

## **An unresolved project, failed and reconsidered by the contingency of a flood**

### **Flood's Tidal-turn on Relevance; 2024 – 2002**

#### **Preface**

A project formatted and written on the Research Catalogue towards the end of 2024 as an artistic exposition combining text, images and media. Its inspiration was a flood that affected house and studio in early October 2024, curtailing a multimodal drawing-based project and causing extensive damage to existing finished artworks; otherwise suggesting a new continuation of practice conducive to an approach where its various iterations are a form of research.

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(Journal entry: 15th October, 2024)

#### **Flood**

The project referenced in this exposition fails on two basic counts. Firstly, the project was curtailed in an unresolved state as research only, and secondly—the cause of the termination—a major flood, the result of natural causes, literally lifted objects from the ground of my studio and destroyed a lot of my past work in the process. I write this opening statement as a journal entry on the 15<sup>th</sup> October during cleaning-up operations, although in a buoyant rather than defeated spirit, for what the trauma to the project brings forth that would otherwise have been unimagined, Figure 1.

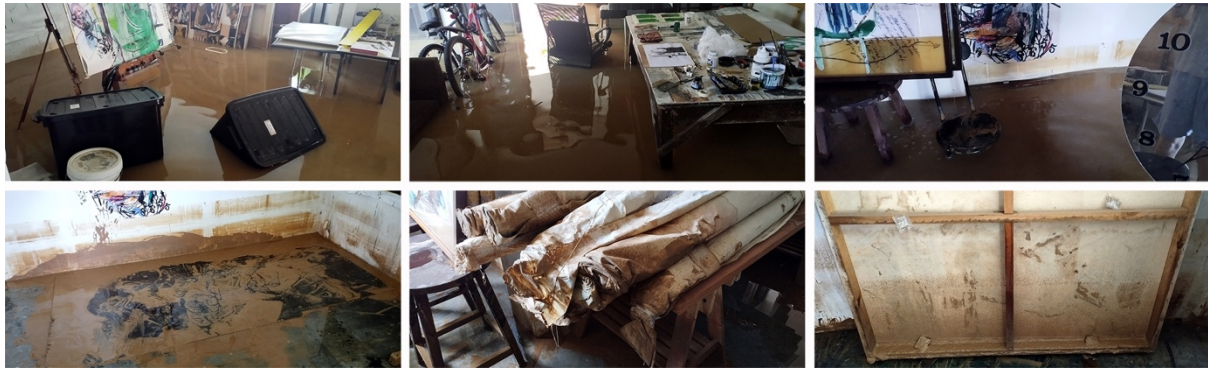


Figure 1: Photos of flood damage to the studio, October 2024 © Michael Croft

## Logical Square

Both the un-grounded and destroyed work is painting-and-drawing based, while the interest is in photographic, audio-visual and language-based recording of such material practice that sustains the work in its research basis. In fact, the project in question is a visualisation of an adaptation of Lacan's Logical Square to the possibility of formalising the human subject in the midst and as a subject of one's artistic practice.

## Hysteric

As an early iteration of the project, a published a paper that presents this adaptation of the Logical Square theoretically, and maps with it an adaptation of Lacan's Hysteric's Discourse to a generic idea of the artist as their own hysterical subject:

<https://psyart.org/diagrammatic-formatting-of-the-human-subject-in-and-as-artistic-research-lacans-logical-square-and-hysterics-discourse/>

The intervention of the flood in a project that is at this moment of time unresolved—failed in its format up to the very recent past but not without possibility of continuation, albeit in different terms—and was itself a moving entity up until its point of completion, is a cogent visual-material metaphor for a theorised hysterically-disposed human subject. In its wake, the flood has left art-based detritus and much trace-evidence of itself as indexical signifier. While the project in question was, before its present demise, the latest in a visual practice, the potentiality of the flood damage has drawn earlier work into the project, and what remains, as part of the

experimental conditions on which the exposition will be based, is how to articulate such potential.

## **Narrative/Fiction**

Expatriatism, human subject, flood as metaphor, are three terms with strong narrative connotations. The word *narrative* may be replaced with the word *fiction*, due to the occasional fictionalisation of oneself as subject in the practice through the use of an invented other or alter ego. How theory works in this instance is through the reading of academic material, guided towards such possibilities through coincidence and contingency that then shadow the artistic work for varying periods of time. Lacan's Seminar XIX, *...or Worse* (2018, English edition), for example, has been the main reference for the Logical Square. What came out of the storage room of the studio as part of cleaning up were a series of paintings dating back twenty-five years.

(24 November 2024)

According to Jacques Ranciere (2020, p.74), 'It is not enough to observe traces accurately to identify those who have left them. The relation of traces to their author has to be part of a total chain of causes and effects'. In this respect, and as the latest journal entry, the exposition of the project in a sense answers to this claim in and through its autobiographical, journalistic and unfinished basis.

## **Coming in...**

The polemical statement fronting the Logical Square visualisation is that one *has to* come into any potential artistic research with something, as indicated in a sole-surviving wall-based part of an installational drawing from the flood, Figure 2.



Figure 2: Studio shot of a large wall-mounted drawn painting, October 2024 © Michael Croft

What substantially renders speculative of the continuation of the project is to somehow respond positively to what has been brought forward from the past in the form of salvage.

### **Materials' autonomy**

The flood intervened at a moment in the project that amounted to several drawings and a large wall-mounted mixed-media piece, these as part of an installation that utilised at least fifty percent of the studio space. While nothing was washed away, a volume of orange-brown mud-laden water one metre in depth, symbolically and in material terms in the immediate aftermath, destroyed the project's purpose and motivation. All elements of the set-up had to be removed from their locations on walls and floor. While nothing of this installation was touched, as a material medium, especially in its semi-dry state bearing traditional analogy to sculptors' source of clay, the water had imposed far too much of what may be considered its autonomous will. That materials can assert their own autonomy may be an assumption acknowledged by many artists that oscillates with the imposition on materials of one's own determination, yet this material-born event had wrought and was still reeking havoc on vast swathes of its geographical location.



### **Other** (Lacanian term)

The Lacanian big Other, as it were, venting rage, depending on how one interprets the event and superposes a relatively familiar idea of personification of authority on a theoretical delusory, though necessary, abstract concept, of which there are many definitions of this in the Lacanian literature. Žižek (2008, p.304) for example, refers to '[...] the "big Other", the symbolic substance of our lives, is: a set of unwritten rules that effectively regulate our speech and acts [...]'. While there are gender differentiations of the Other, it may be automatic for a male subject to regard the Other as a *he*, and equate *him* with authority, even when human embodiments are female.

There are of course plenty of generic ideas of otherness in theory and literature, variously associated with difference, strangeness, and fear, which resonate as much personally as Lacan's particular complex theorisation. Edward Said (2003, p.56) refers to the Greek deity Dionysus for his being '[...] explicitly connected with his Asian origins and with the strangely threatening excesses of Oriental mysteries'. This resonates with the visual practice in question in the exposition, for how, in the past, S.E. Asian images had been *othered* from a Western perspective. Philip Ball (2023, p.268), referring to AI (Artificial Intelligence) in writing on the concept of mind, states: 'The distrust of AI is also a fear of the Other, of the unknown. Because we don't understand the AI's mind, we project onto it the worst that lurks in our own'. While Ball does not mention psychoanalytical theory in his treatise, he does refer to this common human trait of projection, which is an aspect of the conscious use of fictionisation in the present referenced project. The science fiction novelist Philip K. Dick (2011, p.118) infers an idea commensurate with the big Other manifesting as and through his main protagonist, the Christian bishop Timothy Archer, when he writes: 'All at once, he reddened; he drew himself up and the authority that lay deep in him rose to the surface: he changed as sat there from a tired, middle-aged man with personal problems into force itself, the force of conviction contrived into, formed into, words. "It is God himself working through us [...]"'.

Refer to external link for access to:

### Towards a working definition of *subject* and Other (Derrida reference)

While the above references are male gendered, the relevance of the Other may as much be argued from the female perspective. Meanwhile, a reason for attaching more general references to the above-introduced Lacanian theorisation of the Other is to offer in one of the paintings from 2010, retrieved from the studio's storage room, which bears handwritten across its surface a story of ambivalent connectivity between a dominant implied uncaring father and his negatively affected son. Amidst the handwriting, which in a sense moves across the canvas like ripples of tide, is a self-portrait image at age fifty-five, Figure 3.

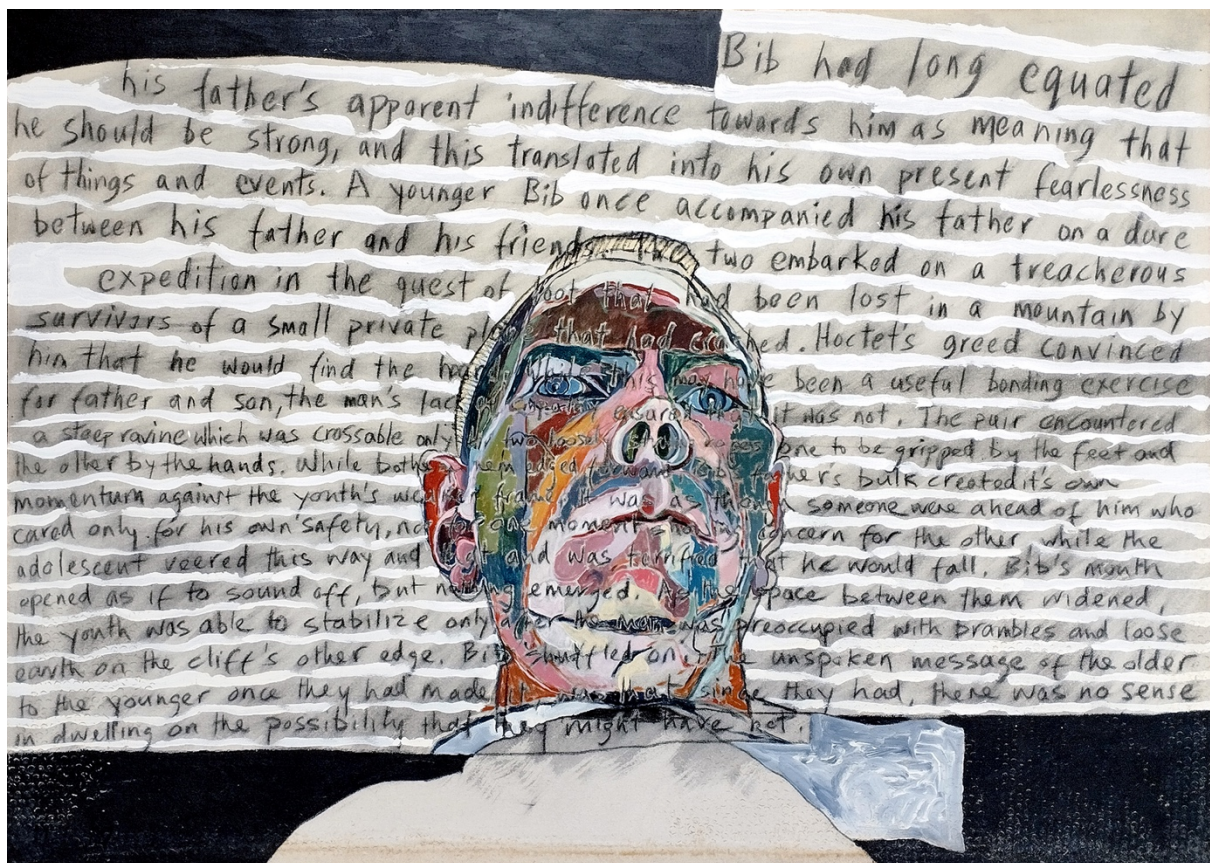


Figure 3: *Back and Forth*. Charcoal, oil, on canvas, 150 x 107cm, 2010 © Michael Croft

### The text handwritten on the painting

Bib had long equated his father's indifference as meaning that he should be strong, and this was transmuted into his own fearlessness of things and events. A younger Bib once

accompanied his father on a dare between him and his friends. The two embarked on a treacherous expedition in the quest of loot that had been lost in a mountain by survivors of a small private plane that had crashed. Hocket's greed convinced him that he would find the hoard. While this may have been a useful bonding exercise for father and son, the man's severe lack of empathy ensured that it was not. The pair encountered a steep ravine which was crossable only by two loosely strung ropes, one to be gripped by feet and the other by hands. While both of them edged forward, Bib's father's bulk created its own momentum against the youth's weaker frame. It was as though someone were ahead of him who cared for his own safety, not for one moment showing concern for the other, while the adolescent veered this way and that and was terrified that he would fall. Bib's mouth opened as if to sound off, but nothing emerged. As the space between them widened, the youth was able to stabilize only after the man was preoccupied with brambles and loose earth on the cliff's other edge. Bib edged on. The unspoken message of the older to the younger once Bib too had made it to the other side, was that since they had, there was no sense in dwelling on the idea that they might have not.

The above painting in itself would not have suggested relevance to the curtailed project, had it not been for a chance relationship noticed between the self-portrait image and two other current self-portrait images indicative of drawings done in connection with the pervading question of *coming in...*, Figure 4.



Figure 4: Studio shot, October 2024 © Michael Croft

(17 October 2024)

### Put another way

The project ongoing at the time of the flood was a still-unclear attempt to visualise Lacan's Logical Square from the point of view of coming into it at **possible**, lower-left corner, and coursing around it to **undecidable**, midway between **contingent** and **impossible**; variously italic and bold for these terms taken from Lacan (2018, p.186), Seminar XIX, *...or Worse*. My contention is that this is the route generically taken by artistic research, necessarily incomplete. However, the mechanics of presenting the contention were themselves still unclear. This did not feel like a problem, because I'd expected that such mechanics would resolve by negotiation of my intentions for them and the differences that they were now unexpectedly proposing. This I consider in any case to be a defining condition of artistic research. This is one aspect of this present exposition concerning failure: the project has failed in that its ongoing unresolved status as research has been curtailed before it reaches the position of the Logical Square at **undecidable**.

The second point of failure is in the manner of an assault; the flood. What I have to try to do is to turn the devastation around and approach it as a contingency that is, in a sense, a remonstrance of the big Other at its/his most punitive; at-once a diagonal relation/non-relation between **contingent** and **necessary** and a casting down in such terms from **necessary** to **possible**; a coming in with decisive new material. If the previous iteration of the project is now mere flotsam, how does the potential of the new medium/terms integrate it and bear it along?

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### Three video animations

The animations concern an installational drawing already under development, the voice recordings of which walk the viewer/listener around the work so far, visualised as a series of still photos. In addition, a second voice intervenes in the pauses in the first voice to make the point, firstly, that a certain degree of one's involvement always already exists – the second voice uses the term *inexists*. This second voice is supported by additional intervening photos as evidence of how the work has subsequently developed. The viewer/listener has to contend with these two montaged levels in time as if they had occurred simultaneously.

Refer to external links for access to three video animations:

***Coming in...to inexist***. Video animation, 09m. 51s., 2024 © Michael Croft

***Coming in... to inexist Part 2***. Video animation, 19m., 2024 © Michael Croft

***Coming in (5)***. Video animation, 06m. 44s., 2024 © Michael Croft

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### Developmental still images relating to the curtailed project

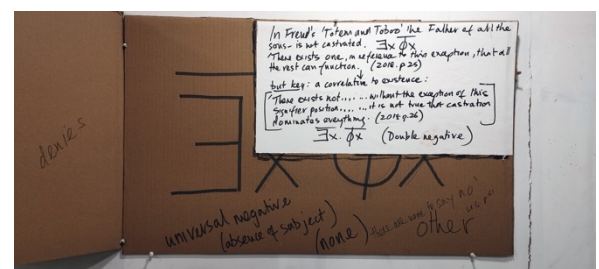
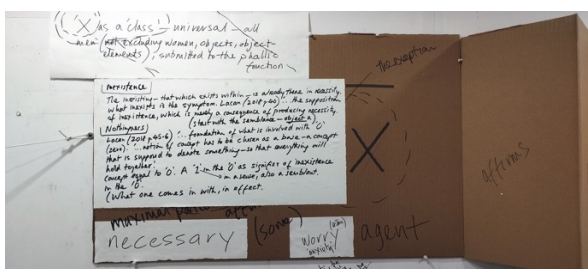
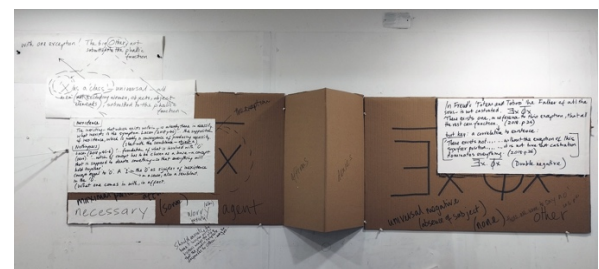
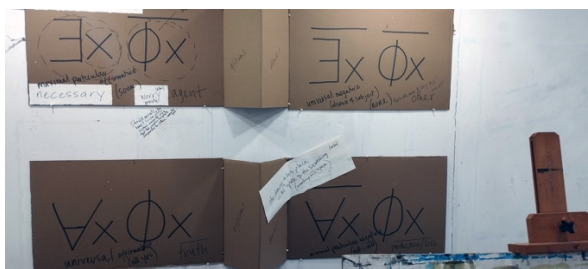
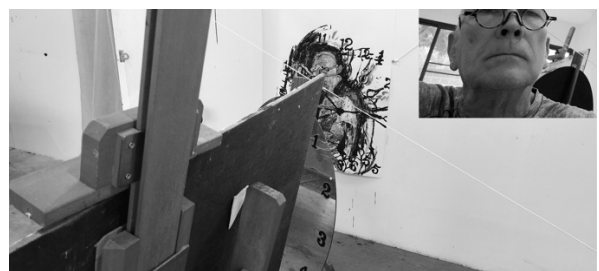
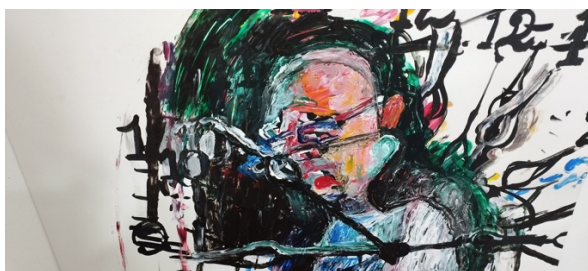
The key to the understanding of ***necessary*** in the Lacanian psychoanalytical sense is where Lacan (2018, p.39) states that '[...] it can only, before being produced, be presupposed as inexistent, which means *posed* as such in discourse', and then: 'In response to the question *what is necessity?* You cobble together your bricolage. Even if you don't know it, you respond in your day-to-day *bricolage*'.

One comes into one's life as more than simply a blank slate—*mother* and *womb* of which may be responsible for much of that. Such psychic material—the latter as also biological, and plenty of other biological and genetic material and experiential influences besides—underpins one's discourse, if not also from time to time becoming its declared subject. Then, amidst and in part due to such reverberations—

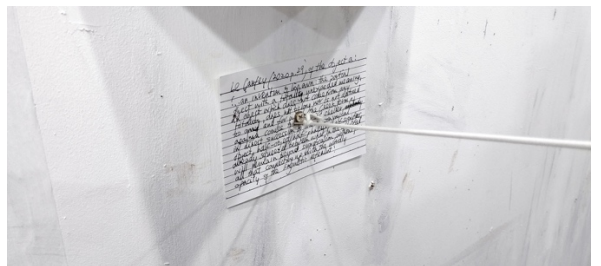
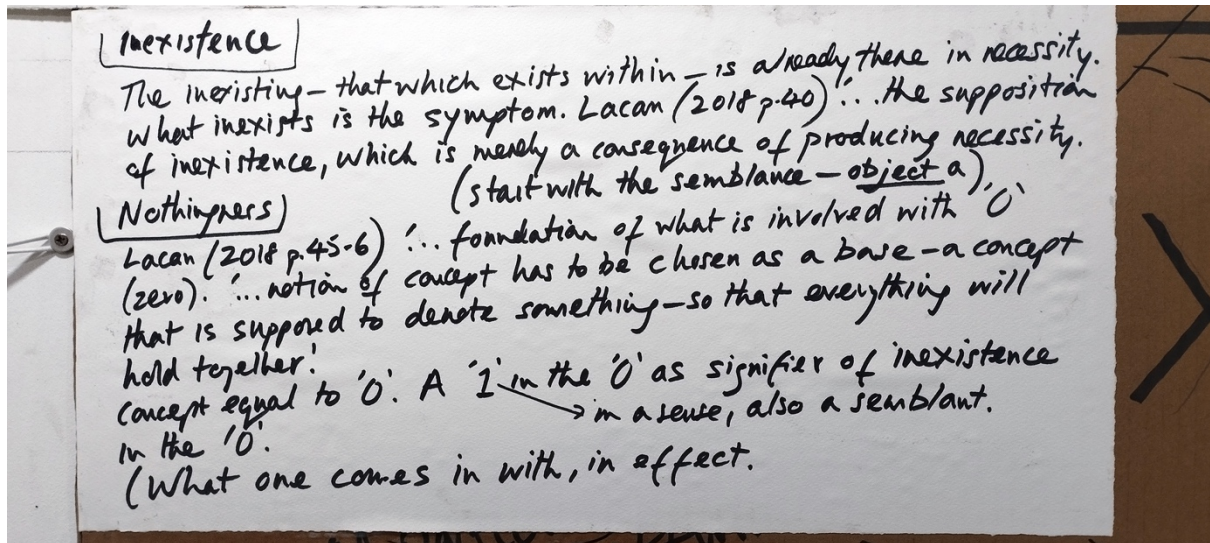


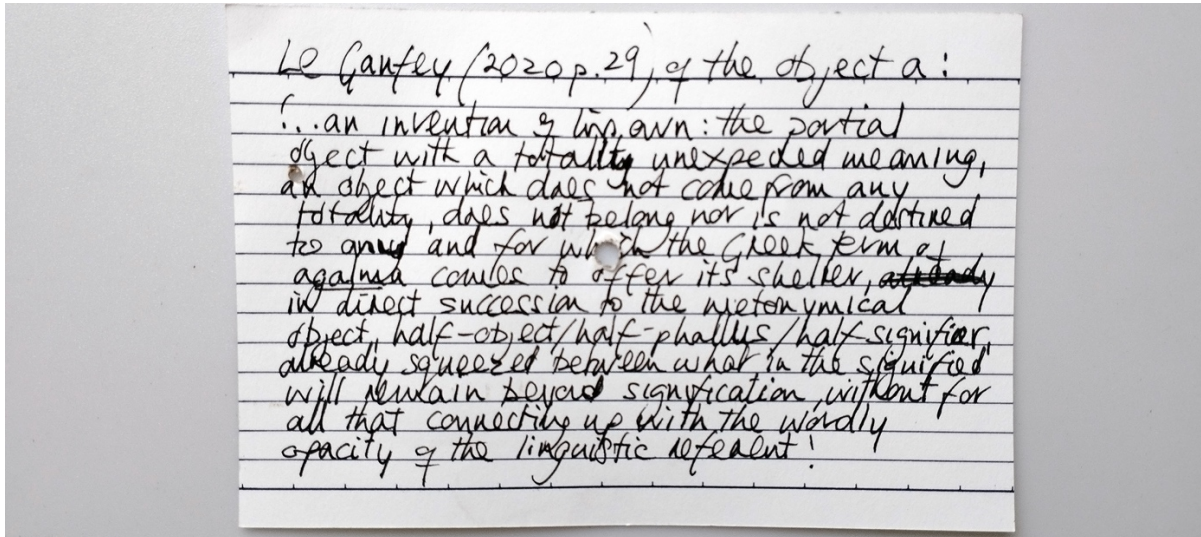
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—that which *inexists*—one makes a collage of one's life from whatever significant material is available.









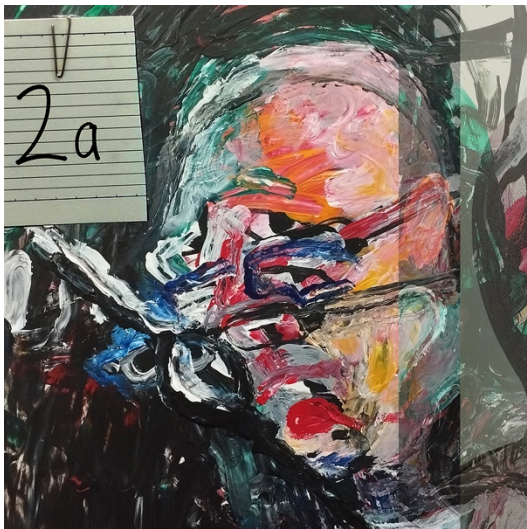
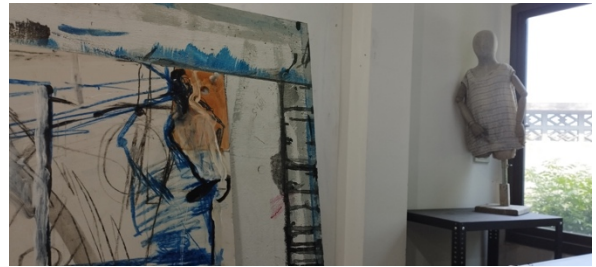
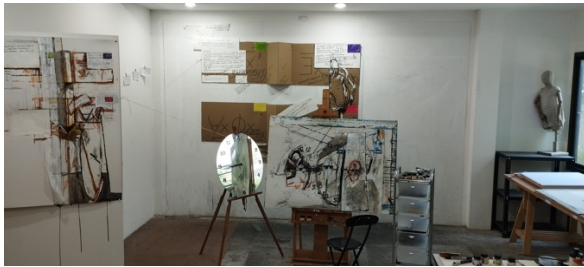
### The text handwritten on the index card

Le Gaufey (2020, p.29) refers to Lacan's invention of the *object a*, '[...] the portal object with a totally unexpected meaning, an object which does not come from any totality, does not belong nor is not destined to any [...]' As a 'portal', the *object a* would seem to offer access, yet not in any direct – or even visible or felt—sense; a kind of redolent blindness within certain objects, chosen completely individualistically and unconsciously. Could one gain the merest suspicion of such a presence within certain of one's choices, particularly pertaining to desire? As an artist, one might be accused of wishing to visualise *object/s a* too readily. The *object a* would then be as signifier in the latter's generic sense conferred on the visual-material, besides the linguistic, from semiotics, even though, as Le Gaufey continues: '[...] without for all that connecting up with the worldly opacity of the linguistic referent'.





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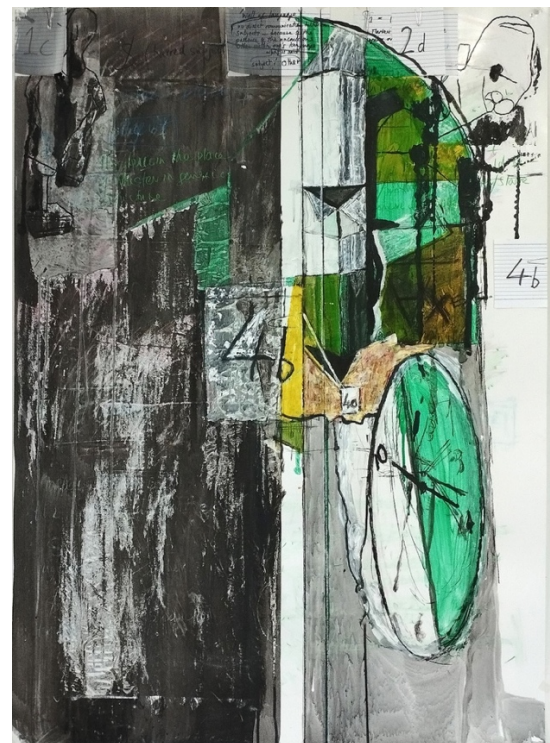


Figure 5 set: Photographs of the the installation, drawings, sketches, and details, various mediums and dimensions, that constitute the project prior to the flood in October 2024 © Michael Croft

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## The Diagonal (after the flood)

In any finish, even due to failure, one in a sense goes back to *start*.

On the adaptation of Lacan's Logical Square for purposes of explaining the artistic research process, *start*, as in completion even when one has failed, locates at **necessary**, top-left of the square, which is most likely the region of Lacan's Symbolic register where humankind resides—where one *has to* reside to stay sane—and is subject to an exception to the rule of symbolic phallic castration in the form of an illusionary, albeit delusionary, big Other.

(24 October, 2024)

Forget castration theory: the floodgates opened on 5th October for a potentially more violent interpretation than this research-based attempt at objectivity/criticality of a recent pivotal event. Suffice to indicate the origin of the *exception* implicit in the position **necessary**, out of regard for the originary theory – and reference Freud's Oedipus complex for that.

The big Other has in this instance struck by means of the flood sufficiently for the project to be finished at *failed*—more strongly termed than *incomplete*—placing its tacitly referenced human subject back in the position *normal*, from which the situation of an unresolved-suddenly-elevated-to-finished work to be considered as Real can be assessed, any finished work of which occupies the position **impossible**, top-right corner of the Logical Square.

With the subject situated to the left of this top horizontal axis of the square and the finished failed work to the right, the situation can be reviewed if or as needed. This is not, however, at this time the consideration so much as to suggest that the flood has come in as a wrathful gesture of the Other, but in a sense also as an ideal meting out



of change from the position where real participation may exist—*jouissance* of the Other—in Lacan's formulae; **contingent**, lower-right of the square. This is the set—some might say *infamously*, due to the controversy it has caused in the theory of sexual difference—that is the *not-all* of humans conforming to symbolic phallic castration, top-left of the square as **necessary**, with the exception of one who/that is not subject. Mainly the *other* position of woman—since all are subject to the rule of phallic castration, albeit in different terms according to the idea's confluence with biology—this may be considered where contingency oscillates par-excellence with **contingent** as such, which is also where artistic research oscillates as, itself, ever-active manner of contingency.

The two positions, **necessary**, top-left, and **contingent**, lower-right, are on a backward-slanting diagonal.

The argument within the project is that one comes into one's research lower left at **possible**, since one always comes in with something—the idea conveyed in the videos, and in the last visual iteration left-side of the larger wall-based work before the flood (See Figure 2, above).

**Possible** moves towards **contingent**, lower-right, before completing as still-unfinished although at its most conceptual stage at **undecidable**, midway between **contingent** and **impossible**, right vertical axis. Cut short, as it were, at **contingent**, in this case due to the flood, the failure can only be taken as a finish and reviewed from the position of **necessary**, which is in effect a diagonal axis of relation/non-relation. In Lacanian theory this is the position of everyone, irrespective of gender, subject to symbolic castration, with the exception of one, the big Other, who/that is assumed to be not, looking down towards the contingent relation of woman at **contingent** as *not-all* oscillating outside of the rule as a participatory Other *jouissance*, while from the latter position one looks back towards **necessary** for the Other as ideal. One's own best bloke, as it were, who has completed, and is now reviewing at best a successful operation that has resulted in a complete work. In this case, the operation was an enforced abort, the flood having wrought havoc on a fragile position of still-unresolved, due to which one retreats to **necessary** to review

one's remaining circumstances, the backward inflection of the diagonal eminently suiting one's case.

Refer to external link for access to:

***The Diagonal – of Lacan's Logical Square (after the flood)***

(18 October, 2024)

Chance viewing of a Moses documentary

**Tevah** (Hebrew for ark—Noah's Ark or the basket in which the baby Moses was set adrift)

Two websites, one stating that Tevah is a feminine noun, the other, from the Jewish Chronicle, stating that Tevah need not be taken literally, and can be a person, or a thing, as a bridge protecting one from a flood. In my case, the fact of having to address the question of keeping or disposing of an earlier set of work and what that work signifies for me, mapped with the theoretical interest in the Logical Square that underpinned the project curtailed by the flood, has drawn me particularly to the square's backslash-leaning diagonal (glyph) ( \ ). This is in effect, the Tevah; the relation/non-relation between **contingent** (feminine) and **necessary** (all humans, including objects and object-elements, subject to the phallic function, with the Other exception), connoted by a relation of the present curtailed, to an ostensibly unrelated past (circa 2006) brought forward towards a future prospect.

## ***Contingent***

The artistic process can feel awkward, as it were, especially at the level of research, when awkwardness may resonate with ***contingent***. Tomšič (2012, p.127) states that a consequence of Freud's theory of the psychodynamic unconscious was '[...] the introduction of contingency in the field of knowledge, an introduction that subverts the classical understanding of not only natural laws, but of lawful necessity as such'. This may result in a disputation or unevenness of evidence due to its intermingling with a level of unconscious knowledge that psychoanalysis seeks to articulate through addressing the human subject. Tomšič (2012, p.132) cites Catherine Malabou on two *types* of contingency: '[...] what Malabou calls "occurential contingency", which is the most common and spontaneous understanding of contingency [...]' and '[...] "gradual contingency"', where 'Thought adapts to the world without noticing the changes taking place behind its back, thereby overlooking contingency as such'. The latter idea suggests that the effects of contingency are generative in ways to which one can only react after whatever has been the contingent event. Instead of in-transmutable laws, Malabou, according to Tomšič (2012, p.132), '[...] proposes that we speak of the plasticity of laws as a different mode of their stability, one that is no longer grounded on the opposition between necessity and contingency (or between continuity and discontinuity)'. While on the Logical Square ***necessity*** and ***contingent*** are opposite, one occurring before the other in the logical movement, Malabou's claim, cited above, that contingency can be 'gradual' as well as 'occurential', suggests that contingency can be a continual factor of one's experience. If the *not-all* of the *x* of the proposition ***contingent*** is, in a reading in terms of artistic research, the intervention of materials and their elements and events unexpectedly, this is the *other* in a sense, of one's inferred *self & other* subjective dialogue, where *x* may indeed be considered object-elements.

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## Backslash forward

The Hebrew word *tevah* translates as ark, in the context of Noah's Ark and, to a lesser extent although more useful in the present context, the basket in which the infant Moses drifted down the Nile before being rescued by the pharaoh's daughter, as told in the Old Testament book of Exodus. Rabbi Aaron Bisno

(<https://jewishchronical.timesofisrael.com/weathering-lifes-storms-with-the-help-of-a-tevah>) suggests that a *tevah* can also be '[...] a means of weathering life's storms [...] For none of us can avoid the potentially destructive waters that swirl beneath and around the bridges we traverse'. While Bisno is extending the material ark outwards as a more symbolic metaphor, the reference draws a contingent event, in the present case the flood of the studio—including the house—towards a common material object as a container that both *bridges* (verb form) and implies that the event can be considered a mobile passage, an opportunity from a curtailed and hence failed project towards a new derivation that is characteristically unresolved, yet arguably more open-ended in one's expectations of it.

The following sketch suggests the potential of the *tevah* as a basket that orientates to the ***contingent*** side of below midway between the backslash diagonal ***necessary/contingent, contingent/necessary***. The flood has come up to meet it, as it were, simultaneously brought in as a curtailment of the project in and as the Lacanian Real; that which is ineffable and outside of rational explanation, Figure 6.

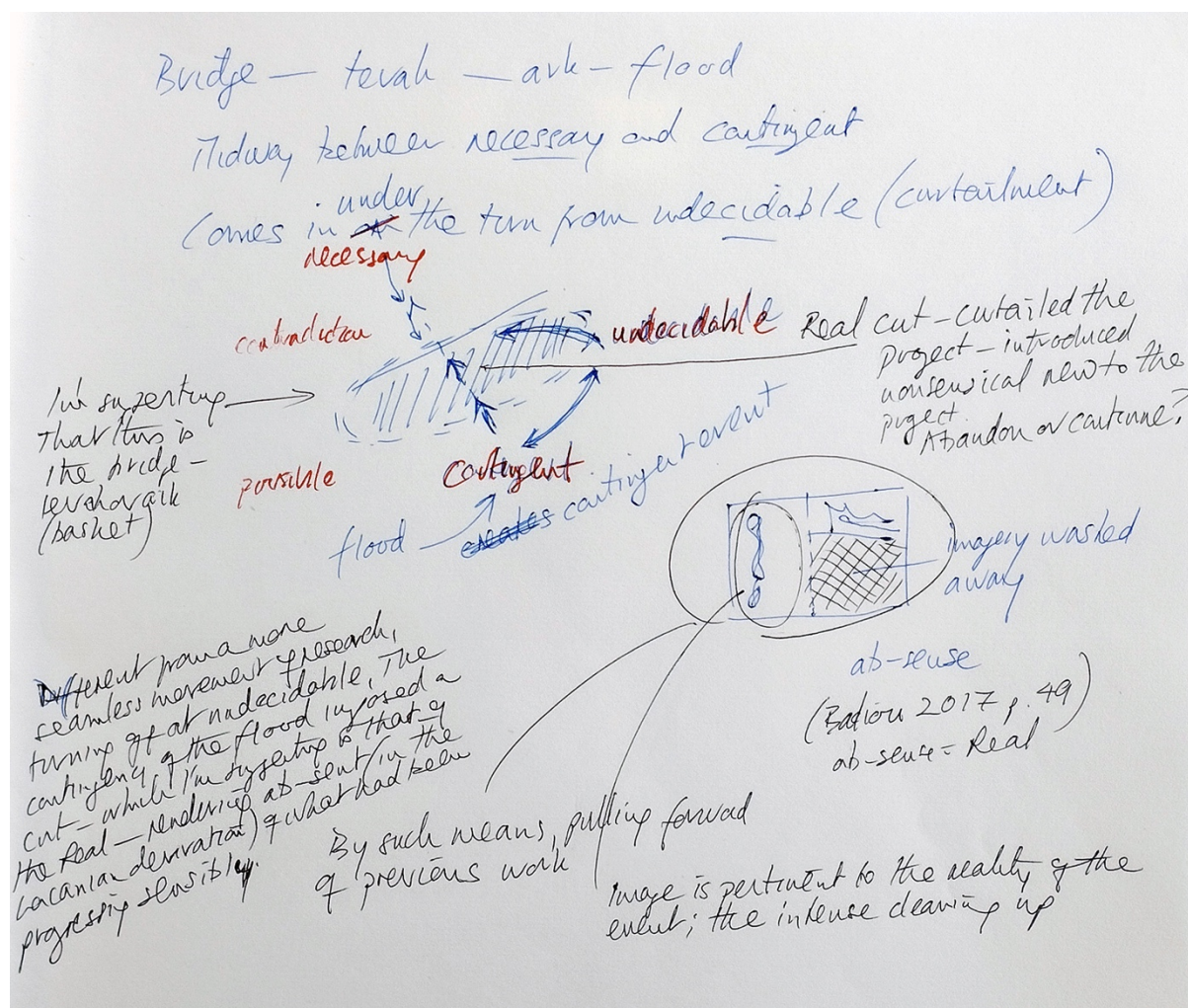


Figure 6: Detail of a sketch in an A4 notebook, October 2024 © Michael Croft

While the Lacanian Real, of his three psychic structural registers Imaginary, Symbolic, Real, is ineffable, it is not nonsense. According to the philosopher Alain Badiou (2017, p.49), '[...] the real may be defined as *sense qua ab-sense*. The real is ab-sense, hence absence of sense, which obviously implies that there is such a thing as sense'. A little prior to the above quote, Badiou (2017, p.48) has clarified that Lacan replaces '[...] the critique of meaning, or sense, in favour of knowledge in the real'. The conviction that one can move forward both despite and within the event of the flood is to a large extent driven by the supposition of efficacy of unconscious knowledge, knowledge within though ordinarily unknown to oneself, which, arguably, finds relevance in ostensibly random contingencies that often disrupt and overturn one's sense of stability.



Of the paintings rescued in whole or in part from the flood—in *part*, due to the extent of degradation of works' imagery—a single small image serves the conjoined purpose of the partial absencing of an image poised in a moment of domestic mopping, a small dog following—serves to trigger the bringing forward of a small set of related work from 2002, Figure 7a/b.



Figure 7a/b: *Mopping image 4*. Pigmented glue size, oil paint, gold leaf, sand & glue on canvas, 98 x 72.5cm, 2000 + digitised sketch, variable dimensions © Michael Croft

The abiding allusion of the early 2000s' work is to the burgandy red of certain Asian temple imagery, hence also the gold leaf and simulated fresco surface of the painting shown as Figure 7a, above. While the flood water washed away the emulsion of the right-side image—digitised sketch Figure 7b—it only partially relieved the sand from its latex binding medium. The water also lifted a layer or two of the burgundy-pigmented glue size, but has not affected the oil paint comprising the figure. The result, far from being destructive, keys into the concept of the work even down to the left-side implied domestic task. In the freehand sketch explanation, Figure 6, above, it is stated: 'Image is pertinent to the reality of the event; the intense cleaning up'.



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Images abound in the previous decade's work, variously with the dryness of fresco and a shimmering iridescence, both of which affirm surface in contradistinction to spatial illusion, Figure 8a/b/c.



Figure 8a/b/c: Mopping images 1/2/3. Pigmented glue size, acrylic, gold leaf on canvas, 52 x 72.5 respectively, 2000 © Michael Croft

The reader may notice plenty of reference to *surface*, and it has been within the nature of the flood to leave traces and stains of its presence behind, Figure 9a/b/c/d/e/f.



Figure 9a/b/c/d/e/f: Photos of devastation from the flood © Michael Croft

The latter can be so like painting, yet read more cogently as signifier traces of flood water than paint that professes a conscience, as it were, to be about something other than itself.

Such traces shown in the Figure 9 set, however, draw out of the painting—literally, in the case of that shown as Figure 7a—its raw presence; the ab-sense, in Lacanian terms, that alludes to the sense that it may not have had, or have the potential to have, in its own absense. According to Badiou (2017, p.50), '[...] one of the synonyms for ab-sense in Lacan's text is "ab-sex sense". "Ab-sex sense" is a formula, the formula expressing that there's no such thing as a sexual relationship'. This is also Lacan's purpose concerning the axis between **necessary** and **contingent**; that there can be no such thing as a sexual relationship. How to get into this, however, is the crucial question, where the axis may be considered a relationship in its very non-relationship, or perhaps the striking of a fragile balance; diagrammatically sketched in Figure 6, above, where it is struck through by a projection of **undecidable** and errs towards caution by favouring the lower side of the division at **contingent**. The contention is that human relationships are ridden with contingency, both eventual and naturally recurring, the flood and whatever are known to have been its personal consequences being a case in point.

(28th October, 2024)

**This is the still-unresolved question again opened up by contingent circumstances—unresolvable in essence, I might suggest: how to articulate the fragile balance between relationship and non-relationship through doing, rather than theorising, and to show, rather than such a quandary being implicit. The flood has offered a rush that's kicked the question into the midst of its own precariousness.**

Interesting in relation to the absence of meaning in visual materiality that is reduced to its signifier basis only, in that it is not necessarily without carnal connotations but these do not succeed in conveying the message—let alone a unificatory one—that this is what it is about. Painting is like this: to appropriate a term from Žižek (2008, p.108, citing Lacan) concerning one's 'fundamental fantasy' that is '[...] inaccessible

to my conscious experience', it purports to being "'objectively subjective'", yet its proper domain is that of the Real, **impossible**, top-right of the Logical Square.

A new state of the surviving large wall-based work subsequent to the flood, though doubted finished, yet in terms of objectifying the fantasy it wavers like the elasticated strings stemming from the work's centre that might be stretched taut but instead hang listless. It is a possibility as **possible**, and the right-side mannequin has been further formed from a contingent of the flipside of a cutting out in order to be let through a top layer of turned muddied canvas, Figure 10.



Figure 10: *Logical Square*, interim state. Acrylic, oil paint, mixed-media on canvas, 2024

© Michael Croft

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(28 October 2024)

I think of the relationships of surfaces and materials, and aspects of the general location in which the work exists—or used to! The same location, due to a natural event, no doubt coerced by human developmental initiatives, yeilded driftwood that has on this occasion attached itself in clusters to the horizontal wires of a fence, below and up to the height of the flood water. I bring this into the conversation to orientate the idea of location specifically with the event that has curtailed the project that I brought into the present exposition—since one always comes in with something! (Figure 11)



Figure 11: Photo + photo insert of driftwood after the flood, in the author's neighbourhood, 2024 © Michael Croft

(28 October 2024)

This is perhaps the key; the strategic formal exercise of ambivalence. It's what makes the flood devastation excruciating; the fact that it's thrown up interesting material. This image of pencils drying in the sun against striations of mud splashed on a window, or the way that marker pen on glass has been partly washed away to leave just the

indexicality of text, or a kind of asemic writing, Figure 12a/b.



Figure 12a/b: Photos of a set of newly washed pencils drying, and flood damage to the in front and behind of a drawing behind and on glass, October, 2024 © Michael Croft

(29 October 2024)

Coming in at **possible** coming in with subterfuge, deliberately no comma: is that it? Semicolons are more of a stoppage within the continuum, while the idea continues to move. It just occurs to me that subterfuge is a kind of avoidance, not of something that should be kept hidden, in this instance, but of that of one's obligation towards meaning in language as communication. The position **necessary** does not cut it; neither fulfils the 'symbolic Law' (Žižek, 2008, p.306) in the way one may assume it's supposed to, nor sufficiently allows one to play with one's symptom because, as Žižek (2008, p.306) also points out, in the later theory of Lacan the symbolic Law is itself just a symptom, albeit '(the most sufficient and established)'. I've been trying to get away from the latter, only to arrive somewhere where one is equally subject, yet which offers a greater degree of difference from where I'm coming from; a location kept sufficiently less familiar – keep it generic – despite one's growing knowledge of and acceptance. Rather than trying to play with one's symptom within what is itself a symptom, I've been looking for a space where sheer difference more cogently keys into one's symptom. This is where ambivalence is an operative condition that finds



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suitable iconography and working methods, geographically and psychically. To name either of the latter adverbs would be to kill stone dead the life-bearing potential of the flood, in this sense.

31 October 2024)

My work from s decade ago does oscillate with images that look like folk art, Figure 13.



Figure 13: *Figure in Landscape*. Reflective synthetic gold-threaded fabric on orange ground, oil paint, sand, latex glue, on canvas, 210 x 126cm © Michael Croft

In this example, space is veiled by artificial gold-threaded cloth that shimmers from reflected light, left-side, and sand encrusting, right-side, both of which are now crossed by a floodwater effacing that has removed and dis-coloured top layers of paint, lower-third. How does one justify this lower-third subtractive addition? Accept as contingent interference; specifically, indeed with some justification, a factitious



returning of the work to a referential origin in decaying walls.

(17 January 2025)

A journal inclusion these months later; a photo from the studio upheaval after the flood has given me a multiple chance relationship, or what might be considered a contingent event. As I've earlier suggested, contingency can key into the artistic process that may already feel awkward. To adapt the idea of Malabou, already cited above, from a text by Tomšič: 'gradual contingency' that will have been occurring without notice through a continuum of natural circumstances and my relatively automatic interventions has thrown up, almost literally, an example of 'occurential contingency'. I key into this chance configuration these months later with some enthusiasm, as the mannequin mimics and embodies the figure in the painting, the sticker on the inside base of the metal bookend complements the label worn by the mannequin, and the upturned legs of the stool substitute as stems of the painted plant painted figure. The small red clamps either side of the stool and the bookend metaphorically, albeit very discreetly, secure the potential of what has here contingently arisen, Figure 14.



Figure 14: Painting detail, tabletop elements, and a mannequin. 2024 © Michael Croft

(30 October 2024)

Reading just today, Zizek (2008, p.68), in the context of *sides* that he takes between woman and how she is viewed in and as '[...] a male fantasy', states: 'Man escapes the inconsistency of his desire by establishing a line of separation between the phallic domain – let's call it simply the domain of sexual enjoyment, the relationship to a sexual partner – and the non-phallic – let's say the domain of non-sexual public activity'. While I've been adapting Lacan's Logical Square to a proposal of how artistic research runs as an experiential process, the relationship of the latter to Lacan's purpose of the square in his argument that there's no such thing as a sexual relationship is still not at all clear. I do know that **contingent**, the pivotal corner of my own contention, is a position of woman as *not-all*—to use Lacan's term.

Zizek's own idea (2008, p.67) is that the 'not-all' is meant as the limit of the phallic function, the feminine of which has come to represent '[...] this structure of the limit as such', beyond which – the idea of an 'eternal feminine', is but 'male fantasy projections'. This based on a reading of

Guy Le Gaufey (2020) on the Logical Square. However, of course I am myself male, can hardly reflect on my male partner as if feminine gender—while I'm very curious as to the possibility of a feminine *other* kind of language, perhaps as suggested in the writings of author/theorists such as Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray. What I stay with is an intuition, based on experience, that contingent occurrence and events as and when they intervene in the artistic research process have a kind of untethered sense to them, unconstrained by meaning-orientated—what one might call symbolic—thinking most commensurate with **necessary**, top-left corner of the Logical Square, which is the very domain of the phallic function in the theory.

Back to the distinction Zizek makes, above, between 'sexual enjoyment' and 'non-sexual public activity', I'd suggest that artistic practice oscillates between the two but at the level of contingency in the research process, while it cannot necessarily be argued as sexual, is much less likely to be in the public domain.

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## A way forward

(31 October 2024)

These weeks later, the flood has been a *bastard*—to use an expletive—but because it is *inviolable*; in no need of a father and even without evidence of the big Other's constitutional *lack*. Not just the cleaning-up operations, which have been difficult enough, but a brutal disruption of the continuity of the project up to that point. I've sketched it as topographically different to my contention of how the artistic research process maps with Lacan's Logical Square. The flood has come in by a different route, drawing me along with it. It's come in as an Other, an exception, not merely as

an albeit brutal contingency but also as a lambasting of one's ability to reason and stay on top of events. The flood comes in as all things possible at **possible**, lower-left of the square, but sweeps through the symbolically determined **necessary**, top-left of the square as an **impossible**. In Lacanian terms it's an Other to the common man (humankind), but demonstrates its beligerence to this *rational* idea—or as good as—and orientates at/as **impossible**; a wholesale defiance of reason! If the research basis of the previous now-curtailed project was heading potentially for **undecidable**, appropriately to the finish of research as such, this has now been *shafted* by the imposition of **impossible**, the Real, in and as what the flood has left in its wake, Figure 15.

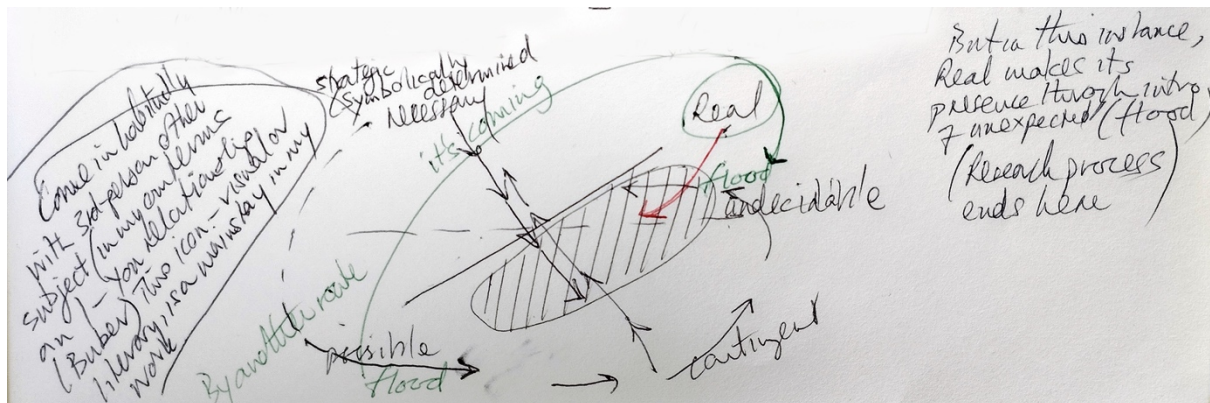


Figure 15: Sketch note at the base of an A5 notebook, October 2024 © Michael Croft

It's a dynamic movement, without hesitation; as green on the sketch (Figure 15, above): it lambasts through, and in/as its **impossible** status, the Real, it centres in the arena that had up until then been an ongoing dialogue, a negotiation, between oneself as subject and one's ostensible and extricable interests, in this case in the very thing, the Logical Square, that it has been my contention articulates the self-same research process in generic terms.



(29 November 2024)

**Trigger (synced word as fulcrum)**

A video animation that concerns two superposed monologues; the first as a paraphrasing of a pre-written text on questions pertaining to the exposition, the second a re-considered paraphrasing of the same text several days later.

The monologues are supported by visual images that variously emphasise points made and most easily heard in each respective layer.

While the video is of the time, early October, 2024, of the referenced flood, it oscillates between present and past visual work and their sources of reference, and between language both spoken and written and their differences.

Refer to external links for a four-part video animation:

**Trigger (synced word as fulcrum)**

**Email from artist, academic and friend Derek Pigrum, 7th February 2025**

*'I watched all four videos and and was fascinated by the way you integrated or rather overlaid the disc on the wall above the stain caused by the flood into various forms. Having watched all four I thought that visually the first one should have been the last. The way the stain gradually merged into an image of your face covered and surrounded by hand written text was very impressive and recalled the work of some Art Brut artists I have read about. In the Third Video you mention the Hebrew word tevah. This word has a variety of meanings one of which is the ark that rescued Noah from the flood. I suggest you look up the various meanings one of which in modern Hebrew is 'word'[.....]*

*I was impressed by the overlays of voice and image where one erased the other in slow succession. I very much liked the way you worked with the instability of identification that at the same time seemed to struggle to stabilise and fix personal ownership but ended up merging into an altered self and an altered studio and the work therein due to the effects of the*

*flood. I see the flood as disturbing and refiguring the self, the subject -effects in the overlay of voice and text that suggests partial recollection. I realise myself in my 53 episodes that there is no canonical way to represent our past. The quest to impose some kind of order or structure for both of us in our very different ways is an attempt to grasp at whatever wreckage is floating past in order to stay afloat. Your real achievement in the videos is to have put it into a series of sliding frames where one seeps into the other like the water that seeped into your folder of drawings. In this way you cancel out the gaps that would naturally occur in recall or temporal succession and attempt to connect events from a number of vantage points or perspectives—written and spoken reflection and images. The flood itself seems to have swept away the dams of memory, but at the same time the contiguity of these perspectives suggests a framework that has arisen from the unconscious reconfigured in in space and time.'*

(23 March 2025)

While a few months have now elapsed, the question of the flood pervades, if not its physical presence. Around the district there is still some evidence of the tidal line on outside walls and surfaces, which appears to vary in height, although of course that's due to differing heights of the ground. How this translates into a drawing and painting-based practice might concern one's eye-level, depending whether standing or sitting in relation to the work. While this is an obvious enough analogy, the implication is of the human body rising and lowering, in this instance determined by the move between standing at the central large work, *Logical Square*, and the drawing on the left, and sitting at the drawing on the right, Figure 16.



Figure 16: Studio view of work in progress, 23rd March, 2025 © Michael Croft

Also, of interest in this respect, is the fact that the yellow-stained rectangle seen in perspective in *Logical Square*—actually a representation of a wooden frame viewable in the circular clock mirror to the right of the right-hand drawing but resting against the left-hand wall further along, outside the frame of Figure 16—conforms to my eye-level when seated. *Logical Square* therefore contains two eye-levels, the space of which tacitly references two different human heights, Figure 17.



Figure 17: *Logical Square, new interim state*. Acrylic, oil paint, mixed-media on canvas, 2025 © Michael Croft

The vanishing-point determined by the frame seen in perspective is below the containing work's eye-level, the latter of which happens to be a little above the middle of Logical Square's square format, which also roughly aligns with a horizontal edge of attached cardboard. The most likely indication of the square's own vanishing-point/eye-level would be the mid-point where the diagonals intersect. Not only is the basis of the sketch diagram, Figure 15, above, which is a diagram now mostly hidden in *Logical Square*, but these present-referenced newer initiatives also happen to confer with the sketch diagram's iteration.



The backslash diagonal ranges between **contingent**, lower right, and **necessary**, above left, each corner cajoling with the other in a dynamic of at-once relation and non-relation. Refer back to the section **The Diagonal (after the flood)**, which is a discussion of how the Lacanian theory pertaining to the square may also be adapted as comment on artistic research as an experiential process. However, the configuration of *Logical Square*, Figure 17, above, gives obvious emphasis to the lower half of the square; to the area **possible** (lower-left corner), **contingent** (lower-right corner), **object a**, barely legible on a filing-card attached midway of the lower horizontal axis, and **undecidable**, just legible on a filing-card midway of the right-hand vertical axis, of Lacan's descriptors, both now submerged in the blue circle. This space between the two eye-levels is in a sense the arena in which artistic research orients as an experiential process. **Contingent**, and all that this term, redolent with implications for creativity, pushes up from the lower-right corner, and what is brought around and into it in terms of a movement that is affected by **object/s a** along the way, causing the region to swell out and achieve consequence. In the aforementioned previous section, I'd used the metaphor of the *tevah*, or, more generically, basket, in relation to the flood (reference to Rabbi Aaron Bisno, above), a means of weatherment of one's storms. This area that I'm suggesting is of consequence, is first indicated by a dashed blue oval in a sketch diagram of an earlier state of *Logical Square*, Figure 18a, and is now painted in, in flat blue, in a diagram of the work in its present state, Figure 17, above, Figure 18b and Figure 19.

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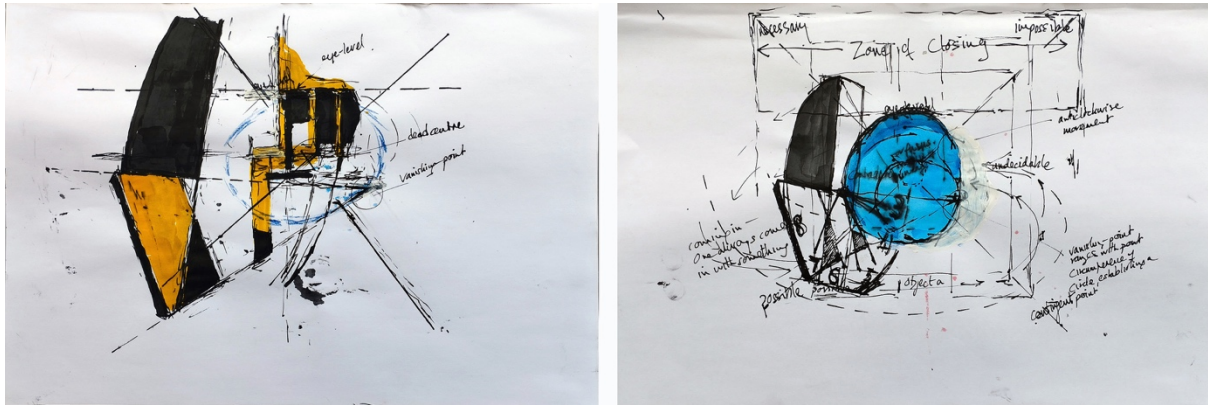


Figure 18a/b: Sketch diagrams. Ink, crayon, acrylic paint on paper, 37.5 x 26cm respectively, 2025 © Michael Croft

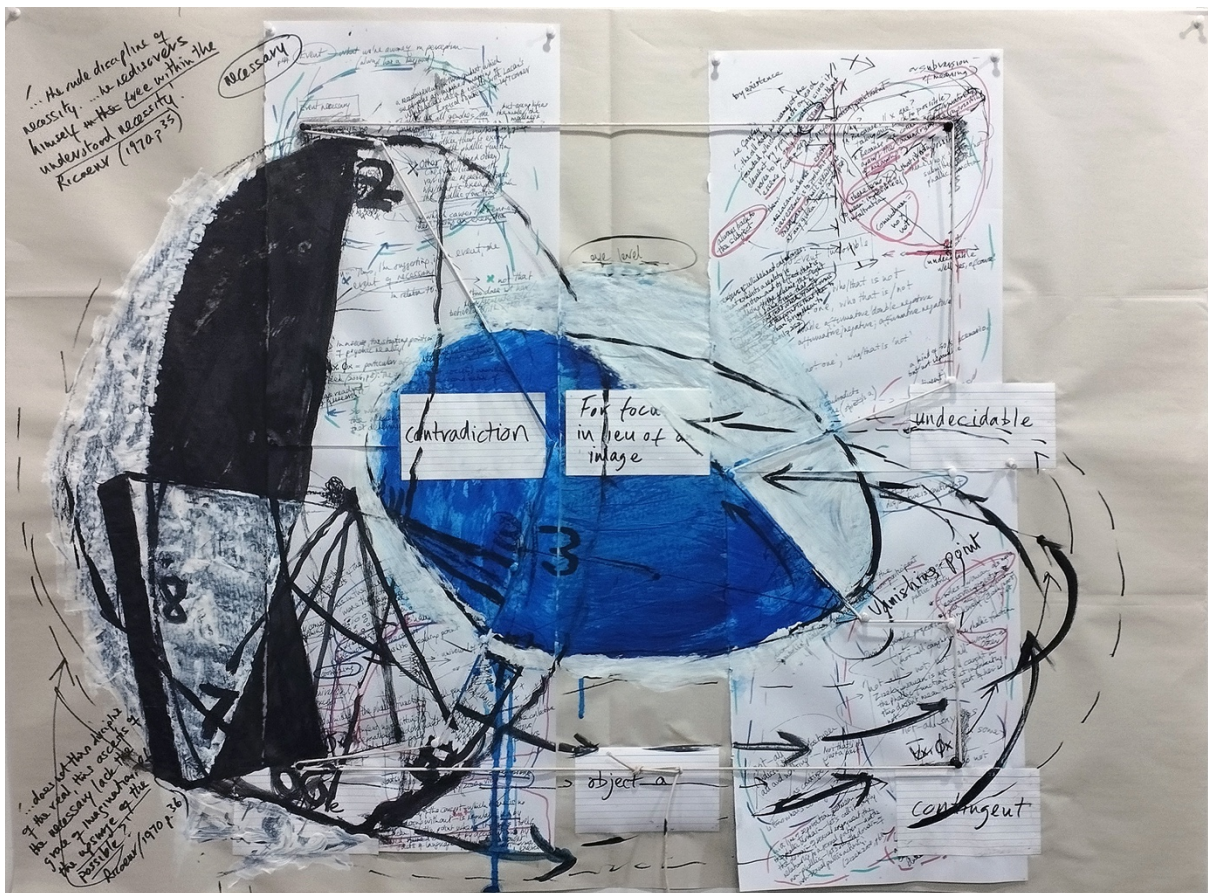


Figure 19: Sketch diagram. Ink, crayon, acrylic paint, paper collage, elasticated string, 104 x 78cm, 2025 © Michael Croft

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