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Report: Confirmative Praxis

This module of confirmative praxis has led me to study many areas of philosophy and artistic practice, new to me. Drawn towards concepts of materiality, new materialism and the fold. My praxis is still strongly anchored in the blacksmith's craft, my industrial landscape and heritage. The materials that surround us and are so often taken for granted, I find a need to re-examine my approach and understanding of them, with a focus on materials that have shaped us, steel, coal, and slate. The post industrial landscape of

Wales, the people and their stories, such an important part of our identity. I want to bring this authenticity and character, to my praxis, and engage with this new materialism, to recognise the persistence and consciousness of materials.

The Artistic Process.

Mathematics, particularly geometry, are often used in metalwork, engineering, manufacture and construction, and very much part of this sort of business. I like to introduce 'The Golden Ratio' and 'Fibonacci's Sequence', in my design and artwork. Introduction to Western European mathematics in the renaissance by Leonardo of Piza also known as Fibonacci was published in his book Liber Abac 1202. Applications of Fibonacci's numbers include mathematics, and are found in many computer algorithms. They appear many times in the natural world, in the arrangements of branches of trees, of leaves on a stem, the fruit of a pineapple, the flowering of an artichoke, and the arrangement of a pine cone's bracts.

Fibonacci's sequence and the Golden Ratio are strongly related.

F is 55/34. F_n were starting with $F_0=0$ then $F_2=1$ etc...

Golden Ratio is approx.~1.618.

Readymades

I have continued with my interest in the Dada movement and in particular the life and works of Marcel Duchamp. How it shook the art world and changed the perception of what art is forever. I am intrigued by the ideas behind his "Readymades". He successfully eliminated the individual, handmade quality of art, changing an

object's character to expressing their own qualities. ,Most famous of these readymades is "*Fountain*" 1917, a mass produced, white porcelain urinal.

I also found joy in the "Notes on the Infra-Slim" 1945.

"A transformer to utilize the slight"

(Groom A 2013)

Small, inconsequential sensory perceptions, felt and observed in the realm of the everyday. Little things in life, both beautiful and ugly.

I often find myself drawn to everyday discarded objects and materials, seeing potential for use in my artworks.

For example the stainless steel woven mesh sheet I found in a Swansea Charity shop which I have now used in the Fold.

Richard Serra has been an influential figure in the development of my praxis, not only because of his choice of material but his philosophy, draughtsmanship, and process.

Like Richard Serra, I have made use of the verb list, not to describe like him the movement of a dancer (that stemmed for a collaboration with the dancers like Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti) but to describe the techniques, actions , and process we practice in the blacksmith's craft. For example, to hammer, to texture, to twist, to flatten, to bend, to fold, etc. As a conceptual practice, a guide used to initiate a thought process and dialogue. Choosing one of these verbs as a starting point, one can initiate a thought process, an analysis as to what this action means relating to the material, what tools can be used, how they can act on the material and then

what you can imagine, or create from this simple instruction. To take it to the extreme, To see how far can you go with it? For me the initial impetus works really well, to focus on one simple action is exciting and generally leads to infinite creative ideas.

Materialism

Through my recent research and study for my MA I have gained a basic understanding of the philosophy of the metaphysical and ontological but I found this explanation representative of my endeavours.

“Socrates practiced *‘philosophia’* which means the love of wisdom rather than the possession of it.”

Harman G. 2018

Henri Bergson believed in the latent spontaneity of nature. Elan Vital, the spark of life, that every living thing shares. Now contemporary philosophical figures are engaged with this theme. Dr. Iain McGilchrist, psychiatrist, philosopher and author of ‘The Matter with Things & The Master and Many’ believes many contemporary philosophers are rotating towards the panpsychist view that consciousness has been there all along but that it has evolved and so there is consciousness at different levels in everything. There is always an inwardness as well as an outwardness. Scientists only deal with things that can be observed from the outside and measured but obviously, there is very much more to life than that. In fact , all the important things don’t fall under that category. There is something that it is like to be, even, a

subatomic particle. Its experience of the world can't be at all like yours and mine, but it has that inwardness as well as an outwardness. You can't say that matter suddenly gives rise to consciousness, because consciousness is utterly different from anything in our outward view of matter. The way to reconcile these two things is to accept that matter is simply a phase of consciousness. You might say, "Well it doesn't look like consciousness and behave like consciousness," So take water for an example, it's translucent and can run across your hand or it's hard and opaque and white and won't move until given a massive shove, and it's suspended in tons in the room you're in, doing very important work in keeping us all alive. So, water has many phases and consciousness has phases. And what matter offers is persistence. And for a creation, I think there needs to be a degree of persistence, not for ever and ever in that form, but some degree of persistence, more than consciousness on its own can have.

Martin Heidegger

In his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" in 1938, Martin Heidegger describes Art as an enigma, and things designed and the nature of the thing. Since this time the understanding of art, passing from modernism and postmodernism, And beyond, has rocked its foundations. Heidegger not only acknowledged the causal relation between the artist, the work, and art as circular but asked if art exists as the generative point of origin.

The practice of design predates any identity nameable as “designer”, yet at the same time design, as an act of prefiguration (the idea of “to be made” going ahead of making to direct form) was intrinsic to the most fundamental moments of the development of “the human”. That is to say, “design came before the category was described or designated to the practitioner”, the same is true of art that was made prior to the designation or categorisation of the role of the artist. Art was made before it was commonly known by the people to be art.

Heidegger’s concept of thingness refers to the essential nature of a “thing”, which emerges when an object transcends its mere utility and reveals its deeper being, often through breaking or stillness, focusing on its relationship or space, void, and gathering.(e.g. A jug holding emptiness not just clay). In contrast with the scientific view of objects as measurable data instead, emphasising how things “thing”, by gathering presence and meaning into our world, revealing themselves rather than just being used. He also introduced what he called, “Gathering the World”, a concept that is more profound, and deals with the “fourfold”: earth and sky, the divinities and the mortals. The jug gathers the “fourfold” through the act of pouring a gift (water from a spring, wine for a libation) The link is the earth, the jug, the sky, the rainwater, mortals, the drinkers and the divine , the offering.

The role of the void: The essence of the jug’s thingness lies in its void- the emptiness that holds liquid, which is shaped by the potter. The material walls merely form the boundary of this essential void.

He asked the question, “How does an object become a thing?” or its “Thingness”,; i.e. An ordinary object like a hammer becomes a “thing” when it stops functioning as intended e.g. it breaks and reveals its deeper presence and relationship to other things, it reveals itself as a mere “present- at-hand” conspicuous object. The concept of “Readiness-to-Hand”, used to describe things as they appear in our everyday practical engagement with the world. A tool like a hammer, is primarily experienced through its use and its place within a network of involvements (wood, nails,a task, the user) rather than as a disconnected object with abstract properties. When a tool breaks its “readiness-to-hand” vanishes and

“The jug” example, used to describe, “The Thing” Heidegger uses is a jug : its “thingness”, isn’t the ceramic but the void it holds- the emptiness that shapes it and allows it to hold water revealing a fundamental relationship between material and nothingness.

Gathering matter together of Things “thing” by gathering elements (like the earth and sky for the jug) into a unified presence, bringing them into our world and making them near, thus creating his concept of “Thingness”. This “Nearness and Distance”, involves a complex interplay or nearness and farness; things are near not just physically but through their meaning and relationships, a closeness lost in technological objectification. Beyond objectification Heidegger critiques the modern scientific approach which views entities as mere “objects” that are present-at-hand, dislocated from their environment and having only instrumental value or quantifiable properties. This reductive view obscures the true nature of things.

Thingness: This is the active process where things reveal their being, a dynamic self-disclosure distinct from our static perception of them as mere objects.

New Materialism and Vibrant Matter

In her book 'Vibrant Matter' Jane Bennett when discussing bioengineering she believes that it has rendered the line between organic and inorganic life and matter increasingly problematic.

Immanuel Kant's 'Bildungstrieb' the embryologist Driesch's 'entelechy' and Bergson's 'Elan Vital'. Bergson and Driesch were sceptical about mechanistic models of nature. They conveniently left an open space for vibrant materialism to fill.

All material things have material qualities independent of whatever cultural values are posited with them, but conversely the possibility of cultural values depend upon the existence of the thingliness of the thing. The music, the score, the painting, the canvas, the dance, the stage, all made things are bracketed by a directive conjoined immateriality prior to and in addition to their thingliness.

In my confirmative Praxis I have continued to be driven to look at the "As found and the found"

[...] The 'as found', where the art is in the picking up, turning over and putting with...and the 'found', where art is in the process and the watchful eye...

Alison and Peter Smithson 1989.

S. Johnson 2008

. Objects, materials and the things in my environment that catch my eye, and speak to me of potential. Readymades as Marcel Duchamp called them. I love things with provenance, a story behind them, a history, things that have a vibrancy, an intensity, a character wishing to speak out, to speak of lives beyond the observable and visual.

I see the aesthetic in things that have been shaped by time alone. Photograph and collect them. They all have persisted and existed, and have a story to tell of lives lived.

I seek authenticity and balance and as such use Fibonacci's sequence and the Golden Ratio.

New Materialism

The development of my praxis in this confirmative module has led me to study the area of New Materialism. I have always been fascinated by the materiality of different materials, how they are made, how they are used and utilized and how to work them. New materialism is a term which refers to several theoretical perspectives within contemporary philosophy that attempt to rework the conventional ontological understanding of the material world. While many philosophical tendencies are associated with new materialism, in such a way that the movement resists a single

definition its common characteristics include a rejection of essentialism, representationalism and anthropocentrism as well as the dualistic boundaries between nature/culture, subject/object and human/nonhuman. Instead new materialists emphasize how fixed entities and apparently closed systems are produced through dynamic relations and processes, considering and distribution of agency through the interaction of heterogeneous forces.

To understand that inorganic as well as organic materials have agency. Franz Kafka's, In "Odradek" he tells of an often overlooked object, which is observed to have a secret life and personality. Not secret but unobserved and misunderstood.

"I must let my senses wander as my thought,
My eyes see without looking...
Go not to the object; let it come to you."
The journal of Henry David Thoreau

"It is never we who affirm or deny something of a thing; it is the thing itself that affirms or denies something of itself in us."

Short Treatises II, Baruch Spinoza.

Bennett J 2010

If a life is visible only fleetingly, for it is "a pure event freed... from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens." Gilles Deleuze, based on the philosophy of Spinoza, explores "Immanence" God is 'within' the physical world as opposed to transcendence, God is 'above' or beyond the physical world.

Spinoza states that the characteristic feature of a pantheistic God or single substance which is the cause of all things, including the attributes and modes.

God is the immanent but not the transitive cause of all things[...] no substance can exist outside God[...] and] there can exist no thing which is in itself and outside God. [Spinoza (The Ethics 1, prop. 18) 2000, 91]

“Immanence is not immanence to substance; rather, substance and modes are in immanence”.

Deleuze G 1993

Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, the manner in which the expression of the same, infinite, univocal substance cannot be separated from the finite mode in which it is expressed, and not in a causal relation to each other, but expressed in parallel within the substance.

The pure power of life can also manifest as utter joy, The indefinites of life, and can also manifest as unspeakable, sheer violence.

In a slight variation to this 'plane of immanence' Deleuze and Guattari suggest this serves as a field of concepts, desire being part of our social world.

The reason iron was first made on an industrial scale here in South Wales is because of the proximity of the raw materials necessary to make it. In South Wales we say that “iron is in our blood” and it literally is in our blood, 3-4 grams in fact, enough to make a

reasonably large nail. Hemoglobin (red blood cells) contains 70% of the body's total iron.

The Blacksmiths Craft

Working with hand tools everyday they become an extension of the arm and hand. Each tool in the workshop has to be mastered. And there are many.

A favourite hammer is sorely missed if lost or even when the handle needs to be replaced.

Individual tools have an individual character. A tool of the same size and type may have a slightly different pattern of wear, be a slightly different weight or have a different balance.

Blacksmiths would call it 'Hand-Eye' coordination. The hammer face lands flat and true where the eye sees it, guiding it through the head, neck and shoulder, arm, hand, hammer handle, and hammer as one, without thinking. Here there is proprioception, a phenomenological experience of the body, as memory, and self-awareness of one's body, its position, movement, and action without relying solely on visual input.

Experience of working on one material over time gives you the knowledge and awareness of that material in its many different phases. Steel when cold can be soft when annealed and beautiful to file, and drill etc. but if hardened by quenching and tempering, hard to work.

In its hot phase you are guided by its colour, from black through to white. Steel is plastic and pliant malleable and ductile, when it is

white hot (close to its melting point) it feels slick and on the surface it can become liquid, it is what you want if you are to produce a forged weld. It is a tacit knowledge, intuition, insight, an internalised, experience-based understanding, that can only be learnt through doing.

Materiality

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1227: *Treaties on Nomadology-The War Machine*, the idea of “Material Vitalism” and “Itinerant Metallurgy”

To early man the process of making iron would have appeared magical, though iron is formed from a process that gathers components from numerous locations., which essentially meant an itinerant lifestyle for the artisans.

During the Stone Age most tools were made of flint, wood, and bone, materials which lack resilience and are soon broken or blunted. Metals are different, they flow, and are malleable, they can be hammered into shape, and become work hardened by hammering them. The metal can be softened by reheating it in the fire. Discoveries made over 10,000 years ago, made materials that are almost as hard as rock but have a plastic behaviour when hot.

They have almost an infinity of applications, are the perfect metal for making tools, specifically cutting tools like axes, chisels, and razors.

Originally the biggest problem for mankind was the scarcity of metals. The earliest metal discovered was copper. Extracted quite

easily from the greenish rock malachite. (at the time, supposedly a dead inert rock with a mysterious inner quality) Selection of the right rock and control of the fire would have been crucial.

Copper chisels used on rock would have needed to be sharpened every few hammer strikes, so not ideal for this job. Bronze, an alloy of copper is much harder but requires tin and sometimes arsenic. During the Bronze Age elaborate trade routes were developed to get these much rarer commodities from places like Cornwall and Afghanistan to the centres of civilization in the Middle East.

Steel, the alloy of iron and carbon, is even stronger than bronze, but It took thousands of years to discover.

Carbon in the form of charcoal used in the smelting process in the case of iron is not simply the fuel it gets inside the iron crystals and for many thousands of years remained a mystery, it is now known through quantum mechanics that the carbon in steel doesn't take the place of an iron atom but is able to squeeze between the iron atoms creating a stretched crystal.

In Greek mythology weapons of magical power were made of material with a particular character or consciousness. Adamantine the linguistic source comes from the Latin and ancient Greek word *adamas* and *diamant* old French,

Adamant swords, and sickles, as hard as diamonds were manufactured as weapons of retribution, used to inflict lethal wounds to the Gods and other mythical beings.

Cronos castrated his father with an adamant sickle, and Perseus decapitated the Gorgon Medusa with an adamant sword.

Hephaestus the Greek God of blacksmiths, and craftsmen, fashioned unbreakable adamantine chains to bind Prometheus to the jagged rocks.

Nomadism (Nomads, Nomadic Distribution, Nomos)

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari chapter 12 1227: *Treatise on Nomadology-The War Machine*, discuss the idea of Itinerant Metallurgy, refers to the historical practice of mobile specialised metalworkers (smiths) travelling between communities to produce tools, weapons and jewelry, particularly in the Bronze Age. These artisans were central to spreading technologies and often operated outside settled, bureaucratic or state-based power structures, fostering innovation and independence.

The War Machine is defined as a fluid, nomadic force existing outside and against the secondary State. It is not about soldiers, but a creative destructive force (deterritorialization) that resists rigid, centralized power (striated space) by operating in “smooth spaces”. This also works for artistic/ intellectual creative thought and science that escape institutional coding, detailed in discussions like *Nomad War Machine*.

Metallurgy can operate outside of state controls; there is a certain freedom of movement in this, same as it is important for creativity to be given freedom to operate outside of constraints devised by institutions. Dada rebelled against this and artists in general have

always fought for these freedoms. Freedom of choice , freedom of speech, freedom of thought.

The problem is exposure within the galleries system. No access to the collectors lists.

There is now a fight against class nepotism and inequalities within the arts due to an autocratic system that only gives opportunity to the connected.

The Fold

“We are time unfolding and our time is finite.”

Heidegger M. 1953

As we all know, to fold means to bend paper, cloth, or similar materials so one part covers another. It commonly refers to making items more compact, for example, folding laundry, crossing arms, or in culinary terms, gently combining ingredients. It can mean a business closing or withdrawing from a hand of poker.

In the works of philosophers like Hegel, Sartre, Spinoza, Leibniz, Foucault, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty the metaphysical is dissected . The fundamental questions of reality and existence, mind and matter, being and time, space and causality, knowledge far beyond the visual world.

In ‘The Fold’, ‘Pleats of Matter’ Gilles Deleuze states “The Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a

trait. It endlessly produces folds. It does not invent things: there are all kinds of folds coming from the East, Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Gothic Classical folds ... Yet the Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque folds unfurl all the way to infinity.”

He draws upon the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and the Baroque.

The Baroque state reveals identical traits existing as constants within the most diverse environments and periods of time.

The “Baroque” is not exclusive to Europe; here it designates a trope that comes from the renewed origins of art and has stylistic evidence that prevails in culture in general.

Deleuze G. 1988, Conley T. Intro.1993

In ‘The Fold’, Deleuze describes how different styles like Romanesque and Gothic sometimes fold into each other.

Leibniz’ mathematics of the Baroque fold.

The definition of Baroque mathematics was born with Leibniz. The object of the discipline is a “new affection” of variable sizes, which is variation itself. To be sure it is a fractional number or even in an algebraic formula, variability is not considered as such, since each of the terms has or must have a particular value.

Deleuze G. 1988

The term Monad is attributed to the philosopher Leibniz, who for him was a basic unextended compound, and also the building

block of the soul and body which is “higher” if it produces more effect on other monads and has more clear perceptions.

“The Monad, of which we shall here speak, is nothing but a simple substance, which enters into compounds.” Leibniz, 1898

“All simple substances or created Monads might be called souls[...] the

The general name Monad [...] should suffice for simple substances which have perception only, and that the name of Souls should be given only to those in which perception is more distinct, and accompanied by memory.” Leibniz, 1898

Deleuze G 1988

Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz, the unity of the soul which enveloped, and at the same time developed as a multiplicity or series.

The unity of the soul and matter which folds the outside onto the inside; an organism which assembles inorganic matter and has a body but is irreducible to its body (determined by derivative force but determining through primitive force), because the singularities that encompasses through perception express a unique actualization of the world.

“Every monad [...] has a body, it is inseparable from a body corresponding to its clear zone, but it does not contain it, and is

really distinguished from it. The Monad merely requires it because of the limitation of its force [...]

Deleuze G. 1988

All monads express the whole world darkly, even if not in the same order. Each one enclosed in itself the infinity of minute perceptions. [...] What distinguishes them is their zone of clear, remarkable, or privileged expression.”

Deleuze G. 1988

Young, Genosko, Watson 2013

“Explication-implication-complication forms the triad of the fold, following the variations of the relation of the One-Multiple.

(De triplici minimo, Giordano Bruno based on the previous work of Nicolas de Cusa “complicatio”)

“It might even be stated that insofar as it is filled with folds that stretch to infinity, the soul can always unfold a limited number of them inside itself, those that make up its subdivision or its borough.”

Deleuze G. 1988

Unfolding

Unfolding to open, spread out, or reveal something that was previously folded, closed ,or hidden. It refers to physically opening items like maps or blankets, as well as figuratively describing the development of events, stories, or situations over time.

Similar words are unfurl, unroll, develop, and reveal.

Slate

Slate is a fine-grained metamorphic rock derived from an original shale type sedimentary rock composed of clay or volcanic ash.

Fine particles of clay form in layers perpendicular to compression forces creating “slaty-cleavage”, a foliation which allows separation of slabs or plates when skillfully struck with hammer and wide masonry chisel. The property of many slates is ‘fissility’ allows the forming of smooth flat sheets of stone, which have for a long time been used for roofing, floor tiles and billiard tables.

The many variations in the colours, and textures of slate have been utilized by artists to create stunning works of art, often paying homage to its natural beauty, its geology but also its cultural and historic significance.

In my praxis I have begun to explore slate, not as we have traditionally made use of it. Its layered nature means that it can be split into thin sheets and with some skill made into a near perfect durable roofing material. Because of its durability it has been fashioned into paving stones, thresholds and window lintels and window sills.

I have recently started to experiment with slate, wanting to incorporate this iconic Welsh material in my sculptures.

Taking a thick reclaimed flooring slab I cut off several pieces, 30 x 80mm. I had seen the work ‘Y Nefoedd yn Toddi i'r Tir’ (The Heavens Melt into the Earth) by Rhiannon Gwyn at Y Lle Celf , at

the Llyn a Eifionydd Eisteddfod 2023 in Boduan. Used as a base or plinth to rest her ceramic work upon.

My experiments involve cutting the slate into pieces about 80 x 80 x 300mm, cleaning, and then drying them out thoroughly. They were placed on the college kilns for four weeks. Sag walls were built inside the kilns to protect the kiln and its elements then the individual slate piece was placed on a curve shaped fire brick Aluminium oxide powder was spread over the brick surfaces to prevent adhesion. The kiln was then fired up slowly at 50 degrees an hour up to 1000 degrees centigrade . The first experimental firing stopped here and was left to cool down. The result was a simple colour change from slate grey to bright orange, probably because of the iron content of the original slate piece. The experimental piece was put back in the kiln and then fired up to 1080 degrees C. When completely cool the kiln door was opened to reveal a transformation in the slate. The piece has now puffed up formed pockets of gas and delaminated, and changed to an earth ochre brown much more ceramic in nature. It as become a very different material.

We have repeated the process with several other pieces of slate with mixed success. On one occasion the vent was accidentally left open and the kiln would only reach 1000 degrees C, until it was realised and then it continued up to 1080. On another occasion the piece ruptured and pieces of slate pierced the interior fire bricks.

At present I have two pieces of Preseli slate, (a soft pale slate) in the kiln, waiting to see what transformation has occurred.

In the future I will continue to develop praxis by combining steel?stainless steel and slate. Creating cages or wraps the enclosure and confine the slate to see where this might lead.

I'm looking forward to exploring this technique further and to develop sculptural pieces uniting forged metal and kiln fired slate.

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