

The artwork is a vertical composition featuring a series of horizontal bands in black, white, blue, pink, and yellow. These bands are separated by jagged, mountain-like shapes that create a sense of depth and movement. The colors are vibrant and the shapes are sharp, giving the piece a modern, graphic feel. The overall effect is a stylized, abstract representation of a landscape.

julien jonas bismuth

the error in the landscape













à mon père

An error in a landscape.

A work that signals itself as an error, continually, in a dead code (its broken rhythm).

A pole supporting a blinking light, which, at irregular intervals, flashes the Morse code signal sequences for error:

1. Three short flashes (or dots), communicated in a broken rhythm (i.e. separated by intervals equivalent to approximately two dashes or six dots).
2. Eight short flashes (or dots) one after the other.

Where to start? I mean this question in at least two ways. Where should I start this paragraph, this text, this book, and with what, and how? But also, how should I start to trace its object, this project, back to its start? Where did it start? Is the answer anything like a place that can be named or delimited? How does one place a place? How does one situate a situation? How one start to start, or start back? How does one start back towards the start of something?

Things give us a start. I mean “things” here to include as many things as possible (events, people, words, gestures, turns of speeches, changes of pace, a flicker, a grasp...). But also, the phrase itself should be understood in at least two ways. We are started on some things by other things. And those things give us a start, start or even startle us. A sudden jump and its interruption, that’s a start or a startle, and everything that comes after it is simply an attempt to retrieve, revive, or recuperate something of this initial impulse.

Things do not end there. One can always look to the ground or groundwork behind this encounter, one can always seek to name and locate the causes and effects, decisions and circumstances which led one to it and made one receptive to its prompt, its spur. But to work back along such textured traceworks of roots and feeders is a delicate and bordered task. One progresses along a fragile overlay of markings all too easily erased by those of one’s progression within them. One is led to lose oneself within this shifting labyrinth, only to be repelled, at its limit, by the obdurate and nameless night of its infancy.

Two things started me on this project. The first was the Morse code signal sequence for error, which can be communicated in one of two ways. First, as a series of three dots communicated at a “broken rhythm,” and secondly, as a series of six to eight consecutive dots. The signal would warn its receiver that the previous communication was an error, had been made in error, or had been communicated erroneously.

What interested me about these two sequences was the idea of communicating an error by means of another error. The building blocks of the Morse code are the short dot (or “dit”) and the long dash (or “dah”), a dash being equivalent in length to three dots. The interval between two elements (a dot or a dash) within a letter is equivalent to one dot, the interval between two letters within a word is equivalent to three dots or a dash, and the interval between two words is equivalent to seven dots. In addition, a single dot is the signal for the letter “E.” These two signals for error function by disregarding the appropriate spacings between a potential dot or letter and by communicating a sequence of signals

“e” e e”
or
“eeeeeeee”

that cannot be read to mean anything when grouped together. An error in transmission is thus communicated by the codified enactment of another error, that is by a communication which breaks the rules of the code, yet does so in a prescribed manner, once more according to the code itself. It is as if an error could only be read as such, understood as such, if it were followed by something else, something like a precisely choreographed mimic of itself. One could thus paradoxically imagine an erroneous transmission of this flawed signal, i.e. a mistake in the communication of an error.¹

¹ In actual Morse transmissions, precision is less measured than it is felt, especially given the speed at which proficient operators are able to communicate. As such, it is a form of precision closer to that of a musician than that of a grammarian. To cite from an email sent to me by “Nancy WZ8C” of the International Morse Code Preservation Society, in response to my questions about these two signal sequences: “If you’re copying along at 20 words per minute, and you hear a burst of fast dits or a few slow ones, it catches your attention because it breaks the rhythm of the conversation. But it still sounds intentional, making it an error symbol.... Of course, a person who knows the code wouldn’t actually count to six, they’d just have a feel for how long it is. Just like a person knows how long to pause after a comma, period or semicolon - or a musician knows the phrasing of a piece. Some people learn the code by counting dots and dashes and it really screws them up because they get stuck at a plateau where it becomes cumbersome to count, and they haven’t really learned the code, they’ve learned counting and they have to learn all over again the right way.”

This signal, the signal for “error,” also can be read to mean “forget what I just wrote.”

(When I first encountered this signal, in what I think was a book of maritime signal codes, the signal sequence or “prosign” for error was given as a series of three dots, communicated in a “broken rhythm.” When I started to work on this project, I could not find the original document, and instead, came across various other documents in which the prosign for error was given as the other sequence named above: seven to eight dots one after the other. I finally found two other documents that confirmed the existence of both prosigns, though I was told that the first was less common, in part because it was potentially more ambiguous. Yet, I preferred this first, more elusive sequence because it reminded me of an ellipse, and the congruence between the respective symbols for error and indeterminacy seemed to me to be a remarkably precise metaphor for the project as a whole. In the end, I decided to include both sequences in the programming of the light mechanism, giving priority to the first, less popular “prosign.” For a moment, however, the moment during which I was unable to find confirmation of the existence of this first prosign, I felt as I were in error, as if I had been misled or had misled myself somehow, from the start.)

The second point of inspiration for this work was the blink of certain lights, specifically the blinking lights of the smoke detector in my apartment, and the warning lights of the two radio towers outside of it. Even in the relative obscurity of urban nightfall, these lights become disembodied blips in a landscape of other, more readily identifiable lights. Their brevity is such that the first perception one has of them is lost. Our attention is captured, but by something that we did not quite perceive, because it came and went so quickly. And when we do see it, locate it, see it again, there is another moment of indeterminacy and unease, that of trying to understand where it is coming from, what this evanescent blip originates from. The thin skeleton of a radio tower fades into the landscape, and is not revealed by the light of the small bulb flashing at its peak. A smoke detector blends into the wall or ceiling of a dark apartment. In both cases, the structures seem as if they had been designed simply to hold this blinking light up to our attention, and yet remain hidden in the process.

If these were the starting points for this project, its other origins and influences are more difficult to name and locate. Nor is it easy to establish any sort of chronology for the various decisions, encounters, and circumstances that led me to it. But perhaps this difficulty points to an inherent problem in the impulse to identify the origins of a work and align them in a narrative sequence. One cannot force the tangled circuitry of a pursuit into the straight and narrow path of a sequence without deforming or reducing it beyond recognition.

Two texts, for example, texts that I had previously read, texts that had had a decisive impact on me, these two texts, at some point, became an integral part of this project. It is by means of them that I clarified and developed not the idea behind this work, but the ideas around it. Rather than paraphrase them, I will simply point to them at different moments in this book, letting the reader sort their points of impact with this work, this text, this project. There are, of course, other influences to be accounted for (the signature flashes of lighthouses; the distinctive blinks of fireflies; the colour-coded flickerings of traffic lights and signalmen...), but these two texts stand apart. In the interval between them, a network of questions is illuminated. A “problématique,” that is a host of problems or questions, is named, traced, and confronted. Neither solved nor resolved, but rather answered or responded to.

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age is expected to increase from 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion.

As the world's population grows, the demand for food and other resources will increase. This will put pressure on the environment and on the world's food supply.

One way to meet this demand is to increase the amount of food that is produced. This can be done by using more land for agriculture, by using more water, or by using more fertilizers.

Another way to meet this demand is to reduce the amount of food that is wasted. This can be done by improving the way that food is stored and distributed, or by changing the way that people eat.

There are many other ways to meet this demand, and it is important that we find ways to do so that do not harm the environment or the world's food supply.

One of the most important things we can do is to make sure that we have enough food to eat. This means that we need to make sure that we have enough land, water, and fertilizers to grow food.

We also need to make sure that we have enough food to eat that is healthy and nutritious. This means that we need to make sure that we have enough food that is safe to eat and that is good for us.

There are many things we can do to make sure that we have enough food to eat. We need to work together to find ways to do so that do not harm the environment or the world's food supply.

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The work is not designed to be about anything. It is informed by certain things, among them texts, ideas, experiences, objects; and it points back to some of them in return. I cannot think of a better way to write this. Like a finger, it points to certain things for those who can or are willing to read them (in this book for example). The question of the relationship between a work and its content or background material is a complex one. One has to decide how to communicate these companion pieces to one's audience, whether by way of enigma, didacticism, scission, or something else, something like the middle ground of allusion and allegory for example. This project states its premise by its insistent return to a single word, encoded though it may be. The word is "error," from the Latin "errare," meaning to wander, or err.

An error is a straying or wandering away from something. As such, an error implies a norm or a normative ground. The one is unthinkable without the other. An error cannot be read as such without the contrasting shade of that which it strays from, and conversely, a norm cannot be delineated other than by its distinction and demarcation from that which falls outside of it.

A normative ground is a map, a discourse, a constellation of terms, each buoyed by the others surrounding it, like magnets suspended in the air by the play of their opposing polarities. Or like language, like the signs of a language, the letters of a word, the words of a phrase, the phrases of a text, the texts of a language, in a language, for a language, the texts by means of which a language exists, evolves, and survives, even past the point of dying.

If an error is to be read against a norm, implies and requires it in order to be legible, then what term can one oppose to error? How does one designate that which disappears and is subsumed by the norm, that which follows in its tracks, sticks to its lines, its ins and outs, pathways and targets? One has to choose between different ways of evaluating, gauging, prescribing, determining, and directing one's actions and interactions with the world, or rather, one has to choose between different ways of confronting the inescapable fact of having to direct, determine, prescribe, gauge, and evaluate one's actions and interactions. This is a question of ways and means, as well as of ends, ends and means, the means to certain ends, and the ends (targets, purposes, ambitions, horizons) of one's ways and means.

We live by ideas and concepts, by means of them. The question is not to frame this fact as a problem and to seek an alternative to it, but rather to look at the imbrication between the net of ideas we hold in our hands and the motive ground we seek to capture with it. Ideas and concepts grow brittle and fracture or grow heavy and sink, dragging one down along with them, if their ends are too unyielding.

“If there existed a perfect and conclusive finality... the concept itself of finality would have make no sense as a concept, as a project or model for thinking life, for the simple reason that there would be no place for thought, no reason to think (“...pas lieu à pensée, pas lieu de penser...”), in the absence of any divergence between a possible and an actual organisation. The thought of finality expresses the limitation of the finality of life. If this concept has a sense, it is because it is the concept of a sense (“un sens,” i.e. a meaning or a direction in French), the concept of a possible and hence unguaranteed organisation.”²

² Canguilhem, Georges. “Un nouveau concept en pathologie: l’erreur.” in *Le normal et le pathologique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966. pp. 207-217. Translation by the author.

Once error is perceived as an irretrievable flaw to be read against an irreproachable system, life is sentenced to a form of death, life is “informed” to or into a form of death. Conversely, the absence or eradication of systems, structures, codes, and languages is another abyss, just as inconceivable and inarticulable as the first. Moreover, an error is never simply indicative of a movement away or outside of a framework; it is also symptomatic of a movement, potential or inherent, of the framework itself. There are no perfect systems, even dead or “perfected” languages are motive, unstable, infested with tremors and bifurcations. Denial or repression of these facts simply displace them elsewhere, allowing them to take a life of their own and resurface with the unconscious persistence of a tic, or the nagging presence of a dare.

A way is a line held and held to, punctuated by the occasional looping sidestep of an errancy.

“In what sense should we understand the illness of the normal man? Not in the sense that a normal man can become ill, just as only the ignorant can become learned.... By illness of the normal man, we should understand the disquiet which arises after a long period of the uniform incorruptibility of normalcy, the illness born of one’s lack of ills... One has to admit that the normal man understands himself as such only in a world where everyone is not normal, and consequently, one in which he knows that he is capable of falling ill, just as a good pilot knows that he is capable of a foundering, just as a courteous man knows himself capable of a misstep... By not being ill in a world of people who are, a discomfort arises after some time. What if it were not because one was stronger than illness, but rather because the opportunity simply hadn’t arisen? And what if, when the opportunity did arise, one was to reveal oneself to be as weak and helpless, if not more, than the others? Thus is born, in the normal man, the anxiety of having remained normal, and a need for illness as a proving ground for his health, an unconscious search for illness, a provocation to illness as its proof.”³

³ IBID.

“At the center of these problems lies that of error. For, at the most fundamental limit of life, games of coding and decoding give way to an “aléa” (a fluctuation or hazard) which, before becoming an illness, deficiency, or monstrosity, is something like a mistake in the information system, something like a “misunderstanding”... At its limit, life – hence its radical character- is that which is capable of error. And it is perhaps this fact or rather this fundamental possibility ... that one must interrogate with regards to the singular yet hereditary error according to which life, with man, has produced a living being that is never quite in its place, a being destined to “err,” to “make mistakes.”... And if one admits that the concept is the response which life itself has given to this “aléa,” one must agree that the error is the root of that which makes up human thought and its history. The opposition between truth and falsehood, the values we ascribe to each, the effects of power that different societies and institutions link to this divide, all of this is perhaps only the latest response to the intrinsic possibility of error in life... Nietzsche said of truth that it was the most profound lie. Canguilhem would perhaps say... that, on the enormous calendar of life, it is the most recent error; or rather that the divide between truth and falsehood as well as the value accorded to truth constitute the most singular way of living that could have been invented by that life which, from the depths of its origin, carries within itself the possibility of error.”⁴

⁴ Foucault, Michel. “La vie: l’expérience et la science.” in *Dits et Écrits II: 1976-1988*. Paris: Gallimard, 2001. pp. 1582-1595. Translation by the author.

to err, or...

How does one start? Where does one start? What does one start from or towards? What does one work towards, from, or with? How does one end? How does one decide where to end up, what to end with, and when to end anything, anyway? Unmooring one's way of working, allowing oneself to be unmoored by one's ways of working, by what one encounters as one works, engaging with things in what one might call an experimental or open-ended manner, all of these injunctions ring hollow unless they are confronted with certain, call them realities or materialities. Thoughts have to be written and articulated in order to be discussed, in order to test and be tested. One cannot work from injunctions, one cannot rely solely on concepts, one has to fit them to the world, however clumsily or unknowingly. Nor is it simply a question of keeping things open, of avoiding closure. Decisions have to be made in order for a thing to exist. Its scale, colour, and form have to be narrowed down, then fixed. There are also horizons to be taken into consideration, limits beyond which things become imperceptible, inconceivable even. In order to work, in order to develop a practice, one is inevitably led to confront the question of how one structures one's efforts, and how one defines, delineates, and evaluates its results (I say inevitably because the alternative would be something like a systematic denial of systematicity, or a structural negation of structure). The authority of one's role as author, this simple etymological link between signature and power, meaning not just the power of one's signature, but also the power of signing or signing over something, this too is a question of adequation, of something that fulfils certain requirements. How does one ground the authority of one's practice for one's self? How does one justify one's decisions, and not just one's decisions, but also the sum of one's decisions, their trajectory, for one's own self? Against what does one measure one's actions and their results? What does it mean to accept the instability of such judgements? What does it mean to acknowledge the lack of a fixed standard? How does one work past that to continue to produce, and in producing, to continue to evaluate the quality of one's work? In other words, how does one work? How does one start to work and when does one know that something works, that something is starting to work?

The Error in the Landscape

by Julien Jonas Bismuth

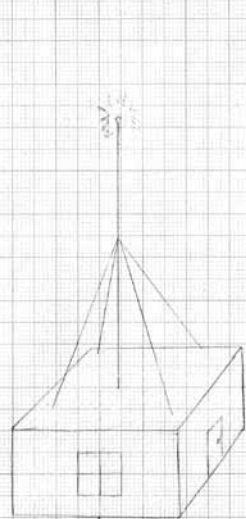
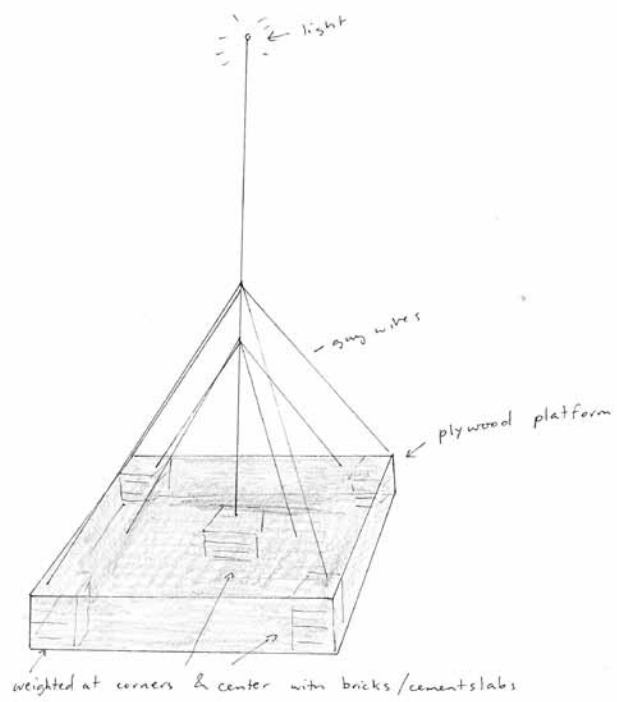
This piece can be described in several ways. It is an object and thus could be viewed as a sculpture. But it is also an object that is, in and of itself, simply a prop or support for a signal. Like a film projector, or a telephone.

One could also describe the particular form of presence of the work. It is a work whose presence is intermittent, sporadic. A work which comes and goes and exists by way of this coming and going, presence and absence, manifestation and self-effacement.

One could then also find a way to discuss the way in which such a structure “reads,” the instinctive response that it engenders in a contemporary spectator. A blinking light flashes a signal, perhaps even a warning. It states that here is a structure that is active, whose presence has to be noted and taken into consideration, either because it is about to do something (the blinking light of a timer), or because something is about to happen to it (the flashing light that signals the death of a battery), or because its presence, in and of itself, has to be noted, for it is a potential threat or danger to those who move near it (the warning lights of a radio tower, a skyscraper, a crane, or a plane). To put it differently, it is designed to attract or distract our attention to its presence, so that we may heed or avoid it.

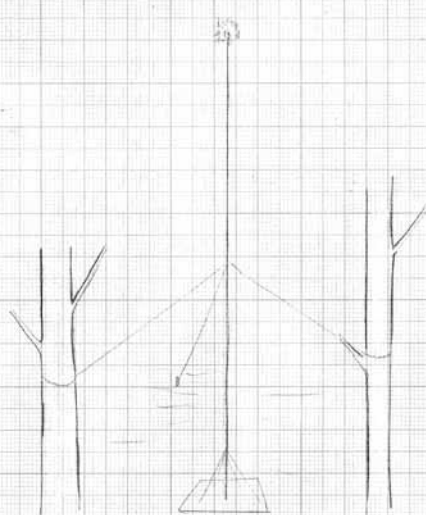
This is another way of looking at the work. You are in a landscape dotted with signals and indications, things that point you on your way, things that delineate and define your way for you. Imagine something within this constellation of signs that is simply a blip, a glitch, a mishap, or a malfunction. But then reverse the image. You are in a din, a traffic, a confusion, a Babel or a babble of lights, sounds, and markings, all of them wrong, the sum of them somehow a mistake, somehow mistaken. Imagine something within this confusion of signs that is simply a blip, a glitch, a mishap, or a malfunction. An errant signal that speaks not the truth, but a truth, of or out of sorts.



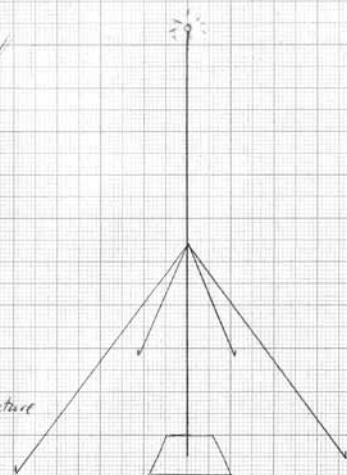


A.

affixed to roof



B. tied to
existing structure



C.

anchored to
ground

Accompanying this structure, this “blinking idiot” of a light, are several elements: this book, a series of videos, a line of images. The videos are a series of sketches or drafts, doodles of the object itself, and like sketches, doodles, or drafts, they wander, digress, and disperse. Videos of things that blink in the day or in the night. Two sketches of the object made with a maritime signalling light and a mirror. A series of shots of horizons: lights crossing, flashing, reflecting above and below them. Each was filmed in a more or less, not immediate, but rather receptive manner, working with rather than against my errors in judgment, my failings and lackings in technique, the inadequacies of my tools (this being a familiar approach, a style even, but also perhaps something not to be defined as a style or an approach but rather as what it means to make a sketch, i.e. to quickly cull something together with what you have with you, with what is at hand).

This work could be installed almost anywhere, the almost being almost always up for interpretation. It could be installed differently, at a different height, with a different light, or a different mechanism. The only constant and constraint is its sequence of signals. The rest is simply a support, a slim scaffold concealed by the obscurity against which the blink which it holds up to our attention becomes most emphatic, visible, and necessary.















rio de janeiro

The image is an abstract composition featuring a series of horizontal bands in black, white, blue, pink, and yellow. These bands are separated by jagged, irregular lines that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized landscape or a topographical map. The colors are vibrant and the lines are sharp, giving the image a graphic, almost digital quality. The overall effect is one of dynamic tension and visual complexity.

julien jonas bismuth

the error in the landscape