

Niall de Buitléar *Out of Order*

8th July – 20 August 2011

The LAB, Dublin

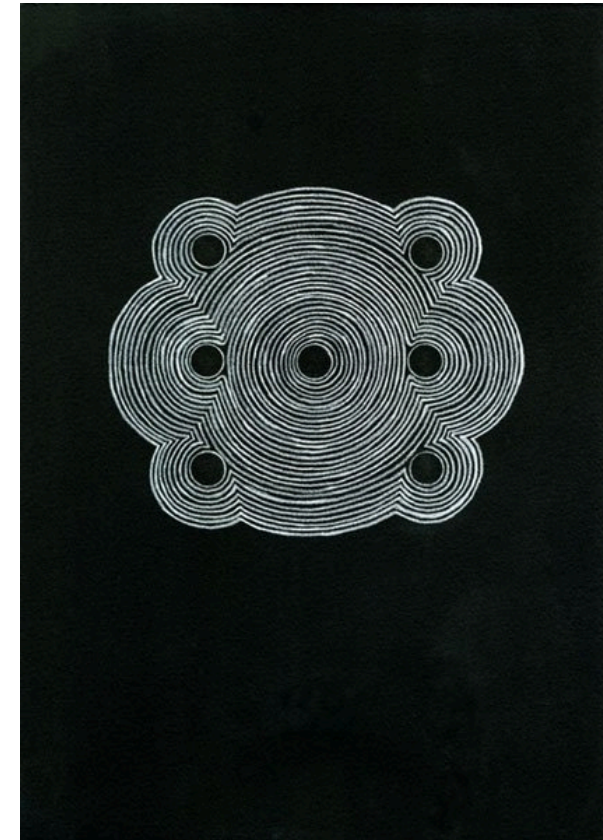
Text by James Merrigan

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Niall de Buitléar, Untitled, white pencil on paper, 2010-2011;
courtesy the artist.

1. The definition of “Ready-Made Geometry” is bound in a statement – that geometry has no origin of development, and was found ‘ready-made’ in the Egyptian sand or Greek temple. From Jacques Derrida’s introduction to Edmund Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*, University of Nebraska Press, 1989. p27

“Our interest shall be the inquiry back into the most original sense in which geometry once arose, was present as the tradition of millennia...we inquire into that sense in which it appeared in history for the first time – in which it must have appeared, even though we know nothing of the first creators and are not even asking after them”

Edmund Husserl, *The Origin of Geometry* [2]

Niall de Buitléar’s solo show at the LAB entitled *Out of Order*, invites the viewer – or in this case the writer, to begin at what Husserl described as the unknown origin of “ready-made geometry.” This unspoken invitation is a breathing ground for possibility and imagination – to go beyond de Buitléar’s modest press-release, which describes the “loose system[s]” of his paper/ drawn ‘communities’ of objects that populate the LAB’s ground floor gallery – and posit de Buitléar’s art objects as a generator of language and writing

Coincidentally, de Buitléar’s “loose system based on a three by three grid of circles to generate a family of forms” is reiterated (in a way) by the French philosopher Michel Serres in his essay *Origin of Geometry*. Serres describes “the space in which the geometer intervenes is a space of *similar*s: he is there, evident, around the three tombs, of the same form and of other dimension, and *imitating* one another.”[3] Housed in long rectangular perspex boxes, de Buitléar’s “untitled” concentrically-formed black paper sculptures read as either model temples/tombs – the sort of primordial architecture that Serres alludes to in his search for the origin of geometry. Alternatively, they could be ‘unread’ as hieroglyphics – ideograms that represent a concept by way of a graphic symbol.

2. Edmund Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*, University of Nebraska Press, 1989. p158

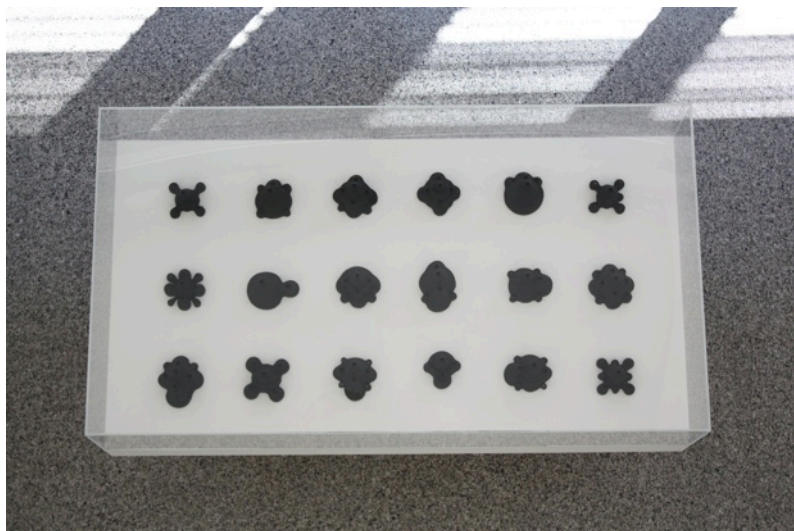
3. Michel Serres, *Origin of Geometry*, Clinamen Press, 2002. p25

On the walls, the same tenacity and patience in the replication of “similar” is regimentally displayed as a series of white pencil aerial drawings of the perspex entombed community of paper sculptures. The commonality between all the drawings and sculptures is the fact that they all contain the same central axis of rotation – or stasis in the case of the still life displays. Between the drawings and the sculptures there is the obvious black/negative and white/positive polarities in their aesthetic makeup. The materiality of the sculptures is deceiving (in my view). For instance, the form of the black paper sculptures have such a strong triangularity expanding outward from the base shape of the circle, that a centrifugal force distorts their paper materiality into ‘stuff’ that could contend with such imagined force, such as rubber or coal. The same can be said of the materiality of the drawings, which allude to other origins, such as drawing in the sand or chalk on slate.

In his exhaustive analysis in the introduction to Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*, Jacques Derrida writes in reference to Husserl’s contention “that the mathematical object is the mode of every object’s constitution”:

The mathematical object seems to be the privileged example and most permanent thread guiding Husserl’s reflection. This is because the mathematical object is ideal. Its being is thoroughly transparent and exhausted by its phenomenality. Absolute objective, i.e., totally rid of empirical subjectivity, it nevertheless is only what it appears to be. Therefore, it is always already reduced to its phenomenal sense, and its being is, from the outset, to be an object. [être-objet] for a pure consciousness.[4]

4. Jacques Derrida, op.cit., p27



Niall de Buitléar, Untitled, black paper, 2010-2011;
courtesy the artist.

There is something deafening in Husserl's and Derrida's hypothesis. Serres, whose philosophy is always concerned with the marginalisation of the senses by the domination of language and the information revolution, writes: "Mathematics presents itself as a successful dialogue or a communication which rigorously dominates its repertoire and is maximally purged of noise."^[5] Simply put, mathematics is not spoken. Looking at de Buitléar's drawing you can re-imagine the first didactic strokes of chalk scraping the blackboard in the classroom. There is almost this compulsion (to my mind), to be brought back to the primary school classroom and the origins of our experience of knowledge: 'primary' knowledge; the forgotten basics; the alphabet; the sum; all the fundamentals that buttress our linguistic interests and visual luxuries in later life – what Derrida describes as "Traditional Sedimentation."^[6]

5. Michel Serres, op.cit., p25

6. Jacques Derrida, op.cit., p57

The learning and articulation of "primary knowledge" lends itself to another form of noise – the repeated sound (as in the spoken repetition of the mathematical tables), and form (coming home after the school day to see the aerial is out, and snow accumulates on the analogue television screen). In these instances of noise, information is memorised through the act of repeating one word or sound, or information is blocked by the disruptive nature of noise. Alternatively, the invariant quality of noise, or the infinitely repeatable sound, could create the most complex forms and ideas. There is something that ties the banal or the constant with complexity, or more specifically, breathes complexity as a separate entity. From this conclusion, the simplification of the repeated form is a way to beget complex images and concepts that have nothing to do with the origin of their impetus. In this sense, Husserl's and Serres' search for the "Origin of Geometry" is unachievable, as the allusive gap between geometry's inception and reception is part of its origin.

Noise can also be music to one's ears, and noise to another. The American 'minimalist' composer Philip Glass practices what he describes himself as "music with repeatable structures."^[7] But within these "repeatable structures," Glass' intentional use of subtle and intermittent 'chaotic' notes against the larger field of ordered notes in his compositions, creates moments of heightened polarity. As mentioned above, de Buitléar presents similar visible polarities in the black/white aesthetic of his drawn and fabricated works, but it is the subtle malformations between the communities of objects that creates the largest schism between the twin and its opposite, or in the grander scheme of things – the collective and the individual.

In regard to the individual, and the specific term "community" that I have repeatedly used (unconsciously so up to this point) to describe the collective *sameness* of objects that make up

7. Philip Glass: <http://www.philipglass.com/bio.php>

de Buitléar's current work, and which 'populate' the ground floor of the LAB – Jean-Luc Nancy writes in his brilliant analysis of *The Inoperative Community*:

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But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of the community. By its nature – as its name indicates, it is the atom, the indivisible – the individual reveals that it is the abstract result of decomposition. It is another, and symmetrical, figure of immanence: the absolute detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty.[8]



Niall de Buitléar, Untitled, black paper, 2010-2011;
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This death of the community – what Nancy describes as a joint “suicide” – is based on the individual's anxiety over their immanent death, not the community! Although we do subscribe to

8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *op.cit.*, p3

the benefits of the community – the utopian ideal of collective progress, ‘Being’ is inherently subsumed by the individual. From this perspective, de Buitléar's sculptures take on the form of black funerary-like objects – fit for human ashes, or possibly found by an archaeologist in a peat bog. Humanity is also etched in the sculptures' subtle differences – making them anthropomorphic. Derrida defines Husserl's search for the ‘origin’ as a “reactivation” of a “hidden historical field”[9] – a ‘tomb raider’ so to speak.

7

In the first paragraph of Serres' *Origin of Geometry* he asks:

Now, to ask the question of the Greek beginning of geometry is precisely to ask how one passed from one language to another, from one type of writing to another, from the language reputed to be natural and its alphabetic notation to the rigorous and systematic language of numbers, measures, axioms and formal arguments. What we have left of all this history prevents nothing but two languages as such, narratives or legends and proofs and figures, words and formulas. This it is as if we are confronted by two parallel lines which, as is well known, never meet. The origin escapes ahead, inaccessible, irretrievable. The problem is open.[10]

de Buitléar's *Out of Order* is a corruption of Nietzsche's phrase “out of chaos, comes order,” but the artist's unfinished phrase leaves us with a question without a resolution. The artist's new work at the LAB does not pretend to offer a conclusion, or even a narrative. We could read the unfinished *Out of Order* as an equation, minus the = sign. However, to look at the work as a series of absences – a ‘method’ that art utilises all too often – maybe missing the point. There is something more here than the accumulation of form for the sake of art. The ‘communist’ output speaks of society

9. Jacques Derrida, *op.cit.*, p51

10. Michel Serres, *op.cit.*, p24

and the relationships between subjects and objects, between language and the visual. de Buitléar's forms leave sufficient gaps that allow the viewer to imagine sci-fi spaces and social precepts that define how we individually imagine or collectively live and die in society, and the literary manifestations that can take seed in the gaps between the origin of the object/subject and its inevitable death.

However, it would be unproductive to end a sentence – not to mention an essay, with the word “death.” Nancy would call this a ‘horizon’ “that must be challenged”^[11]: just like Sartre before him who described ‘communism’ as “the unsurpassable horizon of our time.”^[12] In de Buitléar's repetition of a singular ‘concentric’ form, there is a sustained focus and purpose in the individual making of objects, that somehow, as if by chance rather than method, a community sprang forth. This scenario is in keeping with Nancy and Gilles Deleuze's definition of the *clinamen* – the inclination of one object toward another. Nancy writes that the community is at least the *clinamen* of the “individual.”^[13]

Duration and time make communities – not to forget labour. Before now, de Buitléar's assemblages were scaled up – the focus, labour and purpose was more monumental, more individual. By sharing this focus over a ‘field’ of objects and drawings, there is something that transcends individual subjectivism. I think it is the many voices, rather than one voice, articulated by the ‘community’ – a term that I repeatedly come back to after experiencing de Buitléar's new work. The same compulsions of repetition and routine is here as in the previous work by the artist – a behavior that inflicts the majority of artists. But more specifically in regard to this work, it is the compulsion to repeat – not in an effort to improve or rectify – but to populate a space, that explodes meanings and forms outwards – the centrifugal force that I wrote of earlier.

11. Jean-Luc Nancy, op.cit., p8

12. Ibid., p4-5

13. Quoted in Nancy, "The Inoperative Community", p1



Niall de Buitléar, Untitled, white pencil on paper, 2010-2011;
courtesy the artist.

The word that I am left with in the wake of seeing de Buitléar's work is community. The artist's repetitive and relentless routine subscribes to Nancy's call that community will *become* at the limit of the individual.