

### iii[b] In-forming

In November 2017, I attended the second *Worlding the Brain*<sup>1</sup> conference in Amsterdam. Alva Noë, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, was one of the keynote speakers sharing his notions on 'Art and Entanglement' with the assembled crowd. In his book *Strange Tools* he argues that *human*, is a group of beings which are "cultural by nature". Noë regards *cultural technology* in broad manner: including tool usage and actions such as writing and drawing. These movements *in-form* us into what we are. In organizational sense. He claims that art's aim is *reorganization*. Disruption. In his talk at the Amsterdam conference, he focused on entanglement of nature and culture itself. He feels we have radically underestimated the significance of this entanglement. A Pyrrhic victory. The origin of writing, Noë conveys, lays with accounting, with "tel-ling" or the taking down of numbers and keeping trail. This 'score taking' technology articulates *mark making* other than speech. Actions, not only preserved for humans as animals also make this movement when creating tracks and routes. The creation of tracks is part of a knowledge cycle. A 'keeping track' of what we do creates readings of our doings offering insight towards possible intention. Writing is the scratch on the body made by another, painful to the skin ... its sounds show up in the way we have learned to play with them. I can relate to that statement. A trained graphic designer/artist, I cut, scrape, pin, bruise, stain, burn, solder, weave and sew symbols and tracks into materials such as paper, wood, stone, clay, cloth, skin, iron, paraffin ... an effort to articulate that what cannot *speak* within the linear, to articulate what is buoyant in interlinear space. As a designer, I am accommodating, translating the will of the client (sender) to that of the receiver. As an artist, I question and disrupt conventions. Either are ways to speak from within matter itself. Entering its domain by force ... appropriation of intrinsic inner values from another body - human and non-human alike. Used towards creating an understanding with ones' own. An emotive gesture that is performative through its action. Matter gives way to force inflicted. The non-human body allows the will of human mind to use the familiarity of its compound as an *intercessor*.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.worldingthebrain2017.com/program/](http://www.worldingthebrain2017.com/program/)

And so, for those who are able to write, spoken language becomes more than a medium through which they express themselves (as it is for illiterates and children); language is rather the material against which they press the alphabet, against which they literally express. In short, they work on the language. Only at the point when language ceases to be a means (a medium) and begins to be a purpose does the essence of alphabetic writing come into view.

(Flusser, *Does Writing* 62)

Therefore, from my performative actor role, I feel akin with the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser's (*Does Writing*) etymological account of one of the foundational myths of the West: the precedence of the act of writing over the act of creating images. The narrative Flusser sets out follows an act of creation executed by God - the Great Father, whom sculpted his own image from clay (Hebrew: Adamah), which can be interpreted as the material of 'the Great Mother', by imbuing it with his 'breath' -the spirit this intercourse erected human being (Hebrew: Adam). From this myth one could further the narrative to the birth of the act of writing. Baked Mesopotamian clay tablets induced with information. Gods intra-action of breath and clay matter, meant grasping an object, reshaping it through tactile intercourse towards an act of information: he physically scraped form into it. *In-formed* it (41)... Then he continued to burn the informed tablets, hardening them. The gesture of writing comes from this informing and burning. To inform means a subject performs a defiant scratch, insinuating 'spirit' into complacent objects, relieving oneself of phlegmatic resistance from objects towards subjects by tunnelling itself out of the conditional into objective realm. Writing presses its meaning into the object as an act of inspiration. However, temporality will erase all that is 'pressed in' and as objects tend towards entropy all engraved information in time will pulverize. The subjects will to inform is weaker than the objective world. Future efflux of influence of scraped out written information relies on the resilience of the object into which it is engraved. The strength of a message can be measured by the effort it takes to scrape it away. The hardening of clay by heating is the hardening of memory. However, even the most adamant matter resists deliberate reworking: iron rusts, sand riding wind scours, water gullies and simple usage of inscribed, *in-formed* material wipe our renderings away over time.

Let us pause here and take a brief look at a particular example of in-formed material: *St. Peter's Statue*. A work in bronze attributed to *Arnolfo di Cambio* demonstrates temporality as an intrinsic property of objects. Centuries of pilgrims visiting the Basilica touch and kiss the representation of St. Peter's (the key bearer) foot which proceeds to *wear thin*, the right toe caressed amorphous by faithful pleads that he be merciful and open the gates of heaven should they die before ending their journey. A representative tool that carries a message of faith through time, the gesture of its usage as a *divine tool* performative, its material adagio a return to its primary *form* in the temporal progression of myths. The reproduction of the representation, its only true chance to travel with posterity.

If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change.  
"If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again;  
that is, you must be always having a revolution...An almost unnatural vigilance is really required of the citizen  
because of the horrible rapidity with which human institutions grow old.  
(Chesterton)

Flusser points out that the history of the West revolves around this theme of the passing on of information production and safeguarding it through *reproduction* and *storage*. The imaginative subject that seeks to be free and immortal, forms a binary with the static object that tends towards heat and death. He sees this act of scratching in or inscription as the ultimate expression of free will. By generalizing this act of writing, a pathway to a feeling of *detachment* is created...a tearing up of the imaginative.