

## Contingency and Complicity

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Who is a contingent artist, an artist who embraces the thought of contingency in her approach to those materials that constitute and determine her work and artistic production? Or perhaps rather than singling out such an artist, we should ask, 'what is common to those artists who embrace the contingency of the materials they work with?' The link between such artists is their 'complicity' with contingent materials. It might be thought that 'complicity' here is synonymous with an 'openness' to contingent materials. But this is not the case. For if we consider art as a material-driven process of production, these anonymous materials enjoy an autonomy of their own; and such autonomy continuously interferes with the artwork itself regardless of the decisions of the artist – that is, whether or not the artist determines to be 'open' to their influence. In other words, the contingency of the artist's materials cannot be the strict subject of the artist's openness. Contingent materials cannot be directly embraced. Once we acknowledge materiality as an undercurrent to artistic production, different variants of participation between the artist and her materials can emerge, driven by the artist's affect or interaction with the materials. But these will exhibit only certain possibilities of participation, possibilities limited by, on the one hand, the determinations, decisions and capacities of the artist and, on the other, a restricted concept of materiality – restricted to the facets of the material which the artist can directly feel, engage with, and develop. Now, these possibilities are not contingencies as such. Contingency can give rise to certain possibilities that can be used as bases for interactions and dynamic processes; but it can equally bring forth adverse possibilities resistant to such interactions, or no possibilities at all. Contingency is the concomitant expression of possibilities (any possibility regardless of its rational necessity) and no possibility at all – anything can happen, but equally, nothing might ever happen; it is the simultaneous suspense of infinite likelihoods and inexplicable frozenness. What do we find in affect-driven interactions with materiality, and in process-oriented forms of artistic production such as those which celebrate unfinished artworks or open-ended processes? That they are based precisely upon those possible states of interaction that are derivative upon contingency, and which therefore possess only a restricted capacity to approach the concept of contingent materiality. In other words, affect-driven and processual approaches of the artist toward anonymous materials, allowing the latter to influence the course of artistic production and the artwork, are restricted only to those states of interaction which are possible because both the artist and the overall ecology of the process can afford them. This concept of 'affordance', taken from JJ Gibson's work in ecology, is an important one: every agency has its own set of affordances, limits within which it can persevere in being itself. These capacities or affordances can be cognitive, or determined by the environment we live in, or quite literally can be the results of the state of our material embodiment. And because their supposed 'openness' remains circumscribed by affordance, different forms of explicit openness toward the concept of materiality in art, whether in search of a primary material substrate or open dynamic interactions, are incapable of thinking contingency. Here by contingency we mean both a contingent conception of materiality that has autonomy of its own and the contingent influences of artist's materials on the course of the artistic production and the artwork. Both artistic

creativity and the understanding of artistic production are nurtured by reflections of art on its material conditions, reflections which can be extended to the creative reflection of the artist on her materials. But this reflection cannot take place through gestures of openness because it is precisely the restricted nature of openness that limits us to affordable conceptions of materiality in artistic production. Meaning, thematic profundity and aesthetic imperatives are but the expressions of this affordable – that is to say, fundamentally circumscribed and illusory – conception of materiality. Complexity is another form of artistic sensibility that is often privileged whenever the creative role of materiality in artistic production becomes the subject of the art itself. But complexity refers to a sort of evolution out of the possible states determined by the contingency of the artist's materials. In short, it already presupposes that the transition from contingency to possibility has already taken place. Furthermore, the emergence-oriented processes of complexity follow the same logic of affordable interactions whereby those possibilities that have adverse effects on the emergence of the system are either appropriated or eliminated. Complexity, in this sense, domesticates the thought of contingency. It may escape the restricting role of human affordability in openness toward a contingent conception of materiality, but only to replace it with that of processes. We cannot simply be 'open to contingency', because our openness and consequently our modes of interaction are determined by our capacities. We can only be open to contingency within certain specific limits that we can afford. If the contingent expression of materiality replaces these given affordable possibilities with other possibilities or ceases such possibilities altogether, our so-called sensible openness will begin to negatively deteriorate. Accordingly, what we need is a twisted type of interaction with contingent materials (whether in art or writing) that is built on the formidable asceticism of closure. In this case, rather than seeking openness toward the contingent outside through affordable modes of interaction, the work of art strives to embrace the twisted logic of capacity and rigorous closure itself as precisely the playground of contingency, in what Robin address as a cosmic acid attack not only on our tastes and dogmas but also on the entire ambit of our thought and sense of creativity – the 'distillate of humiliation' administered by the thought of contingency. What we referred to as complicity is the embracing of contingency through a rigorous and twisted mode of closure. Complicity can be understood as an involvement and collusion but one without any emphasis on commonalities. Illusory and economical modes of openness always look for commonalities because commonalities are affordable for all involved parties. Commonalities are affordances – but contingency entertains no commonality with anyone. Likewise, the contingency inherent to artist's materials does not entail any commonality with the artist's intentions; if anything, such contingency bends, hijacks and punctures such schemes, sensibilities and intentions. In reality, the work is not created based on commonalities but on patterns of intrusion, twisting and suspension determined by its contingent materials (during the movement from the so-called ideas to physical materials), in the process of artistic production. If we consider the effectuations of contingency as traumas, the work can be said to be a regional or focused gradient of traumas that simultaneously shape it and mediate it with the cosmic exteriority in alternative – or more accurately, contingent – ways. So in this sense it can be said that the work is a synthetic traumatic drive that has more than one way of being opened. While the manifest identity of the work is afforded by fending off these alternative or contingent ways of openness through conjuration of meaning, novelty or authenticity, its true identity is shaped, beyond recognition, by such contingent ways of openness that

mediate it with the outside by any twisted means or scheme of intervention. Complicity exhibits this necessary shift from the inhibitive role of commonalities to the role of closure as a focused engagement with contingency, its intrusions, twists and suspensions. Whilst openness domesticates the thought of contingency through affordable states of interaction, commonalities and other forms of soft dogma, closure, on the other hand, turns itself into a 'good meal' or a 'genuine prey' for the real expression of contingency and its unrestricted play: the more closed a work, the more radically it is subjected to the interventions of its contingent materials, the wider it is broadened and butchered opened to the outside. Therefore, we can say that closure realises openness in its radical sense: not as openness toward the possibility of contingencies from the outside, but as a 'being opened' by the contingent materials that form the work. This is why complicity is a twisted form of embracing contingency, because it has an inverse mechanism: through closure, complicity seeks to twist the soft dogma of 'openness toward contingent materials' into a 'being-opened by contingent materials'. As its criminal connotations indicate, complicity is an extreme form of speculation, one that grasps the work from the perspective of its contingent materials – it simply sees from the other side, that is, from the intrusive perspective of contingencies. Instead of providing the artist with an opportunity to make new things by reflecting on her materials (the modernist thought – human superstition – of the new and novelty), complicity gives the artist the speculative opportunity to see the work as the reflection of contingent materials on themselves, their secret collusions, conspiracies, antagonisms, indifferent attitudes, and their weird twists in and out of the possibilities they bring about. Therefore this form of speculation more than anything presents complicity as the culmination of the conspiracy of contingent materials with regard to the artistic production and the artwork. Complicity reformulates the rigorous closure of the work as a narrative plot where contingent events unfold, where unpredictable twists take shape and where the work becomes the subject of experimentation of its own materials. It is essential for the artist to see the artistic production as a conspiracy of contingent influences; as the work proceeds toward completion and coherency, the plot thickens. In this conspiracy, the plot twist is that so-called 'creative openness' turns out to have been a distraction all along: the closure of the work is the only way to participate with and uncover the conspiracy of contingent materials, by luring the forces of contingency to play their weirdest games, and in doing so, to reveal themselves. To this end, when it comes to the thought of contingency, the artist must recognise herself as the conspiracy theorist of her materials. But we must first realise that the work of contingency is neither horrific nor suspenseful; it is subtly twisted. In thinking the conspiracy of contingent materials, one can think of a continuum where everyday superficiality, horror, reason, comedy, suspense and seamless uneventfulness are all fuzzy gradients of the same contingent universe that might be brought in and out of focus without respect to any necessity whatsoever.

To sum up, complicity marks the transition of the artist's attitude toward her materials. The putative daring and adventure of experimenting with materials is replaced by a rigorous approach to the closure of the work, as a way of becoming an accomplice with the thought of contingency and uncovering the conspiracy of contingent materials in opening the work beyond its confines. This is an artistic transition that suggests a fundamental shift in understanding a work of art: the work should be appraised not in terms of an experimental 'adventurism' toward the materials at hand, but in terms of its capacity to uncover itself as the field of experimentation of its contingent materials, as a

conspiracy plotted by anonymous materials. The ascesis of closure lures the contingent forces to play their role in plotting the work with utter tenacity; and in doing so to reveal their twisted conspiracies. This 'closure' cannot be conveniently translated as some kind of introverted mysticism, artistic self-authentication, or even essentially in terms of isolation which sooner or later will be overthrown by entropy; but must be thought as a mode of coherency or a cunning closure capable of bringing these contingent plays into focus. To this extent, closure calls for a new philosophy of experimentation – for it is not merely a recipe for art-making or writing, but a vector toward an ethics of humiliation and a science of openness.