

## The data world and daily theatre

*Things often start with a Renaissance... and explore the modern... enter an immaterial void... end up living in the matrix... indeed: we are hybrid and therefore pluralistic.*

*- exploring a living history of orderliness between nature and culture through the work of Esther Stocker.*

*Things often start with a renaissance...*

Revelations are never sublime but simply connect elements, in a manner previously unknown, to our awareness. This sense of "eureka" is motivated by the clue that, on the back of that profound insight or understanding, you set out to try and investigate further by experience. Like when that guy was lying in his bath; this often happens when you are in spaces alone, for example under the shower or using the toilet. Moreover, it mostly occur when your mind is wandering: It's a proven fact that best ideas develop while you're doing things automatically and thinking a bit out of focus, for it is at such moments that we combine experience and imagination slightly outside the box that we tend to focus on so much: the box of our daily routine and our push to deliver.

I experienced this moment on the toilet here at Onomatopee, an exhibition space I run, after having browsed through the work of Esther Stocker and texts about her work on her website. The walls of the toilet here are covered with 15 x 15 cm tiles covered with about 90 mini tiles of about 1.2 cm square: typical cheap standardised materials. These tiles not only covered the walls of the small space that surrounded me, but also covered up the toilets' cistern, therefore having this 90 degrees edge of tiles at a height of approx. 120 cm. The tiles created an optical pattern and the edge brought that pattern even closer, foregrounding the pattern, along horizons and verticals next to me and in front of me establishing a grid that could almost have been inspired by a Renaissance drawing...

*And explore a modern...*

Of course it wasn't Renaissance here: I was simply captured in-between the richness of modernity's democratised standardisation. Although my cultivated clothes tried to blend in, having stripes on my blouse and vest and wearing well-cut jeans, it was my body that felt out of place: aware of it's natural uniqueness as represented in the curves of my jawline, the un-centred moles on my back, the out-of-tone rhythm of my toes, the uncertainty of having my hair still in the style set before I jumped on my bike and drove to work and so on.

I describe the above in order to argue that we truly are the living examples of an in-between of 'nature' and 'nurture'. This awareness-situated momentum brings to mind that we can never fully succumb to the modern. *Eureka*. Nevertheless, we are trying to align ourselves to the tokens of modernity all day long: we drive for the better parts of it and we hope to be pulled into it for here (or there) "we will be in place".

But can we really –as to say "in reality"– get there? Or do we only produce well when letting our minds wander? Of course, as scientific scholar and creative guru Bruno Latour has argued, we've never been modern: there has never been a separation of nature and culture. Nature and culture are mutually inclusive, rather than exclusive. And personally, to be frank, I feel I cannot relate to all of modernity's abstract orders while living my day-to-day life and I hope people are emancipated enough to affirm this aspect of our "humanist failure" in this sense. There's just too much knowledge and words to be taking into account in order to live the life promised by modernity. We have to put a humanistic hold on the notion of *Bildung*, although it started as a humanist emancipatory push to achieve a larger goal.

And so we are not so much at a standstill, for there are many specialists still busy building the body of modernity, but we are at a moment in human history where we've reached the maximum of processing knowledge in order to expand our daily horizon and our lived

practises. We know we are neglecting elements of relevance all the time or at least know so “pretty much”, as we do not always accept or affirm this and therefore often lack a certain modicum of modesty.

*enter an immaterial void...*

So, in a way the immaterial side to our “modernity” is expanding and expanding, even if it almost seems a physical, holistic entity when we speak of it: expanding as a void. This void is increasing not just through the cumulative growth of knowledge but also through the immaterial platforms it uses. It is in this immaterial sphere or resonant to this sphere that our lives become part of a neuropolitical order: not only because we train our minds to relate but also because our bodies increasingly start following the immaterial paths set out for us by professionals in the void management of the “experience economy” and we do so within a somewhat holistic interface, often kind of “techy”, we’re relating with all the time.

We, the creative producers of our culture, are playing the immaterial platforms. Therefore it is at this moment that we vacate a modernity that helped us in our Big Leap and become simple elements within the sum it produced. The holistic entity of that emancipated modernity we experience here became –expanding this thought experiment- an opaque entity of the immaterial that indoctrinates and turns us into small wheels of data traffic within the big system, albeit only if we believe technology will prevail. Luckily there are still many territories this “global mechanics” has not yet reached. There still is a divide where the old idea of the modern remains very much alive; where the “global” has not reached.

But meanwhile we do live in this global. For we are the newest labourers, the immaterial ones. We draft things behind our computers, send our commissions to produce by activating a sequence of digital assignments in nanoseconds, resulting in cut foil or printed objects according to the unseen algorithm’s delivered by a file that visualised these to our sense of reality. We are the immaterial creative labourers who don’t need people to do the producing. We live the prophesy of creative emancipation and productive freedom excluding physical labour and exploiting the economy by selling the services of imagination. We are at the top of the food chain and no one is allowed to join us producing (forgive me the symbolic exaggeration). We only allow people to like and to follow. We are the poets that play about autonomously a new humanist emancipation through, among others, the immaterial dissonant, the immaterial opaque and the immaterial mimesis.

*ending up living in the matrix...*

So: we might be living in the Matrix and in need of a Neo who brings back our sense of reality. I relent at the toilet and dwell on the walls. I do so only after considering the work of Esther Stocker and ask myself if she has features of Neo –here personified as the Matrix film character who took the order of immaterial fiction imposed to people back to a sort of self-governance-, at this down-to-earth junction where we look the modern and the immaterial in the eye. It seems we might be caught up in a productive push through beliefs into the fruits of either the modern or the immaterial, while we know we’ve never been modern. So what about this immaterial reality: Can we level it to our reality?

Of course this question is a rhetorical one. You, dear reader, already noticed in the tone of voice of the above that I refuse not to level and probably sense that my take on the work of Esther Stocker is that I affirm her work as subversive of the immaterial. A Neo? Well: it would sound obscene to mirror her work to the efforts of a film character. Rather it is a deeper material understanding that catalyses a tactile experience which is of strength in her work.

Of course the work “reboots”: it seemingly takes out all noise and culture in order to figuratively and materially accentuate the rhythms which play in our experience. It does so in the here-and-now. Yes: this is a theatre of the immaterial and, somehow subversive, it is experienced somewhat minimalistically and therefore modern, for we experience it as an immaterial order. We’re not wearing 3d glasses to experience her work (yet), though I feel

she does this on purpose. It is the immaterial made tactile here which allows us to step back from the immaterial and humanize the basic grids that play our neuropolitical status in the space where we live our lives. Here, the patterns presented only appear to be consistent and suggest set algorithms. They are rather complex for the blind eye and tend to play with the scope of our understanding, yet at times we see and experience faults in the grammar of the lines. And of course, when moving through these spaces, the perspectives alter and might change tone. Evidently lines do toy with our senses, as Esther professionally plays out the opportunities of diagonal and orthogonal lines. It captures us in the ensuing theatre play and sets out physical courses, portals playing us out to the structure we're living up to right there.

Typical to her installations and typical to installations, her work comes close. The bodies intersect and your body walking through it becomes something of a viral element in the algorithms. Typical to her paintings and typical to painting we experience by situating ourselves along a visual trans-positioning into the abstract beyond. We are in the matrix tunnel, yet we're not. This work is an allegorical representation, an immaterial abstract of fundamental "nature", featuring the format iconic to our time as represented by the matrix made visible, made real, tactile and close. This is the algorithmic, visual representation of that which pushes us to become less natural and pushes us to succumb to live by culture instead of living through culture. Here, we are led by experience, minimal and thorough, yet find ourselves walking through a space which is called exhibition space or "installation piece". We leave through the door and end up in the open, under whatever sky. *Indeed: we are hybrid and therefore pluralistic.* It is in this poetic dichotomy of nature and culture, playing both determined as dynamic in a double prole, that this work is relevant to our horizon.

Freek Lomme, April 2014.

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