

CONDITIONS FOR COINCIDENCE

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Conditions for coincidence,

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MAX/
MEI

Introduction

For the past few years I have combined a full-time course at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy with a part-time job. That in itself is not unusual, but in my case it meant that I was traveling often. It did not take much of my time, but the trips have left a significant impression on me as a maker. The unexpected moments when I was away required me to find inspiration or to be productive in moments that didn't always suit me, rather than times when I would normally (seemingly randomly) feel *creative*. I became fascinated by the phenomenon of the mental state of creativity; was it manufacturable? Is there an on/off button? A way to plan or situate moments in which you can decide to become inspired?

Another aspect of this essay originated some time ago, with my fascination for unravelling processes¹. To give an example of what I mean by *studying processes* I will explain one of my works, which shaped my view on making, and thinking about making, art in general. The project was called *direction weave*. Weaving is one of the techniques² we are taught at the textile department where I study. I approached this project not from the angle of re-producing the techniques I was taught - the craft - but instead I took the system of weaving apart and observed all the treads separately. I also looked at the relationship between a print and the material on which it prints, in this case the textile. The ausbrenner technique affects cotton by making it burn and disappear in the places where the ink is printed. Inspired by this technique, and dismantling the notion of weaving in advance, I wove a cloth in which the material of the wires alternated every 10 cm, using silk and cotton threads. I did this in both the warp (vertical threads) and weft (horizontal threads.) The result was a checked pattern formed out of blocks composed of different combinations of threads: only cotton; half-cotton half-silk; completely silk; and half-silk half-cotton, relative to the warp and weft. Printing my woven fabric with the ausbrenner technique, resulted in surfaces with silk threads dangling in both a horizontal as vertical direction. Thus by looking at the characteristics of weaving, in combination with ausbrenner, and changing the craft from

¹ see *Processes** in glossary

² see *Technique** in glossary

there, I discovered something new. I looked back and changed the usual conditions, testing the ultimate potential of the combination of these two techniques, searching for the limits of the capacity of an existing technique. 1 + 1 = 3

The latter became the starting point for my research. Fascinated by processes and the way things go³ I examined my own work process and that of artists around me. And all of the conditions⁴ in which they take place. Whilst traveling for my work, I noticed that the places where I was, besides being absence of the academy, had another effect on me, mainly influencing my state of mind. Corresponding to the way my thoughts were running or my course of action, these mode's⁵ were calming, motivating or inspiring. Upon realizing this, I wondered: How can your environment be used to affect the malleability of your creativity? To what extent is the environment a condition, and the condition an influence?

And so I began my research with a similar approach as with the weaving example, always looking for the nuances, the gaps, the conditions and their consequences.

During this research I stumbled upon various existing terms that people use when they talk about creative processes, and I wanted to break open their current meaning⁶. The reformulation of these terms, making their meaning negotiable, resulted in a list: the glossary. You can use the glossary definitions while reading, as tools or keys, to receive the texts in a similar way as the glossary was created: curious, questioning, and open.

This essay will consist of two parts, the first is the glossary, the second a compilation of episodes taken from my body of research.

³ *Showcasing the relationships happenings and conditions have on the way one thing follows up the next. The Way Things Go (German: Der Lauf der Dinge). An 1987 art film by the Swiss artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss, documents a long causal chain assembled of everyday objects, reacting on each other creating a chain reaction.*

⁴ see *Conditions** in glossary

⁵ see *Mode** in Glossary

⁶ "Art, for him, is paradigmatic, since as praxis it continually be remade anew, and in this it is rather the opposite of fixing or identifying thinking" - *Drawing a Hypothesis* by Nikolous Gansterer. page.37

Part I

Glossary

These are the words I use to reason, think and investigate. This is a tool kit for my research, which I used in the way a carpenter uses a hammer to do his job. This research then turned into texts and the texts into an archive.

ma•ker

The maker can be defined as true professions such as creator, artist, writer, designer, architect, painter.⁷

Whilst writing, my own process was obviously my reference. At this moment I am studying at an art academy. But how do I view the term *artist*? I want to compress these definitions into one by referring to a maker as a person that makes or produces something. Leaving open the possibilities of what that something is; just refereeing to the maker as the link between an idea and an object.

pro•duc•er

This is the role a maker plays when planning, structuring and

systemising to support the process of making. For instance, acquiring materials⁸ and scheduling time in order to make.

crafts•man

I believe that when looking at crafts, the quality lies in taking over existing knowledge and skill from experts. This deed already directs the focus on traditional ways of making.

However in this essay I am interested in makers who behave in an opposite manner: makers who have a contemporary vision rather than a tradition of reproducing. A traditional craftsman often strives for perfection in his makings. But the maker I am interested in is open to anything, for the role it could

play in translating their idea, rather than labelling results as failed or successful in term of their craft.

think•er

In these texts I am curious about the role a thinker can play as a maker who generates thoughts as materials. How does someone work if they are mainly present in their mental space rather than working with physical objects as works of art? Think of philosophers, psychologists, architects, or writers.

ma•king

This is how I'll call the moment you are making materials. The physical *action* of turning an idea into a physical or readable object. Such as drawing, performing, writing; all are verbs.

ma•kings

This is the name I appointed to all materials. They can be anything, from a sketch to a finished painting to even a recorded conversation; and words can also form a net of methods creating a concept. A making doesn't always have to be a physical artwork.

tech•nique

For me, this term doesn't explain what you do, but the way you make. For me a technique is not about the method itself, but about the way you perform your action. So not only: by hitting a nail with a hammer you are constructing. But: by hitting the nail in a certain way with your specific hammer you are developing a certain way of constructing.

think•ings

My term for thoughts⁹. On average my thoughts move fast and are hard to grasp. In my mind, they form a dense and 3 dimensional matrix of moving images, colours, emotions, smells and sounds. It is important to understand that thinkings are not round, they are un-finished, fragments of ideas and situations. Sometimes I picture them as mice running through a restaurant kitchen. They appear to have a mission of their own whilst fleeing from humans that wish to catch them. Some days there are many, others they seem to have left the building.

⁷ "For conceptual artists, the artwork is seen as the documentation of the idea. They have the will to redefine art. They want to rethink the fixed ideas about art and critically examine what art can be." - translated piece from a description about the Seth Siegelaub exhibition from the website of the Stedelijk Museum.

⁸ materials will be referred to as Makings*, see glossary

⁹ "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically" Sol Lewitt.

storm-y_think•ings

This is my term for the state of mind you are in when your thoughts are seriously influenced or confused. This can happen because of your emotions or external factors: conditions¹⁰. Picture the kitchen again, what if you are trying to catch the mice while there is a storm, it's raining and the wind is blowing. You can't see clearly and the mice are hiding beneath the cupboards. The circumstances make it impossible to reason clearly. But then I wonder: can we use stormy thinkings to our advantage, to be productive? I do think that this state of mind can produce valuable thinkings, but not in the rounded manner in which clear thinkings would. They do generate mass, but require re-visiting once the storm has passed.

clear_think•ings

This is the description that I connect to the times when you experience an insight and it clicks in your head. The moment you are able to catch the mice. Picture the kitchen once more, in this state of mind the space is lit, all the objects are gone, and you can grab the mouse off the floor. Clear thinkings is not the same as eureka, were you are celebrating

a positive solution, but rather having an understanding that has to do with recognising something valuable; the moments when you understand a situation completely and are able to make connections. I personally tend to experience them during *actions*.

ac•tions

Making material is one of them, but so are all other bodily actions, such as developing, producing, drawing, talking, walking, meditating. I think that the primary requirement for an action is that the focus-point of the concentration lies outside of the mental space. The focus-point re-locates to either the body or the environment. This re-location of concentration gives the mind space to rest, which often results in a breakthrough happening *in* the mental space. Those breakthroughs are the clear thinkings, the moments when your mind suddenly forms a clear image, which can be valuable for your work.

in•ven•tive•ness

My term to describe creativity. I will no longer mention the term creativity, not because it is a taboo, but because I want to suspend the meaning that you've most likely linked to it as a reader. I want to look at the aspect of "creation" within creativity, whereby *making* as such, is already valuable. And the discovery of value in this created matter, is having an insight. In this way, we get two layers in the term creativity. And that is exactly what I mean by inventiveness: Discovering new opportunities¹¹. For me, these are the moments when you have the ability to transcend traditional ideas/patterns/relationships in order to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations. You spot them - discover them - within *happenings*.

co•in•ci•den•tal_hap•pen•ings

They are moments, just situations or chain reactions, happening in the world around you. I see them as moments of chemistry, when several ingredients, components, together give form to something else. Look at it from the perspective of the formation of plastic: where A and B component turn liquid into a hard shape. The combinations of

components undergo some kind of condition, which creates the formation. In my opinion, all the separate components play almost equal roles in the outcome of this process. For instance, the time you take to mix them, the temperature of the room, they all influence the result. And the way this applies to the formation of plastic, it could also apply in daily situations, where all of the components of your surroundings, all the *conditions*, form something new together.

con•dit•i•ons_and_cir•cum•stan•ces

The conditions under which you work are very important to me, as I believe they influence your process and thus its outcome. And with these conditions I mean the full spectrum of influences. For instance, the people you work together with, the time you take, the expectations you have of something, the space in which you do something, how you feel, your physical health. They are all components in the make-process. Surroundings, mood, and mode are three key components of these conditions.

¹⁰ see *Conditions** in glossary

¹¹ "perception of ideas generates new ideas" Sol Lewitt

sur•round•ings

The term for your spatial environment, meaning all the components that are surrounding the maker. This is not only the colour of the walls around you, or the smell of the room, but also the energetic qualities of the room, the other humans, weather. If you are writing in the library, I believe it will not only be the room itself that supports your concentration as a condition. But also the fact that others are there with the same intention to work in a focussed way.

mood

The mood has to do with your mind-state as a maker. The mood is just one of the components influencing your way of making. What if you see yourself as a tool too, you can function like a well-oiled machine or an old piece of rusted metal. It's an invisible phenomenon but nevertheless it has consequences on the mental and physical state of the maker. I don't think mood is only our emotions; it can also be something "in the air". It can mean that people are simply un-able to

focus or be active, without it being scientifically explainable why¹².

mode

It concerns *how* you do something, and it is affected by your conditions. It is not the mood, the state of mind, but the *way* of performing an action. So the difference between *mood* and *mode* is that a *mood* overcomes you and a *mode* can in some cases be awakened. For instance, you are at home and your mood is just lazy and slow and thus you are not productive, so you decide to go to the library hoping to get into a concentrated mode. So is your process impulsive or structured? Do you work according to a plan or just spontaneously, inspired and focused?

Sometimes the method directs the temporary nature by which you act. It can have a specific nature, which is for instance active, focussed, contemplative, creating, or considerate; if you are lucky your mode can even be inventive.

view•ing_dis•tance

In Part II, I'll mention the term distance a few times. I believe distance can play different roles in processes. I'll now give an example regarding viewing-distance, with the hope that you can easily relate to it later on. This example explains the use of distance as a means to study a subject or situation. Imagine, you study a coffee cup in front of you on the table. You just see the cup and you can only understand it by looking at the object itself. If you walk away from it, you create distance and see the cup on the table, the context, and thus gain a greater understanding of the cup, as you can see in what context it is used and what its position is. You can also take a third form of distance where you step away from physical reality by deconstructing all parts of the scene. This is how you create a new non-existent reality by viewing all objects independently, as separate ingredients. Example: you see the table where the cup was standing, all decomposed, 4 table-legs and a table-leaf. To me, the key to this way of looking is that you create change from these individual objects. For example, these four table legs; could you

create change by combining the four legs into one object: a kind of spider shape, which supports the table by itself, instead of four separate parts? This creates the potential for something new by using distance as a tool for discovering.

tools

These are the resources that you can turn to when making. You can choose them consciously. These so-called tools¹³ help you to build a bridge between your fleeting thoughts and tangible objects. I often experience talking as a tool, even though I have a hard time documenting the insight it provides. Another example is drawing: you can draw to translate your thoughts into drawing so that you can share them with others or can clarify them for yourself. Drawings form a gate between the mind and matter. The main tools I use are drawing, speaking out loud, or randomly making, meaning doing something active that doesn't require much conscious concentration. Perhaps the result of using a tool has to do with relating that which was unconsciously already there? And by placing ideas on paper or in spoken words they become

¹² Richard Dawkins defined the meme as a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation and replication, but later definitions would vary. The lack of a consistent, rigorous, and precise understanding of what typically makes up one unit of cultural transmission remains a problem in debates about memetics. In contrast, the concept of genetics gained concrete evidence with the discovery of the biological functions of DNA. Meme transmission requires a physical medium, such as photons, sound waves, touch, taste or smell because memes can be transmitted only through the senses. - [Meme, Wikipedia page]

¹³ "as tools of thought and forms of representation, however, diagrams in themselves have no status as art per se, but they nevertheless serve to crystallise repeated reformulations of the concept of art in the 20/21st centuries." - Drawing a Hypothesis by Nikolous Gansterer, page.37

accessible for discussion or re-visitiation, and become valuable even when unfinished.

proc•es•ses

They are the moments when one thing is being turned into something else. While looking at a process you are only looking at steps: such as walking or kneading. You are not looking at the beginning of a project, nor at the final result. These are the moments in between.

es•ca•la•tor

When I look at processes I also look at the impact they have on the end result. While writing my essay, I experienced the inescapable influence that the process had on itself. I wrote one part of the essay, and then the next, gradually learning, which influenced the next part, because of the insights I had developed in my first text. So I started to believe in the chronology of the consequences that a process has on itself. Imagine it as a visual metaphor for an escalator. Each step supports the following step. Without making the first step, the second is out of range. In addition, the whole staircase moves slowly forward, in the same way as the accumulating knowledge simultaneously establishing itself within you.

sponge

In my fantasy this object simulates your unconscious mental archive, the laboratory where all your thinkings, happenings, and mice come together to be collected. A sponge is not selective, and it is not active. Its needs the actions of the maker to give it purpose. Your surroundings, even when you don't choose for them to, can already influence your sponge by being present. When many happenings have been experienced there is an abundance of water inside the sponge, which creates the urge within the maker to get rid of the water.

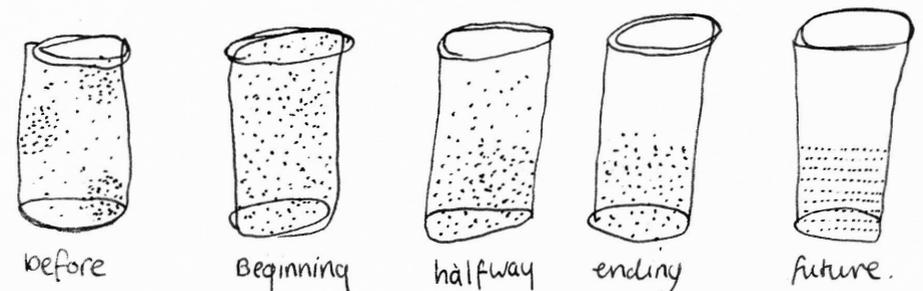
vacuum_clean•er.

This is the sponge it's conscious opponent. The size of the hose represents the notion of selection. Only items smaller than the size of the hose end up being sucked into the bag. This is the more aware version of your mental space collection: information in order to formulate insights later on. It can be texts you decide to read. For example, when you decide to read texts about your subject, not entire books are being sucked up, only the sentences or notions valuable to the maker. I also experience this when I am cycling through a city and I am simultaneously very motivated or seized by a particular project, this combination of factors gives me a filtered view that magnifies all relevant things along

the way, I feel as though I am collecting a selective basket of inspiration parts I can use later on when making.

tick•ing_ten•sion

I experience that the driving force behind all processes is time. It is the accelerator in the case of a deadline; it is the cause of the increased demand for productivity. It is also the distributor of tension, by dividing the time you have, you also distribute the amount of work and thus the pressure. Time is also a healer; the divided pieces flutter to the ground and resolve themselves. But when there is no tension at all, time will slowly snow burry the urgency to finish the idea.



Part II

Chapter 1

The coming anecdote is the documentation from a moment that occurred when I was working in Paris during a school weekend. We were having a photo shoot during the closing hours of Musee du Grand Palais, at an exhibition showcasing the history of Louis Vuitton, the client I work for.

Museum
Paris
04:42 AM

I stand in room filled with vintage Louis Vuitton trunks.

The theme of this particular part of the show appears to be “road trip” as the whole space is covered in a highly stylistic wallpaper suggesting a life size road accompanied by typical French town trees. Leaning my tired forehead against the vitrines, waiting for the photographer to set up, I inspect the trunks. Each of the boxes have 12 or more drawers with complimentary purpose; they take unnecessary space; they must be heavy. They remind me of my essay.

I have a folder filled with the 14 chapters I have written; approximately 6 versions per chapter that are stacked chronologically, organised per chapter and neatly separated by plastic sheets.

The reason my essay research branched out to this extent is because I am a careful investigator.

Potential fascinations, clustered together, looking like frogspawn. Picture an interest looking like an egg, the yellow core is the actual interest, the white is the border supporting it's content. But this borderland can lean on the border of another subject, and by doing so support each other. As a researcher, I get the feeling that in order to understand one subject fully, I need to understand the bordering subjects as well. Therefore my essay topic became broader and broader until it became a pond filled with baby frogs all equally precious.

Next to the core research folder I have a separate folder with printed articles, hand-written notes, drafts and copies from books. Of course there is also a digital folder that has the same information backed up including more in-between drafts and even older stages from when I was still interviewing artists last spring. Trashing all the useless papers, I could place all of the current sheets on the floor, like tiles in a bathroom, and by doing so cover all the floors in my house. Making it impossible for me to walk anywhere.

As if the photography assistant sees my thoughts leaking into the cold glass like a hologram where I am still pressing forehead onto it, or perhaps just to be polite and try to keep me awake, he asks:

Him: “What project will you be working on when you go home on Sunday?”

Me: “I’m writing my graduation essay. It’s about the way surroundings influence you as a maker, and if you can use this awareness. If it, the awareness, has an effect on what you make and if you can play with that effect”.

With a surprised and honestly interested expression on his face he continues by asking what I’ve done so far. I explain the almost year long process I’m in, not admitting having written about 30.000 words of overflow and the need to make space on the floor to walk. When he states, in a both naïve-joking as well as all-knowing saint tone of voice:

Him: “Well good luck doing that for the next 10 years!”

After which I miraculously state, hearing myself speak unfamiliar words and fresh opinions while utterly agreeing on them once I release them into mid air:

Me: “Yes I know, I’m only going to show the reader what stage I’m in now. This is just one part of the process, its silly to collude on something like that and lock it, you could perhaps say that the great thing about having process as a subject is that it contradicts itself to conclude about it, walking the path further I will just get shaped by it and my opinion will change with the passing of time! “

He’s called back to work so I return to studying the trunks and the pictures hanging behind them. A road trip, a path. A couple sitting in a car awaiting adventure. *It’s all too connected.*

A remark from one of my teachers pops into my mind: she once wrote in an email: “*and also: what happens if the conditions for making work / object radically change : by others, by yourself, or the weather for*

example?" Looking back at the pic-nick trunk I hear a piece of a song from Outcast.

"You can plan a pretty picnic but you can't predict the weather".

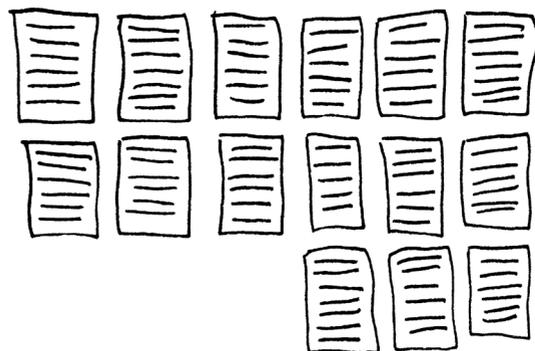
And I think of the way I sometimes wish to plan having *clear thinkings* in the way I just spoke out loud. Planning a moment I want to write something good, but when the time comes, encountering *stormy thinkings* instead. I go on wondering if I will ever find solutions to control these thinkings, or will just keep on driving down this road for 10 years like the assistant suggests.

Picking up papers

Through this research I came to believe that my creative process is always chronological, every step has consequences on the next. Like on an escalator¹⁴, when you finish taking one step you walk onto the next. I believe everything you experience in your research leaves a trace in the end result. Look at it as a trace material leaves in space. When neglecting matter by storing, recycling, or throwing something away, all you do is re-locate; it still exists and leaves a trace. In my theory, processed words leave traces in new text by establishing themselves as a new kind of knowledge. All the research I've done for the entire essay is embedded in my thinkings, and thus my texts. Everything I will write from now on will be carried by all the words written previously.

What I will be serving you in this booklet are the sheets of paper I decided to pick up from the floor:

episodes from a larger on-going process, digesting, rethinking and reshaping my position towards the subject.



¹⁴ see Escalator* in glossary

Chapter 6

This chapter is about using working conditions to my advantage.

Hotel room 405

Paris

22:32 PM

Sitting on my hotel bed, because there is no other place to sit comfortably, I flip through my agenda.

Making notes for the days ahead in Amsterdam, my mind is already there, waiting for my body to follow. My existence is numbed in order to work without letting it affect me. A routine of stepping outside of my conscious self in order to deal with the physical aspect of my work. A way of being un-sensitive to the world around me, now that I think of it, it is exactly the opposite of the mode I desire to behave during my academy life. When I return from this trip, I will have to deal with switching from this routine, absent mode into a present, maker mode – this takes time. By then, I will have spent half of my week without being productive as a maker, thus I nervously ask myself: *How to be productive when I return?*

My belly kneads my intestines while digesting. My fingers knead clay while making a sculpture.

What body part can knead my brain whilst thinking? I want to gain control over the quality of my thinking in stormy moments, and I wonder: *what tools can function as my brain's kneading fingers?* The space around my intestines is my belly, what space surrounds my brain? Skull, hair, room, roof? In my opinion, a room sets a mood¹⁵. Your mood can be uplifting and energetic, emotionally and physically powerfully positive. And I think this mood influences the way you behave: your state of mind. By disconnecting from daily routine I think you can transcend into another state of mind, one that can influence your behaviour and thus your way of working. So I've come to think that surroundings are invisibly kneading my thinkings, because they influence mind-states and therefore my work. We all know what a change of context can do for us: visiting family, you tell different stories than when chatting in your classroom. A big part of this shifting behaviour does not even happen

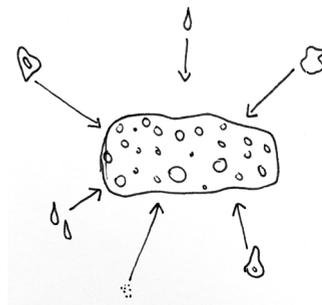
¹⁵ see Mood* in glossary.

consciously, it's possible that you only realise its effect afterwards, or not at all.

I believe surrounding spaces influence what the sponge¹⁶ endures: your unconscious mental archive. Inspiration is the state of experiencing, when the sponge is absorbing. Rest is the state of digestion, when the sponge lays in silence. Expression is the state of concentration, when you wring the sponge.

Following this idea, a maker can place the sponge, or act with the sponge, in a way that is suitable to the present stage in their process. *In what ways we can deal with this awareness of your behaviour in a certain context? Can you steer your productivity by situating your process in ways that you expect will be beneficial?* Chewing on this question in the context of my current situation, a clear thought strikes. I pick up my phone and send a message to my mother. Her best friend owns an unnecessarily large house in the dunes of a southern province called Zeeland. The house is called Duinzicht and is empty for ninety percent of the year. I tell her that I really need to write my essay and when I'm home I'll get into the routine of cleaning my house or seeing friends or doing yoga because those are the things I normally do there. And at school I'll be equally distracted by my own enthusiasm and then at the end of the day just be really stuck on writing and have even less time to succeed. I tell her that I need a place to go inward, a place where I don't have too many choices, or an established connection with any routines or activities. I hope to create something new there, being alone and in these unfamiliar rooms will be a constant reminder of why I'm there. Not a space I have associations with, but just a blank space I can give a purpose too and get into a writing *mode* without anybody to be responsible for.

I end up moving to the house for little under two weeks with the intention to write in the ways I imagined.



¹⁶ see *Sponge** in glossary

Chapter 10

In this chapter I revise my position towards travelling whilst flying on an airplane from Amsterdam to Los Angeles.

Boeing 747-400
California
16:02 PM

I deliberately chose to become a sucking sponge, turning into my own lab-rat, my own test animal; testing the influence I can have as a maker over my mind state. I have experienced writing in Duinzicht, where the surrounding served as a supportive structure of the mind and of focus. But now my desire is to look at the other effects changing surroundings can have on you as a maker. In addition to expressing accumulated mind matter on this trip I want to suck up inspiration. My boyfriend and I have planned a 10-day road trip, travelling without a direct goal, apart from being open to *whatever*. Thinking about it in that way, isn't it a method too? Once you choose to do something, even if it is doing nothing, maybe it is still part of a plan or a type of behaviour? And I wonder, in the case that I discover methods, are these inventions still authentic? Are the things I experience so deliberately on free terms, still authentic and real when situated? Or isn't there such a thing as *situated authenticity*? This duality probably comes from the fact that I often experience an insight when my concentration is shifted to a space outside of my mind, into nature or my body. *So, how can I have a conscious focus outside of my mind and simultaneously experience clear thinkings?* I cannot be in two places at the same time...

The plan is to spend the next days in a Californian mind-state, not yet sure what that actually means, driving in a car that's converted into a driving house, *creating the chance* to live free from plans, but with an intention... A driving contradiction? I'm wondering if it's even possible; when already expecting something, can you still have an authentic experience?

Traces

I believe there are a few ways of looking at the role context plays in makings.

Context can, as mentioned before, have the potential of being a supporting structure for the mind.

But where lies the boundary between facilitating and influencing your work? Not in the way that you purposefully situate yourself in an 'experience' environment like the purpose of this road trip, but in the way that the surroundings are so inevitably connected with the content of the work that the context becomes the content. Take photography, where the surroundings automatically become part of the final work. You choose a subject to photograph; therefore it's always shape-able by your choice of location or framing: the surroundings you point your lens towards. You visit a desert: take a picture of sand. You build a set: take a picture of the installation.

But recently, I began to wonder; doesn't this *always* apply? Doesn't everything you see and experience settle within you, and transform into something new once you create a work? Isn't there always a trace of the visited space within the final material?

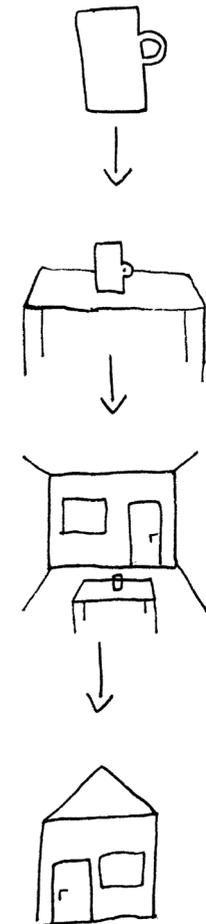
Looking at inspiration from the perspective of the photographer, where you deliberately choose your surroundings with an expectation, searching for a location that has potential, the location is not the final work itself, but it becomes the playground for material to be created. So just like the photographer, can I always shape my surroundings and trips in such a way that I create a foundation for makings to come? And will I, in retrospect, be able to see the trace Los Angeles left on me or my work? And if I do, how will I look upon travelling in the future?

Distance I

Still sitting in the airplane I continue contemplating my adventures ahead. Perhaps travelling has played another role, a third one, besides inspiring or influencing the content of my works. I look at the unfamiliar grounds passing by underneath me and I think about my position towards travelling, the literal one. With the rocky landscape forming a sandy map thousands of meters beneath me, I feel the distance. Every mile I travel further from home, the feeling of the pressure to be productive grows smaller, as if the magnet loses its strength as the physical distance from being surrounded by my makings¹⁷ grows. Only

¹⁷ see *Makings** in glossary

seeing my makings in my minds eye perhaps resulted in an overall habit of studying situations from a distance¹⁸? Looking back, perhaps this shaped my general vision, causing me to look from a distance at an entire structure, not only the house, but also the poles it's build upon? So viewing a situation in its entire context. For example, I don't just look at a work I've made on its own as an object, but also at its context. Where will it stand, who will look at it, how do I look at it; the whole situation or scene surrounding the object, its context, will shape my vision or trigger ideas.



¹⁸ see *Distance** in glossary

Chapter 12

In this chapter I will introduce serendipity, explain it, and define its value.

CC-corner
Amsterdam
10:25

I return from Los Angeles with very stormy thoughts. Craving for a surrounding where I can clear my thoughts, I go to a coffee place around the corner from my house to work on this essay.

A couple of days before travelling to California I did the same thing. There were only a few people at the coffee place - most of them concentrated - a perfect atmosphere to write.

A girl walks in and finds a seat at a table next to mine, we immediately recognise each other; she also studies at the Rietveld. The change of surroundings from every day hall-way passing at school to a remote coffee place triggers a conversation. Her motivation was the same as mine: she is seeking silence to write her graduation essay. After my Californian trip the ritual re-occurs, a few moments after I set up the girl coincidentally walks in again. She enthusiastically describes the process she's been in recently. After we spoke, she followed my advice and retreated into nature, a cabin in the north, imitating my method of traveling in order to trigger my writing. Using an external source to stimulate an internal process. She then admits that, just like me, she also became addicted to this way of working, to depending on the support of a carrying structure, a silent surrounding that stimulates a stream of writing. We go on talking about our subjects, linking them to the current situation, the coincidence that we met again.

She asks me: "Do you believe in Hazards?"

Me: "What's that?"

She: Chance, probability, fortuity, luck, accident. I don't know If I create it myself by giving it meaning, or if it's a set thing? I want to make this day matter so I give meaning to it, in order to comprehend it.

Me: "You mean this situation is: Serendipity"

She: "Huh? What's serendipity compared to chance?"

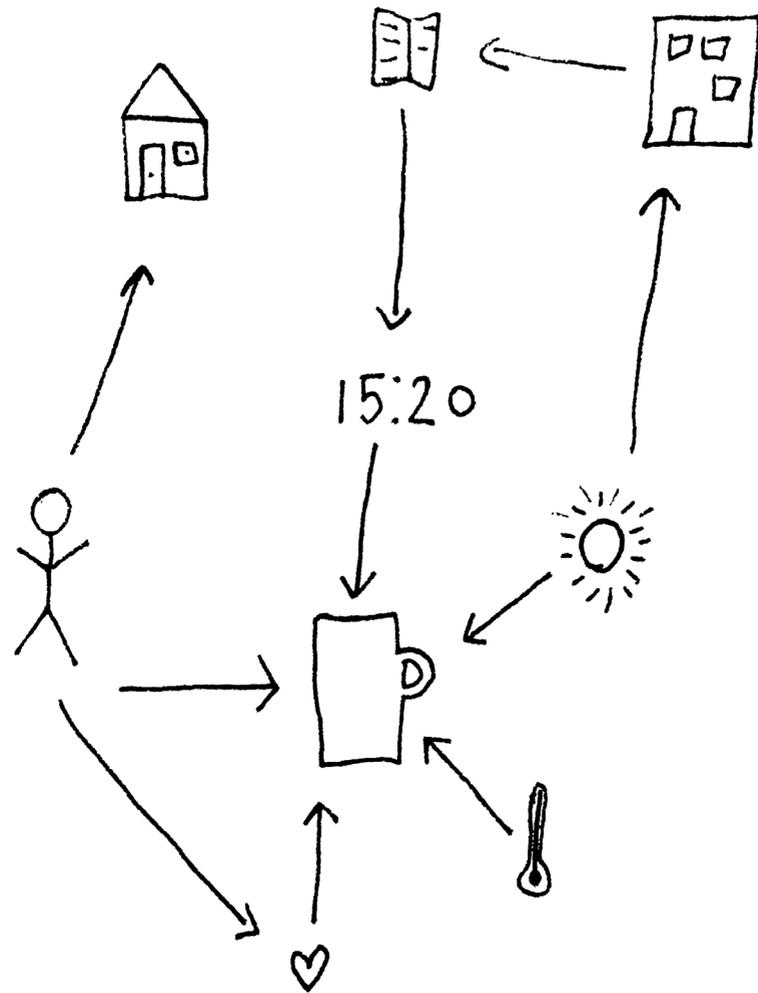
Me: "I believe serendipity is when you are already looking for something but you find something else, or something even better. For instance,

your walking on the street looking for gum on the pavement, and you find a golden ring. It's actually similar to the situation we are in now! I'm here to work on my writing, actively searching, and I run into you! I was looking for an environment to work on my thesis, which resulted in coming here; I find you instead. These conversations ended up being far more valuable than coming here simply to write in silence, thus it's an example of serendipity. You search, and find something else because you allow the other thing to happen. I could have also just said hello, and stuck to my plan. But here we are, both moving two steps ahead!" I go on by telling her that I believe that all these surprises aren't pure coincidence. That in fact I was creating circumstances hoping for productivity, but by chance created this opportunity. Using the coincidence to my advantage, as well as coming here in the first place, are not purely accidental happenings. With serendipity the emphasis lies in active behaviour, which again links to our current situation, as I actively went here with a goal. While doing this, I was aware that possible shifts might occur during this process, leaving open spaces for conversations like these to occur. So both being here and accepting influence may seem coincidental, and were indeed not planned, but were influenced by the fact that I situated them¹⁹.

It's almost like chemistry, the way that it is influenced by all ingredients: space, time, people. All these conditions are shifting external components; the weather, people, and moods are like a chain reaction, or web, all influencing each other in one way or another. I cannot view such a coincidence separated from this web of happenings. Thus I cannot view it separately from engaging in plans either. If something positively affects my mood before I decide to make a work, the outcome of that work might be influenced by this positive happening. To use the idea of serendipity is not a tool, not a system; it's as fluid as its components. It is not directly the method (for facilitating suitable surroundings) that made serendipity, but rather the openness towards these situations, and that I decide to react to them, use them to my

¹⁹ "Many of the things that have happened in the laboratory have happened in ways it would have been impossible to foresee, but not impossible to plan for in a sense. I do not think Dr. Whitney deliberately plans his serendipity but he is built that way; he has the art—an instinctive way of preparing himself by his curiosity and by his interest in people and in all kinds of things and in nature, so that the things he learns react on one another and thereby accomplish things that would be impossible to foresee and plan." — Irving Langmuir
Quoted in Guy Suits, 'Willis Rodney Whitney', *National Academy of Sciences, Biographical Memoirs* (1960), 355.

advantage, that attracts serendipity. This is serendipity within you, because you are the one who spots it. You are not someone who is controlling serendipity by forcing the web of happenings in such a way that it suits you, but rather you are someone who is simply open to what the web has to offer.



Un-finishedness

Once I stopped writing this essay everything fell into place, as if the knowledge had suddenly settled in my system. Whilst writing I learned that concluding a work like this is a contradiction. Since I could start again at this point, using the wisdom I have accumulated through writing.

This essay began with searching for ways by which you can influence your creative productivity. Was there an on/off switch to get into an inspired mode²⁰? One in which you effectively make or experience inventive insights? Can you gain control over the mystified²¹ creative process?

I gradually realised that the term *control* is more appropriate to connect to the moments before and after the making process, than to the moment of making itself, the happening. Searching for systems and methods to initiate creative productivity, I came to believe that this space in between is actually supposed to be free from control or influence in order to experiment in a limitless manner. Aiming to control the deed of making, as I wanted before, started to seem contradictory in my eyes because this method involves having a plan. You make something from an idea, an expectation. I believe that in this way you'll discover nothing new, because this idea is formulated from pieces in your mind that are already familiar to you, pieces that already exist. Because of this, I believe you will no longer be surprised by what occurs during this moment²² of creation. So in my opinion, the results can only become

²⁰ see *Mode** in Glossary

²¹ Paul: "Somewhere you were quoted saying artists are mystics". Sol: "I was trying to get rid of the idea that they are all rationalists. In my eyes all artists are mystics in the extend that they do something that has not been done before, that an artist goes into an unknown space" - Sol Lewitt says in an interview with Paul Cummings - taken from an episode of *Close up*, Avro May 2013

²² Ernest: "I should have said that great artists work unconsciously, that they were 'wiser than they knew'. Gilbert: It's really not so Ernest, all fine imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate. No poet sings because he must sing. At least no great poet does. A great poet sings because he chooses to sing." - *A critic as artist* by Oscar Wilde, page 33, 2012 edition, originally published 1890.

ground-breaking²³ when there is space to experiment totally free from restrictions or pre-conceived expectations.

However, this layer of not having expectations doesn't count in the moments you are trying to situate the moment. You can design the structure the work is emerging in beforehand, but not the moment itself. And you can reflect upon what you've made afterwards, but not during the action of making itself. Look at it as a kind of space between bookends, which support the coincidence originating. The choice of books is yours; the space between is made by you; the choice to engage with that which occurs in this space is yours, all choices, all deliberate actions, all connected to control. What exactly happens within that space however, is "anything". From valuable to nonsense: that is for the moments after to decide. To me, this once again emphasises the value of physically made material: something visible, negotiable and adjustable to reflect upon. Imagine the function of the created object as a living entity that may interfere with the outcome of your experiment. The material is the key to coincidence. I feel like the materials can change your ideas by "going differently than planned" in a good way, influencing you to behave differently, or perhaps to take an unusual step in the process that creates, which creates opportunities. What is important in this way of approaching the creative process is having an openness to whatever occurs. Looking back at the craftsman²⁴ mentioned in the glossary: these coincidences can also be mistakes. If they are discarded by the maker and labelled as mistakes, they are no longer valuable, so the awareness towards the materials or the moments is absolutely essential.

On spotting the serendipity within these situations: serendipity on its behalf is again inevitably linked with taking action in general. If you don't *make*, there is also nothing to discover within the *made*. If you don't pay attention, you will not spot what is there to discover. Therefore, looking

²³ "Rather than sequestering or policing the diagram in an axiomatic grid, Deleuze repeatedly emphasises the ways diagrams work to generate a kind of cognitive sweep that extends the possibilities of thought. Every artistic work which attempts to produce spaces for thought and experience, and moreover, which are in confrontation with regulations and mechanisms of control, has shown that this cannot be understood voluntaristically". *Drawing a Hypothesis by Nikolous Gansterer, page 33*

²⁴ see Craftsman* in glossary

at my own process, I believe that it is all about these active decisions²⁵ to engage beforehand, and about carefully paying attention and reflecting afterwards. Realising these things changed me in that I am no longer afraid of the external pressures for maintaining productivity - which initially made me search for mechanisms of control - because I have now come to trust the efficiency of making.

Any project can become valuable, as long as I keep making, and reflecting; nothing has to be perfect, or finished, or as planned, things can become fluid if you are the final editor.

In the period following up on my essay presentation I travel for work once again. This time my work takes me to a village in the unspoilt nature of Kentucky, in middle America. The village, where the Shakers had once settled their commune as a branch of Christianity similar to the Amish, had now turned into a museum. They had a workshop instead of a church, and believed in the act of *making* as a prayer²⁶. The items they produced were mainly tools: things such as hammers, brooms, rakes and wheelbarrows. But I think, in retrospect: isn't the act of making a tool²⁷ in itself? The tool that helps you get into a certain mode? A switch for creativity? So now that I no longer look for ways to control coincidental happenings, except by situating the conditions, are there at least methods that can stimulate it? If you make with no expectation, and there is no pressure, it does not have to be finished; doesn't the threshold to start making then become lower or even absent? The act of making can then be seen as a way to create a kind of openness, something unexpected, some kind of trigger to enter a certain state of mind, a mode²⁸. This receptive mind state once again reminds me of the prayer of the shakers, looking at prayer as a form of meditation, in which you try to create distance from your thoughts and be fully present in the moment. A tool to become sensitive for all that happens in the present

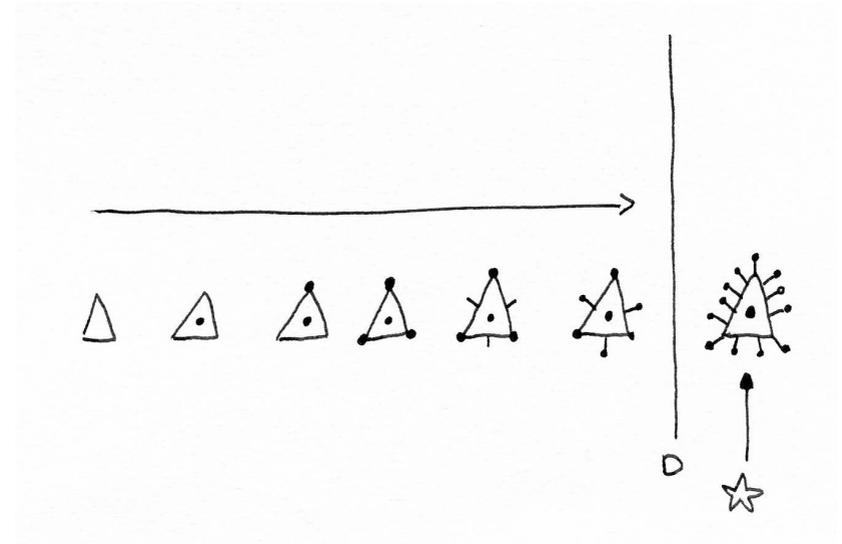
²⁵ "Train yourselves. Don't wait to be fed knowledge out of a book. Get out and seek it. Make explorations. Do your own research work. Train your hands and your mind. Become curious. Invent your own problems and solve them. — Irving Langmuir, In 'Dr. Irving Langmuir', *Boys' Life* (Jul 1941), 12 - taken from *Serendipity* by Pek van Anel. Bloemlezing.

²⁶ believing that making something well was in itself, "an act of prayer." - Wikipedia page about the Shakers.

²⁷ see Tools* in glossary.

²⁸ see Mode* in glossary

moment, including material or inventive ideas. In chapter 6 I talk about the state of numbness I often live in while I work or do things, day-to-day things, and I believe that the purpose of using these tools is to break out of that state, to consciously switch from being a machine that ploughs through life, into a receptive 'canvas', empty from influence and filled with opportunity. Imagine thoughts being like clouds; when you are inside of them you just sense a fogginess surrounding you, but when you create distance you can evaluate them from afar, observe their overall shape, and thus become the witness of what occurs - witness to those things with potential within them, but also the faulty or un-finished - in the same way that experiencing the Shakers shaped my opinion towards appointing tools to stimulate creativity. I had a flexible position towards my essay, and allowed myself to re-write parts of it. Re-think them even though the final draft was already submitted. To realise that every time you think you finish something it's o.k. to change your mind about it, or to be shaped by the process itself, to be open to *open* endings.



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