

**“This is my family, home, my landscape, memory and affection. And such it will remain”**

**Andrzej Szczypiorski**

**Title: Independent Enquiry Proposal**

**Key-words: “*Ontophany through Phenomenotechnique*”, “*Advancement Design*”, “*Restoration*”**

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## Independent Study Proposal

With the aim of arriving at an individualised topic, in a way which reflects my morals, post-graduation goals and ideology, yet condenses them into three key-words, my dissertation proposal will investigate the terms; “*Ontophany through Phenomenotechnique*” and “*Design Advancement*”. I wish to inspect the inclusion and effect of technology and science in design, firstly in a psychological, philosophical context. My third key-word, “*Restoration*”, will specifically focus on the conflict and erasure as well as reinstatement of the Jewish-Polish culture from the eighteenth century. Exploring each term with conjunction to my practice in order to find and examine my role and purpose as a designer, I will synchronically explore the seemingly inescapable symbiosis and the gradual merging of design and technology in the three contexts outlined by the chosen key-words. The desired outcome of this document is accumulating academically and personally relevant knowledge, enriching my understanding and application of relevant theoretical framework in research, and finally arriving at the question I’m truly compelled to pose and inquire into for my independent research project.

“*Ontophany through Phenomenotechnique*” is first term I decided to explore. Firstly, *phenomenotechnique* is the “act of proliferation, where the instrumental interventions open up new fields of phenomena to be expressed, creating new questions or domains of phenomena” (Simons, 2018). The term itself has roots in the Greek word *Phainomenon*, ““thing appearing to view’”, based on *Phainein* (to show)” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010).

This term was established in the 1930s, by a French philosopher of phenomenological psychology, Gaston Bachelard. Exploring the nature of thought and creativity, Bachelard initially ascribed imagination as an epistemological obstacle in the face of scientific discovery, thus suggesting it to be an obstruction of one’s understanding of scientific thought. Bachelard’s later work however, revealed substantial heterogeneity in his stance, as the philosopher later promulgated the notion that “The imagination lays the foundation for a human time and space, and it gives birth to a truly intersubjective world...Imagination and human creation are thus intimately related” (Thiboutot et al., 1999). Perhaps inspired by Aristotian philosophy of being and not being, Bachelard developed this strand of phenomenology, recognising that the imagination is one’s only lens of experiencing an idea of reality, as we are unable to perceive existence. Therefore it is through *phenomenotechnique* that we can conceptualise the phenomena of human existence to science and mathematics.

This notion has recently been further explored by a philosopher and design researcher Stéphane Vial, who rekindled Bachelard’s *phenomenotechnique*, revising it in an era of technological developments. Vial’s exploration of the digital phenomenon rendered the “*Theory of Ontophany*”. *Ontophany*, translated from Greek to “the appearance of being”(Fresian, 2003), is a framework which upholds Bachelard’s belief that while experiencing reality, we are unable to perceive it. *Ontophany* illustrates an idea that virtuality and technology “are first the perceptual structure of our existence; they are the “devices” or the invisible matrixes, produced by culture and history, into which our potential experience-of-the-world is cast”(Vial, 2017).

*Ontology through phenomenotechnique* “... consists not in describing phenomena as if they preceded their dedicated theories, but in constructing them wholly, using technological devices that afford them an appearance and an existence as phenomena per se.”(Vial, 2017).

While comparatively exploring and assessing the validity of the two theorists’ beliefs, even against the wider concept of phenomenology, many examples supporting the existence can be found in design.

A mathematical example of *ontology through phenomenotechnique* is the invention of multidimensional cinema. As humans we can perceive the world in only 3 dimensions, width, breadth, and height. Yet with the knowledge and understanding of mathematics, much to the accuracy of Bachelard and Vail’s phenomenological theories, the invention of multidimensional discovery has indeed created a new genre of phenomena, creating 4D - 9D cinemas, but it also supports Bachelard’s contradicting, early 1930s view, which would portray 4D cinema as an epistemological obstacle, as it wasn’t designed in a mathematically accurate way, but in a conceptual, imaginative way.

Whilst the phenomenological theorists, such as Édouard Le Roy met *phenomenotechnique* with heavy scepticism, fronting the notion that “scientific facts are fabricated to meet the requirements of theory”(Fabry, 2018), *ontology* and *phenomenotechnique* are undeniably relevant in the creation of artistic biomimicry. Biomimicry is a practice in design which centres around the observation of nature, in hope of finding design solutions through the study of biology and evolution. A notable example of biomimicry influenced architecture is The Gherkin.



Fig 1: The Gherkin, London ©www.arch2o.com

Designed by Norman Foster, its outer structure is made to mimic that of a venus flower basket sponge’s exoskeleton. This design was implemented to provide structural stability.

Another, perhaps more contemporary user of biomimicry is Elmo Mistiaen. Mistiaen approaches biomimicry in an abstract way, fusing its elements with large wearable forms, such as expansive



Fig 2: Elmo Mistiaen

Puffer coats, as evident in the picture. The merging of those two elements, alongside Mistiaen's other collections, evokes me to consider and perhaps experiment with forms in a more conceptual, abstract manner. This artist also utilised technological advancements such as AI to create their work, and they have mastered that art form as evident from the hyperrealistic result of the work, for instance the textures are folds of the fabric.

There is however a growing sentiment which opposes that of Bachelard's seemingly upheld belief that imagination, and as an extent creativity. Societal appreciation for art and culture has been to some extent rekindled, perhaps due to the collective realisation or even a subconscious yearning for the positive cognitive function art has been proven to provide, as "On an individual level, engaging with the arts helps people synthesise information and solve problems, often leading to innovative breakthroughs in science and technology." (Badizadegan, 2020).

The second chosen keyword is "*Advancement Design*". This term articulates my own design beliefs of; utilising technology to aid the perpetual evolution of *design* in the face of also constantly arising design problems, as well as a collective progression and improvement. The definition of *advancement* being "the process of helping something/somebody to make progress or succeed; the progress that is made" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010), the word connotes the idea of striving and advancing, but not on an inherently personal and self-serving level, instead implying the conscious improvement of a collective.

Since the industrial revolution, the field of design has been increasingly succumbing and reflecting the, also drastically increasing capitalist values. While it cannot be stated that Capitalism has not bred *advancement* in design, especially in conjunction with technology, the ideology however constructed a damagingly false paradigm of meritocracy. This non-human

centric design shift is inevitable, as Capitalism encourages and values “larger social systems of contemporary design- not individuals' intentions or values”(Wizinsky, 2022).

As opposed to my principle of *advancement design*, meritocracy is the belief in improving/progressing by raising up the system of Social Class, the ascension being directly parallel to the quantity of labour.

*Advancement Design* is without the inclusion of the term “technological”, as the current evolution of design and its response to the goal of eradicating societal problems heavily features technology, therefore making it an inherent aspect of *advancement design* in the context of the current societal demand. The argument that designers and artists alike have to join this technological revolution, in order to identify as well as solve society’s problem, and even achieve success, or rather, on a more relevant and larger scale, be able to earn a living wage, has ample evidence noted throughout the immersing, previously noted influence of capitalism. “In order to take full advantage of the effects of digital technologies on the creation and dissemination of cultural products, artists and organisations must “adapt” and even “recreate themselves”.”(Paré, 2022).

This sentiment somewhat aligns with the self-proclaimed values of *advancement design*, which are often enriched by André-Louis Paré’s creative journalism and frequent praise of the technological advancements in the World of Art and Design, however he fails to mention, or perhaps consider the negative implications of technology in the creative realm, for instance describing Artificial Intelligence almost exclusively as a ““tool” holds an extraordinary promise to revolutionise the world of work...more broadly, better manage our daily affairs.”(Paré 2020). failing to cast aside a journalistic bias and bring light to the arising issues the AI brings into design, such as the increasing trend in the use of AI art generating software, which not only plagiarises the work of all the artists in its vast database, but also renders the craft and jobs of an increasing amount of graphic designers obsolete.

It is important to examine and scrutinise the influence technology has on all aspects of art and design, its creation, promotion, consumption and response. *Advancement Design* does however, as previously noted, encourage the use of technology, as it is beneficial in ways which align with its values. For example, technology undeniably provided a platform for the creator and the viewer, connecting the majority of the world. This allows for artists to support, guide and collaborate with each other. The internet also offers a plethora of recorded information, increasing the accessibility people have to sources which can help them improve artistically. Technologically aided accessibility to data could also be utilised in the practice of Inclusive Design, which is “The premise is that, if a design works across a full range of human abilities, it will be more functional.” (Maisel, et al.,2017).

Therefore technology should be used as a tool used to solve design problems and *advance* in the art space, however art and design are primordially human in creation, and societal technological progress should not remove that sacred aspect. To reiterate, and perhaps better apply Bachelard’s early philosophies of imagination, is it not human to think creatively and innovate? It could even be argued that removing the human aspect of art removes the element which makes art, art. “History has proved time and again that the technological advancements

of visual medium pale in comparison to the artists and the artwork that reside in that medium”(Kang,2019).

It has to be argued however, that the middle-ground between Kang’s preference of traditional media, and Paré’s encouragement of embracing the all technological, is where the most innovation, exploration and experimentation takes place. A pioneer in the exploration of both the physical and the digital, Iris Van Herpen is a hugely inspirational figure and designer. Herpen’s explorations of raw materials such as metal, resin and fabric, contrasted with their highly ornamental, detailed 3d printed creations makes for stunning, very distinctive pieces.



*Fig 3. Iris Van Herpen, Sensory Seas*

Incorporating biomimicry into their dream-like pieces, accompanied by the colour and in areas, symmetry, Herpen is a constantly evolving designer, and their continuation in exploring this exoskeleton-esque is evolving with each collection.

The final key-word chosen to reflect my practice and values is “*Restoration*”, “the reinstatement of a previous practice, right, or situation”(Oxford English Dictionary), focusing on the loss of cultural heritage in the Jewish and Polish cultures and the conflicts surrounding the premise of *restoration*.

Before the threat of World War, by the late eighteenth century, “Poland had the biggest Jewish population in Europe, about 10% of the entire Polish population”(Matynia,91). Subsequently, Poland saw the birth of Hassidim, a group of Jewish “mystics”, who introduced the element of joy, expression and zeal, which initially heavily contrasted the sombre style of Roman Catholic worship in Poland, but in turn inspired the Polish Romantics to create paintings featuring Jewish people, exploring their assimilation into the Polish culture whilst conveying a loss of independence,migration and relation with God.. It’s crucial to note that while cohabitating in the same country for centuries, while Jews were multi-generational migrants turned citizens, “they are first and foremost Jews. however their fate in this land also constitutes the fate of the Polish nation.”(Rostworowski, 91). While a separate nationality, they became involved with the Romantic Movement, under the term “The Jews Of Poland” with their work specifically portraying the Jewish experience, both as the models and the painters.



Fig. 4: Henryk Berlewski, *Dybbuk (Chonon i Lea)* (1894 - 1967)

The loss of Polish and Jewish history (which has been merging for nine centuries at that point), politics, culture, art, customs and writing is a somewhat confusing phenomenon. We can, of course accredit the two World Wars and the Soviet regime that followed to a significant extent, the attempted erasure of the Yiddish and Polish language has not prevailed, but the nation will never even know how many books were burned, and what's worse, their contents. The disconcerting aspect of this cultural genocide, is the discrepancy of cultural *restoration* between the Jewish and Polish cultures. Post-occupation, Poland saw an architectural reconstruction using archival imagery as well as paintings, and there was a publicly large effort to restore Polish media of cultural significance, meanwhile not only was the effort not extended to the preservation and *restoration* of the Jewish culture, the country did not end its antisemitism.

On the national scale, Polish attitude towards Jewish people was discriminatory, scapegoating Jewish people for "the National Democracy (Narodowa Demokracja) anti-Jewish tropes became a powerful emotive tool for nation building".

We have to therefore acknowledge the involvement of Poland, in the conversation of cultural erasure of the Jews/Poles. Veiled by a mixture of lacking historical accounts, the country's refusal to accept its violence against the Jews, and the world-wide anti semitism, Poland seems to be disguising the extent of which it may be responsible for the Jewish cultural genocide.

"We Poles suffered under the Nazis" was a frequently used slogan that has come into scrutiny due to the fact that the Polish population is seen to some as "collaborators"(Easton, 2013)., a statement, publicly, digitally and casually distributed on the BBC website.

There is a clear link between "*Ontophany through Phenomenotechnique*" and "*Design Advancement*", the two key-words seamlessly combine in the realm of design. The two key-words could also relate to "*restoration*" in context of using technology to restore and conserve art. Researching the ever-improving technologies and their possible application in Cultural *restoration* would link the keywords and their complimentary values. I chose the term "*restoration*" before gathering resources, having a vague idea that my proposal may explore the ways in which technology can be utilised to *restore* or perhaps even recreate/ reimagine the art of both cultures, reviving the history of our creativity. To my surprise, my research led me to articles which portrayed Poland in a completely different light than that of Polish history books. Unfortunately, most sources lack authenticity due to lack of evidence provided, and therefore are rendered obsolete, as the likelihood of its authenticity could equally be a true account of a deeply shameful and hidden history, or the deeply shameful xenophobia directed at the Polish. Investigating the inseparable connection between the Jewish and Polish cultures I have decided to abandon the realm of phenomenology and technology, at least as the focus of my writing. In my ceramic work, I am currently focused on exploring Polish folk art, restoration and revival on a personal scale is a culturally therapeutic process.



I've been compelled to deepen my understanding of the relation between Jews and Poles over the centuries, as while researching I saw some interesting parallels to the treatment of both. The subjects of the Polish Romantic paintings, the Jewish people experiencing prejudice and loss of independence as a result of migration ended up being less like a distant struggle and more so like a reflection. The hostility, fueling the turning of Jew and Polak into slurs, harmful narratives impairing the "other". Perhaps this is a testament to the thousand year connection between the cultures. And yet the Polish blindly overlooked the erasure of Jewish culture and tradition, failing to recognize it was, in a large aspect, their own culture and therefore their own downfall. Examining my own relationship with Polish and Jewish culture, I reflected on the words of Andrzej Matynia; "My generation does not know the colourful image of the joint existence of Jews and Poles in Poland before World War II". My research has made me conscious of the potential futility of traditional and folk reintroduction to the culture. It seems that as long as the Polish reject the Jewish, they are inherently rejecting their own culture. And with that I have arrived to the question for my dissertation:

*"Is it possible to achieve a Cultural Revival in a multi-ethnic country with a ruling ethnic majority?"*

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## Figures:

Figure 1. The Gherkin, London ©[www.arch2o.com](http://www.arch2o.com)

Figure 2: Elmo Mistiaen

Figure 3: Iris Van Herpen, Sensory Seas

Figure 4: Henryk Berlewi, Dybbuk (Chonon i Lea) (1894 - 1967)