

Mirror Lamp Press

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EDITORS

Gwen Burlington
Eoghan McIntyre

PROOFREADER

Jen Wade

PUBLICATION DESIGN

Paul Mulgrew

WEB DESIGN

Clio Meldon

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

Rebecca O'Dwyer



@mirrorlamp

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EOGHAN MCINTYRE

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Laurence Counihan

Laurence Counihan is an Irish–Filipino writer and critic, who is currently a teaching assistant and PhD candidate in the History of Art department at University College Cork. His research and writing is located at the intersection between art, technology, and continental philosophy; currently investigating the links between conceptual photography, early algorithmic computer art, and the theories of Gilles Deleuze, François Laruelle, and Vilém Flusser.

Julia Dubsky

Julia Dubsky is a painter currently living in Berlin. Recent exhibitions include the group show, *Sphinx of Black Quartz, Judge my Vow* (09.12.2020 – 31.01.2021 Palfrey, London); and *M/modesty* (12.02 – 27.03.21), a second solo exhibition at Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London. Forthcoming slim book publication from Material Verlag, Hamburg.

Chris Hayes

Chris Hayes is a writer based between Ireland and London. His essays, interviews and features exploring politics and contemporary art have been published in CIRCA, Elephant and Art Monthly amongst others.

Ingrid Lyons

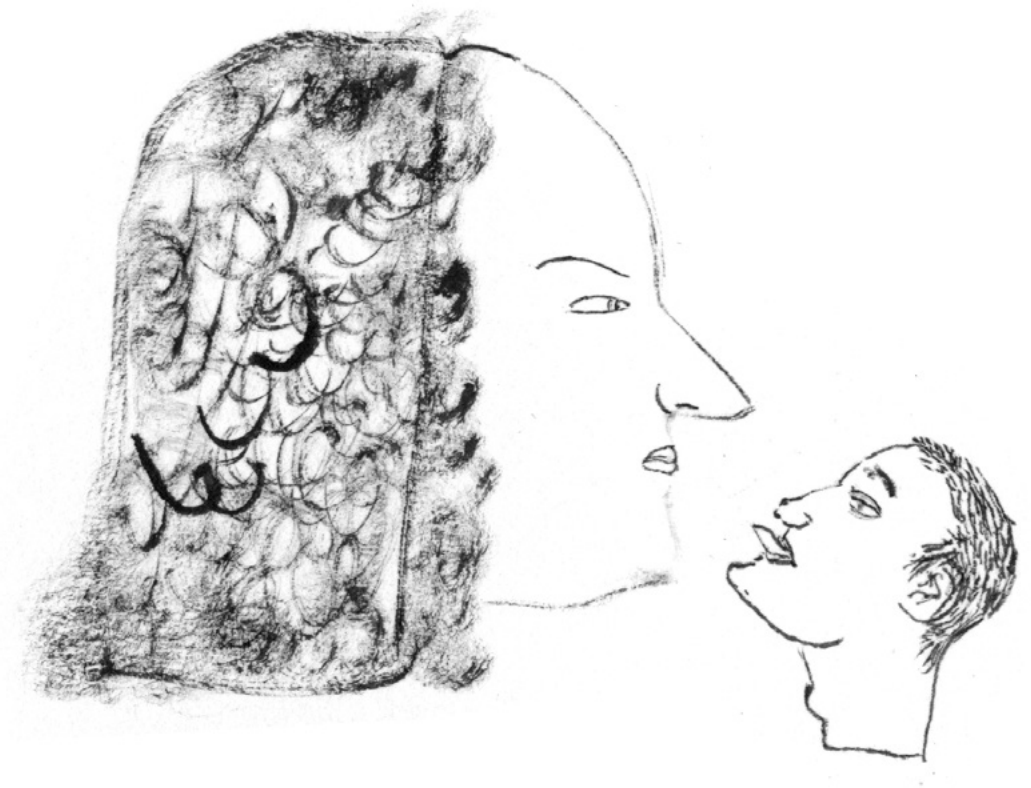
Ingrid Lyons is a freelance writer, currently living and working in Donegal.

Christodoulos Makris

Christodoulos Makris is a poet and writer with a practice rooted in contemporary experimental, hybrid, documentary and collaborative poetics. He has published three books, most recently *this is no longer entertainment* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2019), as well as several pamphlets, artists' books and other poetry objects. He is the poetry editor at *gorse* journal.

Jenny Smith

Jenny Smith studied Illustration at Cambridge School of Art from 2007, during which she was awarded The Ronald Searle Award for Drawing. She went on to study at The Royal Drawing School, London, graduating in 2012 and later completed The Turps Studio Painting Programme in 2017. She has shown widely in the UK and internationally, recently returning from New York where she presented her first solo show of work at Disturb the Neighbors Gallery. Smith's work appears in a number of collections, including The Royal Collection and The Dumfries House Estate.





Introducing *Mirror Lamp Press*

It started as a sort of unexpected idea. One of the frenzied kinds that you tell your friends, roping people in to get involved and, somehow, you find yourself in a funding application. And then it's all logistics; budgets and 'institutional partners' and word counts. You send it off and forget about it. Write it off as another pipe dream, burnt into the ashes of unrealised ideas. Funny how you can invest so much time in something without entertaining the idea that it might actually happen. Months later, while you're in the middle of your perfunctory lockdown routine—tea, mindless scrolling, tea, state-sanctioned walk, work, tea—you receive an email that tells you yes. At this stage, you are so used to no, the non-negotiable, pervasive, better-luck-next-time no that you react in a sort of half-hysterical cackle. Your family, crooning over your shoulder, "oh you're going to set up your own magazine? That's lovely." This excited vim lasts for around ten minutes until the paralysing fear of actually pulling-off such a hare-brained scheme, concocted under the duress of pandemically

sustained sensory deprivation sets in.

The skates get put on, and we *Zoom* ourselves into existence; a small team of four. We discuss who we want to be as a publication in real terms—a space for writers to test, explore and expand interdisciplinary ideas around art in Ireland that foregrounds the writer’s voice as opposed to a publication’s agenda, exhibition programme or news cycle. Each issue is divided, somewhat linguistically, into five sections: *subject*, *object*, *verb*, *word* and *place*. Some of these are self-explanatory; *subject*, for example, refers to personal pronouns *I*, *you*, *we*... meaning artists, groups or collectives. *Word* on the other hand asks the writer to respond to the discursive environment we inhabit, responding to a word or phrase that speaks to them rather than an idea or visual. We have set these constraints in place to encourage the writers to respond in a more expansive—dare we say it—*ontological* sense. While we approach writers with this brief, we encourage them to follow their instincts and embrace where that may lead, even if it looks nothing like we imagined.

It is January 2021 when these discussions begin and the world is enmeshed in an empirical misery

that we individually have never experienced before. A melancholy pervades that stretches beyond the abstract sense of global loss of life and economic devastation but lingers on the very edges of your skin, touching everything. *Happiness*, we decide, is what we want to focus on. Not the banal kind marketed in films that focuses on commodified notions of falling in love against all odds, losing yourself in a rush of euphoric rapture or throwing caution to the wind. Nor the ubiquitous kind that is concerned with getting, spending, having, consuming or receiving the benefits of privilege. The dimension of happiness we want to explore in the inaugural issue of *MLP* is more felicitous. By that, we mean it is concerned with seeking out pleasure, in a more subtle than sensational way.

In this issue, Chris Hayes responds to *Subject* and discusses the work of Laura Fitzgerald in relation to rural and urban spheres, taking into account the Irish historical and artworld contexts that the artist pushes against. For *Object*, Christodoulos Makris has composed a poem, *Bandsalat*, which roughly translates as ‘tape jam,’ in response to the Nirvana album *Nevermind*. It is an assemblage of sorts, constructed through a process of collecting,

mixing and disassembling documentary and critical writing on the album and cassette culture of the time. Makris wrote it, coincidentally, before the inventor of the cassette tape, Lou Ottens died earlier this month. Julia Dubsky has taken on *Verb*, through the art historian Bertrand Prévost's words on the Renaissance painter Antonio Pollaiuolo. She has even included some sketches inspired by the pleasure she derived from printing this text. For *Place*, Laurence Counihan has applied the thinking of some of the godfathers of deep thought - Giles Deleuze and Mark Fisher - along with some personal insights to consider the implications of online screening platforms such as *aemi*. For *Word*, Ingrid Lyons considers the word 'reverie' through the artwork of William O'Neill and the southern gothic novel *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner. We have included the illustrations of Jenny Smith, whose notebook work and collage speaks to a light whimsy we enjoy.

Released quarterly, MLP is freely downloadable and exists in the digital sphere and so we designed it for the ease of scrolling on digital devices. You can read it on your laptop at home when you're supposed to be working. Or on your phone on

the way to wherever you're currently allowed to roam. You could even print it out, and taste its inky words on your fingertips as you eat your toast in the morning. Either way, we intend to embrace the current conditions of our time; illuminating and reflecting like M.H. Abram's *Mirror and the Lamp*.

Enjoy the inaugural issue.

Gwen & Eoghan





Myths of Exile and Return in the Work of Laura Fitzgerald

Chris Hayes

There is a pervasive myth about Irishness which conflates rural identity with conservative politics; this deeply rooted belief both reproduces its own claims and erases alternatives to it. Much of recent artistic practice, from the '70s onwards, has addressed itself towards this weighty, stifling presence. Somewhere between the false promise of Éamon de Valera's "comely maidens" and the image of a nostalgic John Hinde postcard, Irish artists have pushed back and staked their own claim to the island and their identities. Laura Fitzgerald is an Irish artist who explores the boundaries of and finds potential within the rural as a context, while also asking difficult questions about the networked international artworld. Both the landscape and the politics of labour feature heavily within a legacy of Irish art, but few others connect these themes as directly, as ferociously, and fluently as Fitzgerald does.

Fantasy Farming (2021) is a series of works that

featured in the first phase of EVA International as part of their Platform Commissions. At the Limerick City Gallery of Art, there were wall-based works and an installation of freestanding wire structures. Rich in substance and full of energy, the individual pieces are almost bare, thinly dispersed and scattered, constructed with a kind of scarcity. The series of artworks share a colorful, almost acidic, palette as well as a kind of brushy, painterly quality shown across the gestural marks on paper and textile used in the sculptures. The formal links between the installations are made explicit in the audio pieces, enclosed in ‘hay shed’ styled structures, which guide the viewer through the drawings on the walls with many meandering asides. The visual language here is expressive and exuberant. In Fitzgerald’s practice, the rural is complicated, layered, messy and radical – far beyond the clichés that have come to define it.

Moving between Kerry, Dublin and London, the artist has found herself navigating many different places in her life. She has a deep love of rural Kerry from growing up there, but also finds it maddening. As an artist, she is inevitably pushed towards urban centres – for education and

exhibition opportunities, as well as finding artistic communities. Yet, while other artists interested in rural identity have sought to create alternative artworlds in the countryside, Fitzgerald's career shows no attempts to retreat or recreate but to push through and find new conceptual territory between the edge and the centre.

One could imagine figures like Dorothy Cross and Kathy Prendergast as precursors to Fitzgerald, as her work is steeped in similar concerns about landscape, an affinity for painting and sculpture, and features references to folklore and myth; but she also represents a notable generational shift. Fitzgerald, a millennial, grew up in an Ireland that was rapidly urbanising and opening up to global capitalism – turning its back, wilfully, on what had defined it previously. Her concern with landscape is steeped in Ireland, but also steps outside of it. Her interests cross different periods and places, such as 1960s American land art, the approach of Bruce Nauman, and the video works of people such as Laure Prouvost and Trisha Donnelly. The work holds little reference to memory and hardly any tolerance for a nostalgic engagement of place, instead, she leans towards the absurd with a comic – even ironic – deadpan delivery.

While in London to study at the Royal College of Art she lived on the outskirts of the city, as many artists do for cheaper rent. Yet, attending an elite institution placed Fitzgerald in the heart of a competitive, commercialised artworld which would become a site of equal concern and exploration for her work. The RCA was a pivotal point for her practice as the trajectory of her key recent projects begin from then. But it wasn't an easy experience, she often felt out of place. She needed something to bounce off of and that was to be found in Kerry, both as a subject as well as a location where she would live off and on again. Away from home, Fitzgerald could deploy the idea of it through art, finding a productive tension between the rural and urban to explore wider questions of what is inside and outside – a question that defines her relationship with identity and the artworld. The rural is as much a subject as it is a tool; place is how her practice is activated.

Her participation in the The Freud Project Residency Programme at the Irish Museum of Modern Art is another pivotal point, one which came about five years after she graduated. This may seem to have been a slow build up,

but it represents an extraordinarily significant consolidation of ideas and strategies that define her practice today. The relationship between the context of the rural and questions of artistic labour is pronounced in *Portrait of a Stone* (2018). This short video flips the script on bureaucracy with lines like: “You have reached the ‘I was an Artist Helpline’ ... due to the high volume of calls, all our practicing visual artists are currently unavailable.” Various scenes show a rock struggling with the life of an artist – pledging to attend fewer biennials, as well as getting a job in an administrative role – alongside an older man sitting on a larger stone in the middle of a field and then later standing by a traditional Irish cottage.

There is a tension pushing her practice, a pervasive doubt about place and purpose that never settles into inertia. No wonder walking features as a recurring trope within her video works, acting as a kind of performance of underlying anxieties. *A Walk to Clear the Head* (2014) relays doubts that will continue to surface. Am I good enough? Should I give up being an artist? Against a whirring backdrop of yellow-flowered shrubs, she strolls through a field

and sings these concerns, reflecting on history, exhibition-making and her own future.

Field Research Continued (2016–19) is a series of short videos continuing the walking format in a more direct style which become characteristic of later pieces. In one scene, she is talking about the “fickle” nature of curators but, in a humorous twist, appears to be really discussing the sheep which are in front of her. *P45* (2017) is the longest and most realised of these. With a squeaky distorted voice, Fitzgerald explores a derelict building while recounting the endless applications and project submissions. She discusses feelings of getting older (“cobwebs are forming in the corners of my mind”), laments her current situation (“I feel like I’ve literally been waiting forever”) and stares longingly at a dress in a wardrobe that has been “waiting for the opening night”. This opens on a hard-hitting portrayal of an artist’s struggle, with a sharp poetic bite. But the video is also full of moments of humour and absurdist play between what the artist is saying and the scenes of nature shown on her simple phone camera visuals.

The origin story of the walking videos is

illuminating. While out for a walk, she might encounter neighbours who would ask how her art-making was going. This friendly small talk forced a question which is uncomfortable for many early and mid-career artists. “On some level,” she explained to me, “I felt outraged that nothing career-wise was happening for me.” Channelling this anxiety into the art became a way of taking control of such doubts, and putting forward productive questions about labour, success and the artworld. The humour throughout the work can be understood as far more than a coping mechanism or narrative device, but an often derided strategy which pushes against the very limits Fitzgerald has set her sights on – the work is funny, but it’s also more than that. Yet, who gets to decide what is allowed anyway?

She is drawn to the rural as much as an idea of Ireland, but it is not a retreat to quiet sanctitude – those familiar with the countryside, its tightly-knit communities and hectic natural landscape, know its anything but this. In conversation, Fitzgerald repeatedly makes reference to encounters with people and animals in her daily life. It is a reminder of how busy such places are, how connected you can be to the community

and the landscape which is commonly framed as isolated or empty. While such overlaps can be frustrating they can be welcoming, too. Personal boundaries, like the land itself, are both a site of conflict and security.

Fitzgerald is staking her own claim on the land, reasserting her voice into a subject which shapes her life and Irish artistic practice at large. It's notable, historically and up to the present day, how many Irish artists engaging in similar conversations to this are women too; no wonder, considering how oppressively gendered a context it is. In conversation, she reflects on how her parents' divorce was novel at the time, becoming the talk of the parish and subject of much scandal. In short, she has no reason to approach the landscape with reverence. There is no deference towards the artworld either, but close attention to the systems that define and determine the limits of culture and what constitutes success. Through her multifaceted practice, she points to gaps in understanding and the assumptions which fill the void – grasping with history, identity and the future. From the edges, Fitzgerald is asking questions about power.



Bitmapped Fantasies: *Real Experience of Virtual Art*

Laurence Counihan

A number of years ago I sat listening to a talk by the late cultural critic and theorist Mark Fisher, entitled ‘No Time’, delivered at *Virtual Futures* (2011).¹ The conference itself was a partial reanimation of the infamous legacy of *Virtual Futures*; a series of para-academic talks and provocations from the 1990s, which initially gave a platform to philosophers such as Manuel DeLanda, Sadie Plant, and Nick Land, amongst others. As the title implies, these conferences were concerned with the ways in which rapid technological developments were radically changing the field of human experience. Fisher’s talk offered a melancholic account of the ways in which capitalist society has become augmented by various technologies over a 15-year period. Mourning the loss of any tangible future outside of this specific ideological category, he decries the manner in which everyday machines, such as mobiles, have been instrumentalised as tools of

jouissance, providing an endless stream of sensorial pleasure that triggers our fleshy meatsacks into according to the axiomatics of the neoliberal system.

Recalling this talk, Fisher opened with an idea that has stuck with me ever since: “But my job is my whole life. Or, my whole life is my job. When I move from calendar to address book, to email, to text messages, I feel like I’m master of the universe.” As I sat plugged into various devices, an overwhelming assortment of tabs and windows open in the background, I remember this line resonating with me. I think I may have paused the video and written down a series of half-concocted thoughts and reactions on this polar, and almost paradoxical nature — one which is equally horrifying and exhilarating — of contemporary virtual experience.

Thinking through and making sense of our present digitally-saturated landscape strikes as something of vital importance; new modalities and conceptual frameworks are necessary if we hope to rewire the machinic configurations that increasingly govern every aspect of our daily lives.

Writing at the beginning of the third decade

of the 21st-century, any proclamation of how technology has incessantly and irredeemably modified the category of the human, risks the charge of appearing passé to the point of an almost formulaic conservatism. Although, over the past 12 months these tepid anxieties have been temporarily put on hold, as one of the literary byproducts of the forced migration to life online has been the avalanche of words dedicated to analysing how virtual experiences compare to their, often assumed, *more real* counterparts. When we speak of the virtual there is a cultural tendency to view it as a perceptually-reduced variant of the real from which it derives. Even William Gibson's use of the term *cyberspace* in the cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984) describes the phenomena of an existing and traversable virtualised dimension. This term helped to massively popularise the portmanteau and alludes to this idea of a category that is *less than real*: "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators".² A 'consensual hallucination', but a *hallucination*, and therefore a fictive reordering of the real, nonetheless.

However, a much more interesting and fruitful

aperture to interpret all manner of online spaces is to see the virtual as different from physical IRL experience, but where this difference is not constructed from hierarchal notions of *realness*. Although not explicitly concerned with our contemporary notions of *virtual reality* or how technology initiates *virtual experience*, Gilles Deleuze's ideas on the relationship between the real and the philosophical concept of the virtual offer a framework for thinking through these forms, in a way which speaks to many of the problems incurred when considering the implications of our own contemporary cyber-existence.

For Deleuze, the *virtual* is not in opposition to the *real*, rather it signifies an immanent zone of becoming from which all forms of *actualised* events may, or may not, spring forth. As such, the binary that is present here exists between the *actual* and *virtual*, with all *real* objects comprising of properties from both. What Deleuze essentially proposes is that *actualised* experience always emerges from a *virtual* reservoir. When we stand in front of a painting in an art gallery, this is an *actualised* experience, whose concreteness has become manifest from the swell of *virtual*

conditions which prefigure the form we perceive. What is important to note here is that all direct instances of experience — of art and of general reality — are the coalescence of “a cloud of virtual images”,³ whose attributes and relational existence is always *fully real*. This text which you are reading is an *actual* object, with the recognition of it being an *actual* event. But, for this to become present in concrete reality, it has to emerge from the pool of the *virtual*: my own thoughts, the mechanical keyboard I am typing on, the digital zeroes and ones which store, translate, transmit, and decode this information; all of this is *virtual* and all of this is *real*.

Establishing the coordinates by which the channels of *actualised* aesthetic experience are understood and maintained, is something that the artworld has very recently been forced to contend with. The retreat to online forms of exhibition has meant that much of the ritualistic lustre associated with the pilgrimage of entering into the museum or art gallery has been lost, with different institutions managing this transition with greater or lesser degrees of success. Whilst the contemporary, physical, artspace still presents itself as an evolution of an image-producing factory, the

methods by which this visuality is projected has become increasingly reliant upon the specificities of exhibition modes which seek to restrict, and in doing so sanctify, the material limits of its reified objects; for example, the tendency to employ sculptural forms as a means of grounding the pure immateriality of video works.⁴ When reformatted as a digital object, the material conditions of the artwork become redefined by strict technical guidelines: the quality of a jpeg, the sample rate and bit depth of an mp3, the compression codec of a .mov file; all of which are programmed to be decoded in accordance with standardised protocols of representation.

For the most part, generically speaking, all of this essentially *works*. However, the manner and degree by which it can be said to work effectively inevitably differs vastly across media, from a virtual exhibition or fully-loaded interactive website to the simple display of image files. Video art seems primed to make this transition in the most seamless way possible (relatively speaking at least). When viewing art online, of the kind which you would typically expect to encounter in the gallery, video appears to offer the most authentic facsimile of the physical IRL experience. For the

past decade, my favourite and most consistent platform for viewing contemporary video art has been *Vdrome*, a project initially launched in collaboration with *Mousse Magazine*. Its presentation mode is incredibly simple: *Vimeo* hosts a work for a fixed-period, with the video-link embedded into a website for the duration of the screening time. There is an extended text introduction or dialogue with the artist accompanying each viewing and providing the necessary conceptual framing for the film in question.

And so, I felt a sincere rush of excited anticipation when *aemi*, an Irish-based initiative for moving image works, launched a new online platform in July 2020. Their format is much the same as *Vdrome*, and while not exactly innovative from a technical or exhibiting standpoint,⁵ the localised setting subverts many of the established parameters of video when presented within the confines of the white cube. Video in the gallery thrives upon a specific kind of submersion within the myth of the exhibition space, one which engenders a special kind of periphery reception of the filmic work. Paintings and sculptures have no minimum run-times, and so are much more

amenable to quick scanning. In comparison, video, particularly pieces of extended duration, typically require a form of sustained attention, which is, often times, pragmatically unattainable in such an environment.⁶

Whilst in the process of writing this text I have the films from *aemi's* '2020: Year in Review' programmes playing on a second monitor. The volume is low enough so as to just be present as ambient background noise, with the intention being that a re-exposure to these works will elicit some amount of creative inspiration in my writing. When Graeme Arnfield's *Far From The Far Future* (2020) comes on, I immediately stop typing and increase the volume on my pair of nearfield monitors. A silent monologue is delivered to a soundtrack of Terrence Dixon records, with Arnfield asserting how listening to 1990s Detroit techno now "feels like mourning for the future." He dictates his experience of listening to these tracks as he gazed out over "dark barley fields" from the confines of "a tiny English farming village".

I pause the video, and open up a playlist of Dixon's *From the Far Future*. Vinyl crackle from

the ripped recording is accompanied by piercing hi-hats, as blurred analog tones arpeggiate in a distance which sounds submerged within ethereal atmospherics. Dixon's work, like so much of the best Detroit techno, feels like it is always building to a horizon which never arrives; it is always in a continual form of becoming. I let the music wash over me as I oscillate between typing and furious pacing. Here in this moment I feel the rush of endorphins dispersing from the base of my neck, allowing for a euphoric moment of respite in the midst of overwhelming anxiety. And for a brief pause I, to echo Fisher, "feel like I'm master of the universe"; or rather, more precisely, I feel an overwhelming sense of joy and control as my psychic state opens itself up to the pleasures of aesthetic experience.

Virtuality, in its technological guise, reminds me very much of a certain brand of techno, in that in the very recent past they both became cultural signifiers for the potential of an unbounded future. That moment has very much passed, as the forgotten futures which both critically manifested are now haunted by a sense of melancholic nostalgia; with each becoming somewhat neutered and standardised in accordance with

the demands and dreams of the capitalist market. However, I think a latent form of that repressed emancipatory core still exists, which originally accompanied the emergence of the virtual. In fear of descending into unabashed, gleeful techno-optimism, I stress that we lose a lot in the transition of art to the virtual domain. A physical space of resistance and discourse dissipates; but only in relation to its previously decreed existence.

As it reaches its terminus point, Fisher's talk begins to boil over with anxiety-fuelled energy, lamenting the immersive dreams of '90s cyberspace, whilst simultaneously spitting venom at the parasitic machines that have come in its wake. Like much of his writing, it is characterised by melancholy; a sense of loss for a future that is no longer attainable. In the face of such annihilation, we should look to Deleuze's virtuality, which strives to inhabit the field of virtual potentiality, technological or otherwise, as a corrective to the Luddite reaction to recede entirely from its plane. Deleuze's main theses on the *actualisation* of the *virtual* is that it does not follow the logic of representation, but rather proceeds via the construction of a new event. In

such a context, the standards by which we judge and perceive online platforms for video art and experimental film should not be strictly beholden to the historical model of the physical gallery, and should instead be tentatively approached as spaces which provide the potential for new forms of emancipatory aesthetic experience. Although that form may only be a potential, it always was, and very much remains, *fully real*.



1. Fisher, M. (2011). 'No Time', Virtual Futures. <https://www.virtualfutures.co.uk/discover/no-time> [viewed March 2021]
2. Gibson, W. (1984). Neuromancer. New York, Ace Books.
3. Deleuze, G. (2007). 'The Actual and the Virtual', Dialogues II. New York, Columbia University Press.
4. Osborne, P. (2018) 'The Distributed Image', in *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*. Brooklyn, Verso Books.
5. Author's note: 'One of the main errors of our own technologically-saturated age is that quantified innovation has become bootstrapped to ideas of value. I would warn here that an uncritical embrace of the new simply by virtue of its differentiation from established modes is one of the chief crimes of innovation that doesn't think; one which proceeds forward purely in accordance by stimulations from the market.'
6. Groys, B. (2009). 'Comrades of Time', e-flux journal, issue 11. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/> [viewed March 2021]



Bandsalat (Verse Chorus Verse)

Christodoulos Makris

packaged with a suppository
a used condom wrapped in tissue
the B-side blank
the purchaser records their own

sermons by the Ayatollah
in Chile blacklisted anti-dictatorship groups
their small size and durability
rock behind the Iron Curtain

in the US
DIY sound collage riot grrrl & punk
about a man who sits alone in his room
doesn't care discussing his stint in an LA jail

we got him this left handed Fender Mustang
in a coastal town in Washington State
typical repressions happening
we felt odd like why are we weird

getting these radical messages
society is screwed
junky equipment but motivation
a portable four-track

set up wherever
the forest of microphones
a problem the crew solved with a dedicated
tapers ticket

I don't care I don't care I don't care
I don't care I don't care I don't care
more important
the group is above easy categorisation

accelerated rhythms
three chord power riffs
dense slamming guitars heavy as metal
Mr Cobain a menacing growl

but when the songs lighten up he shows a voice just as well suited to melodic pop
sometimes they will crack open a ballad by inserting a full-scale chorus
construct a song out of acoustic guitar bass and no percussion
except a few well-timed cymbal crashes

follow an internal purpose all their own
with enough textures mood shifts instrumental snippets
inventive word plays
an extended guitar chord that suddenly distorts and loses shape

like crayon melting on a radiator
a fade out
but luscious three part harmonies at full volume remain
a few extra

miniature spools
magnetically coated polyester type film
passed and wound inside a plastic shell
eighth-inch but slightly larger

two stereo pairs of tracks or two monaural audio tracks
the second moving in the opposite direction
flipping the cassette or auto-reverse
when the mechanism detects the tape

tied to a blue plastic ashtray
shaped like a fish
This Window packed
an X-ray of a broken limb

The Lamb
buried in earth
a tin covered in leaves
spray painting abstract

hand-made labels
creating one of a kind pinup covers
issuing
Certificates of Genius

in exchange for a blank plus envelope
(an offshoot of the mail art movement)
trading fanzines and social networks
unauthorised copying, public performance, and broadcasting of this tape record prohibited

we were terrified
drove down to LA found an attorney
talking to these people found out how they worked
we gained an education and comfortable

in India bringing Christian and Islamic influences
in Spain at filling stations
gipsy rhumba light music joke marginal performers
anarcho-punk groups purveyors of industrial

common mechanical problems when resistance causes
failure to keep sufficient tension on the spool
fed out through the bottom
and becomes tangled

said to be chewed
destroying playability
referred to as bandsalat
splicing blocks used to remove the damage





Reverie as Resistance: William O' Neill

Ingrid Lyons

In a painting titled *Baby's Bathtub* (2019), a pink washbasin levitates against a background of varying greys. With closer observation, its seemingly realist depiction gives way to disorienting deviations; shadows that contradict and deceptive lines, alluding to intangible and enigmatic histories contained within the object. The washbasin itself was passed on to the artist's mother by her sister, after her own children had grown too big to be bathed in the sink. William O'Neill's still life paintings form an inventory of objects that serve as prompts to recollect and reconstruct personal histories.

Many of the commonplace objects that we see in his paintings – teacups and saucers, salt cellars, TVs and VCRs, lunchboxes – often carry with them a narrative and are of sentimental value, others act as stand-ins for objects long gone but not forgotten. In *Birthday Reminiscence* (2021) an iced sponge cake appears, elevated on a glass stand

with six candles. The cake itself was procured especially, to fulfil a composition that appeared on the mind's eye in reverie. It was one of five; bought, adorned with candles and photographed before the winning cake was chosen to paint. In conversation O'Neill expresses regret that he chose one with hundreds and thousands as it had taken months to fill them in, such is his dedication to the representation of these objects that are part of his life, even fleetingly. In his paintings O'Neill reifies his chosen objects, honouring them with minute detail and a space of their own, even adorning them with a halo; his austere way with paint, still fostering a sense of warmth. Compositions are imbued with the fondness of the artist's affections – affording them a mysterious life of their own. With time spent looking, it becomes apparent that a minimal and temperate approach to the medium somehow does not equate to starkness.

When he is not painting, O'Neill works full-time at a bank. During work hours, he keeps to himself and does an 8am – 4pm shift. He drives home, has a coffee with his partner L.A (Lesley Ann O'Connell – also a painter), and then the two of them go to their separate studios out the back for

about three or four hours each evening. In the studio, items are compartmentalised and materials are categorised, finished works are arranged with purpose-built storage. Only with careful planning and a steadfast routine can O'Neill's two full-time occupations co-exist and even complement one another; dovetailing his daily tasks at the office with reverie and the application of artistic epiphanies and ideas in the evening. So meticulous is the allotment of time for each task, that even a ten-minute conversation with a colleague during his lunch break could impact the process. Often compositions appear suddenly on the mind's eye or are reimagined in reverie as he moves through the day, jotting ideas on yellow Post-its. Last year O'Neill was short-listed for the prestigious Hennessy Craig Award, and at the bank word got around. Colleagues commended him with congratulatory well wishes, curiosity and offers of commissions to paint – babies, cars, houses, etc. With this, the time spent dreaming up compositions was temporarily disrupted until the accolade wore in.

Dividing time, attention and energy between two jobs is not uncommon in the arts. A second 'normal' job can bring with it a level of

social conscience and empathy. But it can also provide an insight into other ways of life. In William O'Neill's case, he has an insight into the otherwise cryptic and evasive world of banking. In the manner that he develops his compositions through the structuring of his routine, his work often becomes reflective of the uniformity of institutional compliance and the disparities between objects and value. Workflow and routine are asserted in the creative process, and the presentation of objects with peculiar painterly anomalies hint at tensions or suppressions of the individual by the institution, alluding to the constraints of corporate standards of bureaucracy. They are charged paintings that have been informed by rigorous routine.

A famous example of such a contextual narrative is William Faulkner's Southern Gothic novel *As I Lay Dying*. In it, the Bundren family traverse the countryside during the onset of the Great Depression to honour the dying wish of their mother: to be buried in her hometown. One character in the novel, Darl Bundren, is particularly visionary. He frequently joins inanimate objects or features of the southern landscape with more cosmic epiphanies,

connecting the mythic and the mundane.

The gruelling tale is punctuated with passages, narrated by Darl, who often drifts into stream of consciousness and internal monologue.

‘...the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank.’

In his reverie, Darl mediates an epiphany of the divine through the everyday objects that make up his surroundings. Despite depictions of grim, relentless ardour within the book, it came from a place of private reverie in uniformity and routine. Faulkner maintained that he wrote the novel from midnight to 4am over the course of six weeks whilst working at a power plant in his hometown of Oxford in Mississippi. To behold such a complete world manifested out of reverie in the mundanity of work – how a book about the Great Depression emerged from a cog within the industrial wheel itself – is so rare and glimmering as to be the epitome of resistance against the capitalist system; a gleeful victory.

There is a congruent sense of perseverance and resistance in O'Neill's practice, in recounting a personal and family history that is embedded in objects. In moments of reverie, a transcendental harmony arises from the contemplation of memories and belongings from within the constraints of the leadenly hegemonic system of the institution. Taking a tangible material thing as his starting point, and through the medium of paint, O'Neill engages in a form of active reverie; of being lost in thought, speculation, and dreamlike fantasy. In this way, he meditates on the representation of inanimate objects, eking out a path between memory and materiality.





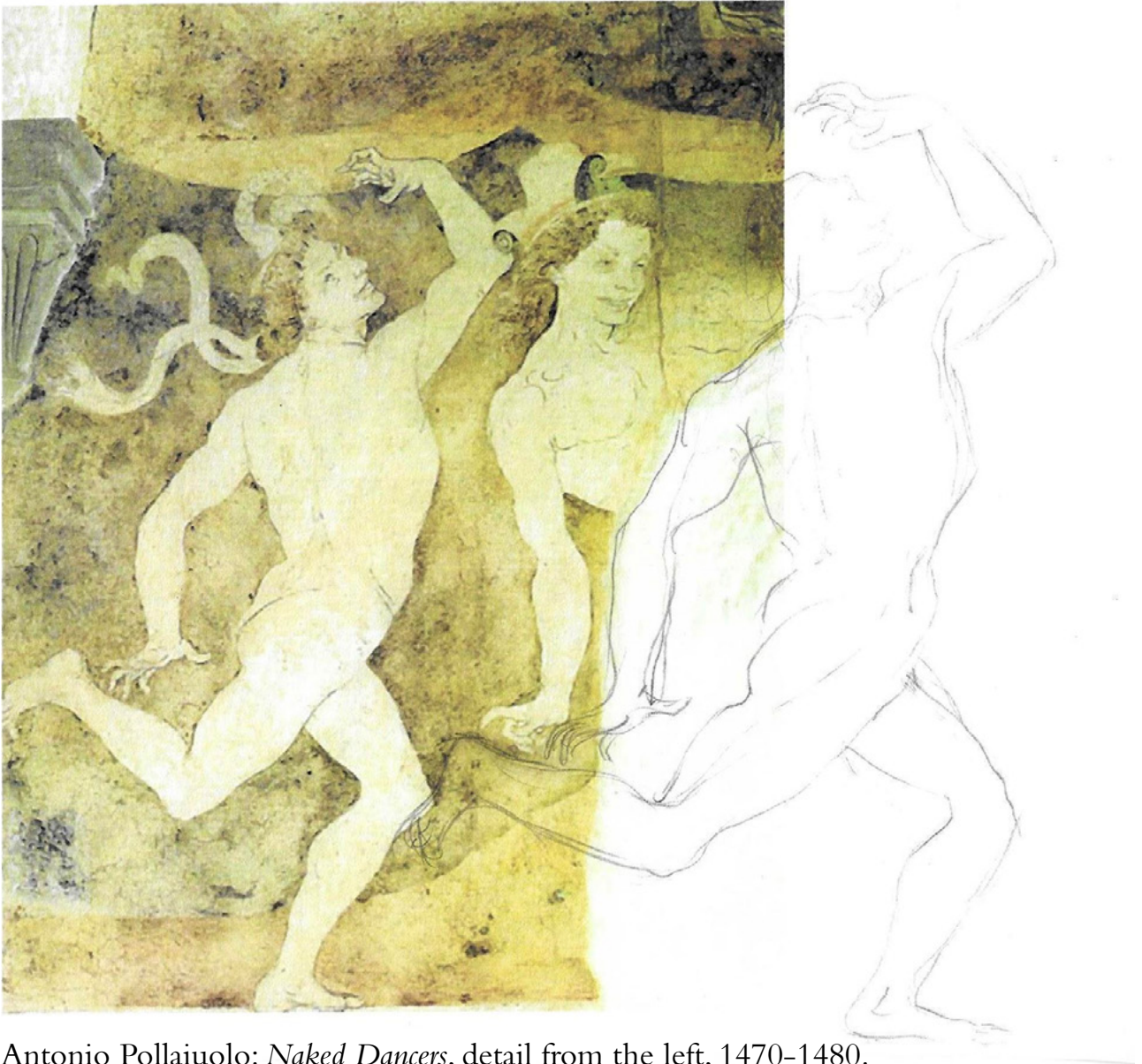
Pollaiuolo's Actors Athletic

Julia Dubsy

Antonio Pollaiuolo's figures are notably expressive and excessive. Rare for painting in the early Renaissance, the figures sometimes laugh or smile cheekily like a flirty Cocteau drawing or contort emphatically like gothic goblins. As examples, I am attaching cut-outs from an academic paper (the author's associative writing style made me so happy that I somehow could not concentrate on the simple task of printing it out, resulting in multiple, slightly differing, superfluous copies that wound up here as material for my doodles and collage).

Pollaiuolo was a goldsmith before becoming a painter, and in this paper by the art historian Bertrand Prévost the emphasis is on the qualities Pollaiuolo transferred from his goldsmithery to painting. Prévost makes the argument that the eccentric gestures of Pollaiuolo's figures echo the ornamentation on (and out of) an object. Ornament in Prévost's account, as I have understood it, is like gesticulation. He compares

the unusually flexed fingers that reoccur in Pollaiuolo's figures to the ornamentation of his intricate sculptures. Transferring this way of thinking about ornamentation to the body, "implies that the human figure must not be treated as an organic form to be represented, but as an essential plasticity". It leads to expansive questions such as: "How in painting to end a body, a limb?"



Antonio Pollaiuolo: *Naked Dancers*, detail from the left, 1470-1480.

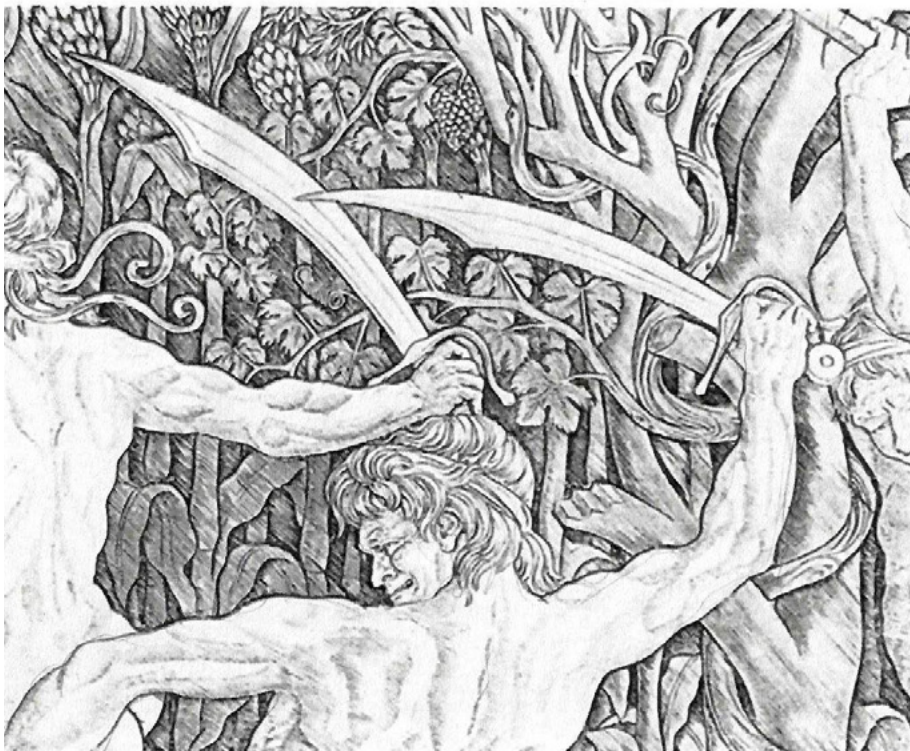
What led me back to Antonio Pollaiuolo recently was a friend's tarot card reading. She drew the Five of Wands, a card that shows five young men, seemingly battling with sticks that are raised over their heads. On second glance it appears that no flesh is actually being struck in this prophetic card scene and, as my friend interpreted it on this occasion, the card relates to adrenaline that is not necessarily occurring in a state of danger. It could look like an aggressive argument but it could equally be discussion, in good faith. Another association she made was that of wrestling, which was used analogically by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus to describe the unison in opposite forces that mutually hold the wrestlers together.

Granted, what follows might at first seem more like ferocity than 'happiness'. Indeed, this seeming contradiction is the crux of my thoughts: to explore the idea of opposites within happiness.

The tarot card scene reminded me of Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Nudes*: ten figures, in action, with weapons. They are muscular, slim, naked men. It is a surprisingly tight composition. In the centre, we see one man stretching across the picture

plane with his back to us. In front of him there are two men leaning out from each other, with raised arms in a swinging stretch. They are keeling outward in a 'v' shape, like a young fern. We see one of them from the front and the other from behind. In the bottom left and right quadrants, two sets of entangled bodies push and pull on each other. In the left pair of figures, a man on the ground pushes his foot into the groin of another man above him. The man on top pushes his hand against the head of the man on the ground, whose neck muscles bulge at the strain of pulling his head forward against the pushing force.

Ornamental Pathos according to Piero and Antonio Pollaiuolo



The Bathys

Antonio Pollaiuolo: *Naked Fighters*, detail, ca. 1470.



The most explicit symbol of push-and-pull in *Battle of the Nudes*, is in the top left quadrant where a man is tilting into the picture field with a drawn bow and arrow. If the scene is not seen as actual violence but more like a performance, then there is something comical and resonant in thinking of the push and pull in painting in this excessive form. 'Push and pull' in relation to an artist's control over the creation of the work is more often spoken about in gentler terms, such as to *pull in the reins* and *push out the boat*. Here there is also push and pull but it is heated and camp, existing both figuratively in the choreography and more abstractly in the representational attitude. It was only from squiggling my own copies that I grasped the exaggerated weight in the hips and its counterweight in the chest, or the facial expressions that often seem like an actor's – 'put on'.

On the right-hand side of the picture, a man brandishes an axe raised over his head. His arms are stretched and his torso is pulled long; his knees are bent – and his muscular bum cheeks are pressed out! If there is any giveaway signalling excess, this is it. I imagine Pollaiuolo being so enthralled by the human figure (we know that he

dissected them), that the figure's form is treated with more emphasis than the narrative. This is apparent in *Battle of the Nudes* and in many of his paintings, such as *David* at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin.



Ornamental Pathos according to Piero and Antonio Pollaiuolo



In *Battle of the Nudes* the figures are examples of poses and positions, in principle. One line of thought is that Pollaiuolo created *Battle of the*

Nudes as a learning tool on human anatomy for other artists. The figures are actors, and their exaggeration creates a rupture in the representation; it bulges. In his painting of David standing firmly over the severed head of Goliath, David's young face looks directly out to us, with a serene-cum-focused gaze. His chest is slightly pressed out. Switch attention to his hands and David's composure has a leak – or, rather, a sprout. As Prévost puts it, “the splayed little finger seems like an outgrowth of the body ... less a gesture than a tic”.

What I loved in Prévost's paper (admittedly paired with caffeine buzz) is the way in which his writing style makes more explicit the associative processes that are always part of our perception. For instance, Prévost draws our attention to the likeness between Pollaiuolo's treatment of bodily extremities and the decorated letters of medieval manuscripts, where the letters with descenders have a comparable 'extremity'. Making improbable connections can support thoughts that are not imaginable yet from what is otherwise given. On the other hand, our daily associations include problematic biases, prompting a back and forth between *intuition and counter-intuition*,

reminding me of the push-pull forces again. In Pollaiuolo's figures, I have the sense that their motion and emotion evolves out of itself and its opposites.

1. Prévost, B. (2007) Das ornamentale Pathos nach Piero und Antonio Pollaiuolo. Actes Sud. <https://journals.openedition.org/trivium/333?file=1&lang=de> [viewed January 2021]
Author's note: Only available in German or French. I used Deepl translate for a first impression quick read before moving to the German. The quotes in this essay are my own translation.
2. Walsh, J. (2013) Unintended Consequences: Antonio del Pollaiuolo's Hercules and Deianira . "Lecture 2, Unintended Consequences: Antonio del Pollaiuolo's Hercules and Deianira" www.youtube.com/watch?v=15Vpr_HP7uU [viewed March 2021]
3. Linsenmayer, M. (2013) Heraclitus's Metaphysics of Tension with Eva Brann — <https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2013/06/23/topic-for-79-heraclituss-metaphysics-of-tension-with-eva-brann/> [viewed March 2021]
4. Pollaiuolo, A. (c.1470-95) The Battle of The Nudes Engraving, on paper washed pink. 41,6 x 59,4 cm. British Museum. Available online at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-1-33
5. Pollaiuolo, A. (c. 1465-1470) David the Victorious . Oil painting on wood. 48,2 x 34,8 cm. Gemäldegalerie Berlin. Available online at: <https://smb.museum-digital.de/index.php?t=objekt&oges=61519>





www.mirrorlamppress.com
info@mirrorlamppress.com

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