

THE QUIDDITY GRID

We do not transcend the world, but only descend or burrow towards
its numberless underground cavities - each a sort of kaleidoscope where
sensual objects spread their colours and their wings. There is neither finitude
nor negativity in the heart of objects. *

This writing has evolved through ongoing conversation with Tim Spooner and forms a series of responses to his work, 24 Grotesque Manipulations, first performed by Tim in the Courtroom at Toynbee Studios, London in Spring 2011.

It comprises three conversing parts: The Quiddity Grid, an introduction or home for potential readings; 24 Object Recalls, a series of illustrated micro-chapters; and The Afterword That Lives Outside The Cave, a narrative written at the beginning of the process, but one in fact that might better suggest an ending event. In this final section, two 'players' are given roles as geographical phenomenon and literary structure.

24 Grotesque Manipulations demonstrates the potential of objects and their living core or quiddity (their essence). Over the course of 24 minutes Tim presents a series of chemical and mechanical objects, enabling them as substances and components to interact, and in doing so, to produce new variations of themselves. They become amalgamations or syntheses of forms, presented on a mirrored table and illuminated across surfaces above and to the side, so that at any one time their progress can be monitored as a kaleidoscope of reflections. Sometimes their behaviours are pre-empted, and sometimes they pre-empt each other, often defying expectation, and colliding so that there is engaged motion. No freeze-frames, only a constant travelling from one state to another. It seems then that 24 Grotesque Manipulations is as much about movement as it is about things, so that movement itself becomes object.

If the work is movement, there are several propellers to its kineticism.

There is the body-catalyst responsible for triggering events. For our purposes we will call this propeller the Demonstrator (or Operator, though decidedly not Animator, for the substances are already active). The Demonstrator makes object quick-changes before the audience, revealing and discarding each manipulation so that nothing is held in stasis. The Demonstrator does not speak per se, but is indeed a voice, and provides a corporeal feedback-loop through tubes, valves and whistles that gasp and scream, wheezing everything along.

And another propeller, the sonic grit, is scored precisely through the flexing motions of the Demonstrator's fingers, each signal assigned a note, where the thumbs are percussive markers. The code is also temporal. An LED clock reads outwards into the audience, operated by pins and a punched scroll, that slides across to fold and fall to the floor. Each manipulation a digit.

And then the holder of the action is the cave, inside which movement is intensified. The cave is proposed in 24 Grotesque Manipulations, where grotesque is a relative of grotto, as the site of presentation (in this instance, the Courtroom at Toynbee Studios), and as site of the body (here, the Demonstrator's felted, hollow-belly-suit from which objects are extracted like organs, though it is also lacking). But, what is a cave? Often dissolutional, it might be formed by chemical weathering of surface rock, and mechanical weathering widens joints and fissures in the usually soluble sedimentary rock. Some other types of caves are formed by percolating sulphuric acid, flowing lava, flowing water in glaciers, wave action, and particle abrasion. It is also a philosophical home. Plato coerces it into a space where actions are mirrored, shadows become the real deal, and in some way it introduces a never-ending reality of copies. For the copy is the original, over and over amen. The original does not exist but only speculates upon itself. Shadows in caves come up too in Werner Herzog's Cave of Forgotten Dreams, 2011, or at least a recall from a scene with Fred Astaire in Swing time, 1938 **. Digression. So it would seem in these instances that the cave points to the potential for recursion and change. It recalls a drive that is distinctly someplace else, and is only ever observable in passing. The cave permits echoes and deviations and growths.

And this is where 24 Grotesque Manipulations operates. It suggests a philosophy of objects - not just through their properties, though these are evidenced - but how the object opens up a world beyond the human as end-point. Once we reach the 24th manipulation, all that is left is a crust, a brine-y landscape of detritus or the remnants of a visitation, ...a roadside picnic, on some road in the cosmos... *** It is not really an ending, because in the decay of one object another is produced, and its energy is dissipated ad infinitum. And in the same way that the majority of energy in cave environments comes from the surplus of the eco-systems outside of it, here too, the thing that happens beyond and after is where we should look.



24 OBJECT RECALLS



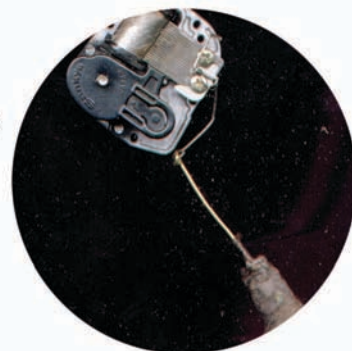
2. A mussel shell performs a ballet, gently exerting itself. Inside, a teardrop pearl.

3. A flat, wide, metallic surface is presented and unzipped through its middle. It fizzes fire, and proceeds to haemorrhage as precision-folds over the edges of the stage.

7. A glimmering, milky liquid rocks in a jar, propelled by a proboscis it describes a circle on the stage.

8. An object with two legs, one a curved needle, walks forward across the stage. It remembers what its survival instinct is, and draws towards a dog-bowl of magnetic fluid food.

4. A Russian doll opens, and from its shell another body is extracted. It appears white at first, quickly turning black. It expresses processes of oxidisation and division. It is a fractal. From inside this new belly another body emerges, a clear stretchy fluid that disperses. Once left to its own devices it rolls away from the scene.



1. A match lights two candles. They produce heat-wave images on the ceiling, to suggest other places to look and introduce the show.

6. Two bears in onyx and glass knock against each other. They are percussive bodies, or musical breaths that speed towards destruction.

5. A moth flies around in a wild way and bursts into flames, a spontaneous and nervous combustion.



10. A viscous liquid is poured onto a delicate lace tent. Electricity passes through. It clenches and cramps.



11. A black, cloth cosmos shudders.

9. An object with two legs, one a music-box, is propelled into dance.

14. A mouth froths and glows, all fingers now engaged in music.

15. Two flowers are melded together, the organic daffodil and its smiling image.

12. A shell extinguishes two candles, those that first made heat-wave distractions. It is a fire swallower.

13. A lighter strikes up and introduces two candle replacements. Travelled by the left hand, they glide to the front of the stage.

17. A moth is dipped into magnetic fluid and draws a frown on the stage.



19. A mussel rocks back and forth, cradling a magnetic pearl that is soon dislodged and escapes.

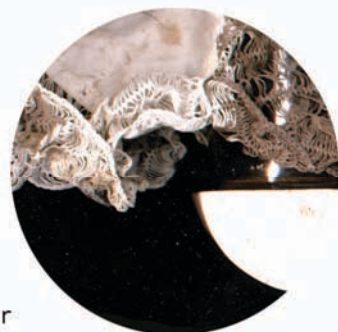
16. An object with three legs attempts to reach the dog bowl. The bowl is covered with a handkerchief. Its movement is clumsy and it falls.

21. An object with one leg, a music-box, accelerates towards sonic destruction.



18. An object artery, a snake, performs its death throes. It crunches and unfurls in shocked exhalation.

20. An object with two legs, one skinny with a sock and one a bulby rubber, attempts to reach the dog bowl. It dips a toe into the dark liquid that now creeps up its leg, regular globules that produce an uncanny, nervous texture.



23. A daffodil cries luminescent fluid, creating its own light.

22. A jar of viscous liquid animated on a plaster crescent, solidifies mid-flow, and is put to sleep beneath its cover.



24. The left hand collides a lighter into a match-box held in the right hand, controlled combustions, and ends the show.



THE AFTERWORD THAT LIVES OUTSIDE THE CAVE

Outside The Cave lives The Afterword****. Speaking aloud, The Afterword acknowledges that it may have been written by someone other than the author. It knows that this affords it a peculiar, though happy, vantage point. The Afterword is not a practitioner of Speleology*****, preferring instead to operate from a small ledge at the mouth of The Cave. From here, at a somewhat oblique angle, it observes a contagion of forms growing and being pushed upwards from the floor. They come into being as miniature crystalline events. It seems that changing itself changes.

From the ledge, The Afterword considers The Cave through the prism of a weird object-oriented philosophy, where all phenomena exist as objects, their relations too. The proliferating forms that swell up from inside are infinite conversation pieces. Contingent on each other, they resonate as chains of molecules, alive and vital precisely because of their anti-static bodies.

The Afterword shouts down into The Cave and listens intently to the echoes. The sonic vibrations cause some of the crystalline events to knock wildly into the walls of The Cave and they begin to glow with a fluorescent brilliance, almost angry. The quakes leave dense deposits, such detritus that reveals a fragile system. At this point, The Afterword prepares itself to fold inside The Cave, as an exquisite corpse, though there is no inside for it to be within, only sequels and perforations. And so it goes.

ECHOES:

* Graham Harman, 'On Vicarious Causation', in Robin Mackay (ed.) *COLLAPSE* Vol 11, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2007. p.193.

** Arguably, for for me, the greatest single sequence in all of film history [is] Fred Astaire dancing with his own shadows, and all of a sudden he stops and the shadows become independent and dance without him and he has to catch up with them... And when you look at the cave and certain panels, there's evidence of some fires on the ground. They're not for cooking. They were used for illumination. You have to step in front of these fires to look at the images, and when you move, you must see your own shadow. And immediately, Fred Astaire comes to mind — who did something 32,000 years later which is essentially what we can imagine for early Palaeolithic people.

Extract from interview with Werner Herzog on *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, 20 April 2011, NPR online <<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/20/135516812/herzog-enters-the-cave-of-forgotten-dreams>> [accessed August 2011].

*** Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, Gollancz publication, 2007. p.89.

**** The Cave played by Tim Spooner, The Afterword played by Frances Scott.

***** Cave-specific studies, introduced as a distinct area of study by Edouard-Alfred Martel (1859 - 1938).



Text: Frances Scott, in conversation with Tim Spooner

Images: Tim Spooner

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