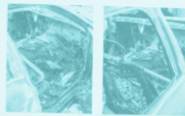


MY THREE ENCOUNTERS

by Marco Bene



Installation view of Wendi Wang's *She Said, She Said*, 2022
Stair climbing cart, Pelican 1450 case, Elektron Digitakt,
leather jackets, Monster Energy drinks, headphones, aluminum, cables, dirt, etc.

MY THREE ENCOUNTERS¹

This is a text to be published² in the *RRR* online magazine,³ that was written after briefly visiting the MFA studios of three graduating CCA artists. However, in the act of writing—in the act of writing about their work; in the act of writing about the act of writing about their work—I stumbled upon several problems. How to encapsulate a conversation, with all that lies outside the text: their mannerisms, their works, their personalities; my mannerisms, my personality? Is it possible to address it all? How to taint my position;⁴ to subvert the assumed connoisseurship of *the writer who writes about?* How will the artists take it? There is no perfect solution. Recounting an encounter is always a risky enterprise. What is included or excluded, what is written or omitted, is the dilemma. This issue is inseparable from writing. That is why I decided to corrupt it (somewhat), to distort it (somehow). That is why, in these semi-fictionalized meetings with Wendi Wang, Katayoun Bahrami, and Roy Vessil, the employment of certain rhetorical figures, such as the *periphrasis*,⁵ or the appeal to the reader, elicits a kind of Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*,⁶⁷ making it obvious for all listeners that, even if we often try, life cannot be transcribed.⁸ One last thing before we begin: footnotes are important.⁹

¹ My-th-Reencounters was also a title possibility, fortunately it was discarded.

² I guess it's published, If you are reading.

³ PAY ATTENTION! It's the online magazine you're reading right now.

⁴ I am what is known as a CCA CURP MA 1ST YEAR student. What is that? Those of you—READERS IN THE ACT OF READING—who have nothing to do with CCA—NOT MANY, I SUSPECT—will be wondering. It means I am a student in the first year of a master's degree in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts. Yet, explaining what Curatorial Practice is would take two years of master's to be exact, so I'll pass.

⁵ Pompous use of speech or indirect and circumlocutionary writing.

⁶ Complicated word in German that translates into *estrangement effect*, another convoluted term I like.

⁷ See what I'm doing with the gibberish? It's annoying, isn't it?

⁸ Anyway, I hope that even if I have broken my promises with what was real in our encounters, with what the artists told me, a bit of their essence and a bit of my genuine curiosity survives. If it didn't, I apologize.

⁹ FOOTNOTE!

Wendi¹⁰ and I met in Alison O'Daniel's *Moving Image* class.

On one of those Monday seminars, at 8:37 am,¹¹ Wendi stood up, plugged his laptop into the class monitor and displayed an image of a vertical piece of white paper with a small fluorescent greenish rectangle on one side. It was a still image.¹² The page was not completely blank, several subtle lines were discernible. The lines, as Wendi explained, came about by walking around with a trolley, on which a piece of paper lay flat and a pencil hanging from a string drew random strokes. Then, an error in the scanning of the paper led to the lightness of the marks.¹³



Wendi Wang's *Untitled (A Mistake by Final Cut)*, 2022
Digital Image

¹⁰ Wendi Wang (1997, China), is an artist that uses photography as his primary medium. His work often deals with the gap between lived experience and photographic memory. In his experimental approach to images, the audience, time and place are fundamental concerns.

¹¹ Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. You will have to make that choice.

¹² Presenting a static scanning for a *Moving Image* class project about motion, was something that quickly caught my fancy.

¹³ For Wendi and for me the glitch was fundamental to the final work.

Wendi pointed towards the screen and said:

—"The transcoding phenomenon reveals the cryptic nature of simulation and hypothetico-deductive models." He stopped for a second, and continued: "In a way, it's like witnessing the mnemonic exercise an image is in the process of making!"¹⁴

I thought the piece was beautiful. It was really special, but people in the class wanted more. They also stood up:

—"We want documentation; documentation, and the intrinsic dissection of your apparently hybrid comprehension systems!" they screamed.¹⁵

—"You all!" Wendi said very calmly, while smiling gently, "Do what you have to do as viewers, ask yourselves if the image is somehow autonomous. Should we always disclose, part by part, the background information? Is this not the prerequisite that validates the finished object and thus renders it a commodity? And, what about the *hactenus vulgo ignotus*?"¹⁶ He asked.

Weeks later Wendi and I headed to his studio. Standing at a zebra crossing waiting for the light to change, we talked about his interests, my interests, and the eagerness of the class to know more.¹⁷

—"They didn't get it!" He said, "I think these days tautologies have come to an abrupt halt. We are now in the age of *lexico-indexico-contextual* frameworks."

—"Yes... maybe." I answered.

I told him my plan was to narrate our encounter and asked him if I could start recording.¹⁸

—"Yes," he replied, "but only if the subject, thou, is bereft of the acute sentiment of quotidian dullness."¹⁹

—"Yes," I said.

¹⁴ He didn't.

¹⁵ They didn't.

¹⁶ *Hactenus vulgo ignotus* or, as some say: *to this point (but no further) unknown*.

¹⁷ We did.

¹⁸ We were.

¹⁹ His exact words were: "It will sound stupid."

We decided to cross on red.²⁰

In the studio, Wendi told me that he disagreed with Susan:²¹

—"I'm not against interpretation you know, but context, be it name, caption, materials... conditions the subject to believe the objects are x, y or z; while myth/fiction, fact/reality dichotomies are not considered, it shouldn't be that way, you know? In any case, please know that my work is fragile, based on fragments, it asserts what intelligibility is in its most elemental state. Flattening presentations and representations of immanence, or something like that," he said.

In the center of the studio cubicle, a kind of synthesizer was placed on a trolley. I approached it and put on the headsets attached to the machine. A soft voice was whispering a song, and there were noises in the background. The short track was looping. I thought the melody was pretty, catchy but somewhat sinister.



View of Wendi Wang's *She Said, She Said*, 2022

Stair climbing cart, Pelican 1450 case, Elektron Digitakt, leather jackets, Monster Energy drinks, headphones, aluminum, cables, dirt, etc.

Courtesy of the artist

²⁰ While crossing I told Wendi about Ben Patterson's traffic light performance, in which the artist waited on one side of the pavement until a traffic light turned green, crossed, and again waited for the traffic light to turn green, crossed, and so on and so forth. Wendi smiled and told me how important the deconstruction of conventional procedures is, portraying the acute awareness of supra-conscious dislocations.

²¹ Sontag... the author I mean; Susan Sontag, and not Sunday in German, written Sonntag.

—“It's an ever-changing loop, a random progression of infra-thin superimposed deviations. An ode to the impossible transcendence of pure symbiosis.” Wendi paused. Then he asked: “You know when tobacco smoke also smells like the mouth that exhales it? Well, the two scents are married by *inframince*.²² A homologous substance is presently taking shape here.”

[Audio excerpt of Wendi Wang's *She Said, She Said*, 2022](#)

—“I like it; it's like an infinite lullaby!”

—“Yes,” Wendi said. “It is about the nocturnal, the intimate and the oneiric. One track plays the voice of my girlfriend singing something in bed, and the other track the sounds recorded while a friend and I were camping.”

I nodded. Then, he uttered something about the tragic loss of his beanie. I was amused. And then he cited, word by word his thesis in its entirety,²³ but I can only remember this quote:

—“I confirm my existence as an individual by shopping and fantasizing—exist in this flesh I dominate (in this world, it's easy to blend in as a whole with the crowd waiting for traffic lights).”²⁴

—“Great, thanks for that. I would like to end it there; I mean, here.” Do you have any final words?

—“Shit, I don't know what to say! These are my final words.” He said.²⁵

²² Paraphrasing a Marcel Duchamp's sentence about the *Inframance*.

²³ This is a lie: like the Epimenides paradox.

²⁴ Wang, Wendi. “Unit 303, Flowing by Water, and Other Stuff,” (CCA MFA Thesis, 2022)

²⁵ This is true.



TRAFFIC LIGHT - A VERY LAWFUL DANCE - FOR ENNIS

A traffic light, with or without special pedestrian signals is found or positioned on street corner or at stage center. Performer(s) waits at real or imaginary curb on red signal, alerts self on yellow signal, crosses street or stage on green signal. Achieving opposite side, performer(s) turns, repeats sequence. A performance may consist of an indefinite, an indeterminate or a predetermined number of repetitions.

Benjamin Patterson, Wiesbaden, June 1962

3 "Sneak Review," photo/score, B.Patterson "A Very Lawful Dance - For Ennis," performed by B.Patterson and others, photo by L.Irmisch, 12 x 16 cm, 2014
Copyright © Patterson, Ben, All rights reserved

On Tuesday at 9.37 am, I went to meet Katayoun Bahrami.

Katayoun is a multidisciplinary visual artist. As she wrote in a bio I found, her practice mobilizes “memories from her home country juxtaposed with her current reality. As an Iranian female artist, her research activities investigate the intersections of boundaries, identity, and women.”²⁶

In her studio, Katayoun approached one piece and spoke to me about her interest in exploring the conditions that delimit a subject of displacement.

—“The idea is to remain in a constant state of arrival while always departing,”²⁷ she firmly stated.

—“Yes, I guess I understand what you mean.” I said.

We moved closer to a small mound of rectangular cement bricks²⁸ in one corner of the room. The bricks, rough, hard and sharp-edged, were wrapped in fiber, knitted in patterns that exposed the gray cement, crocheted like pouches. Katayoun picked up a small, traditional Iranian ceramic bowl:

—“Family heirloom,” she said.

It was visible that the bowl had been reassembled, its segments glued together.

—“A traditional Iranian method was used to fix it.” Katayoun said, as if anticipating what I was about to ask her.

Inside the bowl was a dried plant.

—“It’s Borage,” she said, “or Magic Herb, a plant grown by my grandmother exclusive to the slopes of Mount Damavand in the Alborz Mountains in Iran. It has healing properties.”

²⁶ Bio by Katayoun Bahrami.

²⁷ Linklater, Richard, director. *Waking Life*. 2001. (Film)

²⁸ Forty, to be exact.

—“Can I touch it,” I asked.
—“Sure!” replied Katayoun.

It was a small, purple flower. I picked a bud and held it close to my nose trying to guess the scent, but with a mask on I could only smell the garlic I had eaten for breakfast.



Detail of Katayoun Bahrami's *The Weight of The Wall*, 2022
Crochet forty 4"x2"x8" cement bricks with cotton and metallic yarn
Two 25"x25" mirrors, Dried Borage

Video 4:00

Courtesy of the artist

Two mirrors touching at ninety degrees, one on each side of the corner of the wall, reflected three angles of the pile of bricks.

— “The bricks are an analogy of the burdens I have to bear: as a woman, away from the geographical realm of the familiar, with all that this entails.” Katayoun stopped, bent down, picked up a brick and said: “The pressure I hold is enveloped by soft fibers. Weaving is a central element of my practice, it allows embodied and motoric reiterations to intersect and signpost my intimate, experiential, symbolic and geographic archive. One mirror reflects my past to the right, the other, to the left, my future, and there is a third image. A true-mirror image, in between, created by two mirrors meeting at a 90-degree angle, that reveals a continuum present tense, interrupted, depending on where you stand, by memory on the one side: the past; and speculation on the other: the future. It is the *plateau* from where liminal consciousness expands. You read it, like in Farsi, my native language, from right-to-left. You see?” Katayoun asked. —“Yes,” I said, “really interesting.”²⁹

²⁹ I thought it was a reference to Smithson's work, like the 60s' *Nonsite (Essen Soil and Mirrors)*, 1969. But unlike Katayoun's work, Smithson's project of *less is more*, dematerialisation, failed in many ways. Affects and the subjective were discarded; and this piece revisits the questions of an affective turn through an extrapolated conceptual and concrete subject matter. For me it is the *noumenon*, the thing-in-itself conceived, but for Katayoun it is the *phenomenal*, empirical experience, tangible, and if you like, real; yet I don't like to use that term.



Detail of Katayoun Bahrami's *The Weight of The Wall*, 2022
Crochet forty 4"x2"x8" cement bricks with cotton and metallic yarn
Two 25"x25" mirrors, Dried Borage
Video 4:00
Courtesy of the artist

Katayoun turned a projector on, and projected a collage-like image of the flowers and hands crocheting, while telling me that the piece, the objectual intersection with real time and space signified by the reflections, was thereby contested when a time-based moving image, the representation of real time and space, illuminates the piece.

—“What is that sound?” I asked.

—“My grandmother sings a song while my mother and I crochet, whispering over it,” Katayoun replied. Then she asked quietly, as if inwardly: “What is the motion traversed by represented movement and reflected *ad eternum*?”

— “I think I have more than enough material to write about,” I said

—“Yes,” she said, “but before you go let me say bye to the readers.”

—“Why on earth not!” I said.

—“Wherever you are, farewell *RRR* readers.”

The next day, at around 10:37 am, I met Roy Vessil³⁰ while waiting outside the Dogpatch studios building. Roy approached me and said:

—“Nice to meet you Marco, if you are in fact Marco?”

—“Yes, that’s me.”

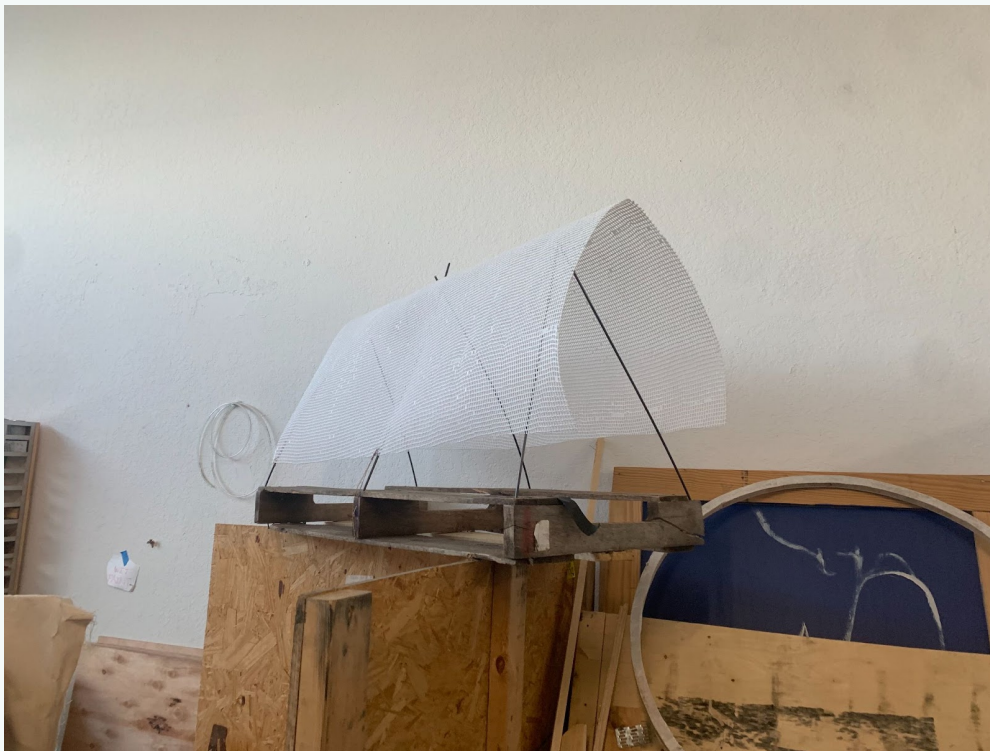
—“I’m Roy. How are you?” He asked.

—“Very well, and you?”

—“I’m good, thank you. And you?”

—“Yes, good. Thanks.”

He was carrying three very long wooden slats with him, so I gave him a hand up the stairs. When we got to his space, he left the laths in a corner. The cubicle was full of pieces of wood, materials and things; things in general.



Detail of Roy Vessil’s studio, 2022

Photo by Marco Bene

³⁰ “A maker at heart, during online schooling he picked up an interest in video. Roy Vessil was born as a way of physically embodying the ideas inside various works it shows up in, easily reshaping to what the idea needs to be. Some say it looks like Roy Cannon-Berg and these are self-portraits, others may disagree.” Bio by Vessil.

Roy started at the beginning, and began to show me stuff to begin with.

Two wooden plinths built from parts and maquettes of all kinds, small houses, watchtowers, hand-painted landscapes, lego parts... It all created a rather strange site, like floating islands designed digitally and later printed by a machine-like entity.



Detail of Roy Vessil's studio, hands and miniature piece, 2022
Photo by Marco Bene

—“All the things you see here are salvaged materials, things I collect from the street, construction sites, etc. What is interesting about recycled goods is how they are living records of their previous uses, interactions, conditions and so forth. The ontological univocity...”³¹ He said. “Think, for example, of the slats we have walked up with, picked up from the side of the train tracks. If in a speculative realist exercise you define what the slat was to the train and the train rail to the slat, you thereby create an object-oriented ontology that goes beyond my interaction with them, positing the dissolution of the binary opposition of object/subject, inside/outside, even thought/theory. In short, to glimpse an outside through the fabric of subjectivity. Or “an immanent or incipient signification in the living body [that] extends to the whole sensible world,”³² if you like.

—“That’s very interesting!” I said.

—“Are you going to write about this for RRR?” Roy asked.

—“Yes, as a matter of fact I’m writing it right this very second,” I said.

—“Or reading it further along the way, I guess,” said Roy.

—“Right you are.” I answered.

—“Let me just say,” he said, “that the little models you see here, like architectural maquettes, are the result of a ‘hypertrophy of appetite for cultural references,’³³ as much as they are the result of object-in-space to object-in-space correlations. Take that piece of wood and, beyond the efforts of mediation between objects I constantly engage in, it fits inch by inch here, while that fits there and there, that fits over here with this and that... umm.... am I making any sense?”

—“Totally!”

—“There is a certain potential for embeddedness in all things, something that makes stuff stick together, click together, just fit like a glove. It's something we should spend some time focusing on.” He mentioned and concluded. “Well, that's what I do.”

I thanked Roy and headed for the exit as he moved materials at a frantic pace that seemed choreographed.

³¹ See Gilles Deleuze concept: the *univocity of being*... if you want to, that is.

³² Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things” in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 62-63.

³³ Again the great Sontag, Susan. *A Susan Sontag Reader*. (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2014) 54.

—“Bye,” I said.
—“Bye, bye,” said Roy.



Detail of Roy Vessil's in his studio, 2022
Photo by Marco Bene



Marco Bene (he/him) studied a BA in Art History at Goldsmiths, University of London, from 2012 to 2016. In 2017, he moved to Lisbon, writing vacuum cleaner reviews to subsist, until he started working as curatorial assistant to the exhibition programme conceived by Natxo Checa, at Galeria Zé dos Bois; studio manager to the artist Alexandre Estrela, and curatorial assistant to the Oporto, Lisbon exhibition programme. Currently, he is studying an MA in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts, San Francisco.