

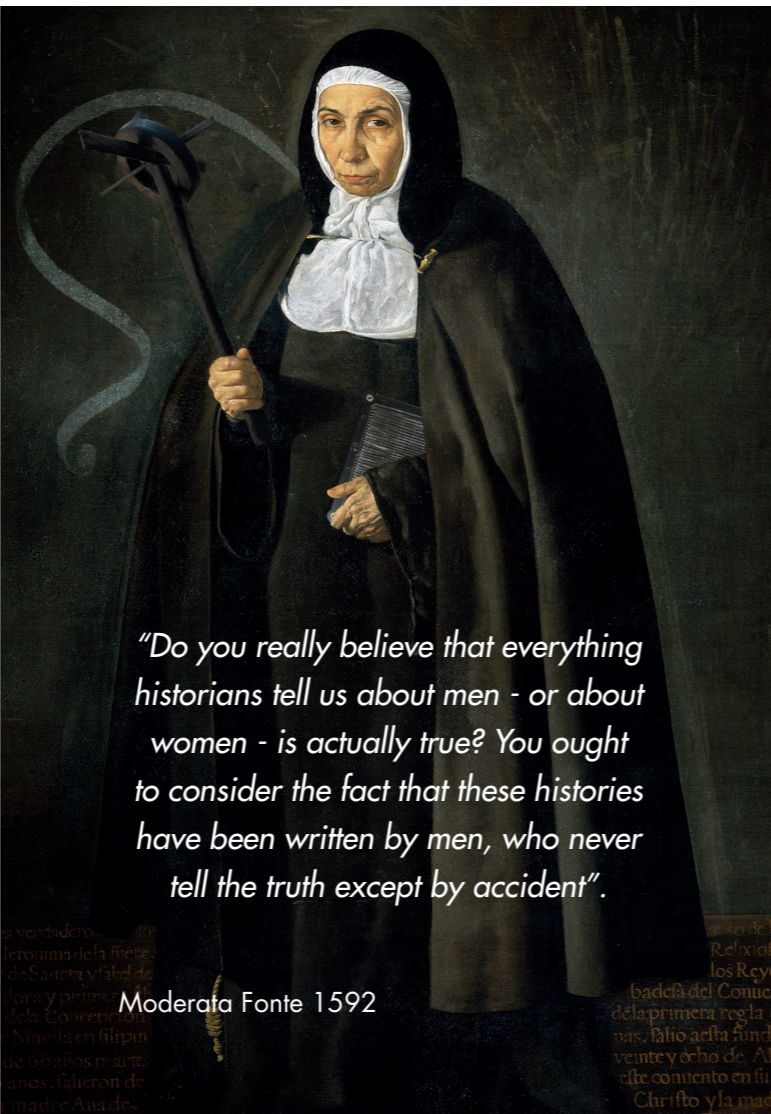
The Transubstantiation of Knowledge

Rachel Ara

15 - 23 September 2018
V&A Medieval and Renaissance galleries

#LDF2018
#Transubstantiationofknowledge

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/TOK>

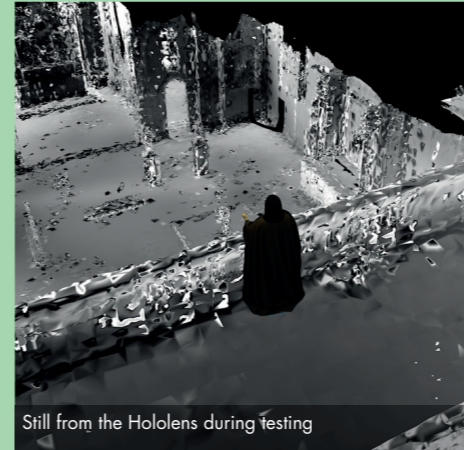


"Do you really believe that everything historians tell us about men - or about women - is actually true? You ought to consider the fact that these histories have been written by men, who never tell the truth except by accident".

Moderata Fonte 1592

The Installation

The Transubstantiation of Knowledge is a mixed-reality story set in the Medieval & Renaissance galleries at the V&A. Located around the chapel of Santa Chiara. Adopting lo-fi technology, recycled materials and with a minimum budget, holographic nuns are brought back from the 15th century via loop space. The nuns can be seen within the chapel and surrounding gallery space when wearing a holens headset and on a small screen in front of the chapel.

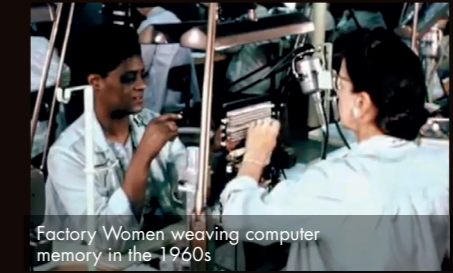


Still from the Holens during testing

The Transubstantiation of Knowledge merges real and virtual worlds to tap into an alternative universe where the fifth force, the key to the theory of everything, remains embodied by the Franciscan nuns of Santa Chiara.

The Whispering Gallery (the passage behind the chapel) is filled with the sound of voices, speaking in mother tongues that reflect the multiple languages within the museum and the collective strength of women worldwide. At the entrance, to the right, is a display that draws from the collection of chausibiles. Mixing artifacts and untruths, the coded garments and recently discovered apprentice piece, can actually be read. On the left, a display contains woven magnetic cores, circa 1960, that were once RAM memory in computers, illustrating the physical nature of data storage. Behind the chapel is a large loom physically referencing the magnetic cores, weaving of code and the transubstantiation or embodiment of knowledge.

Critique



Factory Women weaving computer memory in the 1960s

The Transubstantiation of Knowledge is a feminist narrative critiquing hypercapitalism, post truths and how we look at things. A parallel is being drawn. The silencing of women is ongoing and knowledge is being devalued. The artifacts are in front of us, but the

question is, are we really looking at them? The story weaves together facts and possible fictions, manipulating some of the facts because we need to question who is telling our stories and what it is they want us to believe.



Medieval Nuns Weaving on upright loom

Mary Beard demonstrates that when it comes to silencing women, "Western culture has had thousands of years of practice." much of it violent. In ancient Greece Philomela, whose tongue was cut out, denounced her rapist by weaving his name with threads. In Shakespeare's England Lavinia, whose hands and tongue were severed, carried the shadows of their guilt, until all they could do to silence her was murder.

Activity: Decoding the Apprentice Piece

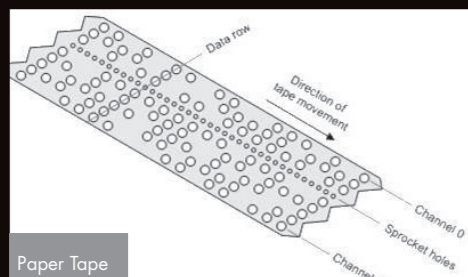
A rare piece of coded embroidery was found during the installation of the Santa Chiara Chapel at the V&A. It is thought to have been an apprentice piece as it used a very basic form of character encoding similar to the ones in computers this century. We know the nuns used much more sophisticated methods that we don't yet fully understand so have attributed this to an apprentice.



Apprentice Piece

How to Translate:

This code is read in rows of five from left to right, which is quite similar to the punched paper tape of the last century.



Paper Tape

Character Encoding

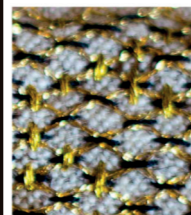
A	00001
B	00010
C	00011
D	00100
E	00101
F	00110
G	00111
H	01000
I	01001
J	01010
K	01011
L	01100
M	01101
N	01110
O	01111
P	10000
Q	10001
R	10010
S	10011
T	10100
U	10101
V	10110
W	10111
X	11000
Y	11001
Z	11010
?	11011
,	11100
'	11101
;	11110
.	11111



Apprentice Piece

G U I L T

0	1	0	0	1	0
0	0	1	1	0	1
1	1	0	0	1	1
1	0	1	0	0	0
1	1	1	0	0	0



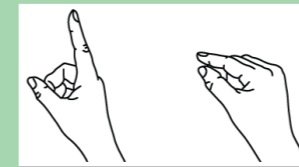
This example above translates to the word "guilt". When the black stitch is crossed with a gold stitch, this denotes a "1" and when left untouched a "0". By using the character encoding you can decipher the apprentice piece.

Activity: Hand Gestures & Missing Bits

As the story goes, the gestures of the nuns were interpreted into stone by the masons of elite merchants but their mysteries were still not understood. Fearing what they could not understand or control, an order was given to remove all gesturing hands. To avoid attracting more attention to the gestures and what may have been communicated, the dismembering was hidden behind the mass removal of other body parts to rid public sculptures of male nudity.* Take a closer look around the Medieval and Renaissance galleries. There are many gesturing statues such as Angel of the Annunciation in Room 50b. You can find statues whose hands have been removed everywhere. Many hands are



The Angel of the Annunciation No: A.10-1914



Holens Gestures



Apollo No: LOAN:ROYAL BOTANIC. 1

missing, some deliberately and carefully cut, some broken off accidentally, others violently. (Angels in 50b). The more you notice the more you might see. Do you notice any other bits missing from statues?

*[Using the rules laid down by the Council of Trent, Pope Paul IV mandated the use of concealing fig leaves, promulgating the church's attack on nudity in art in a papal bull dated 1557.]



Kneeling Angel No: 7614-1861

CREDITS

Director:	Rachel Ara
Writer:	Laura Hudson
Costume:	Charlie Flint
Sound:	Shan Verma
Mixed Reality:	DoubleMe
DoubleMe:	Albert Kim
Loopspace Creator:	Marius Matesan
DoubleMe Project Manager:	James Edward Marks
Holoboy:	Chris Szkoda
V&A Project Manager:	Kate Quinlin
Layout:	Angela Lam
Audio Voice (Italian):	Dani Parodi
Audio Voice (English):	Elaine Tierney
Speaking in Tongues:	Women at the V&A
Assistant:	Beth Taylor Ruby Loveday Hudson

FURTHER READING

Fonte, Moderata, 1592, *The Merits of Women*. Venetian poet, Modesta Pozzo, the author's real name, completed the dialogue the night before she died of childbirth at the age of thirty-seven. Ed.Tr. Virginia Cox, University of Chicago Press 2018

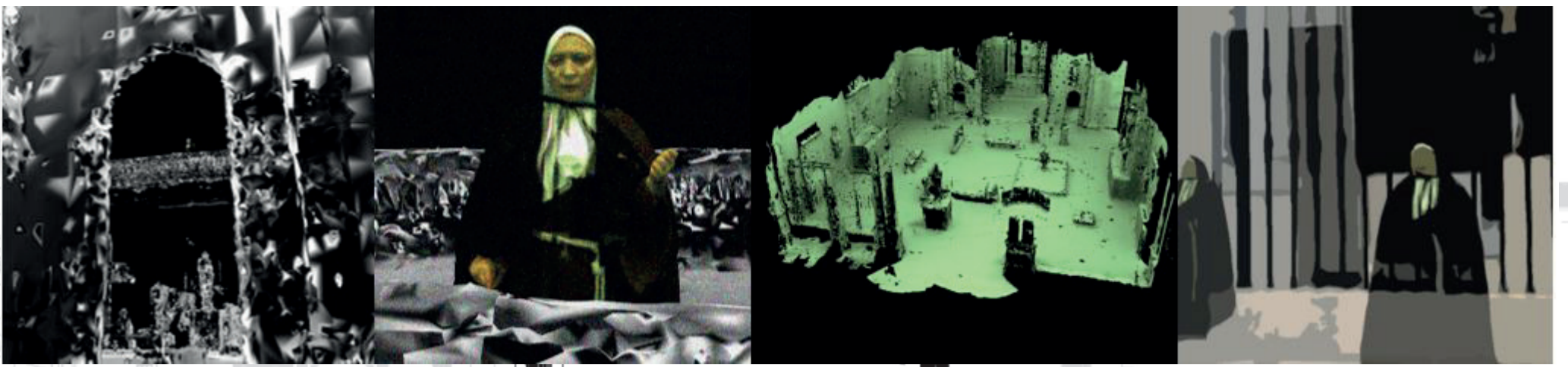
Solanas, Valerie, 1967, *Scum Manifesto*, self-published, USA

Dunye, Cheryl, 1997, *Watermelon Woman* DVD RT 90 mins. Dunye plays a filmmaker attempting to make a documentary about 1930's black actress Fae Richard. The film is a treatise on the complications of persistent iniquities and how we might uncover the histories of marginalized people, written out and unable to document themselves. "Sometimes you have to create your own history," say the end credits.

Strocchia, Sharon T. 2009, *Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA

Houston, Jean, 2009, *Jump Time: Shaping Your Future in a World of Radical Change*, Sentient Publications, 2009. An anthropological study predicting the emergence of a different kind of human being, shaped by new technologies and previously dormant capabilities.

Beard, Mary, 2017, *Women & Power: A Manifesto*, Profile Books Ltd., London



AUDIO NARRATIVE : TRANSCRIPT

INTRODUCTION: Female Museum Voice

You are now standing in the church of Santa Chiara. Built in the 1490s this is the only Italian Renaissance chapel outside of Italy. The chancel chapel came from a Florentine convent that was home to the Franciscan order of nuns known as the Poor Clares.

The fifteenth century was a time of dramatic change, Florence was one of Europe's leading industrial cities and arguably the birthplace of early capitalism. It was common practice during this time for unmarried women, in elite society, to enter convents. By 1552 around 1 in 8 Florentine women lived in religious community. This unprecedented concentration of highly educated women transformed convents into large civic institutions with great social and political influence. However, nuns and nunneries became essential sources of labour for the booming textile industry, open to exploitation by Florentine merchants, their influence for the good was compromised. 500 years later we should not be able to draw comparisons. However, hypercapitalism is stretching the very fabric of society to breaking point. Women continue to be silenced and knowledge is no longer valued. Every form of human labour is expendable and exploitable. Those at the top take the most, while women are paid the least. This story proposes a revolution in human awareness, a breakthrough in connection, a rip in the continuum; where the dimensions of time can be crossed and parallel universes collide.

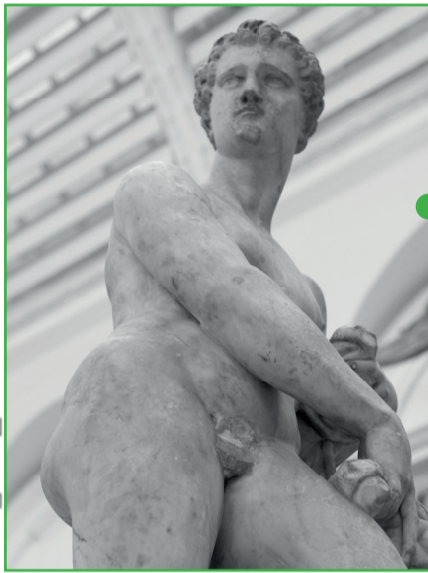
NUNS NARRATIVE : Female Italian Voice

We each found our way to the convent and for many it was our only choice; some to escape marriage and the social restrictions placed upon us, some were sent with large dowries so that our daily prayers would bring prosperity and the assurance of heaven to families, some of us were deemed too ugly, feisty, hysterical, too assertive or clever to be tamed by the demons of patriarchy and others were simply thought of, as no use. We chose a simple life of few physical comforts but rich in contemplation, routine and work. Cloistered we had no distractions and soon a harmony came about, a camaraderie born of doing things together. We found rhythms in the repetitive work we undertook and a sense of understanding spread between us, without the need of words.

Our speciality was spinning threads and weaving cloth, first flax, then silk and finally metallic. It was while working with these metal threads that we found our thoughts were able to pass from our hands to the thread. Deep in thought, our collective labour became collective knowledge, shedding light on ways of the universe still no man understands.

Ours was a hidden world of observance, our presence always in shadow, and without direct countenance. Only from behind grills, could we see those outside our cloister.

Outside the convent the greediest of merchants wanted gold thread made by the cheapest of means. Our hours of practice had turned our threads into the most valued for their quality but we were poor and the convent needed to sustain itself. Each of us toiled diligently working the sharp strips of metal to make the finest of threads. The profits were so great that soon the merchants persuaded all the convents to make their gold threads. We were the trustworthy and reliable workers that could be paid the least. We did not mind the hard work but with it came the merchants and their men; the silk dealers and entrepreneurs, the Goldbeaters (battilori), the scissors masters (forbiciaio) and many others.



SCULPTURE COURT

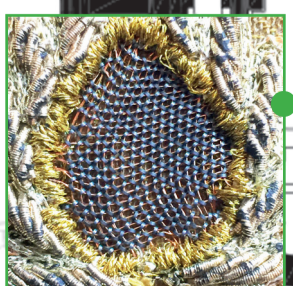
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We were no longer safe in our cloistered spaces, we could not go out into the world but the city's profiteers were free to enter ours. The civic authorities flagrantly violated church decrees and threatened the very idea of female enclosure.

Distracted by the many intrusions on our silence, our thoughts could no longer be shared. Our hands became speaking instruments, we gestured to each other the thoughts we could share, while the external world encroached on ours

The intruders observed our hands and relayed what they had seen to their masters. The masters, intrigued by the mysteries of our hands, wanted to know more and had carvers copy our gestures into stone.

People began to notice the gesturing statues and gossip spread about their meaning. The authorities, in fear of what they did not understand, ordered all hands be removed.

Afraid that this might draw more attention to our message and our gestures, the removal of hands was buried by the distraction of removing other body parts. The Pope ordered the mass castration of public statues to rid them of male nudity.

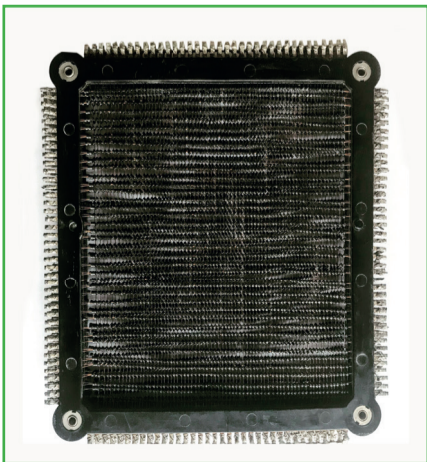
When the merchants had exhausted the supply of cheap labour they had found in our convents, they still wanted more and so moved on to the Convertites (Houses of Reformed Prostitutes), where women were equally powerless against exploitation.

We needed other ways to communicate. We took our threads and stitched them into the backs of the outermost robes of priests (the chasubles) so that, as they moved freely, from convent to convent, they would unknowingly take our coded messages with them. It took many years to learn a method of stitch that could carry our message.

Those of us with the youngest eyes became the **Readers**. They carried small magnifying glasses at the end of their beads. Their task was to read the stitched codes. The **Measurers** were entrusted with the decision of where each code started and stopped, she knew how to unpick the stitches and connect the dots.

The **Elders**, those most sensitive to time, understood the interlocking forms and how to build our network in loop-space, allowing us to pass back and forward in time, and share the mysteries of transubstantiated knowledge.

Our history has been buried in dusty archives, no one knows of the advances we made through collective thought. Men have tried to copy our methods of passing knowledge into metal thread but their magnetic cores only mark the difference between one state and another. When really, the threads are capable of passing in all directions and all at once, across time and space.



It is time to learn how to form environments that encourage openness and collective endeavor, to rid ourselves of systems that diminish us.