Gabriel Stoll

Two Round Dots and a Masquerade

Gerrit Rietveld Academie
Department of Fine Arts

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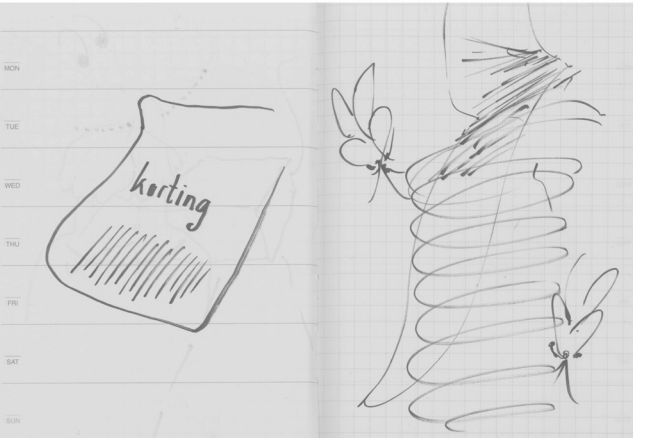
Foreword

When I am creating, the most intriguing things are often happening intuitively. Intuition is trusting your gut — a hard task, being pushed into a corner and surrounded by preconceived notions about what creating as well as its reading and value is. Possibly, intuition means to unlearn. To understand unlearning, I need to understand learning, and this text is a reflection of a process central to it: mimicry. The term exists in several disciplines and my text travels between them, looking for clues if questions that can't be answered in one find better responses in another. On that path, I cross the fields of biology and the protagonist of the butterfly; sociology and Erving Goffman; psychology and Gustav Jung; and visual art, including the works of Elaine Sturtevant, Peter Fischli, David Weiss, and Maria Sibylla Merian.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Part1

Merian

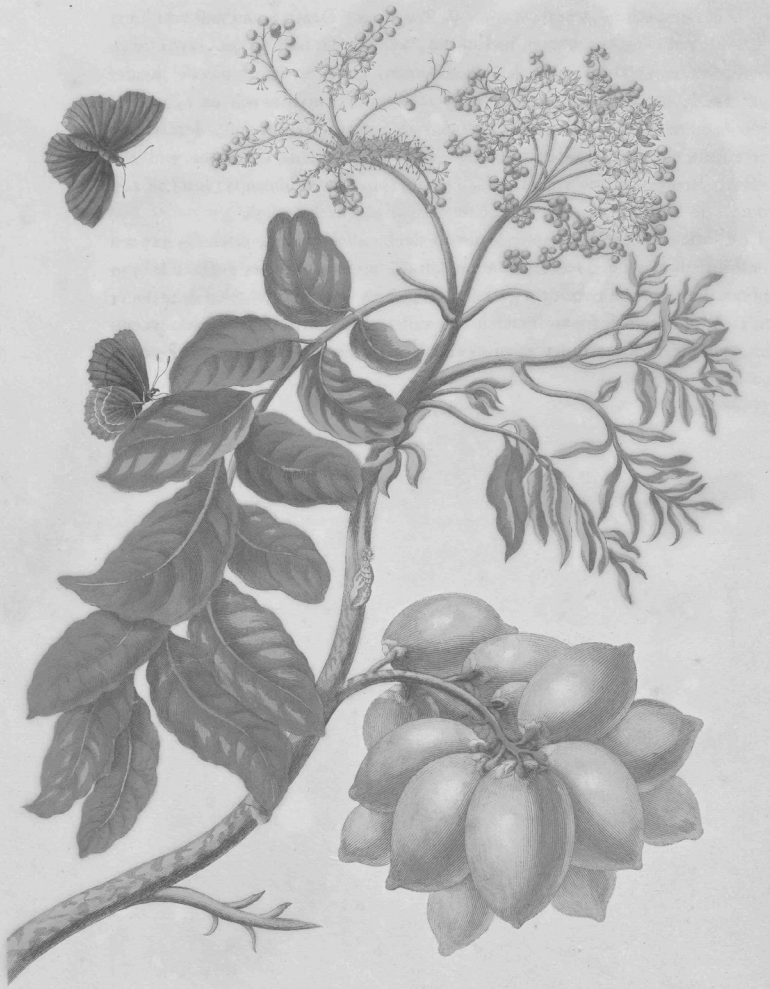
My grandparents live in Freiburg, in the southwest of Germany, while I grew up in Munich. The drive to their place is just four hours, but to me it felt horribly long. When we arrived, we walked up the little path to the house, a strange modernist bungalow.

It is charming in its own way, for dinners, singing Christmas songs, and running in the garden. But the house has some sort of architectural brutality and rigidness that makes it scary. It would be a very cold place if it wasn't filled with laughter and chatting and my grandfather's passion for the fireplace, which could be accessed from the living room and the terrace. I loved that fireplace. When I was young, I had trouble sliding the heavy glass doors open. The fireplace was just big enough for me to crawl through. It was a door for me, a glitch linking inside and outside. My grandfather had a big passion for butterflies; he collected all sorts of things involving them, from closets with small butterfly engravings to real butterflies that were carefully stored in a special cabinet. When I visited my grandmother this

summer, I looked more closely at the prints hanging throughout the hallway up to my grandfather's old bureau. I found out that they were prints by Maria Sybilla Merian, a German artist that made some fascinating publications about butterflies.

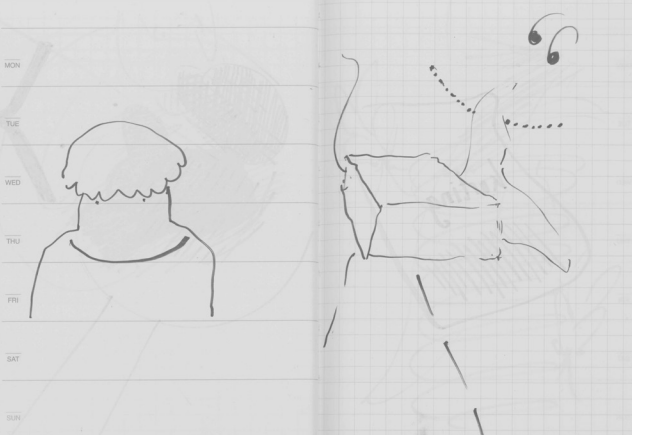
One of these publications is her 1705 study Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium. It is full of intriguing facts, just like the life of its author. By the time this book had been published, Merian had emigrated from Germany to the Netherlands after separating from her husband. She traveled to Surinam, a former Dutch colony, to pursue entomology studies. Her first book paved the way for other researchers. The publication's content renders Merian's trip and observations of the flora and fauna she captured in great detail in text and precisely crafted colored prints. The attention to detail is exceptional, and thanks to the internet's archive, it was easy to get my hands on a high-quality scan of her book.

Many aspects caught my eye, but the most prevalent one is what I will refer to as the back page. The book's structure consists of a repetitive pattern of inscriptions, notes, and text leading to a page of colored print. What follows is the pattern in reverse, a colored print followed by text, and so on. In the middle between the two strung-together pages, I find two blank pages, or back pages as I like to call them



for now, for the reason of them being everything but blank.The prints are carefully manufactured, assembled, and fed with text for the book.

To manually print the pages double-sided would have demanded enormous care and the use of thick paper to prevent tracing and still might have ended up challenging the single print's autonomy. The back page's fullness can be explained by not undergoing any of the previously stated difficulties, the paper used is thin and light, and it doesn't shield its content and colors from its empty back because it doesn't need to. The paper becomes the stage design that separates the stage from the backstage, only this time, it is a thin, transparent curtain that doesn't just shield but traverses content through the material. It allows for insights that usually remain concealed. The audience catches glimpses of the organization behind, the production, the makeup. I am asking myself if it is taking away some of the magic of the front stage, of the surprise. The audience can foresee, observing the actors lining up at the entry points to the stage, and still see actors walking off long after they leave. The time zone, the present, is stretched with ghosts of the past and foreshadows fading into a cloudy image with contours that become hard to distinguish. It raises the question of what the stage is now, and what happened to the content it looked to behold.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Goffman

Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman is most known for his studies of symbolic interactions. It is a sociological theory that tries to better understand how individuals interact with each other, for example, using deduction and correspondence to create symbolic worlds, and in return, how these worlds shape individual behaviors. Goffman's first important work, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1956, is a dramaturgical analysis of daily social interactions. It describes the connections between theatre and what he observes in the acts we perform to steer a conversation to create an image of us in our counterparts. In both the social and the theatrical performance, there is an onstage area where the action takes place and a backstage or hidden area where societal roles can be dropped and left in the cloakroom.[1]

The cut between these two places is sharp and definite; it reminds me of the Berlin Wall, which once separated identities and ideologies. Today it is a monument, in German, „Denkmal," a compound

1 Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959.

noun that literally translates to the imperative „Think!" It asks you to remember the moment in history when 150 meters appeared longer than crossing the Atlantic by canoe. A wall that not only separated but enforced ideologies, divisions, and opposite ways of living. The „Mauerfall" marked the moment of the wall being torn, physically. It kicks off the process of unifying two worlds that live in close proximity and yet are disconnected.

Can the wall between Goffman's stage and backstage be torn, and what would that unification mean for behavior? The disclosure of the backstage, the private and the production, reveals the subject. It rips its clothes off and peels down layers of the onion, it might make you see the uncanny, the naked, and it is most definitely unarming. On show is what should have been hidden, creating a play about relatability and authenticity. It is opposite to breaking the fourth wall, where the actors become aware of the audience, yet something similar is happening. A connection is built, screaming „we have nothing to hide". Still, these scenarios might only fall into place as described if the subject is at last partly unaware of its transparency towards the viewer. Otherwise the person might extend its onstage performance into the former private. It makes me wonder if the wall between front and backstage is a necessity, a balance between act and authenticity.

I don't think that Merian planned on creating an interplay between the pages—a fireplace that connects the content physically and allows for further insides on the metalevel. I think it is just a happy accident, which makes it authentic. The paper becomes the curtain, the book the entirety of the play, and the page is a moment. A still, a snapshot, and within it, we find traces of the timeline and the content.

The front-page content is pressing through to the back page predominantly, but not only that. You can observe traces of two or three pages towards the back or front, depending on the positioning and therefore overlaying of the motives on the following pages. Text becomes visible and merges with the contents of the prints. Something is happening that I refer to as the anarchy of color and the democracy of the monochrome. A selection process happens independently of the size and positioning of the motives and text. This selection is enforced by different tones of color. The darker, green shades of the fauna central to most of the

prints weigh more and press themselves through the page with ease while lighter shades that we find in the exotic fruits and butterflies fade away entirely or are barely hinted at in the back of the pages. Anarchistic in its effect, color decides where the eye travels on the printed front pages and what is visible through to the back page as well. Color competes with shape and content, but it doesn't seem to be the only deciding factor as little black moths, butterflies, and other animals can't be traced through the paper either. The way of production determines, as a second more prevalent factor, what the back page shows. Almost like the tragic life of a formerly successful pop star, the carefully colored insects fade into nothingness and their biggest fear came true; people don't remember them anymore. Interestingly, we can follow a different story on the back pages than on the front-pages. The selection of the content that we see is determined not only on the basis of aesthetic criteria, by criteria of production and method. To experience the surrounding pages at once in this abstracted form as well as the visibility of the underlying production of the pages both hint towards the passing of time.

The monochromatic though is the determining factor for the democracy of the composition of the back page. Time has taken its toll on the paper and what once used to be white is now shades of beige,

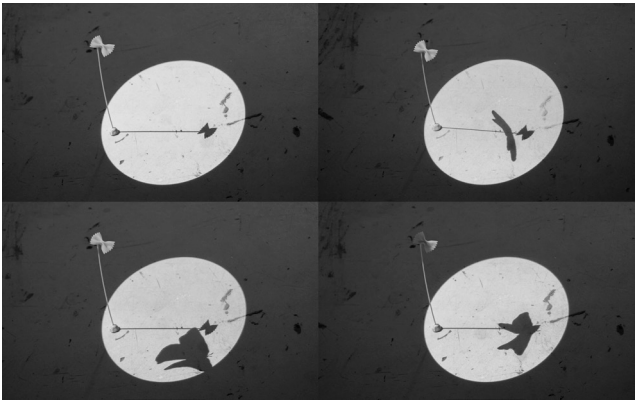
but the transformation didn't halt there; the vibrant colors of the front page took to their heels and have faded into shades of beige, as well. Transformation and fading into shades, now that is something, something we know all too well from the nature of the investigated protagonists of the front page, the butterflies. In other words, what we observe is both metamorphosis and mimicry, but back to that later. The effect of the monochrome is that motives and background blur, text and context are coequal, and the paper's craggedness and signs of wear are indistinguishable from deliberate imprints on the front page. It reminds me of shadow plays—no matter if the objects in use fit together, they become unified by removing all properties besides shape, creating an equal playing field. The elements cooperate in a story of uplifting the context over the text of the front page. It is an abstraction that emphasizes new criteria while other criteria become obsolete. What sticks seem to be the bold, the essential, or the delicate, which finds a precise gap to slip through, undetected. What fades is the content that tries to assimilate to its surroundings, like a character that inherits idiosyncratic traits and traits that are observed and imitated.

Does imitation lead to disappearance? And if so, what distinguishes authenticity from fake? And what are we dealing with when we are talking

about authenticity? The term „authenticity" has roots in the Greek word „authentikos," meaning „original, genuine," and is either used in the strong sense of being "of undisputed origin or authorship", or in a weaker sense of being "faithful to an original" or a „reliable, accurate representation." To say that something is authentic is to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship. Brian O Doherty in Inside the White Cube writes about the experience of abstraction of a moment that might or might not have been reliably accurate. By the example of the holiday snapshot he mediates between what is there and what we create. He notes,"Everyone wants to have photographs not only to prove but to invent their experience."[2] Does that mean authentic and fake performance leads to the same authentic result?

Can the back page as an abstraction and imitation of its surrounding pages, therefore, help us decode it? It seems like what we see is undergoing a selective process, and the same is said about the biological phenomenon of mimicry.

2 Brian O'Doherty, Inside the White Cube, Santa Monica, The Lapis Press, 1986, p.52



Untitled, Gabriel Stoll, Projection of a Butterfly Animation, Farfalle, Spaghetti, 2023, 20x20x20xcm

Team USA Hockey Mascot

Part 2

Biological Certainty

Mimicry derives from the Greek mimikos, „of or pertaining to mimes," verbal adjective from mimeisthai „to mimic, represent, imitate, portray" in art, „to express by means of imitation" in the field of biology, is a phenomenon that has been first defined within the research of butterflies in 1861. It describes the superficial resemblance of organisms that can or cannot be closely related taxonomically. Traditionally it is assumed that this simulation confers an advantage upon one or both organisms by which the organisms deceive the agent of selection. The selecting agent is any factor, environmental or otherwise, that affects fertility or mortality, for example, a predator, a symbiont, or the host of a parasite, depending on the type of mimicry encountered. It interacts directly with similar organisms and is deceived by their similarity. Mimicry distinguishes itself from other types of convergent resemblance that result from the action of other forces of natural selection, such as temperature

or food. Usually, mimicry is separated into several core phenomena. Many harmless species such as hoverflies are Batesian mimics, resembling species like, in this case, wasps. This is called mimicry of terrification and is part of defensive mimicry.[3]

To blend in with the environment and escape the gaze of the aggressor is called mimicry of dissimulation. On the other side, there is aggressive mimicry found in predators and parasites that resemble harmless species; this is part of offensive mimicry.

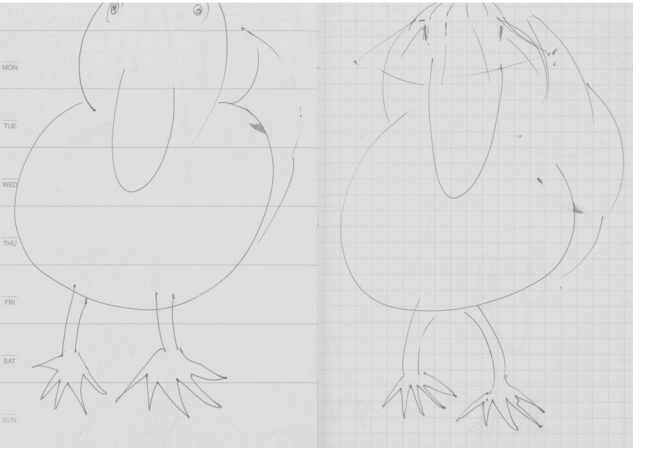
Another fascinating phenomenon is automimicry, which is intraspecific to a single species. An example is the foureye butterflyfish (Chaetodon capistratus). The tail, decorated with a big eyespot, is believed to resemble its head. In situations of danger, they present the predator with their tail, improving their chances of survival. Theoretically, the mimic and the model are the same organism in this case.

In my research about biological mimicry, these categories and interpretations seemed to be carved in stone, which I found quite interesting. I browsed through countless definitions and explanations, and they all resembled each other surprisingly well. It might be because the interpretation of defensive and

3 Britannica, article on mimicry, www.britannica.com/science/mimicry (Accessed on 07.03.2023)

offensive mimicry fits in very well with evolutionary theory.

An animal that adapts over generations and, through selection, arrives at a point of perfect resemblance, proving that adaptation is vital to all processes. I found this exciting and started looking for studies on the effectiveness of mimicry as a defensive mechanism. I couldn't find statistics on that topic which I won't conclusively interpret as evidence for the theory to be incorrect, but as an indication that the subject is more complex than it appears. It seems like the mimic almost functions as a mascot for evolutionary theory. A mascot is a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure. During sport-events, teams often have their mascot dancing on the sideline. Fans see their symbol of identity cheering, a wise and strong eagle, but it is nothing more than a masquerade. What you actually see is nothing more than a cheap costume, worn by a sweaty human, working minimum wage.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Traditional Doubts

Roger Caillois[4] noted core doubts about the traditional assumptions made about mimicry in his essay „Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." He makes his argument in three parts. Firstly, mimetic animals are not fooling their predators:

> **The phasma Carausius Morosus, which by its form, color, and attitude simulates a plant twig, cannot emerge into the open air without being immediately discovered and dined on by sparrows. Generally speaking, one finds many remains of mimetic insects in the stomachs of predators.[5]**

Secondly, he argues that mimics have more effective

4 Roger Caillois (1913-1978) was a French intellectual and writer known for his contributions to the fields of sociology, anthropology, and literary criticism. Caillois was interested in the study of games and play, believing they were important aspects of human culture and that they could provide insight into social and psychological dynamics. He also explored the relationships between art, myth, and symbolism, and he argued that these cultural phenomena were integral to understanding the human experience.

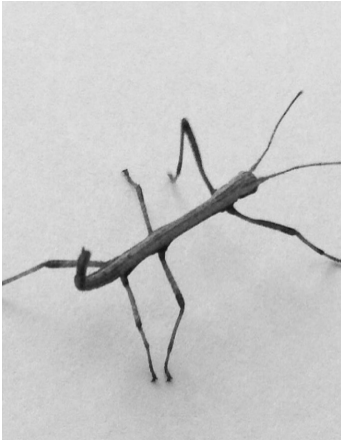
5 Roger Caillois, Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia, trans. John Shepley, The MIT Press, 1984 p. 24

tools at hand to defend or hide, and lastly and concisely „some species that are inedible, and would thus have nothing to fear, are also mimetic. It, therefore, seems that one ought to conclude with Cuenot that this is an ‚epiphenomenon' whose defensive utility appears to be null.'"[6]

I am thinking back to the stage. While the predators are part of the production, observing the backstage and understanding what and how the play is put up, it seems as the general view on mimicry is the one of the audience that only sees the front stage. My mind goes to camouflage suits used in combat by the army, which may serve some defensive function, but certainly give no immunity. Further, you can see how camouflage patterns travel in and out of fashion and streetwear, becoming identifiers of expression and groups. Lower than null, Caillois concludes that mimicry is a luxury that can, in some cases, be dangerous. By the example of the Phyllia, who both imitate and feast on leaves, we learn that prey and model can be the same, building a strange ecosystem where what you are, feast on, and imitate are becoming one. The resemblance even leads to such disorientation that impersonators are unable to distinguish between themselves and the milieu and start subsisting on each other. In that

6 Lucien Cuenot, „On the effectiveness of mimicry." In Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 463-482. Zoological Society of London, 1905.

way, imitation is not only not helpful but harmful; it gives way to questioning why we still imitate. In a sense, it seems like a waste of time. It is similar to not dressing appropriately for cold weather, but instead wearing your favorite clothes.



Phasma Carausius Morosus

Film-still of Eddie Aren't as a butterfly hunter

Part 3

Hobbies or Mimicry as a Coping Mechanism

My sisters and I grew up watching the „Winnetou" films. One of the characters, played by Eddi Arent, is a butterfly hunter that reappears throughout the saga. He is rather awkward and clumsy and flounders to catch the rare species. My grandfather is the complete opposite. At the same time, it was him. It fit him so well. I struggled for a long while to understand how he found this hobby, his passion for butterflies.

I wonder how someone finds their passion, appropriates it, and makes it their own. I played football and computer games, then I did graffiti. I collected records, I found a passion for cooking, fitness, dancing, and partying, I became an active fan of a football club... I feel that people around me have found their hobbies, their passions. My girlfriend told me that I am a butterfly, flying around from thing to thing, not staying with one and losing track of the journey. Or at least that's what I

think she meant. I get into a lot of things, I collect them, but I don't want to stay.

Common hobbies are governed by trends and technology; what is a common hobby is directly influenced by the circumstances of the time. Collecting postage stamps or butterflies is a hobby of the past. Hobby stems from the late Middle English hobyn, hoby, a name given to pets, a cute version of Robin. Originally referring to a small horse or pony, it became later used for the item formerly called a „Tourney Horse." It was made of a wooden or basketwork frame with an artificial tail and head, a toy horse. A toy horse is useless; it won't carry you anywhere. All the same, a hobby is not executed for profit and therefore sets itself apart from a profession or job. The term „hobby horse" was first documented in 1557 in a payment confirmation in Reading, England.[7] The term's recreational and childlike associations made it used in a pejorative sense, which changed with the industrial revolution.[8] Still, another word for a hobby is a pastime, deriving from passing the time.

According to Wikipedia, examples of common hobbies include activities such as collecting,

7 The Phrase Finder, article on hobby horse, www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/hobby-horse.html (accessed on 07.03.2023)

8 Gelber S M. „Hobbies: leisure and the Culture of Work in America", Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 11.

needlework, home improvement, crafts, model making, sports, art, home music, literature, gaming,

or continuing education. A hobby is a leisure activity pursued voluntarily for pleasure or relaxation. It contributes to one's self-image and represents a part of one's identity.

Does a peculiar hobby contribute more to one's identity? It would seem like it could distinguish self-image more explicitly than something popular. Peculiar translates to the German word „eigenartig". It is built from two words: eigen=own and art=way. At its core, it means „in your own way," another way of saying that something is original. Its connotation is different though; it is not situated on the positive side, perhaps slightly on the negative. It can be something strange or even weird. Peculiar has the same connotation in English. Why is that,

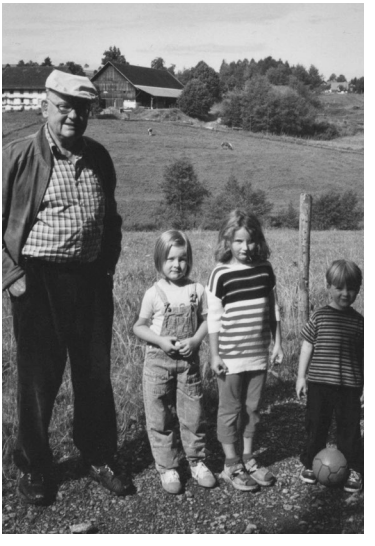
and how is it different from originality?

Children always ask each other for their hobbies, because hobbies connect people. It's a strong connection through passion, by something they do not for profit, but joy. It's interesting that as we get older, we often ask people for their job instead. Both are part of connecting to each other, but the latter also deliberately outlines societal and economic position. Society is defined as people living together in communities. To live in harmony, we surround ourselves with people that commodify us, and the same is happening in society at large. It is ineffective to go your own way while trying to commodify the people around you. The search for one's identity is a puzzle. However, contrary to the original notion of an exciting brain puzzle, a problem that requires creative thinking, you are a piece that needs to fit to be assembled.

If someone is different, society has its own cleaning service of gossip and contempt. Naturally, it demands: Just mimic us and you will be fine. Perhaps this is a very narrow view.

My mother reminded me of how my grandfather found his passion for butterflies. His father, who himself passed away when my grandfather was only 10 years old, took him out on walks and together they would search and collect rare colors and species. The passion stayed, and

I am sure it wasn't only for the butterfly, but for keeping his father alive and close to him. When I see a butterfly browsing through the air, I think of my grandfather.



German politician Horst Seehofer in his private Hobbykeller

Hobbykeller

I once visited the Miniature Wonderland in Hamburg. It's a big tourism hit, housing a wide variety of themed miniature railroad systems. Someone had the genius idea to put on show the hidden mysteries of the middle-aged man's misery. The „Hobbykeller" is a man cave for the German man, escaping his tedious job, nagging wife, and screaming children. Inside of it, so goes the legend, you find a table full of realistic reproductions of European trains and locomotives and carefully airbrushed plastic trees. It is a functioning miniature world, created in the hidden basements of German family houses. I find this place almost magical as it neglects part of the external reality and narrows it down to a small, understandable portion. This is evident when looking at the attention to detail in the precisely realistic reproductions. It doesn't try to imagine a different world but builds on an illusion that we like to entertain, where the power dynamics have shifted. You are not only stepping onto a train, but observing the whole train system from a bird's perspective. You decide which trains are running; you are in charge.

I am reminded of the Swiss artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss, who took the everyday as the subject of their productions. Miniatures as well as scale-ups, functioned as a mimetic tool for them to appropriate and reinterpret familiar objects, materials, and genres in unexpected ways. They used a variety of mediums, such as sculpture, installation, video, and photography. For example, in their famous installation „The Way Things Go" (1987), they created a Rube Goldberg machine made of everyday objects such as chairs, tires, and lamps. The machine performed a series of chain reactions that culminated in a spectacular finale, creating a playful and absurd commentary on the fragility and unpredictability of the world. In another work, „Equilibres/Quiet Afternoon" (1984), they created a series of sculptures made from simple everyday objects such as fruit, vegetables, and furniture.

While it is this fleeting moment of stability that gives Equilibres its name, the subtitle of the series, A Quiet Afternoon, derives from the circumstances in which the project came to be. Central to the artists' practice was their belief that by intentionally placing themselves in a state of absolute boredom—establishing a blank slate of sorts—latent creative forces could be

more easily recognized and aroused. „To celebrate boredom," explained Fischli and Weiss, „was also to go against the whole idea of the 'inspired artist.'"[9]

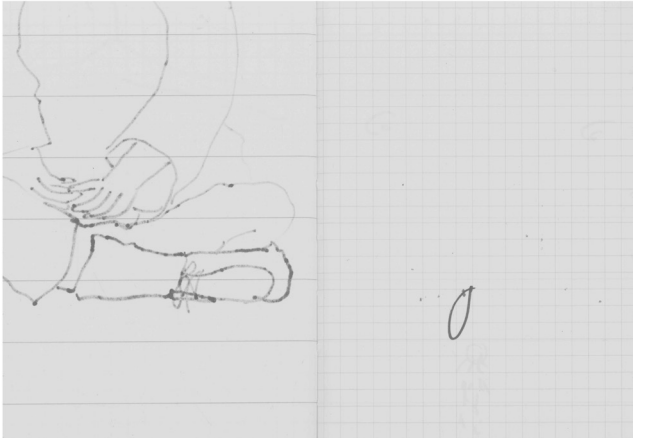
Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Equilibres (A Quiet Afternoon), 1984–86

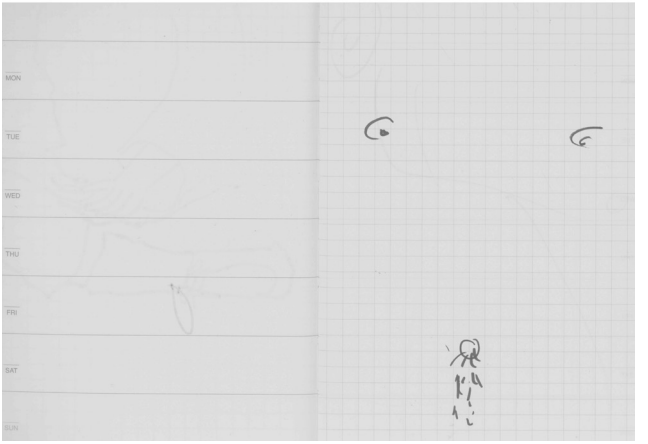
By subverting the traditional expectations of monumental sculpture, they created a humorous and thought-provoking commentary on the transience and contingency of human culture. In contrast, the

9 Guggenheim Museum, article on Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Equilibres (A Quiet Afternoon), www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/peter-fischli-and-david-weiss-equilibres-a-quiet-afternoon-1984-86 (accessed on 07.03.2023)

miniature locomotives seem like an escape. A neglection of the complexities and contradictions of contemporary life through imitation, decorating oneself with fictive control.

It makes me feel more confident about something I noted thinking back to the Miniature Museum in Hamburg: „God, it was boring. I guess not being decisive with my hobbies has its perks; there is room for error. If I hit my head and start collecting miniature locomotives that sell for the price of real locomotives, I can still turn around. Not like those trains that are caged, running in circles, never catching the light of day."

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Central questions

What does this mean for us, me and you? What are the rules and boundaries of imitation in a social context? Being part of a social group can be a benefactor for our identity. And to participate, it is necessary to imitate, adopt and perhaps appropriate the inherent values and codes of such a group. I wonder about the lines drawn between these different stages. When is it an active stance to imitate, and when is it not? Socialization, for instance, where individuals learn the codes of the group they belong to by imitation, is an essential tool for us to function in society and for society at large to function. I fear it's a streamed program that we don't control and can't turn off. Do we lose ourselves on the way to finding ourselves? It comes back to the question from the beginning: Is imitation a form of disappearance?

What I am searching for is what I am fascinated by. It is in the small moments when I feel truly myself, the most authentic, and I wonder where to place that moment in that chain of events. What institutes a sense of belonging, a sense of realness? When are we truly ourselves, and when are we not, and why?

The multiplicity of puzzles that arise in conjunction with the conception of authenticity connects with metaphysical, epistemological, and moral issues. On the one hand, being oneself is inescapable, since whenever one makes a choice or acts, it is oneself who is doing these things. But on the other hand, we are sometimes inclined to say that some of the thoughts, decisions and actions that we undertake are not really our own and are therefore not genuinely expressive of who we are. Here, the issue is no longer of metaphysical nature, but rather about moral-psychology, identity and responsibility.[10]

Swiss psychologist Gustav Jung defined this as the concept of „individuation", which refers to the process of becoming one's true self. According to Jung, this process involves integrating all aspects of one's personality, including the unconscious, and finding a balance between one's internal and external worlds. Our external world is the physical surroundings, social interactions, and cultural context of our daily life. For example, a person's external world may include their job, relationships with others, hobbies, and community. Jung's internal world refers to the inner psychological landscape of a person's mind, including their thoughts, emotions, dreams, and unconscious desires. It is the realm of

10 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on authenticity, www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/ (accessed on 07.03.2023)

the psyche that is not visible to others and is unique to each individual. For example, a person's internal world includes their values, beliefs, fears, and desires, which are often shaped by their experiences and upbringing.

While these two worlds are different, Jung believed they are interconnected and influence each other. He emphasized the importance of balancing and integrating these two aspects to access our deepest, most genuine selves. By exploring and understanding our internal world, we can gain greater insight into our external world. This can happen when we engage in meaningful and fulfilling activities, and when we connect with others on a deep level.[11] It reminds me of a conversation I had with friends of mine last summer that remained stuck in my head.

Do you have friends that you only meet one to one? My friends and I met at the Academy in Amsterdam and became close shortly after. We made the plan to visit another friend of ours in her hometown in Germany, but she didn't like that idea. She said that she would be overwhelmed with friend groups clashing. This brings me back to the notion of mimicry. In psychology it describes people's conscious or

11 Anthony Stevens, Gustav Jung, A Very Short Introduction, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 84-85.

unconscious assimilation to other people's behaviors. It is split into verbal, emotional, behavioral, and facial expression. In conversations, this phenomenon goes as far as our facial muscles being activated to mimic our counterpart's emotional expressions in response.[12]

It expresses our need to be liked, of affiliation with others. By acting similarly we create a feeling of connectedness, and we can feel more empathetic.[13] I am wondering about the performance of it—when is it an act, a show put on, and at what point did the show become reality? It's a super sticky super glue, for social purposes. It goes as far as couples adopting each others facial expressions over time. People look more alike after long relationships. These unconscious assimilations can be mismatched and potentially collide when two groups that unconsciously demand different behaviors meet. Maybe that's why she didn't want us to come?

Is mimicking, being pleasing, and sounding smart just a shield to protect us from saying the thing we want to say, but are afraid to say? Or is striving for the ideal of authenticity breeding a self-centered preoccupation with oneself that is anti-social and

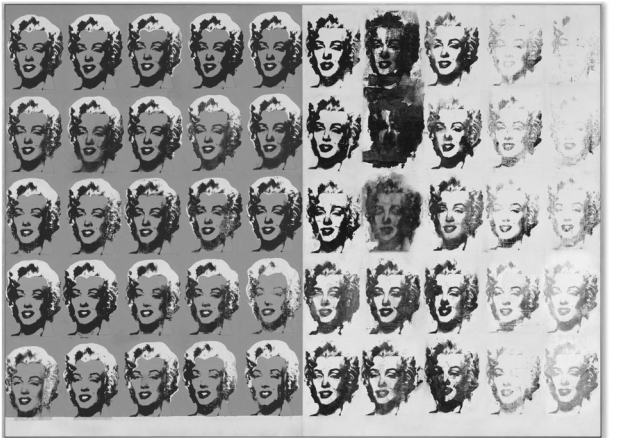
12 Ulf Dimberg, Maria Thunberg, and Kurt Elmehed, Unconscious facial reactions to emotional facial expressions, Psychological Science 11, no. 1 (2000): p. 86-89.

13 Tanya L. Chartrand and John A. Bargh, The chameleon effect, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 76 (1999): p. 93-910.

destructive of altruism and compassion toward others?[14]

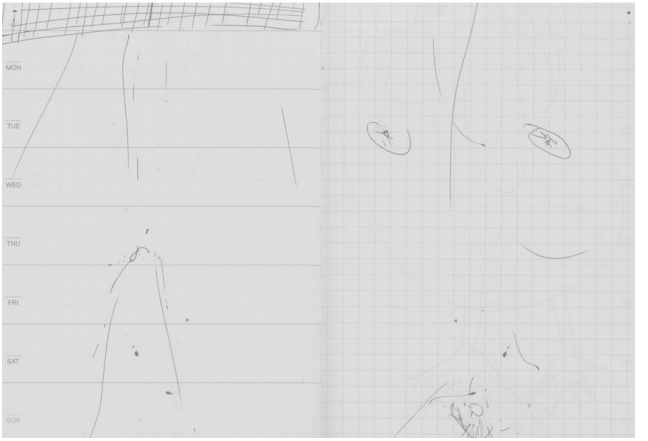
With that in mind, what is the thing that I want to say? These questions might just balance each other out, but I think it's important to ask them, as I encounter them not only in the social or psychological world but also in the context of visual art.

14 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on authenticity



Elaine Sturtevant, Warhol Diptych, Silkscreen ink, synthetic polymer and acrylic paint on canvas, 320 x 214 cm, 1973, Private owner

Andy Warhol, Marilyn Diptych, Silkscreen ink and acrylic paint on 2 canvases, 205 × 145cm,1962, Tate Collection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Part 4

Echos/Ecosystems

The near-instantaneous feedback of visual trends creates an efficient system in which all information about art is almost immediately incorporated into the production of future work.[15]

Michael Sanchez discusses how creating transforms within the age of digital media. Exhibitions and the feedback on such are immediately available and incorporated back into the production, shifting the focus from the experience of the artwork itself toward how the work is received and disseminated. He argues that it creates a glut of similar works that mimic and replicate each other, a worldwide group show. The dependence on feedback beholds the danger of only showing you one-sided opinions, a loop that pushes in one direction. A street that goes from four-lane to three, to two and finally arrives in one overfilled single lane. While the democratization

15 Michael Sanchez, On Art and Transmission, In Artforum Summer 2013, Artforum International Magazine, New York City, p.300.

of the accessibility of art can be seen as a positive, anti-elitist movement, I see Sanchez essay as a critique, suggesting that the ease of transmission has come at the cost of originality and experimentation. He asserts that this shift in focus has led to the emergence of new artistic genres, such as social practice, which looks to create social connections and communities over the decaying individual artistic expression. I found that particularly interesting, as it is a link back to a direct collision of two worlds, the internal and the external world, and the effect one has on the other.

Originality

While thinking about the meaning of originality in art, I remembered two statements that represent two opposing connotations of imitation in art and that have stayed with me over time. One was made by my drawing teacher at art school: „Don't try to draw in a style, you won't have any style." At the time, I remember feeling puzzled and a little intimidated by the thought of not having my own distinct style, but also encouraged to trust in my own ability.

In contrast, in my final high school exam I had to create a poster for an event by copying a painting with colored pencils. I chose Franz Marc's „Blaues Pferd I", from 1911. I received praise for my ability to copy things with great accuracy. In fact, I was told that I had a talent for it. I thought, „Fantastic, of all things to be alike, he compares me to a printer." Reflecting on it, I am wondering: Where does imitation fit in the realm of artistic originality?

In visual arts, mimicry refers to imitating another work of art or an artist's technique, subject, or style. The means for imitation differ according to the artistic position, and it can take different

forms—from experimentation, homage, or using the means of imitation as a critique to appropriate, subvert and challenge the preexisting. What unifies these disparate forms is that they take on points of reference from the past on which they can comment within their social and cultural context.

A perfect example for the later is Elaine Sturtevant, an American artist who is best known for her „repetitions" of the work of other artists, which often involved creating meticulous copies of well-known pieces of art. Peter Eleey, curator of her 2014 MoMA exhibition said: „In some ways, style is her medium. She was the first postmodern artist—before the fact—and also the last."[16] Sturtevant's approach to mimicry was not simply to create exact replicas of other artists' works but rather to create copies that were slightly imperfect in some way. For example, her repetitions of Warhol's work often involved using different color schemes or materials than the original, mirroring or altering the scale of the work. By doing so, Sturtevant challenges our assumptions and perception of the original work and forces us to question the originality and authenticity in art. Her work on mimicry was also deeply influenced by the emerging field of media studies in the 1960s and 1970s. She saw herself as a parasitic artist using the

16 Margalit Fox, Elaine Sturtevant, Who Borrowed Others' Work Artfully, Is Dead at 89, The New York Times, May 19, 2014.

work of others to critique the cultural systems and institutions that produced and circulated art. Her work on mimicry was therefore a way of interrogating the power dynamics that shape the art world and challenging the idea that there is such a thing as „pure“ art.

Overall, Sturtevant's work on mimicry plays with the exact ideas I am trying to question:
Is it original? Is an original more authentic than a „fake“? Is it all perception?

Part 5

Two Round Dots and a Masquerade of a Conclusion

What's my face? What do I stand for? If someone is straightforward and owns up to themself, it is easy to know where you are when you are with them.

Shouldn't we all fear becoming what French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman describes in his essay „Paradox of the Phasmid?"[17] Didi-Huberman explores the paradoxical relationship between perception and representation, drawing on the example of him standing face to face with the phasmid, an insect that mimics the appearance of its environment.

In fact, it is the opposite of face-to-face, as the tiny insect's imitation works to such an extent that it disappears in front of Didi-Hubermans eyes. It doesn't have a mouth, or eyes. The absence of a face in front of him negates the ability to locate himself in front of it.[18]

17 Georges Didi-Huberman, The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms (The Paradoxes of the Photographic Image), trans. Alisa Hartz (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002)

18 Didi-Huberman, The Surviving Image, p. 31.

I'm interested in this disorientation, that gets triggered by the absence of core identification elements.
The merging of the object and milieu stops the process of identifying oneself in confrontation with the other. That schizophrenic loss of self, therefore, becomes viral. What does that mean in a social context?
I have to think of social ghettoes, social bubbles on the internet, personalized advertisements, filters, and effects on photos. They all inherit the same process of narrowing down the sight and removing debris that doesn't seem essential, but I believe it is. It is this debris we see on the back pages of Merian and in the changed sizes in Sturtevants Warhol prints. It is the debris that challenges our perception and doesn't let it nap in airplane mode.

I connect it to the idea of individuation. Each hobby is an identification benefactor; their contexts put us into social groups. We assimilate into it and become part of the group. The more we invest in this group, the more we receive back in the form of identification. Identification with the milieu is mimicry and if the identification is secluded, does it, therefore, lead to disorientation and autolysis? Is the paradox of the phasmid the paradox of identification?

It makes me think that identification is always identification with something. Therefore if we feel identity-less, it doesn't mean we don't have an identity, but we just don't identify with the surroundings

and the external circumstances: „Where are you? I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself." I find this disorientation fascinating, and I wonder about its connotation.

Roger Caillois compares the process of autolysis with medical literature about schizophrenia. Schizophrenic symptoms include a loss of self-orientation in space and permeable skin and a state of borderless existence where the mind and body are disconnected.[19] I compare this blurry line to the effects of the anesthetic substance ketamine, which was first synthesized in 1962 by Calvin L. Stevens. It was approved for medical use in 1970 and started infiltrating sub and rave culture in the following decades. In 1999 Ketamine became a federally regulated substance in the US trying to prevent illicit use. Studies made in the early 2000s indicated the potential for treating depression symptoms and other mental disorders. Today professionals use ketamine to treat treatment-resistant depression and other mental conditions such as PTSD.[20]

In patients with schizophrenia, ketamine produces activation of their psychotic symptoms, which have striking similarities to symptoms of their usual psychotic episodes. Recent studies show that

19 Caillois, Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia, p. 30.
20 Delray Centre for Healing, article on a brief history of Ketamine, www.delraycenter.com/a-brief-history-of-ketamine/ (accessed on 07.03.2023)

ketamine produces a variety of similar symptoms in healthy subjects, such as illusions, delusions, and psychomotor retardation. The psychomimetic effects of ketamine are transitional, reversible, and influenced by time, dose, and administration conditions.

The similarity between ketamine effects and endogenous psychoses[21] may lead to the development of novel therapeutic agents for psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia.[22]

These implications made me wonder about the dialectic of autolysis. What's the truth between the effect of ketamine becoming a desirable state in recreational use, a treatment for mental disorders, and a psychosomatic illness?

Are we interested in a loss of orientation? Can it even be beneficial in its irrationality? This comes back to the process of mimicry being more than a survival strategy but a dangerous luxury. It is ambivalent. As much as disorientation is a loss of identity, it pierces its way through nature like a river, leading to a rebirth in identity. It is always moving, and at one point it escapes not only the river but the ocean, simply

21 Zhaohong Qin, et al., „Ketamine's Schizophrenia-like Effects are Prevented by Targeting PTP1B," Neurobiology of Disease 155 (2021)

22 A. Mechri, M. Saoud, G. Khiari, et al., „[Glutaminergic Hypothesis of Schizophrenia: Clinical Research Studies with Ketamine]," L'encephale 27, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 2001): p. 53-59.

to rain back on us, at a different time, in a different space. Maybe, it's clear now that nothing is clear, and that any attempts to define its purpose are naive.

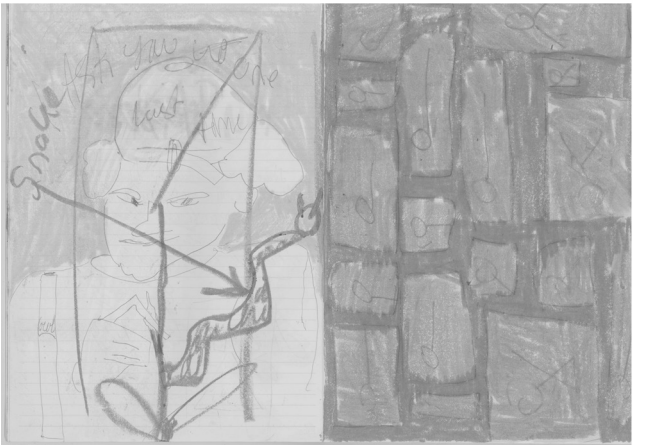
The process of mimicking, identifying, and disorienting is just like an air conditioner that you lock on 18 degrees; it will warm you at night and cool you during the day. It is two processes that pull you in opposite directions, but they lock you in a spot, where neither comfort nor discomfort reigns. It comes back to what process Caillois essentially describes mimicry as, „Depersonalization by assimilation to space."[23] Minkowski describes it in his analysis with the example of the fear of the dark:

> **Darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is „filled," it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light.[24]**

23 Caillois, Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia, p. 30.
24 Eugene Minkowski, „Lived Time," in Phenomenology and Psychopathology, ed. John Cutting, trans. Nancy Metzel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 382-398.

The line between us and our surroundings becomes inextricable when darkness consumes our points of reference. I can recognize myself in this a lot, which I like, because my subject sometimes seems blurry or as if floating away in front of my eyes. It's hard to make out the contours of something that, by definition, blurs them.

I've been terrified of the dark since I was young, and I still am. I find it funny; I always felt that people make it out as something ridiculous. I picked up on a podcast that the reason children are scared of monsters under their beds is because of fears from nomadic days, where predatory animals were a real danger. It is a fear that is supposedly so deeply rooted in ourselves that even after centuries of evolution, it didn't pass. It seems like there might be something to that as well, but our fear is also rooted within ourselves; it's a good fear. A fear that tells us, that we don't know everything. The moment someone flips the light switch, we don't even know who we are ourselves.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Outro

When a liquid is heated, its temperature increases, and the molecules gain energy and move more quickly. At a certain temperature called the „boiling point," the vapor pressure of the liquid equals the pressure of the surrounding atmosphere, causing the liquid to rapidly boil and turn into a gas. During the boiling process, the liquid briefly exists in a state where it is partially vaporized, and this state is referred to as the „boiling state".

This text doesn't want to be water nor gas, but what it means to navigate the in between by exploring the phenomenon of mimicry. My grandfather brought me to the beautiful prints of Maria Sybilla Merian, who's back pages linked and reinterpreted the content of her book. Comparing it to Erving Goffman's theatrical analysis in sociology, I questioned wether imitation leads to disappearance, in both visual art and sociology. Concerning biology, I asserted that traditional conventions are there to be questioned, even if such conventions inherit a sense of belief and belonging. If and how one's surrounding creates belonging was a central

question for the psychological part, in which the duality between the external world such as hobbies and the internal world became inextricably important and influential for each other. Fischli and Weiss used mimicry as a tool to explore the everyday by taking its materials and content into the context of visual art. Elaine Sturtevant's imitations critized the way we perceive originality and authenticity leading us to Caillois central idea of mimicry - the paradoxal process of detaching oneself by adapting to one's surroundings. It's a process so raw and rooted and yet so reassuringly not determined, quantified or rated.

In the end mimicry is much less about the question if you and I, a work of art or a butterfly is a copy or an original. We imitate, all the time, it is a tool that blurs lines between originality and copy, learning and stealing, decoration and function.

An ode to uncertainty, to asking and not knowing, to 50 shades of grey instead of black and white. Rosemarie Trockel once said: „Endlich ahnen, nicht nur wissen" which clumsily translates to „Finally experiencing the joy of guessing, rather than simply knowing."


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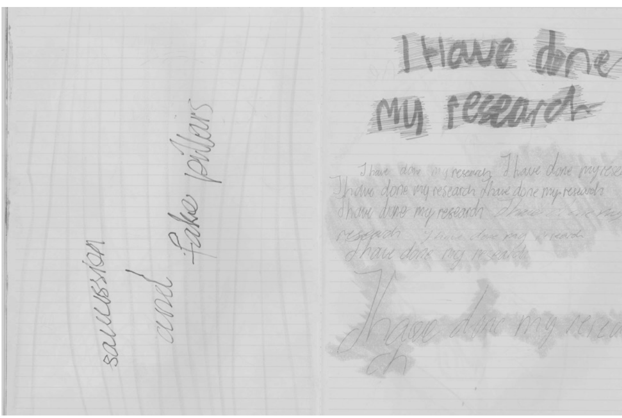

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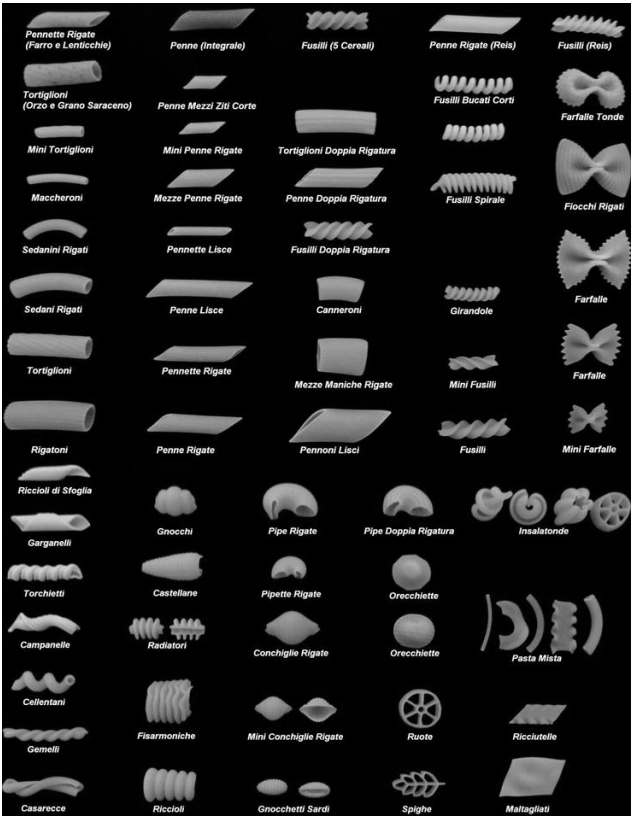
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Maccheroni
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Penne Doppia Rigatura
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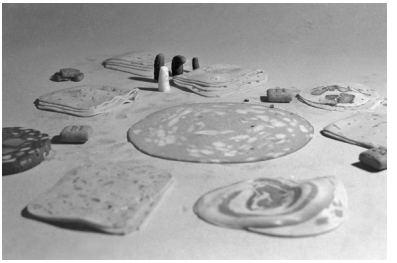


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Department of Fine Arts
27.03.2023, Amsterdam

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