The right to decay: A panel discussion about inherent vice in conservation and creative practice

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ICOM-CC Theory History and Ethics in Conservation Working Group

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Will Rawls, detail from “Amphigory” (2022)

Finding Futures in Alternative Worlds

In her book *The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*, Elizabeth Spelman reminds us that humans have repaired since the beginning of their existence, fixing things, relationships, and ideas: "The homo sapiens is also homo reparans."[1] The history of human-made objects attests to this impulse. From the very first tools to the programming of artificial intelligence, ongoing adjustments have been required to aid in longevity and to further development. Despite the fact that objects, beings, systems, and ideas require continuous maintenance and repair as they break, decay, or fall into pieces, repair has been largely overlooked as an ontological and speculative topic outside of Spelman's study. The act of repair is most often presented as a mundane task performed in the household or by the car mechanic, the shoe mender, or building maintenance person. In this context, repair is not seen as a creative and generative act but rather as a relief to a particular problem and as a way to keep going in the same vein, meaning life as usual.

In the face of breakdown, deterioration, collapse, or obsolescence, capitalist societies have traditionally tended to react by avoiding the underlying systemic problem and aiming instead to return to an original state or trajectory. This response of dodging deep-seated transformation in favor of a quick fix—for instance, fixing and patching holes within a city street without making actual structural adjustments to the road itself—might be called "first-order repair."[2] In contrast, in a June 2021 *New York Times* opinion article written in response to the pandemic, David Brooks brought forward an argument made by Mancur Olson in his 1982 book *The Rise and Decline of Nations* in which he concluded that Germany and Japan enjoyed explosive growth precisely because their old arrangements had been disrupted.[3] The devastation itself, as well as the forces of American occupation and reconstruction, dislodged the interest groups that had held back innovation in each country. The old patterns that stifled experimentation were swept away, opening space for something new.

Meaningfully engaging with the complexities of our world today—including the detrimental thinking, actions, and teachings that have led us to our present state of societal and environmental brokenness—demands profound change along the lines of what Olson noted in the aftermath of World War II. This shift necessitates large-scale, systemic amends that psychologist and philosopher Paul Watzlawick refers to as "second-order change."[4] Watzlawick, who worked extensively in the 1970s on ways of making positive social transformations, deemed first-order change to be a simplistic, "commonsense" approach, limited to making change within an existing system. Second-order change, on the other hand, required deep questioning of the very assumptions around the problems to be addressed.[5]

Conceptualizing repair as second-order change expands the task from making simple adjustments to enable a continuation of what occurred before (i.e., a car mechanic replacing a standardized part), to enacting thinking and practices that challenge the status quo. This practice involves engaging with the broken, discarded, and disrupted not as an intervention limited to adjustments within existing structures, but as a complete transformation of the thing, system, and relationship itself.

OPPOSITE

Poncho Poema (detail), 2018. Carla Fernández, designer; Rosa Hernández Lucas, textile dyer and embroiderer; Mujeres Conservando Raíces (Hueyapan, Puebla, Mexico), dye workshop. Museum purchase, by exchange 2018.41. RISD Museum.

Will Rawls, detail from “Amphigory” (2022)

The Possibility of Patina in Contemporary Art or, Does the 'New Art' Have a Right to Get Old?

Hilkka Hiiop

Seeing things age is a form of beauty.
– Ed Ruscha (Bartley 1998: 10.)

The following article discusses contradictions arising in the conservation of contemporary art. As theoretical, philosophical and material value judgements in conservation are referred to traditional art, we are facing a basic dilemma: how far can we still apply these criteria to the conservation of contemporary art, considering its different characteristics, which have dramatically changed its perception by the public and its relation with the cultural environment? It is not only a technical issue, concerning appropriate methods to physically conserve the materials composing art, but primarily a theoretical issue, which starts from the ideas behind it. This article is an attempt to analyse the applicability of the traditional theories of conservation to contemporary art through the phenomenon of patina, i.e. the ageing of art, the preservation of which forms one of the main working objectives in traditional conservation. An attempt is made to transfer the values given to patina in traditional art to contemporary art and to evaluate the adequacy of conventional conservation theories. To better illustrate the dilemma, in the second part of the article, two case studies are compared: the conservation of an old masterpiece and the treatment of a contemporary art object – two very similar cases that involved significantly diverging conservation decisions.

The epoch we are living in is characterised by a potent duality of conservative and creative endeavours. On the one hand, there is a strong tendency to give meaning to the present through the past. Even if history, as such, exists only as a mental construction, as the glass bead game of historians which depends on the changing trends in the historical narrative of every new generation, the real importance is still given to the 'historical fact'. Modern people have a fixed notion

of the material culture, which is considered a symbol of truth and in which only the interpretation of the truth has a right to change. In this world of changing views and relative values, physical testimonies of the past are carriers of true objective history. Consequently, we are surrounded by museums of all kinds, where even to personal items, such as the broken shoes of an 'important' person, a strong significance may be attributed. The question of whether an object of this material culture belongs to the waste bin of history is considered almost heretical. These objects from the past are continuously used to reinterpret history within changing contexts. The quantity of new concepts is unlimited, but the objects from the past, symbolising eternity, are expected to remain unchanged. The material culture has to persist forever; otherwise the history becomes only a mental game, which does not correspond to our mentality of worshipping material culture as a fetish.

On the other hand, the creative approach of our times has changed dramatically. Contemporary art, the art of this epoch, is in a way the emblem of contemporary civilization, characterised by precariousness, perishability, evanescence, and a mistiness of the border between reality and imagination. Contemporary art has made the traditional values of the uniqueness of art questionable, declaring the relativity and reproducibility of everything.

Hence, the result is a sort of conflict between a post-modern cult, which tends to be nostalgic, quoting and fetishising the past heritage, and being passionate about collecting signs from the past. This perception is contrasted with the cult of creativity, moving away from material culture until it reaches the denial of all material.

Apparently, 'contemporary art' and 'conservation' represent opposite sides in this cultural world, the first standing for creativity and the latter for conservatism. Creativity is expected to undergo continuous change, and conservatism is static and changeless. Paradoxically, in contemporary art the conservative, historically orientated side of the world meets the creative dimension, at times interweaving with it, thus becoming inseparable and creating contradictions with regard to traditional value criteria.

In between this duality stands conservation. The objects handed over by the artist-creator to the destructiveness and forgetfulness of time will be valued as historical relics, in the same way as works of traditional art, and will be selected for preservation. Conservators, standing between these two extremes, are facing

a basic dilemma: to adapt to the requirements of a new creative culture, where all traditional values are relative, or remain in their conservative position and not make compromises.

A lack of historical distance from the moment of creation makes the situation even more complicated, as we do not know yet which manifestations of contemporary culture will be meaningful for future generations. According to Arthur Danto: 'We cannot bring … into self-consciousness the truths about the present that only the future will know. The question of what we ought to conserve, if we mean to preempt the consciousness of the future, is therefore inherently unanswerable.' (Danto 1999: 4.)

To better explain this major dilemma in the conservation of contemporary art, a phenomenon which is characteristic for all visual arts is discussed: the phenomenon of patina. Patina in contemporary art is one of the many issues that generate controversial attitudes and opinions, especially in comparison to meanings and interpretations in the traditional art sector.

The possibility of patina in contemporary art, more then being a technical issue, emphasises the discrepancy between changed attitudes in visual culture and the conservative mentality of the conservation profession.

Patina

As a starting-point, before analysing the phenomenon in contemporary art, a definition of the term 'patina' is necessary.

Natural ageing causes physical and chemical changes in the material of which a work of art is made. Patina, in the broader sense, describes all signs and traces left on an art object by its passage through time – a consequence of the life of an artwork from the moment of its creation to the present day. Referring to patina in traditional art we are talking about alterations, such as colour changes, yellowing of the varnish, *craquelure* etc. These alterations, induced by exposure to natural decay factors and use within human society, change the original appearance of the artwork, with the result of making it look rather different from what might have been the creative intention of the artist.

Despite its external physical appearance, we are used to attributing to patina a strong spiritual value. The physical changes of the material composing art objects are considered carriers of an immaterial dimension of historical, scientific and emotional values. Patina forms a sort of biography of the work of art. Paul Philip-

pot wrote in this regard: 'This [patina – *H.H.*] is not the physical or chemical, but a *critical* concept.' (Philippot 1996: 373.)

Patina is considered to be part of the identity of an art object. With regard to traditional art, we are used to giving great importance to traces of time and signs of ageing. Colour changes, yellowing of the varnish and *craquelure* are not only acceptable, they also give a new dimension and additional values to the work of art.

The opposite is true in contemporary art: the same traces of time are often perceived as disturbing or even destructive to the object. Contrary to traditional art, contemporary art is the art of our times and is expected to look 'new'. However, most pieces of contemporary art are particularly ephemeral. Contemporary artists use all possible (and impossible) materials, including organic substances such as pig excrement (Fig. 1), plants (Fig. 2), mechanical parts which keep kinetic art moving (Fig. 3), and a huge variety of plastics (synthetic polymers) which, although having the fame of being eternal, are in reality more fragile than traditional art materials.

Figure 1] Raoul Kurvitz. Sus Scrofa II–III, oil, organic material, pressboard, 1996. Art Museum of Estonia.

Figure 2] Raoul Kurvitz. Secondary Cultures: The Youth and Middle Age of Eastern European Plains I–II, mixed media: burs, thistles, textile, wood, windows, 1999. Art Museum of Estonia.

Figure 3] Villu Jõgeva. Object No. 1. Kinetic installation composed of four parts, painted wood, electric light bulbs, electromotor, loudspeakers, electric circuits, 1971–1973. Art Museum of Estonia.

The result is that contemporary art tends to show the signs of ageing much earlier than we are ready to accept them; '…we live in a time when there is no professional consensus of acceptable ageing for post-1945 art as there are for other periods of art. We vehemently lament the fading of Rothko's reds, but we accept the craquelure produced by aging in a Rembrandt and the browning of Filippino Lippi's greens.' (Mancusi-Ungaro 1999: 393.)

In explaining the different perceptions of patina in traditional and contemporary art, a basic issue to be considered is the significance commonly attributed to the phenomenon.

Patina is directly related to two main values of works of art:

- the value of authenticity
- the value of historicity

Paul Philippot considers these two values to be the twofold historical character of a work of art. At the moment of its creation a 'first historicity' is formed which can also be described as 'authenticity'. A 'second historicity', as he calls it, derives from the passage through time, following the moment of its creation – or from the biography of the work of art (Philippot 1996: 372–376). While the latter, the 'second historicity', is closely related to patina, as it refers to the physical traces that time leaves on the object, the 'first historicity' is only indirectly associated with it.

In traditional art, the two-fold historical character makes us appreciate the patina phenomenon as an additional value. The same does not seem to apply to contemporary art, where this phenomenon often gives rise to controversial feelings, attitudes and opinions.

Historicity

The value mainly associated with patina is related to historicity. As described by Cesare Brandi, the formation of the work of art is the result of the unique process of creation, which starts with a deep intention of the artist and finds its liberation in an image that is gradually formed in the artist's mind. The 'existential reality' *(realtà esistenziale)* is conceived by the artist and used in the gradual constitution of the object into an image as a synthetic act in the artist's consciousness. During this process the object moves from existential reality into an image – and so the new reality is formed in the artist's mind, which is reality without physical existence, and therefore 'pure reality' *(realtà pura)*. In a subsequent phase of the creative process, the connection with the existential reality is interrupted, and the image is shaped in the artist's mind. The artist then proceeds to its material realisation. Once the material has been used in the physical construction of the work of art, it starts its existence independent of the artist and **it is historicised** as a result of human work (Jokilehto 1999: 228–231). It is the beginning of its lifetime or biography, of the second historicity, as Philippot calls it.

So, the historical value is, first of all, a value which is not intrinsic to the work of art, but is an added value, a value that is given from outside and, as such, is not an exclusive characteristic of the art. That is why we can also consider it as a secondary value – intrinsic values, such as aesthetics, message, intent, and authenticity, being the primary values.

In traditional art we have no doubt that every single piece is a carrier of historicity. 'Historically we have seen that the *patina* documents the passage through time of the work of art and thus needs to be preserved.' (Brandi 1996: 378.) Even in cases in which we are not able to appreciate the inherent values of a given object (e.g. it is too damaged or has lost its artistic/aesthetic value), we still preserve it as a historical document.

Contemporary art, as long as it is 'contemporary', does not yet have a real history. The moment of its creation is too near to historicise the work of art. Value can be attributed only to the 'first historicity', i.e. its creation, and not to the non-existent passage through time. 'From the hand of man we expect complete works as symbols of necessary and lawful production; from nature working over time, on the other hand, we expect the dissolution of completeness as a symbol of an equally necessary and lawful decay.' (Riegel 1996: 73.) Therefore, contemporary art is expected to look complete, as nature has not had time to dissolve its completeness.

The lack of historical distance makes any conservation decision in contemporary art extremely difficult. For the same reason it is impossible to appreciate the patina phenomenon as an additional historical value of a contemporary work of art. The newness value gains precedence over the value of historicity, because 'Newness value [*Neuheitswert – H.H.*] is indeed the most formidable opponent of the age value.' (Riegel 1996: 80.) This might be one reason why we are not willing to accept 'new art' getting old.

The appreciation of patina as a historical value in contemporary art is possible only through the awareness of its potential to become an essential value for future generations. According to Arthur Danto: 'We now know that everything is worth saving, since we do not know what will and what won't interest the future.' (Danto 1999: 8.) Does this include patina?

Authenticity

The second reason for accepting patina – again we refer to traditional art – is the value of authenticity. Authenticity does not directly constitute the character

of patina. It is, however, this value that indirectly makes us accept alterations of ORIGINAL material and influences our wish to keep it, along with the traces of time it shows.

What is traditionally meant by 'authenticity' is the idea of the uniqueness of a work of art. The authenticity is first of all related to the physical form of the art, referring to the unique touch of the artist, to *this* special piece of material, which *the* artist was in direct contact with. It refers to the moment of creation, i.e. to the 'first historicity' as Philippot calls it.

The concept of authenticity as a physical phenomenon, as original material, makes us appreciate alterations caused by ageing and directs the decisions of a conservator, who prefers to preserve a faded original rather than to transform it into a beautiful, fresh-looking new one.

It is through the appreciation of authenticity of the original, including the natural ageing of material, that we have another reason to value changes to the physical appearance of art, i.e. the patina.

In contemporary art, discrepancy again arises, as often the material itself has lost its special characteristic of having been created, sometimes even touched, by the artist. In this regard, a most significant example would be the pissoir displayed by Marcel Duchamp (*Fountain*, 1917) – i.e. a ready-made object presented by the artist as a result of his creation. Immediately the question arises: does the material dimension of this kind of contemporary art possess the same 'authenticity' as an oil painting or marble sculpture in traditional art? Only an affirmative answer to this question would justify the acceptance of patina as a sign of alteration of the original 'authentic' material of such pieces of contemporary art.

The appreciation of contemporary art seems to have moved from its physical form to the intent of the artist and to the message contained in the work of art. Is it still legitimate to talk about material authenticity as the unique possible carrier of the inherent values of art? Hasn't the meaning of the term 'authenticity' changed? Maybe 'authentic' in contemporary art no longer refers to the material dimension of art, but primarily to the authentic, original, genuine message behind it.

As conservators, our main objective is to preserve the primary values of the work of art or, quoting Cesare Brandi 'making the text of a work legible again' (Schinzel 2004: 20).

This means that our duty seems to have changed from preserving the original material to preserving the original idea. The original (or authentic) idea could be

attached to the original material, in as much as it could deny the idea of original material representing a value. The original message could, for example, be in the authenticity of aesthetics (e.g. monochrome paintings, hyper-realistic paintings), which already argues against the idea of the acceptance of a possible patina in contemporary art. Or the primary authenticity could lie just in the intellectual/emotional idea of the work of art, the used materials being only a momentary medium to fix this idea for a little while … and in the next moment these materials might be gone, even though the work of art remains.

In conclusion, both the lack of historical distance and a changing concept of authenticity seem to make it difficult to apply the notion of patina to contemporary art.

However, before drawing very radical final conclusions and setting the removal of historical alterations as a main goal, a closer look into conservation practice may provide further elements for discussion. Two very similar conservation cases, one from traditional art and one from contemporary art, are compared: the oil painting on canvas representing St. Luke the Evangelist (1621) by the Dutch painter Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1629), one of the major exponents of Caravaggism in Northern Europe and the leader of the Utrecht School[1], and the collage from 1963 by the living artist Tom Wesselmann, one of the best-known representatives of Pop art, called *Still Life # 34* [2].

[1] Conservation and research project, carried out in the conservation studio ARR, Amsterdam. Results are published in Dik *et al*. 2002: 130–146.

[2] Conservation case-study presented in the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) conference 'Modern Art, Modern Museums' held in Bilbao September 13–17, 2004. Published in Keynan 2004.

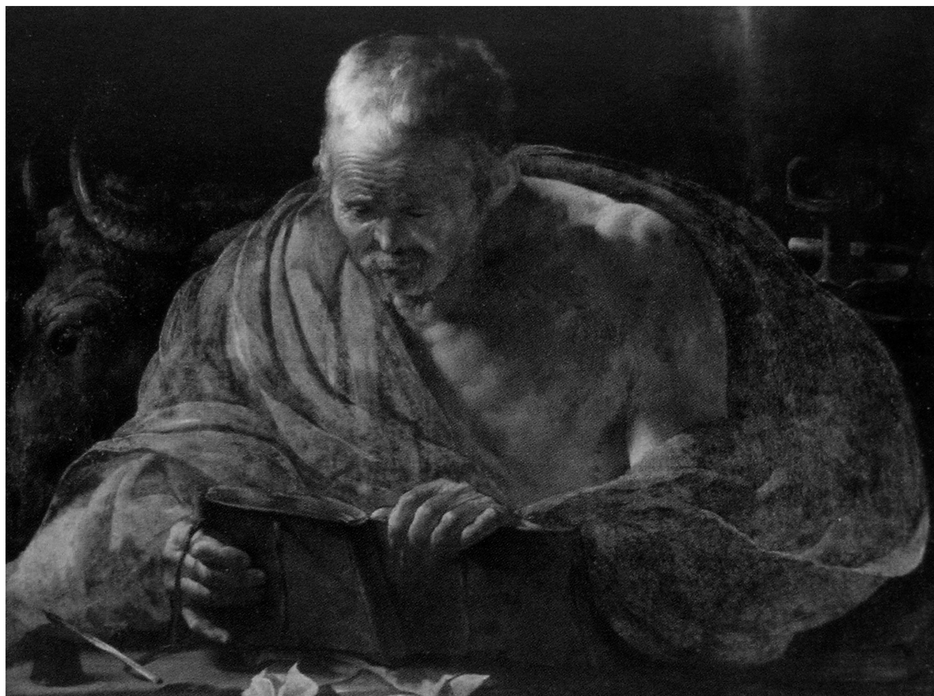

Figure 4] Hendrick ter Brugghen. St. Luke the Evangelist, 1621. Museum De Waag, Deventer. The painting is affected by a typical phenomenon of greenish-gray discolouration of the blue pigment smalt used to paint the coat of the evangelist. While the phenomenon is still visible on the right side of the coat, the left side is already digitally reconstructed.

Figure 5] Tom Wesselmann. Still Life # 34, 1963. Private collection. Photo showing the collage before the discolouration phenomenon occurred, which provoked the complete loss of colour of all lithographic elements: pear, pink cocktail in transparent glass, and walnuts. During the restoration these parts were recreated.

While I had the opportunity to be personally involved with the restoration of the Ter Brugghen canvas, the second case was presented at the recent international conference on conservation of contemporary art in Bilbao, Spain.

Both cases showed a very similar alteration phenomenon, consisting of a drastic discolouration of the pigment, which resulted in a complete change of the original appearance of the artworks.

Although the alteration was very similar, the conservation was guided by two different concepts. In the case of Hendrick ter Brugghen's painting, the conservation solution was to reconstruct the original appearance of the work 'virtually', i.e. the missing colour was reconstructed digitally and the original, faded piece of art was conserved as it was, accepting the changes created by time. The authenticity of original material and its historical dimension were respected as primary values.

In the second case, the collage by Tom Wesselmann, discoloured parts were re-created by a computer and physically glued onto the original surface, which regained its initial look. Definitely, the 'authenticity' of this Pop art work by Tom Wesselmann lies in its chromatic brilliance. In addition, the artist himself shared this opinion and supported the physical intervention. Precedence was given to the authentic appearance of the work.

What can we learn from these case-studies?

First of all, the contemporary piece of art was treated in a way nobody would even dare to think of treating a traditional work of art.

According to the principles stated earlier, the treatment of Tom Wesselmann's work was 100% justified. Missing historical distance seems to give us the opportunity to be free from traditional concepts of historicity, authenticity of original material, unique touch of the artist, valuation of the temporal moment of creation etc.

Due to a changed art concept, conservators become interpreters, with a completely new perspective, in which the objective of conservation seems to be re-creation.

However, something seems to be arbitrary in this case. There seems to be an irrational doubt of being unreasonable. Something, which is conservative in conservation and which, becoming suddenly creative instead of keeping up the conservative side of culture, blurs the borders between creativity and conservatism. If conservation starts to interfere with the creation process, who will sign the artworks?

The well-known case of the white monochrome painting by Pietro Manzoni called *Achrome* (1960) is one more example which stresses this aspect. The wish of the artist was to repaint the piece before every exposition – clearly the intent of the artist and therefore the message of the work was that the work be (and remain) perfectly monochrome white. Continuous repainting seems to be the way to treat this piece. However, as long as conservators remain in their conservative position, supported by traditional ethics, none would feel licensed to do so.

This brings us back to the dilemma with which the paper started. Even knowing that the reproduced NEW would bring out the artist's message to a much greater extent than the faded original, the original is still somehow privileged.

Is it just the fear of changing our conservative attitude towards conservation into a more creative one which may enter into conflict with traditional conservation ethics? Should the conservation of contemporary art redefine existing values and create a new discipline? Do we need 're-creators' instead of 'conservators'? Or should our approach to the conservation of contemporary art remain conservative, although all arguments reveal the need for change?

All these questions are centred around the basic and still remaining issue: for how long should 'new art' look new and when does it start to have the right to get old?

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Will Rawls, detail from “Amphigory” (2022)

Festivals of Tibet

Thubten Norbu

Historically festivals have been a common feature of Tibet life. They were held throughout the year in every region. Some gained widespread renown inside Tibet and in neighboring countries in that part of the world. People would come from near and far to attend the more important festivals, while numerous regional celebrations were mostly attended by the local people. The ideal was to attend each of the most important festivals at least once in a person's lifetime, and most pilgrims would travel many thousands of miles to do so. These festivals served a variety of needs, combining to varying degrees religion with economic and social exchange. Three characteristic festivals can be used to illustrate the movement.

Lhasa, the capital of the country, situated in central Tibet, was the site of numerous yearly festivals. One of the most important was the *Mon Lam Chen Mo.*[1] Although usually described as a religious festival it fulfilled a number of secular purposes as well.

The *Mon Lam Chen Mo* was instituted by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419) to commemorate the two weeks during which Skakyamuni Buddha exhibited miraculous powers. This occurred in the latter part of Tsong Khapa's life, after he had founded Ganden Monastery and after the subsequent founding of Drepung and Sera Monasteries by two of his disciples. The festival was held during the first two weeks of the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. Monks from Drepung and Sera, as well as from many other monasteries, assembled to pray for the peace and happiness of all sentient beings.

During this period candidates for the highest Geshe Degree were examined. Each monk's examination spanned an entire day and was open to public view. The monk was made available to any member of the audience for questioning. This public aspect of the examination was not only useful for the monk and his teachers but also was a learning experience for the spectators who came to listen and to learn how to debate among themselves on one point or another of the religious teachings.

While the monks were busy with religious activities and examinations, thousands of people arrived in the city. They came from all parts of Tibet, China, Mongolia and from as far away as Siberia to be in Lhasa at this special time. Some of them would walk and others would prostrate themselves in religious devotion the entire way, enduring great hardship until they arrived at the city which they viewed as holy.

The influx of so many thousands of people into Lhasa was an event of distinct economic importance both for the people of the area for whom it afforded an opportunity to trade with the visitors and for the visitors who would return home with exciting new things. Goods from its different

regions, and from Mongolia and China, would be distributed in this way throughout Tibet.

The *Mon Lam Chen Mo* was a time of great pageantry. People would parade through the streets of Lhasa wearing antique armour and traditional costumes. But for the majority of the people, this was a time for performing religious devotions, such as making offerings to the assembled monks and lighting innumerable butter lamps. It was a fine opportunity to attend the examinations of the monks and especially for socializing, doing business and enjoying such diversions as archery, horse-racing and wrestling contests. In addition, with people from many regions gathered in one place, news and stories circulated freely.

In Kumbum,[2] a large monastery of eastern Tibet, a famous Butter Sculpture Offering Festival[3] was held during the first lunar month.

Kumbum was one of the major population centers of eastern Tibet. This size resulted from having one of the largest monasteries in the area and from being situated at the cross-roads of the East-West caravan route between Tibet and Mongolia. Kumbum, therefore, differed from the large monasteries of central Tibet in that its activities were not limited solely to scholastic and monastic endeavors, but, as a strategic caravan juncture, it was also the seat of much secular and commercial activity, with the constant presence of people doing commerce. Because of such activity, people from all areas of Tibet and neighboring countries could be found there. There were approximately three to four thousand permanent residents at Kumbum, including Chinese, Mongolians and Uigurs, as well as Tibetans. There were always at least a few hundred visitors resting between caravan trips, or on pilgrimage to this famous monastery, which is said to have been erected at the site of the birthplace of Tsong Khapa.

Tibetans explain the monastery's founding with the following story: Tsong Khapa's father and mother were nomadic people. They herded yaks and sheep for their livelihood. It seems that they camped some distance from where Kumbum now stands and tended to their animals. There was one yak that would not stay with the others and at milking time Tsong Khapa's mother would always have to go looking for it. She would usually find it at the same place, some distance from their camp. Finally, they decided that it would be easier to move the camp than to always have to go fetch this one yak. While in this area the mother gave birth to Tsong Khapa, near a spring. It is said that on the spot where the blood from the severed umbilical cord fell to the ground a white sandal wood tree sprouted and grew. That tree had an image (*ku*) of Tsong Khapa on each of its 100,000 (*bum*) leaves. Thus, when Tsong Khapa became a famous teacher, the place came to be known as Kumbum.

As a teacher Tsong Khapa journeyed to central Tibet. His mother, by now quite old, sent a few strands of her white hair to Tsong Khapa, asking him to come to visit her. Tsong Khapa, however, decided not to return to his home. He felt that he was needed in central Tibet at that time at the monastery. Instead he drew two pictures of himself and sent one to his mother and the other to his sister. He included an image of one of the thousand Buddhas.[4] He instructed them to make one thousand of that

image, and to place the statues around the white sandal wood tree, and then to build a stupa around it.

Prior to Tsong Khapa's birth there had existed a small monastery retreat nearby called Gonpa Lungwa.[5] Strict monastic discipline, however, was not observed, as one found monks and lay people living together. Subsequently, during the Third Dalai Lama's second trip to Mongolia, he stopped at Kumbum and instituted the modern monastic system of organization. The abbot at that time was Ozer Gyatsho,[6] who developed Kumbum into a major monastery.

Kumbum in its modern form had five colleges. These were the Tantra College, the Kalachakra College, the Medicine College, the College of Philosophy and Dialectics and the College of Religious Dance.

The College of Philosophy had thirteen classes. It was from these thirteen classes that the butter sculptures would be contributed during the Butter Sculpture Offering Festival. The various classes were assigned different places to exhibit their sculptures in the monastery. Some had a large area to fill and others a small area.

In the College of Philosophy there were two Prajnaparamita Classes, each following the tradition of a different famous Tibetan philosophical scholar. One studied the tradition of Je Tsunpa[7] and the other the tradition of Jamyang Shaypa.[8] These two Prajnaparamita classes were always given the largest assignment. Their sculptures would be hung on frames and would often fill an area twenty feet high by forty feet wide. These displays involved fairly complex themes with a variety of characters and scenes.

The other classes from the College of Philosophy offered smaller displays, which might have as a theme the four harmonious brothers[9] or the six long life symbols.[10] The themes differed from year to year. The classes decided on a theme which was kept secret until the unveiling of the sculptures on the evening of the 15th day of the first month.

Actual work on the more elaborate creations started at the end of the ninth month of the previous year. These more elaborate themes might consist of the story of the twelve deeds of the Buddha,[11] a Jakaka tale,[12] a folk story,[13] the legend of the creation of the Tibetan people,[14] or perhaps the main events at one of the well-known festivals of Tibet. The large displays might include fifteen to twenty main butter sculptures, and many secondary figures and landscapes, all sculpted from butter and gaily colored.

Take, for example, the theme of Shambala which was depicted at Kumbum in the late 1930s. The sculpture display included hills, valleys, rivers, trees, people and animals. As the theme of Shambala included war, there was, to the great surprise of the people, a butter sculpture of an airplane. It was a bi-plane and even included the wires which hold the wings together.

No matter what the display, the main figure was always life-sized and placed in the center. In the Shambala display the King of Shambala was the central figure, while in the legend of the creation of the Tibetan people, Avalokiteshvara was the main figure surrounded by the secondary figures of the theme.

Each of the Prajnaparamita classes included as a segment of its display a set of sculptures which portrayed the life in its own monastery. This sat on the very top of the display and was affixed to a wheel. In this way by pulling various strings, different scenes or figures were moved into the foreground. Frequently, at the top of the display, sculptures characterized abbots and officials of the monastery in a joking fashion. If the abbot was an old man, the sculpture depicting him might be fashioned with a spring in its neck so that its head was always shaking.

At the end of the fifteenth day of the first month the leader of the outgoing Prajnaparamita class chose the leader of the incoming class, who immediately started to look for funds to provide for the next year's sculptures. These two classes had endowment funds which generated interest in order to pay for the construction of the sculptures, but they were never sufficient. The incoming class leader organized a committee which was responsible for providing the necessary funds. This committee traveled far and near, even into Mongolia, to raise the money. They had to return to Kumbum by the eighth month so that work on the sculptures might begin.

All the material, which for the most part consisted of butter, coloring, hemp, wood and gold and silver leaf had to be provided by the committee before the work actually started.

The people working on the sculptures would begin their day at eight a.m. and end it at seven p.m. Some of the wire forms from the previous year would be reused if they were of the appropriate size, but otherwise all would have to be constructed anew. The black layer of butter that covered the hemp-wrapped rope was colored with ash. All the colors were from natural dyes, yellow from *masala*, red from various roots, etc.

Each sculptor used a bucket of cold water to keep the butter cool and a bucket of hot water to keep his hands clean. If the hands were not clean, the butter would stick. The proper method of handling butter was to first put the fingers in hot water then into dry flour, then to rub the fingers together in order to remove any dirt. Next, fingers were rinsed in hot water, dipped into cold water, and only then would the butter be picked up to be shaped as needed.

The sculptor sat on a cushion behind a small table. On the table was a board about six inches wide and three to four feet long, which served as a painter's palette. It held rows of colored butter stick having variable degrees of shading; dark to light for each color. Next to the table was a small brazier of charcoal on which was kept the pot of hot water and on the floor next to it sat the pot of cold water.

The scupture being shaped was hung by a large iron nail. This nail eventually was used to fasten the completed figure to the frame erected to display the sculptures. If the sculpture was handled directly the temperature of the hand would be sufficient to melt it. Layer by layer, piece by piece, the sculptures were completed over a period of many months.

On the twelfth day of the new year final preparations were fully underway. Poles were set up around two square areas, each covering about half an acre of land. These were structural supports for the two large displays. The smaller displays were installed throughout the monastery.

The poles delineating the large display areas were topped with Tibetan umbrellas of silk brocade or similar cloth. The west side was always reserved for the sculpture display and the other three sides enclosed to head height were embroidered panels called "Offering Decorations."[15] These were decorated with religious scenes and good luck symbols by means of embroidery and applique. The panels stretched from pole to pole above the height of a man's head and in this way marked off the viewing area of the sculpture display. The entire enclosure was covered with a decorated cloth roof and colorful silken canopies were hung inside. The roof and canopies were assembled prior to the fifteenth day. It was not until the fifteenth day, however, that the Offering Decorations and the butter sculptures were put into place.

As there was no electricity at the time and the sculptures would be viewed only for a few hours at night, butter lamps containing about half a pound of butter apiece were hung on the support poles. These lamps together with the lamps arranged on the step-like levels of the offering altar, placed directly beneath and in front of the sculpture display, served as the source of illumination.

Behind the sculpture area a tent was set up to house the musicians. Their music was completely secular in nature and was played on flutes, drums, cymbals and chimes. They started playing about midday and continued to the end of the festival, which was about two or three in the morning of the sixteenth day. On this night and the other nights there was much singing and dancing, and many young men and women met their future spouses in this way.

To the north, a large tent was set up in a courtyard where the representatives of the Prajnaparamita class received all the people who had come for the festival. They offered the people tea, received donations, and accepted complaints and praise at this location during the course of the festival.

People began to arrive for the festival on the eleventh and twelth days. They came from all parts of Tibet and distant areas such as Mongolia and China. Some officials carefully prepared their trip to Kumbum as it was likely to be the only time in their lives that they would be able to visit Tsong Khapa's birthplace and the great monastery. When traders from all regions of Tibet and the neighboring countries arrived, they found a place to stay and also to stable their animals. Then they went to the western edge of the monastery, where between it and the village there was a market reserved for them, to display and sell wares. This became the central market area for the duration of the festival. There were also many restaurant tents in this area. It was to this area that all the young men and women would come in the evenings, wearing their best clothes (the costumes of their regions) to sing and dance. It was in this area as well that one would find dentists, magicians and story tellers.

On the afternoon of the fourteenth day the monks for the College of Religious Dance performed the masked dance known as *Cham*[16], which generally consisted of dancers meditating on a *mandala*. In the process, the courtyard of the monastery becomes the *mandala* and all the dancers

transformed into the deities which exist in that particular *mandala.*

The scenario began with the entrance of the Skeletons,[17]helpers of the Lord of Death, *Yama.* They held a stick about one and one half feet long. When they danced they brought out a large tray about three feet by six feet, and inside the tray was placed a triangular iron box.[18] Inside this was a human figure made of black dough. The figure rested on its back with its knees up and its hands together at its heart. This was left in the center of the courtyard. The next groups of dancers to appear were the helpers of the deity invoked in the *mandala.* They included the Indian Scholars,[19] or Acharyas. After their exit, the Hero and Heroines danced. The Heroes were white-faced with turbans, mustaches and big eyes. The Heroines were green-faced with large eyes and colorful dress.[20]

Three more helpers of the Lord of Death made their appearance and the deer dance[21] was then performed. Each deer carried a skull cap and curved knife.[22] The next act was the lion dance[23] with each lion carrying a double-edged sword. This was followed by the dance of the crocodiles.[24] They too carried double-edged swords. The dance of the Chinese monk[25] and six followers was then enacted. He had a prominent bald head and a broad smiling face and was very fat. He wore a colorful monk's robe and carried large prayer beads. His smiling followers were also dressed as monks and carried items such as incense, a fan or a book. Because of his weight, the monk doesn't actually dance but rather stumbles about. His followers help him and fan him but tease him when he sleeps. This was the clowning sequence of the dance.

Depending on the year, either Yama[26] or Hayagriva[27] danced next. Yama has a blue face and the head of a bull with horns. He carried a skull cap and staff, wearing a skull crown. Hayagriva had a red fierce face on top of which were placed three green horse heads. He held a skull cap and a double-edged sword, and wore a skull crown. Following the main figure, pairs of fierce-faced deities of different colors appeared each wearing a skull crown and carrying a skull cap and double-edged sword. Their costumes were very colorful, being made of silk brocade. Each of the fierce deities also wore a complete set of bone ornaments, these being a network of carved beads in the form of a stylized necklace, bracelets and apron.

If the deity represented was Yama, the skeletons put out the triangular box with the figure inside made of blackened dough. If it was Hayagriva, there was no figure involved. When Yama finished his dance the Indian Scholars appeared and removed the cover of the box. Yama then drove a dagger through the heart of the figure and cut off its head, arms and legs with a sword. One of the deer dancers removed the head and threw it away. Finally, all the dancers came out and performed together in the courtyard. After this was completed they left the courtyard in pairs. The skeletons were the agents for removing the evil which was symbolized by the dough figure. Yama destroyed it, and it was thrown out by the deer.

On the morning of the fifteenth, the three sides of the viewing enclosure, made of embroidered panels, were put into place. It was not until approximately four in the afternoon that the sculptures were finally brought out. Still covered with paper, they were nailed to the frames and

then bits of appropriately colored butter were put over the nail heads to complete the installation.

The butter lamps were arranged and the papers removed when the monks came to consecrate the display.[28] It was not until after dark that they were ready for public viewing. People walked back and forth around the displays. As they viewed them, they related to one another the stories therein depicted, and either praised or criticized the skill of the rendition. Nomads and city dwellers, farmers and merchants, monks and officials, indeed all the visitors came together in a very festive mood. This lasted until about three in the morning when all the monks performed the *Shag Sol* ceremony.[29]

Earlier, during the consecration they had invited the Buddhas to come into the display and now they invited them to leave the display. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the sculptures started to come down. They were removed without care and stacked together in piles for storage in the warehouse until the next year. At that time the old color was scraped off and mixed with ash to make the first coat of the new sculptures. After the sculptures were dismantled the embroidered panels were removed for storage with the canopies. The umbrellas and poles were taken down and the area cleaned up. By the afternoon of the sixteenth there was hardly a trace of the sculpture display left. Between the 16th and the 19th the market areas were quite active with people preparing to return home. By the end of the 19th day the entire place was back to normal.

At the end of the festival the College of Tantra had a *torma*-throwing ceremony.[30] The actual throwing of the *torma* was on the afternoon of the 19th day and this happened outside the monastery. It was called a *torma* festival but the actual object to be thrown was called *zur*.[31] This was an eight or nine-foot high tripod of sticks connected with very stiff paper and decorated with butter sculptures of flames, clouds, gems and other symbols. On the top was a big skull, from the mouth of which issued large flames. There were also many ribbons or strings tied to the top of the tripod. These steadied the tripod as it was carried. Inside the legs of the tripod was a *torma*, and depending on the purpose, its size and color varied.

There followed a three day ritual to propitiate evil. On the 19th afternoon they left the assembly hall in procession. The *zur* was first followed by the abbot wearing his monk's robes and hat and carrying a *vajra* and bell. Following the abbot were monks carrying drums, cymbals and long horns. There were usually 75 to 100 monks, followed and surrounded by people who had come to watch the ceremony. The *zur* and *torma* were usually burned on the east side, outside the monastery. The procession stopped halfway to the burning place at the Nechung Temple.[32] The Nechung Oracle was already in trance and his attendants joined the procession. During the entire time of the procession the monks were still chanting the ritual and playing instruments. Then they proceeded to the place where straw and wood were piled, having a hollow place remaining in which to cast the *zur* and *torma*. The fire was lit, the objects thrown in. The monks continued their recitation, and as soon as they clapped their hands they turned and left the site. All the evil which had been attracted to the *zur*

was burned. Only a few people remained along with the dogs waiting to claim any unburned objects.

Other festivals were basically secular in nature. Still, even these show some religious basis. During the fifth or sixth month there was a horse-race festival in a tiny village in Amdo called *Jyen Tsa.* Everybody who had a horse wished to go there to show it off. The village was located near to the Ma Chu (Yellow River). There was a small temple there which had a large prayer wheel turned by water. The prayer wheel was about twelve feet high and had a circumference of about four double-arm spans.

A person would bring his horse there and wash and decorate it very nicely. Many times the mane, fore-lock and occasionally even the tail were plaited with colorful ribbons. The men then had a race. There was a particular course that each horse was required to run, four or five at a time. The finalists then raced each other. This all added to the reputation of the horse, which, in turn, added to the furor of buying and selling by people coming from all over the region to trade in horses. The actual horse race lasted for only one morning, but the social activities continued on for three or four days. People combined the pilgrimage to the prayer wheel with the horse-racing activities, and traders came to sell and trade with one another and the local people. There was much dancing and singing, and exchange of information among people from all over the Amdo region.

Festivals in Tibet were, consequently, a broad combination of activities representing both religious and secular customs and beliefs. They were times when large numbers of people came together to pray, play, do business, and share news of friends, families, and events throughout Tibet. As such, these frequent festivals were extremely valuable in maintaining the integrity of the country and its people.

NOTES

1. ལྷ་སའི་སྨོན་ལམ་ "Aspiration (festival) of Lhasa"
2. སྐུ་འབུམ་ "Hundred Thousand Images," name of monastery.
3. བཅོ་ལྔ་མཆོད་པ་ "Offering of the Fifteenth Day" of first month.
4. སེང་གེའི་ང་རོ་ "Lion's Roar," name of one of the thousand Buddhas.
5. དགོན་པ་ལུང་པ་ "Valley Monastery"
6. འོད་ཟེར་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ "Light Ocean"
7. སེ་ར་རྗེ་བཙུན་པ་ "Venerable One of Sera" (also called ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་ "Dharma Banner"), founder of སེ་ར་བྱེས་གྲྭ་ཚང་ (a college of Sera Monastery called བྱེས་ "residence").
8. འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཞད་པ་ Manjughosha Laughing" (also called ངག་དབང་བརྩོན་འགྲུས་ "Diligent Eloquence"), founder of བླ་བྲང་བཀྲ་ཤིས་འཁྱིལ་ "Lama's Residence, Whirlpool of Luck."
9. མཐུན་པ་སྤུན་བཞི་ "Four Harmonious Brothers"

10. ཚེ་རིང་དྲུག་ "Six Long Lives"
   - a. མི་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Human"
   - b. ཆུ་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Water"
   - c. ཤ་བ་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Deer"
   - d. བྱ་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Bird"
   - e. བྲག་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Rock"
   - f. ཤིང་ཚེ་རིང་ "Long Life Tree"
11. མཛད་ཆེན་བཅུ་གཉིས་ "Twelve Great Acts (of Gautama Buddha)"
12. སྐྱེས་རབས་སོ་བཞི་ "Thirty-four successive rebirths (of Gautama)"
13. གཟུགས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ་ "Sun of Form," name of a Tibetan play.
14. ཕ་སྤྲེའུ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ "The Father, Monkey Bodhisattva"

    མ་སྲིན་མོ་བྲག་གསས་མ་ "The Mother, Female Cannibal Rock Spirit"
15. མཆོད་རྫས་ "Offering Article," a kind of colorful silk hanging with embroidery and applique pictures of Arhats and deities.
16. འཆམ་ "Religious Dance"
17. དུར་བདག་ "Cemetery Owner"
18. ལིང་ག་ "Effigy"
19. ཨ་ཙ་ར་ "Acarya"
20. དཔའ་བོ་དཔའ་མོ་ "Hero and Heroine"
21. ཤྭ་བ་ "Deer"
22. ཐོད་པ་ "Kapala" གྲི་གུག་ "Curved Knife"
23. སེང་གདོང་ "Lion Face"
24. ཆུ་སྲིན་གདོང་ "Crocodile Mask"
25. ཧྭ་ཤང་ "Chinese Monk"
26. ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ "Dharmaraja (Yama)"
27. རྟ་མགྲིན་ "Hayagriva"
28. རབ་གནས་ "Consecration"
29. གཤེགས་གསོལ་ "Request to go"
30. གཏོར་རྒྱག་ "Throw Torma" (a Torma is an "Offering Cake")
31. ཟོར་ "Triangular Torma"

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Butter sculpture as offerings, Kathmandu valley, photo by Ayesha Fuentes

Choreographer Will Rawls on Opacity and the Glitch

By Aurora San Miguel

August 13, 2021 10:52am

View of "Will Rawls: Everlasting Stranger," 2021, at Henry Art Gallery, showing dancers Akoiya Harris and Fox Whitney.
PHOTO: STEPHEN ANUNSON

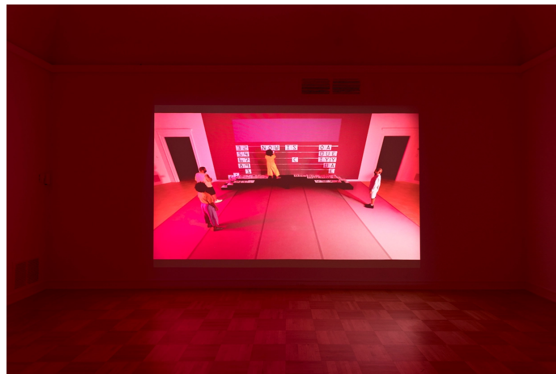
In his first solo exhibition, "Everlasting Stranger," at Seattle's **Henry Art Gallery (https://www.artnews.com/t/henry-art-gallery/)**, New York–based choreographer, performer, and writer **Will Rawls (https://www.artnews.com/t/will-rawls/)** charts complex relations among gesture, language, and image. In the performances that anchor the exhibition, four dancers methodically move letter tiles hung on a gallery wall to spell out abstract phrases while shifting within the frame of an automated camera that takes a photograph every few seconds. From a stone rotunda at the entrance to the exhibition, an audio track of excerpts recited from Guyanese writer **Wilson Harris (https://www.artnews.com/t/wilson-harris/)**'s 1987 surrealist novel *The Infinite Rehearsal* plays and echoes through the halls of the exhibition. Further on, pixelated wall paintings, black geometric sculptural forms, and looped stop-motion animations of the dance flank the performance space. Across six galleries, the installation plays with ruptures and compressions of time. Below, Rawls discusses the role of the glitch in his work, and the seen and unseen labor of dance. "Everlasting Stranger" is on view through August 15.

AURORA SAN MIGUEL Exhibitions make things highly visible to an audience. Throughout the show, however, you also attempt to obscure certain elements: missing frames in the projected stop-motion videos create glitches while the live performers' movements into and out of view of the camera also point to a type of glitch.

WILL RAWLS The glitch is the moment when you recognize a break in the flow of technology. Humans like to explore technology partly to see it fail to fully mimic or represent human life. Representation is a faulty human invention—this is always the starting point for my work. I insist on this faultiness in "Everlasting Stranger." I've also wondered how to explore dance documentation that acknowledges its failure to capture the live dance, and becomes an artwork itself. Stop-motion animation is a super-durational form of filmmaking that can reflect the time it takes to create a dance. Stop-motion is intensively photographic, requiring eight hundred photos for roughly one-and-a-half minutes of animation. This amplifies the capture of the body and alludes to photography's legacy of distorting representations of Black and brown people. Dance is a dynamic counterpoint because it eludes language and image. When you watch the stop-motion pieces, you can sense the gestures that are missing between frames, and so the kinetics that you *do* [illegible] the screen are structured by those missing gestures.

SAN MIGUEL The exhibition makes apparent the intense labor involved in both the performances and their recording. I was particularly struck by the audible clicks of the camera as a type of metronome for the dancers. Between clicks there is a measure of intent in each of their moves.

RAWLS I wanted to foreground dance’s relation to music and to marked time. I also wanted to present the human labor of becoming a moving image, the duress of being captured on camera. The dancers and I discussed the interval, or what transpires between shutter clicks—sensation, thought, and choice—as things that the camera can’t quite capture but that the live audience sees and feels. The interval between photographs is a space of play.



View of “Will Rawls: Everlasting Stranger,” 2021, at Henry Art Gallery. Dancers: Alyza DelPan-Monley, Akoiya Harris, Fox Whitney, and Nia Amina-Minor.
PHOTO: JUEQIAN FANG

SAN MIGUEL What happens to the photos and videos after the exhibition, and what is their function as documents of this slowness? Video can easily become another mechanism for speed and reductionism.

RAWLS I’m attached to the films and videos of **Kara Walker (https://www.artnews.com/t/kara-walker/)** and **William Kentridge (https://www.artnews.com/t/william-kentridge/)**, who both, albeit differently, deal with animation’s complex relationships to text, race, gesture, and history. I feel that both artists address history in a glitchy way, using technologies that belie their infidelity to what they’re representing. I’ll take about 20,000 photos of the performance over the course of the exhibition—still deciding where these will go next.

SAN MIGUEL On New York’s High Line in 2018, in your *Uncle Rebus* performance, you worked with similar techniques—deconstructing and reconstructing movable letter tiles into isolated phrases. I am curious about your choices of language and their source text that comes up in the performance and, in the form of sonic excerpts, before you enter the gallery space.

RAWLS *The Infinite Rehearsal* is a surrealist novel about a child’s fever dream in which author Wilson Harris examines the genealogy of identity as a problem of quantum physics. I distilled the novel into a set of stanzas that the performers spell, line by line, using oversize letters. The performers don’t have enough letters to fully spell the phrases and are prompted to replace letters with punctuation. One of my favorite lines from the text is “Come and live with me before the world ends.” This appears in the performance as: “BE–4 / THA / WRLD ENDS.” In the process of spelling, the wall becomes a space of emergence for syllables, phonetics, typos, dialects, even stammers between sentences. Deleuze describes stuttering as language growing from the inside out; that disruption of normative language attracts me. I’m drawn to the moment when a dialect emerges from—or, rather, against—a standard English narrative or any kind of master text. As a Caribbean author, Harris writes about consciously crafting language as a political form of self-study, imagination, and expression. I see parallels between his work on creolization and the Black American oral tradition. That was my starting point for deconstructing language and movable type in *Uncle Rebus*, where I intervened in Brer Rabbit tales to render the narration perhaps more opaque but also more personal and fluid. These projects have been a meaningful way to expose h[illegible]ancers’ thinking manifests in language, over time.

Will Rawls, detail from “Amphigory” (2022)

A I D /I/ S A P P E A R A N C E

Joan Retallack | 26 Jan 2010 | English

from Joan Retallack's *PROCEDURAL ELEGIES / WESTERN CIV CONT'D / forthcoming from Roof Books (New York)*

A I D /I/ S A P P E A R A N C E
for Stefan Fitterman

1. in contrast with the demand of continuity in the customary description
2. of nature the indivisibility of the quantum of action requires an essential
3. element of discontinuity especially apparent through the discussion of the
4. nature of light she said it's so odd to be dying and laughed still it's early
5. late the beauty of nature as the moon waxes turns to terror when it wanes
6. or during eclipse or when changing seasons change making certain things
7. disappear and there is no place to stand on and strangely we're glad

A I D S
for tefn Fttermn

1. n contrt wth the emn of contnuty n the cutomry ecrpton
2. of nture the nvblty of the quntum of cton requre n eentl
3. element of contnuty epeclly pprent through the cuon of the
4. nture of lght he t o o t be yng n lughe tll t erly
5. lte the beuty of nture the moon wxe turn to terror when t wne
6. or urng eclpe or when chngng eon chnge mkng certn thng
7. pper n there no plce to tn on n trngely we're gl

B H J C E R T
fo fn Fmn
1. n on w mn of onnuy n uomy pon
2. of nu nvly of qunum of on qu n nl
3. lmn of onnuy plly ppn oug uon of
4. nu of lg o o yng n lug ll ly
5. luy of nu moon wx un o o wn wn
6. o ung lp o wn ngng on ng mkng n ng
7. pp n no pl o n on n ngly w gl

F GK Q U
o n mn
1. no n w m no on ny no my pon
2. o n nvly o nm o on n nl
3. lm no onny plly pp no on o
4. no l o o yn nl ll ly
5. l y o nmoon wx no own wn
6. o n l pow n n no n n mn n n
7. pp n no pl o no n n nly w l

L P V
o n mn
1. no n w m no on ny no my on
2. o nny o nm o onn n
3. m no onny y no on o
4. no o o y n n y
5. y o n moon wx no own wn
6. o now n n no n n mn n n

7. n no o no n n n y w

M O W
n
1. n n n n n y n y n
2. n n y n n n n
3. n n n y y n n
4. n y n n y
5. y n n x n n n
6. n n n n n n n n n
7. n n n n n n y

N X
1. y y
2. y
3. y y
4. y y
5. y
6.
7. y

Y
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

Author's Note:
The disappearance moves through the letters of the alphabet (and the source text) in this way: Beginning with letters A I D S, it spreads to adjoining letters B H J C E R T, to F G K Q U,to L P V,to M O W,to N X,to Y.
Part of the text in the first stanza is from "The Atomic Theory and the Fundamental Principles underlying the Description of Nature" in *The Philosophical Writings of Niels Bohr, Volume 1, Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature.* Woodbridge, Connecticut, 1987.

This poem was composed in 1994 and first published in *Object* 5 (1995): it was first collected in Retallack's 1998 collection *How to Do Things with Words*. For a discussion of this poem, see "AIDS and the Postmodern Subject: Joan Retallack's 'AID/I/SAPPEARANCE'" by Bryan Walpert, *Poetics Today* 2006 27(4):693-710.

• lang:en-US

Novos e críticos
Mapa da Língua
Novos poetas
Impacto

Will Rawls, detail from “Amphigory” (2022)