

Metacognitive experience in the work of Alicja Kwade

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the practice of mid-career artist Alicja Kwade with a particular focus on the epistemological value of her work. Inspired by Gregory Minissale's analysis on perceptive and sensorial experience in contemporary art, we will discuss the metacognitive aspect ascribable to some of Kwade's installations. The topic was inspired by my placement at the exhibitions department within the Whitechapel Gallery, where I was involved on research tasks relating to Kwade's first major UK commission "Medium Median" for the Whitechapel Gallery Commission 2016. The exhibition was curated by Daniel F. Herrmann and held at the Gallery 2 (Former reading room of the Whitechapel Gallery) from the 28th of September 2016 through to the 19th of March 2017. The researches on Alicja Kwade's work were further supported by a personal visit to the artists studio in Berlin on April 27th 2016.

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1. Alicja Kwade: a phenomenological and epistemological approach leading to self-monitoring experience.

Phenomenological studies in the mid-1900s and, in particular, the research of french philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) have defined the human being as a corporal-perceptive subject, promoting the perception as prime and constitutive mean to experience and understand reality. According to Merleau-Ponty, our body, together with its sensory-motor and perceptual system, shapes our mental cognition through its interaction with the surrounding environment¹.

Theories of embodiment have been influential for the contemporary art of the 1960s, particularly in the case of Minimalist art. With a propensity for simple, often geometrical form as well as a focus on the materiality of objects and their physical presence in the space, minimalist artworks tend to evoke physical and visual response by forcing the viewer “into a self-awareness of their own body with regard to the art object”².

The phenomenological research and the aesthetic quality characterising the work of Alicja Kwade³ (b. 1979, Poland) have been often associated to the tradition of minimal art of the 1960s. In particular, many motives and themes are traceable in the work of American artist Robert Smithson (b. 1938, Passaic). The logarithmic spiral is a recurrent and distinctive element in Smithson’s practice - like as in Kwade’s - as we will see in later pages. Investigating time, space and displacement, in 1967 Smithson began the sculptural series of ‘non-sites’, presenting earth and rocks collected from a specific area combined with mirrors or glass and installed in the gallery space⁴. These works share with Kwade’s similar materials and rationale in expressing dialectics of time and space both symbolically and physically

¹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Trans: Donald Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012)

² Gregory Minissale, *The Psychology of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 182.

³ Alicja Kwade was born in Katowice, Poland in 1979, She currently lives and works in Berlin. She studied at the city’s University of the Arts from 1999 to 2005. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at 303 Gallery, NY, de Appel, Amsterdam, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Germany and Haus am Waldsee in Berlin.

⁴ <http://www.robertsmithson.com/biography/biography.htm> (Accessed: 7 May, 2016)

through the installation design. Among others, particularly worth to mention is the work *Chalk and Mirror Displacement* - presented at the pivotal exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitude Becomes Form – Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* held at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (26 September - 27 October 1969).

Differently from Smithson, the work of Kwade doesn't belong to the tradition of land art neither addresses questions of displacement creating visual and physical parallel between two different "where".

Kwade's sculptural installations usually include a wide range of found, everyday materials such as coins, metal pipes, mirrors, glass, and lamps. The presence of the ready-made and found objects directly connects to our everyday world and experience: here the parallel evoked is between our "where and now" and another possible reality. The found objects are often altered and manipulated to create disconcerting visions of extraordinary moments where everyday rules and common sense have been abolished. Kwade astonishes the viewer by presenting works that challenges scientific laws and social agreements accepted as universal truths.

Moreover, this device of deception and the integration of familiar objects that we are accustomed to are the catalysts for engaging the viewers's perception and own body.

However, Kwade's approach is not merely phenomenological. What we aim to demonstrate with this analysis is the epistemological element characterising her work. The models and systems she metaphorically dismantles to make us aware of are not merely social and cultural norms but also, and more importantly, cognitive. By presenting sensory-altering, manipulated found objects, she creates the condition for the viewers to reflect on the way the cognitive process that govern our apprehension of objects normally works. According to Minissale: "The artwork may not only stimulate a rehearsal of this familiar activity in our minds, but we may also question the artworks ability to do this, a kind of metacognitive activity involving the self-monitoring of cognitive states and judgements about how the artwork perceptible ingredients are able to anticipate or challenge expectation and lead to complex conclusion"⁵. This self-monitoring condition is mainly evoked by Kwade with installations where time and perception have been investigate by

⁵ Gregory Minissale, *The Psychology of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

means of a physical alteration of familiar shapes and objects. The following paragraph will focus on such manipulating interventions, including distortion, pulverisation and mirroring.

2. Distortion

Kwade's installations present the viewer with familiar, everyday objects in surreal and surprising forms, as if we were looking at them through a distorting glass. Her work distorts found materials through melting, twisting, bending, rolling up, splitting, dismantling and reassembling objects into new poetic sculptures which create sensory illusions. By modelling each material as if it were clay, and through giving different objects that same physical flexibility and shape, she questions scientific laws as well as our common knowledge of the innate quality of each element, therefore hinting that our understanding of the world can be reshaped.

Presented at Art Basel Unlimited in 2012, *In Circles* (2012) (**Fig.1**) is a circular installation which includes 70 different objects positioned in a concentric configuration which is suggestive of a twisting movement. Mirrors, coins, wooden boards, a door, sheets of glass, pipes, a gate, a bike - all are curved following this spiral-shape arrangement.

It creates the feeling that all of these elements are subject to a centrifugal force, strewn across the surface into an unknown, invisible centre. This arrangements request our active interpretation, as our position creates different compositional relationships: we need to walk around the sculpture in order to bring all the different elements into view and assemble our overall vision of the work. Our circular movements which follow the circular configuration of the installation help to compose it, while at the same time the different elements seem to move with us, recalling a carousel. By engaging the viewer with an embodied experience where our body is interlocked with the work, this installation conveys a perceptual awareness of our body as a normative measure for experiencing and responding to the work. Furthermore, our physicality demarcating our visual fields makes us aware of the interweaving of time and space in unfolding our encounter with the artwork.⁶

⁶ Gregory Minissale, *The Psychology of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 182-188.



Fig.1: *IN CIRCLES*, 2012, wood, copper, brass, glass, aluminium, granite, steel, mirror, bronze, MDF, neon tube, found objects, 70 parts, 303 x 1,360 x 1,360 cm

The different, contrasting objects which are bent into similar shapes to suggest the idea that independently and through individual conformation, as part of the same system we are all subjected to the same laws and forces. It is no coincidence that the positioning of the different elements follows a spiral curve, a distinctive shape that often appears in nature. The element of the spiral is recurrent in the practice of Alicja Kwade⁷, inspired and fascinated by the research of the Swiss mathematician Jacob Bernoulli, who named the logarithmic spiral “Spira marabilis” (miraculous spiral) to emphasise its distinctive property of self-similarity.⁸

^{7 7} Emmanuel Alloa, “Der Preis der Unberechenbarkeit / The Price Of Unpredictability” in *Alicja Kwade. Warten auf Gegenwart. Katalog der Ausstellung im St. Galler Kunstmuseum* (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 48-56.

^{8 8} This property was discovered by Bernoulli and consists in the fact that the shape of the spiral curve is not altered by its continuous increasing in size. For more information on this topic: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logarithmic_spiral (Accessed: 13 May, 2016)

One other sculptural work that incorporates these spiral shapes is the series *Eadem Mutata Resurgo* (2013) (**Fig.2**) presenting a wooden door wrapped around itself. The technical process behind the work, consisting of dismantling parts of different doors, bending and then reassembling each piece together to



Fig.2: *EADEM MUTATA RESURGO 3*, 2013, door, 216 x 50 x 30 cm

obtain a perfectly rounded shaped door, has been completely concealed so as to perfectly convey the illusion⁹. The title of the work quotes the famous sentence coined by Bernoulli himself to describe the unique quality of the logarithmic spiral. Because of its unexpected, disorienting curvy shape, this object is disconnected from the everyday world and appears to be part of a surreal, dreamlike parallel universe. Distorting its shape, the door has lost also its function, as we do not know how to approach it or to make any use of this new, uncanny object. This leaves us confused as to our knowledge of the object as our senses are deceived having being completely knocked off centre.

Between the year 2012/13, Kwade took part to the exhibition *Lightness of Being* for the Public Art Fund in New York with her sculpture *Reise Ohne Ankunft (Raleigh)* (**Fig.3**). This work - whose title translates into English as



Fig.3: *REISE OHNE ANKUNFT (RALEIGH)*, Public Art Fund, New York, 2012/2013

⁹ Kimberly Bradley, "Cosmic Girl" *ArtReview* 12 (2013): 81.

“Journey without arrival” - presents a racing bicycle bent into a circular shape. The use of the bicycle recalls Gabriel Orozco’s 1984 sculptural work *Four Bicycles (There is always one direction)* presenting four different bicycles assembled together to create a new object. Just as the wheel does, the bicycle also embodies and immediately suggests motion and speed, the vision therefore of these familiar objects automatically instigate our mental simulation to the act of riding. Although, being that the bicycles are joined together, and because of the multiple directions that each face simultaneously, suggests the results as being impossible for the viewer to mentally project the movement. As stated by Minissale in reference to the sculpture by Orozco: “The bicycles are ‘impossible objects’; our sensorimotor knowledge is completely at odds with the conceptualisations that are normally associated with our sensorimotor capabilities, which are here dissociated”¹⁰. Another reference that can be activated in our mind is Ai Wei Wei’s *Forever Bicycles* from the *Forever*¹¹ series, a public installation visible in London in September 2015¹² as part of the Sculpture in the City Programme.

Similar to the over-mentioned works, *Reise Ohne Ankunft* automatically stimulated the idea of movement. Though, the unconventional and illogical shape the bicycle is presenting prevents our imagination from projecting any movement forward. Like the curved bicycle, our mind ends up going around in circles. As a body situated in the world¹³, standing vertically with eyes facing forwards, we are prone and used to measuring and perceiving the world surrounding us according to one direction at a time. However reality and its moving forces are multidirectional¹⁴. By bending a bicycle, one of the worlds most popular - if not the most popular - vehicle, Kwade messes up our visual habits and in doing so questions the validity of our general assumptions. The

¹⁰ Gregory Minissale, *The Psychology of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52.

¹¹ The title of the series refers to the brand *Forever*, a Shanghai-based company which has been mass-manufacturing bicycles in China since 1940. These installations made of hundreds of bicycle to represent freedom and mobility.

¹² Ai Wei Wei’s *Forever Bicycles* (2015) was installed outside the Gherking building in the City of London between 4 and 13 September 2015.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology define our body as the main and only access we have to the world. The subject is defined as a perceiving body-subject and perception hence involves the subject to be always in a situation, positioned in the materiality of the world.

¹⁴ Katja Blomberg, edit., *Monolog aus dem 11ten Stock* (Köln: Walther König, 2015).

manipulation of a well-known everyday object challenges us whilst at the same time making us conscious of the common strategies, behaviours and habits that we adopt in our cognitive process. In other words, by presenting a familiar object in a surreal shape, Kwade drags us outside of our automatic perceptual response, focusing our attention on the metacognitive process that normally governs our visual apprehension of objects in the world.

Besides stimulating an awareness of our metacognitive process, the distortion of the shape also questions our preconceived and socially structured opinion. As an example, *Bordsteinjuwelen* (2008) (**Fig.4**) investigates the relationship between shape, meaning, and consequently value. A handful of various-sized, multi-coloured pebbles lay on the ground scattered. These found objects have been collected by the artist in the streets of Berlin, then cut into the shape of diamonds. Simple yet clever, Kwade's intervention of presenting a contradiction between form and material invites the viewer to reflect on the way what we know influences the way we see.



Fig.4: *BORDSTEINJUWELEN*, 2008-2012, Stones found in the street of Berlin, different sizes, carved and polished in the classical facet style, dimensions variable

The distortion of found objects and materials is also obtained by means of positioning a mirror or a sheet of glass in front of or across an object. The reflective surface multiplying and alternating the object's vision challenges our understanding of what is "real" and what is just an illusion.



Fig.5: *TELEPORTATION*, 2011 (54° 55' 24.524" N / 12° 10' 33.132" E), Glass, Kaiser-Idell lamps, Variable dimensions - © the artist and Johann König, Berlin

In installations such as *Teleportation*¹⁵ (2011) (**Fig. 5**) and *Matter of Opinion* (2012) Kwade presents a display featuring lamps¹⁶ which are both turned on and off, positioned on the floor and interrupted by sheets of glass that deceive

¹⁵ The word "Teleportation" comes from the greek word "tele" (far) and the latin word "portare" (to bring) and refers to the concept of moving something (or someone) from one place to another without the object or person having passing through the space in between, by means of dematerialising the object at the starting point and then assembling it at the final location. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teleportation>, Accessed: 13 May, 2016).

¹⁶ In *Teleportation*, as in many other installations such as *Parallelwelt* series, Kwade uses Keiser Idell lamps, a popular table lamp designed by Christian Dell in the 1930s. By including everyday objects of mass production with an identifiable style of a specific epoch, this work is linked to a specific location in history with its background and social context.

our perception, confusing what the actual object is through the reflected image and refracted light. The reflection created by the glass transports the light from an object to another, making us struggle and puzzle over its actual source. The vision and the situation represented by this installation changes accordingly to the viewers position. The work invites the viewer to walk around it as a circuit, although a few circuits of the installation might be needed to finally understand the work as a whole.



Fig.6: *EIN HOCKER IST EIN BILD*, 2015, Mirror, Stool - © Alicja Kwade and KÖNIG

Ein Hocker ist ein Bild (2015) (**Fig.6**) disorientates the viewer with a multiple, deceptive representation of a stool splintered into its own reflections. Walking around this sculpture is almost like looking at a cubistic work, whereby all the different perspectives of the object and its surroundings are simultaneously present. The found object has been cut into three parts that are then reassembled and spaced by three angular mirrored plates. As a result, we struggle to distinguish what is physically a fragment of a stool and what is actually its reflected image. Dismantling the boundaries between object and reflection, this work challenges our perception and understanding of materiality and depth. Furthermore, the vision of the stool engages our body by arising our mental simulation of sitting upon the object, which is made impossible by its distortion.

The fictional, parallel realities created by the mirrors can be seen as a metaphor of possible parallel universes¹⁷ and alternative realities and their consequent epistemic models. By presenting an ordinary object sliced and distorted by reflective surfaces, this work is actually mirroring - both physically and metaphorically - the viewers themselves and the structure of our perception as a limited and self-referential system to apprehend reality.

Beside there being a phenomenological approach to this work, another aspect which is interesting to consider refers to the very act of dismantling an object into its parts. Inspired by and interested in antiparticles¹⁸ and particle physics theory¹⁹, Kwade has been creating works that confront the viewer with issues related to our process of categorising and conceptually defining objects. Considering an object as the sum of its composing parts, on what basis should we establish when something begins to be something and when it is no longer itself? Or rather, is the object that Kwade is presenting us still a stool or the fact that it has been dismantled has permanently changed its status? By presenting a manipulated stool which we can no longer use, Kwade is arising the paradox of understanding and expressing something that we can see yet which does not have a correspondent word or class to be described with. This

¹⁷ Kwade is particularly interested in Multiverse theory, according to which there are about eleven alternative time and space dimensions. For more information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiverse> (Accessed: 14 May, 2016).

¹⁸ Katja Blomberg, "Like a mike in a cheese" in *Monolog aus dem 11ten Stock* (Köln: Walther König, 2015).

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particle_physics (Accessed: 14 May, 2016)

work invites us to reflect upon the key role of knowledge and language in determining our everyday recognition and categorisation of objects.

3. Pulverisation

The process of dismantling and breaking up an object into parts was pushed to the extreme in a series realised in 2014, consisting of meticulously labeled glass jars which were displayed in a line within a case, recalling the clinical aesthetic of a science laboratory. Each jar contains one of the elements



Fig.7: *LAMPE (KAISER IDELL)*, 2014, iron 1991.4g, plastic 149.1g, copper 58.7g, brass 30.6g, glass 29g, aluminium 20.9g, ceramic 16.7g, varnish 8,5g, paper 1.9g, Wolfram 0.05g, 12 jars, vitrine, 132 x 144.5 x 32.4 cm

composing a single object which have been pulverised into 0.5 mm grains. A bicycle, a lamp, a radio and a clock have been reduced to their original material components, which are precisely described in the work specification. From this series, the description of *Lampe (Kaiser Idell)* (2014) (**Fig. 7**) reads: “iron 1991.4g, plastic 149.1g, copper 58.7g, brass 30.6g, glass 29g, aluminium 20.9g, ceramic 16.7g, varnish 8,5g, paper 1.9g, Wolfram 0.05g, 12 jars, vitrine”. Through her intervention, Kwade has freed the single composing elements from their artificial shape imposed upon them by industrial production. Looking at these colourful jars we can't help visualising the original object in our mind. Each single particle of the lamp is still there, all the material is still there, only in some other form. A question immediately arises: what are we looking at? Lavoisier's famous principle of mass conservation comes to mind in a flash²⁰. Confronting the viewer with a visual paradox, Kwade is finely reminding us of the intrinsic status of contingency that structured our reality as well as the relentless decay of matter, which includes our own body - dust to dust. This association with our own contingency has been translated into its physical manifestation with *Selbstporträt* (2015), a self-portrait made up of twenty-two vials containing the elements that compose the human body²¹. Those elements accurately encapsulated and displayed in front of us do not refer or belong to a specific everyday object; by bringing into play our own persona, the sense of familiarity conveyed here is stronger and yet alien at the same time. Presenting unsettling questions on something we normally take for granted, the artist dismantles and demolishes our systems of reference and universal consensus.

Less organised, *1979 Liter bis zum Anfang* (2010) (**Fig. 8**) is a shiny, greenish pile of pulverised champagne bottles. Although the material composing the pile is mostly common glass, the specification of the work immediately lends the sparking heap a connotation of precious value and luxury. Like in the work *Bordsteinjuwelen*, Kwade makes the viewer aware of the automatic associations we create between the shape, content, meaning and value of an

²⁰ "Nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is transformed, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservation_of_mass (Accessed May 14, 2016)

²¹ Namely: Oxygen (O), carbon (C), hydrogen (H), nitrogen (N), calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), iron (Fe), fluorine (F), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), manganese (Mn), selenium (Se), chromium (Cr), molybdenum (Mo), cobalt (Co), silicon (Si), aluminium (Al), chlorine (Cl), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), sulphur (S), sodium (Na), magnesium (Mg), iron (Fe), iodine (I).



Fig.8: 1979 *LEERE LITER BIS ZUM ANFANG*, 2010, 2240 kg empty Champagne glass bottles with labels, pulverised, h = 93cm, Ø 267 cm

object as well as of how the social conventions of our consumeristic society are embedded in our everyday observation of the world.

Etwas Abwesendes, Dessen Anwesenheit Erwartet Wurde (2015) (**Fig.9**) presents the process of pulverisation with a forceful, cinematographic effect. A strong sense of time and movement is conveyed by this installation, unveiling the different stages of the destruction of white blocks of marble. A narrative can be created backwards, turning the works into a poetic, sculptural representation of the Big Bang Theory²². Elegantly, Kwade has incapsulated time and movement into sculpture through a floating succession of static, physical images in space, which we are automatically drawn to read as chronological moments of the same movement. It seems like a gigantic slide

²² Nadia Veronese, "The portray of a day" in *Warten auf Gegenwart II* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2015).



Fig.9: *ETWAS ABWESENDES, DESSEN ANWESENHEIT ERWARTET WURDE*, 2015 marble, dimensions variable - Courtesy of the artist and König Galerie.

of fleeting moments has been unrolled. Again, Kwade has positioned a figurative paradox in front of us. It is rather impossible for a human being to perceive an event or a movement in its succession in time, as well as impossible to think and experience the Present itself, since any attempt involves a detachment by ourselves from it and, as a consequence, what is present becomes past. The question about the essence of time and the way we experience present is addressed by Kwade in many intriguing and puzzling installations. As she stated during an interview²³ in 2014: “I’m a bit obsessed by the thought of making time capable of being experienced physically in space”.

²³ ²³ The interview was realised by Sabine Weier during a visit to Kwade’s studio in Berlin and published online on Schirn Mag on the 24th of August 2014. To read the interview visit: http://www.schirn.de/en/magazine/context/a_visit_to_alicja_kwades_studio/ (Accessed: 10 May, 2016)

4. Time

Kwade's artistic investigation addresses Time as a social and conventional system that we use to structure and to order our world. Her installations remind the viewer that our understanding and conceptualisation of time is something fabricated, an optional and shifting frame. As she told me during my visit to her studio, clocks and watches embody the most universal cultural language, as almost everyone in the world can read them. Clocks and their arrows constantly mark our everyday. We are so used to the artificial convention of dividing our day into twenty-four hours and our year into twelve months that we tend to forget that this is just an agreement. Per se, time is not mathematic neither mechanic and, with Augustine²⁴, I would say that its experience is rather subjective. Time is only an abstract model, which could work differently.

Kwade points out the contingency of Time proposing alternative and parallel realities where apparent nonsenses and the discrepancy between what we know and what we see stimulates an awareness of our preconceived opinion and artificial systems.

Her video *Ein Tag in 7 Minuten und 23 Sekunden* (2006) is a non-narrative montage of movies' scenes presenting clocks and watches that chronologically portraits one day in seven minutes and twenty-three seconds. This work anticipated the realisation - yet not the conception²⁵ - of Christian Marclay's 2010 masterpiece *Clock*, a looped twenty-four hour video piece, presenting a montage of synchronised footage from cinema and television history which functions as a proper clock - as its parallel fictional time perfectly matches our "real" time. Fascinating yet not at all immersive and rather anxiety-inducing, the work makes the viewer constantly aware of the time they are spending watching. As brilliantly described by Tillman in the article she wrote for *Frieze* in 2013: "I was watching time pass. My time. It was passing, and I was watching it. What is this watching, what am I watching for? I wouldn't, couldn't wait for the end"²⁶.

²⁴ In the XI Book of his masterpiece *The Confession*, Augustine argues that time doesn't really exist and the notions of past, present, and future are human construction.

²⁵ *The Clock* has been conceived in 2005 while the artist was working on his video piece *Screen Play* (2007). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Clock_\(2010_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Clock_(2010_film)) (Accessed: 10 May, 2016)

²⁶ Lynne Tillman, "Making Time, *frieze*, no. 15 (March 2013): 21.

With her work, Kwade doesn't present a clock to the viewer, she shows a day with an alternative length, marked with a different measurement. This parallel day can represent a day as it's perceived and lived, or the memory of a day or simply another possible perspective making us aware of the artifice of our cultural constructed clock-time.



Fig.10: *GEGEN DEN LAUF*, 2012, found clock, light sensor, microprocessor, Ø 30 cm

Gegen den Lauf (2012) (**Fig.10**) shows a found 1930s wall clock which physically rotates counterclockwise in synchrony with the clock second arrow, which - as usual - moves clockwise forwards. Because of the movement of the clock, the arrow appears to be stuck in the same position, perpendicular to the floor at 12 o'clock. Despite the alteration, the clock is still telling us the time, though our focus is on the troubling attempt of the arrow to move forward. Our customary perception of time is confused and disrupted by what looks like the

physical manifestation of a moment suspended in the present, a self-similar event eternally about to happen.

The paradoxical of our artificially imposed, standardised time system is embodied in the delicate, beautiful lines of *Alle Zeit der Welt* (2015) (**Fig.11**), a



Fig.11: *ALLE ZEIT DER WELT*, 2015, copper, stainless steel, unique

series of 3 sculptures realised by Kwade in 2015, as part of the *Time Zone* series. Created out of bronze, iron and steel, the shiny lines of the sculptures in this series have been shaped according to the border lines of different time zones. Focusing on the universal structure of time shaping our everyday, this work visually reflects the imposition of the artificial order of Time Zones, highlighting gaps and discrepancies between official and solar time. Responding to economical and social needs, the mechanical clock and the twenty-four-hour-day system have been essential conventions for the development of capitalism and the free market²⁷.



Fig.12: (From front to back) *Dienstag, 13. Mai 2014, 17:17:00 Uhr*, 2014, aluminium, zinc, lead, copper, nickel, tin, silver, gold, 14.2 x 186.5 x 115.2 cm; *Mittwoch, 10. September 2014, 10:28:03 Uhr*, 2014, aluminium, zinc, lead, copper, nickel, tin, silver, gold, 14.2 x 171.5 x 106 cm; *Montag, 14. Juli 2014, 12:15:44 Uhr*, 2014, aluminium, zinc, lead, copper, nickel, tin, silver, gold, 14.2 x 180 x 111 cm

²⁷ David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

The everyday intertwining of time and economical value has been made tangible in the series presented for the exhibition *Warten auf Gegenwart II* at Kunsthalle Nürnberg in 2015. This series presents different floor-based assemblies of the eight most important metals - namely nickel, iron, copper, lead, zinc and aluminium, gold and silver - whose value fluctuates day-by-day according to the market. In *Dienstag, 13. Mai 2014, 17:17:00 Uhr, 2014*, *Mittwoch, 10. September 2014, 10:28:03 Uhr, 2014*, and *Montag, 14. Juli 2014, 12:15:44 Uhr, 2014*, (**Fig. 12**) the size of each element composing the work reflects the market value of each metal in that specific moment in time indicated in the title. Again, Kwade is pointing out the gap between what is “real” and tangible and what is just an abstract value, based on a conventional and social consensus. According to Goom: “money is perfectly empty. Neutralised and neutralising in its supreme non-specificity, money is abstraction par excellence - and it goes hand in hand with empty, abstract time”²⁸.

Beside the social aspect of time and its paradoxes, Kwade’s installations often show an attitude to empirical experience of time as well as time as a prior knowledge. In this respect, an epistemological investigation of time inevitably interlaces an investigation of space, as a physical frame of the passing of time. As Nancy observes: “Space is thus the origin of time. It is simultaneously its point of nullity and the whole extension of its successively. It is the opening of time, the simultaneity of its spacing”²⁹.

Von zukunftigen Hintergrund unter anderer Bedingung (2010) (**Fig.13**) presents a succession of mirrors which rest against the wall, progressively descending becoming ever closer to the floor, curving like sheets of paper. Recalling the surrealistic aesthetic of Dali’s famous golden pocket watches, these mirrored sheets present an improbable scenario that breaks the ordinary and our world’s physical laws. The discrepancy between what we know and what we see creates a sense of unease: according to probability theory and common sense, we know the impossibility of what we are looking actually happening.

²⁸ Amelia Groom, “We’re five hundred years before the man we just robbed was born” in *Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; London: The Whitechapel Gallery, 2013): 19.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Technique of the Present” in *Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; London: The Whitechapel Gallery, 2013): 105.



Fig.13: *VOM ZUKÜNFTIGEN HINTERGRUND UNTER ANDERER BEDINGUNG*, 2010, mirrored-glass, six parts, 75.5 x 850 x 160 cm, 60 x 75,5 cm each, unique

This work links to Kwade's interest for Elena Esposito's analyses on fictional reality and probability theory. Her thesis, consisting of explanations of both fiction and probability calculus as modern tools to interpret the unpredictability of reality. In contrast with our contemporary society, Esposito asserts that a parallel and plausible fictional construction of the world is more suitable than probability to explain reality and predicting the future. This is because, as she states, reality is inherently improbable, therefore it is impossible for us to predict the future according to what is probable, as nothing can prevent something absurd from happening. Moreover, she explains how our understanding of reality is based on the use of fiction. In other words, in order to properly understand something, we need to compare it with something else: we need to double or duplicate reality with a similar yet completely fictional

one, as we can only really see something when we are able to distinguish it from something else.³⁰



Fig.14: NISSAN (*PARALLELWELT 1 + 2*), 2009, two Nissan Micras, dimensions variable

In her practice Kwade often uses the device of doubling objects. Among others, in the installation *Nissan (Parallelwelt 1 + 2)* (2009) (**Fig.14**) she exactly duplicated her partner Gregor Hildebrandt's Nissan Micra by means of a right hand drive version of the same model. She duplicated in minute detail all the imperfections and signs of use of the "real" car, transferring the visual manifestation of its own time and history on to the other. The illusion was such that you'd think that you'd seen a double-sided mirror placed between the two cars.

³⁰ Elena Esposito, *Probabilità Improbabili. La realtà della finzione nella società moderna* (Roma: Maltemi Editore srl, 2008).

Returning to *Von zukunfftigen Hintergrund unter anderer Bedingung*, again Kwade succeeded in conveying the idea of movement and the passing of time through a succession of still sculptural objects. What is particularly remarkable is the relationship created in this work between objects, space and time as the mirrors seem to be adapting to the space they are moving within. Although the whole installation is surreal, the force of gravity those mirrors are subjected to conveys a sense of familiarity. The cinematic quality creating the illusion of movement in this sculpture creates a dreamlike vision which comes gliding into our mind, evoking wonder at these new views and perspectives.



Fig.15: 99 SECONDS, 2016, Brass, 170 x 178 x 125 cm

Movement and process have been beautifully formalised in the new work *99 seconds* (2016) (**Fig.15**) which I had the chance to preview at the artists studio, currently on show at the exhibition *I rise again, changed but the same*

at 303 Gallery, New York. Consisting of polished tangled brass rings, each representing one step of a ninety-nine second spinning of a ring on its edge, with this work Kwade aims to embody action into sculpture. By means of new technology, the movement performed by a ring has been digitally recorded and sculpturally recreated by positioning each ring accordingly to a given moment in the time and space of the performed action. The different and consecutive passages of the same movement have been frozen into a single vision, loaded with rhythm and energy. With this installation, Kwade hints to our process of understanding objects and their movements in space through memory. Unable to understand present and actions simultaneously with their happening, our cognition is always referring to a parallel universe of memories of past visions and perceptions.

The work by Kwade invites the viewer to a self-examination reaching beyond cultural and social schema to the very nature of our cognitive process.

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