

MANUFACTURED SERIES

DUET #2: Made in China

performed by:
Tilman O'Donnell & Eschenbach porcelain cup



In the working process of this encounter the human performer has to learn everything she/he can find out about his/her supposedly immobile partner, looking closely at its history, origin and manufacturing process, practicing thoroughly the various stages of confections in order to become one with it...

I am not sure what to expect when I ask the (human) performer to choose a thing that she/he might like but is still kind of unfamiliar with. This time I accompanied Tilman to a local Trödel Markt where he spotted a tiny yet delicate porcelain coffee cup. I know Tilman loves coffee and has an interest in the *savoir faire* of good things but didn't take him for a collector of such old fashioned items. This little bone-white cup with its precious cobalt blue Greek key line pattern brought us, and especially him, to an incredible journey, both in the discovery of its hyper complex confection and origin and in the physical interactions that were afforded by it. A transformation of the utter most delicate and fragile emerged through a queer tango-like type of dance, creating as a by-product some collective new limbs, a cup-plate-mouth for transferring liquid, a plate-foot-knife for sculpting, a stomach-cup-skin for containing. At times, there appears to be no more limits between Tilman and this little cup, as extensions of each other in a type of co-existence. I wonder if they could possibly both break?

Text by: Fabrice Mazliah

By forming something,
you have to learn
to form yourself,
and so we are
a reciprocal relationship
of forming and being formed.

Tilman O'Donnell
Rehearsal Notes



Concept:
Fabrice Mazliah

Choreography:
Fabrice Mazliah in collaboration
with Tilman O'Donnell
and Marialena Marouda

Performance:
Tilman O'Donnell and Eschenbach
porcelain cup and saucer

Dramaturgy:
Marialena Marouda

Production Management:
Johanna Milz
und Jeanne Vogt

The intention behind an unexpected encounter

From object to lover

I have been curious awhile about the origin behind how we (humans) construct the things that are around us constantly, what sort of relationship we have with those things we made with our hands/machines, how they somehow define who we are- our needs and desires and the world we live in. In previous works, I have inserted or dealt

with objects in various ways, more or less conscious of their true nature, function and origin, relating them at times to certain actions they might afford or effects they may produce.

In more recent years I have developed an interest in the procedures of making and manufacturing those objects and their potential for agency in our society. How to conceive and construct something's infinite amount of gestural abilities, or how skills deriving from a long process are generated, developed and acquired, influencing our motoric skills and physical behaviour. How we have shaped the practical world around us and how it has shaped us in return, constantly choreographing our interaction and relationship with it. The negotiation that takes place between the things we construct and the ways we handle them. It is never the same and always fluctuating- it makes the relationship, a relationship which we attempt to tackle and experience in the making of this work.

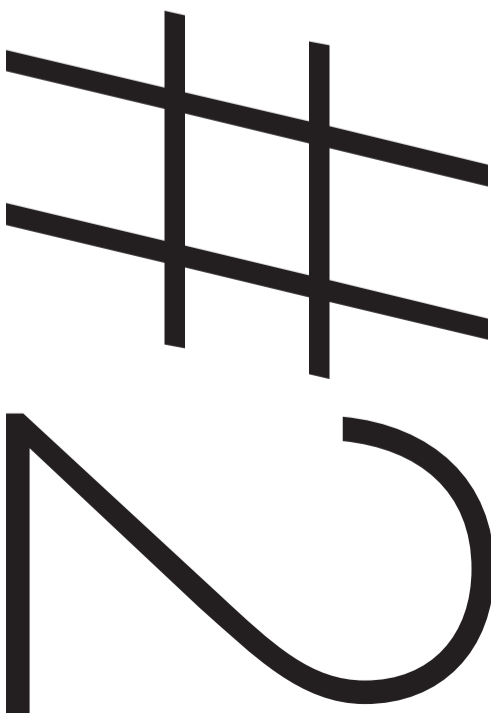
With *The Manufactured Series* I have set the goal to establish 10 different encounters: two performers, a person and a thing who meet and share space and time together equally.

The Manufactured Series

The Manufactured Series is conceived as a series of ten duets, each between a human and a nonhuman body. Each duet unfolds this encounter between the two and their consecutive intertwining by means of movement. The nonhuman bodies within the work are mainly handcrafted. That is, "Manufactured" focuses on things that have a relation with the human hand in their process of coming to be.

In the second duet in the series, Tilman O'Donnell is collaborating with an Eschenbach porcelain cup and saucer produced in mid-20th century Germany. The cup, as a container, can be said to mirror the container that is the human body. However, it has to be transported rather delicately - the fragility of its material having been used historically to signify social refinement and sophistication. This is a dance of reciprocal moulding and being moulded, pouring and being poured, during which, possibly, slowly, form appears and reappears.

Text by:
Tilman O'Donnell and Marialena Marouda



Glossary of some human-cup relations (in order of appearance)

by Marialena Marouda

Introduction

We start simple: humans and cups tend to enter into relations based on use. The question therefore became: what forms of movement and touch, what sensibilities are involved in use-based human-cup interactions?

We break up “use” in its constituent elements: Placing, rotating, lifting, (co-)containing. We consider each element a machine organizing the encounter between the two bodies, but also as setting forth the transformation of one body into the other. Each of those elements is, therefore, not a directed action from the part of the human being exercised onto the cup. In fact, if we prioritize relations such as “placing” or “drinking” over dichotomies such as “object-subject” or “human-nonhuman,” what body assemblages can be produced as a result?

Listening

As the duet unfolds, the performers ask each other one guiding question: “What do we want?” In this sense, the d is an exercise in listening: the two performers listen to each other’s desires but also to the desire of their collective body.

Placing

In its initial form, placing is the action of returning the cup to its saucer. Some of the body parts participating in it are the fingers of the left or right arm, the cup’s handle, the joint of the shoulder. The other hand can hold the saucer, palm touching the bottom of the plate. Placing as a relation focuses on putting down, putting on top of, bringing together, stacking. The main conditions that frame placing can be said to be fragility and

verticality, as the movement’s main direction is downward, following a gravitational pull of the cup towards its “source,” the saucer. The sound of placing is also quite particular—a slight, high-pitched “click” when cup and saucer touch that signals the need for “care” to enter the equation.

After having established these main characteristics and parts of the placing assemblage, we transfer this action to other parts. Can toes become fingers, for example? Hip joints become shoulder joints? Horizontality become verticality? What other sounds can be produced and explored?

This process is essentially an exercise of transference and translation of an action’s main constituents into other parts of bodies. This is a leap of faith. It is one thing for an



assemblage to introduce and establish itself, and it is another for its main parts to shift or slip. This makes it possible for bodies to re-code so that if the conditions and orientations of the assemblage remain in tact, the left foot can become the cup and the right



foot the saucer, or the palm of the left hand becomes the saucer while the cup transforms into an elbow. The possibilities of interaction seem endless.

Rotating

As opposed to the verticality of placing, rotating thematizes horizontality, circularity and orbiting. Tilman says that axes of inward and outward rotation are very relevant here: in order to adjust the angle of the cup’s handle in relation to the hand about to reach for it, cup and saucer pivot on their common central axis in opposite directions. The resulting centrifugal movement of saucer and cup poses a challenge to the human body that holds them. Human bodies are designed to move with all their parts in one direction and not to twist themselves outward ad infinitum. A principle we called “double action” partially, temporarily, solved this situation of infinite outward twisting: instead of extending the rotation to the whole body, rotation could be exercised upon individual body parts. The left foot, toes holding cup, twists outward, for example, making the leg follow the rotation, while the right hand, holding the saucer, twists inward, taking with it the elbow and shoulder. But even then, a bodily limit is reached.

Rotation becomes orbit when the human body, now laying on the floor on its side (right or left, no matter), turns together with the cup and the saucer that appear now as two distant planets on disparate parts of the universe. The fingers and toes, holding saucer and cup respectively, are both separating and bridging the two simultaneously, carefully, tenderly.

Lifting

Lifting is the third human-cup relation we explore. Here, the cup gravitates upwards towards the mouth, with the help of one hand. Meanwhile, the saucer remains constant at about the height of the torso, held in the palm of the other hand. This web of movements essentially leads towards an opening. Tilman describes it as follows: “Initially it is a preparation and a welcoming and then

it becomes an engulfing. You get overcome by the consumption.” Therefore, as a first step of lifting, the mouth acts as a center of gravity. Then, different parts of the bodies are involved in becoming mouth. Ultimately, there’s an engulfing of the cup with those different mouth(s). This consumption suddenly reveals the sexual implications inherent in drinking. What is drinking, after all, if not a making available of the human body towards the liquid that the cup contains?

Co-containing

Co-containing implies an “equalization” of the human body and the cup/saucer in terms of their ability to contain. It is the consequence of the practice of mouth multiplication [see Lifting]. Liquid can be co-contained by the hollow on the inside of the knee and the top of the saucer, for example. Or by the small depression on the inside of the elbow in combination with the cup’s base. Following an initial “filling up” of both human and cup containers -we use water instead of coffee- there is a transfer of liquids from depressions to entrances and vice versa. Spilling happens in the process between leaking mouths and cups.

Balancing (presences)

One of the main ways to “test” the horizontality of the collaboration between the two performers is to observe which performer is more dominant in the perception of the spectator. Are both performers perceived more or less equally or on equal terms, or does the human performer dominate? Then again, there is a habit of foregrounding the human and backgrounding the non-human bodies, which a spectator typically has to work to overcome.

Similarly, from the perspective of performing, Tilman experiences the practice of collective agency in the duet as slightly prioritizing the object. He describes this as the task of dropping one’s own presence down to 47% in order to allow the object 53%. This goes against one’s habits as a performer. One is trained, after all, to attract attention and maintain it, once it is granted. This reminds me of Richard Sennet’s theory regarding the hands of a craftsman pianist (*The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, 2008, p. 149-179). In order to excel at playing the piano, Sennet maintains that one needs to develop autonomy in each and every finger. This means actually reducing the dominance of the two thumbs in order to allow the more precarious little fingers to come into their own. In the case of duet #2, where each relation creates a different assemblage of body parts, the issue at hand becomes more complex. The exercise is to balance presence while the toe is becoming finger, the back of the knee is becoming mouth, the whole of the human body is becoming handle, for example.



A MEDITATION ON PROCEDURES OF CHANGE:

Discursive Notes on Object Toward Subject, Love, and a Slew of Other Minutiae Pertinent to *Made in China*

Tilman O'Donnell May 2018 - September 2019



On Order & Disorder

In no particular order, here are some things I've observed while working on *Made in China*.



On Love

In order to practice interrelations with an object (in this case, a porcelain cup and saucer) perception has to be tuned to assume that the object can exert a particular impulse, direction, or otherwise delicate usage or formation outside of its prescribed utility.

This is, first of all, a leap of faith.

Then, as the collaboration unfolded, it became an act of love.

Since I am used to acting upon objects in my surroundings, they are thus used to uphold a sensory order to my world. The story of a "me" or "mine".

In the context of *Made in China* our aim was to assume otherwise. As I discovered, to do so requires the utmost attention in deferring that desire to order, and instead, to meditate on the potential of this thing to transform me.

To love, then, is to engage with an object while simultaneously

leaving it alone, in so far as I want to re-animate its proper usage (and thus my sense of self).

In practicing this, I think of a quote by the Zen teacher and social activist, Michael Stone:

"Love is the unaltered aspect of any transformation."

The key to the work then, is how to love in this capacity, while also instigating and following through with co-created movements.

This is an act of deference.

I have to leave by the wayside, to a certain extent, what I want to do to the cup, in favour of doing something together.



On factories

In December of 2018, I took a trip to Triptis, a small town about 100 km southwest of Leipzig. The town is the current location of the Eschenbach Porcelain Company, which is now one brand in a large conglomerate.

While there, I toured the factory with a very kind and informative design representative. Even after a few explanations, I'm not convinced that she understood what exactly it was I was there to see, or what *Made in China* was about.

Nevertheless, she graciously guided me around the factory, and patiently answered any questions I had. From kilns to conveyor belts, moulds to mixing vats, the factory hummed along seamlessly, with a no frills efficiency.

One of the central insights of *The Manufactured Series* as a whole is the fact that as humanity creates new technological advances, we in turn create tools to maintain these new objects.

The first stop on the tour was the moulding department, headed by a quick-witted elderly man who had worked at the factory for forty some odd years.

Developing the moulds that will eventually shape the unfired porcelain into tea pots or coffee cups is arduous and exacting work. Moving from the design phase to developing the specific mould requires both existing but also invented tools.

He joked that anthropomorphically speaking, porcelain in general has the characteristics of a diva.

Never settling for anything other than perfect.

At the end of the tour, around 16:00, there was a change of shift.

Men and women meandered out of the factory floor, and



I was reminded of the continual flow of labour that has defined the porcelain industry specifically, and global labour as a whole since the Industrial Revolution.

It felt like traveling forward and backwards in time, simultaneously

Sometimes performing this work feels this way too.



On Categories of How to Interact with the Cup

Containing
Holding
Receiving
Balancing
Shifting
Spilling
Transporting
Attending
Suction
Emitting
Horizontal
Vertical
Delicate



1. Purpose
 1. What is its normal function?
2. Actions
 1. What else could it make you do?
3. Speculations
 1. What could you imagine or project as properties of the object as yet unexposed?



On China Made in China

Traditional china is made using clay (Kaolin) and mica. The mica ensures both heat insulation and can also remain flexible even when heated.



On the Absence of Language in Made in China

Language is an element absent from this work, in its current form. While there was discussion as to how to incorporate language, thus far it always slipped by the wayside.

I think this is primarily due to how language is usually used to bifurcate and delineate the relationship between subject and object. Because the aim of *Made in China* is to call that into question, my feeling is that I don't yet have language appropriate to this particular synergy with the cup. Even though I am trying to describe it here, I feel that there is a syntax unique to that relationship that I haven't yet quite understood.



In early 2019 I visited a potter in Stockholm with whom I finally had the chance to work hands-on with in porcelain.

What surprised me initially was just how much time I needed to knead the raw material before even getting it onto the wheel. This was real labour.

Later, when working on the duet with the cup, I could recall this intensity and pressure and apply it to my own body, particularly in the final section we called "moulding" or "manufacture."

The potter patiently and kindly walked me through the process of centering the lump of porcelain on the wheel. My fingers were clumsy. It reminded me of trying to learn to knit in first grade.

I had encountered a material that required a touch I couldn't quite calibrate. This was both frustrating and marvellous.

After finally getting the porcelain set, (I think she gave up on me after some time, and just asked if she could do it) we began shaping.

Over time, I managed to feel my way into this. The precision and lightness of touch felt soothing. There was a gentle extension and distention that had a rhythm and duration that almost asked for itself.

I would later come to feel quite similar about the cup in *Made In China*.

It seemed to ask for specific action, quality, and timing. It would let me know. As long as I was willing to hear.



On Cobalt Blue

A chemical element, cobalt is found in the earth's crust in chemically combined form. Meteoric iron. The element is a silver grey metal in liquid form.



On Feldspar

Feldspar refers to a group of mineral compounds that make up almost half of the earth's crust. The name feldspar derives from the German Feldspat, a compound of the words Feld (field) and Spat, (a rock that does not contain ore). The change from Spat to -spar was influenced by the English word spar, meaning a non-opaque mineral with good cleavage. Feldspathic refers to materials that contain feldspar. The alternate spelling, "felspar", has largely fallen out of use.

I wonder how spar (noun) and to spar (verb), as in, to enact a fight without hurting your opponent, may or may not be connected etymologically.

In some sense, I do spar with the cup. There is a mutual struggle without trying to hurt one another. At least I don't intend to hurt it.

On Whose Fault It Was

And yet, in the final phase of rehearsals in Stockholm, while practicing the section we call Manufacturing, I broke the cup.

It slipped out of my hand. It cracked very slightly, like an ominous fault line.

It was my fault, though perhaps inevitable. It was devastating and, in some sense, an important lesson in how this declaration of love toward the object mimics the attachment of intersubjective relationships.

It felt like hurting a friend.



On The Greek Key Pattern

The Meander, or Greek key, is a motif used in ancient times as a border pattern, generally just out of view of the horizontal plane, on walls etc. It represents the eternal flow of things. Meandering around the building – symbolizes friendship, love, four seasons, four corners. A symbol of classicism.

This is how I've come to think about the process of research and my interaction with the cup. That I am taking a walk with it on its own terms, discussing, formulating, agreeing and disagreeing with it while moving forward slowly, together.

Co-meandering.



On First Encounters With Porcelain

During our working period in Greece in the summer of 2018, Fabrice and I visited an old friend of his, a potter who works primarily with earthen ware.

Narrowly avoiding a deluge, we ran frantically into her small shop. The ceiling was dripping in a few places. She sat down and offered us coffee. Patiently and methodically she explained how porcelain is prepared and fired.

On her small balcony were plastic containers, large and small, containing various types of clay, as well as glazes.

While a thunderstorm now raged outside, she demonstrated the wheel she used to create the patterns on her bowls and pots. She spoke of the need of the young potter to have a lot of prefabricated tools. Too many! She laughed, then asked us to wait and stepped over some equipment into a back room. When she re-emerged she was holding about ten rudimentary tools, most of which looked as though they could have



been purchased at a local hardware store or had been hand-made.

She said a good potter knows how to use the few tools that really matter, that really make a difference.

A central theme of *The Manufactured Series* as a whole has been to draw attention to how objects create the need for specific tools, that in their turn also require other tools that must be invented or manufactured.

This was the first time this became so tangibly clear for me.

Later, as the rain subsided, she spoke about how all clay has a memory. That even in the early stages, if a mistake is made and then subsequently covered up, it will still reveal itself after being fired in the kiln.

Porcelain, she said, is the most delicate of all earthenware. As if it had the most acute memory for the impact the artisan has on its surface.

Porcelain, she said, has a life of its own.

✧



On Wandering & Wondering

Flâneur - to wander without purpose

In this work, it feels as though the original purpose to which I and the cup are hinged, starts to dissolve. Or at least suspend.

So the sense is wandering not without purpose (always defined by a sanctioned notion of purpose) but with a substantive and co-articulated purposeful togetherness.

It takes a fair amount of courage. And a little bit of a sense of humour.

✧

On Coffee

Legend has it that the first fertile coffee bean was transported to Brazil by the wife of the president of French Guyana, who was having a torrid affair with the judicator of a border dispute between French and Dutch Guyana.

She stuffed the centre of flowers with fertile coffee beans and gave them to her lover (as a sultry symbol of their dangerous liaison, no doubt) who brought them back to Brazil.

It soon bore fruit and thus Brazil became one of the global economies' largest producers of coffee.

✧

Even after performing *Made In China* a number of times, both in Frankfurt and Hong Kong, I struggle to find a description for the way it makes me feel.

There is a sense of absolute silence at the centre of the work, a necessity to connect with a knowledge about the world and about how to be in contact with things far from my normal state.

It demands everything of me, and is so pleasurable in a way that does not concern my sense of self. There is a soft and absolutely precise biomechanics that I experience as merging between my body and the cup, and the surfaces on which we unfold this relationship. Between those surfaces and the people sitting on them watching me. That we share in common: we are on the same floor.

In that capacity, I don't think of *Made in China* expressly as a dance. Though I use everything I know about dance to enact it. Rather, I have come to think of it as a way to learn more deeply about how I am not disconnected from the world in the way that I have conditioned myself to think I am. And so it follows that the world is not a thing around me, but with which I inter-am.

This feels so stunning and beautiful and harrowing at the same time.

Most of all, what I feel is a deep sense of contentment and gratitude.

As though working with the object in the way we do, and doing it publicly, is a way of collectively waking up to the simple fact that we are, all of us, always already in relationship.

The cup is my teacher.

✧

More Keywords To Sustain The Work

Bonding
Pulverization
Mixology

Hiding (obfuscation, obscuration)
Assembled (assemblage)
It Suggests / The Object Suggests
The Former, The Latter
Purposeful
Inseparable
Tuning
Transmitting

✧

Self Portrait With Cup



✧

On Franco-Anglo Incentives

Placement.
The word in English is descriptive, but dry.

To my anglophone ear, however, it sounds precise and clear when spoken in French.

This word often came to mind in performance. That a given action was "just so," or "as such," or "just like this or that".

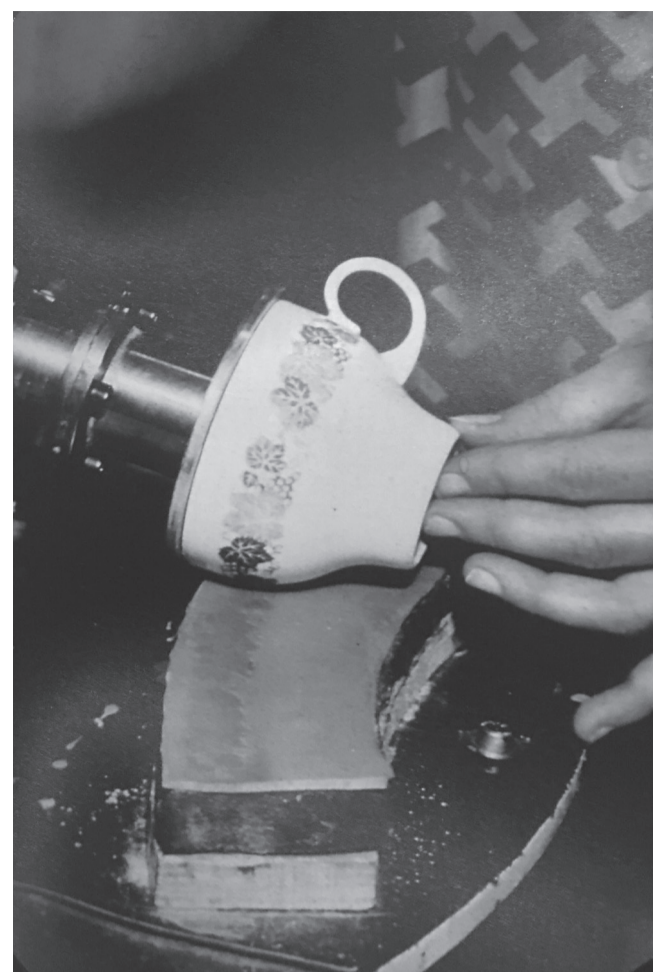
The French accent was important to the efficacy of this procedure.

I think it gave the actions a finesse that English just couldn't muster performance-wise.

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A Final List of Keywords and Technical Terms

Extension
Distention
Kneading
Folding (inward)
Stabilizing (hand/tool)



Throwing

(clay on table, say)

Pinching

Wedging

(throw clay to disperse water uniformly in the material, and to remove air)

Fettling

(removing of excess clay before firing)

Soaking

(during a firing cycle, when a constant temperature is maintained)

Trimming

Carving

Re-Shaping

Comminution

(breaking down materials into their composite states)

Deflocculation

(adding alkaline to disperse clay from slip)

Gilding

(application of gold like material to a ceramic object)

Transfer Printing

(putting a pattern on porcelain, used as a template)

Flow Blue

(colour, for example, that disperses itself)

Slurry

(mixture of solid and liquid that aids transport or moulding, clay etc.)

Stenciling

(apply image on top of porcelain to be repainted)

Coiling

(building up walls with rope like coils, creating a mould)

Throwing

(process of producing pottery on potters wheel)

✧

Mostly, now, I miss being with the cup.

What began as relationship with a simple found object, one among many, has grown into a relationship that is quite difficult to articulate fully.

When we work together I sense a rich world unfolding, a tangible relationship to the embodied realization that I am not separate from things, objects, the world at large. And, perhaps most importantly of all, that the forces we exert on things have an intricate and intimate interrelation with being and time. They sculpt the very heart of consciousness and life.

I long to keep sharing that. To learn about it. To keep asking the cup the question:

"What do *you* want?"

Interview

The following interview took place in Berlin & Greece on the 28th of July, 2019.
MM: Marialena Marouda **FM:** Fabrice Mazliah **TO:** Tilman O'Donnell

PROLOGUE



On Love & Affordances

MM: Hello. This is Marialena.

TO: Hello this is Tilman.

FM: Hello this is Fabrice.

(A minute passes)

MM: Tilman needs another minute...

FM: ...

MM: Tilman is ready.

TO: Yes he is, and he also wants to state for the record, that he thinks you're both wonderful people. Sometimes that's easier to say in writing than in person.

MM: Well, thank you! ...Should we start? Fab, are you still here?

FM: Ahahaha thank you Til, I think you're wonderful as well, and very loving. Ok, yes, I am ready...

MM: I have a question regarding the desire for this duet. Fabrice and Tilman, do you want to say a bit about the initial intention before and during the process? And, possibly, how it changed or shifted over time?

FM: Well, there is the initial intention of *The Manufactured Series* project as a whole, and then there is the intention behind *Duet#2: Made in China*.

TO: Can you start with the idea behind *The Manufactured Series* as a whole? Your intention, that is...

FM: My initial interest started quite some time ago while using objects in a work, positioning the work to focus on the way we function as human beings given that each object has a clear functional purpose. In this previous project I began working on the idea of a-functionality. Meaning, what are we if we do not function as we are supposed to, if we do not know how to use our body, our hands, for example, in a practical learned way? The same question was posed to the objects. Later on I became very curious about how we have constructed our society and everything around us, how the objects we construct have therefore constructed us in return. So, in *The Manufactured Series* I wanted to focus on how the relationship between a person, a human being, and an object could be more than just what purpose they generally serve, but rather, a unique relationship and reciprocity could be made in between those two, outside of the normal bounds of functionality.

TO: You bring up the idea of "a-functionality," and Marialena you also spoke about desire. I think both of these states have a surprising synergy in this work, given that desire

and a-functionality don't usually appear in tandem. Simply put, I usually experience a-functionality as not containing much desire.

MM: How do you mean that?

TO: I mean that my desire is most often activated in actions that reify who I think I already am and what I know about the world. Things that underpin my self-structure. As you put it Fabrice, how I know how to use my body in relationship to the world that I live in and the objects that construct it (and me).

FM: Hmm...

TO: One (of the many) exciting aspects of this work is to teach myself about a desire that is less fettered by self-construction and more directly related to the, how should I put this, to the flow of objects around what I call a "me." This is an extremely rich experience that I think has ramifications for how we rigidly divide subjects and objects in the world in general, and how we cling to a self structure through the practice of doing so. I'd be curious to hear from both of you whether that is something you experience when watching the work?

FM: Sure.

MM: Yes, definitely. Being part of the process was/is quite inspiring and educational in testing a more symmetrical relationship between the human body and the object, (which by the way we decided to call a non-human body instead...)

TO: I see.

MM: In how *you*, Tilman, relate to the cup but also in how I watch you relate to the cup. The piece(s) are as much a practice for the performers as for the audience, because you are as a viewer actively engaged in being confronted with habitual patterns of perceiving the human body as a "subject" acting upon the "object". And now all of a sudden you are called to perceive a different kind of interaction where both performers are equally active (or passive).

TO: Right.

FM: And I'd add that in the process there is something emerging, something I think is a general approach across all the duets in *The Manufactured Series*. We realize again and again that one has to let go of specific expectations and ways of acting on things and really listen to what the objects ask of us or offer us. Or, as we said at the outset of making this work, "What does this object afford?"

MM: And it is a specific affordance.

FM: Yes.

TO: I remember that we came up with the simple question directed toward the cup: "What do *you* want?"

FM: Yes.

TO: This is another way of asking what our relationship co-creates or co-affords. What actions could neither of us take without the other? It is sort of a bizarre premise when directed towards an inanimate object, but I was very surprised what this simple question elicited for me.

FM: That is somehow the most important

rule for each of *The Manufactured Series* duets.

TO: It felt like an act of love.

FM: Love?

MM: Tilman could you elaborate a bit on what love would mean for you in this case?

TO: Yes, let me try. I think that, broadly speaking, we tend to conceive of love as possessive. Something garnered. Something owned. When I talk about love in the context of *Made in China*, I think what I mean is intimacy.

MM: Intimacy?

TO: Yeah, and what I mean is to be close to something (subject/object) and listen to it knowing that one can't ever fully know it as such. That there is a strangeness and mystery at the core of everything, and that leaning in and attempting to, hmmm, understand is not the right word, maybe *dance* with the things you can't ever fully know, feels like being intimate without being possessive. I am thinking of a quote by an old Zen teacher of mine. He said: "Love is the unaltered aspect of any transformation".

FM:

TO: I think that would very much apply to my experience here. Love, or intimacy, happens with the cup and as a specific invitation to the audience, when I get out of the way of what is unfolding, and reveal the moment to moment dynamic of our relationship instead.

FM: Ok.

TO: But perhaps this is just an internal process for me? How do you see it?

FM: In the process of constructing an object there is a tremendous negotiation going on. We mould ourselves to the raw materials that will create an object in order to make it do what we would like it to do. There is nothing magical in that process, only a very thorough listening and adapting to each obstacle those raw materials present on the way to full formation.

TO: Can you say a little more on that?

FM: The fundamental inquiry into who makes who is what is interesting. Giving, taking, offering. Becoming each other, a one another. I see this as a type of beautiful lesson and exchange, yes it could be something like the love you talk about Til.

ACT I



Interlude On A Theme Of Change

TO: Marialena-

MM: Yes.

TO: Something has changed for me during

the process of making this work.

MM: Ok.

TO: Just to address the very first question you posed at the beginning of this discussion. I think the project, and Fabrice's unerring tenacity and will to keep learning about things, almost beyond a reasonable threshold, has taught me that it is possible to really care about anything, as long as you pay enough attention to it. This has been a revelation for me. That care is something you *enact*, that is practiced. Set into motion.

FM: Huh...

ACT II



Know How To Know What & Functionality To A-Function

TO: I have a question for you Marialena.

MM: Sure.

TO: Given the phenomenological or relational ways we're talking about this work, I wonder how the heck it is possible for you to organize it in a structural or conceptual framework? And Fabrice, you in a choreographic structure? Having not sat outside and observed, I'm curious how you both approach making this tacit knowledge (knowing-how) transmittable in structure and thought (knowing-what).

FM: Ok well I...

MM: ... Actually I think that similar to the performance, the structure is something that very much arises from the encounter between you, Tilman, and the cup. It is not something external to this encounter but absolutely inherent to it. So, for example, I would argue that in this duet, we focused more on encountering the cup from the perspective of the user.

TO: Yes...

MM: For example what specific relations of touch, of listening and of attention does the cup's "utility" imply and how can those relations be renegotiated in terms of movement and space? This is also in relation to what you said before about the a-functionality of an object.

TO: How so?

MM: Well, what is interesting is that in the process we didn't negate functionality.

TO: Right.

MM: We actually took a very close look at the movements and relations that functionality suggests and then we exploded them to in-

clude both bodies equally. So one could say that a-functionality was revealed precisely by looking very closely and passing through the cup's original functions, step-by-step.

TO: Interesting, yeah...

MM: Would you agree Fabrice?

FM: ...

MM: Fabrice?

FM: Yes absolutely! And I think there is still a big question that is not yet answered and hopefully will be touched upon in the next duets.

MM: What is that?

ACT III



A Question

FM: How can we make apparent all the processes of the making of the cup, from raw materials to finished object, and not just the resulting form and function it has? No matter what the process is, the resulting function or utility of the cup is pre-inscribed in its manufacturing process from day one, from extracting earthen minerals to moulding, shaping, firing etc.

TO: Uh huh.

FM: How can that be not just a memory or a didactic demonstration but as way of acknowledging what this object consists of whether it be finished or not, regardless of what stage of production it finds itself in.

TO: So with hindsight, in what ways might we have done that more clearly with *Duet #2: Made in China*?

FM: One thing we touched upon but didn't develop further was a potential language emerging, or types of physical modes that deal more directly with the trajectory of the origins of the object.

TO: Right, I remember we started working with language a bit but it fell by the wayside.

MM: Yes.

FM: But on the other hand, whatever you did with this cup, when you are in full collaboration in the performance, my mind can travel to those different times and stages and parts of the process.

TO: Ok.

FM: Not knowing whether it is taking place in the cup, in your body, in between you both or in my own knowledge of this object. It actually contains all of that whether we want it or not. So *Made In China* is both referencing a specific time, a style and place embodying a type of fragility, delicacy and elegance that porcelain first afforded its discoverers.

MM:

FM: Am I making sense?

ACT IV



How Do We Deal With This Situation?

TO: What I hear is the difference between implicit and explicit knowledge and/or history.

And a satisfaction with implicit knowledge when its enlivened through very concentrated co-authoring, but also a desire for some explicit knowledge/history to appear from time to time. Is that right?

MM: Well I would say...

FM: We don't really allow the work to become over demonstrative and didactic and give a lesson, it can only be experienced and that is the challenge.

TO: Right. Marialena what do you think?

MM: Well, in respect to our relation to the manufacturing of the cup, I think we came the closest when the cup broke and we had to repair it.

FM: (*Laughs*) True! But, it didn't really break...

MM: This was something that was not necessarily visible to the audience but it created a shared history with the object that I found quite potent for further and future exploration. What is it for a cup to break in the middle of the process and for us to fix it? You know what I mean? Cause at that moment we "need" the cup to function for us as a performer, so in a sense we change its functionality and we still depend on that functionality. How do we deal with this situation?

FM:

TO: I remember that it felt devastating.

FM: Sure.

TO: Thinking about it after the fact, the cup breaking demonstrated the degree to which I felt attached to that particular object. This was a referendum for me on how intimacy and attachment constellate. In order for me to explore what we're calling a-functionality, I did indeed need the cup to function, albeit in a new and divergent way specific to the task at hand.

MM: Right, a new functional functionality.

TO: And that created an attachment, a way in which I started to rely on the object to reproduce its new functionality to get some stability in the co-creating practice.

MM: Probably a necessity of the work.

TO: But this was and is a good lesson. That being close to something entails the eventual and inevitable changing of its (and one's own) form.

ACT V



In Which Fabrice Introduces the Notion of a Third Leg

FM: I don't think it was only about the cup not functioning as a cup!

MM: What do you mean?

FM: Tilman can break too.

TO: (*Laughs*) Hopefully not anytime soon...

FM: What was troubling and enlightening when the cup broke was that it showed how the relationship they had developed together could be compromised so quickly.

TO: Yes.

FM: They had developed a specific language together. And if it would have been totally broken...

MM: It only cracked in a thin sliver along

one side.

TO: Yeah.

FM: So but if it had broken completely that would have demanded an *entirely* new learning process. If Tilman...

TO: If I...

FM: If you would grow a third leg that would be the same, you would still be Tilman!

TO: Wha...?

FM: I believe we could manage to do similar things with the pieces of the cup since it is still the cup in any state it is in, regardless of whether its in its whole or original form.

MM: A THIRD LEG?!?! Fabrice where is this going...??

FM: Transformation!

MM: ...

TO: Right, for the record, I'm planning on sticking with the two legs I've got. But, we never know. Fabrice, it seems to me that what you're getting at is the interplay between universal and specific knowledge about something.

FM: Yes.

TO: Ok.

FM: And by the way I changed my mind. Not leg, I mean an arm or hand...

MM: You mean a new part.

FM: Yes.

EPILOGUE



Something Left, A Common Surface

FM: I have a question for you Tilman.

TO: Yes?

FM: After this whole process

What of the object is in you?

What of you is in the object?

TO: Hmm...

FM: The cup, I mean.

TO: I think what has been cultivated is a relationship to delicacy and strength, refinement and raw materials. A residue of how those two things can feel side-by-side in a moving body. I think previously they were further from one another in my experience. I also feel that I now have a secret world (though paradoxically it is very public through performance) with this cup. That we, the cup and I, have developed a unique relational world where we know exactly how to be with one another. Exactly what to do. So in that sense, I do feel that I've grown an extra arm, leg, or hand. The object and I have become extensions of one another. I sometimes really long for that relationship, to keep interfacing with the cup on those terms. It feels like one of the closest things to horizontality in an inter-subjective (objective?) sense that I've experienced. Which leads me to point out something that you, Marialena, reminded me of yesterday, which is how important it felt to have the audience seated on the floor. That their pelvis and legs were in contact with the same horizontal surface on which the performance was playing itself out. Can you expound on that if possible?

MM: Yes. I feel that it was important to share the same floor with the audience, because that signals to them, that they are part of the exercise that is playing out before them. And indeed, when I talked to some of the audience

members after the shows they very much felt that they were addressed by us, invited to take part in this re-negotiation of the relationship between the human body and the cup. Maybe not necessarily by performing with the cup but by reflecting on what they are perceiving and how this potentially changes the habitual hierarchies inherent in watching a dance piece.

POSTSCRIPT



A Performance

FM: Tilman, I would be curious, could you give an example on how you co-worked with the cup, for example, co-transferred liquid, in a poetic or speculative way, in writing, as if it is happening?

TO: I'll try to keep it simple.

MM: Good.

TO: First, I pour liquid into different parts of my body (which at this point feels more like a flesh based container that's only partially a Tilman). Once this is complete, I first ask of the situation (by that I mean the co-construction of myself and cup) how we could come closer together in order to transfer liquid from one location to another. This takes a few tries, and I try to remember to tell myself to take the time it takes, rather than a habitual performance time which wants to produce exciting or unusual events, to capture attention and hold it. Once I see an opportunity, I try to move as much of my flesh container (formerly known as me) towards the bridge I am trying to create. Usually, before I initiate the transfer, I wait a second or two. I do this because I need to bypass my first impulses, energetic outputs, or intentions. They are usually tied to old ways of performing (as I mentioned above) that don't serve me here. What I repeat to myself are two inquiries:

1. What do *you* want? (directed to the cup).

2. I wonder what *this* might produce? (directed to our co-constellation).

FM: And then what?

TO: Then, I take action and hope it all works out for the best. It helps to be immediately curious about the results.

MM: Is this a good way to end this discussion? Thanks so much to you both for sharing your thoughts and experiences!

TO: Yes.

FM: Yes perfect! It's funny to think that the first place where *Made In China* was performed after Frankfurt was in Hong Kong, China, as if the full porcelain road has been re-enacted backwards...

Tilman, do you sometimes drink coffee out of your knuckles now since that experience?

TO: (*Laughs*) Everyday Fabrice, everyday...



End

BIOGRAPHY

Tilman O'Donnell

Tilman O'Donnell was born in Boston, Massachusetts to a German mother and American father. He trained at the *National Ballet School* in Toronto, Canada and joined *The Göteborg Ballet* under the direction of Anders Hellström. In 2002 Tilman worked at the Staatstheater Saarbrücken. Thereafter, he joined the *Cullberg Ballet* from 2003 until 2007. Tilman was a member of *The Forsythe Company* in Frankfurt from 2007-2012 and a guest artist until 2015. Tilman worked as a rehearsal director for the *Göteborgs Operans Danskompani* in 2014.

Tilman made his debut as a choreographer in 2002 and has been awarded first prize in two international choreographic competitions. In 2005 he was appointed both "Dancer To Watch" and "Choreographer To Watch" by the leading European magazine *Ballet Tanz*. In 2011 he created two site-specific works for *Cullberg Ballet* in Stockholm. In 2012

he created the piece "August did not have what is commonly considered good taste as far as furniture is concerned." He has also created works for Spira Jönköping under the banner *Cullberg To Come (Word of Mouth)* and a piece for Staatstheater Graz.

In 2014, Tilman was invited to be artist in residence together with Cyril Baldy at *Centre Choreographique Circuit-Est / Goethe Institut Montreal*. In 2015 he created the solo *Whatever Singularity #453: Solo For Maxime / Dancing With Alain* for the *Göteborgs Operans Danskompani*, and toured the work to the *Nordwind Festival* in autumn 2015. A work for full dancer orchestra, entitled *In Life & Love & So On*, premiered in October 2015 at *The Royal Danish Ballet*, Copenhagen. Shortly thereafter, he created *These & Those & Upon Us* (with Cyril Baldy) for the *University of Dance*, Copenhagen, Denmark. In addition, he created *In Some*

Sense (with guitarist Mikkel Ploug), premiered at *Jazz Days* in Koge, Denmark. The work was expanded into a full length piece in 2018 which premiered at *Bora Bora*, Aarhus, Denmark. In 2019 he created *Corpus Dogma: On The One Hand* in Copenhagen, Denmark. Tilman returned to Montreal with Cyril Baldy in 2016 to create the site specific piece *Whateverness Singularities* in collaboration with Montreal based artists Hanako Hoshimi-Caines, Dana Michel, Adam Kinner, and Jacob Wren.

In addition, Tilman teaches workshops internationally and was a member of the artist platform *HOOD*, a long term collaborative format supported by *PACT Zollverein* in Essen, Germany. In 2015, he was named *Hoffnungsträger* by the prominent European dance journal *Tanz*.

www.tilmanodonnell.com



Photos: © Dominik Mentzos

Historical photos taken by Tilman O'Donnell from the museum of the factory in Triptis