

2024 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 26, 2024

Rodrigo Valenzuela: Hello again. [laughter]

So, Daniel Bozhkov was born in Bulgaria, and is now based in New York City, where he is an associate professor of art, new genre, at Hunter College, the University of, the University of New York. [WORD UNCLEAR] as many artists, Bozhkov work across a variety of media, and engages with professional from, professionals form, from different fields to activate public spaces. As a collaborator with reality, Bozhkov refuses mass-produced objects to provoke, to provoke the power of the banal, ridiculous, and inconsequential. He enters the world of genetic science, the – genetic science, [WORD UNCLEAR] mega, mega? And the, [laughs] and the world famous tourist sites [PHRASE UNCLEAR] intruder visitors to produce new strains of meaning in similarly closed systems.

Bozhkov has been awarded the Rome Prize of the American Academy, and grants from the Foundation of Contemporary Art, New York City, the War, the Andy Warhol Foundations, and the National Endowment for the Arts. His work has been presented at the MOMA PS1, the Kitchen, Queens Museum, Artists Space in New York, Santa Monica Museum in Los Angeles, Art House in Austin, Texas, and the Contemporary Arts Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

He has participated in international exhibitions, include the thirty-third São Paulo Biennial, the sixth Liverpool Biennial, the sixth Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, the ninth Istanbul Biennial, and the first Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art. That is very impressive. [laughter] And, but, again, the, the impressive component has been to me to see how quick and thoughtfully he consider the ecosystem where art is produced. And I think some of you guys have seen it in the, in the crit, he take his time, and, and really think about the conditions where art is produced.

It's interesting because if you look at books, or you hear – it's almost like, I have get to know Daniel a lot these two weeks, but also, the rumor of Daniel, I have known for eleven years, right? [laughter] So, and it's always fascinating when, you know, the, when Sean used to teach the fresco, it's the first thing that he tells you, he's like, we gonna work on all the frescoes, we gonna raise all the frescoes, as you see they are somewhat scratched, it's the only one I'm never gonna change, I'm never gonna touch is Daniel's. And that speaks a lot for Skowhegan's story of, like, you know, seventy-five years, having somebody that is so having the consciousness of a place is very meaningful. Right? And I think in the same way that, that he have leaned into fresco, to build his legacy in the space, it's really, really interesting to me because his work is like that, right? It's a storytelling device that stay there forever, but you have to be very quick to do it, right?

So you guys have – and I think he's very quick to understand the legacy of a place. And I think in all his work, he tries to understand what is the kindness of this place, what is the meaning, what is the meaningful of this place, right? It can be with Wal-Mart, it can be pastries, he is not as much of a social practitioner as much of an artist that work in the social space. And I think that is something that we can learn about it, is how to understand

your position in a space, and then use your wisdom to create beautiful works that play with the history of the place, and leads you to the future. And I really feel very lucky to be part of that, so, thank you, and congratulations. [applause, cheering]

Daniel Bozhkov Can you guys hear me? Great. Thanks so much, Rodrigo, that was very personal and provocative at the same time, for me. And another person, or two people I want to thank before I start talking are Lacie [?] and Susanna, for this amazing sign they made [cheering, applause]. I love when artwork becomes kind of introduction to another artwork, or serious presentations on artwork, and, and also, actually gave me an idea, this sign in a way was so kind of insight, incisive, they gave me an idea on how to change the lecture, I had something else in mind, and I'm doing it differently [cheering] because of that carousel that's being suggested there. So thank you, Lacie and Susanna, very much.

I'll, I'm going to show quite a few works, so I'll be kind of, keep the pace. And hopefully after that there will be a little window for questions.

The first piece I'm going to show is called *Brief Scenario for Disappearance*, and it's, it happened in UT Austin, in Texas, I'll tell you a little bit more about that after you see part of the piece first. [video plays 00:06:04 – 00:09:45]

So, I was basically in residence for a few months at UT Austin, and I worked with another scientist there, Brian Korgel, who is a professor of chemical engineering, specializing in advanced materials, polymers, and nanotechnology. (00:10:08) And he allowed me to build this basically wooden scaffolding loft in his office, which is right next to his lab, so I basically lived there for three months. [switches slide] [laughter] [switches slide] [laughter]

[switches slide] It's a brand new building, and you can see the loft in one of the windows there, it's kind of the bottom part of the bed. [switches slide] On the same floor, on the other end of the building, I had a shower I can use. And often like around two o'clock I would find myself kind of [switches slide] talking to the people who were there, or taking late showers, or using [switches slide] the building as a, as a kind of a home, after a while.

[switches slide] Nicole was there at that point, she came for lunch one day, which kind of made my day that day. I was just getting accustomed to the building. [switches slide] Brian and I, he comes very early, and we'd have these kind of long conversations. I started this thing like a advanced nanotechnology for beginners, he was basically trying to kind of translate, you know, deep concepts into, into something that's actually more tangible for me. [switches slide] And I was trying to keep up. [switches slide]

[switches slide] We, through the lab, produced something I was very interested in being part of the process of making. Maybe some of you know about aerogel. It's one of the most porous material that exists. Ninety-nine percent of it is air, and it's used by NASA, I think created in Cal Tech, and, and the, the JPL labs, and it's used to catch little parts of comets, so, because comets, when they enter the, the earth's atmosphere, they burn a lot, so they change their chemical composition. But if they're caught in aerogel, they kinda pretty

much preserve what they are. So it's a great material, one of those new kind of, what Professor Allo [?] calls, and what is actually called meta materials.

[video plays 00:12:32 – 00:14:00]

Another project I actually did with, with that particular proximity, because I kept thinking about the university being this kind of very special place of, that kind of gathered expertise and knowledge, and I also keep thinking about Fred Moten's kind of ideas in *Beyond the Commons*, of how one can be in the university, but not of the university, so how is it possible to actually, in a way, parasite over a system that originally created as a kind of very racist structure, and how one can actually utilize something that's kind of already organized and is, you know, too rigid in a way.

So this project was called *Praxilla, My Bumblebee Queen!* And it's basically a mausoleum for a single bumblebee queen, and we should begin with that kind of idea of reconsidering, the word queen is actually a completely inadequate in the world of bees. Because, I mean, she should be called something like a head nurse or something, you know, that structure of queen, it's kind of ridiculous, and it comes from that human kind of importation, and misunderstanding of how the bees actually organize their internal kind of social structure. The more we know about it, the less adequate that term becomes.

So, the idea [switches slide] for the piece was basically [switches slide] to take one specimen from the collection of UT, and its number 00146801, and rename it. Kind of actually bring a name to her, and with the name, also bring a whole kind of way of understanding and connecting and sort of shifting that kind of situation. The name Praxilla, in my case, refers to an ancient Greek poet, Praxilla of Sicyon, 5th century BC, and we only know of her because of somebody called kind of paroimiographer [?], or nomologist, that kind of like collector of all the poems and poets, mentions her, Praxilla of Sicyon, as a kind of example of incongruity. Like a, there's that kinda expression, 'as silly as Praxilla of Sicyon.' And I'll make that more clear as it goes, [switches slide] but the project involved [switches slide] making, at the glass department of the chemical engineering, at the glass lab, this object that actually housed the bee, and Praxilla is actually a bumblebee, native bee to United States, *Bombus pensylvanicus* is her Latin, it's called Linnean name. And very peculiar moment about bumblebees is that only impregnated queen survives the winter. And hibernates, and then hides somewhere and nobody knows, like there is not enough knowledge to know where the bees go. The living bees, and then, in the spring, wakes up again, gives birth to the new queens, and then the new hive is actually produced from that. So it's kind of a really mysterious process of, between life and death. Weirdly kind of geared to one single individual, it's almost like, doesn't seem economical. What happens if that one thing dies, you know? But, that's the way, as far as we know, things work.

So, [switches slide] I worked with Shalene Jha, who is a professor at the department of integrative biology, and academic director for [WORD UNCLEAR] and Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. And here she's talking a little bit about her research, and more particularly about that, that specific bee, which I asked to say as much concrete information as possible. [video plays 00:18:55 – 00:20:57]

So the way the, that structure worked, in the back we used an old process called silver mirroring, so it can actually, [switches slide] at the moment when you look at the bee and the front had this kind of quite, you know, thick sort of lens, magnifying [switches slide] and you can see really well, and then in the process of, but, you almost have to adjust where exactly you are in the, in your proximity to the lens, and at some point things get very, very clear. At that very point, when, when the bee becomes in focus, you start seeing your face upside down at the other end of the reflective pane. It's impossible to present this as a photograph, but [switches slide] hopefully you can imagine it, it's a kind of amazing process of kind of adjustment and, and some people might miss it. [switches slide] [switches slide] The piece of aerogel, you can see there, is mounted next to her, in the front, and [switches slide] you can see here, in the top, the three eyes that Shalene was talking about. Very special eyes in the bumblebee.

[switches slide] I also, now here, a little bit about Praxilla, the poet. The poet. There is this hymn to Adonis, the love of Aphrodite, who goes into the underworld to ask Hades to rescue her, if, like, to kind of try to, and take her out from the underworld, and Hades kind of agrees, but the condition is like not to look back in any way. You know, not to check if she is following him. But because she is a shadow, you can't hear it, so he turns back, and [NAME UNCLEAR], for instance, talks about that second gaze is the gaze that kills, basically, the look is the one that kills forever, in a way. So, in the poem, "Hymn to Adonis," basically he is asked by the shades in the underworld what is the best thing you left upstairs? What you left behind? And those three lines of, of the survived poem start at that point. And whatever we have now available is the best thing I left behind is the light of the sun. And the second best, the face of the moon, and the shining stars. But also, ripe cucumbers, apples, and pears. And the cucumbers is the one where incongruity, and that kind of silliness is, is sort of, bothers the [WORD UNCLEAR] for later five hundred years. Later.

So, I worked with a relative, actually, who is a scholar of ancient Greek, among other things, and we worked together, I wanted to learn how to recite, as ancient Greek often was recited, I wanted to recite that poem together, so here is a little. [switches slide] Oh, sorry. This didn't work. [video plays 00:24:48 – 00:27:25]

[switches slide] The last voice you heard is of Stephen White, professor of classics and philosophy at UT Austin, and the first scholar's name is Evelyn Richardson.

[video plays 00:27:40 – 00:28:53]

[switches slide] This piece is called *I Love You More Than I Can Say*. And it's a, a reflective surface that you have to, basically, look at a particular angle, and then they're, on the dust, you know, the words are written, but almost like you have to kind of bend over and just kind of see them in reverse.

[switches slide] Now, Oscar, the other day, presented partially this piece, and I'm so glad he kind of put it in the lineage of cave painting, or [laughter] you know, from there to Diego Rivera, and all that, that kind of, the fresco sort of heritage, and for me, the piece is

also simultaneously kind of, at least in my understanding, in the lineage of artists who are actually considering a larger system of relationships that happen between different aspects of kind of the social body. (00:30:05) And I think the other day, at some studio, that came as an idea, you know, when John Cage and Merce Cunningham were asked about their works, and early on to describe what they're doing, and one of them said something, 'less like an object, and more like the weather.' And that is, seems like a, I feel like my work is kind of within that sort of like trajectory. At least that's the way I want to see it.

So, Wal-Mart, the year I started working on this project was, Wal-Mart replaced General Motors as the largest networking corporation in the world. And I found this atlas of United States, which the first four or five pages were all the Wal-Marts. So page eighteen is Ohio, and page, like, two is like a list of – so, it, it just struck me that it's almost like, it's like a weird kind of geography of the country or something, you know.

And then I was in Germany, and saw a program on television in Düsseldorf about the greeter as a, as a kind of particular kind of American figure, the program was kind of celebrating that sort of, somebody who is welcoming you to this kind of warehouse, to - [switches slide] and so [laughter] the project is called *Training in Assertive Hospitality*, because it's like a, Wal-Mart calls it that way, it's part the greeters' kind of training. And assertive hospitality means, if somebody's – they call it also three foot approach, if somebody's three feet or closer than that, you're supposed to say hello immediately, like a – what the greeter does, of course, he has a station, somewhere at the front of the store. There is a secret button somewhere, near there, under some kind of shelving system. The greeter's the person who can actually lock the whole store, just by pressing a button. So it's more like a, it's kind of welcoming guard, and a, yeah. Host protector. [switches slide] Here is doing the training, with the senior greeter, Bill. [switches slide] [switches slide] [video plays 00:32:30 – 00:33:54]

So the, the greeter's vest is a whole, you saw, there are all sorts of messages that kind of, one is kind of promising to fulfill. And I was basically trying to use it as a kind of like a prompter text that I can really help make a difference. So, you know, try to live that kind of, like, possibility. Then I, at the layaway department, I also painted this fresco, [switches slide] which had this kind of, several panels, and also like working with fresco's kind of luminosity. They were all basically building from downtown, people celebrating Fourth of July – there is my mother and my daughter Rosa, who later on in the summer would stop by. And [switches slide] yeah, those kind of scenes were kind of democratically dispersed, in one sort of linear kind of equal sort of - [switches slide] the cow, when the store asked me to make some kind of proposed, when I asked them to do it, I was hired to work as a greeter, and I did the, the fresco in my kind of off time.

I had to follow a particular palette, at that time Wal-Mart was blue and grey, so this palette actually fit that particular kind of range. And [switches slide] sort of, over the course of a couple of years, layaway department is a place that you can kind of, at that point, get stuff that you cannot pay now, but you can pay later. So they leave it there, and keep it for you for a while. So people needed a space, and started putting this bunch of objects, which every time I'm there, kind of would be a different kind of group of objects so

I, I got very interested in that particular kind of not in my hands kind of temporality. [switches slide] And also how the wall itself was kind of being obscured, to the point that if you don't know there is something there, it was completely kind of half-hidden. You can miss it. It kind of blends in with everything else.

Plus, Wal-Mart has a particular kind of [laughing] masterfully kind of curated lighting, which, which is something in the sort of purple and green kind of part of the spectrum, so you don't quite trust yourself, it has this kind of weird kind of – [switches slide] [laughter]

[switches slide] So this is one of the panels. At the time it was painted freshly, like maybe a couple of weeks after it was painted. [switches slide] And this is four years later. You know, it started to get in this kind of serious like neglect kind of shapes, and, at that point, at Skowhegan, we invited the, a visiting Italian restorer, Renato Gianguialano, who since then has been coming several times. And he had just recently restored Tiepolo's frescoes in Brescia. And he had that kind of whole language about like how a fresco is actually not only cared for, but how do you understand its, its kind of process of becoming, in a way. So, he and I had a whole kind of like, you know, serious conversations, actually, in front of the wall. Because I wanted to ask him to make, work with him to make a restoration evaluation report. And at some point, he came up with this concept of abrasions, abrasiones, and was basically saying that these scratches, they're not like cracks on the wall, or there's nothing wrong with kind of the technology of this. It's just somebody's moving a big refrigerator that way, and just not paying attention to what's there, so it's actually, the abrasions are probably the, should be really preserved, cause they're the best, the most kind of valuable part of that incoherence, or lack of, like, lack of ability for one thing to become part of another. In a way it's a kind of foreign object that keeps being kind of rejected, or, or not welcomed by the environment.

[switches slide] Wal-Mart, after that, changed globally their colors from blue and grey to beige and tan, and the management invited me if I wanted to come and remove the fresco, which I was at that point happy to do. [switches slide] This is the wall after the fresco was removed. [switches slide] And this was the color [switches slide] that was painted after that.

[switches slide] This is a few day ago. Wal-Mart likes monochromes, this kind of, in the middle of, I mean, I'm sure there will be a sign there, but these kind of huge patches of color appear often there.

[switches slide] This project is called *Lost Fox*. I made this sign, this is, this happens in, near Detroit, [switches slide] Bloomfield Hills is the neighborhood. [switches slide] I made this sign about a lost fox, and I don't know if you can read the – anybody willing to come and read this for me? (00:40:01) It shouldn't be with my voice. Yes! Can you – yeah. But, I mean, Lacie, you have to be on the mic. If you don't mind. Because it's, it's [applause, cheering] being recorded. Thank you.

Lacie [PHRASE UNCLEAR] Lost fox. She has the sweetest soul. She is my girl! I miss all her cunning ways. Every morning before she would out potty [laughs], she'd make sure we made a pit stop for a handful of mini tangerines first, like she wasn't going to go outside until she got that treat. She is family. We need her home.

You want me to keep going?

Bozhkov Yes, please.

Lacie Okay.

She has a shiny coat up her back, and she's missing a tooth on the top right side of her mouth. She sleeps on her back. She is not an outside fox. Last seen on Sunday, around 3 PM, near Saarinen House Academy Way in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. If you see her or have her, call Elmo Saarinen at 4, or 571-252-3909. You won't get in trouble. [laughter, applause, cheering]

Bozhkov Thank you! Thanks so much.

So, I was hoping that if you encounter that kind of conspicuous text, you know, somebody might call. But also, Saarinen is a famous kind of family of architects, who locally started the Cranbrook Academy, or built some of the buildings, so it has to do with a kind of modernism in, particularly in Detroit. [switches slide] Then, this is the Saarinen House. [switches slide] And inside the house, I made a print, which, and then I asked the guide to introduce this idea that the fox has been there for a while, maybe from the time of Saarinen, so there was that kind of extended sort of, something between a hoax and a rumor, that actually enters into the lore of the – the print is still there, it's a historic house. Lots of people come and see it. [switches slide] It's very near the famous womb chair, one of the original ones, of not Elmo Saarinen, but Eero Saarinen.

[switches slide] [switches slide] This project is called *Learn How To Fly Over a Very Large Larry*. [switches through slides] I made a crop sign with the likeness of Larry King, and [laughter] took some flying lessons above it. [switches slide] Quite large site, it's not far from here, three hundred feet by seven hundred feet is the actual size of the drawing. And I basically just flattened the grass with a big piece of plywood. And made the, you know, the kind of markers with the stakes.

I, as part of the piece was to release the information about it to the local media, like a local newspaper published something in front of it, and I thought it might work that way. Immediately it kind of got picked up by, first it was AP Wire, and, and then also CNN, and – [video plays 00:43:54 – 00:45:36] [laughter, applause]

[switches slide] I showed this as an installation, all the kind of immediate footage, and other things from the site. We made this very big sofa that goes into perspective, so the front part, you can see the person sitting there looks tiny, and the woman in the back looks

really big – it's actually in reverse, she is not very big, and just the sofa goes into like kind of a skewed.

[switches slide] I painted several paintings from stills of, from the program.
[switches slide] And later on, I actually was interested to go and make a botanical survey of the site, and see on that field, you know, different kind of plant species that live on, on the field. And actually properly kind of understand what they are, and, [silent video plays 00:46:31 – 00:46:35] and the person who was my guide, [switches slide] a local woman called Grace, [switches slide] – is this? [video plays 00:46:47 – 00:46:49] It should be playing.

Audience member [PHRASE UNCLEAR]

Bozhkov Mmmm. [video plays 00:47:03 – 00:47:05] I shouldn't actually move, right, it just [00:47:08 – 00:49:37] it's playing already, okay.

So for me, this was almost like this kind of really interesting kind of voice and language, almost like, to me, she almost looks like that kind of pioneer settler, early, and also somebody who had to learn quickly a lot about plants. (00:49:57) And, and also she had this strange kind of, when we're in the field, you know, she would at some point say things like, I, because I didn't actually cut any of the grass, I just smashed it, and milkweed actually started coming back quickly, she said something like, whatever you did here, you didn't harm anything, and because of that, an ecosystem like this sort of just kind of allowed that to happen, and didn't harm you back. And anyway, there was that sort of reading of, of the whole project, from a completely different kind of point of view, and almost like we're some kind of authority, saying like, I just spoke to the milkweed, [laughing] you're okay, you know. That, that level of, of somebody who directly, you know, is able to, to sort of like inhabit that register.

For me, that together with Larry King at the other end, you know, created a, a really sort of, how to say, for me, an account of this kind of, if you slice something kind of below the cultural radar, all of a sudden the connections between things are, you think that things are kind of located in a particular way, they're actually very differently kind of situated in relation to each other. So it was one of those projects that kind of for me, in a way, something came at the other end that I, I actually didn't, didn't know it was there in the beginning.

[video plays 00:51:41 – 00:54:53] This project is called *My Dear Highly Venomous*. And I was thinking about several things. One direction had to do with like the narcocapitalism we live in. And almost like what do the invention of anesthetics, in the middle of nineteenth century, the Nazis' use of cocaine, and the development of Prozac have in common? And the answer is that they are all products of the same logic that defines the contemporary era, the age of anesthesia. Management of emotions through drugs, ranging from everyday use of sleeping pills to hard narcotics, chemistry has become so much part of us that we can't even see how much it has changed us.

And [switches through slides] I have to skip some things to show you this fresco, which is basically the actress Carrie Fisher, who played Princess Leia, at, in *Star Wars*, was buried in a model of a Prozac pill, in an urn that was actually – and this is from, stills from, from her kind of funeral. This was a fresco that was part of an installation I did in São Paulo, and in a way, the best part about that project, which has many kind of, I don't know what to call it, kind of strains and directions, is that the fresco actually, the way it was mounted by the team there, it was, there was something insecure and actually fall and shattered into pieces. Just at the very beginning of the, of the exhibition. [switches slide] So in the rest of the time it was shown as a kind of, that kind of shards. Under glass, with the image of the – for this project I collaborated with Mandy Hoffer [?], who is a professor at Cornell Weill Center in New York City, and Hunter College as well, at the department of chemistry, and her research focuses on venoms and venomous organisms as agents of change and therapeutic development.

[switches slide] Mandy would say something about pain here. [video plays 00:57:35 – 00:58:07] The drug she talks about, Prialt, is the strongest venom, sorry, painkiller known to people at the moment. It's a thousand times stronger than morphine, and it's nonaddictive, and the only way to actually administer it, it's used for only excruciating pain, it has to be injected into the spine directly. And the only way, that particular venom is actually taken from a highly venomous marine snail that is also part of Mandy Hoffer's research. Actually, how this drug can be made a bit more kind of accessible, available, possible, so that the procedure doesn't [switches slide] – this is the actual moment where the snail has this kind of like a sting that, that injects a very highly potent venom. Is this playing? No.

Audience member There it is.

Bozhkov Oh, it is. [video plays 00:59:22 – 00:59:49]

[switches through slides] [laughter] [switches slide] The other branch of this project is making a musical instrument. [video plays 01:00:16 – 01:00:30]

[switches slide] Dizzy Gillespie had that unique crooked trumpet. Somebody fell on it, and then it turned out that he actually liked the sound that comes out of it, and particularly the fact that most trumpeteers have to go like that, and it changes kind of the strength of the, and when the trumpet is crooked, actually, you can play like this, and the trumpet is at the, at the audience. So, this is Chuck McAlexander, of the old New York, it's called the Brass Shop. He is one of the, originally working on the Dizzy Gillespie trumpet, and many other musicians, who, in the city particularly, working with brass. [switches slide] Chuck is amazing, and he was, we worked kind of together trying to figure out how to make a flute that could be played by two people at the same time. And with two ends, and tow, like a, the two sounds kind of potentially mixing. [switches through slides]

[switches slide] That flute was presented kind of as a disassembled object, [switches slide] and every once in a while it would be put together and played as part of the Biennial in São Paulo.

[switches through slides] The installations have a number of frescoes. One of them is Susanna's eye. [switches through slides] And here, the performance itself was, I worked with a, a Veronica Batista, who is a member of a company in São Paulo which is of blind dancers. Classical ballerinas. So in her own biography, she would have never been a ballerina, until her blindness. She comes from a very poor sort of working class family, and when she was very young – she was not born blind – when she was very young, she was watching ballerinas kind of on TV, and saying, this is so amazing, I would never play this, this is out of reach, in a way. I always felt that way about classical ballet, there was some kind of zero gravity moment [laughing] there that just kind of defines the, somehow the body both exists and doesn't exist. So, yeah.

So that flute that we made, which, Chuck McAlexander, it was made so that Veronica and I can play together. [video plays 01:03:37 – 01:06:19]

[switches slide] Old project I'll very quickly go through. Done for Istanbul Biennial. [switches slide] Istanbul is an amazing city, on almost every corner there is a, like kind of a seller of these lovely breads, called simits. Soft pretzels with lots of sesame and molasses in them. [switches through slides] You eat several of these a day [laughter] if you're running around.

[switches slide] So I, for the project I became an apprentice in a traditional bakery. [switches slide] And [switches slide] learned how to make first the regular pretzels, and then, with the help of the baker, we made several new shapes. [switches slide] That they haven't been making. [switches slide] I made a bag that talked about the project in three different languages, plus [switches slide] pictograms about the different shapes. [switches slide] And then I sold them on the street, in the Beyoglu section of the city [switches slide] from a traditional cart, together with regular pret, like, round pretzels. [switches through slides]

Here, a quick video of the process, but also a friend of mine, a filmmaker came and helped me to film on the street, and there this is this one really wonderful moment when the person would buy the pretzel and then realize that something is not exactly the way, you know, through the bag, or through the form. [switches slide] Oop, sorry, this. [switches slide] Oop, help. It's still not – [video plays 01:08:12 – 01:08:19]

Sorry. I forgot to say, important part of the story is that I was there before that with my mother, who I pretty much grew up about maybe three hours away from Istanbul, but during the communism, that was where Warsaw Pact and NATO were kind of, that was a border. It was very highly guarded, you can't even go to the border. So I never been to Istanbul, my mother was seventy at that time, she's never been there. So for her, it was this kind of first time in, I mean, Istanbul is like the, the metropolis of the area, it's like New York that existed for 3,000 years, so it's a kind of very, kind of amazing city. So she and I were kind of walking around, and just taking it in. And then she would hear Turkish words, people would be talking, and she would say, oh, that means, like, I don't know, a fountain, or like, two dogs or something, and at that point I realized that she, because, generationally,

Bulgaria's part of the Ottoman Empire, so the, her depository of Turkish language are actually much more than mine. I didn't know almost any words, she knew a lot.

So I started making this phrasebook of my mother's Turkish. And then based on that, I pulled out some words, and then made the shapes out of that. [video plays 01:09:43 – 01:14:21]

[switches slide] So, for hundreds of years, all the pretzels in Istanbul would look like that. And then there were these new shapes, fountain, [switches slide] eye, [switches slide] curtain, [switches slide] tail, [switches slide] cloth, [switches slide] two dogs. [laughter] [switches slide] Gift. The last two, gift [switches slide] and two dogs were selling so well that the bakery's still making them. [laughter] So it was this kind of tiny scratch of, of [switches slide] -

[video plays 01:15:05 – 01:18:25]

[switches slide] [laughter] So, this is an older work, called *Darth Vader Tries to Clean the Black Sea with Brita Filter*. And it's, it's actually a performance I did at the Black Sea, in the city of Burgas, in Bulgaria. And then I bought a television time, so this was playing among other commercials for fifteen, it's a fifteen-second video, basically. And you can encounter it kind of among other things. Very quiet, you hear the water, so Darth Vader basically takes, scoops a little bit of seawater, let it trickle with the Brita, and then pours it into this other bottle, and then pours the bottle back into the sea. So, at some point it became kind of one of the early memes, you know, kind of proto-meme kind of moment, people would be finding it, and then kind of post it again, and, kind of, it circulated for a while. So every couple of years, somebody would discover it, and just put it again in the circulation.

And then [switches slide] this was 20 [laughter] 21, Elon musk [laughs] kidn of took it and signed all this insignia, the Elon on the head of Darth Vader, the Internet, then, it's not very visible, but on the Brita it has his Twitter feeds, so the Brita is the clearing device, you know, and his Twitter feed. (01:20:01) And then other people's Twitter feeds are in the, in the bottle, by his writing.

So I, I started kind of, I mean, again, '21, he's changed since then even further. But start looking into Elon Musk and his various kind of programs. [switches slide] Occupy Mars refers to SpaceX. If you go on the site, there is a promise there that by 2050, there will be a human colony of a million people [laughter] on Mars, which, just as we're laughing, you know, with Tesla, you know, you know how things happen, you know, he gets things done. [laughter]

And, anyway, so that whole kind of, it's actually, there's some amazing engine that's being kind of produced that beats hundreds times the nearest most efficient engine we ever had, so the idea is that there will be serious rockets that will be able to go to Mars and come back again. And have that kind of like, a, the moments when Mars, every two years, is the closest to Earth, for a couple of months, so during those times, there will be a, that kind of a

fleet of rockets bringing humans to what he basically says that we need, we need to be a biplanet kind of species. He thinks that maybe Earth is not kind of solvable anymore, climate-wise and everything.

And actually Bruno LaTour talks a lot about that sort of like, the, how the, there is a whole kind of cluster of superrich, that they have given the idea that all of us are kind of building something together, or something has to be sustainable together. It's more like a sort of everybody for himself kind of modality.

Anyway, I was very interested to kind of also see how this language is used, and how all that futuristic sort of like space travel, that now can be accompanied by one single person, is wrapped in the language from 19th century. You know? It's still a colonization of Mars, it's still an assumption that there is nothing there, and, you know, so, [switches slide] yeah, I was kind of tracing that, and also paying attention to Occupy also. When Georgia Sagri is here, I'm looking forward for her to talk to us about the sort of finding on the early years of Occupy.

[switches slide] So, the whole project basically, and I'll be kind of quickly running through things, because it's, this is a, for me a very strange work in my own kind of group of works, because I don't think this ever going to be a finished work. It, it's actually a sort of more series of kind of traps, and delays, that would, the more layers get there, the more you, I'm more interested in that kind of unended kind of structure. But the main premise of it is basically a proposal to grow cucumbers on Mars in the form of an opera. [laughter] And the opera, in its initial version, is five days long, but potentially, I would like to develop it as a five-month long kind of durational performance. And in this case, opera is musical performance, but it's also in the original sense of the word, means work. Also in Italian means labor, and it means potentially even trouble, meaning when you trouble yourself to do something.

So, in that sense, I want to think about that kind of, like, endeavor that involves a number of people, and a number of different – but as far as the cucumbers are concerned, [switches slide] there are three locations. One was that in Bulgaria, in the town of Gabrovo. In the middle of the country, the town that Christo is from, by the way. [switches through slides] There is this wonderful building which is basically a house of humor, has its own kind of biennial. So there, the idea was to plant the cucumbers in three different locations, and actually, study local, almost like, in those locations, what does it mean to grow cucumbers? In what terms? In Bulgaria, there is a lot of that kind of traditional agriculture, and a lot of that kind of local knowledge. So, [switches slide] we planted the cucumber garden in front of this building. There was a cade kiosk already nearby, and we turned into a, [switches slide] like kind of a cucumber growers' know-how exchange café. [laughter] With musicians coming and playing to the cucumbers, it was that kind of like a settled-in endeavor for several months.

[switches slide] I worked a couple of times with fortune tellers, to understand the, the potential of this project, kind of how it will pan out in the future. This is meeting with the first fortune teller, which gave birth to the aria of the first fortune teller. [video plays

01:26:01 – 01:26:15] She's basically talking about, she's looking, she's using the beans to, to do a prediction about the outcome of the project.

[switches slide] A beekeeper came, because we needed pollinators nearby, near this cement building.

[switches slide] The second fortune teller. Way more specific, her basic advice was basically go and get in touch with Elon Musk, and, and he should be helping, before it gets too far. [laughter] And then I worked with a composer and a vocalist, for those arias to actually occur, and we did this kind of like a whispering, and very quiet sort of modes of singing, and I'm going to play a couple. [video plays 01:26:53 – 01:28:06]

Her name is Erin Gee, and she works a lot with that kind of, the vocals and also the, the shape of her mouth, and what the mouth produces.

[switches slide] The other location is in Nyack, where I currently live. I've been growing cucumbers kind of for several years now. [switches slide] And the cucumber plant is amazing. I mean, it has this first, this initial leaves, and then the, that curly part is called the first true leaf, and then it grows on there and becomes quite tall, and [switches slide] [switches slide] [laughter] – and this particular [switches slide] location, this time, groundhog came in and ate [switches slide] all the, the leaves, and became the antagonist in the opera. [laughter] Which, [switches slide] there is a, basically actually an aria of the groundhog, later on.

[switches slide] And the third location is Cornell University, which has like an incredible experimental plant sciences program. [switches slide] Part of their experimental fields, the so-called fields of the world, where they plant crops from everywhere, and the great thing about that university is that there is a huge fields around of local farmers that, if you experiment with something, and you want that to be tested in large kind of territory, some crazy person will plant it in like hundreds of acres, and you can quickly kind of go somewhere with that sort of experiment. [switches slide] The people I work with, Johannes Lehmann, one of the top authorities in the world on soil, and, and, through him, I kind of completely changed my idea of what, I mean, the word soil actually he connects very much to gravity, and something that actually, you take from earth from, from the ground and take it to the International Space Station, that should not be called soil, because there is no gravity there, and so it's kind of a, very interesting to actually talk, and, and work with him on a level of kind of soil. (01:30:27) And then, in that direction. Margaret is one of his assistants there, she studied with him first and now she is an experimental plant scientist.

[switches slide] Here is Johannes producing biochar, biochar is one of his, [switches slide] the things he is working on. [switches slide] Morgan Irons is another person there, part of his PhD in, in his lab. [switches slide] She calls herself ecoas, I'm forgetting the second name, second part of – no, sorry, astroecologist, sorry, that's, that's her, she understands her, her [switches slide] occupation and profession. Margaret bringing some soil.

[switches slide] So, with them, basically, we planted, experimented planting cucumber seeds in something called Mars regolith simulant. I was talking to Max the other day, he knows about it. That, basically now all the rovers that are on Mars are sending information, and we know a bit, some of the compositions of the substrate on Mars. So, very closely we can mirror that with the crushed rocks from Mojave Desert. [switches slide] So we used that material, planted seeds – that's completely dead material, it's basically crushed rock, so put some nutrients in it, [switches slide] micronutrients. The plants grew a little bit, and then died, [switches slide] then another generation died, until, after several generations, we actually were able to [switches slide] produce [switches slide] actual cucumbers of proper size. On Mars regolith simulant, which is, you know, can be taken from here on.

[switches slide] As we were growing those kind of already cucumbers, and we're paying attention to how big they're going to be, we named them with the different names of the rovers that have been on Mars, the successful NASA missions so far. [switches slide] [switches slide] And then we made this [switches slide] sort of [switches slide] glass containers that were based for the individual cucumbers, after the shapes of the cucumbers. [switches slide] And then pickled them in there, [laughter] their jars. [switches slide] And this basically, one of the presentations, the five-day long presentation, happened at Neuberger Museum, in White Plains, where SUNY Purchase is. Where I met Lacie, amazing. [switches slide] There. Working together.

So the way the, the presentation took form, I mean basically still kind of mining that idea of the traditional opera, which has like a, there's several chapters there within what even the musical performance is. There is a curtain, there is a certain kind of like a musical structure, but then it takes from there [switches slide] and it becomes something else. For instance, this is one of the pieces that Erin Gee produced, called *Mars As Mineral Consciousness*. [video plays 01:34:03 – 01:34:37]

[switches slide] [switches slide] This is Iko Yoshida [?], singing the aria of the babysitter from Hiroshima. [video plays 01:34:50 – 01:35:25] [switches slide] And here's Iko also embroidering, again, during the opera, the five-day performance at Neuberger, there was this constant embroidering as part of the actual performance. [switches slide] Susanna was very involved in that. Lacie brought her class, and got a number of times involved in that as well, so there was teaching in embroidery, and, and also [switches slide] working on it while the performances and the singing was still, was happening. [switches slide] [switches through slides]

A garment designer called Kiwi and I worked on these garments, that would be hanging on the walls, kind of presented, and then the, every once in a while people who were participating in the singing would wear them and then put them back, so the whole thing had this kind of [switches slide] very [switches slide] how to say, kind of horizontal distributed sort of – you don't know where the center of something is, it was more like a number of things were happening simultaneously, and you have to almost like find your way of what you want to pay attention to. [switches slide] People were reading to the cucumbers. [switches slide] [laughter]

And often, it looked like that, like that kind of, you're not sure where is the performer, or sometimes somebody would pick up a, part of the libretto and read to somebody else. [switches slide] [switches slide] [switches slide] Now this? No, this? [video plays briefly] No, sorry. I don't know how, why this is not playing. [video plays 01:37:44 – 01:42:50]

Thank you. [applause, cheering]

Audience member Hi. It's on. Okay.

Bozhkov Ah, we can hear.

Audience member Can you hear me?

Bozhkov Yeah, yeah, thank you.

Audience member Awesome. Thank you so much for this talk, so generous. I have two questions, but I'm gonna ask one, and I'll save the one, another one for breakfast. Cause it's long. You put yourself into the position of a student in so many of these, you're an apprentice in the bake shop, you're trying to learn ancient Greek, in one of the pieces you're talking to scientists in this very specialized language that they're teaching you. And then I'm looking at your fresco way over there, in the room, and I'm thinking about your fresco work, and your painting work, and some of the pieces that you showed that show this level of mastery of a craft, and I guess I'm curious how you, how you think about mastery, how you think about craft, if that's something that comes into the work and how, so I would love to hear you talk just a bit more about that.

Bozhkov Wow, that's a great question, thanks Marsha. The question of mastery is really cool, because on one level, I deeply think of myself as kind of master of none, in a way. In other words, whatever you learn, it's a kind of a, you learn it in the process of something you need to learn. And at the same time, my initial first education went completely the opposite way. I studied in Bulgaria in a very traditional academy. It doesn't matter what you want, you learn certain kind of, fifty different ways, you know? And then you work from there.

And after that, when I came to New York, I, I also studied with like Robert Morris and the whole, you know, New York avant-garde, you know, bunch of people who were kind of around him. So, it, my sort of experience with that, and ideas now, are very messed up about mastery, in terms of there is some weird kind of reverse moment. You learn it, and you don't need it. And then you need something else, and the one you learned, it actually, it becomes almost like a, some depository of knowledge, how to, more like unlearn things. If that, probably doesn't make sense, but it's sort of like a, because when you learn something kind of rigorously, through some kind of a process, you kind of like, there is some point after which you cannot go at the other end of it. You don't think anymore how much you know it, or no, you know, it becomes almost like a, it's like breathing, you know,

it's so easy. And for me, that kind of unlearning that comes with deep learning is actually the core of, of that experience.

That's why, I mean, you can't do that with too many things, because there is not enough time. But one can sustain, at least I am interested in sustaining that attitude of not only curiosity, but that kind of like a, almost like every one of those things is actually a way of looking into the world. Some kind of dimension of the world, so bakery, for instance, my grandfather was, had a bakery, and I remembered from him a little bit, I didn't help him at that time, we lived in another city, but when I went and started with the bakers in Istanbul, suddenly, I probably had the most profound sculpture lessons from that baker who took my hands and just kind of, almost like showed me at what finger the sort of pressure has to arrive, exactly for something to work. Because the way they work, they wake up at three in the morning, and many of them are kind of asleep, they still can be asleep, and keep kinda working. That's that level of, where the body kind of knows it. So it's a very interesting things of, like, I mean, what you're asking, for me, anyway. Anything you learn becomes an opportunity to unlearn, but also, to see the world in another kind of dimension of it.

Does that answer in any direction you were asking? Yeah.

Audience member Yeah yeah. Thank you.

Bozhkov Thank you.

Audience member Thank you, Daniel. And I have a question, cause you talk about your work is not object, more like weather, right? And the relationship between social bodies. And I feel you being, like, kind of implying yourself into different social bodies, like, into different scenarios. And also, for the Wal-Mart work, you talked about the abrasion, like the people pushing the cart, and like, abrasion on the wall that left the marks on your fresco. And then you talked about one thing become another, the becoming. So, I'm interested in that relationship, abrasion and becoming, and one thing, like, going out from the other end, and, thank you.

Bozhkov Hm. Yeah, wow, that's really great. Well, again, it's almost as if one has to accumulate their own material, or how to say, territory to which to be able to observe. So abrasions, you cannot make an abrasion. You need to make something that can be abraded. You know, in other words, it's a bit like this question I often think about, this kind of like, there is this concept of negative hallucination, for instance. Like a regular hallucination is when you see something that's not there, and negative hallucination is when you don't see something that's right in front of you. So what exactly creates that kind of psychological, mental – nothing is wrong with your eyes, you know, there's something wrong with your kind of mind or your spirit, that you're actually not able to perceive part of the world. And, and from that point of view, I feel like a huge part of the world is really hidden from us. Because we filled it with that, that kind of surface information. (01:50:27)

So, a lot of, at the end, for me, comes down to creating different tools to pay attention with, because you're not equipped just by, naturally, by being, you know, you

need to develop something there. And part of it is these series of objects, for instance, they become this kind of, they are like observation decks or something. Observational object – you need to create it, so that something happens to it, and then, after three or four steps over, then the, the real thing starts. Yeah.

Like, this object that I showed, I mean, I showed one single piece that was actually on its own, like a, just an object. It also, it's not the, I mean, it's actually a mirror. And, and it's more like a how do, how does that mirror kind of breaks your face, and still allows you to read something within it. I'm very interested in objects like that, that they're kind of instruments, but instruments for, I don't know, often that example with Galileo and the telescope, you know, it's like, at the end it's like a, certain kind of polishing of that lens, which he was such a kinda brilliant at, turned the lens that was enlarging three times to enlarge thirty times. And by having something like that, you can see the craters of the moon. That's a different thing. Another degree of magnification actually becomes something else, so, so there is something about that, you know, how do you, you know, how do you alter the reality until it becomes kind of in focus. In a way.

It's very somber, the whole thing. [laughter]

Audience member Hey there. Thank you so much for the generous talk, but I kept on noticing this idea of, like, play. And like this idea of play with a capital P. Like, very explorative, but also like taking the research very seriously, but also like, not letting it get too, like, highbrow. So like how do you navigate that? Cause it's like, it's really a joy to see you, like, navigate the information, but then also, like, you run around in a slug cos, outfit. [laughter] So, how do you, like, how are you navigating that?

Bozhkov Yeah, that's a great question. I actually, this is why I, I personally ends up like often working with scientists, and, and other people that, but particularly in science, there is this, how to say, attracts certain kind of person who, like artists, have something to do with the unknown. And, and not even the unknown by itself, but kind of proximity to the unknown, that kind of comfort, comfort to not know. Really serious scientists I, I, I encounter would not trust initial kind of, you have a hypothesis, and you're doing an experiment, and it works. You just [laughs] you need like a huge amount of nos before something starts kind of maturing into, kind of gives you a, an idea that you are already in the, in the field, in the subject. Immediate answer, it's kind of suspicious, in a way.

So, but how does one cut, yeah, that, that sort of – we talked in one studio the other day, this kind of idea of verbal overshadowing. How does one cut that kind of layer of language, that kinda keeps crystallizing, and almost like puts you away from the unknown? Kinda, you, kinda gives you this pretend moment that you, you think you know, because you have the protocol.

But you asked something else.

Audience member [off mic] No, I think you kinda answered it. I think it's a, I don't know – oh, sorry. [gets back on mic] I think it's this like idea of just like kind of, I don't

know, sometimes like I get a little bit in my head, because I read a lot of theory, but then I don't know how to talk about it, but I can know how to show it. And I think, like, seeing your practice, and like how you're taking like a very complex, like, ideas, and then like kinda playing with it, and putting it on its head, I think that's the answer itself. But yeah. but it's a joy!

Bozhkov No, yeah, you're right, and it becomes almost like a, some kind of form of materialization of something, so you can actually palpably grasp it to experience it, in a way. Even in a, a negative way, even in a, just to say that's not that. I actually thought that, I was looking for something else, but that, you know, that, that step of the kind of, at least in my work, I accumulate a lot of unnecessary turns, until something works. And often, very few work.

That, that's why with the cucumbers, I'm very interested in that kind of, almost like parallel, I don't want to, like, choose out of ten which one is actually the interesting, I'm not interested in that kind of categorization anymore. I want to, almost like a, kind of, that kind of, cast this kind of horizontal net, and then the reality will decide what is going to be caught there. It is definitely not linear. It's, it's more like some, not only rhizomatic but kind of network-dependent type of knowledge. Where very incongru, things that are not supposedly kind of related to each other start kind of gelling into these clusters of kind of meaning, in a way. Which you didn't know exist before. Yeah.

Audience member I have two questions. One is very clear and the other is a bit hazy, but I'm just gonna talk through it.

Bozhkov Hazy's great.

Audience member And they are also related. So the first question is, why Larry King? The second question is, it seems like there's an interest in the viral, in terms of three things that stick out for me, the Darth Vader piece, and how it becomes a meme, the bread in Istanbul, and there was something else, now it's missing from my question – I said hazy. Oh, Larry King. But it doesn't seem like you're – we're living in a culture now that is, with TikTok, that is desperate for the viral. The desperate viral, right? Millions of people, hundreds of millions of people, trying to make their little gestures become a sensation. It seems like when you were making those works that I just listed, maybe TikTok didn't even exist. Maybe Instagram didn't exist. So it doesn't seem like there was a desperate viral that you were feeling. Or even that you wanted to go viral, those gestures just did go viral.

Now that we're living in the desperate viral - which is a term I just came up with [laughter] - you've shifted, and I'm curious what you think about this kind of meme culture, in relation to those pieces, but also how now you're making a five-month opera for Mars, which would be very hard to turn into a meme or a sixteen, thirty-second video.

Bozhkov Mm.

Audience member So I'm just won, I'm just observing that.

Bozhkov Yeah. It's a great, actually, way of, of kind of focusing the, the, the conversation here, because I, indeed, I'm very interested in the viral, but not in a, in a kind of, in the, in the kind of effect of it, or how to say, the, the sort of the occurrence of it, or the event of the viral. I'm interested in the viral the way the, the sort of, or, maybe the parasite that way, too. I believe that art, artist could be a very, very productive kind of parasitical kind of element. Something that not only symbiotically exists, but something that actually, like a virus, kinda causes the infection to occur. Both Derrida and Heidegger talk about that idea of pharmakon, something that's a poison, but it's also potentially a cure, and how something like that actually functions – that, that's the reason, for me, that relationship to the, with the viral, has something to do with popular culture as well. That kind of something, or stereotypes, or clichés, things like that, that are kinda so ubiquitous that you almost don't see them. They are too large to comprehend. So you need some kind of infectious attitude, you need something that actually start gelling, and then all of a sudden, like, crystallizes, or turns the, the whole thing upside down. (02:00:16)

The thing with that, though – and I feel like here's to your question, you, you, it's not like something, you, you look at the world, and you choose among ten, and that's the one that is going to be the most viral. It doesn't work like that in my case. It's more like a, identifying big enough, like Darth Vader, for instance, has to do with, like, cleaning the Black Sea, which is one of the most polluted waters in the world. No other entity can clean it. At that time, like, you know, humans are not able yet, the technology doesn't exist. But a bad villain from, like, badass, kind of metaphorical, you know, can try. So there is something of that notion, where, where things are – and that's why things are not actually, I truly believe that Du Bois was talking about, that kind of membrane that separates the real from the metaphorical. It's actually very palpable, but it's also penetrable or navigable, navi, you know, you can, something can actually go on one side, on the other, cross back and forth. And that's a very charged territory, potentially. That's where the viral can become a real kind of, like a, all of a sudden, reaction for everybody, you know, it's kind of, that kind of, in a way, start connecting to the commons. Which we are losing.

Audience member [PHRASE UNCLEAR]

Bozhkov Say it in the mic, I can't, yeah, sorry.

Audience member Well, [NAME UNCLEAR] talks about that in relationship to poetry, and how, like, the poetic gesture can actually be the cause of the revolution.

Bozhkov Mmhmm.

Audience member So then thinking about poetry –

Bozhkov Yup.

Audience member -- and viral may be analogous.

But also, why Larry King? [laughter]

Bozhkov Mmhmm.

Audience member And not someone else?

Bozhkov Wow. The straight answer is, is kind of, he had an award, which is the largest in his field. [laughs] But, anyway [laughter] he's a, for me, a very particular kind of odd character. He brought, from radio, that kind of direct call into television. Like, for the first time you can actually, in the middle of him talking to Matthew Perry, you can call and ask a question, to the people who – that was unheard of.

So there is something about that type of – and also, the questions, or the way he kind of sustained those interviews were very kind of in a language that kind of felt accessible, and slightly idiotic, kind of very simple. But there would be like, he would invite some general from the Persian Gulf War, and the question is, so what happened today? [laughs] And then there will be, you know, some mega answer coming out of that, so, so that level of somebody who is able to work with the, with the most common denominator, daily, you know, and sustain that type of discourse. For me, it's almost like – I don't mean like in a social way, it's more like a, at that time, the film, what was the name of that film with, I'll tell you the name in a minute, *Science* came out. So, for me, Larry King is almost like an alien that way. Meaning somebody who is so, has such a kind of perspective on culture that almost as if from a distance. As if somebody came from another planet and, oh, humans are about this. [snaps] In three words. You know, so there's something about that, that, that attracts me really much. That dimension.

Audience member Hi. Thank you so much, I really enjoyed your lecture.

Bozhkov Thank you.

Audience member I have two questions, as well, but they're a little distinct, so maybe – and since you are taking notes, it's fine. In, in some of the projects, I noticed that it was almost as if it's like a joined family under a single last name, or like a cast of characters, sort of like there's like an interview, there's a scientist, there's your conversation, there's you in some form, there's an object that comes out of it as the exhibition, and so, it seems like that there's, there's like a limitlessness to that, and so I was wondering how you, where you cinch it, you know, and what is the kind of final set of things that becomes, or where does the project cease?

And then the second thing I was wondering, and I'm curious about, is your own curiosity, and so, I am interested in how you learn things, and what your, what do you read, and what your reading and listening habits are like, and have been through your life.

Bozhkov Starting from the last, I, I read across the spectrum. I'm very interested in many things.

But the first questions have to do with like how seemingly there is this kind of almost like a mutual, and I've been lucky, kind of all of a sudden coming across the, the right people maybe or whatever, maybe, but like a, the, I feel like the artist is a very unusual type of, I don't know what to call it, like a figure, within the culture at large. Both almost useless, and irrelevant, and at the same time, for people who pay attention, is the only hope, almost. Because of that, maybe the proximity to the unknown, I was talking before, but also that type of ability to kind of shapeshift, in a kind of, not, sort of, how to say, as almost like natural instinct. Like facing the world, and sort of like doing accordingly the, kind of based on the climate, or the microclimate, you know? So artists, I feel like, are particularly, if they're masters of anything, they're masters of that. In many mediums.

So I'm just thinking that those other people that end up like doing a project with an artist, they are smart enough or sensitive enough to sense that, to know that. So they actually know that, oh, those questions that cannot even ask when I am pursuing my, because in science, particularly, like, you get a huge grant, you have a time to pursue your initial hypothesis, and that's it. You know, in six months, you have to deliver. So, in the middle of that, if you come across something way more interesting, there is almost, in contemporary situations, it's almost hard to pursue that fork in the road. Artists will go exactly there [laughs] because, like, I never thought about this, let me try, you know? And there is something about that, not, not just experimental, it's like a truly, how to say, I think it's a type of knowledge, or, or, like very deep kind of embodied knowledge, or the way Donna Haraway might, might call it, like, situational knowledge, that comes from the hyper-specificity of the situation.

So I feel like people who are smart and, and kind of actually interested in what they do, they sense that, and they need the artist to be around. And this is how I'm talking in my small sort of collaborating kind of level. I'm talking culturally, people who, who know that they know that about art, that art is that territory, where you can still, you know, deeply kind of start again, everything.

So, I meandered, probably, in a completely different direction. Do you want to ask more of your question now, if you want to? Because I feel like I completely –

Audience member No no no –

Bozhkov -- bypassed the most important part of it.

Audience member We can, we can --

Bozhkov Okay. Ah, yeah. Welcome.

Audience member The question of mine was, it was answered, actually, with [NAME UNCLEAR], with your answer to [NAME UNCLEAR], because looking at the scientist video, and you crawling, and the, and the ballerina, right? It feels like there was a shade of randomness to those actions, right, but it feels like from the artist's perspective, those were certain, right? Those were, like, that was intention. Right? There was like, yeah, he

wanted the ballerina, and he wanted that Roomba, and he was crawling. That, that is as much defined as what the scientists are searching there, right? So like, we have this kind of weird respectability politics about disciplines –

Bozhkov Mmm.

Audience member -- where I feel the science is, we assign this value of knowing –

Bozhkov Mmm.

Audience member -- but they actually are trying to disprove the thing that they supposed to know. Right? While the artist is just trying to figure out this room. (02:09:59)

So, I mean I was saying, this question where it feels that things are being represented, they are not the thing that they, the intentions negate the presentation in a lot of these works, so, and maybe because a lot of us are mostly a roomful of artists, trying to do it through research or through like, you know, deep diving into techniques on craft or whatev, like, and I think there is a, where you stand in this uncertainty, right? Once you are dealing with people that don't know, in the case of scientists. Versus the certainty that an artist have, because you know what you wanted to do, and you are open to the – and you are open, right? You embrace the not knowing as still the art. Right? When the scientist doesn't get the answers, that is not the research, right - well, it's part of the research, but it's not the thing that they wanted. Right?

Bozhkov Yeah.

Audience member We, in some way, the uncertainty is the art in the case. But I wonder where you stand or how you feel about this. Again, it's something that you kind of talk about it with [NAME UNCLEAR], but where it enters.

Bozhkov One of the way I'm thinking about that is recently I read something about very clearly saying that philosophy is not wisdom, it's the love of wisdom. Basically, the way you're looking for, for something is the actual philosophical attitude. And, and I feel like a, it has something to do with that, that sort of like a, not necessarily trusting the process versus the final result of something, it's just more like a, there is something truly kind of, and I'm more realizing it with the later projects. The earlier ones, it still, that's why I kind of mix them up a little bit, because the earlier ones are kind of a bit more answered, to me, because of the distance of time. And the newer ones are not only closer to me now I am in the middle of them, but they also, they get more and more, the outer edges are kind of [laughing] like growing, you know. So I'm, I'm more and more interested in that type of microbial, you know, keep growing, sort of like a culture, that one creates through the work, than the work as a sort of fact, or as a, not only a [WORD UNCLEAR], but as a certain kind of statement, for instance.

And now, a little bit, at least in my own work, I start actually prioritizing work that, or enjoying more, work that actually I don't even know why that is, where is the work, in a

way. I mean, you very, I notice in our studio visits, like, often ask that very good question about like, but where is the art? Like, what are you doing with that issue, with that research, or whatever? So that's a question for me all the time, it's just more like, that answer, it's more about in the, kind of in the attitude. In the kind of, I'm almost like, in the hunger, kind of don't satisfy the hunger by blocking it with some kind of, you know, I'll just finish the subject as much as I can so I can get it done, and put it away. I don't want to put it away. And the more I grow into the work, I want to less put it away.

That's why Darth Vader, suddenly, done twenty-five years ago, got recycled through Elon Musk, and then suddenly a completely different entity from me. That, that piece. Not just using old work, it's more like a, it's like a weirdly, another type of DNA embedded in it. Of that kind of cultural, something came together between what Darth Vader means in different places, often means American culture in its greed, and its darkness, suddenly got folded into this contemporary kind of, I don't know what to call him, not villain, but certainly mega, I don't know, problem to the world [laughs], you know? So I need to ask the fortune teller one more time. I need a third fortune teller.

But, but there is something about that, that sort of – sorry, Rodrigo, it's too, your questions are vast, you know, we need to maybe go and get a drink for three days, [laughter] you know. But no, it's very, for me, that's a really deep question about like, in a way, why one is even an artist. Like, what in the, in that particular way of living one is actually – you know, there is some kind of a functioning, I don't know, something that's actually potentially could be applicable to so many other modes, in a way. And I'm very interesting in practicing it. Half curiosity, half unanswerable – sorry.

Audience member Hi, Daniel.

Bozhkov Ruth.

Audience member It is a pleasure to hear you. This is more like a feeling than a question, I don't know, in some of your videos, not in all of them, but in many of your projects, you have somebody, like, talking about an object, like sometimes in a very scientific way, but you have always this kind of closeup to the hands, to the object, and sometimes it doesn't matter anymore who is talking, who is the one producing the knowledge, who is the one talking about the things.

I was thinking a lot about the theater of desert, where you have like a big mouth talking, like a convert [?] that can walk. I like this kind of disassociation between the source of the knowledge, the person that's speaking, and the object, and sometimes the object is able to perform, and the person that is speaking doesn't matter anymore. So I don't know if that's something that –

Bozhkov Hm.

Audience member I see that as sort of a pattern in some of your work.

Bozhkov Yeah.

Audience member Mmhmm.

Bozhkov Well, I don't know if it's, this will go in that direction, but I'm often thinking about how the, in one of the early *Waiting for Godot* performances, the tree, made by Giacometti, is actually a character. It's not a prop, it's an actual, whatever the three people, and four on the stage, and the tree is like constant reminder that something is, you know, crooked, and not moving, but it's always there, like a kind of witness or something. So I'm often thinking about objects like that. They're sort of, they are not – and the way, also, Rodrigo is asking, the way I'm understanding the question, it's not that kind of final state of something, you work hard to make it functional, or beautiful or, you know, it's more like a, it has something to do with use, but it's not that kind of utilitarian – it, it's actually more about that kind of multiple usage. Can I use this as a hammer, and also to keep the door open, with the same type of, you know, which part of the hammer you can, you know, that level of multi-purpose functionality that suddenly turns the object from a, I don't know, that kind of like precluded function.

Painting sometimes is like that. We think that we know it because we have a history of looking at painting. And, actually, I love moments when you're almost like completely stuck, as if you, almost like stuck, almost like from the beginning, looking at something that seems so historically kind of entered into the trajectory. So how, how does that kind of closure, how can one un, unclosure it, open it up again? Is, is my sort of constant kind of – yeah.

Audience member My mind is just going in so many places, [Bozhkov laughs] Daniel, just, oh my god, you're right, this is like three days of, of having drinks and talking, but there's something that I, I think I picked up on, that, that I hadn't maybe paid attention to, or had not seen the connection, and I feel like – and I hope I can articulate it – but there is, you're talking about the place, somebody asked earlier about play, right, in the work. And when you answered them, I felt like you, you didn't answer that part of the question, but the more I thought about it, I think what I'm connecting is this delight in awareness that connects to care, and that it's care and awareness and tenderness. And I think I had never seen that, the, the video with the, that hummingbird on your –

Bozhkov Hummingbird, yeah.

Audience member Yeah, that's right.

Bozhkov Mmhmm.

Audience member And there's something in that, that there's such tenderness, and care that comes with true heightened awareness in the space of the unknown, that is where, like, knowing is expanded. And I think that delight, it's not so much the play, but that delight is where it can be just seen as play.

Bozhkov Wow.

Audience member Does that make any sense? [laughs]

Bozhkov Yeah. (02:19:57) Well, this goes back to this idea that, at least in my sort of awareness, it's like how little we know about the world, in a way. Because, not because we're not capable, but because like culturally we settle for something, kind of selling it short somehow. So for me it's, Ruth and I were talking today, with an amazing person who might come, or, I'm not sure if this summer, but Gabriel, and he devoted a lot of his time on this kind of, ways of paying attention. And we talked to other people about it as well, but like that kind of, we all live in an attention economy that constantly is fighting for your attention. So how much choice one has in that situation, to actually pay a, really pay attention, in, in multiple different ways, to what is happening.

Audience member But it comes through really this caring –

Bozhkov Yeah.

Audience member -- this tenderness, you know it's like –

Bozhkov Right.

Audience member -- that acme across now to me so strongly, as that is the place of true heightened awareness that goes into this more expansive knowing of the unknowing, yeah?

Bozhkov Right.

Audience member Mmhmm.

Bozhkov No, I agree. Care, in this case, that's why my, my thought about the opera, we're actually trying to understand that side of things. Not the, only the musical performance, or the, sort of the work part of it, but the care part of it. And care in this case is more like an expanded, expanding the scale of what you're able to pay attention. Meaning, not just bigger, but maybe smaller, or something, or, do you see what I mean?

Audience member Yeah, I do know –

Bozhkov With a different kind of –

Audience member -- yeah.

Bozhkov Often people talk about empathy being a kind of a medium, like a palpable, so how does that empathy, in a way, develops to attention? The more you see it, the more, the more you actually [laughs] you're connecting to it. So it's about the connection, ultimately. Not, not about that kind of extracting knowledge from something. Maybe. Yeah.

Wow. Say again? What? Yeah. [applause, cheering] Thank you.

END OF RECORDING