

AESTHETIC FEELING-MODEL  
DAVID PRICE

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Hello Alex, and forgive the late reply. Some furiously busy days without many reflective moments. I would indeed like to *exchange a dialogue*, as you put it (a funny turn of phrase, actually, exchange it for what?). I look at your work and a lot of things seem recognisable, or otherwise elicit an empathetic response from me:

There's a kind of laboratory neatness to it even though much of the *material* (matter, language, form, reference, history) is humorous, slight, or even silly (for me, these are not bad qualities at all).

There's a seemingly ruthless, very considered archiving of the self.

It seems to be work that requires the context of (conceptual?) art to work, whilst at the same time making sense on its own terms.

All these are qualities I like and admire: they're qualities that I've aspired to in my work, never achieved, and probably realised that I was ill-suited to the pursuit of in the first place. My work (visual and written) is generally quite elusive, allusive, I think difficult to triangulate, and certainly doesn't manage to tell its viewer or reader what it is, does, intends or contains. It prevaricates with meaning. So I see in your work an impressive inverse. I'm sure this will be a useful tension in which to locate whatever this dialogue becomes.<sup>1</sup> I must ask:

Is a sense of neatness important to you?

Do all the works form a kind of fragmented autobiography?

What do you like, or what interests you outside of art?

The idea of only publishing *my* responses to *your* responses sounds about right as a way to proceed. The negative space of an interview. I like that kind of writerly/editorial game, and I agree that you should be the one allowed to write "unselfconsciously", and "without being influenced by the context". I'll make sense of it all later on, after the fact, or as I go, in the present, or in something resembling fiction.

I've just spent the last couple of days reading Rachel Cusk's 'trilogy' of novels;<sup>2</sup> I think they've activated my taste for very selective precision (and authorial vacation), and infected my prose: I feel as if I'm writing this email in a very clipped manner that feels a little alien, even to myself. I've been so busy recently that I barely read, and certainly write more than I read. The only book I've really been close to is one that I'm translating into English;<sup>3</sup> translation being both a state of deep-reading and a black hole

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1 Whether it is a useful tension or not is for the reader to judge, unfair as it may be to have only one side of a story on which to base a judgement. This text is objective only in regards to its subjectivity.

2 *Outline, Transit and Kudos*, published between 2014 and 2018, all experimental books that have become literary bestsellers. The somewhat obvious influence brought to bear here is in the figure of the occluded-narrator, albeit inverted: this text is an interview with an occluded subject, an intraview, and is possibly a text about me.

3 A novel about a young man's retreat, after the end of a relationship, into a depressed state of microscopic observation of the spaces in which he finds himself. The other party in the terminated relationship is almost entirely absent except for an initial in place of her name, and one or two replayed memories. Although the book is not overtly formal in its adherence to a structure of occlusion as such, it functions somewhat like an emotionally shocked version of Xavier De Maistre's *A Journey Around My Room* (1794)... but "do not reproach me for the prolixity with which I narrate the details of my journey", as De Maistre teases the reader; I will return to the subject at hand.

of reading and writing in simultaneity. So excuse this email if it reads like some automatically generated text...<sup>4</sup>

CCing a third party, as you suggest in order to make sense of our exchange, doesn't seem strictly necessary. The later-me who will edit this into something fit for publication will be a third party, so to speak.<sup>5</sup> Although I wish we *could* CC your parents to get to the bottom of where your sense of fastidiousness (in regards to a detailed sense of arrangement) comes from.<sup>6</sup> On the subject of which, I assume you're referring to Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*?<sup>7</sup> Or another of his books? My own parents' house is full of stuff: ornaments, rugs, pictures, collected artefacts, weird statues, all kinds of things. It isn't untidy exactly, but is probably the record of lives lived among all the objects that externalise one's thought processes, tastes and interests. Literally and metaphorically like the act of printing out one's emails.<sup>8</sup>

I have a fear that the accretion of objects (especially those that reflect something deep within oneself) is really just a futile attempt to insulate oneself from the deathly void of just 'being'; a fear of contextual nakedness. Producing artworks, however, can be both things at once: making more objects-in-the-world, but also getting rid of them, having them be looked after by someone else. The device of the Roman 'unswept floor'<sup>9</sup> (seeing as you mention it, Alex) seems to me to be an even more refined version of this: having cake, eating it, having it fall to the floor as a measure of excess and luxury, having that act of discarding be represented and displayed, and having the representation outlive oneself by far, only to be 'tidied', restored and cared for thousands of years later.

Your experience of growing up without galleries and museums close by, and knowing art through books and magazines: I understand this precisely. But surely, beyond circumstance, there's also some different aesthetic category of desire at work here, some affinity with representations of representations? As a child I always preferred catalogues of things to things themselves. My son, who has just turned four, really likes the back pages of children's books that show in miniature the covers of other books. Especially other books within the same series as the book being read. I recognize the sensation of this from my own childhood; the emergence of an alertness to iteration. A kind of *mise en désir*.

You talk about the "framing afterwards causing cohesion" that occurs in a body of work which is diverse in media or context. And I can accept that my question about your work forming a fragmented autobiography isn't of particular interest to you. Perhaps it's just something that I'm always preoccupied with: the idea of works that form a kind of ad hoc, totalising autobiography without attempting to impose a narrative onto a life. I think here of my favourite work of Sol LeWitt's, his *Autobiography* book that 'simply' and systematically photographs all the objects of his studio-home

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4 Or if it succumbs to what Alex wished to avoid by being absent: bearing the "influence of context".

5 The edits I'm making are as minimal as possible – the text is drawn almost entirely from our email conversation with very slight adjustments of a word here or there, or of punctuation. The only post-factual 'text' is that present in these footnotes. That said, there are elements of these footnotes that replace hyperlinks present in the original emails, so context is exerting its influence after all.

6 To do so would invoke more than one of the non-literal meanings of 'carbon copy'.

7 Lost worlds, in more ways than one. Alex and I did not pursue the investigation into his (or my own) past. But some residue of Hoggart's thought (the mass steamrolling of the authentic, either in individual or local form, and cultural forms that might resist this) tallies with my sense of Alex's work: the persistence of the recognisable self *in* the work; the eyelashes or sweat that remain even in the most conceptual or formal of gestures. These bodily groundings are *inherently* unpretentious, as Hoggart might have said.

8 Bourgeois, and fetishising bureaucracy, even. I do recognise myself in this.

9 The practice, in Ancient Rome, of producing trompe l'oeil mosaic floors that depict the remnants of a feast. For a very local reference, see the essay 'The Unswept Floor' in *A Book of Burning Matches* by myself, Nicolas de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley (the curators of the exhibition for which the present text has been written), 2015.

- bottles, cups, family heirlooms, his own work, his own books, furniture, the contents of the fridge all becoming equal 'material'. Or the volumes of Michel Leiris' *La règle du jeu* (which begin with the author writing his life through language: "taking as [his] raw material not facts but words...", and telling the reader how he first learned or encountered certain words as a child, rather than straightforwardly describing the incidences of his childhood from the perspective of an adult apt to interpret their childhood in retrospect.<sup>10</sup> The result is a description not of how a certain individual came to be, but of how that individual came to conceptualise their surroundings.

I think that's what I mean by a fragmented autobiography, and perhaps it is simply a more formalised idea of what you call an "automatically written" one (in the context of work like *this*<sup>11</sup> that records the presence of you or your body; you being an artist or being your self). To me it feels like this has an aesthetic or structural analogue in the way a materially diverse practice like your own can be marshalled into "cohesion" by some kind of overall framing device. I know that I, much more haphazardly, use the square boxes of Instagram to do this (in extremis), producing thousands of images that contain, represent and confuse (and are perhaps in lieu of) 'life' and 'work'. On that note, your *Being as Becoming* works seem to do something similar: they provide a gathering place for a thought-process-collage that presumably accumulates meaning in the play between repetition and difference.<sup>12</sup>

It occurs to me that I'm pursuing this conversation without much reference to (or inquiry into) your works themselves. Are there particular works that you know will appear in the exhibition, and which you would like us to interpret or otherwise give space to in this (half-occluded) dialogue?<sup>13</sup>

Whenever I write a text about another artist's work I always feel a bit like I am within the procedures of Jean Eustache's film *Les Photos D'Alix*: I begin in a way that corresponds to the works themselves, but then I slowly slip away from them the more I say, and the more I begin to remember things, think about other things...<sup>14</sup>

Alex, hello, I was amused and interested by your double-response to my last email; it's like receiving the same reply in two simultaneous moods.<sup>15</sup>

I see what you mean about LeWitt's *Autobiography* being too surface-based to encompass 'a life' (and therefore, perhaps, to form an 'autobiography'). But I also wonder if that level of encompassment was what he was really attempting? It seems to me more like one very slight idea that ran away with itself, and in the process came to contain a lot more than the initial idea itself. For example, I like the

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10 From the first volume of Lydia Davis' 1991 translation of *La Règle du Jeu (Biffures)*, 1948: "corpuses of facts grouped according to a natural identity". P.234.

11 This booklet that registers eyelash after eyelash that were once parts of bodies.

12 I was referring here to Alex's 'umble prints which derive from his 'Being as Becoming' research project. They are risographs, "gathering places where images, books, lists, sketch-up drawings and various hesitant starting points for new work accumulate and interact". They look beautiful, but appear to make no distinction between sensory and intellectual content; and seem to be diagrammatic of how both 'an artist' and 'a particular artist' might think.

13 Perhaps I am accidentally mirroring the spirit of Alex's method for titling exhibitions (*The exhibition will be titled after its installation*; to be replaced by 'a title'): *The text will be critical after its writing*.

14 *Les Photos D'Alix (Alix's Photos, or Photos of Alix)*, 1980, is a short film in which the titular photographer (Alix Cléo Roubaud, whose early death is mourned in her husband Jacques' *Quelque chose noir* from 1986) begins to describe some of her photographs to a young man (played by the director's son, Boris Eustache). In the beginning her descriptions correspond to the images but as she leafs through the pile of prints the descriptions depart from the pictures and form another set of images entirely. I think of the film as a fluid, loose counterpoint to Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia* (1971) – Eustache's film a 'subject' as opposed to Frampton's structural 'object'. Frampton comes alive, so to speak.

15 Alex's double-response was colour-coded, a response in two phases, the second expressing regret for the first. I received them both at the same time.

sequence of images that show the spines of Sol LeWitt books. It's an inherently satisfying meta-loop, of course, but it also says what the work is, it more or less just says to the reader, quite casually, "my work is pretty systematic, with loose edges". I have a soft spot for systematic things with loose edges, I guess.

It's also impossible to look at now without thinking of the formatting of Instagram (an obvious thing to say),<sup>16</sup> without thinking about endless matrices of square pictures and about presenting and authoring the self through the assembly of these matrices. I always think about Robert Smithson in this context: his *Passaic, New Jersey* work feels in some way like an extremely intense kind of social media experience.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps that makes it sound diminished in some way, or is a misnomer as it could also just be called a piece of reportage, but the very personal nature of it, as well as the formal sense of it giving personally significant captions to images, makes the comparison seem apt to me.

With this in mind it really struck me how you mention the "praxis based approach" that is evidenced in your *'umble prints*, and how such an approach is something you mention to art students. Smithson's is a very praxical practice, notably so in work like *Passaic* that strays between a kind of journalism, photography, writing, *living*, remembering, etc etc. But it makes me think of things I used to say to art students, the kind of work or writings I used to recommend as being exemplars of means to 'think through the process of making something'. Robert Smithson would be one such example. Since a couple of years ago I no longer teach, and my day job (night job) is very prosaic, and so I no longer think about art or art books so much. They occasionally bubble back up into my consciousness, but are no longer part of my everyday thought. This conversation reanimates some of those thoughts.

The point, though, is that I now realise that the kind of work I used to talk about with art students was very often things that (like Smithson's *Passaic*, or Sol LeWitt's *Sentences*, or many other things besides; Duchamp's conversations with Pierre Cabanne, Paul Sietsema's films, getting into the weeds of Art & Language's more abject work<sup>18</sup>...) was material that implicitly advertised *being and living as an artist* (as opposed to producing 'work' per se). Your work seems to do this but without recourse to theory.

The feeling you describe of "knowing what you're thinking" through the making of work or writing: I think I understand this, although it's a messy or inarticulate process for me. I tend to just probe forward blindly, perhaps with some nearly-inexpressible aesthetic feeling-model in mind, that I attempt to make, but which just functions as a starting point. I never start with something I wish to say, with a subtext or even text in mind.<sup>19</sup> I certainly need language (writing or speech) to know what I think, or to know that I even think at all. I find out what I think through writing; that's what I mean to say.

And "actions that perhaps make sense in retrospect": I was thinking about this earlier on after

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16 And it feels wrong, or perhaps just taboo and uncool, to uncritically mention Instagram twice in this text. But it is a significant medium in the sense of seeing how the world looks to the other people in one's life (or how they would like the world to look), be they artists or not. I feel cautious about my intuition that such a medium enables one to undergo the same processes as the production of art (forming an association of text and image, externalising one's thoughts, providing context and catalogued information) without having to negotiate the conceptual impurities of materials, spaces, scenes, professionalism, viewers, critics, etc etc.

17 Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* formed a quasi-travelogue detailing a bus journey from New York City to some New Jersey locations of his early life, and was published ambiguously as a 'work' in the December 1967 issue of Artforum magazine.

18 I was thinking here of the Art & Language work concerned with what we might call the problematics of art's problematics: the *Hostages* work of the late 80s and early 90s, for example, and their slightly horrified approach to handling the imagery of a conventionally attractive landscape painting. As Christian Schlatter's 'Fragment for Art & Language' in the 1991 *Hostages* catalogue says, "a genuine work of art is a performed action armed with artistic procedures" (p.39).

19 Let alone whatever this text is.

watching *Les 400 Coups* at the cinema. I hadn't seen it for a long time, and I was really struck by how it's like a series of sketches, actions (mischief, mostly) that make no coherent sense because they are the actions of a disaffected child, actions that are 50 fun, 50 boredom. But the actions don't really form a narrative, they just show a series of speculations. I think it's also due to Jean-Pierre L aud's performance: of course he's just a child in this film, but one can already see in him the actor who does funny little physical things for no real reason (like in Godard's *Masculin F eminin* when he keeps attempting to throw a cigarette up into his mouth until he finally succeeds; showing the workings of a trick, as it were, and thereby doing something which is inherently un-cinematic).

I'm really interested in the language your titles generate: *Ecstatic, darkling with lofty, fumble, reverie, angst, bumble and grumble, lucid, limned with Rubin's cornice and fifteen-odd semblable stumps*, for example. And in the post-factual moment of titling that you seem to practice. Do these language-actions feel writerly (poetic), or are they perhaps more to do with effecting a loosening or blurring of meaning?

Also, and if this seems an indelicate question then it's only because of my (genuine) naivety about such things: it is just a happy coincidence that the tree-stump works end up as bronzes<sup>20</sup> (or the bikes and railings as beautiful ersatz-minimalism)<sup>21</sup> that are inherently valuable art objects? Is the instinctive variety in your work in any way compromised by making 'gallery shows', or does it just become another set of criteria that will make interesting work?

To be clear, does your partner's intervention suggest that we do retain your words in the text resulting from this conversation; that we retain your part of the dialogue? I was thinking along the lines of you only appearing when I quote you. But perhaps a suitable form will just come into shape during editing. It occurs to me that my responses are so long (and so digressive) that there's a lot of material already, a lot to cut down from.<sup>22</sup> There is semblable coppicing to be done. I'm enjoying the process so far, although I'm concerned it might be a bit sprawling or overbearing for you - like you've accidentally acquired a really weird pen pal.

The list of physical actions that you characterise as "involuntary expressions": very interesting. It would provide an opportunity to discuss performance, to discuss Beckettian displays of being, to discuss a lot. It also resonates with me a lot due to the book I'm translating at the moment, a novel by my friend Samy that details a kind of slow, depressive meltdown, and very frequently lists things: visible phenomena, thought processes, physical sensations. I translated the following this afternoon:

"Sensations, more scarce all the time: snow falling between my fingers, rays of sunlight that seem to pass through me without generating any kind of foretaste of warmth. The sky is blue, the snow begins to melt and I haven't the heart for anything this evening, I am heart-less, nothing but a cracked shell and dry eyes, cold and stiff extremities, a blocked nose, ten days' growth at least of beard hairs, an aching neck, a crooked back, painful buttocks, creaking joints. I breathe in one direction only, out, I swallow the air without truly inhaling it; weeks of exhalation spent watching the grey, the blue of the sky turning white, pink or blue at night, the snow diminishing, the wind irritating the antennae on the roofs."<sup>23</sup>

I thought about this passage, among others, in terms of your attempts to preserve *nearly* immaterial or ungraspable parts of yourself: your eyelashes, your sweat, the connections and associations

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20 The *Semblable Wood* pieces that formed part of Alex's *Ecstatic, darkling with...* exhibition.

21 The *Happy Valley* works.

22 As I write, the text is only getting longer.

23 From the first draft of a translation of *Mon Temps Libre* by Samy Langerart, 2019

undergone in generating ideas, the word associations that conglomerate into your exhibition titles. These feel like acts of full disclosure.

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Hello Alex, forgive the slightly late reply.

I had to reread my last email to remember what an 'aesthetic feeling-model' was, but I'm glad you like the term! I think your work often seems to form *perfect* models of its own conception and making process. The artist being "least present" is an interesting (and qualified) way for you to describe it: the eyelashes reproduced as "irritants"<sup>24</sup> on paper obviously make a kind of game about (your) presence and absence but also about delicacy (of both material and as a theme), about mess and order, about desire perhaps (eyelashes are intimate things, and you sweeping the floor to harvest them is vaguely fetishistic), and about many kinds of 'light touch'.

It reminds me, strangely, of the Hitchcock film *To Catch a Thief*, which is underrated but very nice, and the way Grace Kelly's character almost taunts Cary Grant's (he plays a slightly ambiguous gentleman cat-burglar) about his desire to steal from her. It's unclear whether she's trying to seduce him, exactly, or (to use a phrase I love) 'draw him out', even to make him 'come out' as a thief. There's perhaps a subtext about Grant's own sexuality here, as well as the strange subtext of Hitchcock's recurrent erasure of the identity of the blonde desire-figure who is often the pivot of his plots. This figure is frequently the conduit for other desires to pass through. Grace Kelly leans back into the shadows so her face is obscured, the upper part of her chest brightly lit to display an instance of Hitchcock's habitual fetish for the parading 'in plain sight' of a given prop (the 'valuable' necklace in this case). In the midst of all these subtexts-upon-subtexts Grant somewhat cheekily asks Kelly if she has ever been psychoanalysed.

You describe the "just being" of the work as a kind of efficiency, allowing the viewer to approach it as you do. This makes sense, I think. The aesthetic feeling-model, and the *thingness* of the work, allows this by sublimating your psychological process into something beautiful, formal or material: bronze, Fabriano paper, primer-painted steel... (much like Grace Kelly's collar-bone for that matter).

"A broad range of expressive language" is a striking description of the ambitions behind a growing body of work. I know exactly what you mean: repeating with variations, a perpetually triangulating signal, accuracy increasing the more points there are in the network. It also makes it sound like you're using your work to learn how you are as a person, to achieve rounded-ness. Investigating being rather than feeling, or thinking, as it were. This is also the life's work of Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, now I think about it: performing ontological experiments 'in the field' rather than in theory. The outline or shape of a person, the suggestion of animation and life. . . you mention the "sand bags filled with clothes" without saying much more about them. I would have to see them in real 'life' to get a sense of how they are to be around, but they remind me of a great work by an old friend, Junya Yamasaki, who ceased to be an artist (he became a chef, then a traveller). Junya missed his mother, so filled a huge plastic bag with water until it weighed the same as her, and then carried it around;,, bore 'her' weight.

I empathise with what I read into your wider project, although I don't really execute it properly myself. I'm just as systematic with recording instances of my being but only with electronically ephemeral photographs and fragments of text that are obscure and not particularly readable by others. But you make coherent, cohesive objects with logical histories. I wonder: is this because you just happen

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24 I am irritated to admit this, but maybe it was just the words 'irritating' and 'irritants' that reminded me of the passage I was translating, which caused me to perceive a wider connection.

to think in way that expresses things in an orderly fashion, or do you work on making the work be accessible for a viewer? Does this require discipline?

If I am a writer commissioned (with quote marks) to write about your work, then I'm approaching the task in a strange way, measuring the work against mine, or against my self or my ways of thinking. I hope this process is both formal and fun, like a courtly dance, and not staged or awkward. I've used the fact we don't know each other, but are thrown together by mutual association with Nico and Nici, to be quite forward, I think, in my questions.<sup>25</sup> I also feel as if I have nothing to lose, no professional position to defend or protect, and have no self-interest to covertly pursue. I'm just interested, I think. But this relationship also reminds me somehow of how psychoanalysts are obliged to undergo analysis in order to become analysts themselves.<sup>26</sup>

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Hello Alex, I'm glad you liked the description of the eyelash prints. And it's almost a funny figure of speech to say you were looking for a light touch after making the lead fingernails. 'Lead fingernails' almost sounds like it could be an idiom for having a heavy touch (an idiom with the same material/body-part structure as 'butter fingers' I suppose). I can imagine it being said with heavy-hearted regret by a snooker commentator: "He's played that shot with lead fingernails..."

I would say that it doesn't matter to me (nor the reader and viewer, I hope) that you "don't quite trust your own ideas about yourself". It seems to me that your work allows you to form ideas about your self, in a way that not all artists (choose to?) do. It seems very engaged with its own structures and processes, but also seems slightly removed from itself 'as art' per se; as if the works are positing what Alex, the artist, would make if he were to make something in response to a certain place or a certain invitation. It forms acts of hypothetical self-awareness, which resemble data (and, again, Data).

Or perhaps I might express it like this: the work seems to acknowledge that it is contingent on you making it. I feel like I'm trying to describe a very slight glimmer of a subtle sensibility here. A sliver of self intersects the art and the artist in your case. I've mentioned him already, but I think again of Jean-Pierre Leaud's acting: he often seems to be performing a kind of studied unselfconsciousness which results in turn within the viewer being presented with a paradox of performativity. Maybe this is just my predilection for 'systematic things with loose edges' announcing itself again. And I'm glad you've enjoyed our 'courtly dance'. Speaking of which, I think the dance is drawing to a close, its enchantment coming to an end, and a shy formality returning to the room: now that I've begun to piece together our words into the text they will become it's hard to write freely or unselfconsciously.

I've kept to the promise of only using my part of our conversation in the text, except at moments where I am clearly and transparently quoting you. I would be very happy if this act of discretion fulfils the sentiment of B.S. Johnson that you quote: "not trying to say anything specific (...), only (to) create the conditions for something to happen, which says a lot in itself."<sup>27</sup>

You almost imply that it was a naive earlier self of yours that would employ such a quote in a statement

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25 Thrown together nicely, like the way the Famous Five are cousins and siblings who spend the holidays together.

26 There are many kinds of transference at work in a text like this, and I am cautious about the narcissism(s) that may be at work; retreating as I am from writing a work of criticism and at times replacing the object of study with my own self.

27 I had originally brought up B.S. Johnson in regards to his film *Paradigm*, in which an unnamed protagonist is depicted as passing from youth to agedness, babbling all the time in nonsense language and gradually decreasing in his articulateness.

about your work, but I think Johnson's work in general is a perfectly apt example of the sort of very 'human conceptuality' (conceptual humanity?) that you work with.

It's great that the book will be so long, and about the laying of the text on the lashes. I miss the convivial nature of art openings in the UK so much I almost want to call this text *On the Lash* now, although of course it will be called *Aesthetic Feeling-Model*. It's the right thing to do, isn't it? I mean using the title to reflect the one idea or observation of mine that really struck home, rather than just to implement a coarse joke?

When I was first asked to write something, and I found out there was no money for me to do so, I said that I *would* do it but consequently would make the process fun or creative in its own right.<sup>28</sup> What I meant by this was that I wouldn't undergo the 'labour' of 'properly' writing something; writing an essay and engaging in the sometimes artificial practice of analytical/didactic/critical thought. I think I've kept to this additional promise (to myself, this time), except that the text is now thousands of words long,<sup>29</sup> and has compelled me to engage in honesty, self-reflection and confession (Catholic, Rousseauian, but not legal or criminal I think). I wanted to play the trick of writing the text (making the work) automatically and without effort, but I think I've tricked myself more than I have tricked the assignment<sup>30</sup>.

Two more questions:

You say that you were "... recently asked in another context if (your) work was personal and it completely through me...". I assume this is a Freudian slip, and you meant 'threw me'? In the wider context I mis-read this and thought you were explaining that the work comes about 'completely through you'; entirely through your own self rather than 'through' an externalised set of references or concepts, or instructions.

I'm also fascinated to know what happened in the conversation with your partner that caused you to write a second reply to one of my earlier emails; to reconsider your responses and, in discussing the occlusion of your words in this text, that your partner "remarked that if we left everything in, it would share the problem behind the format, or at least my problem with it". It was this comment that caused your revised, double response to an earlier email of mine, and which made me worry a little about being like a 'weird pen pal', or a subtly misbehaving guest. Now that the conversation has got this far I think the occlusions and the elisions have become well-marked and elaborate enough that they are almost more present than the text they are the subtext of. Like the way corvid birds hide their food, but also pretend to hide food in other places: acting simultaneously in regard to the present, the future, and to fiction.

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28 I mention this with genuine light-heartedness, although I am quite aware of the often unspoken ways that we, as artists and writers in the art world, are compelled to convince ourselves of the immaterial virtues of working without reimbursement. More or less fool me, I can't quite decide. I raise the issue here because it became a part of the method I would use to produce the text, and so became part of the text. But also because incorporating circumstance into the text feels like one of the acts of agency (and one of the reimbursements) still available; a means of using the working process to 'learn how to be a self' engaged with such things. And the art world is changing: these issues *should* be raised, and a confessional giddiness has allowed me to do so.

29 A further tip to art students, beyond the Smithson and LeWitt references: you could probably get away with forming a dissertation like this: asking an artist questions by email then applying the method of "framing afterwards causing cohesion" to form a text of the requisite length.

30 At the last moment, and too late to have affected the writing process, a fee for the project became available from the Embassy of the Netherlands. None of the above would have been written had the money come first.

David Price is an artist and writer living in Stockholm. He was born in Glasgow in 1982. He studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design, and Manchester Metropolitan University where he completed a Ph.D on the interlinking of visual art and fiction. He has published one novel, *The Fielders* (2013), and with Nicolas de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley is the co-author of *A Book of Burning Matches – Collecting Installation Art Documents* (2015). He is the co-author (and, with Åbäke, co-editor/designer) of the monograph *Ben Cain – Uses of Leisure* (2019).