

## ***It just goes... On Sarah crowEST and the Tumbleweed Methodology***<sup>1</sup>

Greg the Agent: You see, you've got a huge amount of momentum behind you.

Steve Coogan: Yeah, you get momentum when you're going downhill!

The above exchange is a part of phone conversation actor Steve Coogan (playing himself) has with his agent Greg in *The Trip*,<sup>2</sup> the 6-part BBC One series directed by Michael Winterbottom, whilst visiting the Trough of Bowland in Lancashire, England. Facing a major hiatus both personally and professionally, Coogan responds to Greg's unintentionally loaded question "*Where exactly are you at the moment?*" by saying;

I'm in the Trough of Bowland. Rather appropriately, Greg, I'm in a trough... literally and metaphorically.<sup>3</sup>

Though at times she too finds herself in a creative trough, momentum for Sarah crowEST's practice is not, as suggested by Coogan, generated when going downhill, but is largely self-generative. Indeed, crowEST's making "harbours a sense of the free ranging... [that is playfully and rigorously] exploratory, with a momentum of its own."<sup>4</sup> crowEST's art production may be described as a series of *activities*<sup>5</sup>, whether they take place in her studio, home or elsewhere. Rather than neatly unfolding as a linear narrative, crowEST's practice generates an "indeterminate flux,"<sup>6</sup> or a kind of self-sufficient ecosystem, which ceaselessly produces energy vital for its own mobilization.

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1 Tumbleweed Methodology is a term that I coined over the course of discussions with crowEST surrounding her doctorate thesis. It is the process through which a body of knowledge as a composite of materiality is blindly accumulated by its own mobilization across multiple terrains. See Sarah crowEST, "An Unaccountable Mass: bothersome matter and the humorous life of forms" (Ph.D., University of Melbourne, 2013).

2 "The Inn at Whitewell," *The Trip*, directed by Michael Winterbottom (Richmond: Madman Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

3 Coogan's frustration is fully conveyed when he shoots at Greg with a handgun equipped with silencer. (No, not really. He merely mimes this complete with sounds.)

4 S. Maharaj, "What the Thunder Said: Toward a Scouting Report on 'Art as a Thinking Process'" in *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, eds. Mara Ambrožič & Angela Vettese (New York / Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 158.

5 Among her activities, crowEST collects a wide variety of 'mounds' which she documents on the blog, *Mound Activity*. See [www.moundactivity.blogspot.com](http://www.moundactivity.blogspot.com)

6 Maharaj, 155.

In this sense, the body of work presented in this exhibition is but a particular moment within an on-going phase transition of matter into energy (and vice versa) that crowEST's practice repeatedly undergoes. What is encountered in the gallery is a particular point of intensification, an expression peculiar to crowEST's meandering through non-linear histories and material terrains that her practice steadfastly makes, thinks through and negotiates.

Seen *cyclically*, this "body"<sup>7</sup> of work and crowEST's practice as a whole is "the effect of processes of continual creation, movement ... [and] individuation"<sup>8</sup> which in turn feeds back into itself. In other words, she is engaged in the process of becoming-tumbleweed, the agglomeration of matter and energy that ceaselessly rolls for its own production, its form being its very mode of (trans)formation and movement. In short, *it just goes*.

With such resolute determination in confronting "the unknown", crowEST's Tumbleweed Methodology may also point to an ethical project, at the very core of which is "a species of activity that does not ostensibly count as either 'art' or 'thinking' ... [but more fundamentally as] an all over, runaway activity, the urge to press beyond the 'given'."<sup>9</sup>

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7 I have elsewhere argued that 'the thinking' and 'the making' may be seen only as independent as the left leg and the right, which in turn underpins riding of a bicycle as an apt model for thinking about the intimate, and at times unwieldy, coordination of 'the thinking' and 'the making' undertaken in a visual art practice. Akira Akira, "Embodied Practice, Experience and Intuition" (MFA, University of Melbourne, 2013), 2-3.

8 Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming undone: Darwinian reflections on life, politics, and art* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011). 28-9.

9 Maharaj, 157.