Practices & Philosophies
MA Contemporary Photography;
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MA Contemporary Photography;
MA Photography Degree Show

Central Saint Martins
University of the Arts London

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MA Photography at Central Saint Martins is a ground-breaking course that explores the possibilities of photography driven by artistic practice and practice-led research. We understand photography as plural, transdisciplinary, and as a multimedial global language that is situated at the core of contemporary visual arts practice.

Based in the world-famous King's Cross campus in central London, the course redefines photography as central to 21st century arts and culture. Unlike other photography courses, we are not committed to one notion of what photography is, or to one form of media specific practice. Instead of working from a predefined notion of photography, the course aims to provide students with the tools to locate their own practice within a broad range of contemporary visual forms. Through the deep integration of practice and theory, we offer a supportive environment in which to explore photography as a form of expression that interlaces fine art, technology, aesthetics, politics, and new media. The philosophy of the visual image and the understanding of photography as a melting pot of political, aesthetic and social concepts are embedded throughout the course.

Our students, as evidenced in this – our 2018 Degree Show – work across disciplines, combining photography, installation, performance, video, smart technology, site-specific practices, sculpture, and new media. They create work that is visually exciting and intellectually compelling, placing photography - in all its hybridised forms - at the heart of contemporary art. In doing so, they redefine photography as a key component of contemporary arts practice.

Dr Daniel Rubinstein, Course Leader

Dr Pat Naldi, Lecturer
Vinicius Assencio

With my work I explore the process of translation and materialisation of old images in a new language, and the oscillation between the 2 dimensionality and the 3 dimensionality of its image. My practice as an artist has shown me that this oscillation is similar to the way in which human memory operates between the past and the present. My work explores the overlapping temporalities of the intertwined relationship between time and memory by utilising a number of tools from different centuries to deal with the same image.

After asking myself the question: “Where is the materiality of the digital image?” I have carried out several experiments that have combined the digital and the analogue; always using my affection for the photographs of my childhood as the driving force to explore the power of transformation and flexibility of the digital image. What I have most hoped to achieve through these experiments, has been a transposition of affection from one medium to the other, that one day I have the same feeling towards digital images as I have for analogue images.

I am interested in the possibility of transformation in which these images were arranged before the advent of new technologies. I am intrigued by the fact that it is now possible to choose an image from a large archive of 100 years ago and turn it into an object or a contemporary image. This power of mutation is the main axis of my practice.

Another key point in my work is always memory. I contend that the way in which the contemporary image oscillates between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional is similar to the way in which human memory oscillates between the past and the present.

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Photographic Amber (2016)
‘Symmetropia’, what is this made-up word, ‘symmetropia’? It is a word formed of symmetry and topia. Symmetry being an ‘agreement in dimensions’, a reflective and harmonious form, and topia from the Greek, topos/place. By chance the ‘topia’ within my word appeared. It implies ‘tropé’, meaning ‘figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression.’ The inclusion of the word ‘tropé’ gives me flexibility to play with language. Initially the inclusion of the letter ‘r’ irritated me because it conformed to the patriarchal grammatical language structure. The ‘r’ had pushed its way in and destroyed my ‘topia’. That was distressing. I considered getting rid of the ‘r’ to create the word ‘symmetopia’ as my compound word. It just didn’t seem right. The flux of the letter ‘r’ gave malleability of language and freedom within my place/space.

My ‘symmetropia’ is inside and outside of time where turns and deviations from the ‘normal’ are welcome. It is a space/place where my being and becoming simultaneously happen. It is within and without of an ‘ana-materiality’ where plasticity and timeless dimensions exist. It sometimes mirrors the ‘real’ world, while embracing the glitch and the difference. My ‘symmetropia’ is both ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, a ‘topia’ with difference. Within my ‘groundless ground’ language has plasticity and melds into different forms. My ‘symmetropia’ reflects a space/place where eternal difference and plasticity reign.

My need for a new language as a non-male artist drives my desire to unravel the suffocating patriarchal structure, which is currently the dominant form of written language. I am often stifled. I often feel caged and restricted by this autocratic binary system of language. My urge to break these bonds is strengthened by Woolf and Kafka, and the works of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. All have toiled with their anxieties and the constraints of language while unlocking their personal cages. As I draw from their works, I believe I will be guided in seeking a new language from within the multifaceted labyrinth of my own ‘symmetropia’.

Carla Benzing

The shape is reminiscent of a little spaceship, the sound feels uncanny—like a swarm of bees. Its movement seems beautifully shy and aggressive at the same time, and its cyborg-like nature seems somehow human. Drones are the centrepiece of my current research and artistic practice, and I realised the dangers and potential dilemmas first hand. One day, my drone just disappeared. I lost the connection. The drone took off as usual, then suddenly accelerated and turned towards the middle of a lake as if it had a mind of its own. It turned right and was gone. Maybe someone else hacked the remote, maybe it was a technical glitch, maybe the drone had taken control over itself.

When looking up the word “drone” one reads about recent collisions with planes and the horrific reality of drone strikes. But drones also provide new forms for artistic expression and journalistic investigation. Drawn by both the threatening and beautiful aspects of these new technologies, I am trying to further explore our relationship with drones through my arts practice but also through a theoretical approach.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has argued that we will never be able to explore our relation to technology as long as we think about it as something only technological. Thought through to the end, this would mean that we remain unfree, chained to the technology, no matter if we approve or deny it. The most dangerous thing would be to see technology as something neutral, because then we would be completely at the mercy of it and remain blind for its essence. Instead, we should be questioning technology. Heidegger’s idea of the essence of technology is both technical and poetic. In the essence, he sees a disclosure rather than a means.

One way of approaching this issue is through art, as this area is connected to technology yet completely different to it at the same time. Thus, the interest in researching the drone lies in exploring a new technological tool and perspective which I think could develop into a new practice of contemporary art. Against the backdrop of these thoughts, it is vital to shift our focus away from attempts to control these technologies and push aside fears that they could control us one day. Rather we should be questioning these new forms of technology and try to understand their essence, in terms of their origin, their relation to the human, and our common future. At a time in which we seem to sleepwalk into a future of observation and control in social but also political terms, it is essential to reflect on how this future would look like, as we can expect the use of drones in logistic, military and other areas to increase significantly. This not only means raising questions on ethical and legal issues amongst many others, but more importantly: How this will affect being human in general?

How we will be coexisting with drones?
What are we becoming?

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The Artist wishes to overcome this fear and fixation of her reality. In her mind, everything is possible but, on the outside, she doesn’t know exactly where to start. The body here has a fundamental importance, as it is the connection between this outer and inner reality. It belongs to her but at the same time, it is present in this outside dimension. It is her armour, but it is also her link to sensation. The body is feeling and desire. The body is in movement; it becomes alive. It is a movement, which has no aim and has no intention of a fulfilment of an action, but it is just a pure act. The Artist does not move in order to occupy a space, but to create it.

The body moves, feels, and through sensation gives the Artist a base of understanding and a connection to the external world. It becomes flow; it becomes a pulsing beat; it is energy, it cannot be contained, it spreads everywhere without limits.

She wonders in the space, takes one step, then another and another. The repetition of steps becomes a rhythm, which differentiates itself every time it is executed. Without realising, she is swaying all around like wind, blowing so intensely that everything turns upside-down. The more she goes on, the more it becomes difficult to stop. The dancing body shakes off all her fears and anxieties. In each movement she frees herself, “Is this the way to escape?” she asks breathlessly to the Other.

The dance itself doesn’t have any aim, the Artist dances because it feels good to do so. There are no expectations – it is a moment that appears without demands and disappears without nostalgia. What the dance is and becomes, is infinite, without limitations.

When we dance we are not dancing in order to achieve some end outside the dance. The dance is the end itself; at each moment in the dance we are fully dancing, and we do not have to complete the dance to say that we have danced.

– (Colebrook, 2005, p.8)

This is one of the reasons why dancing is so powerful. It creates itself in its act, it is not fixed and it keeps becoming and recreating itself. It does not depend on anything, as it exists on its own, and so it does not have any loss in its creation. The dance becomes itself through its movements and disappearance.

Dance is one of the ways in which the self might define or express itself. And dance would also be a metaphor or figure for this self-creation, a becoming that produces itself through its own activity.

– (Colebrook, 2005, p.8)

But what is this dance and where does it go? The famous dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham, said that in order to understand what dance is, we need to know where it comes from and where it goes (1966). For Andre Lepecki, if dance fills a space, it is definitely one that is outside representation, but still allows the latter to happen. It is like a camera obscura, it is a room ‘between departure and destination’ (1997). To the Artist there isn’t any fixed space; dance is like air. It goes everywhere and creates the space itself. Sometimes it decides to become wind, twirl around, stir up some souls and then vanish again.
Michael Cheung

For me, the self-portrait originated a long time ago in history, together with the idea of “self”, which is always aligned to the political, economical, cultural and philosophical context of its time. In fact, they are constantly interacting and influencing each other. Self-portrature is usually considered to be one of the first forms of arts practice that responds to new philosophical tides of art and cultural movements.

In this age, with the development of information technology, we are now cyborgs existing in physical and non-physical contexts, and we are hybrids of human and machine. The concept of “natureculture” purports that individuality is only a fraction, and we are always “becoming with” other organisms (or partners). The dualist, reflective way of practice no longer has the ability to show the essence of the “self”. Thus, a contemporary artists’ self-portrait should no longer simply be a reflection or representation of anything, as it will denaturalise what the artist is trying to express.

Artists try to express themselves via a self-portrait “existence” as IT IS rather than the “individuality”, which is only a snap, not the whole picture. This can illustrate how we, as artists in this posthuman era, should view self-portraiture. This reinforces the point that reflection (binary thinking) is somehow a deficient method if we want to reach the quintessence of ourselves, because the subject-object mechanism de-natures the “self”, thus it can never be expressed completely; always just a fraction. Therefore, contemporary artists need new ways for their practice. From the literature of Haraway, Barad and more, we can say that contemporary artists should work in a diffractive way of practice, in which the self-portrait should become an on-going, repetitive intra-action event in a performative context. We can see in the works of artists such as Marc Quinn and Stelarc that they embrace this form of practice.

I believe the concept of repetition, cloning, and the feedback loop relate closely to a diffractive way of working. While the endless process of the dialogue between the artist and the work is the self portrait as “self”, it is also in a constant state of becoming and without final a destination.
Asa Desouza-Jones

If the spark of the accidental is a way of drawing out the hidden and unknown, enabling new possibilities, it seems vital to say why this is of importance. Firstly, if perpetuating modalities or styles is the concern of art production, then there will inevitably be stagnation and, if art doesn’t evolve then art dies. We must also realign our perception of what art can do. With one of the main purposes of art within the rational age: that of representing the injustices of the world in order to expose these violations to a wider audience.

Art is not necessarily like a war machine brought in to topple corrupt dictators. Nor is it a newspaper article with global reach providing a searing expose of the lack of government accountability. Art is an affect that first must concern itself with its own production [Jean-Luc Nancy, 1997, p.1]. This production can then be tasked with the purpose of changing the mindset of societies:

‘...art can capture the imagination and change the consciousness of people. If the consciousness of people changes, then the changed people will also change the world in which they live.’

[Groys, 2016]

If ideals of freedom and difference are inherently included within the nature of art set out here, then there will always be hope that art can in turn alter ethics, ideologies and ultimately, subjectivities and structures through its existence and progressive nature.

Thus, the role of art could be considered as a vehicle that lays the groundwork for change on a broader societal, even global scale. Ingold suggested making, and production is about the system of relations that produce it. If so then this art has the potential to affect and alter the ecology of the system of relations into which it is re-inserted, but only insofar as the possibilities that art is granted are not themselves diminished.

I am ultimately reminded of Deleuze’s comments in his final essay: Immanence: A Life:

‘A life contains only virtuals. It is made up of virtualities, events singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane that gives it its particular reality. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen. The plane of immanences is itself actualized in an object and a subject to which it attributes itself.’

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Matthew Greenburgh

“...the poor beetle that we tread upon
In corporeal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies”

The large-scale is one of those important, measurable measures over which artists can assert and thereby reveal their judgement.

The type of scale I wish to explore is spatial and is captured better by Müller, 1972 than the dictionary: “dimension can be envisaged from the point of view of scale or from size. Scale requires constant relating to a standard...Most of man’s creations are made according to his own scale... thus there is always the feeling of anthropocentrism”. So, in a comparison of the artwork to the viewer, the large-scale could be said to start where the length or height is c.150cm, being the height and arm-span of a small adult. This is large relative to the classical photographic print, being (when squared) 45 times the area of a typical 25 x 20cm Ansel Adams and 19 times the Bechers’ normal 40 x 30cm print.

It should be noted that the large-scale gives more scope for variation of the scale of the content whilst retaining sufficient detail to deliver the requisite message and/or aesthetic experience. Equally, there can be contrasts or harmonies between the scale of the artwork and the nature of its content.

The large-scale enables the work of art to create different phenomenologies when seen from different distances. Of course, many large-scale works of art were commissioned to fill distant positions in large buildings and so the experience of a large-scale artwork depends on the appreciation of the setting and the knowledge, as opposed to the sensation, of its scale. The opposite also applies in that a small image, say on a smartphone, held close to the eye might be argued to be large-scale. The large-scale makes perspective more readily achievable but then more readily distorted given the greater range of movement of the viewer; thus, the large-scale can have an important role in increasing the awareness of the viewer of the simulacrum.

A large-scale work can more easily be seen by a number of people at the same time and might possibly help create a relational community between those viewers. The large-scale artwork also requires a greater movement of the body of the spectator, which can create the illusion of greater freedom and a more physical, less purely intellectual experience. This is linked to its immersiveness and to the sublime, which is traditionally associated with what is beyond knowledge or measurement and thus unrepresentable. Hence art, which of course struggles to represent the unrepresentable, has often alluded to the sublime through a large-scale presentation.

The notion of scale has of course been extended by the internet. My definition of large-scale deals with physical space, but it is worth noting that many of the artists who use the internet as their main medium have ended up back in the gallery.

Another technology that is challenging the notion of scale is virtual reality (VR). Although art galleries are exploring ways of incorporating VR, its role as an interesting (and economic) medium for art is by no means established. Clearly this is an area which could potentially have a very significant impact but at present both the art and the theory is at a nascent stage.

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You He

Life is a constant flow of presence. To represent life is to give away the mobile presence to a static absence. Although different in many ways, two activities intersected from different directions to a point that ‘to grasp the reality is to live in the presence and go beyond the absence’. Thus, a new territory opens up which I come to experience but not document. Since the reality keeps changing, to fully grasp it, instead of trying to document the past, we need to experience the ‘now’. The experiences I have gained through skateboarding and photography have added layers like lasagna and interwoven through my life. The patterns they have formed have pointed me in a certain direction, and I want to integrate this experience into my work.

Bridging the gap and beyond the division

There seems to be a division formed between skateboarding and photography. During the activity of skateboarding, I devote myself with intense multi-sensory engagement, experiencing the direct confrontation of body and space. This includes destroying and recreating the meaning of self and space; the body is in the presence and the experience is present. While in photography the body remains behind the lens, it gets a result with the absence of the photographer. The mechanically produced image shows the reality of the past and so photography is criticised for its ‘lack of present’. When we lose ourselves in the ‘black box’ in search of the information, it is a ‘lack of presence’.

Our society has always favoured ‘presence’ over ‘absence’, the ‘present’ over the ‘past’. But I am troubled by this thought, since it shows a hierarchic way of looking at the world, that one is better than another, that comes from the model of a phallocentric society, as stated by Victor Burgin.

I have remarked that the history and pre-history of modern art in our patriarchal, phallocentric, culture is stamped by the presence of fetishism, the fetishism of presence. ¹

It is also confined by the structure of binary thinking which divides the world into two oppositions.

By exploring the rules of engagement that govern the use of images, it might be possible to free thought from its dependence on the Platonic opposites of image (eikon) and Reality (eidos), and from the binary dualisms that follow from it. For as long as the rule of this binary model persists, it is impossible to escape what Deleuze branded as ‘the four iron collars of representation: Identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgment and resemblance in perception’. ²

In order to break down the hierarchy and binary thinking, I turn to look for difference instead of division.

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Yajing Hu

We are too accustomed to be in this ontologically dualistic world. The world is simply divided into two overarching categories, we ignore the middle line, or interstice. As Andrew Bolton states:

the space between entities or boundaries, this in-between space reveals itself as an aesthetic sensibility, an unsettling zone of visual ambiguity and elusiveness, engendering and effectuating an art of the in between.

‘What is art?’ ‘How to define art?’ Even though I have read many academic theories on art, I can’t find a single theory that can persuasively summarise what art is. Thus, it appears that art itself is hard to define as it has indefinable characteristics. Over the centuries, art and art discourse have rapidly expanded, so that it is hard to say if any object or event is not related to the arts. Especially in contemporary art, after Marcel Duchamp brought a urinal into an art museum, it is hard to distinguish between what is art and what is not art? Therefore, the question “is it art?” becomes unnecessary.

Rei Kawakubo’s exhibition ‘art of the in between’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is a very good example. It already blurs the boundaries of the contrasting themes such as East/West, male/female, high/low, which touch upon Kawakubo’s fascination with ‘in-betweeness’.

She never gave herself any ethnic boundaries, nor let them interfere with her work. From the beginning, she dispensed with any preconceived notions about western and eastern social mores and cultures, as all these things are irrelevant to her world...She deliberately cast away all questions of upbringing, nationality, sociology and the like. So many times it comes from just a feeling, an emotion, not a concrete reference. (Adrian Joffe; in: Bolton, 2017).

She created her own garment, focusing on her own instead of deliberately thinking about ethnic issues. Everything is as she said, ‘I’m not inspired directly by other people or even by places, I try to detach myself from the outside world and work within my own vision. Everything is much internalized’. As in her work, people cannot clearly classify whether it is western or eastern style because she is in-between.

Nowadays fashion designers and artists are no longer creating works based on the label given to them by social conventions, but instead, they are truly liberated from social and cultural conventions, they are pursuing authenticity of the thing itself and their own authenticity.

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Elena Larsson

Through the gaze, the suggestion of desire is made more imminent, more personal - yet it is precisely this that seems to blur divides, for in such an evocative fiction, ‘who is the object and who the subject? Who possesses whom?’ Such a destabilisation of boundaries persists again in the digital age. The current screen, considered in its physicality, forms an interesting echo of those first mimetic eyes, surmounted as it is by the ever-present camera, the unavoidable (webcam) eye. Yet the threat of the digital is not empty: it is not only aesthetic. If the Three Ages or the Venus enacted a perceived threat of pleasure in paint, the digital renders it imminent in society. The object of desire - again - is caught up in questions of sacrifice, and the individual who desires seems - again - often ready to sacrifice logic to get what they want. “We expose ourselves”, so the critic says, “to the companies whose technology we use” - and as in a love relationship, we do so willingly, through vehicles that compel rather than suppress our desire. In some ways it is only the return of an old trope: that we must always sacrifice something to get what we want. Yet in the digital era the surrender is displaced. It is not our place in a hierarchy or our money that we give up, but details of identity that we sacrifice: data that forms our exchange.

Thus, in the visuals of technology, as in the visuals of the painter, a power dynamic emerges at the nexus of want, and the resignation of control, of data or of money, can be motivated through an aesthetic and intimate attachment. Yet in the digital age, this sacrifice is not only conceptual, but indicates an essential alteration in how power functions, no longer exercised in a top-down manner but entered into willingly through the force of desire.

Let us return to Agamben, and the apparatus that he, in his theory, constructs around us: scaffolding that holds us in or foundations for our own safety. In the quickly-made dichotomy that the writer identifies (Past: Religious apparatus; Present: Technology apparatus) the former is belief-producing, and the latter creates dependence. In his words: ‘Contemporary societies... present themselves as inert bodies going through massive processes of desubjectification’. With all the modern recognition of individuality, the apparatus - the revelation of some aspect of society united in a seduction or an authority - renders us one body all the same. There is no real creation of one subject: one could always be
in control. Except that one is not. Seemingly the apparatus itself, this time unlike religion, makes constantly present the opportunity for free expression; for self-aggrandisation: surpassing the crowd and gaining recognition. That is part of the appeal: if in the digital all is seen, you too could be seen - but seen better. And yet, the apparatus would still be the vehicle of the presented self - would still retain its position as enabler. From this, it might be inferred that the digital alteration of visual, social and psychological experience is a fundamental shift in how control operates, creating a network in which "every moment [could be] measured, and observed, and organised". A description of prison; a description of data. Nobody say wilful Panopticon. Nobody say we entered because we wanted to. Yet it also, and crucially, incites a shift in what we see and how we relate to it: organising behaviours, systematising self-regard, and changing our relation to the objects of our devotion and desire.

1 In the Council of Trent it is included in the same decree that 'when it shall be, expedient for the unlearned people' that images are used 'not thereby is the Divinity represented, as though it could be perceived by the eyes' (1563). Session XXV, 'Canons and Decrees', 214
2 Goffen, Titian’s Women, 79
3 Harcourt, “Exposed”
4 Agamben, Apparatus, 22
5 Ibid.
6 The digital age “fundamentally transforms relations of power” as well as “the way we exist as political subjects [and as] social subjects” for Harcourt, “Exposed”
7 James explicating Foucault’s description of power systems in prisons. Susan James, “Susan James on Foucault and Knowledge”, Philosophy Bites, 22nd July, 2015, Audio

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According to the principle of computational equivalence, human and machine both belong to the same computational system. Through conducting research on artificial intelligence, humans attempt to simulate intelligence on machines. Consequently, if we try to see an algorithm as a mode of revealing an event and process, as Heidegger does, we might say that the essence of an algorithm is humans revealing themselves. It is a process of decentering human beings, situating ourselves not at the centre of the universe, but the same as machines, animals, and all other systems. Like Cary Wolfe says, this is “a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore”; he also names this “posthumanism”. Therefore, what shall we do with contemporary art practices that relate to the algorithm as posthumanism? At least Yuk Hui’s viewpoint on technological developments gives us a clue: “Focus on spatiality instead of intelligence” and create “an environment in which humans and machines can interact through materialized relations”.

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Diana Lloyd

Melodic Landscapes: Contemporary Art Practice

The melodic landscape is no longer a melody associated with a landscape; the melody itself is a sonorous landscape in counterpoint to a virtual landscape.

– Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus

My art research and practice explores the nature of melodic landscapes as pulsating embodiments of diffraction as methodology, the rhizome, and duration, and considers its political implications in relation to contemporary artistic research, production and spaces.

A melodic landscape ultimately encapsulates a resonating sense of becoming experienced by all of its inhabitants, demonstrating a relational interconnectedness that breaks down the separateness of binary subject and object relations. Melodic landscapes are therefore concerned with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad’s concept of diffraction as a methodology whereby the subject and object are interconnected and constantly “intra-acting” to materially influence each other.

Such diffraction that is inherent in melodic landscapes and performative in its nature, demonstrates how documentation itself has the capacity to shift into positions of both objectification and subjectivity. While melodic landscapes in themselves are not political, their existence has political implications, when it comes into opposition with spatial interventions that serve to separate and objectify.

This constant shifting of different perspectives also highlights the rhizomatic nature of melodic landscapes, which enables endless horizontal lines of connection and multiplicity to occur simultaneously. Indeed my research and practice examines how Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical concept of the rhizome is activated through public participation and place as assemblages that are fluidly relational and interconnected pathways, which criss-cross in the landscape, and instigate multiple and open-ended political and social discourses.

The rhizome, together with diffraction as a methodology, are therefore embodied forms of performative, participatory, networked and non-hierarchical processes that continuously generate a resonating sense of becoming experienced by the holistic melodic landscape over time. These processes constantly alter, connect and grow, and are in perpetual, unfixed states of becoming through duration: ever transforming, but never fully visible or tangible.

By reflecting on melodic landscapes as forms of public participatory process in which the artist-as-facilitator initiates creative improvisation and conversations with others through assemblages within a space, I act by considering how this offers alternative possibilities as a course of living. Art itself encourages all possibilities, but perhaps the possibility of challenging the rigidity of such enforced categorisations such as “the artist” and “the participant”, which only serve to separate others and the places they occupy, could instead encourage a genuine sense of communal belonging in the melodic landscapes that we all inhabit. Ultimately through the exploration of melodic landscapes in contemporary art practice, we can see how this offers us alternative possibilities of inhabiting the world that we share with others.

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drag, fold, talk (2017)
The human condition: Fractured / Portrait / Mirage.

Zooming between the rhythm

//Fractured. A tapping behind my forehead makes my mind feel fractured. What day is it? I look out of the window. Outside on the Boulevard a flush follows gravity towards the time beaten surface of the concrete. It’s fragments spring up and dissolves in all directions.

Her hair looked so thin and wavy, how is that? She thought to herself.

//Portrait. Does it blur out? My right eye twitches again. A layer of a greyish veil seems to centre on the image; I cannot spot the face anymore.

She took the 2 leaves of salad and put them in the middle of the soft yellow half of the bread roll. The leaves glued to the buttered surface. Silently she had watched the entrance of the high grey building from her kitchen window for the last 2 hours, waiting for their return.

“The movement will always take place behind your back”, Professor Crier’s voice is broken, rigid. He takes the spoon to his right and plunges it into a bowl of green soup in front of him. “Professor, I am afraid I cannot follow your thoughts.” My table neighbour grunts. “Imagine me pouring this liquid out of the bowl onto the table. With every spoon full I am spilling over the polished surface, the form image of the outpoured liquid changes. Because the visual content of the frames is blurry, your mind zooms in. Eager to find one image, which gives you a reference. But now you are too close, you cannot see anything but the little bits of organic fibres in it. You try to take the materiality as a starting point. But now all you see is material, little bits of organic fibres, pieces aligned with pieces, like fractals. Because you don’t zoom under the surface, only onto it, their movement stays a cheap shadow play of what you are interested in. A condition where all you have is material, taken out of its rhythm. It becomes distorted by its isolation. The essence of a thing never appears on the beginning, but in its centre where it is the strongest.”

The colour of the light tinted the inside of the car in a soft blue, the neck support she had been resting her head on, was vibrating under the unevenness of the road’s surface.

“Professor, I am afraid I cannot follow you. Why would you spill soup?” Professor Crier looks at me. “Ma petite, we are not living in times of the
Why’s, if you keep asking yourself why you are, you are circling in the void.” His hand, which is still holding the spoon, moves towards the side of the bowl. “Take the matter of memory, whose architecture is multiple. In its process of becoming, memory is fragmenting, transforming and unifying the subject of interest. Try to focus on the already remembered and you miss the point. Memory sits within the blacks between the images popping into your head, blurring over the borders. These loud images inside your head, the perfect and bright Selfies of your retinal Instagram, are examined on their own without content. Only when you put them together, you can see a rhythm, a pattern. It is the reoccurring space, within the tension between the material formations, where things appear.” The professor grunts again, while his view wanders to the window. 

//Mirage. The glass surface starts to mirror the inside of the Maubert. Has the bar counter always been that close to my table? Yes, the distance seemed to be accurate. On its right end, a hand-sized sculpture bows its head towards its left shoulder. Have I seen this before?

Almost there.

Another twitch. My limbs get heavy. A movement, an unpleasant flicker coming from the window rips me out of my pupating state. In its reflection I cannot see anything outside of the ordinary: A table, two chairs, my silhouette. Then slowly, in the unmeasured distance between glass surface and the depth of the reflection, a shadow slowly appears sitting on the empty seat opposing my reflected me. Line after line, like a digital sketch, the outline of a person becomes visible.
Luke Payn

Light
‘forces of the cosmos’

Its meaning has remained largely unchanged coming from the PIE root leuk meaning “light, brightness”. Light and its effect on certain chemicals forms the basis of the entire process, forces of the cosmos and forces of the earth, a chemical formula that eventually generates a print on paper. For photography the tangible vegetable repeatable print was the endgame. Yet now we do not look at an image as reflected light, the light bouncing off a printed image on paper, but at an actual light source itself, a liquid crystal display, powered by electricity, (forces of the cosmos) which is produced through combustion of oil, coal or gas, (forces of the earth). A light enframed in our phone, tablets and devices, we are looking at the sun by degrees, rather than reflected.

“What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us. And yet the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of poiesis. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [Herausfordern], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”

Light has always held an enigmatic place in our shared lexicon and imaginations. It has eluded scientists and philosophers, its wave-particle duality still not fully described by science. It has powerful synonyms for the light and dark in our soul or psyche, the revealed and hidden, safety and danger. But this redemptive and warming aspect shared by secular and non-secular traditions alike is now a standing reserve, no longer mystical, or a means of production, but a means of consuming content, a means for capitalism to steal the ‘fire within your eye’ and sell it back to you.

The photograph, as taken from 1839 to approximately 2006, 167 years give or take, has become, is becoming, an oxbow lake, not removed from the flow of arts, commerce, entertainment, news and communication, but subsumed into it at the same time. We moved from minerals reacting to light, grounded in the earth to the microchip and CCD and CMOS sensors that use millions of tiny solar cells, each of which transform the light from one small portion of the image into electrons. This energy, light, is relayed across the array and transposed into digital information, a number string. If we zoom in, even just slightly we can see the pixels clearly, but not the process. Deleuze & Guattari tell us that “the essential thing is no longer forms and matters, or themes, but forces, densities, intensities.” and invite us to render visible, “visual material must capture nonvisible forces. Render visible […] not render or reproduce the visible.”

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3 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., A Thousand Plateaus (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p399
4 Ibid. p398
Max Stanley

Algorithms have infected almost all aspects of modern life and their scope has been constantly widening. Significantly, they define and control the boundary between the physical world and the digital one, translating information from one reality to the next. This hybridised space has increasingly become a melting pot for culture, business, learning and almost any other practice deemed useful or otherwise. How and what these algorithms produce is a mystery to most people who are unaware of how much of their daily lives are governed by these anonymous pieces of code, indistinguishable from the background of ubiquitous technologies and digital devices that augment our current existence.

If the power of algorithms lies in their systemic, logical and routine execution by means of a linear and causal performativity (Berlinsky, 2000), not all algorithms however behave in this way. Some are inductive, exploratory and generative, and their outcomes cannot be fully predicted. Instead, they operate by opening spaces of inconceivable potential (Terzidis, 2003), and this points precisely to what, for Deleuze, is the virtual: the repository of manifold potential that can be actualized (Deleuze, 1991, 1994, 1999). Thus, the actualization of the virtual is the change that the virtual produces as a force that inserts itself into (and breaks apart) concrete reality and is to be understood not in terms of things, but in terms of events. (Marenko, B. 2015)

A digital ontology grounded not in sequential streams of data but one grounded in a multiplicity of differential relations of intensity. A terrain comprised of objects and data on which flows the inconceivable potential of the virtual to actualise the indeterminate. This terrain constitutes the surface upon which algorithms create and destroy, adapt and propagate. A breeding ground for the synthetic that swells and contracts with a force and dynamism that not only parallels our own but also pushes beyond it in ways we cannot fully comprehend. Through the uncompressed and compressed, the virtual and the actual, repetition finds difference on a multitude of levels and relations. This overwhelming and ultimately incompressible amount of data then overruns the algorithm which forces the cut or the eternal return, pushing computation past its logical operation and into a new non-representational domain, a domain that does not live by the same rules as we do.

Digital aesthetics and especially in the production of art, have barely begun to scratch the surface in regard to algorithmic agency. There are a number of artists working with algorithms as tools to create new forms or structure data, but precisely because they are tools, usually replicating organic systems, they can miss the point. We need to tap into the essential aspects of the algorithms’ ability to produce new realities and events, and this can only happen if we understand, reveal and subvert their fundamental processes both on political level and importantly on one which looks to harness and unlock this inconceivable potential. To produce something other, by forcing the algorithm into breaking from its predefined rules through a laceration or cut.

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Rhythm is an event between what has just happened and what is going to happen. Within rhythmic events such as techno parties and performance art, it is happening and extending the happening itself from moments to infinity. In other words, rhythm shapes things through folds (in time and space). According to Deleuze (2016), throughout the process of folding, unfolding and refolding the becoming, becoming itself leads to infinity. To get there, following the rhythm, our human bodies keep experiencing time and space in a different way. When we experience this in every movement, we repeat ourselves, whereas all that has happened is improvisation. Between rhythm, between order and chaos, is where magic happens. This magic flows in the air and also inside of the body. Magic is the movement in which becoming becomes becoming itself, and within this movement there are multiple times/spaces such as being in a techno party, and an art exhibition. According to Deleuze (2016), musical instruments create an infinite dialogue, each of them perceiving each other in return and also responding to each other repeatedly but also improvisationally. John Cage’s 4’33 creates a body without organs: silences live in this body and infinitely repeat themselves. Meanwhile, each of the silences is also improvisational. The piece creates a sense of infinity throughout by extending the space of waiting. The greatest works are in waiting, and the great work is willing to wait to become true, become what they already are, and waiting for their truth to be fulfilled. Rhythm is the sense and beats of waiting. According to Japanese sumo wrestling, the most exciting part is the waiting; we experience infinite questions: “Wait, what has just happened?” and “What is going to happen?” Based on A Thousand Plateaus by Deleuze and Guattari (2016), action and rhythm exist in between the infinite slowness of the wait and the infinite speed of the result. “Waiting for what?” you may ask. “How long am I going to be in between?” The rhythm is the immanent event, which is actualised in a state of ‘in between’ itself and of the lived that made it happen (Deleuze, 2012).

At the beginning I wanted to write ‘in between rhythm’ based on my own understanding of in-betweeness and throughout, by expressing the human body, time/space, repetition and improvisation from my own experience. I realised that rhythm is ‘in between’ itself and it is the waiting time of the Japanese sumo wrestlers’ fight. Rhythm is the rhizomatic event, and it is becoming itself.

“Do you hear it?”
“What is that?”
“The becoming.”

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The other has transformed itself so clearly inside the fly 194’s body that she cannot see a clear-cut distinction between herself and the other. The other that has emerged from her figure.

The self might be able to say something about itself, and thus connect with itself as another self, but perhaps one must also undergo a painful yet potentially liberating process of self-cognition, of dialogical negotiating with oneself as another. At this moment the self is simply not yet, and perhaps will never be, finalised into a clearly defined and finite image.

As a result of being capable of transformation or becoming something different, there is a chance for mistakes, accidents, wildness as Deleuze describes in Plato and Simulacrum; within the simulacrum there is a process of going mad, a process of limitlessness. The only thing left is a performance of my being/practice and drive to create anew—that is simulacra.

As a result, I have produced in my practice a series of repetitions and rhythms in a sensual way that contain all the aesthetics of mistake, strangeness, adversity, catastrophe and madness. The use of metal has brought about the aggressiveness of my practice alongside its insecurities and vulnerabilities. It is my senses that are creating an image. An image that has the aggressiveness of life, fighting to live. However, “I” is no longer of any importance. I am no longer myself. I have been multiplied. Then ‘the body without organs’ becomes a body without ‘I’. The body that is physical and not physical, a body that has no sense of self. Boundaries have been faded, as have definitions; and all that is left is a sensation.

It is by going to the core of your absurdity that you can become familiar with knowing-yourself. The only task is that the artist, the minority, has to become so familiar in order to remain in the ‘active medium’ to achieve the reification of its becoming; to reach something more fractal, to lose a binary composition.

Understanding other aspects of the metal and its ability to undulate, evokes its sound without creating any sound: this is the way to provoke the Ana-Materialism of the material. Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades, such as Urinal are following the same line. In creating the ‘present material’ the body/the material of the figure makes an image that is a simulacrum. The image that simulacra reveals is extraordinary, something out of the common template. It implies getting used to be unused. There free thinking has potentials.

Fly 194 wonders with a smile that she has seen before. Lewis Carroll and the fly meet on this point: the smile of the cat. Just like that disappearing smile in the head of the man underneath the umbrella in Bacon’s painting of 1946. The fly becomes extraordinary by losing the sense of her body. To illustrated this further, one has to dare to destroy Rodin’s sculpture The Thinker and to start building one’s own version, whatever that would be or could be.

It is not the body that makes difference; it is by being non-body that I will get to freedom. The fly 194 says it to her non-being.

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1 Dmitri Nikulin, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Man at the Mirror, Dialogue with oneself (New School for social Research), pdf, 67.
2 Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss, Plato and Simulacrum (The MIT Press), 49.
Imagine a scenario where the internet survives through time or evolves into something different, yet remains an open accessible world and manages to keep some records of our time. If we base our existence on the most common keywords and research used in today’s internet search engines, we may wonder if experts of the future will conclude that our current globalised world is akin to the ancient Egyptian civilisation that was characterised by the worship of cats. Although this question may appear absurd, it is of relevance how our current times may be described by future generations in a model where the main interest, the daily routine of a population is being analysed and compared with others found from another time.

[...]

One of the possible challenges that future archaeologists will have to face, is to find the material legacy of a period of history that is essentially marked by a transition from a physical world to an immaterial one. We need to consider the fact that archaeology is essentially about finding foundations and physical traces of old civilisations mostly represented by architecture and well-preserved object bodies; thus, physical elements. That is to say only material traces from ancient civilisations may be found, and so all we will have left is our current civilisation, for immaterial legacies are likely to disappear through time. Furthermore, if the remnants of our current times were to be uncovered in the future, how will archaeologists of the future be able to distinguish between the truth and what is forged? For nowadays technology has enabled the ease through which to forge documents.

[...]

We have seen that although the digital has allowed for the preservation of the archive from the ravages of physical damage and the passing of time through the multiplicity of its copy and internet access, we must also acknowledge the ease of manipulation and appropriation by anyone for any means. If we think about future generations collecting and understanding the traces of our current times, what ‘truth’ shall they find? What narrative will they agree on, and based on what evidence? What lies will prevail? Which ones will be unmasked?
MA Photography at Central Saint Martins has been renamed. As from October 2018 our new course name will be MA Contemporary Photography; Practices and Philosophies.

Course website
– www.arts.ac.uk/csm/courses/postgraduate/ma-contemporary-photography-practices-philosophies/