

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Sat, Jan 14, 2023 at 11:34 AM

I begin with borrowed words,
written by Lao Tzu over 2500 years ago, and more recently translated into english or perhaps
rewritten entirely by Ursula K. Le Guin.

Thirty spokes
meet in the hub. Where the wheel isn't is where it's useful.

Hollowed out,
clay makes pot. Where the pot's not is where it's useful.

Cut doors and windows to make room.
Where the room isn't, there's room for you.

So the profit in what is
is in the use of what isn't.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Tue, Jan 17, 2023 at 10:33 AM

It comes to mind to proceed with another quote. Jack Spicer:

The log in the fire
Asks a lot
When it is lighted
Or knot

Timber comes
From seas mainly
Sometimes burns green
-Ly

When it is lighted
The knot
Burns like a joke
With the colour of smoke

Save us, with birthdays, whatever is in the fire or not in the fire, immortal
We cannot be
A chimney tree
Or give grace to what's mere-
Ly fatal.

...which sets me thinking of the homonym, word play and *concept* not-knot: what can a not-knot
tie together, seal, connect; on the other hand, could a not-knot be a juncture, where a bond can
become undone, is there something potentially liberating about it?

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Sat, Jan 21, 2023 at 1:54 PM

Knots seem to be everywhere, both symbolic and concrete ones. I realise my relationship to them is rather conflicted, they are not simple by any means, although their implicit static nature seems more restraining than connecting. It probably depends on context and point of view.

Not-knot is a beautiful concept. A not-knot immediately opens up to various possibilities, and endless potential. A not-knot is probably that specific point, where connections can come undone, free themselves, move, morph and regroup. It seems to be alive.

When categories are inadequate, “no’s” can open up endless possibilities, destabilise something essential.

“No’s” can certainly also exclude, but paradoxically perhaps, no as prefix can also be yes, to everything else.

It can be a not-knot, all the space outside the room and freedom. Beyond the grasp of language.

Is there something essentially patriarchal about knots?

What kind of connections does weaving, braiding or crocheting create? Not-knots.

Robin Wall Kimmerer’s ‘Braiding Sweetgrass’ awaits its turn in my pile of books, it might be time to read it.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Thu, Jan 26, 2023 at 6:26 PM

A possible thought: a not-knot is that juncture in writing (one can think of the word game “not-knot” as a phenomena manifest specifically in writing, phonetically inaudible), where the patriarchal ordering and structure of the knot is subverted and opens up to multitudinous forms?

What could a not-knot be outside of writing, besides language, in other mediums and spaces? What could its relationship be to the uses of “not”, its potential? “No” unto itself feels broad and spacious, also slightly shapeless (but shapelessness always provides its own intrigue!) (How does “shapelessness” itself operate, in any context or somewhere specific even, but unpredictable?)

I have to revisit later the relations between braiding, weaving, patriarchy and non-patriarchy...

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Tue, Jan 31, 2023 at 3:50 PM

I reply from Dhaka, Bangladesh, where I am currently installing new work for an exhibition at the Dhaka Art Summit.

Here I am hit by the realisation that I would like my new works to operate exactly as some kinds of not-knots, junctures that open up to multitudinous forms.

I’d like to think these works materialise, embody even, something somewhere beyond the reaches of patriarchal ordering.

Thus shapelessness sounds particularly resonant. I have been thinking a lot about shapelessness, discontinuity, fragmentation and incoherence in relation to these and other works of mine. They strike me as powerful means to destabilise all binary relations, the prevailing order and occupying a space that only refusals can grant us access to.

That space seems to offer a promise of something new, where binaries simply stop functioning, uncertainty creeps in and things no longer are what they appear to be, or more specifically they make the act of naming and capture so inherent to language simply impossible. As a child I obsessively loved Alice in Wonderland and Barbapapa, I wonder why ;) Not-knot could actually be the perfect title for this new print work, is it ok if I name it that?

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Thu, Feb 9, 2023 at 12:53 AM

shapeless light

a cavity from which

shadows

return: meet...

*

The thought of dealing with things ("things"?) indirectly. Encircling "things", approaching them (and distancing from them) from several directions simultaneously. As a child I also loved Barbapapa; Alice in Wonderland I only read as an adult. I liked it then. I have never been to Bangladesh. Lately I have been very excited about Indian classical music. Does everything, the embodiment of anything always also operate partially somewhere out of reach of a patriarchal ordering? What we perceive, recognise. All of this ties in together, is interwoven. Something in the meaning of weaving together is always overdetermined.

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Fri, Feb 24, 2023 at 9:51 AM

Attached images of Abakans, works by the polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz from the 60's and 70's.

Weaves, braids intertwine (again a new name for a bond!). As you said perhaps there is something inherently overdetermined in the meaning of weaving together. I think Abakanowicz was acutely aware of it too.

Her works were named Abakans, they had their own name, as they didn't seem to fit any existing categories.

"I see fibre as the basic element constructing the organic world on our planet... It is from fibre that all living organisms are built, the tissue of plants, leaves and ourselves... our nerves, our genetic code, the canals of our veins, our muscles... we are fibrous structures... I am interested in every tangle of thread and rope and every possibility of transformation"

Indian classical music, aah, sounds wonderful, I'd like to hear more about it!

I was thinking of titling my new video work Polynotknot (and they bloom). Weaving, braiding, lacing, encircling, circumventing, approaching and distancing from several directions simultaneously.

And one more image of Barbapapas.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Tue, Mar 7, 2023 at 11:25 AM

Lovely and new to me the Abakans! And a resonating quote.

About Indian classical music: I have been particularly enthralled by singer Ustad Abdul Karim Khan. Some of what is to follow relates perhaps to the musical style more broadly, some to Khan in particular. Fascinates: a certain staticity and hypnotism (the drone-level of the music, the way in which melodies repeatedly return to the same notes/sounds), the way in which it holds a rich, sumptuous tapestry of sounds, which strikes with its simultaneous “depth” and “ornamentality”; the logic of its melodic progressions, which I seem to grasp only partially, with some of it remaining opaque, but undeniable in their opacity; the wondrous, glimmering, microtonal, gravity defying, fluid virtuosity of the singing, that nonetheless feels utterly natural and uninterested in showcasing any virtuosity; The androgynous nature of Khan’s voice.

Polynotknot (and they bloom): what a beautiful title!

And I’m lead to wonder what it means to bring together disparate things, ties, traditions, ways of making, their knotting and not-knotting together and apart, only to form new bonds, weaves and constellations of disparate beings... what are the things that one would like to allow to have space, chances to bloom?

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Tue, Mar 7, 2023 at 4:00 PM

Such an important question, what are the things that we should allow space and possibilities to bloom?

And a follow-up question, what would they actually need to bloom?

I guess it depends on the circumstances, on the substrate, the nutrients, since everything is connected, intertwined. There are histories and histories, I believe one has to carefully choose were one ties the knots and not-knots, in which continuums one situates oneself, what connections and bonds one nourishes and strengthens.

Always cherish the imagination, a rambunctious one! And most definitely try to, every now and then (if not always), tie together things that no-one believed could be tied together. Could it also be that every new bond, could potentially undo an earlier one? In a multi stranded way?

In the Barbapapas of my childhood I was most certainly fascinated but their polymorphism, it resonated deeply.

Charles Mingus’ and Roland Kirk’s polyrhythms have always felt good, fitting somehow. For quite some time I couldn’t listen but to jazz and electronic music, it had to be polyrhythms, from Mingus to Arca. Rhythm is a sensitive thing, for me it had to be “broken”, interrupted, layered, seemingly shapeless or quite simply as hard to make sense of as possible.

Roland Kirk could play three saxophones simultaneously, different melodies with each. Polyphony. To be polyphonic.

The Inflated Tear (Live from Prague in 1967): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlqLJmIQNM>

Ustad Abdul Karim Khan sounds magical, what vibration, simultaneous layering.

I have always liked singing voices that can be perceived as being androgynous: Nina Simone, Nico, AHOHNI, all of them have an ineffable sensitivity, particularly in the colour of their voices.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 3:33 PM

I feel an urge to reply to this email affirmatively: how you articulate various states of blooming; histories and histories and the choices embedded in relating to them; how you write about the imagination; broken and layered rhythms; polymorphism, polyrhythms and polyphony; Charles Mingus and Roland Kirk; androgynously perceived voices (all the examples you mention!): yes!

Which brings to mind: our email conversation is titled The Uses of Not: how about “The Uses of Yes”? What kind of knots and not-knots tie these two together, or apart, how they relate to one another or are perceived individually?

Today I listen to Julius Hemphill's, Abdul Wadud's and Don Moye's record Raw Materials and Residuals, the music is lovely and feels alive (it resonates also beautifully with the aforementioned themes of polymorphism, polyrhythmy and polyphony!); right now, listening to it I also contemplate it through the simultaneity and interweaving of various “no”- and “yes” gestures, it feels interesting; and how could this possibly relate to the title of the record referring to materials, its residues and traces?

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Tue, Apr 18, 2023 at 11:57 AM

Yes!

“The Uses of Yes”!

For me refusal has specifically taken shape through the space it opens up, one “no” is simultaneously many “yesses”. All the space outside the room, that Lao Tzu and Ursula K. Le Guin describe. Negative space full of potential.

Cut doors and windows
to make room.
Where the room isn't,
there's room for you

Negative space sets me thinking of Rachel Whiteread's and Roni Horn's sculpture. To consider in more detail what has always bothered me about Whiteread's sculpture, and on the contrary what has been so fascinating about Horn's sculpture. Both give form to something seemingly shapeless; Whiteread quite literally to negative space, more specifically to air, to the ghosts of spaces and objects. Horn on the other hand to water, to the most fluid and volatile of substances, slippery and mirror like in its relations. Why do I perceive of Horn's glass sculptures (photographs too!) as alive, unfixed, spacious and open, with endless potentiality, ushering forth a simultaneous “yes” and “no” gesture. Whiteread's sculpture on the other hand strikes me as static, monolithic and mummified, as she has also occasionally described it. The fluidity of negative space has been denied in her sculptures, they seem to propose only either a “yes” or “no” gesture, without the potential and freedom that their simultaneous existence seems to afford.

‘What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other’

In Gloria Anzaldúa's words half and halves (mita'y mita') are magical, not one without the other and everything in between. Horn knows something about this. Whiteread's sculptures seem to emphasise binarism and this seems to limit movement, close in space, simplify, render things one dimensional.

The question also extends to the aforementioned raw materials, their traces, residues and the implicit relationship between them. I would like to believe that also a trace or residue can be equally vital and vibrant, mutable even, embodying both a “yes” and “no” gesture, and not only existing in an indexical or binary relationship to what we have named raw material after Julius Hemphill, Abdul Wadud and Don Moye.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Mon, May 1, 2023 at 9:56 PM

Your message set off several strains of thought, yet for some reason they seem to have been difficult to fully articulate; since my reply to your message has already taken way too long, here are some unfinished chains of thought, on a tram from Turku to Helsinki:

as a writer I have often thought (from slightly different points of view) of language as material: but language never is “raw material”, as it always carries numerous kinds of traces, residues, potentials and excesses; something other than “itself”. At times I find this very characteristic annoying, and at others, it is precisely this trait that makes working with language so fascinating. Does the same principle apply to everything we can perceive as “material”?

I’d like to think that there is no linguistic gesture that is either a yes or a no, it is always both, in different ratios; but stating this doesn’t conclude much. In what kinds of contexts, webs of relations, different yes- and no-gestures become active, have agency, do something?

It was very interesting to read about your thoughts concerning Rachel Whiteread’s and Roni Horn’s sculptures, their ways of being; I am not that familiar with either of their practices, and therefore I wouldn’t feel comfortable commenting further, but I do recognise and am inclined to accept a lot of what you say. (I can certainly say, that out of the images you sent, one in particular resonated, Roni Horn’s Opposites of White, it seems fascinating and most definitely alive, in a state of perpetual motion and becoming.)

I have never made any sculpture, but I have often thought, if I didn’t do what I do, what I would like to be the most would be a sculptor, something in it, in the way sculptures inhabit this world feels important and resonant. For some reason, something in our dialogue makes me contemplate the differences between linguistic (or “poetic”) and sculptural gestures; it feels like I am about to grasp something about their relation I have been incapable of previously grasping (but not quite!)

What is the nature of any artistic gesture? What kind of act is it in the world?

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Mon, May 8, 2023 at 5:10 PM

This time my message is two-piece, your last set of questions and the focus of our whole conversation so far around no-gestures and forms of refusal urges me to write about Lee Lozano, an endlessly fascinating artist active in the context of New York City in the 60’s and 70’s. But more about her and her radical acts and their effects as artistic gestures in the world in part two.

Part 1:

Your thinking around language as material is fascinating, I concur with many of your thoughts. It is indeed intrinsic to language to never be mere “raw material”. The traces, residues and excesses are an inherent part of it. Every single word, space between them, as well as concatenation of them is loaded with multiple meanings. It made me think of my own relationship to something that could be defined as appropriation, at least in the context of the visual arts. Integral to my artistic thinking is that more often than not, the images I work with, “the materials”, are kind of recycled;

they come with some baggage, with definitions, purposes, assigned meanings, contexts and so on, and destabilising, causing some sort of slippage or even total refusal from these preliminary pretexts is fundamental to my practice. Do you perceive language or words to have a similar plasticity, a capacity to stretch out and reform or regroup in relation to some previous meaning or context even? Almost as if rubbing against some preconceived notions, and ushering the process of naming or generating meaning in some sort of crisis?

It is indeed fascinating to consider the differences, or similarities for that matter, of sculptural and linguistic gestures. The ways in which you use language resonates deeply, and not only in relation to the content or thematic of your work. I think you make use of language performatively, sculpturally even. Your language strikes me as being acrobatic and alive, always elastic, and certainly cherishing the aforementioned plasticity.

I think my own artistic thinking is rooted in the sculptural, but perhaps somewhat paradoxically not particularly in relation to an explicit materiality, at least not in a traditional sense. What seems important to me is a certain indexicality; a relationship to three dimensionality, spaciality, the bodily and perhaps more than material itself, its representations and manifestations.

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Wed, May 10, 2023 at 4:56 PM

Part 2.

Briefly about Lee Lozano

The no-gesture was elemental to Lozano's way of interacting or communicating with the world. Lozano's "no" was always absolute. Written in bold capital letters and underlined.

Here artistic gestures are always enacted through radical negation.

It feels important to stop to consider Lozano's artistic practice for a moment. Our message thread is after all titled 'The Uses of Not' and Lozano, if anyone, knows something about the power of refusal, its destructive potential even.

What makes this reflection particularly interesting is the way in which Lozano's "no" diverts so radically from the refusals we have been mapping out after Lao Tzu's and Ursula Le Guin's poem.

'General Strike Piece', 'Dropout Piece', 'Boycott Women'

These are Lozano's last and most important conceptual, text based works and actions. Time based and requiring life long commitment; don't participate in the art world, step outside of it, don't ever speak to women again. What these intense actions mean is by no means so simple or black and white, as nothing is in Lozano's oeuvre, be it her drawings, paintings or text based works and actions. The only certainty is that Lozano actively refused all systems and categories and made in the process works that are unruly, provocative, complex, perplexing and difficult.

It seems as if Lozano is cutting all ties, her works are in a constant free fall. It is simply impossible to form a singular, clearly defined, "settled" relationship with them and this I find endlessly fascinating. I can't help but think that the wilfulness of her no-gesture, its unflinching determination and inflexibility plays an important part in this.

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Mon, Jul 3, 2023 at 3:05 PM

I am thrilled to hear how you speak of my uses of language, I feel your perceptions are joyfully precise (in that they see something I particularly wish to be visible in my texts). And I most certainly concur with your questions relating to how I wish language to behave. When thinking of my relationship to language, I wouldn't say I am specifically interested in "language": I don't "examine language" per se, perhaps contrary to many writers that would be categorised as writing "experimental poetry"; I'd be more inclined to think that my aim is to merely bend and slide language into a position, where "it" does something other than what language is traditionally expected to do, what comes "natural" to it. (And the act of making or doing something feels relevant here: that's why I am particularly happy about how you describe my uses of language as being "performative".)

I also feel that our acts of making or doing resonate, and this came to mind: could it be that our artistic activities are marked by a simultaneity of gestures that could be defined as being "linguistic", "sculptural", "performative" and "visual", and while embracing them, also actively refusing them, evading and slipping, constantly reshaping or un-shaping new kinds of constellations.

Do we share a similar relationship to "materials", or thinking (feeling, experiencing...) with or through them? (Or is it even necessary to say or think about something like this? Certainly not define at least!)

In relation to what you write about Lee Lozano I'd like to ask: could you tell a bit more about the "free fall" you are referring to?

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Mon, Jul 10, 2023 at 11:50 AM

nights exist, nightshade exists
the dark side, the cloak of namelessness exists

the northern limits of consciousness exist, there
where what is dreamed opens and closes its
northerly crown in nastic turnings

without day and night being definitely
placed, without nadir, zenith
straight below or above and without

the naos, the innermost space of the cell
revealing whether the seed in an inner sky
gathers the limits of consciousness into a point
a flowering point where like a bit of sunshine
ice ages exist, ice ages exist

where like a bit of fire the insects' wingless
Nike exists, neither victory nor
defeat, just the solace of nothing;
the solace of names, that nothing has
a name, namelessness has a name

that names exist, names like narwhal
nettle, names like carnation, tawny owl
and nightjar, names like nightingale, new moon
evening primrose, naiads, and the other kind of
name in which a word when named is scent
like the narwhal's name for Arctic seas,
the nettles' names for fever, like carnations'

names for light reflected into factory-white
nights, like the tawny owl's, the nightjar's names
for feathers, the nightingale's names for being
Old World warbler hidden in moist thickets
like the new moon's names for Earth and Sun
the evening primrose family's names for kinship
like the naiad's names for being pondweed
whispering the naiads' names in wind

- Inger Christensen (translated by Susanna Nied)

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Tue, Jul 11, 2023 at 2:35 PM

Las raíces inhalan. Basta deslizar poco a poco los dedos sobre las rocas para saberlas lisas y despobladas. Árboles de cristal.

Y es el instante de inusitar la lancha por la quilla y deslindar el filo. Los dedos largos y finos.

Sus ojos límpidos.

Este estupor de seda que se derrama. Pero empezar aquí.

La fiesta —sombra finísima— lenta. De la cueva se desprenden sus voces como suaves racimos. Piedras jugosas. Desde el zumo del circo.

Y es el instante; pero empezar aquí. Sus ojos ávidos, insondables. En sus bordes escuetos, las voces, las aguas cambian. Peces de piel fugaz.

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Mon, Aug 21, 2023 at 10:39 AM



Đặng Thái Sơn's performance from 1985.

And very soon a bit more about everything else... hope the summer has been gentle to you.

Jani Ruscica

To: Taneli Viljanen

Thu, Aug 24, 2023 at 11:14 AM

Free fall

I like this pairing of words. It has the promise of something unchained, unknown and it is always fascinating, titillating.

It is undefined despite movement having a clear direction, the destination, if one even exists, is always unpredictable.

Improvisation is a free fall, being non-binary is a free fall.

I used this pairing of words in relationship to Lee Lozano's work primarily because her oeuvre seems to be so loaded with contradictions. Her works pull you into so many different directions that it is impossible to form a clear cut relationship with them. It is interesting to think of the word contradiction, it has such a negative ring. Perhaps a more accurate term could be dissonance, it immediately strikes as more multidirectional and nuanced.

Lozano's work also include the kinds of simultaneities that we have been mapping out; Lozano can be raw and sophisticated, emotional and rational, sensuous and analytical, harsh and sensitive, crude and subtle. Thus the free fall is something that I primarily relate to the encounter with her work, to the relationship one negotiates with her work.

About us.

Different gestures, acts

shaping, sliding, bending, leaking, smudging, rolling

It's a joy to hear you also say our artistic gestures resonate. I think this focus on the act of "making", its particularities, might be key. We seems to have similar objectives for our actions and ways of using "materials", precisely somewhat performatively. I also feel both of us are particularly interested in form, a hybridised one.

Which writers, poets, artists do you feel make use of language in ways that resonate with your own methods? What is the performative use of language like that interests you? Do you have important bonds in this respect; where do you tie your knots and not-knots and what continuums do you cherish?

Taneli Viljanen

To: Jani Ruscica

Mon, Sep 11, 2023 at 4:11 PM

Fascinating and eye opening how you write about Lozano, I will let it settle!

About writers, resonance and continuums: there are obviously several writers, I could indeed answer your question in multiple ways, but today I would like to reflect on my writing practice in relation to two different (probably highly imaginary and shaped by my own perceptions) traditions and ways of using language (but I will try to be more explicit by referencing a few specific books and writers)

-Latin American "queer neobaroque"-literature, something in its uses of language and world building with language (undoing, redoing and undoing once again), its abundance and multiplicity (imagination and multitudinous forms) feel particularly fruitful and inspiring. I would like to mention particularly Severo Sarduy (his novels *Cobra* and *Maitreya*, which were published in english as a joint volume, are my favourites, but I do also like his poetry (in english in the collection *Footwork*) and his essays) and José Lezama Lima (his novel *Paradiso* is one of my favourite books, I love how the "excessively" metaphorical language keeps opening up new spaces and layers in the novel; his poetry is also great). (Also the previously quoted Coral Bracho is linked (at least in my mind) in some ways to this continuum and these very coordinates).

-a certain kind of "feminist genre hybrid literature", that often mixes personal, theoretical, fictional, poetic, political etc. elements; that also, fundamentally, (at least in my experience and in the books dearest to me) has a troubled relationship to language, that constantly seems to force it to reinvent itself; the most important writers in this vein are often the kinds, that write (for example) in english, but whose relationship to the language is bilingual or multilingual and from a minoritarian position, thus not without its problems and frictions. Two books that I would like to mention:

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* ja (the previously mentioned!) Gloria Azaldúa's *Borderlands - La Frontera*.

A plurality of form and language, unfixity and hybridity probably characterise these aforementioned points of reference, as does some kind of mutual gesture of re-imagining?

You also mention the hybridity of form (poignantly, needless to say), and I would like to hear more about it, what does hybrid form mean to you and how does it inform your practice?