

DOMOBAAL

" HAIRLESS DOGS HAVE IMPERFECT TEETH"

oh so reciprocal

The contemplation of the reciprocal condition of everything in a state of coexistence is a very satisfying thought; a set of values flexing and responding in an infinitely changing landscape.

Richard Sennett glosses the Greek word for city, *polis*, as a word that ' meant far more to an Athenian ... than a place on a map; it meant the place where people achieved unity'.¹

This state of coexistence is a place where the interiority of the body lives in a reciprocal process with the exteriority of the city; a vision of the body in a state of integration that places materiality and making at the heart of what it is to be human. Conjured as a space of interaction, this space is best held in suspension, open to reinterpretation and future challenge. I think of the place of making as a relative one, umbilically connected to what has gone before, yet free to gather and become something quite other. Just because this is a tentative and contentious space does not mean that it cannot be tenaciously held and confronted in the interests of remaking. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty

*the perceiving mind is an incarnate mind. I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against the doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness.*²

Yet the word reciprocal requires a closer look at the duality implied, the equality of binding one element in mutual action with another to form a whole. This absolute quantity of equal measure holds the potential of a reciprocal relationship in too tenacious a grip. In my aesthetic world of scale and measure, the tyranny of equal quantity does not exist. Nothing is repeated in absolute terms. Every time I work on a part, even if it is a repeat form in a similar mode, the part behaves differently. Even when similar elements formally cluster or take on the collective intelligence of a swarm through their many parts, minor inflections and undercurrents emerge. This live fabric of making I allow. In my works, such as ' More than anything' (2003), and ' I don't know about that' (2004), elements become collective forces, mechanisms that coalesce to form a way of investigating the nature of matter, its use and abuse through overproduction. These open systems act as mechanisms of change; open in that they take up a relative condition to each site within which they are shown. Repetition of formal elements becomes the driver of the piece, chasing the idea which runs before it, finding new space.

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Further considerations of repetition as a process within making call to mind Diébédo Frances Kéré's Primary School in Gando, Burkina Faso, completed in 2001.³ This ecologically driven building is made by villagers with adobe brick with six per cent of cement added to create a stronger, more uniform, brick. The villagers were also trained to build the school. Their traditional timber mould was developed into a two man operated pneumatic steel mould with a rubber mat insert to act as a resist in the formation of the brick. It is hard not to enjoy the sequence of actions repeated again and again as the clay is pressed into form. This flow of communal action from the pounding of the clay to the finished form asserts itself as a sustainable model, literally from the ground up. The project has also give rise to additional housing for teachers with plans for a Library and Women's Centre. A local material technically nudged forward to serve as a regenerative force in a poor community, has pulled action and material into a unity of purpose.

Vilém Flusser's proposal of a creative house as 'nucleus of an interpersonal network' sits aptly next to such a scheme by the nature of its integration of elements. Flussers' s integration is part of a much larger drawing:

*one no longer sees the earth as a geographical location in the solar system but as a warp in the gravitational field of the sun. This is what the new type of house must look like: a warp in the interpersonal sphere by which relationships are 'attracted'. Such an attractive house would have to assemble these relationships, process them in the form of information, store them and pass them on. A creative house as a nucleus of an interpersonal network.*⁴

ONE THING WITH ANOTHER

It is not just the putting of the chair in the room that excites, but the third imagined space induced by the act. The good thing about putting one thing with another is that it induces additional sensations or shifts in spatial perception. Gabriel Orozco's 'The Weight of Sun', five-a-piece installed in the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, in 2003, gathered a group of objects, 555 grams in weight, together in a system of balance that transformed the interior space of the gallery. The simple weight of a sweeping brush counterbalanced a collection of objects in suspension. In using a brush worn out by use, turned on its head and suspended, Orozco transformed our perception of the objects materially pulling us into their spatial universe. This incisive process of drawing in space prompts us to understand how relative space is, how plastic and receptive it is to transformative use. The coupling of a heavy title with a physically light piece itself engineers a further act of balance. In a not dissimilar installation, Friedrich Kiesler describes his galaxies thus:

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These galaxies, although they start from a minimum of three units and expand to as many as nineteen, were only an attempt at endlessness within the enclosure of a room. But I think they could, with careful nurturing, be added to until the power of the inner magnetism is exhausted. And if they actually end (physically), their capacity to inspire continuity would still be great, in that the observer could go on adding more and more units according to his own imagination. He would then be extending the new magnetic field derived from the existing nucleus of the original concept. ⁶

In the task of reimagining the world from the given, things need to be thrown in the air, turned inside out and thrown up again. Reaching into a used object, weeding out its function and context in order to implant other energies and actions, is part of a process of reuse. The deeper to the point of inception, to the pulse and material centre of the object to be unmade one reaches, the more profoundly the object is remade.

When in close contact, molecule to molecule, contrary materials or colours show their difference and their radiant accommodation to one another. In his 1975 book, *The Interaction of Colour*, Joseph Albers extends our understanding of these aesthetic boundaries through a number of experiments. My favourite is the experiment where a middle mixture is made from two parent colours. A small portion of the mixture is then placed at the centre of the parent colours, which are shown together as two squares sitting side by side. The middle mixture mimics the opposite colour settling into its relative condition, the ensemble resonating as two colours not three, like a correlational coupling, one inducing a change of condition in the other.

The cut and thrust, pull and take, of material in action together as a process is mirrored in Darwin's account of the correlation of growth. I mean by this expression that the whole organisation is so tied together during its growth and development, that when slight variations in any one part occur, and are accumulated through natural selection, other parts become modified. ⁷ The effect of hard parts on adjoining soft parts are worthy of mention, 'it is believed by some authors', Darwin writes, 'that the diversity in the shape of the pelvis in birds causes the remarkable diversity in the shape of their kidneys',⁸ or indeed the observation that 'hairless dogs have imperfect teeth',⁹ the variant qualities acting in correlative existence with one another. In the delineation, measure and radiant behaviour of material, in pinning it like an intrepid naturalist, in the capture of a new species with pins to a base, one must remember the trick is not to kill the specimen. In this world of give and take, aesthetic judgment is an invaluable tool moving forward into uncertainty, taking the relativity of measure into the space of making, a place that cannot be quantified.

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Kurt Schwitter's poem, 'I Build My Time', captures this sensibility:

I build my time
In gathering flowers
And throwing out the weeds.
I build my time
In gathering fruits
And throwing out all that is bad
And old
And rotten.¹⁰

Maud Cotter, 2012

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Notes:

¹ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York, Norton: 1996), p. 38.

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964), p. 3.

³ Andreas Lepik, *Small Scale Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement* (New York: MOMA 2010), pp. 33-42.

⁴ Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things, A Philosophy of Design* (London: 1999), p. 83.

⁵ Miguel A. González-Virgen, *Of Games, the Infinite and Worlds: The Work of Gabriel Orozco* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2003), pp. 147-164.

⁶ Frederick J. Kiesler, *Selected Writings*, (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje 1996), pp. 55-56.

⁷ Darwin, Charles, *The Origin of Species*, (London: John Murray, 1859; Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 117.

⁸ Darwin, *Origins*, p. 118.

⁹ Darwin, *Origins* p. 12.

¹⁰ Kurt Schwitters, *I Build My Time: Columns, Grottos, Niches - A Collage Built on Texts* (Clonmel, 2001): Coracle, p. 68. Darwin, Charles, *The Origin of Species*, (London: John Murray, 1859; Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 117.