



Tinkering Hands,

and a Working Table

Tinkering Hands,

and a Working Table

Jette Kelholt
Rietveld Fine Arts
2023

4 Intro: The Working Table

84 cm till 211 cm stacked with material

8 Bedieningsorgaan

The precious pressure of pressing fingers

20 Accelerate

Where did the button go?

Everything is on, no off buttons are created anymore

34 Full of Uselessness

Ah, but I am not searching for usefulness it is the uselessness I eat

44 The Author and the Material

Who are you? I asked my 10 Finger tops.

A very brief moment to give attention to the non human hands

50 Failure

Where to fall, where to fail, where to not fulfil?

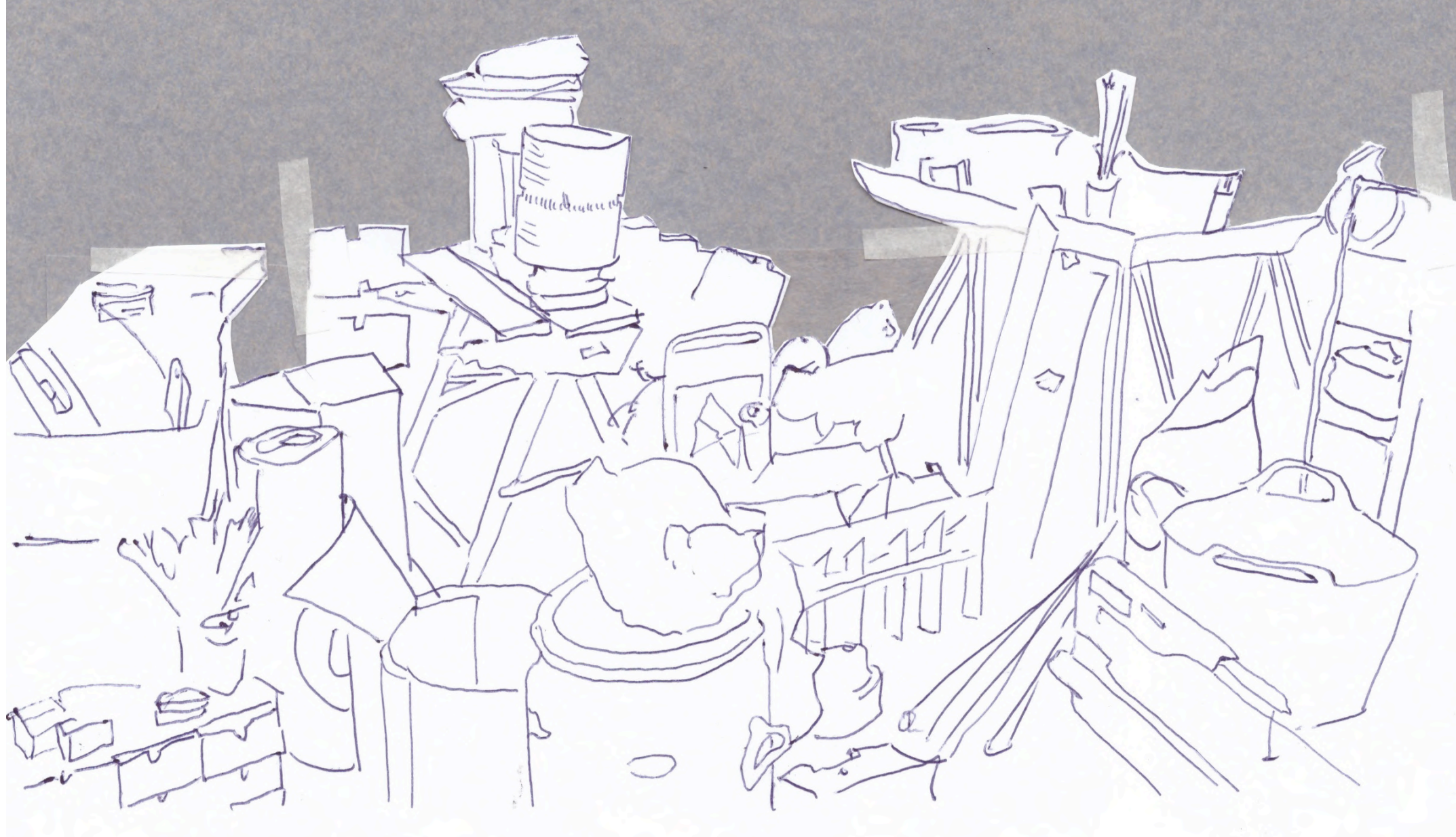
60 Conclusion

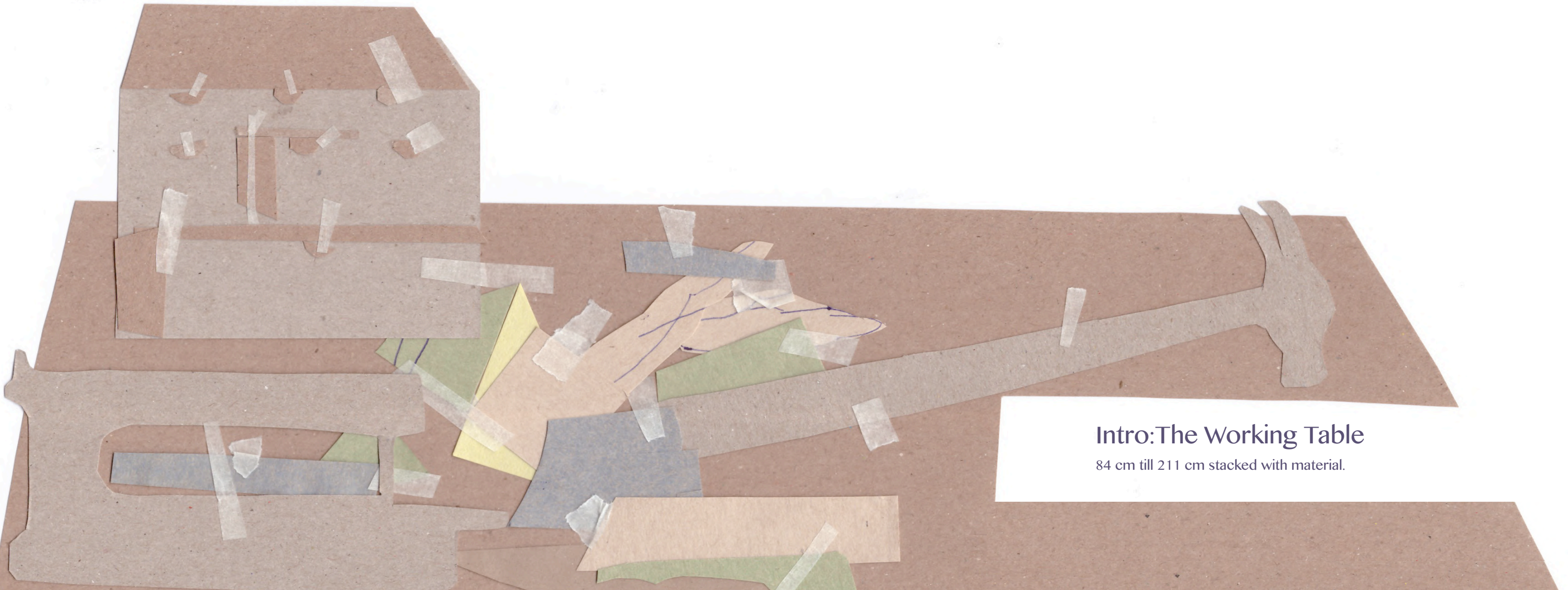
Carving out, A hand gesture

65 Thank you

67 Bibliography

69 Colophon





Intro: The Working Table

84 cm till 211 cm stacked with material.

I would like to start as George Perec starts, as everyone starts when starting a project, by clearing the space where you are going to work. Clearing, in this case, my table. As I am not a writer, my work normally happens on a table measuring 84 cm by 211 cm. It's a proper working table.

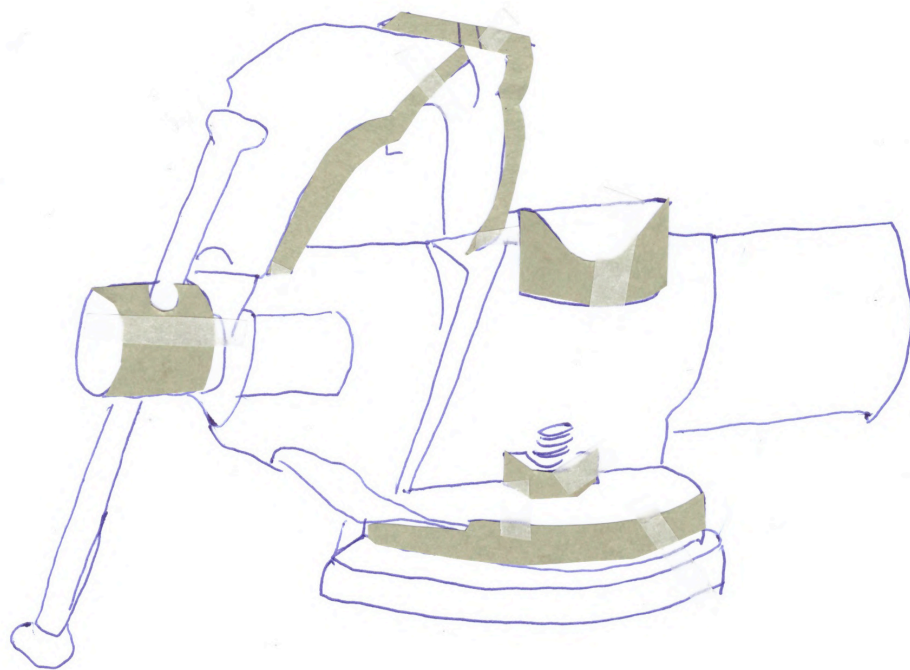
“This rearrangement of my territory rarely takes place at random. It most often corresponds to the beginning or end of a specific piece of work; it intervenes in the middle of those indecisive days when I don't quite know whether I'm going to get started and when I simply cling on to these activities of withdrawal: tidying, sorting, setting in order.”¹

On the left side, a jigsaw is installed next to a green pencil sharpener. There is a small Ikea cabinet sitting on the table filled with pens. Most of the time there are piles and piles of material on that table. Next to it stands a trolley and upon that a bag, filled with all my tools. Underneath the table, materials are standing in line, they didn't get a ticket on entry and are waiting to be picked up. In these moments of clearing out, the space across the table becomes the trashpoint; where I separate materials by their qualities for the containers.

Most of the time, when I clean out the table, assembly starts to happen. Putting one thing on top of another, taping things together just for a second, knowing that this is the last time I can give this material another life, and so value is changed.

In this thesis, I would like to work as I work with material, using everything around myself. Picking it up and throwing it away again, as an endless search for more. Trying to glue Bruno Latour and Sema Bekirovic, casting accelerationism in a mould to use its negative, welding New Babylon on to a running motor, pressing with Donato Ricci, drawing on top of Ismail- al Jazari's drawings, pulling through Mika Rottenberg's films, falling over Bas Jan Ader and holding things in place with the two hands of Merlau-Ponty. Searching, in all these ways, for letters, forming words, making sentences, creating chapters which are impressed with a structure that tries to transport some form of knowledge.





Writing should be like making a work, although for me it's not a work, it is picking up material from wherever you find it: from the streets to your mothers' mouth. Deforming it, putting it together, selecting, modifying and in the end presenting in some way. Just so you, the reader, know, my table is quite clumsy and is really mine. I may have interpreted things wrong, connected the unconnectable, put a bolt and a nut through and gone nuts. I try to make the material mine, but sometimes it feels as Katy Acker describes it in her text 'Against ordinary language,'² That her body has started to reject normal language. It is as if when I am working on a sculpture, it creates its own language. Katy destroys her muscles in order for them to be rebuilt. I make a hundred sketches to just use one.

A few sentences about my love for worktables. The Working table is a strong table. A dinner table is too weak, a kitchen counter, too clean. Even more importantly, because of its special status, it invites handicrafts, just as a kitchen counter invites food preparation. The working table makes the worker handy, just as a bicycle teaches a person how to ride a bicycle. The table shows how working with your hands always implies thinking. You get the idea that you are reclaiming something. Making something that fits in the way you want it to fit. ³

The first thing I need to tidy from the table would be my tools, removing the clamps, collecting the drill bits, taking the scissors, the screwdrivers, the glue and putting them all in their place again.



Bedieningsorgaan⁴

The precious pressure of pressing fingers.

The table is covered in chips and bits of fabric, clay, wood, lead, plastic, foam, screws, tie rips and plastic. On top, a layer of tools stacked on top of each other. There are unpowered tools such as scissors, a hammer, a chisel and pliers, as well as powered tools: a drill, a sanding machine, a small grinder, another sanding machine. I sort them all into the drawers under my table.

All the tools that are laying on my table are a sort of extension of my body. It feels almost as if all of these tools have become parts of my body. Merleau-Ponty introduced to me the idea of the body schedule called the corporal schema or the body image.⁵ As I am currently sitting, my back starts to itch and I move my pencil to the exact point where it itches, without thinking, without knowing anything about physiology or how the body functions. The body seems to know how to move with all the muscles, skeleton and organs involved and without thinking about it. The pencil isn't an object anymore, it is absorbed or incorporated into my body schedule. I wonder if all these tools scattered over my table somehow became part of my body schedule.

Our bodies let us access space and objects without thinking about it. Can this be a way of thinking as well? So much knowledge is given to us verbally, through words, letters and codes. We take that all in, make some kind of logic out of it and return with more words, letters and codes. Before all these words enter, there exists something that can be called sensation, thinking with your senses.

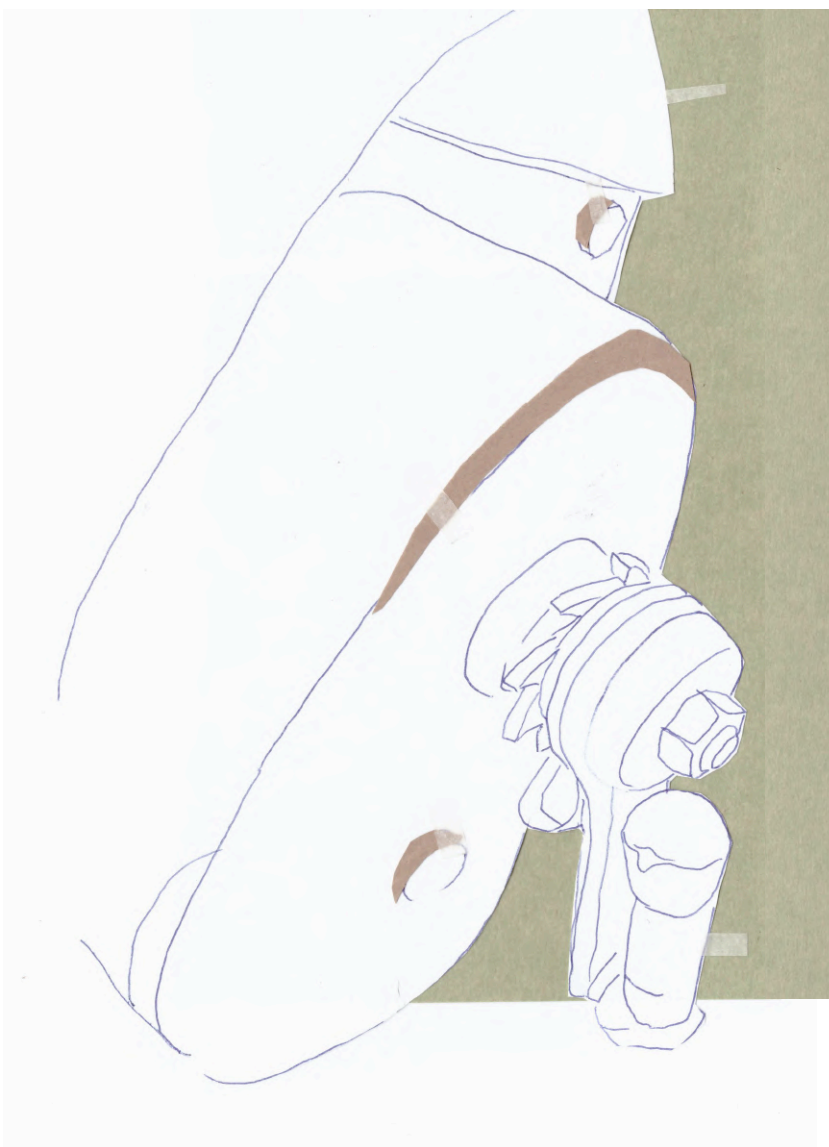
The artist Jessica Stockholder works with these different ways of thinking. Thinking while doing, thinking with your hands, which actually involves the whole body. Jessica Stockholder is an American artist who could be called a painter with space. Stockholder's complex installations incorporate the architecture in which they have been conceived, blanketing the floor, scaling walls and ceilings, and even spilling out of windows, through doors, and into the surrounding landscape. She talks about the 'thinking hands', which she compares with the hands of a piano player.⁶ When the fingers of a piano player learn how to play, they don't think about each note. The way that she works is comparable to this. Working intuitively with colour, shape and form. In a certain way she knows what she is doing, both physically and conceptually, but it's impossible to express verbally. And so, she asks herself what her intuition says. It's not stupidity. Coming from a verbal family she needed to react in her own way. For her, this meant through material. Folding, wrapping, moulding and pressing with thinking hands. Tinkering is one of my favourite words, as it entails thinking while doing.



Jessica Stockholder, *Skin toned garden mapping*, 1991



Jessica Stockholder, *For Mary Heilmann*, 1990



All these tools lay upon my table in reach of my hands. I wonder if we do anything still by hand, the only thing that you can do by hand is form clay. If we say done by hand we actually say done by power-driven tools, instead of produced by machines.⁷ The difference is of course that the body still touches the tools, and by this the material. The body can still make mistakes. It can be made without an exact plan, or better said without a blueprint, put together in the moment. These points where the body and a device touch are called device control. In Dutch we would say Bedieningsorgaan, which translates to control organ. It could refer to things such as a lever, joystick, button, mouse, pedal, tiller handle, steering wheel, key, keyboard, trigger, gear shift or widget. From these points we can create or manipulate material. My mouse adds another page of information. A Bedieningsorgaan can be mechanic, pneumatic, hydraulic, electric or electronic.

Out of a drawer I get a collection of buttons. I spread them out onto the table and have a look. The pressure put on a button by the tip of the fingers sets a chain of reactions in motion. A lot of time, we can't see what we exactly put in motion. By pressing a button, we can not only set things in motion, but we also halt things, to reset them. Fingers pressing buttons to get to an earlier moment.

In his essay *Don't Push That Button!* Donato Ricci compares the cleaning of his grandfather's workspace to the resetting of a Nintendo game, which one could say was the shift from a system of labour into a system of control. The reset button is an object able to instantaneously wipe or clean any error, and able to reinstall, in the thick of any situation, order and homogeneity to any current state.⁸ The button can be seen as alienation from its procedure as it's producing an immediate magic effect, leading from a cause to an effect by a short circuit. The button, thanks to its binary nature, represents, when not activated, an existing state, and when pressed a change in the future of the state. Nowadays buttons are more used as a signifier on top of a screen. Virtual buttons only refer to their mechanical ancestors. We know where to enter or where to exit by colors and shapes, no pressure needed. As Ricci makes clear "rare are the buttons nowadays acting on steel gear and lever by transmitting the force of a body to the metal components."



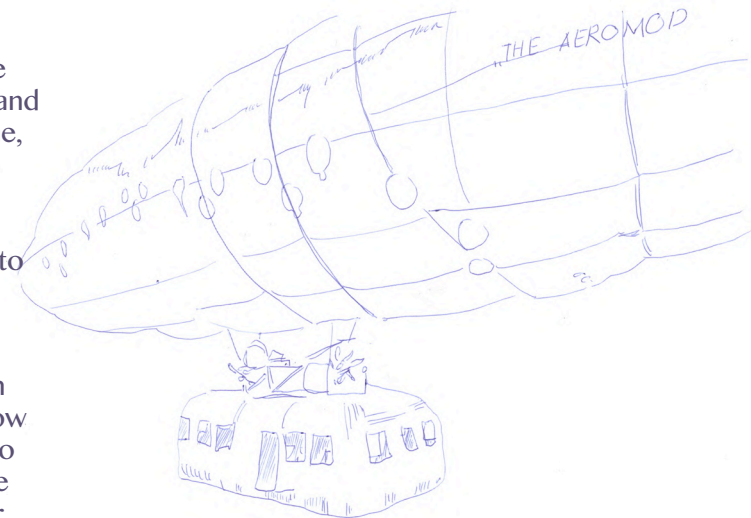
Peter Weisz and Emil Fischli, still from *Der Laufe der dinge*, 1987

Many chains of reactions are in action, which aren't under my control. I didn't put them in motion. Sometimes I feel that only at my working table do I have full agency. I am putting something in motion where I can see most of the circuits. Most of the time I wasn't there when the material was made, but I can still see the material transform, as if I am the director who transforms all the trash and creates actors out of it, just as Peter Weisz and Emil Fischli did in *Der Laufe der dinge*. They trained each material to become a professional acrobat, as if they were creating a circus show. *Der Laufe der dinge* came after the *Equilibrium Series*. It was one step further, tinkering with gravity by putting things in motion. The result is a 30-minute sequence of car-tyres, candles, plastic bottles, firecrackers, suspicious liquids, planks and balloons falling, being activated and activating the next one.⁹

Is it only about control in the end? Having the power to let things work the way you want them to work? Making things smooth or having control on the outcome? Does technology, even the most primitive technology, always make things more efficient?

One of the first known mechanical 'robot' builders was Badi al-Zaman Abu al-Izz Ismail ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari (1136). Al-Jazari's work was part of 'Islamic automation,' wherein automation was a manner of submission, rather than the means of control that it has come to represent today. He worked a lot with water, making inventions both for the king and for himself. The beautiful drawings that he left behind are published in a book called *Book of Knowledge Ingenious Mechanical Devices*. The machines in al-Jazari's book were both practical and playful, from clocks to automaton vessels which dispensed drinks. He designed bloodletting devices, fountains, musical automations, water-raising machines, and measuring devices. As the son of a craftsman, Al-Jazari knew the needs of the everyday. He didn't use difficult languages and made practical machines, such as inventions to irrigate farms and homes, or to make a linear movement into a rotating one, or to exactly calibrate locks. He hoped by making clear drawings, people would be able to make his machines themselves. It would be like some kind of user's manual. The drawings aren't even about production. They seem to be partly about discovering movement and partly about the transformation of these movements.¹⁰

I wonder if to invent is already to accelerate. When form follows failure¹¹ all the machines and devices today follow from the ones before. Above my head flies Panamarenko and I think of all the inventors that dream and investigate those dreams. It doesn't matter if one flies in the end, or perhaps it's better if one doesn't fly in the end. An endless process of discovery.

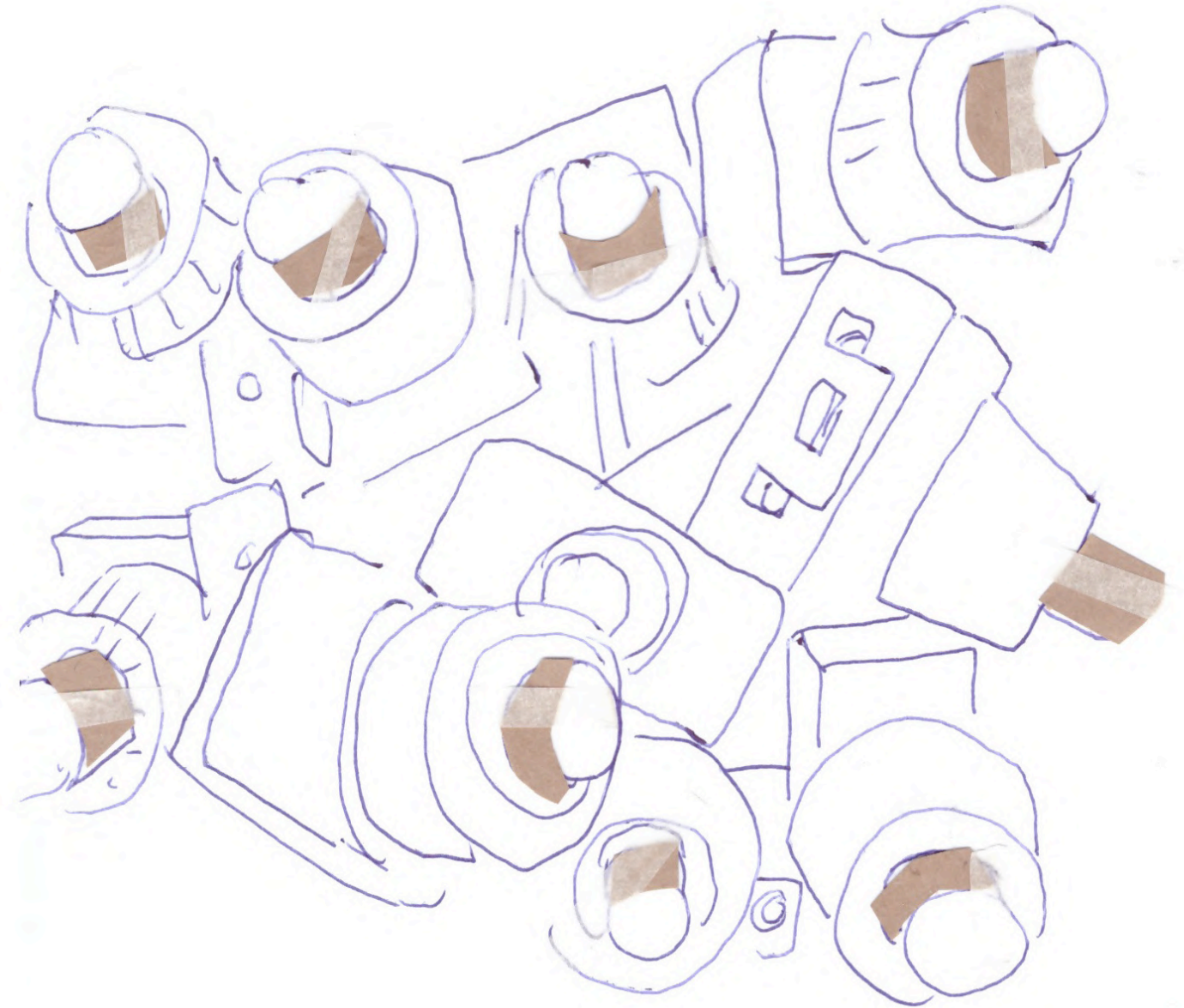


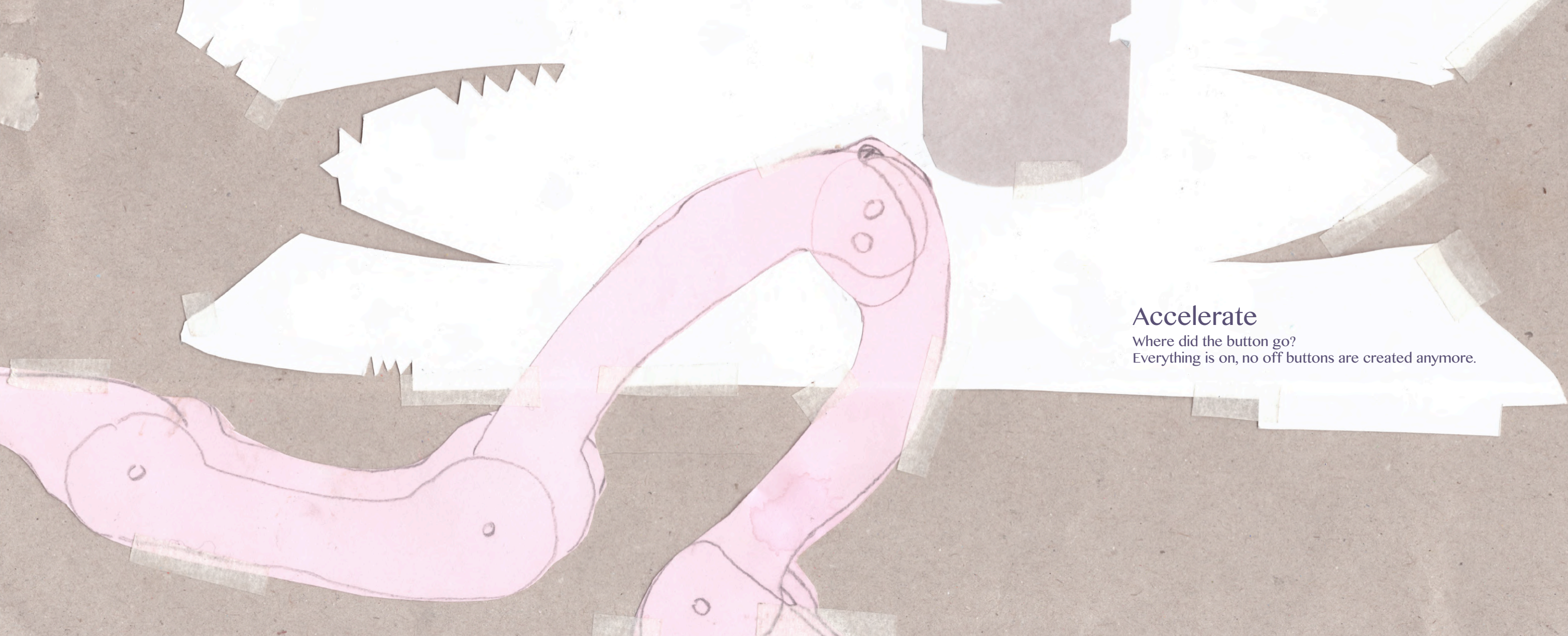
10. Jorge Elices, *Medieval robots? They were just one of this Muslim inventor's creations* (National Geographic 06/2020)

Gunalan Nadarajan, *Islamic Automation: A Reading of al-Jazari's The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* (1206), (Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization 08/2007)

11. Henry petroski, "Form doesn't follow function, form follows failure," in *What's the use?* by Sara Ahmed (Duram and London: Duke university press, 2019) p.25

I put the buttons back under my table and think of all the buttons beyond of my working table. Sometimes it feels as if, outside, the only things that I can control are these buttons. A button to cross the crosswalk, a button for the receipt, a button for the metro doors and a button to turn my phone on. Buttons to set a chain of reactions in motion, most of the time an invisible one. If now we press the accept button on our phone, we press against a flat service that only through the green finch we understand, a whole chain of reactions is set in motion. A product is made from that moment, a plane took off or a vehicle started. An invisible chain. Running on fuel, electricity and human power. Against my window presses a much larger machine, moving with no way back, and I wonder where the reset button is.

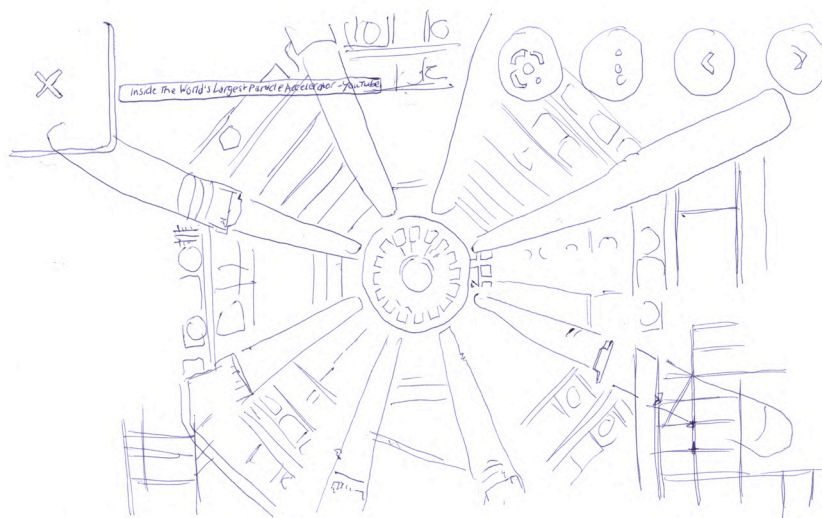




Accelerate

Where did the button go?
Everything is on, no off buttons are created anymore.

Outside the working table, I miss the connection between the material world and myself. As if these points are overruled by algorithms and automatization. Against my window presses a large machine. As I lean forward, I can only grasp a tiny fraction of it. The saw on the left of my table all of a sudden starts running. As I remember, it could only run at two speeds, but it doesn't seem to care about that anymore. It is going quicker and quicker. Through the window, planes fly by quicker and quicker, one after the other. Time is ticking against my window, faster and faster. A machine that's not relying only on muscles anymore. Invisible rotating motors appear everywhere. In a system where everything is connected and all movements happen for a logical reason, am I just hiding behind my worktable? Is there another way out of here?



Accelerationists don't believe in a simple button to get us out of this fast-running machine, they think that we must intensify the process, as Deleuze and Guattari describe in *Anti-Oedipus*:

“To go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process,’ as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.”¹²

Accelerationism is a theory that argues for the intensification and acceleration of capitalist processes, particularly through the integration of computer technology. Accelerationists suppose that the only way to bring about systemic change is to accelerate the capitalist system until it reaches its breaking point. This would cause it to implode. “Through the shit of capital, its metal bars, its polystyrene, its books, its sausage pates, its cyberspace matrix?”¹³ The term Accelerationist originates from a science fiction novel, *Lord of Light* by Roger Zelazny, in which the term refers to a group of revolutionaries who seek to take society to a higher level.

12. Mark Fisher Terminator vs Avatar (2012) in #ACCELERATE the accelerationist reader by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanesian, (Fallmouth: Urbanomic and Merve Verlag, 2014) p. 310

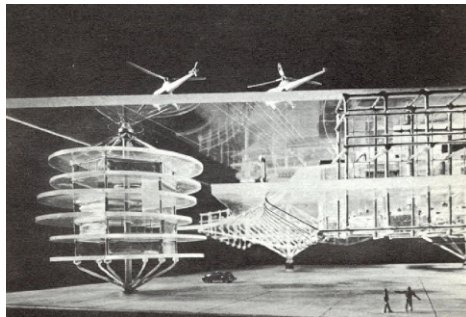
13. Mark Fischer, Avatar versus terminator in #ACCELERATE: the accelerationist reader by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanesian P.340

One of the core beliefs of Accelerationism is that the process of acceleration will lead to the eventual automation of various industries. Full automation is the best path forward or perhaps even the only path forward. This would, in turn, enable humans to surpass the limitations of the physical world and focus solely on the production of ideas, which could be explored with the aid of technological systems. In this way, it could be compared with the ways electronic devices are marketed: they promise to leave this material world, and with this its physical mess, far behind.¹⁴ The accelerationist perspective also has implications for politics, as it rejects traditional ideological frameworks such as socialism, social democracy, environmentalism, protectionism, conservatism, populism, nationalism, and localism.

Instead, Accelerationists suppose that if we get technology right, it will be the only relevant framework for societal transformation. It can be argued that Karl Marx was one of the first Accelerationists. In the essay *Fragment on the Machine*, Marx explores the rise of the machine and with this the impact on society. Before, workers used tools to enhance their own physical and cognitive abilities, but with the advent of machines, the focus shifted towards controlling and directing nature in order to achieve greater productivity. Rather than workers animating the machines, machines began to animate the workers. In this way, workers became a prosthesis of the machine.¹⁵ The hands became the tool, the machine became the thinking hands.

Not everyone who is an Accelerationist is a Marxist. For example, one of the key figures, also known as the father of Accelerationism, is Nick Land. Land is a philosopher who is known for his controversial ideas about the obsolescence of Western Democracy, human biodiversity, capitalistic human sorting, and the disintegration of the human species because of Artificial Intelligence. In his essays and lectures he incorporated the use of 90's culture such as jungle music and films as *Blade Runner*, *Terminator* and *Predator*. He sees human beings as the meat puppets of capital. Their identities and self-understandings are simulations that can, and ultimately will, be sloughed off. He sees the extinction of humankind as a way to make space on the dancefloor. According to Land, this extinction should be something to enjoy rather than to detest, as it's all about the process. A lot of fellow Accelerationists might think he has gone too far but asking 'how far is too far?' is already a question which restrains, which goes against Accelerationism. Mark Fisher describes Land 'as the is kind of antagonist that the Left needs.'¹⁶





Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*, 1956 till 1974

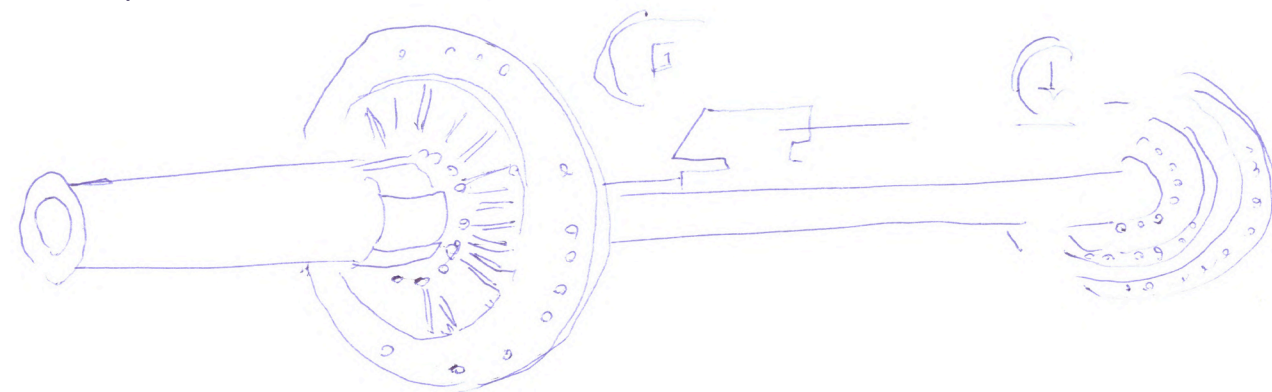
Leftist Accelerationists such as Helen Hester, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams use Accelerationism to rethink labour, the expansion of public services and new forms of social organization. In the leftist manifesto from Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* they state that technology without socio-political action is will never be sufficient for human beings.¹⁷ This is in contrast to the Post-War era, when it was still believed that labour might be reduced by machines.

A good example of this Utopian worldview, where work would be made obsolescent and no longer be part of the social factory, is *New Babylon*. *New Babylon* was a concept of Constant Nieuwenhuys. He believed that all this progress would create space for a new way of living. He imagined a large platform, built over parts of Amsterdam. Underneath would be a running, automatized machine that produced sufficiently for humans to no longer have to work. On the platform itself would be an enormous playground. The *Homo sapiens* would become a *Homo ludens*: playing human beings.¹⁸

Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek made clear however, we didn't gain more time by working less. The only thing that technology under capitalism has produced is more flashy consumer gadgetry, therefore they want to set technology free, free from this system that constrains progress, so that *Homo sapiens* can reach beyond the limitations of the earth and of its immediate bodily form.¹⁹

They also make a division within today's Left. The division between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action and protest and those that follow accelerationist politics which works with the complexity, abstraction and globalism, which belongs to capitalism. They state that the left who is staying in local, temporary, autonomous spaces don't actually interfere in the non-local, abstract and deeply rooted capitalism of the everyday infrastructure. These local, temporary autonomous spaces, I know quite well. When my friends and I were about seventeen, we started a squat group named de Kinderen van Mokum. We filled up empty spaces with mattresses, having some expo's and every Wednesday a voku (volkskeuken). We went to places like ADM, where autonomy behind the gates looked possible.

Direct action feels like carving tiny holes through the things that fell out of the loop. Maybe they only celebrate in the ruins of what was, and maybe the longing back can already be referred to as something that is the result of capitalism.



17. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, in *#ACCELERATE the accelerationist reader* P356

18. Constantijn Nieuwehuizen, *Constant Opstand van de homo ludens* (Bussem: Paul Brand and J.J. Romen & Zonen, 1969) Over normen in de cultuur (voordracht gehouden in 'de brakke grond' te Amsterdam op 15 februari 1967 op uitnodiging van de stichting 'civitas academica Amstelodamensis') P 111

19. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, in *#ACCELERATE the accelerationist reader* P361

To hide in the ruins of something that was, is someTo how to fantasize about the past. It's the desire for a time that can be seen as wholesome, as if the only way out is by looking back or looking forward. Both are nonvisible and so are imagined spaces, which can be filled with one's own buildings, streets, spaces, chains, shapes and functions. The imagination can be seen as the desire. One can wonder just as Deleuze and Guatarri did, if this desire is separated from the world or if it is part of a larger social and economic structure.

I wonder if there is even an outside. Maybe the carvings from an inside to an outside or the other way around don't affect each other if they are both the same space. Accelerationists find their outside in the future, as they think Capitalism can't deliver it.²⁰

I try to carve and to dig, in layers that have been, in fallen structures, in thrown out objects, in torn down buildings, in left over spaces, as a way to hide from the giant and overbearing beast. I grab a handsaw and try to match the speed of the saw on my table. Sweat drips from my armpits and I think of the excretions the body produces. It squeezes out sweat drips into a clean shirt, nails on the floor of the bathroom and hair in the shower drain. The body keeps on spilling out, dropping tears in unwanted places. In this way the body itself becomes something disgusting amongst all these clean objects.

Mika Rottenberg's fists knock on my door. As I open the door, she opens a suitcase. Like an old door-to-door salesperson, she shows me a kind of map of her crazy architectural films. She starts explaining the connections, in her films, between labour, material and the female body. In her films and installations, she plays with loops, from a very imaginative perspective, showing us the absurdities and contradictions of contemporary capitalism, and with this the impact of our bodies. By creating an imaginative cause and effect, she shows the viewer how alienated we are from the processes that create materials in this way she is commenting on the excesses of capitalism. She is bringing labour and production, and with this cause and effect, very close in the same architectural space together.

In all her works she uses cause and effect in a surreal manner, to make connections more direct. A good example is in the work, *Squeeze*, in which the viewer looks at the production-line of value, physical reactions and energy.²¹ All these formless things are materialized and take the shape of a small sculpture. You never see the outcome of what is being produced, but only the whole line of actions. The video itself depicts an architectural structure that connects locations around the world and collapses real spaces into psychological spaces. Similarly, in the work, *Dough*, we become a part of a production line. Efficiency isn't part of the line, it's way more about the actions themselves and the time that is spent between material and body.



Mika Rottenberg, still from *Squeeze*, 2010



Mika Rottenberg, *Bowls Balls Souls Holes*
Installation views: Rose Art Museum, 2014

Rottenberg likes to think of the body as architectural, as something that is inhabited. Not only do the spaces within the films become important, but also the spaces that surround them. Upon entry, the viewer is immediately captured inside strange rooms. For example, in *Sprüth Magers*, (Berlin 2018) the audience entered the video installation of *Bowls Balls Souls Holes* through a blue turning door, that was covered with a layer of coloured gum. The film is about the very complex production system of luck through collective labour, numerical codes, magnetic fields, parapsychology, and global warming. Through *Bowl, Balls, Souls and Holes*, we look at the magical potential of a hyper-capitalist, globally connected reality through the visible: bodies, class, gender and labour, and the invisible and an abstract force: luck. Everything becomes part of a self-sustaining economy.²²

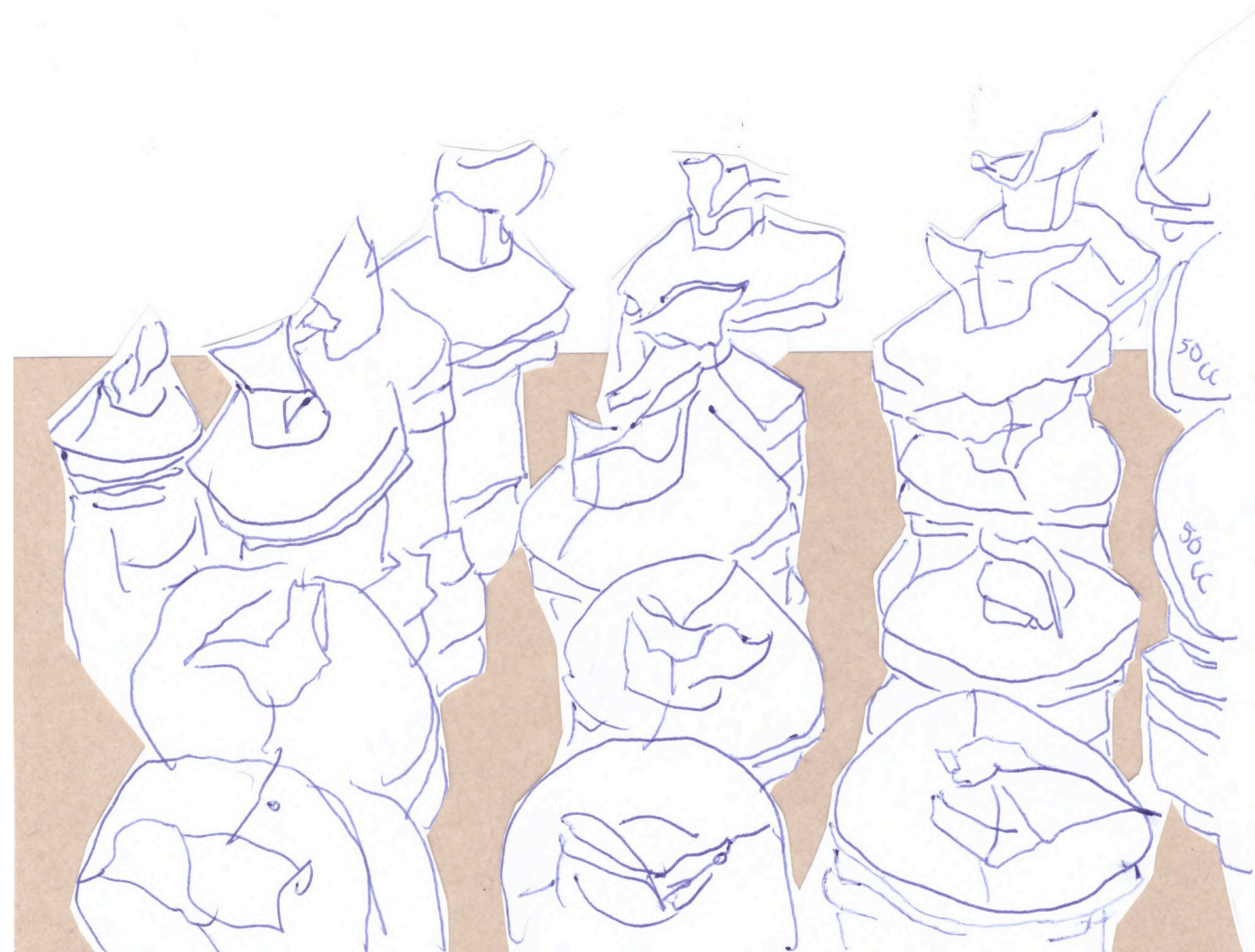
The spaces that connect the videos feel like the organs of the body, dynamic and interconnected, and all vital for production. These spaces can be read as portals which are linked by global Capitalism. They form a system, where the viewer interacts with, “her constructed little ersatz factories, with bodies and furniture and equipment that are fitted neatly, just so, inside of them, are filled to near-bursting.”²³ She builds the sets around her actors. Most of the time she finds people with specific characteristics. They already advertise themselves, and in this way make their ‘handicap’ produce value. In this way, she is thinking about work, alienation and empowerment.

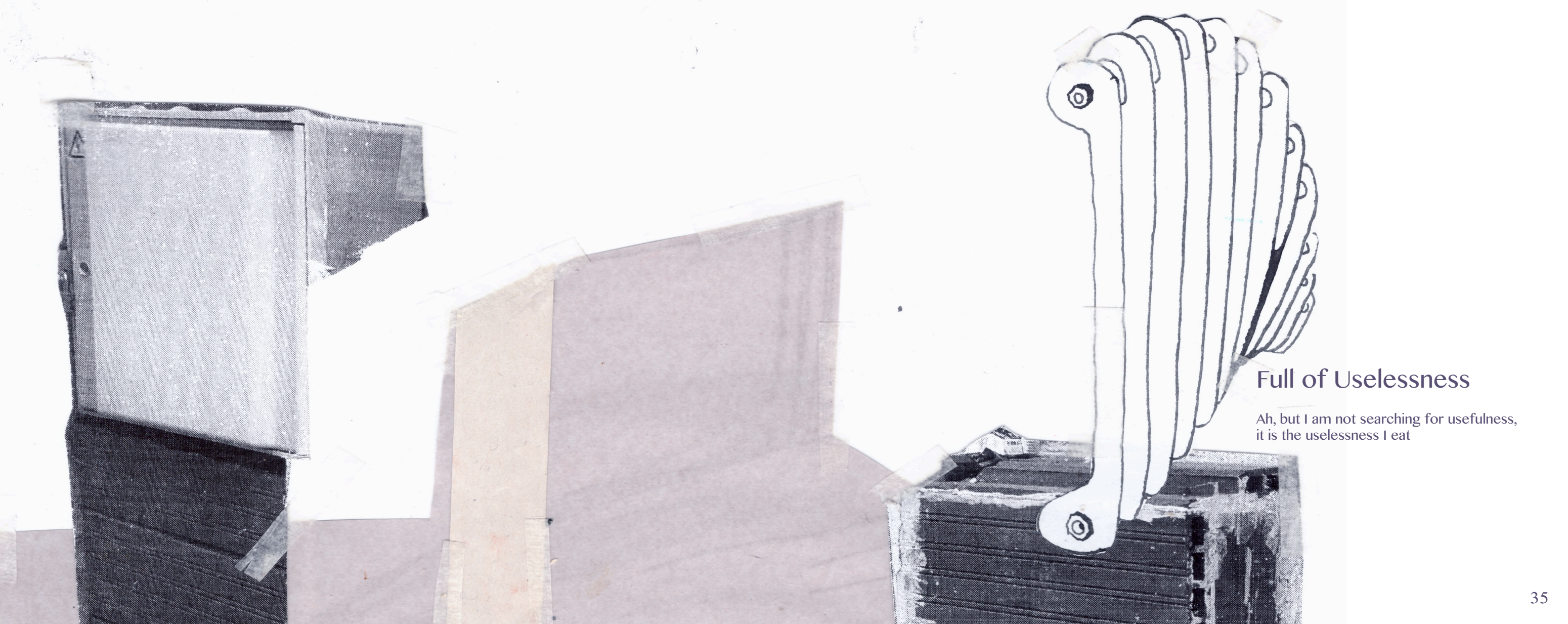
Feminism contains glory holes. One glory hole leads into Marxism. Imagine that political movements and intellectual discourses are rooms that “give” onto each other not through doorways but through illegitimately carved holes. To travel easily between discourses, imagine yourself not as human but as animal, as an adaptable creature, capable of condensing your body to squeeze through a draconian opening.²⁴

As Mika Rottenberg approaches my working table, we talk about the importance of the handmade aesthetic. By using textures and traces from the hands that made it, “texture triggers and flirts with your retina and you can kind of feel that process working when the texture is perceived or represented effectively.”²⁵

She tinkers, creating her own functioning working world, as if she is appropriating the clean factory, where all dirt must be outside, where all objects are made hygienically, for use but not to look like they are being used. Factories want to remove the hand from the product because you don’t want to be reminded of how many people touched, either mentally or physically, the product you are using. You also want to think of yourself as the owner of the product. Too much “hand” by others will make you question your ownership. It is as if by buying something first-hand, you are the first one to touch it, however we know that many hands helped to create a product.²⁶ By showing the clumsiness of the handmade, Rottenberg comments on industrialization and gives back the human touch and production process to objects.

I have been always interested in the visible: in the things you do see. With every step towards Accelerationism, I feel we leave a part of the connection between the body and the material. The inventor is only necessary in the small unseeable chips, which my eyes can't see, and my fingers can't touch. Maybe it wasn't even about finding a button. Maybe it's just about creating your own. On this table all materials are stripped of their original function: one can draw with a drill, write the other way around, make a chair for your head, a door for your feet, use the button only to use for the sound and search endlessly for a self-functioning table.





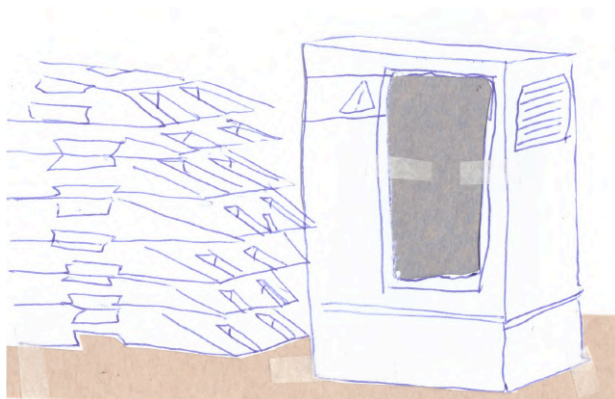
Full of Uselessness

Ah, but I am not searching for usefulness,
it is the uselessness I eat

“The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter. It is therefore the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance, iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use-value or useful thing.”

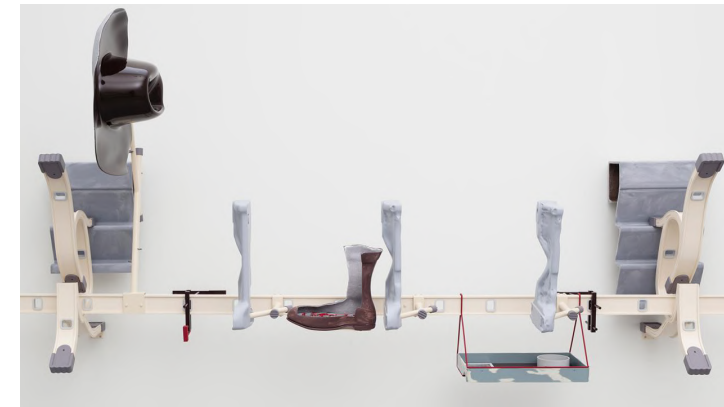
— Karl Marx, Capital

If everything fits, becomes automatic, are the only shapes that we can make the ones that carry functionality? Is everything designed in this way? Everything seems to have a purpose for the human body. Things are made to fit. What is it, to fit? A puzzle piece which fits, is surrounded by the other parts that also fit. Shapes formed by the shapes next to them. Are we left with the shapes that are created to fit? The caps between these puzzle pieces seems to become smaller and smaller. They are becoming so tight, leaving no space for other possibilities. Everything seems to have a place and a function. Everything from the traffic light to my computer, plugged in a system, an invisible one. Things perform a function, have a reason to exist directed by a system, all produced to fit. No cracks, no peeps, just smooth plastic, spinning in Vaseline. But these fitting parts make it so tight, leaving no space for other possibilities because everything has a place and a function. Everything from the traffic light to my computer, plugged in a system, an invisible one. Things perform a function, have a reason to exist directed by a system, all produced to fit.



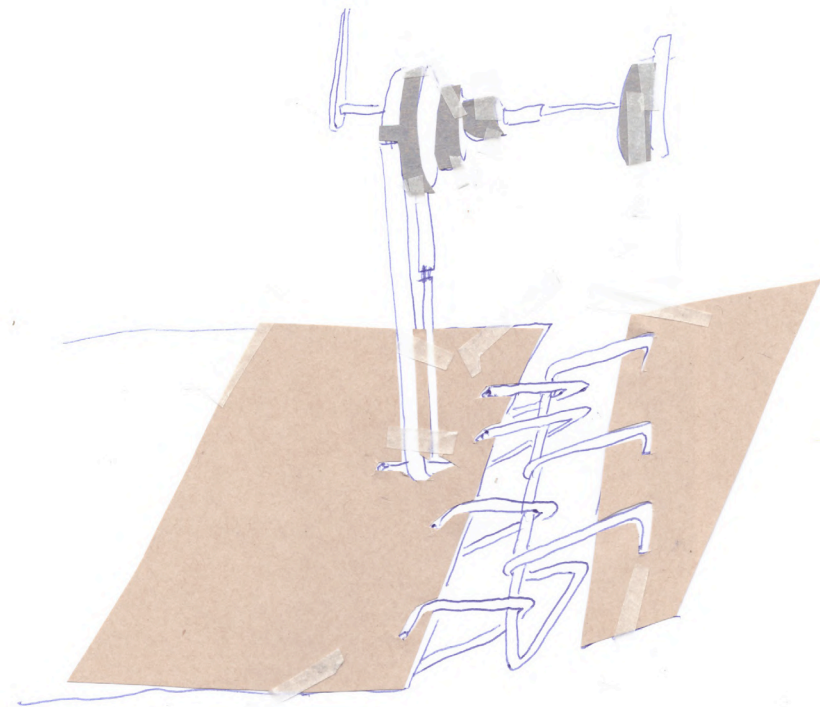
In my view, the sculptures of the Dutch contemporary artist Magali Reus, play with the element that everything fits. All her sculptures are perfectly made and feel like they are produced according to a blueprint. They feel as a ‘mid-render,’ as if not yet manifested in the real world, yet here they are, existing out of plastic, aluminium, epoxy, fabric and all painted with an airbrush.²⁷

It is as if She is throwing a party for all the useful designed objects, giving them all a spot on the table, just so she can remove the table and leave the viewer behind without any clear connections. It is like you are looking at the outside of a device, but you feel like you’re inside. You keep looking for the instruction manual but can’t seem to find it. And somehow, I enjoy trying to break that riddle, enjoying the shapes for the shapes, themselves stripped away from their functions.

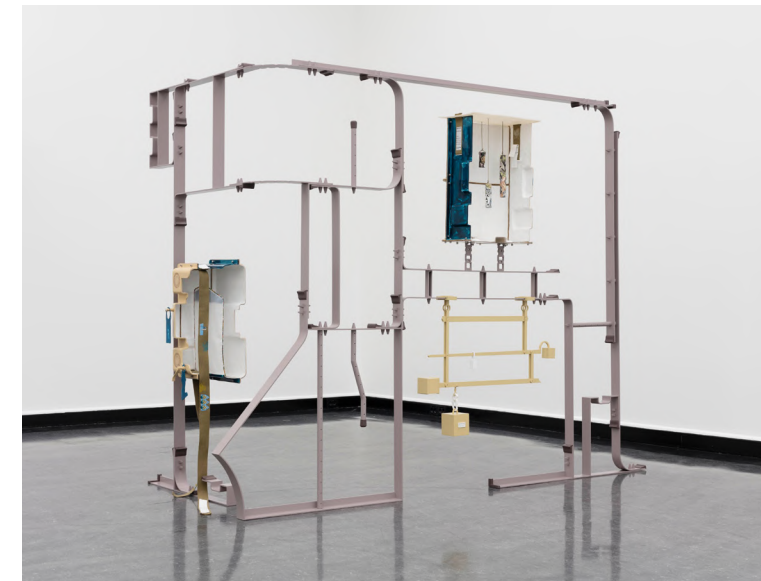


Magali Reus, *Dearest (Achilles)*, 2019

I grab two old toasty irons from underneath my table. When screwing them open all elements become visible, and I wonder if the outside is directed by the inside or the other way around. I think of all the elements in Electronic devices, especially the ones that don't have the plug. Somehow her work fits with this moulded battery that is in your telephone, using all the leftover space to fit perfectly. Nowadays there is little space between the container, the internal element and an energy providing power source. The work of Magali Reus feels like a different kind of apparatus. They are always plugged in, like generators or refrigerators. Plugged in to run forever. They can be read as the overlooked apparatuses that we only notice when they stop sweating. As Heidegger makes clear, only when something stops working does it appears in our consciousness.²⁸ Even though her sculptures don't move, they feel like they're on, no power plugs needed. The sculptures relate to objects and systems of human movement, such as transport, infrastructure, thermostatic control, traffic signs and safety, all serving as control structures.



Soft soap is a work in the *HWEAL* series by Reus. The series *HWAEL*²⁹ invokes both mass transportation systems, like bus networks and the skeleton of a huge whale. The work *soft soap* is filled with details, such as the number of a hotel logged, keys, pensio written in a decorative font, images of death flies and the 'do not disturb' handle signs. The sculpture suggests movement, or better, tourism. As viewers we are the tourists. The bags are being moved to safety and just as we want to enter, it feels like we have lost the keys. Everything is visible but the logic of it all is missing. I am just an outsider searching and looking and searching again for the key.³⁰ It feels as if she embraces the design that our functional world accidentally came up with. The shape came out of the purpose. She takes the shapes, not as leftovers, not as afterthoughts, but incorporates them as a way of letting us know that we are the passengers in a land of objects.³¹



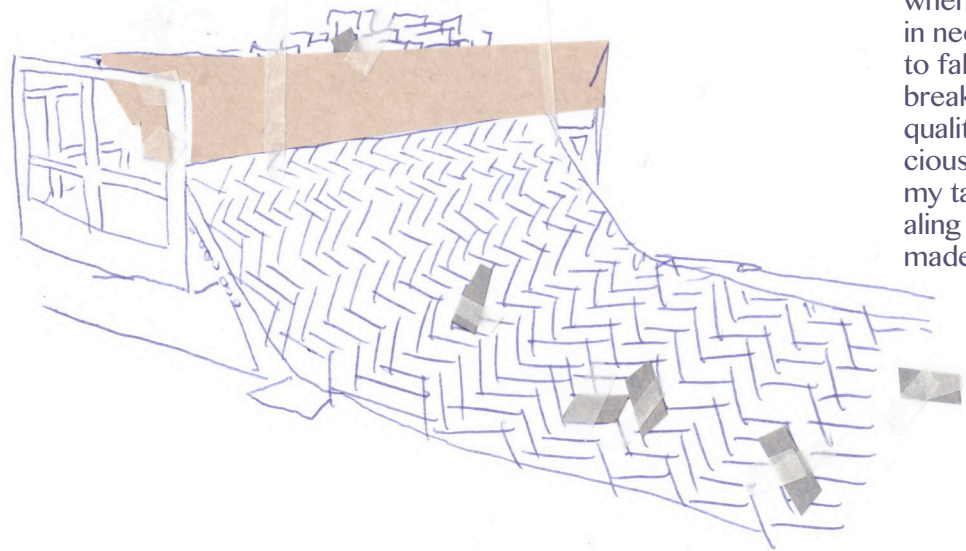
Magali Reus, *Hwael (Soft Soap)*, 2019

29. Hwael means whale in old Saxon/ German

30. Kristy Bell, *Why look at objects?* in *Magali Reus* P.117

31. Laura Mclean-Ferris *Opera Materia* in *Magali Reus, Hot cottons As mist, description* (Berlin: Sternberg press, Bergen kunsthall, South london gallery, 2018) P.25

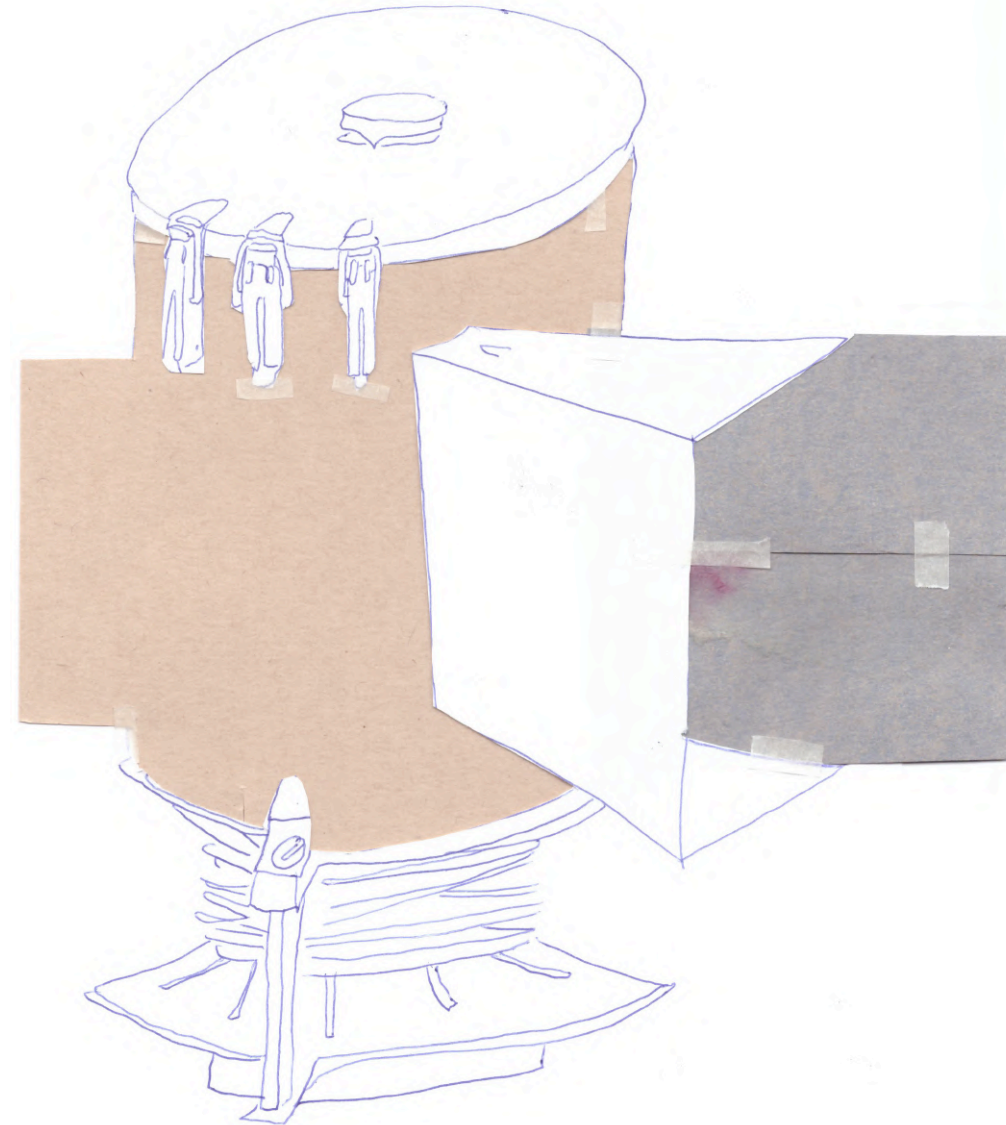
Through the work of Magali Reus, I have been thinking about what it means to use a thing. As if function is projected onto an object. As I already pointed out, the sculptures of Magali Reus feel like they perform a use or function which one can read through the stickers, numbers and letters. Most of the time we only notice an object when it's not usable anymore, like when you can't enter a toilet because the out of use sign is hanging on, when your motor doesn't start anymore, or when you see things only when you in need to use them. To fall can mean to fall out of use. When something breaks, we are faced with its material qualities. Things appear in our consciousness again.³² If I put a 1000 kilo on my table, it would crack in two, revealing the MDF wood that the table is made of.

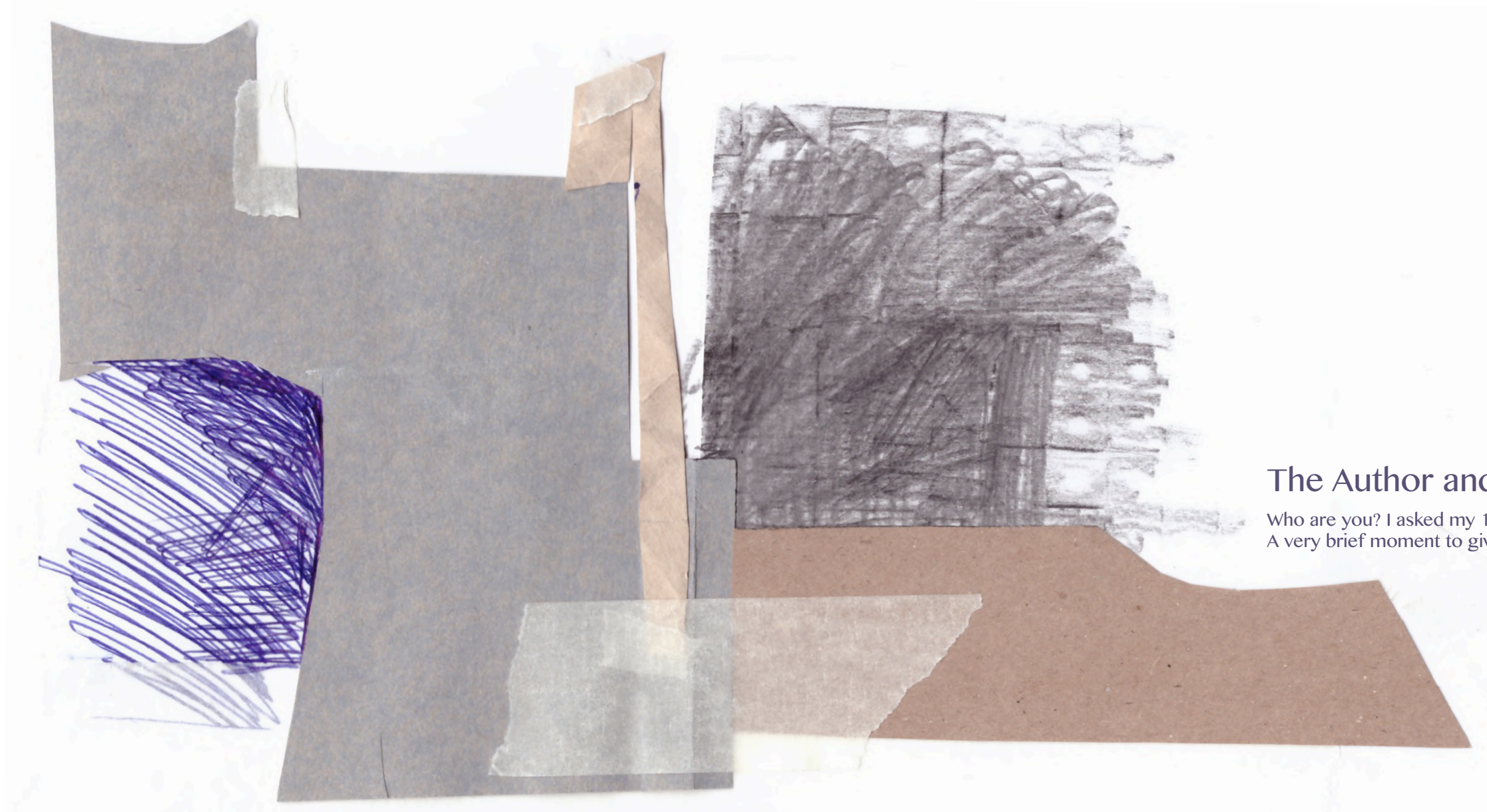


When we can't enter, we are also faced with something that doesn't work or at least doesn't work for you. The streets are filled with marks, which, depending on the vehicle that you are using, show which lanes you can or cannot use. In my head I relate use with the things that make sense. It makes sense that the door handle is at a specific height (not for all bodies though...), that cups have an ear, that buttons are understandable. A chair shouldn't be the exact negative of my ass when sitting because then it's not usable for other butts. Objects that are made to use, we call designed. A well-designed object is one that is easy to read, and therefore easy to use. Use doesn't need to correspond to the indented function. 'Most if not all objects can have a use, or, more accurately be made usable by being put to use'³³ A skateboarder flips over a bench and a bird makes a nest in a post-box. The qualities and the form stay but the ways in which we access the objects become different. If an object is *for* something: *for* is before. What comes after you can make up yourself.³⁴

33. Quote from Howar Risatti in *What't the use?* by Sara Ahmed P.24
34. Sara Ahmed, *What't the use?* P.35

I bend my head and have a look at all the material. What it was meant for was before, and I came in after. The purpose can be stripped away, and only the physical quality of the material stays behind. Metal is heavy, wood can be soft, plastic is flexible, lead weaker than water, paper can be burned, epoxy smells intense, aluminium can be shaped by your teeth, silicon makes me cry, rubber leaves traces, motors need electricity (or do they?). Rethinking where something can function for creates a shift in what is useful and what is useless.





The Author and the Material

Who are you? I asked my 10 Finger tops
A very brief moment to give attention to the non human hands

So we finally arrived at the space underneath my table, which is filled with materials: clay, lead, metal, boxes of motors, plexiglass, a backseat of a bike filled with rust, wax, plaster, concrete, two old ventilators, two old toasters, a toasty iron, a stack of paper, rubber, three buoys, some cameras, SD cards, wood, old mixers, a disco ball. All are stacked on top of each other. All are waiting to be modified by me. Or are they actually waiting for my touch? Just like Phillida Barlow I wonder a lot of times if an artist forms the object, or the object demands its own formation. Am I the only one who can turn them into art? Maybe actually they manifest themselves.

In the work of Sema Bekirovic, *'Reading by Osmosis,'* she questions what is intention? An intention might feel conscious, rational and sustained, but is this true? As decisions and intentions can be maybe no more than the result of electro-chemical processes. Bekirovic makes a connection with other organisms, as we maybe share our unconscious decision making. So, if we make art from this unconscious state, then why can't nonhumans make art as well? Making art is reading, interpreting and transforming the world around oneself. Why can't the North Sea, oysters, gravity, sun, dog, rest or a hummingbird make art? Osmosis means the mixing of the molecules of a solvent through a semipermeable membrane. It is a chemical process at the cellular level and comprises the basis of all known life forms.³⁵ One could say that we humans are rather porous things as we are actually only containers filled with dead matter and alien DNA, leaking fluids and heat. If you think like this there is no clear boundary between 'body' and 'not body'. The work of Bekirovic lets us look at the world around ourselves differently, making not only us the author of art but showing us its non-human authors.



Time
2019
Paint Bucket
(Sema Bekirovic, *Reading by Osmosis*, 2019)

35. Sema Bekirovic and Michael Marder, *Reading by Osmosis*, Nature Interprets Us (Rotterdam: Nai010, 2019)



Moss
Ongoing
Football
(Sema Bekorovic, *Reading by Osmosis*, 2019)



Sun
2019
polyurethane
(Sema Bekorovic, *Reading by Osmosis*, 2019)

I have been thinking about the relation between the work of Bekirovic and that of Bruno Latour, and about Latour's concepts of subject and object, hybrids and representatives. Latour argues that dualism between subject and object is a 'modern' mode of classification. Maybe this divisions of human and non-humans were one necessary order to 'increase mobilization and lengthen some networks', but now it is immoral, and one can say anti-Constitutional.³⁶ Latour also asks whether the dualism we have created with science and politics, or as we like to call it, nature and culture, actually describes the world in which we live. Maybe if the only things we had to make choices about were the machines of Ismail al-Jazari, it would not be such a problem, but nowadays we constantly deal with hybrids between these two groups. The division that has been made by the modern constitution denies the existence of these hybrids. Hybrids such as frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensor-equipped robots, data banks, psychotropic drugs etc.

There is no clear division between nature (science) and culture (politics).³⁷ So why do only people have representatives in a democracy? Why are all non-humans only represented by scientists outside of politics? He states that Objects too have agency: anything that modifies a state of affairs, acts. Things, however, do not become actors, but actants. An actor takes action; an actant puts action in motion.³⁸ It leaves a trace. Maybe it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket or a tag can act, but if you think of a speedbump, it makes the driver slow down and therefore can be called an actant, because it interferes in the course of some other agent's action. A very good example of this is the Embassy of the North Sea, which acts as a way for non-human beings to still be representable.

I don't need to represent the material under my table, or so I think. Most of the time I think they represent me, and what I make with them can be judged by others. It is quite a selfish thought I know. But as I am so afraid of failing, I always keep going from one material to the next. From one sculpture to the other. Exploring endless possibilities from all that has fallen out the loop. Fallen out the loop to under my table to another loop again.

Falen

Where to fall, where to fail, where to not fulfil?

"Failure is a form of deficiency when an anticipated action is not achieved or is accomplished in a different way than anticipated. Failure also signifies an inability to meet and conform to certain norms. These two most common definitions of failure are negatively connoted and depend on forms of achievement that assume and promote functionality, structural sameness, efficiency, positivity, evolution, and progress"³⁹

Across the working table, I divide the materials which are still laying on the table by things that can no longer be used. Things I can't wrap my arms around. Maybe all these materials that I have dragged to this table end up in that pile again. Are all the things that end up there failures? Failing because they are out of use. It's the thing that doesn't bring the desired effect. The outcome you didn't anticipate for.

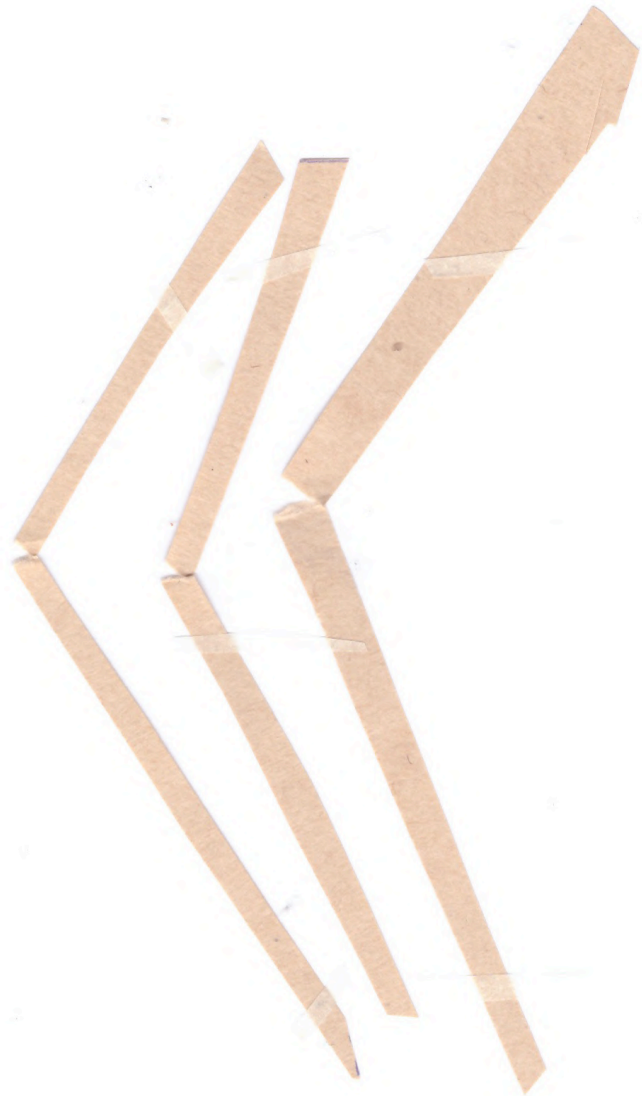
I have always been afraid to fail, to fail, to not fulfil. Failing is the process, or is it? Failing always tells us that there is a right and a wrong and a good and a bad, an outcome that is wanted and an outcome that is not wanted. Harald Szeemann describes failure as a poetic dimension. He talks about Serra's *hand catching lead* as a purely sculptural gesture; it doesn't matter if the hand catches the lead or not.⁴⁰ It is purely a sculptural gesture; the failure itself becomes part of a beautiful story. Failing is surrendering yourself without knowing the outcome, or accepting that the things that didn't have the desired outcome are still valid and perhaps tell us more. Is failure the moment that cause doesn't influence the effect, or the premeditated wanted effect? The hands aren't the only ones who can fail, but they are the easiest to trace back.





Failing has to do with placement. We praise the ones who win by placing themselves higher on a Medaille stage. They are the ones to look up to, to bend our head backwards and look at the winners. The queen's chair is placed high up, the church towers reach the sky and apartments on the top cost most. Everything that is on the ground or underground is placed lower. Heaven is up, Hell is down. When something falls, it is being removed from its position. Falling is a way of failing. The falling body is a failure. Watching home videos of people falling we immediately laugh. As if we lose empathy for a moment and see the fall as a funny gesture of the unexpected. All the early slapstick are based on this principle. Charlie Chaplin criticised industrialization by falling into the unstoppable machine. When thinking about falling bodies I always see Bas Jan Ader cycling in a channel in Fall 2. As if he reminds me of this falling body not only as failure, but as the explorer of the failing dimension. Where the falling body does not stay a joke but rather becomes about taking something seriously. Surrendering yourself to gravity is one of the easiest and most terrifying things you can do. It is something that goes against our bodily instincts. When Ader surrenders himself to gravity, whether this is from his rooftop, by biking in the channel, hanging from a tree or simply by falling over against a trestle. The only thing you need to do is let yourself go, to wait for the tipping point. One can never perform a fall. Of course, you can stage it to a certain extent, but once your body plays with gravity, gravity wins.

Not only do things fall out of use by human hands dropping them, but also by natural disasters. Things decay by erosion or better to say by time. And the hands try to fix this, keeping up with the things that break: damage and the repair. The broken and the fixed. Old houses thrown down, and before you know it, glass buildings stand up and take their places. To fall, is to no longer work. To fall is to damage. In the moment of collapse, there is tragedy, triumph, beauty, and grief.



In the work of Phyllida Barlow the themes of damage and repair stand central. Barlow is a contemporary artist from London who makes giant anti-monumental sculptures from low-grade materials such as cardboard, fabric, foam, plywood, polystyrene, scrim, fabrics, plaster, wood, plastics, ropes, tape and cement. Most of the time painted or been put through a layer of plaster. Phyllida Barlow's work is centred around destruction and construction, or damage and repair. She plays with the notion of gravity pulling on things, making things collapse, and the potential to collapse. Growing up in the ruins of the Second World War in London, she would drive around with her dad, looking at the bomb-damaged areas, and in those ruins, she would find something that is part of nature and humankind.

She sees the sculptural process as something that stands very close with damage and repair. The sculptures carry a theatricality with them. They contain their own architectural space with them, and inside full scene takes place. For example, in the work, *Demo* which was a wooden structure in which large objects were placed, objects that looked like a piano, oversized pieces of furniture and a few sewing coils or the ones where they coil cables on. All of them made from fabric, cardboard and foam. All these objects are between falling, standing and hanging. It feels like the catastrophe already happened, like the flood or the tide ran over these objects, and we can only surrender ourselves for a moment to the enormous power of the movement.⁴¹ The gigantic size, in contrast with the light material of the sculptures gives the viewer a new way to relate to space. One of the fundamental questions that sculpture deals with is how we observe and read spaces. For me, she makes visible the power of gravity, the power of everything that will sooner or later will come down.⁴²

And after the fall, they lay still on the ground, not moving. By the fall they fell out of use,⁴³ and now the loop isn't watching over them anymore. As if the things escaped by dropping themselves onto the floor. Across the street, piles of trash have been falling out of a house. Just before they are moved, I come in. My eyes wide open for whatever is left behind. And when something has any potential, I bow down, my arms stretch, and I take it with me. Things that fall out of use fall back into use by being picked up.



Phyllida Barlow, *Demo* in Kunsthalle Zürich, 2016

41. Adam Jasper, *Phyllida Barlow Kunsthalle Zurich*, ARTFORUM 04/ 2017

42. Ina Cole, *Simple Actions: A Conversation with Phyllida Barlow*, Hauser & wirth Sculpture Magazine 07/02/2018

Kira Cochrane, Interview Phyllida Barlow: 'Just going to art school doesn't make you famous' The Guardian 31/03/ 2014

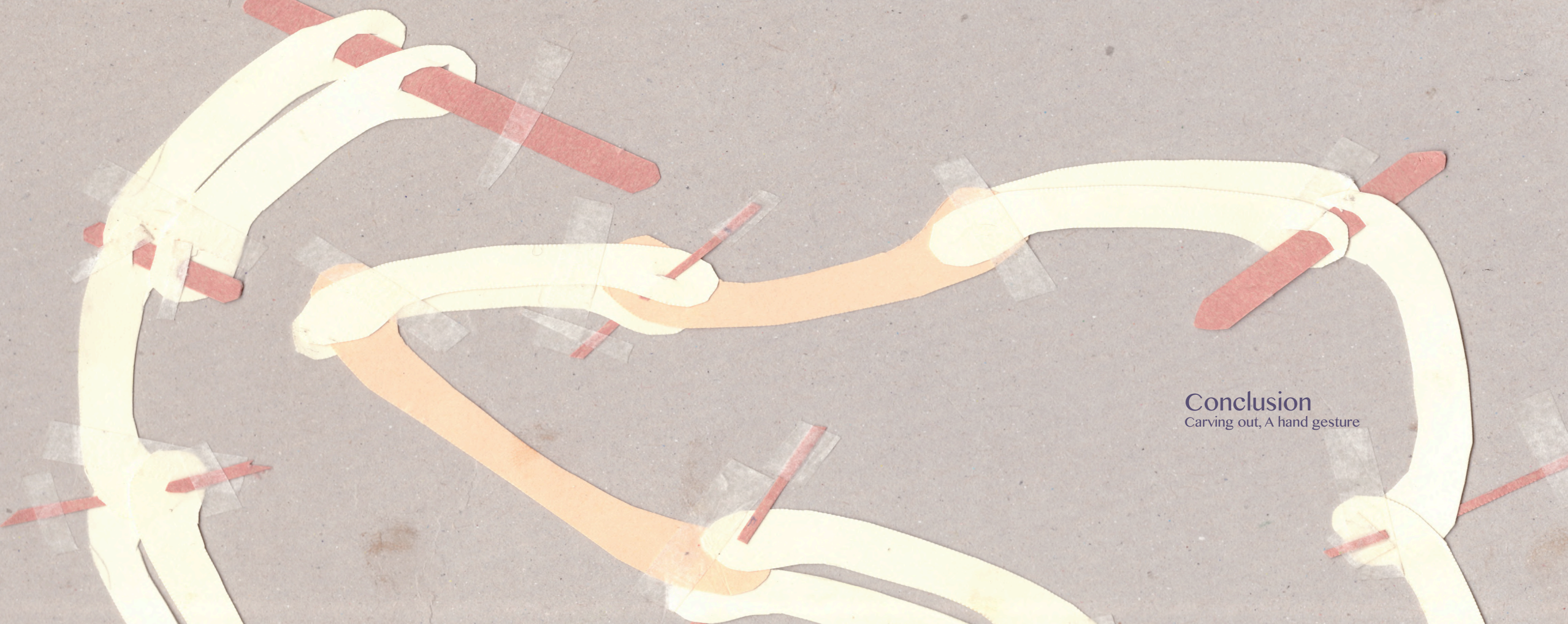
43. Sara Ahmed, 'Sometimes to fall is to fall out of use' *What's the use?* P.32



Agnes Varda, stills from *The Gleaners and I*, 2000

The arms that stretch and the fingers that catch, remind me of the film *The Gleaners and I* by Agnes Varda. Where Agnes Varda makes a connection between the gleaning of the field with cleaning of the streets. Gleaning is to gather the left-overs from the fields after the harvest. This used to be in legal in France as a way to clean the fields. If you search now in the trash bags of any big supermarket, you will be fined. The loops aren't interested in the things that fall out of use, as there is of course no money to be made. When a potato falls out of a certain loop, by taking it in, it can become a political action. *The Gleaners and I* starts with the famous painting by Jean-François Millet, which portrays three women bending down gleaning the field. Agnes Varda portrays characters that deal in their own way with food and objects that are left behind. Some do it as a way to protest, because they can't stand the idea of wasting, others do it purely out of necessity. By connecting the ways people deal with waste, she reflects upon ways to deal with a world that has given itself over to hugeness. These people seem to carve out little spaces for themselves.⁴⁴ In the same way, Varda's hand captures the film. We follow her hand trying to catch food trucks as if she is trying to demonstrate what it is to take a thing and make it your own. The film has a certain cuteness on top of it. This cuteness can be related to something small. There is a famous saying in Dutch, 'onkruid vergaat niet,' 'weeds do not die which means the useless or unworthy live longest, great rascals live longest.

In this overly designed globalized world, maybe things function a bit too well. I have been interested in loops; things put in motion with a certain outcome. Or maybe following the motion itself. When things fall out of these loops, they gain a new meaning. Not what is predetermined but a moment when things can change. "Form doesn't follow function, form follows failure. Misfits provide an incentive to change; good fit provide none."⁴⁵ When something fails, there is the possibility to make something new. When something can be done better. One could say to fall out of a certain economy is the beginning making a new chain of reactions. As if by falling out there exists a new space. The people who are busy with finding these other forms could be called squatters, gleaners, cleaners, diggers, makers or care takers.

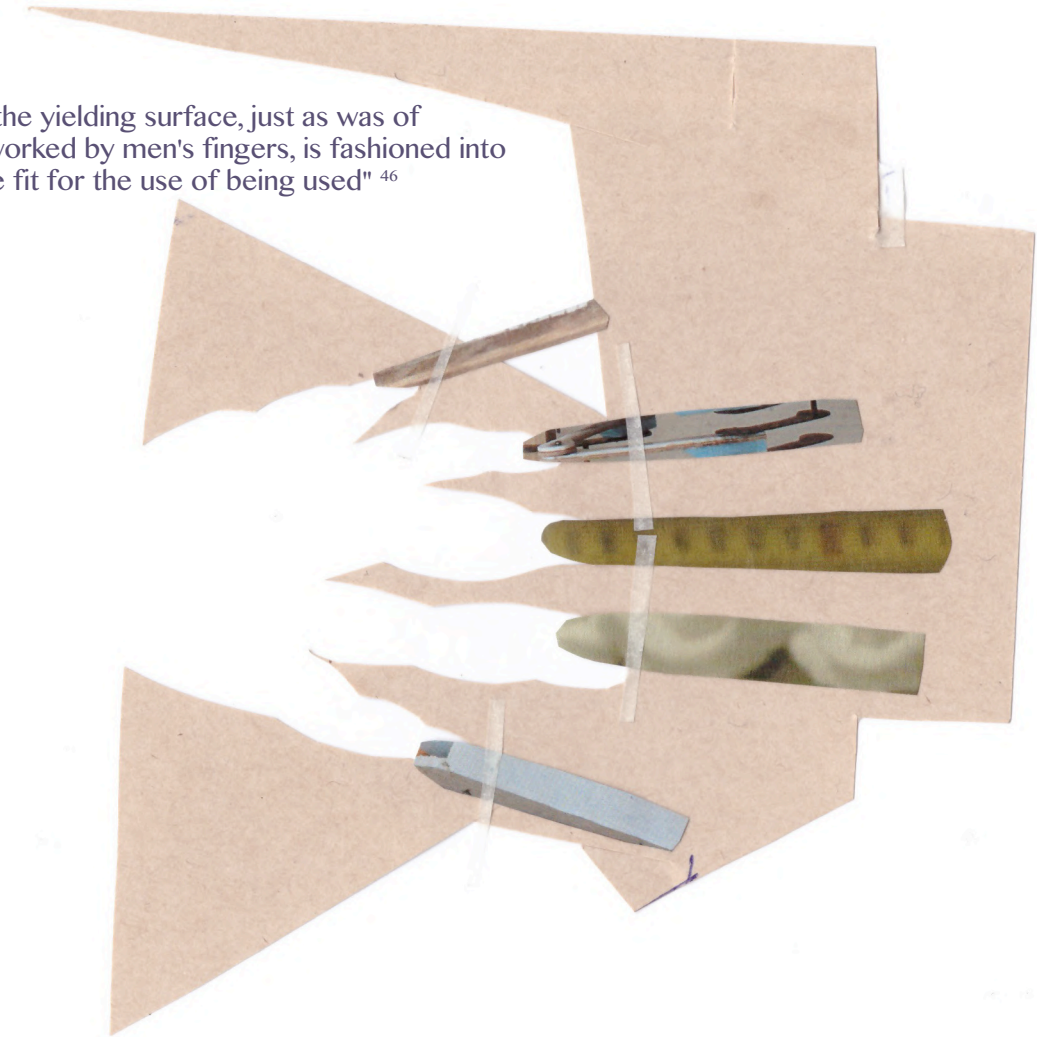


Conclusion
Carving out, A hand gesture

I have been staring at the table, the grey colour has become visible again. Besides the saw, the pencil sharpener, the Ikea cabinet, some traces of cuttings in the plate, some glue and paint marks, there is nothing to see. All the buttons back in place, against the window is still pressing a machine, but I know my place. Scared by the emptiness and the expectation of the table, I go out and fill my hands with leftovers. The leaking parts that were not meant to be, the ones that didn't find their place. My hands start to itch and before I know it, I take a pencil and start to sketch, take the saw and cut things apart. Inside all the functional shapes that this world shoots out, I try to make it my own. Next to all the other non-human authors, I try to interpret the material. Carving out, A hand gesture, making something according to the size of my hands, to the size of my body. Habiting, inhabiting. And so, I lay everything on my table again and see what I can still add, where my hands can still carve out. As a way of living, carving out, in the gaps, the in-betweens, in the ones that fell, fail, feel or are in verval.⁴⁵

Sculpture has been always connected to the texture and materiality of the world. To not only look, but to feel. To put physical pressure on material, to form. The material shaped around the fingers, which is made clear in the story of Pygmalion.

"His fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface, just as was of Hymettos melts in the sun and, worked by men's fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes, and made fit for the use of being used"⁴⁶





I want to give a huge thanks to Alena Alexandra who trusted the proces, my always making and care taking family, who thought me to look at the overlooked, my dad, Bart Kelholt for giving me a worktable, my mom Tineke Tromp for always being intrested, Liese Kelholt and Luuk Vlamings for the great aesthetic feedback and Bela Vlamings for the great distraction, Mauro Jair Gomes Amorim for getting me a jigsaw and sawing through the text, all the kinderen van mokum for showing other possible ways, everyone of fine arts and in particulier Carla van den Berg, Luca Fedele and Pien Overing. And Arthur Boothby for adding a tousand comma's and correcting all my mistakes.

Sara Ahmed, ***What's the use?***
(Duram and London: Duke university press, 2019)

Ernst van Alphen, ***Seven Logics of sculpture***
(Amsterdam: Vis- a- vis Valiz 2023)

Christopher Bedford, Julia Bryan-Wilson and Wayne Koestenbaum, ***Mika Rottenberg: The Production of Luck***
(Waltham, Mass: Gregory R. Miller & Co in association with the Rose Art Museum, 2014)

Sema Bekirovic and Michael Marder, ***Reading by Osmosis, Nature Interprets Us***
(Rotterdam: Nai010, 2019)

Andy Beckett, ***Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live***
(The guardian 11 Novembre 2017)

Kira Cochrane, ***Interview Phyllida Barlow: 'Just going to art school doesn't make you famous'***
(The Guardian 31/03/ 2014)

Ina Cole, ***Simple Actions: A Conversation with Phyllida Barlow***
(Hauser & wirth Sculpture Magazine 07/02/2018)

Jorge Elices, ***Medieval robots? They were just one of this Muslim inventor's creations***
(National Geographic 30/06/2020)

Lisa le Feuvre, ***Failure Documents of Contemporary Art***,
(Londen and Cambridge Mass: Whitechapel Gallery and The Mit Press, 2010)

Elizabeth Grosz, ***Volatile Bodies***
(London, Routledge, 1994)

Kevin Jack Hagopian, ***What happens to all that food?***
(for Writers Institute, Senior Lecturer in Media Studies at Pennsylvania State University
<https://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/webpages4/filmnotes/fns04n6.html>)

Tanya Harrod, ***CRAFT Documents of Contemporary Art***
(Londen and Cambridge Mass: Whitechapel Gallery and The Mit Press, 2018)

Bruno Latour, ***We have never been modern***, trans. Catherine Porter
(Cambridge: Mass Harvard University Press, 1993)

Bruno Latour Christophe Leclercq, ***Reset MODERNITY!***
(Karlshure and Cambridge, Ma/ Londen, ZKM and The Mit Press, 2016)

Bruno Latour, ***Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory***
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, ***#ACCELERATE the accelerationist reader***
(Fallmouth: Urbanomic and Merve Verlag, 2014)

Gunalan Nadarajan, ***Islamic Automation: A Reading of al-Jazari's The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices (1206)***
(Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization 08/2007)

Constantijn Nieuwehuizen, ***Constant Opstand van de homo ludens***
(Bussem: Paul Brand and J.J. Romen & Zonen, 1969)

George Perec, ***Species of Spaces and Other Pieces***, trans. John Sturrock
(Penguin classics, 1997)

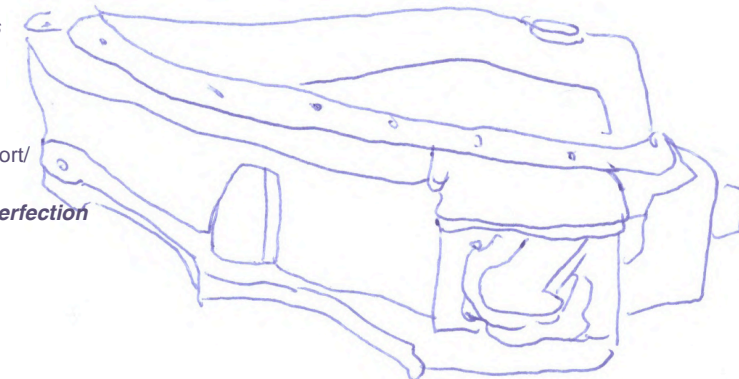
Magali Reus, ***Hot cottons As mist, description***
(Berlin: Sternberg press, Bergen kunsthall, South london gallery, 2018)

Magali Reus
(Zurich: jrp ringer Stedelijk museum Amsterdam and Kunstmuseum St. Gallen)

Warna Oosterbaan, ***Van een werkbank word je een beter mens***
(NRC 10 Februari 2023)

Jessica Stockholder Form ***"Extended Play"***
(Art in Twenty-first century 2005)1.21 min
<https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/jessica-stockholder-form-short/>

Jules Sturm, ***Bodies We Fail: Productive Embodiments of Imperfection***
(Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013)



BA Thesis
Rietveld Fine Arts
2023, Amsterdam

Teachers:

Becket Flannery, Roos Theuws, Ana Navas, Jean Bearneardt Koeman,
Tao Vrhovec Sambolec, Jay Tan, Salim Bayri, Suzanne van de Ven, Isabel Botas
Das Neves Cordeiro, Maarten de Reus, Harry Heijink, Anja Masling, Simone
Bennett, Nirit Peled, Hans Muller, Caspar van Gemund, Vava Stojadinovic,
Christopher Tym, Margriet Kruijver, Mariken Overdijk, Bas Medik, Liesbeth
Pallesen, Tobias Krasenberg, Joram Kraaijeveld, Alena Hudcovicova,
Carla Boomkens, Tammo Schuringa, Paul Gangloff and Marianne Theunissen

Thesis supervisor:
Alena Alexandrova

