

Images of
lightness

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An essay on Jimmie Durham,
digital material and intimacy.

Susan van Veen

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written between summer 2015 & spring 2016

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<i>Intro</i>	11
1. Translating Oerbeelden	19
<i>The Book and Hobby Room</i>	25
<i>Oerbeelden</i>	26
<i>Janus</i>	33
<i>Jimmie Durham</i>	34
2. The State of Things (?)	47
<i>An imaginary conversation with Jimmie Durham (...)</i>	51
<i>Lightness and The Next Millennium</i>	57
3. Images of lightness	62
<i>Susan en de Kewelgeest</i>	65
<i>Two of Cups</i>	69
<i>Jesse Darling's Ghostmodern Intimacies</i>	70
<i>Myrrha</i>	72
<i>How to Touch a Screen</i>	77
<i>@pushinghoops on Perfume</i>	81
<i>Outro</i>	85

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*an essay on Jimmie Durham, digital
material and intimacy*

When my mother was still in high school, she had a dutch teacher, called Ms. Verkroost, who, at random moments during class, would frantically shout “Etymologietje!!!” and point at a student that was at that precise moment doing something highly illegal, like talking with a friend. (I propose shouting at young people for talking with friends should be illegal just the same)

Anyway, “Etymologietje!!!” meant that the person being shouted at had to sum up the origins of a word on the spot. This person was of course never able to do so, resulting in a fairly sizeable fail, which in its turn meant they would not be able to score a sufficient grade for dutch that year.

My mom’s etymological trauma might have gone so deep that it nested somewhere in her inner biochemical processes, which could be a possible explanation as to why I inherited a bit of an interest in it. I can imagine it may be considered a bit stupid to start an essay with a thought about what the hell is meant with the word essay, but I think most stupid things are not illegal per se so let’s do it anyway;

essay

noun

noun: **essay**; plural noun: **essays**

/ˈɛseɪ/

1. a short piece of writing on a particular subject.

synonyms: **article**, piece of writing, **composition**, **study**, **paper**, **dissertation**, **assignment**, **thesis**, **discourse**, **treatise**, **text**, **tract**, **disquisition**, **monograph**; **More** **leader**, **commentary**, **critique**, **criticism**, **exposition**, **appraisal**, **assessment**, **discussion**; **theme**;

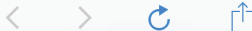
informal **piece**

"he wrote an essay on overpopulation"

2. *formal*
an attempt or effort.

"a misjudged essay in job preservation"

synonyms: **attempt**, **effort**, **endeavour**, **try**, **venture**, **trial**,



 **essay etymology - Google Search****1. attempt or try.**

"Donald essayed a smile"

synonyms: **attempt**, make an attempt at, **try, strive, aim, venture, endeavour, seek**, set out, do one's best, do all one can, do one's utmost, make an effort, make every effort, spare no effort, give one's all, take it on oneself; **More** have a go at, **undertake**, embark on, try one's hand at, try out, take on; *informal* give it a whirl, give it one's best shot, go all out, pull out all the stops, bend over backwards, knock oneself out, bust a gut, break one's neck, move heaven and earth, have a crack at, have a shot at, have a stab at "many essayed to travel that way"

Origin

late 15th century (as a verb in the sense 'test the quality of'): alteration of **assay**, by



The best essay I ever saw was shown to me in an art theory class about essays, a few years ago. It is called *Sans Soleil*, a French documentary film from 1983, directed by Chris Marker. It has been one of my my favorites until this day. I will now be quoting a piece from it to start this essay off i n s t y l e *

(also, I feel more comfortable to begin this thing hiding a bit behind other people's words)

“The first image he told me about was of...”

[...]

“...The basement where my friend - *the maniac* - busies himself with his electronic graffiti.

Finally his language touches me, because he talks to that part of us which insists on drawing profiles on prison walls. A piece of chalk to follow the contours of what is not, or is no longer, or is not yet; the handwriting each one of us will use to compose his own list of Things that Quicken the Heart, to offer, or to erase.”¹



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* Important price determinants

Chapter 1

Translating Oerbeelden

*“There is a person who collects sand. This person travels the world and – on arrival at a sea-shore, the banks of a river or lake, or a desert, or wasteland – gathers a handful of sand and takes it away...”*²

Italo Calvino
“Collection of Sand”

I collect digital images, much in the same way that other people sometimes collect rocks, stones, or minerals, to put in their garden or just to have lying around the house, on shelves, in drawers, atop mantelpieces or in windowsills.

Much like those stones, my images are from all over the world, their time and place of origin hard to trace. They seem to consist solely of computer language; binary code. Bodiless, they flutter together, in folders within folders within folders.

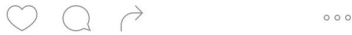
Some of these images are pictures, some are fragments of film, some instagram posts, memes, google image search results and some are screen captures containing one of—or, a combination of—the above.

The main thing they have in common is that I feel like I am their guardian, albeit temporarily (I agree with this idea that you can never really own anything, only take care of it for a while).



susanvveen
Teylers Museum

10w



♥ 15 vind-ik-leuks

susanvveen TOUCHED THE MOON TODAY



evaldimarsdottir 🙄



THE BOOK AND HOBBY ROOM

In the city of Haarlem, the Netherlands, next to the river Spaarne, exists a very old museum called the Teylers Museum. This museum houses a large oval room, with at its center an extensive mineralogical collection, on display in a specially designed cabinet made of wood and glass.

This cabinet used to have a display surface that could also double as a library table. Under this table top that is currently in the process of executing its display function, is a storage space, its contents unknown, surrounded and closed off by little locked cabinet doors.

In 1779 the board of the Teylers Foundation commissioned Leendert Viervant, an Amsterdam-based architect, to build a “book and hobby room” or “book and art room” (hobby and art were apparently still interchangeable words at the time) in the garden of the former house of Pieter Teyler, a wealthy cloth merchant and banker who collected beautiful things he considered important. Things like minerals and stones, but also mammoth hairs, books, all sorts of instruments, coins, paintings and drawings.

Whenever I’m insecure about the value and overall usefulness of collecting in general, and this carefully maintained collection of .jpegs .movs .gifs and .pngs of mine in particular, I think of this huge, heavy, beautifully crafted cabinet that was built around these unsuspecting fragments taken from mountains, caves and forests, and the room that was in its turn built around this cabinet, and the museum that was then built around this room.

The space seems not only to host an incredible amount of loot, but also an almost tangible imbroglio

of various methods of contextualization. Per displayed item, without it having moved, both symbolic value and monetary value have repeatedly lost and gained in volume and credibility, like an invisible layer shifting back and forth over the surfaces of the rocks, leaving them weary, dusty and slightly homesick.

The longer I look at them, the less sense everything seems to make.

...

OERBEELDEN

The other day, whilst discussing this legion of collected images hovering in between the tiny invisible components of my MacBook Pro Retina (13-inch, Late 2013) with my friend Maria Louise, she suggested my archive might be a collection of *oerbeelden*.

The word *oerbeeld* sounded so beautiful her comment left me feeling very flattered (having been the one selecting them and bringing them together). After the gold rush had faded however, I became a bit unsure whether what she had meant to say was what I thought she had meant to say, so I did some research, trying to find some back up on the term;

Oer.

When writing on my laptop, like I'm doing now, every time I type - o e r - I am disappointed by the length of it. The word looks very unimpressive and it takes no effort at all to write down. On the keyboard the o is already always under my right index finger when in resting

position, and the e and the r are sitting right next to each other under the fingertips of my left hand (I never learned to type correctly).

I once heard someone use the word oer in an otherwise entirely english-spoken lecture.

Not primordial,
not primal,
not primeval.

Oer.

Funnily enough, this passage was about being “Oer English”.

“What a strange, unfortunate thing that in these days, England and Great Britain are trying so hard to deny their current reality, that they make a show of “English Folk Art” as though it were somehow... English. As though it were Oer English. And the rest of us were not, English.

All these people over here (points at first row of the audience) are not even English. Italians, Americans, who knows!”

(giggles)

“Foreigners!”

Oer is a dutch-ish word, that tastes like earth. No matter if read, heard, written or spoken out loud, it always spawns strong associations of mud, soil and partially decayed vegetation or *peat*.³

I am writing this particular page in the British Library in London. In order to be permitted into one of the “reading rooms” (which is where the actual books are at, I suppose, for I don’t see any here in the public area) I first need to register myself, get a reading pass, wash my hands and get rid of all things in my bag that are sharp or contagious or otherwise capable of causing any kind of destruction. Out of overall laziness combined with some sort of childish obstinacy, I resort to using the Library’s free Wifi to look up some definitions;

oer (o.) begin, aanvang, oorsprong [mogelijk ~ oes ‘riviermonding’], anders aard ‘herkomst; woonplaats; wezen’ oer [ijzerhoudende grond] {1764} < hoogduits Ur, nederduits ur, ablautend oudengels ear [aarde], eor [grind], oudnoors aurr [kiezel], oud iers ur [klei]

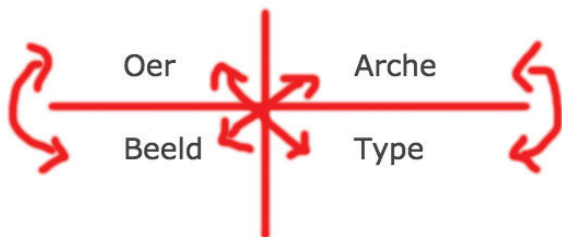
Apparently, in the mineralogical sense oer means ferruginous, iron-bearing. I also found the definition “wat te maken heeft met het begin” which translates quite nicely to “that which has to do with the beginning”.

According to Google Translate, the word *oerbeeld*, as a whole, may best be translated to English as *archetype*.

archetype - via Latin from Greek *arkhetupon* ‘something moulded first as a model’, [from *arkhe* ‘primitive’ + *tupos* [‘a model’]] The word *archetype*, “original pattern from which copies are made”, first entered into English usage in the 1540s and derives from the Latin noun *archetypum*, latinisation of the Greek noun *ἀρχέτυπον* (*archetupon*), whose adjective form is *ἀρχέτυπος* (*archetupos*), which means “first-molded”, which is a compound of *ἀρχή* *archē*, “beginning, origin”, and *τύπος* *tupos*, which can mean, amongst other things, “pattern,” “model,” or “type.” Also, 1. a very typical example of a certain person or thing. An original which has been imitated; a prototype.

Synonym: typification, type, prototype, representative, stereotype. More 2. PSYCHOANALYSIS (in Jungian theory) a primitive mental image inherited from the earliest human ancestors, and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious. 3. a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, or mythology; “mythological archetypes of good and evil”

Thankfully, both the words oer-beeld and arche-type consist of two parts. Now we can pretend to be scientists of sorts and split them both in half, put them in a nice table and then stare at it for a while;



How does one decide when to stop collecting data;
When you are tired of it? / When you're out of time?

It is now 17:45 and I am kindly reminded the library is closing (see? time's up) which means I will miss the Alice in Wonderland exhibition showing Lewis Carroll's original handwritten manuscript in celebration of its 150th anniversary.

Lets decide on oer as something that is almost opposite to history, oer as something that is there at all times, it not being about going backwards, like the words p r e - h i s t o r i c, p r i m i t i v e, or even worse, m o d e r n .

●●●○ KPN NL 11:08 100%
< 12 December 2011 17:50 Edit





JANUS

This is Janus, a sculpture crafted from PVC pipes, held together and muffled by duct tape and held erect by a chunky wooden structure. This image is the only one I could find of him on the internet that shows him from head to foot.

I took a picture of the other side of Janus with my phone when we met in the Serpentine Galleries in London a while back. Unfortunately my photo is very bad and only shows the piece of paper holding the text Janus had attached to him. (I guess at the time I was only interested in the talking part of his personality, something I feel a bit conflicted about now, I probably missed out on a lot)

In the picture I took, the note has been typed out and printed in a sans serif font, in some other really old image I found it seems to have been handwritten. I transcribed it from the picture I took, which is too horrible to show anyone. (This one on the left is from the Serpentine's website, also a pretty bad portrait since it only shows his backside.) The text goes like this:

“Good morning/afternoon/evening. Would you please pretend for a few moments that it is actually me, the piece of art, that is talking to you? Thank you, you are very kind. I just think it may be easier to explain myself directly. I am a representation of Janus, the two faced god. Please do not confuse my doubleness with duplicity, however, or with palefaces who speak with forked tongues. Actually, the Europeans usually depicted me as having red faces.

Anyway, I am the guardian. Seeing, as it were, with future hindsight and historical foresight. I must naturally attempt both action and the blockage

of action. In other guises I'm called Romulus and Remus, the twins, Charon, Cerebus the two or three headed dog, Anubis, and Coyote. You can see then dear spectator, I am also the god of passage, and the god of the unification of opposites.

Sorry folks! This is the artist Jimmie Durham interrupting here! As soon as Janus mentioned opposites I could see he was going in the wrong direction. Humans and their gods seem to naturally create opposites-as-a-system.

When one thinks "white" one's next thought is usually "black," for example, and then one declares a polarity that may not necessarily reflect a natural truth." (Do you think the North Pole is really "up" in the universe? That the earth is bobbing along in space happily right-side-up?)

May I suggest that we imagine systems in opposition to any concept of opposites?

Thank you for your patience.
(But you still have to pay.)

...

JIMMIE DURHAM

As you might have guessed already, the person interrupting Janus in previous passage also happens to be his creator. (this particular PVC and duct tape version of him at least)

Jimmie Durham is an artist, and at the time of writing he is 76 years old (exactly 50 years older than me). He is

one of the main reasons I was in London the other day, to visit his exhibition called *Various Items and Complaints* in the Serpentine Galleries. The little passage about being Oer English I used earlier is something Durham said during a wonderful lecture at the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art on the 12th of June 2014. Jimmie Durham's work has a lot to do with Oer and origin.

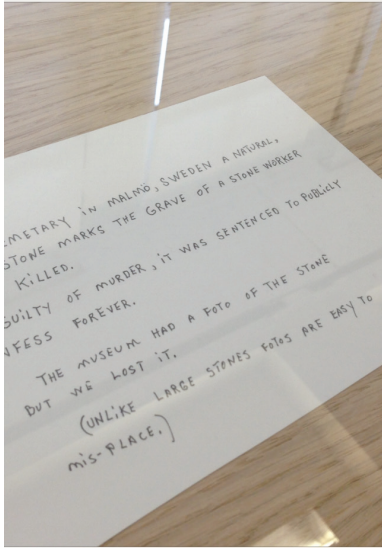
I believe Jimmie Durham's lines of thinking make him a good friend, especially when talking about digital material. Many of his ideas and articulations are great for describing what happens when this dualistic/dialectical "easy thinking" he illustrated so nicely by making Janus, would become less and less useful.

To start with, Jimmie Durham works a lot with rocks, stones and minerals. He likes to throw them (big ones) through televisions screens (*Resurrection*, 1995), or at refrigerators (*Stoning the Refrigerator* 1996) or on cars (*Still life with Spirit and Xitle*, 2007) and sometimes even through display cabinets (*A Stone from François Vilon's House in Paris*, 1996)

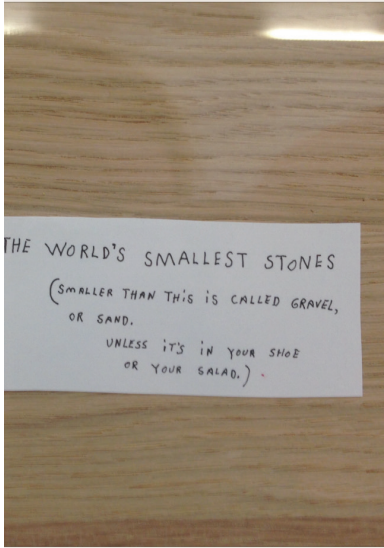
"I had seen the entire show the day before, along with a brief performance during which Durham threw a cobblestone at a glass showcase. Betraying the laws of ordinary physics, the cobblestone—allegedly taken from the house of the medieval French poet, wanderer, and thief François Villon—broke the glass neither the first nor the second time it was thrown. It rather acted like a die, stubbornly hitting the improbable number, and Durham seemed to enjoy the process." ⁴

**- Manuel Cirauqui
on "A Stone from François Vilon's House in Paris"**

In another work of Durham's, titled the *Museum of Stones* (2011/2012, *mixed media installation, dimensions variable*), he puts rocks and minerals on display in those same showcases made of glass and wood, accompanied by handwritten notes on small handcut pieces of paper, like so:









Since moving to Europe, Durham's work has focused primarily on the relationship between architecture, monumentality and national narratives. His anti-architectural sculptures, performances and videos seek to liberate architecture's privileged material, stone, from its metaphorical associations with monumentality, stability and permanence.

"It is impossible for me to do justice to the art historical or theoretical importance of Durham's work. I am incapable of adopting the appropriate distance. On the whole, Durham's work is too archaeological in nature, too much about origins, and too playful."

- Vivian Sky Rehberg

Or as the other JD, Jesse Darling (whom I will discuss later) quite recently put it (on *twitter.com*, in <140 characters);



Tweet



JD
@dzeij_dii

Getting into Jimmie Durham like a drink of water wen u thirsty, jealous of the projected solitude of masculinity but no [man] is an island

31/12/15 14:26

3 LIKES



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Me

* when typing like this, words become unrecognisable for a majority of language based algorithms, while they simultaneously seem emphasised to human readers. I sometimes used it on words that either needed some emphasis, needed to be destroyed, or just needed a little more (poetic) s p a c e

FOOTNOTES

1 the rest of the transcript can be found on this mysterious website: www.markertext.com

2 from: "Collection of Sand"
by Italo Calvino

3 Peat is the stuff that makes bog bodies. Bog bodies are the remains of human beings that have accidentally fallen into - or have been brutally murdered and dumped into - a peat bog & due to natural embalming processes have accidentally been preserved, sometimes with their 2000 y/o Iron Age hair gel and manicured nails still intact

4 BOMB Magazine — Jimmie Durham by Manuel Cirauqui, BOMB 118 Winter 2012

FIGURES

p 23 screenshot showing instagram post showing picture of my handpalm, holding a tiny piece of moon in the Teylers Museum.

p 31 screenshot showing Makapansgat pebble, (ca. 3,000,000 BP) a jasperite cobble with natural chipping and wear patterns that make it look like a crude rendition of a human face. It has been suggested that some australopithecine might have recognized it as a symbolic face, in possibly the earliest example

of symbolic thinking or aesthetic sense in the human heritage, and brought the pebble back to the cave. This would make it a candidate for the oldest known manuport.

p 37 - 40 screenshots showing pictures I took from Jimmie Durham's *Museum of Stones* at the Serpentine Galleries, handwritten notes read the following;

"In a cemetery in Malmö, Sweden a natural, un-cut stone, marks the grave of a stone worker that it killed. Guilty of murder, it was sentenced to publicly confess forever. The museum had a foto of the stone but we lost it. (Unlike large stones fotos are easy to mis-place.)"

"THE WORLD'S SMALLEST STONES (Smaller than this is called gravel, or sand, unless it's in your shoe, or your salad)"

"This stone is even better than fake; it is marble dust mixed with pigment and glue. much stronger than real marble"

Chapter 2

The State of Things (?)

*I own a book that bears this title, I haven't read it but it's very thin, which I find highly suspicious. I once took it with me to read on a camping trip but ended up using it as a flower press.***

From a human standpoint, within one and a half decade the world has changed quite a bit. There are a few key words that catch my eye/brain every time I read something that tries to describe “the now” in language. Very roughly and very inappropriately combining all of this stuff together, I ended up with something like this: The Internet expanded and reached deep into social life. Smartphones were introduced. Things are accelerating, robots will soon take over, you know the drill.

All (half)joking aside, one of the things that seem to have happened in between then: the pre-internet era(?), and now: the internet era(?), is the merge of the physical and the digital/symbolic. The line between the two, seems to have become blurry, and seems to me to be doing so, more and more. We, or I, started to consider digital objects and online activities to be as real as anything else we were used to experiencing ‘offline’, an attitude I notice people around me are also coping with:

“Web today is a space of content overloads and too much information. My instinct tells me that rather than making things even more complicated, juxtaposed and hard to take in, it makes more sense to isolate elements from the mess and expand them in a relatively empty space.

In my work *Approximation I*, the pair-bonding penguins couple is arching over the nothingness of a gallery floor. In the original image, they are standing in the sunset in Antarctica with their baby between them. Taking them out of that National Geographic visual trope allowed them to express other, perhaps more basic, qualities: nearly perfect visual symmetry, extraordinary beauty of their coating patterns, the simultaneously clumsy and ergonomic structure of their bodies.

This is a way of seeing material properties we tend to use in sculpture and design, in the realm of human culture and technology. But the fact is these forms have evolved by themselves millions of years ago, for their own sake, long before there were humans to snap a photo around.

Moreover, we are also a product of the same processes, and one can look at the whole existence of online images as our form of complex pattern coating."⁵

- Katja Novitskova

...

Did you notice the oer in there? If so, I propose this logically brings us back to more Jimmie Durham. If not, I propose this brings us back to Jimmie Durham anyway, and I will try to explain why, by patchwriting his own words into a somewhat coherent story. It may look like an unacceptable amount of direct quotation at first, but please bare with me.

AN IMAGINARY DIALOGUE WITH JIMMIE
DURHAM (HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO
AS JD) CAREFULLY ASSEMBLED BY YOURS
TRULY A.K.A. THE AUTHOR OF THIS TEXT
PRETENDING TO BE THE INTERVIEWER
(HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS SV)

JD: "This [*holds up a piece of iridescent shiny synthetic fabric*] is natural material. It's mostly made of petroleum, which is very natural. Petroleum is rancid oil."

"When all sorts of plants and animals die, the oil, over the years, seeps into oil patches underground and this bacteria starts working on it, and makes it into super poisonous rancid oil. We could do it ourselves if we had a whole lot of oil and a couple of millions of years, we could make our own petroleum."⁶

SV: My friend Andreas Maul, who is a painter, once told me a story, and I sometimes retell it when trying to impress people. It is very short and usually quite effective. It goes like this:

If plastic dinosaurs are made of plastic;

And plastic is made of petroleum;

And petroleum is made of dinosaurs...

If we apply this train of thought (plastic dinosaurs are made of dinosaurs) to my preferred material, let's call it digital material - immaterial material produced by technology - what we end up with then, is the idea of technology not being at all oppositional to, or even away from whatever it is we mean when we call something "nature" or "natural".

A key element in your oeuvre seems to be the way you work with language, often involving a double take – not necessarily accepting the word as a transparent entity, but taking one step back to see where it comes from. This strategy of interruption appears in your work in many different forms. What are your general thoughts on language?

JD: "People often ask me: Do you like music? What music do you like? You can't say what music you like. You can say you like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, but you can't say you like Pakistani music, because it's too big of a category."

"I want to communicate, I want to say something, and there are no languages that will say what I want to say. It's always a bad compromise."

SV: This point seems to keep coming back to me every time, whether I'm discussing very huge, vague notions like material or more concrete stuff like peanut butter. I was wondering whether you thought it sometimes is more important how we talk about things than what we talk about?

I keep thinking that categorizing is not always helpful, and I'm afraid we constantly need to remind ourselves

of this in order to not slip back into familiar old arguments all the time. I think this is where, for me, this thing called “art” comes in. You talk about art being an intellectual activity that is not dependent on language, one that is beyond language. (Like with music, the intellectual meaning is IN the music, not in an interpretation OF the music.)

JD: “My mentor is Italo Calvino. When I read him, I feel so energized. I never read a lesson; I am not taught anything. My brain gets a little freer than it intended to. It’s the same thing when I listen to the great symphonies of Beethoven. I know the Sixth Symphony very well. Listening with my eyes closed, a passage happens the way my internal music knows it should happen. It’s so beautiful—you feel musically smarter than you intended to be.”

(Dear Mr. Durham, I don't know where you are. I hope you are well. If you ever accidentally get to read this, please forgive me for being rude and shuffling your words around the way I did. I tried my best to do it in a manner of which I hoped you wouldn't mind so much.)





SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

- 1 - Lightness
- 2 - Quickness
- 3 - Exactitude
- 4 - Visibility
- 5 - Multiplicity
- 6 - Consistency



LIGHTNESS AND THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

Lightness is the first chapter in “Six Memos for the Next Millennium”⁷ (Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio), a book published in 1988, based on a series of lectures written by Italo Calvino for the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures to be given in the fall of 1985 at Harvard, but were never delivered as Calvino died before leaving Italy. The six memos are lectures on the values of literature which Calvino felt were important for the then approaching next millennium:

“I will devote my first lecture to the opposition between lightness and weight, and will uphold the values of lightness. This does not mean that I consider the virtues of weight any less compelling, but simply that I have more to say about lightness.

After forty years of writing fiction, after exploring various roads and making diverse experiments, the time has come for me to look for an overall definition of my work. I would suggest this: my working method has more often than not involved the subtraction of weight. I have tried to remove weight, sometimes from people, sometimes from heavenly bodies, sometimes from cities; above all I have tried to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language.

In this talk I shall try to explain—both to myself and to you—why I have come to consider lightness a value rather than a defect; to indicate the works of the past in which I recognize my ideal of lightness; and to show where I situate this value in the present and how I project it into the future...”

[...]

“Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don’t mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. These images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future.

[...]

“When I began my career, the categorical imperative of every young writer was to represent his own time. Full of good intentions, I tried to identify myself with the ruthless energies propelling the events of our century, both collective and individual. I tried to find some harmony between the adventurous, picaresque inner rhythm that prompted me to write and the frantic spectacle of the world, sometimes dramatic and sometimes grotesque.

Soon I became aware that between the facts of life that should have been my raw materials and the quick light touch I wanted for my writing, there was a gulf that cost me increasing effort to cross. Maybe I was only then becoming aware of the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world—qualities that stick to writing from the start, unless one finds some way of evading them.

At certain moments I felt that the entire world was turning into stone: a slow petrification, more or less advanced depending on people and places but one that spared no aspect of life. It was as if no one could escape the inexorable stare of Medusa.”

[...]

To cut off Medusa's head without being turned to stone, Perseus supports himself on the very lightest of things, the winds and the clouds, and fixes his gaze upon what can be revealed only by indirect vision, an image caught in a mirror."

** The design of this essay is (loosely) based on this book. I still haven't read it, but I will. It has some Vandana Shiva in there, so it can't be all that bad: *The State of Things* (Verksted) Paperback – September 30, 2013 by Jacques Rancière (Author), Marta Kuzma (Editor), Pablo LaFuente (Editor), Peter Osborne (Editor)

FOOTNOTES

5 From a REALLY GOOD interview between Martijn Hendriks & Katja Novitskova on Post-Internet Materialism, of which a Dutch translation was published in *Metropolis M* No 2-2014, but can also be found here: metropolism.com/features/post-internet-materialism/

6 Various sources;

Artist talk with Jimmie Durham at Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art on 12 June 2014. (youtu.be/D8_ZPsm3rWc)

BOMB magazine - Artists in Conversation - Jimmie Durham by Manuel Cirauqui (BOMB 118 Winter 2012)

"Various Elements": Jimmie Durham in conversation with Kirsty Bell; Frieze magazine Issue 150 (October 2012)

7 *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino, Harvard University Press, ISBN 0-674-81040-6

FIGURES

p 55 screencapture showing Jimmie Durham, *Self-Portrait Pretending to Be a Stone Statue of Myself*. Courtesy of the artist and Christine König Galerie, Vienna. Photo Maria Thereza Alves

Chapter 3

Images of lightness

“But writing! What an invention! What a marvelous monstrosity! When I write I know that I am drawing. (...) As an invention, writing has replaced memory with law, and therefore metaphor with “truth.” Writing invented history and tied us to it. All of us who write, then, or use words in any way, have the responsibility to become poets.”⁸

Jimmie Durham
2003

The year today is 2016, we are 16 years in this New Millennium. I feel pretty safe in assuming that whoever stumbled upon this publication for whichever reason is well aware of the many crises and tragedies unfolding themselves under our very eyes at this very moment; in private or in public, whether assumed global, local, ecological, sociopolitical, financial, physical, psychological or maybe even economical, whether they are vague and abstract or whether you encounter their concrete causes and effects on the daily.

...

SUSAN EN DE KWELGEEEST

Personally, on the whole, I am currently doing pretty good. (If you are particularly interested in my own personal problems, I suggest you read this wonderful book called “*Susan en de Kwelgeest*”, by Tony Ross and Hiawyn Oram.⁹ Or you could start following me on www.twitter.com/SusanVeen for daily textual updates concerning my overall wellbeing.) However, miniature disasters happen, and sometimes I do get lonely and sad and melancholic. It is in those moments I spend a lot of time and energy on missing people for no apparent reason but the simple fact that they are not in my physical proximity.

“I am so tired of all these people living in my phone” I read somewhere amidst a few other overly sentimental notes I wrote on that exact same electronic device last summer:

“It’s mid summer, everybody lives in my phone. Their physical bodies took off to Reykjavik, Rio, London, New York, Paris, Cologne, Copenhagen, Xiamen. And yet they are here in my hands.

I can touch the screen with my fingertips and send them all kinds of stuff. They reply, sometimes immediately, sometimes after a while.”

Someone (I think it was Jasper Coppes) dropped this very beautiful sentence in a lecture I was attending a few months back:

(it was a passage about a hunting ritual of sorts, I pictured a group of about 12 hunters silently moving through knee high yellow grass together, crouching through some flatland, communicating through skillful whistles and complicated sign language)

“...once a tribe member moved behind the horizon and disappeared out of sight, he ceased to exist.”

...

I suspect existential loneliness and social loneliness might be secretly making beautiful (and slightly corny) love in this particular combination of words, so let's leave them to it and pretend to do this thing where the camera smoothly pans away from the silk bed sheets to the candles, to the window, in front of which the curtains are slowly moving in the wind.





susanvveen
Molukkenstraat



TWO OF CUPS

In the tower room that is my apartment exists a tarot deck I once got as a gift. I find it quite an intimidating presence, mainly due to the multitude of symbols and meanings hidden within every single one of the 78 cards, let alone two or more cards combined.

Still, they fascinate me, and I invented a ritual for them that goes like this: I quickly go through them, one particular card somehow draws my attention (usually something stupid happens, like one accidentally falls to the floor) and I put in on top of the deck and just have it lying there for a few weeks. In addition to this I sometimes take a picture of it with my phone and post it on Instagram, for other people to admire.

On November 25th, 2015, I posted the Two of Cups.

This card depicts two rather orange looking humans facing each other, both holding a - presumably golden - goblet. The illustrator seems to have accidentally put womens' clothes on the man, but closer investigation suggests they might as well both be men. Or women.

They don't seem so oppositional to me, these guys, even though they are a duo. I think the secret to this might be in their enigmatic relationship status. It's easy to assume they are lovers, but in reality it's impossible to tell what they are to each other. They could just as well be a buyer and a seller, or brothers, or sisters, or complete strangers, or friends, or ex-lovers or - god forbid - something even more complicated.

(There is another, more 'important' card in the deck called The Lovers, it looks a bit like this one but is way more boring in comparison.)

When contemplating the symbolism involved in the exchange of goblets/cups it seems to become inevitable to fall into the trap of trying to describe Everything That Could Possibly Exist In Between, which I expect would probably mean we would swiftly transcend into the Kingdom of Intolerable Vagueness.

I hereby suggest we focus instead on the bodily aspect that is represented. There seems to be a near or slight touching of hands, seemingly generated by this gesture of exchange. A hidden suggestion of touch, almost non-existent and easily overlooked, right at the center of this whole situation of over-symbolisation.

...

JESSE DARLING'S GHOSTMODERN INTIMACIES

I don't know much of Jesse Darling the person and/or the artist, but I know her twitter account (It's one of my favs). I stumbled upon a public google doc she wrote, through her twitter account. They are notes for a keynote on Intimacy, to be given at an unknown event on the 2nd of June 2015. It is a very beautiful text and I recommend it.¹⁰

Darling starts the text with explaining the concept of *ghost*, borrowing a bit from Derrida and concluding to the definition: "a body dispersed across time."

"...These kinds of images are ghosts, even as they appear in realtime from across the divide of different timezones. If you don't have proximity, what you have instead is the space made by longing, which is quite literally a space of projection, the parallax view..."

She goes on explaining how online space (just like ‘regular’ space), is something like a practised commons, a practised place, something you produce through doing. She compares online space to a shopping mall or an airport; saying “once you spend more 7 hours a day in a place (the amount of time the so-called average person is supposed to spend online) or at least do most of your socializing and organizing there,” then what happens is that “the behaviours that arise from the practise of living will override the behavioral protocols around which the space has been designed.”

According to Darling, intimacy has to do with this moment of transgression:

“a set of behaviors that transcend those ritual protocols of sociality, through crossing over to the contingent realm of the relational,

**relative,
interpersonal,
even transpersonal...**

...had to look up the latter, it means “denoting or relating to states or areas of consciousness beyond the limits of personal identity.” And that sounds sexy as hell, doesn’t it? Not to imply that intimacy always be erotic, but maybe intimacy always has a certain eros – an aspect of the life drive, a will to permeate, to reach beyond yourself into the whatever of another.”

It might be worth noting that the Eros I suspect Jesse Darling is referring to here, is Eros in the shape of the ancient Greek deity, sadly often confused with Cupid. Eros, in the earliest sources, is one of the primordial

gods involved in the Coming Into Being of the Cosmos. In later sources, however, Eros is represented as the son of Aphrodite, whose mischievous interventions in the affairs of gods and mortals cause bonds of love to form, often illicitly. This later version of Eros is the precursor to the chubby Renaissance Cupid (a way more frivolous image).

“If and when these interactions cross over into a different kind of space, when some kind of a meeting takes place – a meeting between subjectivities (not just between market roles, or other behavioral protocols around which any space has been designed) - well, then you can start talking about something like intimacy.”

...

MYRRHA

On tuesday the 17th of November 2015 at 10:15, my friend Miron Galić sent me an iMessage. This seemed strange, for I never use iMessage. Also, the speech bubble appeared empty. To be sure, I tried copying the contents into a different textfield, nothing happened.

We have been holding an empty conversation since then (he had sent it on purpose, for he can't help being a poet like that). Every so often, we send each other text messages that appear to only contain a variable amount of space characters.

Its twin, a mirrored image, living in Miron's iPhone, what I hold in my hands is one half of a Rorschach, stretched through space and time, quite literally. All textual and visual individuality annihilated, except for a name that was assigned to some numbers, years ago.

Pure interface, pure software, pure communication, beautifully distilled, all that is left is a sense of shared space, or time, whichever.

Maybe touch is something that does not happen only to the 'touch screen'. Maybe it does not only reside in the microscopic changes in pressure between the glass and the backlight, measured by capacitive sensors. Maybe it does not stop there.

[Redacted incoming message]

Sun 6 Mar 02:03

[Redacted outgoing message]

Sunday 14:55

[Redacted outgoing message]

Thursday 13:35

[Redacted incoming message]

Yesterday 23:51

[Redacted outgoing message]


[Redacted incoming message]

[Redacted outgoing message]

[Redacted outgoing message]

Tweets Media Likes

 **Matt Ford** @fordm 10/02/16
GOP establishment strategy
↳ 2016
↳ Primary
↳ Stopping Donald Trump
↳ yakety-sax.mp3
1.055 1.641

 **shi'ite passing** @WahhabiPeas 10/02/16
tbh I wish there was a decent
portmanteau of depression and selfie
but until then here is a picture of a
long egg



HOW TO TOUCH A SCREEN

After contemplating this seemingly wordless conversation a bit longer, I came to realize that what I have also actively been collecting all this time, less consciously perhaps, are texts.

When going through my archives again, in retrospect, I find loads of them. Lots of actual texts, like tweets (I love twitter, did I mention this already?), notes, pdf's and other text based documents, but also texts disguised as images, photographs of pages of books, scanned chapters, and an immense amount of iPhone screen captures.

These screen captures (also called screenshot, screen cap, cap, screen dump, or screengrab) have been really puzzling me lately;

To make a print screen on an iPhone 5, I use both hands, even though I'm not touching the screen at all.

I use my right hand to hold the device, my thumb on the smooth circular dent that is the home button. The rest of my fingers I use to exert pressure on the back, which I even out with my thumb, to hold it steady. My left hand, I place around the top of the device, my index finger resting on the slightly protrusive elongated shape on top.

I Now simultaneously press the home button and the sleep button, (normally used to put the device to sleep), the buttons harmoniously produce two gentle clicks, the screen softly flashes white and I know a perfect copy of whatever was displayed there a split second ago is patiently awaiting me in my camera roll.

Even though their metadata tells us these really are images (they are .png's once I open them on my laptop),

I have my suspicions that screen captures are somehow more related to text.

They seem to be imprints of something that has never had any physical materiality involved to begin with. Yet they really do seem like they are capturing something. They appear to have frozen a moment, the way photographs do, yet they always end up photographing the same physical subject: themselves, at a particular moment in time. If they are photographs, what are they photographing?

I think it might be something like text. Text, in a more broad or abstract sense of the word. The more material sense of the word, maybe. Text as data or metadata, text as programming code, text as computer language, text as the thing that all digital images consist of. Is this text maybe also still just writing? Did binary code ever really move away from writing? Did all of our images and languages ever really move that far away from touch?

“We ask: How are we to touch upon the body? Perhaps we can't answer this “How?” as we'd answer a technical question. But, finally, it has to be said that touching upon the body, touching the body, touching - happens in writing all the time. Maybe it doesn't happen exactly in writing, if writing in fact has an “inside.” But along the border, at the limit, the tip, the furthest edge of writing nothing but that happens.

Now, writing takes its place at the limit.

So if anything at all happens to writing, nothing happens to it but touch.”¹¹

- Jean-Luc Nancy



Tweet



jay santa cruz
@jscz_



a real blessing to start 2016 with
[@pushinghoops](#) talking about
perfume 🙏🌸 [papermag.com/
amazing-women-...](http://papermag.com/amazing-women-...)

Reading about perfume. That probably calls to mind what people say of writing about music, that it's like 'dancing about architecture'. But all of those sound fine to me. Like music or dancing, perfumery has its own vocabulary. Even if it's borrowed like the term "notes". Using "note" to describe a scent component enriches the meaning of the word "note" far more than it makes reading about perfume imprecise. It turns the entire alchemy into a metaphor for a wholly different pleasure, that of a song. Trying to capture and convey in words the specificity of a sensory experience mirrors the idea of bottling scents. Or anything else that's supposed to be futile, but manages to exist anyway. Go!

**expert descriptions. |
ume is low stakes kn
urden you, which is ;
information to have.
ate knowledge. Being
invisible layers worn |
und you is a way of s
em.**

01/01/16 19:38

Reply to jay santa cruz, Ayesha A. Siddiqi



Home



Notifications



Messages



Me

@PUSHINGHOOPS ON PERFUME

To conclude with, let me share with you this quite rare specimen I recently added to my collection, It's a .png, an image, an iphone screen capture of a tweet composed by a complete stranger, retweeted into my timeline, showing two screen captures of a snippet of text on "reading about perfume", from some listicle on "Amazing Women To Follow On The Internet In 2016":

I retraced the original text and pasted it here for you so you can read it:

What's your favorite 'Internet K-hole' search topic?

"Reading about perfume. That probably calls to mind what people say of writing about music, that it's like 'dancing about architecture'. But all of those sound fine to me. Like music or dancing, perfumery has its own vocabulary. Even if it's borrowed like the term "notes". Using "note" to describe a scent component enriches the meaning of the word "note" far more than it makes reading about perfume imprecise. It turns the entire alchemy into a metaphor for a wholly different pleasure, that of a song.

Trying to capture, and convey in words the specificity of a sensory experience mirrors the idea of bottling scents. Or anything else that's supposed to be futile, but manages to exist anyway. So I appreciate the attempts, from layman reviews to expert descriptions. Reading about perfume is low stakes knowledge, it doesn't burden you, which is a rare quality for information to have. It's also very intimate knowledge. Being able to name the invisible layers worn by the people around you is a way of seeing more of them." ¹²

FOOTNOTES

8 Jimmie Durham - A Certain Lack of Coherence (Writings on Art and Cultural Politics)

9 In the original English version Susan is called Jenna. Jenna and the Troublemaker Paperback – January 28, 1988 by Hiawyn Oram (Author), Tony Ross (Author, Illustrator)

10 INTIMACY Keynote 2/6/15 - Jesse Darling. (Sorry for crazy url)

docs.google.com/document/d/1L-faD6Zas5vhitkbzhLdSmyYj6pulwYjsf-czOgO0FnFw/edit?usp=sharing

11 I stole this from Jesse Darlings keynote, but originally from “Corpus” Jean-Luc Nancy, Translated by Richard A. Rand, Fordham University Press, October 2008

12 *from: AMAZING WOMEN TO FOLLOW ON THE INTERNET IN 2016 (AND ALWAYS) by Carey O'Donnell and Sandra Song. @pushinghoops is Ayesha Siddiqi / @AyeshaASiddiqi*

FIGURES

p 67 screencapture showing instagram post showing screencapture of my world clock app, set to show timezones of friends

p 76 screencapture showing twitter app “likes” tab. on display are two random tweets I once liked. More here: twitter.com/@susanvveen/likes

OUTRO

I am a visual artist, which to me currently means I do art, which to me currently means I try to make sensible things. I try my best to make things that are intellectual and unexpected and that give courage to whoever feels connected to them, and through them connected to me.

It's often not so easy to convince myself of the idea that my silly game with images and language and other material is not a completely pointless occupation. (Especially in regard to all those other weighty matters of concern, like crises and disasters) However, even if sometimes I really can't manage to do so, it's a comforting thought that, even if it were, pointless. Pointless might be not as bad of a word anyway.

Imagine me and my friends would start an army of utterly pointless things:

We would instantly be joined by QR codes;
Then a lot of different types of hair gel;
Then jellyfish;
Then panda bears;
Then most twitter accounts;
Then dragons (aren't even real);
Then pretty much all other imaginary creatures and characters;

Then all works of fiction, for without imaginary creatures and characters they would have become completely nonsensical and nobody would like them anymore;

By then we would have automatically convinced the poets; If we've got the poets, we also have the dancers; When we've got the dancers, we've got the musicians, and the filmmakers and the sculptors and the painters...

And then, a while after we have become VERY popular, especially on the internet, (for sure we now convinced both Kim AND Kanye) I'm talking trillions of likes and followers, and television and radio has finally caught up with what's happening, maybe even Mrs. Verkroost would eventually decide to join in on the fun, and put her enthusiasm for etymology to some good use after all.

♣

Many thanks to my tutors:

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Maria Louise van den Putte;

thanks a lot for a lot of proofreading & the great talks

∞ *ŠhóutÖyt² thq Ğods:*

*Ásgerður Birna Björnsdóttir, Ruben van Dijk, Channa Brunt, Eva Valdimardóttir, Simon
Becks, Miron Galić, Thom van Hoek, Andreas Maul, Luca Asta, Lukas Meßner, Annahita
Asgari, Flavia Evangelista de Azevedo, Machiel van Stokkum, Mom, Dad, Cindy & aaalll
of my other insanely beautiful fam. LY*

(Design by me)

Susan van Veen, 2016

"It seems a little silly to call something silly — as if it is not to be taken seriously. But then as soon as I attempt to explain it I notice how silly the phrase 'a little silly' sounds.

A little like a bird chirping. A little bird, perhaps a silly little bird from little Italy in the big apple new york city.

Oh, sorry, I lost my train of thought, or the thread of my thought, as some people say. Thread-bare. Beware the dreaded tred bear. Teddy bear. Bear with me a moment if you can bear it; I will bare my soul. My sole reason for writing this is to