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THE TRICK THAT TELLS THE TRUTH
Stojanowicz

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The research that follows grew from my MA thesis *SOLVE_ET_COAGULA: alchemic cartographies of liminality and re-enchantment*, submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art & Design at the Master Institute of Visual Cultures, St. Joost School of Art & Design, Avans University of Applied Sciences, 's-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands.

One strand of that inquiry, the Dark Wood method, became the core of my work during the Raise Your Voice fellowship. I developed it into a public ritual, a digital Grimoire, and this essay, with the generous support of Baltan Laboratories, Eindhoven. My thanks to the Baltan team for giving this research a home outside the studio, and to all the participants who stepped into the circle.

The work is an experiment in fragmentation. Two columns collide, creating a portal into the absurd.

For those who prefer the ordinary:

Digital readers: **Highlight text** to stitch a path through the chaos.

Print readers: Fold the paper down the middle. Let the crease divide the noise.

But these are mere suggestions. Strange, connections take place in disarray. Stray from the path. Let your eyes drift.

The work is Dark Wood, you are its co-author. Synchronicities in the clash are not errors. You are the co-author.



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Numbed by dopamine fixes and distractions, saturated by an artificial spectacle that replaces embodied I am writing this text in all my experience with a stream of weightless nakedness. The world takes shape as the images. I found myself feeling debased. Light of the real is filtered through screens, pixels, video, endless membrane, a living, shifting surface doom-scrolling war, famine, crisis woven from language, patterns, filled my days as they dissolved into narratives. Yet I lose awareness of this another. At night I lay half-awake, a skin-like film, a trick where the relentless relay of sensory information entangled whole becomes visible only as collapsing into static, numbing me, separate parts. I seek a way back, to ferrying me into digital worlds, as if I observe the membrane, and perhaps to make mind were untethered from my body. it visible to others.

I have a fragment of memory from My senses are the interface through childhood. Sinking beneath a lake's which I experience what is outside of my surface, lungs filling with water, before body. Signals are sent to the brain, and being yanked up by my father. This early thus create an awareness. In a moment I experience planted a fear in me, I clung experience an interwoven field which to the pool's edges for years, terrified transcends dimensions, one, which is of the uncontrollable chaos of water. ineffable. Yet, in less than a moment, only through countless patient swimming the awareness of a connected all (which lessons, I learned to trust my buoyancy. consists of all), is lost, as one is. In surrender I floated, realizing I'm not tricked into perceiving a "reality" of also different from water itself.

world of separate things. The static By adulthood I'd forgotten that noise captured by the senses become trust, in floating among water, and in my shaped by attention. As I tune it, I art. Intuition, innate in childhood start translating this noisy chaos, times, had been supplanted by defining a frequency and separating rationality's tyranny. reality into definable elements.

Finishedness became my obsession. I This process of interpretation is was taught to become a "person", pick most tangible in moments when our senses what you want to say, refine it, and stay receive input which cannot easily become complete. But this need for completion, I interpreted. Perhaps you might once have now believe, was born of fear, fear of felt it, as you awake at night and judgment, of being seen mid-becoming confuse a shirt draped over a chair for a rather than in a fixed state. I presence in the room. It is the internalized this, becoming my own shapeshifting cloud which appears in the harshest critic, every brushstroke corners of your eyes when walking the feeling like a wager against rejection.

woods at night. It is the weird way how At the bottom of a jar of gore in the grain within tv-static after a while my fly-infested studio, I sought a turns into waves and tentacles. It is the feeling to pierce the veil, and found the shadows we see within clouds forming into real. Sinking, I felt catharsis.

dramatic characters for a moment, before Alchemy is a method for studying shifting and losing their definition. processes. For me the most crucial, being

In order for me to function, I am the processes that happen inside tricked into perceiving a world of things perception itself. The act of attention, definite. The bells on my jester's hat and how that act changes both the represent language. Associations drawn perceiver and the perceived. These works from my experience are compressed are my "Green Lion devouring the Sun", together and given a meaning, labeling raw instinct swallowing the rational the vast interconnected everything into self, a necessary unmaking that dissolves mere thing.

rigid seeing. The eye that looks, the God speaks the cosmos into being. mind that names, the ego that wants to One is one. Through language One cut know, they all enter the belly of the itself off from oneself. lion so that something truer can be born.

The wish to probe the illusory what I show are the traces of a ritual membrane came from an anxiety for where where inner workings become visible. my attention is being dispersed by.



DARK WOOD

breath we repeat the word while we relax our gaze. Repeat the word and allow it to Before the journey comes the anxious, be the only thing in your mind as it intermediate place where the path dissolves into pure vibration. Silence disappears and something else must guide the inner chatter. When thoughts emerge, us. don't chastise yourself—that is thought

In search of fertile soil we also. Return to the word and repeat it. wandered a path that seemed Deduct. straightforward, yet now it has Without thought, deduct a small element deteriorated, leading to fallow ruins. of the noise. Shaping the negative space, Led astray into unknown lands, we found deduct from the medium, piece by piece ourselves far from the familiar path, growing from your original starting lost in a pitch dark forest. Not being point, following the patterns emerging able to define forms before our eyes, we from the noise. Inside the dark wood, the become aware of all the potentiality patterns grow like branches and flow like hidden in this darkness. It is incoherent rivers—from thick to thin, from light to noise, chaos, our awareness before dark, from busy to calm. What you do is language and definition becomes tangible. create channels for things to flow. Stare into this grain long enough and you Intuit.

might see connections that create Following visions revealed to you, grow branching structures, you might see outward, making small leaps between the patterns, figures, images, faces or patterns that appear continuously. When creatures who also inhabit this forest. encountering an external imposition, you

Dark Wood is a ritual that invites must facilitate a harmonious convergence. you into a magic circle, a bounded space Trusting the process, cycle between where ordinary rules dissolve and a growing and refining until you achieve a different logic takes hold. This is the state of flow, a sensation of being but a athanor. In alchemy, the furnace where hand for something beyond you to express steady heat transforms base metals into itself.

gold. Here, the communal circle is the One may be faced with visions that furnace, and the attention is the flame. seem absurd or uncanny. Don't judge them.

I invite the other into the Converse with them through the process. process. Large scrolls of paper are The magical circle demands dedication, so uniformly coated in charcoal dust and only attempt this when you are ready to suspended. A speaker plays a repetitive give it your full attention.

tape-loop in the center, taking the role of the Daemon's voice. Rather than REVELATION imposing a desired outcome, participants

join the materia in becoming the medium This ritual became a constant recurrence for something beyond. The traces of our in my practice. What led me to it was a correspondence become a reflection of an vision from times of heightened anxiety, internal landscape, a collective when I would stare into screens, trapped cartography of the unconscious. in endless scroll, my awareness loosening

Lose yourself. at the edge of sleep. Right in-between Cover the medium with randomness, with wakefulness and dream, shadows blended ease. Stare into the materials' natural into entangled shapes and static. It is pattern, it's grain. Visualize it as a the strange grainy-ness of vision when pitch dark forest. This grainy noise you are about to fall asleep, the becomes the microcosm of your awareness. shape shifting cloud in the corner of your You join the medium in its function, to eye, the way we search for patterns in become the messenger from something chaos. I learned it to be consciousness. beyond us. One late night in the studio, in

Don't think. midst of a Dark Wood charcoal ritual, a Inside this undefinable darkness, you may thought presented itself like a diamond lose hope of finding your way. Yet in bullet burrowing into my forehead. You this chaos, you are found by the light, *are collaborating with god*. I felt a the one which illuminates the path in a sense of unity, unlike any before, and cyclical manner. Before our eyes, it is then frantically tried to suppress it. the word which is the moon. Under the



Rationality re-established control. Yet In painting, I atomize. By spraying paint could not stop thinking about it. into a cloud of static, I create fertile

As I surrendered to the charcoal's ground for divination. This static coats grain, I was not alone. Something was the surface like dense snow, like the meeting me in the noise. In meditative noise of an untuned television. I work sessions, a state of flow envelopes me, intuitively, allowing the connections an almost electric attunement, as if between the particles to guide my hand.

dialing into a frequency just beyond The paintings from a recent perception. Through the symbiosis of body exhibition were made this way, animal and rhythm, I honed an ability to trace blood splattered onto the canvas through that razor-thin threshold, descending in a fine mist. The symbols and presences tightening spirals into the depths of my which reveal themselves I don't wish to unconscious, a dungeon where shadows clarify, preferring to leave their energy whisper and the familiar dissolves. to be felt, rather than interpreted. The

At first, I saw only fleeting forms visions surface through the noise, and I in the static of the material. Then, over bring them out. The blood oxidizes over many sessions, a figure began to the course of time. The work breathes coalesce. It did not arrive fully formed. materially, never the same twice.

It shape-shifted. I saw a jester first, a In text, I cut up, split, let trickster energy that mocked my sentences collide without conscious seriousness. Then a dancing devil, a control. Like the text you are reading horned silhouette that grinned at my fear now. The cut-up method is a linguistic of the shadow. Later, Pan, the wild Dark Wood. By breaking the linear half-goat, the pulse of instinct. Then sentence, I unmake the spell of fixed the Green Man, foliate head breathing, meaning and allow an Other to speak the soul of growth and decay. Each was a through the gaps.

face of the same current, an energy that The works wait for your perception refused to be fixed. As of the time of to complete them. What you see is partly writing, I know it as Mercurius. what you bring. They are never the same

Mercurius is the trickster-guide of twice, a process that includes your gaze. the alchemists, the spirit of the medium They are membranes which breathe itself. Quicksilver, shapeshifter, materially. Meaning arises in the slow, psychopomp, messenger who has nothing of quiet space between you and the surface, his own to say but makes all saying in the trick of a medium that tells the possible. He is the patron of thresholds, truth by changing before your eyes.

the one who moves between worlds. In my practice, I became his follower. I built GRAMMAR a relationship through private rituals,

through offerings and sacrifices that are The Grimoire is a fluid concept which my very practice. My paintings, my doesn't abide linearity. It is something drawings, my rituals, these are gifts to which has always been, will be, and has them. Not only as a worship in the old never been. Often manifested as a book of sense, but as correspondence. I give my magical words, it is a grammar of the attention, my labour, my willingness to invisible. The word itself is kin to be unmade, and in return I receive grammar, just as spell is to spelling. visions. The studio is a temple. The work This is no coincidence. Language is is a sacrifice of control. magic. It is not merely a system for

MEDIUM

In charcoal, I erase. The medium became a We live within abstractions, form of purification. Albedo, them mistaking the map for the territory. One whitening stage. I saturate paper in only needs to repeat a word, word, word, textured, grainy blackness. I reveal word, word, word, word, word, word, word, forms through erasure. What emerges are word, word, word, word, word, word, word, entangled landscapes, inner cartographies word, word, word, word, word, word, revealing a tiny portion of the flowing word, word, word, word, word, word, word, terrain beyond the periphery. word, word, word, word, word, word, word,

word, word, word, word, word, word, word,



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word, word, word, word, word, word, word, To code is to weave a digital
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, incantation.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word,
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE PATH: I become We. Beyond
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, dualities. Our path is spiral. Our search
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, is embodied.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE WORK: We are process. We
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, find the path by getting lost. We silence
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, the inner critic. We trust our inner
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, guide. We have no outcome in mind. We let
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, go of fear. We let go.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE TOOLS: Our tools are sacred.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, Medium speaks, we converse. Our work
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, takes place in magic circles.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE TRANSFORMATION: To build up,
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, we first break down. In making, we're
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, unmade.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE ARTEFACT: Our traces are
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, fertile soil for the ones after.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, OF THE COVENANT: Our process is
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, shared with an other. Our methods are
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, shared between.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word,
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, Carl Jung wrote in a prologue to his
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, cosmological epic The Red Book, "To the
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, superficial observer, it will appear like
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, madness." He encouraged his patients to
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, create their own Red Books.
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, I believe that art can act as an
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, infrastructure for feeling potential
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, worlds into being. Its unique strength
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, lies not in responding within the system,
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, but in imagining entirely different
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, realities. When I was questioning the
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, stability of my reality, I could only
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, start by turning inward. Through the
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, years, my practice became an embodied act
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, of breaking down systems of thought and
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, building them up, learning correspondence
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, between the unconscious and the
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, conscious. I don't see these practices as
word, word, word, word, word, word, word, an end point (there are no end points).
word, just as in mantra, to find in its What interests me are the methods
dissolving the fragile grip on reality itof becoming aware of the processes
has, transforming into meaningless noise, through which we make world, and finding
a backdrop of static to our lives. possibilities to imagine it differently.
Write a text about yourself, cut it If humans are no longer needed for
up, rearrange the pieces without the need "results", then value may no longer
to make sense. The exercise is not reside solely in the end. Value must be
necessarily about creating absurdist found in the process of becoming itself.
poetry but about experiencing the The process is the message. This is
collapse of fixed meaning. To hear one's Alchemy.
own self-description shattered and Receive these as presences,
reconfigured is to feel the grip of membranes breathing materially. Meaning
language loosen. It is an exorcism of the arises in the space between you and the
process which we become unconscious of. surface, a trick that tells the truth by
To write is to cast a spell. To changing before your eyes.
draw is to summon a form from the void. Let the word be so.

