

THE FALL EXPERIMENT





Type of output:
Exhibition

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**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

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SUPPORTING STATEMENT

The Fall Experiment was a practice-based research project by Borland/Condon: fostering engagement with prospective human body-donor participants, they examined perceptions of the body and identity and explored processes, legal procedures and ethical frameworks for the aesthetic (re)purposing of the body after death.

Research aims:

1. Explore the donated human body as a site of artistic research, thereby lending imaginative agency to death and dying.
2. Employ socially engaged, sculptural practice and the performative construction of knowledge to;
 - understand individual and societal attitudes to death
 - develop a creative contract between artists and participants (in relation to body donation for the purpose of artistic research).

The project developed relationships with experts researching and practicing in the field of death and society, focusing on the distinct context of local regulations and societal attitudes to euthanasia and burial, including critical engagement with Bolt's analysis of gift-giving theories in relation to body donor monuments in the Netherlands. Working with materials and processes historically associated with burial, the project extends explorations in the cross-disciplinary field of New Materialism to include the material of the dead human body in the examination of the agency and entanglements of Matter (Haraway 2016, Bennett 2010).

The artists tested research propositions in a series of public events and cross-disciplinary conversations including a symposium, *Death Animations* and the re-enactment of an 18th Century Fall Experiment, which engaged participants, audiences and speakers to directly address the question, 'Can a legally binding contract [in relation to body donation permissions] be developed through sculptural and performative means?'

With support from The Mondrian Foundation, *The Fall Experiment* exhibition at Stroom Den Haag shared these findings in the form of sculptures, artifacts and video. A booklet (with essay by the Curator, Netherlands Funeral Museum) and a short YouTube documentary disseminated all stages of the research process and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The collaboration between Borland and artist Brody Condon (USA/ Berlin) was initiated in 2011 on receipt of Creative Scotland's 'Vital Spark' Award. The outcome of their first period of collaboration was *Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen*, a sculpture installed in the watchtower at New Calton Burial Ground, Edinburgh in August 2013.

In early 2014 Borland/Condon began working together as *Circles of Focus* in response to a term used to describe successful working practices in operating-theatre teams. The culmination of their research on anatomical body donation, (developed in partnership with the Department of Anatomy at Glasgow University) was exhibited at CCA, Glasgow in April 2015. The artists were consequently invited by Gallery Stroom den Haag, Netherlands, to be Artists in Residence in The Hague; considering current societal concerns around euthanasia and body donation legislation in the home of international law and arbitration and extending previous research into a broader, non-medical context.

Over a series of visits and an embedded residency period, they built relationships with experts in local institutions and a group of 8 participants interested in imaginative engagement with body donation; together they sourced and processed sculptural materials used in the public re-enactment of an experimental demonstration from the *Theatrum Physicum*, University of Leiden, 1718, 'SGravesande, Willem Jacob's Fall Experiment, which gave the project its title and the findings of which were the source material of the subsequent exhibition.

Below:
The Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen,
Borland/Condon, 2013
Photo credit: Stuart Armit



Below:
Detail *Circles of Focus* Clay Circle,
CCA Glasgow 2015
Photo credit: Alan Dimick



TIMELINE

2016 MAR	2016 SEP	2016 OCT-NOV
<p><i>Death Animations</i> Symposium, Stroom den Haag With Dr. Quentin A. Fogg: Centre for Human Anatomy Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia (Via Skype). Dr Jonathan Price: Interdisciplinary Study of the Law, Leiden University with Prof. Boudewijn Sirks: Emeritus professor of Civil Law at Oxford University Bart Grob: Curator for the History of Medicine, Museum Boerhaave (Leiden) Tiemen Cocquyt: Curator Natural Sciences, Museum Boerhaave (Leiden). Lonny van Ryswyck: AtelierNL Conversation Paul Perry (NL) with Francis McKee (UK). 4th March 2016.</p>	<p>Artists Residency period, The Hague 1st September-16 October.</p> <p>Clay Event Christine Borland and Brody Condon source clay in the vicinity of Leiden, in collaboration with AtelierNL. Tiemen Cocquyt, curator of Museum Boerhaave, gave an informal lecture about the historic 'fall experiment', conducted by Willem 's Gravesande in 1722. 20 September 2016.</p> <p>Iron Bloom Event The artists, alongside experimental Archaeologist Jan Jennissen and using pre-historic production methods, created 'blooms' of locally produced raw iron ore on location at Archeo-park, Archeon Sunday 25 September Jan Jennissen and the artists in conversation about the production process and <i>The Fall Experiment</i> project. 22–25 September 2016.</p> <p>Legal Event & <i>The Fall Experiment</i> performance Location: Fundatie Voorhoeve, Dunne Bierkade 18, The Hague Speakers: Daniel McClean, lawyer specialising in art and cultural property law and a curator of contemporary art; Jonathan Price, PhD Fellow and Lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Study of the Law, Leiden University Peter Pels, Professor in Anthropology at the University of Leiden. Mr Frank Mutter, legal advisor, speaker and columnist on Dutch funeral law. 30 September 2016.</p>	<p>Open-air firing Event 14 October 2016.</p> <p>Exhibition <i>The Fall Experiment</i> and Documentary Launch 15 October-13 November 2016.</p>

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Aims

- To develop work, which explores the donated human body as a means for artistic research, thereby lending imaginative agency to death and dying through a reconceptualization of the distinctions between 'living' and 'non-living' domains.
- To employ socially engaged sculptural practice and the performative construction of knowledge, as a means to develop a contractual agreement between artists and participants (in relation to body donation for the purpose of artistic research).
- To explore, through the sourcing of elemental materials and enactment of archaic, performative sculptural processes, the erosion of distinctions between the conventionally regarded 'living' and 'non-living' domains.



Right: *The Fall Experiment*
Detail Exhibition
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd

Objectives

- To identify, and engage with a core group of participants in a practice-based exploration of the body and identity, in relation to considering the donated human body for artistic research.
- To develop a series of preparatory workshops and events which critically engage participants in sourcing, and processing elemental sculptural materials for use in the public re-enactment of an 18th Century Fall Experiment as a means to explore the development of alternative contractual agreements [in relation to body donation permissions].



Right: *The Fall Experiment*
Detail Exhibition
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd

CONTEXT

The project challenges the limits of participatory and socially-engaged art practice (Bishop, Bourriaud et al) through a fundamental engagement with human body donor participants. It develops Borland & Condon's research exploring the donated human body in relation to Anatomy Dissection and the Body Donation register (*Circles of Focus* 2015).

The project extends explorations in the cross-disciplinary field of 'New Materialism' to consider the dead body in the re-examination of matter and material and the falling away of distinctions between the conventionally regarded 'living' and 'non-living' domains (Haraway 2016, Bennett 2010, Morton 2013)

Consistent with Borland's practice *The Fall Experiment* is in the context of cross-disciplinary work, which engages with expert cultures across science, technology and medicine. The project was analyzed in relation to gift-giving theories with an emphasis on the significance of the sculptures to the bereaved, by Bolt (Bolt, S 2012).

The research is closely aligned with Northumbria University Cultural Negotiation of Science research group. (Crisp, Donachie, Dorsett).

The exploration acknowledges artists who work with the body and human remains in both a contemporary and historical context (Margolles 2009, Czanecki 2012, Quinn 1991).

METHODS & PROCESSES

Over the course of a year Borland/Condon devised a series of introductory workshops, private experimental performances and meetings to foster participatory, performative relationships with a small group of potential participants who wanted to engage in critical dialogue around the artist's research aims, with a view to considering the donating of their bodies for artistic research.

Inviting potential participants and interested individuals, the artists organised a performative public symposium *Death Animations*, to further explore traditions and rituals around death and society.



Right: *Death Animations* Symposium
Photo credit: Borland/Condon

Over a period as Artists in Residency in The Hague, working alongside experts and project participants; Borland & Condon sourced elemental materials and enacted archaic, performative and sculptural processes relevant to the public recreation of an 18th Century Dutch Fall Experiment.

These included;

- Sourcing clay on reclaimed Polder land in the vicinity of the city of Leiden.
- Forging iron from locally source ore over a period of four days on location at Archeon (an archaeological 'living museum' in Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherlands where public re-enactments from various periods of Dutch history are performed daily). Using Iron Age methods to construct and fire a forge made of clay with Experimental Archaeologist Jan Jennissen, to produce the iron used in the reconstruction of Willem's Gravesande's 18th Century Fall Experiment.



Right: Methods and Process
Photo credit: Borland/Condon

Left and Below: Methods and Process

Photo credit: Borland/Condon



Exploring performance and mark-making as a means of legally binding promises, agreements and contracts (Samek, R 1965) to donate the human body for artistic research, was the focus of The Fall Experiment performance. Through-out the course of a day of talks and events, project participants used locally sourced materials to make a choreographed series of 'drops' into 3 beds of prepared clay; the resulting clay sculptural tablets containing marks and indentations, were later fired and exhibited.

The accompanying symposium expanded issues relating to the research including; the legal concept of person and definitions of personhood, the common ground between animate and inanimate objects, the practicalities, legalities, ethics and procedures surrounding human remains.



Right: Preparations for the *Fall Experiment* performance and Legal Day Symposium
Photo credit: Borland/Condon



Left: Legal Day Symposium Speakers
Dr Frank Mutter & Professor Peter
Pels, Legal Day Symposium
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd

Below: *The Fall Experiment*
Participatory Parlour Performance
Photo credit: Borland/Condon



In order to preserve and permanently record the indented marks made by the Fall Experiment the indented clay tablets were fired overnight in a hand-made clay kiln, constructed in the back-yard of the gallery by the artists and participants, led by ceramicist Ingrid Mol and students of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam. All participants and collaborators were invited to the public firing event, which drew heavily on expertise from the field of experimental archaeology in the performative construction of knowledge through ritualised making.

The indented, fired clay tablets which evidenced the Fall Experiment, formed the core of the subsequent exhibition.



Right: Indent of bloom dropped onto
wet clay from *The Fall Experiment*
Photo credit: Borland/Condon



Left and Above: Public firing of clay tablets from *The Fall Experiment*
Photo credit: Borland/Condon

DISSEMINATION

In the run-up to the exhibition the artist devised public sharing platforms for research propositions, including a performative public symposium *Death Animations* and the re-enactment of an experimental demonstration of a Fall Experiment from the *Theatrum Physicum*, University of Leiden, 1718.

The exhibition *The Fall Experiment* at the gallery Stroom den Haag disseminated the culmination of practice-based research through exhibited artifacts made throughout Borland/Condon's residency period;

- 3 clay/wood and iron ore sculptures – the result of *The Fall Experiment*
 - 3 circular video projections recording participants' trialling Fall Experiments
 - 3 examples of clay process
 - 2 tables of iron ore process
 - Iron ore furnace



Right: *The Fall Experiment* Exhibition

Photo credit: Hein van Liempd

Below: *The Fall Experiment* Detail
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd





Left: *The Fall Experiment* Exhibition
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd

Right and Below: *The Fall*
Experiment Exhibition
Photo credit: Hein van Liempd



A booklet with text by the artists and commissioned essay by Dr Babs Bakels, art historian and Curator of the Netherlands Funeral Museum *Tot Zover*, was produced and a mini-documentary was made to document all aspects of the process and exhibition, which is available on YouTube and via social networks.

The exhibition was reviewed in Metropolis M, December 2016 (#6) by Eline van der Haak.

Stroom den Haag gallery supported a Community of Practice (CoP) – a group of local people with diverse educations, backgrounds or experience who shared a common interest in art, to engage with the artists and the project and develop the exhibition's closing event; *Donate What You Do/n't Need*.

Appendix 1

https://www.stroom.nl/activiteiten/tentoonstelling.php?t_id=2549563

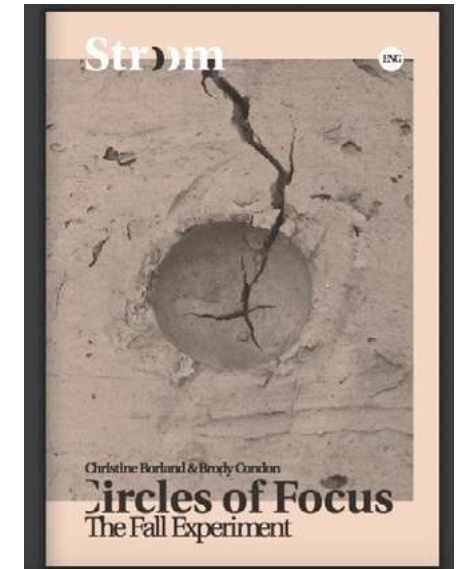
Appendix 2

<https://vimeo.com/188648287>

Appendix 3

https://www.stroom.nl/media/Stroom_A6-Circles%20of%20focus-ENG-web-2.pdf

Below: Screenshot of Stroom website
Right: Stroom den Haag, *The Fall Experiment* booklet



Below: *Circles of Focus: The Fall Experiment* at Stroom Den Haag



Below: Community of Practice (COP) Closing Event

Photo credit: Hein van Liempd



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