

# STOWIC PHILOSOPHY

Throughout the end of the last millennium archival practices have been denigrated by notions of power such as that brought forward by Jacques Derrida linking archivists to the magistrate that in ancient Greek cities not only archived the law but also dictated it. While this notion has been enforced particularly with the rise of digital media and data capitalism, LARNAX is interested in the more subtle practices of individuals setting up their own manual system of archiving elements of reality. Far from defining these individuals hoarders we are interested in the ability of these individuals to predict with their bricolaged techniques the catastrophic effects of new technologies. In this respect we have identified the following criteria with which we look at these practices:

## Stowing

In the first place we opt to change the world archiving, collecting, logging, quantifying, tracking, hoarding or storing to stowing. In this respect we are inspired by Marshal McLuhan envisioning of marginal media artists:

*"In the history of human culture there is no example of a conscious adjustment of the various factors of personal and social life to new extensions except in the puny and peripheral efforts of artists. The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand. [...] "The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present." Knowledge of this simple fact is now needed for human survival. The ability of the artist to sidestep the bully blow of new technology of any age, and to parry such violence with full awareness, is age-old. Equally age-old is the inability of the percussed victims, who cannot sidestep the new violence, to recognize their need of the artist. To reward and to make celebrities of artists can, also, be a way of ignoring their prophetic work, and preventing its timely use for survival. The artist is the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness."*

So not only we could agree that marginal media artists can act as social radars but that they stow within predefined containers aspects of reality as clearly exemplified by for example the closet used by Dziga Vertov and Elizaveta Svilova to stow the film reels of their 1920s master piece "Man with a Movie Camera", depicting life in the new Soviet union right at the brink of the Nazi invasion and Stalinism. In this respect the word LARNAX itself, while predominantly used in archaeological context, mythologically was the ark rescuing Deucalion and Pyrrha from the flood, bringing them to mountain Larnassus, now Parnassus home of the muses.

# Effortful

LARNAX is most interested in artists acting like algorithms, performing the very automation turning humanity so effortless. So many are the promises of Artificial Intelligence and new sensors to act as smart as or even smarter than the human agent that the figure of the marginal media artist could in fact demonstrate an alternative to this enslaving road. Such reluctance toward effortless technologies can be exemplified by the following ancient Chinese tale:

*"As Tzu-Gung was traveling through the regions north of the river Han, he saw an old man working in his vegetable garden. He had dug an irrigation ditch. The man would descend into a well, fetch up a vessel of water in his arms and pour it out into the ditch. While his efforts were tremendous the results appeared to be very meager. Tzu-Gung said. "There is a way whereby you can irrigate a hundred ditches in one day, and whereby you can do much with little effort. Would you not like to hear of it?" Then the gardener stood up, looked at him and said, "And what would that be?" Tzu-Gung replied, "You take a wooden lever, weighted at the back and light in front. In this way you can bring up water so quickly that it just gushes out. This is called a draw-well." Then anger rose up in the old man's face and he said, "I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine, and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes unsure in the strivings of his soul. Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them."*

The very low-tech profile of these manual and effortful systems of life documentaiton guarantees its existance over time. The more advanced is a technique the more in fact it is likely to be deprecated as it has been the case for the many users of ready-made lifelogging, wearable and quantified self users who have disrupted their data collection due to their short-lived effortless technologies. In addition the very fact that one is to utlize a more self-taylored effortful technology is the key to allow him or her to be committed over time without also the suspicion that his or her data are used for third parties commercial and suirveillance purposes.

Also given the curated data generation collected by a human agent the effort should also come from the side of the human viewers of such data. Generally however this viewing of human curated and collected data requires some sort of training beyond the usual traditional cultural forms which may in fact hinder the public to immerse itself in a more in depth understanding of the genereted archive. In this respect LARNAX opposed to any machine driven and automated reading of such human curated content and wish for a more focused and less mass media numbed audience.

Beyond and standing as an alternative to any effortless approaches, LARNAX also wishes to warn against not only approaches where technology does the work but also where a human enroll other humans to do such a work. The American tradition is yet another example of this with for example their 20th century inventors such Buckminster Fuller and Gordon Bell who relaid on their secretaires to do the work archiving their lives (see history section for a more in depth discussion on these individuals). In this respect LARNAX sees a continuation between the Body Art movement of the 1970s with artists

using their own body as the material of their own art with more mentally and psychologically effortful practices connecting rather to individuals such as undocumented migrants like the Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh shifting the use of the body to the use of a more mental endurance combined with the use of technology. In this respect we believe that the sort of effortful Mental Art brought forward unofficially by marginal artists in the last decades not only is a symptom of the mentally draining new technological paradigm but that through their practice these artists set up the last stronghold against an ever more pervasive technology now aiming to penetrate not only human lives but also human souls.

## Shamanic

As already stated we embrace the theory that LARNAX builders set up their own stowing technique often time tinkering with whatever off the shelf technology they find available and in this respect creating a bricolage that is not the dangerous and compromising technology critics always have in mind but has something more to do with Foucauldian notion of Technology of the Self or rather in Jacques Ellul's terms:

*"It has not been sufficiently emphasized that technique has evolved along two distinct paths. There is the concrete technique of homo faber-man the maker-to which we are accustomed, and which poses the problems we have normally studied. There is also the technique, of a more or less spiritual order, which we call magic.[...] Magic developed along with other techniques as an expression of man's will to obtain certain results of a spiritual order. To attain them, man made use of an aggregate of rites, formulas, and procedures which, once established, do not vary. Strict adherence to form is one of the characteristics of magic: forms and rituals, masks which never vary, the same kind of prayer wheels, the same ingredients for mystical drugs, for formulae for divination, and so on."*

Such technique becomes from an antropological point of view some sort of bricolage of off-the-shelf technologies. Thus not only the resulting archive comes to represent the current time and space but also the very tools utilized to accomplish it.

## Political

While apparently the systematically stowing of daily reality might seem a socially disengaged act, it can be in fact the premise to become a good leader. Beyond the awareness of reality these practitioners develop and beyond following ancient philosophical practices of knowing oneself, or taking care of oneself as pointed out by Michel Foucault in reference of the Stoics, such artists follow up the paths of wise political figures. Seneca, Franklin Benjamin and Mahatma Gandhi are just but a few leader who have been cultivating throughout their political activities self-examining practices. Rather than becoming directly involved with politics the very act of archiving daily life constitute an autonomy which brings the practitioner in touch with an understanding of his or her nature.

Thanks to the common sense he or she reaches, he or she is able to not only suggest good choices also for others but also warn others when times are becoming increasingly too Epicurean and

Imperialistic. The kind of political stoicism the archival practitioners develop is in fact not only providing an autonomy which enables them to live as well as to reason according to nature but also enables them to point out the rise of a too imperialistic or automated or better algorithm dictated governance to which the actual manual procedures of stowing life opposes against. A most symbolic example of this is the Stoic Cato who in all his honesty and virtuosity fiercely opposed with his life the shift of the Roman republic from becoming an empire.

In this respect while the art world in general is becoming more directly involved with politics losing touch with more mystic realms and producing bitter art critics with repressed talents, LARNAX is interested in the full commitment of practitioners with their talents away from any academic traditions but simply developed out of a commitment to the self and its surrounding. These practitioners also shows how to in fact reach a level of more or less cynic self-contentment beyond all the power struggle so much driving contemporary culture. Time becomes their real capital and in this respect they find ways to abstain from the capitalist algorithm enslaving humanity and draining time each individual could potentially spend to know him or herself.

## **Syncretic**

In the quasi kabalistic systems that practitioner generate in their systematic documentation of themselves and reality an interesting element that rises is that such systems inevitably come to unite what mass media in general divides into extreme polarities often bringing much friction among the various social groups. There are historical examples of this such as the 16th century combinatorial systems developed by Raymond Lull who wished to provide answers to pacify the clashes among Jews, Muslims and Christians. Another straightforward example of the syncretic effect of such systematic approaches is the Ideal Palace built by the 19th century postman Ferdinand Cheval.

## **Transcending**

Living in accordance with nature is somehow what in the end the practice of becoming aware of the self and the surrounding develops. In this respect as for Henry David Thoreau, such practice comes inevitably to clash with modernization and the very absurdity that lays behind it. As via new technologies society becomes increasingly more epicurean, in some cases the act of stowing such life become the stoic response to it. Life become more Tolstojan in search for a natural dimension away from the Dostoyevsky like madness of the new metropolis, not necessarily going Into the Wild as in the case of Christopher McCandless but creating some sort of Dionysian tendency to it while adapting a rather Apollonian life-style.

Rather than immediately label these practices as compulsive with somewhat of a Freudian detach-drive to it, LARNAX invites to look at them as attempts of social liberation by means of natural enslavement. They can be indeed seen as a refusal of a society going increasingly astray and the more or less conscious will to recover a natural ground.