



Ilustração do demônio Yan-gant-y-tan por Louis Le Breton, gravada por M. Jarrault (*Dictionnaire Infernal*, 1863). Arte de domínio público. Composição visual remixada.

ARTISTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

AND THE MAKING OF *PHILOSOPHICAL ARCHAEOLOGY*

SPACE 2009–2019

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Abstract

This visual essay unfolds my research on *philosophical archaeology* by means of artistic practice, showing how philosophical archaeology—a method of historical inquiry that essentially embodies one's relation to history and historiographic research—is conceived and carried out as an artistic *modus operandi*, as an artistic historiography. Thus, at the core of this research lies a broad question: How can artists historicize? The following, being solely a special case, attempts an answer—it exhibits a research space (titled *Philosophical Archaeology Space 2009–2019*) that was constituted as, and by, philosophical archaeology in my own artistic practice of the years 2009 and 2019. Finally, this research reflects on philosophical archaeology's potential (as artistic *modus operandi*, as “Ar[t]chaeology”) to distend the discourse of history and historiography.

Keywords

Philosophical Archaeology, Artistic Research, Artistic Historiography, History, Giorgio Agamben.

HISTORIOGRAFÍA ARTÍSTICA Y LA CREACIÓN DEL *ESPACIO DE ARQUEOLOGÍA FILOSÓFICA 2009–2019*

Resumen

Este ensayo visual desarrolla mi investigación sobre la arqueología filosófica a través de la práctica artística, mostrando cómo la arqueología filosófica —un método de indagación histórica que encarna esencialmente la relación con la historia y con la investigación historiográfica— se concibe y se lleva a cabo como un *modus operandi* artístico, como una historiografía artística. Así, en el núcleo de esta investigación yace una pregunta amplia: ¿Cómo pueden los artistas historizar? Lo que sigue, siendo tan solo un caso particular, intenta una respuesta: exhibe un espacio de investigación (titulado *Espacio de Arqueología Filosófica 2009–2019*) que fue constituido como, y por medio de, la arqueología filosófica en mi propia práctica artística entre los años 2009 y 2019. Finalmente, esta investigación reflexiona sobre el potencial de la arqueología filosófica (como *modus operandi* artístico, como “Ar[t]queología”) para distender el discurso de la historia y de la historiografía.

Palabras clave

Arqueología filosófica, investigación artística, historiografía artística, historia, Giorgio Agamben.

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Introduction

I first came across the notion of “philosophical archaeology” roughly a decade ago while reading Giorgio Agamben’s book *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. Initially, philosophical archaeology seemed pertinent to my scholarly work and—of at least equal importance—echoed central concerns of my ongoing artistic practice. As my interest in it deepened, I identified an unexpected but nonetheless evident correlation between Agamben’s philosophical archaeology and my own research methodology, albeit worked out by different means and in the different but tangential discourse of visual art. It was as if, similarly to Agamben but unknowingly, I was exercising an artistic *modus operandi* as philosophical archaeology.

This form of archeological production parallels the ways in which I work in the studio as an interdisciplinary artist; and specifically, it shows itself in the exhibition and art methodology I discuss in this essay, which includes projects on historical accounts, archives and documents, acts of excavating and unearthing, memorials and testimonies, as well as processes of reconstruction and reenactment. What they all share is not only storytelling but also history telling (of self and other).

This essay thus aims to explicate the exhibition *Philosophical Archaeology Space 2009–2019* that I produced and exhibited in the summer of 2019, its two-part structure, and, more broadly, the artistic historiography and practice I used at that time to work on, among others, this exhibition. By artistic historiography, I mean art that explores history, the “writing” of history undertaken by an artistic practice that researches historically (the complexity of which will gradually be revealed as the essay unfolds).

Part of this effort also includes the offering of terrains of thought regarding the various artworks (or, echoing the jargon of philosophical archeology, “paradigms”) that are included in this exhibition as well as issues of materiality in relation to the presented works. Productive insights opened up by these thoughts are offered throughout the essay as a supportive element. These insights are reached (in the tradition of glossaries) as part of a “creative form of intellectual work.”¹ I aim to write about these works rather indirectly, without over-explicating them, in order to leave enough room for the readers (and viewers) to generate their own self-directed archeological interpretation. Moreover, these terrains of thought somewhat shy away from a discussion mostly based on contemporary art theories or heavily infused with examples of artworks from the history of contemporary art. I use philosophical archeology, in writing, to comment upon ideas that lie at the core of (my) artworks and artistic practice (as an *arche* or “historical *a priori*”), and that has the power to do exactly that. The important thing for me, given the logic of philosophical archeology, is to unfold a non-authoritative reading of the

¹ A commentary is a discussion or expansion of a text in the form of writing (glosses, annotations) or images (diagrams, miniatures) as features that can form part of the original program of work but which can also take on a secondary or extraneous nature. A gloss is a marginal or interlinear annotation of a word or wording in a text, commenting on, elucidating, or translating those of the main text. In the history of commentary, glossing, and marginalia, the gloss (as an ancient genre of writing) is a creative form of intellectual work. The gloss focuses, in most cases, on a single object, formally shaping itself to its object while preserving the object’s structure. The gloss forms a relationship of “continuing discontinuity” with its object; it digresses from it in order to open it from within. The gloss multiplies and synthesizes meanings, ideas, and references without necessarily revolving around a central thesis, providing interpretive and philological access to its object.

pillars/concepts (or, echoing the jargon of philosophical archeology, "signatures") that condition and govern my ongoing artistic historiography and practice.

This essay will thus show both this material-based historical *a priori* (subjective aspect) and the methodology that I used in this process (i.e., philosophical archaeology, objective aspect). Implementing this method on my own artistic practice of the same nature, that is, implementing the operation onto itself (something like "thinking through a form of thought"), means that not only did I inquire about the concept of "origin" as such but also about my personal origin—what gave birth to, and still commands, my personal identity and meaning of self; what conditions my artistic engagement in the world, and how?

This aims not to be merely a narcissistic exposition—I will attempt to transgress my personal circumstances (somewhat against the internal logic of this exposition) and to offer ideas and knowledge that I gained throughout the working process to other artists and scholars who will hopefully be able to benefit from this essay after it is published.

The following questions reverberated in the making of *Philosophical Archaeology Space 2009–2019*: If examined from the perspective of contemporary art practices, is philosophical archaeology at all a research methodology that (in part or entirely) can or should be rethought, executed, or transformed into the different but related discourse of art? In what sense could philosophical archaeology be artistically used, or, better, regenerated as an integral, organic part of artistic practices and productions? How can an artistic act interpret and develop philosophical archaeology (as a relation to history), both theoretically and in practice? And consequently, how will it influence the knowledge generated relationally at the intersection of the foregoing discourses of the humanities?

With the intention to illuminate philosophical archaeology as an artistic *modus operandi* and to examine whether this artistic practice is in a position to distend history and historiography rather than vice versa, these questions are addressed also by the process of making the exhibition—by deciding upon (and constructing) the two-part structure of the exhibition (archive and index), by choosing the previous artworks to be included and the way to exhibit them, by the materials I used in the process (sound included), by the staging of the archive and its positioning, by lighting, etc.

1. A bit of philosophical archaeology in theory

Before I progress, it is probably worthwhile to remind the readers of a few ideas of, and by, the notion of philosophical archaeology as it was gradually conceived, ultimately, by a series of theoreticians ending (temporarily, and with respect to this particular essay) with Agamben.²

Philosophical archaeology aims at researching the "historical *a priori*" dimension of a certain historical phenomenon, that which *a priori* conditions its development. It is a dimension that cannot be identified as the phenomenon's diachronic origin but as an active tendency within it that conditions its development in time.

² For further discussion, see Govrin, *Philosophical Archaeology*. In the context of this essay being published with a Brazilian journal, it is worth nodding to a few Latin American theoreticians who work on "philosophical archaeology" and Agamben's thought: Raúl Antelo, André Simões Chacon Bruno, Luis Periañez, Natalia Roberta Taccetta, and Mercedes Ruvituso, to name a few.

Philosophical archaeology, however, can be understood more broadly, revealed to be a multifaceted concept—it is a research methodology (a historiographic framework) in the humanities at large, which essentially embodies one's relation to history and historiographic research; a metaphor (allegory); (art) content or subject matter as well as a material-based historiography or method of historical inquiry in art; a critical force that conceives of its (past) objects as (future) prototypes or blueprints; and, lastly, philosophical archaeology embodies a certain (messianic) conception of time that conditions a conception of history.

The originality of philosophical archeology, as a critical methodology, does not necessarily stem from the nature of its tools but from the integration of threads drawn from various disciplines and broad fields of knowledge.

As a historiographic methodology in use throughout research across the humanities at large, philosophical archeology aims at researching, as said, the “historical *a priori*” dimension (“point of emergence”; “moment of arising”) of a certain historical phenomenon. The “historical *a priori*” designates a sequential past, yet not simply as an older prehistoric unified phase nor as an ahistorical structure; as a past that still commands in the present, it is an operative force within the historic phenomenon that guarantees its intelligibility and consistency. Philosophical archaeology is thus “a ‘science of signs,’ an inquiry into the signatures left by the origin on the living body of history.”³

The “historical *a priori*” dimension is synchronic, contemporaneous with the present and the real, and therefore the archeologist withdraws, so to speak, towards the present. Once the archeologist reaches this phase or dimension, the past that was never really experienced (and thus remained a present) becomes a real or true present; thus it has the temporal structure of *future anterior*, a past that will become a past in the future once the archeological work is complete.

The “historical *a priori*” dimension is qualitatively different from the historical dimension. Like the child in psychoanalysis (which is a continuous active force within the life of the adult) or the “big bang” (which we assume took place and the effects of which we can feel, though we cannot locate chronologically), the “historical *a priori*” is not an event or substance that precedes the phenomenon diachronically or which can be dated or chronologically situated. Neither is it a metahistorical construct that narrates the phenomenon from the outside, as in the common sense of an origin. Lacking a concrete time and space, it is a heterogeneous fracture existing between history and prehistory, a field of bipolar historical tensions that spreads between the phenomenon's *arche* and its becoming, between arch-past and present.

From an epistemological perspective, the “historical *a priori*” dimension, through various processes of canonization, conditions the potential to constitute knowledge of and by the phenomenon while at the same time being conditioned itself as it is embedded within historical constellations. Fulfilling the paradox of an *a priori* condition embedded within history, it is thus paradigmatic and transcendent. Once the archeologist, through a critique of origins, reaches this dimension that is covered and concealed by the long-lasting effect of tradition, the past that was never really experienced becomes accessible for the first time, and with it, its buried epistemologies. Hence the “historical *a priori*” (the *arche*) elucidates the phenomenon from within.

³ Cerella, *The Myth of Origin*, p. 225.

A final, introductory note

The kind of temporality I was dealing with throughout the creative process, characterizing the temporal structure of philosophical archaeology, was termed “messianic,” that is (in short), an unpredictable, non-linear temporality that is the sum of infinite, heterogenous times arranged in a kaleidoscopic-like structure and charged with a redemptive, messianic force; thus, the question I asked was as follows: “What entails a material-based artwork, unfolding its inner most temporality in messianic terms, for a conception of history?”

The structure of temporality at large, of which numerous philosophies of history were based upon, was historically conceived in different ways (for example, as circular in the ancient world, as linear with the advent of Christianity, or a mix of both as in Hegel)—what a material-based, artistic conception of temporality looks at, I suggested, is somewhat different: in fact, it harbours the ahistorical.

Its metaphor is that of the crystal, which reflects the very structure of living. Notice the convergence of a few elements pertaining to artistic practice: materiality, structuralism (not the discipline), crystal gazing and alchemy, and there are more. That the crystal reflects the very structure of living enables the artist to “read” both, specifically living that tends to evade being read, and at the same time, based on this adequacy, to escape history altogether since living and history are in opposition. The emphasis here is on the present tense; and furthermore, knowing the structure of living propels one, in principle, to go against its grain, to become ahistorical— “The crystal ‘appears as the index of a certain aesthetic occurrence’ that represents reality in an ahistorical manner, as something primordial that happens before judgment or language.”⁴ An aesthetic occurrence that represents reality in an ahistorical manner is a messianic occurrence, that which can be deciphered by, and represented by, the crystal as index. This “aesthetization” or “messianic duration” unfolds in a preconceptual manner during early childhood or during a process in which a Being undergoes complete transformation.

Recall that the index, the crystal, is materially produced; it sprouts from the depths of the ground, and in this sense, when the artist works it out, the artist works out a conception of temporality and therefore of history.

As materiality, worldly things disrupt (in their emergence, existence, and life span) the balance between the infinite and time—the infinite (that which Anaximander called the *apeiron*) is crossed by time and cannot overrule it; material things defy the infinite due to their dwelling in time, but also defy time due to their inevitable return to the infinite. Note that the infinite is not in opposition to time and is not a force of the cosmos; what this ancient Greek concept entails is that the infinite is an intermediary between the elements of the cosmos, a mediatory field they termed *meson* (the middle). The infinite is a central space from which all elements are equally distanced due to the balance they are forced to maintain, a concept that is not whole but perforated, and this characteristic is what enables it to be a mediator. Similarly, material time is formed as a porous structure.

Materiality thus gives us an indirect indication of the structure of temporality we are here interested in (a messianic temporality that is the basis for a material-based philosophy of history). Think, for example, of a Saharan sand dune: when we picture it in our mind, it looks like the invisible wind. Now, wind is a pressure-variant phenomenon that fluctuates

⁴ Govrin, *Philosophical Archaeology*, p. 97.

over time. The sand grains that move about by the wind are like a lower-dimensional slice of the wind itself, and by looking at photographic analysis of the dune, we can calculate the speed and duration of the wind that made them, so that the dune is, in fact, a lower-dimensional slice of time; in other words, the dune carries an imprint of a higher-dimensional force that made it, giving us an indirect indication of the structure of time.

2. The exhibition's two-part structure: the archive and the index

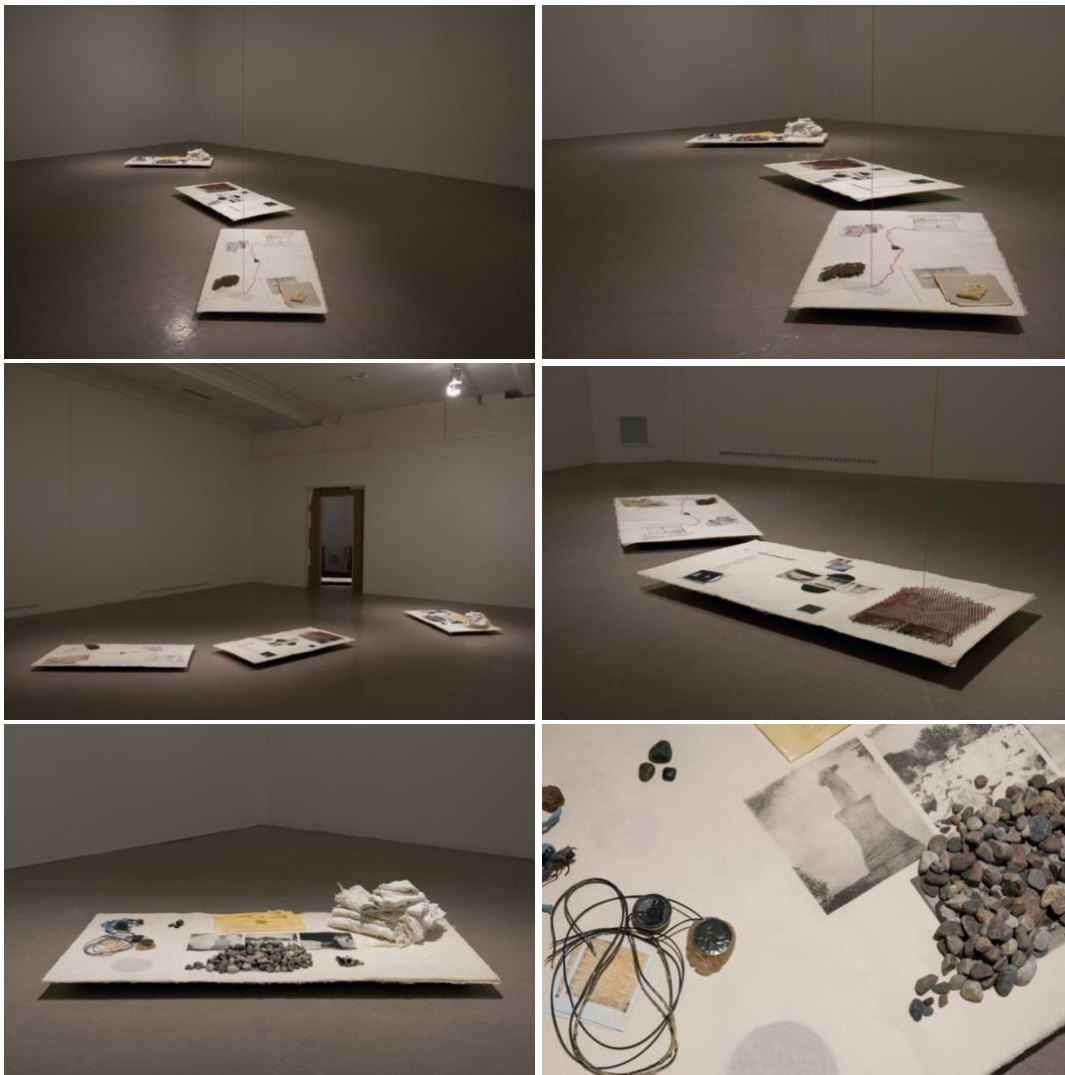
The archive and the index constitute the exhibition's two-part structure.

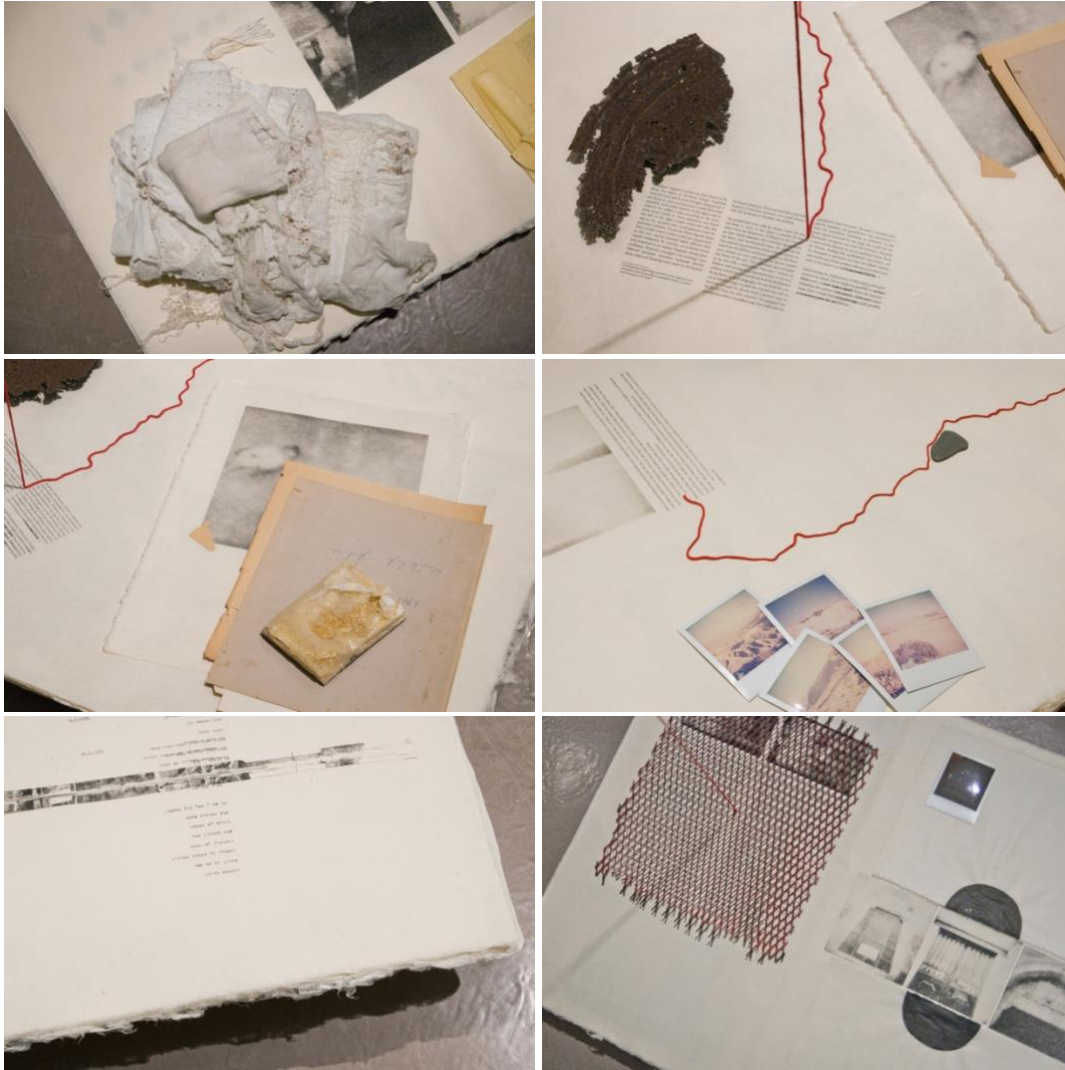
The first part, the archive, delimited in roughly one-third of the exhibition space, is not fully accessible. A perforated metal door blocks the physical entry to the archive so that one can merely view and listen to (remotely behind the door) what's inside. The archive contains previous works of mine from the years 2009 to 2019: some of them are boxed, some are fully exhibited, and some are in between.





The second part, the index, situated in the main part of the gallery space, is a series of photo-litho prints (Japanese Washi paper sheets, 30 x 55 in. each) infused with collage work, sounds, and ephemera, forming a constellation rendered and conceived by archeological art-making.





Based on what he defines as “the *culmination* of twentieth-century linguistics,”⁵ Benveniste’s well-known scholarly study *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society* (1969), Agamben points out the philological finding that the word “*index*” derives from the Latin verb *dico* which originally means “to show”—to show by words, therefore, to say. The lexical family of *dico*, as observed by linguists and philologists, is joined by an essential bond to the sphere of law; thus *index* “is ‘the one who shows or indicates by means of the word,’ just as *iudex*⁶ is ‘the one who says the law.’”⁷ The term “*vindex*” (“which denotes the one who in a trial takes the place of the accused and declares himself ready to suffer the consequences of the proceedings”),⁸ Agamben indicates, belongs to the same group and is derived etymologically from *vim dicere* (“to say or to show force”).⁹ The force in the action of *vindex* is thus the force “of the efficacious formula, as the originary force of the law. That is to say, the sphere of the law is that of an efficacious word ... [and] if this

⁵ Agamben, *The Vocabulary and the Voice*, p. ix.

⁶ In English, judge.

⁷ Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 74.

⁸ Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, pp. 74–75.

⁹ Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 75.

is true, the law is the sphere of signatures par excellence, where the efficacy of the word is in excess of its meaning (or realizes it)."¹⁰

It follows, then, that the *index* is not simply a neutrally configured locus designed to indicatively and expressively function as a means for communication and orientation, but is inherently a locus that incorporates dimensions of authority, constraint, and even coercion as it literally forms itself in the figure of a binding locus of *signatures*. In this sense, one could find in the presented index an illuminating relation, if not an equivalent (albeit in an artistic form), to the concept of the *arche*. The exhibited archive and index function (under the framework of my artistic *modus operandi*) in parallel to Agamben's paradigms and signatures (under his method of philosophical archeology)—the various works in the archive participate in, and are conceived under, *signatures* gathered together by the index.

The index is comprised of three complementary and interwoven *signatures* (that I titled as follows):

- (1) Impassability—Impassibility—Impossibility;
- (2) Anchorite—Anchorage—Bridging; and
- (3) Remnants—Relics—Fragments.

The first signature (Impassability—Impassibility—Impossibility) refers to a discussion of dishomogeneity, to the gap that can be identified within the evolution of historical phenomena or the gap within the creative process that prevails between preliminary thought and executed action. Here, a fracturing of unity marks both the need for artificial construction of meaning and the point where artistic historiography begins. In terms of a cultural critic's vocabulary, this signature alludes to the discussion of the crisis in representation and its reference to the ontological problem. This signature thus also touches upon ideas of reconnection and relations formation. The first signature is a reminder and a call for unification.

The second signature (Anchorite—Anchorage—Bridging) aims somewhat to offer a response to this call and, in this sense, can be seen as a complementary part to the previous signature, but at the same time, it stands independently. This signature incorporates various elements of bridging—fulcrums to be based upon. Several theoretical and material elements are presented as tools to process and generate meaning, interpretation, and understanding—such as techniques of ekphrasis, acts of translation, mental maps, hermeneutic strategies, etc.—tools that the works use, although differently in each occurrence.

But beyond these tools that are primarily based on spoken, written, or visual language, the works themselves are also forms of bridging—they attempt to convey to a certain viewer, through their materiality, the subjective experience of the artist. Discussing his own practice, the British sculptor Antony Gormley articulates this very point while emphasizing the potential of materiality in addressing this issue. When asked about the problem of bridging intense, subjective experiences, he replied:

That for me is the real challenge of sculpture. How do you make something out there, material, separate from you, an object amongst other objects, somehow carry the feeling of being—for the viewer to somehow make a connection with it.... That idea that in some way there are things that cannot be articulated, that are unavailable for

¹⁰ Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 75.

discourse, which can be conveyed in a material way, but can never be given a precise word equivalent for.¹¹

The various fulcrums of this signature are attributed to a subject that, historically developed, has a special function that pertains to the signature's theme. As Alain de Libera's archeological analysis (on the basis of Foucauldian concepts) portrays, the concept of a subject was conceived mutely and non-linearly prior to Descartes, throughout the history of (Western) philosophy. He writes:

Descartes did not bring about a comprehensive concept unifying subjecthood, personality, identity, egoity, agency, and causality under the single word *subject*. Before being decentered 'the' subject had to be centered. It had to become a 'centre' of perception, a 'centre' of acting and suffering. Such a concept had been delineated in the Middle Ages.¹²

Thus, the modern subject emerged through the combination, in late scholasticism, of two conflicting "models of subjectivity" inherited from late antiquity—the Aristotelian philosophical conception and the Augustinian theological conception—"enabling us to grasp the 'modern subject' as a 'bridging', transdisciplinary entity."¹³

In this sense, artistic practice (and this presented exhibition that takes into account the historical discussion in terms of the medium of presentation and the certain historical charge of presenting art "archeologically") involves a subject as a focal point of perception that also has an active, participatory role in the construction of the body of work. Allying itself with poststructuralist theory at large, and in contrast to a perspective rooted in the Renaissance, art historian Claire Bishop advocates for installation art's potential, however tentative, to propel in the viewer/subject (after recognizing its fragmented and decentered subjectivity) a form of emancipation, because the *activation* of the subject is analogous to the subject's engagement in the world. A tension prevails between the fragmented *model subject* of poststructuralist theory and a self-reflexive *viewing subject* capable of recognizing its own fragmentation, since installation art "insists upon the viewer's physical presence *precisely in order to subject it to an experience of decentering*."¹⁴ What installation art offers, then, "is an experience of centering *and* decentering: work that insists on our centered presence in order then to subject us to an experience of decentering."¹⁵

The third signature (Remnants—Relics—Fragments) emphasizes the material aspect that is at work in the index, speaks to the archeological momentum the index manifests, and the various acts of digging and unearthing that were employed at hand.

Additionally, this signature echoes the recurring, interpretive theme of the "hermeneutic circle" (as it is comprised by pairs such as general-particular, object-subject, text-interpreter, and classic-romantic), albeit in a material fashion, by the use of scattered pieces of various kinds in relation to a (supposedly or imaginary) complete

¹¹ Hutchinson et al., *Antony Gormley*, p. 12.

¹² Libera, *Subject (Re-/decentred)*, p. 22. See also Libera, *When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?*, pp. 185; 194–95; 202–203.

¹³ Libera, *Subject (Re-/decentred)*, p. 22. See also Libera, *When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?*, p. 216.

¹⁴ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p. 133.

¹⁵ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p. 130.

material entity. It underlies a material practice that continuously negotiates parts and wholes within the artwork.

This material negotiation entails an epistemic dimension, in accordance perhaps with Foucault's crossing of dispersed remnants and the existence of knowledge:

[T]he epistemic is not a grand unifying theory, it is a space of dispersion, it is an open field of relationships and no doubt indefinitely describable.... [T]he epistemic is not a slice of history common to all the sciences: it is a simultaneous play of specific remanences.... The Epistemic is not a general stage of reason; it is a complex relationship of successive displacement in time.¹⁶

The fragmentary, material-based characteristic of this signature establishes a relation to the dishomogeneity characteristic of the first signature. In the same manner that, for instance, Edmond Jabès' writing is a succession of textual fragments that (due to printed spaces that separate them from one another, as well as its mixing together of different times, places, and levels of language) constitutes a structure of dishomogeneity and openness to further elaboration, so the fragmentary signature allows the artwork to stay open to unforeseen possibilities, whether on the interpretive dimension or the creative one. New uses become possible only through a perforated structure, between its cracks.

The other material aspect of the index reveals itself in the form of sound (although sound, beyond its materiality, appears in other ways within the exhibition at large). In his essay on listening, Roland Barthes speaks about a first type of listening he terms "*alert*," in which living beings orient their listening to certain *indices*, similarly to animals. Thus, he writes, "[T]he raw material of listening is the index, because it either reveals danger or promises the satisfaction of need."¹⁷ By the human "invention" of intentional reproduction of a rhythm or rhythmic representations, "listening ceases to be a purely supervisory activity and becomes creation," and due to rhythm language becomes possible since "the sign is based on an oscillation, that of the *marked* and the *non-marked*, which we call paradigm."¹⁸ Barthes raises the example of a child who listens to noises indicating his mother's desired return—the child performs *alert* listening, that of indices. But once the child stops supervising the appearance of the index and begins miming its regular return, the child turns the awaited index into a sign—thus entering the second type of listening, which is that of meaning. This type of listening is a mode of deciphering in which what the ear tries to intercept are certain *signs*. The child no longer listens to the *possible* but to the *secret* (recall Walter Benjamin's idea of "secret indices"): "that which, concealed in reality, can reach human consciousness only through a code, which serves simultaneously to encipher and to decipher that reality."¹⁹

The (visual, textual, and sonic) juxtaposed elements in each signature are not intended to be read in direct opposition, nor do they suggest simple forced equivalencies. Rather, they are deeply entangled notions of coexistence. They refute dichotomous logic in favour of a bipolar analogical model, a model that archeologically proceeds by means of reading signs and their analogies. This reading does not necessarily intend the conception of the signature as a unity-in-plurality, in accordance with the traditional,

¹⁶ Foucault; Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Barthes, *Listening*, p. 247.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Listening*, p. 249.

¹⁹ Barthes, *Listening*, p. 249.

aesthetic demand from art, which was raised by Plato.²⁰ The knowledge the signature generates propagates in time, as it appears in one place only to manifest differently somewhere else, at another time. The signature is a mode of distribution that operates through time and discourses.

Are the written sentences, concepts, images, and sounds imprinted on the paper actually a call to decipher hieroglyphics as in ancient Egypt, or are they abandoned signs, which serve only the image? And what does it mean, in this context, to have an aesthetic experience, that is, to experience beauty?

The three *signatures* of the index crystallize and unify, transport and disseminate the different artworks (referred to here as “paradigms”) that are contained within the signed archive, forming a practice-based historiographic methodology, an archeological *modus operandi*. Thus, the index, in its presented materiality and conceptual structure, corresponds and refers to similar artistic-hermeneutic techniques of historiography. One of them, for example, in the context deployed thus far, is Benjamin’s *Denkbild* in which its further explication will assist in highlighting the index as an artistic, archeological, and historiographic (cross-disciplinary) apparatus.

As of 1923, Benjamin began to publish short narrative prose pieces, so-called *Denkbilder*, which bear a relation to the Baroque emblematic technique.²¹ The Baroque emblem contains visual and verbal material in a tripartite form: *pictura* (icon or pictorial aspect), *inscriptio* (*motto*, written above and describes, somewhat enigmatically, the image), and *subscriptio* (epigram, written below the *pictura* as an explanatory poem or prose). The emblem aims to reveal a hidden meaning and significance (*res significans*) and additionally follows the two-fold intention of *Darstellen* (representation) and *Deuten* (interpretation).

Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* works similarly. They generally have a three-part form consisting of a title, a narrated image, and a related thought, and present an image as an integral albeit not immediately recognizable part of the thought. Neither is clear without the other, and their relation is subject to critical reflection of their interdependence. This interdependence of parts is characteristic of the Baroque emblem, and likewise in Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* these parts are supposed to provide information about the hidden signatures of reality. The objects of the *Denkbilder* become signs for hidden, fabricated *human* meaning about the world (as opposed to *divine* meaning in the Baroque emblem). Because the emblematic structure is intimately bound to the concept of *res significans*, the author must believe in the possibility and necessity of uncovering a secret meaning in the world, whether religious (as for the Baroque writer) or materialist (as for the modern artist). The reader is not presented with a clear meaning but is compelled to find the description of their own reflective process, to be led into a careful contemplation of the world. Thus, the *Denkbilder* relate to the hieroglyph—in the tension between image and thought, it conveys polysemy. It is this polysemy that, once reflected upon prudently, may reveal the world’s hidden meaning. This significance, however, may never be grasped fully, according to Benjamin. But nevertheless, his *Denkbilder* are intended to illustrate that reality may be constructed in multiple ways.

²⁰ Plato’s demand finds its connection here with the idea of *kairos*: “The idea of *kairos* as right timing is reimagined by Plato as aesthetic and ethical propriety, or the power of proportion to harmonize elements into a proper balance.” (Chan, *A Time Apart*, p. 53.)

²¹ The following discussion of Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* is based on Kirst, *Walter Benjamin’s ‘Denkbild’*.

The *Denkbilder* urge the reader to turn backwards upon history, to recognize in it "the past" as philosophical material that has yet to be re-presented "visually," wishing for the reader to discover it as a paradigm of (Benjamin's) experience of reality. Consider, for example, the following Benjaminian *Denkbild* titled "*Heidelberg Castle*": "Ruins jutting into the sky can appear doubly beautiful on clear days when, in their windows or above their contours, the gaze meets passing clouds. Through the transient spectacle it opens in the sky, destruction reaffirms the eternity of these fallen stones."²² The view through the castle ruin reveals the dependence of eternity on its contrast to transience—the ruins serve as an allegory for the lost past when it is identified by the observer as a permanent loss, also a loss that could be one's own. Simultaneously, the *Denkbild* of the castle ruin illustrates the multidirectional temporality of history when the past is revealed (for a fleeting present moment) in its future, revolutionary potentiality. The observer's perception of the ruins is revealed as the rubble of historical hegemony. The aesthetic appreciation that was produced by the tension between eternity and transience turns into the understanding that the once-ruling historical protagonists have been overthrown and are permanently destroyed. Benjamin's *Denkbild* provides an insight into the tragically self-inflicted catastrophe of human history, a catastrophe stemming from a lack of understanding of the discontinuous relation of the present and the past. Benjamin, writing within the discourse of historical materialism, refers to this revelation as "profane illumination," which can occur only if the historian will recognize the reappearance of the past in the present; only then will past events gain their true significance. In this sense, as per Benjamin, history can be pictured as a kaleidoscope—infinite, ever-changing constellations of past and present moments (accordingly, for example, the calendar reveals itself as a document of historical time). From this perspective, the past does not progress linearly toward the present, but (as the *Denkbild* demonstrates) rather endures in the present. As such, time is charged with a redemptive quality. Thus, the *Denkbild* gains importance as a historiographic narrative form. In 1928, Benjamin seems to further develop his thinking of the functionality of the *Denkbilder*—he writes: "[T]he function of artistic form is ... to make historical content ... into a philosophical truth."²³

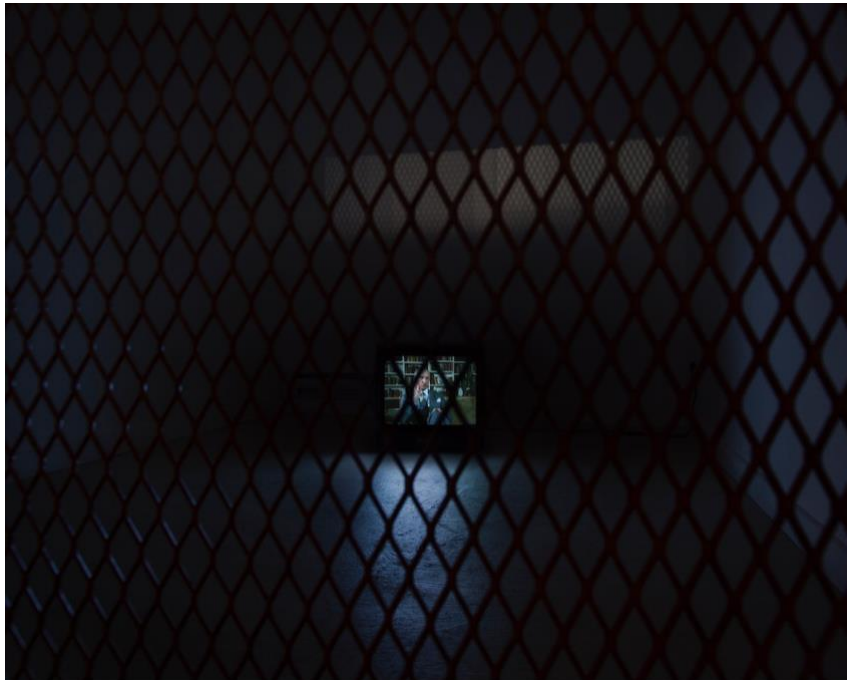
3. Further comments and glossaries

The following introduces comments (or terrains of thought, in the tradition of glossaries) on my own work, the presented artworks and issues of materiality, to questions I asked myself as an artist while making the works, and to questions (however pressing) I was unable to formulate. For example: What is a historical *a priori* inquiry in art? What is an artistic *a priori* inquiry into history or historical phenomena? How does one perform philosophical archaeology in art? What is a material-based philosophical archeology that addresses the past via objects containing their own epistemologies?

²² Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, p. 81.

²³ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 182.

3.1 (Gloss 1) I knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe, I didn't know (2017)



In this mixed-media installation, an analogue TV screen is positioned on the floor in a defined space. The physical entry to the space is blocked, but the viewer can see through and hear through a perforated metal door. The TV shows a close-up video segment of a man (Jan Karski) speaking indirectly to the camera. The video has no sound—sound, however, is played back from within the space through concealed audio speakers. The sound includes abstract sounds and field recordings of a forested surrounding. Outside the space, next to the door, a text²⁴ is hung—a transcription of the talking head,

²⁴ The text reads: "A few days later the ambassador tells me: 'Johnny, now you're going to see Justice Frankfurter. He will come here.' Again, he gave me his briefing. 'Now, Johnny, again be careful.' He always would brief me. 'Now, all knowledgeable people consider this man the most brilliant man in the administration.' As a justice of the supreme court, the institution is very important. But next, 'For years he is a confidant of the president. All America knows about it.' Now he says: 'Johnny,' now 'he is a Jew, so be sure he will be interested in your report.' All right, so I wait again carefully. On the appointed hour – as a matter of fact I even remember it was between breakfast and lunch, before lunch in the morning hours, on time – I was sitting in the living room, salon... ambassador comes from the first floor with Justice Frankfurter. Justice Frankfurter, a little man. He did emanate some brilliance, very alive, his eyes... unimpressive physically, a little man, Jewish looking. Very friendly, friendly, smiles, towards me all the time friendly, several times he called me 'young man' during our conversation. Well, I introduced myself, we sat down. He in front of me, Chehanowski on my left. Justice Frankfurter starts: 'Mr. Karski, I had been invited by my very good friend, your ambassador, to come here to see you. I was also advised that I should see you. Apparently, you have some information that I should know. What do you have to say?' My answer: 'Sir, I don't know what you're interested in. Could you ask me some questions? It will be easier on me.' Frankfurter: 'Young man, do you know that I am a Jew?' 'Yes, sir, Mr. Ambassador told me about this.' 'Well, tell me about the Jews. We have here many reports, what happens to the Jews in your country?' Now I become a machine again, I give my stack. The man sits. I remember he looked like... smaller and smaller, somehow... like... looking at the floor, but listens, he doesn't interrupt me. I report, as you know from this film, usually it lasted 15 to 20 minutes. I tell him, Jewish leaders, Ghetto, Belzec. 15 to 20 minutes passed and I stopped. Now, Justice Frankfurter, he sits, looks at me still at this moment, and tells me the following: 'Young man, as I mentioned, I had been informed about your activities. I was told that you came out of hell, and I

depicting his desperate attempts to convey his firsthand report on the unprecedented events of the Shoah.

In 2010, Claude Lanzmann's film *The Karski Report* was released. It is comprised entirely of an interview with Jan Karski, an official in the Polish resistance during World War II whose testimony in *Shoah* (Lanzmann's seminal film from 1985) remains unforgettable. *The Karski Report* outlines Karski's desperate attempts to convey the unimaginable events to the West from occupied Poland. Did he succeed? What will entail an unheard-of, horrific story to someone who is unprepared to receive it because it concerns a crime that is without precedent in the history of humanity? To Lanzmann's question regarding the early (yet unfounded) rumours of the fatal events, Karski replied: "I knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe it, I didn't know."

Thus, in this installation, I attempt to address the problem of representation, to point to the presence/absence split relation, and to a possible attempt to close its gap. I try to conceive of the index as a mediator.²⁵

According to Lanzmann, the catastrophe of the Shoah is non-representable. He thus employs, in both films, a "non-representability" cinematic principle according to which any kind of archival images or documents associated with the Nazi killing machine are avoided, and the common historical archive as well as fact-based fictions are likewise rejected. Instead, Lanzmann relies exclusively on spoken testimony²⁶ in order to examine,

was told that you're going back to hell. My admiration for people like you.' And then now: 'Young man, I'm no longer young, I'm judge of man. Man like me, with a man like you, must be totally honest. And I'm telling you I don't believe you!' Chehanowski breaks in: 'Felix! What are you talking about? Well, you know about him, he saw the president, he was checked and rechecked ten times, in England, here, Felix! What... he is not lying!' Frankfurter: 'Mr. Ambassador,' formally, 'I didn't say that he is lying, I said that I don't believe him... these are different things. My mind, my heart, they are made in such a way that I cannot except it... No! No! No!' I mumbled something; that is a shock for me."

²⁵ The relation between an index and the object it represents is a natural relation (as opposed to agreement-based characteristics of relation or other signification functions such as the symbol or the icon). The index forms a direct relation between the signifier and the signified; it points to its object. Accordingly, the pointing finger seems to "penetrate" the object and thus indicates its existence. The indexical signification diminishes the gap between the signifier and the signified and creates contiguity. The penetration point marks the conceptual point of incredulity, which therefore subsides but simultaneously generates pain.

Various passages throughout the holy scriptures depict God as experiencing emotions (See, for example, Jeremiah 14:17 and Isaiah 63:9 *apud* Oei, *The Impassible God Who 'Cried'*, p. 238), textual depictions that afterward had certainly propelled controversies with regard to the Christian doctrine of divine impassibility (somewhat influenced by Hellenistic philosophy) according to which God is not subject to emotion — on the one hand, an impassible God is too distant and thus inferior and incapable of redemption; on the other hand, an emotional God entails His dependency upon creation and the contingency of the world, clearly an impossible theological situation that diminishes God and enables His vulnerability. The doctrine of God's impassibility (by nature), the idea that God is indifferent to human life, poses a serious theological problem — if God cannot weep, it is claimed, He cannot love either. To modern Christian theologians, who witness (like all others) the terrible suffering of modern times, this problem becomes perhaps more acute than ever: if man can enter into a relationship with a caring God, they say, God must be capable of entering into man's pain; sheltered under God's compassion and empathy, man can overcome its pain. Hence, their search for what is called "a God after Auschwitz."

²⁶ German anthropologist Johannes Fabian terms the temporality of the ethnographical fieldwork as "coevalness": the sharing of time between subject and object, "the temporality of dialogical interaction." (Erber, *Contemporaneity and Its Discontents*, p. 30.) It indicates an attempt to correct the betrayal of the anthropologists who distinguish themselves from the time of their subject of knowledge, often constructing the Other in terms of distance, spatiality and temporality. This

beyond the memory of the slaughter of Jews during World War II, the discourses of historical representation and truth.²⁷

Historical representation

Lanzmann's categorical choice in favour of spoken testimony emphasizes a fundamental absence—a missing and impossible image—that is indicative of the irreducible totality of the catastrophe. But can verbal testimony be considered as a withdrawal from representation? Can we even indicate clearly when the threshold of representation has been crossed and a phenomenon has reached the area of non-representability? Certainly, we cannot be satisfied with the lack of visual material only, as spoken testimony is a crucial part of the film's archival material. Perhaps the threshold is crossed if we are left with abstract tones only, sounds supposedly devoid of meaning, as a testimony only to the land that involuntarily hosted the monstrous events.

Thus, I decided to extract the full soundtrack of *Shoah*, which runs for roughly eleven hours. I then deleted all the sound scenes and sonic materials that could be associated with even the minor conveying of meaning (dialogues, field recordings of folk songs, train sounds, etc.). Eventually, I ended up with about fifteen minutes of sound. This ratio came to me somewhat as a surprise, since I'd expected it to be much higher. My surprise was a result of a direct encounter with the film and the overall impression of it as a slowly progressing, meditative, lamenting, and silent cinematic work—an impression that was in clear contradiction with the minor degree of semantic, verbal, and sonic material. How could one reconcile this supposed paradox? Perhaps it means that an audible space, its sense of volume and density, is not necessarily and solely a result of sonic information. As my editing action over *Shoah*'s soundtrack showed, a large degree of meaning-conveying sounds of various forms and textures can still constitute a sense of contemplative, silent space (mental space as well as cinematic space).

Exemplified by the lack of visual imagery, the impossibility to represent the Shoah as a historical event is further emphasized, in addition, by the abstention from using meaning-conveying sounds. This makes evident the radical lack of context and the meaninglessness itself, unrelated to a certain historical event—a crossed threshold. The threshold (from meaning to meaninglessness) is crossed backwards. In an attempt to inversely cross back over it, meaning does not constitute positively but as a subtraction of information, knowledge, history, and time from a place (or space) beyond us, beyond our bodies. The soundtrack is an archive that lacks the use of language as a means of representation—what meaning does it thus generate? I was wondering whether, because it lacks the language of representation, a certain context is required to form the entry to the work without, at the same time, diminishing its interpretive dimension that is subject-dependent.

distance means a denial of contemporaneity and is established in the transition from oral, dialogical knowledge to the written medium. Fabian terms this fallacious situation as "allochronism," which is grounded in a primacy of seeing and observing, transforming the other into an object of contemplation—it amounts to "a sort of aestheticization of the other" (*Ibid*) instead of an inquiry into the other based on linguistic communication. Thus, one finds a different mode of temporality that originates by the "oral-to-written" displacement.

²⁷ On reenactments of the Shoah in art and imaginative literature, see Van Alphen, *Caught by History*.

We can even imagine an archive, apparently devoid of context, presented without the perspective of whoever constructed it. In such a scenario, it seems, the archive is understood and constituted differently each time according to the viewer's ideologies that have been embedded through many years of education and social involvement. Is this an archive that, instead of supplying more knowledge, intensifies disinformation and speculations just as a drama is spun in a child's mind? What role does the imagination play in this sense? Experiencing such an archive does not guarantee the reception of meaning, but its mystery generates an imaginary dimension aroused by the physicality of the archival material and the wish to make sense of it. It seems as if the act of searching and sorting the archive, randomly digging its depths with one's hands (or ears), has an importance of its own because it slows the viewer's experience and thus discharges the excess of imagination.

Truth

One of my intentions in this work, following Lanzmann, was to think about the truth-fiction relation. I was wondering whether information becomes knowledge when completed with faith. Faith, for its part, is dependent in the sense of the truthfulness and verity one grants this information with—this appears to be the relation between information and knowledge, as well as between truth and fiction. One believes in the story one tells oneself, as the story is based on the long-lasting actions of narrative plotting and sketching. I suppose that a work of art does not necessarily tell a captivating story in and of itself but constitutes a rich, symbolic meadow for the viewer and the entry into the work in terms of an adequacy with one's branched psycho-ideological array at the core of consciousness. This array is perhaps the condition for giving faith in the feasibility of a certain event. One can know something informatively but deny its possibility or existence due to a mental block. Thus, the story we tell ourselves conditions what we believe to be real.

In "On Fiction" (1966), Vilém Flusser maintains that reality is not given or discoverable; it is invented. Reality is fictitious. There is no comparative reference (or external world); fiction is the only reality. Each type of fiction is a reality in its respective discourse. No specific perspective is more "real" than another. All points of view are relative and equivalent. Eliminating perspectives leaves nothing. A thing is the sum of its perspectives, Flusser claims, and the reality of a thing is the sum of the fictions that form it. If all perspectives are fictions, then the human beings who project these perspectives form reality—but aren't we exactly what we project? We, ourselves, without things to project on, are nothing. Without things, we are mere fictions, mere virtuality. Reality is thus not in objects and also not in subjects (since they are both fictions). Perhaps reality is the relationship between subject and object—but what if there are many relations as points of view? Does it mean they are all reality, ontologically equivalent? Then, according to Flusser, reality is fiction and fiction is reality, and only faith can provide reality.

3.2 (Gloss 2) Silent maps (2016)



This body of work is presented as a mixed-media installation in variable dimensions. It includes maps made out of various materials (paper, wood, stone, resin, wax, and rusted metal) and formations (photolithography prints, collage, text-based works, sound works, and a display cabinet). My work on it began with a reflection on what I perceived as a peculiar intersection of two things: a material I often use in my works—damar resin—and a story I was once told.

From preliminary research towards the exhibition, I observed that inclusions trapped in amber are often found in the Baltic Sea region of Northern Europe. Fossilized from tree resin and formed through a long period of petrification, these inclusions don't easily share their mysteries. Early amber hunters of the region used to measure the amber's value according to the inclusions found within it. Their assessment was based not only on the object caught within the resin but also on the narrative they could generate from the particular inclusion. Vernacular Baltic legends about how a certain insect or plant ended up trapped within this once viscous material highly affected their overall evaluation. By contrast, an inclusion found and presented as an orphan fragment caused great confusion. Mysteries entangled, and exchange rates followed promptly. Extensive landscape descriptions, maps, and drawings were made by the hunters for future

reference. Their outlines had to be reliable; however, if mistakes occurred, one could always revisit the landscape to decipher the problem.

Can we apply this methodology to a textual landscape? Can we follow the same path, back and forth, between a text (as a system of representation or as an abstract map) and the world supposedly outside the text? Can we revisit the world in order to decipher an error or a problem in comprehension that occurs within a textual landscape? Will it still be the same world?

My grandfather once told me about a story he was planning to write. It was about a journey he had taken from his hometown of Vilnius to the Curonian Spit, which separates the Curonian lagoon from the Baltic Sea's southeastern coast. He departed on that journey, as a somewhat modern Baltic hunter, in search of the earliest catechism written in Old Prussian, around AD 1400, and said to be buried within the dunes of the spit. The catechism also included, so he was told, a mysterious "footnote" written in Hebrew and serving as an important key to the text, without which the text could not be fully deciphered. Being fluent in both languages, he was hired by a local archbishop eager to find the original text and its footnote (though he already held a printed copy in his hands from the 16th century). He equipped my grandfather with a crumpled map that indicated the catechism's exact location. Because it seemed completely hopeless, my grandfather was astounded to find the catechism, including its footnote, in the exact place indicated by the map. But he could not immediately recognize nor read the footnote, because it was written densely by an encumbered hand. Back in Vilnius, feeding the archbishop's discontent, all he managed to ascertain was its subject matter. I then asked myself: what if I'll retrace my grandfather's journey?

In Eastern philosophy, one finds the idea of *subtle realms*—experiential inter-worlds and realms of unconscious associations that form intuitive perceptions of physical reality.²⁸ The territory of *subtle realms* is a territory that runs parallel to physical reality but interacts with it so that a person is effectively living in two worlds at once, subtle and physical. When one searches for the *subtle realms*, one develops an intuitive awareness through the use of the imagination. As a faculty yoking the sensible and the intelligible, the imagination operates in the experience of the beyond and in the construction of imaginable worlds.

With this work, I ask myself (as an artist) the following questions: How can one draw the territory of the *subtle realms*? What does it mean to enter its landscape? How does one form its map as a mode of external symbolic storage?²⁹ What is the relationship between the concept of "landscape" and the environment or world? In the history of art, landscape painting is a genre; in geography, it is part of nature, etc. What does it mean to see a landscape? Is it something exterior? Is it something psychological or internal? The concept, I assume, can be understood in various ways.

²⁸ "Such is the case with the *Kehai* of *Kami* as well, where *Kami* come and go into the interstices of being but leave their faint signs, and where sensitive humans, by emptying themselves into the midst of now (*naka ima*) may directly experience the time/space gods embodied—however fleetingly—in the signs, sounds, and sights of the world. It is an 'experiential, mysterious place' created as a third place between all other places and as an accumulation of experienced *ch'i* beyond all distinctions, boundaries, orders, and descriptive constructs." Pilgrim, *Intervals* (*Ma*) *in Space and Time*, p. 271.

²⁹ For a thorough discussion of mental maps, see Gould; White, *Mental Maps*.

When anthropologists and historians treat the concept of landscape, they often claim it is a modern invention and refer to a letter by Petrarch, who describes his climbs up Mont Ventoux in Provence to gaze at the landscape.³⁰ This is considered, in the West, as the first description of man looking at landscape (similarly, art historians claim that “landscape painting” begins with fifteenth-century Flemish painters), a false consideration since even Petrarch himself mentions the ancients climbing the mountain to contemplate and look down at the landscape, or even Roman frescoes with beautiful landscapes, and so on.

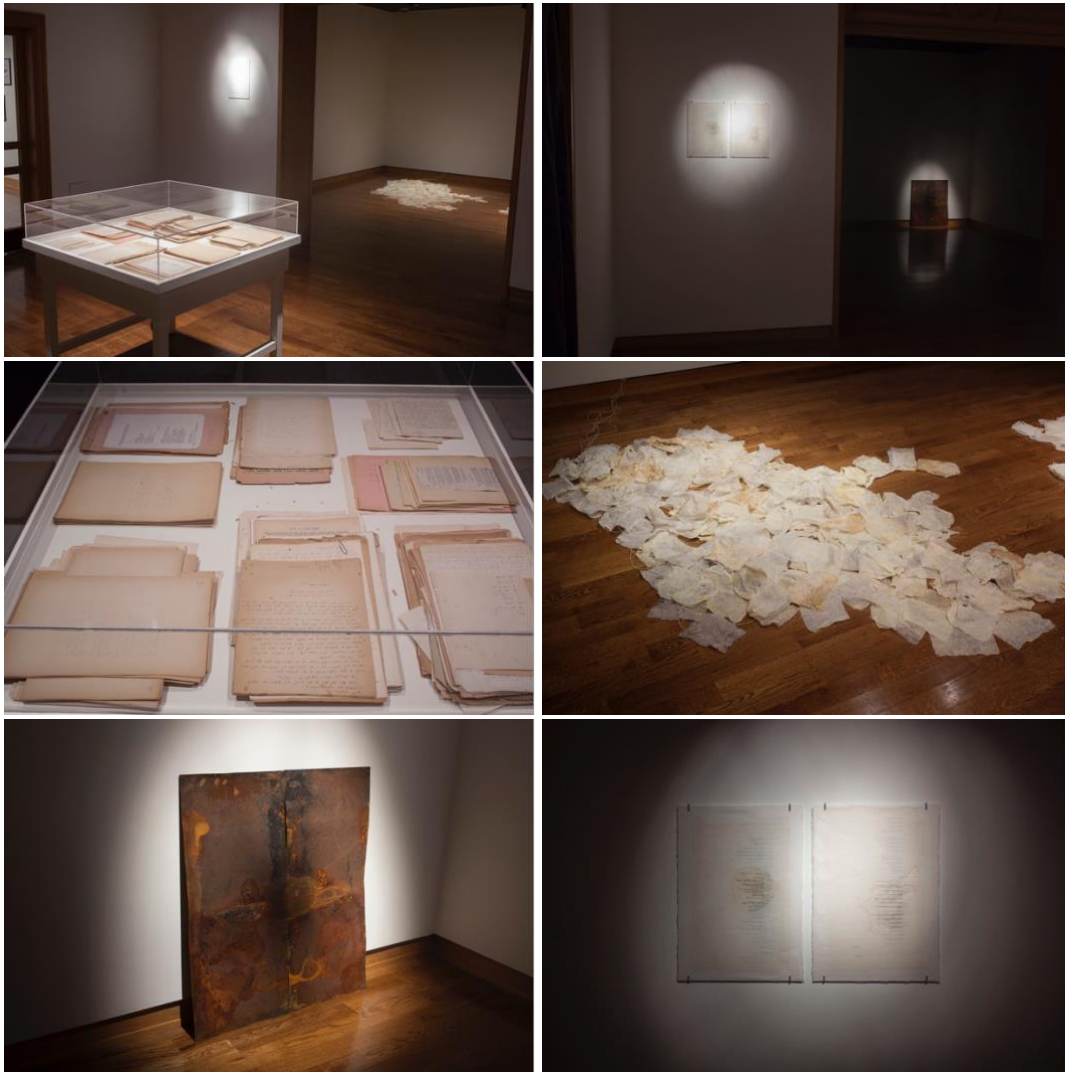
For a philosophical perspective on landscape, one can possibly turn to a seminar Heidegger gave in Freiburg in 1929/30 titled “Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude.” In this, perhaps his most important seminar, Heidegger tries to define the fundamental structure of *Dasein* (of human beings) as a passage from the poverty of the animal world to the building of a world that defines humanity. In order to do this, he must define the essence of the environment of the animal, thus understanding the difference between the animal environment (a poor world, in his terms) and the human one. The animal’s environment is defined, as per Heidegger, by the idea that each animal selects (in the natural world) one crucial element that defines its environment and is absorbed in it without being conscious about it. On the contrary, what defines the building of the human world is the fact that man is never unconsciously absorbed but perceives being as such. Deep boredom, according to Heidegger, is a good example: when we are bored, we suspend any relation to the world (cannot do anything or are not interested in anything). Thus, in the suspension of animality, one becomes human.

Looking at a landscape, we see everything, all elements at once, and perceive it in another dimension, suspending all animal relations as well as human relations (being as such); we are absorbed in the landscape as if we lose our subjectivity while observing it, becoming an integral part of it. In Heideggerian terms, the human world is the making inoperative of the animal relation to its environment, while landscape is the making inoperative of the human world itself—this is a third stage after animality (environment) and human (world).³¹

³⁰ Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 36–46.

³¹ See Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, pp. 45–50.

3.3 (Gloss 3) Vaalbara (2014)



This body of artwork is constituted of several overlapping narratives, manifest in varied artistic mediums, that unfold by means of a series of artistic revelations in dialogue with a fragmented, poetic manuscript of my late grandfather. Since he passed away when I was nearly fourteen years old, I have been left with a strong sense of loss. His diverse manuscript and artistic work, although insignificant for me at that time, has become increasingly important to me. By telling a story and reimagining its narratives, I interpret in and through this personal archive. This work tries to recreate the possibility of a shared biography through an artistic dialogue.

The first narrative displays the manuscript, which is placed inside a covered cabinet. A sound that resembles that of Morse code emerges from within and fades in and out. It was necessary to divide the voluminous manuscript into several piles due to presentation constraints, but also due to issues such as fragmentation, meaning construction, and the relation between parts and whole. How should I divide the manuscript? Which pages should I explicitly show, at the expense of others?

The second narrative is made out of many sheets of paper, stitched together and bathed in a mixture of resin and beeswax (as an encaustic medium)—materials I use in several of my works. The papers are thus grouped together to form two main strata that correspond to the left and right audio channels. Sound comes from beneath the thick

layers, portraying abstract, unpleasant (even appalling) murmurs, perhaps that of a little child at a pre-verbal stage who tries, but fails, to communicate.

The third narrative combines two rusted metal plates and sound. The plates are leaned against the wall, connected to one another by a hidden sound device that works both as a speaker and a tactile transducer—it simultaneously plays the distant sound of faint, slow piano playing and, by rumbling, causes the plates to sound out low metallic noises.

The last, fourth narrative is a diptych made out of Japanese washi paper and a few texts from the original manuscript. The papers are treated with diluted resin, which causes them to rearrange in layered forms as they become transparent in various degrees. The original texts combine together to become a partly deciphered unity.

These narratives seem to suggest the signified yet obscure and unreachable nature of a literary work sealed shut. I was thinking about them as trying to traverse a gap, to bridge a physical presence that will cause them to materially seep into the archive. I felt that the textual depth of this archive is suspended to present the gravity of the work as a physical mass, as if the manuscript is rendered as an object. Deleuze writes: "Time becomes a subject because it is the folding of the outside and, as such, forces every present into forgetting but preserves the whole of the past within memory: forgetting is the impossibility of return, and memory is the necessity of renewal."³² The outside entity, the manuscript, is folded in and, as such, is preserved in memory. My intention was for the overlapping narratives to be the renewal—not interventions but parallel responses, like light rays aligned in parallel, communicating as collimated spirits in non-linear time. It was written that they indicate wormholes where the dialogue becomes possible, taking place, and by avoiding semantic translation and representation, the aura of the literary manuscript is maintained.³³

3.4 (Gloss 4) To return to a place, is, like dying (2016)



This is a multidisciplinary body of work in sound, installation, printmaking, and text. The geographical and spiritual remoteness from home constitutes the exhibition's core, as a fundamental contemplation on distancing, exile, retreat, and nomadism. However, more personal questions guided me in this work: how much of my cultural, biographical, and subjective background comes into the writing and the making of exhibitions at present? And even: what is the tension between the foreign and the local perspectives in

³² Deleuze, *Folding, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)*, p. 327.

³³ See Abraham, *Collimation*, pp. 10–12.

this process? The exhibition space, coloured in shades of yellow and brown, brings to mind an ancient appearance, an old photograph, or a cave revealed in an archaeological dig.

Re(moteness); re(treat); re(turn)

The late Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote: "To return to a place, / is, like dying. / It is, to fulfill prophecies / or empty them."³⁴

In an interview between Edmond Jabès and Bracha Ettinger Lichtenberg, incorporated into an art exhibition catalogue, we find the following dialogue:

Ettinger Lichtenberg: At the moment when it's impossible to fixate something, it's impossible to separate one thing from another.

Jabès: Here you touch at the heart of the nomadic writing. You're at the heart of nomadic writing.

Ettinger Lichtenberg: Which is the inability to fixate, to strike roots?

Jabès: This is the desert, nothing strikes roots here.³⁵

And finally, the curatorial text summarizes:

The archeologist conducts a journey to discover relics of an extinct culture. The fragments that he exposes do not exist, in effect, without his gaze, and their chronicle is formulated by him by means of the language of his discipline. But this discipline (even when it is conscious of its reflective activity) represents the historical processes that it contextures as events that happened in the past (before the language of archeology which constitutes them). Hence, archeology conditions itself upon a prior time that it itself signifies—a time signified as an artificial product, and not as an origin or an authentic basis.³⁶

The voice of the past is combined with that of the present.

³⁴ Quoted from his poem "Ein-Gedi"; my translation.

The aforementioned quotation is at the same time formal and semantic; inasmuch as the quoting action itself, by which the quotation's content is concerned with—its meaning—is happening (again) "in-itself," we perceive it as a drawing. Because it is also semantic, in its simple textual sense, it seems to achieve, without an insignificant extent, an almost automatic precedence. The double move is in fact a second order abstraction; a reverberation of a reverberation, a quote of a quote—a return to something alienated and familiar.

How should this be understood? Perhaps, by a pre-understanding (what is pre-understanding?) that it is of great significance to correctly position a question, any question, in order to fulfill, even temporarily, our basic curiosity drive. But this temporality points more than anything else to the significance that a properly given answer will leave the question open yet stable. The punctuation marks condition the thought, and being conditioned by repetition and sense fixing—it is impossible for the thought to reveal itself in its pureness; however, clear methodological forms, through their interrelations, can determine between various senses that "seep into" the thought from the outside. The mark requires repetition and sense, iteration and sense... until the question's deep foundations will (again) collapse into themselves.

The double operator of the punctuation marks—multiple roles become possible—as an organizing element, structures, balances, calms, permits a relation, a relationship to be established, and again soothes, or rather, emerges, reveals, breaks, bubbles, and floats from above in trauma? The assumption is that the experience of art requires from us a certain disregard, even if against our natural and humane will.

³⁵ Zalmona, *Routes of Wandering*, p. 248.

³⁶ Zalmona, *Routes of Wandering*, pp. 209–10.

(Re)—time

The prefix (Re–) inevitably includes a certain conception of time. What is the time of return? Different philosophical approaches view the present as the most important time; it is the atemporal time, the time to which all other times refer. The more it becomes possible to connect the past to the present experience, the richer and deeper the present consciousness gets. The larger the liaison with past events, the more the contemporary, present consciousness gains through sprawl and a burgeoning horizon. According to the philosopher Edmund Husserl, the experience of the present works to bring into focus its strength as well as the contents of all times of the past and of the future. For this he coined the term “standing–streaming”—a formalistic expression that measures the consciousness’ static dimension of the present against its dynamic flow of experiences.³⁷

In Jewish sacred and literary sources, a certain time is mentioned that is “not day, and not night.” It is a time described as uniting all times, a time that designates a conscious space of abstruseness: a conscious space of numerous intellectual contradictions into which coherent, logical reasoning tools collapse.³⁸

This conception of time brings to mind Agamben’s conception of messianic time and the form of time at the basis of Benjamin’s dialectical image.³⁹

3.5 (Gloss 5) Galut (Diaspora) (2011)

This is an eight–channel sound installation (in the form of a radio drama) that is presented in a dark space alongside a painting. The installation is inspired by the artistic work of my grandfather—this time, by a painting he made of his late parents, who were exiled to an unknown concentration camp during WWII (the ultimate diaspora). The content of the installation is made out of fragments of my grandfather’s literary works, which were removed from their original context and rejoined to tell a story.

Some of the questions I asked myself in the making of this work were as follows: How is it possible to reuse old decontextualized fragments in order to produce a new literary meaning? What role does sound take in conveying and representing meaning? Is this role unique to sound? Can I return from this metaphorical (even physical) exile? What is the relationship between the three figures of the radio drama, which are actually one and the same? Where do our histories converge?

It seems as if an unavoidable gap exists between the work and its interpreter, between the work and the text written about it, as if, enforced by various techniques of defamiliarization, the interpreter becomes an exile who faces itself. If these alienations will not be resolved, one is left in suspension as an exile in one’s own land.

³⁷ Govrin, *To Return to a Place, is, Like Dying*, pp. ii–vi.

³⁸ Govrin, *To Return to a Place, is, Like Dying*, pp. ii–vi.

³⁹ On the application of current theoretical examinations of time to the field of contemporary art, see Ross, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too*.

In the radio drama, a man is transformed into a number. 56698 is his new, alienated, and estranged name. He dwells in a place without a place, where there are no openings. In the eternal night that prevails in this place, no face is revealed in the mirror. The sole traces of a meaningful world are barred shadows upon a missing floor, merely projections.

When listening to the installation, the sonic garden of forking paths seems to resist a linear melodic motif; it rather forms a multidimensional, atemporal space. It is an exilic space in the deepest sense, detached and forever irrelevant. A fabric of distancing.

3.6 (Gloss 6) Between things (2010)



This installation is based upon a few (poetic, philosophical, scientific) texts that attempt to articulate time. The texts are hung in the air, while various leftovers of paper, ink, accompanying materials, and sound are piled up on the floor beneath them. In this installation, time is contemplated and expressed as a plastic thought, as image and sound. This is a work about a concept (time) that prevails perhaps in any work of art but is here conceived within an ongoing series of works that attempt to formulate a specific form of time—a form of time that evolves into the conception of time as messianic time and that lies at the basis of this thesis exhibition. What kind of trace does time generate in this installation?

A leftover is a testimony to an act that took place at the interval between things. This act occurs in relation to time—it is carried out in light of an expected final result and therefore desperately clings to the speed of change and its purpose, or alternatively, through an involuntary and temporary act of conspicuousness (as a deviation from somewhat predicted and routine path). This act is temporally carried out in the world, even as pure abstraction. Time is expressed through numerous descriptions (in parallel with the characteristics of the act itself) that complement each other in different modes, and their nature often remains unclear to us. Each action matches a different relation, and it seems as if we cannot comprehensively generalize the exact nature of this relation. Moreover, perhaps other infinite relations exist, and therefore infinite types of time exist as well; these time essences will always refer to various actions in themselves and in relation to other actions.

Leftovers are piled on the floor. The space divides and separates them as it divides and has been divided by time. Therefore, a series of questions arise in the making of this

work: What exists between successive events that come to be in time? Does time exist within time? Can we at all speak about a “between things” mode of existence? Or whether this is a different type of time that requires a different comprehension?

Personally, in making this installation, the most interesting aspect of time occurs between things. An action occurred, a body appeared, an object was installed, a cat crossed the street, stopped, and sat down on the sidewalk. What happened at the point of transition, a moment before it started and a slight moment after it ended? Could we at all split or bound the action and consequently the time it took for it to happen? Does this mean that time stands still? Or alternatively, do infinite essences of time correspond to infinite types of events whose theoretical summation is “the” time that we talk about or intuitively relate to? How, if at all, does time exist between things?

Time indicates life, whether intensive or almost static, short or long, fulfilled with actions or reduced to the smallest measure needed to keep life going. Time means living souls; it cycles from morning to the next; it always exists within things but also (and especially) between things, where it exists perhaps in the strangest way. The breath indicates life, life within the body, alive, which continuously helps time to be formed. Every breath feels differently. So is time.

3.7 (Gloss 7) Not quite the highest point (2017)





This mixed-media installation corresponds with the concept/research methodology known as “Philosophical Archeology”. It consists of multiple sets of objects, ephemera, sounds, leftovers, miniatures, books and perishable instances which form various paradigmatic historical constellations or thought-spaces, rendered and conceived by archeological art-making.

The archive includes other, undiscussed previous works or only minute fragments of these works.⁴⁰ The scale, both physical and symbolic, of the leftover or fragment is occasionally the reason for not discussing the work or for not offering any terrain of thought in regard to it. However, sometimes the reason is of a different register, as in the case of the following works (that are nonetheless included in the archive), which present a challenge for thinking. This challenge, so it seems, sometimes overpowers an attempt at critical analysis; at other times, the work is utterly intuitive and does not easily lend itself to words.

⁴⁰ For more works, see this [link](#).

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