

BUT, ACTUALLY, WHAT I MEANT WAS...

CLAUDIO MOLINARI DASSATTI IN CONVERSATION WITH HANNAH-DAWN HENDERSON

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Hannah-Dawn Henderson *But, actually, what I meant was...*, January 14 2014 in 1646.

The exhibition is part of *The Ongoing Conversation* series, a collaboration between 1646 and the Master Artistic Research, The Hague.

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JAN 9: HANNAH DAWN HENDERSON [HDH] - CLAUDIO MOLINARI DASSATTI [CMD]

Dear Claudio,

I know you don't like to talk about French philosophers, but I want to tell you about a dream I had recently that inspired one of my new works. I was dancing with Foucault in a disco, who was trying to give me advice on my love-life and how I can be a better artist.

I am sure there is some very deep albeit perverse Freudian reading one could take on such a dream. But I'd rather know what the Dassattian reading would be.

Incidentally, do you have any idea how hard it is to find a French, bald, choreographically-talented, philosophically-enlightened male actor nowadays? I wanted to find such a unique individual to star in my film, but instead I ended up dancing on my own. It seems that it is only ever possible to get two of each traits: bald and French, or bald and philosophically-enlightened, or choreographically-talented and male. But never the winning combination.

Ps. Do you remember the disco era, and if so, what was your favourite track?

CMD - HDH

Well, the reading is that you think answers supposedly lie in French minds. But as in French food, where the actual food is obscured by thick sauces, the French obscure the actual information. Since you like references, read the novel *Flicker*, where the same movie is reviewed by a Frenchman and an American. A hilarious gladiator combat between getting from A to A1 to A 3 to to A 16 to A 4012, and getting from A to B. Empires are not built on extra sauce. You see, we live in LIFE not in the academy, where people have time to ponder for decades.

Ps. *I Got Protection* by Chic – little known song by amazing musicians and producers: Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards. If you don't believe me, see who plays the guitar with the latest Daft Punk hit.

HDH - CMD

Dear Claudio,

There's something very amusing about the name of the band you pointed me towards, bearing in mind your adamant dislike of all things vaguely French. But I should have told you the end of the dream too:

Baudrillard turned up and he started trying to philosophise to us all (about hyper-reality, of all things!). The mood was totally dead after that. I've never been able to like Baudrillard – partly because I always forget how to spell his name, and partly because he kind of has a moody-teenager vibe about him.

So, in a sense, I don't think the dream was necessarily representative of my latent desire to worship philosophers, but rather to acknowledge that philosophers are just as mundane as everyone else.

We all have danced when no one has been watching. Even Foucault. That said, I do think the dream may indicate my latent love of disco...

Well, I am quite happy to ponder for decades in both the art(-academy) and life. But what do you suggest as an alternative?

Hannah

JAN 10: CMD - HDH

I think philosophers are like an oasis you must reach on your quest through the desert of life, a reference, a touchstone.

Feeding for knowledge exclusively on philosophy is not the way, I think, like too much salt in your food – sorry but I cook quite a lot.

Why then not look at other artists, physicists, poets... why not aesthetics? Perhaps this is the reason art has developed such a need for over-explanation and reached such peaks of profound ugliness.

HDH - CMD

As an 'FYI', I should like to tell you that I don't ever add extra salt to my food.

As someone who is prone to meandering, rambling, and performing an array of verbal aerobics before actually arriving at any coherent conclusion, I would like to declare myself the Patron of Over-Explanation. But what strikes me is that you seem to want to segregate 'the artist' from 'the philosopher'.

So can an artist not be a philosopher, or are the roles mutually exclusive?

I think you paint a funny but very traditional image of these two archetypes: the artist whittling their hours away lamenting and praising the qualities of emotion in their ivory tower (or white cube), whilst the philosopher wedges himself between encyclopaedias of science and humanities in the stuffy academy.

Comparing my practice to such a paradigm, I see myself more as someone who is trying to navigate philosophy, 'aesthetic', society, and life through a process of reflecting, filtering, processing, making. But this act of trying to make sense of a mass of input, affect and discourse isn't restricted to just the academy (academic or

artistic); it manifests in every interaction, every internalised dialogue. I see it more as 'feeling for' than 'feeding for' knowledge, and no, I do not wallow indulgently in just the philosophy of Foucaults and Derridas (okay, sometimes, yes, but we all have our guilty pleasure), but in the philosophy of mundanity. Philosophy lies in all things, grand and mundane, from discourse to disco.

Hannah

CMD - HDH

"Fear the man who reads only one book", said someone. I think philosophy is not the only book. Far from it.

If you think I want to segregate you must have read without much attention. Actually I spoke to you about aggregating. I wrote to you, and I quote:

"Why then not look at other artists, physicists, poets... why not aesthetics?"

JAN 11: HDH - CMD

Dear Claudio,

What I meant was that it sounds as if you perceive these roles to be fairly fixed, closed – that the artist is the artist, the philosopher the philosopher, the poet is the poet – and although each archetype can perhaps cast the occasional glance at one another, they never shift between roles.

But maybe I am reading you wrong; that's likely, I can be prone to thinking only in black and white (I mean that literally and metaphorically: all my dreams are in black and white, but reality is always in colour ... I'm not totally colour-blind ...).

I like the idea of taking on roles – the notion that occasionally we take on different archetypes whilst fumbling to see what lies beyond the superficial.

I suppose I do this a lot in my work: HDH the artist, HDH the pseudo-intellectual, HDH the disillusioned and unwitting devotee of the Cult of Singledom. Falling in and out of different voices and different I's (eyes), composing the body of a biography, but not being certain whether it truly is an (auto)biography.

Maybe it is all just make-believe; I think it's all right to allow fact to mingle with fiction...

I want to ask: have you ever read a book and thought it must surely have been about you? Have you ever thought that 'I' could almost be mine?

Written somewhere between Leiden and Den Haag

Hannah

CMD - HDH

If you're a mechanic you probably are able to fix cars, bikes, machines...then you specialize, because we all do.

Just as well, any person with artistic inclinations tries several disciplines before he or she settles for one. I guess we all do that until we find the craft that we feel more comfortable with.

That makes you able to understand 'the arts'. That's why reading philosophy to me is limited, I see great composition in poetry, in music, in painting, in architecture.

An artist can read different forms of creation because that, and no other, is their craft.

I love a book called *The Thought Gang*, by Tibor Fischer. ¿Are you getting it for me as a present?

HDH - CMD

Dear Claudio,
Surely you already own a copy of *The Thought Gang*? Or are you the type who makes full use out of their library card?

I recently gave away a lot of books. I'm not sure if I gave them away strictly as presents. I gave them away as part of what I'd describe as a 'life garage-sale', a de-archiving of sorts. Some I just put on marktplaats (a sort of eBay), but for some I picked the recipients quite carefully. When I was sat in my studio, boxing-up the final book, I felt pretty saturated in regret – not because I didn't want to post this last fragment, but because I hadn't documented any of the entire de-archiving process. I had one of those 'darn, this could have been the foundation of a work!'

But perhaps that is just one of the things that has to remain in the private realm of my memory. It is funny how some experiences simply must remain private, whereas other times exposing the private – that is to say: offering something intimate up for voyeuristic consumption – is somehow reassuring.

Perhaps because in that moment of exposure, we suddenly realise that much of what we maintain as private isn't necessarily a 'secret', and nor is it unique.

Realising that many of us share similar fears, insecurities and hopes bridges a kind of distance and dilutes inhibition.

Although, lately, it's been a bit difficult pinpointing where this line between public and private exists, particularly in my practice and in the process of making.

For years, correspondence has served as an element of my practice - but more as something that is hidden, a foundation of sorts. But recently I have been using such correspondences as my material to work with – extracting stories, words, (physical) gestures from these voiceless dialogues and making them into works.

Knowing when it's okay to expose others, and not just

yourself, is tricky.

I don't know if I am strictly focused on 'making' (this word suggests something concerned with 'newness')...perhaps it is more a matter of archiving and digesting – and again, this is where the notion of biography crops up again.

Hannah

JAN 12: CMD - HDH

I also gave away my 3000 book library. Even my book on Soutine, a much greater painter than Modigliani. Miss horribly my copy of the *Thought Gang* and *The Ginger Man*, and all my WWII books.

Regarding the public/private choice, I think the artistic distinction between public and private has to happen when you feel your private experience is universal and therefore useful for others, or at least may touch others. The private must remain private when the experience is not universal enough.

When my father lay dead on his hospital bed (something quite private, I never spoke about it before) I looked at his hands: they looked exactly like mine, or mine like his. This image was so powerful that I never forgot it. I consider it artistic material because we all were young once, we all have parents, we all get old, and we all die. And in certain aspects we are not different at all. (Of course, the image I described should have sufficed. I shouldn't even be explaining this).

HDH - CMD

Dear Claudio,

Reading your email, I started to think about the notion of 'giving away' – giving away books, giving away private memories – essentially, giving away stories. Although both actions seem to induce some sense of lamentation – a kind of regret or even a sort of vulnerability, a sensation of loss – there is surely something gained in the act of giving away. When we see that our words can belong just as much to others as they do ourselves, we are confronted with a revelation: indeed, to take your words, we are not so different, nor so alone. And that is perhaps one of the most frightening and calming notions one can ever come to realise.

Hannah

Ps. I am going to send you a book to rebuild your library. It's entitled: *Critical Essays on Foucault*.