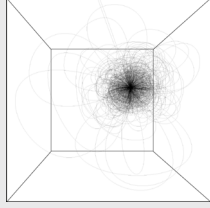


# Confusion

# Matrix

## *Oliver Hull*



Goolugatup Heathcote acknowledges the Bibbulmun people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we stand and pay respect to the Whadjuk people, and Elders past, present, future. Sovereignty was never ceded.

*According to the coastline paradox, the more accurately you measure something, the larger it gets. Computers can't generate their own random numbers, for this they need something outside of themselves. No matter how much data we have, it only ever makes sense to predict the weather two weeks in advance. The human brain and weather prediction algorithms both use random noise to model the unpredictability of turbulent and complex systems - the world is noisy, some call this chaos! Maybe it's called living life, living with infinite resolution and possibility.*

*Confusion Matrix* is an exhibition composed of a computer controlled by the condensation of water inside an acrylic cube, and an assemblage of components from windchimes, precision automated manufacturing, mood rings, antennas, and the cooling systems of personal gaming computers. It is about the ways in which we process the world through representations and measurements, and the limits where these technologies break down.

Oliver Hull would like to acknowledge  
Alex Tate for coding. David Attwood for feedback.  
Katie Paine for writing. Emma Buswell for mood ring advice.  
Guy Loudon for long phone calls.  
Jack Wansbrough for the secret 3rd work.  
and Celeste Njoo for ongoing support.  
and all windchime enthusiasts world-wide.

- Oli

# GOOLUGATUP

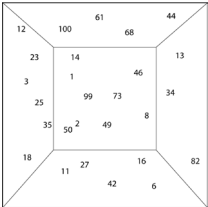


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Wringing water from a stone, blood from a turnip  
\*

In 1620, the Dutch inventor Cornelius Drebbel, funded by England's King James I, is credited with building a 'diving boat': the first navigable submarine with which he supposedly traversed the River Thames at a depth of four meters. This submersible was made of leather stretched over a wooden frame. In illustrations from the time, the vessel is depicted as looking something like a swollen porpoise, propelled through the river with oars. Rumour has it that King James himself even joined Drebbel for the descent. However, aside from eyewitness accounts, there are no plans or schematics for this structure; its development was deemed a royal military secret, and documentation of its construction has since been lost to time. We have no tangible proof that such a strange undertaking took place: no representation of how the submarine may have functioned - nor accounts of what it was like to sit, submerged beneath the frigid rapids. What watery aquatic visions might have been encountered on this maiden voyage? Without evidence as a framework for understanding, Drebbel's diving boat exists primarily as a speculative object, a historical fiction.<sup>1</sup>



Today, despite extraordinary developments in submarine technology, the majority of the ocean's remote depths remain a mystery, the deepest abysses, unseen by human eyes. Numerous arenas of our existence continue to perplex us. We cannot yet construct a clock with absolute accuracy. Scientists have not yet found concrete rationales for why we cry, why we dream, and how certain pain medications succeed in alleviating suffering. Questions regarding why some storms produce tornados and others don't, why birds migrate or why the planet Venus has such a fiery atmosphere also elude us.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the rapid expansion of the internet's gargantuan archives over recent decades, the sciences' indefatigable quest to systematize and control the natural and virtual worlds, and language's attempts to define and taxonomize all existing things, we remain mesmerised by the penumbral realms of that which remains unknown.

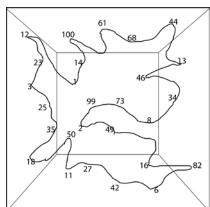
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The term *adynaton* refers to a hyperbolic<sup>3</sup> figure of speech, a statement exaggerated to the extreme, in order to articulate a moment of impossibility. When we wish to speak of that murky, nebulous space of the unattainable, the unknowable, we image it in various forms:

*One can expect an agreement between philosophers  
sooner than between clocks. [Ancient Greek]*

1 Vera Keller, *The Interlopers: Early Stuart Projects and the Undisciplining of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023)  
2 Wikipedia, s.v. "Lists of unsolved problems", accessed 29th May, 2024 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists\\_of\\_unsolved\\_problems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_unsolved_problems)  
3 Hyperbole (noun): exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally. H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

When pears grow on a willow tree. [Bulgarian]  
 When Easter and Pentecost are the same day. [Dutch]  
 The week of the four Thursdays [French]  
 When [the] crow will fly upside down [Malayam]  
 When fish climb poplar trees [Turkish]<sup>4</sup>



Sometimes, even research that strives to answer our plethora of queries simply confirms with more certainty, the scope of what we do not know. Sitting in the café at the foyer of City Library (Naarm), artist Oliver Hull tells me of one such instance. The *Coastline Paradox*<sup>5</sup> refers to a perplexing phenomenon in which, “the more accurately you measure something, the larger it gets”<sup>6</sup>. If one makes a set of cartographic maps in which the measurements increase in detail, the perimeter of a landmass expands indefinitely. Such endeavours become futile, revealing the void-space of the unknown that stretches out before us. French writer Maurice Blanchot refers to this yawning epistemological chasm when discussing the processes of writing. He muses that: “writing is a product of dread. It’s the activity that incessantly tries to build a bridge across the void, but in doing so it only makes visible the absence that the passage of time bequeaths to us”.<sup>7</sup> It is these terrains of absence, their strangeness, and their rich potentiality that Hull contemplates within the exhibition *Confusion Matrix*.

\*

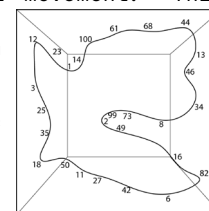
Snaking high up along the walls of *Goolugatup* gallery, like a waterline, is a thin stripe consisting of elongated coloured glass tubes which, at intervals, are adorned with mood rings. Despite appearing empty, they infer a presence: something might flow inside, some invisible gas or inaudible sound might whisper through this strange circulatory system, titled *Abacus*, that Hull has constructed.

Hull tells me these tubes are the same as those found on windchimes. Discussions of the weather are often considered a quotidian affair and yet, despite advances in predictive technology, changes in the earth’s climate and atmosphere can surprise us. The weather is capricious, and we remain subject to its every whim. In a cinematic context, the tinkling melody of a windchime is used to build suspense,<sup>8</sup> often inferring the beginnings of a storm - literally or at times metaphorically - they indicate the coming onslaught of something insidious or disastrous. In Ancient Roman times, early chimes were believed to ward off malevolent spirits.<sup>9</sup> Our private feelings are often

likened to the weather, subject to sudden surges or changes we cannot forecast. I remember as a child, my sister and I were given mood rings from a local market. We spent the next hour or so mesmerised, giggling as the colours swept from azure to a sulphuric yellow and back again; these small charms inferred that our emotional inner world was dancing across a volatile spectrum. In actuality, these adornments simply contain thermosensitive liquid crystal elements that, at best, signify the body temperature of the wearer.<sup>10</sup> I can see the appeal, however, of gleaning the mysterious unspoken sentiments of one another through visual signs. In these narrative scenarios implied by Hull for *Confusion Matrix*, the windchime and the mood ring become auguries, tools for divination.<sup>11/12</sup>

\*

Throughout history, rarefied scientific knowledge has often been held by a small and privileged minority and frequently misunderstood by the general public, leading to instances of magical thinking that arise from a lack of comprehension. Early perspectival frescos in the 15th century, when lit by candlelight during mass, frightened churchgoers, appearing to ripple and shimmer with spectral movement.<sup>13</sup> This moment of apparition is echoed centuries later when the first cinemagoers rise from a steam train that towards the audience. Similarly, the last of in 17th century Spain we now know to be Velázquez depicted the protective charms and talismans. Confined to the palace, the prince’s fits were believed to be visitations by the devil.<sup>15</sup> Medicine has gone on to collapse the boundaries of the real and the intangible, as indicated when Bertha Röntgen, wife of physicist Wilhelm, exclaimed ‘I have seen my own death’ upon glimpsing the very first X-ray image taken of her hand.<sup>16</sup> Across time, the unknown has loomed within the intervals and holes that riddle academic thought, a mystical presence, birthing strange fictions.



\*

Along two walls of the gallery screen large projected videos which broadcast computer screens, a cursor perambulates across an ostensibly random series of digital platforms: YouTube playlists, search engine interfaces, online stores,

4 Wikipedia, s.v. “Adynaton”, accessed 27th May, 2024.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adynaton>

5 Wikipedia, s.v. “Coastline paradox” accessed 20th May, 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coastline\\_paradox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coastline_paradox)

6 Oliver Hull, interviewed by Katie Paine, Melbourne, April 12th, 2024.

7 Maurice Blanchot, “From Dread to Language”, *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. L. Davis, P. Auster, and R. Lamberton (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1998), 343-359.

8 This can be seen in a range of films across genres and decades, such as: *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Twister* (1996), *The Conjuring* (2013), *IT* (2017) and *The Tree of Life* (2011).

9 Wikipedia, s.v. “Tintinnabulum (ancient Rome)”, accessed 27th May, 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintinnabulum\\_\(ancient\\_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintinnabulum_(ancient_Rome))

10 Catherine Marechal, et al. (2019). “Survey on AI-Based Multimodal Methods for Emotion Detection”. In Kołodziej, Joanna; González-Vélez, Horacio (eds.). *High-Performance Modelling and Simulation for Big Data Applications*. Springer. p. 308. ISBN 978-3-030-16272-6.

11 Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*, trans. R C Cuningham (Surrey: Oneworld Classics, 2008)

12 Stanislaw Lem, *The Cyberiad*, (New York: Penguin, 2020)

13 Nader El-Bizri, (2010). “Classical Optics and the Perspectival Traditions 14 Leading to the Renaissance”. In Hendrix, John Shannon; Carman, Charles H. (eds.). *Renaissance Theories of Vision (Visual Culture in Early Modernity)*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing. pp. 11-30. ISBN 978-1-409400-24-0.

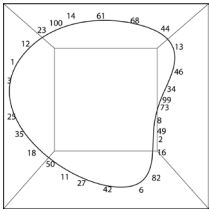
15 Louis Lumière, *Arrivée d’un train à la Ciotat* (Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat), 1895, Cinématographe, Museum of Modern Art, [https://www.moma.org/collection/works/307080#:~:text=Louis%20Lumi%C3%A8re%20Arriv%C3%A9e%20d’un,train%20at%20La%20Ciotat\)%201895](https://www.moma.org/collection/works/307080#:~:text=Louis%20Lumi%C3%A8re%20Arriv%C3%A9e%20d’un,train%20at%20La%20Ciotat)%201895)

15 Wikipedia, s.v. “Philip Prospero, Prince of Asturias”, accessed 27th May, 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_Prosporo,\\_Prince\\_of\\_Asturias](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Prosporo,_Prince_of_Asturias)

16 Howard Markel, “‘I Have Seen My Death’: How the World Discovered the X-Ray”, December 20, 2012 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/i-have-seen-my-death-how-the-world-discovered-the-x-ray>

databases and the computer's own internal system preferences. This cacophonous deluge of material and activity is directed by computer hardware installed upon the gallery's ceiling. Beside the computer's apparatus sits a clear Perspex cube containing a small amount of water. This construction is a direct appropriation of German conceptual artist Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963-68), in which a similar Perspex cube provides a microcosmic view of water's transmutation into vapour and back again. For Hull's installation, *Random Cube*, the rhythms of this minute aquatic cycle direct the adjacent computer hardware in order to generate random numbers. These integers correspond with the computer's central processing unit and direct the happenings we see 'on-screen'. Watching each projection, the inner workings of this computer are made visible through the sequences of resulting activity, and yet, what is it that can be inferred by these episodes? There does not appear to be an inner logic or sensible pattern. *Random Cube* seems to provide us with the promise of its title: a stream of haphazard and inscrutable information – an exercise in futility. If the installation *Abacus* evokes the unpredictable terrains of the weather and the human body, *Random Cube* images the slippery, cryptic topographies of the unknown through an unrelenting cascade of digital material. The notion of a hidden logic embedded within seemingly chaotic sequences has long been a defining characteristic of some forms of divination: the machinations of the future read in piles of steaming entrails, sodden tea leaves, or the role of a dice. We may not glean a concrete body of knowledge from *Random Cube*, but we are provided with a consideration of the complex and porous boundaries between the rational and the illogical, the future and the present, knowledge and a lack thereof.



The quest for the attainment of knowledge has remained a continuity across epochs. We are seduced by the unexplored, the arcane, the obscure: we stubbornly try to prise information from the world like a recalcitrant pit from an unripe fruit. For *Confusion Matrix*, Oliver Hull's work asks us to sit in a space of discomfort, uncertainty and doubt. These works document a process of measuring, mapping and analysis. Hull bestows questions, yet he allows for something other than an answer.

Katie Paine is a Naarm-based artist and writer investigating semiotics, science-fiction, hauntology and the archive.

Oliver Hull is a Naarm-based West Australian artist working across digital media, video, installation and drawing. Hull is interested in the poetic and political properties of fiction and images, and their relationship to time, history, technology, and nature. He has exhibited widely and frequently, most notably with Kunstintitut Melly, FAC, Success, and at ARI spaces internationally and nationally.



Images Top to Bottom:  
Aaron Claringbold & Rebecca McCauley.  
*Here's what we know*, National Photography Prize 2024. Murray Art Museum Albury.  
Image by Jeremy Weihrauch  
*Here's what we know*, Hillvale Gallery, 2023, Melbourne. Image by Aaron Claringbold.

We developed this work from the isolation of our studio apartment in the throes of *yet another lockdown*. Throughout this time we would start every day by reading the news and checking the numbers. The phrase '*here's what we know*' dominated article headlines, from ABC to *The Age*, to *The Guardian* – it became a running joke between us, a symptom of lazy journalism, but also a reflection of the fact that really nobody knew what the hell was going on. It felt deeply ironic, to be making a work about travelling across vast stretches of land when confined to our home for all but two hours of the day. Against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter, we watched through our screens as grand statues to colonists toppled all over the world, and we reflected on the fate of those same monuments here, onto which this nation's foundational mythologies cling. Not only the big ones, but the small ones too. The little lumps by the side of the road, the brass plaques mounted on piles of rocks that sit next to rest stops and public toilets and picnic tables; under freeway overpasses and in public parks. The monuments that are so ordinary that they are totally ignored, everywhere, the background to the everyday. We started visiting these explorer monuments in the only way that we could, through searching the gps coordinates listed on [monumentaustalia.org.au](http://monumentaustalia.org.au) on google maps. We started screenshotting them and somehow the low resolution pixelated images felt satisfying, like proof of their futility. That's what this work is really about, about trying to understand how our infrastructure and our history is designed in a way that is so ordinary that you would never question it. Because all the major roads in this country trace the paths of people who were already here. Because the banality smothers the meaning that is already everywhere. And because the work is more than just toppling the big statues, it's also about dismantling all those silly little rock piles and trying to grapple with the logic that says *this is ok, forget about it* and the labour and the resources and the taking and the taking and all of the taking.

Aaron Claringbold & Rebecca McCauley

Aaron and Rebecca are based in the south west of the continent. As artists they are interested in the role of images in seeing and imagining the world, and try to use photography as a tool for thinking and feeling a way through the mess of now. Working from their positions as settler-descendent/English they make works about how we inhabit this place; what we bring and what we take – and the many discrepancies and spaces between.

Working collaboratively, Rebecca and Aaron have previously exhibited works at a range of galleries and festivals across the country. From 2021-23 they facilitated STRAY VOLTAGE, Kings Artist Run's video program which included a series of commissions, public programs and screenings, and were the inaugural artists for Next Wave's TIDAL research commission, alongside Jack Mitchell and Eliki Reade.



Image:  
Aaron Claringbold & Rebecca McCauley, *Here's what we know*, photographic slides, 2023.  
Image by Aaron Claringbold.



Goolugatup Heathcote acknowledges the Bibbulmun people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we stand and pay respect to the Whadjuk people, and Elders past, present, future. Sovereignty was never ceded.

*Consider the telegraph poles, tracing a path walked for a very long time. The bitumen and the boreholes; the rest stops, the monuments, and the highway names. The distance between here and there, collapsed into the size of a holiday, or a weekend away.*

*Here's what we know* was imaged and conceived across many locations within the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung, Whadjuk Nyoongar, Jinigudera, Yapurarra, Pindjarup, Nyaki Nyaki, Kalarko, Ngadju, Kaalamaya, Wongatha, Mirniny, Wirangu, Barngarla, Kokatha, Arabana, Arernte, and Meintangk people. Sovereignty was never ceded. Free Palestine.

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# Here's what we know

## *Rebecca McCauley*

## *&*

## *Aaron Claringbold*

