



Fig. 1—Nicolas Bourriaud hosted a key-note lecture on Zoom, for the PKU project Matter Gesture Time led by artist Geir Harald Samuelsen (KMD), at the seminar *Resisting nature – the aesthetics of a fading division*. The lecture was a tour de force in scoping time from the prehistoric to the contemporary human. After the lecture he welcomed questions.

After Nicolas Bourriaud's key-note in Bergen 13.11.23 a discussion ensued on *distance* as related to the possibility of the projective power in art. He accused the lack of distance, in the contemporary setting; as symbolic production becomes unrelated to art-work, because it has become undelayed and imbued with the appearance of immediacy. Under the spell of this illusion humanity will evolve in a direction where we are increasingly vulnerable to invisible predators, moving us back to the place the first humans (living with visible predators) who engaged with symbolic art-work.

From the *lack* of distance that permeates populist alt-right milieus, for one. But how do we make up the difference between *distance*—and the *lack* of it—and what one might call *inarticulate* distance (I asked)? For instance, one might consider *infinite* distance as inarticulate: following which we may ask whether transcendentalism is inarticulate distance? Does it operate in a similar ways to inarticulate distance as a *lack* of distance? What they share is that *distance* is in both cases inarticulate. What if art-work hinges on the *articulation* of distance, not only its *projection*?

In that case, we are back to the difference between illusion and fiction: the intrinsic connection that we may see in the world today—between alt-right *populism* and *theocracy*—makes this discussion unavoidable. Here, I retort, that it is inessential whether we dismiss the transcendentalism as conceived by theocracy, in favour of openness (which with Kant as a reference might be so open after all, and problematic in regard of post-colonialism). If complexity is what is at stake (and what separates complexity from alt right *chaos* and from theocratic *complication*) then we are in want of a better understanding of what we call *fiction*.

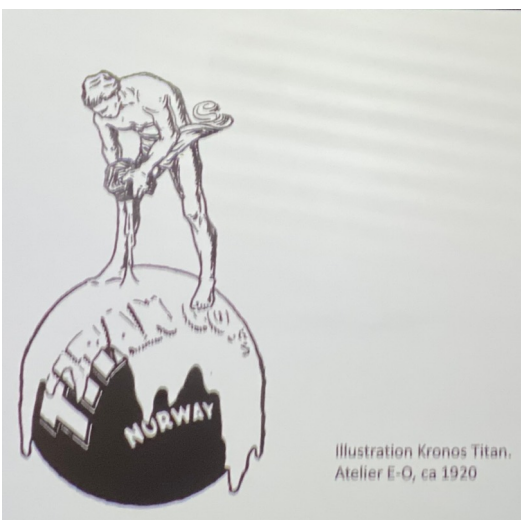


Fig. 2—In the seminar's last lecture, ceramist Marte Johnsen gave a lecture—based on her collaborative artistic research with art historian Ingrid Halland—on the production of Norwegian white: TiO₂ (titanium dioxide). It provided a critical counterpoint to Heidi Gustafson's and Elizabeth Villik's research on ochre: profiling the intervention of a Norwegian industry in the terrestrial ochre palette. What is attempted here is to look at this through an ecology of agency: i.e. [disordered systems](#).

Fiction is then what moves from the double reflection of the *object* and the *horizon* (Kant), to double articulation of distance: that is, something we can actually know *when* we have reached in our work. It is *neither* possessive *nor* out of reach, but within the relational range of the *immersive* (one of Bourriaud's major points). Here, fiction can be precisely defined within the cross-pressure between the articulation of distance with regard to the immediate, but also articulating the distance of the infinite. Here, the immediate and the infinite may be *contained* by fiction, where they are also *marked* by reality.

This is the *tooth* (or the “bite”). It turns up *between* the infinite and the immediate. And is, in my view, where we should look to art: it is here it links up with *agency*. Not as an optical instrument, but what brings thought and extension together in what Spinoza calls the *3rd way of knowing*: intuition as something specific tending toward the unique. This moment of vectorisation is also the entry unto the problematic of *deixis*. That is, the *pointings* that are both functionally and materially integrated in [structural layers](#) of reality. Most likely it can happen through the steps below.

Starting broadly with *disordered systems*. In the cross-pressure between two *axiologically inarticulate* instances of distance (one lacking, the other infinite) something *else* turns up, as soon as, in the said *cross-pressure*, the two instances of distance *become* articulate. By articulate we mean *deixis* as *steps to an ecology of agency* (and the material trace it leaves in its wake). During the seminar organised by Matter Gesture Soul (Resisting nature—the aesthetics of a fading division) this sort of layer emerged from two interventions about *ochre*: [H. Gustafson](#) and [E. Velliky](#).

Between the short time-span of human life/history and the long time-span of earth evolution/-history is the [time of ochre](#): in this relationship it is the mean-time. Though Gustafson’s and Velliky’s approach are quite different—in the critical relation between science and other forms of knowledge—the ochre substratum of what I am tempted to call *time-matters*, is located *between* the long *and* short time-spans of sizeable terrestrial processes: in the relation between the living and the inanimate, there is the *mean-time*. It is the realm of [possibility](#), and various undertakings.

So, between the disordered systems of life and what Latour calls the [universe](#)—one of a short time span the other of a long time span—there is kind of ordering principle unfolding in the mean time: whether it is *working* that way (Gustafson) or it is function humans *ascribe* to it (Velliky), this is the substrate of ochre in its multiple manifestations and *system-like* properties. Whether it is the one or the other, what can take interest in are the *steps* manifesting this substratum as a realm of possibility, at a terrestrial scale, that makes it not *entirely* random: possible, contingent, arbitrary...

A case was presented by M. Johnslie of steps to an ecology of agency moving *beyond* this realm (ochre): *titanium white*—which in its non-toxic and covering property has repercussions for the entire ochre colour palette (to remain within the reflective precinct of painting). Titanium dioxide (TiO₂), is the epitome of the *same*: unlike ochre which varies systematically, TiO₂ is uniform. It is everywhere at any time the *same* white. Alongside its production, the bi-production of *similar* powders: the greenish vitriol and the grey-white sand lift as detritus from TiO₂ extraction.

Alongside these same and similar entities: the discovery and study of alchemical symbols in the terrazzo-floors of the Norwegian production plant. In the accompanying industrial narrative the symbols are simply equated with the names of the chemicals in the periodic table. The articulation of the *difference* between 1) the industrial appropriation of the symbols—in a scientific framework—and 2) the ideas/practice of alchemy, thereby becomes relevant. Consequently, M. Johnslie and I. Helland have engaged an investigation of this difference, articulating it in their research. Following the gross pattern of the same, similar, different and other. The other being the other uses of alchemy.



Fig. 3—if we move from [the same to the similar, the different and the other](#), have we moved in a way that can be subsumed by the radican: growing roots while advancing. Perhaps. It is a form of knowing—proceeding by steps—happening on condition of a particular form of projection, called [empathy](#). Making oneself available to *stirrings* at the boundary to where we cannot go. In other words, responding to Michel Serres’ statement: *le monde s’èmeut/the world is moved*.

Rounding up the day with the PKU project Matter Gesture Soul, this last seminar successfully contributed to locate the [fulcrum](#) of where its different contributions appear to meet: where artistic research verges unto environmental humanities, and archaeology verges unto geology. The four of them being required to move [future investigations](#) unto that *cross-roads* between the four disciplines, where fieldwork—in the sense of observing, keeping a record, retrieving samples, consulting archives and engaging in productive conversations with contemporary theory—becomes the main vehicle, or method, through which the articulation of distance (in a spatiotemporal sense) will happen, because they are articulated differently within these disciplines in the first place. This is at the core/heart of [field research](#).