

A Correspondence

Jens Masimov
10 September 2018 10:40

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hi Jenny!

I'm writing to you regarding the idea that we've already been talking about. I've been planning to start an email correspondence with an artist colleague and friend to be able to have an ongoing conversation about anything and everything, but still being rooted in contemporary art, theory and thoughts. I think that our interests and practices will function as a good platform from where discussions can evolve. The form (emailing) gives us space and time to think about what we want to say to each other, and the possibility to fluctuate between formal and casual. The possibility to incorporate links, images and other type of files/ attachments also adds an extra layer to the conversation.

I hope all of that sounds ok and makes some kind of sense? Also if you want it to be different in any way then we'll obviously change it!

I would like to start out by asking you about what influence 'the real and the virtual' might have on your practice (if it has any?) and what further thoughts around that subject in reference to contemporary society + space/place you have? And I apologise beforehand if I'm totally wrong assuming that you do link these topics to what you are making.

Looking forward hearing from you and to see what this will lead to,

:)

//////////jens

PS. I have just been watching the Swedish elections and omg its mad and scary

between

Jens Masimov & Jenny Wilson

Jenny Wilson
11 September 2018 22:50

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hey Jens,

So nice to hear from you! After getting your email I began reading about whats been happening in the Swedish elections, what do you think the most likely outcome is?

I think that what you're proposing sounds great, I hadn't even considered attaching files, links etc but that makes a lot of sense. I'm a bit daunted by that question! I am definitely still getting to grips with exactly how to speak about my practise and what 'my practice' consists of. I think that I'll try to start by considering what my understanding of 'the real and the virtual' is and how this implicates my research and resultant work.

For the past year or so I've been working my way through Karen Barad's Meeting the Universe Halfway which is centred around Niels Bohr's philosophy physics. I'm still struggling to understand some of the subjects that she deals with, however I keep revisiting Barad's theory of 'agential realism'.

"In an agential realist account, discursive practises are not human-based activities but specific material (re)configurations of the world through which boundaries, properties and meanings are deferentially enacted"

With this in mind I started considering the distribution of agency with regards to the technological object. Susanne Eichner's Agency and Media Reception and Hito Steyerl's Proxy Politics are two texts which have positioned my interest in digital media within the context of agency/materiality. More specifically I am interested in the entanglement of external and internal factors that emerge through the digital, 'the real and the virtual' so to speak. Some examples of these exchanges may include input & output signal/resolution/viruses/personalised adverts etc.

I could go on to speak about this more but I'd like to hear what you have to say and/or if this makes sense haha - whatever you feel like!

Jenny :)

* * *

Jens Masimov
21 September 2018 01:56

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hello again!

So good that you're up for doing this, and it feels exciting to have started!

Regarding the Swedish election its been over a week now and there is a complete deadlock. The right wing block are claiming that they should form a government despite they got less mandates in the parliament then the left block, and they cant answer straight about the chances of them collaborating with the Swedish democrats, a former (they still are though) nazi party. We'll see how it goes, I dont really know right now. maybe there's gonna be re-elections soon.

Im sitting here in my kitchen trying to find a way how to start responding to your message, there is so many things in what you wrote that I want to elaborate on : O

First of all I wasn't familiar with Barad's work, and I just looked her up and read about the book and theories you mentioned. The agential realism seems, in my opinion, to embrace the 'happening' = course of events, and the context it happens within (from physics to life (?)) but maybe I totally misread it?:

That looks like an equation hah

What I mean is maybe that she seems to have a super interesting take on the whole spectra of life and planet and existence, and that she values the unpredictable nature of everything. Its like she took metaphysics + physics and melted it into a flexible and interactive substance. I also, whilst reading about it, seem to think about the importance to embrace the non linear, whether its about progress or thinking or anything else. That's something that I try to explore in my practice, to create cross-connected narratives between objects and image and sound. I think I strive to create installations and exhibitions that can be started anywhere within it and then you gradually explore it and that exploration gives you the tool to zoom out and see all the components creating a whole and from that you can sort of create whatever narrative u think it needs by using your previous experiences of life combined with the new experiences u have gained from the (art)installation you've been looking at and interacted with. Maybe thats just how you would describe any exhibition?! Ha

According to Barad's theory of agential realism, the universe comprises phenomena, which are "the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies". Intra-action, a neologism introduced by Barad, signals an important challenge to individualist metaphysics. For Barad, phenomena or objects do not precede their interaction, rather, 'objects' emerge through particular intra-actions. Thus, apparatuses, which produce phenomena, are not assemblages of humans and nonhumans (as in actor-network theory). Rather, they are the condition of possibility of 'humans' and 'non-humans', not merely as ideational concepts, but in their materiality.

(from wikipedia page about agential realism)

Thats what I mean! Without exchange there's nothing, and with exchange there's everything!

I also need to say that English is not my first language so if there's anything that you completely don't understand tell me and I'll try to explain what I think in a better way! (Feel like I might need to clarify what I mean in the paragraph above)

The quote above can also be used to discuss the input/output in relation to the digital and how the exchange between the virtual and the real goes both ways through different interfaces such as the internet,

or just a screen carrying information. I'm thinking about what tools we can use to differentiate what is a simulation, or if there even is one. I thought a lot about these things after seeing Rehana Zaman's video work 'Some women other women and bitter men' from 2014 at the CCA. The blending of a fictional soap opera that depicts discrimination in various ways with the non-fictional footage of members from Justice for Domestic Workers Leeds (<https://www.thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com/>) tells us the the real is right now, and it effects people in drastic ways.

It would be interesting to hear you explain a bit more about the digital entanglement and the 'agency with regards to the technological object'. And I'm looking forward reading your next email :) I hope I make sense, it feels like its just a river of drifting thoughts

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jens

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Jenny Wilson
30 September 2018 16:24

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hey!

It has taken me a few days to reply to your email - you touched upon so many important/convoluted topics, I've tried to respond in some capacity to as many as possible! I'm really drawn to what you said about Barad's ontology/epistemology as taking the form of a flexible and interactive substance. I think that adopting a fluid (and sometimes contradictory) approach to making/writing/researching is something that I'm increasingly realising the importance of and hopefully stumbling towards. Theoretically this makes so much sense to me however putting this methodology into practise is another thing altogether!

With regards to what you've said about installation/exhibition assembly I keep returning to a work that you included in the exhibition **UR**. If I remember correctly it took the form of a video piece and it documented a conversation between you and your sister. I don't suppose you would want to talk a bit more about this work within the context that you exhibited it? I recently read a text that discussed the importance of boundary-shifting objects, this feels somewhat relevant in relation to both Barad's work and the importance that you place on cross-connected narratives within your work:

"Boundary objects interface as boundary shifters, entities that cross boundaries, but in doing so shift identities to produce transformations in institutions" (Aaron D. Knochel, 'An object-oriented curriculum theory for STEAM: Boundary shifters, materiality and per(form)ing 3D thinking')

The examples given of boundary-shifting objects include the video games console (in education) and graphics software (in laboratories). With this in mind, do you think that using media that would fall into this category of boundary objects can help to facilitate the emergence of cross-connected narratives? I haven't actually seen 'Some Women Other Women and Bitter Men', but I was able to watch some of the documentary clips through that link. Do you think that through the juxtaposition between fiction/non-fiction, Zaman is able to communicate a heightened sense of urgency with regards to the injustices that domestic workers face? I'm quite new to Zaman's work tbh but I was able to watch a video of hers online ('Tell Me the Story of All These Things' 2017).

I was really intrigued by the constant fluctuation between highly aestheticised 3D animation/documentary footage and the ways in which this aids Zaman's inquiry into the "processes of disassembling as constitutive of lived experience." (<https://lux.org.uk/work/025218-tell-me-the-story-of-all-these-things>)

I'm going to have a think about how I would summarise what I mean by agency and the technological object however I think that it could be interesting to develop a joint understanding over the course of our correspondence?

Hope you are having a lovely Sunday,
Jenny

* * *

Jens Masimov
7 October 2018 23:00

Re: *Email Correspondence*

hi jenny!

I totally agree (and also trying to work towards) with the contradictory feelings, I think we need lots more of that. Traveling multiple highways & small roads at once.

Yeah, I can talk a bit about that exhibition in general and the video specific! The title U R formed out of thoughts around heritage, family and context, and especially but being mixed (armenian+finnish+swedish=me). I grew up in Sweden and have been in Finland quite a lot, and never been to Armenia. Im not particularly Finnish nor Armenian but through getting older and also through making work and approaching topics of identity combined with simulation, technology and meaning of objects I've more and more started to embrace and form my mixed background. The notion of **FORMING/CREATING/ALTERING** was key to the exhibition and its contents. I see a strong connection to notions of the simulation through my agency over my background. It is like walking down a generic LED-tube lit corridor with a door in the end, opening the door and finding a giant room filled with possibilities. By having multiple 'cultures' within me I can use that to form it however I want, and that combined with my actual lived experiences creates an interesting tension between what is ME and what is M_simulated_E. In that there is also thoughts about assimilation, i'e forced into 'being' Swedish.

—————> Side note, I have finished reading the book *More than Real - Art in the Digital Age* (edited by Daniel Birnbaum & Michelle Kuo), and I know that you've read it too cause you got it as a gift from me and Karin! I got a copy myself at the same time (hah) and it was actually the purchase of that book that instigated this correspondence, and omg its a great book. A lot of what we are talking about here (as u also know) are thoroughly discussed in the book, and maybe it will function as a kind of key text for this conversation? How do you feel?

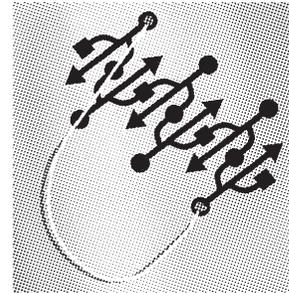
Here's the first one:

"Re(per)curve shows and mixes two codependent worlds (the real and the virtual) to create a **MIXED REALITY** space" and some pages after "Designing a performance for interaction in virtual or mixed reality implies that the way the narrative and score are developed needs to be reconsidered." - Paul E.M.J. Verschure, "The disappearing genius and situated aesthetics: explorations at the borders of science, art and reality"

The term **MIXED REALITY** is so literal in the mixed background sense, and the mixed (virtual)reality and sort of sums what I mean with mixing lived experience with the sense of a created one. The video consisted of me talking to my sister & mother separately over facetime about our Armenian Heritage and their relation to it and their lived experiences. I showed it as a looped video on my MacBook standing on the floor with speakers hanging above. The funny thing is that it was meant to be presented on a phone attached to the big window in the garage space (barnes building) but because of long rendering time I had to show it as a loop in final cut, haha. But it worked I think! And the different parts in the exhibitions was meant to reflect my thoughts about different components creating a whole, whether its life

or exhibitions etc etc..... And also the thing of different lived experiences, like they said it hasn't effected them at all, or experiencing any discrimination or racism, whilst I feel totally opposite.

And maybe there is something in the displaying of the computer that touches the boundary objects and boundary shifters. This because it is _my_ computer, but still just a generic computer that lots and lots of other people also _own_, creating this sense of familiarity and distance at the same time, and the interface acting as a translator between multiple different languages (spoken, aesthetically, rendition-wise etc.) Maybe parallels can be drawn to a USB-hub redistributing different channels. Maybe Factory Floor's record cover for *Heart of Data/Babel* sums my thoughts up a bit:



And when we talk about the the society I think we need to embrace the notion of translation/decoding as much as the chaotic cross-connecting, this to be able to understand what the boundary shifters actually are and what they do. And by acknowledge these 2 opposite (maybe?) sides, and by understand it and use it as a tool I think we can better form a cross connected narrative that also can transform institutions as the quote says, I dont know if this part makes sense but I'll maybe come back to it in a later email. I feel that I need to form a more substantial thought about it.

What are your thoughts or reading about/of the boundary object/shifters? Can you identify any within your practice, and how you may utilise them? Im very interested in what connections you can draw from it to your work that you showed in the Glue Factory exhibition (did it have a title?). If you could explain the work a bit more that would be great! Cause the game interface was present in that + the virtual world that you navigate through with your hand using an interface. Also the objects placed around the environment and what they represented. And have you continued to work with 3D?

In regards to the the work of Rehana Zaman I think that the sort of split between contemporary reality and contemporary documentary acts as a cursor following a loop. I mean the following of the history of labour, and how the market destroys everything in its way. Maybe what I read into it is that the nostalgia towards history should be redistributed into a feeling of urgency within the larger population (i.e supporting WOC and working for change) Using the past as a vehicle for today. I feel like this maybe can be connected:

"But I would argue that an impulse toward **RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT** can be detected here, in the attempt to bring back life into reason: a reason that has not been instrumentalised, and whose goals therefore haven't become illusory or deceptive." (Lars Bang Andersen - *Anti-disciplinary feedback and the will to effect*)

Im getting more and more delirious reading over what I've written. Its a lot, and im more interested in hearing ur thoughts than rambling on.

Hope you're good and looking forward to ur answer.

//J :)
ps. Yes!! A joint understanding of it sounds so good.

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Jenny Wilson
15 October 2018 22:28

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hello!

It's really interesting to hear you describe the nuanced relationship between your work and identity; do you think that this notion of forming / creating / altering occurs in any other areas of your practice such as writing? I'm going to ask you another question but would you be able to explain a bit more about what you mean when you refer to simulation or simulated experiences...

The book is great, thank you both so much <3 I think you're right aspects of it definitely feel related to the themes that we have touched upon. I hadn't actually read the text by Paul F.M.J. Verschure until you mentioned it haha. He mentions the term situated aesthetics quite a bit which I'm intrigued by;

"Aesthetic experiences and artefacts (that) emerge from a situated aesthetics, (are) grounded in interaction between conscious agents and their physical, social and cultural environment"

I think that by positioning this theory next to real life examples of work, such as Re(per)curse, its a lot easier to understand how an understanding of situated aesthetics might develop or be put to work. I'd never heard of this theory before so had to look it up but it's in line with externalism which is defined as: 'a group of positions in the philosophy of mind which argues that the conscious mind is not only the result of what is going on inside the nervous system (or the brain), but also what occurs or exists outside the subject.' (Wikipedia) I feel like this in turn bears some relationship to the challenging of the individual 'knower' - I don't know if this makes sense please tell me if it doesn't haha
Tbh find it really difficult to talk about the work that I presented in the Glue Factory in a positive way; I think that at the time I was really - maybe too - into this kind of virtual / physical dichotomy. Although this makes up a bit of what we are talking about but I think that the resultant work functioned as an exploration of media and maybe not much else. Theory and practical research are beginning to diffuse into my studio practise which I'm really enjoying.

I don't know if I've already told you but during the summer me and Blise helped to document an archaeological dig using equipment that would enable the site to be reconstructed into a virtual 3-D model (photogrammetry & 3-D laser scanning) I think processes like this are especially interesting within the context of boundary shifting objects. It was only for a couple of days but it definitely marked some kind of shift in how I think about 3-D imaging and animation. More specifically what interested me was that this virtual process of archiving and documenting was still entirely dependant on physical environmental factors such as whether or not there are clouds in the sky.

I had an interesting conversation with someone the other day about the idea of an object or set of objects that is constantly subject to reworking. I think that this is something that I'm finding increasingly important in relation to my own work. Materialising as a piece of work the object (whether this be textual / digital / physical etc) could communicate multiple strands of research whilst also alluding to the progression or extension of the thing beyond the context of an exhibition or time of presentation. In some ways I think a similar workflow could be reflected in our emails.

I need to keep reminding myself not to be too precious about writing to you / I'm finding it quite difficult - I feel as though my default is to try and write academically aha

Kind thoughts, Jenny

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Jens Masimov
18 October 2018 21:28

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hi!

So many great things to respond to again! But I'll keep it a bit shorter this time, felt that my last email maybe contradicted our initial reasoning of doing these emails, that of keeping it informal and fun!

(:

It's hard to actually pin that down, and to see what the *altering* literally consists of and where it is to be seen. I just want to say *everywhere!* And that's that.

Maybe it occurs as an overarching notion of the narrative VS the non-narrative (sort of the non-linearity I talked about in an earlier email). It takes form in making titles for my work, or using text within video pieces, not in writing in general (this is sort of my first written thing besides university essays). But long format text is something that I would like to explore more, both in the sense of discussing, but also for creating further platforms & inputs for my work/practice to be attached to. It also goes into my music productions and the different visual identities around that.

I think what I mean with it in short is: by mixing *making sense* with *not making sense* a narrative in flux is created, making more room for altering and questioning of static systems.

Further, what I mean with simulated experiences is that I am sort of detached from any other societal context then a Swedish one, and that gives me a sort of virtual and real (mixed reality) freedom to form a Finnish & Armenian one. Obviously it's a bit more complicated, but that is the sort of base of what I mean by it. Hope that makes it a bit clearer!

yeah! Also got super interested in the situated aesthetics, it's also cool with the comparisons to a first contra third person perspective mentioned in the same text. And yeah right, it questions the monophonic. I'm all about the polyphonic! We are situated in contexts that intermingle and that is great! The collective is great! I'm interested in the no author thing, like not naming pieces by who made it, is that something you have thought about, or can relate to? I'm so sick of the individual being successful, and that we all are individuals that should be successful, where is the good new capitalist critique? I read this article and thought it was good:

<http://reallifemag.com/same-difference/>

Also found this the other day, in addition to the situated aesthetics topic: (thought I read something more about it in the mousse magazine anthology but can't seem to find it!!)

"Two consequences of this work process are: the specific nature of any object formed is largely contingent upon the details of the situation for which it is designed; through attention to time, objects formed are intentionally located partly in real, exterior, space and partly in psychological, interior, space." - Victor Burgin - *Situational Aesthetics* (1969) (Situation, Whitechapel)

That also acts as a transition into what you wrote about reworking, and your own work and the experiences this summer!

It's super interesting to read what you are writing and how those 3 different sections are connected and how it influences your work! Cause what you say about the exhibited object just being in transit (?) is retraced into what you're saying about testing media and work (glue factory) and how that usage of media is effected by circumstances outwith (context+environment+knowledge). It would be cool if you could

elaborate a bit more of the impact the 3-D scanning had on you as u say. Also I saw your instagram story yesterday and i'm interested in what was shown in that photo. was that the different geological samples that you have been working with? Do you think you could talk a little bit more about those, and maybe in relation to what you've said about research taking different shapes and forms and being communicated?

Hope you're having a good week!

//J

* * *

Jenny Wilson
21 October 2018 23:14

Re: *Email Correspondence*

Hey :))

Whatever you feel is right! It feels exciting to be writing in this way with you and part of what's great about this format is that some bits can be longer or shorter than others.

Yeah I get what you mean and maybe it would be counterproductive to establish a set boundary within which these alterations can occur. I might be completely wrong but do you think the way that you use punctuation to break apart and form new words (e.g. M_simulated_E) seems to fall into line with this way of thinking / making / challenging? Also thanks for explaining more what you meant by simulated experience!

I'd never heard the terms monophonic / polyphonic before haha but that makes total sense. I enjoyed that article a lot - I feel as though the central focus of the text echoes a lot of what is spoken about in new materialist theory (or maybe its the other way round I don't know!)

"Once you are convinced that creativity begins and ends within yourself, your work stops destabilising the power structures that divvy out the rewards. / Neither people nor things are creative; ideas and processes and relations are." (David A. Banks, Same Difference)

The last section of this quote resonates with me and with this in mind maybe I can talk a bit about the archaeological site and more specifically, the equipment / processes used. These included photogrammetry and 3-D laser scanning, here's a short and probably inaccurate description of both haha

-- Photogrammetry digitally joins up multiple photographs, taken from multiple angles together - commonalities are found in the images and points in virtual space are established in order to build a 3-D object.
-- 3-D laser scanning uses lasers to read the topography of the surrounding environment, recording these points in space which then enable a digital reconstruction to be formed.

For photogrammetry the images that are fed into the software (open source programmes are available !) can be from multiple cameras and of varying quality which to me is super interesting - photographs can be 'crowdsourced' which helps to gather information that's up to date in constantly changing environments. The high number of variables mean that the validity of the results are subject to constant scrutiny - these potential flaws or fluctuations are what intrigue me the most about this medium I think.

The photo in my Instagram story was of the thin sections of rock that I have been studying - this has been an interesting point of departure for my current research / work. I'm now looking at an old oil-shale

site and the ecosystem that has developed there as a result of the land's material make-up; this relatively small area of land is now home to rare species of plants and mosses which struggle to grow elsewhere. The landscape is both the product of an environmentally destructive industry and conservator of these lifeforms.

Right now I feel as though my written and practical work are being built up and fractured alongside each other. I don't know if this is a good or bad thing yet! Hopefully elements of this dispersion come through visually - I'm in the middle of editing (and learning to edit haha) a short film of footage that I took on a visit to the site. Are you working on anything at the moment ?

Hope you've had a lovely week!

Jenny

p.s. I tried to transcribe an audio clip online the other day and the results I got were nothing like the audio it ended up really strange aha



* * *

Jens Masimov
25 October 2018 16:00

Re: *Email Correspondence*

hello!

I'm having breakfast and trying to organise my life, but i'm just ending up looking at the square iceberg spotted the other day, and listening a lot to swedish radio.

I hadn't actually thought about that, how the sort of altered language would come out of those notions, but now thinking about it its definitely connected! A lot of it is probably that english isn't my first language, and that encourage me to dissect it and make it weird, it isn't surrounded by rules or boundaries. And I think it's also visual, how to make something sound and look like what u r thinking, trying to cover more dimensions. But its also mainly because we're writing to each other that i'm doing it, feeling that I can experiment with language and writing. Do you feel like you can do similar things? In the sense of abstraction of rules maybe? language is so ruled based but for me language don't have any rules like writing without punctuation and also only using lower case letters to be able to disintegrate static values. take control over everything u can possibly take control over! but do it together!

TAKE)CNTRL(GIVE=autonomy——>share&re-do

For me its also a way of practicing resistance against efficiency.

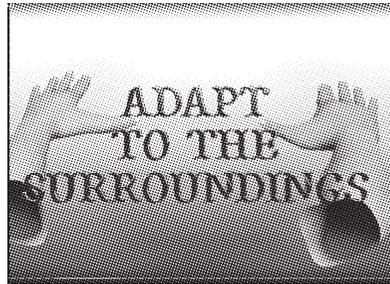
This, and a lot of other topics we've discussed could have a connection to these words i think;

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as is you are floating, or not even moving at all. Falling is relational - if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling" - 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective' (Hito Steyerl, from the catalogue of Sondra Perry's show 'Typhoon Coming on' at Serpentine Gallery)

That speaks so well about looking up, view ur surroundings and form something new out of the current circumstances, and how everything is relational. Steyerl also talks about different axes, can the 2 methods you're describing be

Sort of translated into that? In the sort of Y+X being topographies in large and small scale (area+object(s)), and how this then could be further explored through making art. The thing about using different kind of cameras and quality is super interesting in a hierarchy and value kind of way. Different inputs still carries their value in order to create the file, or any outcome. Does these thoughts/theories influence u in using different mediums? It's also really interesting hearing u talk about this in relation to the quote about processes and relations being creative! It goes with some kind of thought of an artist being an enabler not a creator? Enabling experiences 4 other ppl.

That sounds great, and its really cool how its possible for things to adapt to the surroundings and follow its changes. but that's also really scary at the same time. Had that line in one of my videos for degree show!



Its also just like, 'oh, here's lots of space, lets be here!' Gentrification-plants!

Whats the next stage of that work? Besides the editing?

I'm working on trying to make structural plans to be able to make some installations and sculptures that I have I mind (sort of big things), and making some videos of clips/material from the summer, + making a book and recording new music. Its a bit chaotic and feels weird not having a studio to go to and make it, therefore its a lot of not making rn. But a lot of planning!

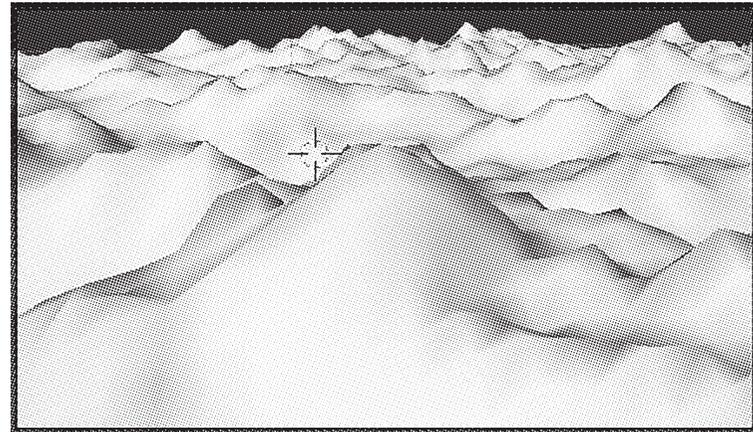
AND haha, thats fantastic with the transcribed sounds!! What was the sounds?

Until then

jens

Jens Masimov graduated in 2018 from Fine Art: Photography at the Glasgow School of Art. He is currently participating in the GRADJOB programme at the Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh.

Jenny Wilson studies Fine Art: Painting at the Glasgow School of Art. Jenny is particularly interested in interdisciplinary practices.



ABOVE
Jenny Wilson,
Test Landscape (2018),
digital image.

LEFT
Jens Masimov,
200%LIFE (2018),
laughing gas canister,
tripod.