

## *for the love of the unknown room*

*Estragon: I can't go on like this.*

*Vladimir: That's what you think.*<sup>1</sup>

*Deleuze and Guattari are content to group together artists and birds because they take the same route to motifs and counterpoints: via the posting of placards and the maintenance of a critical distance which, between members of the same species in different territories, is rhythmical, and between members of different species in the same territory is melodic.*<sup>2</sup>

*A cloud is an aggregate, a nebulous set, a multiplicity whose exact definition escapes us, and whose local movements are beyond observation. A flame is an aggregate . . . that is even more nebulous . . . heat and flame, cloud and wind, climate and turbulences, [all] concepts of multiplicities.*<sup>3</sup>

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*to go on, artefact reckonings, distance, to risk*

### *Archival Drift: Attention, Performance and Affective Ecologies in Spatial Art*

*Practice* is a research project that promotes an eccentric archiving involving a kind of temporal drift. Through this process, the practice functions in relation to the speeds and rhythms of other practices in the world and in an accumulative and local way, it impacts on the fixity and coherence of the social and political systems within which it functions. This eccentric archiving does not necessarily involve the archive that catalogues objects, documents and places, although it may refer to the territories that this kind of official archive attempts to sequester. Archiving in this research proposition is rather an active process: partial, and always becoming. It is not motivated by a psychoanalytical or nostalgic desire to “get back” or to return to some “originary” state, (arché), but it is rather an archaeology of the present that slows things down so as to explore material processes and intensities from the past, recombined through assemblage in the present, in search of innovative potentials for the future. This archival process of temporal drifting and diversion of purpose, deploys

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, (London: Faber and Faber, FP 1956, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Gary Genosko, 'A Bestiary of Territoriality and Expression' in *A shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* edited by Brian Massumi, London and NY: Routledge, 2002 51.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Serres, *Genesis*. trans. Genevieve James and James Nielson. Ann Arbor: (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995). 103.

techniques similar to those favoured by the Situationists International group of the 1960s who were intent on activating a political agency beyond identification with fixed dogma, the spectacle of commodities and screen-based technologies and other sources of hegemonic power. The processes of artistic assemblage, as part of an expanded practice and with a univocal relation to the world, thereby constitute a “politics of becoming”. In paying attention to what is already there on the micro-political level, in the molecular processes of deterritorialisation, a spatial art practice can become a platform that recombines affective qualities in an experimental way. It is thus one aspect of a (positive) desire to produce sustainable processes of differentiation in the world with which to “go on”.

In the historical tenor of this archival research and in the concern with the present, the artist can linger in the temporal constellation of work, becoming a reader of signatures by selecting affective potentials and sensations. This is not to restate well-established thoughts, intensities and social constructions of memory and to preserve the immutability of spaces of collection and memorialisation, but instead to activate and accentuate the less familiar, or to give voice to hitherto silent or absent forces.

This research accentuates the way in which forces and intensities or affects pass through and flow into forms/objects and subject/identifications, while affirming the necessity of these “constellations” or “swarms” of properties and sensations that we must in order to manage the motile chaos in the world. Archival drift in spatial art practice therefore enlists this tendency in order to reveal a more complex durational nexus of relations.

In the genesis of the research, *Continuous Wave: Forms for a Dialogue* (2007) was a project that, like a refrain, regularly inhabited a set of social and spatial relations. Engaging at the contextual moment of urban gentrification, the collaboration encompassed the highly developed skills and making practices of participants. Within the territory of old architecture, old practices and old objects, the project produced artefacts and performances through processes of dialogue and verification between participants. The work epitomised the

qualities of attention required for the accumulative processes of rhizomatic interrelatedness through trust built over time. It also exemplified the idea of an expanded practice in its exploration of what an artwork can do outside of (as well as within) an art-dedicated context. The work was affective in its auditory qualities and in its engagement with the eccentric archive of the radio shack. In the politics of listening to voices that might not often be heard, and perhaps in the consequently idiosyncratic ways in which those voices offer their views, unheard perspectives and unknown potentials for a world of different temporal and spatial dimensions are revealed.

Embarking on the research from this point, *Aptitude for Play and Forgetting* (2008) acknowledged cultural practices that function not only according to the obligations of institutional times and economies, but prioritised the time of the artist. Based on a layered or complex understanding of material and performative qualities that are built over years of slow aggregation, the installation unfolded through a more immediate performativity, involving intuitive leaps and extended processing time within the gallery. This opened the work to another dimension of participation and a level of calculated risk that is vital to innovative practice. In this way, the gallery functioned not only as a proto-museum, but also as a place that promoted alternative models of working whereby the finessed finished product of practice is only a component part of what is revealed to the audience. Using an eccentric archiving process, seconded theatre props were deployed in a kind of experimental spatial probing. The affective qualities, of *Aptitude for Play and Forgetting*, its lines of flight in performance readings, writing, engagement in dialogue, its location of practice beyond studio-based paradigms, and its witnessing of new technologies, enabled multiple rhizomatic openings for the work and potentially for the community of participants who witnessed it. This kind of practice allows for the speculative and experimental, destabilising the priority of certainty in the staging of propositions.

*Oxymorons for a better life* (2008) intervened in another social and spatial context such that scientific practices and other historical contexts were

explored. The work functioned in the expanded field, where the frame of architecture determines not mere limits of a fabricated inside and natural outside. Instead it made those apparent limits permeable, or made evident active vectors through the geographic nuances of both. The work functioned at a molecular level, with minimal institutional intervention, where local people run the gallery and witness the artwork. The audience was aware of the archival records of the experimental orchard that were previously housed in the gallery at a time when the witnessing of scientific practices by unqualified outsiders was unsanctioned. More recently, it is acknowledged that the attention of the observer, scientific or otherwise, conditions experimental outcomes. Although speculative practices are advanced by this research, the conditions of expanded practice evidence a concern for the perspective and understanding of our immanent relation to our shared biological context. Through witnessing the processes of other makers we attend to the joint responsibility of considering the potential consequences of experimental practices for all, even the rocks.

In the site-responsive work, *having nothing to do with savagery* (2010), the research acknowledged the materiality of text as part of a performance event. In a way similar to Deleuze's notion of the "formula", it involved a "material operation" produced by the text and it was also an aspect of "the line of flight" of the artwork. Involving text and object, the work achieves its communicative force in the movement between. The artwork is also affective in its conjunctions between the physical extension of the body as maker and manipulator of tools. References to understanding, knowledge and mortality are alluded to in the word *Aufklärung* in relation to and juxtaposed with the felted hair that will outlast it. We remember and perceive only what interests us. However, like the contagious magic of cultural ritual, and Marcel Mauss' *mana*, the virtual "presence" of the absent or forgotten, and our experiences of the unknown also infect and transform our lives.

*the slight surprise of action* (2010) and *incantation for the slim chance . . . and this applied to rocks* (2010), as the final research artefacts each achieved strongly affective outcomes and participant responses in assemblage work that had many component parts. Both installations were multiple and extensive, offering many points of access. The assemblage at both sites accessed an implicit or virtual movement and for some may have activated the “swarm” of intensities’ and chaotic forces that underlie our thinking of the world.<sup>4</sup>

*the slight surprise of action* offered a resistant experience of movement through in its aggregate action stations, while *incantation for the slim chance . . . and this applied to rocks* proposed a chaotic, horizontal and entropic formlessness. Objects in the latter were also more partial, scattered and perhaps less closely and formally congregated, while still functioning on the edge of assemblage. Entropic qualities and pulses of kinetic rhythm were summoned up by the movement of nearby participants and Krauss’ base materialism was evident in the weathered, growing or dying elements.

Although an artist may return to previous motivations in order to encounter them differently, importantly, this research is not about establishing concentrated intellectual themes, styles or an art territory. Instead it is intent on deterritorialising to expose the affective “wildness” beneath the codes or signification systems that can dominate social and political opinions. There is a paradox in research that foregrounds the archive in relation to art objects and assemblage yet seeks out continuous flows and forces. However we must function through some cohesion and so we tend to interrupt and ‘divide continuous flows of difference into separate objects or static qualities.’<sup>5</sup> The artefacts work with forces that are not necessarily visible but are nevertheless palpable, especially if the work activates a line of flight through dialogue, writing and other companion events and in the “shadow” cast by this maker/researcher. It is at this level that a nomadic practice can activate the new in the partial, everyday and local opportunity. Our incomplete temporal

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<sup>4</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 130. Accessed 17/04/11 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/21980908/ClaireColebrook-UnderstandingDeleuze>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 15–16.

experience of the world, the partial experience of objects, and the virtual and actual movement, focuses attention on the ways things interconnect and are related or might potentially synchronise and activate.

The research also questioned what might constitute affective ecologies of spatial art practice. It explored kinds of attention that relate to the performance of art as an event immanent with the world. The extended and gradual understanding resulting from attentive listening or otherwise sensing the world can occur by returning to an event, as a rhythm, to slow and thereby experience it differently. As part of an expanded practice, the perspective of looking away or the temporal gap created by interrupting the usual point of focus, is vital in attending to or caring for the particular or molecular within a broader context. Variations in intentional attention and intentional inattention alike change what things can do. The distancing facilitated in the latter, is critical to the work's navigation of and interrelatedness to the world.

Correspondingly, the material object or text can become a bridge for dialogue between participants to develop new understanding and innovative practice as well as for affective audience engagement. This could be any object but in this research the selection of an object positions the artist as eccentric archivist and offers thereby the added durational references of the past within the present. While the bridge is relational, connecting interlocutors, it does not aggregate because it maintains the distance that sustains each participant's active (rather than reactive) voice. The exchange happens rather through the verification of the sensational material event.

My spatial art practice has emerged from and is beholden to choreographic forces that have had their genesis in my longstanding dance practice. The contribution of this research and its nomadicism emerges from a tendency to "dance" things or qualities of things and to make visible their durational dimensions through the "meanings in motion" that this entails. Through the artist's body, a collaborative maker's body or in the body of an object, and in the partiality of the performance of those things in tetravalent assemblage, the drift of the artist's eccentric archive articulates its localised forces in

relationships. It engages in material contextual dialogues and it makes boundaries permeable in the process of moving through them.

This research artwork achieves its social and political agency therefore through localised movements in the spatial field, in the intuitive movement (dance) of the assemblage method and in the exploration of the durational context that archival drift brings into play. The work achieves its research contribution enacted in the sensational, conceptual and affective particularity of the event of the material work itself and also through the philosophical and artistic contexts it offers in the research writing. The work of this spatial art practice is a risk, a responsibility and a challenge; both an aggregate and a becoming of singular difference.

Felix Guattari writes that every artist must face the dilemma to ‘go with the flow’ . . . or to work for the renewal of aesthetic practices relayed by other innovative segments of the Socius, at the risk of encountering incomprehension and of being isolated from the majority of people’.<sup>6</sup> He writes positively that . . . ‘the very productions of science, technology and social relations . . . will drift towards aesthetic paradigms’ while he questions how ‘forms are going to be arranged so that the subjectivity adjacent to them remains in movement, . . . alive.’<sup>7</sup> In what may appear to be the smallest of artistic moves, archival drift, opens to a future becoming, through an archaeology of the present and a vital performance event in which the chaos of matter becomes affective in the world. *Archival Drift: Attention, Performance and Affective Ecologies in Spatial Art Practice* is research undertaken with a view to sustaining affective practices in this unknown room of becoming.

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<sup>6</sup> Felix Guattari, ‘Chaosmosis: An Ethico–Aesthetic Paradigm’, in. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Claire Bishop. (Whitechapel: London: Whitechapel Press Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 80.

<sup>7</sup> Guattari, *ibid.*