Jolles misses out on the truly



revolutionary Surrealist exhibitions that took place in New York. These have already been thoughtfully analysed in Lewis Kachur's 2001 book *Displaying the Marvelous – Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* that however barely gets mentioned by Jolles. Instead he starts his discourse with Breton's "first major curatorial endeavour", the exhibition 'La Peinture Surréaliste' in Galerie Pierre, Paris (1925) that meant to acknowledge a possible visual expression of the surrealist ideas. In the way the exhibition was apparently hung the organisers, in my opinion however, also made their Dadaist, cross-disciplinary, and especially literary background clear. When Jolles mentions how Breton has included all of the works titles in a short prose poem accompanying the show, he indicates that this text is qualified by the Surrealists "somewhat confusingly" as a 'poetic and absurd' text, ignoring the fact that they observed these as two distinct but happily congruent literary qualities. Further on Jolles comes to the late and rather obvious conclusion to "(...) consider the exhibition to a certain extent as an experimental exercise in the picture-poem itself, a means of reconceptualising the exhibition as the artistic work rather than as simply a vehicle for display."

It would have been helpful in discussing this so-called curatorial endeavour if there had been some kind of visual reconstruction of the layout of the exhibition besides the verbal description and 15 small black and white images of works shown. Jolles mentions contemporary critiques on 'La Peinture Surréaliste' but, unfortunately does, not give any references. More importantly, there are no quotes of Breton or any of the Surrealists to justify the use of the terminology 'curatorial discourse or practice'. The only allusion Jolles gives in this direction is the Surrealists' take on museums, which were called 'museum of horrors' by Michel Leiris and likened to slaughterhouses by Bataille. [This actually brings to mind Will Self's recent review of the upcoming extension of Tate Modern – "The new Tate Modern will thus be not an art gallery per se, but a sort of life-size model of what an art gallery might be should our culture have need of one. Since it doesn't, but rather has requirements for visitor attractions that reify the ever-widening gulf between haves and have-nots, I'm absolutely certain it will prove an outrageous success", 'Art Sharks' in *The Guardian*, 22 November 2014].

Further chapters in Jolles' book are dedicated to 'Denouncing de Chirico' or "the

formulation of a *polemical curatorial model*”, ‘Colonists by Vocation’ on surrealism’s approach to ethnography, “the synonymous transformation of surrealist art in relation to the tide of *curatorial activity* during the interwar period (...) when the distinction between artwork and exhibition blurred within surrealism”, ‘The Artist as Dealer’, and finally a conclusion related to Adorno’s essay ‘Valery Proust Museum’ from 1953.

In general, the curatorial looms all over the book as an out of place newspeak. That the curatorial profession researches its ancestry is apt and refigures modernism possibly, as well. Kachur’s earlier mentioned book, however, seems to do a far better job as does Elena Filipovic in her recent ‘Artist as Curator’ research for the magazine, *Mousse*. [Weirdly enough all three publications share an orange cover]. What Jolles, in contrast, painstakingly tries to prove throughout his well designed, well illustrated, and fairly well documented coffee table book is the Surrealists’ factually non-existent curatorial position. Acknowledging that they were in the first place artists who naturally considered a non-institutional, cross- and possibly, even trans-disciplinary way of presenting of their artwork that is informative for a current curatorial practice and discourse would have been more helpful.

## **TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara**

by Marius Hentea

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2014 360 pp., illus. 60 b/w. Trade, £24.95; paper, \$34.95 ISBN: 9780262027540.

*Reviewed by Edith Doove, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth*  
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It is rather shocking that it took almost a 100 years after the 'official' 1916 start of Dada in Zurich for a first comprehensive biography to be published in English on its main instigator Tristan Tzara. Beautifully designed and with a title worthy of this poet that points to his first ever published book *La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*, it makes for a truly enticing read. Tzara was born, for lack of a birth certificate and also a somewhat Dadaist start, on either 14, 16 or 17 April 1896 in Moinești, north of Bucharest, Romania as Samuel Rosenstock. He would move to Zurich in the late autumn of 1915, where on the opening night of the Cabaret Voltaire on 5 February 1916 he would declaim poems in Romanian. While still at school he already wrote literary reviews, amongst others on Apollinaire's *Alcools*, and set up the magazine *Symbolul* with the later Dadaist Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea, setting the tone for his further main occupation in life. The magazine *Chemarea* that was run by Vinea and Tzara in 1915 was, according to Vinea, the "embryo" for Dada and the first to publish poems signed with the pseudonym Tristan Tzara. Young and enthusiastic, Tzara quickly took over from the more restrained Hugo Ball as organiser of the Cabaret Voltaire events and eventually led Dada in Zurich from more performance-based to publication-oriented with a wide international appeal. He would over the years edit and publish several issues of the magazine *Dada*, also after Zurich Dada had ended and had dispersed itself over Europe with, amongst others, Huelsenbeck in Berlin, Ernst in Cologne and Tzara himself in Paris. Tzara maintained strong correspondences with Dada enthusiasts and disciples all over the world. This led to the (surely somewhat tongue-in-cheek) statement in the collective tract 'Dada n'est pas mort' of 1921: "We are organizing 72 exhibitions in all the capitals of Europe and the two Americas (Africa, Asia and Oceania are spared); the same day, at the same hour, the 392 presidents of the Dada Movement will speak in 118 different

cities.” Where Tzara throughout his life defended the inherent freedom of Dada and poetry, in Paris he had to eventually give in to the urge by Andre Breton for a stricter organisation, leading to the demise of Dada in 1923 and the more or less simultaneous birth of Surrealism. The relationship with Breton would always remain problematic, but from 1929 Tzara nevertheless fell for his courtship and actually became one of the most active surrealists of that period, connecting back to his old Dada friends and the collaboration he so strongly believed in. With the Second World War looming he, however, also became convinced of a need for political action, which led to a final break with the Surrealists in 1935 whom he accused of being purely aesthetic. Tzara would, in the years to follow, engage himself more and more with politics, be it via various cultural organisations, such as the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires that had strong links to the French Communist Party, or as director of the Support Committee for Spanish Intellectuals during the Spanish Civil War. He worked on the organisation of the Second International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture that took place in Valencia, Madrid, and Paris in July 1937 and represented France during the 16<sup>th</sup> World PEN Congress in Prague in June 1938. But as a Jewish immigrant without a passport, his situation became quite difficult during the war, which he spend mostly in hiding in Souillac in Southwest France where he hooked up with Pierre Betz of the still-existent cultural magazine *Le Point*. As soon as Souillac was freed, Tzara started publishing again, and he moved to Toulouse where he became an important member of the Centre des Intellectuels and worked with, amongst others, Henri Lefebvre. He became a French citizen in 1947 and only regained his Paris home and belongings, left behind during the war, in 1948. Joining the Communist Party, he would publish his poems mainly in small luxury editions due to the fact he got little support for work that was not immediately of use as cultural propaganda. It probably also did not help that he was quite a critical member. Towards the end of his life Tzara became known as a specialist in African art, which he started to collect in the 20s. Politically disappointed and isolated, he started an exhaustive study of anagrams in literature, mainly in François Villon but extending also to Dante and Rabelais that, however, never was published, as he could not let go of the manuscript. This research connected, as Hentea states, to Tzara’s lifelong fascination with language and his wish to find its secret as well as his mania as a collector. But equally, this endeavour seems to connect back to an academic

approach that also came afore in the Study Group of Human Phenomenology that he had set up with, amongst others, Roger Caillois as forum for contemporary philosophy, the human spirit and modern science in 1935. In the one and only issue of the magazine *Inquisitions* that the group published, Tzara's friend Gaston Bachelard wrote an article on 'Le Surrationalisme'. As a scholar Tzara was, in 1962, invited to take part in the 10-day International Congress of African Culture in Salisbury, Rhodesia "because of his expertise on the relationship between traditional African art and contemporary practice." For this review I have concentrated mainly on the possibly lesser-known aspects of Tzara's later life, but Hentea pictures a very detailed account of the Romanian and Dada episodes as well. The book, overall, is extremely well-researched, and although much of the Dada history can be found in various other books, it is certainly good to read it from Tzara's perspective. After a somewhat laborious start in which Hentea, in any case, sets a clear international scene, a sense of the "virulent anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Romania" and the strong early French relationship, the book really takes off. One of the things that become clear is Tzara's knack for the 'commercial' – he stressed and made good use of the commercial strength of the word Dada and always had an international approach. Hentea analyses Tzara's poetry and numerous manifestos throughout the book, which is helpful, with it only being a shame that the French original text is not included alongside its translation. As Hentea states at the beginning of his book, it took the Library Jacques Doucet six years to get the Tzara archive organised, donated by his son Christophe and consisting of 54 book manuscripts and over 4000 letters, postcards, and telegrams. Interestingly enough, and not mentioned by Hentea but to be found on their website, the Tzara archives already date back to 1922 when Doucet bought amongst others the manuscript of *Vingt cinq poèmes* on advice of Breton and Aragon.

## **Your Everyday Art World**

by Lane Relyea

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013 264 pp., illus. 36 b&w. Trade, \$24.95 ISBN: 9780262019231.

*Reviewed by Edith Doove, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth*  
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If there were one word to describe Relyea's relentless analysis of today's art world, then it would have to be 'cynical'. Relyea's book is a razor-sharp analysis of the contemporary art world from circa 1987 onwards that leaves the reader close to severely depressed. Relyea argues convincingly that the way artistic creativity and networking have been operated during the past 27 years has led straight to the current neo-liberal economy with its abundance of zero hour contracts, most notably also in the cultural sector. Artists, and for that matter also curators, although Relyea does not mention them specifically, will always produce because of the inherent need of their productivity. So no matter if there is no budget, the making and producing will go on. On top of that artists and curators are flexible, creative and come up with quick, "just in time" solutions, something Relyea describes as – "being a DIY artist, uncategorizable and nomadic, a hacker of culture and a poet of the everyday", the new romantic. It serves any neo-liberal politician or economist well. In what seemed to be a spontaneous process to build an alternative to the museum, the longing for the real, everyday, in terms of Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics, a genuine joy in DIY or maybe rather self-initiation, might have bitten the art world collectively in its tail. Relyea questions for instance amongst others a devaluing of theory since the late 1980s in the wake of this development. The international platforms and the networks connecting them, created certainly an "immeasurable space of international mobility" in which being somewhere was more important than doing something, and as Relyea seems to indicate, thinking about something. What seemed to be refreshing at the time now becomes somewhat muddled in hindsight and poses the question whether we really got it so wrong. In the whole process disciplinary arenas collapse as Relyea states and indeed libraries and museums nowadays remind someone rather of air port lounges and vice versa. Birmingham's new library is a good, and I would argue,

exciting example. But the way Relyea describes the process to get to that point leaves a bitter taste. After introducing the importance of networks and platforms Relyea goes on to look closer at four specific cities that he sees as particularly important in the eventual downfall – Glasgow, Los Angeles, New York And Cologne. For someone like me, starting to be active in the art world from exactly 1987 onwards a city like Antwerp could have been easily added to this series. Especially since one of Relyea's protagonists, Dennis Anderson, ended up working there in the beginning of the '90s. No doubt other readers will add their particular cities, as Relyea's analysis seems to portray the art world per se during this period. This is however a rich and extremely informative, well-documented historical chapter that in itself is a must-read to fully understand the workings of today's art world. All ends unavoidable and literally in ruins but where the rest of this book slaps the average art professional around the ears, the last chapter seems to be too forced to be convincing. Whereas the overall underlying message is dramatic enough in itself, the tone of this last chapter does not do the argument a favour. The attention for so-called bricolage art seems already to be somewhat out-dated. As usual, we need distance to get a clearer picture. What is clear however is that cherishing flexibility, relentless creativity and a DIY attitude in itself is not the problem. It is preventing politics to exploit this and cultural institutions to seamlessly adapt to zero hour contracts where they are supposed to protect art, artists and curators. To be able to do this, a book like Relyea's should be compulsive reading and re-reading matter for anyone involved in the art world as it gives all the arguments we need.

## **Dancing around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp**

Exhibition at Barbican, London 14 February – 9 June 2013

Dancing around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp

Exhibition website: <http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/765.html>.

by Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle, Editors Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, Philadelphia, 2012

448 pp., illus. 100 col., 105 b/w. \$29.95

ISBN: 9780300189254.

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Making an historic overview of multidisciplinary art is an art in itself as this intriguing exhibition at the London Barbican successfully demonstrates. Compiled by Carlos Basualdo in collaboration with Erica F. Battle, in an inventive *mise en scène* by French contemporary artist Philippe Parreno, *Dancing around the Bride* convincingly shows how this can be done. Basualdo, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Battle were inspired by the memorial for choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham in 2009 to develop this exhibition about the artistic relationships between Duchamp, Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns, as ‘an unfolding dance’. As they claim in the wonderful catalogue, Cage was the first to learn about Duchamp when seeing his work in 1935 at the home of the collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg who would later donate their collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Cage met Duchamp in New York in 1942; the same year that he encountered Cunningham. Later, in 1951 Johns and Rauschenberg were introduced to each other by art critic Suzi Gablik, and independently Cage and Cunningham met Rauschenberg during his first one-man exhibition in New York. Toward the end of the fifties Johns and Rauschenberg travelled to Philadelphia to see the Duchamp collection and met Duchamp who, was sufficiently curious about these so-called ‘neo-Dada’ artists to visit their studios in 1959.

Basualdo and Battle state in their introductory catalogue text: “From these



multifarious points of introduction onward, each of these artists and Duchamp developed relationships that pivoted around mutual interest and exchange that would last until Duchamp's death in 1968 – and that would, for the younger generation, reverberate well beyond” (Basualdo, 20). This so-called dancing around each other, as a metaphor for responding to each other, work together and build influential relationships, is evidenced in several ways in the exhibition. For example, the set up is quite playful on the lower level and opens with Duchamp's key pieces, the paintings 'Nude Descending A Staircase (No. 2)' and 'Bride', (both from 1912) and the movement depicted in the first painting is picked up by one of two automatic piano's as well as on a central stage nearby above which the set pieces from Cunningham's ballet 'Walkaround Time' (1968) that refer to Duchamp's 'Large Glass', are hung. Panels designed by Philip Parreno and installed throughout the exhibition, light up alternately to indicate which sound or musical piece is played as part of the looped soundscape, consisting of work by Duchamp, Cage, Parreno and David Behrman. The idea of playful movement is not only evoked on the central stage during weekends and Thursday evenings, but also in the programme of dance, music and theatre that accompanies the exhibition and that makes full use of the location in the Barbican. The upper level is shaped by the imposing architecture of the building and is somewhat more regimented. Each of the rooms on this floor is used to explore particular aspects such as the use of chance, important exchanges and dance collaborations. The fact that the exhibition originates from the Philadelphia Museum of Art makes for a unique chance to see a whole series of works by Duchamp that normally resides in the museum's collection. As a consequence, apart from his 'Nude Descending' there is also 'Apolinère Enameled' (1916-17) – a painted work that resonates with the work of Jasper Johns, or the object 'With Hidden Noise' (1916) that inspired Robert Rauschenberg. There are also various other high-end loans from other international private and museum collections to be seen. The unique combination of the chosen art works and documents therefore makes for an extremely complete and insightful exhibition.

The catalogue, designed by Takaaki Matsumoto (described by a colleague as the ultimate form of book porn) is another artwork in itself. It compiles amongst other

things an extensive anthology of over 200 pages of texts as well as a chronology that gives a good view on how these artist's lives intertwined with each other.

### **Captain Cap (vol.1)**

by Alphonse Allais; translated from French by Doug Skinner

Black Scat Books, California, US, 2013

Absurdist Texts & Documents Series – No.11

60 pp., illus. perfect-bound. Trade, \$14.00

ISBN: N/A.

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The translation into English of Captain Cap as the first in a series of three is both welcome and very timely. It is welcome since the Absurdist Texts & Documents Series by Black Scat Books project has filled an important void since the only other English venture into Allais' writing, *The World of Alphonse Allais*, translated by Miles Kingston and published in hardback by Chatto & Windus in 1976, was made available in a paperback in 2008. But apart from long awaited, Captain Cap also comes at a timely moment because of the fact that its ironies are particularly opposite today as we witness global intellectual colonisation. The importance of not forgetting about the French context and its originality for a true understanding of this text was underlined by the former director of the National Library of France Jean-Noël Jeanneney when he launched a counter-attack against the American (U.S.A) imperialism by Google Books in which search results for European writers initially were mostly provided in English, (which resulted in the establishment of the Europeana Libraries - <http://www.europeana-libraries.eu/>). The first book that Jeanneney showed in the course of recent documentary 'Google and the World Brain' (BBC, 2013) was Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, which, without wanting to be overly chauvinistic, does put things in the right order. He dryly remarks (in French with English sub-titles) that on being confronted with the gift of a small thermo flask, brought to him by a Google Book VP in order to win him over, it was clear to him that they clearly did not understand who the director of the National Library of France actually was, or better, what he (commercially) represents. The documentary also identified similar misunderstandings or even better 'misreadings' by Google Books when, for example, the initial cataloguing of Walt Whitman's famous book of poems

‘Leaves of Grass’ went under Gardening, and when it failed to recognize that Japanese books need to be scanned vertically rather than horizontally, turning any search result in complete nonsense. Such faux pas are hilarious after the event rather than the absurd way in which Allais’ texts actually points to – even anticipates - these kinds of dangers in an indirect or implicit way. So aside from the sheer pleasure of meeting an old friend, his observations have relevance now more than 100 years later.

The importance of Allais in the French speaking world is clear amongst other things in the fact that his Captain Cap’s proclamation “Loin d’être l’apanage de certains, l’assiette au beurre doit être le privilège de tous” is today still used in the online version of the *Larousse* dictionary as an example of the use of the word ‘assiette’ (<http://www.larousse.com/en/dictionaries/french/assiette/5827>). Inevitably something gets lost in the traffic between languages, and, in this case, the ‘assiette au beurre’ proclamation becomes in Doug Skinner’s current translation “Far from being the privilege of a few, the pork barrel must become the privilege of all”. Pork barrel alludes to a typical American kind of politics and might be the closest you can get to the French idea but alas some important information does get lost. *L’Assiette du Beurre* was one of a series of satirical magazines that existed around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Paris, and Allais was one of its contributors. Born in 1854 in Honfleur, Normandy in the same street as Erik Satie, with whom he later collaborated, he published *Captain Cap: His Ideas, His Adventures, His Drinks* in 1902, a few years before his death in 1905.

Allais, together with Alfred Jarry, remains highly respected as one of France’s truly great humorists, brilliant in his subversion of truth and reality. A demonstration of which is the fact that in 1954 the literary Prix Alphonse-Allais was instigated with Ionesco as its first laureate. However fictional Allais’ Captain Cap may seem, rather like Jarry’s Ubu, he did exist, as Doug Skinner points out, in his informative introduction. In the hands of Allais he just becomes quite a lot more active than the original, running to get elected in the 9<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, 2<sup>nd</sup> district of Paris. Elected as what exactly, however, stays unclear. Captain Cap is the hero who was the launcher of shooting stars while a starter at the Conservatorium, the discoverer of the meat-mines of Labrador, and maybe most noteworthy, the fighter of bureaucracy. In short he becomes larger than life and absurd in every way. It also becomes apparent

that in spite of all his strengths, he was not elected but disappeared. However, in order to help with drinking away one's sorrows there is a whole section of rather stiff cocktails at the end of the book that probably reveal Captain Cap's true character the best.

As a frequent user of the holorhyme or holorime in which each sentence gets a hidden meaning, Allais was an important influence on Duchamp who relished in tongue-in-cheek wordplay in his *oeuvre* to which the significance of his French origin all too often seems to be forgotten. Allais frequently exhibited at the Salon des Arts Incohérents and was editor-in-chief of the humoristic journal *Le Sourire*. At the same time he was a highly critical commentator of (French) politics, something that also becomes clear reading between the lines of Captain Cap. The fictive play with reality that, as in Jarry's pataphysics, often seems to reveal much more about reality than a pure scientific approach, becomes clear in Allais' so-called abstract drawings and compositions such as 'First Communion of Anaemic Young Girls in the Snow' (Carré blanc, 1883) and 'Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf Man (1897): Masterpieces of irony that resonate with today's conceits.

This publication of *Captain Cap* is a little gem. It is wonderful that not-for profit publisher Black Scat Books, which seems to operate in true pataphysical tradition with former bookstore owner Norman Conquest (sic) as its 'Président-Fondateur' clearly respecting its French origins, has taken the initiative to bring Allais' text to the attention of the English-speaking world. Its highly recommended blog [blackscatbooks.com](http://blackscatbooks.com) proclaimed Monday 18 February, usually known as Presidents' Day, as Allais Day, "A day of celebration for all who are sick to death of President's Day. Have a drink! Buy a book! And vote for Captain Cap!" Perhaps now more than ever it is important to just do that and keep reading as many languages as possible in order to get between the lines.

## **A Natural History of Laughter**

by Jacques Mitsch Icarus Films, Brooklyn, NY, 2011 (copyright), 2012 (release)  
DVD, 48 mins. col. Sales, \$348. Distributor's website: <http://icarusfilms.com>.

*Reviewed by Edith Doove, Transtechnology Research, University of Plymouth*  
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Giving a documentary the title 'A Natural History of Laughter' is rather ambitious while it is clear that within the scope of 48 minutes it is hardly possible to discuss the full scope of this subject. It would, therefore, have been better to call it, for instance, *An Investigation of Laughter in Six Chapters*. Starting off with the research of Robert Provine, an American neuroscientist and psychologist at the University of Maryland devoted to the study of the evolution of human laughter, we first see what his studies have revealed about the human brain. It is made clear that the origin for this by all means unusual gesture can be found in our animal ancestors, which is demonstrated through the comparison with laughter in apes, especially through the research of the Dutch ethologist Jan Van Hoof, another pioneer in laughter sciences who is primarily concerned with human and ape research. It becomes clear that laughter plays an important role in the sustenance of social cohesion through its contagious character, which in itself can be rather scary as demonstrated in a group session of laughter yoga. Where the evolutionary approach in itself is no doubt qualitative, it doesn't hold that many surprises; whereas, the suggestion of laughter in rats and other animals through the research of Dr Jaak Panksepp at Washington State University indicates a more innovative understanding of laughter in living creatures in its totality.

Although the documentary ends with the suggestion that laughter is serious matter and as a whole deals in an informative way with pioneering interdisciplinary research, its overall tone, so-called humorous graphics and soundtrack, are somewhat irritating. If seen as specifically aimed at an audience of high school students, postgraduates, and aspiring scientists, this approach may make sense. However, although laughter is contagious, it is also clear that there are different qualitative ways to make people laugh.

**The Islands of Benoît Mandelbrot: Fractals, Chaos, and the Materiality of Thinking**

by Nina Samuel, Editor

BGC/Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012

176 pp., illus. 160 col. Trade, £23.75

ISBN: 978-0-300-18643-7.

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There are two things that spring to mind when reading this very informative book on Mandelbrot. One is René Daumal's pataphysic, unfinished novel *Mount Analogue* and its account of a voyage to an imaginative island. Early on in his book the protagonist notes: "For a mountain to play the role of Mount analogue, *its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible* to human beings as nature made them. It must be *unique* and it must exist *geographically*. The gateway to the invisible must be visible" (32). The other is the recent news on Google's Phantom Island, a non-existing island that somehow slipped into Google maps, images of which have more than a close resemblance to some of Mandelbrot's constructions.

I will delve into these associations deeper elsewhere. For now it suffices possibly to state that although neither of these associations are mentioned in this book, what triggered them is the fact that Mandelbrot himself quite early on in his development of his fractal landscapes, makes the somewhat surprising connection of these (and their mountainous landscapes) to the science-fiction world of H.G. Well's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, thus alluding to a connection between the fictitious and the real. What this book successfully tries to demonstrate is how "images actively generate knowledge with their own particular logic", more specifically in the work of Benoît Mandelbrot. It is published as the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition 'The Islands of Benoît Mandelbrot – Fractals, Chaos, and the Materiality of Thinking, organized by Nina Samuel and others at the Bard Graduate Center at New York, running from 21 September 2012 till 27 January 2013. The researchers were able to make use of materials, images and objects, found in Mandelbrot's office to which

they had limited excess after his death in 2010 and that were previously unpublished.

Investigating in both book and exhibition, “the complex relationship between visual and scientific reasoning in fractal geometry and chaos theory, both of which are well-known for using digital scientific imagery”, one of the insights is the importance of images for generating knowledge rather than ‘just’ being illustrations. What is fascinating even more is the importance of hand drawing, especially in the early years of experimentation with computer graphics. As stated in an interview that Samuel held with him in 2005, Mandelbrot had a special talent for visualizing formula: “Once I heard a mathematical formula a shape came to my mind.” For him this was one of the explanations for his interdisciplinary approach. Where this fascinating and rich book holds a specific interest is exactly in the link between art and science that is instigated through Mandelbrot’s work. Although Mandelbrot never pretended his images, hand-drawn or computer-printed, to be art there is a constant underlying interest in bridging the gap. He does that through his reference to Wells, in signing some of his drawings and prints, but even more explicitly in his article ‘Scalebound or scaling shapes: a useful distinction in the visual arts and the natural sciences’, published in *Leonardo* in 1981, and to which this book dedicates a whole chapter. In this article there is an attempt to apply his fractal sets to visual arts, indicated by author Juliet Koss as a possible “(...) draft for future analyses.” Although much more than a draft, the current book holds exactly that same promise.



## **Inside Jokes – Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind**

by Matthew M. Hurley, Daniel C. Dennett, and Reginald B. Adams, Jr., Editors

The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2011

384 pp. Trade, £20,95/ \$29.95

ISBN: 978-0-262-01582-0.

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Laughter currently seems to be at the centre of attention, since following Parvulescu's recent book, *Laughter – Notes on a Passion*; *Inside Jokes – Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* is the second book published by MIT in a relatively short time on the topic.

Whereas there are some inevitable overlaps with Parvulescu's, these are obviously very different books. Parvelescu concentrates hers on the actual phenomenon of laughter, relating it to a wide range of subjects like laughing as incantation, the matter of laughing at, passion, the mouth, the last avant-gardes, woman, reading/listening and finally the archive of laughter (see my review in *Leonardo* December 2010, [http://www.leonardo.info/reviews/dec2010/doove\\_parvulescu.php](http://www.leonardo.info/reviews/dec2010/doove_parvulescu.php)).

Hurley, Dennett and Adams, on the other hand, state in their preface that they will explain “why humor exists, how it works in the brain, and why comedy is an art” and thus different from science (p. x). While they admit that theirs “is an unabashedly eclectic theory, drawing heavily on existing work on humor” (p. 7) their extensive bibliography, however, does not include Parvelescu, possibly because it was published too late.

The starting point for the book was Hurley's dissertation; nonetheless for all three authors the book represents the “proper account of laughter” (and amusement) that “moves beyond pure phenomenology”. This account was first called for more fully by Dennett in his *Consciousness Explained* (1991, 64-66). However, there is a significant deviation from the original call by Dennett, which was that “[a] proper

account of laughter must leave out the presumed intrinsic hilarity, the zest, the funniness, because their presence would merely postpone the attempt to answer the question” (1991, p.64). Rather confusingly this is exactly what Hurley, Dennett and Adams do not do in this latest book. This book looks inside jokes and how humor can be used to reverse-engineer the mind. At the same time, it *delivers* inside jokes and *uses* humor to reverse-engineer the mind. It seems obvious that a book that wants to look inside jokes would present examples of these. It is worse if a book tries to both explain humor and be funny at the same time. One could argue that Hurley, Dennett and Adams are happy to take on a risky business, as humor might be a universal phenomenon, but the appreciation of it, as they indicate themselves, is not necessarily so. This leads to some fairly weak jokes at the start of the book, a feature that is reflected in the title of the book and unfortunately continued throughout.

Apart from a thorough study of humor and the working of jokes, the reader is not only presented with mostly non-referenced jokes at the beginning of each chapter and section, but, additionally, also with a mysterious system of numbered, equally non-referenced, jokes throughout the book, causing considerable distraction. There is also an overall populist kind of tone that somehow is bothersome with insertions like “in case you wondered”, and the kind of sloppy quotations mentioned earlier.

The most interesting question this book poses and tries to answer, however, is why humor exists in the first place. It appears to be very prominent in our lives, and maybe more so then ever before given the profusion of stand up comedy in recent times. In order to answer this and other why questions, Hurley, Dennett and Adams declare that they want “to provide a preliminary sketch of not just a cognitive model, but an emotional and *computational* model of humor” (p. 3). Additionally they want to work “toward a theory that would allow humor (...) to be computed and experienced by a nonhuman agent (...) that not only can make jokes but that can truly be said to have “a sense of humor” much like the human sense” (p. 4). In order to do this they argue that humor “depends on *thought*” requiring that their “book must sketch a theory of the kind of general intelligence that could support a genuine sense of humor” (p. 5). In the process they introduce some “key novelties” such as “a new evolutionary explanation of the origin of humor; an ecologically motivated theory of the emotional component of mirth; and a cognitive theory of humor and laughter” (p. 6).

The question remains what is humor for? From a biologically determinist position there is a possible, and seemingly logical, connection to fitness where “females use sense of humor (in males) as a hard-to-fake advertisement of intelligence and power” (p.11). But Hurley, Dennett and Adams regard humor more as a “powerful reward system” that will keep our “brains engaged full time in real-time (risky) heuristic search, generating presumptions about what will be experienced next in every domain” (p.12). It, thus, becomes clear that humor and laughter are connected to insight and leads to mirth as we crack the puzzle or, for that matter, the joke. In a way we all seem to be cast as fulltime detectives, constantly solving problems and delighted when we do so. Apart from solving problems, we come across automatically as we go through daily life, we also enjoy inventing them and jokes are in this sense puzzles, mathematical problems, or detective stories.

Hurley, Dennett and Adams have, indeed, managed to write a puzzling book with an open end as they freely admit that their research is nowhere near creating a nonhuman agent with a sense of humor. Despite the criticism above on aspects of its structure, *Inside Jokes* certainly does deliver a thorough study of jokes, humor and laughter, which is worth engaging with. It is rich in its references and thought provoking, providing amongst others a phenomenology of humor and a brief history of humor theories on which to build further research. It is just a pity in trying to be both funny and serious, it falls between two stools. Admittedly (a sense of) humor is a personal matter, and there will be a range of readings of it, but the strategy that the authors have adopted can (and in my view does) make research into the complicated topic of laughter and jokes more complex.

## **We Can Change The Weather - 100 Cases of Changeability**

by Marleen Wynants

CROSSTALKS Vub Press, Brussels, 2010

224 pp. Type N/A, € 29,95

ISBN: 978-90-5487-692-2.

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This is the fourth CROSSTALKS book coming out of the academic and corporate networking talks launched by Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2003. Projects tackled so far have been Smart Logistics, Energy Efficiency, Sustainability and Changeability, Prosperity without Growth?, Bridges over Troubled Water, Cleantech and Transparency in Healthcare, resulting in the publications *How Open is the Future?* (2005), *Brave New Interfaces* (2007), *In Sickness and in Health* (2009), and this *We Can Change the Weather*.

*We Can Change The Weather* offers, as Operational Director Marleen Wynants puts it in her introduction, tangible initiatives instead of "more political talk, more reports on climate change and unstable financial markets, more reports on resource depletion and pollution." As the title suggests, the book is a collection of 100 cases of change or changeability taking as its premise that we have changed the weather and how it is changing us. The explicit "holistic" approach is expressed in the fact that the cases originate from scientific researchers, architects, artists, political thinkers and entrepreneurs, true to the idea of sharing knowledge and stimulating creativity in search of sustainability that is behind all the CROSSTALKS projects. The result is thus a mixture of both quite hands-on solutions and more philosophical visions, differing in terms of scale and approach.

In taking for its headline a quote from literature, namely one by Marcel Proust ("A change in the weather is sufficient to recreate the world and ourselves"), the original scope of the book is clearly set. Every case has been assigned two pages, not unlike the Pecha Kucha format that the CROSSTALKS introduced in 2007. Trying to state a

case in such a confined format has obviously its pros and cons. Sometimes the cases are mainly a thought-provoking suggestive (visual) statement; at other times the contributors succeed in making a clear point. The order in which the cases are presented seems to be somewhat arbitrary: they do not follow an alphabetical order or one according to discipline. As a consequence, the temptation is to flip to and fro through the book, getting lost in a world of possible solutions some of which have actually been tested and others that are just speculative proposals or are in various stages of development. Overall the word 'holistic' returns regularly in the contributions, as in a take on Ecotherapy and Ecopsychology - "A holistic, human ecological, psychological and philosophical approach to a society and planet in crisis". Other suggestions in this same vein are those urging the choice for macrobiotic or vegetarian food. But this does not mean that the book solely opts for what in this context is more obvious alternative way of life. It opens, for instance, quite surprisingly with the case of JDS Architects who have been asked to develop a part of a city in Shenzhen, China. This is an unusually large development of some 2,5 million square meters and, following the principles of Feng Shui, opts for designs that are preferably 666, 888 or 1111 meters tall. The discussion of this project raises the question for the architects why urban growth should require the erasure of public space and nature.

On a relatively smaller scale François Jegou, director of the Brussels-based design research company Strategic Design Scenarios, questions whether it is possible to design products that influence users towards new and more sustainable behaviours, for example by introducing particular switches. Simon Dewulf of CREAX that aims at energy sufficiency in R&D gives recycling a new meaning when it is not only applied to recycling cars in a take on Industrial Ecology at Delft University of Technology, but also to recycling knowledge across domains. Other contributions deal with aspects such as creative ecologies (as practiced by Culture Lab at Newcastle University) or the use of renewable energy in the Dutch theatre production Eager To Know. The project 'Laptops Unite!' seeks to raise awareness by creating a super computer for climate simulation by, tapping into their potentially huge computing power when laptops worldwide are connected. In a similarly informed response Takashi Ikegami, both a physicist and 'a maker of artworks', is developing a Mind Time Machine that needs to run all day in a public space and as a consequence asks

for a new kind of sustainability.

Sustainability in *We Can Change The Weather* is researched in a wide variety of domains ranging from architecture, design, food, industry, R&D and art, the results of which in the end all feed back into each other. In this respect the book definitely offers a wide range of thought provoking cases although, unfortunately, it is not a practical book - an index of keywords would have been helpful - but, that said it is important book in that it demonstrates how the most diverse researchers try to find new transdisciplinary ways of dealing with our planet in peril. What would be especially interesting is to see how these ideas will hold or develop over a period of five, ten years and to give the book thus the dynamic status it asks for.

## **Laughter - Notes on a Passion**

by Anca Parvulescu

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2010

208 pp. illus. 30 b/w. Paper, \$21.95

ISBN: 978-0-262-51474-3.

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Parvelescu's Introduction to the subject of laughter is extremely comprehensive and, at times, somewhat convulsive. The scope of the book ranges from laughing as incantation, the matter of laughing at, passion, the mouth, the last avant-gardes, woman, readening/listening and finally the archive of laughter, and in setting this out the author touches on so many intriguing aspects of laughter that there is an almost irresistible temptation for her to stray into domains that distract from the subject rather than add to it. This is especially the case when she explains the subtitle and the initial framing of the book. Laughter in this book is returned to the passions and while the history of laughter does not necessarily have to be funny, the author has structured the book in such a way that each of the chapters revolve around an anecdote as well as a central figure which turns out to be such a tight corset that it leaves little room for actual laughter.

Parvelescu's main target is to return to the materiality of laughter itself. In this regard the image of a laughing puppet on the cover summarizes its key discussion which is not so much the why and what about of laughter as the how and where. The book comprises of five chapters: on the civilizing of laughter; modernism - or an extravagance of laughter; the philosophical avant-gardes - or the community of laughers; feminism - or "she's beautiful and she's laughing" and finally cinema - or the laughing gas party. It is a narrow spectrum of the topic and can hardly be said to deliver an objective archive of laughter but perhaps that is not the intention, although it immediately draws attention to what is left out. Starting the book with the civilization of laughter this chapter also delivers an extensive overview on how society tried to deal with 'the savage' and kill it so to speak. In the discussion of

laughter by the philosophical avant-garde or feminists, the central figures (Bataille and Cixous) connect laughter with death as does the chapter on cinema in which most of the laughter that Parvulescu discusses in this is produced by actors that have died a long time ago.

Perhaps this morbid fascination should be expected since in opening with Nietzsche's, "It is the past - the longest, deepest, hardest of pasts - that seems to surge up whenever we turn serious", Parvulescu of course sets the tone of a book which is very explicitly about laughter in the past tense. As a consequence as an archive of laughter it necessarily lacks the immediate aspects of the actual act of laughter - even in an historic context. This could have been recovered with perhaps a broader brush to include the impact of laughter on art. For example Zurich Dada's highly influential reinstatement of laughter in Modernism (which is discussed in this book mainly in terms of Afro-American culture) about which Hans Richter wrote:

"The unprofessionals and art historians recognised us more by our laughter than by anything we did. Because of our external and internal perceptive powers we were aloof from the world of the petty bourgeois. [...] we laughed to our heart's delight. In this way we destroyed, affronted, ridiculed and laughed. We laughed at everything. We laughed at ourselves, as we did at the kaiser, king, and fatherland, beerbellies, and pacifiers. We took our laughter seriously; it was our very laughter that guaranteed the seriousness of our anti-art activities in our efforts to find ourselves." [1]

This creative insistence on the what, how and effect of laughter is perhaps the 'dog that does not bark' in this book. However fascinating as an (partial) archive of laughter, history (and the medium of the book) *Laughter - Notes on Passion* apparently leaves no place for actual laughter and that seems almost perverse given the subtitle. But to its great credit it places a key topic on the agenda for those interested in art and culture (and for that matter the sciences and technology) which is that although it is a largely private and apparently unpredictable reaction it has great resonance with where we are and how we view the world as a cultural habitat. Parvulescu says as much in her introduction: "Drawing on its musical overtones, the teacher writes "notes", around which she and her students improvise. Crucial in any note-writing exercise is the interval, the energetic white space between the islands of



writing, where the interesting swimming happens." The burst of laughter may have been theorized to death; however, this book definitely inspires to write others on these white spaces and to bring laughter and its determining influences alive.

References:

[1] Hans Richter, *Dada : Kunst und Antikunst* (Cologne: DuMont, Schauberg, 1964), 66f.]

## **Liverpool Biennial: International Festival of Contemporary Art**

Liverpool, UK

September 18th – November 28th 2010

Festival website: [http:// www.biennial.com/](http://www.biennial.com/).

*Reviewed by Edith Doove Transtechnology Research University of Plymouth*  
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Since its start in 1998, the Liverpool Biennial has grown to be the largest and one of the most visited biennials in the world. Given that today there are about 250 biennials and triennials for contemporary art, basically opening one every other day, that is no mean achievement. This year's sixth edition is the most ambitious with more than 60 national and international artists and more than 45 commissions for new work.

To stay in that league requires a combination of clever marketing and good programming, and with this year's central theme 'Touched' the marketing aspect was covered since it has a good ring to it—and it, thus, will no doubt stand out among the many biennials and triennials going on in the world. Content-wise it is quite a timely theme, too, as it responds to the recent bank crisis and the recession that followed upon it, urging for a more in-depth approach by demonstrating an emotional involvement that comes in a multitude of forms: social-political, poetic, intellectual, humoristic, but also quite literally 'touching'.

Of course, a theme like this can be quite hazardous since it can easily slip into the superficial and sentimental. 'Touched' stays clear of that trap most of the time by addressing a general sensitivity for the 'other' in a myriad of guises: an openness to another point of view, for the knowledge of people of old age, of other cultures, and other ways of knowing, etc.

The central exhibition 'Touched' extends over the city occupying several venues, the Bluecoat having a particularly convincing presentation with Daniel Bozhkov's installation 'Music Not Good For Pigeons' as its central focus point. As the result of his research into the difference in experiencing the city of Liverpool today and during

his first visit as a sailor in 1986, it couples a personal encounter with a political and poetic approach while avoiding the all too biographical and shallow navel-gazing that the visual arts has delivered us in recent years. He first knew Liverpool mainly as the city of the Beatles, as a historic harbour city, the place where local socialist activists had stood up against the politics of Thatcher and where he saw his first homeless person. Bozhkov now mixes these first impressions in a replica of the dressing rooms of Liverpool Football Club, with video footage of his interviews with several former Militant Tendency councilors, a popular YouTube video of a startled panda when witnessing its young born baby moving, a report of exploring an old cargo vessel and attempts of trying to sing Lennon's 'Imagine' in collaboration with local musicians and in different musical styles. It demonstrates how Bozhkov tries to reveal hidden strains of meaning on the basis of months of research and engagement with a certain location, producing another kind of knowledge in a baffling mix that in turn asks to be explored and at the same time is exemplary for what the Liverpool Biennial tries to do as a whole. Although 'Touched' does not back away from the seemingly sensational, as in Do Hu Suh's Korean house wedged between 84 and 86 Duke Street, it almost always is capable of simultaneously addressing deeper meanings. Do Hu Suh's intervention is surprising and impressive but even more so when the graffiti on the façade of the neighbouring 84 Duke Street are taken into account, asking 'Do you like your neighbours?'

Less political approaches include Sachiko Abe daily creation of a fairy-tale world by cutting extremely thin strands of paper and Annti Laitinen's photographs of him trying to win over the natural elements in boats made of bark with which he also wants to conquer the Mersey at A Foundation. These come as 'touching' surprises in the impressive former industrial surroundings, but the more activist and critical approaches are difficult to compete with. At the former Rapid Store in Renshaw Street the exhibition is as multi-layered as the original decoration with the sub-expo 'Re:Thinking Trade' as a constellation of installations and actions that reanimate the disused shop, having the collective 'freee' transforming the shop windows into a place for debate on public space. Although there has been a critique of the prefix 're' being overused as a way of preventing to produce original art, in this context it is not only still a very usable but even necessary concept that manifestly does produce content.

At the former Scandinavian Hotel annex Europleasure International Ltd the combination of Alfredo Jaar's video-installation 'We Wish to Inform You That We Didn't Know' and Christine Lucas' video 'Touch and Go' is one of the most impressive within the biennial. Jaar addresses the Rwanda genocide through very gripping testimonies of some of its survivors. Lucas' video is in stark contrast with it: the building in which it is shown and that also forms its subject is one of the warehouses on the edge of a very desolate, Liverpudlian version of Chinatown that stand witness of a once flourishing economy. Combining humour with a political-economical consciousness, Lucas has some former, now octogenarian, unionists throwing stones at the windows of the derelict building with evident delight. The result is far from the bone-dry and sterile social-political orientated art that seemed to rule the past decade.

Liverpool Biennial consists of five other exhibition platforms. Of these S.Q.U.A.T. is a very inspiring collaboration between the New York initiative No Longer Empty and the British The Art Organisation (TAO), using empty commercial spaces for art projects such as Sound Art in Seel Street. Projects like these demonstrate where the Liverpool Biennial can make a difference. As it is all about city marketing, a biennial should make good use of its background. With a reputation of being free-minded, self-confident, and in a humorous way straightforward, building on its formidable economic past, using its architectural history in a critical and innovative way Liverpool Biennial makes for a project in which new and genuinely 'touching' art can flourish. This year's edition is clear proof of that.