

... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitylessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Suarez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658<sup>1</sup>

## SYNOPSIS

The exhibition *Archipelago — A Problem (On Exactitude in Science)* centres around a fictitious, mental archipelago where a group of mathematicians, geologists, cartographers and other scientists try to index the measurable facets and phenomenological manifestations that they uncover during their research expedition. As the unprecedented landscape is subject to constant change and fluctuations, the advanced instruments with which the research group is equipped prove to be unsuited to recording and documenting their observations and findings accurately. The scientific languages they employed elsewhere do not appear to correspond in any way to their somewhat predetermined, stable patterns of expectation, preconceived knowledges and epistemological registers: the diversity of living conditions and environments found within the archipelago appears so diverse and unstable that every island seems to require its own individual linguistic and scientific approach. To this end they decide to develop a new compendium entitled *The Sea Island Mathematical Manual* in order to do justice to a world of constant change using a series of SFs (science fact, science fiction, speculative fabulation, so far).<sup>2</sup>

## CONTEXT

The observation of natural phenomena is an exercise in perception and representation that is contested on many levels: from the accurate use of measuring equipment to the social and political exploitation of information. *Archipelago — A Problem (On Exactitude in Science)* investigates how the composition of artistic practices can represent the negotiation and slippages between scientific and non-scientific knowledge production by measuring the impact of climate change in times in which stable backdrops have ceased to exist. Searching for new relational templates and approaches in inter-agentivity between humans and non-humans, the exhibition aims to advocate for the loosening of thought from the constraints of human phenomenality, as structures of being do not necessarily correspond with structures of lived experience. Or, in other words, to quote philosopher Alfred North Whitehead:

[...] What we ask from the philosophy of science is some account of the coherence of things perceptively known.

This means a refusal to countenance any theory of psychic additions to the object known in perception. For example, what is given in perception is the green grass. This is an object which we know as an ingredient in nature. The theory of psychic additions would treat the greenness as a psychic addition furnished by the perceiving mind, and would leave to nature merely the molecules and the radiant energy which influence the mind towards that perception. My argument is that this dragging in of the mind as making additions of its own to the thing posited for knowledge by sense-awareness is merely a way of shirking the problem of natural philosophy. That problem is to discuss the relations *inter se* of things known, abstracted from the bare fact that they are known. Natural philosophy should never ask, what is in the mind and what is in nature. To do so is a confession that it has failed to express relations between things perceptively known, namely to express those natural relations whose expression is natural philosophy. It

may be that the task is too hard for us, that the relations are too complex and too various for our apprehension, or are too trivial to be worth the trouble of exposition. It is indeed true that we have gone but a very small way in the adequate formulation of such relations. But at least do not let us endeavour to conceal failure under a theory of the byplay of the perceiving mind.

What I am essentially protesting against is the bifurcation of nature into two systems of reality, which, in so far as they are real, are real in different senses. One reality would be the entities such as electrons which are the study of speculative physics. This would be the reality which is there for knowledge; although on this theory it is never known. For what is known is the other sort of reality, which is the byplay of the mind. Thus there would be two natures, one is the conjecture and the other is the dream.<sup>3</sup>

What is consistently sought for by the research expedition are the relations *inter se* things, what is found there, in addition to the things we perceive as given and known. But how could we gradually open up the sensorium to rendering ourselves conscious, sensitive and attentive to those forces that bypass our dominant scopic regime, combined with our mind's tendency to make additions to the building blocks of the world in order to make sense of it all? A first attempt may concern a withdrawal from our tendency to endow the human figure with the capacity to be the basis of reconstruction, to bring the things concerned into our anthropocentric courts. It is certainly hard not to be a Prometheanist, but we must extend our measuring efforts elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Philosopher Donna Haraway offers an insightful perspective on creating a distinction between self-organising and "making-with":

*Sympoiesis* is a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. [...] earthlings are never alone. That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. *Sympoiesis* enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it. [...] Perhaps as sensual molecular curiosity and definitely as insatiable hunger, irresistible attraction toward enfolding each other is the vital motor of living and dying on earth. Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages.<sup>5</sup>

There is a logic to be changed. Let us transpose the notion of sympoiesis to the mind's antipodes, towards navigating and chronicling a mental archipelago that is simultaneously nested somewhere in us and elsewhere, in this case historicised before our eyes by this exhibition and its constituent elements in the shape of artworks. Here we can no longer poke the things we encounter with a stick to see what they have to say or—for that matter—employ our measuring instruments to make deductions solely corresponding to our own anthropocentric logic. Life within the archipelago is one of embodiment, of applying oneself and working through as well as with sympoiesis, towards languages that were never ours in the first place. Instead of resting all too comfortably in our own category, we may as well develop navigational tools and translation tables for a different logic found in the key of the relations *inter se* things.

## Footnotes

- 1 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 181.
- 2 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble — Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 2–3.
- 3 Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cranston: Angelnook Publishing, Inc., 2012), pp. 28–29.
- 4 Prometheanism is a term popularised by theorist John Dryzek to describe an environmental orientation which perceives the Earth as a resource whose utility is determined primarily by human needs and interests, and whose environmental problems are overcome by human innovation. The term was introduced in Dryzek's work, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses* (1997).
- 5 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble — Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 58.

# THE SEA ISLAND MATHEMATICAL MANUAL

This manual is a catalogue of the life project as pursued in *Archipelago — A Problem (On Exactitude in Science)*. The archipelago has long required a document of secret motion and instruction — a collection of studies that might serve to clarify the terms obscured within every facet of the living programme.

## Botanical Codes

The work *Botanic Code — Botanischer Garden Universität Potsdam* began as a walk in the park. A further study into perception, the work takes the shape of an installation with which Jorinde Voigt examines her own perception of colours during walks in botanical gardens. According to an algorithm, the most strongly perceived colours, ranked from one to five, are translated into proportional colour fields and transferred onto aluminium rods. The result is a code, which breaks down information with respect to colour, proportion, performance, time, season and standard.

## Contact

In the work *Contact*, Nicolás Lamas exhibits an ammonite—a fossil at least sixty-five million years old—and an iPad that rolled off Apple's production line at the beginning of the current decade. The notions of obsolescence, waste and traces left behind by humanity, the digitisation of our environment and even our memory, rise to the surface of our consciousness like this fossil found beneath a hiker's feet.

## China IV

Jorinde Voigt has developed a coded form of writing in her drawings to transform material phenomena into visual compositions. No matter how complex these processes are, the artist's system on the surface seems to instil order. Voigt examines the workings of human perception and the factors that shape it using network of lines, mathematical grids and musical patterns that are simultaneously chaotic and poetic.

## Dave (Version 3)

Michael E. Smith's works often appear to be a physical reconstruction of emotional disfigurement. He counters the ecological and economic disasters of our era with a materialism of basic needs, displayed

as a layout of ruined bodies. Smith has effaced humans from his art and retained the things that were once close to them, which clothed them and provided them warmth, which fed them or stored their food, which they used as tools, for communication or on which hope could be pinned.

**Exact Opposite of Distance, The**  
*The Exact Opposite of Distance — Drawings (Forest Windows)* consists of a set of drawings made in the Amazon rainforest. In this environment saturated with colours, sedimented layers of materials, heat and moisture, one's attention is distracted by tangled lines, the density of textures and the ever pulsating colours caused by the continually changing qualities of the light. Irene Kopelman's drawings make the metamorphosis of the landscape perceptible. She achieves this by using a protocol that originates in her perception of the environment and which allows her to frame a particular viewpoint. In this way Kopelman has turned scenic overlays and interlacings of the landscape into her starting point, framing consecutive views by following a random line in her field of vision until it crosses another, a branch, a liana, a stem: all are followed *ad libitum* until the space of the page is entirely saturated.

## Grasses

Francisco Tropa's artistic practice combines sculpture with obsolete technological items and humanity's detritus. His works tend to feature an attentive relationship with the concept of history. The artist creates a sort of archaeological portrait of the contemporary, halfway between the fossil and the artefact merging stillness, movement, suspension and balance.

## Great Universe, The

Joëlle Tuerlinckx aims to unravel constructions of time and space as they

exist in words and images as part of a larger system of interconnecting works. *HET GROOTE HEELAL (Planche explicative — Série De sterren in hun loop)* pictures a page of a book on hypotheses about the possible shape of the cosmos. New connotations and dimensions are added to the text using additional margin notes, underlined phrases, bookmarks made from torn pieces of paper and a thick piece of black paper that covers a large section of the right-hand page. With these careful interventions macrocosmic reflections become paired with the microcosm of the studio and the gestural actions of the individual.

## i.e n°1

Benoît Maire's fundamental artistic approach centres on the practice of collage: images, documents, objects and texts are drawn together by a precise network of references from philosophy, science, psychoanalysis, film and literature. Maire's quest for the ultimate, concrete expression of the intellectual foundations of his work reflects that of other artists of his generation, seeking to renew the practice of conceptual art by quite deliberately looking beyond the schism between the object and the idea. What matters is to make cognitive structures collide and to find a wild and sensual rapport between theory and culture. In the video *i.e n°1* Maire is seen measuring his surroundings with various tools, which he refers to as weapons. They are inventions made of found objects and materials, both natural and manmade.

## Larkspur and Cutleaf Teasel

Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932) is recognised for his unique, extensive collection of photographic plant portraits that reveal the tactile qualities, intricate forms and uncanny aspects of flora. His fusion of scientific observation, sculptural form and surreal composition pioneered an artistic style that forged new

approaches to modern art and photography. Blossfeldt developed a series of homemade cameras that allowed him to photograph plant surfaces in unprecedented, magnified, detail. His works were primarily used as teaching tools and were brought to public attention in 1928 with his first publication *Urformen der Kunst* (Art Forms in Nature).

### Liar, The

*Le menteur* embodies a problem or thought experiment, which cannot be resolved because it presents insurmountable internal contradictions. The image shows Benoît Maire sitting on the floor watching something between his hands, set against a white backdrop on which a bottle of water, a red spirit level and a measuring tool of his making are arranged. The question is: what is the purpose of the sight Maire is pointing to? In the work Maire portrays an important condition of our way of constructing the real in a collective sense, which consists of believing the other who attests to a certain reality, even if the other is the only one who sees it, and the possible disrespect and sadness that the other may suffer from collective disapproval; the witness is alone and their vision remains unsubstantiated.

### Naked Parrot, The

For the series *The Naked Parrot*, Etienne Chambaud used a black and white photographic print depicting a book opened to a page featuring a picture of a white dove. Each photograph is rendered unique by the various colours bestowed upon the animal subject, by pigment printing and the addition of paint and food colouring. Across the works in the series, the bird's feathers range from the understated to the outrageous, lending it expressiveness and originality. Here, the artist is interested in the complex hybridised relationships that exist between animals and humans. He gives each bird a new look, as if to symbolically extract it from the procedures of construction and production which it initially came from by means of breeding and domestication. The dove can therefore be said to become "a naked parrot" or a "modern chimera"; a being fully constructed from the outside.

### Pillow

Anna Betbeze's sculptural work *Untitled (Pillow)* is a soft, ovoid platform which allows a heightened experience of the colours, holes and stains that remain from her work process. This sculpture expands upon her practice of painting on Flokati wool, but moves the action from the vertical plane of the wall to a soft, undulating and multidimensional form. The work, covered in painted, dyed and burnt wool, is characterised by Betbeze as: *simultaneously a landscape, planet, body, bed, an ash tray, a cancer, a wool blanket in midsummer, an old smoked-in living room, a garden in full bloom—hot and sweaty, maybe the way a body feels under a dress.*

### Raining

*Raining (Sound Piece)* is an atmospheric sound installation by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, consisting of a speaker that reproduces the sound of endlessly falling drops of water. The melancholy soundscape of raindrops, developed around a fictional dystopian vision of living several decades into the future, sets the mood of the space where the work is exhibited.

### Ruler (100 Years)

Or in other words, as formulated by Cevdet Ereğ:

1. *These rulers are not timelines themselves.*
2. *These rulers are timeline makers.*
3. *The usual rulers (in the world of distance, angle, or measured space) are tools for measuring, drawing, cutting, etc.*
4. *These rulers are meant to be tools for drawing (or tools to be looked at and contemplated). I mean, I am not making an absurd proposition to "measure time."*
5. *Sketches of bird's eye views of chronologies*
6. *With or without scale.*
7. *Dates or any kind of marks on these rulers are proposed (only and only) as reference points. Like 0, 1, 2 on a usual ruler. I am doing my best not to make any comment on them.*
8. *I don't know what 1971, 1974 or 1980 means to you. Just as I can't guess what you will measure or draw with a 10 meter long tape measure.*

### Seahorse, The

Advocating the credo "science is fiction", the films of Jean Painlevé (1902–1989) are haunted by the spectre of the inhuman, the disconcertingly mindless movement of microscopic cilia disturb because they are functional and reflect an intelligence—environmental and evolutionary—that is far vaster than our own puny claim in that area. Painlevé's work leaves us with a haunting sense of our own strangeness, even as we gape in wonder at nature's bizarre marvels. This isn't an inappropriate projection of human qualities onto another species, but an observation of how we resemble the rest of the animal kingdom: once again, it's a case of inverted anthropomorphism.

### Self Portrait as a Distribution Diagram

In his *Self Portrait* series, Gabriel Kuri uses materials and the ready-made forms of quotidian objects to create compositions that oscillate between abstraction and anthropomorphic representation. The collage of materials, colours, surface structures as well as the mixture of natural and artificial objects often set the emotional tone of these self-ironic works. In the work *Self Portrait as Distribution Diagram* the natural shape of the seashell is combined with plastic objects associated with contemporary practices of production and consumption. The sculpture therefore contains both the ironic subjective image

of the self at a particular moment in time and a reference to the determination of a person's identity through utilitarian quotidian items.

### Swarm

Jochen Lempert studied biology and his knowledge of the natural world shapes his photographs of the plant and animal realms. The intersection of biology and visual art is his ongoing concern. Sometimes he addresses the links between science and its photographic visualisation directly—underlining the fact that scientific insights cannot be understood in isolation from the medium of their communication. His pictures grant access to our immediate surroundings—as both aesthetic realms and as sites for scientific insight. In this way, they reveal that the world around us, which we are mutually interdependent with, is shaped by factors that always mark us as parts of a larger whole. As such, his work is an example of biology in the best sense: a lesson in life.

### Tales #5

#### (Perada, Greece, September 2009)

Photography takes precedence in Daniel Gustav Cramer's work. He likes to work with repetition and the continuity of a still image. For example, *Tales*, a series of successive events at specific locations (started in 2000 and ongoing). The analog photographs depict incremental shifts in time or in the case of the work exhibited here, an ostensible time vacuum with the suggestion of movement: the presence or absence of a boat on a lake, a lonely figure's diminutive movements on a rock formation surrounded by water, a woman appearing behind the various windows of an apartment or a fisherman's quiet activity at sea. Cramer creates a large proportion of his work while travelling. Travel brings him to another state of consciousness: alert, observant and open. Cramer likes to consider things from a distance: *I attach great importance to the idea that my involvement with my subjects and surroundings leaves no trace and does not affect anything. When taking pictures, I take nothing with me; nothing changes. I am just observing. The view through the lens is the only active device.*

### Voyager

Oscar Santillán's work insinuates the existence of a territory where the limits of what is possible can be trespassed: what happened, what may have happened and what is presented are equivalent terms. The work *Voyager* consists of a lost shirt with missing buttons, which was found by the artist during a walk in the forest. To restore the shirt, Santillán had new buttons made by melting down meteorites and recasting the material into the shape of buttons, subsequently sewing them onto the shirt. The act brings together two different entities and their coinciding temporalities that would otherwise never have met.

Act II

*Archipelago — A Problem (On Exactitude in Science)*

Anna Betbeze, Karl Blossfeldt, Etienne Chambaud, Daniel Gustav Cramer, Cevdet Erek, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Irene Kopelman, Gabriel Kuri, Nicolás Lamas, Jochen Lempert, Benoît Maire, Jean Painlevé, Oscar Santillán, Michael E. Smith, Francisco Tropa, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, Jorinde Voigt

04.11.2018 – 23.12.2018

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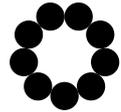
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Albert Groot



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