THE WANDERER'S NIGHTSONG II

CURATED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH IAN DAWSON

KATE ATKIN
CATHY DE MONCHAUX
CHRIS HAWTIN
NEIL GALL
GAVIN TURK

C&C GALLERY

03.04.2015 - 10.05.2015
(1) Babies are illogical;
(2) Nobody is despised who can manage a crocodile;
(3) Illogical persons are despised.
(Concl.) Babies cannot manage crocodiles.
Lewis Carroll, Symbolic Logic

(1) I remember trying to mimic my elder brother when I was a teenager- sneaking into his room, flicking the switches on his musical equipment and amplifier, becoming entranced in the trippy noises created from his Moog and Roland synthesizers - altering the wavelength and pitch settings - I remember the echo pedal - the right mix of frequency, delay and intensity and there would be a heady mix of sound adding to itself creating wave after wave of new reverberations built from the previous one - a self swelling creature that copied, enveloped and evolved. I remember this buzz, its a sensation that returns whenever encountering an artwork that is both of and about itself; self-referencing - recursive - language about language.

(2) In Argyll, Scotland, some four-thousand years ago, neolithic humans performed acts of carving onto selected rocks across the landscape; embedding and interweaving an array of ring, cup, and triangular marks into the existing network of cracks and fissures. 'Rather than a process of imposition' as the archaeologist Andrew Jones explains these rock art motifs, 'are worked into the pre-existing geological features of the rock' (1). Patterns of glacial erosion were even copied, replicating the natural rock for it to become part of the ancestral design.

(3) A piece of quartz as the tool, an example of what it is to be human, of possessing an inadequate body needing added technology to both survive and make sense of the world, what Bernard Stiegler would call 'originary prostheticity' (2). This piece of quartz like all other tools is exploited because it has a capacity to have an effect, of 'inflicting some kind of blow on reality', one could say a tool isn't 'used' it 'is' (3). The chisel doesn't need to be re-invented for us to carve. Tools, equipment and the technologies they support, they amass information, from the earliest times until now, passing its practices across the generations.
(Concl.) "The food-gatherer reappears incongruously as the information-gatherer" Marshall McLuhan 1967 (4)

(1) Information. Physicists wonder whether it is a principal factor, more essential than matter, the essence of existence, 'all things physical are information theoretic,' wrote John Archibald Wheeler, it's now 'a participatory universe.' (5) We are no longer merely blood and guts, more six billion encoded bits.

2) Veronese's The Wedding at Cana, a depiction of Jesus' party-trick miracle of turning wine into water, painted for a Benedictine Monastery in Venice in 1563, plundered 235 years later by Napoleon and hanging in the Louvre, now has multiple lives; 210 years after its abduction an exact facsimile was unveiled on the original site - the refectory of San Giorgio. Here visitors can now consider an exact copy in relation to its authentic surroundings, whilst simultaneously visitors to the Louvre are experiencing the original work of art.

(3) The kind of mediation that produces exact copies is not efficient - the translation of data is a track that leads inexorably to mutation. It is an entropic process - creating a counter-intuitive position - the instinct to create order - of regimenting the translation of data - will tend towards a final entropic state and the death of information - when it is no longer meaningful. Copying that seeks to eradicate mutation comes at a high price as it increases noise within the system to the extent that future emergence and invention becomes problematic. (6)
(Concl.) 'Cripples and handicaps lie like corpses along the technical path to the present' Friedrich Kittler 2010 (7)
(1) The ‘knotty problem of mimesis’(9) is central to Western notions of representation; concerned with making through imitation, it is, as such a blind activity, a parasitic action that nonetheless augments through depiction. Appropriation and mimesis permeate Gavin Turk’s work; here five ceramic studies of Ariadne, presented on columns. In history Ariadne pops up, over and over, Roman copies of Hellenistic sculptures, De Chirico, the reclining recurrence - and Turk takes the form again, but this time legless, in the shape of a rough sleeper in a sleeping bag.

(2) The emergence of any new art-form seems to simultaneously inspire an imitation, an echo, constructed to respond, disrupt, mess with the original- and in parody, there is something more than just mere imitation for a comic response, the repetition becomes exaggerated, exposing, questioning its modes of production. When rules are momentarily revealed as rules.

(3) A photogrammetric scan has produced a print of Turk’s studio, one can peer inside the object and just about make out two small Ariadne sculptures about the size of peas, petrified within this cave. This amorphous looking lump converts Turks studio into a memetic Henry Moore version of Ariadne.

(Concl.) ‘It is humor that makes language stammer’ Gilles Deleuze (9)

(1) Human memory is fragile and finite(10), and human societies have constantly created devices for storing memories via extra bodily form, from stone tablets to cuneiform to the printing press and the computer, 3D printing and scanning has now entered the fray.

(2) In The Wanderer’s Nightsong II, I wanted to explore some of the issues that arise out of our current position, as smart phones become digital devotional objects, and it emerges that media are not extensions of the human but are extensions of the planet. What is the function of representation when image making depends on the algorithm? Data does not need to be visual.

(3) Statistical imagery used by Paul Virilio to describe artificial images that only exist through accelerated computer processing power. ‘Such images create “rational” visual illusions that damage peoples comprehension as well as their ability to interpret the real world’(11)

(4) I wanted to collaborate with artists to explore what would happen if a part of these new technologies intruded into their practices, I was to be an agent in this process, wanting to act as a technician of sorts. And I am indebted to the artists- to their openness and willingness to make such a consideration. Gavin Turk suggested that it was perhaps like pulling up a ladder to a brick wall and peering over. And I enjoyed that sentiment, whilst being uneasy about the implication of witnessing the driverless car departing the forecourt.

(Concl.) ‘‘‘, have you heard of a writer who writes for his pen...?’ Paul Virilio, Vision Machine (12)

(1) It was Ariadne who gifted Theseus with the ball of string to escape the labyrinth, and it is the story of his ship that gives rise to Theseus’ paradox; of whether an object is real if all its constituent parts are ever replaced.

(2) Chris Hawtin’s paintings preside over the show-post-human-mutant-cybernetic-figureheads rendered wistfully, glazed oil on canvas, these are portraits- Seth, Clio, Gregor, Photius, -standards- that act as both an anchor and extension of ourselves- for both remembrance and reconnaissances(13). These paintings that are figured in our own image, part machine, perhaps come to represent a Faustian impulse, to converge art with a universal desire to re-create life non-biologically. These are dimly hued paintings- with deep shade- the figure blanketed in darkness and silhouetted in a shaft of light. Light, the basis for all image making- energizes the figures while the surrounding dimness perhaps manifests a fear of the dark, the most primordial of phobias.

(4) Ghostly white 3D prints, are arranged as both fragments recovered from an aseptic archaeological dig- miniature ancestors to those from Luxor- whilst also operating as prototypes- Do the paintings act as a genotypes to the phenotypes of the printed copy?

(Concl.) As Walter Benjamin noted in the Arcades Project ‘In nature the new is mythic because its potential is not yet realized; in consciousness, the old is mythic, because its desires never were fulfilled.’ (14)

1) A range of cultural and art historical references operate within Neil Gall’s work, his paintings make reference to Velazquez, Bronzino, Magritte and Piccinni, whilst painting illusory, life-like depictions of assemblages of a particular range of poor materials- pingpong balls- electrical tape- cardboard. This precise visual style is achieved in some part by discarding the irregularity of the object in favour of painting from a meticulously lit photographic print. Here a maquette bonded by red electrical tape was laser scanned - and printed- the copy was dense, stable- the tape solidified and smoothed into gentle undulations- becoming a landscape highlighting the topography of the printing process - the z-depth.

2) Gall, photographed the 3D print and painted Walpurgis Nacht (2015) whilst an altogether different mesh was being constructed- the original model was being re-photographed again- multiple times from multiple angles- these photographs then aligned, the common points located the camera positions identified, and a mesh constructed, the distance and geometry extrapolated from the combined JPEG information- a much more complex model was rendered.
3) This virtual model spins on a monitor—in its current status too imperfect to print. The rotation of the object, like that of a potter’s wheel, or a pizza in a microwave; illustrative of the process of data capture, the spin as a prevailing gesture in the rendering of 3D data. Can the loop be a new narrative form? Instead of a narrative that progresses through a line of unique events—that avoids repetition, can the loop be the ‘engine’ that puts a different narrative in motion? (15).

4) The monitor is the black box from inside which a piece of magic is conjured. In folklore Walpurgis Nacht is the mystical meeting of witches on a german mountain—here two accounts of the model congregate—creating a complex chronicle of events in and between themselves. (Concl.) ‘In the universe now there was no longer a container and a thing contained, but only a general thickness of signs superimposed and coagulated, occupying the whole volume of space...the galaxy went on turning but I could no longer count the revolutions, any point could be the point of departure, any sign heaped up with the others could be mine, but discovering it would have served no purpose, because it was clear that, independent of signs, space didn’t exist and perhaps had never existed.’

Italo Calvino (16)

(1) On the evening of September 7th (or 6th) 1780, (or 1783) historians are still debating. Goethe scratched an eight-line poem onto the walls of a mountain lodge. This poem known as ‘The Wanderer’s NightSong II’ describes a progression from mineral through animal to human, of a natural process becoming language. The poems power—three simple factual statements followed by an assertion for the future is constructed without the use of simile, metaphor or symbol. (17)

Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögel, ein Schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.

(2) A constructed environment of printed wood on MDF echoes the mountain lodge. The collage of wood, garnished from scraps from my studio—has become lavish—instead of the poem etched on the surface, bitmaps—a memory organization file—from the 3D scans—as juxtaposed in strips alongside the wood-grain; the artwork migrating into the fabric of the space.

(3) The mountain lodge—the ground for the poem—burnt down in 1870 and was rebuilt four years later, a perspex plaque with an English language translation currently resides in the rebuilt cabin. It goes;

Over all of the hills
Peace comes anew,
The woodland stills
All through;
The birds make no sound on the bough.
Wait a while,
Soon now
Peace comes to you.

(Concl.) ‘The certitude that everything has been written turns us into phantoms’
Jorge Luis Borges, The Library of Babel (18)

(1) It is easy to forget that copying isn’t primarily the preserve of the mechanical process, it is the basic tenet behind life—cell copies and splits—reproduces— we are all copies—its how organic information passes down the generations. Kate Atkin evocatively captures this in the elaborately titled drawing ‘...and all the time the forms kept growing out of my egg like cracker snakes’/Mein Freund Der Baum Ist Tot’, an arc of now dead growth extrudes from a tree trunk, this outer bark—the dead cells of the tree are scrutinized and rendered in pencil. Representing an organism that displays its damage in such a way might be considered a study of function. This arc appears to capture another part of the lifecycle, its shape clearly reminiscent of larvae, an immature form not yet ready for metamorphosis and in another twist—the image is faded, blurred, and it turns out that in a final phase the drawing has begun to be erased by the artist. A buzz returns again—as the action re-inscribes the content.

(2) Reminiscent of Rauschenberg’s erased de Kooning drawing of 1956. The effect of light on the sheet of paper is heightened as erasure reveals the deeply embedded lines etched on the paper. What remains is a shadow, addressing the notion that something negative might have positive consequences, of determining function by way of malfunction.

(3) On her studio shelf, sat a small sculpture, a model of a prawn—wire board tape and glue—that how I remember it—thoughtfully constructed—as if to understand the logic of the structure, wire snaking along the spine the card describing the vertebrae—line and plane. Here the 3D printed copy becomes animal again, the modernist construction undergoing a metamorphosis of its own.

(Concl.) ‘A nightmare has haunted me since childhood: I am looking at a text I can’t read, or only a tiny part of it decipherable. I pretend to read it, aware that I’m inventing it; then suddenly the text is completely scrambled, I can no longer read anything or even invent it, my throat tightens and I wake up’ Michel Foucault (19)
(1) A skueomorph; an archaeological term that denotes artefacts made from one material to imitate the form of another. It's a curious copy, at times thought to be deceptive, the 'aping' of shapes that are proper in one medium that then become amiss in another (20). An axe-head fabricated from chalk - a violent object safely displaced into the symbolic; a fossil (21), the sound of a camera shutter on a smartphone. A skueomorph can be about acceptance- forms from a traditional technique can be employed on a new material in order for it to become conventional. Others might try to betray, attempting to erase their origins in the imitation of a higher status. An alchemical process, the 3D scanner makes skueomorphs- extracting its precise geometric coordinates and points and reconstructing those in vector form.

(2) A figurine- appears calcified as if literally unearthed from Chauvet, the cave of forgotten dreams (22). This is a copy of Cathy de Monchaux's new works where tiny figures handmade from copper wire and paper pulp are amassed into networks, the image becoming slowly retrievable from the depth and tangle of filament. These are fragile sculptures often housed within a 3 dimensional frame, and here the scanner dismantled a single figure, into a blizzard of points- reforming the root complex as a linear network, tethering the figure in another way.

(3) Within the exhibition this pregnant print has no associate. (Concl.) "...the machine does work, be sure of it. There is no danger of this machine going mad, it has been mad from the beginning and that is where its rationality comes from." Deleuze (23)

(1) Who is addressing the wanderer? in Discourse Networks, Kittler asked that simple question of Goethe's poem, whose is the voice 'speaking to the wanderer of the way that nature is speaking to him' (24). Kittler begins by locating the voice as that of a 'mother', that the poems mimicry of a saxon lullaby recreates the prominent features of a voice teaching a child language, of imbibing profound meaning onto the most minimal of utterances. Thus triggering in the wanderer, and the reader, a response similar to that of an infant listening to hush-a-bye-baby. The poem thus both describes and brings about a sense of poetic bliss precisely because it re-stages that which made us receptive to it in the first place. In revealing how the mechanisms of the development of language are wholly bound within the essence of the poem Kittler exposes how the medium is the message.
GAVIN TURK, RECLINING FIGURE, 2003, EARTHENWARE, 7 X 9 X 20 CM
IAN DAWSON & GAVIN TURK, UNTITLED, 2015, 3D RESIN PRINT AND MIXED MEDIA 15 X 20 X 18CM
CHRIS HAWTIN, PHOTEUS, 2015, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 40CM
CHRIS HAWTIN, CLIO, 2015, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 40CM
CHRIS HAWTIN & IAN DAWSON, 3D RESIN PRINT AND MIXED MEDIA, 13 X 12 X 18 CM
CHRIS HAWTIN & IAN DAWSON, 3D RESIN PRINT AND MIXED MEDIA, 16 x 15 x 18CM
KATE ATKIN, ‘...AND ALL THE TIMES FORMS KEPT GROWING OUT OF MY EGG LIKE CRACKER SNALES’ /MEIN FREUND DER BAUM IST TOT, 2009-20015, PENCIL ON PAPER/ NO PENCIL ON PAPER, 136.5 x 202cm
KATE ATKIN & IAN DAWSON, UNTITLED, 2015, 3D PRINT AND MIXED MEDIA, 38 x 18 x 20cm
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

C&C Gallery and Ian Dawson would like to thank the artists for their contributions, their commitment, energy and enthusiasm in helping develop and realize the Wanderer's Nightsong II. It was a remarkable experience to be informed by their unique perspectives and be encouraged by their visions; throughout the process they have been a constant source of inspiration. Thank you!

Thanks also to Serena Zacho, Paul Rushworth, George Watson, George Thom, James Briggs, Alex Goulden, Christian Carter, Andrew Brook, Celeste Carleton, Adrian Baxter and Meri Atkin, for making the show possible. Grateful thanks must also go to Helen Hayward, Martin Westwood, Andrew Jones, Louisa Minkin and Ryan Bishop for stimulating, supporting and spurring in innumerable ways.

Photo credits:
Gavin Turk, The Swimmer © Andy Keates
Gavin Turk, Cyclops © Andy Keates
Gavin Turk, Rough Sleeper © Andy Keates
Gavin Turk, Reclining Figure © Andy Keates
Gavin Turk, Matisse Woman © Andy Keates
All other photographs © Ian Dawson

© Ian Dawson 2015