



WORDS
IN
FORMATION

Carla Liv Madelung Petersen
Words in Formation
Rietveld Fine Arts
2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	6
They Build a Dazzling World	9
Suggest Whatever Utopia	23
Recognizing Hope	33
Imagine a (Shared) Myth	41
Words Building Worlds	47
Soft Touchdown	55
Bibliography	58

Introduction

With a desire to unlearn language, re-learn words, to re-configure the world we live in and look at, *Words in Formation* declares linguistic aspects of a potential utopian language. Utopian thinking can be the critical re-imagining of the present, considering different aspects, with which we can conceive a better future as a possibility in the present—realms in which the deep past spills into possible futures and imaginary languages, architectures and images.

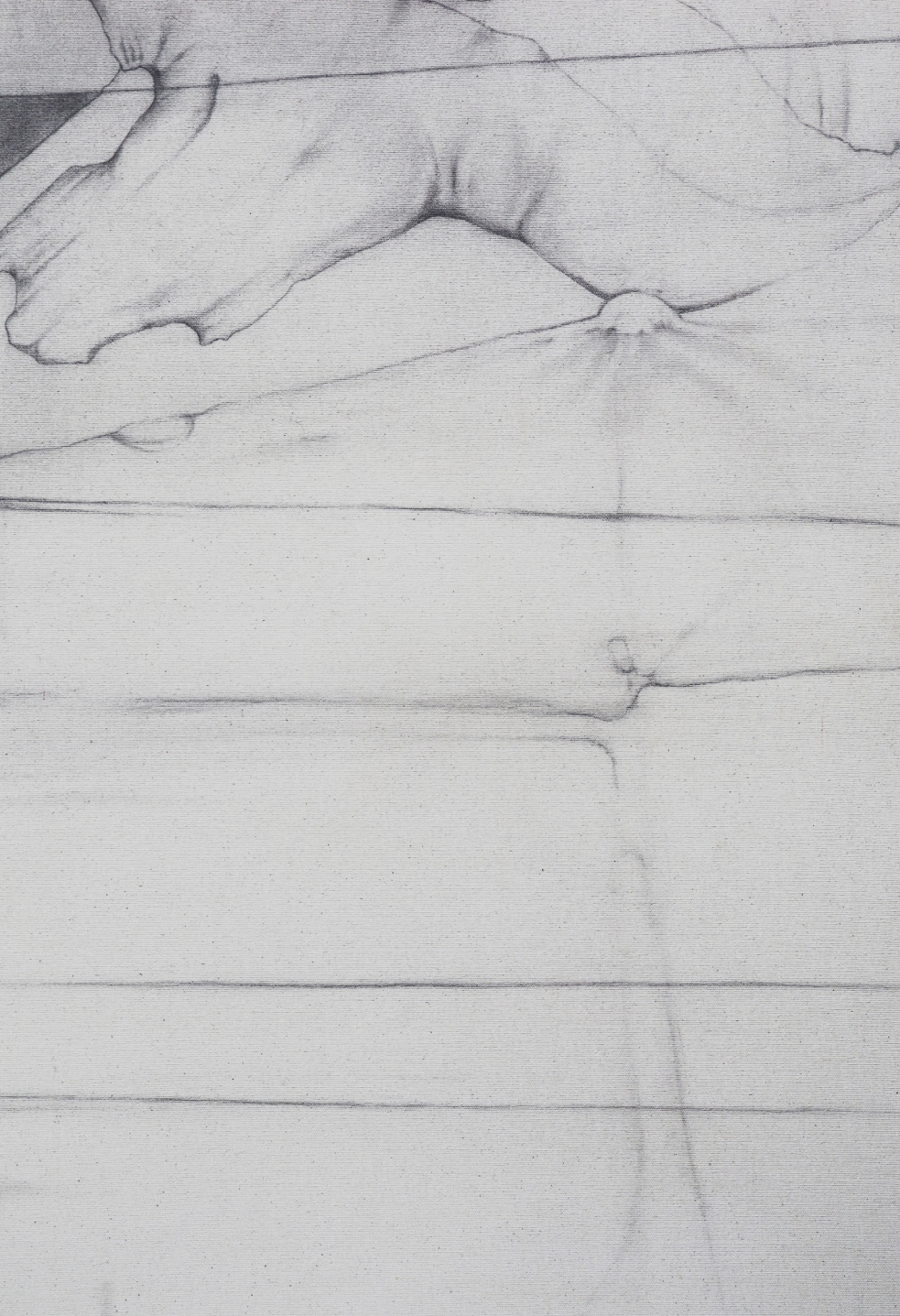
This paper advocates sensibility, heroism, animal spirit, and feminism to fertilize a language with utopian principles. It's a longing for suggestive softness and the interruption of domination to provide the world with a new voice and the emergence of new stories. By reflecting upon a common denominator, even though we can't agree on universal principles, I speculate whether a language should be (could be) universal.

To sense Utopia, I'll sow the soil with beauty, wilderness, hope, and drawings. I will ask what the common tongue is to spread a voice of hope. This Arcadia that I'm interested in is a realm out of time that aims to consume the past and present, to undo and redo, in order to reshape our trajectory for the future.

I engage with the poetics of fiction, as a method and as storytelling, in order to inhabit alternative worlds that are otherwise out of reach: faraway or imaginary places, intimate languages, and a longing for universal yet intimate experiences that suggest alternative environments, of softness and blurriness, of fiction and reality. I express what I think is spectacular or important as an inner reaction toward this world. I don't declare any truths but offer an idea. I suggest imaginative worlds, exploring the synergy of ancient and contemporary art forms. A futuristic anachronism, like an Internet cafe in medieval times or a heavy metal t-shirt worn by a Renaissance woman.

This thesis depends on a wide range of references from prominent artists, thinkers, and writers who serve as inspiration in the research of my material practice and my writing. They are, among others:

Ursula K. Le Guin, Sappho, Agnes Martin, Italo Calvino, Giovanni Piranesi, Étienne-Louis Boullée, Amalie Smith, Emily Dickinson, Max Ernst, Angela Gram, Virginia Woolf, Laure Provoust and Donna Haraway.



They Build a Dazzling World

During the early researching for this paper, I stumbled across *Words are My Matter*: a generous collection of talks, essays, introductions and reviews on fiction and literature. This, inevitably had quite an impact for my research in literary genres. Ursula K. Le Guin is one of the most acclaimed science fiction writers, in large part due to her ability to unfold the story of Being in the world, by experiencing it through the realm of fiction. She tells stories about imaginative worlds and ambiguous utopias. Visions of a better reality, through literature - a reflection on hope, freedom and a devotion to fighting injustice and oppression.

Words are My Matter is a collection of writings on imagination: "an essential tool of the mind, a fundamental way of thinking, an indispensable means of becoming and remaining human."¹

I use my imagination as a tool, in order to open up associations that lead to undefined ideas and pictures, thus relying on one's imagination to fill in the blanks. When you begin to draw what you can't see, smell, touch or hear, you enter the fantastical realm, the product of your imagination.² This way, many weird, but fantastical worlds, creatures and languages have been invented through time. I engage with the poetics of fiction and the vividness of our imagination, to create a whole narrative, a narrative of being.

¹ Ursula K. Le Guin - *Words are My Matter* (USA, Little Beer Press, 2019) p. 4

² "Fandom and Media, Science Fiction Art", In: *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Ed. by Brian Ash (London, Book Club Associates, 1978) p.286

Through my own longing for a utopian feminism, I contemplate society and its cultural symbolism. One way to consider society is to re-invent the past and trace parallels with other worlds. To follow trends into the future, traveling through space and time, a common denominator to all recurrent topics of Science Fiction.³

With her anarcho-feminism, Le Guin delves into the moral seriousness, the daring and the beauty of the Science Fiction genre. The short essay *On Not Reading Science Fiction*, is about the genre's poetic pitfalls and necessity. Most important she pervasively describes why she reads and enjoy Science Fiction:

The vividness, roundness and accuracy of imagination; the playfulness, variety and strength of metaphor; the absence of traditional literary expectations and rigid forms; moral seriousness; wit; daring; and beauty.⁴

She emphasizes beauty, a term I've reflected upon as well: Is beauty a result of subjective perception, imposed by the eyes of the beholder, and if so, does the word then have any meaning, does anything that anyone defines as beautiful qualify as beauty? Or is beauty solely objective, which means that everyone feels a corresponding pleasure, and that would mean that beauty has a universal communicability.⁵ Is it so simple, that what you love is beautiful?

3 Frederik Pohl - "Cities and Cultures", In: *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, p.164

4 Ursula K. Le Guin - *Om ikke at læse science fiction*, trans. Rasmus Brin Pedersen (Copenhagen, Forlaget Virkelig, 2021) p.11 (trans. by me)

5 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on Beauty: *Objectivity and Subjectivity*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/#ObjSubj> (accessed 05/02/2024)

Ancient feminist poet Sappho remarked that "some say thronging cavalry, some say foot soldiers, others call a fleet the most beautiful sights the dark world offers, but I say it's whatever you love best"⁶ She introduces herself best: "My name is Sappho. My song surpasses the song of women as Homer's the song of men."⁷

With her desire for women, love and beauty, her search resembles mine: one of female longing.

Beauty created the vitality of an object, threatening the commonplace, the matter-of-fact, and the dull. The un-aesthetic is not the ugly, but the dreary, as it does not command any attention. Beauty directs our desire to learn, understand and possess - to sense vitality. Longing for the perfect little thing, that responds to your heart and connects with your mood. Beauty is indispensable, an inherent part of human experience, as it serves as a catalyst for certain feelings. The beautiful thing is desire, that is constantly looking for nuances and possibilities for contemplation and reflection. To responds with beauty is not the use of an extreme vocabulary,⁸ but the power we gain from beauty is developed by sensibility, a power we should reinvest with our own purpose.⁹

The strength of our mind and imagination lies in the ability to conceive of something beautiful. When we start to collaborate with our imagination, beauty becomes irreducible and endless like desire.

6 Sappho, "Fragment 16", *Love Shook My Senses. Lesbian Love Poems*, Ed. Gillian Spraggs, (London, The Women's Press, 1998)

7 Sappho, *The Complete Poems of Sappho* - Trans. and Ed. by Willis Barnstone (Boston, Shambhala Publication, 2009)

8 Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Whatever Happened to Beauty? A Response to Danto // 1996", In: *Beauty - Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Dace Beech (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009) p. 34

9 Suzanne Perling Hudson, "Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism" with quote by Felix Gonzales-torres, 1994, In: *Beauty - Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Dave Beech (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009) p.50

A story, a work of art that possesses depth and internal beauty, can serve as a means to understand and navigate the world. Beauty is not a moral attitude, is rather free from outrage, but not from judgement. The internal connection between beauty and awareness, sans the possible to reflect our mood and motions and leads the way for a positive work of art and attitude.

I follow Agnes Martin, when she contends that beauty is an awareness in the mind and a mental and emotional response to life. Beauty teaches hope, a threat to futility and unhappiness. Not to say that the lack of beauty produces these discomforts, but with the awareness of beauty, we are able to grasp happiness and joy within a complicated matter. "The development of sensibility, the response to beauty"¹⁰ can be perceived as a lucid description of Agnes Martin's approach to the material and the profound experience we undergo when encountering her works. Her writings and paintings seem to parallel each other, and beauty serving as a clear voice in both regards. Composition formulated as a grid. A horizontal landscape, that touches with a pervasive sensibility. Bright colors, a notion of a hue, blend with geometrical shapes, and conceptualize the works in the minimalistic context. No attempt is made to represent an outside reality; the work is perceived as an awareness in the mind.

¹⁰ Agnes Martin, "The Untroubled Mind", *Paintings and Drawings*, Ed. by Marja Bloem, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, English trans. Don Bloch, Marja Bloem, Brigitte Kalthoff (Eindhoven: Lecturis, 1991)

*Beauty is pervasive
inspiration is pervasive
we say this rose is beautiful
and when this rose is destroyed then we have lost something
so that beauty has been lost
when the rose is destroyed we grieve
but really beauty is unattached
and a clear mind sees it
the rose represents nature
but it isn't the rose
beauty is unattached: it's inspiration - it's inspiration
the development of sensibility, the response to beauty¹¹*



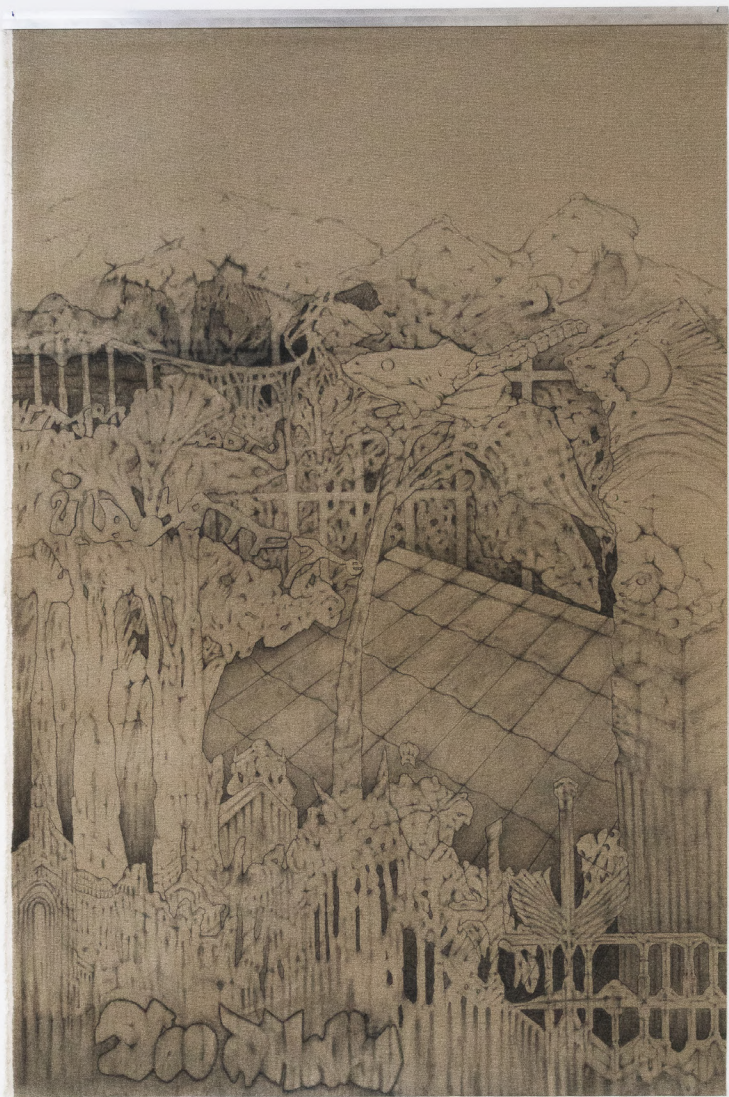
I Love the Whole World, Agnes Martin 1999

Beauty thrives in wilderness and order. In between those poles, exist the etchings of Italian architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi. His Views of Rome show fragments of architecture's encounter with natural forces. It is an alluring combat that arises between uncontrolled growth and decayed architecture. A modulation between art and science, with a poetic quality in the imagined ruins, sets the frame of mere fantasy that embraces the monumental sublime. The fantastical pieces of monumental classical architecture explore the possibilities of perspective and spatial illusion.

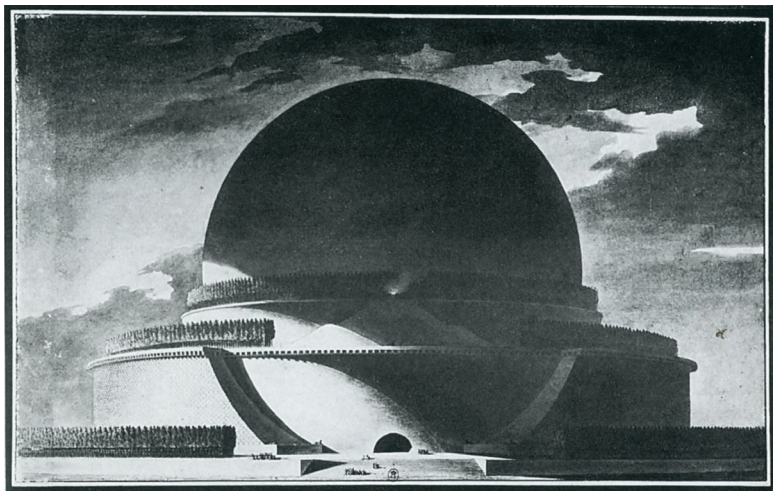


The Baths of Caracalla, interior of the central hall. (1757) Giovanni Battista Piranesi

I'm responding to his universe by composing my own: *Receipt of a View*. My drawing is a nostalgic longing for fantastical tales, as the known and the now can seem so intangible. I find solace in the images of infinite places that resemble the order of nature, the paradigm of beauty. It is a testimony of a coexistence between chaos and order within nature and architectural geometry.



The classical Western conception of beauty is that beauty appears as a unified entity, an arrangement of integral parts of harmony, symmetry, and proportions.¹² The 18th century witnessed the emergence of exceptional architects who formulated beauty within architectural proportions. The French architect Étienne-Louis Boullée immortalized the futuristic, neoclassical architecture with mesmerizing drawings. He theorized beauty through regularity, symmetry, and variety in the geometric forms, with domes proportioned so overwhelmingly that the grandeur is undeniable. This dark architecture allows the incidence of light to outline the shadows. The drawings illustrate the supreme sublime - dark beauty.



Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton (1784), Étienne-Louis Boullée

The work of Boullée stimulates the need to embrace the grandeur and immensity of the natural world, like we see in the project of the cenotaph, as a hollow globe representing the Universe. The surroundings succumb to

¹² Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on Beauty: *The Classical Conception*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/#ClasConc> (accessed 07/02/2024)

something else to rise, in the stereotomic architecture, where everything in nature seems to strive towards perfection. The regularity and symmetry representing order serve as a pleasing element and clarification within the architectural imagination. The impact of Classicism, in both Boullée and Piranesi's work, serves as a language of humanism that aims to visualize a sense of beauty. Piranesi's world is composed of no particular order, in contrast to the symmetry of Boullée. Still, despite the difference, I consider both architects to formulate utopian architecture from a dreamer's perspective.



Still from *Metropolis* (1927)

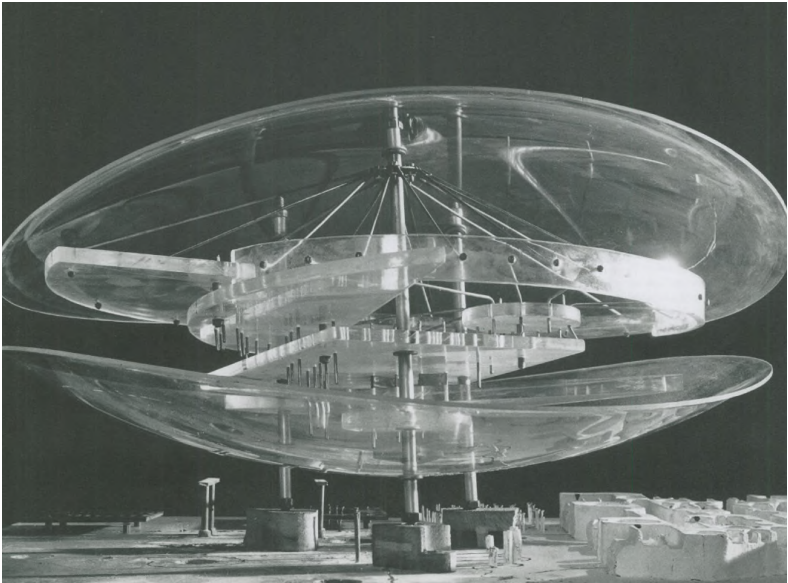
Architectural utopias, as well as dystopias, are formulated in drawings, movies, and models. Fritz Lang's seminal picture, *Metropolis* from 1927, is set in a dystopian city of the future, where hope, fear, and enthusiasm for technology tell the story of a society marred by differences in class. Scenes of workers, human machines,

articulate a critical state of human labor and the inequality between the working class and the elite. We inhabit a divided world, where the working class toils beneath the ground while the upper class thrives in skyscrapers, a vertically up-rising city. In contrast to the drab utilitarian locales of the working class is the sublime cityscape of the far future, made with theatrical set designs that are exaggerated and visually superior. Various art movements influenced the optics: prominently among them Art Deco, Futurism, and Gothicism, unfolding the dark beauty of a faded futurism that sucks you into dazzling architectural landscapes.

The architectural landscape of a vertical city-planning, New Babylon, was a project that, through extensive models, described utopian desires for a city freed from the permanence and uniformity of property, which presume the socialization of the earth's surface. Constant Nieuwenhuys worked on a vast imagined automated society that would free human life from utilitarianism and monotonous human labor.

New Babylon is a layered city: automated factories would be underground, the surface level would be for transport, and a landscape for permanent play would be situated above the construction. It is a nomadic city—a world in flux, where citizens themselves determine optimal spatial utilization, devoid of fixed elements and grounded in collective principles. Non-fixed behavior, akin to utopian ideals, is the principle where ideas remain in circulation and hold suggestions and possibilities to foster alternative modes of thinking. The theory of cybernetics, formulated by American mathematician and philosopher Norbert Wiener influenced Constant's vision of an automated society. Wiener defined cybernetics as "the science of control and communications in the

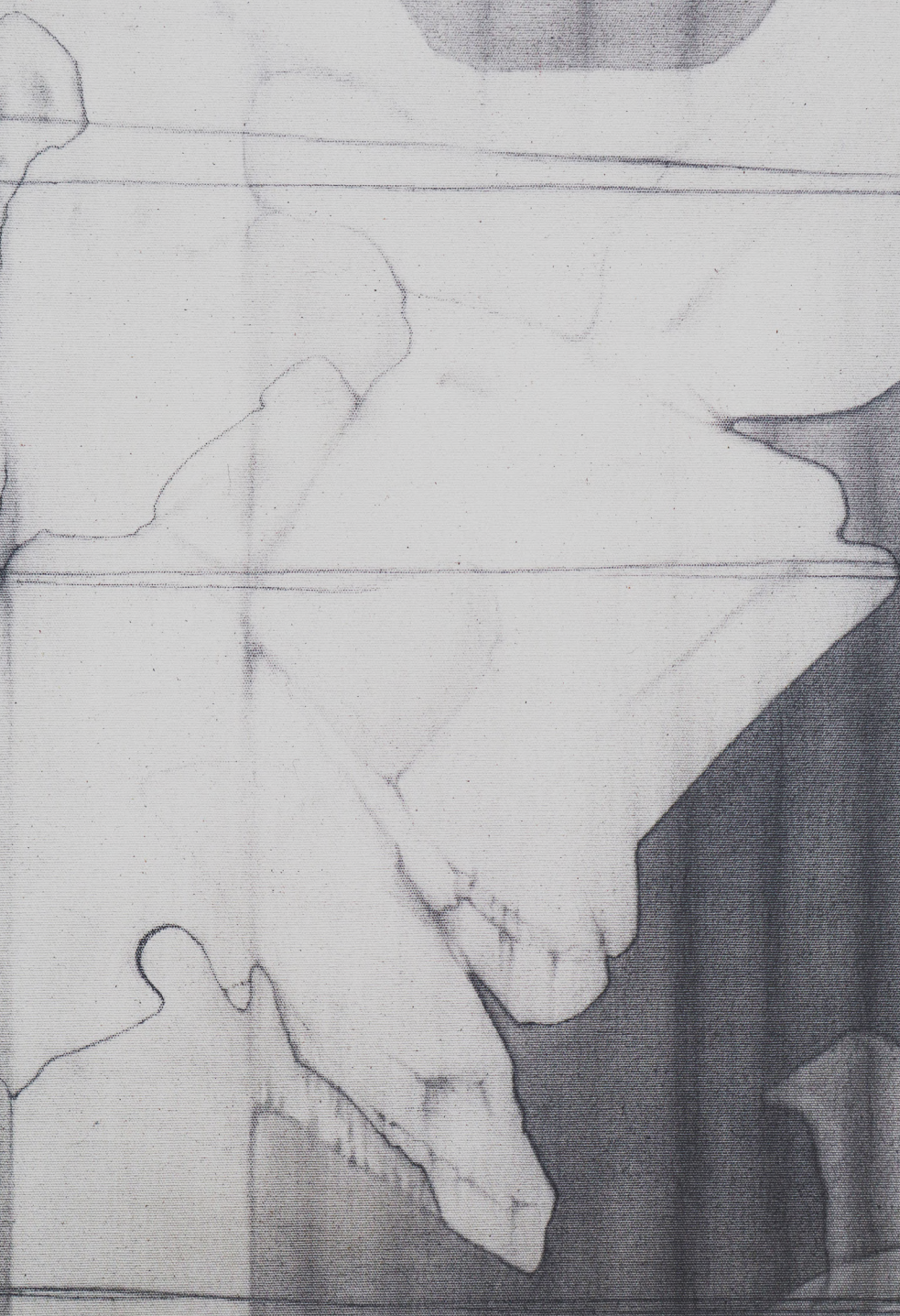
animal and machine,”¹³ particularly Wiener’s notion of a second industrial revolution, with cybernetic automation to develop and reconfigure space — the cybernetic imaginary: the relationship between control and autonomy. The cybernetics is located as the administered control below ground. Cybernetics as freedom is the ability to connect anywhere, anytime.¹⁴ New Babylon is a utopia on the level of infrastructure.



New Babylon (1956-1974) Constant Nieuwenhuys

13 Encyclopedia Britannica, article on *Cybernetics*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/cybernetics> (accessed 17/03/2024)

14 Ali Dur, McKenzie Wark, “New New Babylon”, in *October Magazine*, (138): 37–56. (Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011)



Suggest Whatever Utopia

To narrate the dreams of the future, let us begin with the concept of Utopia. The word derives from Greek οὐ (not) and τόπος (place), no place, to describe an imaginary place.¹⁵ The old social utopia, the best state, is described by Thomas More in his 1516 treaty *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia*, as a goal and the realm of conscious dreaming.¹⁶ Utopia is born for a desire of something better. We know the term as a social utopia, dreams of a better life, through the state's maintenance of social order. There are the older levels of utopia, the imaginary places which are told through folktales, fairy tales and myths. Fantasies about non-places or places of our dreams, lands of fabulous riches of gold.¹⁷

Do we need to find a common language to spread the word? I speculate with a utopian attitude, for a language which names a new vision of possibilities and limits. But since utopia and dystopia go hand in hand - one man's trash is another man's treasure, after all - the communist's utopia is dystopia for the fascist and so on; therefore, the utopian dream of a common language, will not appear within a totalized universalized form. Whatever utopia is, or can be imagined to be, I interpret the utopian language, to be a radical transformation within a detached language.

15 Encyclopedia Britannica, article on *Utopia*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/utopia> (accessed 14/12/2023)

16 Theodor Adorno and Ernst Block, "Something's Missing", In: *Utopia - Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Richard Noble (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 51

17 *El Dorado*, the golden one, is a myth of a land, of pure gold and proper wealth. In this utopia gold is a rather aesthetic value, the beauty of gold has replaced the monetary value.

I see the utopian language to be both nowhere at no time and anywhere at any time, thus 'out of time.' Esperanto, Interlingua, and Volapük, their invention witness a desire for a utopian language, of something that can appear beyond time and place, not to replace the native but to create a language to communicate between people in no-and-any-place.

Volapük etymologically means 'World Speak,' i.e., a language of the World. However, equivalent to gibberish in English is the word preserved in Danish as broken or otherwise incomprehensible speech. A meaningless sentence or utterance is a text without the smallest unit of meaning, with no information or verbal content being provided, but suggesting that the reader interpret and meaning to occur beyond linguistic understanding.

Esperanto, which means 'one who hopes,' was designed to be easy to learn, with simple grammar and phonetic spelling. Its lexicon had a Romantic influence, while the syntax and morphology resembled those of Slavic and Germanic languages. It would unite the World through a common tongue, designed as a politically neutral and culturally free language.¹⁸ The intention seems to bring peace through understanding each other by means of words, which is a beautiful gesture. Still, the appearance of these 'artificial' languages is now forgotten and rarely used.

Let us look at non-stringent linguistic behavior in the search for utopia. A language that is not in order possesses freedom and suggestions that appear absurd and with irrational meanings to reshape and recreate the familiar.

¹⁸ Robert Patterson, Stanley M. Huff, "The Decline and Fall for Esperanto," In: *JAMIA*. 1999;6, p.444-446. <https://academic.oup.com/jamia/article/6/6/457/779414> (accessed 16/01/2024)

An intimate, private language, which occasionally verges on nonsense, occurs in Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics*.

Cosmicomics is a subgenre of science fiction with mesmerizing narrations that expand time and place and appear beyond our realm of understanding. It blends scientific principles with fantasy and imagination. *Cosmicomics* portrays absurdity, an effortless dismantling of normality and reality.

All at One Point is a story before the univers began to expand in space. The story takes place in a metaphorical sardine can, to indicate how packed everything was, when all the universe's matter was concentrated in one single point. Calvino uses absurdity to tell the story of how we were all there from the very beginning, but the ones he remembers most were: "Mrs Ph(i)Nk0, her friend De Xuaeaux, a family of immigrants by the name of Z'zu, and Mr. Pber[†] Pber^d (...)." ¹⁹

The unpronounceable names read as an obvious abstraction to his storytelling, and the legibility becomes succinct when the lyrics veer toward more suggestive writing. The narrator is known as Qfwfq.²⁰ It indicates a fictional detachment that veers towards a suggestive manner of understanding language. The realm of his abstractions and the obviousness within his stories is the humorous voice that intensifies absurdity. It is luring storytelling with a casualness or offhand manner that I enjoy the absurdity and inherent nonsense as it presents itself so cheekily.

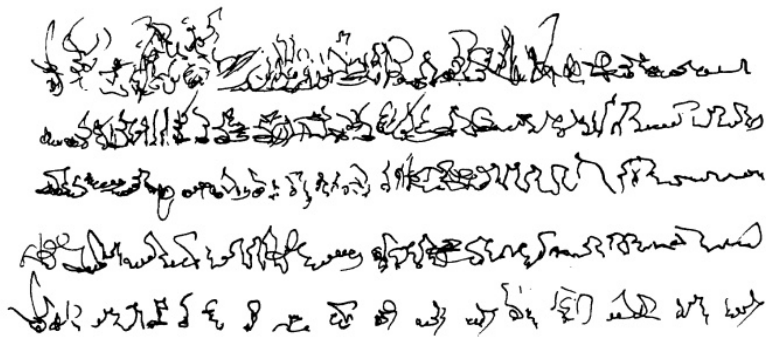
19 Italo Calvino, "All at One Point," *Cosmicomic* (Great Britain: Little Clothbound Classics, Penguin Classics 2022) p. 48-54

20 The name "Qfwfq" is a palindrom and may be an allusion to the first law of thermodynamics; substituting = for f gives Q=W=Q, which describes a heat engine. Wikipedia, article on Qfwfq, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qfwfq>

However, abstraction is not about simplifying or extracting. It is about intensifying the specific features or the very literal. Calvino mentions the Z'zus, an 'immigrant' family, that the others have wronged by calling them immigrants since the others were there first. But since the story takes place before the Big Bang, and everything is concentrated in one single point, no such place exists to migrate from or to. This concept of immigration must be understood as an abstraction outside of regular time and space. There exists an element of familiarity and normality within Calvino's narratives, even as they wholeheartedly embrace the realms of the absurd, the invisible, and the fantastical.

An unpronounceable name like Qfwfq²¹ or other kinds of compound letters seems like a relatively or truly asemic code language, where letters start to transcend the boundaries of conventional legibility. Asemic writing does not rely on phonetics; it simply mimics the notion of writing that places the reader in a state between reading and looking, without an oral translation. Asemic writing or suggestive writing can simulate calligraphy and appear as a seimographic system, an automatic writing as we see in the work of Henri Michaux.

21 The concept of an unpronounceable name appears in DC comics already in 1944 with the troublesome and mischievous archenemy of Superman, Mr. Mxyzptlk, which must have been an inspiration for Calvino. Mr. Mxyzptlk is not evil, sometimes he is presented as a supervillain and sometimes as an anti-hero, regardless a playful and omnipotent trickster. He sees the universe from a meta-perspective, with the ability to distort reality, and the only way he can be stopped is by tricking him into saying or spelling his own name backwards, which will return him to the fifth dimension, where he is from.



Narration, Henri Michaux (1927)

Reading is following the order in alphabetical sequences and the instruction in literacy. Reading absorbs language through the eyes, where phonetic principles are the unique features that deny traditional neglecting of voice and dialect in literacy. Each letter has its own sound. In addition to the sound of language, silent speech is in the reading process. An inner voice that, during inward reading, can be measured as weak electrical activity in the speech-related muscles, thus a practice of 'silent speech.'²²

22 Amalie Smith, *Læsningsens Anatomi* - Trans. *The Anatomy of Reading* (Copenhagen: Emancipa(t)ss)ionsfrugten, 2012) p.30

Amalie Smith examines aspects of language. Through theory interwoven with an intimate diary-like form, she dissects the act of reading to understand the inherent structure of reading. Approaching something with a dissecting intention is an in-depth analysis that requires sensitivity toward the subject to emphasize the subject's distinctive characteristics. Examining the anatomy of reading is an essential scientific approach to any topic in which one might wish to immerse oneself.

The potential of suggestive softness - what does it mean to have a voice? Smith's 'silent speech' could be considered a voice for our sensible mind that doesn't harm or offend nor make itself heard. It is a voice we share through understanding each others' presence. It is a common tongue that could bring about peace, like softness as a new means of power - as a promise we give each other. The inner voice will suggest a sense of utopia.

That utopia: to offer without determining²³ (trans. by me) is a manifestation of suggestions, as they embrace imprecision, allowing for fluidity and evolving behaviors while maintaining an openness to the unforeseen. I've taken this utopia of suggestions to heart — the phrase stem from the book *Læsningens Anatomi* written by Amalie Smith. In the world of poetic expression, suggestive writing is a realm of an open language that hints rather than dictates. It's an aesthetic strategy, like a note form, that acts as a mysterious allure of a coded language.

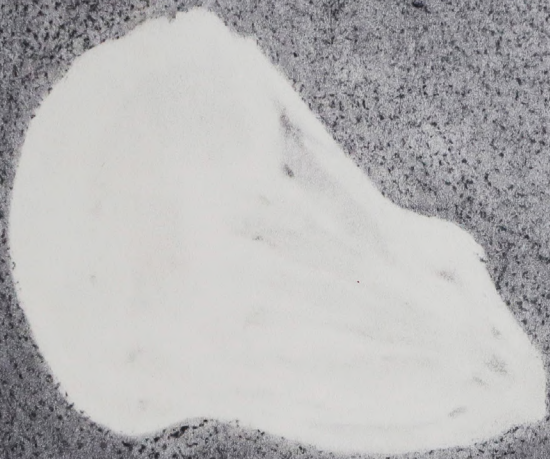
23 Amalie Smith, *Læsningens Anatomi* - Trans. *The Anatomy of Reading*, p.12

phonetics forgotten

asmr

amidst silence

mortal reality



Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, written in a dark ink on a textured surface. The text is somewhat obscured by the texture and appears to be written in a cursive or stylized font.

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, written in a dark ink on a textured surface. The text is somewhat obscured by the texture and appears to be written in a cursive or stylized font.





Recognizing Hope

I recognize the feeling of hope, a rapture, and a subtle longing for what seems somehow reachable. And where does it exist? Hope exists in literature, art, and other good inventions, in well-made works, honest works, and well-written words, according to Le Guin. Hope is most likely not in the message since the message may vary depending on the receiver. The message is often redundant, surely subjective. Hope is in the materials, the context, the presentation, and the representation. Hope is in the freedom of the detachment of conventional systems. Hope is the holistic approach to the environment; it's in rethinking our relationship with the land and alternative systems. Hope is in fiction. It's in the infinity and finitude in drawings and other stories. I see drawing as writing a story. And it is simply what it is; it is lines of pencil that suggest the incompleteness; this is where I find hope.

Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 anime fantasy is set in a post-nuclear futuristic world 1000 years after the fall of industrial society. It unfolds the narrative of a unifier, Nausicaa. A female equivalent of a legend and the princess of Valley of the Wind. She represents pacifism and harmony, which fulfills hope for the villagers. A warfare between small kingdoms, compounded by an ecological war where poisons and viruses are considered the paramount enemy, threatens the harmony between humanity and nature. Nausicaa communicates with the menace - the giant insects. Her gentle appearance, soft voice, and pure soul serve as a unifying force between humans and nature.

The greatest weapon is eliminating oppression with love, hope, and kindness. I suggest re-approaching Nausicaa as a symbol of hope, the savior with a soft voice. She is carried by the feathers, the Möwe fly, a glider that refers to the shape of a bird. Specifically, it relates to a seagull, the queens of up-cycling, and the unheroic heroes as they protect their young with ferocity and fearlessness.

The seagulls scream shrilly, like crying birds, as they fly above. They are not the ones with soft voices and suggestive manners, but they can fly, a prototype of freedom. The ultimate freedom is to move through time and space, soaring, only interrupted by wind resistance. Layers of feathers and their ethereal levity and tickling sensation carry hope within the airiness.

'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers is a poem by Emily Dickinson. "That perches in the soul. And sings the tune without the words. And never stops at all."

The bird is used to portray our capacity to find hope within ourselves. The notion of hope assists us in getting through, even surviving; it's the internal voice that sings the loudest, even in the worst noise. It exists in the farthest country and the tiniest cell; it exists within ourselves. If it's strong enough, it can drown out the horror. Hopefully, we won't search in vain to cure the lack of hope that will cause the pain. Nausicaa is the little bird that sings a tune in the most powerful storm. I associate her with the white bird for purity, innocence, peace, and freedom. She is the protector that carries the hope.

*'Hope' is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops - at all*

*And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm*

*I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest Sea
Yet - never - in Extremity
It asked a crumb - of me²⁴*



“People like to look at animals, even to learn from them about human beings and human society.”²⁵

The figurative symbol of the animal is a way to describe human conditions, emotions, and movements. In myths, the protagonist is often an anthropomorphic animal, which conducts cultural symbolism and psychological depth. It is a primordial dialogue in history in which the natural world and animals narrate human behavior. Through animal imagery, we narrate within reality to define and redefine our values, ideologies, and identity in a political context and as a personal matter. The non-human actors serve with universal communicability; we recognize them, and thus, they assist us in understanding the world we look at and live in. Through nonhuman actors, we inhabit the fantastical worlds that can shape our understanding and perception of reality. If we reconstruct mythology into social realism, who would play the dragon? Organized religion? Unbridled greed? Shortsighted patriarchy? We search for possible symbolism and moral understanding to understand the world of phenomena and the complexity of existence.

Surrealist interpretations of the natural world exist in the works of Max Ernst. Ernst was a drawer, a sculptor, and an originator of Surrealism. *Fireside Angel*, originally titled *Triumph of Surrealism*, was painted in 1937 after the Fascist victory over the Spanish Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. Ernst's grotesque figure depicts the political events, chaos, and destruction after fascism's tremendous rise in Europe (from the 1920s onward).²⁶

25 Donna Haraway, "The Reinvention of Nature", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1991) p.21

26 The Art Story, *Max Ernst*, www.theartstory.org/artist/ernst-max/, (accessed 21/01/2024)

The painting depicts a creature with fierce ferocity, stomping with a horseshoe, a dragon-like face, and a bird's claw. Clad in vivid colors, with a wildness in barbaric formation, narrates the creature in a transition to the present time.



Fireside Angel, Max Ernst (1937)

I want to juxtapose *Fireside Angel* with *Spiral* by Angela Gram. Gram is a contemporary artist who depicts the natural world and the animals within, intertwined with humanity, an anthropomorphism that attributes human characteristics to non-human entities. She elevates the primordial historical topic of non-human characters that function as sociological or cultural symbols.

Gram's work explores the present condition of the relationship wherein the realm of the mind distorts, allegorizes, and projects onto animals in diverse manners.²⁷ *Spiral* shows eagles and birds swarming around each other in different positions. Wings are proudly spread in

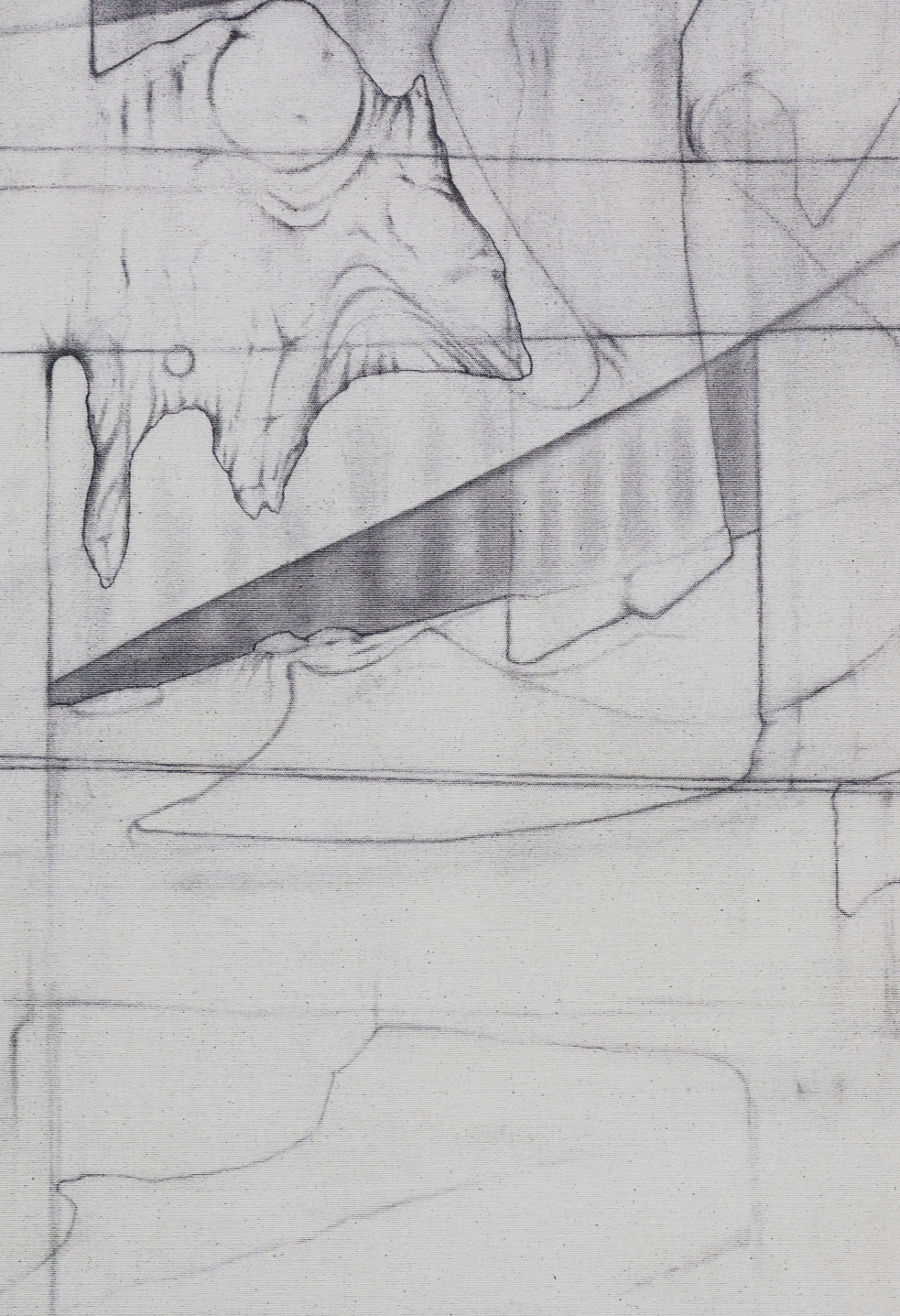
²⁷ Angela Gram, *Gallery Poulsen*, www.gallerypoulsen.com/en/artist/angela-gram (accessed 20/01/2024)

a triumphant position, while others are folded for protection.

I look at Gram's work and am convinced that the birds show transformation and movement as an inner struggle or a more extensive sociological matter. In both paintings, the animals constitute the majority of the composition. In Gram's painting, a white sail on a little boat simulates vulnerabilities and peace, making me look at the birds as a silent gathering, the tiptoe of a battle. I do see harmony, though violence exists as well. I consider a torn piece of white cloth in Ernst's painting a call for peace, especially given the time he made the painting. The horizontal lines hold brightness and glory. It is very distant, yet in our eyeline when we look ahead. The horizontal line is the future, which could possess brightness, but only if we realize in wilderness, disorder, and chaos; only then will the colors of our dreams and the bright future seem achievable.



Spiral, Angela Gram (2023)



Imagine a (Shared) Myth

Ursula K. Le Guin reconfigures the world through fiction and theory by showing how we might re-word our world.²⁸ *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* evokes the idea of rewriting the history of human evolution. It is an unheroic story about the carrier bag: a tool to gather and collect, instead of the sword and bow's killing and hurting. "A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container. A holder. A recipient."²⁹ She redefines technology and science as a cultural carrier bag rather than a weapon of domination.

Le Guin refers to Virginia Woolf's writings about redefinition and reinvention of English words in order to tell a different story. Woolf defines heroism as 'botulism' in her glossary as a supplement to the English Dictionary. Le Guin evokes the idea of a stringent re-evaluation. "I now propose the bottle as hero."³⁰ With this explanation, I understand that the carrier bag, the bottle, is the hero in the history of human evolution. It's not the dagger, firearm, or any other weapon of domination that is the primary tool telling the story of human evolution. Through her theory, we gain an alternative connection to the history of the past and the emerging narratives of the future. One based on creation and community, rather than destruction and rivalry, something more appealing to be rooted in.

28 Ursula K. Le Guin - *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Preface: Sarah Shin, Ben Vickers (London, Literary Trust, 2019) p.1

29 Ibid. p.29

30 Ibid. p.28

Rewriting human emergence within a feminist reappropriation of history will center the stories of the others. Reimagining common history will enable us to tell 'the other story, the untold one, the life story.'³¹

Through words, we excavate meaning, and we shape our reality. In the discourse of human evolution, confusion arises in language, as it appears as if the male and the human or the male and the neutral figure are the same, as if language is trying to make man disappear into the human. In this process, everyone else becomes clearly labeled as Other.³² Only with a radical widening of definitions can we deconstruct, thus analyze, a traditional scientific interpretation of meaning and history. To deconstruct traditional history will not mean deleting or forgetting previously told stories. Still, it means hearing the tales of those who gathered berries and protected the little ones—the ones who sang amidst the storm and fostered hope through troubled times.

In an attempt to render justice, deconstruction can be the critical and questioning position to interrogate the dominance of certain hegemonies. With language comes the mastery of power; with this power comes the ability to impose certain structures upon reality in a socially political context. Language can serve as taxonomy, a tool for classification that leads us to name things and to force meaning. Language is not innocent, as it contributes to maintaining binary divisions between subject and object, male and female, science and fiction. Binary divisions are power hierarchies that promote a basis for judgmental and inappropriate arrogance.

31 Ibid. Introduction by Donna Haraway, p.10

32 Mads Ananda Lodahl - *Upassende Opførsel* (DK, Forlaget Solidaritet, 2018) p.54

Jacques Derrida used deconstruction to describe and reveal the binary system in our language that structure our thinking and are so ingrained that we no longer question them. Deconstruction is the critical and questioning stance, to analyze the thing, the system, their possibilities and limitations. Deconstruction is not about dismantling for the sake of violating a system, but rather asserting absolute dominance of one mode over another. It means to analyse the thing and their history, to track reasons and effects. It does not seek to make any system better, but it serves to disclose that the starting point of a system is not a naturally given but cultural construct. A definition of deconstruction is closely related to the word 'analysis' which etymologically means 'to undo'.³³

Feminism is a search for new stories, and for a language that seeks to deviate from binary hierarchies and power structures. A feminist deconstruction is an intimate experience of boundaries that aims to challenge the informatics of domination. The feminist reappropriation of deconstruction aims to confront epistemological universalism, which maintains artificial and constructed hierarchies. Both terms, deconstruction, and feminism, suggest a way out of the polar domination that otherwise inevitably will create hierarchies and promote ignorance.

American biologist and feminist theorist Donna Haraway has sought to develop a critical feminist approach to the link between gender, technoscience, and global power structures. She is concerned with deconstructing the divisions that have determined the hierarchization of gender, such as nature/culture, living/dead, human/non-human.

33 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* - Trans. and Introduction by Barbara Johnson (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.) p.14

In the essay: *A cyborg manifesto: science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century*, Haraway presents the cyborg:

"A cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation."³⁴

The cyborg represents a hybrid between a machine and a living organism, a creature, both human and animal, and of reality and fiction. It merges nature and culture into one body, blurring the lines between them and denying the idea of essentialism and dualism. It seeks to contribute to reconstructing the boundaries that have determined what is 'natural' and what is constructed by a capitalist patriarchy. Haraway uses the cyborg to present her vision of a world transcending sexual differences. The feminist cyborg is a myth that transgresses boundaries and rejects patriarchal ideas based on a natural matrix or unity. The cyborg myth will argue against the construction of the whole, the production of a universal, totalizing theory.

The myth of the cyborg is a myth of a political voice, a political language, by now not a common language, but the language of a powerful infidel heteroglossia.³⁵ We choose ourselves which myth we want to rely on. Feminism is a myth, like patriarchy or science. The myth system

34 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" - *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p.5-7

35 Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, p. 67-68

is a proto-political language, challenging how we view science and particular hegemonies' dominance.³⁶ Relying on the myths that deconstruct the inherent structure and examining the possibilities of technical and ordinary words is a way out of the maze of determined (and determinist) language. We can create a new sense of purpose, meaning, and belonging by telling tales of redefinitions and reinventions of words and objects. Instead of understanding the objects, the thing that outlines history with a linear meaning, we must learn to interpret things in an attempt to make common sense. To expose your own thinking to deconstruction is one step closer to imagining a world where we will properly recognize the indeterminacy, the openness of interpretation, and the importance of difference.

I hope the stories from progressive tongues will travel from mouth to mouth, as through myth-making we reinvent the world.

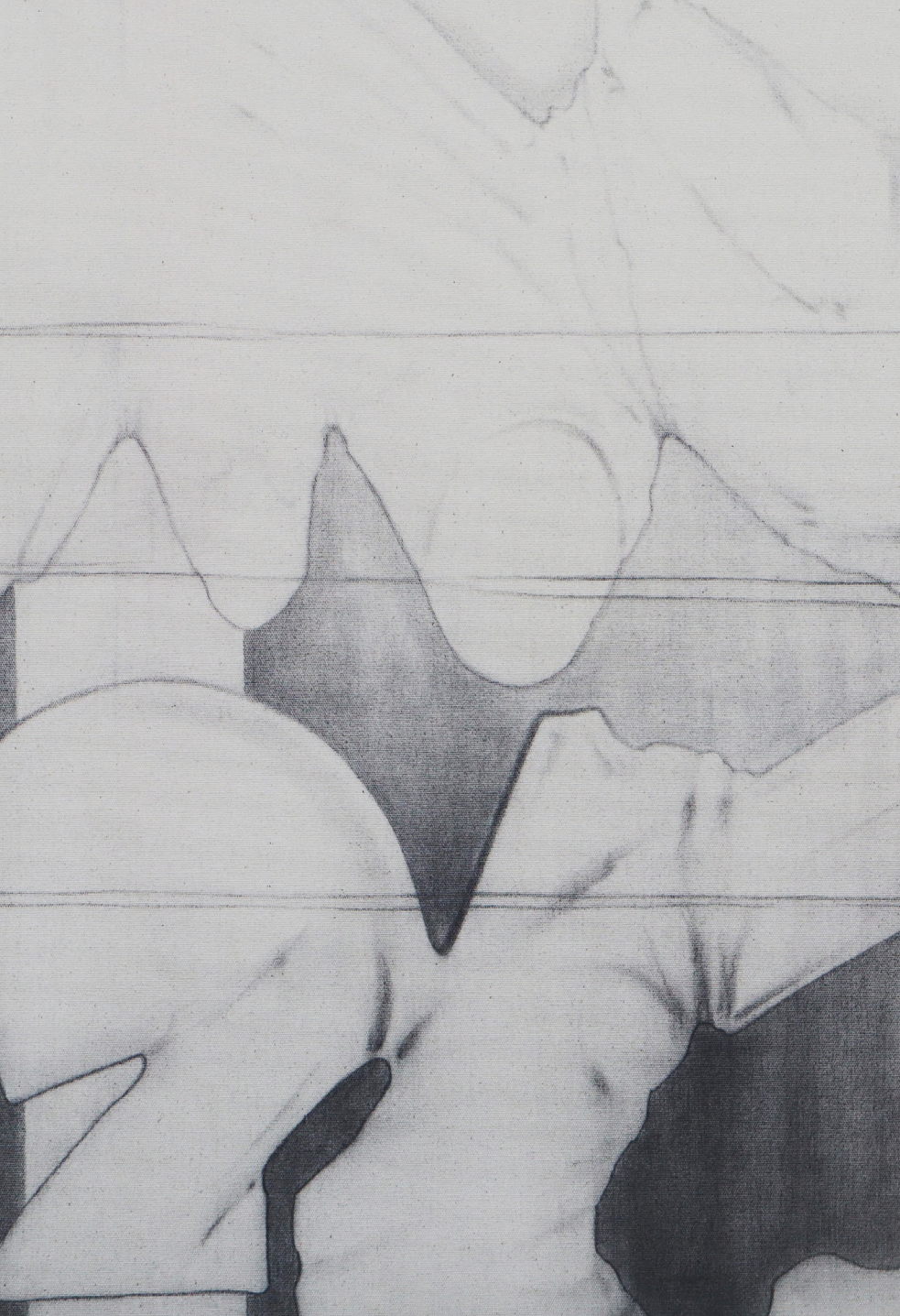
Myths

*All would
say
that my tongue
tells tales*

*and for a greater
man³⁷*

³⁶ Ibid. p.66

³⁷ Sappho, *The Complete Poems of Sappho*



Words Building Worlds

Everything I do has been done before.

Therefore, I redo.

Systems are intriguing to deconstruct.

Hence, I undo.

Undo dualism, to release words from their constraints. Although systems may appear fixed, I find possibilities in reinventing language systems since words possess the ability to evoke meaning and emotions beyond their explicit definitions. I find undoing interesting, in terms of not repeating, to overcome the fundamental issue of stagnation, that history seems to bring along. Undoing is also a way of learning. Unlearning the abundance and overconsumption of the planet's resources. Unlearning power, to let a sensible intuition of things and space be the catalyst, for a future of hope. I look to unlearn the inherent understanding of an object, to dismantle the order of things and reassemble it with newfound associations and meanings. For what seems more intriguing than to dissect the inherent system through ceaseless striving motions of alternatives. A dissection and further dismantling, in order to build and renew. Let's delve into the realm of reinventing words and their meanings to unveil 'the other story'. Let's play with language, assuming language can be played with, to challenge the ingrained perceptions and to achieve freedom from the detachment.

Laura Prouvost uses language to create new relations. She establishes a new context, a condition for the receiver, as a deviating perception of the familiar. Detachment is embodied in Prouvost's object alphabet. Her works address themes of unfamiliar worlds and imaginings of alternative environments. Interwoven storylines that combine fiction and reality, alienating familiar symbols or situating new relations by pushing commonplace and expected connections and associations between language, image, and perception.³⁸ In her work, she suggests possibilities by hinting at imaginative sequences in our perceptions of already existing objects. She redefines words in relation to the meaning and the image.

In the work *Re-de-en-un-learning*, she suggests the icon of a goat to be interpreted as YOU. The ideographic icon of the goat is no longer a goat. You must un-learn previous associations to understand the goat as YOU.

This means love is a new ideographic language, a 'Legsicon' of 160 pages of anthropomorphized objects transcribed with new meaning that challenges the conventional systems of linguistics and representation. It's an object alphabet that requires the audience to de-code and re-interpret. I like the subverted behavior that provokes the ingrained perceptions, by using the language as a tool for the imagination to get lost in translation of miscommunication, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation.

38 Laure Prouvost, *Lisson Gallery* <https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/laure-prouvost> (accessed 21.10.2023)

I would like to introduce a self-invented word, *Slamfishing*. The word is intimate, since it's not known by many. Slamfishing seeks to track the act of oversharing, miscommunication, fanning the flame of conflict - typically on others' behalf. A wordplay that does not find its place in the conventional system of language, but that could be preserved in the Urban Dictionary.³⁹ A quirky and untamed word, just like the rest of the self-invented slangs, cultural words and phrases that you will stumble upon on the anti-elitist platform. The concept of slamfishing evokes misunderstanding and confusion. Some will ask for a definition, while other will pretend to know the word, as no one wants to be perceived as clueless. And let them pretend, or let them invent. New definitions and meaning can occur. The word was created as a gesture for possibilities, as when malapropism breeds new metaphors.

The autonomous language works as a shield against the pedantic recipient, an activist gesture, which provides possibilities for anyone with a tendency of nonsensical, ludicrous speech errors. Nonsense will appear to cause discord for the pedantic spectator. You could see it as a nefarious act that wants to violate the universally-agreed-upon-only-through-implication dictionary that many pedantics seem to assume exists, or as a barbaric behavior towards language formation.

I say, use your words as you want, you are the one to give them power.

39 *Urban Dictionary*, founded in 1999 by Aaron Peckham. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/>



HELP



NO



MOTHER



GO THIS DIRECTION



CAR



HAPPY



LEFT

THIS



THEY ARE WAIT

WILL BE
BUT ONLY
FORWARD



LOVE



WORK



ANGRY

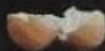
MEANS



YOU



I'M EXITED



YOU ARE LATE



YOUR FATHER



THOOT BRUSH

ING FOR YOU

On the power of language - hegemony - let's cast a spell
- *YOUTOO*.

Casting a spell is a violating act, derived from words, that intends to target it's prey with the use of specific words. I'm just cursing what is already cursed, YOU.

Deep, deep in utopian dreams, a faded futurism, and *YOUTOO*, since you are also the target for binary categorizations, and the power of language. In a feminist future, a new term is required, since feminism is a term laden with biases and often invokes the near absence of its counterpart, masculinism, another conflicted word, that I would rather not involve. "I long for the day when neither word is necessary."⁴⁰

YOUTOO attempts to navigate through reactionary constitutions that lack an understanding of love, time, and hope—the very essence of existence. *YOUTOO* attempts to navigate existence through antiquated, arbitrary systems that systematically promote hierarchies and create the basis for judgment and inappropriate arrogance. How will it ever be possible to prevent the enduring history of predators, prey, war, and weaponry? Only through interruption, a term against a senility that has forgotten the earthly connection. The capitalist system operates on the basis of constant movement, production, and consumerism. Interruption is thus essential for the emergence of alternatives. It will only be possible to prevent by not repeating the words or following the methods we are already too familiar with. Interrupting the old story allows us to tell a new one.

40 Le Guin - *Words are My Matter*, p.1

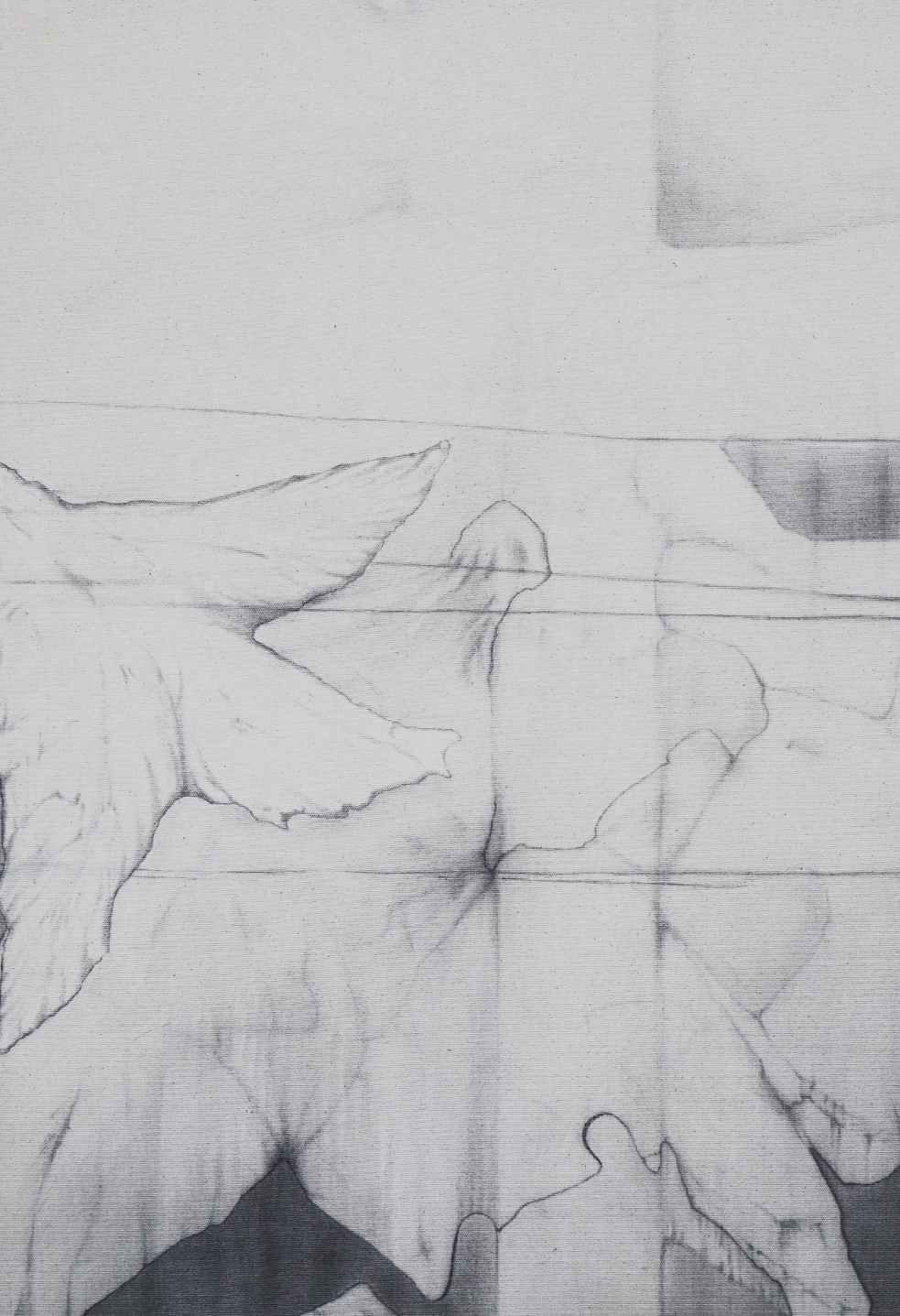
Among writers who have sought to interrupt the standard matrix of domination, Virginia Woolf stands as a feminist authority. The myths she tells provide the world with a new identity. The collaborative redefinition between Ursula K. Le Guin and Virginia Woolf has led to a feminist theory of human evolution. They reappropriate science to discover and construct a voice and tell a story. These tales contest for a voice and the power to originate and define what is 'natural' for ourselves.

Three Guineas is a letter written by Woolf in 1938. The letter surveys gender inequality and its intersections with education and war. She uses her voice to speculate and explore the alerting dominance of the patriarchy and, thus, the exclusion of women from power, health, and privilege. In the letter, written to a recipient without a face, without a name, she answers the question posed by the correspondent: How in your opinion are we to prevent war? A question one can barely answer. Woolf approaches the question: to prevent war will mean to end patriarchy.

Her letter is a pacifist act, where she illuminates the state of the world. She advocates an interruption of the traditional methodology of society when she remarks:

"We can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods. We can best help you to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in co-operation with its aim."⁴¹

41 Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (London, Hogarth Press, 1952) p.260



Soft Touchdown

A picture is worth a thousand words

- Fred R. Barnard

I enjoy language and practice my own word-building within the familiar and the conventional. I explore materials as a language in order to open up associations that lead to undefined ideas and pictures. A world in between reality and fiction is opened up. I use drawing to trace utopias, fictional and invented ones, and those that exist in the now. I aim to depict other spaces, utopian worlds, architectural dreams, and immortal nature. Here there are no rules but a glimpse of our inner landscape that declines the division of inside and outside. My drawing denies the assumption that the mind cannot be treated as simply part of the physical world. It serves to undo dualism and deconstruct hierarchies between the physical world and the ability to imagine.

Drawing can manifest as systems, whether of order or chaos, serving as a symbol of time, awareness, beauty, or something more immediate, akin to a sketch. With its accessible and free medium, it persists with a sensibility, a non-fixed behavior that questions material conserving. Drawing encapsulates elements of composition, inspiration, imitation, and imagination. Composition involves charting ideas; the aesthetic strategy molds inspiration and imagination into legible creativity and storytelling. We use drawing as a tool when words reach their limits, particularly in facilitating understanding across langua-

ges. Through pictograms and ideograms, we attain an aspect of a universal language that serves as a means of conveying information or meaning. In manuals, we rely on symbols to comprehend the unfamiliar. Drawing is a research tool. One of the most primordial forms of expression, its historical significance is undeniable. The dignity and utility of drawing serve to investigate the world. It encompasses the world we are familiar with and the world we are still exploring, even the world that is foreign to us. It communicates like an open language that hints rather than dictates, creating a sense of utopia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Theodor Adorno and Ernst Block, "Something's Missing", In: *Utopia, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Richard Noble (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009)

Brian Ash, "Fandom and Media, Science Fiction Art", In: *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Ed. by Brian Ash (London, Book Club Associates, 1978)

Italo Calvino, "All at One Point", In: *Cosmicomic* (Great Britain: Little Clothbound Classics, Penguin Classics 2022)

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, Trans. and Introduction by Barbara Johnson (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.)

Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", In: *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016)

Donna Haraway, "The Reinvention of Nature", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge taylor & francis group, 1991)

Kathleen Merie Higgins, "Whatever Happened to Beauty? A Response to Danto", In: *Beauty, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Dave Beech (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009)

Suzanne Perling Hudson, "Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism" with quote by Felix Gonzales-torres, 1994, In: *Beauty, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. by Dave Beech (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2009)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory* (London: Literary Trust, 2019)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Words are My Matter* (USA: Little Beer Press, 2019)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Om Ikke at Læse Science Fiction*, trans. Rasmus Brin Pedersen (Copenhagen: Forlaget Virkelig, 2021)

Mads Ananda Lodahl, *Upassende Opførsel* (DK: Forlaget Solidaritet, 2018)

Agnes Martin "Paintings and Drawings", Ed. by Marja Bloem, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, english trans. Don Bloch, Marja Bloem, Brigitte Kalthoff (Eindhoven: Lectoris, 1991)

Frederik Pohl, *Cities and Cultures - The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Ed.

by Brian Ash (London: Book Club Associates, 1978)

Amalie Smith, *Læsningens Anatomi* (Copenhagen: Emancipa(t/ss)ionsfrugten, 2012)

Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (London: Granta Publication, 2023)

ONLINE BOOKS

Emily Dickinson, "'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers", *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University press, 1960) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-314> (accessed on 18/11/2023)

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (London, Hogarth Press, 1943) <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.46243/page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed 25/02/2024)

Sappho, *The Complete Poems of Sappho*, Trans. and Ed. by Willis Barnstone (Boston, Shambhala Publication, 2009) <https://archive.org/details/completopoems0000sapp/page/64/mode/2up> (accessed on 18/02/2024)

Sappho, "Fragment 16", In *Love Shook My Senses. Lesbian Love Poems*, Ed. Gillian Spraggs, (London, The Women's Press, 1998) <http://www.gillianspraggs.com/translations/sappho16.html> (accessed on 18/02/2024)

JOURNALS

e-flux journal, *ALPHABETIZATION, Part II: Hegemonic Language and Arbitrary Order* <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61355/alphabetization-part-ii-hegemonic-language-and-arbitrary-order/> (accessed on 15/03/2024)

Ali Dur, McKenzie Wark, "New New Babylon", in *October Magazine*, (138): 37-56. (Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011)

Robert Patterson, Stanley M. Huff, "The Decline and Fall for Esperanto", In: *JAMIA*. 1999;6, p.444-446. <https://academic.oup.com/jamia/article/6/6/457/779414> (accessed on 16/01/2024)

INTERNET ARTICLES

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on Beauty: The Classical Conception, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/#ClasConc> (accessed 07/02/2024)

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on Beauty: Objectivity and Subjectivity, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/#ObjSubj> (accessed on 05/02/2024)

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, article on Jacques Derrida <https://plato.stanford.edu/ENTRIES/derrida/> (accessed on 05/02/2024)

Encyclopedia Britannica, article on Utopia, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/utopia> (accessed 14/12/2023)

Encyclopedia Britannica, article on Étienne-Louis Boullée, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Etienne-Louis-Boullee> (accessed on 12/01/2024)

Encyclopedia Britannica, article on Cybernetics, <https://www.britannica.com/science/cybernetics> (accessed 17/03/2024)

The Art Story, article on Max Ernst, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/ernst-max/>, (accessed on 21/01/2024)

Gallery Poulsen, Angela Gram, <https://www.gallerypoulsen.com/en/artist/angela-gram> (accessed on 20/01/2024)

Lisson Gallery, Laure Prouvost, <https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/laure-prouvost> (accessed on 21.10.2023)

BA Thesis

Rietveld Fine Arts

April 2024, Amsterdam

Teachers: Dina Danish, Frank Mandersloot,
Alena Alexandrova, Jean Bernard Koeman

Thesis supervisor: Alena Alexandrova



Carla Liv Madelung Petersen
Rietveld Fine Arts
2024