



**deborah cornell.  
zaćmienie i potop.  
nieprzewidywalne moce  
i utajone zdarzenia  
eclipse and deluge.  
accidental powers and  
oblique contingencies**



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# sztuka powiązań

## the art of connections

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Druga połowa XIX wieku i znaczna część XX stulecia były w dziejach cywilizacji zachodniej okresem pocięcia świata natury i postrzeganej rzeczywistości na oddzielone od siebie obszary, często obwarowane murem pojęć i wymyślonych ograniczeń. Rozwijały się różne dziedziny nauki i sztuki, a także literatura i filozofia jak rośliny rozsadzone w osobnych doniczkach, doglądane przez restrykcyjnych kustoszy strzegących odrębności. Poszufladkowany świat powoli stawał się nie do ogarnięcia. Studiowano odmiennosc, rzadko poszukując podobieństw. Nawet historię kultury, w tym nauk i sztuk dopadła choroba wąskich specjalizacji. Szkolna edukacja, muzea, uczelnie były jak pokawałkowane torty, podzielone na porcje dawkiowane wedle wykoncypowanych receptur. Koncepcje zdominowały odczuwanie.

Sztuka broniła się przed tym niefizjologicznym podziałem na różne sposoby (teatr, opera, synestezja, obrazy w architekturze), ale już w XIX-wiecznych akademiach zarysowały się odrębne wydziały i nawet artystom wyznaczono specjalizacje. Przyszło jednak opamiętanie. W drugiej połowie XX wieku – przetrwale gdzieś – ślady integracji zaczęły powoli przypominać o prawie do jedności, o zachowaniu homeostazy, o prawie do szukania związków między najodleglejszymi dziedzinami. Wzmocniła to scalanie ekspansja cyfrowych metod dokumentacji i zapisu, uświadamiając, że wszystkie podziały są sztuczne i można je bez problemu pominąć. Techniki wizualizacji w skali makro i metody obserwacji najdalszych z widocznych fragmentów kosmosu ujawniły, że

In the history of Western civilisation, the second half of the 19th century and the majority of the 20th century marked the division of the world of nature and perceived reality into separate fields, often guarded by the walls of notions and imagined boundaries. Sciences and arts, literature and philosophy, developed like plants redistributed into separate pots, cultivated by restrictive guardians who ensured their mutual isolation. Gradually, this divided world of disparate categories became impossible to grasp for a single mind. Research focused on differences, rarely investigating the similarities. Even the history of culture, including sciences and arts, was plagued by the malaise of narrow specialisation, while school education, museums, and universities became much like sliced cakes, divided into portions rationed according to conceived recipes. Concepts came to dominate over emotional perceptions.

Art defended itself against this non-physiological division in a number of ways (theatre, opera, synaesthesia, pictures in architecture), but as early as the 19th century art academies introduced separate departments and artists were delegated to different specialisations. However, there was finally a break from this practice. In the second half of the 20th century the surviving traces of former integration started to bring back the right to unity, retaining homeostasis, the right to search for connections between the remotest of disciplines. This process of integration was reinforced by the expansion of digital methods of documentation and recording, making us aware that all divisions are



artificial and can be easily avoided. Technologies of macro-scale visualisation and methods of observation of the remotest visible parts of the cosmos revealed a visual similarity between the particles of a single atom and the structure of galaxies.

These impulses for integration were enough for artists to regain the ability to perceive the whole. After more than 200 years, in the second half of the 20th century, new activities emerged whose authors postulate the unity of imagination, fantasy, knowledge, and technology. There is a rebirth of the idea of artistic installation, the meaning of performative forms, together with multimedia works.

Deborah Cornell's practice is a perfect example of this new awareness of the relations between sciences, technology, and the artist's free vision, determined only by her imagination. In Cornell's instance, this awareness comes with a specific use of language — her use of ambiguous notions as titles of her works. We discover this ambiguity with certain surprise, as it proves to offer a key to her artistic installations — a semantic self-commentary.

A model for such references between visuality and language can be found in the *Tracer*<sup>52</sup> series. This title can be understood in a number of ways: TRACKER, MARKER, SYMPTOM? Particularly interesting is the second, versatile and semantically charged notion, used in linguistics and stenography, in information technology as "tag," and in molecular biology and genetic engineering as "marking method."

Dictionary provides a long list of synonyms of the notion of "marker," including among others: forefront, substitute, symptom, reflection, marking, mark, sample, display, signal, expression, indication, portent, sign, harbinger, proof, etc.<sup>1</sup> This list could go on, at each moment of reflection expanding it to include new references. Deborah Cornell involves us in the process of multi sensory perception, directed in such well-designed manner that each new association evoked by her work brings up new references. This way an image that resembles a layered sphere might be both an image of the earth, a planet, as well as a toy, a virtual element in a game. When another frame shows copies of prehistoric cave drawings, fragments of writing, this biological-natural matter transforms into physiology of culture, which is not only an artificial (artistic) marker of human activity, but also a result of the genome of civilisation.

The artist herself describes the idea of this series of works in the following way:

*Tracer's* references are to gesture, human communication, time and transience. It is a luminous revolving world of drifting atmosphere and cryptic messages appearing in thin air. The piece combines active real-time participation with the discovery of ancient images from archeology, historical texts, and proto-verbal markings. Visitors to *Tracer*, both on location and at remote sites, connect with each other in its environment, by creating their own gestural tracery within its sphere. Sound sculpts the local atmosphere, emanating from air and objects and responding to the movements of navigators.<sup>2</sup>

It seems that *Tracers* play the most important role in the artist's work. If we are able to understand their function, we can also read the messages coded into other works. In the series *Games of Chance*<sup>53</sup>, the shape of a single-cell organism seems to be multiplied in a complex form of a human figure. This presents a unity of observed world, some common algorithm used in the project of evolution. Is the perceived image a trace left by a metaphysical foot, or a result of a defined mathematical function? We cannot but feel that the story told by Deborah Cornell concerns the crucial aspect of life: multiplication. Multiplication is anything but a simple production of copies, but a three-stage life process: it moves from matrix/concept through process/development to the emergence of multiplied but non-identical beings.

Is there a better definition of printmaking as an art practice? In Deborah Cornell's interpretation printmaking as a form of creation is a perfect reflection of evolution, this evolution of which we are markers. Printmaking is the mother of disciplines, designing beings in response to the requirements of a given moment in a given space, to use their virtual, potential form (matrix) to generate both the experience of change as well as images — effects of this process. In this sense, the medium is of secondary importance. Whether this entails generating virtual reality through digital animation, or making sculptures — forms in the gallery space — or photographs, drawings, prints, texts, or gestures — they all form a line moving from perceived idea to its innu-

merable outcomes. Of primary importance is the designed unity of thought — the matrix. In this sense, the term PRINTING reveals its meaning in contemporary world. The Graphic Artist "m-a-r-k-s" the world. She models its smallest fragments and brings them together. She repeatedly recreates the process of "c-r-e-a-t-i-o-n" as a construction of multiple-use model. But this is just the beginning. The goal is to see, to learn to see, to learn to sense and find relations, references, and connections. The goal is also to take pleasure in viewing, develop fascination with discoveries, sense the thrill of sensing beauty when the viewer gets goosebumps while being enveloped by the spatial installation of sounds. All this is "g-r-a-p-h-i-c," it is the result of the interplay between the idea and its realisation. Deborah Cornell has mastered this game to perfection.

She shows her viewers how by coming to her exhibition and entering her works they become perfectly unified with the story about the interconnections between all forms that can be seen, discerned, named, and described. Deborah Cornell teaches us how to g-r-a-p-h-i-c-a-l-l-y perceive the world.

1 Online synonym dictionary, "znacznik" ["marker"], <https://synonim.net/synonim/znacznik> [URL: 29.12.2017].

2 Website of Deborah Cornell, [http://www.deborahcornell.com/Tracer\\_stills.html](http://www.deborahcornell.com/Tracer_stills.html) [URL: 29.12.2017].