

Peacock Cabinet.

Mary Magdalene
From Feathers
To Fur
To Flesh

Painting a woodparent cabinet red



**Mirroring the making of a “Curious Cabinet”,
an art school theory on furniture; part of PhD-project *Level Up*
by Bjørn Jørund Blikstad, Design department, Oslo National
Academy of the Arts (KHiO):**

It's The Peacock Cabinet. Mary Magdalen From Feathers to Fur to Flesh
- *Painting a Woodparent Cabinet Red*.
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Karen Disen & Theodor Barth)
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Wardrobe studies of 0 – The Surge of Wilderman. (Barth, Blikstad). [Archive, #1].
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Embarking on this paper is a voluntary trip down several rabbit holes. So is my relationship to the author - I know by now that engaging in his work holds the potential risk of being tasked with unpacking yet another "Pandora's box", but I engage nevertheless.

I arrived at the Design department at Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2016. What I encountered during the first course, "human-bearing-construction" led by Bjørn Jørund Blikstad turned my expectations upside down, whatever they may have been. We were encouraged to expand our perception of the object, and the aim was not to design, neither primarily functional nor aesthetic, furniture, but rather using "furniture-like" objects as catalyst for debate or reflection. 'Lo and behold, a new world emerged. Inspired and filled with vigour, some students started gathering in the workshops after hours to discuss the state of the art. And we felt as enlightened and invincible as only students can, as if seeing things clearly for the first time. I might have been as happy as I will ever be - everything was new, and each encounter with the group and Bjørn led to another level-up.

By the end of the first term, the department gathered for a celebration, and at some point I found myself next to Bjørn. I told him that I was going to buy myself a chair with money I had been saving up, and that I had decided I would buy the Wishbone Chair, commonly known as the Y-chair, by the Danish architect and designer Hans Wegner. And to my bewilderment, Bjørn laughed at me. He explained that the chair was the most obvious and oblivious choice I could possibly make and would only mimic the impression of understanding the cultural codex while, in reality, proving that I had failed completely to do so.

And so the bubble burst. The feeling of invincibility turned to vulnerability as my Y-chair blunder had revealed my naivety. Slowly, I was starting to realize the complexity of the cultural hierarchy - permeated with codes and layer upon layer of references and meta-references. I had absorbed as much input as possible from the workshop and the lecture hall alike but suddenly realized the flip side of the coin; knowing what I now (then) knew meant that I would never blindly enjoy again. I started second-guessing everything; whether my opinions and proposals were sharp and adequate, and to which extent my visual taste would be deemed on point. I was beginning to feel as if trapped within a maze, and the threshold to approach the workshop grew taller in parallel with the fear of failure.

Throughout the remaining part of the bachelor, the conversations with Bjørn and the group continued, and even though we might have felt less unbeatable as our perspectives broadened, the discussions did not cease to engage. With time, it became evident that the engagement might potentially be mutual, and I believe that the group offered some space for resonance for Bjørn, just as he did for us. However, the further we went with our inquiries, the longer became the intervals between the satisfying (once so available) revelations. We all dealt with this in our own way, but I personally felt the desperation to regain a sense of control growing by the minute.

Intrigued but perplexed and confused by my Bachelor years, I spent my Master making a manual of ways to survive criticism and baptised myself a Paranoid Practitioner. I made my graduation project based on pretending to be others in an attempt to manipulate and control the evaluation process, and called it "*Paranoid Production and Perception, or You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Project is About Me*". And to my amazement, the approach worked wonders. The effect was so close to what I had anticipated that I was unsure whether to be relieved or concerned - both of my own inclinations to calculation and cynicism and of how easy it was to hack the system. Thus the laud is bitter-sweet. I will be the first to admit the potential cowardice nature of this practice - simultaneously as I find it a better alternative than creative paralysis and apathy. Maybe.

"The Peacock Cabinet. Mary Magdalene, From Feathers To Fur To Flesh" is exactly what one might expect knowing Bjørn's previous work; it is unpredictable, absurd and immensely thorough. Throughout the project, he examines a quote by Oscar Wilde regarding Lord Byron's work, claiming that "half his strength was wasted on friction". Inspired by Tilman Rimenschneider's depiction of a furry Mary Magdalene (1492), Bjørn constructs a Peacock Cabinet with a hole in the position of the peacock's body, and explores the concept of woodparent (non-polychromed) surfaces.

What does really the hairy Mary have to do with peacocks or black holes? Everything, it might appear, after reading the following pages; a hodgepodge of theology, astrology, history, anthropology, and linguistics assembled in the context of the workshop. Artistic research might be regarded as a way to play with lenses, angles, references and sources which traditional, scientific research would deem irrational, inefficient or invalid.

It allows for unexpected and possibly fortuitous combinations of topics and findings, and the lack of framework is as much a blessing as a curse. Whether or not Bjørn is truly authentic in his execution remains a question which I suspect not even Bjørn himself can answer at this point. Nevertheless, it is beside all doubt that he has engaged in the research with the genuine intention of seeking answers - however filled with friction the pursuit might be.

And there is friction in the perception of the work as well as in the production behind it. Each time the project appears comprehensible, another layer appears, keeping you on your toes and in constant question of whether you have fully grasped the content or not. To me, this illustrates the eternal (and highly addictive) push and pull between friction and level-up. And for what it's worth, "*The Peacock Cabinet. Mary Magdalene, From Feathers To Fur To Flesh*" satisfies a friction-junky's every need.

There are obvious connotations within the depiction of the peacock, as the show-of, proud and magniloquent. However, I am tempted to propose that the tail is neither primarily something to be dragged nor displayed proudly, but rather a diversion manoeuvre as a symptom of an inferiority complex. There is innate complexity in the pattern of the peacocks tail - which Bjørn explores through his research and later translates through his carvings. Such complexity can serve the purpose to impress and intimidate, and working in layers and meta-layers may enhance a feeling of sexy intricacy which in turn may provide a convenient distance to both evaluators and audience. So, is this demonstration of skill and technicality, and the scale of it all merely a way to distract and compensate? And how hard can it really be to paint a woodparent cabinet red?

Bjørn questions whether a return to style is a welcome defence towards nihilism, apathy, and blockages, which to me testifies a fundamental superstitious attitude towards the frictionless. Is surrendering oneself uncritically to the ornamental any better than the abandonment of it altogether? I am inclined to imply that a return to style might at least offer some momentary sedation and a vacation from the maze. However, turned into a sceptic and a paranoid myself, I share the concern that the way forward is not U-turn. But what is the origin of this reluctance? Are we scared that passionate devotion and emotion will lead to anarchy, and that a return to style equals a break with rationality?




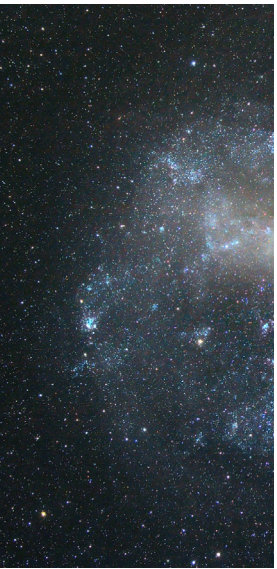
Speculations aside, I find the idea of allowing oneself the guilty pleasure of an ornamental splurge alluring - even if it requires an intellectual cover-operation in the aftermath.

There is a twisted irony in being the one to edit the work of someone who was my teacher, became my friend, and who will always stay my mentor - in one sense or the other. There is, till this day, no one I am more scared to show my work to than Bjørn, and I can think of few greater fears than misinterpreting the things he writes. We would not want another Y-chair-gate. It might appear as if Bjørn saw the opportunity to drag me down the rabbit hole with him, but whether he is seeking an accomplice or a lab-rat remains an open-ended question. So, is this simply yet another Frankenstein story? Is Bjørn then the mad scientist or the monster himself? And where does that place me and the rest of the group? Regardless, I owe him some of my greatest highs and deepest existential crisis, and in the name of friction, I am thankful for both.

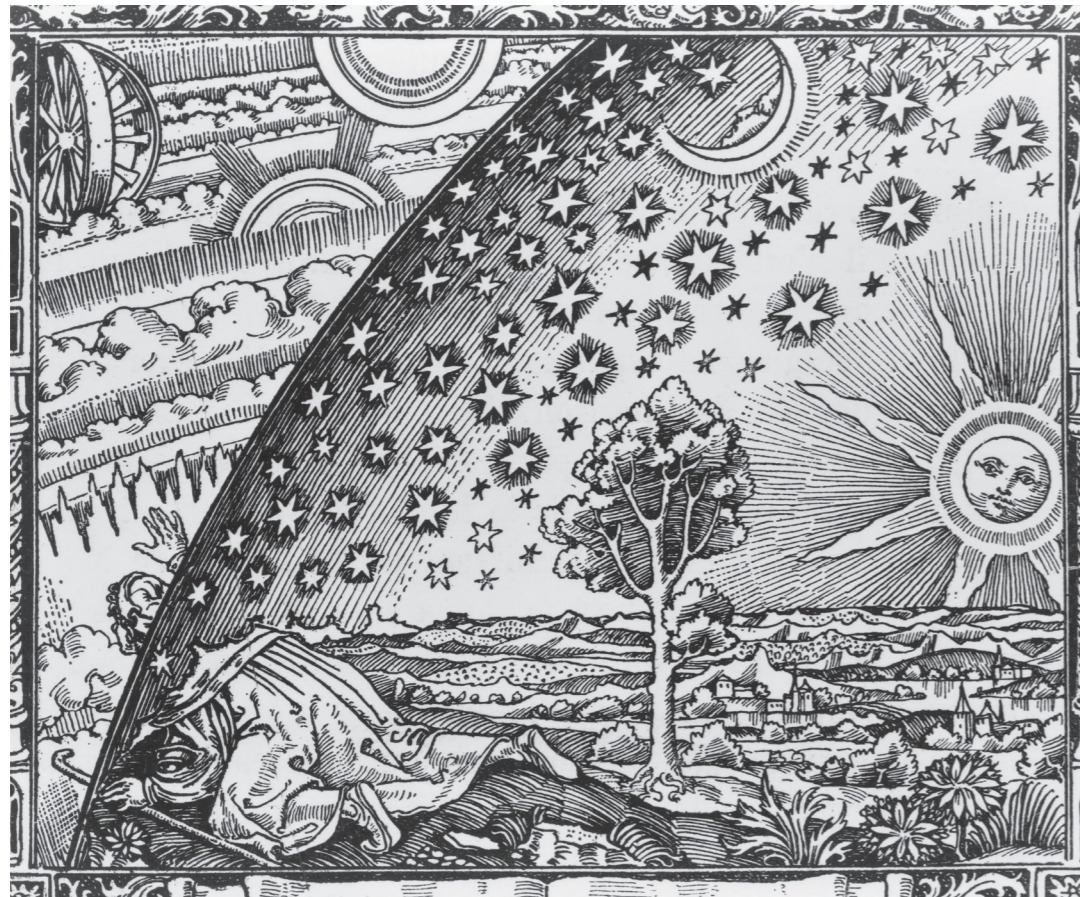
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Part 1



Half His Strength Was Wasted on Friction

Body of work - kunstnerskap.

Skap (nor.) - shape, figure, form. Contour, but also to get something into shape; in order. Inform (lat.) - shape, fashion, describe, to give form (into - form).

Both the suffixes -ship and -scape have close etymological connections to the old Norse skapr

Kunstnerskap	-	-
Trollskap	Sorcery	-
Faenskap	Mischief/Evil	-
Vitenskap	Knowledge	-
Galskap	Madness	-
Klokskap	Wisdom	-
Garderobeskap	Wardrobe	-
Landskap	-	Landscape
Borgerskap	-	Citizenship
Eierskap	Possession	Ownership
Bruk(skap)	Use	Usership
Kontrollskap	Order	-
Kontorlandskap	Fascism	-
Påfuglskap	Argus Phenomenon	Selfawarenessship
Selvskap	?	?

Skap = the *form* into which its constituent elements have congregated.

The word congregation is usually used for a large gathering of people in religious worship, but I want to use this word to reflect the heritage of modernist's belief in form, which in essence is a metaphysical logic and an aesthetic claim; their true legacy is our contemporary awareness of trivial objects not only being carriers of existential meaning, but also a direct (un-scaled & non-representational) expression of it. (These qualities makes it a focal point for the arts, perceiving through usership and usefulness a way out of the problems of representations and scale between life and art. Retrospectively any artefact can be seen as a true representation of its time, but in the process of it being created, it is ambiguous and uncertain. The sought-after directness is believed to bring new vigour to the process of making; colouring the position of ambiguity and uncertainty with intent and purpose.)

In any congregating process, the form it ends up taking is dependent on an interplay of each constituent element having its' say on the form. If it turns out good, we are lucky, if we are obliged to accept the form, based on any stated utility, we need policing. Woodstock in 1969 went rather well, the four months later Altamont Free Concert didn't. The form of any congregation is perhaps only robust when all the participants, being people or other constituent elements, can behave generic to their "nature" or have their inherent agency and/or adjust wilfully. Congregations, as large assemblies of people gathered in common purpose does not have to be peaceful.

War is also perhaps a robust *form*? The forming of a congregations is also where culture and evolutionary biology meet in the unresolved status of our relationship to nature.

A typical artistic contemporary solution to this problem is "asking" what the *elements themselves* wants to do, letting them collude into place, where we stand a little back and support the collusion process, trying not to override it (e.g. new materialism). We can also look at the issue by using Christopher Alexander's critique of urban planning, where a town's congregating possibilities are limited by the prior planning of waterlines and sewage. A town planned like that, as most new settlements are, cannot achieve a robust form over time - where and how people actually want to settle would be intrinsic to the logistics of the sewage planning - but by a stroke of luck. One can inject that people will eventually learn to appreciate their surroundings, that they will grow into their surroundings' possibilities and constraints and eventually inhabit them. The brutalists certainly believes/d that when designing their urban environments. The modernist idiom 'Form Follows Function' is a claim on the nature of congregations.

The world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims is the Kumbh Mela, a Hindu festival celebrated four times over the course of 12 years. It is supported by a *Great Kumbh Mela* which happens every 144 years, which in 2001 gathered 60 million people in peaceful community. Its origins are linked to astrological

¹ Modern successes of furniture design, its classics, are furniture designed for a specific location like museums, hotels, embassies, etc. The concept of making specificity out of something non-local is a problem yet to be overcome by designers: the non-locality of e.g. "industry" is lacking every feature the successful designs took from the specific location it was designed for.

² Vinegar, A 2010. *I Am a monument: on Learning from Las Vegas*

³ By extending Freud's analysis of the three decisive blows to man's narcissistic illusion - 1) Copernican heliocentrism, 2) Darwinian theory of evolution, and 3) Freud's psychoanalytical theory of the unconscious - through Nietzsche's death of God to Foucault's death of the Author.

mythologies and observations [Encyclopaedia Britannica]. Projects like *Ephemeral Urbanism*, a project exhibited at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, want to extract learning for urban planning from large congregations like the Kumbh Mela.

The origins of Kumbh Mela is both mythic and historical and the description of such large congregations as ephemeral, perhaps millennia in the making, at the same time being inspired by the forms they manifest, reveal perhaps the largest aporia of the contemporary design culture, related to the problem of culture itself; between custom, purpose and cultivation: that a form's usefulness, however intrinsic to a specific place and time, can be deconstructed, or reverse engineered, to its constituent parts and reused elsewhere. Site specificity and portability is an old paradox of furniture design and industry even reflected in many European words for furniture; *meuble* (Fr.); *möbel* (G.); *møbel* (No.), meaning mobile and portable.¹

Learning from Las Vegas reveal a similar stance, that you can transport the form without regard for its constituent elements. That the form is trans-portable, perhaps even universal. Learning from "Learning from Las Vegas"² reveal the rigour of the 'universal' spell – but analysis and implementation are linked to articulation! However, because it is impossible to articulate everything, the reuse will unintentionally be dislocated from important constituent elements and factors. This is, I believe, the main basis of the trends to "de-colonize" the arts and academia in the west. But note, in this line of enquiry, there will always be residue.

In processes of art-working its' forms and what the forms are constituted by are fluid up to a certain point. This Point is still governed by the Author, even though s/he is supposedly dead. Nevertheless, because authorship has received the connotation of probably being a narcissistic illusion³, it has instead become bureaucratic, where the Point still happens but where its ontogeny remains either hidden or too complex to locate. The effect of which is that *authorship* is extended to account for everyone/thing responsible for the outcome, all of the constituent parts that governs the congregation, perhaps to a whole cultural system. In this aspect the artist/author is only a small factor. This interwoven complexity makes any claims of authorship arrogant or ignorant, dependent upon political preference.

Design is situated in the middle of this because it actively attempts to accommodate for new emerging constituting elements, by tethering it to the consensual. Or the other way around: design needs to conflate the consensual with every emerging constituent element in order to continue to build/grow. Design through industrialisation/communication, a structure that necessarily must harvest emerging trends and translate them into, or onto, its consensual platforms

of presentation, reveals a utilitarian core. To me, from the perspective of speculative design, utilitarianism is just that.

As Design *can* be seen as an ever-increasing set of new constituting elements congregating into its overall form, Design, by its debt to the “pitch”⁴, is an assimilator of cultural emergencies. Conversely, designers now need to make e.g., cultural misappropriation and decolonizing part of its set of constituting elements, embrace it and make it immediate. Artists and designers, with acute senses of the zeitgeist and sensitive to what this do to both their platforms of presentation, as well as what is possible to present there, should also be aware of the problems of meeting this demand. Because we still demand consistency, by aesthetical logic between form and function/form and its constituent elements/form and its in-formation, Design continually needs to readjust to accommodate for the current and any postulated congregates. The new constituting element(s) we currently are struggling with, is accurately described in a heated exchange during the 2017 riots at Evergreen State College⁵, recorded by the rioters and uploaded to YouTube:

*«You need to stop demanding that everybody use logic and reason and white forms of knowledge to fucking prove yourself to the world!»*⁶

Why this is difficult to include into the set of constituting elements is because of opposing ontologies. On one side is the hope we have for artistic research being an alternative knowledge provider to scientific knowledge, or in the words of the protester, an alternative to white forms of knowledge. The second, is in order to do so, we first must overcome a larger problem, e.g., presented by Kierkegaard in 1843 in *Fear and Trembling*. A problem, by *his* use of words didn't seem insurmountable. As in passing, he writes:

«On the whole, it would be desirable if aesthetics, one day, would attempt to begin where, for so many years, it has ended, with the illusion of magnanimity. Once it did this it would then work hand in hand with the religious, for this power is the only one that can rescue the aesthetic from its combat with the ethical.»

However, with contemporary *non-religious* lenses this reads as near impossible to overcome; how else to defuse the polarity between aesthetic and the ethical? The initial question we must ask is how design, as a developer of goods for the betterment of the average life, relates to magnanimity. The first clue is obviously the meaning of the word magnanimous (*høimodighet* original Danish word). I think Kierkegaard simultaneously expresses that magnanimity both was, and is, as well as didn't, and doesn't have to be, an illusion, because we should begin where it ended. To Aristotle magnanimity is one of the forms of

⁴ A proposals' success is intrinsically linked to the ability to convey its utility immediately.

⁵ A liberal arts college famous for the campus shutdown due to student protests and perhaps to its equitable positionality training regarding identity, gender, race, and privilege.

⁶ Benjamin A. Boyce. (2019, 27. Aug) *The complete Evergreen story (8)* -17:45-18:00 [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOht7EXA8hs>



⁷ Kierkegaard's native country had its first king titled *Dan den Høimodige* (danish); *Dan the Magnanimous*; from which Denmark has its name, *Dan-mark*. In both Danish and Norwegian *høimodig/høymodig* would be an ambiguous title, meaning both loudmouth, brave, and noble, through *storiåten*. It is quite common that Viking kings and leaders received ambiguous titles from their bards. Outside Norse territory, Elector of Saxony John Frederick I *the Magnanimous* (1503-1554) received the same ambiguous honour.

Virtue, but the contemporary currency of Kierkegaard's use of magnanimity is of course also related to the forming of councils of equity and community, diversity and inclusivity. They too, could be both a beginning and an end, i.e. a magnanimous illusion.⁷

For me, the pairing of the two quotes above, together hold the problem of artistic research. The statement from Evergreen, which also is a question as true as it is possible to make one, holds the emergency of our times. Kierkegaard, being cleverer than most, have combined this emergency - *aesthetics combat with the ethical* - with the affairs of its making by making a magnanimous knot of the aesthetics and the ethical together with the religious. (The image I am continuing to play with is the perpetual directionless growth of a black hole, as a variant of the Ouroboros, and the Will to exit its pull, or break its feed. The cultural significance of the astronomical *Event horizon*, the pairing of which will become clear, as a threshold beyond which no information is found, that Hawking radiation eventually will lead to the black hole's evaporation, together with the puzzle of what is left of the information that went into the black hole compared to the radiation, presents itself as a possible re-establishment of a link between cosmology and culture. The Gut and The Stars. G/Astronomica.)

Both quotes above present the same desire of purposeful direction, but the question of what would be strong enough still remains; Adorno is the force that attempts to pull Heidegger back into the black hole, as a safety-mechanism, because direction too often is accompanied by violence. As in western movies -we have ourselves a Mexican standoff.

This reflection presents my own findings of artistically attempting to research these questions. It is centred around the creation of *The Curious Peacock Cabinet – Påfuglskap* - and understanding through writing, its ontogeny. There are two kinds of ethics at play, that of breaking the Ouroboros and that of sustaining it.

End of introduction, which introduces: friction, congregating processes (a build-up of forces that must go somewhere), ontogeny; articulation is linked to implementation (design), Kierkegaard's knot of magnanimity, fascism's link to direction from the void, aesthetics represents such a direction.

What doesn't add up on paper, must play itself out in fates (or in the workshop)

CONTENTS OF CONTAINERS. CONTAINERS OF CONTENTS

The Norwegian word *skap* is both related to a piece of furniture and the act of creating something. In addition, it is also a suffix as in e.g.: *kunstnerskap* -artist's body of work; *vitenskap* -science; *galskap* -madness; *landskap* -landscape; *eierskap* -ownership. The English suffixes of -scape and -ship are both etymologically related to the Old Norse *skapr*. The definition of the Old Norse word *skapr*; form, contour, figure, but also, to get something in order, is similar to the English word *inform*; shape, fashion, describe (into form). The noun *shape*, from Old English *sceap*, meaning form; created being, creature; creation; condition; sex, genitalia, had in plural form in Middle English "a sense of a woman's private parts" [etymonline.com]. Remembering Salvador Dali's purported state of being when he put drawers on Venus de Milo [with reference to Curious Cabinets 2019], it is all summed up in the 18th century word *shapemith*; one who undertakes to improve the form of the body. Then going back to an artist's body of work, *kunstnerskap*, i.e., *artistry* as an embodied knowledge of the art of being, two worlds collide: branding and artistic responsibility.

While I am making this document, which is a reflection and dissemination on the intentions and reasons behind the recently finished *Påfuglskap* ("peacock-ship"), I am building and designing *Taweret-Selvskap-Utenforskap*.⁸ They are both cabinets with pun names related to the word *skap*, which in English would conflate the words *cabinet*, *closet*, *create*. The English names I have given the cabinets, which is more in line with branding, are *The Curious Peacock Cabinet* and *The Curious Moustache Cabinet*. However, a proper semantic translation would for the name *påfuglskap*, through the symbolic interpretations of the peacock; from evolution (see p. 49); the all-seeing Argus eyes (see p. 57); male vanity (see p. 56), be *selfawarenessship*. *Selvskap* still hasn't a good English equivalent, I am not even sure what it is yet, but it is part

⁸ What ever happens during this work, trickle into this text somehow. The effect of which is meaningless to pin down without the work of documentation of that too. It's mentioned as a note on the method of research.



Venus De Milo with Drawers. Salvador Dali (1936)

⁹ The AR community is currently struggling with how to deploy *the artistic* onto any field of study with out simultaneously studying the researcher (me-search). It catches a drift in a deep philosophical problem concerning the concept of objective knowledge, superficially discussed in the problems of academizing the arts and specifically caught in the quote from Evergreen. A whole range of related issues emerge from this drift and is an opportunity to discuss human beings' relationship to *nature*.

¹⁰ Or, patron.

¹¹ "The Schrödinger equation, which is itself deterministic, resembles the equation for water waves propagating across a lake. Much as water waves have a height or amplitude at each point in the lake, the Schrödinger equation determines at each point in space and time a height, that is an amplitude, of the Schrödinger wave. Mathematically, the square of this amplitude is [...] the probability that a specific quantum process, if measured by a classical apparatus, will occur – for example, that a photon will be polarized in a specific way. In the wonderful weird world of quantum mechanics, which applies to very small things such as atoms, nothing actual happens when the Schrödinger wave equation propagates its wave. Everything remains a propagating wave of mere possibilities, each of which has a probability of a corresponding event being observed if the event is measured. It is only when the event is measured by a big, or macroscopic, non-quantum measuring apparatus (in the famous Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics) that an actual, real, or classical event, say a photon hitting a photographic detector array, happens." (See footnote 14)

self-portrait, part self-image, part self-conscious, part party. None of them look like anything I have made before. Probably because as I am trying to reinvent myself⁹ through the job of doing artistic research; I have made artistic research - from interior architecture and furniture design, through Oslo National Academy of the Arts, to the government - my client.¹⁰

The client's expressed desire is "form", via *kunnskap* (eng.: *knowledge*; directly translated to English from Norwegian as

"know-ship"), i.e., contributions to the *form knowledge takes*. One could claim that knowledge is on those terms more tangible than e.g., in-sight or sense, at the same time remembering that insight of something can produce knowledge of something else. (and vice versa) The semantics is important because in and behind the meaning of the words is a philosophy of what the world is, what knowledge is and what we are. I like this, because it aims directly at what the arts currently refuse to provide, accurate representations. I.e., something that has been given form, and is true because it is a gift. Rather, we insist on infinite complexity. We propagate probability while we yearn for the actual. It is shapeless, like the Void, while the client asks for Utterance. Can we have *knowledge* of something shapeless? Can knowledge be without form? Is it possible to embody the infinite? It maps out an existentialist ideal:

It is now about four years ago that I got the notion of wanting to try my luck as an author. I remember it quite clearly; it was on a Sunday, yes, that's it, a Sunday afternoon. I was seated as usual, out-of-doors at the cafe in the Fredricksberg Garden. I had been a student for half a score of years. Although never lazy, all my activity nevertheless was like a glittering inactivity, a kind of occupation for which I still have a great partiality, and for which perhaps I even have a little genius. I read much, spent the remainder of the day idling and thinking, but that was all it came to.

So there I sat and smoked my cigar until I lapsed into thought. Among other thoughts I remember these: "You are going on," I said to myself, "to become an old man, without being anything, and without really undertaking to do anything. On the other hand, wherever you look about you, in literature and in life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short

recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier, yet more and more significant. And what are you doing?" Here my soliloquy was interrupted, for my cigar was smoked out and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly this thought flashed through my mind, "You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder." This notion pleased me immensely, and at the same time it flattered me to think that I, like the rest of them, would be loved and esteemed by the whole community. For when all combine in every way to make everything easier, there remains only one possible danger, namely, that the ease becomes altogether too great; then there is only one want left, though it is not yet a felt want, when people will want difficulty. Out of love for mankind, and out of despair at my embarrassing situation, seeing that I had accomplished nothing and was unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, and moved by a genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere.

-Concluding Unscientific Postscript by Johannes Climacus/Søren Kierkegaard (1846)

THE DESIGNER

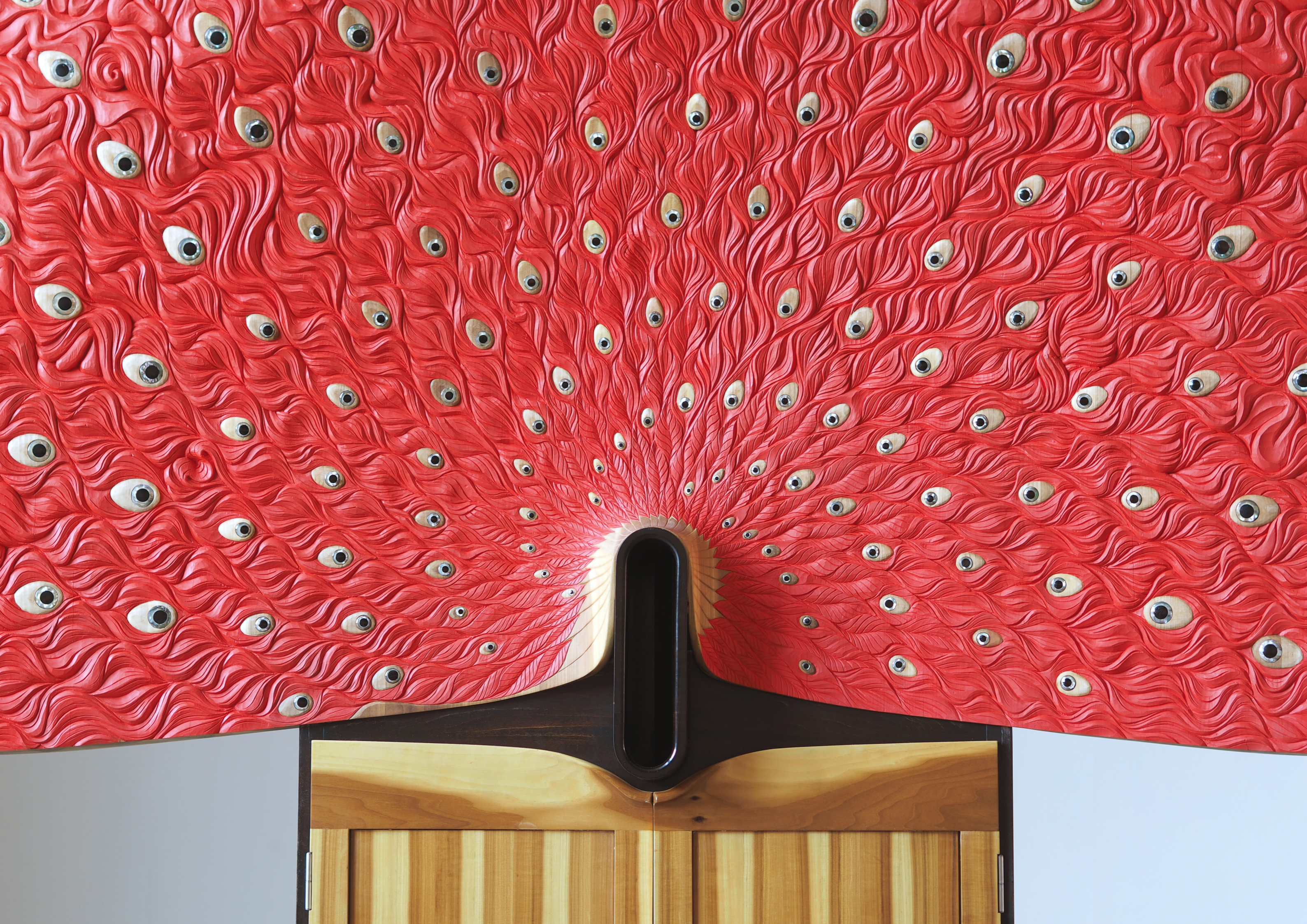
Perhaps one strength of the designer, in particular, is precisely the ability to interact seriously with the client, or integrate the clients desires, to be able to "self-brainwash" yourself enough in order to utilise something personal in the outcome of the project, so you can at least enjoy the consistency of it.¹² However, it is not without its difficulties because at some point you will face something that simply does not blend, and you'll learn something about both; yourself and your client. As the client can't easily be budged, as in my case is the government, I am faced with the prospect of fragmenting *myself* instead: who I was, who I am and who I think I am becoming. Sometimes all three can be radically different, even in

the current flow of art-working. This covers a neglected point concerning designers doing artistic research, in particular, because in some sense design is already artistic research, as it *experimentally embodies a speculative [future projection] reciprocal agency* by its serious engagement with the client.

Artistically researching artistic research or designing designs, need a vector to begin its trajectory. Perhaps in the 2020's, a designer always waits for a client with reciprocity standing by, not embodying intent but rather the project's inherent reciprocity, which is a game of causality and consistency.

In this lighting, what the government asks of artistic research, in expecting features from the featureless Void, by lawful adjacency of artistic research to viten-skap; Wissen-shaft; science, is to design something that helps counteract the nihilism that follow suit by the propagation of the materialist scientific paradigm? I.e., the trajectory of which science once shot out, with great intent and purpose, full of passionate intensity, is bending off and returning to its beginnings. (a tendency which the statement from Evergreen is a testament to)

¹² Artistic autonomy as a prerequisite for critique to happen is not applicable to design in general, because of its integration of the client, often at odds with the designers' own preferences. In later chapters in this text, it will also relate the client to the medieval patron and its role in medieval polychromy and the late medieval abandonment of it.



To create *skap* that is divergent from how the emergent constituents *seems* to be congregating themselves, i.e., opposing your sense of trends, becomes either a philosophical exercise or a critical philosophical exercise. Because in the making of a cabinet in the above sense of the phenomenon (*skap/scape/ship*) - along with the attempt to reflect its constituency in writing, where the conceptual goal is to document the causal effect between content and container, form and content, or form and its' information, by some kind of transposition - eventually translates to the personal; When your analysis of the constituent elements of the congregate is not governed by individual choice but encompasses everything in a complex network-entanglement, where the creating force is not Will but Process, any emphasis of personal choice will be considered narcissistic or naïve. A natural way out of this predicament is to mimic the larger model onto the personal; Letting your own personal constituency change alongside the rest of the process; to match. Or even, can you afford not to let it, on reasons of branding? (attempting to trap design as part of the arts). If it doesn't fit, should you make it?

To me, the power of the zeitgeist¹³ is so strong that going against it takes a lot of effort. Part of me obviously agrees with the consensus because it also manifests everywhere in the work. Part of me don't because, of reasons of spite, scepticism, doubt and even shame, I refuse to accept its influence. That is, at least, not without friction.

All facets of the congregation process itself is an issue of intense philosophical, historical, artistic, theological, and scientific inquiry. Stuart Kauffman has a recent [2008] biologic-economical interpretation¹⁴ of this evolutionary process called *the adjacent possible*. The theory of the adjacent possible attempts to capture an evolutionary phenomenon where an outcome

¹³ Meaning how I envision the fluid constituency of congregations, which often manifests emotionally

¹⁴ Kauffman, S. (2010). *Reinventing the sacred*. Basic Books

¹⁵ When Adam and Eve became (double) sapient by learning good from evil, their shame turned to their short extension as creatures in the present in relationship to their future together with their responsibility for the continuation of the species. Shame attempts to cover the ambiguous relationship to the paradox emerging between the short extension in lifespan in comparison with the greater extension in thought as the shorter attempts to accompany the greater. Harold Bloom would put the issue like this: any achievement in individuation is always accompanied with a sense of shame.

of a process is not intrinsic to any agency or possibility by any sole predecessor but manifests only in the combinatory effect in the meeting (adjacency) of previously unrelated processes of evolution and development. Two causes, being theoretical or biological, can combined, create a singular effect unrelated to any of them. Thus, it attempts to solve the problem of speciation by natural selection. Also, it avoids the allure of origins, i.e. in eliminating the paradox of the Expulsion¹⁵ by explaining that the intricate complexity of any emergent congregate is impossible to be mapped accurately by any scientific measure or logic inference, in such sense that finding any place or period of origin is rendered a meaningless effort. It is also anti-atomistic; not even by a total knowledge of every atom in the universe can you calculate the outcome of the adjacent possibilities. Kauffman gives the process itself enough power to start "Reinventing the Sacred" (title of the book); The main thesis of the book is that the interwoven complexity of both the biosphere

and the Technosphere cannot be reduced to any first mover, i.e. non-reductionistic, and because of this the Galilean spell is broken. Because the Galilean Spell is broken, religion and spirituality are back in the game. The Galilean spell is the belief that the nature of the cosmos can reveal itself to us through the discoveries of natural laws. Kauffman argues that the spell is broken, and have been for a quite a while, though in secret in most scientific communities. The radical core is the book's breaking of this silence, which comes with quite high stakes for "a child of the enlightenment". The actual science underlying the thesis is the discovery of *auto-catalytic sets* in complex information networks. This discovery is obviously believed to be powerful enough to muster the courage to speak against the paradigm and be taken seriously at the same time. Something is auto catalytic when the outcome of a process is a needed requirement for the process itself to happen. The *adjacent possible* describe outcomes of evolution and development that is impossible to predict and is impossible to be reduced to physics. Apart from the book's presentation of excellent arguments that go against the belief that truth can be discovered by reductionistic scientific inquiry, the book also features in its concluding chapters, a possible departure for an aesthetical revival in tandem with *religious feeling*.¹⁶ This is the reason for why the concepts of emergent auto-catalytic sets and the *adjacent possible* are important tools to use when thinking about the dream of artistic research; 'artistic research' embodies the hope that we eventually can design a culture that sustains us (meta-sic). Reductionistic science is abandoning its hold on ultimate truth, or its' ability to track causality to its first mover, because of the unfathomable, or infinite, complexity of the ontogeny of physical manifestations and calls for art and religion to console the ambiguity of existence.

The phenomenon of *skap*, which at the same time is a piece of furniture, a verb, a noun, and a suffix, which manifests its phenomenon through consensual developments - or if you will: an emergence of forms by historical adjacent possibilities - has been unnoticed as an issue that can contribute to the

¹⁶ Kierkegaard's quote where the religious is the only force that can rescue the aesthetic with its combat against the ethical speak to the role of conviction. Later we will also learn that Paul Tillich has something important to say in this regard.

problematica of culture. [problem + erotica]. I now think cabinets are a potential distillate of our consensual relationship between body and mind. As each emergent addition or subtraction, will reconfigure the propriety of any former epistemological coherent form, i.e. its consensual congregation, the professional field of design has emerged as a consequence; Because we demand consistency/causality, either consciously or sub-consciously, we constantly need to reconfigure this *manifest* to match it with the ever-changing properties of our evolving culture [projection].

I even think it is reasonable to think of cabinets as a distillate, or emergent manifestation, of the consensual image of the relationship between the inner and the outer (in every possible interpretation of it). However, through cabinets' simple symbolical and literal entrapment of this content/container-issue, what does it mean, culturally emergent, that our cabinets today look like any other cabinet today; like simple boxes that pretends to be part of the wall?

This is exactly where Kauffman's concepts enter the arts; he believes there is sufficient force in the concept of adjacent possibility and the discovery of auto-catalytic sets to combat this dead end.

What insights can be gained by extending the ideas of auto catalytic sets and the adjacent possible as a thought experiment on our own field of research? (which in essence is what Kauffman invites us to do). Because of the European arts' particular standing in this regard, due to its position as a secular substitute for its religious heritage [Gell, 1982], it is on behest of the dangerous proposal of merging science and religion that theology also returns. Theology of design.

One major part of the designers' role in society, is to detect emerging phenomena and translate these to their consensual platforms of presentation. Some designers are more aware of this than others, but retrospectively,

¹⁷ Remembering the etymology of *skap*, (i.e. viten-skap; Wissenschaft; science; know-ship) an English linguistic equivalent to the process of designing and building one would be to *ship* a *ship* that is consistently *shipped* into the *ship* it is *shipped* as and is quite a lot to get your head around. And to me it mimics cosmogonic mythologies where chaos is ordered or informed by the *Word*. The basis of many cosmogonic myths is auto catalytic, in some sense. Or singular. Can such an invention be speculated into being and yet hold its sanctity?

¹⁶ Artistic autonomy as a perquisite for critique to happen is not applicable to design in general, because of its integration of the client, often at odds with the designers' own preferences. In later chapters in this text, it will also relate the client to the medieval patron and its role in medieval polychromy and the late medieval abandonment of it.

all will either conform to the emergent phenomena or not, again either conscious or un-conscious to it. By this simple comparison the idea of the emergent properties of culture can be seen as a negotiation of friction and non-friction to the congregating process. The interplay of frictions might even yield adjacent possible outcomes, non-inherent to any of the interplaying elements. Being in tune with, or in friction, to the “game”, as a designer’s working mode, are also part of the dynamic that might yield an adjacent possible. By lending language form the title of Kauffman’s book, the unpredictable *adjacent possible*, and the awe-inspiring quality of auto-catalytic sets, is the foundation upon which we can start reinventing the sacred, simply because it is impossible to predict by any scientific measure. However, we also must inquire: is it the *adjacent possible* itself that is scared, or is it the dynamic that produce it? Is it the auto-catalytic sets, or is it its emergence? Do the sacred emerge as a category because it is scientifically unpredictable? If something is sacred, what about sacrilege? Is being in tune sacred, and being in friction sacrilegious? Or vice versa? These are not rhetorical questions, because in the process of reinventing a new world view of the sacred, who are the pious, and how will opposition be defined? Perhaps by councils of magnanimity?

Kauffman expects this form of critique in the last chapter of his book, with a call for precisely magnanimity, circumventing his main error; making use of the power of the unpredictable and scientifically incomprehensible to reinvent [plan/design] the sacred; a consensual, communal, worldwide invention of the sacred. This would at first sit well with artistic research as traction towards alternative forms of knowledge, but shouldn’t. The belief in artistic research as a future provider of knowledge alternative to science, will easily tap into the careful optimism and “humility” of Kauffman’s last chapters. However, that something is incomprehensible from the point of view of hard science does not necessarily make it a source for the sacred. The reason to take this seriously is because of the easily available arguments for the broken status of *the Galilean spell*. The proposal from the ending chapters of Kauffman’s book, that scientific reductionism is inadequate to make the universe understandable and, therefore, the scientific and religious communities should unite, reveals a disclosure of some kind of scientific conspiracy, that its goal *was* to overthrow the world of religion-cum-superstition, but now regrets and wants to be friends. The same religiosity is found in the idiom “where science stops, art takes over”. The title of the book also infers that the sacred was invented to begin with¹⁷, which of course it may be, but the speculative version of re-invention is only asking for an iteration of an historically effective illusion.

In Kauffman, the sacred potential of the adjacent possible is dependent on the congregation of auto-catalytic sets of such complexity that they self-organise a form; they become

auto-catalytic when they inform their own form - when they start “metabolizing”. This happens biologically of course, which still is a great mystery, systematically and technically in Kauffman’s research, and even in culture; the hermetical quality of some ornaments, akin to palindromes and magical squares, as I propose, might give them a significant aesthetical value alongside the concept of auto-catalytic sets. Douglas R. Hofstadter investigates a similar thesis, or reports on a similar discovery in his *Gödel, Escher, Bach - An Eternal Golden Braid*, which he calls *strange loops*, perceived by many as the basis upon which to discover artificial intelligence. For me it is important to discern between them, the relevance of their forms as given or discovered. Both Kauffman, Hofstadter and Gödel must attribute their science to discoveries, but Escher and Bach do not have too, they are in a position to claim that their forms were given, found, or happened upon, in any configuration. This difference in position is a clue to the kind of religiosity that the Arts have conquered, or inherited, a position it may yet lose. The road towards this loss may go through autocatalytic sets and an embrace of emergent adjacent possibilities, in a continued inflation of the concept of the Process, because it makes it evident that it is not dependent on people.

Autocatalysis is scientifically proven, to such an extent that it is proposed that scientific creation of life is predicted to be achieved in the near future. The adjacent possible is a theory of evolution which can’t be predicted because we would need to know everything. Instead, we can try to discern its form! From a designer’s perspective, perhaps since the death of the Author, we have tried to immerse or absolve (even assume, see p. 72, *assumpt*) ourselves in our processes and surrender to the emergent properties of its catalysis. The goal has been to facilitate unpredictable outcomes, by attempting to place our subjectivity outside the place of events, where catharsis justify the displacement, to trust in the process, so to speak. This is of course the gold standard, but I truly mean to describe this as a semi-religious experience: by allowing ourselves to be truly amazed by the immersive absolution, generate a feeling that the emergent phenomenon is

¹⁸ Bandlien, C.B. (01.04.2020). *Kulturproblemet*. Kunstkritikk. <https://kunstkritikk.no/kulturproblemet/>

something more than only our own internal processes, that we can “channel” something, hopefully universal, avoiding the trap of cultural bias. From Kauffman’s side, this can be seen as a form of search for the sacred, or perhaps even a worship. I believe we, designers relating to architecture, are about to abandon this practice, because of the sense that it feels poisonous. It feels poisonous because of our inability to discern whether or not it is sacred, sacrilegious, just superstitious, or even a conformation bias of a different sort. I propose we need to discuss theology, not utility. I say this because of the artistic re-emergence of magical tendencies and mythical inclinations. I too can feel it at the door, but why should I invite it in? Because it is useful? Powerful?

We do not find anything in Kauffman’s concepts that go *beyond* the current attempts of defining the complexity of culture’s double and contradicting meanings; *custom* versus *the cultivated*.¹⁸ At first, however, the powerful concept of the adjacent possible attempts to conflate both categories of custom and cultivation in a combinatorial system where both are dependent upon the other. It renders the categories superficial, however, it might yet be helpful. But contrary to the hopes of the author, it will not change the dynamics of its dichotomy. One is con-sensual, while the other is just sensual, and which one is which, between custom and cultivation, is both interdependent and dependent on our sense of meaning. Consider this: congregations, forms, and manifestations, can be seen to emerge from the interplay of positions being in tune and in friction to the congregating process, as an evolving consensus taking shape. This interplay may even produce an adjacent possible outcome, that hitherto was non-possible. So, regarding custom vs. the cultivated, the dialectics itself between them, between friction and non-friction to the congregating process, is itself a cultivating custom! Conversely, we can further assume that opposition to the emergent phenomenon will always be subsumed by any eventual autocatalysis, as an important



constituent part of the set, information to its form, and that whatever the outcome is, independent on the particular interplay, can always be attributed to the sacred, where it eventually becomes an historical problem. So, as long as the set thrives, we are good, but the moment it stalls it loses its sacred potential, with retroactive effect. Herein lies the problem; Re-inventing the sacred, compared to discovering or finding it, is a logical necessity to prevent the prospect of stalled autocatalysis, which would un-consecrate its sanctity. Behold, not only re-invented once, but necessarily continually tending to the sacred. Thus, investing in the sacred re-inventions, harvesting and tending their growth, does not speak for the sacred, but rather to a desire to mimic the idea. Mimicking the sanctity of inventions is equivalent to re-inventing the sacred; a variant of idol-worship that mistakes the representation from what it represents.

Some force of the human condition is always capable of placing one system in a larger meta-system. Perhaps a difference between things that *adds up* in itself, whether those are strange loops, autocatalytic sets, palindromes, ornaments, prose, or poetry is whether or not the “add” conflates, inflates, or deflates its ontogeny; whether or not the sum is greater or smaller than its parts. The good conflate, the bad deflate and the ugly inflate?¹⁹ This is an ornamental hypothesis that homes in on the nature of the Ouroboros: a self-sustained, metabolizing paradox. Some self-metabolizing paradoxes are more paradoxical than others and it is the task of the ornamental desire to query each occurrence’s validity and consistency. A palindrome speaks to the magic of language as auto-catalysis speak to the magic of complex information networks²⁰, mistaking those for the sacred is idolatrous. This magic is demonstrated and intercepted by an aesthetical epistemology, and the world is filled with wonder once you open that eye. From the ending chapter “God and Reinventing the Sacred”:

We can only understand the biosphere, economic, and culture retroactively, from a historical perspective. Yet we must live our lives forward,

into that which is only partially knowable. Then since reason truly is an insufficient guide, we truly must reunite our humanity. And if so, we truly need to reinvent the sacred for ourselves to guide our lives, based on the ultimate values we come to choose. At least, we must be fully responsible for ourselves, our lives, our actions, our values, our civilizations, the global civilization.

When paired with the word *knowledge*, what *artistic* should mean in this context differently than *scientific* (which is objective at its best and democratic at its worst) is that artistic claims must be *assumed*²¹ by the personal, which is the autonomous requirement for critique. So far so good. Then, what we further are tasked demonstrate, is to treat our own artistic assumptions as illusory: between culture’s contradicting double standards, custom and cultivation, the *artistic* gets already pre-folded into the sanctity of the proposed beneficial outcome, by retroactive negotiation, rendering *artistic* conviction arbitrary without any claims on knowledge and outside any critique, transferring autonomy from the *artistic* to the critic.

¹⁹ Even though the title of the movie by Sergio Leone refer to the three main characters, all three engage in good, bad, and ugly deeds. What I am struggling with is whether or not it is good, bad, or ugly, that a self-sustained paradox conflates, deflates, or inflates.

²⁰ It should be equally simple to attribute what coherently interrelated ornaments speak to, but it isn’t.

²¹ To arrogate, take upon oneself, adopt.

The abandonment of the subject/object dichotomy obviously must happen simultaneously with the breaking of the Galilean spell; the aesthetico-epistemic operators²² of its consequence reveals a zero point, obviously: the two are linked by Enlightenment ideals! The perception of the zero point is why Kauffman, including many others, turn to “the sacred”. The process of breaking the Galilean spell along with the problem of subjectivity and objectivity has been a tacit mode of post-modern art and design and it is obvious to me that Kauffman now is able to articulate something that was considered impossible without losing your credibility; reinventing the sacred on the basis of discovered and perceived autocatalysis, i.e., there is something wrong with our notions of entropy and causality. As Kauffman himself states, it is not the refutation of scientific reductionism and the breaking of the Galilean spell that is problematic, it is the *reinvention* of the sacred. He is also aware of the trepidation that in the eyes of religion, as a self-proclaimed child of the Enlightenment, he will always be seen as an adolescent. Perhaps a clever move, as it is where the book is open for critique, but it depends on what kind of religiosity he is met by. Paul Tillich in *Theology of Culture* (1959) begins where Kauffman ends. From the chapter “Basic considerations”:

“Religion is not a special function of man’s spiritual life, but the dimension of depth in all of its functions. The assertion has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of religion, and it needs comment on each of the terms used. Religion is not a function of the human spirit! History tells us the story of how religion goes from one spiritual function to the other to find a home, and is either rejected or swallowed by them. Religion comes to the moral function and knocks at its door, certain that it will be received. Is not the ethical the nearest relative of the religious? How could it be rejected? Indeed, it is not rejected; it is taken in. But it is taken in as a ‘poor relative’ and asked to earn its place in the moral realm by serving morality. It is admitted as long as it helps to create good citizens, good husbands and children, good employees, officials, and soldiers. But the moment in which religion makes a claim of its own it is either silenced or thrown out as superfluous or dangerous for morals.

So religion must look around for another function of man’s spiritual life, and is attracted by the cognitive function. Religion as a special way of knowledge, as mythological imagination or as mystical intuition – this seems to give a home to religion. Again religion is admitted, but as a subordinate to pure knowledge, and only for a brief time. Pure knowledge, strengthened by the tremendous success of its scientific work, soon recants its half-hearted acceptance of religion and declares that religion has nothing to do whatsoever with knowledge.

Once more religion is without a home within man’s spiritual

²² Schwab, M. (2018) *Introduction*. M.Schwab (Ed.), *Transpositions: Aesthetico-epistemic operators in artistic research*. DOI: 10.11116/9789461662538. ch00 Leuven University Press

life. It looks around for another spiritual function to join. And it finds one, namely, the aesthetic function. Why not try to find a place within the artistic creativity of man? Religion asks itself, through the mouths of the philosophers of religion. And the artistic realm answers, through the mouths of many artists, past and present, with an enthusiastic affirmative, and invites religion not only to join but also to acknowledge that art is religion. But now religion hesitates. Does not art express reality, while religion transforms reality? Is there not an element of unreality even in the greatest works of art? Religion remembers that it has old relations to the moral and the cognitive realm, to the good and to the true, and it resists the temptation to dissolve itself into art.

But now where shall religion turn? The whole field of man’s spiritual life is taken, and no section of it is ready to give religion an adequate place. So religion turns to something that accompanies every activity of man and every function of man’s spiritual life. We call it feeling. Religion is a feeling: this seems to be the end of the wanderings of religion, and this end is strongly acclaimed by all those who want to have the realms of knowledge and morals free from any religious interference. Religion, if banished to the realm of mere feeling, has ceased to be dangerous for any rational and practical human enterprise. But, we must add, it also has lost its seriousness, its truth, and its ultimate meaning. In the atmosphere of mere subjectivity of feeling without a definite object of emotion, without an ultimate content, religion dies. This also is not the answer to the question of religion as an aspect of the human spirit.”

Part 1 THE RE-INVENTION OF THE SACRED IS A RE-TURN TO STYLE

34

The abandonment of the subjective/objective dichotomy in favour of the communal, place the Evergreen question on “white forms of knowledge” and trends in-suit to de-colonize the arts and academia, in an interesting light, because it might be the same tendency that drive both; a desire of reviving an aesthetical epistemology. I think this desire is equally driven by a state of being tired of doubting everything, especially your own *senses*, because there is a sense of meaning to be found in the combat between the sensual and the con-sensual. Reinventing the sacred and reviving or reanimating an aesthetical epistemology are two sides of the same coin but will fail again if it engulfed by consensus opinion²³. I.e., style.

From this perspective, various manifestations of the same problem seem to be unfolding from the same belief that history somewhere took a wrong turn. Perhaps it did with the “scientific revolution: Copernicus’ heliocentrism (1543), Galileo’s discovery of sunspots (1612), Newton’s law of universal gravitation (1687), or with Renaissance humanism (1400-1650)? Or with political revolution: The American Revolution (1776), the French Revolution (1789), or the Russian Revolution (1917)? Or, perhaps, an artistic revolution: Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) or Gropius’s Bauhaus (1919)?”²⁴. One party search for new ground by surrendering to the incalculable nature of the universe, while another search for the universe by embracing it through the senses (e.g. flat-earthers). One enfolds, while the other conflate, in the pressure between the sensual and the con-sensual?

Nevertheless, any aesthetical attempt “to fashion an alternative religious vision that promotes a global ethic of life”²⁵ must first surpass the reason of Kierkegaard: you cannot accept your aesthetical perception if you don’t allow every aspect of it to the surface, not free floating, but securely tethered to a void beneath. If not, the lingering question, from

²³ Barth, T. & Blikstad, B.J. (2021) *Crabwise #05. Crabwise #01-06*. 6th June, KHiO. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmliui/handle/11250/2759139>. - Show that assumption and opinion cannot be conflated

²⁴ Taylor, M.C. (2009) *After God*. The University of Chicago Press

²⁵ *ibid*

a position of habitation and adaptability is: who shall sacrifice their *now* for the promised future of the communal? This is the same ethical contradiction that speculative design is pointing to²⁶, similar to the problem of magnanimity. The way towards understanding it is lifelong and personal. Interestingly, both Harold Bloom and Robin Diangelo agrees on it being lifelong and personal, but they differ on how articulation and implementation are linked. Bloom believes in the autonomy of the aesthetic, only achievable in solitude and concentration, Diangelo believes we first must establish an environment for the new aesthetical to flourish, to ethically nurture its growth. Bloom meets Kierkegaard head on by accepting the risk of the combat and seeing the illusion, i.e., a vote for friction/tension. Diangelo vote for communal accord, by hoping a magnanimous consensus can provide a productive platform. - The neoliberal buzzword is transparency.

Kierkegaard’s entanglement of the aesthetical, ethical, and religious in the knot of magnanimity is Gordian, or hermetical. However, like some ornaments seem autocatalytic and self-metabolizing, it does not mean they are independent and self-sustainable. Ecosystems are not hermetically sealed from their surroundings but need the appropriate environment to sustain themselves. That they occur might be magical but keeping them is not. When they need policing, they have obviously stopped being auto-catalytic. The Phrygians of Gordium accepted the knot as the end of a certain line of inquiry, as Harold Bloom does; a knot where attempts can be focused, Robin Diangelo is of Great Macedonian temper.

I would like to make a bridge from Stuart Kauffman’s *Reinventing the Sacred* to Mark C. Taylor’s *After God*, which have just been cited, with another quote from *The Theology of Culture* by Paul Tillich, 1959. This bridges Part 1 with Part 2.

In two developments Western humanity has overcome its age-old bondage under the “powers”: those half religious-half-magical, half divine-half demonic, half superhuman-half subhuman,

²⁶ Critical design uses the language of commercial design to reveal its inherent aporia. Speculative design has abandoned its ability to make any aesthetico-epistemic claims on its own. Through Kierkegaard’s quote this could be attributed to the consensual notion that there no longer exists a force that can help aesthetics in its combat with the ethical. That politics is all that is left. After speculative design, come ‘design for debate.’ (Dunne & Raby)

²⁷ The ontological way is described as the way of overcoming estrangement; The cosmological way is the way of meeting a stranger. I propose that speculative design could be seen as overcoming estrangement, and that critical design could be seen as meeting a stranger. I think everyone knows what this stranger is, simply put; the sense of meaning, or the yearning for it. In Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian tradition termed the logos.

half abstract-half concrete beings who are the genuine material of the mythos. These powers were conquered religiously by their subjection to one of them, the god of the prophets of Israel: his quality as the god of justice enabled him to become the universal God. The “powers” were conquered philosophically by their subjection to a principle more real than all of them; its quality as embracing all qualities enabled it to become the universal principle. In this process the “powers” lost their sacred character and with it their hold on human consciousness. [...] But the “powers” although subjected and transformed, were not extinguished. They could return and establish a reign of superstition and fear; even the absolute God can become one power beside others, perhaps the highest, but not the absolute. It is one of the tasks of the philosophy of religion to protect religion as well as the scientific interpretation of reality against the return of the “powers” who threaten both at the same time.

Elsewhere, Tillich distinguish between the two ways of approaching God/the sacred, (even though the sacred and God are theologically very different, yet both point to each other) which accurately describe the two current approaches of reviving the aesthetical; “the way of overcoming estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger.”²⁷ From Kierkegaard, and for artists that recognize aesthetics’ combat with the ethical, as an existential problem larger than it is political, they are

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two propositions on how people have utilized the force of the religious as their ally in this combat. To both propositions, this ally provides a direction out from the Void, or put in modern activist-terms; Truth may be in the Void but the direction out from it is at least Real.

As soon as one says anything about religion, one is questioned from two sides, Some Christian theologians will ask whether religion is here considered as a creative element of the human spirit rather than as a gift of divine revelation. If one replies that religion is an aspect of man's spiritual life, they will turn away. Then secular scientist will ask whether religion is to be considered a lasting quality of the human spirit instead of an effect of changing psychological and sociological conditions. And if one answers that religion is a necessary aspect of man's spiritual life, they will turn away like the theologians, but in an opposite direction.

This situation shows an almost schizophrenic split in our collective consciousness, a split which threatens our spiritual freedom by driving the contemporary mind into irrational and compulsive affirmations or negations of religion. And there is as much compulsive reaction to religion on the scientific side as there is on the religious side.²⁸

A possible outcome, which I feel is a feeling many possess, is that reason itself is an aesthetical perception and therefore subjective. Is it true that belief systems regulate emotions? There is a slim hope that the arts can survive the accompanying forces to a re-invention of the sacred, that of taste and style. National institutions of art must take the proposition of post-art very seriously.²⁹

²⁸ Tillich, P. (1959) *The Theology of Culture*.

²⁹ The best critique on Kauffman's book I can think of is to compare his prospect of the magnanimous global civilisation and the commission behind a carved retable (1492), which we will learn about in Part 4.



Part 2



The Presentation of the Pommeranian Art Cabinet (1617) Anton Mozart (CC)

Part 2 AMBIGUOUS BIGOTRY/ 40 HIPPOPOTAMUS

	MONISTIC (BOTH / AND)	DUALISTIC (EITHER / OR)	COMPLEX (NEITHER / NOR)
LOCUS OF THE REAL	Present Immanent	Absent Trancendent	Neither absent nor present Neither transcendent nor immanent
RELATION OF IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE	Identity-without-difference negation epiphenomenal	Identity-in-opposition-to-difference Affirmation-by-negation	Identity-in-difference/ difference-in-identity Affirmation of affirmation and negotiation
SOURCE OF ORDER	Implicit Unfolds gradually	External Imposed from without	Emergent Spontaneous self-organiation
STATUS OF TIME AND HISTORY	Archaeoteological process	Struggle between closed systems	Interplay of open systems
RELATION OF SELF TO WORLD	Primordially unified At home in the universe	Primordially divided Estranged from the world as it is	Nodular Infinite restlessness
POSSIBILITY OF REDEMPTION	Relaized exchatology Always already redeemed(actual)	Apocalyptic eschatology Redemption certain but in the future (possible)	Emergent creativity (virtual)

Personally, I will probably always be in opposition to accept the emergent properties of an interdependent friction-play as enough to explain my position in the world (sic). Nevertheless, I recognize the necessity of the contention; it will be very bad if everyone is in tune with the emerging phenomena - It will be a different version of very bad if everyone is in opposition to it.

The logic of either/or leads to closed systems that make negotiations difficult and compromise often impossible. The situation can become perilous when equally self-certain and uncompromising closed systems encounter each other. Though appearing to be radically different, these polar or binary opposites are actually mirror images of each other. The structure of both systems is the same but the signs are reversed: what is positive in one is negative in the other and vice versa. Both sides subscribe to a vision of history as the tale of struggle with the evil Other. As long as the forces of evil – however they are conceived – are not vanquished, things are not as they ought to be. If the real is not fully present here and now, it must be affirmed by negating what currently exists. Individuals and communities find meaning and purpose by participating in the struggle to destroy the darkness of the present age so that the light of a new world order can dawn.

The eschaton might be delayed but for true believers there is no doubt it will arrive.

This quote from 2007 is an attempt to describe one of the reasons we should train ourselves to move away from dualistic thinking systems. I read it in tandem with one of the main tropes of artistic research; to bypass the problem altogether, of aesthetics' combat with the ethical, by Ouroboric con-, de-, or inflation (again unsure which one). The above quote is written by Mark C. Taylor, the friend who wrote Jacques Derrida's obituary, and taken from his book *After God*. In it, Taylor describes the need for a third religious schema on the basis of "if the changes now occurring are, indeed, radical, this strategy [ed., returning to the past for guidance] is doomed to failure. Old maps cannot provide guidance for new territories."

Within this I find the opportunity to articulate a problem I previously wasn't able to, and it starts with the categorization of *Homo s. sapiens*. The need for two s's to express the distinction between our own subspecies from other subspecies of the genus *Homo sapiens*, has a history related to discovery. At different times in the history of palaeontology and anthropology various species have been classified as *H. sapiens*, e.g., *H. s. neanderthalensis*, which later lost

its sapiens. Propper classification is of course important because it carries meaning. Names and titles are similarly important because we want them to reflect accurately. Gender neutral job titles and pronouns too, depart from the same desire. That *H. neanderthalensis* used to have a designated s and the fact that taxonomic practise subdivides a species only when there is evidence of two or more distinct subgroups, (which *H. sapiens* disputedly got with the 1997 discovery and naming of *H. s. idàltu*) expresses two things: First, it is a prediction of what the taxonomic rules predict, on reasons of technical consistency, its science, and secondly, how big the differences actually are.³⁰ The names should reflect this. *Sapiens* is Latin for wise and is usually taken to mean self-aware or self-conscious when grouped with the genus *Homo*. In this environment the extra designated s could be interpreted to mean extra wise or extra self-aware; meta-self-aware, perhaps. Compared to our elfin relatives and predecessors, something must account for our exceptionalism. The additional s covers the evidence of an historical evolutionary leap; Self-named.

If the belief in a new evolutionary leap by *Homo s. sapiens* will result in *Homo s. s. sapiens*, meaning perhaps *neo-meta-self-aware* we are beginning to come close to the

virtual plane of the contemporary western arts. The desire for authenticity within the virtual is the problem of our time, elevated by the unprecedented connectivity of our digital lives, and the real question is whether or not it is possible to *inhabit* the virtual, to discover authenticity and real inspiration that yield outcomes that prove the value of the effort (stuff that works), or if the position always will be caught up in a meta-narrative. The burden of proof will lie with aesthetics [(n)either sensual (n)or con-sensual]. Above is a table from Taylor's book which describe the proposed third religious schema in comparison with historical

³⁰ Stanford University by Robert Saplosky (March 1, 2011) *Introduction to Behavioural Biology* [Video]. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN-nlGh9g6fA&list=PL848F2368C90DDC3D.34:56-37:02> "The challenge [...] is recognizing there is nothing fancy about us. [...] Some of the time we are just a plain old off-the-rack animal. The second challenge is going to be circumstances where we appear to be just like everybody else, all the other organisms out there, but we do something very different with the similarity". Leading from a punch line on the Wellesley effect (menstruating cycles): "Oh, when we roomed together in the summer, I had her synchronized by the first of august!"

schemata. (ancient, modern, and future) One small aesthetical proof is already present within this table. And it is the *n* of the *complex* schema which conflate the either/or of the *dualistic* schema in *meta-ness*. The expressed belief of the author is that his analysis of historical religious schemata, which are rigorous, and the proposal for a new, the complex schema, is not to be seen as a development, but more as a perquisite platform from where the *monistic* and *dualistic* could have emerged. The inherent agency of this *n-ornamentation* is quite powerful, on reasons of it being both timely and elegant. However, we can question the singular of the *complex*, as it by name, is forever related to what it pretends to conflate; it names one of its offspring with its own name. Conversely, the lineage between the two needs to be addressed, as Taylor does with the platform, or substructure analogy, but we are left with lingering questions. The question of necessity and causality of the propriety to conflate the monistic and dualistic schemata in a complex layer, is related to magnanimity in the sense of it being a virtue or an illusion. With the illusion you lose all agency, while thinking you are virtuous might be a lie. These designations are both virtual concepts, however, polarity provide direction regardless. As Adorno is to Heidegger, Taylor wants to bring polarity and direction back into an ever-inflating churning Void -- critical theory must produce more theory, as a safety measure.

As I'm primarily interested in evaluating the schema by attempting to prove it personally by art working, I arrive at an impasse. Can the origin and agency of aesthetical considerations or choices be altogether non-directional? Can we be autonomously ambiguous? What happens to critique if we adhere to total ambiguity? It should be obvious that the arts have, at least in my lifetime, attempted to answer similar questions by experimentation.

However, answers to these questions are dependent on your artistic practise relationship to the virtual.³¹ As my practice have a strictly analogous side by woodcarving and cabinetry, where ambiguity is immediately cancelled out by e.g. safety considerations or constructional properties, the other side of making text and

documents don't share the same immediate connection to the physical world. This could open a critique of Dunne and Raby's *speculative design* as an invitation to deconstruct the personal as it accidentally establishes an unintended hierarchy; the only way you can facilitate the reading of objects with functional ambiguity is to deploy *monistic workmanship* as a subordinate factor working for the complex. If both are done by the same individual, each schema is tainted with a lie, and you decompose yourself in the process, mirroring the schizophrenic split in our collective consciousness [Tillich]. Only with proficiency can you penetrate the actual and operate in the virtual in any meaningful way. The other way around is absurd. You can dispute it, but the only way you can try it out is to build you own workshop. In my book that is exactly what Taylor haven't done.

A place to perhaps start an aesthetical conversation, between theory and practice from an artistic research point of view is by elevating small thoughts and insist on their importance: the *n* that conflate the *either* and the *or*, is it a coincidence? Is it deliberate? A little poetic, maybe? Is it a lovechild? Thought like these, together with the conflation itself, in my book reveal evidence of an ornamental drive and the reality of an aesthetical epistemology. I think rather the complex schemata works as a speculative holding pattern, which still might be useful, because transit is always ambiguous, while arrival is definite. The complex religious schema is an aesthetical holding pattern speculatively circumventing categorical thinking. A proper return to the Ouroboros would be better, but the word speculative has here a utilitarian purpose. In effect it cements the bond between art and politics by asking for a speculative religion, a utilitarian religion; politically correct arts.

³¹ Halland, I. (2019). Beholder: Or the unthought's negation: An essay on Hanne Hestvold's sculptures. *Sun and Spring in January - Next generation in Norwegian contemporary art*. Astrup Fearnley Museum.

Congregations form quicker without friction. Going against the grain, to create one that is divergent from how the emergent constituents would congregate themselves through the consensus, becomes for a Norwegian mind, because of the word *skap*, a critical philosophical exercise. It is a worry that friction is offensive and somewhere along these lines I have started to *re-invent* a trickster deity.

Being irritated by a newspaper I was reading at the age seventeen, I told to my mother that I was convinced that there existed, in a sort of intermediary stage, somewhere between and behind the fabrics of existence, a kind of gnome that warps and changes the outcomes of people's intentions and actions, just in spite. I have finally, 22 years later, come up with a name for this gnome, I will call hir the *Ambigot* and ze sings my favourite pop song:

*I'm not a woman
I'm not a man
I am something that you'll never understand*

*I'll never beat you
I'll never lie
And if you're evil I'll forgive you by and by*

*'Cause you, I would die 4 U, yeah
Darling if you want me to
You, I would die 4 U*

*I'm not your lover
I'm not your friend
I am something that you'll never comprehend*

*No need to worry
No need to cry
I'm your messiah and you're the reason why*

*'Cause you, I would die 4 U, yeah
Darling if you want me to
You, I would die 4 U*



³² Elam, M. 1999. Living dangerously with Bruno Latour. *Sage Journals*. 16(4) 1-24 <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632769922050692>

³³ In mythological terms one would say that the garden of Eden is surrounded by a wall made by a paradoxical union of opposites

The Curious Peacock Cabinet would have a Norwegian translation to *Påfuglskap*, but as previously explained by etymology, I don't think I have made one of those. Similar to the concept of the adjacent possible, I think I have made *ambiguous bigotry*. A concept that started to form in my mind when reading Bruno Latour's essay "Crisis" during the making of the Dawkins-Kardashian stela, and a critique called "Living dangerously with Bruno Latour"³². A mythological equivalent to ambiguous bigotry is the hermaphrodite as both are constituent congregates of opposites, or a paradoxical union³³ of such. But ambiguous bigotry is also a form of a practical joke in the flavour of leprechauns, which will never reveal itself, as it will always be something else, always elusive, always the opposite. Ambigot is at work when attempting to fill or plaster the gaps.

A common romanticism between artists, is that some have the ability to get things just right. The simplest expression of it happens in layout and composition. Conversely, every person experience this through doubt, by the inability to rediscover that first 'perfection', now lost in analysis. That is also the work of Ambigot, because even if you were to rediscover the precise composition, you will never come to peace with it. It is tainted, but not necessarily forever. Ambigot can attach and release himself.

When designing *skap*, each input reconfigures both the map and the terrain, so that the route the project takes is continuously negotiated. The attempt of documenting this process is surprisingly difficult. Nevertheless, I think it is important to try for several reasons. When my map and my terrain are interconnected and changes with the entries I make, that each 'entry' have a reciprocal agency, I can assume that the display of the finished work too, as is expected with such objects, have a similar kind of agency. The desire to retrace in writing is a combat against the Ambigot. Obviously, I will fail completely, but can comfort myself that my interest lies with the experience that the work seems to manifest itself by the attempt. That I learn stuff. Learning I was wrong, learning I can change.

The project of reflection and documentation becomes a sort of narrative that auto-ornaments the first thinking and making part of the project, with scholarly attributes, at the edge of what I am capable of articulating. In this regard I must admit that I often combat the relevance of Nietzsche's "we find words only for what is dead in our hearts, so that it is always a form of contempt in our act of speaking". So ambiguous are my combat, that my first attempt of reflecting in words, at KHIO Research Week 2019, on the until then "silent" process of making the

Curious Peacock Cabinet, drawn from the unfinished work on the documentation on the Dawkins-Kardashian Stela, became a conscious exercise in ambiguous meta-ness-talk: If Billy Meier is the last reincarnation in a long line of prophets, the last two being Jesus of Nazareth and Mohammed, and I have recently haloed Richard Dawkins as the patron saint of the arts, an upgraded version of the gnostic ignorant demiurge, the Ptah 2000, then I'm the reincarnation of Harold Bloom's critique of Foucault; because I no longer know if I'm being ironic or not.

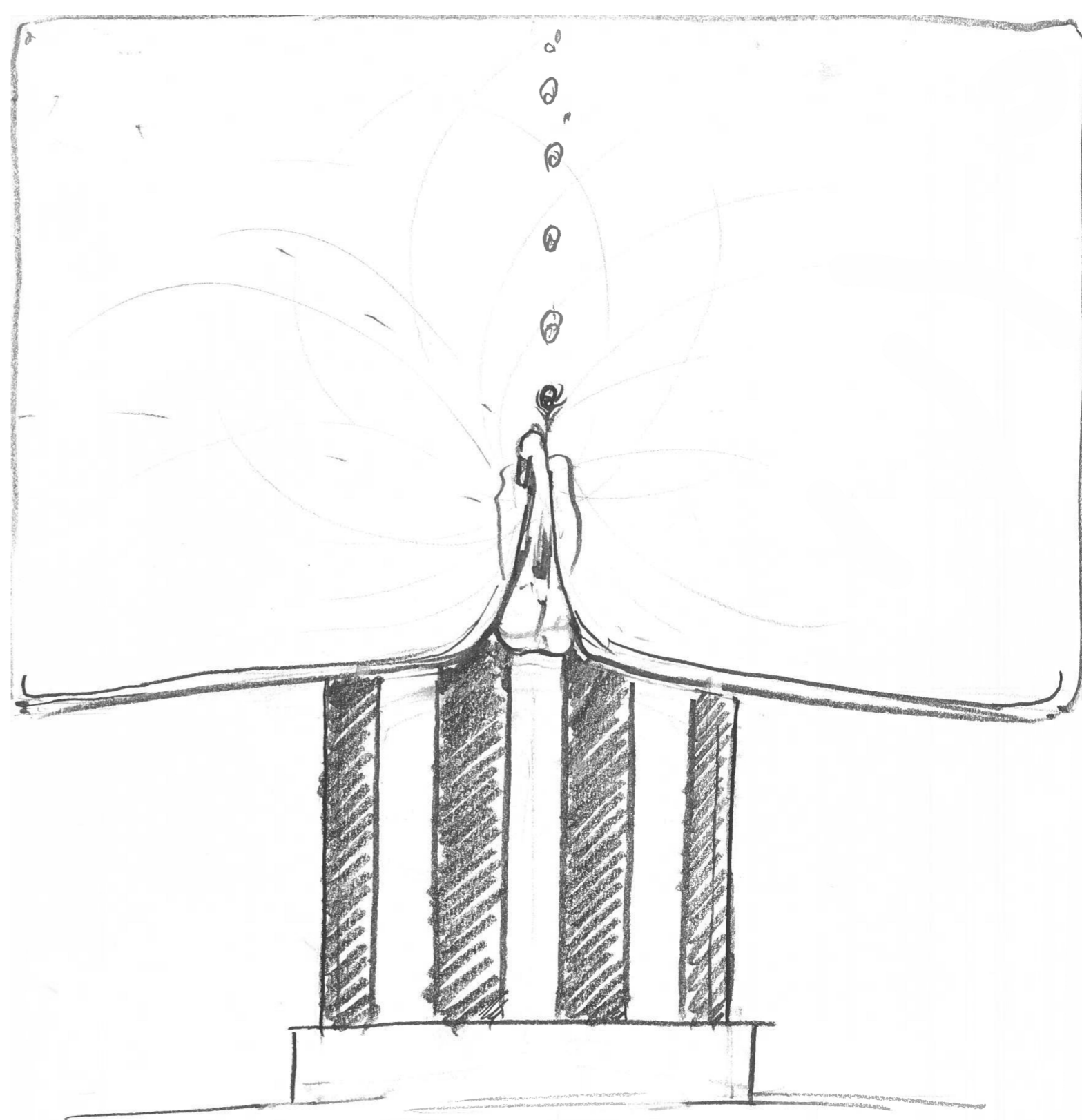
Meaning, I wouldn't know what would be considered bigotry, and meanwhile, will be talking in ambiguous terms.

The difficult point is made vivid in an anecdote from Yorubaland (West-Africa), which is told of the trickster-divinity Edshu. One day, this odd god came walking along a path between two fields. He beheld in either field a farmer at work and proposed to play the two a turn. He donned a hat that was on the one side red but on the other white, green before and black behind [these being the colors of the four Directions: i.e., Edshu was a personification of the axis mundi or the World Navel]; so that when the two friendly farmers had gone home to their village and the one had said to the other, "Did you see that old fellow go by today in the white hat?" the other replied, "Why, the hat was red." To which the first retorted, "it was not; it was white." "But it was red," insisted the friend, "I saw it with my own two eyes." Well you must be blind," declared the first. "You must be drunk," re-joined the other. And so the argument developed and the two came to blows. When they began to knife each other, they were brought by neighbours before the headman for judgement. Edshu was among the crowd at the trial, and when the headman sat at a loss to know where justice lay, the old trickster revealed himself, made known his prank, and showed the hat. "The two could not help but quarrel," he said. "I wanted it that way. Spreading strife is my greatest joy."³⁴

AXIS MUNDI, WORLD NAVEL, OMPHALOS?

That the word *omphalos* has nothing to do with any phallic principle, is in this context exactly the same as a peacock representation where the bird is replaced by a whole, made by a male designer. However, only deities can occupy the position of the omphalos. The Curious Peacock Cabinet, being a coincidence of opposites, which the next part will discuss, surrounding an iteration of the *anus mundi* [from its creation in the conclusion of the magazine "It's the Dawkins-Kardashian Stela!"], a pivot point, is on that reason dependent on this presentation to explain the satire or critique of the pseudo-omphalic claim. The *anus mundi* as satire on the omphalic *axis mundi*, would quickly be treated by Ambigot. Reworked into a cultural hippopotamus' discharge, or into bigotry. One aim of the project is to see whether or not it is possible to inhabit an ambivalent and/or ambiguous position, to such an extent that the artistic research can yield designs. Can it be a truly aesthetical-cum-ethical position, or is it forever caught up in a meta-narrative?

³⁴ Campbell, J. (1949) *The hero with a thousand faces* (3rd edition) Joseph Campbell Foundation.



Part 3



The social mobility of peahens, and the geometric analysis of the peacock's aesthetical presentation of his tail feathers.

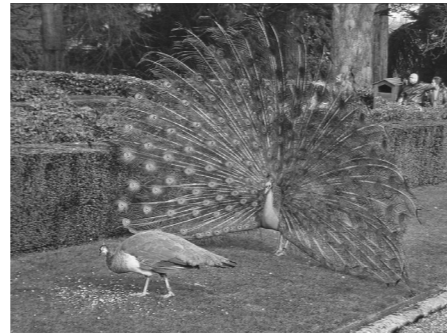
The following asthetico-geometrical analysis of the peacock's tail is a compromise between my own perceptions, what I would be able to execute by woodcarving and what I believe would be an interesting contribution to the fact that it exists. Interestingly, the peacock has allegedly lost and gained its striking features several times over in the course of its evolutionary history, due to peahens' preferences.³⁵

But the referenced article says nothing about how, or when, peafowl re-imagined themselves as the rebirth of the provenance of Bestiaries.

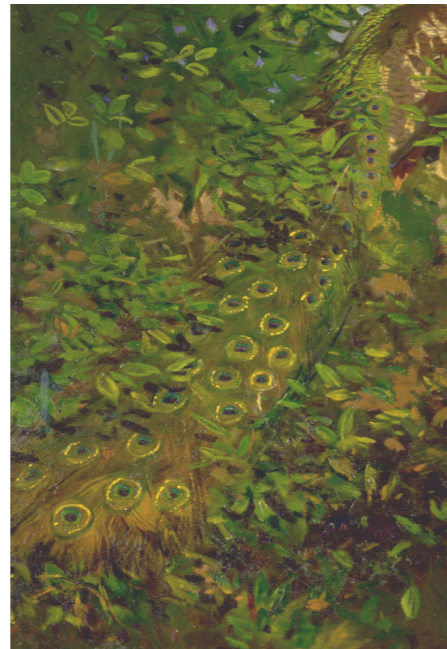
A single tail feather from the peacock look more like a leaf from a palm than a feather, were it not for its eyespot; It has a solid 'stem' and 'leaves' branch off symmetrically to opposite sides with little or no twisting. This system runs straight up to the eye spots (ocelli), without which, the peacock would only look like a flat shrub. There is only one eye spot on each stem, and it is made up of an area of thickened 'branching' and a change of colour. Each stem grows out of the peacock's back, the feathers are of different length, and they are regrown each mating season. The shorter are on top of the longer. Because the ocelli are situated such that we read it as a pattern of growth or as they are in motion on lines and arcs, the "journey" of each ocelli, along its perceived trajectory, at the peacock's full display, seem to originate from, or converge on a central point. However, this point is covered with what looks like an oval patch of baby ocelli, or scales, or even closed eyes, getting ready for their migration; 'maturing' towards the edges of the peacock's full display. Whether or not these closed ocelli actually mature outward, or if the actual tail feathers come out *beneath* this patch, is difficult to discern from photographs. (The number and length of the tailfeathers continue to grow with the age of the peacock and reaches a maximum of about 175 and 1,7 meter long.) It certainly looks like it is intended to be viewed (sic) like the peacock are in great supply.

Including the patch of 'baby scales', or closed eyes, the Peacock's courtship display make the appearance of a parabolic disk being placed on the peacock's back, seamlessly connected to the rest of the bird, as a funnel. The image that came to my mind, as I have become interested in black holes and other astrophysical and theoretical breakdowns, was that the plumage and the peacock looked like how we popularly would represent a wormhole in space-time (interestingly the peacock is related ecologically and mythologically to worms and snakes as their hunter): The blue neck, chest and head proudly/curiously/cautiously peaks out from this wormhole or, perhaps even better, nesting in its entirety. He basically walks around with a representation of Einstein's theory of relativity, 'owning' an image of (space)Time itself, himself as the gravitational singularity; yet, seen from the obverse side of the funnel any wormhole traveller would ever see. The obverse side of the theoretical reality of mathematics and physical laws, inhabited

³⁵ Kimball, R.T. (2014) *The evolution of peafowl and other taxa with ocelli (eyespot): a phylogenomic approach*. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2014.0823>. "Modified feathers and featherless regions on the head of many phasianid species highlight the eyes during displays. In addition, female preference for traits that emphasize the eye have been identified, suggesting there may be a general female preference for eye-like structures. Thus, female phasianids may have a pre-existing sensory bias for eye-like structures."



Peacock wooing peahen (CC)



Abbott Handerson Thayer & Richard S. Meryman, *Peacock in the Woods*, study for book *Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom*, 1907, Smithsonian American Art Museum



Children's own library (1910) (CC)

by natural fallacies, fables, myths, anthropomorphisms and pareidolia, is the realm of fantasy and imagination. Does the peacock embody anything more than our projections?

My deep appreciation of these, now adjacent images, is connected to how we typically represent four dimensions as surfaces,³⁶ and by doing so we can turn the representation around and look at it from any virtual perspective, that is, virtually outside either time or space, inside the estate of the mind. It is this faculty that create the notion of an *obverse* side to reality, represented by the non-Euclidian 4-d tunnel.

Ornamentally, or pattern-wise, the analysis of the feathers provides a frame for how the feathers could be stylized and eventually carved. The analysis of the symmetrical branching of each stem makes an underlying cross hatched grid pattern converging on/from a central point, onto which the ocelli could be spaced systematically. (However, this system supports more variations of mathematical spirals and arcs than the peacock presently seems to utilize to space its ocelli on to highlight, or which we are currently able to read.)

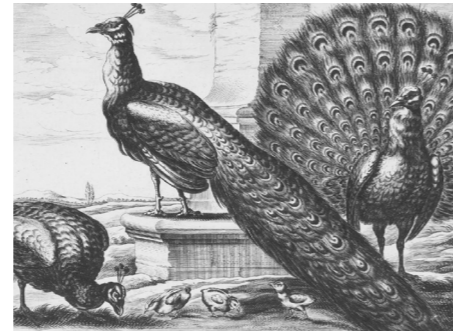
By looking at other artistic representations of the peacock it is obvious that not all have seen the same pattern, or at least not bothered to represent it. My/our perception of the striking geometrical system of the tail seems unrecognized by most attempts of depicting the peacock, both previous and recent. The ability of spacing the ocelli evenly across a hyperbolic plane demand some knowledge and interest in geometry and mathematics, otherwise you will not be able to construct and complete the pattern. Meaning perhaps that what we read as pattern varies between us, even between contemporaries. We consciously only see what we already know, but the question of what was seen before we consciously knew remains. People and peahens were and are nevertheless still struck by its display, independent of analysis. The stylized peacock pattern is meant to honestly demonstrate the idea of implementation's link with articulation by the *adjacent possible* connection of, which in this case is, Einstein's theory of relativity and artistic representations of astronomical galaxies with the peahens' aesthetic appreciation of peacocks' courtship display. The peacocks' plumage and a spiral galaxy have become *possible adjacents*. Which next, inevitably, produce the idea that the peacock presents himself as the gravitational pull, the black hole at the centre of events.

Now, when examining the display of various peacocks, we can even find flaws and 'mistakes' in the pattern according to this geometric/astronomic analysis and discriminate between them. At various times, according to the growth, some will off course be more complete than others because the peacock fells its train each mating season. Mistakes we might see, may be attributed to each tail feather's growth; but it is difficult for us not to interpret the pattern as a display of

³⁶ Blikstad, B.J & Strøm, S. (2014). *Rise of the heptagon*. [KHiO] <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2380180>



Cross hatched pattern by two "stems" adjacent branching making a grid. (CC)



Pfauen, aus *Diversarum avium species*, Radierung mit Kupferstich auf Bütten. Pieter van Lisebetten (1630-1678)



A peacock and goose set in natural surroundings. Etching by A. Collaert, 17th century.

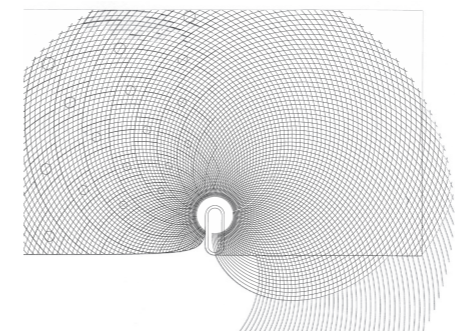
³⁷ Tekahashi, M. et al. (2008) "Peahens do not prefer peacocks with more elaborate trains". *Animal Behavior*. Volume 75, Issue 4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2007.10.004>. Stating that they found no correlation between the symmetry and elaborate complexity and geometrical precision of the train of the peacock and mating success, neither as a sign of good genes. Even stating peahen's complete disregard of train and ocelli.

³⁸ Previous to this I had never entertained the notion that the peacock's ocelli lay along mathematical arcs.

³⁹ Kurzgesagt (2017, 26. July) *Optimistic Nihilism* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBRqu0YOH14>



Pattern sketch, (B/B)



Grid pattern based on hyperbolic arcs.

his condition. As some kind of precision and accuracy. Simple questions emerge from this conjecture. Is the pattern-discerning system of peahens triggered by the aesthetics and precision of mathematics too? I.e., mathematics as the underlying language of reality. Was the discerning system different when the peacocks didn't have ocelli, i.e., would the birds have the same faculties at times without ocelli? Is the pattern a congregation or a constitution? Will a pheasant relative to the peafowl see a pattern in the plumage of the peacocks too? Can one speak about the aesthetico-epistemic operators of peafowl?³⁷

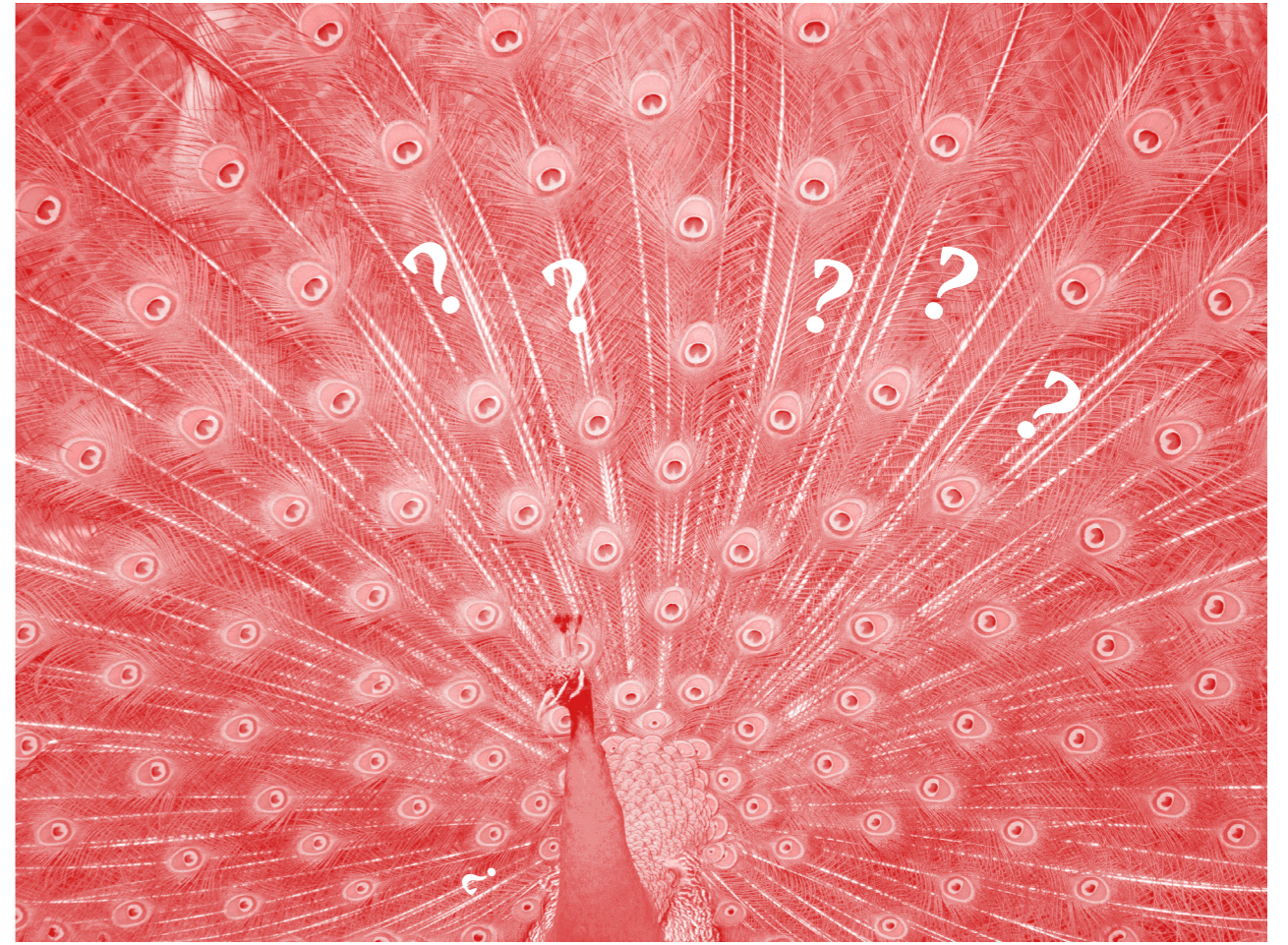
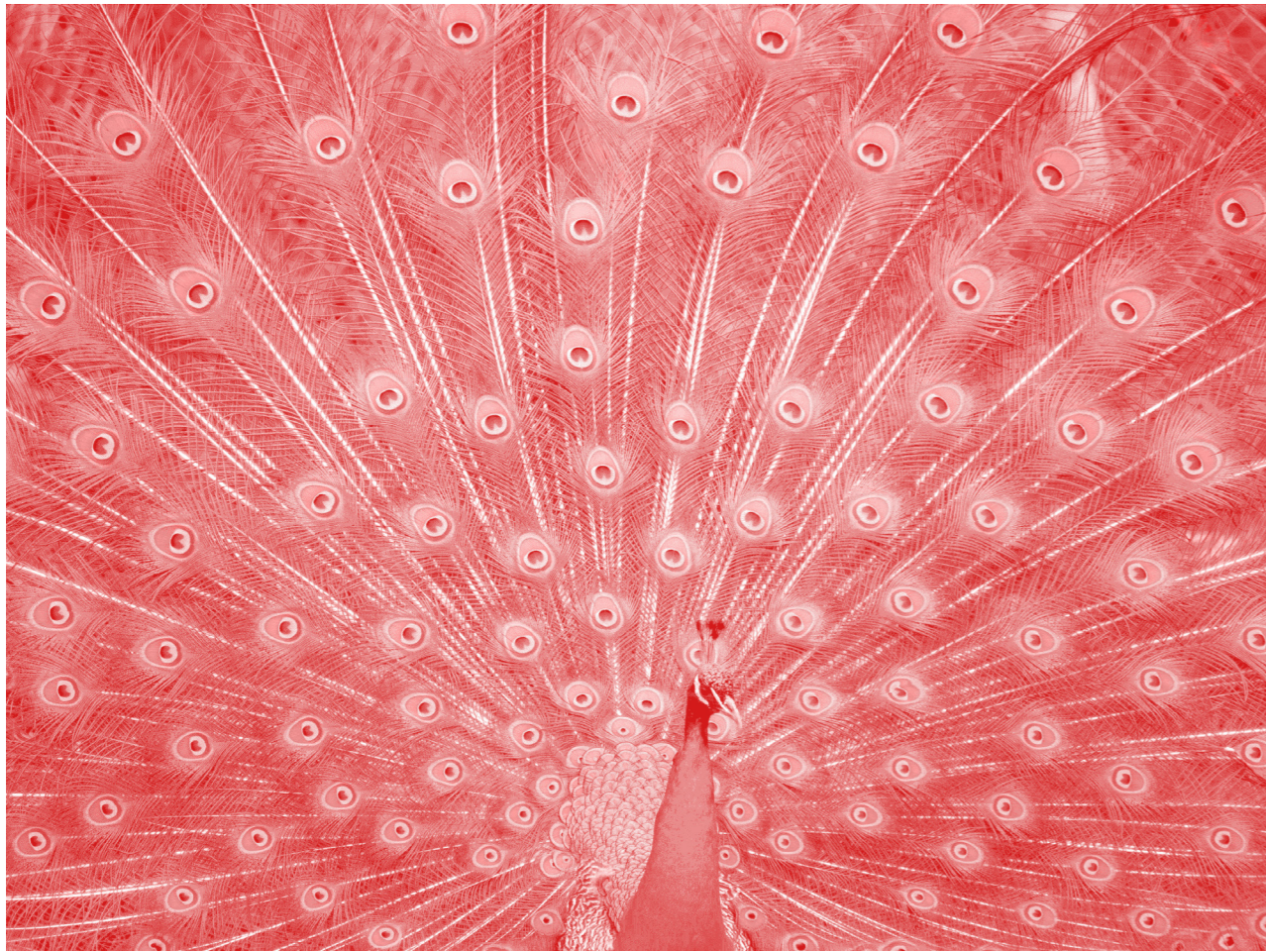
Even though these questions might seem digressive, they are very much constitutive for how and why I designed both the pattern and the Curious Peacock Cabinet. How we view peafowl, is the epitome of our own relationship to nature.

My solution to the problem of systematically spacing the ocelli evenly across the disk, was a rotated crosshatch pattern. The implementation of rotational symmetry is accredited by the analysis that the peacock's tail is fanned out from its long train, where the individual length of each tail feather, ending in an eye spot, are combined in an overall pattern by circular motion. To my eyes, a certain precision and accuracy is necessary for it to be read as a pattern, with quite a lot of leeway. It is no problem to invent any line between any ocelli and hold it your mind's eye, but we wouldn't perceive them the same way we do the geometry that strikes us. I can hold, perhaps, a couple of "invented" lines but not a total *pattern*. For that I need knowledge, and perhaps it points to a mystery of aesthetical conviction.³⁸

Patterns can be inaccessible and unintelligible before you understand its underlying system and principle, between a complete mess and intrigue. By understanding the pattern by *seeing it*, you are convinced by its aesthetical argumentation through your faculties, even though it could be a projection. This is the power of reciprocity, at its centre is the constituent congregation of knowledge.

It is not a very good argument, but a point worth taking into account: Considering the belief in artistic research as a knowledge provider, alternative of scientific knowledge, given that all art is political, we must also consider that all knowledge is political too. I attempted to exit this quagmire in the project "It's the Dawkins-Kardashian Stela!" ending in the phrase "As of now, Richard Dawkins is haloed as the patron saint of the arts. The reincarnation of Ptah. His consort is Kim Kardashian and together they create a black hole of sorts, only void of singularities. The world filter through this *anus mundi* recreating it in a new image", but I left out the description of this image, "- that of the optimistic nihilist".³⁹

(A mess of) Red pottage



flickr.com_photoswvarby

TAWS
TAOS
PAVO
PÅFUGL
PFAU
PEACOCK

The peacock has been many different things to different peoples throughout history and before. You can't just make a peacock cabinet without having looked into the matter. Today, perhaps the most readily available interpretation of the symbolic properties of the peacock is male vanity, and that I, being male, deploy this in some speculation of culture and gender. Obviously, but this is not misogynist and the article from the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Science is not feminist. The Epiphanius *Physiologus*, a medieval bestiary containing animal stories elaborating on Christian moralism, says in similar lines that the peacock is "of all birds, the most proud, and indeed his body and wings are beautiful. When he walks about, he admires himself greatly, but when he looks down and sees his feet he gives a loud cry, for they are very ugly".

*There is an old Hindu saying that the peacock has "the feathers of an angel, the walk of a thief and the voice of the devil". The stunning tail is a courtship display that is also heavy and conspicuous, making the peacock vulnerable to predators, and also to moralizers who perceive an example of pride and fall.*⁴⁰

- Aras, The Book of Symbols

The ISIS too, have everything to do with peacocks. It was formed partly to the destruction of the Yezidi culture, believed by the Islamic fundamentalists to be worshipers of the devil, tainting their holy land, preventing eschaton. This devil, or *Melek Taus* as the Yezidi of Kurdistan calls it/him, is a peacock angel, the chief Archangel, Gods first creation, and quite similar to Lucifer of the Bible; who defied God and was thus cast down from Heaven to Earth and became Satan. The difference between Melek Taus and Satan is that Melek Taus was forgiven, and Satan was sent to Hell/Earth as punishment.⁴¹ To ISIS this is of no consequence; the Yezidi are devil worshippers and must be destroyed, and they almost did. Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad just barely

⁴⁰ The Archive for Research in Archetypological Symbolism, ARAS (2010). *The book of symbols*. Taschen

⁴¹ This information was revealed to me by an accidental encounter with designer Nebil Zaman, an emigrated Kurd, as I had set up my woodworking practise "on display" at the wood workshop at Oslo National Academy of the Arts.



Circular symbolism and peacock. Solar bird and moon. Time and space.

escaped. If "God is Dead" in the modern West, the devil surely lives in the Middle East.

If I where Yezidi, the creation of a Peacock Cabinet would probably be made in attribution to Melek Taus. I'm not, however, but for all I know, it still can be a worship of either Melek Taus or of the devil. But that is not what it is, nor what I intend it to be. What it can be is not the same as what it is and is the most important lesson I have learned in our time of various crises. But I appreciate the imagery and symbolism being there, both political and religious. It is adjacent to many things.

So Argus lay low, and all the light in all those eyes went out forever, a hundred eyes, one darkness
-Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Bloomington, H. 1955



Argus Panoptes, The all seeing Giant. Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Mercury, Argus, and Io*, 1492-95

In Greco-Roman mythology, the peacock's eyes are a remnant of Argus Panoptes, the vigilant watching Giant, the all-seeing, set by Hera (Juno) to guard the heifer-nymph Io against the lust of Zeus (Jupiter), who had his 100 eyes taken of his beheaded body after being lulled to sleep with flute play by Hermes (Mercury). Hera then put Argus' eyes into the plumage of some birds of hers. Her chariot is pulled by these peacocks.

Many other deities of various origins have peacocks as their means of celestial transportation.

The Peacock Cabinet has 105 eyes.
The number is accidental.

I have been thinking of black holes since the beginning of this PhD in artistic research,⁴² so the sudden reading of the peacock display, as an adjacent possibility to galaxies, with the peacock at the position of the black hole, were welcome. The Greco-Roman names given to astronomical bodies serves as a link between modern and ancient cosmology, and in this context, it is fitting to think of astronomical names as remnants of the ancient science of astronomy and its astrological and mythological counterparts, similar to the eyes of Hera's peacocks as a remnant of the hundred eyes of Argus Panoptes. However, with the international effort of charting the sky the International Astronomical Union is tasked with the increasing problems of nomenclature. It is a problem of representation, both cultural and spatial.

The cultural pool of astrological, mythological, and astronomical names has of course increased with the modern international effort of astronomy. However, at some point it will stop making sense, altogether, the task of naming important cosmic phenomena from its position on a star chart seen from Earth. However, at the same time bring new vigour to the connection between astronomy and cultural thinking. The cosmological and cosmogonic importance of black holes has nothing to do with its position on a star chart. It is more related to where you direct your telescope and has little to do with understanding its agency. What significance will a name carry, given to a black hole in the centre of a galaxy, when no previous cultural efforts can commemorate its discovery, or when its *mapped* position, compared to its larger range of dimensions, no longer makes sense? Obviously, it will be technical to avoid interpretations because we're not sure anymore that we even feel entitled to give it a name. The discovery's significance to us is ambiguous and we will give it a pending placeholder name. Either way, the name will still carry projections or be an embodiment of something (Black Hole, Black Matter, perhaps as variations of the white spots on incomplete

⁴² Chesterton, G.K. (1919) *Heretics* "Now, in our time, philosophy or religion, our theory, that is, about ultimate things, has been driven out, more or less simultaneously, from two fields which it used to occupy. General ideals used to dominate literature. They have been driven out by the cry of "art for art's sake." General ideals used to dominate politics. They have been driven out by the cry of "efficiency," which may roughly be translated as "politics for politics' sake." Persistently for the last twenty years the ideals of order or liberty have dwindled in our books; the ambitions of wit and eloquence have dwindled in our parliaments. Literature has purposely become less political; politics have purposely become less literary. General theories of the relation of things have thus been extruded from both; and we are in a position to ask, "What have we gained or lost by this extrusion? Is literature better, is politics better, for having discarded the moralist and the philosopher?"

maps). It is perhaps easier to delegate the responsibility to something else, as God did to Adam by tasking him with the naming of the creation. "And whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19). However, through the analogy of the abysmal origin of words, it might even be considered constitutional, but never trivial.

LMC X-3, analysed to be the second discovered black hole after Cygnus X-1, discovered by Paul Murdin and Louise Webster in 1971.⁴³ Cygnus X-1 is named from its position on star maps in the constellation Cygnus (swan), X is for x-rays. LMC X-3 is a source of X-rays discovered in the Large Magellanic Cloud, situated in the modern constellations⁴⁴ *Mensa* (table) and *Dorado* (dolphin).⁴⁵

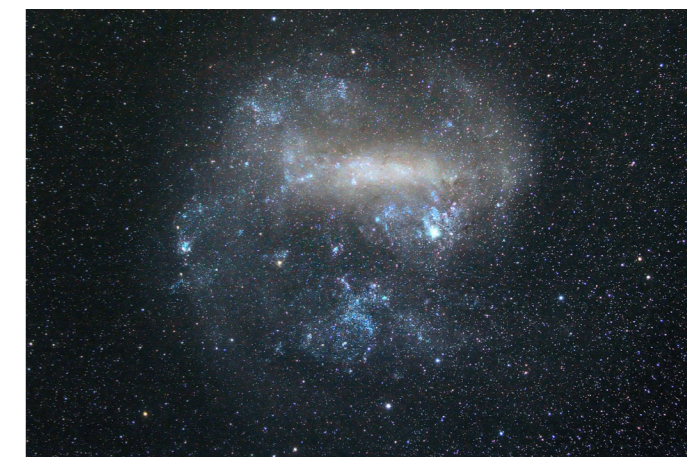
The reality of black holes has been a source of speculation since 1784, then named a *Dark Star* by John Mitchel. Einstein used in 1915 the phrase "collapsed gravitational object". But it wasn't until the 1960's that the term black hole took favour. The existence of Cygnus X-1 as a black hole was confirmed by measurements of gravitational waves in November 2015. NASA captured an image of a Black Hole in 2019 at the centre of the galaxy Messier 87/Virgo A (one of 110 astronomical objects Charles Messier presented in a catalogue of 1781) by an international network of radio telescopes called the Event Horizon Telescope. The term black hole has various accreditations, also being a name for a notorious prison in Calcutta, "a prison where people entered but never left alive".

A fitting description of such cosmic phenomena, where nothing, not even light, will escape its' gravitational pull. Popular science would describe the experience of coming close to a black hole, passing the point of no return, the event horizon, as spaghettification. A *noodle-effect* where you are decomposed into many lines of lines, light and matter⁴⁶ before you are collapsed, compacted, or joined into the nothingness/infinity of its centre.

Modern cosmology, at the moment, needs something like black holes, for the mathematics outside it to not fall apart. Perhaps not *need*, but cluster around, point to

or make apparent something odd; something worthy of further study. But for black holes to work, they must, at the moment, transgress the laws of physics and mathematics. In this particular case it is a gravitational singularity.

The prediction and discovery of the Higgs-Boson, the God-Particle, is important in this context. The name "God particle" is coined because the discovery of it would confirm that the physicists' models of the universe are on the right track.⁴⁷ The discovery would confirm the standard model of particle physics, i.e., electromagnetic forces, strong and weak nuclear force, electrons, quarks, etc. There are now 17 particles in the standard model, where the 17th is the Higgs-Boson (2012). The idea is to understand what matter is, what time is, what the universe is, and understanding cannot have singularities. A scientifically understood



LMC X-3 located in the Large Magellanic Cloud, a small companion galaxy to the Milky Way.

⁴³ Orosz, J.A et al. (2014). The mass of the black hole in LMC-X3. *The Astrophysical Journal*, 794(2). <https://doi.org/10.1088/0004-637X/794/2/154>

⁴⁴ Messier, Charles (1781). *Catalogue des Nébuleuses & des amas d'Étoile*. Bureau de Longitudes. <http://www.messier.seds.org/xtra/Mcat/mcat1781.html#messier1781>

⁴⁵ The importance together with the names' triviality seems be material for the kind of satire Douglas Adams does so well in *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

⁴⁶ Included in spiralling bands in the cabinet pattern: *Ego sum niger albus et ruebus* (p.40)

⁴⁷ The narcissism of its naming is a sign of vitality?



⁴⁸ See footnote 36 & 38

phenomenon could not be termed a singularity.

Along these lines I have also been thinking on why we don't worship black holes, being mysterious, awe-some and wonderous, miraculous even. Maybe we have accepted that answers are pending, so we sort of wait. We know that the black hole is not the end of the line, so we preserve our worship to something worthy of it. Or maybe our science will be seen as a form of worship, by later societies. In the meantime, the hydrogen bomb is a good argument for the precision and accuracy of the standard model. So accurate that anything not scientific probably is make-belief or speculation. It could be anything, but truth.

Particles have weight, and the measurement of the Higgs-Boson after its discovery was important because it would imply weather answers to our questions are possible to find in this universe. Answers could also be located in other universes, according to various multiverse theories, forever out of our reach. Luckily for us, the weight was such that the answer to this question is ambivalent; The god-particle is godlike, but not *that* godlike.

A heavy Higgs-Boson would imply the possibility of finding our answers, a light would imply the opposite. The actual weight was right in the middle of the two mathematically predicted outcomes (measured to 1,25 GeV between the postulated 1,4GeV and 1,15GeV) laughing in the face of the proposition. It is perhaps arrogant to see the irony of this being a typical human problem when considering the enormous amount of resources that have gone into its' discovery?

How the cultural fecundity of the ancient symbolism of the peacock sits with scientific attempts to discover why and how the peacock got its ocelli is perhaps displayed by the two studies ⁴⁸ that differently conclude, either that 1) the peacock got its ocelli due to peahen's preference, or 2) any ornamental properties we can observe is irrelevant for mating success, or 3) the peahen's complete disregard for train and ocelli. A fourth "model" is now possible through the broken Gallilean Spell, together with the peacock's possible adjecency with black holes, its event horizon, and the noodle effect of its trespass. Brilliantly captured in a cartoon by Gary Larson: A dog in a chair at an American talkshow is given the question "So tell us, Buffy... How long have you been a talking dog?" His reply is written on a cue card: "Well, Jim I have been a talking dog for quite some time now." The scene is seen from backstage. Lets call this the cue-card-hypothesis, or Hypothesis 1,25.

Part 4



Part 4 AN EXAMINATION OF 64
WHAT MY INTERNAL
DEBATE ON WHETHER
OR NOT TO PAINT THE
PEACOCK CABINET IS
ABOUT.

I STILL WANT IT PAINTED
RED!

30.06.2020
RIEMENSCHNEIDER AND
THE CURIOUS
PEACOCK CABINET:

Apart from the images, in the catalogue for the 1999/2000 exhibition *Tilman Riemenschneider - Master Sculptor of the late Middle Ages*, in both Washington National Gallery of Art and New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, it is the text "*The Surfaces of Riemenschneider*" by Michele Marincola that intrigues me the most. Her text, or perhaps the intention behind the whole exhibition at large, deals with the fact that many sculptures by Riemenschneider makes a point of being made of wood, him being perhaps the first medieval sculptor not

to polychrome his work. Marincola herself would prefer the term *monochrome*, instead of *not polychromed* or *unpolychromed*, conscious of the fact that *mono* also is a little misleading as the sculptures often had their eyes painted in. German scholars would favour the term *Holzichtig* from a debate on the terms *unpolychromed*, *wood coloured* and *unpainted* as unfitting for such important works, because it states what something is not, instead of making a description on its' own terms. If that is the case, I would propose a translation



from *Holzichtig* to *woodparent* ⁴⁹, through the Norwegian word for *transparent*; *gjennomsiktig* [-zichtig; -siktig].

The term late Gothic does not do justice to their art. Although technically master craftsmen, they were able to attain a much higher artistic level by studying masterpieces in their field. The importance of journeymen's travels and artistic interaction thus becomes obvious. This mobility resulted not only in greater specialization but in a new artistic consciousness. [Hartmut Krohm]

The paragraph that invites me into this question, or more precisely the particular bracketed sentence at the end of the quote below, connecting the quote above to the larger whole of placing *woodparent* sculptures of the late Middle Ages at the cusp of a rising, or new, artistic consciousness, is central to my own project. That is not a question on wood in art, but the question of rising artistic consciousness. The name Level Up refer to precisely this. I presume artistic consciousness in this context is related to what is thought possible to *react to* or treat artistically. How does the concept of journeyman travels' obvious relationship to consciousness translate to our time? We certainly see a lot through the web.

A towering work presented almost entirely without color, the Holy Blood altarpiece in Rothenburg is so radical a departure from what came before that scholars are still grappling with its significance. Some believe that monochrome sculpture was made because master sculptors did not want their virtuoso carving obscured by a painter's work. But it's likely that the choice of decorative mode lies at least partly with the patron. (Like most medieval artists, Riemenschneider had only limited control over many aspects of the contract, including central issues such as the iconographical program) [Michele Marincola]

This quote talk to a material paradigm in furniture design from an art historical perspective. And it is welcome, because this paradigm is rarely expressed through other means than through what is *comme-il-faut*. This unspoken norm could perhaps be

rephrased as a kind of code of honour, that any proposed designs must be true to its word [ThB]. That it should deliver on the terms of what it pretends to do, e.g., when a table presents itself as being made of solid oak, it should be precisely that and not only a thin layer of veneer, or worse, a plastic laminate in wooden disguise. At face value it makes sense, however, kitchen counter tops reveal a paradox. Most Scandinavian homeowners want their counters and tabletops to be *woodparent* and the thickness of most *woodparent* kitchen counters and tables are somewhere between 28 and 40 millimetres thick due to industrial standards, constructive purposes, and taste. Most kitchens boldly display its counter thickness as a clearly visible horizontal line to perhaps demonstrate the authenticity. Even laminated or veneered counter tops, where the rest of the thickness is made up of wooden fibreboard, even go to such lengths that it is edged off with a wooden strip, partaking in the illusion. I see the volume as being a representation of a certain durability that will leave plenty of material to resurface if the counter gets worn, as we would do to proper wooden floors. However, no one refurbishes their kitchen counter and continues to use cutting boards to save the surface, when you just as easily could cut right on it - it is de facto a very large cutting board! Most owners wouldn't even know if their tabletops are veneered fibreboards or solid wood, but still want the appearance of thickness and solidity, *woodparently* solid. From the perspective of the kitchen being a workspace, the mass of wood could be attributed to the workload it should be able to handle. Like a butchers' block. But it is beginning to look mysterious to me why we cannot accept that all we practically need are only the thin visible layer of veneer. All the rest of the wood behind the surface will usually never see the light of day. So why is it there?

⁴⁹ *Woodparent*, with its adverb form *woodparently*, links it well with Scandinavian design's apparently obvious materiality; material choice carries meaning that should reflect the conceptual consistency from within the projects' tenets.

A Scandinavian designer will frown at veneered tables or laminated wood flooring, probably because it pretends to be something it is not.

This pseudo-paradox seems to me related to the whole catalogue's idea of late medieval abandonment of polychromy in favour of *woodparent* sculpture as a source for a new artistic consciousness. Nevertheless, the above quote by Marincola demonstrate more questions and paradoxes that bracket stuff I have been thinking on in my making of the Curious Peacock Cabinet. The questions that emerge from my reading of the catalogue and the paradoxes I find between agenda and agency, helps me discover my own.

There are three places of origin in the quote, or if we allow an ornamental allegory, three animal heads out of which mouths stream fourth three foliate branches, braided into one

another; as the "root dragons" of the portals on Stave churches, together constituting the portal.

I can identify three entangled separate lines of thinking that not necessarily should be entwined in Marincola's text. And it is the intention of this part to untwine, tumble them up, and hopefully re-twine them, in in order to say something *interesting* about the idea of rising artistic consciousness/leveling up.

1) *Scholars would rather have a description of what the work is, not through what it is not.*

2) *The sculptor did not want their virtuoso carving painted over*

3) *The role of the patron on the decorative mode and iconography*



Tilman Riemenschneider (1505) Holy Blood, St. Jacobs-Kirche, Rothenburg



Part 4 PRECONDITIONS 70

BEFORE THE PLUNGE. ME AND MY CLIENT

My own thoughts' place of origin must be examined because I believe it to be of importance, both consciously and subconsciously, for how this proceed. At the same time, it is a projection of the opposite position of my imaginary antagonists. The crux of my desire to entangle this knot begins with an embrace of the idiom "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Even though I do not whole-heartedly believe that I'm capable of doing this, being tied by both the zeitgeist and the euphoria of new insights, I am consciously going to try to take the stand that there is no such thing as an *historically* rising artistic consciousness. On an individual level, obviously yes, but it is far from given, based on the personal experience of *leveling up*, that increased individual knowledge, increase of consciousness or self-consciousness, acquired during a lifetime, can be transferred, transcribed to, or passed on to anyone else. The individual changes and develops, but do the species? [*Homo s. sapiens* which translates as double sapient, meta-sapient, or self-aware/self-conscious]? What is our responsibility in this regard?

I ended my first ARF presentation of the Curious Peacock Cabinet (24th June 2020) with a proposition that a revision of the mythological story of Argus Panoptes could be reimagined through contemporary phenomena such as web cameras, surveillance, demand for transparency, zoom meetings and webinars

[Covid-19]. And also, perhaps, help us figure out how to deal with, what I then termed, *the ever-increasing self-consciousness of the arts and its' artists*. This text, then, is also an effort of unpacking this unprecise closing statement from my first Zoom presentation, **because to think that there is nothing new under the sun and simultaneously point to an observation of an ever-increasing self-consciousness of the arts does not make sense.** (Perhaps it's non-sense in the same lines as non-polychromatic. However, non-sense or un-sense does not have to be true; I think I will call it in-sense, and it marks different ontological modes in the artistic researcher. Sometimes you are sensible, sometimes you are not, which happens quite regularly, yet both modes can be productive). Nevertheless, the idiom and the closing comment from the zoom presentation alludes to personal change.

An ever-increasing artistic self-consciousness would ultimately bring thinking to new levels. Reading old literature and studying old works of art seriously makes me doubt this. At the same time, having named my research project *Level Up*, which would imply that I have experiences, or desire, of attaining new levels of thinking and working, suggests the opposite. Perhaps the answer is simply that whichever level you think you are at you will always find an historical counterpart; levels unaware to you are invisible or incomprehensible. This is where I can begin to tackle the first point from the catalogue

text in question; *Scholars would rather have a description of what the work is, not through what it is not.*

As I become more conscious of the reciprocal agencies, or strange loops, that occur in woodworking, between the material, the tool and my own intentions and will, my understanding of statements like these become more and more absurd. Somehow it is flattering that art historians would prefer to describe a piece of art by its own uniqueness. At the same time, it might reveal a naïve awe of what goes on in the production of such works. Awe I think is attributable to the esoteric nature/culture of artists' internal processes. Alfred Gell ⁵⁰ would perhaps put this to his understanding that the West have sacralised art, "that art is really our religion." 'Woodparently' Tillman Riemenschneider becomes a prophet. I believe our own art history would look very different if the art we have beatified would be accompanied with what their artists' intentions actually were, their affective origins.⁵¹

However, my intermediary conclusion is that this is, was and always will be impossible. Both the ability to precisely express the intention behind any artistic desire and the ability to describe it uniquely. The attempt of doing so would change the outcome completely, and we will be equally dumbfounded in trying to describe the revealed third phenomenon that now hover about the previous two. As it should be. A precise and accurate definition of what the artwork is trying to do, kills off its artistic potential, as it should do, and we owe it every attempt. However, within this attempt of contempt and depletion [Nietzsche], there is a possibility of discovering what the work is not, that is, if it still survives the attack.



Gregor Erhart (1469-1522) *Mary Magdalene ("La Belle Allemande")* (c.1500) Polychrome limewood, Louvre, Paris.

⁵⁰ Gell, A. (1992) *The Enchantment of technology and the technology of enchantment*. Coote, J. & Shelton, A. (eds.) (1992) *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*. Clarendon Press, (p. 40-66)



St. Anthony Abbot (1510) Tilman Riemenschneider (CC)

⁵¹ Which this reflection attempts to cater for, hoping to push 'autonomy' past the material representations, coining a new phrase for autonomy, the investigative spirit; it is not the wood we are interested in.

LEAP

I'm going to further investigate the issues of speciation, singularity, and artistic consciousness through analysis and discussions of Tilman Riemenschneider's *Assumption of Mary Magdalen*, from the central shrine of the Münnerstadt altarpiece made between 1490 and 1492. The reason behind this is the inspiration I have drawn from it in my own making of the Curious Peacock Cabinet; practical problems of wooden representation of the peacock's tail, and research into the symbolism of the bird, altered my initial desire to make a peacock with chip carving to instead include sculpted hair and fur drawn from Riemenschneider's Magdalen.

The contract between Riemenschneider and the burgomaster of Münnerstadt, and members of the municipal county of Würzburg and the master builder of the church, discovered in 1883 in a chest in the church, document the practicalities of the production of a new retable. In addition, a second document was found that explains in detail its commissioned iconography. This document describes the iconography of the whole retable, but I will focus only on the *Assumption of Mary Magdalen* in the central shrine, because, apart from being unusually well modelled for a wooden sculpture⁵², she is totally covered in fur and hair!

“Late medieval devotion conflated three biblical Mary's into their concept of Mary Magdalene”⁵³. 1) Mary Magdalen, delivered by Christ from seven demons, who attended the Passion and first witnessed his resurrection; 2) Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, the repentant sinner who washed Christ's feet with her tears and hair; and 3) the French legend that Mary Magdalen travelled to Provence and lived there 30 years as a hermit. The legend says that she was raised seven times a day by angels to attend a celestial concert and she was viewed as the repentant harlot, embodying the hope for redemption. The seven angels were specified, in the document complimenting the contract, to surround Mary Magdalen's ascending body. Nothing of which explains her 'suit of hair'

Assumption, from *assume* or *assumpt*, has contrasting and tangent meanings. The various interpretations for the chosen title give depth to our interpretation of the *intention* behind this late medieval contract. It is interesting to read etymological descriptions of the word as it changes radically in 1590. In the Early 15th century *assume* means “to arrogate, take upon oneself”, and “obtain, in addition”, or simply “adopt”, from the Latin *adsumere*. While later interpretation of the word is to “suppose, to take for granted without proof as the basis of argument” [etymonline.com]. Riemenschneider's contract is signed between these diverging interpretations. It is today common to interpret the Assumption of Mary Magdalene as an *addition* to Heaven. It is not much of a stretch to also assume that

⁵² Between wooden and marble sculptures: – The homogenous and heterogenous materials and its appropriate tools (line or point), operated at the appropriate speed, render them incomparable. Perhaps akin to writing by pen and typesetting; in marble you can slowly tinker the sculpture into success. In wood you cannot tinker because success is in the motion, the act of the lines' creation. In my view, it is an important reason why wooden sculptures tend to look a little awkward.

⁵³ Marincola, M. (2000). The surfaces of Riemenschneider. Chapuis, J (Ed.) *Tilman Riemenschneider – Master Sculptor of the Middle Ages* (p. 100-116). Washington National Gallery of Art.

the church's commission is a form of argument, that it assumes the three Mary's (to be one and the same) and with this assumption makes a kind of ethical argument, a contemporary interpretation of the New Testament, together with the hairiness, in an effort to extract or present theology on historical facts and fiction. The question I begin with is whether *The Assumption of Mary Magdalen* in Münnerstadt, in a church devoted to her, contributed in any way to the 1590 interpretation of the word *assume*? This question will not be answered here but we will return to the ethical/ontological complexity of the sculptural argument. Nevertheless, the catalogue offers no explanation for the reasons for her body being completely covered in fur. The hair that washed the feet of Christ, might give us a clue, but as there are differences between the decorative appearance, the technical execution, and the symbolic representations of her hair and her fur; it hints at a different explanation! Later we will learn that this actually marks a fourth facet, in addition to the conflation of the three biblical Mary's and is what interprets the 'assumption' as an attempt of ecclesiastical diplomacy, or missionary work, through mythological and artistic symbolism in a time of political upheaval. (one could say that it fell for deaf ears, but similarly it can also be said that its ecclesiastical conflation carried all the way to at least the catalogue of the year 2000).

But first, my initial reaction to Riemenschneider's Magdalen:

I marvel at the conception of Riemenschneider's Assumption of Mary Magdalen as I marvel at the conception of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's fruit and vegetable heads. Arcimboldo made a dozen of them as court painter employed by the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II in the latter half of 16th century. Just before the birth of Galileo Galilei and just after the Copernican Revolution, it is surprising to me that such portraits came from within this Holy court, considering the tension between the church, the rising popularity of the modern sciences and the renaissance; as the term itself states, the Dark Ages - a hole out of which people eventually emerged only

with the help of rebirth and enlightenment. As a consequence, popular opinion often places all of the Middle Ages in the same lighting, and Arcimboldo's art embodies, from the reformists point of view, the ending of Christian dogmatism. In the catalogue for a 1980 exhibition, also in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and an exhibition we will



Summer (1563) Giuseppe Arcimboldo



L'Origin du Monde (1866) Gustave Courbet by Jeanette Hayes, 2020

return to later, *Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, Timothy Husband writes in his opening lines: *Toward the end of the Middle Ages, all aspects of life had become so steeped in an atmosphere of deep religiosity that no object or incident, no idea or action could escape religious interpretation.* Remembering Galileo's house arrest, Arcimboldo's pictures begs the question of whether they were private or public, secret or on display, heretic or funny, ironic, or spiteful? I can't help to imagine the revealing of Arcimboldo's portraits as a form of fumbling satire, a playful experiment of the tension of the changing world views. That it emerges from within this Holy Court is part of the marvel.

Either by projection or coinciding ideas, I imagine Arcimboldo's inner trickster as similar to my own when I anticipated reactions on my own presentation of the Curious Cabinet of Mammalian Testicles. This could be interpreted as self-price, however, my marvel of Arcimboldo's portraits and Riemenschneider Mary Magdalene, was based on a display of what I previously did not consider possible in dogmatic Europe. Similarly, my anxiety before the presentation of the Curious Cabinet of Mammalian Testicles, was fear of committing professional suicide, but instead lead me to a position as a research fellow.

As everyone else, I shared Timothy Husband's view on Dark Age Europe, even extended the period, and didn't really think artists integrated their conceptual self-awareness in their art properly until the impressionists. Many believe the ecclesiastical art of Medieval Europe is mostly attributable to oppression and propaganda. (Here, is the same belief in rising artistic consciousness.) I, for one, no longer think so: A Mary Magdalen totally covered in fur, suspended in the central shrine in a retable in a church devoted to her, either added to the celestial totality by ecclesiastical scholarship, obtained or assumed by heaven for embodying the hope of redemption, or assumed to be one of Christ's most trusted followers, in contrast to the misogynist exclusion of her based on her sinful harlotry, is impressive either way.

Before studying the historical descriptions in the catalogue, she is a juicy compound of artistic vision, fuelled by my

contemporary knowledge of profanities hidden within the churches throughout Europe, e.g., the misericords in medieval choir stalls, grotesques on the outsides, as well as modern art's frame and filter from Freudian sexuality and unconsciousness. It is even reflected in the story of the ornamentation on the Stave churches in Norway; the Vikings included their Norse mythology on their new Christian buildings as a safety measure in case the trend would pass. Maybe then, she is a form of grotesque who has migrated from the outside of the church to occupy the central shrine? Maybe she is a kind of Freudian slip, emerged through autonomous woodcarving from the depths of Tilman Riemenschneider oppressed sexuality? Then something strange happens: a metoo-question pops to mind and question the male composition of the contract holders and the motive as a furry nude woman. A line of thinking that simultaneously contaminate the old work and our own time with the same poison. A line of thinking that not only make me question rising artistic consciousness but makes me think of the reverse. Riemenschneider has depicted Mary Magdalen as a furry woman, with bare breast and knees, her genitalia accidentally covered by sensually flowing hair, assumed into heaven accompanied by seven angels, six of which have survived - The seventh would carry her crown. Is it blasphemous? Contemporary images and thought categories continue pop into mind: furies, anime fetishes and zoophilia. Not because they are appropriate, but because we are in trouble. The same trouble that led to the sculptural penis loss of classical works of art, the same trouble that led to the 1796 removal of the Assumption of Mary Magdalen by the church authorities of Würzburg on reasons for being offensive. The same trouble we are in with the calls for removal of offensive art and sculpture, even benches (E.g., the call to remove the bench in The Botanical Garden in Oslo, dedicated to Carl von Linné. Fun fact: made in my own workshop by a former student of mine). The fact that Mary Magdalen is *assumed* despite her promiscuous history, *despite* the qualities of her body, seems lost on

everyone. I think this problem is related to a misconception of what constitutes the notion of embodiment. Embodiment as our ability to in-form and give shape to the world around us by inter-acting with it, changes to a kind of *projection* of our bodily qualities *onto* the world.⁵⁴

The contract of 1490 alleviates Riemenschneider's responsibility for the iconography because Mary Magdalene was *commissioned* to wear a "fur suit", and the details for the commissioned iconographic program is stated in the documents discovered in 1883. This is surprising and brings us back to the intertwined lines of thinking extracted from Marincola's text: the role of the patron on the iconographic programme and to the question of where the fur comes from. But in order to proceed a digression must be made. This digression will probably braid itself with the questions at hand and make the task of untwining more complicated. However, only a digression in the sense of the text's expected procedure, not in the sense of provenance for the cabinet. The articulation of this detour is an attempt of homing in on why the cabinet was made the way it was; to extract what went on during the first jaw dropping encounter with the Riemenschneider's Assumption.

⁵⁴ The artistic development of the crucifix tells the same story through ever more convincing depictions of the *corporal* pain that Christ endured on the cross, as if personal identification with and recognition of Christ's pain is necessary to fathom the enormity of the concept. I think this kind of change in embodiment, to corporal empathy so to speak, only can happen alongside a scientific epistemology that dispel or place large doubts on our inner life. It even helps describe Passion movies' increasing insistence on graphic intensity. It even gives a sort of credence to aniconic Islamic tradition, which now can be viewed as a prevention against the inevitable system breach, by a Great Macedonian [see Bloom/DiAngelo p. 35]. Embodiment mediates between the inner and the outer by in-formation and its hermetical qualities are discovered by its reciprocal causality [Dasein], as I have come to understand as the ornamental drive of philosophy, its motor. But, between the notion of embodiment and projection there is an ugly cousin, a notion of autoerotic auto-propaganda. The problem of engaging in an open-hearted play with the world (since spaghetti westerns already is mentioned in the introduction) is accurately described when Harmonica leaves Jill in *Once upon a Time in the West*: "It's gonna be a beautiful town, Sweetwater"; He leaves when things are about to settle, him with it. Harmonica as a settling factor that cannot be included in the final settlement. An image of the owl of Minerva within the residue that builds up between constituent elements and its settled congregation. "The mirage of perfection that emerges between the two failures" [Slavoj Žižek]

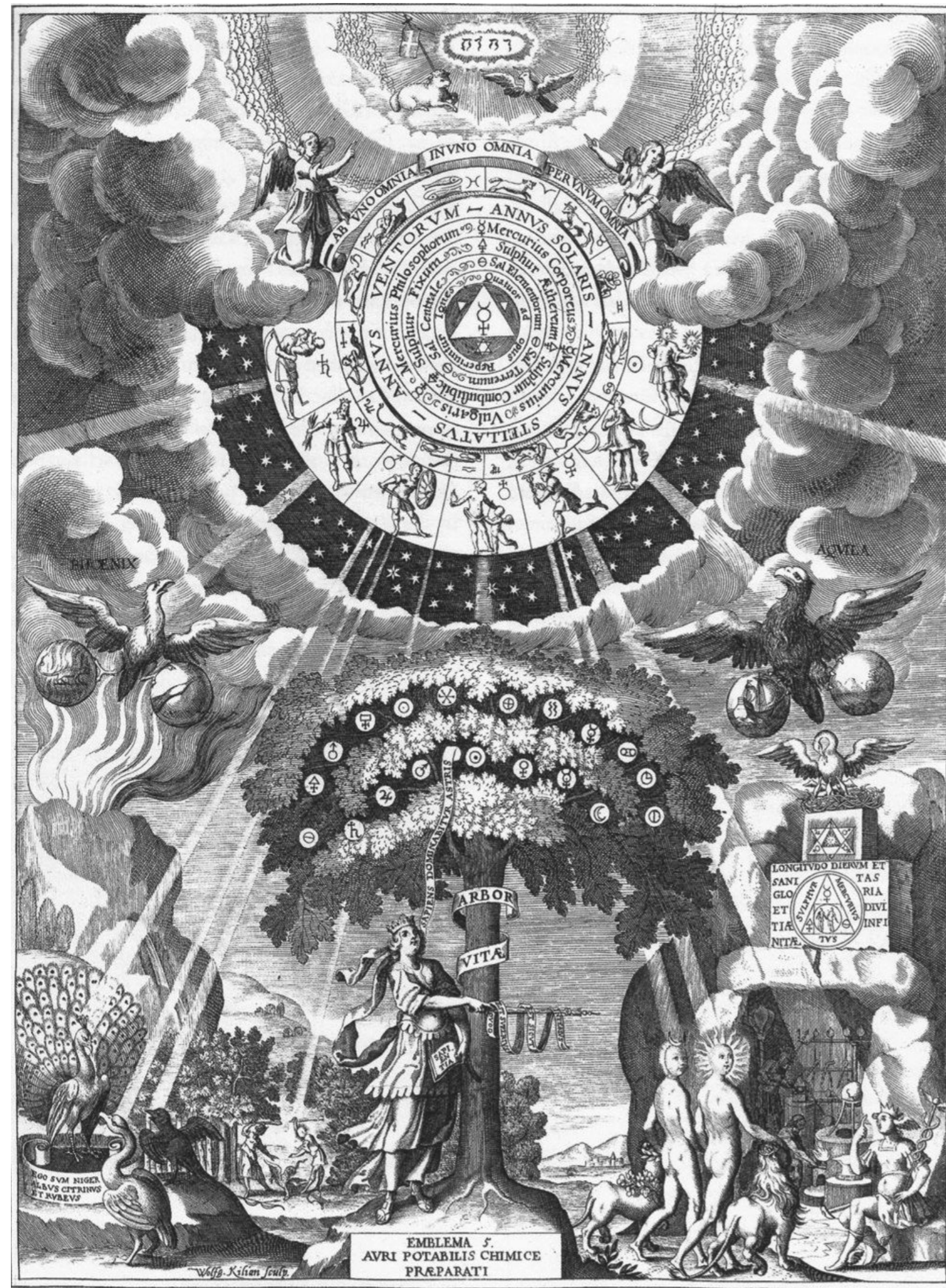
DIGRESSION >

I discovered ARAS, *Archive for Research in Archetypical Symbolism*, though a quick browse of C.G. Jung's *Red Book* on display in the library of Oslo National Academy of the Arts and bought their latest book; *the Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypical Images*. I had discovered the online archive previously but could not discern its legitimacy from the website, so I did not pay much attention to it. The *Red Book*, a previously unpublished work, now published posthumously by Jung's family, mention a collaboration between ARAS and Jung's family to make available Jung's research into archetypical imagery. As many know, Jung spent his whole life centred around this issue, and the *Red Book* was a work in progress, a loosely guarded secret of his 30 last years, even a documentation of his own way out of psychosis. He also used the book in therapy, showed it to many, with the intention of publishing, however, he concluded not to. Either way, this information made me curious, and I acquired their book of symbols.

The preface of *The Book of Symbols* features an anecdote with someone with the mind to publish a lexicon on symbols and asks C.G. Jung on advice – he tells them not to, since each symbol would require a book on its own. If that would be extended to the actual *Book of Symbols*, it would be 800 books. Many curious minds come through Jung in a search for the inexhaustible; the concordance between the Jung estate and ARAS makes their reflections on archetypical symbolism a place to stay for a while, at least for me.

It is not true to say that it is strange to me that I suddenly wanted to make a peacock, because it is a transfer of ideas from the paradise bird I made on the Dawkins-Kardashian Stela, both being male birds in courtship display, but it is strange to me that the cultural significance of the symbolic interpretations of it, in such a degree, lines up with what I am interested in. Earlier in the project I have used Jung in relation to my interest in black holes, and the spaghettification effect that theoretical





physicists would assume that a trespass over the event horizon on your inevitable route to the central gravitational singularity, would ensue. I compare this noodle effect to the opposite of the Jungian process of individuation, a process describing the goal of unifying your fragmented psyche into your *self*, as a healthy whole. For Jung there are tight links between alchemy, Christian dogma, and psychological symbolism, i.e., mysticism, scholarship, and the sub-conscious. Underlying the whole psychoanalytical project is the belief that a successful individuation process would ultimately heal history, too.

The peacock is of essential symbolic value in this context.

Birds of Alchemy describe the concept of a process of transformation through a symbolic use of birds; The Black Crow - the White Swan - The Peacock - the Pelican - and the Phoenix, each representative for a particular inner alchemical process. In this sequential order⁵⁵ the peacock is at the crucial point that either let the alchemist finish or will have to try again. With alchemy, you have the same problem as with bible studies, asking questions of it being historical facts or literature, metaphorical or literal, because at one hand, alchemy is the seed of science, and on the other, the mystical appearance of it makes us curious about the relationship between knowledge, inspiration, and insight. I.e., through the “Portsmouth papers” sensational re-emergence in 1936 and Isaac Newtons’ own occult research, at the time of his death (1727) deemed unfit for publication. Through the papers it becomes clear that “his own hidden alchemical furnaces never went cold.”⁵⁶ The first researcher of the Portsmouth papers, the economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) said on the tercentenary of his birth that “Newton was not the first of the age of reason, he was the last of the magicians”.

On a band, around a peacock in the bottom left corner of an engraving by Wolfgang Kilian from the 17th century, it is written: **EGO SVM NIGER ALBVS CITRINVS ET RVEBVS**. The peacock is standing on an elevation with his tail on display, looking down at a [ed. black]

crow and a [ed. white] swan. I have translated the Latin phrase to “*I am the black of the white-yellow and the red*”, through two other “bird quotations”:

- 1) “*Ego sum albus niger, et rubeus citrinus*” – *I am the white black and the red yellow* [ed. The Rosarium]
- 2) “*Ego sum albus nigri et rubeus albi, et citrinus rubei, et certe veridicus sum*” – *I am the white of the black, the red of the white, and the yellow of the red, and I speak very truth.* [ed. Hermes Trismegistus]⁵⁷

The three quotes, then, two from Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy* and one from an engraving by Wolfgang Kilian, are all dealing with various uses of the four colours sets white and black, red and yellow, yellow-white and red-yellow, one within the other, and the phrase I AM. “I AM” is perhaps the most singular representation possible to express, the black hole of culture, if you will. Or a gamma-ray burst out from its chaos. (I have no idea what to do with the four colour sets, although I have attempted unsuccessfully to incorporate them)

Then, if I AM, is the peacock what it is?

⁵⁵ The sequence of how they appear to the alchemist, alters the interpretations within the larger context. I met the Black Crow in 2009 and have now met the Peacock, still unsure if I ever really met the Swan.

⁵⁶ White, M. (1998) *The last Sorcerer*. HarperCollins.

⁵⁷ Jung, C.G. (1980) *Psychology and Alchemy - The collected works of C.G. Jung (2nd Edition)*. Routledge

The Book of Symbols say this:

Nature's extravagance has made the peacock almost more mythical than actual. Like the phoenix, he is a solar bird. His shimmering tail is emblem of the sun's expansive, fiery descent, and its radiance fanning out darkness at dawn. Bird of immortality, the peacock enthrones immortals, his multiple "eyes" suggesting their surpassing vision, the all-seeing eternal. There is an old Hindu saying that the peacock has "the feathers of an angel, the walk of a thief, and the voice of the devil" The stunning tail is a courtship display that is also heavy and conspicuous, making the peacock vulnerable to predators, and also moralizers who perceive an example of pride and fall. [...]

Ovid relates how Mercury slew the hundred-eyed Argus, whom Juno had enlisted to spy upon the maiden Io, one of Zeus conquests: "So Argus lay low, and all the light in all those eyes went out forever, hundred eyes, one darkness. And Juno took the eyes and fastened them on the feathers of a bird of hers, the peacock, so that the peacock's tail is spread with jewels ..." (Ovid, 25)



Hera and Argus (1611) Peter Paul Rubens

I think the least vital relationship to peacocks is our own fundamentalist objective and scientific interpretation. I have the feeling that we today, through evolutionary biology, would answer the question - is the peacock what it is? - Yes; it has its ocelli because of the effect on the ladies, the peahens, and together they are called peafowl. Case closed. Darwin attributed it to sexual selection, and the latest genetic study show that the birds have developed and lost their eyespots several times over time: How and why the peacock has developed its striking tail, as "one of the most extreme evolutionary traits" [Kimball, 2014] is because of peahens' preferences, which change over time.

Evolutionary biology is like the police officer, standing at the plastic line of a crime scene telling us to "move along, nothing to see here." And we do, surprisingly. We move along. Leaving the tail of the peacock to sex and survival, thinking we simultaneously leave any moral imperatives with it. But do we really? The unanswered questions, which mythologies attempts to elaborate on is why we perceive the peacock's tail as beautiful, or striking, or anything else, for that matter. Why do we have any opinions on the appearance of a peacocks' tail at all? Question like these will never be answered from behind the police line. Why do we perceive anything that does not concern us? Are we also sexually selected too like peacocks? [see the movie Mænd & Høns, 2015]. What is the relationship between peahens' sexual preferences and human perceptions? Questions like these are scientifically illegal (Hume, Moore, etc) and science is all too aware that its findings may easily be misappropriated and misunderstood (perhaps by artistic researchers) and would rather not speak of issues that contribute to certain ornamentations and speculations. By usurping the throne of existence, science also finds itself responsible for providing meaning. Something it refuses to provide. Something it cannot provide. So, in order to surmount any naturalistic fallacy [Moore, Hume], happened by either anthropomorphic projection or pareidolic *trickery*, emotional responses must therefore be doubted; either *assumed* [1590] to be biased, or as an accidental effect of natural selection. But it leaves residue.

> DETOUR

Within the digression we're having, a detour is necessary. To clarify, I'm using my own route of discovery to bracket the thinking behind the commission of the fur suit.

Upon receiving the book of symbols, three entries was quickly examined: *The Peacock*, *Hair*, and *Transformation*, because in my own peacock relief the pattern would transform from leaflike feathers to fur and ends up as intestines, from the centre stadium and outward. I could not find any entries on *offal*. Under the section on the human body, which comprises 1/3 of the 800-page volume, *The Book of Symbols* says this on *hair*, accompanying a picture of a wooden altarpiece of Mary Magdalen from Italy ca 1280:

Unadorned and disregarded by its owner, Mary Magdalen's flowing hair veils the chaste body of the penitent sinner, and at the same time conveys the faded heat of the former prostitute. Red hair belonging to only two percent of the world's population, has signified erotic ardour and sexual looseness, fiery, typhonic temperament, Mars-like anger and the uncanniness of witch and devil. [...] Hair is incredibly potent. It's root follicles, fed by tiny blood vessels, lie invisibly under the skin, associating hair with interior, involuntary fantasies, thoughts and longings. Hair tells us something about the state one's



Splendor Solis Dismemberment. Harley MS. 3469

“head” is in. Dirty, lice-ridden, unkempt looks have signified derangement, but also ascetical retreat and disregard of the worldly and bodily.

I imagine contemporary art criticism would extend this analysis to the artist’s choice of depicting hair, too. Perhaps not directly, but that the elevated narrative is one thing and the narrative of the narrative being created is another. Alignment would make an addition narrative. So, we might ask how this archetypal hair-symbolism matches the “Hairy Mary” in 1490 Műnnerstad? Had it emerged from an autonomous dialog between Tilman, his tools, the material, and the motive – perhaps - but knowing that she was *commissioned* to wear a “hair suit” it is more likely that it’s philosophical than psychological. Perhaps it is archetypal, perhaps scholarly? Perhaps the male composition of the commission is important. Is it sexist?⁵⁸

Alchemical manuscripts quickly turn up when researching archetypal symbolism. Some miniatures from illuminated manuscripts are depicted in the Book of Symbols. Evidently, the first symbol I looked up was that of the peacock, and a representation of a miniature from the famous alchemical manuscript, *The Splendor Solis*, has a peacock inside a glass vial. Incomprehensible and fascinating. I find yet another miniature from *The Splendor Solis* on the chapter of *Transformation*, with subtext: “A tri-colour man in the process of transformation emerges from a muddy stream to accept a robe offered by a peacock-winged queen.” The colours of the man are black, white and red. The peacock winged queen has large yellow sleeves on her dress. The discovery of a third miniature from the same manuscript, under the chapter of *Dismemberment*, convinces me to acquire a copy for myself. It is in the “unboxing” event, of me in the car, outside a Narvesen kiosk in Elverum,

⁵⁸ It is impossible not to think these thoughts, being appropriate or not.



Splendor Solis Venus. Harley MS. 3469





opening the long-anticipated parcel from the publisher M. Moleiro, that I find a clue to Riemenschneider's commission to carve a hairy Mary Magdalen. Attached in the parcel is a leaflet showing other medieval manuscripts available through the same publisher. "The Hours of Charles Angoulême" (father of Francois I) from 1485 by Robinet Testard, have a miniature with a woman surprisingly similar to Riemenschneider's Mary Magdalene.

This is undoubtedly the most peculiar illumination in the entire manuscript. A centaur with a wild woman on his back is attacked and about to be slain by two half-naked men wielding axes. But the arrows that have hit the centaur and his rider were fired by Death himself, a bony corpse above them aiming deadly arrows. Depicted on the left in the background is a lion wandering along the edge of a forest, and on the right, a castle on a promontory.

This wild woman has long red hair and is completely covered in fur apart from her breasts, knees, and elbows. The Assumption of Mary Magdalen in the church of Münnerstadt, started five years after the creation of this miniature, is then not only a conflation of the three Biblical Mary's, but adds a fourth by the mythical creature known in medieval times, as Wild Men. The previously mentioned catalogue from the 1980 exhibition *Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, opening with Timothy Husband's words cited earlier, documents the widespread knowledge of this myth. Its documentation lets us appreciate an added complexity of Münnerstadt's Assumption of Mary Magdalen: the medieval Wildman is exactly the same image we use to today when we speak about cavemen. *Every facet we today can attribute to "cavemen", if we include bigfoot, yeti and sasquatch, the medieval mind included in their image of the wild man. The Wild Man of the Middle Ages would occupy the same image as e.g. the Neanderthal in our age. The internet lets us discover that belief in bigfoot is quite widespread, and as "they" were in medieval times, of different opinions on the existence of these woodland creatures, "we" are of the same constitution. Timothy Husband writes in the catalogue for the 1980 exhibition *Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*:*

*Saint Jerome [...] gave heretical and demonic interpretation to the hairiness of such mythical creatures. [...] [ed.: 1952, Richard Bernheimer *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*]. Saint Augustine [...] declares, "however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or color or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part or quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from one man who was first created." [ed.: *City of God* vol. 5]*

Anything in between, typically attributed to folklore and superstition, as cannibals, baby snatchers, nature's paragons



Jean Bourdichon, *The Wild Condition from Four Conditions of Society*, c. 1505-1510. Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

and protectors, the idealistic primitive, the noble savage, the brute, or the idiot, is documented in the catalogue through medieval drawings, paintings, engravings, illuminated manuscripts, sculptures, stained glass images, coats of arms, and even bread moulds, showing men and women in furry “costumes”.

Despite the arguments of Saint Augustine and many of his followers [...] popular belief held that the wild man was hopelessly damned. [...] With the eventual collapse of feudal Europe and the rise of an urban middle class in the fifteenth century, however, the very social, political and religious concepts that had established the wild man as a negative myth grew themselves into disfavour. Disillusionment was rampant, and the demand for radical change universal. Just as scientific knowledge had exposed the fallacy of the external myth of the wild man [ed. when first-hand reports from Africa, the East and the New World began to filter back to Europe], the changing social climate dispelled the internal myth. The Wild Man's disassociation from the collapsed institutions from which he had been barred and from which he had derived no benefit suddenly placed him in a positive light. As he was without knowledge of God he could not commit sin against Him. He indulged his impulses at will and without guilt. Unburdened with man's stagnant values he enjoyed a free existence. Once viewed with repugnance, the wild man now elicited envy. [...] The depiction of wild folk as winsome, elfin creatures merrily tilling the soil and harvesting their crops could only have appealed to an urban bourgeoisie with no conception of the realities of rural life. [...] Melchior Lorsch (ed. or Lorck), in an engraving promoting the Reformation [ed. with a text of Martin Luther, dated: After 1545], went so far as to represent the pope as a wild man.

I was not aware of this when I began making my peacock cabinet, only in its finishing stages. From hopelessly



Pope as Wildman (after 1545), Melchior Lorch

damned to winsome and elfin eliciting envy.⁵⁹ The thinking behind commissioning a Hairy Mary from Riemenschneider, attempts to cater for it all in the magnanimous embrace of Christian salvation.⁶⁰ It is obvious that the Assumption of Mary Magdalen has everything to do with the myth of the Wild Man, that it rendered an opportunity to use the myth to evangelical/political purposes. There is even a Mary, commonly depicted in the 15th century in an unkempt fur-suit, St. Mary of Egypt, a desert hermit.

Today however, it seems that by appropriating Riemenschneider's Assumption of Mary Magdalen, by letting her hair transform into the tail of the peacock, inheriting the sculpture's own ontogenetic provenance, I've made a quite potent statement on our contemporary world view through late medieval allegory and symbolism, much more salient than I could have imagined initially. That the Peacock Cabinet happened, is to me a testament to the fact that I truly was wrong in my views on art and consciousness before and after the impressionists, but it is also a testament to the fact that this view was/is readily available within the contemporary. As I age, and if I mature, I can relate to older 'art'. Meaning, I used to consent with the idea of historically rising artistic consciousness vis-à-vis development, now I don't.

Tilman Riemenschneider as a prophet of a new artistic consciousness, woodparently (obvious through an honest use of material, i.e., aesthetically self-evident akin to form follows function), argue for the true nature of man behind the glaze of social virtues and customs. However, after having removed all the glaze, ground, and polychromy, all you will ever find is only wood. Why this is important for me to state is for documentary purposes to what may change by work and research, and to reflect on the title of my project *Level up*. The personal effect of which is profound. These things happen to me: 1) the psychology of archetypical symbolism becomes the vantage of my efforts to tackle the concept of the *adjacent possible* in relation to what we mean when we speak about context in art and design, because 2) it is no longer obvious to me that the consistency of



The hermit Mary of Egypt received a cloak from St. Zosimas (15th Century)

our ethics can be reflected in material choice. (I cannot escape the added complexity by the accidental discovery, and propriety of the myth of the Wild Man to the concept of the peacock pattern. I have inherited its provenance) and 3) your hunch can be right from the wrong reasons, and vice versa. But ultimately it cements the bond I initially perceived between evolutionary biology (peacock), ecclesiastical iconography (moralism), and the arts (politics).

Remember, we are in the middle of the detour within the digression.

⁵⁹ William Poundstone, Los Angeles County Museum of Arts on Fire, coined the phrase: *the fake-news memes of the alt-Lutheran movement* based on eerily reminiscent contemporary trends. <http://lacmaonfire.blogspot.com/2016/11/renaissance-and-reformation-at-lacma.html>

⁶⁰ However, salvation is not automatic but elicited by acceptance, riding on the premise of each individual's assumption of it, where no evidence or argument is possible to make, or necessary. The commission tries to make such an argument.

An example that can clarify this newfound position is seen in the recent debates on colour in architecture; e.g. the architecture rebellion, Oslo 2021.

The only thing that is affordable/plausible today, is to treat the surfaces of a building as an effect of its structure, its program, its logistics - its constituency. Adding e.g. colour undermines the ability of the architect, which is tethered to finding meaning *within* architecture's creation - Paint is the smallest of architecture's problems. The same goes for furniture design. The incapacity of dealing with it aesthetically, nevertheless, is adding to it. Reverting the problem by starting from the vantage point of the users of the architecture, in a way neglects the whole problem all together. The interior designers' aesthetic desire opposes the ethics of architecture.⁶¹

> SWERVE <

Now, everything in this reflection converge on the single issue of the 'top coat', the last and final, infra-thin, layer between the dust of the earth and us: The loss and acquirement of the peacock's ocelli due to peahens' preference, the late medieval abandonment of polychromy, ISIS' attempt to erase evil from their holy land, the idea of rising artistic consciousness, and the adjacent possible and autocatalysis, even the conflation of historical religious schemata in the complex schema, together with *Learning from Las Vegas*, all meet in the same question: Is the peacock a Duck or a Decorated Shed?

Humour aside, this is where the full weight of the statement from Evergreen, sited in the first chapter, comes into play. When a building's appearance is as it is because the art of architecture is founded upon the belief that its aesthetics should emerge only on the premise of consistency, i.e., as a peacock by genetic evolution, or else it abandons its numinous possibilities, its profundity and depth, it homes in on two specific aspects. 1) If the artifacts our culture produce is no longer appreciated, the only thing we *can* do is to change the culture itself. It also homes in on 2) what *kind* of religion the western arts are, which, by Alfred Gell's argumentation in "Enchantment of Technology. Technology of enchantment", so many dislike; if religion itself is the dimension of depth in all aspects of mankind's spirituality [Tillich], the western arts cannot abandon the idea of *embellishing that which is useful, in itself, in an appropriate manner*.⁶² These two aspects are not compatible unless we accept an intermediary transition where things don't have to be appropriate and consistent, and we accept the return and the influence of the old "powers", i.e., the momentarily abandonment of reason.

The recent clash between the interior designer and the architect is a perfect example of what Tillich describes as the "two ways of approaching God: that of overcoming

⁶¹ Even the architects and entrepreneurs agree that our new housing is less than desirable. Obviously, it can't be changed just by fancy and caprice, by simply picking a colour; its' choice must be attributed to necessity. Any building or any designed artifact must earn its' embellishing's. Like a phenotype would be justified by its genotype.

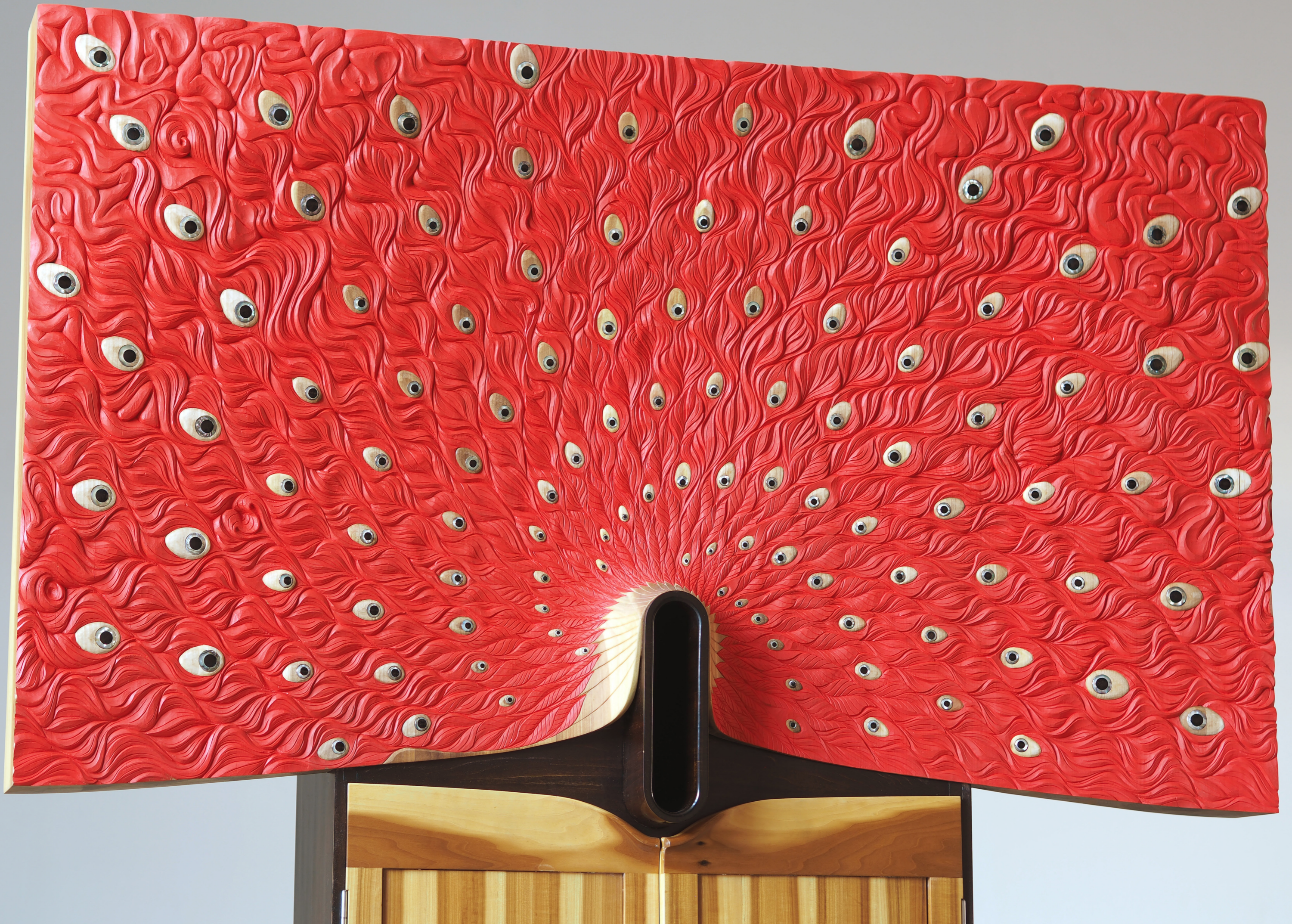
estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger” - The ontological way and the cosmological way, given that the architect and the interior designer are various acolytes of a certain western religion. One says: “We don’t like the architectural manifests our culture produce”. The other reply “We are not responsible for the manifest; it is beyond our control”.

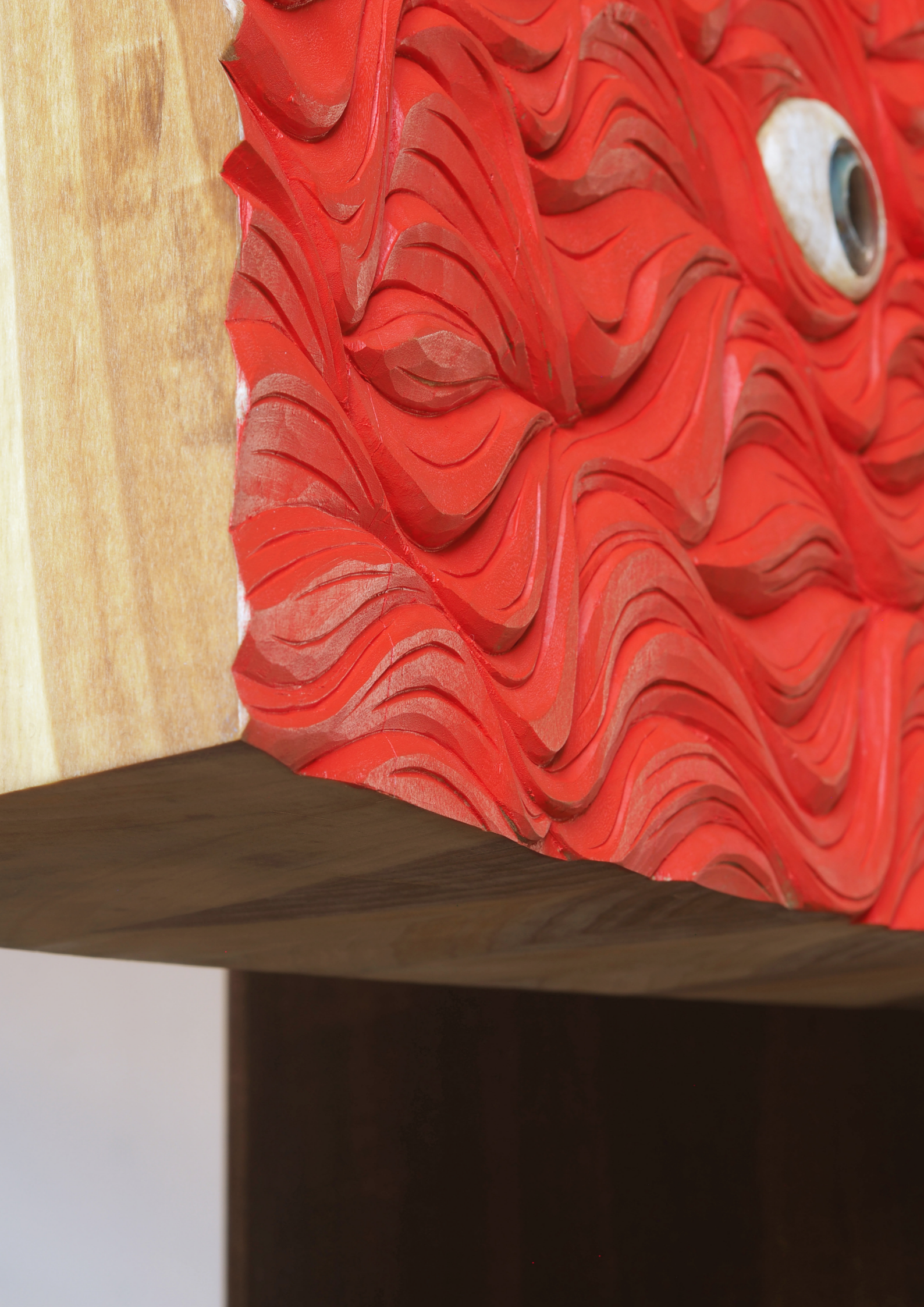
We can now flip it around and ask: between buildings (decorated sheds and ducks), interior designers, and architects who is the peacock and where is the peahen?

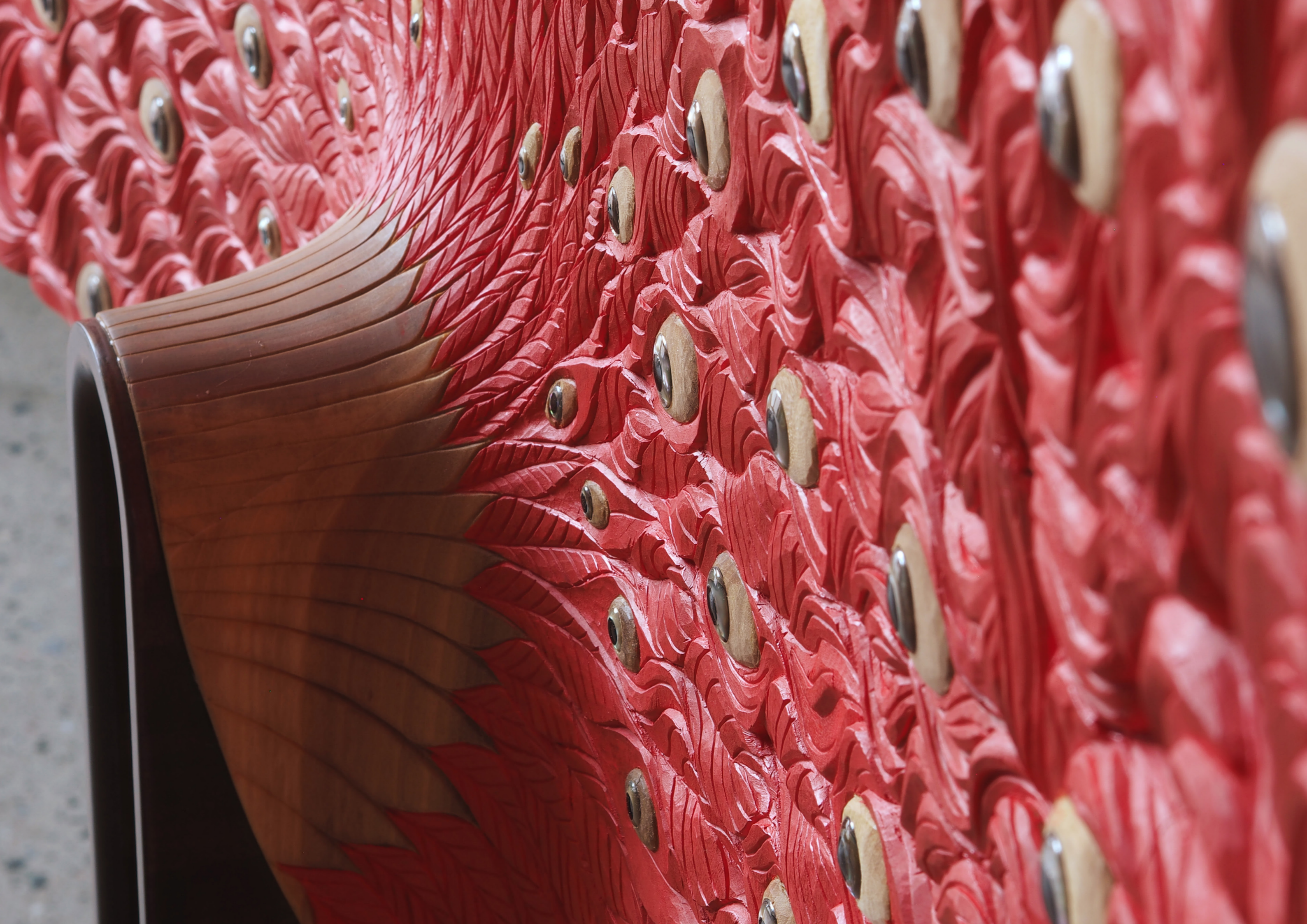
A Northern European idiom (Danish, Norwegian and German) “å ta bladet fra munnen”/”kein blatt vor dem mund nehmen”, refers to the fig leaf from the Expulsion story and means to speak one’s mind truthfully. A contemporary revision of this is possible: Until further notice we are stuck with the fig leaf, some way or the other. Remove it from your mouth just to discover its appearance elsewhere. Either they are in unlimited supply, or it swaps between being stuck to your mouth, on your genitalia, or on the ontogeny of your cultural artefacts, as representations of either the present or the future. Kim Kardashian’s “Break the Internet” of 2014, Richard Dawkins’ Atheist Bus Campaign of 2008/9 as well as “On the Nature of things” by Lucretius, rediscovered in a monastery by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417, all think it is possible to dispel with it completely. A different solution than to believe, by Latour’s use of the words, “in emancipation or the promises of the sciences” is to embrace artistic choice in all its agonistic technicality, accepting the combat between the aesthetical and the ethical in honest discourse. Which in turn create a defined position to occupy, probing the consistency, the theology, of design, if you like. If there are undesired forces within the land of art and design that prevents ‘eschaton’, opposition cannot emerge elsewhere than from the numinosity [Rudolph Otto] of depth. Meaning, we are working at a too shallow layer.

Break.

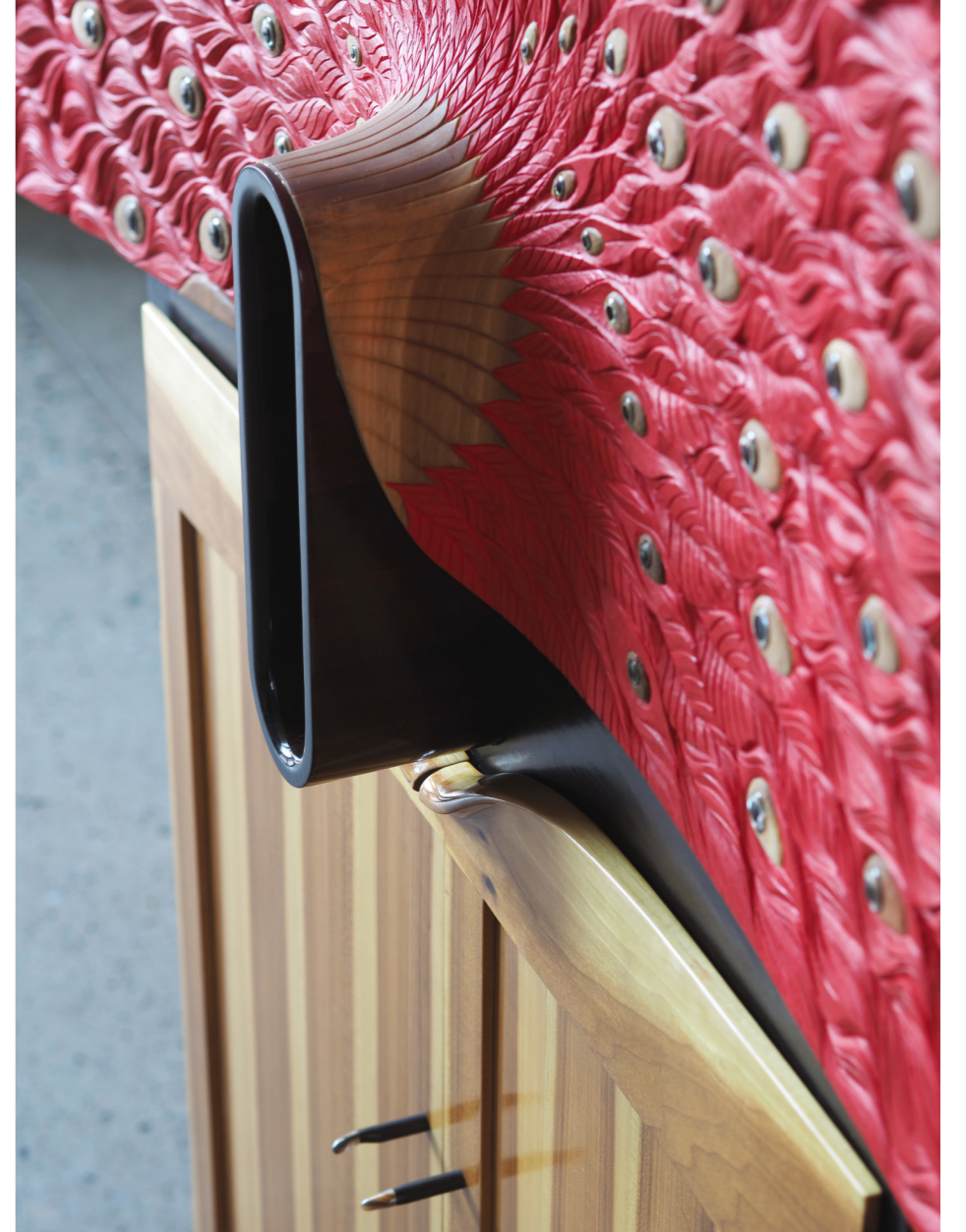












The discovery of the Wild Man exhibition, particular that of Melchior Lorck's engraving of the Pope as a Wild Man with a text of Martin Luther, makes my inclination of the need to explain myself even more important. Simply because the interpretation of the use of the Wild Man by Melchior Lorck, Riemenschneider and his commission, and in the peacock cabinet, differ significantly. Through my own use of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's Portraits and the fact that I have haloed Richard Dawkins as the patron saint of the arts, a Demiurge 2000, the reincarnation of Ptah, by foliating his facial features as a Green Man's mask of fig leaves, makes me acutely aware that my project, not at all is comparable to Melchior Lorck's satire. They are equally similar as Greyson Perry and his Kenliworth AM1 is to Dykes on Bikes™.

My position can perhaps be triangulated by the polemics of Melchior Lorck, the autonomy of the meticulous aesthetics of Tillman Riemenschneider, and the probe for depth and ambiguity of the commission behind the Assumption of Mary Magdalen. Melchior embodying the dream of a less self-conscious society than that proposed by Saint Augustine or the commission (freed from sin), and Tillman embodying the benefits of toil. These are obviously troubled waters but the tide of the idea of rising artistic self-consciousness as a predecessor for contemporary times, and a mirror in which we can reflect our own progress and development, creates a much larger problem. The trouble is, as similarities between people then and people now are evident, whoever is entitled as risen, someone else receives the obverse. A solution to this problem, which might be ignorant to search for, is to try to adopt the idiom of nothing new under the sun, which perhaps is arrogant. Nevertheless, the concepts of genericity and self-consciousness becomes mutually exclusive; You can't claim genericity and self-consciousness simultaneously.⁶² You can of course claim that Homo sapiens' genericity is self-conscious, but then, arrival at actionable intelligence would take the whole of history, and no claims other than what is testament to feeling are possible to make before that. It is possible that this is what the miniature of Robinet Testard is attempting to visualize:

attacking the monsters emerging within the chasm between what is known and the unknown, within the attempt of enlarging the walled city into the forest of dangers (wild animals), is already illusory as they get slain by Death itself instead - both the attacker and the slain are tricked by Death, one from the theft of victory and the other by the judgement of prejudice, as they both inhabit the same subconscious chasm. The walled city only gets inflated with more of the same, missing the opportunity of learning something new. Razing the city, as the opposite of enlarging it, will do no good either. However, the miniature is conversely from the perspective of the ego and is where Kierkegaard problems of levelling are at its strongest.

>I RETURN

As the digression is done, the return to the idea of rising artistic consciousness by woodparent iconography, is painted in a new light. But I will get no further without investigating the claim of virtuoso woodcarvers not wanting their art painted over. What is new, however is that the level of complexity of the allegorical interpretations and intentions behind the retable is greater than the conflation of the three biblical Mary's. Their *Assumption* is created and presented in a time of social and political upheaval. It is either an embodiment of a solution, or a presentation of an argument with the obvious intent of bridging political, social, and theological misconceptions by an engagement in philosophical discourse through aesthetical judgement. I see the same failed argument in Bård Tufte Johansen's chicken costume stunt in 2002 as in the Munnestadt commission of a hairy Mary Magdalen. Based on the material documented by the Wild Man exhibition it seems that the power of the church at that time was a lot less totalitarian than most of us have believed, and the Assumption is an attempt to be intelligent

⁶² Which speciation by natural selection, or autocatalysis by the adjacent possible, is attempting to provide in its simplest representation

about it, perhaps even populist. The text by Timothy Husband clearly conveys the time as polemical, with alternative ideology on the rise. Projected from our own time, it seems that the fervour of social reformists, those who perceive themselves as riding the crest of the wave of the zeitgeist, does not mix very well with complexity. Ideology and complexity are not enemies, it seems, they are opposites. It speaks directly to designer's belief in the bond between form and communication.

As the complexity of the iconographic program cannot be attributed to the artist Tilman Riemenschneider, which of the contract holders then can the risen artistic consciousness be attributed to? If we would assume that a rising artistic consciousness can be traced to woodparent sculptures from the end of the 15th century, and that this is a source of our own artistic consciousness [main thesis of the catalogue], our artistic predecessors is not only the woodcarvers of the time, but the intellectual intelligence behind the commissioned iconographical program. What we also have inherited from late medieval ecclesiastical Europe, the beginnings of the Enlightenment, the woodparent (pluss stoneparent = x-parent) material paradigm, is the desire to conflate and include. Levelling down as Kierkegaard would put it. "Dumb it down" as designers of the 90's and 00's would say. The *supposed* [assumed] faculties of the consensus cannot provide a frame for what is constitutive of either the artistic or of knowledge.

LAYERS OF GROUND AND PAINT

No mention of the myth of the Wild Man is mentioned in the catalogue for the Riemenschneider exhibition, and it might be wrong to assume that the target of its rising artistic consciousness is attributed to the complexity of the iconographical program. Rather, its target is the abandonment of polychromy for the *honesty* of woodparenthood. If this is the case, there must be within the thesis, a hope or claim for the belief in purity and authenticity, which without the paint can finally be perceived. As if the sculptors' intentions, his lines, somehow are blurred

with the additional layer of paint. Lines that now only speak true fresh and unspoiled from its maker. Only then can we see his intentions, perhaps even a glimpse of his soul or his deepest psyche, as we eventually did with Munch and Van Gogh. Personally, this is a central issue as it integrates my own polemical interest in surface treatments over material "honesty", as a "Scandinavian designer".

Riemenschneider's retable survived the Peasant Revolt in 1525 and Munnestadt's temporary conversion to Protestantism but not the baroque remodelling of the high altar between 1649 to 1653. (...) At the same time the Munnestadt painter Otto Sebastian Eigenbrodt was commissioned to "clean the old paint off from the high altar", which probably meant the removal of Stoss' polychromy.⁶⁴

Fifteen years after the completion of the contract for the altarpiece for the church of Mary Magdalen, of which the Assumption is a part, Veit Stoss was commissioned to polychrome Riemenschneider's work. It is, however, important to remember that the altarpiece of central value to the idea of rising artistic consciousness is not the *Assumption of Mary Magdalen* in Munnestadt but the *Holy Blood* in Rotenburg commissioned in 1501, even though the *Assumption of Mary Magdalen* was delivered woodparent according to contract. The catalogue questions Stoss' integrity for accepting the task to polychrome Riemenschneider's work:

The altarpiece was finally polychromed between February 1504 and June 1505 by the sculptor Veit Stoss, who had come to Munnestadt to flee Nuremberg, where he was being sued for debts (...) It is ironic that Stoss did the polychromy: keenly aware that the layers of ground and paint would conceal the fineness of carving, he stated explicitly some years later that the large altarpiece he had made for the Carmelites in Nuremberg should not be painted.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See footnote 53

⁶⁵ Ibid.

One additional fact is that the sculptors rarely did the polychromy on their own work. Historically this is attributable to guild regulations and hierarchy. Tilman was paid 145 guliders for his work in Műnnerstad, Stoss was paid 220, and the catalogue makes a point of this being somewhat unfair, as Riemenschneider also had to pay his joiners, even though Stoss' payment probably had to cover gold leaf and other exclusive material. Documents discovered even show plans of polychromy already in 1497. In 1501, Riemenschneider signs a contract with the municipal council of Rotenburg for the *Holy Blood* altarpiece, the project which significance still is grappled with by scholars today. The earlier *Assumption* is of course important in this respect. However, the significance of the *Holy Blood* altarpiece has little to do with scholars wanting to understand the technical prowess and knowledge of the old masters. It is the agency the altarpiece ended up having, in the social, artistic, political, and religious change that the enlightenment ensued, we are curious to understand. The abandonment of polychromy is an important step toward a further reduction by searching for the minimal constituency of the concept of truth in art, reflecting the forming of a scientific epistemology. A common assumption, that does not even have to be stated today is that the 'beauty' of a polychromed sculpture can be surpassed woodparently if the material consistency attributes to its allegorical depth. It is an assumption intermixing efficiency, necessity, proficiency, and agency, and as a central issue to modern design thinking, it is economical - good design saves on resources too. We have eventually learned to appreciate the beauty of simplicity, as it has integrated itself as a constituent element. And it contributes to the memetic evolution [Dawkins] that changes the possibilities of the successive changes. The new rising artistic consciousness that aims at the core of things and no longer pay proper attention to the surrounding detail, ignores the fact that it is only the surrounding details that hints at the invisible centre. That it is invisible, or disappears in the removal of its surrounding layers, is a sinking sensation more and more people are capable of expressing. Nothing happens when nothing meets nothing else. (The beauty of the gravitational singularity at the central geometrical point of a black hole is represented only by the moulding effect it has on its surrounding space and time. A black hole cannot be observed directly, only through the agency/effect it has on its surroundings).

Because both professions of woodcarver and polychromist survives today, partly due to preservation, restoration and replication of such medieval sculptures, the knowledge they possess today would reflect that of the object they work on. The replications I'm aware of, through the workshop of Boni Wiik, seem to me, in no aspect inferior to the proficiency of late medieval workshops. The same division of labour, between



Photos: Boni Wiik & Nadine Huth

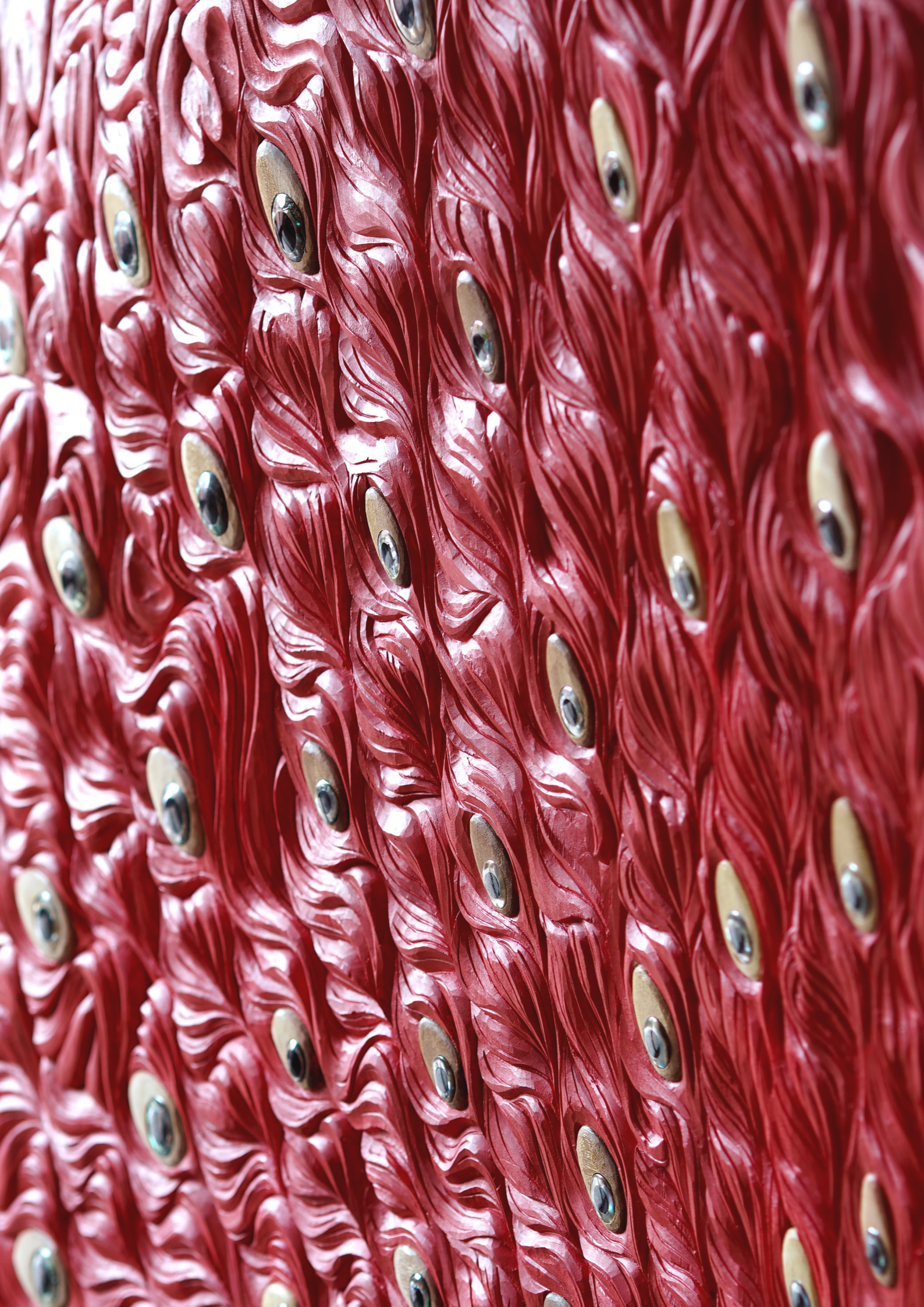
craver and polychromist, is still maintained! The catalogue in discussion also mentions continued collaborations between certain carvers and certain painters. It might be that a certain understanding between the two is central to the success of a project. A contemporary project that might shed light on this is the reconstruction of the 11th century Hove Madonna, from Vik in Sogn, Norway, by the aforementioned workshop, where the carver and the polychromist are life partners. The important issue is that the carver would negotiate both the lines, the ambition, and the surface finish if it is known that the sculpture is to be polychromed. It would probably be wrong to generally assume that "that the layers of ground and paint would conceal the fineness of carving", through Stoss' desire not to have his work painted. To think that proficient woodcarvers are not capable of controlling the appearance of the lines after the polychromy has been done, is not giving them 'the credit' they deserve.

From my own experience of woodcarving, and not having a companion polychromist, and therefore a lacking knowledge of what paint really can do, I can relate to the questions of whether or not additional layers of paint or finish would enhance or diminish the effect I'm trying to achieve. E.g. the peacock relief I have kept woodparent, or the testicles which surface I treated with varnish and lacquer. From the woodcarver's perspective, suddenly seeing his sculpture again "for the first time", as paint can change the totality of the perception, previously perhaps blinded by detail, the polychromy lets the carver enjoy the work for himself. This event may attribute to its effect, but the experience might just as easily turn to horror if the paint does not do it justice, and perhaps speak to the fact of companionship between a particular carver and a polychromist. My reasons for speculating on this interplay, is my own doubts and the new knowledge (to me) of the historical significance given to the abandonment of polychromy in favour of woodparent sculpture in ecclesiastical art at the end of the Middle Ages. In one regard, woodparenty as "truer" than polychromy, ties in with the later modernists personal psychological view of art, as its precursor. That is, only when stripped of all unnecessary elements, the pure intent, the spirit of man, the essence of the work, can shine through - showing the real value of art. It is this line of thinking that leads me to an interest in surfaces over material consistency. The breaking of the Galilean spell has radical consequences - incantations - for the philosophy of art, too.

CONCLUDING PART 4 ⁶⁶

Scholars would rather have a description of what the work is, not through what it is not, because embedded within this desire is, a yes! to the question of whether or not the singular [in and of itself] actually exists or not. That the sculptor did not want their virtuoso carving painted over would be a logical extension of the first answer. A catalogue on Riemenschneider made in Europe

⁶⁶ At the onset of the plunge, with the attempt to untwine and re-tangle Marincola's braids, I lost track within my digressions and for a long time didn't think I would re-surface.



would perhaps have concluded differently than the American catalogue of 2000, on both questions. However, *the role of the patron on the decorative mode and iconography* would remain undisputed and seems at first indifferent to the questions. But since we are discussing artistic consciousness, meaning what is possible to treat artistically, the political aspirations of the patron, or in Riemenschneider's case the commission behind the *Assumption of Mary Magdalen*, is now obviously a new part of the artistic consciousness too. This addition askew the two previous questions in similar ways as the complex religious schemata of Taylor conflate the dualistic schemata with an n, from either/or to neither/nor, maintaining the argument that it is prevalent and not in contention to it (or political). A new question emerges from within this misalignment: If an artist can have anything to say on political matters, as artist, what else than aesthetical conviction can s/he use as currency? Or, does s/he have a particular contract with the numinous by title? Tillman Riemenschneider didn't have to agree with the opinions of the commission, but it is his task to make *the assumption* immediate for others, including the commission. Hence, he is also tasked with the attempt of demonstrating its sincerity. Weather this attempt is heartfelt or not is something we believe we are good at assessing.

The woodparent sculptures of the late medieval age, as an abandonment of polychromy, which might mimic the discovery, of what we only later learnt to be a misunderstanding, of Greek "stoneparent" sculptures, undermine, what for a long time was an artistic drive for mastery, achievement and control, its inherent autonomy – animating stone and wood - and from where art first earned its authority.

Woodparenry is therefore not a new terrain the artistic consciousness has arrived at, it is rather a testament to a change of how the personality of artistic fit into the moral dynamic between aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The semantics is of huge consequence; 1) *woodparenry* emerged from the realisation that paint was no longer needed to achieve a numinous effect; 2) *monochrome* sculpture was an abandonment of polychromy. Woodparenry is not political in its ontogeny or etymology, monochrome is. Either way, polychromy became superfluous and a new standard [heraldry] for the numinous started to form. At a certain level of completeness, the artist can evoke a sense of presence within a sculpture. The "naked" quality of woodparenry adds to this effect differently than when "dressed".

The nature of man *behind* the glaze of social values, with all its layers of ground and paint, is as absurd an idea as a *peacock* without the features of one.

Part 5

Post-library event⁶⁷

Painting a woodparent cabinet red

⁶⁷ Blikstad, B.J. (2021) *Av- og Påfugl*.
Maria Magdalena med pels. Presented at
the KHIO Library Event Arena, 25-28th
August. <https://khio.no/events/1303>



Jehan Fouquet *The Melun Diptych* (ca 1450)



02.09.2021

THE RIEMENSCHNEIDER EFFECT

Robinet Testard's *Centaur's Death* (1485) and *The Assumption of Mary Magdalen* (1490) by Tilman Riemenschneider and his Commission, both use the same image of a furry female as a central theme of its iconography, but with different emphasis: one slain by savage enlightenment and Death itself in tandem, while the other assumed into heaven by ecclesiastical conflation. Understanding where the Hairy Mary comes from is easier than understanding the minds of late medieval Europeans. Through working on this reflection on The Curious Peacock Cabinet (simultaneously making a different cabinet with the Taweret-panel and the Self-Shaft) I became aware of a way of thinking about cabinets as a potential distillate of our consensual relationship between body and mind. An unintentional revelation of a metaphysical position, or lack thereof, revealed by our executive philosophy (design). That is: skap = the form *into* which its constituent elements have congregated.⁶⁸

Then, as each emergent addition or subtraction, will reconfigure the propriety of any former epistemologically coherent 'skap', the professional field of design has emerged as a consequence. Because we demand consistency and/or causality, either consciously or sub-consciously, between artefact and culture, we constantly need to reconfigure this *manifest* to match it with the properties of our evolving culture.

This prompts the concept of embodiment by the adjacency of design to art, along with its autonomy as a requirement for critique - any design must be true to its word, conversely extended to 'designers must mean what they say' - simply because design is taught at art school (e.g., KHiO). The claim is then that design by art school must *assume* the position that the symbolic value of our forms, spawned from the democratic combination of industry and usership, by propriety of their agency, conserves the content instead of bringing it to use.

Idioms of modern furniture design used to hold a metaphysical belief, because its results were hermetical, as epistemological claims on truth; now, form, function, truth, by the addition of usership, woodparently⁶⁹ becomes contained in a hermetically sealed container, instead! Canned goods! Inert, or very slowly decaying inside its own container.

⁶⁸ The physical form of 'skap' reflects its surrounding architecture. Additionally, they even used to reflect in its design the content which it was intended to contain. A feature no longer possible to attain now that 'usership' [Stephen Wright] is what we design for. It is a paradox that the abstracts qualities of such, render forms that are mundane, uninspired, and boring. The potentially metaphysical qualities of content/container issues are either untapped or a wish-fulfilment.

⁶⁹ Obvious in the sense that it binds its convictions to its own obvious ontology.

What this eventually reveal is that the act of giving form has everything to do with the content the form is intended to contain. And it surpasses the concept of storage. The hermetical is always pointing towards something else. When this something, by definition and attempts of entrapment, are targeted, it offers a trajectory that is only guiding us to the pantry. The remedy is not to abandon our sense of consistency, or reason, but to acknowledge that the elements we have allowed agency are inadequate: between monochrome and 'woodparenty', what elements are missing might be covered by 'polychrome'. Pun intended; it might enable us to exit the dead end of reductionism, away from infinite regress, by painting a door out without inventing the ethics that would allow its creation.⁷⁰

It is obvious to me now, that the road from woodparenty leads to a black hole of infinite regress.

WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

If the bird in the whole courtship display, the symbol of the peacock, is replaced by a hole, the symbol opens its contemporary potential. Now, the similarity between the arcs formed by the ocelli/eye spots in the feathers and the shape of spiral galaxies become evident; At the centre of a galaxy is a black hole; at the centre of the courtship display is the peacock; making possible the idea that the peacock walks about with a representation of Einstein's theory of relativity on its back! Or, that it is nesting in its centre - owning an image of time itself. The way space and time is depicted around a black hole, in two and three dimensions, is like a funnel. The courtship display, now with the bird re-attached, is obviously funnel-like, giving credibility to this entertainment. Humorous in many aspects, but serious when compared to reproductivity as the only way passed our short lifespans. In humans, however, this is usually accompanied with shame and self-awareness (biblical), something that obviously doesn't apply for the peacock; It is unambiguously bold and proud, perhaps beyond anything else in nature.

Then, when the feathers in the carving were incorporated with the hair and fur, mirrored from the sculpture *Assumption of Mary Magdalen* by Tilman Riemenschneider, along with the attempt to incorporate the skillset of the woodcarver, the focus changed from relative achievement to understanding the iconography of this strange sculpture of 1492. A different body appears on the scope of the horizon, spanning the context of a human lifespan and outside the range of sexual reproductivity, still with a sense of familiarity, fecundity even. It became obvious that the fur on the body of Mary Magdalen could not be attributed to feathers and celestial flight, which is a common interpretation, or as an extension of the hairs on her head, but evidently something much closer to the human body. It is about the human body, and how flesh is connected to thought! The compound of the peacock and the fur of Mary Magdalen, in the peacock cabinet, makes a transformative case, a process from feathers, to fur, to flesh, as the pattern emerges outward from the central stadium. In essence it is a tentative critique of the utility of the artist's embrace of scientific epistemology.

THIRD BODY

"'Being-in-the-workshop' as a way of being-in-the-world. The mallet and iron testifying to the relation between **a**) the carver and **b**) the wood as it shapes two bodies in the process of carving: the body of **a**) the wood and **b**) the body of the carver. The emerging pattern initiates a convergence within what is seen and what is done till it becomes *metastable* as a compound."⁷¹ This compound, summoned into existence by concentration and effort, can eventually settle as fully *stable*. The will, or agency, of the metastable compound and the stable compound are differently perceived.

⁷⁰ In Looney Tunes, Coyote makes doors he cannot use, that Roadrunner run through. Doors that aren't constructed.

⁷¹ Barth, T. & Blikstad, B.J (2021) Crabwise #04. Crabwise #01-06. KHiO, 6th June. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2759139>

There is a side of animism within this sort of embodiment. An artistic researcher must have the ability to control their possessions because knowledge is likely only found between states of influence, between the emotional and the rational, between the conscious and the unconscious, between polarity. The effort of learning is to understand this new will compared to your own. If incorporated, it becomes your own. This must be the ethics of AR concerned with theories of knowledge because there might not be any knowledge to be found in the metastable, and once incorporated, thus stable, it is hard to separate from the rest. [Assumption]

By keeping making and writing apart, instead of conceptually keeping them in parallel, they can operate orthogonal to each other. Not separate but allowed to function in their own right to influence the other. The knowledge that might be extracted from the project, and the practice that might be extracted from this knowledge, is found between the subject matter and the orthogonality that is emitted by the workshop mode and writing mode (reflection and documentation) -entanglement. Within this entanglement is a second body, apart from the workshop entity. In this research project, the second third-body appear within the entanglement of BJB's and ThB's independent yet occasionally adjacent research. It is perceived much clearer by ThB because it is the realm of theory. This body is on a different stratum of concentration. The skill of the scribe is needed to keep track of all the adjacent possibilities and "possible adjacents". Because once allowed there are no discerning system, apart from the system that made the connection, that prevents the ornamental drive to make adjacent, anything it might desire. Through Kierkegaard's quote, the preventing force is the role of the ethical. However, in the tug-o-war between aesthetics and the ethical, religion is not needed to win, but to keep the battle even. Where we are confused today is what side of the rope the artistic should be on.

After contemplating this for a while, we come to the realisation that there are in fact several third-bodies!

⁷² Etc., etc., etc... This could be continued ad infinitum

One between the body of the carver and the body of the material, one between the body of the scribe and the body of the scriptorium, one between the body of writing and the body of practical work, and one between the bodies of the scribe and the carver.⁷² This project was guided by the shifting presence of these bodies. At this time, artistic research *can* be seen as the study of such bodies, by the bivalent deployment of artistic and research. Obviously, new such bodies emerge all the time, but all cannot be studied simultaneously, even if they are all present at the same time.

I have tried to take seriously the idea of disseminating, through writing (orthogonal to making), as much of what has happened in relation to the project of making this peacock cabinet as time, insight, and effort allows. Instead of allowing a photographic documentation of the progression to be interpreted by readers, I have attempted to be sincere about where the project comes from⁷³, how it came about and how the project's third-bodies eventually grew and my continued interest in it was sustained - contributing to the will to finish it and further elaborate. The need to eliminate the studio diary with photographic documentation of the process was necessary.

⁷⁷ Barth, T. (2020). *Digitus #01-06*. KHiO, 8th October. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2681794>

⁷⁸ Barth, T. (2021). *Crabwise #04*. *Crabwise #01-06*. KHiO, 6th June. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2759139/%2304%20crabwisepdf?sequence=31&isAllowed=y>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ I now believe this link must be severed if design shall have any hopes of attributing to the realm of knowledge through artistic research. As long as the Riemenschneider effect is active, artists have no other option than to use lies to tell the truth; obviously it is working against the benefit of documentation, and for artistic research at large.

The result from my side is a profuse bastard-mix of essay, novel, and diary, and a carved Curious Peacock Cabinet. While the tutor, Theodor Barth, produced a wide range of flyer-series^{74 75 76 77 78} incorporating this work into his own and giving it back. It can be seen as an attempt to avoid what we now term the *Riemenschneider effect*. That is, *pawning the craft for the concerns of political correctness, while the resulting work carries the signature of the artist/author*⁷⁹. I would claim that the reality of "The Riemenschneider effect" have created a modern magnanimous virtue; originated in stalemate by the inability to tackle Kierkegaard's problem [introductory quote], which I think came about by placing assumption at the mercy of evidence, shifting our ethics from participating in the world, to observation. Or in stronger terms, from embodiment to projection.

The un-polychromed stature of the Assumption of Mary Magdalen was delivered by Riemenschneider 'woodparent' [Holzsichtig] according to contract (along with the rest of its iconography). The sense that the status of Riemenschneider as one of the first sculptors do this (influencing our contemporary material paradigm) paired with its origins of ecclesiastical and theological concerns for the populace, brings new questions to the perceived symbiotic relationship between design and communication. Seen from the workshop, communication is both a lens and a filter.⁸⁰

"Half his strength was wasted on friction" is a quote from Oscar Wilde on Lord Byron's body of work. Well-meant and honorary; precise but still misses the mark - is what I initially thought! I began with this quote, and perhaps unfairly, paired it with the Flammarion engraving. This pair would now allude to the idea that the person peering through the firmament is responsible for its breaking, making a case for the necessity of friction. That something old must be destroyed for something new to be found. There is

⁷³ A danger I am fully aware of: "All bad poetry spring from genuine feeling", as Oscar Wilde said, paraphrased by Harold Bloom to "All bad poetry is sincere". Why not go the full mile; all bad artistic research is sincere?

⁷⁴ Barth, T. (2021). *Categories #01-06*. KHiO, 5th May. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2753567>

⁷⁵ Barth, T. & Blikstad, B.J (2021). *Rotation #01-06*. KHiO, 1st July. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2762485>

⁷⁶ Barth, T. (2021). *Aggregates #01-06*. KHiO, 14th April. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2737663>



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friction between the monk's head and the fabric of the firmament as he pushes his head against the glass-like, but not transparent, material. When the firmament would yield, he would cut himself! Regardless, the possibility of injury is obviously insignificant to the potential reward of continuing along the proposed plan; he must have an intuition of that there are something else behind the veil! A veil he cannot see, however, certain of its existence. The pushing intensifies the certainty. This is, however, contrary to the original use of the engraving; it accompanied the story of a naïve monk who 'happened upon' the cracks where the sky met the earth, where he only 'had to bend down' and look behind the firmament. That's not much of a stretch and involves no amount of friction. Maybe Oscar Wilde is right, again.⁸¹

Scientific discoveries are made like this. But how do we know that the accidental finds are important when the accomplishment was arbitrary? What about the meticulous set of preconditions that allow the accident of discovery to happen? Remember, Wilde calls it wasted! And it might be true...

The amount of friction, e.g., between myself and my desire to paint the peacock pattern red, is incomparable with the ease of which it was eventually painted. It is truly curious; there is a mode in which friction is accumulated, retrospectively thriving in its constraints, a mode where the friction is released, and a final mode where all the previous tension is assumed by the newfound ease. The initial modes become a Past, a tail of a process, like the peacock is dragging his; radically different to the strenuous effort of fanning it out in display. In the heat of the moment, which can last for a long time, the present gets entangled with its projected future.

Without a result in which you⁸² can be 'content' its process can never be contained; it is the result that hatches the process! And whatever it needs, it gets, indifferent to their previous non-relationship - it is actually what make one; a relation-ship!

What used to be friction between constituting elements, as it is contained by ease, now becomes joy. The *ambigot*

temporarily vanishes, and the artefact finally has the possibility of being what it is! Here Wilde is right regarding this project; a cabinet constituted by friction is not really contained by anything else than the friction; held together by defiant will alone! Joy is the only thing that really matters, he seems to say. For, in the event of the continuous churning of friction, without a joyful release, the effort is truly wasted, even though it is a precondition. Even from the containers' point of view it is incomplete. It is not a proper artefact before it is contained in *itself*, separated from the will and grips of its maker/summoner. This cannot be done by other means than through joy, or a content relationship to it.

To paint, became a vessel to summarize the project, and is what finally enabled it to be contained, its final constituting element. The settling factor. The 'content' aspects of the act make Wilde's quote surprisingly wise (that is, surprising to me because it contradicts my initial position). However, regarding my fear of idleness from simply being content, which the idle week after the act of painting the pattern is a small testament to, there is a matter where Wilde is wrong too. It has to do with ownership: the signature of the accumulated friction, with its provenance, and the signature of its emancipator. The dimensions of Wilde's error are perfectly put in the introduction to the book I am picking up now; it is 20th September 2021. It is an essay by Slavoj Žižek (2009) with the text of Schelling's *Die Weltalter* (second draft, 1813) in English translation by Judith Norman. Žižek's essay "The Abyss of Freedom" starts like this:

Perhaps the best-known single line from film noir is the final remarks of the doomed hero in Edgar G. Ulmer's Detour: "Fate or some mysterious force can put the finger on you or me for no good reason at all."

⁸¹ Wilde, O. (1891) *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. Url: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/>

⁸² Or we? It changes the scope drastically...

This parlance provides a concise expression of the central enigma Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854) struggled to resolve through his long philosophical career – the enigma of freedom, of the sudden disposition of the "principle of sufficient reason", discernible from God's radically contingent act of creation up to the "irrational" insistence of a stubborn child on a seemingly trifling point, on which, however, he is ready to stake everything. Schelling's solution involves an unheard-of reversal of the very terms of this enigma: what if the thing itself is not freedom but the emergence of the chains of reason, of the causal network – or, to quote Schelling himself: "The whole world is thoroughly caught in reason, but the question is: how did it get caught in the network of reason in the first place?"

*Nowhere is the endeavour to comprehend this enigma more strenuous than in the three drafts of *Die Weltalter* ("Ages of the World") from 1811 to 1815. For many years, the third draft, from 1815, was the only one known to exist; it was published in volume 8 of Schelling's Works edited by his son, Karl, immediately after the philosopher's death. The two previous drafts were discovered at the end of World War II in the debris of the Munich University library, destroyed by Allied bombings; they were published in 1946. The three drafts remain fragments: all of them contain only book 1 of the planned trilogy of "Past, Present, and Future." They are interrupted at the crucial point of giving an account of the differentiation between Past and Present, of the emergence of the Word from the self-enclosed rotary motion of drives. However, in their very failure, they are arguably the acme of German Idealism and, simultaneously, a breakthrough into an unknown domain whose contours became discernible only in the aftermath of German Idealism. This breakthrough is most tangible in the second draft, and for this reason it was chosen for translation in the present volume. The work bears witness to such an effort of thought that it is almost painful to read.*

The dimension of Wilde's error would then be related to time. However big, might Wilde's stature be even bigger? Oscar Wilde is always right, they say. If so, and if there are any conclusions to draw out between his quote,

Schelling's effort of thought and the Peacock Cabinet, it must be that we are all ethically obliged only to release our own accumulations of friction as contents of a container, designed to Gordian specifications. Not to pass them on un-contoured, or un-shaped [-skap, -scape]. No matter how tall this order is. Unless, the ghost of the author, the frictional remains will be sustained by continued unsuccessful efforts to unveil the blurry contours of the unfulfilled desire. Either as a possession or an inheritance, producing the desire to catch the chaotic contour will, unfulfilled, only feed the friction. Only when found is this *Will-O-the-Wisp*, the ghost that holds the chaotic construction in the perception of a shape, evaporated. As some of these constructs of friction would take longer than a lifetime to figure out, however obvious, it is not obvious that it is ethically responsible to pass them on. (Which might help to explain why some posthumously published work wasn't published during the lifetime of the author.)

With the effect that this produces an ethical concern for the call on Time to aid to sooth or heel problems of friction, either by itself or by the hopeful arrival of an emancipator, transparency of artistic processes (e.g.: documentation of artistic research) produces it in equal measure. By putting on the mantle of artistic research you inherit so may blurry knots of friction, that a return to style would be welcome in the defence against the threat of nihilism or apathy. If only as a vessel to contain them temporarily, well aware of the links between style, ideology, and violence [Gerhard Richter]

Let us leave this as a desperate cry from inside the pantry. It is not a good representation of either the work or the author. It is not a placeholder of either.

What really makes no sense is how “the emergence of the Word from the self-enclosed rotary motion of drives”, or the emergence of the chains of reason, eventually achieves nothing, *nihil*. Truly this must be a mistake?

Symbols, e.g.: language, is itself a representational choice, because any other representation could also be possible [Kosuth, 1965 One and three chairs]. No matter what symbols are used, they will always be representational choices. Language or any other symbolic representation cannot produce anything absolute, simply because it will always represent a choice, and therefore neglects, or misses, something else. However, the most rigorous attempts of examining what the most accurate representation can produce, i.e.: mathematics [Gödel], show that within its symbolic representation there is a place where certainty ends. Where knowledge through its representation stops [the incompleteness theorem]. By examining the reach of axioms (yes/no statements) Maybe is discovered. The search looks like it is driven by the search for certainty, which always remain out of reach.

There is a wellspring of existential conundrums within the notion that the religious Mind would know not to search for the Absolute inside this Maybe, whereas the scientific Mind can't help itself - It must look. Is the interpretation of the client's [government, p. 22] lawful adjacency of artistic research to scientific research, as an alternative knowledge provider, correct? That it really is a call for an alternative to the propagation of probabilities? A cry from a different pantry?

Documentation of artistic research calls forth this self-referencing paradox which eventually leads to problems of infinite regress, which can have no bearing on the truth of things. The truth of things, in tandem with binary either-or categories, is what is believed to produce such paradoxes in artistic research. It could be seen as a representational fault by symbolic inadequacy.

The defence against self-referencing paradoxes (which will, if you let them, pull everything back into the self-enclosed rotary motion of drives. The set of all sets. The Ouroboros) is to see the error in mistaking

the representation for what it represents.

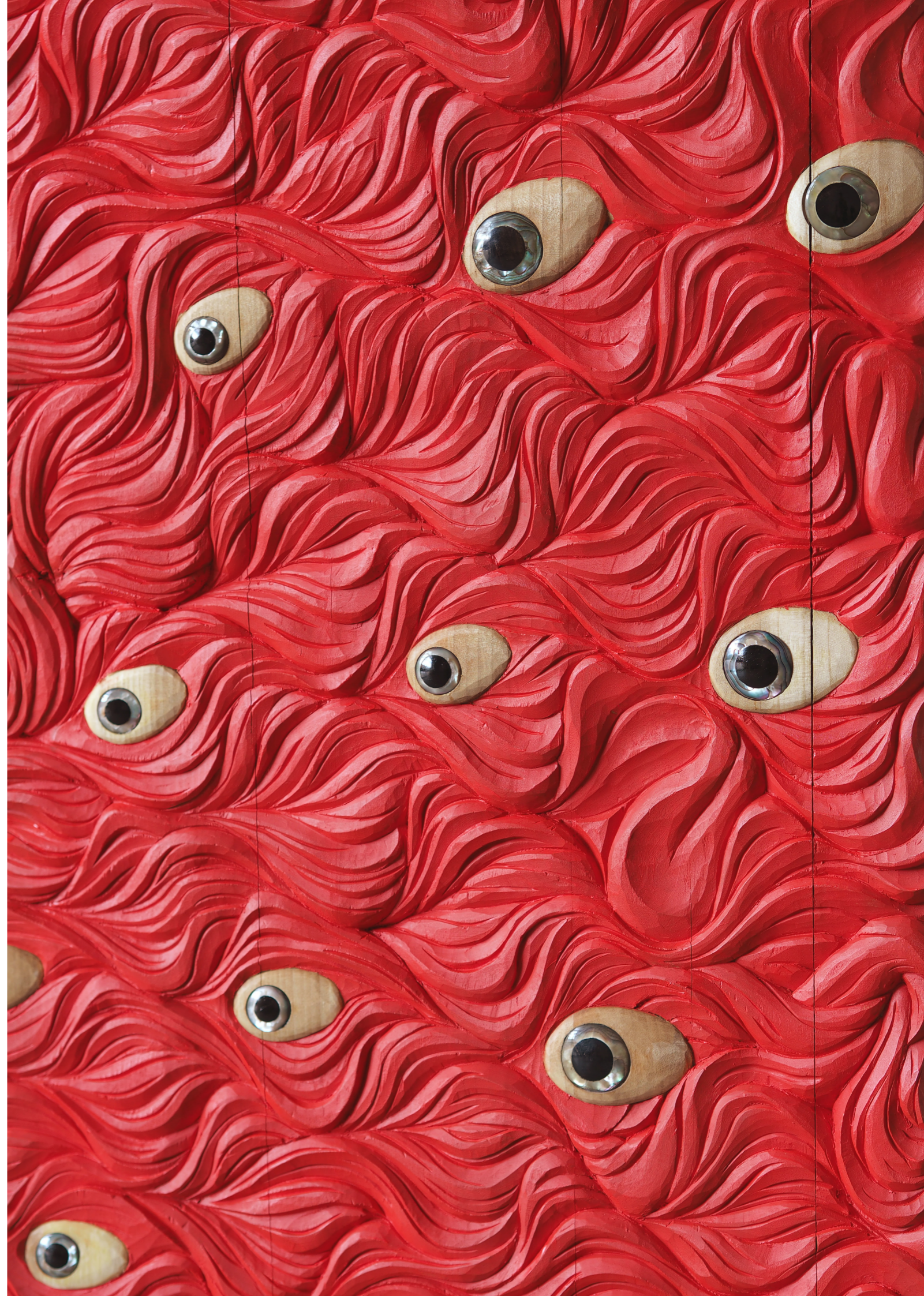
A difference between scientific depth and religious numinosity is that when science goes as deep as it can, it discovers that it is not depth it has found, only that it needs to readjust its zero point.

Knowledge of the Absolute, or absolute knowledge, cannot be contained within a representational choice (symbol). However, it can point to it but never contain it.

A different approach than to drill deeper into the infinite regress of self-referencing systems in search for solid ground (absolute), is to accept the finds we already have made in this search; that a symbol is in-itself a choice, and that somehow, we must choose. A perfect representation is impossible, but would, were it to be invented, eliminate the possibility of choice altogether.

Either-or categories help making choices, but the symbols' lure of true honest representation, can transport You into the dichotomy. Remembering that there always is a Witness (e.g.: You/I) to any choice of any either/or category suddenly makes it dynamic, and the need for overcomplication is not necessary. The witness, which always will be within a different dimension of existence to the symbol, transforms the either/or because the witness itself cannot be transformed and reduced into it. It cannot be represented fully. We cannot live inside our own mediation.

The terrible thing is that we already know this.



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Wardrobe Studies of 0*A Furniture-Study of Embodiment: The Surge of the Wildermann*

Abstract— The essay enters the subject matter of embodiment from the vantage-point of a specific artistic research project, in which the depths of a *craft* (woodcarving) is used as an entry-point to cabinetmaking (Bjørn Jørund Blikstad [BJB]). Moving from crafts to design. This query takes place in the context of a school rooted in a tradition of *industrial art* in which crafts have always been difficult to locate. The phenomenological topic of ‘embodiment’ is key to the present *redrawing* of this horizon: the exploration of *embodiment* as the transition from *cabinet* (as a crafted object) to *wardrobe* (as a designed cultural item). Industrial art is the horizon a body appears (Merleau-Ponty), marking the transition from a *crafted* object to a *cultural* item. Here the vector of embodiment—the procedures and concept by which the cabinet appears as a body [a wardrobe]—features a *foreclosed ground zero*: one of either a concealment or an entrapment. Like in a dream, we cannot tell exactly where reality begins. Stealth entities occasionally move past this border-traffic. In the case that we are examining here: the surge of the Wildermann in Tillman Riemenschneider’s wood-sculpture of furry Mary Magdalen’s ascension (1490-92), but also in the emergence of crafts as a post-industrial “barefoot philosophy”. The essay aims at making a substantial progress in the analysis of embodiment as a vehicle of transposition. And to make the transpositionality of embodiment a focus in research where archaeology and phenomenology join.



Background—The substance of our practical query into phenomenology is linked to an ongoing PhD project in artistic research at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO). It aims to level up contemporary practices in furniture design, by delving into the presently uncharted territory of the crafts at KHiO, in an environment with towering industrial machines, hallmarking the school with this unusual trait. In this project—*Level up*— woodcarving and cabinetmaking fuel a query that aims at coming up with artistic propositions in design, on KHiO’s industrial backdrop.

This appearance of emergent insights on a backdrop warrants this *phenomenological* search.

Bjørn Jørund Blikstad’s (BJB) project of cabinetmaking is experimental by virtue of articulating with writing as an activity in its own right, rather than extending from it nor being conceptually conducted ‘in parallel’. It is “orthogonal” to the making process in the sense that it seeks an autonomous justification in writing. It constitutes the discursive track of an archaeological search into how design hatched from industrial art in the history of a school that dates back to



1818. In an historical period when Norway had ceased to be a Danish colony, to become a Swedish protectorate. Enlightenment and industrialisation came at the same time.

The *Interim Drawing School* was founded in 1818. The same year as the Botanic Garden opened its gates in Oslo. It was the dawn of a young nation, with a constitution dating from 1814, in want of opening to the world, satisfying its needs for technological development, aspiring to an international cultural level. In the conception of a provincial capital in Northern Europe, the school would provide an education aiming to fulfil this array of ambitions. All at once. Beyond providing the foundations for an artistic education, the school also included a polytechnical curriculum inspired by the *École Polytechnique* in Paris, the capital of modernity (Sprovin, 2018).

In 1909 the Academy of Fine Arts was established. In 1910 engineering followed suit by the establishment of the Norwegian Technical College (NTH) in Trondheim. More institutions peeled off from the Drawing School, later on in the 20th century. A school of architecture in 1961. Industrial design 1996. A persistent trait of the Drawing School is that it *never rid itself completely* of the fields that had left it to form separate educational institutions. It is striking that when it entered into a *new* conglomerate with the performing arts and the fine arts, the industrial equipment acquired as it in 2010 moved to new facilities was *new* state of the art industrial machines.

A CNC mill, laser cutters, 3D printers, knitting machines and a ceramic kiln that was huge even at global scale in 2010. So, even though the lateral drift from from industrial art to design—from the beginning to the end of the 20th century—was definite it was still quite paradoxical (Kjellberg, 2011). It is as though a school not given to historical reflection, yet insisted on holding on to its archaeological layers. Which is why *Level up* features a combined phenomenological and archaeological query, articulating in the larger and growing international field of artistic research.

Area—The creative role of writing to research in-the-making is conceivable what sets phenomenology on a new mission, when the research in question is research with, through and for the arts (Frayling). The irresolution that the joint scientific goals and pedagogical objectives of artistic research—conceived in this framework—have achieved thus far (Belcher), could be addressed by developing writing with and through the arts within the framework of the phenomenological query. Pitching out artistic research to funding authorities could be salvaged for the nuance it deserves, by highlighting the durable impact of writing on the detail of perception.

On the other hand, the historical backdrop of how phenomenology itself has evolved from Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Schütz, Ingold, Varela and Petitengien stands the challenge of meeting a critique of *subjectivism*—from the introspective method of Wilhelm Wundt to the cognitive queries of George Lakoff—that could be addressed by considering how the *analytical* subject matter of phenomenology (Føllesdal) has evolved from the object, the body, the event, the social context to human experience prompts us to stop and linger on the *body* for a bit.

In the *Phenomenology of perception*, Merleau-Ponty states that as we make the statement that ‘river flows’ we are surreptitiously placing in the river a *witness* to its course. The real or imaginary artefacts that stand to witness the river as consistent phenomenon—otherwise given to the irreversible chaos of flow—constitute the first instances of *embodiment* in Merleau-Ponty’s early writings. It stands on the shoulders of a linguistic usage which historically allowed a much wider reception of what is named ‘a body’ than the one restricted to the human body.

In the history of science—during the two last centuries—the notion of ‘body’ would extend to solids in physics, corpus in sculpture, corpus of knowledge, astronomy (celestial bodies) and in politics (body politic). In the above example from Merleau-Ponty the interest of the ‘witness’ is triple: **1)** it features the embodiment of the river; **2)** it could be a proxy embodiment of ourselves [since we are not a leisure to stand in the river]; or alternatively **3)** features embodiment in terms of a categorising impact on humans, their witnesses and the phenomena when combined.

That is, how they combine—in the activity of making—as material agents. If the *research* ensuing from this combination is powered by making and shaped by writing, the philosophical errands that are run by this synergy are not argued in an for themselves. But are included as vehicles affording a *transposition* which is key to our project: if writing with and through art is transposed unto acting and thinking in a unified field, the understandings hatched by artistic research may be difficult to conceive outside an existential understanding of industry; a postindustrial query of the modern conceived by collapsing centuries of manufacture in the experiment.

Thesis—The late medieval abandonment of polychromy in favour of woodparent, or monochrome sculpture, is perhaps a starting point for a modern material paradigm; that of honesty and purity over fakes and *trompe l'oeil*. In order to investigate this claim BJB tried to understand one of the first sculptors to do this—Tillman Riemenschneider—by mirroring one of his famous sculptures (Ingold). BJB became intrigued by his Assumption of Mary Magdalen (1490-92) and the way Riemenschneider had sculpted her totally covered in fur, surrounded by seven angels on her ascent into heaven.

How the image of Mary Magdalen is embodied within the sculpture is one thing, how the artist and the commission behind the iconography concluded that she best could be embodied as a fur-clad hovering nude is another. The method of 'looking conjointly' hatches a reduction that somehow opens a different door than the one leading to either the psyche or the event. Which we take to determine the basic gesture and discovery of phenomenology (from Husserl onwards).

Here, we wish to establish embodiment as a functional aspect of the *displacement* occurring as a maker (Ingold) manages to project and reflect—tool in hand—as s/he works to incorporate the skill-set of a wood-carver. Being-in-the-workshop as a way of being-in-the-world. The mallet and iron testifying to the relation between **a)** the carver and **b)** the wood as it shapes two bodies in the process of carving: the body of **a)** the wood and **b)** the body of the carver. The pattern initiates a convergence within what is seen and what is done till it becomes *metastable* as a compound.

The pattern is a perceptible mark tracing the acquaintance between what is seen and done. The puzzle of why *this* pattern rather than another emerges is never entirely resolved. While departing from ontology it resists epistemic appropriation. If leaving from a *ground 0* it can **1)** be constrained to express the simple correspondence of a wood-carving trade. Or, the correspondence can **2)** be laborious and ritual, in that the work communicates an achievement. In both cases we remain within the perimeter of the *craft*. However, when the correspondence between what is seen and done shifts to become *generative*, the practice itself will **3)** move beyond wood-carving.

A *third body* emerges, which is neither that of the wood nor the carver's, to transpose the readable patterns —problems-cum-solutions—to a mean level. That of cabinetmaking. We claim that the emergence of the third body is a mover of a different



kind than what moved the carver and the wood up to this point. As an offspring from the courtship of woodcarving, cabinetmaking shifts from crafts to *design*, as it becomes a subject to cultural *appropriation*: which is the *wardrobe*. This foreclosure of the crafts in the step following wood-carving is our topic.

The said 'mirroring' of Riemenschneider's Mary Magdalen occurs as a previously initiated peacock ornamentation transforms into a resemblance of Mary's hair and fur, BJB got close enough to the motif's dust and dirt to intercept the contagious potential of embodiment. The proximity made his interest shift a little from ideas about the intentions of Riemenschneider to ideas about the intentions of the *commission* behind the iconography. The shift happened because of the political aspects of the work, both the hairy Mary and my developing Curious Peacock Cabinet; featuring the contemporary surge of the Wildermann in Hairy Mary.

The woodcarving of the peacock motif took about 500 hours. It took place in a workshop rigged with machines mimicking larger larger industrial capabilities (about 500 hours). The choice of doing the work in this workshop was partly BJB's way of paying a debt back to the students and colleagues, as a former teacher at the school and now a PhD-candidate. But also staged his previous apprenticeship in wood-carving in a different workshop where the cultural ethos expressed itself by practitioners standing *barefoot* as they chiselled the wood. In a similar way as phenomenology features a "barefoot philosophy" in modern times.

Here, the emergence of human being as 'of nature' resonates both with the motif of the Wildermann and barefoot philosophy. The query is performed conjointly to gently disengage with the personal narrative—or, singular discourse—to conduct a deeper ecological query into embodiment as the phenomenology of the third body. It will allow the search to the comparative value of other examples, as relevant to the case or case-studies in their own right. The collaborative writing process is of experimental value to both our ventures in artistic research, and makes a case in point of *thinking through, dissenting within and thinking for* (Puig de la Bella Casa, 2017) *design* fuelled by artistic propositions that live with the workshop-practice.



Structure—The essay proposes an archaeological deconstruction of an historical phenomenon, employing an experimental phenomenological study of *embodiment* to do precisely this. The title —*Wardrobe Studies of 0*—suggests the ground zero of culture as a ground-figure of the surge of nature in culture: the modern vision of human being as ‘of nature’ prefigured by the theme of the Wildermann, long before the Enlightenment, J.J. Rousseau and ‘Sturm und Drang’. It is proto-historical in the sense of W. Benjamin and G. Agamben: a precursor needed for history to be told.

The above sections will be worked into an introduction to the paper. BJB’s profuse writing developed in the backdrop of his errand with wood-carving will go through a reductive process to fit the requirements of brevity needed for the special issue of *Phenomenology & Practice*. In other section, we will transpose this experimental reduction—based on *need*—onto a *phenomenological* reduction to pitch the job and errand of this paper specifically (drawing on Husserl’s and ulterior discussions on the role of *reduction* in phenomenology). *What is an adequate reduction?*

We will drive for a concept of reduction that is productive/generative, and model it in dynamic phenomenological terms as an output from *writing with*, *dissenting within* and *writing for* an artistic proposition in design. To this end a main body of the essay will be devoted to multiply the workings of tryouts in the project, as an assemblage that will feature a minimum variety of possible alternative combinations, for the reader to conceive a plausible model of/for artistic research as a workshop for experimental phenomenology. A hope for a *barefoot philosophy beyond the metaphor*. The artistic method of adding/subtracting applied to the subject.

The section is concluded with a discussion pro/contra positions. However, the essay will *not* produce a mapping of the field in the style of a position-paper, but will limit itself to discuss positions that serve to locate *this* project. It will sample the loose ends of the main text-body (above) and synthesise these in the form of a model: a design for a phenomenological *experimentarium*. A tool-kit for theory developing theory from *within* artistic research (rather than simply adding to it). In the conclusion we will return to assess what has been achieved in the matters discussed in the introduction, enriched and altered by the mileage in the paper.



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Catching the Peacock's Tail

‘Theorising in practice’ prompts two obvious alternatives: theorising in the context of practice, and theorising as a practice. What we wish to bring to Malmö are performative aspects of theorising in the context of making. Featuring the ‘learning theatre’ as an *iterative* concept for making and learning *in performance*. The edition of the *learning theatre* that we will bring to the audience in Malmö, constitutes the next step after a previous iteration in Oslo: this learning theatre took place in the library at KHIO 25-27.08.21 (Oslo National Academy of the Arts).

In that *iteration* the learning theatre gathered class-members of the first year MA in furniture and interior, some second year MA-students from different specialisations and from Art & Craft, along with a teacher and some administrative staff. The centrepiece of the learning theatre was a large wood-carved peacocks tail on top of a cabinet, as an integrated piece made by PhD fellow in furniture, Bjørn Jørund Blikstad. The piece is an iteration from Tilman Riemenschneider’s *Mary Magdalene* (1492)—depicted with furry skin—on *commission* for the City of Münnerstadt.

The library session was on 12:00-13:00 for three days. The piece was discussed from the perspectives of *art-history*, *drawing* and *provenance*. We realised that the *three-session combination* had grown a tail: adding to the provenance—a *journey* and travail of theorising, some *staging* to combine audience-input, the *presence* of the work and a *structure* to complete the session. We could *turn* the page, *review* the session from an arms length distance, propose a theoretical practice *not incline* to operate from distance, but move from successive resettlements of an *aporia*.

Leaving the internecine wars between C.G. Jung’s *persona* and *shadow*—the presenting self’s taunting hindsights—for a query on the peacock’s alternating between *showing* and *dragging* its tail. In the words of Kierkegaard: “On the whole, it would be desirable if aesthetics, one day, would attempt to begin where, for so many years, it has ended, with the illusion of magnanimity. Once it did this it would then work hand in hand with the religious, for this power is the only one that can rescue the aesthetic from its combat with the ethical.” Catching the drift at *ground zero*.

In Malmö we propose to *extend* the work of reception from our circle—Bjørn Blikstad and his mentor Theodor Barth—to the audience/conference *participants*. This we will do by involving another of Blikstad’s works: *Taweret*. Her hippo-, alligator- and lion-attributes featuring the *other/fierce* mother. In the ecology of the ground zero—the mother of reception—*house-clearing* is an integral part. The structure of the space will be mobilised to initiate a C-19 safe group-work with the audience. It will highlight the role of active repertoires in generating semiotic reflection.



Peacock Cabinet

Peacock Cabinet (detail)

Taweret panel—inside

Taweret panel—obverse

photos: Jørn Aagaard, Exhibition: HULLIAS

Orthogonal Embodiment

This proposal is a presentation and an attempted demonstration of a particular relationship between theory and practice. The project proposal is a direct consequence of an event that took place in the library at KHiO where three guests, an art historian, an ornament-expert, and an anthropologist (Mona Pahle Bjerke, Karen Disen, Theo Barth) were invited to extract, and add, content from the Peacock Cabinet (part of Blikstad's artistic research). <https://khio.no/events/1303>

Here, however, Blikstad and Barth (phd-tutor) will elaborate, by experimentation, on a believed fertile working relationship between making and writing.

By several attempts of co-writing research papers, one paragraph made by two quotes from each serve to highlight the issue: "Being-in-the-workshop" as a way of being-in-the-world. The mallet and iron testifying to the relation between **a)** the carver and **b)** the wood as it shapes two bodies in the process of carving: the body of **a)** the wood and **b)** the body of the carver. The emerging pattern initiates a convergence within what is seen and what is done till it becomes *metastable* as a compound.¹ "This compound, summoned into existence by concentration and effort, can eventually settle as fully *stable*. The will, or agency, of the metastable compound and the stable compound are differently perceived. There is a side of animism within this sort of embodiment. An artistic researcher must have the ability to control their possessions because knowledge is likely only found between states of influence, between the emotional and the rational, between the conscious and the unconscious, between polarity. The effort of learning is to understand this new will compared to your own. If incorporated,

it becomes your own. This should be an ethics of AR concerned with theories of knowledge because there might not be any *knowledge* to be found in the metastable, and once incorporated, thus stable, it is hard to separate from the rest. [Assumption]"²

We want to make an arrangement of the 'architecture of presentation' - the audience, the presenters, the designed artefacts, and the digital technology - to present an idea we have of a working relationship between 1) theory and practice, 2) work and display, and the relationship between 1) and 2). The designed 'artefacts' for display are the Peacock Cabinet and the Taweret Panel. Taweret is an Egyptian Goddess, a pregnant four-part compound of hippo, lion, crocodile, and human. We believe the distinction between the parts is necessary to extend, also to the architecture of the presentation, and we will elaborate on this through a concept of orthogonality, both literal and metaphorical, opting for an alternative to parallelism/alignment. Any whole from the parts will not attempted to be kept within the architecture but allowed to



¹ Barth, T. & Blikstad, B.J (2021) Crabwise #04. *Crabwise #01-06*. KHiO, 6th June. <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmliui/handle/11250/2759139>

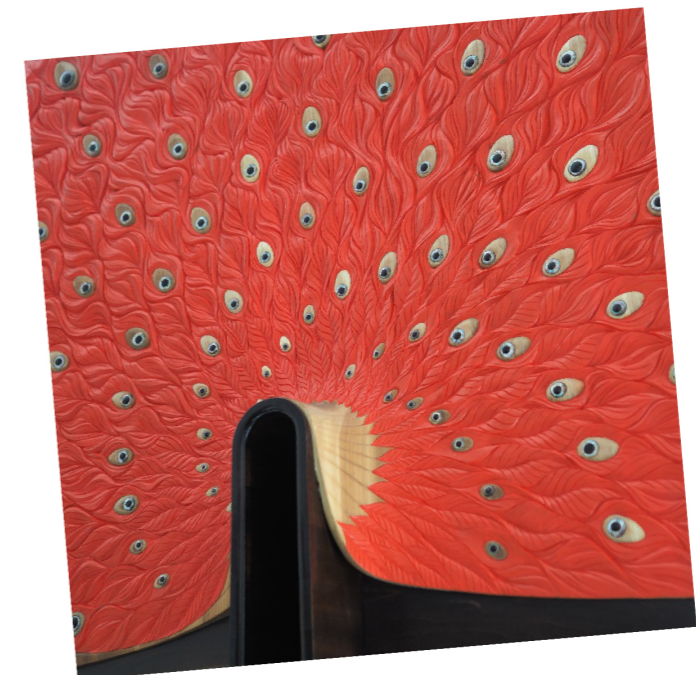
² Blikstad, B.J. (2021) *The Peacock Cabinet*. KHiO (to be published in December 2021)

be taken away by each participant. Some involvement, by simple image and writing tasks, will also be required by the audience.

The first tier of orthogonality is represented by the embodiment of the workshop (by BjB) and the embodiment of the scriptorium (by ThB); between our two bodies/between the two spaces. A second tier will perhaps be tangible as each presenter will assume the other, by co-operation (candidate and tutor) and requirement (articulation and documentation). Perceiving an orthogonal intersection from both positions, on both tiers, allow for the potentiality of assumption beside the concept of incorporation. That is, consciously summoning 'a third body' outside each of us and testing the potential reach of this new entity. The involvement of the audience inside the architecture of this presentation is testing the effect of this geometry. If successful, their contributions (handwritten statements on top of a printed image as contributions to elevating the discussion) will be presented in a line up of panels on a later date.

The claim, 'tacit knowledge might be an oxymoron', is the hot potato. Concerning "artistic research" at KHiO; "en vitenskapelig høyskole" as an alternative knowledge provider, it is a worry that a quest for definitions is reducing rather than enriching the arts. Hence, we get caught in combat between the role of language and words compared to the role of making in the arts. What the word *knowledge* is thought to contain is heavily influenced by the recent establishment of KHiO as an academy of science. However, within the trouble new possibilities emerge.

Instead of the attempt to be exhaustive to each other's possibilities, we attempt to let the craft and technicality of each flourish in its own right, opting for orthogonality, avoiding parallelism, historicity and philological attempts to encapsulate the process of the arts. Respecting the technicality of each craft and remain faithful to their own laws [Agamben, *Warburg and the Nameless Science*]. Letting them off the hook of *having* to match each other. [Kosuth, *Three chairs*].



Bjørn Jørund Blikstad

Theo Barth



