

Project Proposal - Draft 2.0

8 November 2018

Working Title

The Making of a Contract with the Universe: Shaping Creation as part of the Self

Research Question

How does one 'define' the finite self, I, in the context of a plurality, we, in an infinite world, all, shaped by anthropocentric notions in terms of the living past, present and future?

Aims

- To shape a personal mythology or counter-mythology, explicating and or reconciling the self, the group, and the human animal in the context of the 'horror of creation', through visual, tactile and sonic modalities, challenging anthropocentrism's role in dehumanising the human animal and the use of language to control knowledge and manipulate behaviour.
- The poetic unfolding of the mechanisms that lie behind a myth.

Objectives

(Conceptual)

- To build a theoretical framework on which to stretch the skin of personal expression by:
- understanding further the role of creation myths and sacred texts in the formation of world views and the subversion of these, in literature and art;
- exploring the role of language, ritual, imagery, sound, position, impetus and inertia in giving shape to myths.
- focusing on particular aspects of creation myths such as evolution, Eden, time...
- Develop writing:
- as connective tissue between ideas;
- to interrogate, explicate and synthesise the expression of these ideas.

(Formal)

- To make a series of works in single form or as parts of installations together with their collateral explorations using material, motion, sound and light as part of a myth building process:
- exploring the relationship between sound and free standing sculpture;

- experimenting with light, motion and sculpture to give shape to a ‘shadow world’;
- learning the use of new software applications for the manipulation of sound and images;
- creating a programming structure for manipulating sound in real time.

Context

Creation Myths

Creation myths are an integral part of how cultures identify themselves and function. They also change in structure and meaning as a society transitions from one mode of life to another. Myths also form the framework by which an individual relates to others on a one to one as well as with the collective. Myths have a powerful effect on how one is reconciled with what Ted Hughes called, ‘the horror of creation’.

The project focuses on the separation from nature: the metaphors of the loss of Eden; the separation of the self from the other; the evolution of our species; the invention of God. In a rapidly changing world, myths provide an anchor by which we may understand where we have come from and by extension where we might be going. Art can affect perception and ideas through sensual mediums, in ways that rational argument cannot. Myths are a powerful means of effecting responses on personal and societal scales: from how an individual relates to and treats nature; individual isolation, actualisation and relationship with society to how society treats individuals and the natural world. These two aspects are about equilibrium and power. These are two salient elements by which myths are created both within the narrative and their propagation.

Myths also change with cultural transitions. From the pre-hunter gatherer to cyberspace, the telling of our history in metaphorical terms tells of the power struggle between one paradigm and another.

Types of cosmogeny: accretion/conjunction, secretion, sacrifice, division or consummation, Earth Diver, emergence, two creators, Deus Faber, ex nihil

Language

The language and semiotics of creation myths is central to what they represent, how they function and affect people. Writers and artists have extolled, challenged, subverted the dominant view offering new and exciting perspectives in their age. Inspired by scientific, spiritual, economic and philosophical notions, again the variety of view is bewildering and humbling when confronted with such a task and elaborating yet another personal response to the idea of creation.

Martin Esslin’s, ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’, looks at the difficulty of meaningful communication through language alone. How are language and symbols used to manipulate, enhance, persuade or explicate ideas.

Robert Graves, ‘The White Goddess’

Cognition

Creation myths are cultural constructs. Do they form the sense of self or are they built by the sense of self, in other words, does culture make us or do we make culture?

Are there different ways of viewing the self in relation to the collective? Neurological studies have shown that this may be the case. Looking at the differences may throw light on how I tackle the question of building a mythology in the terms defined about or how the question might change in response to these ideas.

Form

Representation of ideas influenced by imagery from around the world and from a wide range of periods of history.

Wabi Sabi – Arte Povera – People’s Art – Ethnic artefacts

Science Fiction and Science Fact

Since the enlightenment, creation myths have been rapidly altering to the point where the imagination has outstripped the facts available. Big History, evolutionary theories, cosmology have all created a literature and filmography rich in allusions. However, few science fiction scenarios tackle the question of deep origin starting their narratives with already pre-existing worlds.

Transitions

Cultural transitions have brought with them changes in world view and an evolution of creation myths. Much has been written about these changes

- hunter gatherer – pastoralist
- pastoralist – agriculture
- city states – empire
- classical – medievalism
- spiritualism – enlightenment
- enlightenment – systematisation (post-enlightenment)
- digital – ...

Biological transitions represent moments in the history of life analogous to the cultural transitions such as the emergence of sex, predation, seeded plants, and consciousness, to name but a few.

Themes

- Separation from nature
- Evolution
- The self and collective

- ethology and evolutionary psychology vs classical psychology
- Garden vs farm
- Complexity out of simplicity
- Reduction to Radiation
- Poetry and Aesthetics
- Poetic principles based in nature play a significant part in myth building as does aesthetics which is not just the study of beauty but could be defined as the study of appreciation.

- Hughes
- Graves
- Aesthetics

- Jones
- Gil
-

‘The Horror of Creation’ – the human animal

The origin of the word horror is to bristle or shake with terror. Terror itself has its root in trembling. Normally taken as signifying fear, Ted Hughes refers to the ‘horror of creation’ in his Crow poems. He deals with the raw violence of the world by seeing through the dispassionate eyes of the eponymous bird. Following from his animal poems in *Lupercal*, he pictures the world as a pitiless locus in which each animal is adapted and honed to survive in a particular, intelligent, brutal way. This is how Hughes finds meaning in the context of nature. We attempt to reconcile our own sentient vulnerability in the first instance through religion and technology. We have our own gifts that have given rise to wonderful accomplishments as well as the basest acts. Our brain has allowed us to see beyond the horror envisioning a paradise the idea of which flows through our collective consciousness.

Language

I have often found that in trying to grasp the ineffable, spoken language breaks down and gives way to what I would describe as coherent incoherence. From this state of chaotic order or ordered chaos, new meaning and patterns of behaviour can emerge. These manifest themselves as religion, art, science and other such human activities driven by the imagination. This grasping of the big questions is more often than not articulated in a language of tropes or more simply put by labelling. Uncertainty and ‘ignorance’ are often expressed in ambivalent terms. Oracular proclamations in ancient Greece and Rome, were translated from incomprehensible utterances and arcane signs into common language and accepted as sacred and divine. Shamans, politicians, clerics and many more arbiters of behaviours, enter this territory, one that is full of rhetoric, and poetry, politics and faith; areas in which ambivalence of meaning and clarity of intention coexist but each exists for very different reasons. Martin Esslin (1961) discusses the difficulties of communicating meaningfully and how any attempt to do so will fall short of truly meaningful intercourse. He describes ways in which art is an attempt to connect individual Umwelts.¹ I see progress towards further understanding of the world and between people, as being made possible by the unsayable being conceivable.² The

imagination is prime matter for art and as so often it is with art, the absurd can cut through the strictures of society's conventions and get to the core of the problem or question in hand.

Behaviours

Robert Graves (1961), in the context of ancient civilisations, deals with intertwined issues of politics and religion. In his book *The White Goddess*, Graves conjectures on the development of the West European alphabet in terms of migrations, religions, cultural appropriations and takeovers through the analeptic narrative of the struggle between the eponymous female deity and subsequent patriarchal beliefs. He makes a case for poetry's origins lying in humanity's response to the seasons, agriculture and the cycle of life. This link between civilisation and nature has been severely weakened under pressure from urban industrial culture which is rooted in the Enlightenment. With the preoccupation with description, classification, and ordering, the taming of nature has led to the wholesale industrialisation and exploitation of the planet as described by Kraft Von Maltzahn (1994). The transition towards a post-enlightenment world, driven by scientific enquiry and commercial activity, has given way to a period characterised by the mathematisation of enquiry: the formulation of the 'laws of nature', statistics and probabilities to name just a few of the ways in which the world is now defined and quantified. The advent of computers and digital technology has greatly accelerated this mathematisation of knowledge and the development of big data. This revolution is recalibrating trajectories of enquiry, control and expectations. The botanist Agnes Arber (1950) describes a more personal and intimate world of enquiry; how a botanist visualises and represents what she sees through the lens of continental philosophy. In later books, Arber (1954) considers biological research more widely. She finally ends by drawing together Eastern and Western philosophies in a search for that elusive sense of the whole (Arber, 1957). It is an intensely personal exploration made with the detachment of a scientist: a poetic rendition of an analytical world.

Form

Gareth Jones' essay *The Object of Sculpture*, describes a changing reciprocity between (free standing, statuary³) sculpture and music (sound]) in recent European history. The competition for attention between the two within the same space has resulted in sculpture gradually moving towards having a greater correspondence with architecture rather than dependence on it. When sculpture and sound are considered as part of an artwork, the former is often used to 'produce' sound, ostensibly or actually, as an instrument, its form subordinate to the acoustic element. Alternatively sound is often used in its own right to 'sculpt' space. There are many cases of acoustic sculpture such as the complexly-engineered multichannel installations by Wolfgang Gil (2018). In other cases, sound has a subordinate role as a descriptor, diegetic, or simply as an added quality. Whatever the case might be, the relationship seems to be more often than not one of either asymmetrical coexistence or detached partnership. This is borne out in many institutions by the division between visual arts and sound departments. The question arises, can sculpture and sound coexist on equivalent poetic levels, synchronous to one another in their making? Can the asymmetry be mitigated at least? It is not easy to

reconcile the two so that neither one is subordinate to the other: their respective modalities and generation are manifestly different.

Performance: The Individual and the Collective

Much of my practice resembles a theatre with characters, props, scenes and plots as remnants of an abandoned play. Aristotle's Poetics provides a starting point for organising these elements into a drama of sorts. His 'four causes' in Physics, subsequently built on by Heidegger gives a way of analysing the causal position and therefore role of each component. Anthropology and archaeology are of significant interest in what I do. Richard L. Anderson identifies art in its broadest sense from an anthropological perspective, 'Art is culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium.' (Anderson, 1990, p.238). This seems apt in the pluralistic contemporary environment where the term art has become so blurred as to be of little use. Anderson redefines the term making it flexible and applicable to past and future situations even where the concept of art may not be recognised. With each one of his criteria lying along a spectrum and acting as part of a cohesive whole, a critical rigour can be applied to what are all too often confused correlations between being creative and bringing an artwork into being. Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2016) in a series of essays and books, describes the nature of social contracts and the relationship between the individual, the collective, and nature. His writings invite further exploration into the relationship between the self and the universe which can be extended to the artist, audience, and contemporary society. Finally, I am mindful that, in the age of the machine the human becomes more important than ever and that we are in partnership with the computer, not subordinate to it (Fry, 2018). We live in a world where the absence and presence of humans is equally important.

Historical texts

Historical

David Lewis-Williams – The Mind in the Cave

Freud – Totem and Taboo

Ethology and human behaviour – (Dawkins, Tinbergen, Lorenz, Von Frisch, Ardrey, E. O. Wilson, Maynard Smith)

Ovid – Metamorphosis

Philosophy

Pre-Socratics

Plato

Aristotle

Lucretius

Thomas Aquinas

Luca Giordano

Francis Bacon

Descartes

Euler[/one_t

Cantor

Hume

Goethe

Kant

Hegel

Humboldt

Darwin

Marx

Nietzsche

Pierce

Usserl

Da Vinci

Buonarotti

Von Uexkull

Freud

Frazer

Heidegger

Benjamin

Graves

Esslin

Von Moltzahn

Arber

Poetry

- Michelangelo
- Hughes
- Whitman

Contemporary

- Jones
- Mangabeira
- Fry
- Gil
- Dennett
- Anderson
- Dutton

Methodology

It is not the why but the how that tells me about the nature of a given thing or event; intent and process cannot be separated for intent without action is latency made infinite.

Qualitative research on:

- hermeneutics of sacred texts
- modern and contemporary scientific evolutionary theory
- philosophy history of science
- philosophy; poetic works and world creation myths
- historical and contemporary art practices.

The digital is an ideal mediatory tool, perhaps medium in its own right, with which to work. It offers a 'simultaneity' of means facilitating synthesis out of complex relationships and the possibility for what I would describe as an operatic outcome.

I see this process taking place as a feedback cycle of material and process led ideas and practices evolving on a metaphorical stage through rigorous making, thinking, investigating, experimenting, analysing, collaborating, speculating, and above all in my case listening. Notwithstanding the need for critical thinking, I am also mindful of the need for a less formal, more intuitive abductive approach, as well as embracing contingency.

Research methods:

- practice based
- text based, online and library sources
- Conversations with peers, staff and audience
- collaborations
- analysis and reviews of works and exhibitions
- reflective critical writing

Mediums:

- cast metal and non-metals
- clay
- digital sound
- painting and drawing
- video
- performance

In-and-on-action reflection

- Drawing as a means of exploring ideas and relationship with the idea
- Maquettes to test process and feasibility of making and interaction
- Sound recording and manipulation

Outcomes

I envisage the final outcome as a drama born out of a dialectic between forms, notions, and audience, in which assertions invite tensions and polemics that foster new meanings and behaviours.

1. Performance: ritual involving inertia, weight and motion; working title, *Axis Mundi*.
2. Performance: talk on the nature of reality, order and chaos involving two screens and a large enough space.
3. Installation: ceramic, sound, metal; working title, *Sculpture Waiting for Meaning*.
4. Installation: ceramic, sound metal, wood; working title, *Oracle*.
5. Installation: light, sculpture, video, other materials; working title, *Motion and Being*.
6. Create a narrative in comic format.
6. Accompanying works

Work Plan: Term 1.6

7 Nov – 14 Nov

- Project Proposal
- drawings
- experiment with hyperlapse
- start maquettes
- look at digital printers

7 Nov – 7 Dec 2018

- Exploratory drawings and elaborate on ideas on larger scales
- try other materials for drawings
- maquettes for various works
- reflective journal entries
- experiment with hyperlapse techniques
- consolidate on Premiere and After Effects software
- connect large kiln to electricity supply
- complete first draft of Project Proposal
- start exploring library facilities
- puppets
- start scripting screen based performance
- practice movement based performance and elaborate on idea
- make microphone blimp/dead cat

8 Dec – 6 Jan 2019

- continue with above
- work on larger scale ceramic models
- start co-ordinating ideas for installation
- elaborate on video work
- read books and articles

7 Jan – 15 Mar

- develop work
- residency in February

May – Sep

- test first prototypes
- develop work further
- Research Statement
- curate work for Unit 1 assessment

Oct – Nov

- complete Unit 1

Dec

- start Unit 2

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Von Maltzahn, K. E. (1994) *Nature as landscape: Dwelling and understanding*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Others

- Genesis, the Bible
- Purusha Sukta –
- Shatapatha Brahmana
- Upanishads
- Homer
- Pre-Socratics
- Aristotle – Poetics, Physics
- Plato
- Ovid – Metamorphoses
- Virgil
- Lucretius
- Herodotus
- Milton – Paradise Lost
- Berkley
- Darwin – The Origin of the Species
- Frazer – The Golden Bough
- Freud – Totem and Taboo
- Gould – It's a Wonderful Life
- Various science fiction books

- Aquinas
- Da Vinci – Note Books
- Spinoza
- Esslin
- Graves
- Hughes
- Mircea
- Dennett
- Dawkins
- Buber – I and Thou – Man and Man
- Benjamin
- Dewey – Art as Experience
- Heidegger
- Gould – It's a Wonderful Life
- Jones

- Darwin
 - Gould
 - Dawkins
 - E. O. Wilson
1. A German term introduced by pioneer of ethology, Jakob Von Uexkull, meaning surrounding world or environment describing the environment as experienced by a given organism being conceivable.
 2. The imagination is prime matter for art and as so often it is with art, the absurd can cut through the strictures of society's conventions and get to the core of the problem or question in hand.
 3. I use this term in the loosest of meanings rather than free standing sculpture in the context of sculpture having been very much concerned with human form in earlier periods.