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UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

PAUL NEAGU: HYPHEN AS CONSEQUENCE AND CATALYST

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH**

BY KIRSTIE GREGORY

HUDDERSFIELD, UK

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Research Statement

This dissertation will explore the critical nature of the form, which came to be known as Hyphen, for the practice of Romanian/British artist Paul Neagu (1938-2004). Romanian traditions, both cultural and visual, the recent rise of Communism, and early work experiences combined with a metaphysical way of thinking, and led circuitously, but logically, to the invention of the Hyphen. Conceptual and formal artistic concerns met with a complex, esoteric, philosophical approach, and resulted in this invention being an alchemic discovery for the artist. The genesis of the Hyphen merits close examination, as does its changing properties, its appearance in many different contexts, its multiple functions, meanings and purposes and its identity as a malleable signpost to metaphysical pathways. The cosmological and ontological ambitions of Neagu both produced the Hyphen and grew following its invention; the Hyphen came to be a catalyst for and integral to the development of Neagu's work.

As well as looking at the development of Neagu's sculpture — the way in which his early work led up to the realisation of the Hyphen — and contextualising the Hyphen in its changing geographical and historical

locations, this dissertation will read his sculpture as the most important component within a wider philosophical code - his Generative Art Code. Neagu created this code through a highly personal intuitive process and it was visually demonstrated perhaps most successfully in 1975 at his solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Oxford — which also marked the occasion of the Hyphen's first appearance. Following the creation of the Hyphen Neagu's work was transformed by his invention and this dissertation will detail its many different actualisations, including finally its giving rise to the Nine Catalytic Station ensemble of sculptures.

Neagu's practice is explained frequently in his own writing, as well as in the wonderfully expressive explanatory language of his extended recorded interview with Mel Gooding.¹ The philosophical viewpoints which have been recorded by Neagu as influential resonate throughout the progression of his art-making and it is worth attempting to unravel these connections at key moments.² Journal articles, reviews, monographic publications, exhibition

1. Paul Neagu, National Life Stories interview with Mel Gooding, Artists' Lives, British Library, catalogue reference C466/27.

2. Neagu has frequently recorded the influence of structuralist philosopher Claude Lévi-Strauss. An interest in structuralism was followed some years later by his reading R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz's *The Temple in Man*. Schwaller's interest in sacred geometry (geometry in the architecture of sacred structures) is a fit with the development of Neagu's practice. In the later years of his practice the work of Jacques Derrida became integral for Neagu, with his emphasis on deconstruction and the importance of metaphysics clearly chiming with Neagu's own approach to life and art.

catalogues, interviews, archival material and direct examination of the work are integral to the research ambitions of this dissertation. The structure of the dissertation is — coincidentally — similar to that of an excellent short text by artist and curator Deanna Petherbridge, who explains this approach as follows:

I have deliberately chosen to explain the work chronologically, because this is the way that Neagu's conceptual system and artistic practice has grown: ideas inherent in thinking find physical embodiment gradually, as wider speculation and reading give a more concrete aspect to the theory.³

By the same means this dissertation aims to contribute to research into sculptural theory and production in Britain in the 1960s and 70s, to analyse the heritage of an immediately mysterious object, and to indicate how Neagu exploited and experienced the potential of his invention. Perhaps it is worth noting here that I have decided to refer to the Hyphen without inverted commas as Neagu himself seems to err towards this choice unless referring to a specific work, although writers have also used 'Hyphen' and *hyphen*.

3. Deanna Petherbridge in Paul Neagu, *Writhing Space: Paul Neagu*, exhibition catalogue, (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1981), n.p.

Abstract

The Hyphen at its most basic is a three legged, impractical table, with an isosceles triangle formed by its three legs. It occupies an integral position within Paul Neagu's practice. His drawings, paintings and sculptures all explore forms, materials and, crucially, concepts which are linked (or 'hyphenated') to his oeuvre in its entirety. The Hyphen is the critical fulcrum. Within this practice there is a logical progression of concepts and creations, although key concerns also move back and forth in prominence, eventuating into a philosophically and historically dense practice and narrative – one deliberately interwoven. This dissertation seeks to explain the Hyphen and its context as far as possible, specifically its role as a crucial pivot within a practice overall more concerned with circularity than stand-alone sculpture.

The Hyphen was formally a result of both Neagu's Romanian heritage and his strong sense of the semiotic capabilities inherent in simple shapes (the triangle, the rectangle, the circle). Conceptually the Hyphen is clearly linked with his Generative Art Code, this being a philosophical approach to life which merits careful explanation in order to clarify this relationship. The Generative Art Code was for Neagu as important a textual guidebook by which to grasp the world as the Hyphen was a visual tool. Also integral to the development of the Hyphen are the works which came before – primarily the anthropocosmic work, his palpable art and the invention of the Generative Art Group. The Hyphen melds form and concept in a highly eccentric, highly intellectual sculpture, derived from philosophical and visual influences and eccentric and intellectual sources.

The dissertation is split into three sections, outlining in turn Neagu's practice pre-Hyphen, the context in which the Hyphen emerged and the new sculptural oeuvre which emerged from its invention.

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Introduction

An early intuition called 'subject generator' has been drafted, shifted, built, destroyed and re-drawn hundreds of times. Named sculpture as HYPHEN as sculpture, re-enforced, lost several times, re-founded as fulcrum and meeting point between subject and object, as sculpture and idea. It rounds up libido, ego and the self in one contemporary symbol.⁴

This is how, ten years after its first public appearance in 1975 (fig. 1), Paul Neagu describes the object he created and constantly re-created, the form he came to call Hyphen. His words are tricky to follow, somewhere between poetry and prose, they demonstrate the confident lyricism of an artist with intent focus and philosophical depth. The above quotation indicates the sustained significance the Hyphen had for Neagu – its enduring catalytic potency and the complex roots of its conception are the central concern of this dissertation. He refers to the Hyphen as “an early intuition”, which can be interpreted as indicating a physical manifestation of an individual instinct. Unravelling the strands of Neagu’s systems of thinking and the sculptural expressions of these systems, is also at the heart of this dissertation.

On arrival in the UK Neagu already had much experience of negotiating obstacles, both personal and professional, and following an invitation from artist and gallerist Richard Demarco, himself an avant-garde catalytic presence

4. Paul Neagu, *Paul Neagu: Hyphen*, exhibition catalogue, (London: Visual Hermeneutics, 1985), 3.

within the Scottish art scene, Neagu arrived in Edinburgh a mature person and artist, that is to say a confident, thoughtful worker prepared to negotiate life in a foreign country and master communication in another language (he already spoke fluent French as well as Romanian). He was mentally equipped to focus his mind and activity towards the opportunities open to him, these first being presented through Demarco, who met Neagu during a tour of Eastern Europe, in fellow Romanian artist Ion Bitzan's studio in Bucharest in 1968.⁵ Neagu's early years in Bucharest and Timisoara had a significant influence on his practice and chapter one will look at this in some detail. His modest, urbane self-belief and the nature of the work itself saw that he went on to create a subtle and unusual impression on British art, rather than the other way around. Neagu's burgeoning philosophical concerns deserve emphasis and chapter one will also examine how they led to his 'anthropocosmic' art and his *Palpable Art Manifesto*, also demonstrating the importance of these two personal artistic developments and their influence on his future work. 'Anthropocosmos' is a term Neagu uses to refer to his visual depictions of man as in the universe whilst the universe simultaneously exists in man, of man as microcosm of macrocosm, a modern image for an ancient philosophical concept. The *Palpable Art Manifesto* sought to challenge the dominance given to the sense of sight in

5. Richard Demarco, "Such is the Dance", in *Nine Catalytic Stations: Paul Neagu 1975-1987*, ed. Angela Wrapson, (Edinburgh: The Scottish Sculpture Trust, 1988), n.p.

the visual arts, a concept closely related to the twentieth-century philosophical phenomenological movement. Neagu (fig. 2) shown here beside examples of his early tactile sculpture which led to the manifesto being written, emigrated from Romania to the UK in 1970 following an initial visit a year earlier.⁶ He gained British citizenship (whilst retaining his Romanian citizenship) in 1977 and following this returned to Romania frequently, although from the early 1970s he made North East London his permanent home.

Chapter two will look at the context of the Hyphen, framing its conception within a logical sequence following the anthropocosmic, the palpable, and - directly preceding the Hyphen - the Generative Art Code and the Generative Art Group.⁷ The Hyphen prototype was constructed in wood and steel and titled 'The Subject Generator'. Drawings of the eventual sculpture exist from the previous year, 1974, (fig. 3) and from 1975 (fig. 4). Neagu explains the revelatory invention as follows:

6. This photograph shows Paul Neagu standing in front of his work at his first exhibition outside Romania, in Hamburg in 1969. The exhibited work which can be seen behind Neagu was displayed at Richard Demarco's gallery in the same year, 1969.

7. Not to imply that Neagu 'dropped' these earlier concerns, they endured, just ceded precedence.



Figure 1. Paul Neagu, 'The Subject Generator', 1975, installation view Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.



Figure 2. Paul Neagu with the first exhibition of his palpable boxes in Hamburg in 1969.

In 1974 The Hyphen was born..... This tool was nothing if not a sculptural tool for dancing spirals. Since 1975 I made hundreds of Hyphens, their subtlety is beyond intellectuals simply because they are not an illustration of spirals..... they promise spirals in the same way a compass is (a caliper [*sic*] is a promise of a circle!)⁸

In these early drawings Neagu appears to be combining practical and theoretical strands that had long concerned him; he links the object very clearly with the Generative Art Code, with his Generative Art Group with gender, and in one of the annotated sketches, very clearly with the Christian cross. Reminiscent of a plough, a mathematical compass, a creepy triffid, a crab, an insect, the Hyphen's first three-dimensional appearance not only possessed metamorphic, anthropomorphic qualities, it also retained a coherent practical function as a table or desk, albeit an unusual looking one. Artist Peter Lewis, who knew and worked alongside Neagu, has observed that the Hyphen emerged at a time when Neagu was very concerned with the shelving furniture within an exhibition space, and makes a direct link between this and the Hyphen, implying an atypical early practical function.⁹ As the quotation above demonstrates Neagu also thought of the Hyphen very definitely as having the potential, if in motion, for circularity, for creating spirals, alongside a clear

8. Demarco, "Such is the Dance", n. p.

9. Peter Lewis, 'The Generative Art of Paul Neagu: Object as Catalyst'. Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

triangular base and a definite rectangular crown. These geometric shapes were a sculptural evolution from his Generative Art Code, the code being a philosophical understanding of mankind formulated by the artist in the early 1970s and a concept or 'thinking tool' for his practice. A tripartite code made up of the sections 'Blind Bite', 'Horizontal Rain' and 'Going Tornado', this served as an approach to the world which came to permeate every aspect of his practice.¹⁰ Chapter two will examine the Generative Art Code and explore Neagu's extraordinary visual manifestations of it in more detail.

The prototype Hyphen was exhibited as part of the exhibition, *Paul Neagu and his 'Generative Art Group'*, at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1975. It has three legs; curved and hooked at the bottom, the pointed tips lending it a faintly menacing air, hinting at the potential to move of its own volition, to both creep up and hang on. These sharpened legs also simultaneously ground the object, and through this the critical connection between a code for living being rooted in nature and beginning at ground level is revealed – which will be explained as a clear visual manifestation of the first section of the Generative Art Code. This original Hyphen had a rectangular glass top and displayed, "a double version of five working implements (magnifying glass, microphone,

10. Chapter two explains the Generative Art Code in more detail, but in summary the three unusually named 'levels' refer to three stages in life as delineated by Neagu. 'Blind Bite' is a stage of innocence and curiosity, 'Horizontal Rain' indicates being in tune with society and material culture, and 'Going Tornado' is a point in life where one reaches for transcendence towards spirituality. The majority of Neagu's art is closely related to the Generative Art Code.

mirror, lamp, white board)."¹¹ The presence of these objects was not unusual; Neagu had previously displayed a selection of anomalous objects in exhibitions at the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool and the Serpentine Gallery, London, sometimes referring to them as 'mutants', an oddly organic description for a group of inanimate objects. 'The Subject Generator' was described in art and architecture historian Paul Overy's review of the Oxford exhibition in *The Times* as, "a huge and monstrous glass and wood table resting on great legs of ash steamed into hook-like curves."¹² Peter Lewis has also pointed out that, perhaps influenced by Constantin Brancusi whom he greatly admired, Neagu's Hyphens are both sculpture and plinth.¹³

Following its first manifestation in 1975 the Hyphen has a chameleon-like ability to adapt to different environments and appears (amongst many other variations) as the inspiration for movement in a photo of the artist 'performing' in Greece; palm-size; monumental; alone (usually); as part of a group; hard-edged; endless-edged; with exposed craftsmanship and with highly polished patina; painted, sculpted, even drawn-over a photo of a Mexican crystal skull

11. Matei Stircea-Craciun, *Nine Catalytic Stations: A Study in Hylesic Symbolism*, (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House, 2003), 183.

12. Paul Overy, "Products of the split personality", *The Times*, 4 March 1975.

13. Lewis, 'The Generative Art of Paul Neagu: Object as Catalyst', 2012.

(fig. 5). Over time Neagu is testing its potential to adapt and retain meaning and potency while making material, formal and contextual shifts.

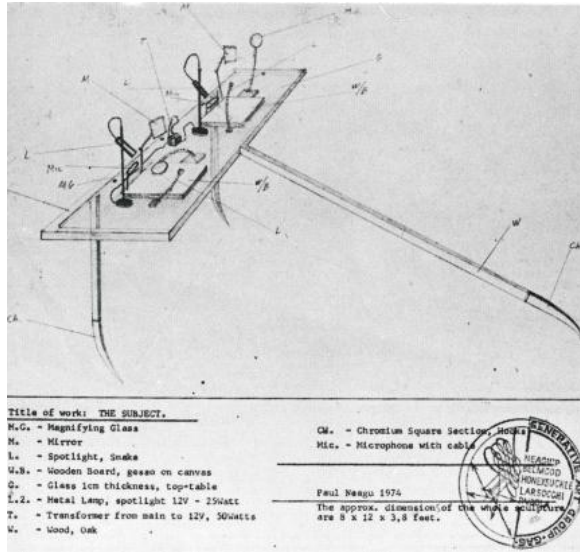


Figure 3. Paul Neagu, 'The Subject Generator', 1974.

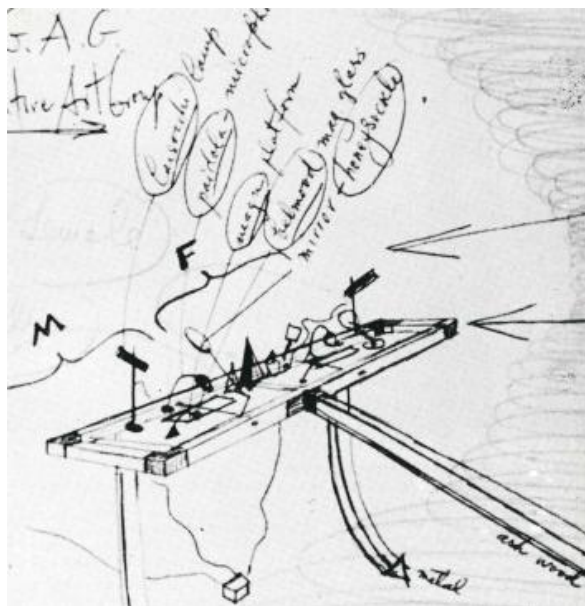


Figure 4. Paul Neagu, 'The Subject Generator', 1975.

The Hyphen has multiple contextual and philosophical meanings, and as well as moving through countless different contexts, the archetype diversified into countless forms and materials, which will be examined further in chapter three. By looking at examples of the Hyphen in different locations, with many formal nuances, in various materials, the creative potential of the object will become apparent, as will the wonderful power of this modern visual signifier to cross geographical and historical boundaries and test the potential of Neagu's peculiar ethos.

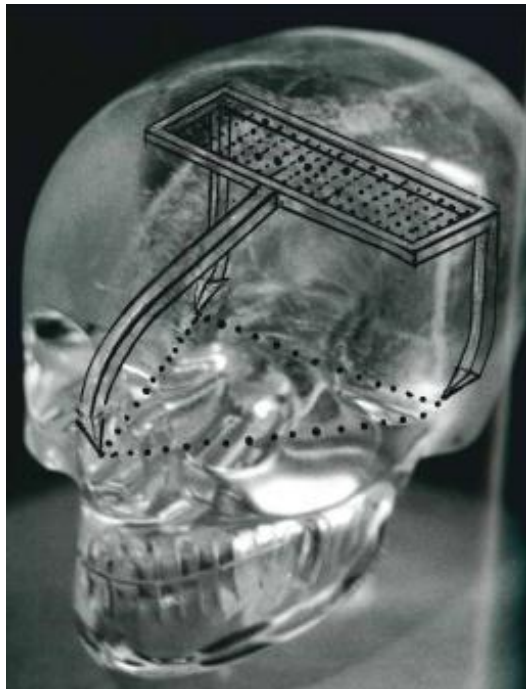


Figure 5. Paul Neagu, 'Hyphen and Skull', 1975.

Neagu constantly re-explored forms and compositions, as well as the inherent properties and associations of materials. His practice demonstrates an enduring enquiry into a relatively small number of forms but with unlimited reserve for invention and exploration within this small visual lexicon. Conceptually, from his late teenage years he was intensely interested in philosophical theories such as cosmology, anthropology, structuralism, post-structuralism, psychology and shamanism, and investigated the signs and symbols of philosophies. Whilst he often employed traditional materials such as steel and wood, he also experimented with the haptic capabilities of less traditionally constructed objects, and materials were thoughtfully employed. This attention to the inherent metaphysical qualities of materials led anthropologist Matei Stircea-Craciun to create the term 'hylesic symbolism'.¹⁴ Neagu also explored and invented many more unexpected forms, and embraced performance, painting, drawing and photography to explore profoundly sculptural concerns. The third chapter will also look at the catalytic potential of the Hyphen – at what came next. Arguably, the 'Nine Catalytic Stations' sculptures (fig. 6), which were generated by the Hyphen, eventually came to be almost as compulsive for the artist as their inspirational progenitor –

14. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*. Stircea-Craciun's 2003 publication (which Neagu was actively involved in) is invaluable in its examination of the artist's use of materials. 'Hylesic Symbolism' is a methodology developed by Stircea-Craciun involving the critical examination of the material of a work of art.

the Eve from Adam's rib. Each station can be traced back to the Hyphen formally and conceptually and this chapter will look at the fate of the Hyphen within the Nine Catalytic Stations, including Neagu's desire to achieve a hermetic, circular practice, a comprehensible (if complex) creative answer to and demonstration of both the observable world and the metaphysical environment. The Hyphen is not Neagu's only recurrent visual question - a habit of working through ideas through repetition emerges from the very beginnings of his practice in both individual works and composite installations, and the idiosyncratic vernacular he uses to explain his practice becomes similarly well-established.¹⁵ His concerns are all connected, but the process of translating and joining-up the lines between the works is not always clear and at times fraught with paradox. In addition, the often opaque but wonderfully poetic manner in which Neagu describes his approach to life and art makes for an artist potentially both tantalising and off-putting. This dissertation will ultimately seek to examine the sculptural manifestations of these written and spoken theories, to demonstrate that the Hyphen is not only the most likely and

15. For example, his 'anthropocosmic' work, his three-part 'Generative Code' (encompassing the 'stages' of existence he christened 'blind bite', horizontal rain' and 'going tornado'). This curious phraseology was in no way random, growing out of his interest in and knowledge of the philosophies of George Gurdjieff, Noam Chomsky, Gilbert Durand, Tantric Scripture and Buddhism. Unpicking the influence of his philosophical readings on Neagu is difficult. I attempt to do so further at relevant points in the dissertation.

logical formal and conceptual result of the artist's experiences and philosophies but also the most important agent in the creation of the work which followed.

In 1981 art and architecture historian Paul Overy published a sensitive and insightful book, *Paul Neagu*, detailing Neagu's work between 1965 and 1981 and particularly responsive to Neagu's Romanian heritage.¹⁶ The only other monographic study of Neagu's work was published in 2003 by Matei Stircea-Craciun, a writer and researcher with a background in anthropology, whose book, *Paul Neagu - Nine Catalytic Stations: A Study in Hylesic Symbolism*, takes as its primary focus Neagu's later work (serendipitously he takes up the narrative almost as Overy's account ends). But Stircea-Craciun has a strikingly different approach to Overy's, examining the Nine Catalytic Stations through the methodology of hylesic symbolism.¹⁷ As well as the artist's own writings, invaluable and frequent from the time of his move to the UK, other art historians, curators and critics who have published articles, reviews or interviews for national press and specialist art publications include Guy Brett, Marc Chaimowicz, Richard Demarco, Alastair Mackintosh, John McEwen, Cordelia Oliver, Ileana Pintilie and William Varley. There also exist many exhibition catalogues which are invaluable in piecing together a visual history

16. Paul Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context 1965-1981*, (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1981).

17. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*.

and evaluating the impact of Neagu's exhibited work. Neagu's 1994 extended interview with art historian Mel Gooding is perhaps the singular most valuable research resource, with Neagu, a very expressive speaker, recounting a wonderfully detailed auto-biography which gives one revealing, emotive and unparalleled access to the artist's thoughts. Other resources include video recordings of Neagu's performances, the vast Richard Demarco archive, the Tate archive (largely uncatalogued at present), archival documents in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, and a fascinating documentary film, *Heart of the Tornado*, made by Laurentiu and Agnieszka Garofeanu in 2004.

Work by Neagu is available to view first-hand in collections including those of the Arts Council Collection, the Henry Moore Institute, Laing Art Gallery, the Neagu estate, the Richard Demarco collection, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Tate collection, as well as various private collections (often those of close friends of the artist), all of whom have been unwaveringly supportive of further research into the artist. These various resources are a rich, underexposed and disparate collection of material and this dissertation will pull together primary and secondary material with the intention of bringing further and closer attention to a complicated artist and a mysterious object. Art historical/critical writing on Neagu has slowed significantly since the 1980s, although responses are reliably forthcoming and admiring when one elicits responses from contemporary artists, writers and art historians. Those who

write most convincingly about Neagu's practice are often those who have returned to the work as a subject repeatedly. He is not an artist whose work is easy to grasp on first acquaintance, and the repetitive, re-worked nature of the work, with a traceable pattern of ancestry and ascendancy, lends itself to a protracted relationship. Essays and reviews from the 1970s are most profuse and are particularly useful both for gauging the critical reception of these works and performances as well as providing contextual depth and information. The ebbing away of such reviews, and his lack of critical acclaim and financial success in later life is largely due to the unfashionable allegiance to a very personal spirituality which he maintained throughout his life. Curator and critic Sarah Kent wrote in a 1977 exhibition catalogue essay:

It is rare for a contemporary artist to acknowledge a spiritual orientation. The mysticism of American painters of the Abstract Expressionist generation like Newman, Rothko and Reinhardt, tends to be brushed aside as somewhat embarrassing. But Neagu is quite firm in his position: 'Certainly man's existence on earth has a definite purpose,' he wrote, 'namely, the obligation of evolving towards a higher consciousness.'¹⁸

Neagu is not easy to categorise. His influence on contemporary art is subtle, and although the spiritual roots of his sculpture remain unpopular, the formal and material strength of his work is sufficiently powerful to ensure his enduring interest to critics and curators. However, extended critical writing

18. Sarah Kent, "The Flavour of the Olive", *Paul Neagu: Sculpture*, (London: ICA, 1977), n.p.

which takes both actual and metaphysical qualities into account and makes clear the connections between both is lacking. One cannot help but separate Neagu's practice into defined components, his own intellectual skill with phraseology encourages this approach too, but it is necessary to keep in mind that the successful, circular, amalgamation of art and philosophy is what Neagu was striving for.

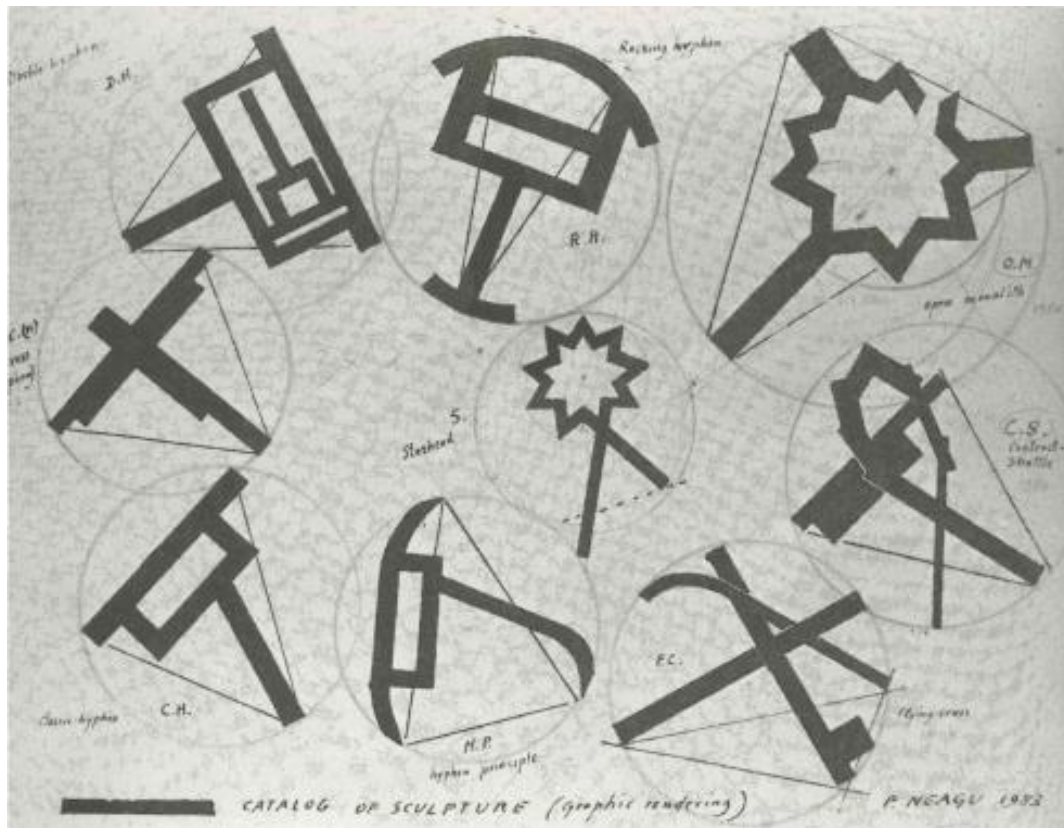


Figure 6. Paul Neagu, 'Catalogue of Sculpture', 1983.

Chapter One: Pre-Hyphen

Paul Neagu was born in Bucharest in 1938. His father, Tudor, was a shoemaker, a profession with tools and skills which made a strong impression on Neagu and was to influence his later artistic practice. Following a move to Bucharest from Moldavia, a province of north east Romania, Tudor met Neagu's mother, Rosalia, as a result of joining a local Baptist church. Both parents had been raised in the Orthodox Christian religion, the prevalent faith in Romania then as now, but were drawn to the welcoming nature of the Baptist community they discovered in Bucharest. Paul Overy highlights something of the significance of Neagu's Baptist upbringing, "Romania is a predominantly Orthodox country, but Neagu's family were strict Baptists, so his family were 'marginalised' both before and after the coming of Communism to Romania in 1945". He continues:

The total immersion central to the Baptist faith in which he was brought up may help to understand the physical and bodily involvement of many of his rituals and happenings. In all his work the totality of the experience is incorporated and in his performance his own bodily involvement becomes the most potent symbol of this: the whole man.¹⁹

The serious, all encompassing, self-confident approach Neagu had to his practice can also be seen, in part, as a result of an upbringing within a family of

19. Overy, *Paul Neagu*, 12.

strong principles and a resilience to popular, majority, beliefs. Following the rise of Communism the family moved to Timisoara, in the West of Romania, c.1946. Tudor had employed two people in his Bucharest shoe making business and therefore had been identified by the regime as a capitalist; he was forced to take work in a factory in Timisoara, although he continued to make shoes in secret, at home. Neagu also learned the profession of the shoemaker.



Figure 7. Mid-twentieth-century Italian shoemaker's last

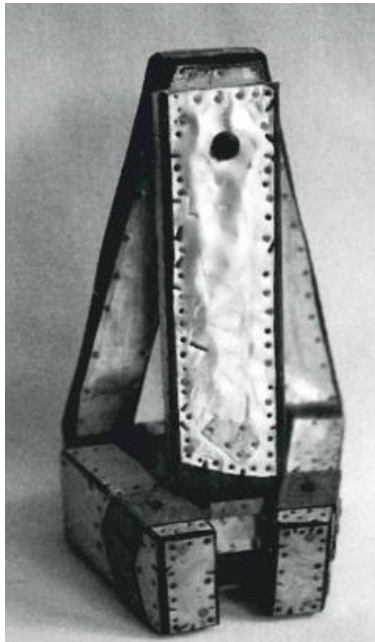


Figure 8. Paul Neagu, 'Shoemaker's Hyphen', 1984.

Childhood for Neagu coincided with a period of significant societal upheaval, not just in Romania, but worldwide. It is worth briefly outlining some of the key historical/political events in the country which coincided with these impressionable early years and indicate the changing political and social landscape of the country.²⁰ Following a period of relative stability in Romania on either side of the turn of the twentieth-century, and after initial attempts to remain neutral, Romania joined WWI in 1916. This choice was related to longstanding positive Franco-Romanian relations. Romania had retained a friendly relationship with France since the beginning of the nineteenth century,

20. This timeline was compiled largely from the following two sources: Mungiu-Pippidi, "Hijacked Modernization: Romanian Political Culture in the 20th Century", in *Südosteuropa*, 55, 2007, 1, S. 118–144; Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, (London: University of California Press, 2003).

strengthened by Napoleon III's assistance in the founding of the young Romanian state mid-century. Until the rise of Communism French was the unofficial second language in Romania, and the majority of Romanians held French culture in high regard. Neagu spoke French fluently and after leaving Romania made frequent visits to France. The Romanian Communist Party (RCP) was founded in 1921, although it remained a largely underground movement until 1944; from its inception it maintained strong links with the Russian Communist party and the Comintern. During the 1930s Romania saw the rise of the ultra-nationalist, fascist, anti-communist Iron Guard movement, culminating in a dictatorship being established by King Carol II in 1938. This coincided with the year of Neagu's birth (Neagu had one elder brother, one younger brother, and three sisters). Romania again tried to remain neutral in WWII but came under increasing threat of invasion from Russia and in 1940 ceded territory to Hungary and the USSR. Following this, and two days after being made Prime Minister, pro-Nazi General Ion Antonescu forced King Carol to abdicate in favour of his son, Michael, but subsequently assumed dictatorial power himself; in 1941 Romania fought against the Soviet Union with Germany. This allegiance continued until 1944 when a political coalition formed around King Michael I overthrew Antonescu and Romania switched sides as Soviet forces occupied the country. Neagu does not discuss his family's political leanings, but their Baptist religion is frequently referred to by him.

From the strength of belief he describes one can draw the conclusion that they would not adapt easily to a society ruled by an atheist political party. In 1945 a Soviet-backed government was installed and in 1947 King Michael was forced to abdicate and the Communist party proclaimed the Romanian People's Republic the same day. Neagu describes his family's experience of that year:

About the same year when we moved to Timisoara, the Baptists became a kind of illegal religion in the sense that the Communists didn't accept something which they knew came as a spread from America.²¹

These events were followed in 1948-49 by the establishment of a Soviet-style constitution and purges of dissidents in the Communist party. In 1952 party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a Stalinist sympathiser, became Prime Minister and in 1956 the RCP supported Soviet intervention in Hungary. As a result of this there was great civil unrest, notably in Timisoara and Bucharest. Neagu was eighteen years old. He speaks briefly on the subject in his extended interview with Mel Gooding:

As you could imagine, before the war and during the war and immediately after my childhood, along with the other children, was surrounded by this tense situation, in spite of which my father continued to be a progressive person, he was always a very courageous character . . . he was a go-ahead kind of guy.²²

21. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 3.

22. Ibid., 2.

And so not only through his family, but specifically in the example of his father, Neagu had a much-admired role model for quiet rebellion. In 1958 Soviet troops retreated from Romania – indicating Khrushchev’s trust in Gheorghiu-Dej - and in 1965 Nicolae Ceausescu became Communist Party leader after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej. Ceausescu eventually pursued independent foreign policy from Moscow.

After finishing school at sixteen Neagu spent a year training to be an electrician at a power station in Timisoara, and following this he was employed as a topographer, making maps for the railways, moving on to work as a cartographer, or draughtsman; he also worked sporadically on stage design. This work experience within the railway industry continued for over three years and Neagu progressed in this profession. One imagines a good cartographer as necessarily possessing an eye for detail, a quick grasp of symbols, a command of drawing instruments and a strong spatial awareness - a mind with the capacity to conceive a landscape larger than that depicted. All these skills are present in Neagu’s artistic output. If one looks at a drawing such as figure 9, of 1977, the influence of thinking in grids, the use of numerical notations and quite simply the ability and desire to map and understand both surface and interior of the subject is obvious, with both being integral to the function of Neagu’s railway maps. Overy also points out the influence this profession must surely have had on Neagu’s proficient use of exploded

diagrammatic and perspective viewpoints (fig. 10).²³ Neagu made countless drawings in this style, demonstrating that the individual part is as important as the whole and also apparently imagining the directions of energy from each separate cell. It is a way of drawing indicative of a highly sculptural imagination. The artist himself describes his early profession:

I was interested in drawing, which I always liked, in a sense in a very uneducated and naïve way, so the draughtsmanship took care of my abilities, how I started taking lessons of how to work in ink, black ink, you know, for drawings proper, for architects and so on. Again educating myself in a mathematical direction, which at some point I thought it would be something I would like to do.²⁴

Neagu went on to invent his own shapes, his own visual signs (the Hyphen being the most important) and to see new potential in established geometry. He liked to make visual and metaphysical connections, and, as curator Bryan Robertson pinpoints:

From looking at traditions thousands of years old replenish themselves through pagan, pre-Christian motifs in woven carpets and modelled and decorated pots, and from studying the forms of vernacular architecture which had so affected Brancusi's wooden carvings and sculptural bases, Neagu came to feel that geometry was in some ways the moral skeleton of the visual arts.²⁵

23. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 12.

24. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 14.

25. Bryan Robertson in *Paul Neagu: Epagoge*, exhibition catalogue, (London: The Pale Green Press, 1993), 3.



Figure 9. Paul Neagu, drawing, 1977

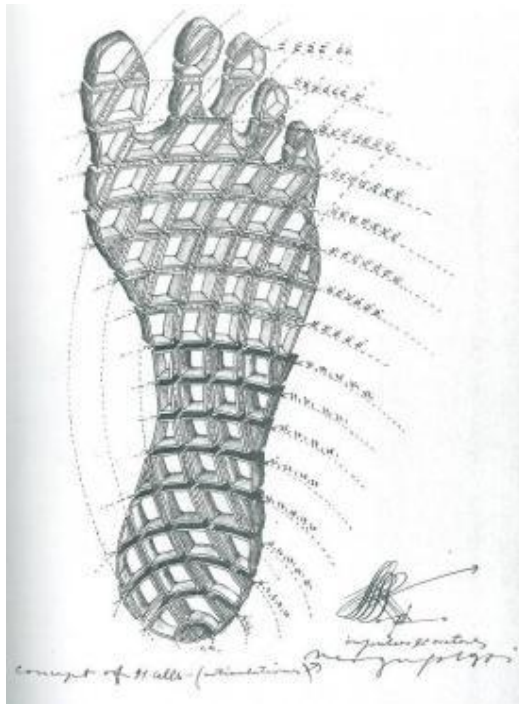


Figure 10. Paul Neagu, drawing, 1971.

Throughout his late teens Neagu made applications to university and his first academic ambition was to study philosophy (although art historian Ileana Pintilie has noted that whilst still in secondary school he was friends with Roman Cotoşman, Diet Sayler and Ciprian Radovan, all of whom went on to become successful artists).²⁶ He was eventually offered a place to study Fine Art at the Academy in Bucharest in 1960, at the age of 21, where he undertook a very traditional curriculum of academic training. By way of contrast to this curriculum Neagu was at a stage in life which saw him hungry for modern, unconventional ideas. Whilst contemporaneously elsewhere in Europe artists had greater access to current art publications and exhibitions, as well as freer leave to discuss their ideas and impressions, Neagu's own access to modern art was not achieved without difficulty. Texts on the artist and his work are more disposed to discussing his early work experience than his eventual art school training, as indeed Neagu is in his interview with Gooding, although his social life as a student is discussed at some length. The nature of the institutional teaching is only briefly sketched and appears to have been extremely traditional, in no way comparable to the creative developments in art education being achieved contemporaneously elsewhere in Europe.²⁷

26. Ileana Pintilie, *Actionism in Romania during the Communist Era*, (Cluj: Idea, 2000), 27.

27. My own knowledge is of the UK in particular, where art schools all over the country had very decisively turned their back on traditional teaching methods by this point and were employing new approaches to teaching art, such as the Basic Design Course initially famously

With the ascent to power of the Pro-Stalinist Communist regime in 1944, when Neagu was still a child, an atmosphere of secrecy and mistrust prevailed throughout his childhood, youth and life as a young adult; this could not but make an impression and came to mark his practice. After graduating many of Neagu's early works included boxes within boxes, heavy with a sense of secrecy and puzzles, but also mimicking reliquaries or tabernacles, as if Neagu was creatively working through the less comprehensible corners of his upbringing. In his interview with Gooding, Neagu recalls his father's secret shoe-making, his own clandestine reading of contraband books, and the ever-present threat of betrayal from a neighbour or colleague - all the result of a culture of state suspiciousness and censorship. The petty and unfair systems of the Communist party may have indirectly pushed Neagu further into his search for a higher state of consciousness, to look into concerns more universal and profound and with the merit of truth and balance. This atmosphere combined with his wide philosophical reading was the backdrop to his imminent personal 'discovery' of the 'anthropocosmic'.

implemented in Newcastle by Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton and in Leeds by Harry Thubron and Tom Hudson.

I: 'Anthropocosmos'

In an undated letter to Richard Demarco Paul Neagu wrote:

When in 1968 you met me in Bucharest.....my work – research and visual enquiries were full of cells, boxes upon boxes to the extent of being what they now fashionably call fractal geometry – this means an organic geometry which has depths, the deeper you go the more of the same you discover ... remember my anthropocosmic cells within boxes! ²⁸

'Anthropocosmos' is a word coined by the French-born German-speaking painter, philosopher and Egyptologist R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, whose most enduring work is *Le Temple de l'homme*, published in 1957 after many years of the author researching the Temple of Luxor in Egypt, an ancient temple built in the shape of the human skeleton (fig. 11).²⁹

28. In *Nine Catalytic Stations: Paul Neagu, 1975-1987*, exhibition catalogue, (Edinburgh: The Scottish Sculpture Trust, 1987), n.p.

29. Schwaller was also the founder of the French anti-Semitic right-wing group *Affranchis*.

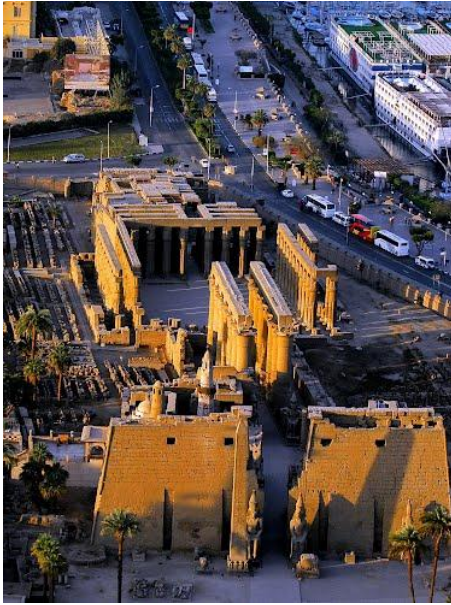


Figure 11. Bird's eye view of Luxor Temple

Neagu records having read *The Temple of Man* in 1969.³⁰ In his publication Schwaller examines and develops the ancient Egyptian concept of man as the centre of the universe.³¹ Not only was Schwaller evidently key in Neagu's development of the anthropocosmic man, but one can find in his text concerns which clearly influenced Neagu's development of the Hyphen. Schwaller was expanding upon much earlier philosophical writing, as Sarah Kent points out in her 1979 catalogue essay:

The human body is often described as a community of interdependent elements, a microcosmic model of society or of the whole universe. Neagu was influenced by this idea as expressed by Plato and Heracleitus who, in

30. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 208. It is not clear whether Neagu would have read this in French or English, though Stircea-Craciun cites the English title.

31. René.A.Schwaller de Lubicz, *The Temple in Man: Sacred Architecture and the Perfect Man*, (Vermont: Inner Traditions Bear and Company, 1981).

different ways, emphasised that man as microcosmos was governed by the same laws and principles as the macrocosmos, or universal order.³²

With this in mind, it is worth focussing on the artist's discussion of the final work he produced at the Beaux Arts Academy, his diploma painting, 'Girl Market' (1966) (fig. 12). In his interview with Gooding Neagu identifies this work, in lyrical language, as representing perhaps the beginnings of his attention to the anthropocosmic. He vividly recalls attending a 3-day festival - an annual event in Transylvania - when:

Peasants from the four cardinal points of the Romanian geography would meet on top of a hill called Chicken. Now the ancient custom was to bring their young daughters which were ready to be married to meet the potential young men who would be their husbands [. . .] imagine a festival, a kind of huge carnival, festival, dancing, drinking, bonfiring, for three nights and days.³³

One can discern in 'Girl Market' - a wonderfully vital painting, and highly untraditional - the beginnings of Neagu's intention to show the layers of human experience, the coexistence of multiple perspectives and the wonders of a wide perspective. The influence of artists such as Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky,

32. Kent, "The Flavour of the Olive", n.p. In Plato's *Timaeus* the proportions and inner workings of the human body are analogous to the movements and directions of the cosmos.

33. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 40.

whose work one imagines he had seen in reproduction, is striking.³⁴ For example, the painting resonates with a work by Klee, 'Revolving House' (1921) (fig. 13). 'Girl Market' uses a limited number of colours - orange, red, pink, shades of mossy green - which appear quite logically to highlight key elements of the festival – hill, people, bonfires. The use of perspective is unusual: Neagu portrays a triangular, almost diagrammatic hill, crowned with multiple sketchy hills, as if one sees the hill at first from a distance only to move at once to being on top of it. The components of the carnival are similarly untraditional in appearance: schematic figures are presented enjoying all the activities Neagu describes, from many perspectives and in varying degrees of clarity, as if the artist wished to encompass the three-day event into a single view. The work is ambitious in its aims. It proved to be a cathartic and catalytic piece for Neagu.

34. Art historian Sebastiano Barassi has noted that (along with Piet Mondrian, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright) both Klee and Kandinsky were schooled following educational principles which were "founded on the centrality of sensory learning and attributed great value to 'the education of the hand'". Sebastiano Barassi, "The Sculptor is a Blind Man: Constantin Brancusi's 'Sculpture for the Blind'", in *Sculpture and Touch*, ed. Peter Dent, (London: Ashgate, 2014), n.p.



Figure 12. Paul Neagu, 'Girl Market, 1965.



Figure 13. Paul Klee 'Revolving House', 1921.

Anthropologist Matei Stircea-Craciun explains the term 'anthropocosmos' as follows:

Neagu seems to conclude that the whole, being the target of division, is the quintessence of human existence. *Anthropocosmos* highlights the cosmic relevance of the function of segmentation.³⁵

In Neagu's case, as he began to construct three-dimensional anthropocosmic work, one can observe an attention to the depiction of both macrocosm and microcosm; he reveals the normally hidden interior of his figures in order to show that man is a cellular compound, as are all worldly things, and that one must comprehend the world being in man as much as man being in the world.

35. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 58.

The influence of folk art and architecture (and folk traditions), his topographical and traditional art training, his personal history and his philosophical interests had developed a unique impetus for making art – and provided the ignition for ‘Girl Market’. Speaking again of this particular painting, and his defence of it to his examiners in 1965:

It became, like I said, almost the parameters of an investigation which had an anthropological feeling, first with humans in it, marked and present as humans in a graphic or painterly way, later became as pure energy to create the complexity of this system of mine which I am working with even now, and I am talking about, what is it, 25 years on . . . in a symbolic way it constitutes probably the whole development of my work since.³⁶

In the late 1960s (when figurative art languished relatively *recherché* in Western Europe), Neagu retained the figure’s influence within his practice but saw the abstract as a potential product of the figurative and the figurative as generator of the abstract, as is evident in another early painting ‘A Mountain for Every Man’ (1968) (fig. 10). There is a joyful freedom in this way of thinking and working. The possibilities of the universe are endless and a creatively daunting prospect. Overy also points out, “The abstraction and division of the human form is common in folk and primitive art and Neagu drew on this without becoming precious or nostalgic.”³⁷ In the artist’s own words:

The idea of man as geometric expression is ancient. In the temple of Luxor in Egypt and in the Greek mode of thinking and building, man’s presence

36. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 40.

37. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 29.

permeates and vitalises the volumes and spaces . . . My bipartite plastic enquiry began in the sixties with the observation that the most relevant and comprehensive portraits of the 20th-century human beings are not traditional pictoriality but a more essential and radical picture by which one could see the face of man and his thinking in one image [. . .] I believe in the art of transcendence by which the individual soul expands and adheres to the infinite self. In one word, spiritualism³⁸

Most importantly perhaps in relation to the development of the Hyphen is the fact that Neagu was beginning to realise the potential of geometry for developing philosophical theories through visual means. In the same publication Neagu continues, "*Anthropocosmos* constitutes my first important working metaphor. From and for it I developed the sculptural framework called '*Hyphen*' followed by a family of related, catalytical and synthetical sculptures."³⁹ Neagu has listed the writings of Gilbert Durand as being influential and the symbolic anthropology of which Durand was a leading exponent could certainly lead Neagu to enjoy creating his first sculptural signpost. The anthropocosmic man as a metaphor for man's relationship to the universe is far less complex than the Hyphen which followed, and in turn, the Nine Catalytic Stations.

38. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 186.

39. *Ibid.*

As a final, separate observation on the anthropocosmic Paul Overy evokes a rather more political or societal perspective:

Neagu's exploration of cellular structure derives from the conflicts and resolutions between the social and the individual which are present in all societies, but which are more sharply focused in Eastern Europe.⁴⁰

This reference to reconciling life under the Communist regime with following one's own path in life highlights the intertwining relationship between a rigid institutional pattern for life and Neagu's subjective metaphysical meandering.

It is worth noting that Neagu did not refer to his work as anthropocosmic until 1975, a point much later than many of the works discussed here.

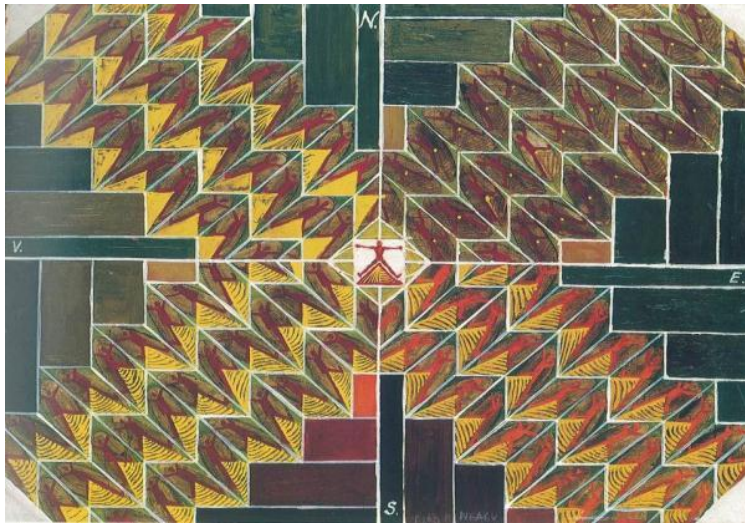


Figure 14. Paul Neagu, 'A Mountain for Every Man', 1966-67.

40. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 53.

II: The Palpable Art Manifesto, 1969

Not long after Neagu's early experiments with anthropocosmic art he began thinking about and working in a quite different direction, whilst concurrently developing his interest in the anthropocosmic. He made progress quickly with his experiments in movable, tangible art, an indication of the future importance sculpture would come to have for him (fig. 15).

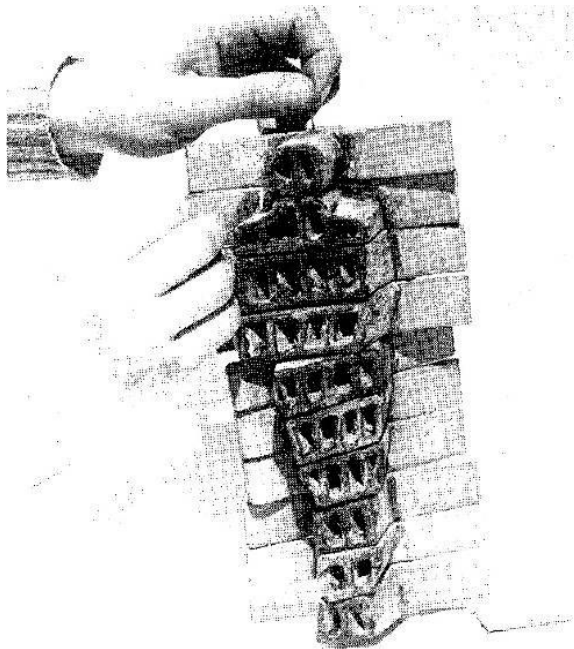


Figure 15. 'Ceramic Cakeman', out of its box, 1970

He began working on a relatively small scale, with anthropocosmic figures made to be handled, and tabernacle-like boxes similarly intended to be opened

by the onlooker (fig. 2). While the figures are a clear three-dimensional representation of his anthropocosmic drawings (and how apposite to now bring them physically into the world), the boxes, made from everyday materials, are both simpler systems for exploring cells, and apparently more influenced by traditional religious objects. It is perhaps not surprising that Neagu did not work with the box (except as a cell) for much longer. As he developed more and more complex and eccentric philosophical systems to structure his practice he left behind somewhat the directly visible influence of his religious upbringing and the religious objects which would have dominated his environments.

Art historian Magda Radu has speculated on how his recent first-hand experience of Western art may have encouraged this development:

A synthetic chronology of significant encounters, exhibitions and biographical events, composed by Neagu in the later years of his life underscores the importance he attached to having a first-hand experience of the art of Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni, an experience which occurred during his first stop in Paris in 1969 . . . The manifesto of palpable art displays a clear awareness of the conceptual assault on the traditional concepts of visuality and plasticity. By stating this I do not intend to imply that Neagu's conception of art underwent a complete transformation after he gained a more intimate knowledge of Western art, but it is possible that through his awareness of a position like Manzoni's he felt encouraged to go further in his reconsideration of the artistic object.⁴¹

In 1969 Neagu wrote his own palpable art manifesto:

41. Magda Radu, "A Contextualisation of Paul Neagu's Early Works: from *Neagu's Boxes* to the *Palpable Art Manifesto*". Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012.

PALPABLE ART MANIFESTO! EDINBURGH 1969

1. The eye is fatigued, perverted, shallow, its culture is degenerate, degraded and obsolete, seduced by photography, film, television. . .
2. The eye is losing its primary role in aesthetic responses, while remaining secondary in this respect.
3. Art must give up its purely visual aesthetic if it wants to survive specifically as plastic art, and must move towards an organic and unified aesthetic that will make use of senses that are still fresh, pure.
4. Let there be one public, palpable art through which all the senses, sight, touch, smell, taste will supplement and devour each other so that a man can possess an object in every sense.
5. You can take things in better, more completely, with your ten fingers, pores and mucous membranes than with only two eyes.
6. These ideas are linked inseparably with the concept that art must function socially, yet never in a vulgarly naturalistic way.
7. Palpable art is a new joy for the "blind", while for the "clear-sighted" it is "the most thoroughly three-dimensional study" . . .⁴²

This public, palpable art was shown in Neagu's one-man exhibition at the Richard Demarco Gallery in 1969 (fig. 16). Sketches of the installation also exist (fig. 17) in a sketchbook, with the interesting later annotation, "Drawing of an early installation for the blind . . . tactility/dark/eastern darkness . . . darkest/est/east see "derrida"" , drawing a clear link, intentional or otherwise, with Brancusi's 'Sculpture for the Blind' (c.1920), which the artist - apocryphally - invited visitors to handle through two holes in a sack.⁴³ Of this first solo

42. Paul Neagu, 'Palpable Art Manifesto', published in *Gradually Going Tornado! Paul Neagu and his Generative Art Group*, exhibition catalogue, (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1975), 6.

43. Amongst his significant philosophical readings it is noteworthy that Neagu does not record reading Derrida until 1999 (in the timeline of Stircea-Craciu's publication), and he also recalls specifically reading Derrida "on deconstruction" (it is more regular for him to just note the name of the writer). Following on from an interest in phenomenological and structuralist philosophies Neagu clearly kept abreast of twentieth-century developments in philosophical

exhibition in the UK, Stircea-Craciun writes, “he introduced ideas which were intended to challenge the prevalence of form in the visual arts . . . having painted the gallery walls black and turned off and blocked out all light sources, the artist invited the public to touch and explore with their hands a collection of objects suspended from the ceiling.”⁴⁴ Overy picks up the descriptive thread, “around the walls of the gallery were a forest of ‘palpable objects’ . . . which had to be experienced by touch rather than sight. Strange twittering noises came from hidden loudspeakers and Neagu himself spent much of the time standing or crouching in the darkened room, dressed completely in white.”⁴⁵ Overy continues, describing a work which was an evident link/hyphen between the anthropocosmic and the palpable, ‘The Cake Man on 23 Floors’ (figures 18 and 19):

This was a figure divided into 23 horizontal ‘slices’ – each slice containing a different number of cells according to which part of the body they represented, each slice rotatable on a central axis, so that the compartments or ‘floors’ could be turned through 350 degrees.⁴⁶

approaches and ultimately found Derrida’s to be the most suited to his own practice. Both Derrida and Neagu died in 2004.

44. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 69.

45. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 23.

46. *Ibid.*, 26.

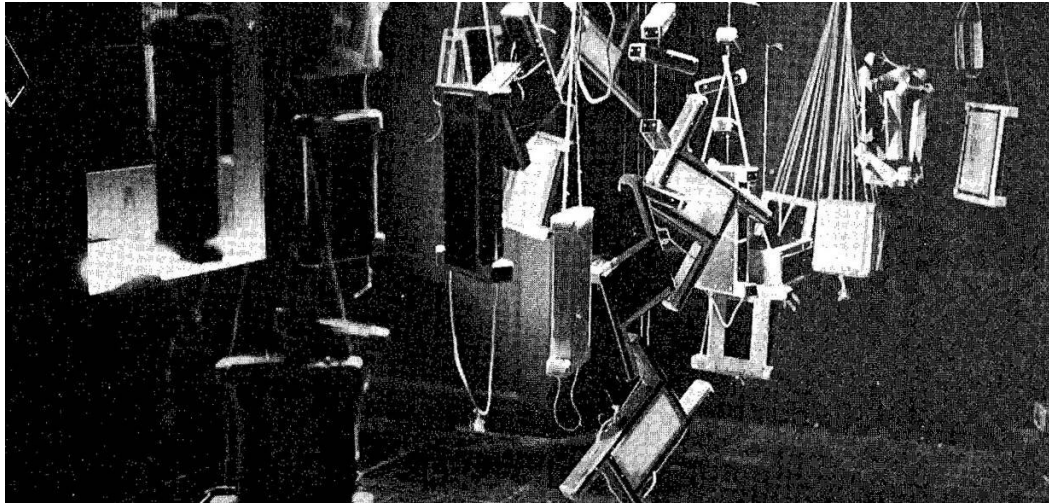


Figure 16. Paul Neagu, palpable art installation, Richard Demarco Gallery, 1969.



Figure 17. Paul Neagu, sketchbook, 1969.

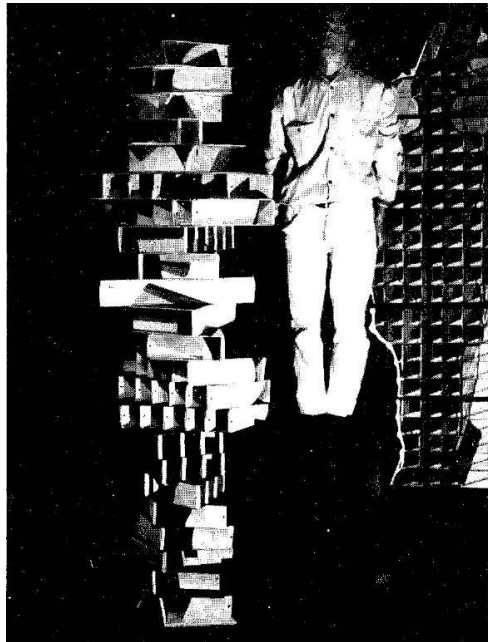


Figure 18. Paul Neagu, 'Cake Man on 23 Floors', 1969.

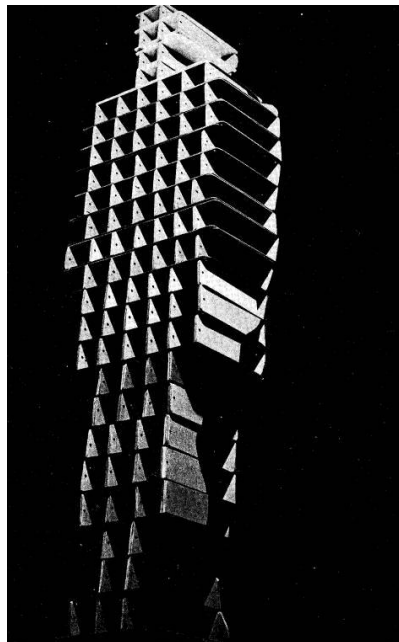


Figure 19. Paul Neagu, 'Cake Man on 23 Floors', 1969.

Writing in 1979 Neagu describes what drew him to make this palpable turn:

I wanted a new *gestalt* working across media and embracing all possibilities from the craft of waffle-making to the spatio-temporal concepts where all the senses would take part in a simultaneous totality (a Gesamtkunstwerk').⁴⁷

Again an indication that Neagu was interested in exploring the idea of the unified whole, implicitly a circular experience. Earlier in 1969 Neagu had exhibited in Hamburg with fellow Romanians Peter Jacobi, Ritzi Jacobi and Ion Bitzan. Bitzan's own practice in particular appears to have been influential in the development of Neagu's 'Palpable Art Manifesto'. In 1971 Neagu exhibited again with Bitzan, this time at the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh (also with Horia Bernea, George Apostu, Ovidiu Maitec, Pavel Ilie and Vladimir Setran). Bitzan, 14 years Neagu's senior, exhibited drawings and sculptures, or 'objects'. In a critical review of the group exhibition Radu Varia describes a work by Bitzan from 1970 as, "a wide sleeve, into which you could put your arm and by the sense of touch could perceive the same form, the same leitmotif that the eye had seen in a multitude of graphic and spatial hypostases in the same exhibition."⁴⁸ He goes on to pinpoint a more overarching concern of Bitzan's:

47. Neagu, "Gradually Going Ahead", 49.

48. Radu Varia, 'Letter from Bucharest', *Studio International*, Vol. 182, no. 935, July/August 1971, 26.

He invents objects. Nothing in his work fascinates him more than these objects, produced by the free play of imagination. He then reproduces them in coloured drawings or in engravings with pure forms and lines, thus sublimating them. Matisse did the same more than once and the procedure is not new.⁴⁹

This description sounds very similar to Overy's description of Neagu's work in the very same exhibition, "Neagu showed . . . tall 'palpable' boxes into which the spectator could reach as far as the elbow, experiencing a number of different tactile sensations."⁵⁰ Figure 20 shows an installation view of Bitzan's two-dimensional depictions of his invented objects. Radu Varia's article demonstrates the same in three dimensions (fig. 17). As well as visual similarities Varia's description of Bitzan's drive to invent objects is pertinent; this is what Neagu had begun to do since leaving art school and continued to do alongside his experiments with the anthropocosmic and the palpable. This was a habit which was to reach its zenith in his creation of the Hyphen.

49. Ibid, 28.

50. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 29.



Figure 20. Installation view of works by Ion Bitzan, Demarco Gallery, 1971.



Figure 21. Page from *Studio International* showing work by Ion Bitzan, 1971.

Neagu continued to explore the palpable through installation and performance. At Sigi Krauss gallery in London in 1971 (fig. 22), Overy describes

that the artist, “gave a performance in which the spectators were invited to eat an anthropocosmic figure made of 80 bundles of waffles tied together with string. Associations with the Eucharist, and with folk-traditions which were once alive all over Europe, but have persisted longer in Romania, were obvious.”⁵¹ This performance had first occurred in front of an audience in Bucharest the previous year.⁵² One can easily read associations with the Eucharist into this event, although such symbolic conclusions cannot give the full story as Neagu did not pursue his Baptist upbringing into adulthood and he may have been more interested in dividing his anthropocosmic man *in extremis* - through ingestion, an exploration into the opposite of art as gestalt.



Figure 22. ‘Cake Man event’, Sigi Krauss gallery, 1971.

51. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 30.

52. Ileana Pintilie, lecture, ‘Paul Neagu and the Generative Art’, Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

These experiments into palpability in the arts had precedents in and connections to the world outside the visual arts. It seems likely that through his wide philosophical reading Neagu may have come across the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher connected with existentialism and phenomenology, who developed the ideas of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and whose own work was concerned with the philosophy of experience and perception. Art historian Alex Potts describes Merleau-Ponty's chief concerns:

[Merleau-Ponty] offered a new way of thinking about viewing and visual perception that represented a radical alternative to the norms of conventional formal analysis. Viewing was envisaged by him, not as the self-contained activity of a disembodied eye, but as embedded within the body and inextricably bound up with a broader situating of the body within the physical environment.⁵³

From this we can gain further academic/literary support for the work and environments Neagu was creating. He was not just thinking about the material of the object, and the importance of this in itself, but of the environment in which one encountered the object and equally of the experience and context of the viewer.⁵⁴ And so similarly when he came to make his first 'Subject

53. Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurist, Modernist, Minimalist*, (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 209.

54. Neagu has not specifically listed reading Merleau-Ponty, but he is relevant here as the predecessor of philosophers such as Claude Levi-Strauss (who dedicated his publication *The Savage Mind* to Merleau-Ponty) and as a writer who was 'setting the scene' for this new interest

Generator' in 1975, he was not making an object for its intrinsic qualities alone, but he was making an object with power and meaning adaptable and responsive to context. Around this period Neagu has listed a great many philosophical influences.⁵⁵

As well as these philosophical influences, an early artistic movement cited by Neagu as of interest to him is *GRAV (Groupe de recherché d'Art Visuel)*, a group formed in Paris in 1960. In their pamphlet *Enough Mystification*, published alongside their first exhibition at the Maison de Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1961, many of the group's concerns resonate with Neagu's. On the "relationship of the work to the eye":

This relationship is presently based upon:
 The eye considered as intermediary
 Extra-visual attractions (subjective or rational)
 The dependence of the eye on a cultural and aesthetic level

The group propose to "totally eliminate the intrinsic values of the stable and recognizable form". It continues:

To displace the habitual function of the eye (taking cognizance through form and its relationships) toward a new visual situation based on peripheral vision and instability. To create an appreciation-time based on the relation of the eye and the work transforming the usual quality of time . . . To state the existence of indeterminate phenomena in the structure and visual reality of

in the phenomenological. His first book on the subject, *Phenomenology of Perception* was printed in France in 1945.

55. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, pp.206-209.

the work, and from there to conceive of new possibilities which will open up a new field of investigation.⁵⁶

The group's intention is different, but connected to, that of Merleau-Ponty before them, or Neagu after - they appear to recommend a 'waking up' of the audience's ways of seeing and a willingness from the viewer to engage in a new type of artistic encounter, moving away from an ocularcentric position. One can draw the connection between an interest in the universe and an interest in universal art, or art which can touch and stimulate its audience through as many senses as possible.

The ephemeral nature of the materials Neagu often used during this period to depict the human body indicates his perception of both the corporeal body and the inner spirit as fluid, changeable and very much a component of a complex universe. He chooses both material and form carefully to express the eternal cycles of both material and mankind – one may begin as one thing but very easily change, or evolve into something materially and spiritually completely different. Though concern for palpability later became more subtly demonstrated in his work, Neagu remained convinced of its importance.

56. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 725-726.

Chapter Two: The Context of the Hyphen – The Generative Art Code

Gradually I came to realise the organisation of my work into a flexible system which I called 'generative arts', or with a term borrowed from Arthur Koestler: "open hierarchical system". Looking back now, I was obviously unaware of the degree of fragmentation and high formalist specialisation of Western art into departments . . . Nor was I aware of a characteristic of British humour which makes light of things of the utmost seriousness.⁵⁷

In this quotation Neagu is specifically acknowledging the influence of Arthur Koestler and his theory of 'Selforganizing Open Hierarchical Order.'⁵⁸ Though Neagu's declared lack of knowledge of the Western desire for classification and caricature is understandable, this was clearly countered by a self-confident approach to art-making bolstered by his extensive philosophical knowledge, not least of the critical theory of structuralism, the influence of which is apparent in his work as the anthropocosmic developed alongside the generative. Structuralism as a philosophy of society and culture became prevalent particularly in France in the early 1960s, replacing the previously dominant existentialism. One can see how an approach to understanding the world concerned with the study of basic structures, interconnections between

57. Paul Neagu, "Paul Neagu: Gradually Going Ahead", in *Artscribe*, no. 16, February 1979, 49.

58. Arthur Koestler was a Hungarian/British writer and thinker (1905-1983). It is in his 1967 publication *The Ghost in the Machine* that Koestler introduces open hierarchical systems.

objects, and the meanings behind the limited patterns which can be generated by structures, would appeal to Neagu, who also regularly cites the research of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Noam Chomsky – who pioneered theories of linguistic structuralism in the US – as being influential.⁵⁹ Professor of Philosophy William R. Schroeder explains the approach of structuralist theorists:

They try to uncover the unconscious codes that make the creation, transmission, and comprehension of meaning intelligible. They discover various types of code, but the most explanatory are generative rules. These consist in a small number of rules, which can operate recursively on strings of terms and thus can account for many possible expressions.⁶⁰

Through thinking along these lines, and alongside his experiments with the anthropocosmic and the palpable, Neagu began to develop an individual ‘generative code’ - difficult to sum up, it can be described as a systemic way of dividing man’s journey through life, encountering external phenomena and ultimately, achieving spiritual harmony and a higher state of consciousness. These were not common concerns within the British art scene at the time. In 1977 Neagu wrote:

Graphically, the generative code constitutes of a vertical axis with three stages – respectively: triangle, rectangle and point in spiral motion, and horizontally, the expression of each stage is semi-dependent on and refers to

59. Their names appear often in sketches and drawings, but are also listed in the biographic chart at the back of Matei Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, n.p.

60. William R Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*, (Malden/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 244.

the other two. The relationship which hyphenates the three moments (the generative purpose) functions in two ways, as a dynamic-dialect and gradual evolution, or as a sudden short-cut (odd possibility).

In my personal work I have employed for each stage a different title:

triangle = Blind Bite, (palatable realities, palpable art)

rectangle = Horizontal Rain, (As I am we and we are I)

spiral = Going Tornado, (realisation of freedom, atomisation)⁶¹

Art historian Ileana Pintilie refers to these 'levels' succinctly as "individual, social and cosmic."⁶² Neagu further describes his Generative philosophy as follows:

The primordial position of what I called 'Blind bite' is the incongruous behaviour, the constructive instincts or impulses, mechanic inheritance such as self-preservation, survival, procreation, natural selection, aggression or tenderness. 'Blind bite' is well described by customs and non-verbal tradition. . . 'Blind bite' is the chisel hewing stone, the teeth in the food, the knife in the flesh, the reason in impulse . . . the second position [is] : a conscious realisation (of the first) the 'Horizontal Rain' . . . the dynamism decreases, we become aware and sometimes embarrassed about the fact that we are dependent on the previous roots-level . . . 'Horizontal Rain' means subordination to the social demand . . . The 'Horizontal Rain' activity is the function and fashion of a road, a bridge, a motorway, building, architecture and humanity . . . This rectangular shaped behaviour, due to gradual erosion and individual awareness might become a belt of frustrations. Then we need to readjust them to new demands. This is the third and final position of the cycle, namely 'Going Tornado' . . . 'Going Tornado' contains concern and detachment, love and judgement, respect for physical life and spirit of understanding for "supra-humane" dimensions.⁶³

61. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 180.

62. Ileana Pintilie, lecture, 'Paul Neagu and the Generative Art', Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

63. Paul Neagu, "Gradually Going Tornado", in *Gradually Going Tornado: Paul Neagu and his Generative Art Group*, exhibition catalogue, (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1975), pp. 24-26.

The writing of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, one of the founders of General Systems Theory (GST) was also influential for Neagu's Generative Art Code. Von Bertalanffy was concerned with connections between philosophies of science and the humanities. Thaddus E. Weckowicz, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry, Psychology and Theoretical Psychology at the University of Alberta, describes Von Bertalanffy's work further:

He believed that . . . A society was a system of communication patterns and institutions, while a culture was a system of symbols. The systems theory was applicable to physiological, psychological and sociological phenomena. Physical, mental and social events may appear to be intrinsically different, however they are organised in systems, which are governed by the same set of systemic laws. The unity of systems is the basis of the unity of nature in spite of the kaleidoscopic motley of external appearances.⁶⁴

Neagu acknowledged his knowledge of and respect for Bertalanffy's work in a 1975 exhibition catalogue which addresses his writings in some detail (with his typical enjoyment in dancing between complex references). He quotes Von Bertalanffy as follows, employing the biologist's words to explain the ambitions of the Generative Art Group:

A complex of components in interaction, material, energy and information in various degrees of organisation. In evaluating systems the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structures, input, output, and related activity inside and outside the system. Where the object almost always has a fixed shape and boundaries, the consistency of a system may be

64. Thaddus E Weckowicz, "Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1901-1972): A Pioneer of General Systems Theory", Center for Systems Research Working Paper No. 89-2, Edmonton: University of Alberta, February 1989, n.p.

layered in time and space, its behaviour determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control.⁶⁵

Bertalanffy had developed his theories following a comprehensive study of the Renaissance philosopher, Nicholas of Cusa or Cusanus (1401-1464). Cusanus believed, "that absolute truth could not be known. Such a knowledge could only be approached from different perspectives providing apparently contradictory appearances of reality, which nevertheless complemented one another."⁶⁶ From Cusanus' theories regarding man as a contracted image of the universe (a system within a system) Bertalanffy went on to develop his General Systems Theory. Neagu was as interested in structures as in systems. In John Sturrock's *Structuralism* Jean-Michel Rabaté cites German philosopher and phenomenologist Edmund Husserl as one of the earliest structuralist thinkers and quotes Husserl in a helpful definition:

What is a structure, then, for Husserl and 'in general'? The broadest definition is that a structure is an abstract model of organization, including a set of elements and the law of their composition. Even when the nature of these elements varies considerably, what matters is the inner coherence of the whole. The elements could be atomic clusters in a snowflake, totemic identifications underpinning circuits of exchange of women in an Amerindian tribe, or a network of images playing in counterpoint through a

65. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, in *Gradually Going Tornado! Paul Neagu and his Generative Art Group*, n.p.

66. Thaddus E. Weckowicz, "Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972): A Pioneer of General Systems Theory", Centre for Systems Research, University of Alberta, 1988, n.p.

sonnet; what stands out in a structure is that the relationships between the elements are more important than the intrinsic qualities of each element.⁶⁷

One way Neagu explored his Generative Art Code, and one can see close links here with his anthropocosmic vision, was through the use of his own body in his performances, whose titles are often exactly tied to the generative code (figures 23 and 24):

Ever since 1969-72 . . . my obsession with cells within cells has re-worked itself (I was just watching it) around a centre. First of all this centre was my soul. See *Gradually Going Tornado* of 1974 — an historic ritual around a spiral, around a centre.⁶⁸

Neagu's exploration and development of his code seems to have been demonstrated initially most passionately by the artist through such performances, which began in the UK in 1971 (his fictitious Generative Art Group (GAG) was established in 1972 and the group's most important exhibition was held at MOMA Oxford in 1975). The Code and the context it provided for the Hyphen can be approached by looking at Neagu's own writing on the subject, and also through an examination of some of his early performances. Although Neagu most regularly refers to these events as

67. Jean-Michel Rabaté, in John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 6.

68. Demarco, "Such is the Dance", n.p.

performances, he also commonly uses words such as 'ritual' and discusses elements of the performances in terms of their links to 'custom'.⁶⁹ In fact all of the performances possess a spiritual quality one might associate with folk customs and religious rituals – but Neagu appropriates the seriousness and sense of history inherent in such associations and uses them with a suitably esoteric and personal purposefulness.

The previous chapter discussed the 1971 performance at Sigi Krauss Gallery in London, which was the first of a number of 'Blind Bite' performances. As previously discussed, the blindfolds and the biting involved in these events render them the most easily comprehensible as representing a primal, instinctive relationship between man and nature. Recordings and images of these performances demonstrate a softly charged atmosphere, as the audience trusts the artist with their very well-being, as blindfolded or not, they consume his sculpture - ingesting it and therefore connecting to it in the most intimate possible way, by literally *incorporating* the sculpture. The 'second level' to the code was 'Horizontal Rain', and perhaps the most well-known of these performances was that which Neagu gave in Edinburgh's Greyfriars Churchyard at the Edinburgh festival in 1971 (figure 23). Paul Overy describes Neagu's outfit on this occasion, "The suit . . . had a grid of pockets containing

69. This occurs frequently during Neagu's extensive NLS interview with Mel Gooding.

messages sewn into it. This symbolised the 'Horizontal Rain' level of human communication", the level where one connects most successfully with society.⁷⁰

Ileana Pintilie continues the description, "the artist wearing a special outfit, provided with dozens of transparent, small pockets from which he produced slips of paper reading different messages (the script of the performance, the signature of the artist), which were offered to the audience to be bought."⁷¹



23. 'Horizontal Rain', 1971, Greyfriars churchyard, Edinburgh.

70. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 58.

71. Ileana Pintilie, *Neagu - Hyphen: Emancipated Form*, (Timisoara: Galeria First, 1994), n.p.

The suit makes manifest that Neagu retains his interest in the anthropocosmic not just through the use of his own body, but also through the suit as a composite of cells – grids containing clues to his identity as an artist which were distributed randomly into the world, connecting him to it through a finite number of paths. 1976 was a critical year for Neagu in terms of performance (and just a year away from his last public performance, which was in 1977). In 1976 Neagu performed the complex *Gradually Going Tornado* series at the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol – comprising ‘Blind Bite’, ‘Horizontal Rain’, and ‘Going Tornado’. Artist and critic Marc Chaimowicz reviewed these performances for *Studio International*, and he describes the third performance in the cycle, ‘Going Tornado’, as “the closest to the whole spirit of *Gradually Going Tornado*, and the most overtly allegorical. (The most evocative and beautiful it is also near-impossible to describe.)”⁷² Neagu performed ‘Going Tornado’ at various times throughout his career, Ileana Pintilie describes one such performance evocatively:

Wearing a special suit, with objects evoking a certain cultural heritage and looking like a shaman’s accessories, Neagu allowed himself to be transported

72. Marc Chaimowicz, “Paul Neagu and his Generative Art Group at the Arnolfini”, *Studio International*, May/June 1976, 285.

in a spiral –like ritual into an ecstatic state where he could merge with the infinite self after atomisation.⁷³



Figure 24. The final movement of the ritual 'Gradually Going Tornado', 20th March, 1976, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol.

It seems that Neagu eventually came to dislike the natural and somewhat insurmountable barriers between performer and audience and he describes why he gave up public performance in the publication *Artscribe* in 1979:

The reason for this was that I had come to believe that the essence of true performance could not be confined within the boundaries of 'theatrical' arrangements, with audience and performers as separate categories,

73. Ileana Pintilie, lecture, 'Paul Neagu and the Generative Art', Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

helplessly wishing for a common platform of understanding. With the same need for depth communication, the performer that I was and his gesture had to be felt from inside, so I discovered that this idea of the static and staring spectator gives a one track communications much too shallow for my ardent ambitions. Thus I decided to keep such impulses to myself and maybe show to the public only a formalised record.⁷⁴

Neagu formulated his philosophical code, an approach to and a study of life and knowledge, form and function, at a time when his own practice was about to enter the Horizontal Rain stage, a period of success within the system, of his star rising; following the invention of the Hyphen and the development of the Nine Catalytic Stations, he consequently 'went tornado' and for various reasons seems to have left the orbit of the mainstream art world ('Going Tornado' performances tended to be the most demanding, often involving Neagu gradually spinning faster and faster as a performative demonstration of man's attempts to attain a higher state of consciousness). This dissertation aims to demonstrate the artist's progression from an enthusiastic and passionate early studio and exhibition practice, through to a certain astute knowingness and necessary complicity in his interaction with the art world, leading eventually to a shrugging off of superficial, worldly concerns and a commitment and dedication to exploring and attaining spiritual harmony through his work.

Ileana Pintilie identifies that Neagu's anthropocosmic work corresponds neatly

74. Neagu, "Gradually Going Ahead", 50.

with the first level of his Generative Code – it is all about the individual.⁷⁵ If one is to take this observation to its natural conclusion one can note that Neagu's work from the early 1970s demonstrated a marked ability to 'fit in' with the wider (art) world (the worldliness of horizontal rain) and as his work progressed it came nearer to the perspective of a man 'going tornado'. It is difficult sometimes to discern whether Neagu controlled his code, or vice versa. As a young man he boldly and instinctively followed his creative urges (Blind Bite). Following this, his practice became more social, his performances and his exhibitions were frequently participatory social events – Richard De Marco exhibition of 1969, Cake Man performance, etc. Then, as he gave up performing with audiences, he conceived of a circular ensemble of sculptures which he would turn to again and again, becoming tornado himself.

I: The Generative Art Group

Before attempting a description of what the Generative Art Group (GAG) was it is perhaps worth pointing out what Neagu's art was *not*, in terms of how the term 'generative' has been used to apply to other visual art/artists. As indicated

⁷⁵ Ileana Pintilie, lecture, 'Paul Neagu and the Generative Art', Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

in the previous chapter, Neagu's work in many ways had more in common with philosophers and theorists than with other visual artists.⁷⁶ Philip Galanter, an American scholar who has researched the subject of generative art at length, provides the following definition of generative art:

Generative art refers to any art practice where the artist uses a system, such as a set of natural language rules, a computer programme, a machine, or other procedural invention, which is set into motion with some degree of autonomy, contributing to or resulting in a completed work of art.⁷⁷

Neagu has a generative structure in mind when he describes his code, but is it a 'system set into motion with autonomy'? It is more of an architect's blueprint (which chimes with his early training as a draughtsman) than a set of rules or a machine. I would also question the Generative Art Code being a procedural invention, it is more of a code for living than a system for making, and it has a wider resonance for Neagu than 'simply' to produce art. Neagu is not quite in step with other artists who, during a similar chronological period — and perhaps picking up on ideas formerly explored by minimalists — used

76. It is not that visual artists were not experimenting with generative art, successful artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Hans Haake and Sol Lewitt are just a handful of these. However, I would posit that these artists, though concerned with systems and generative systems, are less concerned with metaphysical systems than Neagu. Also, generative art more commonly occurs in two dimensions than three.

77. Philip Galanter, "What is Generative Art? Complexity Theory as a Context for Art Theory", (working paper, Interactive Communications Program, New York University, New York, 2003). http://www.philipgalanter.com/downloads/ga2003_paper.pdf

generative systems or sequences to create cool schematic sculptures. The words of Sol Le Witt for example are an interesting foil to those of Neagu. In 1967 in 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' Le Witt wrote:

To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity for designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number. Other plans imply infinity. In each case, however, that artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. That is the reason for using this method.⁷⁸

Neagu does not wish to avoid the subjective, his plan is more of a map than a set of instructions, a map of signs, not an ordered list of symbols or rules, a map whereby decisions made by the artist may be finite, but they are also subjective. And Neagu is not necessarily looking for a solution, he is following a path with no real will for completion. Neagu's generative art is related to philosophical investigation rather than mathematical equations. The Generative Art Group was a serendipitous tool he created for himself to pursue this course of enquiry.

Shortly following Neagu's conception of his Generative Art Code was his invention of the Generative Art Group (GAG), in 1972. Neagu's Hyphen is his most significant creation but the Generative Art Group was perhaps his most significant *way* of creating. The fissure of his personality, the mischievous

78. Sol Le Witt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art", *Artforum* 5, 10, Summer 1967, 80.

secrecy, the imaginative impetus, creative freedom and also, (if fleeting) financial success of the group were a consequence and as consequential catalyst for Neagu as the Hyphen. Overy points out that in one respect the reasoning behind the invention of the Generative Art Group was very clear, and not so unusual at all, "by splitting and fragmenting himself like one of his own anthropocosmic figures, Neagu was able to extend and develop his ideas on a number of fronts."⁷⁹ Not something artists regularly feel the need to do, Neagu was still in a sense hiding from the establishment in order to achieve an exhibition of irregular appearance.⁸⁰



Figure 25. Generative Art Group, Liverpool John Moores University exhibition, 1974.

79. Overy, *Paul Neagu: A Generative Context*, 45.

80. The subjects of the works of the five different artists were very different, the style is arguably not and it is perhaps surprising that so many people, including the Arts Council's awarding body, 'fell for' Neagu's conceit.

Richard Demarco describes the individual members of Neagu's Generative Art

Group at length, as follows:

Philip Honeysuckle was the only thoroughly British member. He was in fact Scottish and born and educated in Perthshire. His work was memorable, concerned as it was with drawn images of his own right hand and arm becoming the instrument of drawing and the quintessential gesture of mark-making.

Eduard Larsocchi was a Corsican artist. His very surname came from the Latinised root *eye* or *occhi*. His paintings and drawings concentrated upon the image of the human eye as a pool of cosmic energy and its dilating pupil representing the constantly exploding and imploding movements of far distant terrestrial bodies beyond the limitations of human vision unaided by the power of the imagination.

Husny Belmood was a Parisian artist. He concentrated his attention upon images reminiscent of flying saucers moving so fast through space that their physical reality was defined by an unutterable stillness and quiet. It was a relief for me to discover that the source material for these unforgettable drawings was to be found in the basic form of a tablespoon observed frontally.

Anton Paidola was a certain poet and philosopher, reminiscent in life style and character, of a mutual friend of both Paul Neagu and myself – the Barcelona-based painter and theatre director, Iago Pericot. Paidola's contribution to the group was that of a conceptual artist who dealt exclusively in the presence of the written word.⁸¹

81. Demarco, "Such is the Dance", n.p.

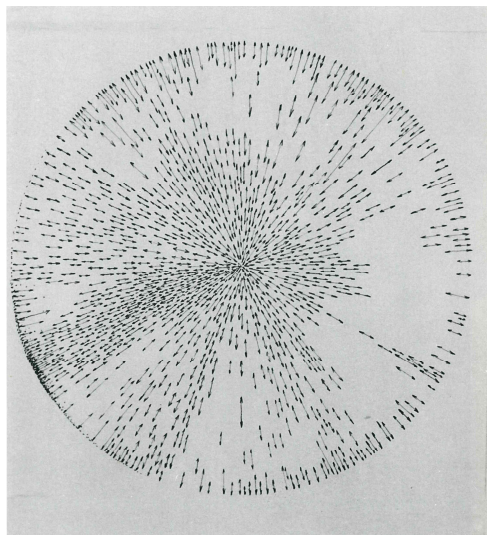


Figure 26. Edward Larsochi, untitled, 1973.



Figure 27. Philip Honeysuckle, 'Left Hand', 1974.

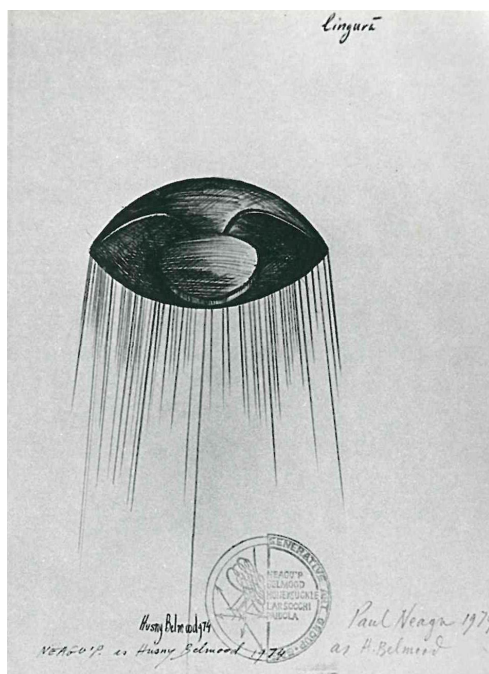


Figure 28. Husny Belmood, 'Spoon' 1974.

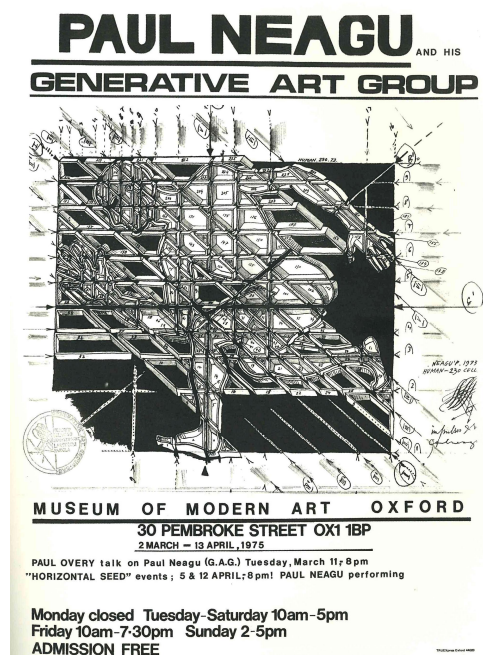


Figure 29. Advertisement for MOMA exhibition, 1973.

There was a lot of playfulness and positivity in the nature of the Generative Art Group, as is demonstrated wonderfully by many of the images contained within the first Generative Art Group catalogue, printed with the help of the Arts Council in 1974 (figures 30 and 31). Neagu was both playing a cerebral trick on and a surprising success with the British art world. But, as Sarah Kent points out, as with much of Neagu's activity, these elements exist alongside a more unsettling metaphor, "The Generative Art Group . . . also represents the fragmentation of knowledge brought about by the western tendency towards increased specialisation."⁸²

In 1975 Neagu published a small exhibition catalogue with Sunderland Arts Centre, where he also held a solo/group exhibition with his Generative Art Group. The catalogue cover (fig. 32) shows a photograph of the artist caught mid-step, foot in the air, crossing a stile in the countryside. At first glance it is deceptively similar to an impromptu holiday snap, but the photograph demonstrates the importance Neagu places on ideas of crossing over, connection, bridges, and fulcrums — Hyphens. Illustrating the indivisible relationship between the Generative Art Group and the Generative Art Code the catalogue is largely made up of images of the 'Gradually Going Tornado' performances. The same catalogue contains a photograph of the MOMA

82. Kent, "The Flavour of the Olive", n.p.

Oxford subject generator as well as a sketch (fig. 4). The sketch is extremely useful as it explicitly links the five members of GAG with the objects Neagu placed on the installed sculpture: [Eduard] Larsocchi is written beside the lamp, [Anton] Paidola beside the microphone, Neagu beside a small 'platform', [Husny] Belmood with the magnifying glass and [Philip] Honeysuckle beside the mirror. So each member has an object as a signifier of their chief artistic concerns; Neagu has placed the objects on the rectangular table-top, the 'horizontal rain' stage. As Ileana Pintilie has pointed out, two of the first names of the members of the group, Anton and Eduard, are also the names of two of Neagu's brothers, who remained in Romania.

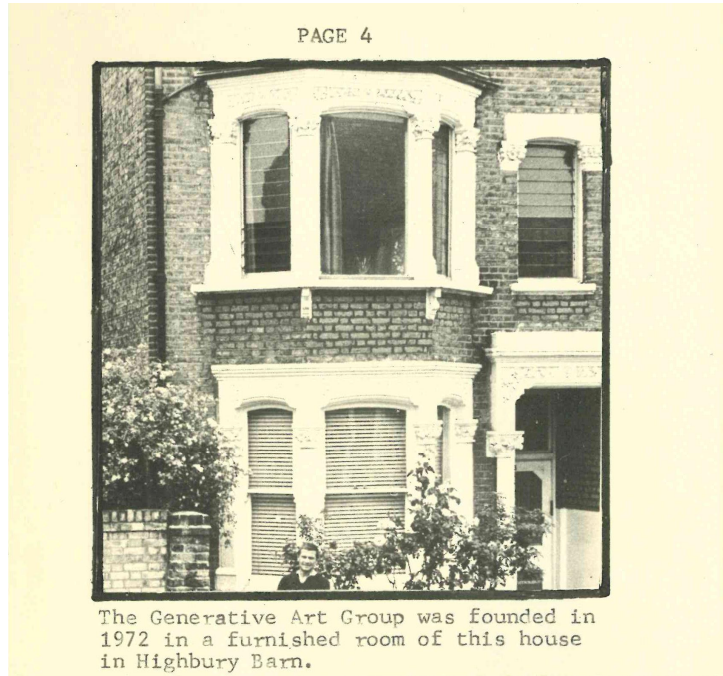


Figure 30. Generative Art Group Catalogue, 1974.

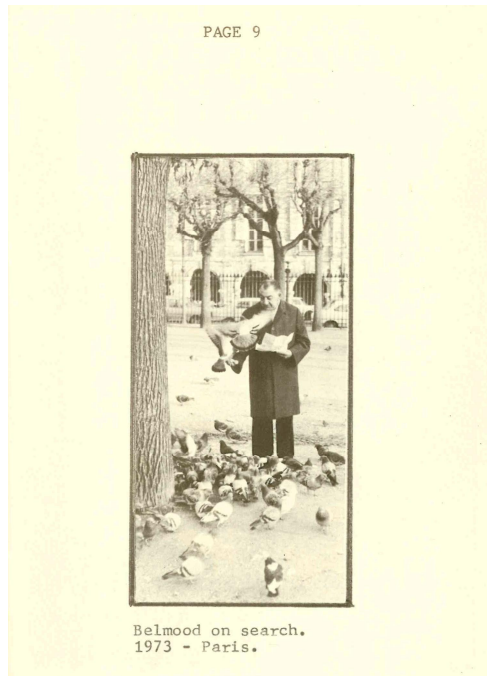


Figure 31. Generative Art Group Catalogue, 1974.



Figure 32. Cover of exhibition catalogue, *Gradually Going Tornado! Paul Neagu and his Generative Art Group*, 1975.

II: The 'Subject Generator'

It was like a machine made of wood, very simple, like a table with three legs, which had two halves because the third leg spilt this rectangle in two, one was for a man, one was for a female, and each part on the table, there were five tools, each tool stood for one member of the Group. As it were, the same members were, on the left side they were female, on the right they were male. Imagine this kind of generation, generating artists, male and female.⁸³

83. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 118.

The same 1975 Oxford MOMA exhibition which brought the Generative Art Group prominently into view for the British art scene also saw the first appearance of the hyphen/‘Subject Generator’ (fig. 1), though it had appeared in drawings from the previous year (figures 3 and 4). Neagu’s description, above, written many years later is very clear, very precise about its original ‘identity’ as a hermaphrodite, generative ‘machine’, with tools placed on top which represented the members of his group, clearly linking what was to become the Hyphen with GAG. Neagu himself went on to describe the work as follows:

Then, through a sudden stroke, I managed to see ahead, constructing the first *Hyphen*. At the time it was called ‘The Subject Generator’, and almost involuntarily it consisted of all the instruments of the previous inquiries.⁸⁴

Earlier in the same article Neagu demonstrates an unusual clarity in setting out these “previous inquiries”, which include: “the possibilities of fusing warm, soft and typically humane characteristics with the structural/epistemological principles of the mind . . . with emphasis on content of a universal-sociological type”; “the tactility of textures, the pluralistic and hierarchical organisation of materials and how they related to content”; and lastly, to put “figurative elements under stress by imposing on them a geometric/axionometric grid (anthropocosmos) as geographers would use meridians and parallels across

84. Neagu, “Gradually Going Ahead”, 50.

oceans and continents.”⁸⁵ In 1979 Neagu himself was able to identify the Hyphen as involuntarily consisting of *all the instruments of the previous enquiries*. However, just as Neagu noted, the Hyphen as a conclusive composition was also quickly to realise its generative potential for his practice. One can see in a sketch of the same year (fig. 4) that male and female sides of the table are marked very clearly, while in later drawings (fig. 33) these become ‘father’ and ‘mother’ with the ‘third’ leg now labelled ‘off springs’ and ‘newborn’, with the latter clearly ending with the beginning of a spiralling tornado – Neagu is experimenting with and harnessing imagined generative potential.

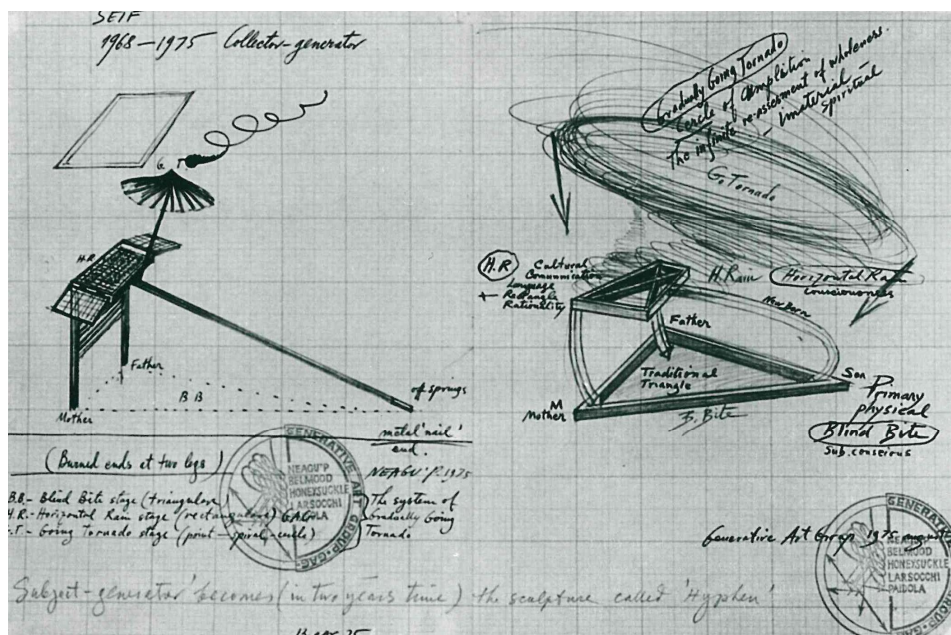


Figure 33. Paul Neagu, ‘Subject Generator’ or ‘Hyphen’, 1975.

85. Neagu, “Gradually Going Ahead”, 49.

Slightly later in the same interview with Mel Gooding Neagu again describes the 'Subject Generator'. After first referring to the sculpture as a 'tool' and a 'magnet' he continues:

I remember even the psychological anxieties I had at that time, needing an anchor. Strangely enough this table, divided as you call it, was like an anchor, having hooks into the ground. And in retrospect it's very clear that it was renamed from an original title which was 'Subject Generator', about two years later it was re-named 'The Hyphen', which then clearly became evident it was the first time I did a three-dimensional piece of sculpture, even though it was skeletal . . . Looking back it becomes not only a hook and an anchor but it becomes the central spine of my concerns.⁸⁶

Neagu had created a sculpture with anchor-like properties, a vertebra or frame onto which he could hook his complicated philosophical thoughts, and thereby have less chance of them escaping. From a social point of view Neagu remained without family in his adopted country, and this hook/hyphen had the potential to both root his work geographically and create the potential for procreation through the multiple offspring Neagu would create from his prototype.

In a decision somewhat contrary perhaps to the 'Subject Generator' as anchor, one of the elements of the structure observable in this initial prototype (but easily missed unless one has seen, and ideally touched, a Hyphen first-hand) is the frequent precariousness of Neagu's sculptures. The size of the progenitor 'Subject Generator' implies that sturdiness would be useful – it is

86. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 130.

logical when creating something so big, and pointy (and serving as a table!) that one would strive for balance, but a wire steadying the sculpture is clearly visible in the photograph of the Oxford installation and, this element of precariousness, often combined with the hooked 'legs', became a regular feature of the Hyphens. If we read the sculpture's three legs as the three points of Neagu's 'Blind Bite' triangle we could surmise that Neagu is illustrating that although man must necessarily have roots, he must be aware of them primarily in order to shake them off, and ascend to the next stage in his metaphysical development (= Horizontal Rain/the table top/the rectangle).

Neagu was consistently drawn to everyday materials (initially for primarily practical/economic reasons one imagines) and these materials by their very nature are often far from durable – but this tense, visible instability is new, as if Neagu was implying the story of the sculpture was not finished, and it occupies a wavering, liminal position at the present time.⁸⁷ Five years after the 'Subject Generator' first appeared in drawings Neagu published the below excerpt, hinting at the reasons behind his light-footed, trembling invention:

When sculptures are built on legs (like animals and humans) that satisfies an expression of uprising. They suggest the detachment of the body from the ground as an anti-gravitational desire . . .
 Large bodies floating in space are intriguing and revolutionary.
 Psychological space is the nerve of architecture.

87. Although from the early eighties, influenced by artists such as David Smith and Richard Serra he became increasingly interested in working on a larger scale, and in steel.

The pondering and elevation of elementary matter is the job of a good sculptor.

Nesting in a high place, that is what I would really like to do.⁸⁸

The 'expression of uprising' Neagu refers to here is an idea that visibly occupied his art since his creation of 'Girl Market' in 1966. It is an aspirational enquiry into the potential for transcendence from materiality, a desire to depict a sort of pantheist Assumption as man rises above earthly boundaries to make meaningful connections with universal systems. In all of his anthropocosmic, palpable and generative work Neagu's ultimate concern was with spiritual enlightenment, of achieving something celestial. The idea of a sculpture reaching upwards with its form, rather than requiring plinth or platform, was quickly recognised by Neagu as very well encapsulated in the form of the 'Subject Generator', soon to become the Hyphen.

Also clearly shown in the installation of 'The Subject Generator' is the contrary usage made of the sculpture as a table. The knowledge of the precariousness of the sculpture makes this perverse in the first instance – but it is also much too high for a person to sit at and utilise the objects presented. It is difficult to confirm whether the objects on the MOMA 'Subject Generator' are exactly alike to those in a 1974 drawing (fig. 3) but one can discern they do not stray far from the collection depicted in the drawing. Those in the drawing are

⁸⁸ Paul Neagu, *Paul Neagu: Sculpture*, (London: ICA, 1979), n.p.

very easy to make out and are also labelled: a magnifying glass, a mirror, a spotlight, a wooden board, a metal lamp, a transformer, and a microphone with cable. All these objects are not only clearly labelled but specifically placed, all appear twice in an 'almost' mirrored layout – although Neagu does not appear concerned with exactitude in this instance. These are objects which among other things, assist with artistic creation.

In 1979, in Neagu's own words the Hyphen sculpture is described in terms of being resultant from his personal history, "In writing, a hyphen binds two words together but also keeps them apart. The hyphen is something I carry with me. I am the hyphen."⁸⁹ Some of those experiences were more earthly. In her book *Brancusi and Romanian Folk Traditions*, Edith Balas paraphrases Sydney Geist's observation of the resemblance of Brancusi's 'Table of Silence' (1938) to "the masa joasă, the low, round dinner table of stone or wood commonly found in the cottages of the Romanian peasantry" (fig. 34).⁹⁰ One might just as quickly note the similarity of this object to many of Neagu's later Hyphens. These three-legged, imperfectly balanced structures share the haphazard, animated quality with many of Neagu's early Hyphens, an appearance which celebrates their utilitarian function, which of course transforms to a different purpose

89. Clare Henry, "Nine Catalytic Stations at the Demarco Gallery", *Arts Review*, 22 April 1988, no. 8.

90. Edith Balas, *Brancusi and Romanian Folk Traditions*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1987), 28.

within the non-utilitarian Hyphen. And unlike Brancusi's work benches, which Balas describes as both utilitarian and sculpture, Neagu's Hyphen was only really presented as functional in its very first incarnation. Following this appearance in Oxford Neagu uncharacteristically put a very clear end to the Hyphen as being an 'everyday' object as if its cosmological qualities could not be seen whilst its prosaic potential remained.⁹¹

91. Ibid., 31.



Figure 34. Oltenian masa joasa.

Chapter Three: Hyphen – Conclusion and Catalyst

I discovered in English dictionaries that ‘hyphen’ comes from Greek, and in fact in its original genealogy it means, if you look at the philosophy of that as it’s used by linguists and philosophers *hyphenekinon* in Greek means a place where we will meet, which place exists before we even get to it, therefore it serves me once more with a fantastic, as I said, impetus, with an encouragement, that my hyphen, it’s in the first place not a parody of an abstract place but it’s an archetype of sorts. I seem to be the one who has given birth to an object, to a place, and to a meaning. The meaning existed but there was no body to it. I for the first time bring a concrete body to a meaning.⁹²

The previous chapter looked at the genesis of the Hyphen and the context in which it was created. Neagu had discovered a form which fit perfectly with his continued concerns with materiality, anthropocosmos, and through his Generative Art Code, the ability of art to portray and encourage transcendence. In order to accurately show the potential and power of the Hyphen for Neagu one must consider not only the longevity of his concern with his invention (the Hyphen was a constant in Neagu’s practice from 1974 until his death in 2004), but also the myriad forms it took, the many materials it was made from, and multiple contexts it appeared in. By tracing the various appearances of the Hyphen along an approximately chronological path it is possible to identify the components or ‘ingredients’ integral to the Hyphen, and assess the differing

92. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 151.

importance ascribed to these various components, and thereby attempt an estimation of what Neagu was aiming to achieve both in a single work, and over time, as the Hyphens multiplied and took precedence 'through' an amassed body of work.

The fact that the Hyphen was christened considerably post-genesis indicates Neagu employed this appellation without haste and with consideration. To return to a previously cited quotation, Neagu "Named sculpture as HYPHEN as sculpture, re-enforced, lost several times, re-founded as fulcrum and meeting point between subject and object, as sculpture and idea . . . This has become the processing of a catalytic premise."⁹³ The Hyphen is a fulcrum (a point on which a lever is placed to get support), a meeting point, and a catalyst; as it was for Neagu's conceptual development it was for his artistic practice. The Romanian word for hyphen also has the meaning of 'coach' or 'carriage', with related connotations of travel which must have appealed to Neagu's appetite for the geographically wide contexts to which he took his creation.⁹⁴ A Hyphen is a bridge between separate elements, although it is also an indicator of separation it is perhaps more emphatically a connector, as Neagu writes, a meeting point, and when it stands alone, as a drawing, painting, or most potently a sculpture,

93. Paul Neagu, *Paul Neagu: Hyphen*, exhibition catalogue, (London: Visual Hermeneutics, 1985), 3.

94. Although as far as I am aware Neagu always referred to his creation as Hyphen in the English language, even when in Romanian or other foreign publications.

it stands for the importance of the idea of the catalytic meeting-point in itself – the scope and potential of a meeting point and the endless possibilities for new and wholly original creation.

The formal elements which are necessary for a shape to be designated as a Hyphen are few – one might stress the importance of the three ‘legs’, the isosceles triangular base these create, and the rectangular ‘table’ where the three legs meet. Although these characteristics are prominent they are not prescriptive. The two back legs of a hyphen sometimes become conjoined into a single support, occasionally a scalene triangle makes the form of the base, and often the table is far from rectangular. But, despite these variances, the rectangular table-top shape, the triangular base formed most usually by three legs and, the variously hinted at, performed and actualised spirals are the most important elements of a Hyphen. One can make the connection between Neagu’s generative code - as condensed down formally to blind bite = triangle, horizontal rain = rectangle, going tornado = spiral - and his Hyphen. But which came first? Neagu’s writings and drawings seem to point to the following order: generative code (but without the geometrical symbolism), Hyphen, generative code II (with geometrical symbolism). The Hyphen’s appearance enabled Neagu to literally give shape to his more abstract and metaphysical thoughts. In 1979 Neagu explains this symbolism poetically:

Formed as a bridge inside the hierarchy of manifestation and becoming. As in mineral-vegetable-animal-human-superhuman . . . or; point-line-angle-triangle-rectangle-circle-spiral (amorphous-alive-conscious-self-aware etc). Thus the hyphen is an epistemological metaphor is the spirit of meditation and 'betweenness'.⁹⁵

The Hyphen's 'legs' (for want of a better word) are often hooked - suggesting the potential to anchor, to dig in. The hooks make the imaginary triangle crisper, and give the 'legs' more impetus and suggested movement. This potential to produce circles in the manner of a mathematical compass may have been on Neagu's mind, although spirals do not appear in the earliest drawings. This spiral/tornado quality came to be more explicitly demonstrated in Neagu's exhibitions of the late 1970s but following this *less* frequently graphically underlined in later Hyphens. Eventually, with the Nine Catalytic Stations, Neagu was to find another method of representing the importance of circularity for his thinking.⁹⁶ In addition to the plough, the anchor, the compass, the insect, another of the Hyphen's evident associative forms is the phallus; Neagu refers

95. Paul Neagu, *Hyphen*, (London: Visual Hermeneutics, 1985), 51.

96. The idea of circularity in art is explored by Martin Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950). Andrew Mitchell explains Heidegger's position on the body (or 'thing' or sculpture) and space as follows, "Space must become a medium of exchange, not simply defined by an absence of body. Space must be understood "materially", or rather, as no longer antipodally opposed to bodies. Only such a materially mediating thinking of space can allow the bodies to radiate beyond themselves and join in the multitudinous relationships that make up a world, a world indissociable from its spacing. Heidegger's sculptural reflections trace the contours of this material space of radiance", Andrew Mitchell, *Heidegger among the Sculptors*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp.1-2.

to this more than once in his 1985 publication dedicated to the Hyphen, using both his own writing and quotations from others, usually philosophers or poets, and including author Anika Lemaire (here paraphrasing psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan):

‘Phallus’ is to be understood in the sense of that kingpin, that articulation which cannot be apprehended in either the anatomical figure of the male sex (penis) or that of the female sex, but at best as a copula. It is even, one might say, the hyphen in the evanescence of its erection; the Phallus is the signifier of the impossible identity.⁹⁷

This observation only serves to emphasise the generative potential of the Hyphen, and its embodiment of both the fundamentals of life and its mysteries; but its phallic quality is a notably cool one, rather than a symbol of lust or sexual power. The Hyphen sculpture is intended more as a potential ‘missing link’ or decoder for the entire life cycle – the ambitions of its creators are more lofty than base passion.

In its prototype form it was made from wood and glass, but as the Hyphens multiply their material make-up diversifies; this is a subject which has been addressed extensively by Matei Stircea-Craciun in his book, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*. In particular Stircea-Craciun addresses the significance of the

97. Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 174. In *Paul Neagu, Hyphen (1975-1985) A Sculpture by Paul Neagu*, exhibition catalogue, (London: Visual Hermeneutics, 1985), 8.

use of steel, and credits this medium (and fundamentally its iron component) with possessing the most spiritual potency for Neagu. He writes:

With the steel variations, the Hyphens rooted themselves firmly in the artist's mind and he saw them as an effective vehicle for analysing the fundamental determinants of external form. The orientation of the visual discourse towards an investigation of intellectual mechanisms is accompanied by recourse to a constrained geometric style, imposed by the disciplines of working in steel.⁹⁸

As well as these formal properties Stircea-Craciun expands at length on the anthropological symbolism of iron:

Myths and legends and customs often deal with iron in a disapproving manner. For instance in ancient Egypt, Seth, the 'God of the Inferno', was attributed with having iron bones, and King Solomon, during the building of the temple in Jerusalem, insisted the wood carvers should avoid using iron implements inside the temple precincts. Similarly, carpenters from the northern Romanian region of Maramures used to construct wooden churches and fix the timbers without using nails, so that these sacred buildings would not be profaned or contaminated. The ancient Greek explicitly associated iron with a curse.⁹⁹

Stircea-Craciun continues by suggesting that Neagu wished to "rescue" iron from these associations. However, it is only in Neagu's later work that steel dominates, and this concentrated focus may have more relevance for examining the Nine Catalytic Stations than for the Hyphen (as is in fact Stircea-Craciun's

98. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 21.

99. *Ibid.*, 47.

primary aim). The level of hylesic altruism implicit in the word 'rescue' is quite an unprecedented impetus in Neagu's work. Also, prior to (and during) his creating numerous Catalytic Station ensembles - he continued to use other materials regularly. It is worth noting that it was in the late seventies that Neagu became aware, and a self-confessed admirer, of steel work by artists such as David Smith and Eduardo Chillida – this being concurrent with his own increased interest in tougher materials and larger scale sculpture.

The 'Subject Generator'/prototype Hyphen was made in 1975, from wood, metal and glass and the form came to be unmistakable. Through this formal endurance and this emphatic process of repetition the form is (relatively) fixed, but the materials are various. It is worth examining a number of examples of Neagu's Hyphens, chosen here primarily for their distinctness from one another, and examined chronologically, with the intention of charting their development.

I: The Forms and the Materials of the Hyphens

Hyphen is my recurrent instrument of work as the plough is for the farmer. Conceptually it relates the *essence of the earth* to the *body of man* and to the ideas of the harvest . . . the man knows that the salt in the soil and his planted seed will, one day, become a round fruit. As there is a hierarchy of quality: mineral, vegetable, animal, human – so there is organisation in my geometry: triangle, rectangle, spiral, sphere.¹⁰⁰

100. Paul Neagu, in Third Eye Centre Programme, Double Issue, 17 February - 6 April 1979, 1.

In the same year that Neagu made the Subject Generator he produced 'Hyphen-Generator-Gyroscope' (1975), now in the collection of the National Scottish Gallery of Modern Art (fig. 35). Numerous drawings also exist of this curious sculpture (fig. 36) – a construction in wood, metal, canvas and gesso. This early hyphen is one of the most obviously tactile works that Neagu created, and quite delicately balanced and fragile. It has not been on public display since being acquired by the SGMA in 1977 and this might be partly due to its friable nature. Neagu was gradually moving away from his cardboard and cake men, indeed the 'table-top' of this hyphen still demonstrates the artist's interest in grids and cells, the anthropocosmic, as does the strange attachment nestling on the protruding leg which in a sketch he has labelled 'collector of axioms/provisions'. But two of the most noteworthy elements of the sculpture are easily missed at a glance. Firstly, the implicit potential for movement in the Hyphen is becoming clearer - while the sculpture does not have the appearance of a traditional gyroscope (as one might expect from the title), one can conclude that the idea of balanced movement appealed to Neagu – made demonstrable in the sketch if not so much in the sculpture. Also contributing to the kinetic potential of the sculpture are five pendants suspended from the rectangular grid, these are metal 'weights' which are intended to represent each of the five Generative Artists – each pendant is clearly initialled in the sketch. Why would Neagu want to connect his imaginary artists to this Hyphen of 1975? One could

speculate that just as with the presence of the anthropocosmic in the work, Neagu was concerned with retaining coherence and logic in the development of his practice, surely cognisant of the fact that the viewer could not comprehend the multiple and metaphysical ideas contained in a single work without being able to read in it connections with previous work, work which had been more thoroughly explicated, by both the artist himself and other writers. An early photograph of the sculpture shows five talisman-like metal objects dangling from the hyphen's 'table-top', reminiscent of the descriptions of Neagu's exhibition of palpable art at the Richard Demarco Gallery in 1969, but the tactility of these pendulous objects - they are metal, not waffle or fabric - is less important than their capacity for measuring gravity and movement. By suspending these five objects (artists) Neagu is also testing the potential of his new invention - he regularly tests the potential for additional metaphysical meaning in the hyphen - by experimenting with context, attributes or probable purpose.

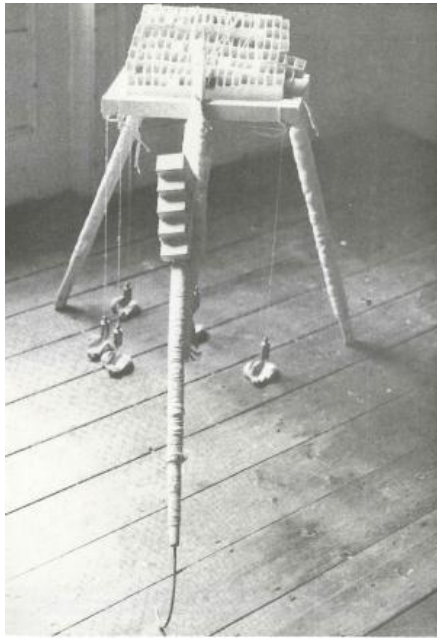


Figure 35. Paul Neagu, 'Hyphen-Generator-Gyroscope', 1975.

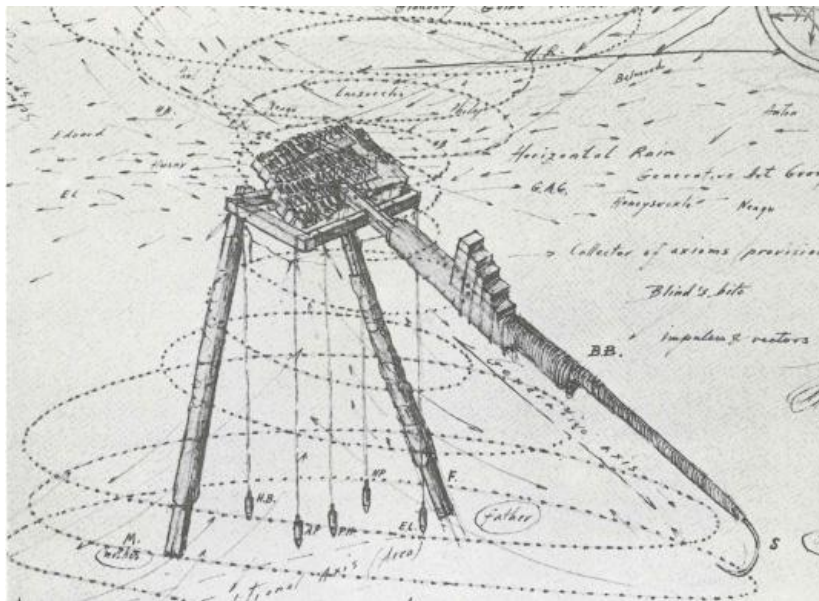


Figure 36. Paul Neagu, 'Subject Generator', sketch, 1975.

Another early Hyphen – sleeker, smoother, and shinier – now in the Arts Council Collection is one of Neagu's most elegant visual encapsulations of his Generative Code. In 'East-West Hyphen' (1975-77) (fig. 37) the physical

definition of the presence of triangle/blind bite, rectangle/horizontal rain and spiral/going tornado is clear. However, while the lines of the sculpture are cleaner, just as with 'Hyphen-Generator-Gyroscope' the attainment of balance is precarious. The sculpture teeters at the touch. And this Hyphen is tempting to touch, the protruding central wooden 'leg' has a carved surface reminiscent of the rolling wooden columns found in traditional Romanian architecture —and by extension Constantin Brancusi's iconic 'Endless Column' (1938) — but the peculiar painted wooden curve that begins at the tip of the hyphen and ends as the spiral emerges is remarkably insecure. The balance of the sculpture hangs on this bow-like form. Neagu is certainly drawn to the concept of thresholds, of the liminal, to being 'on edge', which this unsteadiness might represent. Also on the subject of bows and balance, at least six different drawings exist by Neagu wherein he explores the geometry of the tense moment depicted in Titian's 'Death of Actaeon' (c.1559-75) (fig. 38). The painting shows the moment just prior to the death of the fallen hero, and Neagu is clearly interested in the potency of depicting this 'highly strung' instant, and the accompanying potential for destruction and/or transcendence. He is interested in seeking a geometrical truth behind the metaphysical mysteries of death and transcendence. 'East-West Hyphen', poised as dramatically as an arched bow, is also a very clear visual representation of 'going tornado', the flowing metal 'scribble' which rises from the end of the bow and spirals through the air to

meet the rectangular table top is the third part of the generative code which rarely appears so tangibly in the hyphen sculptures. The scarcity of the appearance of the tornado is indicative that at this stage of the code one should be more concerned with that which cannot be seen, with the metaphysical.



Figure 37. Paul Neagu, 'East-West Hyphen', 1975-1977.

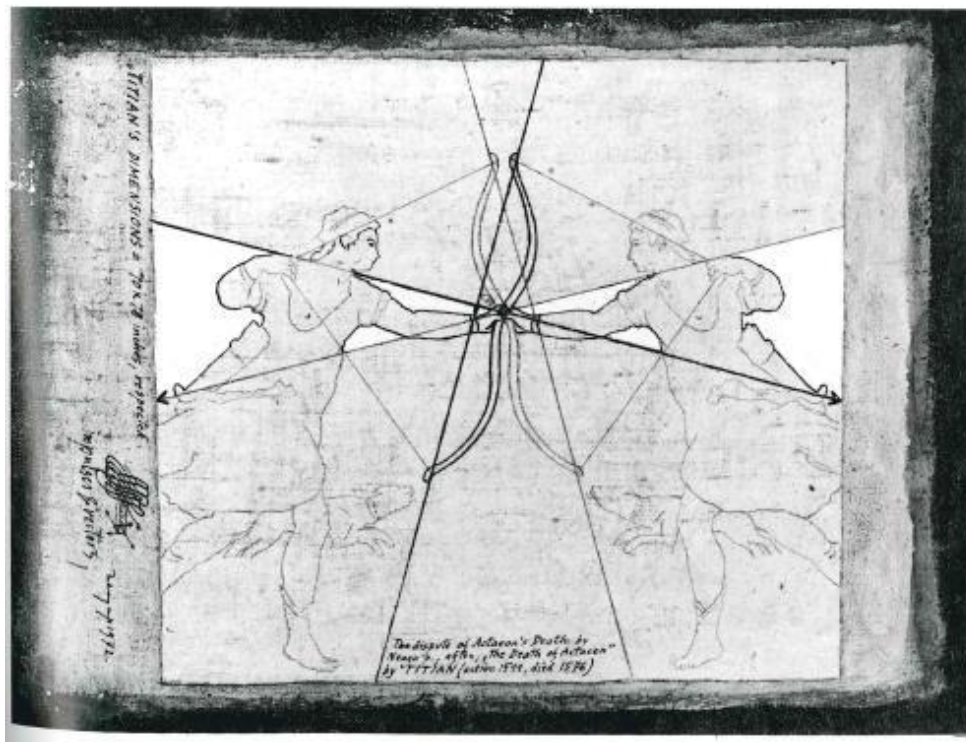
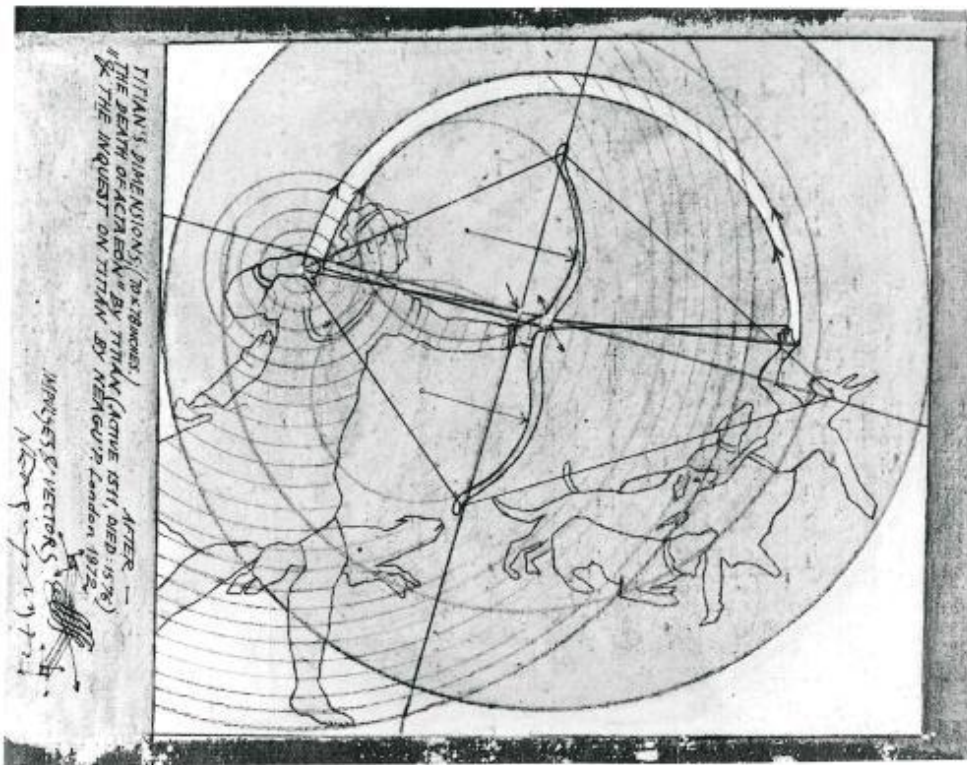


Figure 38. Paul Neagu, drawings, 1972.

In 1977 Neagu gave a performance at the Serpentine Gallery, 'Hyphen-Ramp'. 'Ramp' was first performed in Aberdeen, over the course of 5 days in December, but without the presence of a Hyphen sculpture. Numerous photos also exist of Neagu performing his jumping 'Ramp' outside the gallery context, against houses in Greece, in more rural locations, or frequently as an intricately drawn leaping figure in his own graphic work (fig. 9). The primary action of the event was Neagu jumping quickly and with remarkable effort against a wall. A recording of the Serpentine performance is available to watch in the Tate's collection and the event was reviewed in *Studio International* by artist Marc Chaimowicz who describes it as follows:

Ramp . . . is the physical enactment of an attempt to achieve the impossible, i.e. literally to challenge gravity. Perry Robinson, his collaborator, was led, blindfolded, and placed with her back to the wall. After each jump she would mark the place at which she approximated he had hit the wall by 'seeing' with her senses. The flux of the piece was the marking of time, with Neagu recording each jump by marking the inside of the wooden sculpture. Time was further structured by the rhythm of a metronome that needed rewinding regularly, thus allowing for resting, and by the 2pm to 4pm advertised duration per day. The performance was concentrated rather than dispersed.¹⁰¹

Later in the piece Chaimowicz goes on to record the following impression:

The very short time given to him to install the whole work in a changing show may have also contributed to the tenuous relationship between Hyphen and Ramp. The wish to challenge dogma of form and to cross-breed

101. Marc Chaimowicz, Performance report, *Studio International*, March/April 1977, 138.

types of work is becoming more frequent in performance; and problems posed by such a wish, which partly reflects an attempt to synthesise past with present, were inherent in Hyphen-Ramp. Compared with Neagu's installation at the Serpentine gallery in 1973, which remains one of the delights of their Summer Shows, it was therefore inconclusive. But that earlier piece was the completion of a cycle, whereas this one is obviously symptomatic of a transitional stage and is therefore bound to be less conclusive.¹⁰²

On watching the video recording Chaimowicz's point is made clear, the hyphen sculpture appears somewhat anomalous, or, in this situation, inutile. Neagu's action of jumping against the wall is in itself a Hyphen, as the artist leaps up the protruding leg to meet the table-top, his blindfolded colleague marks his varying heights, a nod to the fact that Neagu still adheres to the statements of his 'Palpable Art Manifesto'. The repetition of the movement only emphasises the meditative, cyclical nature of the activity, a ritualistic quality which hints at the inherent desire to break through a barrier and reach a stage of higher consciousness. Discussing other 'Ramp' performances, all without the presence of a sculpted Hyphen, Stircea-Craciun underlines the purpose of the leap (and implicitly the lack of need for the object) (fig. 39):

Further photographs provide evidence of performances in Greece which are similar in their intention and may be considered as visual and physical investigations relating to the preposition *over* . . . The climb of the barren buttress of the monastery could perhaps be seen as a preparation for a symbolic leap into the transcendental. Similarly, Neagu's leap on the immaculate whitewashed walls of a funerary chapel may have been

102. Ibid.

intended, through the rich working of a restless mind, to represent a leap into death or, in other words, *over* the boundaries of life.¹⁰³



Figure 39. "Going" (towards Tornado) – gesture – Aberdeen, 1975.

One of the less immediate consequences of the *Hyphen-Ramp* performance was that it very nearly marked the end of Neagu's public performances (he continued to record these events privately). As the meaningful link (Hyphen) became increasingly important to Neagu he began to find the theatrical separation between performer and audience problematic.

103. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 42.

Circa 1978 Neagu began to make hyphens which he attributed to particular geographical locations, amongst others 'New York Hyphen' (1978) (fig. 39), 'Romanian Hyphen' (1978) (fig. 40), 'Battersea Hyphen' (fig. 41), 'Montreal Hyphen' (1982) and 'Sarajevo Hyphen' (1988), as if underlining the international (indeed universal) relevance of his invention. 'Romanian Hyphen' is 80cm high and made from wood, string, a coat hanger, a chopping board and a spoon ('New York Hyphen' in contrast is 246cm high, has the look of very solid wood and oddly even appears to have five 'legs' – it is formidable). These location-linked works are (perhaps logically) the most down-to-earth, explicable Hyphens, the 'horizontal rain' stage of Neagu's collected army of Hyphens – they make sense in the world of practical concerns. In 'Romanian Hyphen' we see Neagu return not just to his country of birth, but to the habit he demonstrated when he lived there of making his art with bits and pieces he found to hand. Similarly to 'Shoemaker's Hyphen' (1984) six years later (fig. 8) it is an object of meaning and memory, whose material is crucial – nowhere else (except perhaps with his edible sculptures which are equally linked to his cultural heritage) can a better example be found of his using non-traditional sculptural materials with such anthropologically symbolic potency. He uses the materials of his ancestry and locates his Hyphen in the world of man as at other times he has envisioned them dancing and reaching the height of transcendence. Neagu also created a number of Hyphens with 'utilitarian'

sounding names, a contrast to the somewhat impotent Hyphen in the 'Hyphen-Ramp' performances. These included 'Shoemaker's Hyphen' (1984), 'Hyphen with Funnel' (1976), and 'Hyphen for Garden' (1979) (fig. 42).

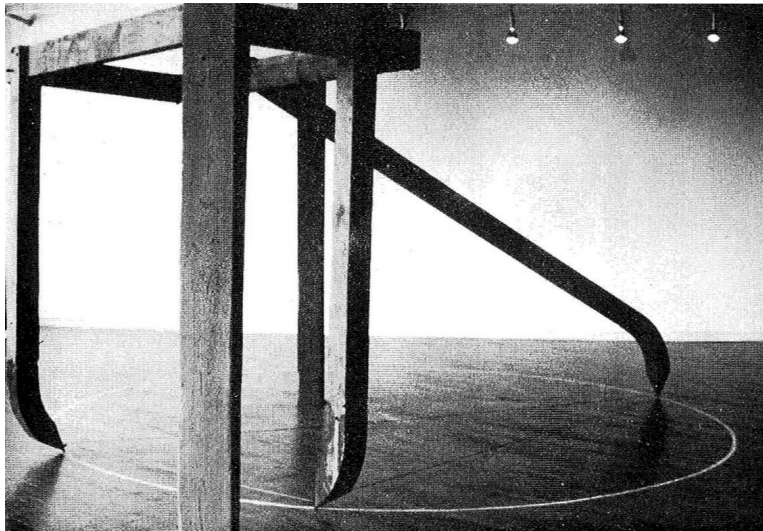


Figure 39. Paul Neagu, 'New York Hyphen', 1978-79.

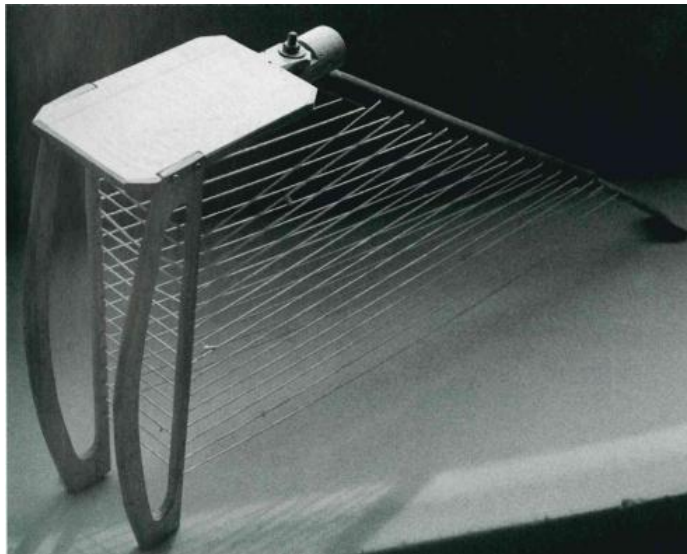


Figure 40. Paul Neagu, 'Romanian Hyphen', 1978.



Figure 41. Paul Neagu, 'Battersea Hyphen', 1977.

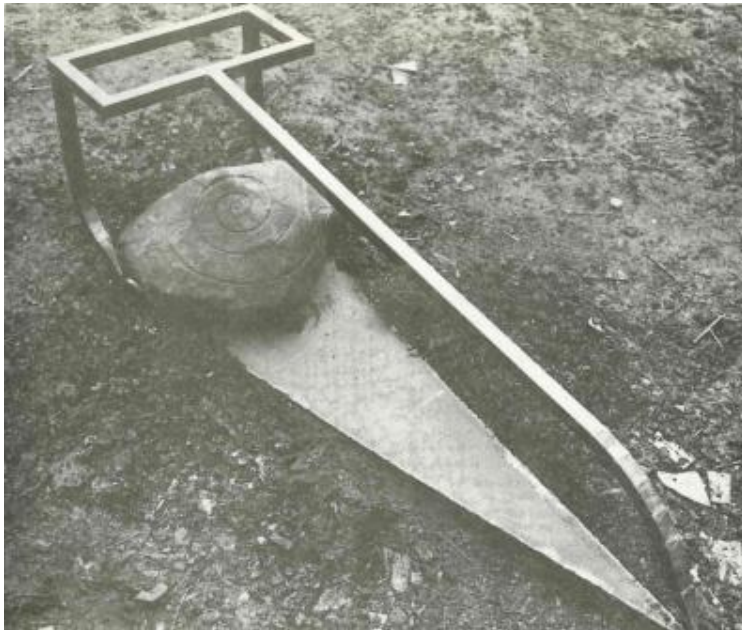


Figure 42. Paul Neagu, 'Hyphen for a Garden', 1979.

In 1994 Neagu had a solo exhibition at First Gallery in Romania – *New Hyphen*. Matei Stircea-Craciun describes the exhibition as follows, “[the exhibition] featured several shoe-making lasts and templates, which could be seen as having a confessional purpose. These were simple, harmonious rounded forms which had an unmistakable inner monumentality” he goes on to pinpoint that not only does the shoe-makers last have an undeniable auto-biographical symbolism for Neagu it is also neatly tied to Neagu’s concerns for generative art, “the concept of generative sculpture, i.e. form-engendering-form, is represented, *in nuce*, by a shoe-making last and template.”¹⁰⁴

In more than one instance Neagu draws a Hyphen over a skull – in figure 5 and figure 43 the Hyphen is added by the artist to a photo of a Mexican crystal skull and also over his own portrait photograph. Stircea-Craciun wrote that Neagu, saw the “hyphen as metaphor of the human skull.”¹⁰⁵ To take this observation further would be to suggest that instead of Hyphen as skull, Hyphen is more representative of that which is inside the skull, instinct, thought, and consciousness – the essence of man.

104. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, pp. 77-78.

105. *Ibid.*, 22.

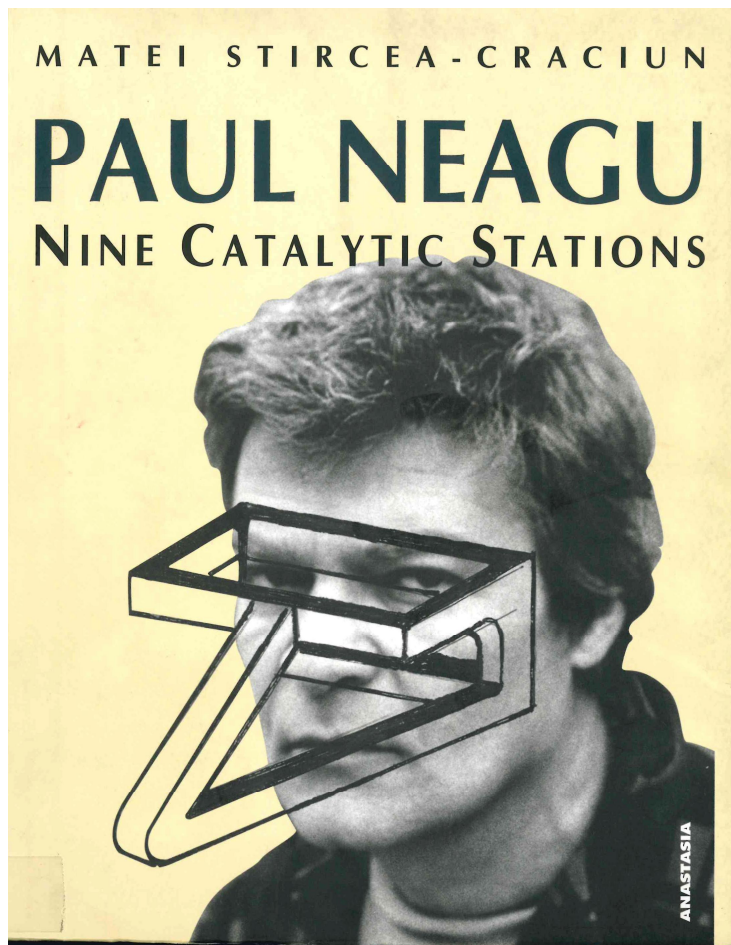


Figure 43. Paul Neagu, 'Hyphen-Head', front cover of *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*.

II: Nine Catalytic Stations – Repetition and Circularity

Mel Gooding: . . . as we move towards a discussion of your major sculptural work, which is the 'Nine Catalytic Stations'. Because clearly that picks up in many ways on some of these ideas, but with that these ideas find sculptural three-dimensional form.

Paul Neagu: That's how I move, yes.¹⁰⁶

An exhibition catalogue published in 1988 to accompany an exhibition held consecutively at the Richard Demarco Gallery and Traquir House in Scotland describes Neagu's protracted work on his Nine Catalytic Stations as follows:

The nine sculptures listed here are the final result of twelve years of intuitive and ideomorphic working. The whole process should contain many more different items in three main areas; sculpture, drawing and painting. During 1975-87 Neagu made over eighty sculptures, about three hundred drawings and about forty five oil paintings, all related to the arrival at the unforeseeable NINE CATALYTIC STATIONS as it became clearly itself, round about 1985, after an exhibition of small sculptures in Tokyo at Gallery 'K', that summer.¹⁰⁷

The two exhibitions which the catalogue was published alongside were quite different in appearance (figs. 44 and 45), with the most obvious divergence being one was held outside, in the expansive grounds of Scotland's oldest inhabited house and former Royal residence, Traquir House, while the other was organised in the somewhat cramped rough-around-the-edges Richard

106. Neagu NLS interview with Gooding NLS C466/27/F4529-A

107. Demarco, *Nine Catalytic Stations*, n.p.

Demarco Gallery space. If these exhibitions celebrate twelve years of work they also mark something of an end point for the Nine Catalytic Stations and their Hyphen progenitor (the quotation above significantly uses the word 'final').



Figure 44. Paul Neagu, *Nine Catalytic Stations*, Traquair House, Scotland, September 1988.

With the Nine Catalytic Stations we are presented with eight additional sculptures alongside the Hyphen and the task of interpretation is somewhat daunting. The majority of them relate formally to the Hyphen, and those that do not do display a definite link with the Generative Code. There is a specific order in which the Stations should be arranged (see fig. 46) and, although it is not immediately evident, there is also a particular recommended direction around them one should follow (clockwise from the Hyphen), which one can infer from both drawings and the fact that when the Stations are described by

Neagu or others this order is consistent. Often in drawings he also assigned the individual stations with points on a compass – ‘Fish’ being North, ‘Starhead’ and ‘Wake’ North East, ‘Fish over Gate’ East, and so on.



Figure 45. Paul Neagu, *Nine Catalytic Stations*, Richard Demarco Gallery, April 1988.

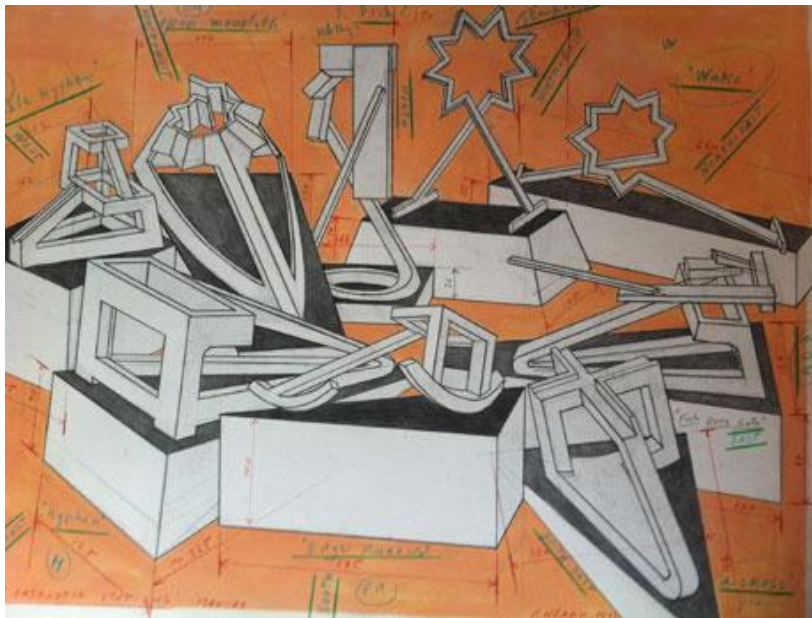


Figure 46. Paul Neagu, ‘Nine Catalytic Stations’, drawing, 1991.

Following the Hyphen is the 'Double Hyphen', the 'Open Monolith', 'Fish', 'Starhead', 'Wake', 'Fish Over Gate', 'A-Cross' and 'Edge Runner'. Unlike the Hyphen, their forms are quite stable and consistent. Each station relates very closely to the others with primary inspiration for each originating from either the Hyphen or the 'Open Fusion' – a radiating symbol which began to appear in 1979.¹⁰⁸ Writer and curator Deanna Petherbridge describes the Open Fusions:

In these works – sculptures and drawings, by slightly dislocating one of the elements in a sequence, the star- or loop-forms spiral spatially on to another plane, implying an open-ended development.¹⁰⁹

The Open Fusions were initially often exhibited alongside Hyphens, usually hung on the wall, sometimes placed on the ground. A much more simple form than the Hyphen at first glance, the Open Fusion can be read as the artist finding an effective sign for the 'Going Tornado' stage of his Generative Code, as is shown in a drawing of 1980, an element of his code which the Hyphen rarely materially demonstrates. The circular radiating star was left intriguingly with 'one end open' – indicating freedom, escape and potential. Neagu himself describes their significance as part of the ensemble in some depth (in reference in to the Open Monolith in particular):

108. Deanna Petherbridge in Paul Neagu, *Writhing Space: Paul Neagu*, exhibition catalogue, (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1981), n.p.

109. Ibid.

Now this open monolith, to dwell a bit on that world of openness, it's twice open, first because this form itself affirms not a closed form but an open one, in other words the star itself which forms the skirt of the upper part of the open monolith, is pointing to a spiral, to a continuation, which is suggested. Secondly because you could look at the sculpture and see through it, it's not a solid block as a monolith is. You see this openness which wants to, the symbolic of all the stations and all the sculptures, are showing themselves to their greatest flexibility; like you said, it's variations on a concept, or variations on a same code, almost like a DNA thing expressing a family of individuals.¹¹⁰

Within the Nine Catalytic Stations they are (in order) 'Open Monolith', 'Starhead' and 'Wake'.

As well as the Open Fusions we have five sculptures which figuratively relate very closely to the Hyphen, originally, prophetically, the 'Subject Generator'. The 'Double Hyphen' appears quite similar to images previously (or simultaneously) produced showing one or more Hyphens together, which are strangely reminiscent of more traditional artistic representations of the 'mother and child' subject. In such images two or more Hyphens are placed very closely together, often touching, or, in common with this sculpture, one on top of the other. Neagu had the habit, common to many sculptors, of constantly re-arranging the sculptures he lived with in his home/studio and, if one thinks of the Hyphen as a generative object the Double-Hyphen indicates generative power very clearly; two Hyphens huddled together represent very well the

110. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, pp. 144-145.

generative emblem of the family. Neagu described the Double Hyphen as “a first step of progress in the spiralling growth of shape.”¹¹¹ Matei Stircea-Craciun picks up on this comment and develops it further:

Double Hyphen fuses together two *hyphens* through the *rectangular* interface of a shared support, and a keen eye would detect that, with two rectangles condensed into a single intermediate rectangle, there is a subtle emphasis on the second of the three previously listed stages of the ‘generative code’ . . . Such details about the programme which drives Neagu’s work may be useful for viewers because it helps, for example, if they are expecting to discover that one of the following *Stations* will add a concluding *gradually going tornado* comment on the cross motif.¹¹²

Stircea-Craciun is suggesting that Neagu has deliberately developed the Double Hyphen to emphasize the Horizontal Rain stage of the Generative Code, the stage which deals philosophically with man assimilating to and being harmonious with the world. The Double Hyphen, with one Hyphen literally on top of another, is a metaphor for the importance of this stage as a ‘building block’ for Gradually Going Tornado, so perhaps we should expect an emphasis on the stage to follow.

‘Open Monolith’ comes next in the cycle – and its appearance, further indicating the importance of the sculptures being set in sequence, is part-

111. Paul Neagu, *Desen-Gravură-Sculptură*, (Bucharest: National Art Museum of Romania, 1996), 13.

112. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 103

Hyphen, part Open Fusion, inviting contemplation on the relationship between the levels of the Generative Code as figuratively it appears to eliminate the Blind Bite stage. And its name is new to Neagu's practice. He has demonstrated an interest in ancient monuments in his drawings, writings and listed philosophical reading, but why chose to name a monolith now? If Neagu's Stations were solid rather than skeletal more than one could potentially be described as a monolith but perhaps this is the point – to underline the weightiness of the Stations both physically and spiritually and also to emphasize the primeval quality of the sculptures Neagu consciously creates. The more aged the Stations appear, the more they justify their high metaphysical ambitions.

Neagu speaks very eloquently about the creation of his 'Fish' station:

I realised that symbolically and allegorically the fish is a very very heavy symbol of many many connotations. I built my sculpture, which was an evolution in space of a very simplistic rectangle, which rectangle you could find in artists before me or after me . . . I had a three-dimensional thing built by my assistants, I wasn't even present at this process, when it was ready, looking from its profile I realised that the bottom of it, they had no other way of articulating the higher loop with the basic circle, but building the end of a fish . . . It's like a strict necessity way of articulating the two forms, because we were talking about the twist again . . . I remember the first time I saw that, I was absolutely trembling with emotion . . . I'm trying to point to spiritual life of events, to a spiritual life of symbols, which is independent of me.¹¹³

113. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 155.

The symbolic connotations which Neagu refers to at the beginning of this statement are not further explicated by him, which indicates his interest in signs rather than symbols. One cannot ignore the symbolic potency of the fish symbol – of Christianity, of female fertility, of the Pisces sign of the Zodiac, also Greek Nereids and folklore mermaids – but it seems as though Neagu is really more interested in having created another dynamic sculpture. One can see why Neagu was pleased with this station – the circular base which he confesses he had not fully imagined prior to his assistants realising the sculpture has an ‘endless’ quality which would have appealed to his sense of the circularity of life. In fact, countless of Neagu’s drawings demonstrate his preoccupation with circularity, similarly with vectors, specifically infinity loop vectors, which he constantly sketched, and which his ‘Fish’ also effectively emulates.

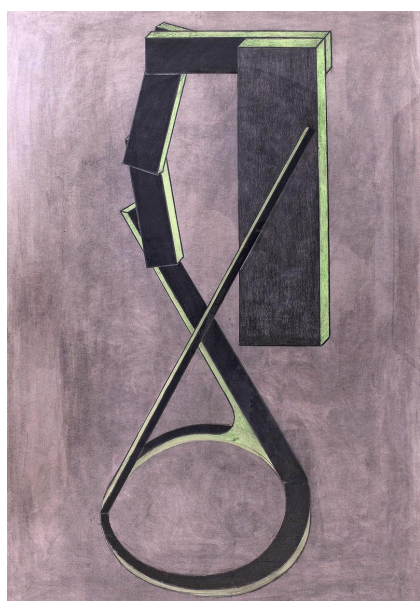


Figure 47. Paul Neagu, ‘Fish’, sketch, no date.

The 'Fish' station is followed by the two other Open Fusions, the towering 'Starhead' and the more modest 'Wake', placed to create a feeling of sweeping movement when one views the stations all together, a curving wave in space which leads to 'Fish Over Gate'. Neagu states that "The 'Fish Over Gate' is a combination of 'Hyphen' and 'Fish.'"¹¹⁴ Stircea-Craciun elaborates on this, using this station as an opportunity to highlight the artist's intense exploration of "the semantic field of propositions"¹¹⁵ Although Neagu is extremely well read, and has a gift for expressing himself with words, this exploration of propositions does not seek to express concrete facts or conclusions, it is rather a search for the metaphysical behind the specificity of certain words – the creation and many recreations of the Hyphen being the most obvious example of this. 'Fish Over Gate', 'A-Cross' and perhaps even 'Wake' all possess this aura of exploring the more abstract connotations behind the actual word. Stircea-Craciun again makes the link from these sculptural manifestations of propositions to Neagu's many performances involving the artist leaping, to his philosophical concerns, referring to Neagu's private performances captured only by photographs:

The climb of the barren buttress of the monastery could perhaps be seen as a preparation for a symbolic leap into the transcendental. Similarly Neagu's

114. Ibid.

115. Stircea-Craciun, *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, 41.

leap on the immaculate whitewashed walls of a funerary chapel may have been intended, through the rich working of a restless mind, to represent a leap into death on, in other words, *over* the boundaries of life. ¹¹⁶

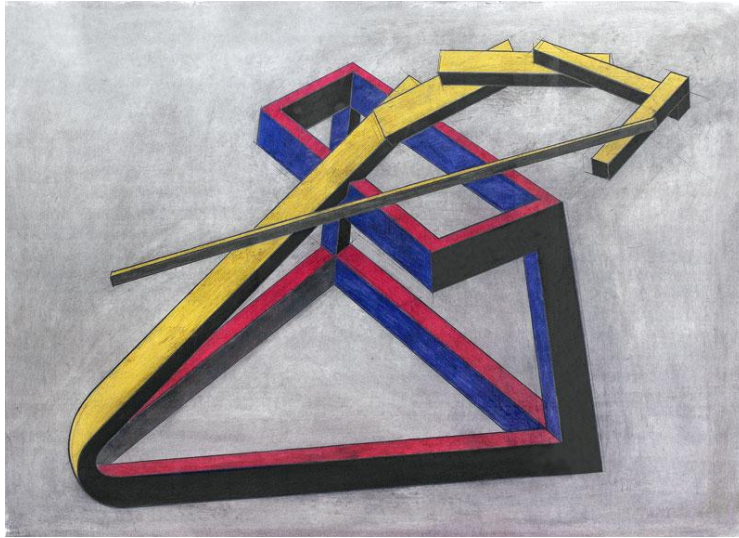


Figure 48. Paul Neagu, 'Fish Over Gate', sketch, undated.

The same theory can be applied to the next station 'A-Cross', as with 'Fish' Neagu has chosen a shape which could not be more steeped in traditional Christian associations and appropriated it for a new purpose. It seems from drawings that Neagu began working on 'A-Cross' quite soon after creating the Hyphen and the resemblance between the two is obvious. It is a more awkward shape than the Hyphen, not so pleasingly symmetrical but with its unusual

116. *Ibid.*, 42.

joining points it seems to possess even more than the Hyphen the sense of representing a 'meeting place' which Neagu discusses.¹¹⁷

'Edge-Runner' is the 'last' of the Stations, before we return to the generative Hyphen. It has in common with some of the earlier Hyphens a less balanced, more 'edgy' appearance, similar to the form of Hyphens such as 'East-West Hyphen' (1975-77) (fig. 37) or 'Romanian Hyphen' (1978) (fig. 40). Ever since his early palpable objects and anthropocosmic sculptures Neagu has been concerned with structures within structures, with cells and grids and shapes and vectors. Just as 'Edge-Runner' relates to Hyphen it relates to all of the Nine Catalytic Stations. Neagu describes this particular station as follows:

I wanted to show an aspiration, an aspiration towards flying, towards an elevation, towards imponderability. But that was all visible.¹¹⁸

Neagu's aspiration is not an easy one to achieve through a static medium but the Nine Catalytic Stations ensemble is perhaps Neagu's most dynamic achievement. The sculptures give the visual impression of being both ancient, fossil-like forms from nature or, contrarily, futuristic 'mutants' of more traditional shapes. This timeless quality sets them apart and reinforces their group identity as one both circular and spiritual.

117. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding 151.

118. Neagu, NLS interview with Gooding, 146.

Conclusion

One might say of Neagu that his sculpture aspired to escape gravity and to generate and radiate light. How lightly his sculptures touch the earth, how insistent within them is a kind of upward energy, a desire to move from the earth and into space.¹¹⁹

This dissertation has explained the central position the Hyphen occupies within the practice of Paul Neagu. It has traced an intricate but logical path from the artist's upbringing and early artistic practice through his experiments with the palpable and the anthropocosmic to the creative crux of the Hyphen. It has shown that following the clarification of the Generative Art Code for Neagu, he went on to use the Hyphen itself as an infinitely malleable, generative tool, resulting eventually in his *Nine Catalytic Stations* ensemble. This research has set out to determine that the Hyphen is a visual manifestation of the Generative Art Code and as a result of this was employed to test the potential of the code in different contexts and materials.

From chapter one, 'Pre-Hyphen' one of the most significant findings to emerge is the presence of Neagu's childhood and early adulthood in his later practice. The Baptist upbringing in which his family was immersed inevitably influenced his interest in ritual whilst the omnipresence of Orthodox Catholic

119. Mel Gooding, "Nine Catalytic Stations: Neagu's British work in context". Conference *Paul Neagu: Nine Catalytic Stations*, Henry Moore Institute, 31 October 2012. Sound disc is available in Henry Moore Institute audio-visual library.

religious practice in Romania - reliquaries, icons, crucifixes, as well as traditional architectural elements were equally potent. The 'rebellious' behaviour of Neagu's family in remaining true to their belief system despite suffering prejudice and persecution also instilled in Neagu an identity as a person removed from conventional societal beliefs; this made him comfortable later with exploring and adhering to a myriad of irregular philosophies. Neagu saw the potential within established geometry and philosophy for further exploration, for examining a concept such as the sacred architecture of the Temple of Man at Luxor and combining this with modern philosophical theories.

The beginnings of Neagu's explorations into the anthropocosmic can be seen in his diploma painting, 'Girl Market'. He was not at first depicting the universe as being present in one man, but rather attempting to show many sides at once of a durational human experience. He was attempting to depict this experience as multi-faceted and of time as a complex multi-sensory phenomenon, very probably influenced by his early experience of Cubist art in reproduction, and impossible to recreate through traditional painterly techniques. His figures at this point were an unresolved mix of schematic and primitive, he was beginning to realise the idea of man as receptacle for much larger philosophical concepts, an idea he further developed in the early 1970s, alongside setting down his Palpable Art Manifesto. Directly before and after writing the Palpable

Art Manifesto Neagu made his anthropocosmic ideas palpable. He sculpted men from matchboxes and waffles, cardboard and wood; he made sculptures whose intention was the very opposite of the 'do not touch' traditional mentality and he observed their various fates in a manner, as recorded on camera, of quiet satisfaction.¹²⁰

These still relatively early creations demonstrate not only Neagu's continued awareness of developments in twentieth-century philosophy, such as phenomenology and existentialism, but also his awareness of how these philosophies impacted on the world. It has been noted that Neagu's interest in palpability was not a unique phenomenon in the intellectual environment at the time, he was not alone amongst thinkers or artists in his preoccupation in this direction and in fact there existed a sympathetic background for his ideas.

In chapter two it was shown that despite the fact of this palpable art being exciting for both artist and audience, Neagu quite quickly moved from an overt audience collision with the multi-sensory to a desire to more subtly engage the viewer with metaphysical ways of thinking. Through his readings of structuralist philosophy he became ambitious to make visual representations of the world's most basic structures, and the limits and rules of these structures. From the study of systems to that of structures is a logical intellectual step and

120. This satisfaction is visible in a performance at Sigi Krauss Gallery in 1971, 'Cakeman Event', in 1971. This video tape is available in Tate Archive Audio visual collection, location: TAV 3413G.

the influence of systems theorists was as relevant to Neagu as that of the structuralists who followed.

The performances which Neagu gave whilst simultaneously developing the Generative Art Code were his first public demonstrations of the code, a way of testing the reactions of others to his experimental thoughts. The performances began in 1969 and were integral to his other artistic developments, although he gave up his public performances soon after the appearance of the 'Subject-Generator'/Hyphen, thereby building a three-dimensional sculptural prototype on the foundations of the performances. Neagu's practice over time came to (whether by design or accident) reflect his Generative Code; his early work is sensual and instinctive (*Blind Bite*), from c. 1975 and the invention of the Subject Generator he attains some 'worldly' success and balance (*Horizontal Rain*), but with the development of the *Nine Catalytic Stations* he leaves behind this balance somewhat in search of work reflecting circularity and the potential for spirals, tornadoes (*Going Tornado!*).

It has been noted that Neagu's conception of Generative Art is very different from that of other artists whose work could be referred to in this way. Although his work is always traceable back to his code, this relationship is often much more tangential than that of the work of other artists whose work might be seen as being produced from generative rules or systems. A work can

sometimes be more strongly linked to the metaphysical, spiritual ambitions of the code than to unambiguous guidelines for its production.

The Generative Art Group made their most prominent and successful appearance at a period which could, as stated, arguably be referred to as the Horizontal Rain stage of Neagu's practice. The invention of these characters, and their successful assimilation into the art world was not intended as a cynical joke, rather as a practical and intellectual experiment, but it could certainly be read as such and, to paraphrase Mel Gooding, clever-clever, amusing art work is often highly acclaimed in Britain. Neagu was unfortunately, at his most accepted when misunderstood.

The MOMA exhibition of 1975 was the first instance the 'Subject-Generator'/Hyphen was explicitly linked with the Generative Art Group, appearing as it did alongside work by the invented Generative artists. One imagines its appearance as being quite anomalous amongst the delicate drawings of the five protagonists. Although Neagu in his early sketches seemed to see the sculpture in some ways as a three-dimensional stage on which to pose found-object representations of his artists, it must have been quite difficult for the viewer to make these links; it was an oddly inutile work desk for the imaginary artists. In figure 4 the lamp is labelled with Eduard Larsochi's surname (or rather, the surname is followed by the item), the microscope with Anton Paidola, Neagu is followed by 'platform', (Husny) Belmoody by

magnifying glass and (Philip) Honeysuckle is matched with a mirror. One can see in this instance the 'Subject-Generator'/Hyphen very effectively operating as the creative meeting place Neagu discusses at a later date. Following this first manifestation Neagu became far more interested in his meeting place than the invented personalities which had fascinated the public. The Hyphen became a physical and metaphysical anchor for Neagu's practice.

The three most important areas to examine in order to determine the essence of the Hyphen are its various materials, forms and contexts. Chapter three sought to give some sense of the mass of sculptures and drawings which Neagu made of his subject. As the Hyphen multiplied and moved around the globe it was as if Neagu was exploring what happens not just to the three-dimensional object but to its underlying Generative Art Code as it was placed in various situations or created from different materials. What happens when you put the visual signifier of the code in a public park, and make it huge? What happens when you soften its sides, polish it, and place it in the gallery setting? As the Hyphen met the world in many guises Neagu was interested in what impact it could have upon it, what impression the Generative Art Code in the form of the Hyphen could have upon the earth's surface. Eventually Neagu decided the best context might be in the company of eight other related mutations.

The Nine Catalytic Stations expand the Hyphen (and the related Open Fusion form) in many ways not previously possible. As well as diversifying

formally from the Hyphen, balancing differently, reaching higher, reflecting and deviating from its intentions, the Stations emphasise how interested Neagu is in the semantics of language as well as of signs. The titles of the Stations are far from arbitrary and here Neagu has found a new direction for exploration to add to his experiments with form, material and context. He also finds an opportunity to achieve circularity with his stations which he had struggled to represent visually before, although he discussed his interest in the topic many times over the previous years. The Stations eloquently extract the Hyphen from its role as a lone explorer of the universe and ground it as it had not been since its first appearance in 1975.

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