

reading as a process of
selecting the bits one likes
& assembling one's own story?

lichens + mosses that grow in the
cracks of walls?

A Process Of Bewilderment

Simon Denny & Tahī Moore

DANIEL DU BERN

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Notes on Grand Narratives: Simon Denny & Tahī Moore in conversation with Daniel du Bern

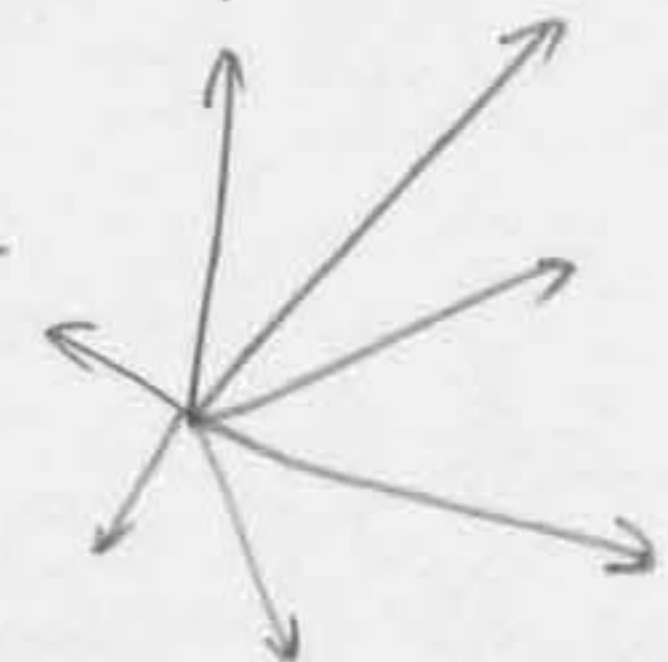
The following text is an edited transcript
of a conversation between Tahī Moore and
Simon Denny and myself, Daniel du Bern.

The subject of our discussion was Moore
and Denny's exhibition at Enjoy,
A Process of Bewilderment.

Respecting the nature of these two artists'
practices, the decision was made to move
away from the conventional style
of interviewing - of questions posed and
answers given - instead pursuing a more
open mode of discussion; furthermore,
we have opted for a style of presentation
that does not clearly distinguish
between the different voices within
this text. The order in which these
extracts appear is not necessarily
sequential and many passages
have been revisited and revised
during the course of this
conversation.

Knowing how and where to begin is difficult.
How does one go about discussing work that
is clearly concerned with the expansive, the
hyperbolic and chaotic? This is a conundrum. It
is antithetical to begin in a selective manner. To
single out aspects of the work for discussion,
even with the desire to open things out, is
a reductive process. Thus there can be no
preamble here. The photographs accompanying
this text will provide any description that may
be required.

Structures are built at the point where nothing
becomes something. As these structures
expand and grow meanings become attached
to them. Eventually these structures become
saturated and new structures need to be
made.



Some time back I met with a curator to discuss
an idea I had for an exhibition. Prior to our
meeting they had asked me to write a 'project

05

outline', in which to detail the conceptual basis for the proposed work. After numerous failed attempts at writing an outline for a project that was only in its conception, I deemed it appropriate to draw a diagram instead. In this diagram I detailed ideas and concepts of perceived significance; and through the use of scale, proximity and an array of lines and arrows, I tracked the various relationships existing between these ideas and concepts. It became somewhat convoluted and incoherent. The curator had little time for this diagram. From what I could gather they saw this as showing my inability to prioritise information. They did not see it as my desire to address the complexity inherent in reality, that things are riddled with contradictions.

Some people have responded in a similar way to my work. One viewer said there was too much to see, too much to look at and that you end up looking at nothing. When I have shown works that were simple and pared back some viewers perceived my work to have clarity, whereas they see my more expansive works as being only a muddle. I think this notion of 'the complexity of reality' is something hopefully built into my practice. The contradictory is always important. This show in particular had a lot to do with contradiction and hyperbole.

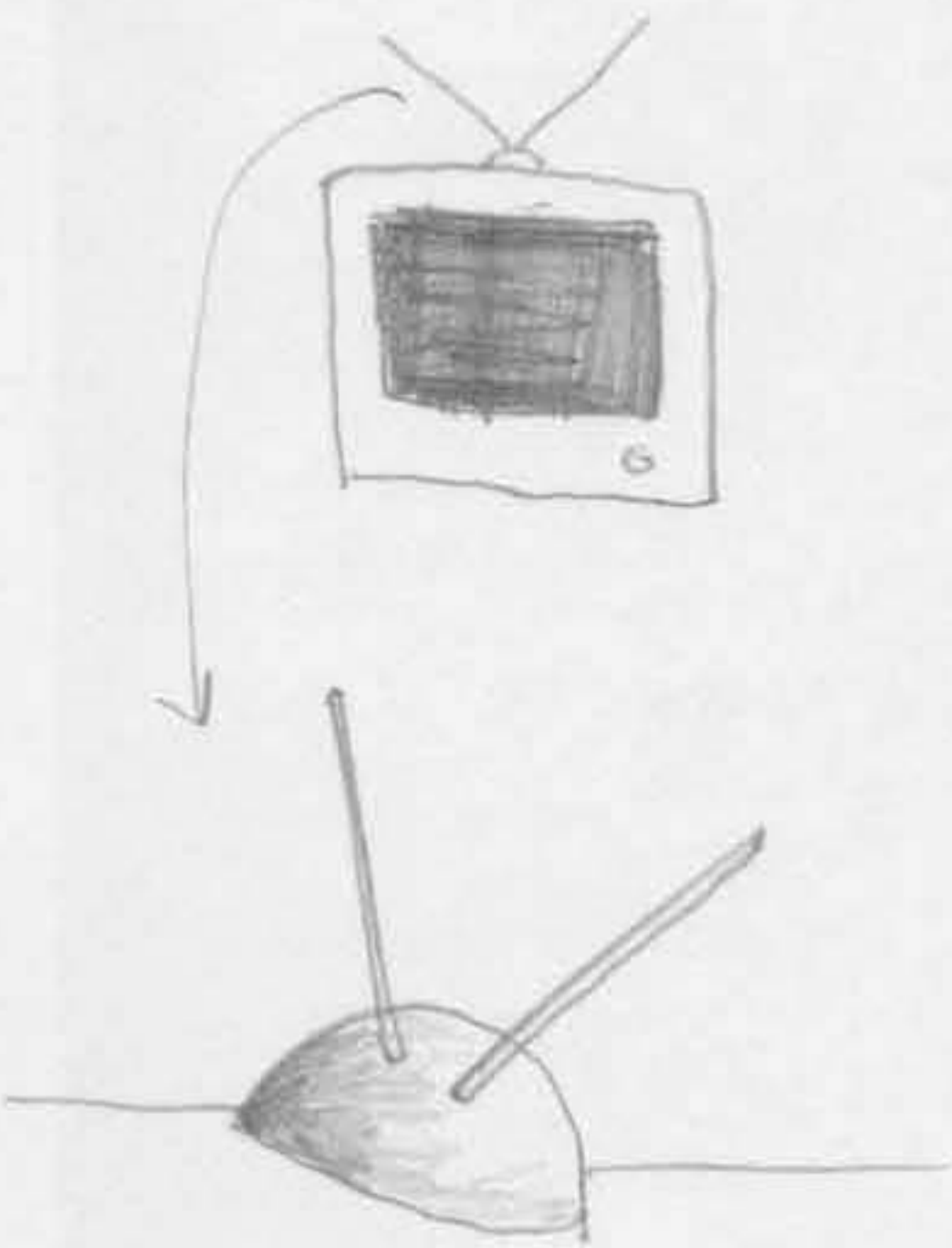
There were a lot of objects in this show. In making artworks from many constituent objects the responsibility of meaning is shared [...] On the back wall of the gallery there is a shelf, on this shelf there are biscuits, then there are bits of wood, then a little piece of plastic; this is an object sentence. The objects get turned into parts of a sentence, and sitting together they form an object paragraph. I like to think about communities of objects; where their relationship to one another is empathetic involving many objects in a work takes the stress of meaning away from The Single Mighty Object. This idea of shared responsibility is very important to us.

Life is a necessary component in our practices. Hyperbole - the muddle-of-the-too-many - is an interpretation of life. There is a lot to see and when you take it all in at once, I feel you become closer to understanding what is really there. I want to get closer to that. The act of participating with objects is central to the idea of making work about life - of building meaning in one's world. These are things we exist with, which are extensions of our situation. By doing things, by working around things, with objects and situations, we ourselves become clearer. Our being becomes more at ease through the act of doing.

If I really want the situations to work, then instead of building strategies for finding truth and working out life, I need to lie back



Images by: Loretha du Plessis and Dean Shirriffs unless otherwise specified



inbetween

→ only one of many

and wait. Lying back in the right way, has become a serious affair for me.

I'm often confused by my work. I think a lot of the time that's why I make it. Especially with the videos, say for example the airbed infomercial. These were moments, situations and scenarios that didn't make any kind of sense. I found this very compelling. When I was editing them I tried to remove the extraneous material surrounding these moments. I was trying to bring out this stuff that made no sense, but I guess when it's on its own, it starts to form some kind of sense of its own, like it has an internal language.

We have often taken to writing parallel texts that work to confuse as much as to inform. We are not used to talking lucidly about our strategies, we are more used to reflecting the confusing nature of our artistic enquiry in our texts.

Who's confused by your work? Is the audience or is it you? I don't find your work confusing as much as mystifying. You notably employ bewilderment as a strategy and this makes it be known that your work has no intention of providing a reductive clarity. And because I don't expect such clarity from your work I don't judge it using such criteria as a result. If I did then I'd probably be very confused, but I don't, so I'm not.

Artists' writing is often used as a form of parenthesis, which informs peoples' perception of the work, like a tinted lens. I disagree with you when you say these parallel texts are reflective of your work. Writing has a tendency to simplify things. I think you have resorted to this way of writing because you are in need of writing that is not definitive or categorical.

I avoid definitive statements because of the shifting ground of the work. When I would revisit work, it would have changed, and become something else. The writing, however, would then be at odds with what the work seems to say.

I think I've developed a kind of poetic shorthand, largely as a response to my artist statements at art school. They tended to make me cringe a bit when I read them afterwards. They always showed up a kind of arrogance. And I'd make these broad statements that seemed to be so true at the time. But a week later, I'd realise that they were glib, or bullshit; or even worse, they were true. But to say these things in a statement was like shouting out things at people that they already knew.

I really like Fellini's statement in an interview, when he is asked what his movie is about. He responds by saying that he is sorry, but that he really doesn't have anything to say and that he makes the movies purely for his own pleasure.

I think for me making art is a lot like that. I don't think that the kind of art I've been making says too much. I think it does things. I don't think it talks about life so much as being a part of my life, just like sleeping or being in love. That's both with making art, and looking at it.

With the lights in my videos, where they explode and fill out the screen, making it all white: I was trying to describe something about how I give things meaning and draw them into my life (already I'm breaking my own rules about not being illustrative.) I was trying to describe the idea of things starting out being nothing. Then they seem to develop significance and meaning. In the end this kind of truth might come out and envelope you, like your whole life makes sense. Then a moment later it's back to normal and you remember your wife wanted you to sort out the plane tickets you forgot to book or something. I imagine this with surfers, and the world sometimes exploding into light and this pure truth as you go through the half pipe. As an example, I remember looking at a big red canvas. There was also a circle on the wall, like if someone had spray-painted over a disc, leaving this round sunburst. It was like someone had accidentally stared at the sun for too long. I started to feel as if the literary artist implied in the work had been searching for the truth, and had found these holes in their mind's eye. The holes and the Solaris on the wall were like the truth that had come too near and could



Image: Courtesy of the artists



not be known; either because it was too terrible or it was really just nothing. I guess a lot of people think the truth would burn like the sun. I think that life is nothing, so I have to make it.

Making art's important in a large part because it's making life.

Maybe those videos aren't that descriptive. I think that they're still doing their thing, which in this case is mythologizing. I really feel that mythology is as vital as breathing. I think the six o'clock news tells us pretty much fuck all. It's real function, and this is my theory, is that it provides a mythology about the world. That offers a way of thinking about it. So when we think about things we don't go insane, we just think, "Oh, he's so terrible" or "They're really dealing with the problems in the world." And we feel that things are ticking along rather than there just being this great mess of stuff that has no meaning or plan.



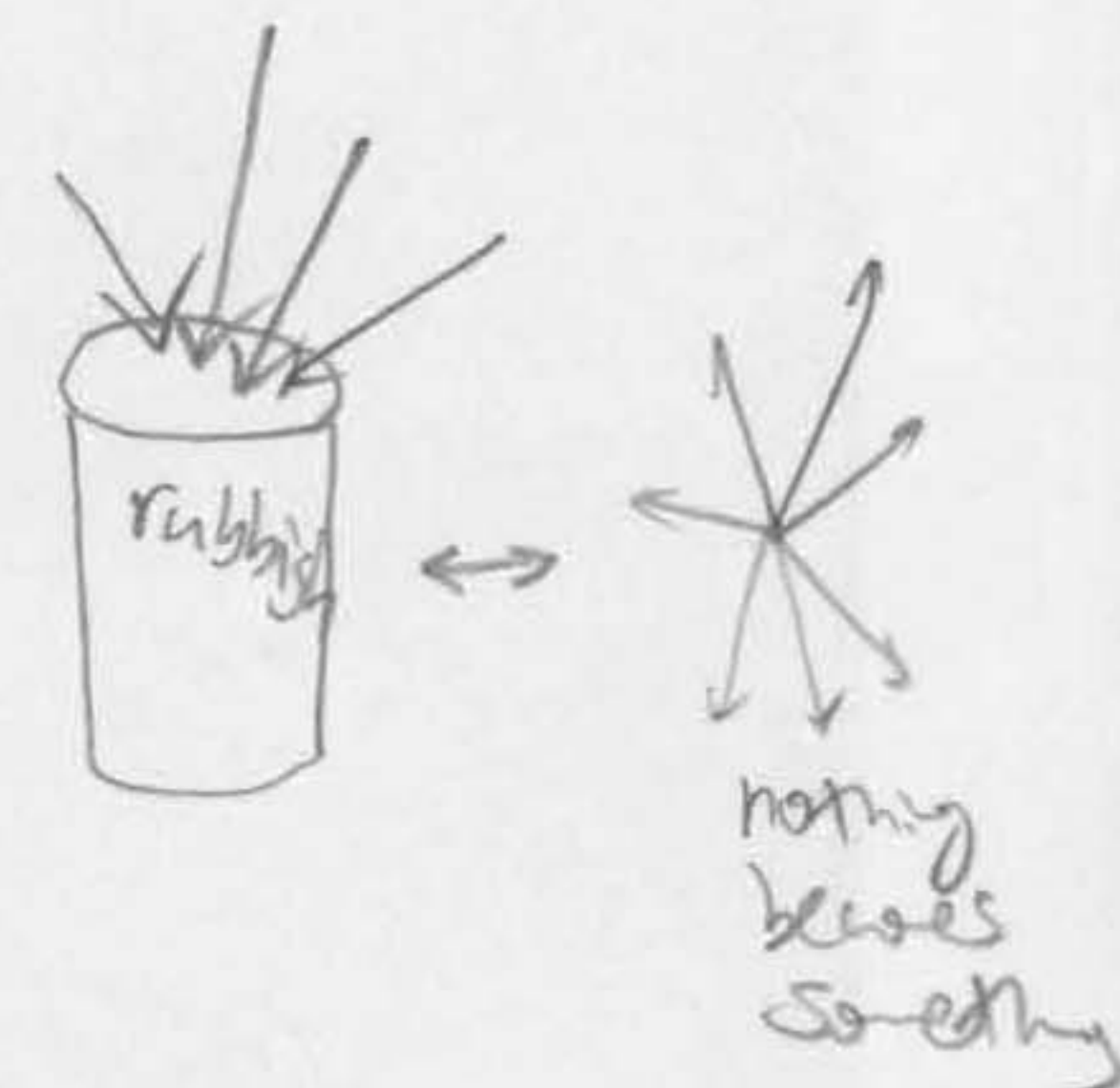
I really hope that the videos operate a bit like the TV, and do a bit of mythologizing. But the mythologizing in the video's case is more about things being really messy and not making sense. So I think the coloured lights are more about "what the fuck is that?" or things just spilling out of the world into your head and then back out of your head into the world in a big mess. I think we're always trying to make sense of the world, but maybe it can just be a big mess a lot of the time.

The other thing I think is going on with the lights, at least thinking about it now, is emotions. I have a lot of emotions that I know I shouldn't have, and a lot that I just don't want. I spend a lot of effort trying to get rid of emotions I don't want.

One most effecting affecting aspects of this body of work is its pace. There were moments where things seemed instantaneous, where time collapsed in on itself and the light became divided into a spectrum of pure colours. And parts where things just went along as they did unaltered, where things would grow or rot. And moments where time stood still and nothing happened.

I have an idea that there is no time and space. Time is measurement of movement. Space is perception of differences. So the space between my hand and my face would be the energy it took for them to come in contact. Which is to say that objects in themselves are nothing, but the way they relate to each other and the situation is everything. A lot of the elements in the work can be quite tenuous if seen as individual objects. They often have potential that is barely seen. The way they form together becomes a lot more visible than if they stood out by themselves. There is activity that develops out

meaning of life/AA?



of the movement through and between these things. I think the pace, the timing and the editing becomes essential to the work.

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As you have suggested there is no clear delineation between representations and actual objects within your work. And the way that the two of you work and show is equally unclear. You are not making work as a collaborative pair, there are divisions, but they are not rigid or definite. I see it as encouraging. I sometimes wonder if art such as this should not be seen in galleries or museums, but rather in houses, shops, restaurants or parks. When I see them in galleries I get preoccupied with the notion of artifice. I question as to whether or not they are real, regardless of whether it bares any relevance to the work. In my mind there is a clear division between art and life, where life equals reality and art equals fiction. And by this logic I feel art is inherently fraudulent. *Real* art is truncated and dis-empowered by this reasoning and I am resistant to it because of this.

Try to imagine a world where art is considered to be as real and concrete as science or current affairs.

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I have been having real problems with videos in galleries. I edit videos at home and watch them on the TV. That always seems the best place to view them, as if it's their natural environment. The same goes for objects that are made or found. I've stopped believing in a certain idea of art altogether. I think that there's stuff that's trying to be art, stuff that looks like art, and then there's stuff that does something. Often its hard to tell where something lies on this scale.

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'It is uniquely art (of a certain kind) that can be a tool with which to imagine, and imagination becomes a tool to rethink... or to picture a different state of the world and to try and create it. Such an art is rarely overtly political in its content or instrumentally related to actual social change. Instead, it lays out a claim to a version of certain intimate but shared experiences and asks complicit viewers to draw their own imaginative political implications. At best, it is appropriately small-scale, unpretentious and common in terms of its ambition and address.' Charles Esche

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We are becoming increasingly religious with our art making and as people-artists. Belief and attitude are conveyed through the way we work with, and think about objects.

We believe that responding to things in the first person is very important. We do not feel that art is a tool for bettering oneself or society, but that the process of making and watching is a necessary activity for us.

We do not wish to say anything; we are curious and want to know. Often the knowing has more to do with feeling, and less to do with knowledge. We are impressed with the profundity of the everyday. Objects in themselves are full... We need to harness that potential through processes of arrangement and manipulation. I suppose these are fairly basic strategies for sculptors.

We make sense of the world by shopping, breaking and feeling. First we find something of interest and then we have to make this apparent to others. To make work for us is to filter our experience.

insomnia
The activity of making tends to dominate other areas of our life. Even when we consume, we don't switch off. We are still making this into something and renovating it into the fluidity of the mess, out of which grows our meaning.



art as therapy?

