

Observation, distillation, aggregation

Framing aesthetic encounters in the atmospheric milieu
through expanded art practice

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Claire Krouzecky

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Abstract

Drawing from a range of light-based and atmospheric phenomena observed in everyday situations, this research project explores the threshold across which the ordinary and the extraordinary intersect. It examines art's role in framing these alignments and its potential to help us understand what constitutes aesthetic experience. Acknowledging the highly specific, ephemeral and often ineffable character of such encounters, the research has been conducted as experimental fieldwork.

The setting for this fieldwork is defined by that which is familiar, provisional and durational by nature – the immediate everyday environment. These qualities also define the subject matter (which include the rainbow, dust, and birds in flight) and methodological tools (such as the chair, the window, and the camera obscura). The practical research is centred on familiar manifestations of the light and air. Diverse media have been employed, including series of paintings and drawings, voice recordings and video documentation of chance atmospheric encounters, gallery-based site-specific installation and performance.

The project draws together a field of artists and theoreticians who reject representational models in favour of directly framing experience. Central to the research has been the philosophical thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and its interpretation as an approach to art practice by Simon O'Sullivan. Other writers informing the project include Alva Nöe, Brian Massumi, Richard Holmes, Jörg Heiser, and Anna Dezeuze. The contextual field is further defined with visual examples that apprehend the light and/or air, discussed through selected works by John Ruskin, Gabriel Orozco, Spencer Finch, Ariane Epars, Francis Alÿs, Robert Barry and Olafur Eliasson, as well as the methods of Romantic scientist Humphry Davy.

The research has implemented open-ended working systems that allow an accumulation of responses over time. With an intention to communicate personal aesthetic encounters, parameters were established through which I could respond, intervene, and often push against. Expanding the research to consider how others' experiences might be included, frameworks for participation were introduced. These methodological systems or 'armatures'

were themselves investigated for their potential to both contain and stimulate aesthetic awareness.

The research unfolded as a series of related encounters. As such, the project seeks to extend the creative ‘moment of meeting’ into the presentation of these processes. The submission does not bring together a series of resolute works but instead assembles multiple responses to phenomena at different stages of inquiry, with the intention of setting in motion complex re-encounters, where viewers engage in the here-and-now collectively. Expanding on existing models of art practice that resist definition and permanence, the project contributes a new experiential body of work. The research does not arrive at objective knowledge but instead a place of subjective awareness, proposing this place of un-knowing might be conclusive in itself.

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1

Introduction

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*.¹

The core proposition

Drawing from a range of light-based and atmospheric phenomena observed in everyday situations, this research project explores the threshold across which the ordinary and the extraordinary intersect. It examines how art practice can play a role in framing these alignments, and the potential for these framings to not only apprehend, but also teach us about what constitutes, aesthetic experience. The notion of teaching is taken broadly and does not refer to a didactic outcome-oriented trajectory, but rather to encouraging an open curiosity to the experience of not knowing. The research proposes that becoming acquainted with this ‘unknowing’ through art *is* a kind of knowledge acquisition in itself.

The project moves forward from the idea that aesthetic experience is situation-specific. Acknowledging its constituent elements are complex and often ineffable – more to do with an unpredictable, intuitive feeling than a determinate, cognitive logic – the research has been conducted as experimental fieldwork. This fieldwork has focused on familiar manifestations of the light and the air in the immediate everyday environment.

Foregrounding the aims of the project is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘immanence.’ Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the processes of art making are a means for attending to the sensation of being in the present, *as this moment unfolds*. Not only can art attend to this sensation, it actively creates it through the symbiotic relationship between viewer,

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 139.

object and subject (Deleuze and Guattari's use of the terms 'percept,' 'affect' and 'concept' could here be interchanged with each or indeed all three of these components of art).² Simon O'Sullivan in his adaptation of these philosophies argues it is through non-representational art forms that this can best be achieved,³ where the viewer-object-subject correlation is grounded in the *experience* of the here-and-now, but creates new and different openings into it.

Rather than affording a transcendent experience that elevates away from reality, the project has aimed to direct awareness to the immanent nature of our own, and others' existence – to the absolute subjectivity of experience.

The project sidesteps representation by framing aesthetic encounter directly. The framing devices used are often adaptations of commonplace 'tools,' such as the chair, the window, the kite and the camera obscura, reiterating an insistence on the 'ad hoc'⁴ and provisional. This methodology has involved not just an investigation of the subject matter but also the form of the frame itself. The project questions how the framework might generate, capture, transform, order, conceptualise, refine and relate these experiences – and equally how it may fail at this.

Diverse media have been employed, including accumulative series of paintings and drawings, voice recordings and video documentation of chance atmospheric encounters, gallery-based site-specific installation and performance.

At the outset, a series of simple observational exercises were implemented, and these routine recordings have continued over the duration of the research period. Initially these were focused on personal, solitary encounters. Instructions for action or gesture were established through which I could respond, intervene and often push against, using observations of light-based or atmospheric phenomena as a trigger (eg. *Record a description of the rainbow each time it appears*). Expanding the research to consider how the experiences of others might be included, new frameworks for participation were introduced (such as self-assembly, or sharing a seat together). Improvisation and spontaneity feature prominently due to the unpredictable nature of the subject matter, and hence the modes of response are often slight and provisional.

² Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163-199.

³ O'Sullivan, Simon, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

⁴ Literally 'for this' in its Latin translation.

In considering the final submission of these often ephemeral and situation-specific works, I have sought to re-synthesise the distilled responses to experience that sustain a vitality, avoid fixed meaning, and maintain within the work an open potentiality. The project proposes the exhibition as an aggregated space, marking out an opening for shared presence, as multiple subjectivities together in experience.

...

The overview outlined in the first part of this introduction offers insight into how the research project has come into being and where it has arrived. The second part of the chapter clarifies some fundamental concepts, providing a series of entry points into the project.

The aesthetic encounter

The terms ‘aesthetic experience’ and ‘aesthetic encounter’ are used to describe a subjective and intuitive shift in awareness, prompted by the sensation of certain stimuli. The points at which ‘experience’ becomes ‘aesthetic experience’ are the moments that have directed this project. Characteristics of stimuli that bring about this shift are identified by Philip Fisher in *Wonder, the Rainbow and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (1998) as intrinsic to experiences of wonder and the sublime, each of which he argues “depends on moments in which we find ourselves struck by events within nature whose power over us depends on their not being common or everyday.”⁵

The idea of being ‘struck’ by an event relates to the terms ‘experience’ and ‘encounter.’ Although they are used interchangeably in this project to refer to an event or occurrence that leaves an impression, ‘encounter’ has the added inflection of the unexpected, a ‘coming up against’ that suggests adversity. The implied hostility of the ‘adverse’ here could perhaps be exchanged for milder terms such as ‘indeterminate’ or ‘unfamiliar,’ which might lead to an affirmative experience of ‘surprise’ rather than ‘shock.’ It is by way of this distinction between surprise and shock that we can separate wonder from the sublime – the former suggesting a pleasurable, curious newness, compared to the latter which involves emotions of discomfort, or even fear. It is this experience of wonder – the “aestheticization of delight” – as opposed to the sublime – the “aestheticization of fear”⁶ – that underpins this research project.

⁵ Fisher, Philip, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

Fisher goes on to identify a “lively border between an aesthetics of wonder and ... a poetics of thought.”⁷ Experiences of wonder, he suggests, evoke a slowly unfolding attention and questioning in their presence. He lists further qualities:

The sudden, the unexpected, the all-at-once of the visual, a first-time experience, a rare or even singular event, a progression from mystification to explanation, a feeling of freshness of the world, the bodily states of the smile and the swaying – a somatic pleasure much like the state that Wordsworth experienced in the field of dancing daffodils.⁸

It is this temporal, unexpected, often fleeting state of punctuated attention, intuitively leading to further thought, that characterises the trigger points for this project. Wonder has operated as a useful term that encapsulates something of the complexity of this aesthetic experience. However ultimately, the nature of such experiences is that they often resist definition and do not always follow a direct formula. It is important to note, therefore, that wonder is not necessarily the intended outcome for the work in this project, although of course it is a welcomed element in its reception. More simply, the particular type of aesthetic experience the work has opened itself to, and indeed that has triggered its coming into being, possesses many of the qualities described by Fisher here as part of an aesthetics of wonder.

Light and air

The stimuli this project draws on fit with Fisher’s definition of primarily visual impulses as core to aesthetic experience. In the research, the visual plays an important role in capturing attention in the initial stages of experience, producing an impression and making engagement with the work enjoyable. Despite this, the visual has not been the primary focus, and the research refutes to some degree Fisher’s favouring of it, indeed often through a deliberate *removal* – an exploration of the invisible, a *lack* – which often serves to heighten the other senses.

It follows then that the subject matter of the research centres on ephemeral, transient, and elusive phenomena manifested through light and air. These subjects have long fascinated artists and philosophers throughout history, who sought ways to hold or capture them in order to study and understand how they are revealed (and concealed) to our perception. Our sustained curiosity towards the essential nature of light and air is related precisely to our intrinsically existential relationship to them.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Ibid., 26-27.

On the subject of light in the recent collaboration between Australian artists Leslie Eastman and Natasha Johns-Messenger,⁹ Melissa Miles writes, “Both filling space and revealing its voids, light simultaneously separates and integrates the realm between perceiving subject and the world of perceivable things.”¹⁰ ‘Light’ here could also be exchanged for ‘air’. However the air pertains more explicitly to the topic of invisibility, as Australian industrial designer Malte Wagenfeld¹¹ writes in relation to his recent research into the aesthetics of air,

Air envelopes us in sensual effect. It can warm or chill us, it carries smell and sound; breezes stimulate the skin, and wind can literally move us; sometimes we can even taste the air. Although we cannot see air, it reveals its presence to the eye through swaying branches and windswept landscapes, and the particulates it carries – dust, smoke and fog.¹²



Figure 1 Leslie Eastman and Natasha Johns-Messenger, *Pointform 2 (Taxi Yellow)*, Rosco Mirror, steel frames, Perspex, 2011.

⁹ XYZ:NYC - 10 Downing, 7 – 22 December 2011, 10 Downing Street, Manhattan, New York. In this sixth iteration of an ongoing collaboration, Eastman and Johns-Messenger constructed a series of installations that combine architectural, optical and technological components to capture, manipulate and disrupt the experience of light and in turn make evident the complex relationship between it and the viewer's perception.

¹⁰ Miles, Melissa, "Turning on Axes of Light," in XYZ:NYC - 10 Downing (New York: No Longer Empty, 2011), 17, <http://www.leslieeastman.com/XYZ-NYC.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2013).

¹¹ Addressing the phenomenological qualities of interior environments, in *Aesthetics of Air* (14 April – 28 May 2011, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne) Wagenfeld developed interactive installations using fog, lighting, lasers and electronics that made visible the patterns and movements of air in a space that is moved through and affected by participants.

¹² Wagenfeld, Malte, *The Aesthetics of Air: experiments in visualising the invisible* (RMIT Gallery) <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Our%20Organisation%2FRMIT%20Gallery%2FExhibitions%2F2011%2FAesthetics%20of%20air/> (accessed 18 August 2011).



Figure 2 Malte Wagenfeld, *The Aesthetics of Air*, fog and lasers, 2011.

This research project has questioned how and where we are reminded of these elemental qualities in our day-to-day surrounds, and how in turn punctuated perceptions of light and air can serve as a reminder of our subjective position in the world. As a point of distinction, it has sought not to isolate and interrogate these in their primary essence, as Eastman,¹³ Johns-Messenger and Wagenfeld do in their works, or seek transcendence and spectacle through them, as other light and space artists such as James Turrell and Robert Irwin, or more recently, Ann Veronica Janssens, do, but rather locate and create space for them as familiar, commonly understood experiences that perhaps we forget to notice in our contemporary, distracted lifestyles.

The everyday

There is a suggestion in Fisher's discussion of wonder that its potency lies in its unexpected or accidental emergence from ordinary situations. Likewise, this project proposes that within banal, ordinary experience, moments of profound or *extraordinary* poetry may reveal themselves through the 'frame' of an artwork. However Fisher argues that there can be no experience of the ordinary, instead suggesting that it is "what is there when there are no experiences going on. It is the necessary optics within which there can be such a thing as an experience, but which cannot itself be seen."¹⁴

Fisher's argument depends on an understanding of experience as a definable and discrete moment – formulated, described, remembered, self-contained

¹³ The work of Leslie Eastman does perhaps have a stronger link to this project than the other artists mentioned here, particularly due to Eastman's extensive use of the camera obscura. Although I discovered Eastman's work later on, it is worth noting this connection with an experimental Australian artist who fits broadly within the contextual field described in Chapter 2.

¹⁴ Fisher, *Wonder*, 20-21.

and separable from what came before and after.¹⁵ Although this might outline how we come to *recognise* an experience, a less rigid interpretation of Fisher's model – with allowance for indeterminacies, slippages, and uncertainties – perhaps is more suggestive of what experience *feels like*, which although discernible, is not always easily defined or contained, but rather emergent and in flux.

'The Everyday' has arisen in contemporary art as a critical genre, and its definition in more recent art theory discussions¹⁶ provides an expanded view of how it is experienced. Michael Sheringham in *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to Present* (2006) suggests an elusiveness to the everyday that is equivalent to the elusive nature of light and air:

Quotidieneté dissolves (into statistics, properties, data) when the everyday is made an object of scrutiny ... The everyday exists through the practices that constitute it, the ways in which times and spaces are appropriated by human subjects and converted into physical traces, narratives and histories ... The figural dimension of the day, the street, the conversation, the gadget, the *fait divers*, which connects with everydayness as *sens*, over and above (or prior to) *significations* that can be objectified, stems from practice.¹⁷

In Sheringham's definition, the everyday is a milieu of creative potential that is actively shaped, and thus noticed, through subjective experience. By way of its commonality, this 'creativity' is not highly specialised but instead inclusive and unfolding amongst relations between things, people and places. While Sheringham's argument provides an entry point into the project, it also offers a rationale for the conclusion of the research with a submission exhibition whose motivation lies in its being contingent and changeable.

The everyday is a fertile field for this project because it is durational, provisional and itself fleeting by nature. It is also a strategic choice of setting, as the potential of the everyday can be taken up by anyone. The artist's 'exclusive vision' is hence downplayed, reinforcing instead a casual and informal standpoint, within which the capacity for wonder and the extraordinary is explored. Through careful attention to the light and the air (themselves dually banal and profound) within ordinary circumstances the project seeks to cultivate a kind of 'hiatus' that allows for reflection and redirects attention to the present.

...

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶ Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Allan Kaprow *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993), 11th Biennale of Sydney (1998) titled *Every Day*, and Stephen Johnstone's edited compendium, *The Everyday* (2008), where in his introduction Johnstone cites a list of relevant references far more exhaustive than the few named here.

¹⁷ Sheringham, Michael, "Configuring the Everyday," in *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 386.

The chapters that follow will describe in detail the conceptual underpinnings and practical manifestations of the project as they unfolded within this process-driven research.

Chapter 2: the project in context outlines a field of artists and theorists who argue for an experiential approach to the making and reception of art. These are drawn from diverse genres and time periods, and have therefore been organised into several thematic groupings, rather than as a chronology. These categorisations also provide a framework through which to relate the practical component of the research.

Chapter 3: methodologies and processes charts the unfolding visual practice developed during the project, outlining the different stages of the process as it evolved. Using similar groupings to those in chapter two, this chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the fieldwork undertaken during the project period, and an appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, **Chapter 4: conclusion** provides a summary of the research and the reasoning behind its strategic aggregation in the examination exhibition, as a cohesive body of work experienced holistically. While it comments on this particular end-point for the project, it also refutes conclusion by expanding on the project's potential for new beginnings and re-newal in the future, as a continual, ongoing inquiry.

2

The project in context

In its attempts to understand the ways we relate to our environment, the project is situated in a field of artists and theoreticians who reject representational models in favour of a more direct framing of experience. Investigating the nature of the frame itself, the research has conducted experiments into diverse possible relationships between viewer, frame and content. In keeping with the broad scope of the project, the contextual examples outlined in this chapter have been drawn from a number of areas and time periods. In order to best understand them in relation to my work, they are categorised according to several thematic clusters, which correspond to the unfolding concerns of the project.

Beyond representation describes an argument for the direct and experiential approach to the making and reception of art that delineates this field of research and foregrounds many of the contextual examples. **Solitary observations** outlines preliminary fieldwork through examples of artists who use mark making and seriality to respond to aesthetic encounters. **Open process** details theoretical and practical models for establishing parameters in creative practice that allow for heightened attention and open potentiality. **Romantic attitudes and familiar subjects** outlines the Romantic precedent, and its lasting effect in Conceptual art, that came to inform the project. **Collective presence** explores the participatory aspect involved in re-presenting the outcomes of experimental processes, and **Re-synthesis/aggregation** makes a case for the assemblage of multiple components from a larger process, brought together as a holistic new experience in the gallery space.

Beyond representation (event-encounters and affirmations)

The early research looked to phenomenology, in particular Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), for its philosophical underpinnings. To vastly summarise, Merleau-Ponty describes the nature of encounter or 'sensation' as a mutual and continually shifting exchange between beings, objects and environments. While this text is relevant to the research, it speaks rather broadly on the nature of being and experiencing the world, and could essentially be applied to all art and all artists.

In a paper titled 'Experience and Experiment in Art' (2002), Alva Nöe investigates a recurring stumbling block¹⁸ in phenomenology, which he terms the 'transparency' of perceptual consciousness. He explains,

When we try to make perceptual experience itself the object of our reflection, we tend to see through it ... to the objects of experience. We encounter *what* is seen, not the qualities of seeing itself.¹⁹

Nöe argues that a description of experience inevitably leads to a description of the experienced world, pointing to the problem with representing experience. Instead, he suggests perception might be better understood through non-representational art forms that afford an "opportunity to have a special kind of reflective experience"²⁰ within a temporally extended process that turns attention to our outward, rather than inward, activity.

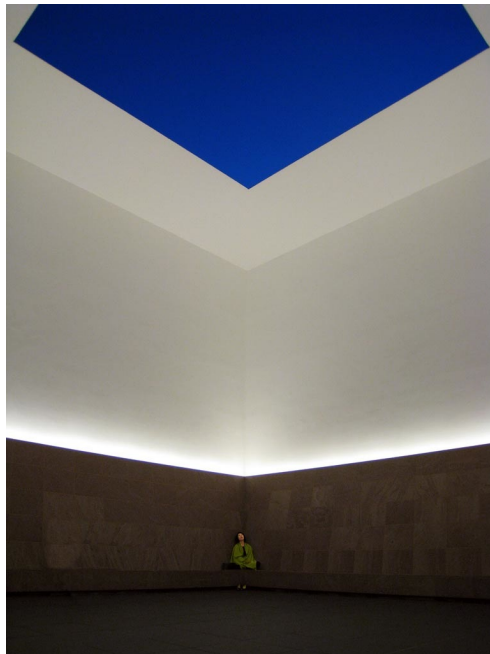


Figure 3 James Turrell, *Skyspace*, Villa Panza, Varese, 1975.

¹⁸ Here Nöe refers to phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, but also their predecessors David Hume and Immanuel Kant.

¹⁹ Nöe, Alva, "Experience and Experiment in Art," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7, no. 8-9 (2000): 124.

²⁰ Ibid.

Nöe refers to ‘experiential’ artworks by Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Robert Irwin, and James Turrell, as examples that foster active engagement with the surrounding environment by way of their site-specificity and the complexity of experience they provide. These qualities compel the viewer to physically explore the work in order to ‘grasp’ it, drawing attention to the particular *feeling* of this experience. Nöe, therefore, describes a type of ‘presence’ – facilitated by artworks that enable us to “catch ourselves in the act of perceiving.”²¹

Catching oneself in the midst of encounter as a way of interrupting habitual modes of being is a concept that concerned Gilles Deleuze in his philosophical writings.²² Simon O’Sullivan in *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari* (2006) discusses how the philosophy of Deleuze (and his collaborations with Félix Guattari) can be applied to our reading of experiential artworks. Deleuze, like Nöe, rejects representational forms because they reconfirm existing knowledge, beliefs and values. Deleuze writes that objects of genuine encounter “can only be sensed,”²³ as opposed to objects of recognition that can be sensed but also grasped by other faculties such as memory, imagination and thought, therefore presupposing the *sensible* with “common sense.”²⁴

O’Sullivan argues, “It is common sense that predetermines and we might say limits typical experience ... Common sense operates here as the cornerstone of representation.”²⁵ He calls instead for genuine encounters that rupture habitual experience, *affirming* new openings into, and understandings of, the world. O’Sullivan suggests that this ‘encounter’ is the creative moment, that art is the bringing together of these two moments – rupture and affirmation – and is necessarily always beyond representation. “Art then,” he writes,

Is the name of the object of an encounter, but also the name of the encounter itself, and indeed of that which is produced by the encounter. Art is this complex event that brings about the possibility of something new.²⁶

Unlike Nöe, whose examples are specifically monumental and precipitate rupture through awe, bewilderment and disturbance²⁷ (qualities historically associated with the sublime), O’Sullivan in his “Manifesto for future art practice”-cum-conclusion outlines a non-representational approach through the activation of Deleuzian immanence:

²¹ Ibid., 128.

²² In particular, *Difference and Repetition* (1994), and the work with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1994).

²³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 158 n1.

²⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁷ Nöe, “Experience and Experiment,” 131.

Turn away from transcendent modes... Celebrate the 'isness' of all things. We call for a turn to matter, and a tracking of the latter's singularities and creative potentialities. Practice is the utilisation of that which already is (what else is there?) but in the production of new and specifically *different* combinations.²⁸

This research project sits between these two arguments. It takes Nöe's problem of the 'transparency' of perception as a challenge to explore how experience might be felt, as opposed to illustrated. Taking my aesthetic encounters as the primary subject matter, the project seeks, as O'Sullivan advocates, to understand the world anew by *practicing* an active awareness to, and engagement with, it.

Solitary observations

Undertaking preliminary fieldwork or 'primary research' necessarily begins with personal and solitary observations. In the examples that follow, artists implement routine practices into their daily lives, executed over an extended, indeterminate duration. The resulting 'artefacts' could be classified as the residue of a mark-making process that serves to record the artist-as-conduit, carefully and creatively examining the act of perception itself.

The 19th century British writer and artist John Ruskin pre-empted Deleuze when he emphasised that we "behold the world by means of convention,"²⁹ and that practical, creative activities like writing and drawing from nature can teach us about the world in new ways. In the mid-1800s Ruskin developed the technique of 'word painting' as a way of more meaningfully responding to aesthetic experiences. His 'paintings' of clouds are pertinent to this project:

The true cumulus, the most majestic of clouds... is for the most part windless; the movements of its masses being solemn, continuous, inexplicable, a steady advance or retiring, as if they were animated by an inner will, or compelled by an unseen power.³⁰

Alain de Botton in *The Art of Travel* (2004) refers to Ruskin's word paintings for their characteristic use of unembellished but descriptive "psychological language,"³¹ which he suggests more effectively probes the aesthetic qualities of these difficult-to-grasp encounters (or, moments of "beauty"³² as de Botton defines them). The word paintings describe not just the clouds' visual effect but also their emotive qualities. It is a decidedly subjective picture Ruskin paints, one that does not attempt universality but instead embraces

28 O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 155.

29 Landow, George P., "Chapter One: Ruskin the Word-Painter," in *Ruskin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, reprint for web, 2000) <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/pm/1.html> (accessed 9 February 2013).

30 Ruskin, John, *Modern Painters Volume 5* (New York: John Wiley Publishing, 1860), 139.

31 de Botton, Alain, "On Possessing Beauty," in *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 234.

32 Ibid., 217-238.

its own singularity, focusing on the apprehension of experience rather than the image of it.

Pertinent to Ruskin's work is his insistence that anyone could undertake a word painting exercise (he also suggested children should be taught drawing in the same way they learn writing and mathematics, not to improve their skills but as a means to more deeply comprehend visual experience). Distinct from poetry, he argued, skilful and well-crafted execution would not necessarily enhance the benefit of doing a word painting. In this way, Ruskin was pioneering a particular kind of *process*-driven approach, actively attending to these encounters with an openness and lack of emphasis on the finished product.



Figure 4 John Ruskin, *The Cloud Chariots*, woodcut, 1860.

Ruskin worked at a time when photography was burgeoning, and, to his frustration, used as a convenient tool for the “innately human tendency to respond to beauty and desire to possess it.”³³ The word paintings enabled Ruskin an alternative lens through which to comprehend these moments, and as de Botton suggests, sustaining a practice of this kind could lead to an important shift, “from a position of observing beauty in a loose way to one where we acquire a deep understanding of its constituent parts.”³⁴

The automatic response to photograph aesthetic experience has, since Ruskin's time, only increased with the rapid technology and widespread availability of the camera. Like many contemporary artists, Mexican-born Gabriel Orozco's photographic works form just one part of a broader multi-disciplinary practice. His use of photography is partly as a documentary tool, but also as a device for isolating and carefully framing everyday poetic alignments. The resulting image is, in Orozco's words,

³³ Ibid., 220.

³⁴ Ibid., 221-222.

Not about photographic composition or drama. It [is] more about sketches and immersions, and not about explaining an action through photography. I [want] to construct a self-sustaining image that generates meaning by itself and is not a mere anecdote of the action.³⁵

Extension of Reflection (1992) encapsulates the “receptive mood”³⁶ characteristic of Orozco’s practice, and his modest and simple means bestow the work with a poetic potency. Bernhard Bürgi describes the confluence of documented encounter with the production of a new view of the world, in reference to this work in a catalogue essay:

A bicycle, circling round and round, crosses a manhole cover en route and passes through two puddles, one almost dried up, the other still fresh. The wet bicycle tyres draw circling lines of movement on the dry pavement, paralleling the gesture of the painter’s brush on canvas. The trail drawn by the tyres gives way to the branches and fragments of grafting reflected in the water, extending reflection both literally and figuratively as immediate, concrete mirroring and a deepening of thought processes. Before the rays of the sun can put a speedy end to this actionist scenario, Gabriel Orozco shoots a picture of this profoundly elementary rendition of overlapping cycles of body, spirit and nature: *Extension of Reflection* (1992).³⁷



Figure 5 Gabriel Orozco, *Extension of Reflection*, Chromogenic colour print, 40.6 x 50.6 cm, 1992.

We see the puddles as connected; a relationship extended between them. They reflect what is unseen beyond the frame of the photograph, but also their very substance is the matter that Orozco models to create something

35 Orozco, Gabriel, quoted in Ann Temkin, ed., *Gabriel Orozco* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 58.

36 Iversen, Margaret, “Introduction: The Aesthetics of Chance,” in Margaret Iversen, ed., *Chance* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2010), 18.

37 Bürgi, Bernhard, “The Extension of Reflection,” in *Gabriel Orozco*, eds. Bernhard Bürgi, Bettina Marbach and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, (Zürich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1996), 7.

new. In this instance the artist's manipulation is immaterial; more an imaginative re-visioning of his surrounds, but the work persists in showing Orozco's openness to a potentiality. It also suggests his tactile engagement with the everyday, as Margaret Iversen writes, the artist takes his practice "into the street ... making contact with a reality beyond the studio through chance."³⁸ *Extension of Reflection* evidences a playful but concentrated intent, an intuitive commitment to understanding the world in new ways through careful attention and active response.

Where Orozco chances upon these moments, American artist Spencer Finch seeks them out in order to draw his subjectivity to the forefront. Finch's work usually stems from a point of acute observation, then manifesting as a representation of this observation and producing a kind of secondary encounter for the viewer. Exploring the spectrum between primary and secondary encounter, the resulting artworks generate experiences ranging from the minimally noted (such as in viewing a watercolour study),³⁹ to the maximally felt (for example in his large scale light installations),⁴⁰ and are made using diverse media.

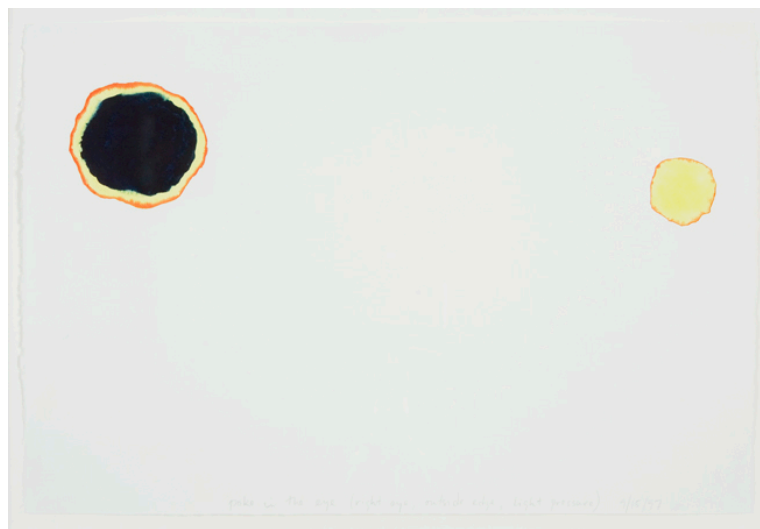


Figure 6 Spencer Finch, *Poke in the Eye*, watercolour on paper, 56 x 76 cm, 1997.

³⁸ Iversen, "Introduction," 18.

³⁹ *Poke in the Eye* (1997) consists of two painted watercolour blobs on paper that represent 'precisely' Finch's observation of the effects of applying pressure to his eye.

⁴⁰ *CIE 529 418 (candlelight)* (2009) used coloured filters and tape applied to the windows of MASS MoCA gallery to shift the colour of the exterior sunlight to the colour of candlelight inside the gallery space and experienced as a spatial immersion.



Figure 7 Spencer Finch, *CIE 529 418 (candlelight)*, filters and tape, dimensions variable, MASS MoCA, 2009.

In the recent work *Vultures, Over Canyon Del Rio Lobos, Spain* (2012),⁴¹ Finch drew the flight paths of vultures as they circled the sky in Spain. Each vulture is drawn with a different grade of graphite pencil. The Canyon del Rio Lobos is a historic location, known for its “magical rugged beauty,”⁴² its presence of cave paintings from the Bronze age, and its high population of birds of prey. The reference to the historic or the mythical is a recurring theme in Finch’s work, and also a point of difference for this research’s grounding in the everyday.

In *Vultures*, the exotically located Canyon becomes shorthand for recalling cultural clichés of the beautiful or extraordinary, against which Finch’s ‘residue’ of experience is compared. However, relevant to the project is Finch’s knowingly futile effort toward accuracy and precision, which, as Susan Cross remarks, “resist, in the end, a definitive result, [but] reinforce the fleeting, temporal nature of the observed world, illustrating his own version of a theory of relativity.”⁴³

Genuinely approaching his practice as fieldwork, Finch examines visual perception with the same rigour as a scientist, repeatedly drawing attention to the dilemma of how to convey aesthetic experience. However by insisting on materials that are impractical, unconventional or inadequate at capturing the phenomenon, he suggests a certain paradox in the attempt. In doing so Finch sidesteps traditional representation, creating an entirely new and

41 There is a direct similarity between this work and my own *Birds* artwork I made in 2011.

42 "Natural Park Cañon Del Rio Lobos (Spain), Magical Rugged Beauty," <http://worldimages.nirudia.com/8775> (accessed 2 October 2012).

43 Cross, Susan, “Spencer Finch’s Alchemy,” in *Spencer Finch: What Time Is It on the Sun?* (Michigan: MASS MoCA, 2007), 9.

arguably equivalent or even greater experience for the viewer. The work represents not so much the phenomena, but rather Finch's own subjectivity in observing these phenomena. Consequently, he calls into question how a re-configuration and re-presentation of observation might acquire new significance as an experiential work in itself.



Figure 8 Spencer Finch, *Vultures, Over Canyon Del Rio Lobos, Spain*, graphite on paper, 84 x 118.8 cm framed, 2012.

Open process

Evident in the examples so far discussed is the adoption of sets of parameters that allow practice to openly, indeterminately, unfold within. This approach became pronounced within Conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 70s, where according to curator Donna De Salvo, artists employed “generative or repetitive system[s] as a way of redefining the work of art, the self and the nature of representation.”⁴⁴ Such frameworks function in

⁴⁴ De Salvo, Donna, “Where We Begin: Opening the system, c.1970,” in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art C.1970*, ed. Donna De Salvo, (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 11.

measuring the artwork against both the time and space it exists in and its own process of coming into being. They also give structure to otherwise unbounded subjective experiences, particularly when those experiences stem from phenomena that are themselves indefinite and ephemeral. The following examples show how ‘open systems’ demarcate a field that at once defines and expands potentiality in the artwork.

In the site-specific work of Ariane Epars, commonplace materials and a thorough, systematic process form the framework through which the artist inhabits and then transforms a space. Epars’ aim is to re-sensitise audiences to their surroundings, in meticulous detail. In her *Untitled* work, exhibited at Kunsthhaus, Hamburg, 1991, she smeared ‘udder cream,’ a translucent moisturising cream, onto the windows of the gallery. The view from the windows, which look out over a promenade below, became blurred through this new intervenient layer, simultaneously filtering the light let in to the gallery interior.



Figure 9 Ariane Epars, *Untitled*, udder cream on windows, dimensions variable, Kunsthhaus, Hamburg, 1991.

Reflecting on how Epars’ process is both opened and contained by the particulars of the exhibition situation, Horst Griesse notes, “The specifics of a space thus become components of the ‘material’ which makes her work, and which also simultaneously defines it.”⁴⁵ The nature of the work, the artistic effort and time spent is also dependent on the site itself, as Griesse adds, “The spaces’ offerings regulate Epars’ creations as well, giving a kind of logic to her work rate.”⁴⁶ Epars yields her creative practice to the given spatial conditions, the timeframe for install prior to the exhibition opening,

⁴⁵ Griesse, Horst, "Domus 2: Call and Response: Remarks on the Work of Ariane Epars" (Adelaide: Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, 2001), n.p.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and materials available. The very conditions of art-making become the strict guidelines within which Epars produces the work, and which the work inherently makes manifest.

Untitled demonstrates Epars' precise and deliberate subtlety, as well as her clear interest in the aesthetic attributes of the gallery and how these might be protracted most effectively. It is noteworthy that the work exists on the windows of the gallery, a commonly used metaphor for art itself. Aptly, Epars blurs a literal opening onto the world in order to perhaps elucidate a new metaphysical view of it. At play here is an understated version of Deleuze's "rupture," and although there are perhaps more overt examples of this in Epars' oeuvre, the use of light through the simple mediation of the window's glass aligns this particular work closely to the research.



Figure 10 Ariane Epars, *Untitled*, udder cream on windows (detail), Kunsthaus, Hamburg, 1991.

Although contextually very different, Belgian artist Francis Alÿs' ten-year video series *Tornado* (2000-2010) employs a similar minimal but deliberate intervention into the surrounding environs. Each video repeatedly shows Alÿs locating a tornado, chasing it and throwing himself into its eye. Footage is a combination of both first person perspective and that of a bystander, and the videos explore the passage between onlooker and participant, calm and chaos, external and internal. Vulnerable in the face of the unpredictable phenomenon, Alÿs records chance as it unfolds, drawing attention away from any outcome or conclusion, and rather to the action itself.

Tornado exemplifies a 'hunt' for aesthetic encounter, a kind of forcing of chance. Alÿs' game-playing approach engages failure as a strategy for both

generating content, but also delaying completion.⁴⁷ In a recent article on the implementation of loops and repetition in contemporary art, Emma Cocker relates Alÿs' endless revisions to Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942),⁴⁸ suggesting an emphasis on process over outcome. She suggests failure for Alÿs is an affirmative process that reverses the progress-driven cultural norms of contemporary society, explaining,

This mode of refusing to perform according to teleological expectation (or of *preferring* to fail) can ... be witnessed in the work of Alÿs where ... a single protagonist often appears locked into a process of protracted action that invariably fails to produce any sense of measurable outcome.⁴⁹



Figure 11 Francis Alÿs, *Tornado*, video series, varying lengths, sound, 2000-2010.

The *Tornado* series underscores the difference between primary and secondary experience. Alÿs' contact with the tornado is akin to Nöe's description of the physical encounter with a large-scale, complex and dynamic 'object' in a specific environment. It also fits the category of the Sublime: man pitted against awe- and terror-inspiring nature. Yet confined to the screen of the gallery, the viewer experience of *Tornado* is vicarious.

Here is a secondary type of aesthetic experience, passed on by the artist, who is both catalyst and conduit. Alÿs speaks of his approach as

⁴⁷ Ferguson, Russell, Francis Alÿs, and UCLA Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, *Francis Alÿs: Politics of Rehearsal* (Los Angeles: Gerhard Steidl Druckeri and Verlag, 2007), 12.

⁴⁸ In the classical myth, Sisyphus was punished by the Gods to push a boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down and the task to be repeated, for eternity. Camus relates this myth to the absurd existence of man, the hopelessness of which can be overcome through finding joy in the repetition.

⁴⁹ Cocker, Emma, "Over and over, Again and Again," in *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, eds. Isabelle Loring Wallace and Jennie Hirsh (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 281.

“introducing some poetic distance”⁵⁰ into particular situations. Through a lightness of touch he suggests things can be seen “from the outside, from a new angle.”⁵¹ While Alÿs cannot replicate his physical experience, his repetition of a simple gesture and reliance on chance neutralises his subjectivity, inviting us instead to inhabit an *idea*. Transcendence is not the goal here, but rather *Tornado* is a suggestion towards engaging with an indeterminate potential.

It is appropriate here to briefly mention the unique studio model of Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.⁵² Established over several years, Eliasson’s studio today consists of some 30 other artists, architects, engineers, and technicians who collaboratively develop projects from the formative stages through to their realisation as gallery exhibitions, commissions and public installations. Unique in its self-organising and experimental structure, art historian Philip Ursprung describes Studio Olafur Eliasson as a ‘machine.’ But contrary to many large-scale studio operations that work toward production efficiency and output,⁵³ Ursprung suggests in this instance, rather like a laboratory, “the product becomes secondary to the production process.”⁵⁴



Figure 12 Studio Olafur Eliasson, 2007.

The equal significance of process and product proceeds through to the presentation of Eliasson’s work in galleries or public spaces, where various stages of production are exposed as part of the ‘final’ display of the work. As Ursprung describes,

50 Francis Alÿs quoted in Faesler, Carla, “Francis Alÿs,” *BOMB* 116, Summer 2011, <http://bombsite.com/issues/116/articles/5109> (accessed 30 September 2012).

51 Ibid.

52 Specific work by Eliasson is discussed later in this chapter under **Collective presence**.

53 Andy Warhol’s Factory is perhaps an earlier model for the large studios of ‘star’ artists like Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, or Anish Kapoor.

54 Ursprung, Philip, “From Observer to Participant in Olafur Eliasson’s Studio,” in *Studio Olafur Eliasson: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Olafur Eliasson and Anna Engberg-Pedersen, (Köln: Taschen, 2012), 11.

This is most obvious at exhibitions where the Studio is effectively reconstructed to accommodate the visitor, in examples such as *The Curious Garden* (1997) or *Surroundings Surrounded* (2001) or *Model Room* (2003), which are variations of a continuing process of radical change and successive experiments with absolutely no ambition to find any kind of 'solution.' In such exhibitions or works, [Eliasson] turns the structure of the studio inside out and transforms the surroundings into an experimental laboratory. Likewise, many individual works of art seem to lay bare the mechanics of their production, implying that they form part of a greater whole and are elements of an overall process.⁵⁵

Here not only the studio but also the presented 'artwork' is a fluid system that lends itself to dynamic input and change.



Figure 13 Olafur Eliasson in collaboration with Einar Thorsteinn, *Model Room*, chipboard, mixed media models, maquettes, prototypes, dimensions variable, 2003. Installation view, SFMoMA, 2007.

Romantic attitudes and familiar subjects

Common to the contextual examples drawn on in the research are the subjects of light and air. The concentrated study of light and atmospherics concerned historic painters like Rembrandt, Vermeer, Turner, and Monet, just as it does modern-day artists Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Ann Veronica Janssens, and the artists aligned with this project. A direct engagement with the relationship between man and the invisible or ephemeral matter that surrounds us most notably came about during the Romantic period.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁶ In the context of the research the exact dates of this period are defined according to those suggested by Richard Holmes, who takes two celebrated voyages of exploration as its bookends – James Cook's first round-the-world expedition on the *Endeavour* (1768) and Charles Darwin's voyage to the Galapagos Islands on the *Beagle* (1831). Significant artworks of the period fit within these dates also, with many of JMW Turner's important Romantic works being produced from the early 1800s.

Richard Holmes in *The Age of Wonder* (2008) traces a narrative around the second scientific revolution⁵⁷ that swept Britain at the end of the 18th century and vastly changed the understanding of man and his place within the world. He terms this ‘Romantic science,’ connecting the typically objective sciences to a “cultural force ... generally regarded as intensely hostile to science,” and arguing that “the notion of *wonder* seems to be something that once united them, and can still do so.”⁵⁸ Treating Romantic subjectivity and scientific objectivity not as cognitive or philosophical opposites, but instead as complementary elements of *experience* resonates with the core sentiment of this research project.

Significant in the spirit of fieldwork undertaken in this research, not least for his investigations into both light and air, is the methodology of the British chemist Humphry Davy.⁵⁹ The young Davy championed a creative approach to science (at times to the detriment of his accuracy), where his experimental process sought not to *prove* an understanding of nature but instead to observe his relationship to it. In 1799 Davy began a year-long investigation into the field of ‘pneumatics’ or the study of air, during which he performed countless experiments on himself, inhaling quantities of nitrous oxide and carefully observing its effect on his physical and psychological states.⁶⁰

The rigour with which he analysed this mysterious and invisible substance is of pertinence to the project. What began as a study into the medical uses of the gas eventuated as an investigation into human consciousness, through the pursuit of elevating the spirit beyond the physical world. This suggests the typical trajectory of a Romantic inquiry, towards transcendence, indicating a significant point at which my research differs from Davy’s.

⁵⁷ Holmes writes, “The first scientific revolution, of the 17th Century, is familiarly associated with the names of Newton, Hooke, Locke and Descartes, and the almost simultaneous foundations of the Royal Society in London and the Académie des Sciences in Paris. Its existence has long been accepted, and the biographies of its leading figures are well known. But this second revolution was something different. The first person who referred to a ‘second scientific revolution’ was probably the poet Coleridge in his *Philosophical Lectures* of 1819. It was inspired primarily by a series of breakthroughs in the fields of astronomy and chemistry. It was a movement that grew out of eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism, but largely transformed it, by bringing a new imaginative intensity and excitement to scientific work.” Holmes, Richard, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: HarperPress, 2009), xvi.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Davy’s early scientific speculations ranged from topics such as the chemistry of heat and starlight, to perception and human consciousness, pleasure and pain, and the metaphysical implications of chemistry. He would later go on to discover several new metallic elements and invent the Davy Lamp.

⁶⁰ Holmes describes Davy’s ingenious equipment involving silk bags and bladders, glass vacuum flasks, wooden and metal mouthpieces, corked tubes and valves through which he inhaled the ‘laughing gas.’ Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 258.

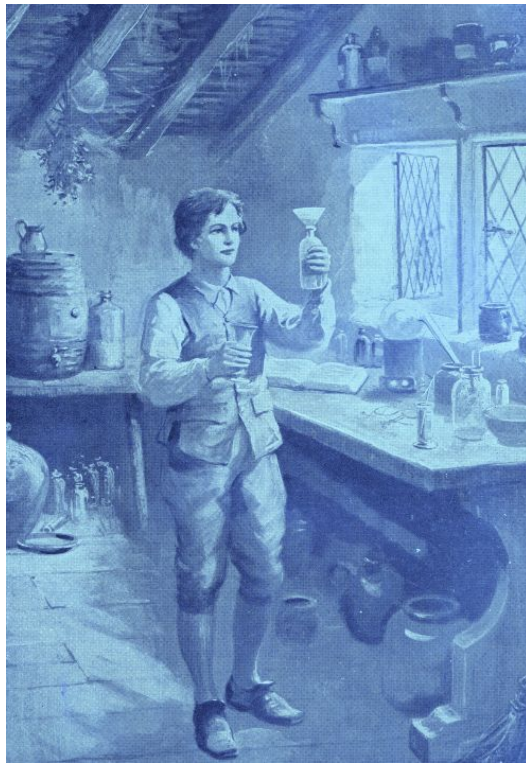


Figure 14 Humphry Davy in his laboratory.

Davy was not just a scientist, but also a poet and a painter. He was a close friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and their respective works influenced each other significantly. Davy referred frequently in “later lectures to comparisons between the poetic and scientific imagination.” Holmes quotes an 1807 diary passage; with a sentiment he suggests would later be “echoed by both Coleridge and John Keats:

The perception of truth is almost as simple a feeling as the perception of beauty ... Imagination, as well as reason, is necessary to perfection in the philosophic mind. A rapidity of combination, a power of perceiving analogies, and of comparing them by facts, is the creative source of discovery. Discrimination and delicacy of sensation, so important in physical research, are other words for taste; and love of nature is the same passion, as the love of the magnificent, the sublime, and the beautiful.⁶¹

Although his interest lay in the pursuit of a transcendent sublime, as opposed to an immanent wonder, Davy speaks of a harmonious co-existence of imagination and reason, and the importance of the aesthetic encounter in understanding the world that surrounds us. Jumping ahead some 160 years, a similar harmony between the imaginative and the rational – within, no less, an inquiry into the mysteries of the air – is evident in Conceptual artist Robert Barry’s 1969 *Inert Gas Series*. Jörg Heiser discusses this work in his

⁶¹ Ibid., 276.

writings on Romantic Conceptualism,⁶² which shed new light on how a romantic approach might be taken within contemporary art practice.

Heiser makes a case for works of Conceptual art – typically understood as witty, devoid of emotion, and soberly detached – that centre on Romantic subject matter, or whose effect on the viewer is strongly Romantic. Drawing on Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis' 18th century writings,⁶³ Heiser identifies characteristics of the fragmentary and the open as core Romantic attitudes that have also been adopted by artists working in the Conceptual lineage, such as Bas Jan Ader, Yoko Ono, Douglas Huebler, and Susan Hiller. He suggests these artists have found new 'languages' for articulating what have now become Romantic clichés, "letting things and processes speak for themselves ... conceptually and performatively offering them up for consideration."⁶⁴ In summary Heiser writes,

Romantic Conceptualism is ... a manoeuvre: a disregard for the (mostly unspoken) rules of seriousness, coolness and authority pertaining to conceptual art. Conversely ... [Romanticism's] topoi (melancholy, desire etc.) and motifs (ocean, desert, bird, flower, tree, etc.) are employed but at the same time stripped of the pathos of an artistic soul seeing itself reflected in the beauty and sublimity it contemplates.⁶⁵

Barry's *Inert Gas Series, from a measured volume to indefinite expansion* involved four 'actions' where the artist released inert gases (gases that are undetectable to both smell and sight) – neon, helium, xenon and krypton – into the atmosphere. Barry chose these gases precisely for their Romantic qualities, saying in a 1994 interview, "They were completely unknown about 100 years ago, we didn't know they existed, and yet we breathe them in and exhale them, we live around them and move in these inert gases."⁶⁶

62 Heiser first wrote on Romantic Conceptualism in Heiser, Jörg, "Emotional Rescue," *Frieze Magazine* no. 71 (Nov-Dec 2002). He later curated the exhibition *Romantic Conceptualism* in 2007 at the Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nuremberg, May 10 – July 15, 2007 and the BAWAG Foundation, Vienna, September 14 – December 1 2007 alongside which he published a catalogue of the same title.

63 Heiser cites: Schlegel, Friedrich, "On Incomprehensibility," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003); Schlegel, Friedrich, "Athenaeum Fragments, No. 16," in *Friedrich Schlegel: Philosophical Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and Riem, Walther, ed. *Novalis* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1956).

64 Heiser, Jörg, "A Romantic Measure," in *Romantic Conceptualism*, eds. Jörg Heiser, Ellen Seifermann, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, and BAWAG Fondation Wien, (Nuremberg: Kerber Verlag, 2007), 143.

65 Ibid., 148.

66 Weh, Holger, "Robert Barry, Die Einladung Als Medium," *Kunstforum* (Jan-Feb 1994), <http://archives.carre.pagesperso-orange.fr/Barry%20Robert.html> (accessed 15 February 2013).

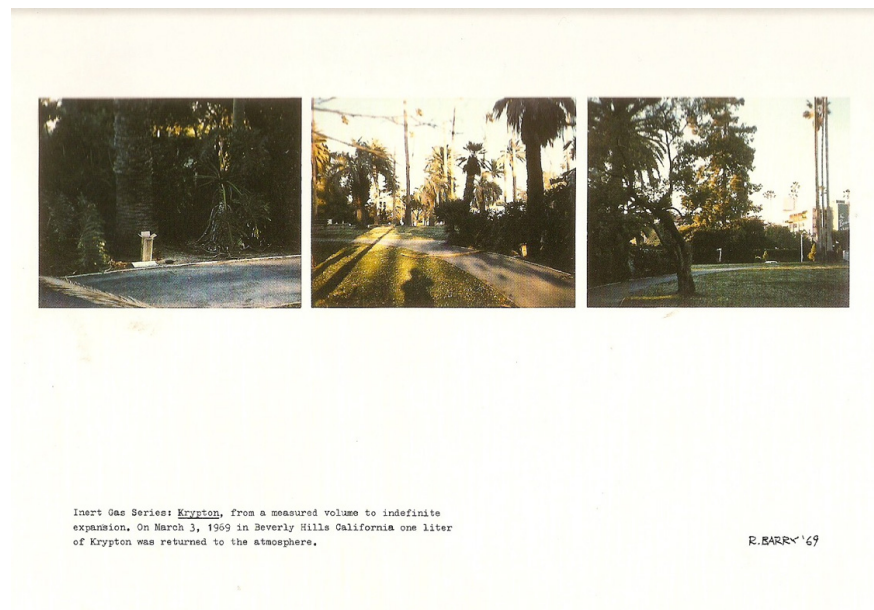


Figure 15 Robert Barry, *Inert Gas Series: Krypton, from a measured volume to indefinite expansion*, 1969.

Released amidst the palm trees of Beverly Hills, the mountains, the beach and the desert, the locations of the actions are romantically charged, relating to Heiser's statement on employing romantic motifs to conceptual ends, as well as O'Sullivan's suggestion that art "might make use of the components of cliché in order to resist cliché."⁶⁷ The potency of *Inert Gas Series* lies in its imaginative potential, as a proposition that triggers a series of subsequent recognitions and re-evaluations of the body, and its existence amidst the atmosphere we all share.

Barry doesn't illustrate; he acts. Through a concise framework (a kind of 'instruction') the action gives way to poetic sentiment – just as measured gas is released and then expands infinitely. Jan Verwoert describes this synthesis of the rational and the poetic as a strategy shared by both the Romantics and the Conceptual artists, where,

The supposedly intangible can be made to seem tangible for the moment, and in the same moment it can be made to question whatever appears everyday and tangible by opening it up towards an abstract idea.⁶⁸

Notably in *Inert Gas Series*, the action is materialised through documentation and endures as photograph and text. This literal and conceptual framing of an ephemeral moment suspends its imaginative potential as just that, suggested potential. While this allows it to participate in commercial exchange (perhaps negating its romantic imperative) it also allows for

⁶⁷ O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 67.

⁶⁸ Verwoert, Jan, "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse," in *Romantic Conceptualism*, eds. Jörg Heiser, Ellen Seifermann, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, and BAWAG Fondation Wien, (Nuremberg: Kerber Verlag, 2007), 172

reproduction and circulation of its visual material, which secondarily re-opens the imaginative potential of the work to wider audiences.

Collective presence

A characteristic of Romanticism is the impulse to connect with others, seeking intimacy through the communication (or artistic presentation) of subjective observations. The research has expanded this concern by investigating how an artwork might function as a potential site for shared experience through direct encounter. How might an artwork *generate* experience?

According to Philip Ursprung, the work of Olafur Eliasson addresses this question, exploring how art can function as a ‘tool’ for “the creation of concrete presences, of a ‘here and now.’”⁶⁹ Ursprung clarifies his use of the term ‘presence’ as different to how others have previously used it to describe the effects of artworks – an overwhelming feeling of boundless expression, a quasi-religious reverie, or an effect of the sublime. Instead he describes the effect generated by Eliasson’s work,

In the sense of a communal presence of people, a bond forged in the here and now, and a situation in which all those present are engaged in what can best be described as ‘paying attention.’⁷⁰

In Eliasson’s exhibition *Your Position Surrounded and Your Surroundings Positioned* (Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999), the viewer is fundamentally implicated so that he or she affects, and to an extent defines, the spatial and temporal parameters of the work. Three installations are spread across different parts of the gallery, with the central space containing two large lanterns. Each is constructed around a 2000-watt light bulb, with cylindrical metal casings that rotate silently via the circulation of surrounding air. A thin vertical slit in the casing emits a band of light that illuminates the gallery walls. This light is focused through an “evidently hand-made”⁷¹ black foil mask that echoes the profile of the gallery, in effect mapping the “rectilinear space to a cylindrical form.”⁷² Upon entering the room, viewers cast shadows on the walls, and their movements affect the airflow, and therefore the lanterns’ rotation.

⁶⁹ Ursprung, “Observer to Participant,” 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Brown, Katrina, “If the Eye Were Not Sun-Like, the Sun’s Light It Would Not See,” in *Olafur Eliasson: Your position surrounded and your surroundings positioned*, eds. Katrina Brown and Olafur Eliasson (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999)
http://www.olafureliasson.net/publications/download_texts/If_the_eye_were.pdf (accessed 11 October 2012).

⁷² Ibid.



Figure 16 Olafur Eliasson, *Your position surrounded and your surroundings positioned*, multimedia installation, Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999.

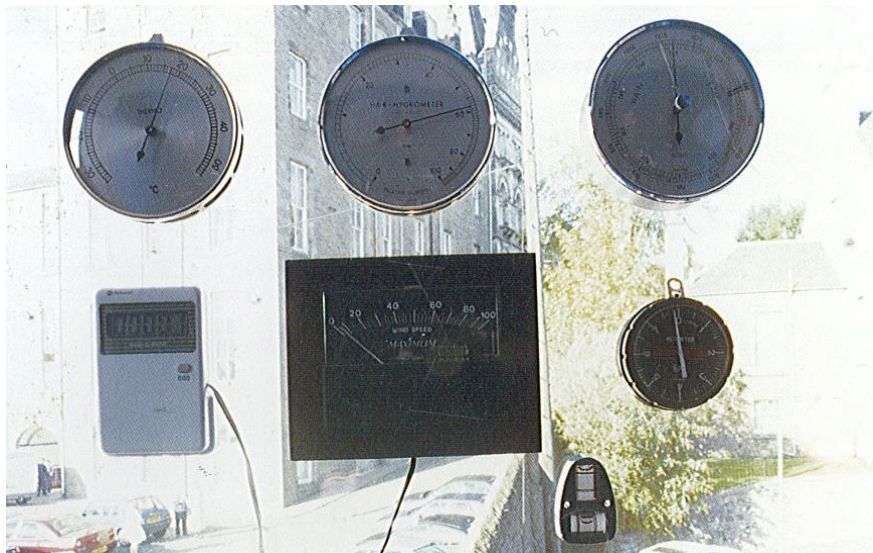


Figure 17 Olafur Eliasson, *Your position surrounded and your surroundings positioned*, detail, Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999.

In adjoining rooms are two familiar mechanical devices apprehending familiar phenomena. First, a small hole in the wall functions as a camera obscura, projecting an inverted image of the view outside the gallery onto a small suspended screen. Second, a blue plastic tunnel leads to a small room where at the window is a makeshift weather station; equipped with barometer, thermometer, compass, wind-speed indicator, altimeter and spirit level. Outside the window an orange windsock is visible. These two rooms offer interaction with devices commonly used to distance, objectify, measure and quantify the ever-changing light and air, though without the imperative to record or analyse the data. Rather than demonstrate knowledge about

the light and air, the installations simply bring attention to the phenomena, amplifying these elements of our usual synthesised experience of the world.

As a whole, *Your Position Surrounded...* observes the contingent nature of the immediate environment, but also affirms the “fundamental and indivisible importance of the subjective in our experience.”⁷³ Responsibility is given over to the spectator, whose actions and movements affect both their own and others’ experience. What Ursprung writes of Eliasson’s current-day Studio is equally true of the earlier *Your Position Surrounded...*,

It makes clear that artworks cannot be reduced to isolated and complete objects in an exhibition space. Their primary role is to make the connection between production and reception, acts and decisions, trial and error.⁷⁴

Eliasson does not just frame the environment so that we can reflect on its beauty,⁷⁵ but rather encourages viewers to actively examine, better understand, participate in, and be present – with others – in, their surrounds. The ‘artwork’ involves not only the installation itself, but critically, the shift in *experience* that it affords.

In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) Nicolas Bourriaud writes that relational art practices “take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”⁷⁶ Bourriaud’s identification of the *specificity* of participation, that is, that it rarely occurs on neutral ground, is where participatory artworks have often become theorised in ethical and political terms. In *Conversation Pieces* (2004) Grant Kester identifies certain ‘dialogical’ art practices as capable of instilling social and political change through facilitating discussions and possible solutions to community issues.

However, Anna Dezeuze in her volume *The ‘do-it-yourself’ artwork* (2010) defines a contrasting category of participatory artwork that has its roots in the Fluxus movement of the 1960s, remains “largely embedded within the discursive and institutional frameworks of contemporary art, and [does] not purport to provide direct, concrete solutions to specific issues.”⁷⁷ She goes on to explain:

Do-it-yourself artworks exist in an intermediate position between the two extremes of self-reflexive autonomous practices and collaborative community projects, and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ursprung, “Observer to Participant,” 11.

⁷⁵ Although he does recognise the value of producing an immediate impression through the aesthetic qualities of objects or spaces as an entry point into a work.

⁷⁶ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), 113.

⁷⁷ Dezeuze, Anna, ed., *The ‘Do-It-Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 7.

thus operate strategically ... to disturb and unhinge models of art making and art viewing.⁷⁸

This distinctly *experimental* type of participation in art has not been historically addressed,⁷⁹ and often falls into other established categories, such as performance, conceptual, installation or new media. However Deuze argues that do-it-yourself artworks are not unified by formal qualities, but instead their defining feature is often a deliberate *lack* of distinction between typical binaries of content and structure, object and process, the work and the experience of the work.⁸⁰

Here, play and experimentation are crucial elements, and Deuze's example of John Cage provides a pertinent case study. Loosely, his experimental approach to the familiar format of the concert in order to make viewers acutely aware of ambient sound could be linked to this project's concern with the air, itself a vehicle for sound.

Cage's now famous 4'33" (1952) is a three-part composition that calls for four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence, an act that points in fact to the impossibility of silence in the physical world. The work establishes a temporal framework within which audiences experience themselves and their immediate surrounds as "co-extensive with, and therefore part of"⁸¹ the parameters of the artwork. Here, audiences become participants by way of their self-consciousness *within* the work; no one remains a detached observer. Cage's emphasis on experimentation as intrinsic to 'unknowing' is apparent in his comment that 'Experimental Music' should be understood, "not as a descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as an act the outcome of which is unknown."⁸²

Cage insisted on avoiding artistic self-expression, however the simplicity of the instruction in 4'33"⁸³ means that in its performance, participants inevitably 'furnish' the work with a surplus of activity that links directly to their specific, subjective, and in the context of the concert, collective, experience of presence.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Deuze cites two primary sources that her volume expands on: Frieeling, Rudolf, ed., *The Art of Participation: from 1950 to Now* (San Francisco and London: Museum of Modern Art and Thames & Hudson, 2008) and Bishop, Claire, ed., *Participation* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ Deuze, 'Do-It-Yourself', 6.

⁸¹ Rodenbeck, Judith, "'Creative acts of consumption' or, death in Venice," in Deuze, 'Do-It-Yourself', 71.

⁸² Cage, John, "Experimental Music: A Doctrine (1955)," in *Silence: The Lectures and Writings of John Cage* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978. Reprint, 1999), 13.

⁸³ Cage's score reads "TACET" meaning, "it is silent," followed by, "the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time."

be better understood as a synthesis of diverse inquiries. The aggregating effect of re-synthesising these elements *together* as a new totality aims to provide a multiplicity of encounters, related not necessarily by subject matter or material qualities, but rather through the open-ended, exploratory *experience* of them.

Perhaps the closest precedent for this is Eliasson's *Your Position Surrounded...* for its integration of component parts across three rooms, experienced both spatially and temporally. The proposed examination exhibition for this project expands on Eliasson's model, placing emphasis not on an intended 'meaning,' but instead an awareness of what the artwork does; what it sets in motion, an effect that is complex and individual to each person, and in many ways indefinable.

Multi-disciplinary artist Jorge Macchi asks, "why not attempt to understand complexity rather than reduce it?"⁸⁴, a statement this project agrees with, but also expands on by suggesting further, *is not experiencing complexity a kind of understanding in itself?* Although his artistic concerns and focuses are slightly divergent to those of this project, Macchi's approach to exhibiting materially diverse work is of relevance:

The multiplicity of media has to do with the specific relationship I attempt to establish between images and materials. In general, the thing that's most important about a piece should move behind the surface, and, in this sense, the variety of media I use matters very little. In general, when I show my work, I try to allow works that are materially very different from one another to coexist. My intention is that spectators will perceive an underground river passing through all the objects, though I couldn't specify the name of that river.⁸⁵



Figure 19 Jorge Macchi, *Music Stands Still*, installation view, S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, Belgium, 2011.

⁸⁴ Macchi, Jorge, quoted in Rudnitzky, Edgardo "Jorge Macchi," *BOMB* 106, Winter 2009
<http://bombsite.com/issues/106/articles/3218> (accessed 15 September 2012)

⁸⁵ Ibid.

This concept of the gallery as capable of co-ordinating an undercurrent *plurality* of experiences, wholly dependent on the viewer's perception, is also explored in Brian Massumi's recent writing on 'activist' philosophy. In *Semblance and Event* (2011) Massumi eschews the traditional Western aesthetic dichotomy between subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity, preferring to consider these instead as a "differential."⁸⁶

Building on the foundations set by Deleuze and Guattari for a complex, all-encompassing 'becoming' Massumi argues all things, including art, exist through experiences of activity. Art in particular, he suggests, organises these events of perception and activity for potential re-activation by a viewer. This subsequent encounter with the artwork, and the way this encounter is organised are topics especially pertinent to this research, supported further with Massumi's suggestion that this is not a simple or easily defined thing but rather indeterminate and complex by nature:

The issue ... is not the form of the work per se (its recognized genre or conventional gestures), nor even its pointing outside itself toward extra-event content as such. Whatever elements enter the event, the issue is the *force* of their becoming immanent to it, toward the self-detachment of a fusional effect having a dynamic form and affective tonality, animate quality and intensity, singularly-generically its own. Whether the work has this depends not on the "what" of the different elements that enter, but on the "how" of their differential coming-together. This cannot be prejudged, only experienced. The ways in which the conditions have been prepared will have a lot to say about it performatively. The strategies of composing-away and composing-with, and the economy of *their* mutual coming together (and holding part), will also be determining.⁸⁷

Echoing the intention for this project's manifestation in the gallery, both Massumi and Macchi welcome the formation of new, often intangible, indefinable, or invisible connections between elements of an exhibition, and critically, the spectators. Here, the gallery is re-established beyond a simple space of presentation, instead as an active 'arena' or field of interplay – a space that does not concretise experience but rather mobilises it.

Indeed the process of coming into being described by Massumi is one that identifies strongly with the emergent nature of my own practice during this project. In the following chapter, **3: Methodologies and processes**, the unfolding of the practical 'fieldwork' will be described in detail. As I have done in this chapter, my event-encounters with the different stages of inquiry have been organised into sub-headings that give lead to common concerns or themes pursued in each cluster.

⁸⁶ Massumi, Brian, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2011), 5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 175.

3

Methodologies and processes

Over the course of the project period, a number of open-ended processes, methodologies, framing strategies and materials have been experimented with to develop a diverse body of work. In keeping with the overarching premise of the research as an aggregation of this entire process, this chapter traces a trajectory that, although more or less chronological, emphasises several themes or focal points that radiate from a central interest. These thematic clusters operate like co-ordinates that chart the development of fieldwork, but also suggest relationships running between and through the coincident developments.

Rather than drawing conclusions about the final exhibition of the practical work, this chapter describes how the body of work has emerged over the project period. **Chapter 4: conclusion** goes on to describe the intentions for the exhibition more explicitly, by way of the strategies concluded through these methodologies.

Solitary observations (preliminary stages of enquiry)

The project began with a series of regular tasks and exercises that had the intention of attuning sensitivity to my surrounds and identifying some key interests. Akin to early sketches, these open-ended exercises would gain magnitude through repetition and accumulation without much initial thought towards their final resolution.

The first exercise drew on a watercolour painting technique developed during my undergraduate degree, and became a grounding material practice throughout the research. These works involved recording my perception of the colours of the sky in circular pools of watercolour, dried on small squares of paper. The liquid colours are drawn to the edges of the circle in the drying process, forming markings that evidence each individual wet-to-dry lifespan.

Due to their random and unpredictable drying process the paintings are not representations of the sky per se, but of an observation and subsequent memory⁸⁸ of the sky. The round form may resemble a small droplet, reminiscent of the sky's constitution, but importantly they are new configurations of the observed sky, ultimately generated within the paint and independent of my hand.

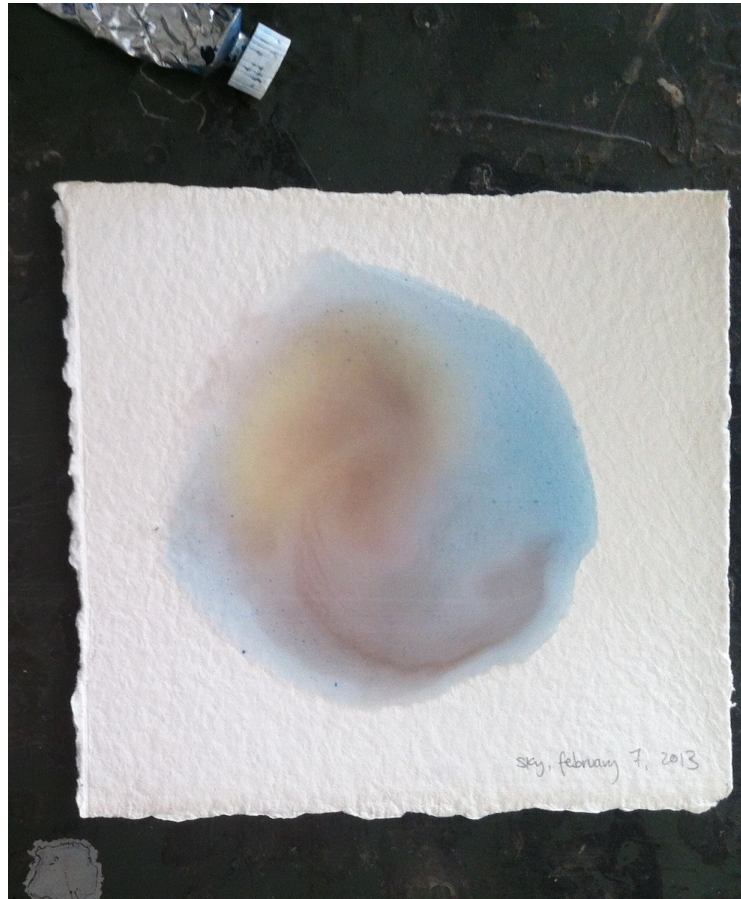


Figure 20 Sky painting – wet, watercolour on paper, 175 x 160 mm (process still).

The paintings' small scale enabled quick and un-laboured production that became a tool for both honing attention to the sky, and also providing a practical task that might stimulate other work. Enjoyable to make because of their unpredictability, the element of surprise enlivened an otherwise repetitive process.

⁸⁸ To begin with, because my studio offered no view of the sky, the paintings were based on my *memory* of the sky, rather than a direct record of what I observed as I made the painting. However later, my studio situation changed, and as I could now see the sky directly it was difficult to ignore as I was making the paintings. The paintings are specific therefore to whatever conditions the present studio situation provides.

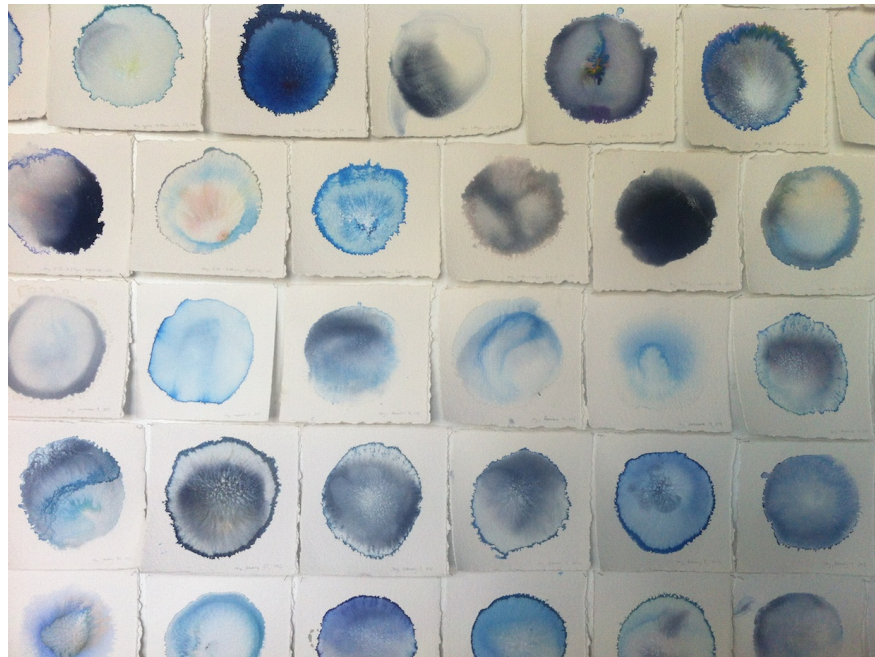


Figure 21 Sky paintings – dried, dimensions variable (test installation detail).

Concurrent to the paintings, a collection of rainbow recordings was developed. Contesting the urge to ‘capture’ the beauty of the rainbow in photographs, I wondered how the experience of seeing a rainbow could be elicited through voice recording. Rather than treating the rainbow as a material object, which in truth it is not, sound could express something of its transient and ungraspable quality, exploring how a predominantly visual phenomenon might be communicated using non-visual modes. Each time a rainbow was sighted, I used the dictation tool on my mobile phone to record a short oral description that included the date, time, and location of myself and the rainbow, as well as other related observations.

The exercise focused on the subjective aspects that shaped each sighting: how to ‘measure’ each rainbow so they could be compared, how to use the body as a measuring tool, and how to relate the specific everyday-ness of these rainbow sightings to the way they also recalled universal properties of light and the complex mechanisms of vision. This subjective information was recorded in the pragmatic, pseudo-scientific manner of a botanist or field reporter. Inevitably my ‘data’ was flawed, but in its failed attempts at capture, the romantic *intent* was brought to the fore. Earlier recordings conveyed the urgent surprise and wonder of an unexpected rainbow sighting, but through familiarity the remarkable also quickly became unremarkable. As the collection grew my subjective ‘lens’ and focus was continually adjusting to match the shifting value of each subsequent experience.

Philip Fisher describes the rainbow as the “epitome of an aesthetic experience.”⁸⁹ He defines its unique combination of qualities – sudden and unexpected appearance; temporal but neither too fleeting nor too enduring; rare but common enough to be recognisable and to have been named – as amounting to a pleasurable poetic encounter.⁹⁰ However my sustained attention to the rainbow suggested limitations in Fisher’s definitions, and indicated the aesthetic fragility of such experiences. Sometimes, the rainbow re-appeared up to three or four times in a single day, or simply persisted for several hours, outlasting Fisher’s temporal window for aesthetic experience. Furthermore, I wasn’t necessarily always in the mood, and some days I wished to avoid seeing the rainbow altogether so as to dodge my obligation to record.



Figure 22 Rainbow sighting, 27 June 2012, 10.39am, West Hobart (documentation of recording process).

The project intrigued friends and family, who began alerting me to rainbows. This was encouraging but also became irritating as the element of surprise so intrinsic to the pleasure of seeing a rainbow was thwarted. My frustration presented a conflict between a kind of interaction from the audience I wanted to be open to, and how this diluted or interrupted my personal satisfaction in making the work.⁹¹ Persevering, I recorded as truthfully and as often as I could, and the collection thus charts an evolving (truly subjective and contingent) set of aesthetic variables rooted in day-to-day circumstances.

Lastly, I began a series of drawings of the Man in the Moon, regularly spending time to notice, through drawing, what I was seeing. The Man in the Moon is an example of the psychological phenomenon *pareidolia*: the

⁸⁹ Fisher, *Wonder*, 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

⁹¹ This complex and fragile relationship between the personal and the communal encounter became an important duality in the research that was further explored and negotiated in later works.

perception of significance in random stimuli, such as seeing faces in clouds, trees, or indeed, the markings of the moon's seas. There are a number of spiritual and mythological legends associated with the Man in the Moon, and they differ across cultures. Likewise, the perceived details are dependent on the hemisphere in which it is viewed, and ultimately are entirely personal for each individual.

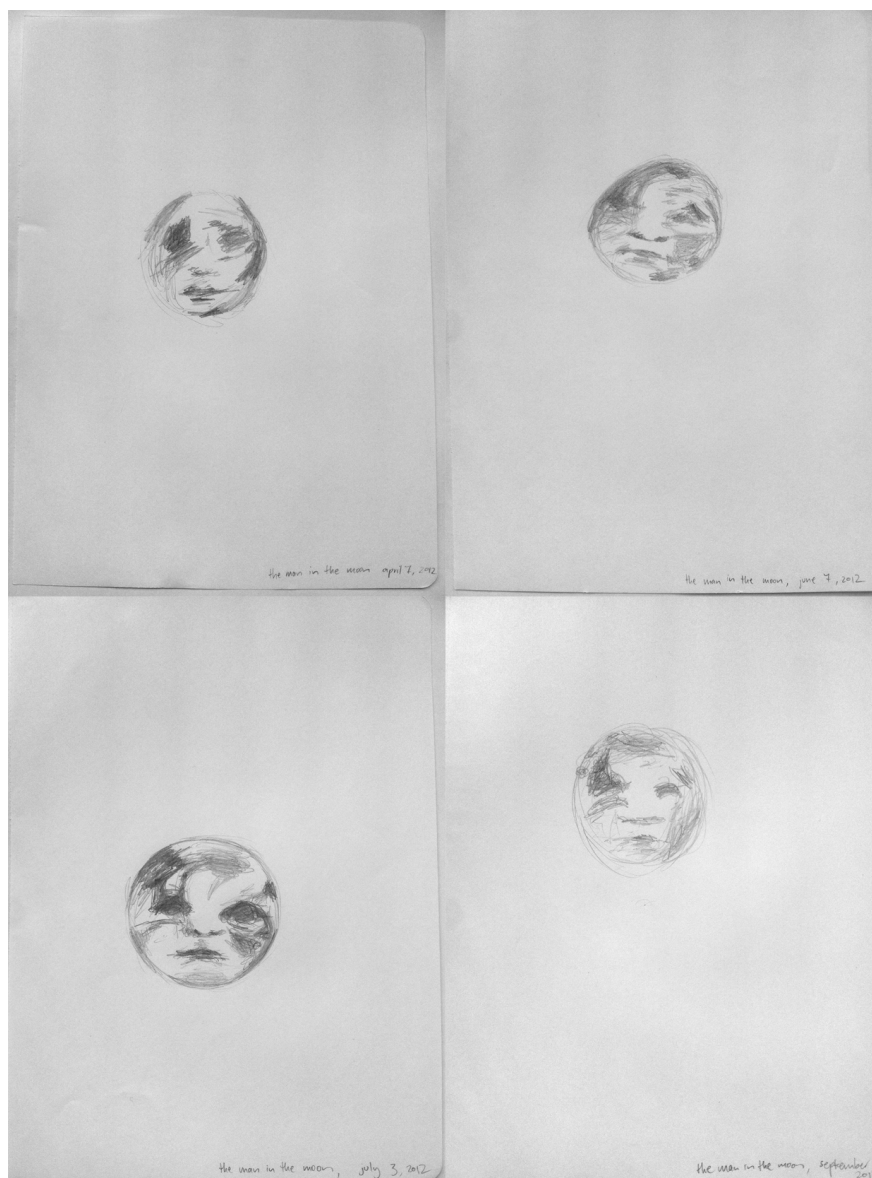


Figure 23 *Man in the Moon* selection, pencil on paper, 210 x 285 mm.

The *Man in the Moon* series explored the processes of looking, and the influence of subjective context during any viewing period. I wanted to see what differences or common emotive qualities might emerge over a period of time. As often as the Man in the Moon revealed 'himself' (usually during a full, or near-full, moon), a period of up to fifteen minutes was spent

looking and recording what I could see in pencil. Sometimes the faces were more abstract, other times they were more figurative drawings. Usually there was a melancholic, plaintive quality to the drawings – which indeed reflected the sadness I observed in Man in the Moon. This suggested something of the introverted and contemplative moments spent drawing the moon, but more broadly also pointed to the way emotional states and personal anecdotes are intrinsic to aesthetic experience, and ‘colour’ the subsequent transcription of these.

These preliminary exercises might best be understood in relation to John Ruskin’s attempts to comprehend, and further respond to, aesthetic experience. By implementing artistic tools like mark making, language and drawing, I, like Ruskin, pursued a more conscious understanding of the psychological and visual factors responsible for evoking such experiences.⁹² These preliminary exercises also led to a new understanding about the subject matter I was drawn to. The subjects of the sky, the rainbow and the moon suited the project precisely because the phenomena in question were established examples of stimuli that caused one to dwell on the nature of observation. Although they were universal, the experience of them was subjective and personal, and their recurrent appearance meant I was able to observe them repeatedly, allowing for deeper understanding through accumulation and comparison of the ‘residue’ of experience.

Observation → response (frameworks for generative processes)

In July 2011, in the early stages of the research, I had an opportunity to exhibit in the Top Gallery at Salamanca Arts Centre with a project titled *That Which is Breathed or Blown*⁹³ (July 21 – September 1, 2011). Over six weeks I inhabited the gallery, locating the preliminary exercises and studio explorations within a more public setting. A desk and chair were set up in the space where the daily Sky Painting exercises continued. The paintings were shown one at a time on the wall, each time replacing the previous day’s, which was discarded in a growing pile on the floor. Recordings for any rainbows sighted during the project period were played through headphones that hung down from the rafters. On another gallery wall, pins, string and paper notes were used to build a sensory mud-map, locating my daily movements around town and subsequent observations as an unfolding network of experiences.

⁹² de Botton, *Art of Travel*, 220.

⁹³ This title was taken from the literal translation of the Greek term ‘pneuma’ which refers to the circulating air, but is also used in Stoic philosophy to suggest a more metaphysical life-giving force – the soul and creative spirit – that is essential to both the individual and the cosmos.

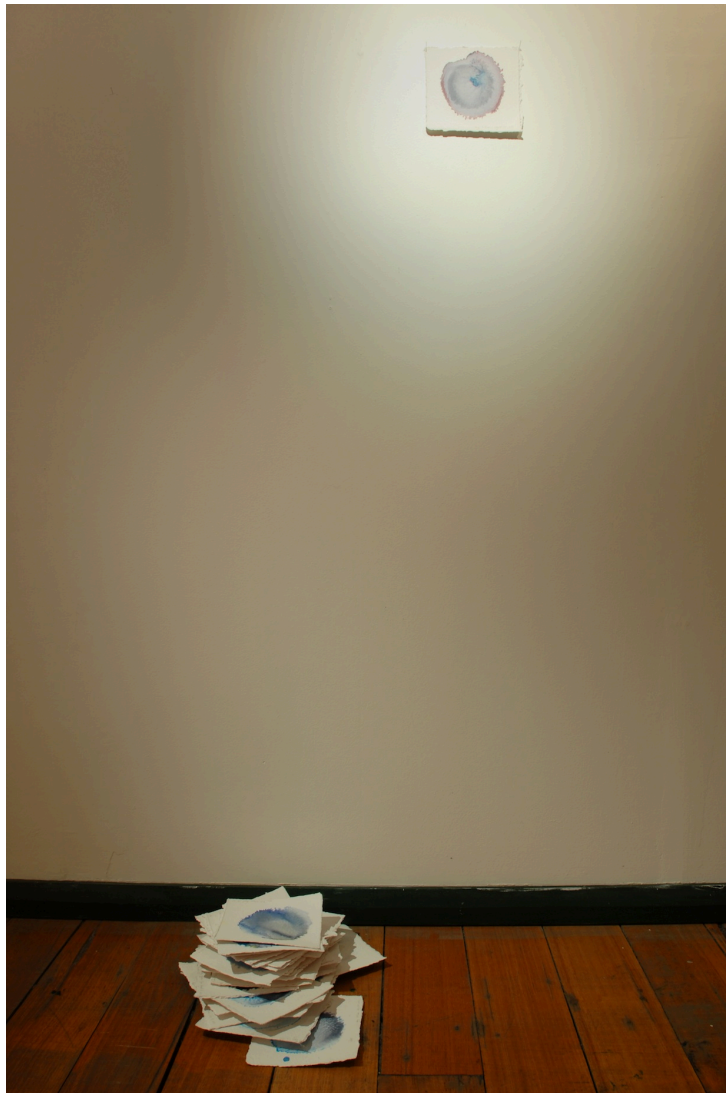


Figure 27 *That which is breathed or blown*, install view.

The need to narrow the focus of my observations soon became evident, so drawing on what the project title had already intuited, my attention turned to the subject of the air. Exploring ways of giving form to this vital, but largely invisible, element, I attempted not just to passively record, but more immediately capture the air's manifestation through light, movement, sound and smell. Many of these artefacts were suspended from the rafters: a sheet of paper on which the wind was 'caught,' rolled acetate that allowed visitors to 'hear' the air, and glass bottles and jars in which I had collected air for periods of time. Notes were attached to these objects that recorded overheard conversations, sounds and smells. All this had the effect of heightening attention to the air in the gallery itself. By filling a space with objects that spoke of an elsewhere air, I was displacing the existing air, and through its displacement, calling attention to it.



Figure 28 "11.21am, August 17, 2011: waiting for coffee and holding this rolled acetate, when for some reason I held it up to my ear. Everything swirling, echoey, amplified. HOLD IT UP TO YOUR EAR NOW...", *That which is breathed or blown*, detail.



Figure 29 *That which is breathed or blown*, install view – final day.

Using a space as an accumulative and generative site was a strategy I had employed in the past, but here I understood it as a methodology that could be applied to my research. As Maria Lind has recently spoken of curating as a performative task, *That Which is Breathed or Blown* was an exercise in curating (indeed, performing) my studio processes, bringing together “disparate images, objects and other material and immaterial phenomena within a particular time and space-related framework.”⁹⁴

Working in this open and fluid way led to questions about how to define or locate the ‘art’. Was this a space in which many artworks were presented simultaneously, or was the space itself, and the conditions by which the works were made, the art, and the objects a kind of residue? It seemed

⁹⁴ Lind, Maria, ed., *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 12.

to be both at once, and negotiating a flux between the two states became a recurring concern throughout the research.

Some fundamental subjects had also emerged, chiefly my attraction to the subject of the air, the atmosphere, and the light. Locating these ephemeral and fleeting observations in everyday situations was clearly of concern to my project. As much as I wanted to find a way of equalising the relationship between objects and the processes by which they came about, I wanted to level the relationship between the artist and the viewer, finding recognisably poetic moments within an everyday we all inhabit, but perhaps forget to notice.

Exploring Romantic subjects conceptually

Reflecting on *That Which is Breathed or Blown*, a connection emerged between my concerns and those of the Romantics. Through Richard Holmes' *The Age of Wonder* (2008) I read of the early explorers, ballooning experiments, the beginnings of meteorology, the new *experimental* scientific method, diaristic habits and rigorous observation, and the growing interest in the scientific instrument. This interest in Romanticism also led to an engagement with Jörg Heiser's *Romantic Conceptualism* (2002). Alongside this new arm of research three new works were developed.

The first, titled *Birds*, was a series of three line drawings on my studio windows in white chalk marker. It emerged as a spark of inspiration as I sat, staring outside my window towards Sullivans Cove. Spontaneously I thought to trace on the glass the flight-path of the seagulls as they arced their way through the sky. I did this until I felt tired, then noted the time (3.07-3.28pm) and date at the bottom of the window. This action was repeated on the other two windows on the successive Fridays, making a triptych that manifested the "invisible (but intuitively sensed) air-drawings made by the birds."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ This is how Peter Waller described the work in a catalogue essay for a later development of *Birds*. Waller, Peter, "The Feeling of an Idea," *Claire Kruzecky: Lines of Flight*, ed. Blindside Artist Run Initiative (Melbourne, 2012).



Figure 30 *Birds*, still from composite HD video documentation of action, interior view.



Figure 31 *Birds*, chalk marker on window glass, exterior view.

The work directly implemented strategies I had been researching, applying conceptual tools (at-hand materials, specific notation of time and place, repetition of the act) to a spontaneous, Romantic gesture (an inspired moment with nature, making visible the invisible, finding wonder in the ordinary). Similar to *That Which is Breathed or Blown*, *Birds* responded to the specificity of my present situation. It too performatively offered up an (open-ended) process to an indeterminate audience, in this case, the passing pedestrians. The transparency of the glass enabled my tracing, but dually it was this transparency that allowed a view into my studio. The work was a gesture toward communicating with the world outside my window, and in doing so explored a threshold of visibility and invisibility.

The second work, *Dust*, responded to observations of floating dust as it passed across a shaft of light. In summer the phenomenon appeared in my bedroom through a gap in the blinds. It struck me as beautiful,⁹⁶ and with that came the impulse to capture it on video. Lacking a tripod, and the time to locate one, I rested the camera on the bed and filmed at the wall opposite. A close-up of the scene was framed, and recorded at three intervals. The light gradually faded over the three recordings, and slowly the dust disappeared.

The videos are uncut and unedited. The camera wobbles as I move off the bed. Audible in the background are my retreating footsteps and activity around the house – turning a tap, boiling the kettle, making breakfast. The impact of my movement on the flow of the air is visible in the dust, which is pulled magnetically to the right of the frame after I leave the room, but eventually slows and settles. The camera lens, having been accidentally left on the auto-focus setting, searches for a stable focus. But the dust continually upsets this and so a gentle blurring back and forth occurs throughout.



Figure 32 *Dust*, still from video, 23 min. 33 sec., sound.

The video itself is not tightly resolved, but shown as a video projection it manifests a tangible, though not always realised, potentiality. In a dark space, dust becomes visible floating across the beam of light thrown by the projector. The projection materialises the phenomenon it seeks to show, but that it can only show if its beam of light is captured and focused on a surface or screen. Through projection the work allows a 'live' experience of the original phenomenon, and renders the representation of the video image as secondary, or at least equal, to its live counterpart. I later discovered

⁹⁶ Here, the role of the visual is evident, where this entirely subjective quality of aesthetic beauty triggered an experience, similar to Philip Fisher's 'wonder.'

commonalities between this and a closed-circuit video installation by Dieter Kiessling, also titled *Dust* (1996), described by the artist as such:

The video-installation is shown in a darkened exhibition room. A slide-projector is placed behind a television set and projects the pure projection light onto the rear of the television set. A video camera records part of the beam of light and transmits the image directly to the television screen. On the screen, one can see the dust particles floating in the light.⁹⁷



Figure 33 Dieter Kiessling, *Dust*, video installation, 1996.

Kiessling's reflexive work frames the materiality of projected light, and formally demonstrates the mechanics of its mediation (the technology of capturing and reproducing video). Comparatively, the spontaneous quality of my own video and the attempt to exceed the representation of an aesthetic encounter through its re-presentation frames chance encounters and chance (mis)fortunes.⁹⁸ By resisting the urge to re-film the piece I resisted the need for overwrought fabrication. For this reason *Dust* holds an important place in the research as an active suggestion of potential, a fleeting glimpse at the possibility for the extraordinary to occur within the ordinary.

The third work, eventually titled *Sky Watching Instruments*, had several manifestations, but was conceived of during this period. Informed by the Romantic scientist's use of instruments to apprehend the natural world⁹⁹ I built my own apparatus to facilitate an experience of watching the sky – a box kite. Following generic instructions found on the internet, the kite

⁹⁷ Kiessling, Dieter, "Dust," <http://www.dieter-kiessling.de/dust1.htm> (accessed 13 February 2013).

⁹⁸ Such as forgetting to turn off auto-focus, the potential for the image to be stumbled upon rather than immediately given, and ultimately, the potential that the image might be overlooked or unnoticed.

⁹⁹ On this matter, Richard Holmes writes, "The notion of an infinite, mysterious Nature, waiting to be discovered or seduced into revealing her secrets, was widely held. Scientific instruments played an increasingly important role in this process of revelation, allowing man not merely to extend his senses passively ... but to intervene actively." Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, xviii.

was constructed out of cheap materials – dowelling, plastic tablecloth, plastic tubing and sticky tape.

Taking it to Hobart’s Queens Domain, the kite flew so well I was able to unwind the full 50-metre length of twine and lie back on the grass, watching the sky. After around 30 minutes, it tumbled back to earth and I was moved by the realisation that, although made by my own hand, the instrument exceeded my human capacity. While I had really just flown a common kite, it had afforded me a very particular experience of wonder, intrinsically of my own creation.



Figure 34 *Sky Watching Instrument (prototype)*, dowelling, plastic tablecloth, plastic tubing, sticky tape, kite twine and handle.

Using the camera on my mobile phone I videoed the kite as it flew. The footage was engaging and rather beautiful, but inadequate at conveying the complexities that made up my rather profound personal experience. This raised critical questions for the research: how might an artwork communicate the specificity of aesthetic experience, and further still, how could the artwork’s parameters be expanded to allow others to have this particular kind of experience?



Figure 35 *Sky Watching Instrument (prototype)*, still from video, 13 min. 8 sec., silent.

Sky Watching Instruments had a second life in January 2012 as a donated artwork for the Inaugural Inflight Auction at Inflight ARI. In the tradition of the instruction works of the 1960s and 70s,¹⁰⁰ I assembled a do-it-yourself kit, complete with instructions and required materials to build a replica of the box kite. It would be one in an edition of six.¹⁰¹ The premise of the auction introduced a value factor that had been previously unconsidered, and care

100 Through reading both Jörg Heiser's *Romantic Conceptualism* and Anna Dezeuze's *The 'do-it-yourself' artwork*, I was directed to Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* (1964), a compilation of instruction pieces that invite participation (whether this be on an imaginative or practical level is up to the reader). Ono also wrote instructions for the assemblage and flying of kites, constructed out of "the Mona Lisa" a "De Kooning" and the reader's own enlarged photographs. My intent was somewhat different to Ono's, but the phrasing and direct character of the instructions were of interest, something not unique to just Ono but a technique used by other artists of the era too.

101 An edition of six allowed for several people to take part, but also limited participation to a manageable number, which would allow greater engagement with the individual participants, while suggesting a focus on quality of experience over quantity.

was taken to package the kit invitingly, in contrast to the first iteration. Individual elements of the kit were wrapped with brown paper and string, pinned and rested low against the gallery wall. Although ultimately the focus was to give an experience of *flying* the kite, that experience was crafted in a particular way and again the visual played an important role. The *Build Your Own Sky Watching Instrument* sold at auction to a UK resident who would return to England to fly the kite.



Figure 36 *Make Your Own Sky Watching Instrument*, dowelling, plastic tablecloth, plastic tubing, sticky tape, kite twine and handle, paper instructions, installation view, Inflight ARI, Hobart, 2012.

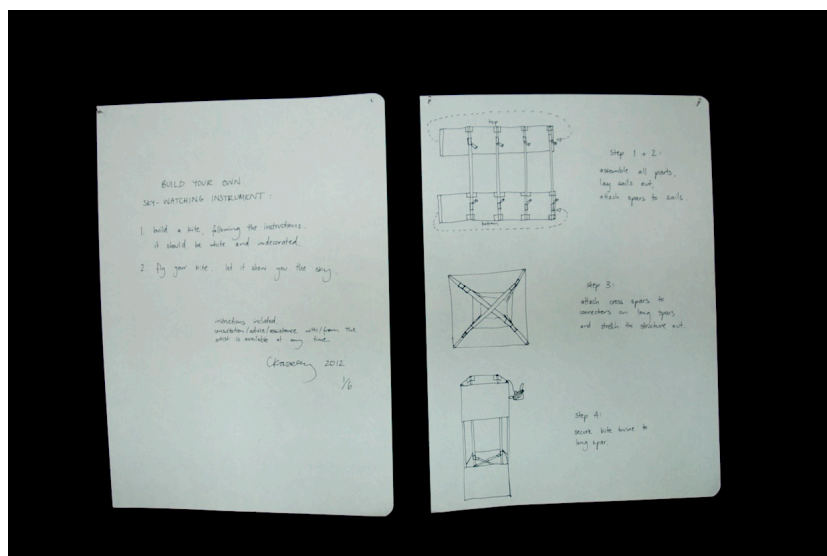


Figure 37 *Build Your Own Sky Watching Instrument*, instructions detail.

Collective encounters

The following gallery-based projects consolidated findings from *That Which is Breathed or Blown* (an awareness of the gallery space as a decidedly public, though mediated, site of potential) and the *Sky Watching Instruments* (the experimental potential of participation). Exploring what it means to 'have an experience' and how we relate experience to others, these works encouraged a kind of co-authorship, with a view towards levelling the relationship between artist and viewer.

The first of these projects was at Blindside ARI in Melbourne, entitled *Lines of Flight* (11-28 April, 2012). Assuming as its premise the same 'sitting and waiting' that instigated the *Birds* artwork some months prior, *Lines of Flight* would be an experiment, meditating on the oft-romanticised creative process, and staging the anticipated 'eureka' moment.

At 7am, April 10, I flew in to Melbourne. Equipped with no art materials and unfamiliar with the gallery I had the single aim to occupy a seat by the window in Blindside and await inspiration. On the gallery wall I wrote a description of the inspired moment sitting at my window that had prompted *Birds* in November 2010, alongside which hung a small black-and-white photograph of the resulting window drawings. A blank workbook titled *Book of Work Done* sat on a plinth, for recording my daily activities over the course of the project. I considered several second-hand chairs, but decided on purchasing a flat-pack chair from Ikea – a generic, readymade (or rather, ready-to-be-made) object with minimal distinguishing features. Echoing the self-assembly of the kite, the chair was assembled as a performance on opening night.

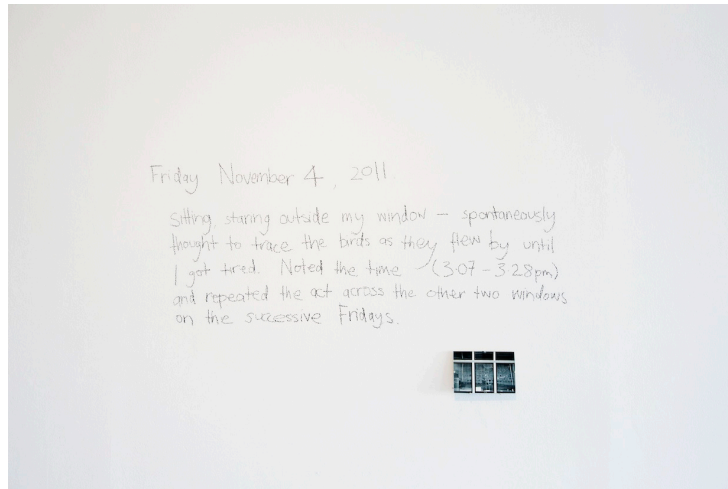


Figure 38 *Lines of Flight* install detail, Blindsight ARI, Melbourne, 2012.



Figure 39 *Lines of Flight* install detail.

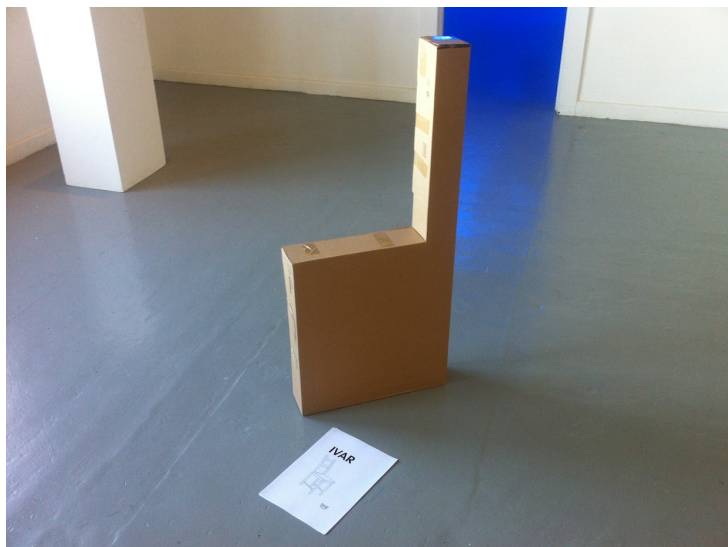


Figure 40 *Lines of Flight* install detail (prior to opening night).

During gallery opening hours (12-6pm Tuesday – Saturday), I sat in the chair and looked out the window. I meditated, thought, and observed, greeting visitors when they entered the space, but talking more only if they initiated further conversation. Initially I was flooded with ideas for ways to respond, but overall the feeling persisted that I could produce nothing material that would compare to the *idea* of inspiration, or to the *anticipation* of creative outpouring. I became more intent on absorbing as much of the space as possible, and in a sense, was inspired *not* to act. Two small interventions were made, but these were deliberately liminal suggestions of ‘work done’ that sat quietly on the periphery.



Figure 41 *Lines of Flight*, performance.

One intervention, recorded in the Book of Work Done under the title *Chalking the light*, was made using white chalk, drawn onto the (also white) gallery wall where a diffuse veil of light appeared each afternoon. Guided by its chance appearances, chalk was added to the drawing whenever the light showed itself. The chalk dust and wrappings gathered in a pile on the floor below; a subtle residue that revealed my near-invisible activity.

The other intervention, *Pools of light*, involved pouring two puddles of water onto an area of the floor where light from the windows was reflected. The sky outside became crisply mirrored on the floor below, although only when the viewer was aligned correctly in relation to it, and only until such time as the water evaporated and dribbled away. Whereas the chalk gradually appeared over a few weeks, the water slowly disappeared in a few days. The gallery was a flexible space where attentions could be guided according to my dilating perception.



Figure 42 *Chalking the light*, white chalk on wall, dimensions variable, stills from HD video documentation.



Figure 43 *Chalking the light*, detail.



Figure 44 *Pools of light*, water on concrete, dimensions variable.

The decision to introduce a second chair came about as the project drew to a close, based on the suggestion of a visitor. Now acquainted with the space, I felt genuinely inspired to share the experience. The second chair (identical to the first) served as a direct access point into the project and shifted the dynamic of the space markedly. The potential embodied by the chair was activated as a proposition of shared encounter when a visitor entered the gallery.

The interactions during this final week felt rich with contemplative connection. Conversation shaped the feeling of the space in new ways, and the equality of our positions – sitting on twin chairs sharing the same view – was a shift away from the previous dynamic where artist and viewer outlooks were different.



Figure 45 *Lines of Flight*, introduction of a second chair.



Figure 46 *Lines of Flight*, introduction of a second chair.



Figure 47 *Lines of Flight*, introduction of a second chair.

Conscious of the complexities surrounding the archive of durational artworks,¹⁰² *Lines of Flight* was documented through multiple channels. The experience of visiting the gallery may have been elusive and ambiguous, and so each form of documentation aimed to provide a different elaboration on the project. This related also to the project title, which was derived from a term used by Deleuze and Guattari¹⁰³ to describe multiple “escape routes”¹⁰⁴ that arise from a rupture in habitual experience. These creative *ligne de fuite* promote fragmentation, or as Guattari writes, “fractalisation,”¹⁰⁵ making available a “variety of expressive components”¹⁰⁶ at once.

With this in mind, I kept a blog,¹⁰⁷ wrote daily in the *Book of Work Done*, employed a professional photographer to document the project, and made several retrospective reflections of the project (a scientific-style written report, visual maps of observed activity inside the space and outside the window, and a photographic catalogue of remnants from the project grouped into the following categories: *Remnants from what I did*, *Remnants from what I didn't do but nearly did*, and; *Remnants from what I read, thought, wrote, received and saw*).

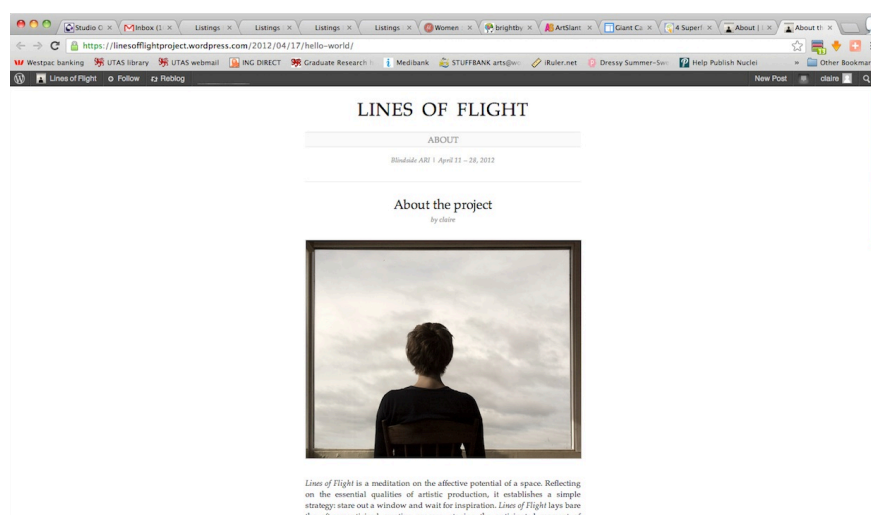


Figure 48 Screen shot of *Lines of Flight* blog.

102 During my time in Melbourne I visited twice an exhibition curated by Bala Starr at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, *Post-Planning* (31 March – 22 July 2012), which included a work by Australian artist Alex Martinis Roe titled *Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange* (2011-12). Although Martinis Roe focused on facilitating feminist conversation, the openness of the work, manifesting as multiple forms of documentation and disseminated across multiple locations, was influential to my re-thinking of archiving dialogical and durational projects, and how these archives defined the boundaries of the artwork itself.

103 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.

104 O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 28.

105 Guattari, Félix, "Cracks in the Street," trans. Anne Gibault and John Johnson, *Flash Art* No. 135 (1987): 85.

106 O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 188, n. 61.

107 <https://linesofflightproject.wordpress.com/>

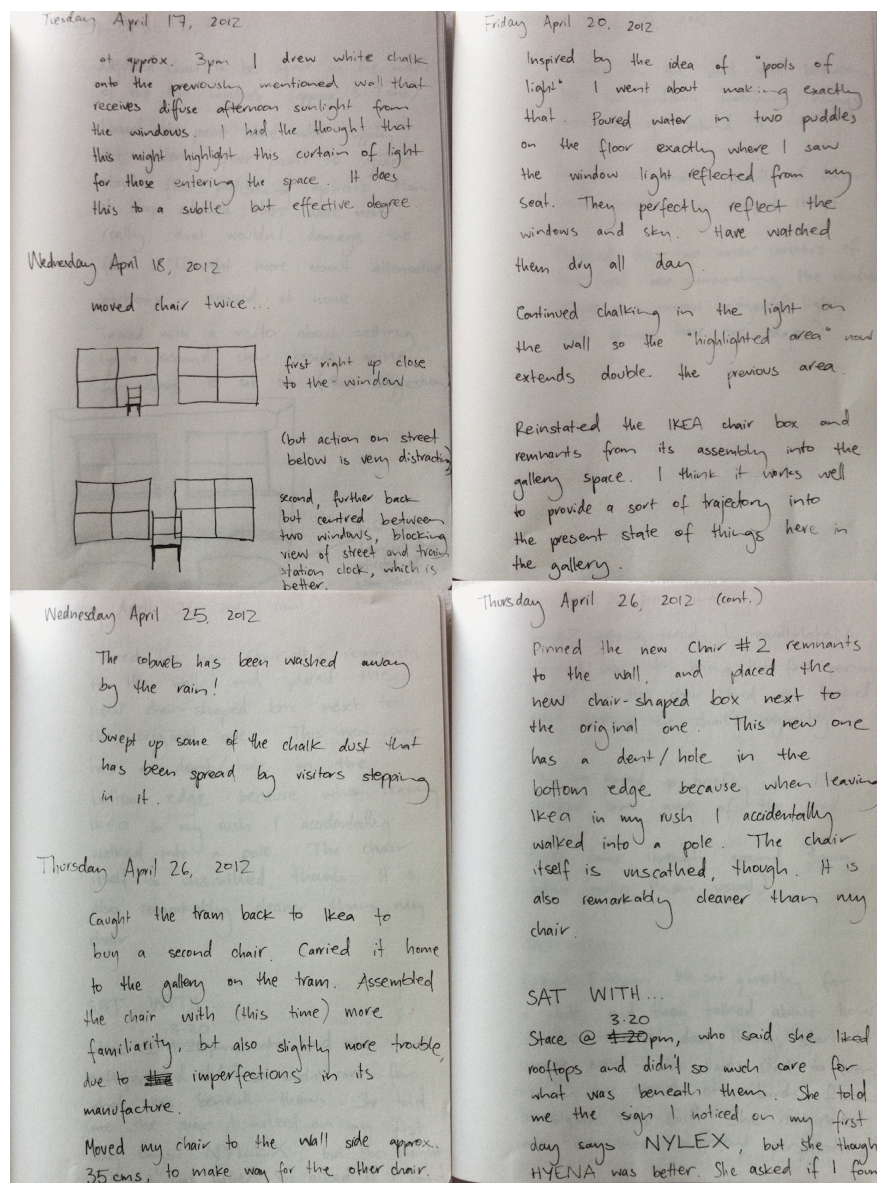


Figure 49 Selection of scanned pages from the *Lines of Flight* Book of Work Done.

LINES OF FLIGHT
Blindside ARI, Melbourne
April 11 – 28 2012

PROJECT REPORT

AIM: To await inspiration.

HYPOTHESIS: It is believed that artists spend much of their time sitting, staring out windows, waiting for an inspired "eureka" moment. The project puts this theory into practice, testing what can be elucidated from an endured ritual of anticipation and waiting.

MATERIALS: Artist (me), Ikea 'IVAR' chair (assembled), Book of Work Done (to record activity). Later introduced materials include white chalk pastels, water, a second chair (identical to the first).

RISK ASSESSMENT: Potential boredom and lack of inspiration, or alternatively, an overwhelming amount of ideas and inspiration.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES: Gallery opening hours, which determine the hours I will ritually return to sit on my chair.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES: What phenomena presents itself; my thoughts, ideas and potential inspiration; how visitors will engage with the space, how they will interact with me, and how I will behave as an "artwork."

METHOD: At 7am, April 10 2012, I flew in to Melbourne from Hobart, Tasmania. Equipped with no art materials, I had the single aim to occupy a seat by the window of Blindside gallery and await inspiration. Upon the assessment of Blindside's available chairs (all unsatisfactory) I made the decision to purchase a new Ikea chair, which I assembled on opening night. On the gallery wall I wrote a passage and placed a small black and white photograph of a previous artwork – to reference the moment (inspired in itself) I arrived at my idea for Blindside. On a plinth I placed a blank workbook, titled *Book of Work Done*, in which I recorded my daily activities.

From 12-6pm Tuesday – Saturday I sat in the chair and looked out the window. I meditated, thought, and observed. I greeted visitors when they entered the space, but talked more only if they initiated further conversation.

RESULTS: (SEE ATTACHED MAP AND WORKBOOK ENTRIES)

CONCLUSION: Setting a chair in an otherwise empty space established a simple concept – a framework – within which a more fluid unfolding of aesthetic sensitivities could play out.

Figure 50 *Lines of Flight* project report.

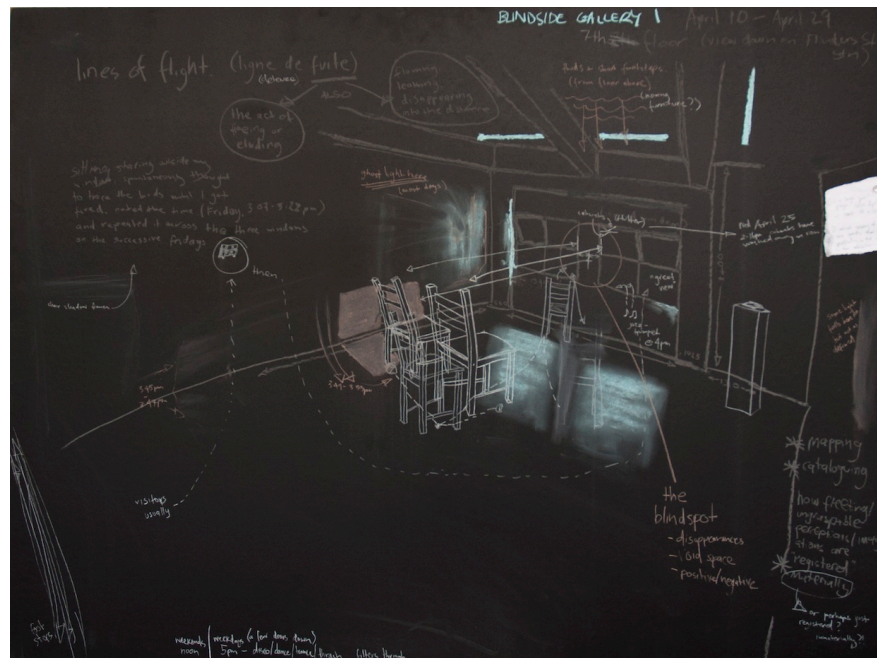


Figure 51 *Lines of Flight*: map (interior observations), chalk on board, 1220 x 915 mm.

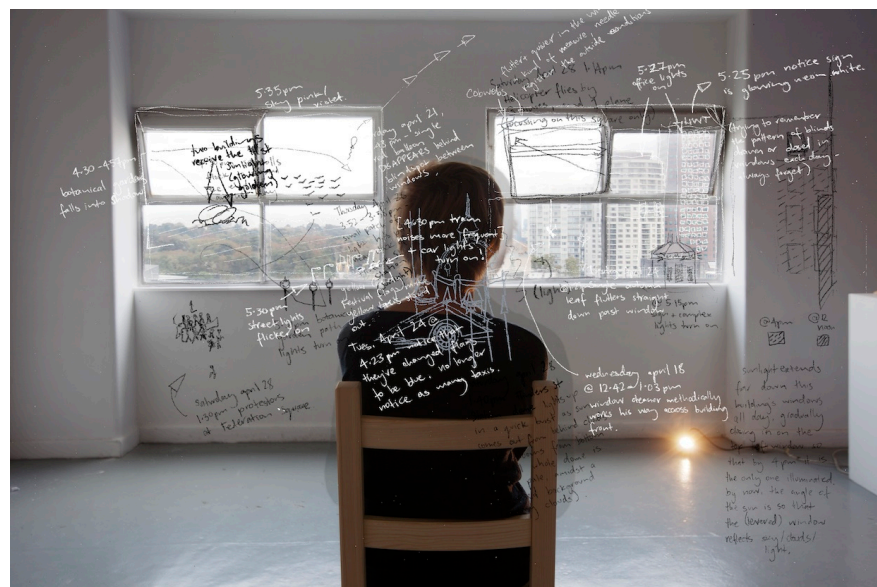


Figure 52 *Lines of Flight*: map (external observations), digital composite, dimensions variable.



Figure 53 *Lines of Flight: remnants from what I did*, paper, tape, photo frames, receipts, catalogues, Book of Work Done, Copic marker, Conté.

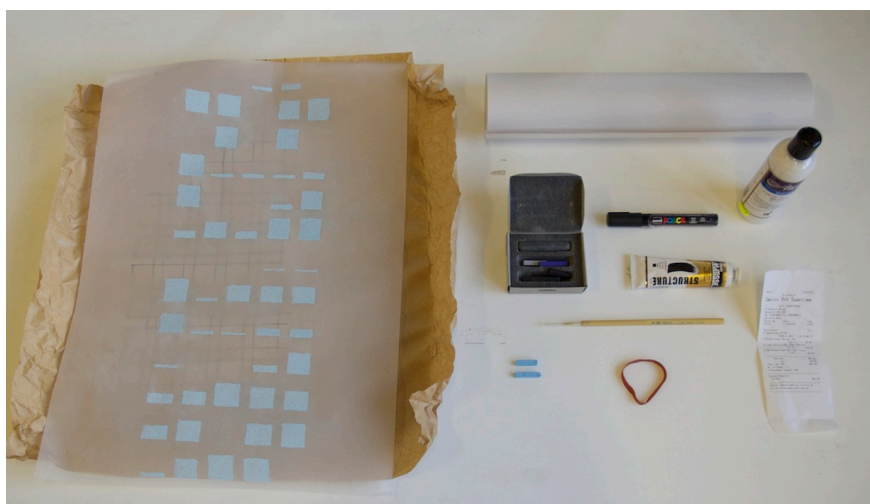


Figure 54 *Lines of Flight: remnants from what I didn't do but nearly did*, Conté, tracing paper, brown paper, thinning medium, graphite, paint marker, brush, acrylic, rubber band, receipt.



Figure 55 *Lines of Flight: remnants from what I read, thought, wrote, received and saw*, papers, letters, receipts, books, catalogues, Myki, tickets.

Through these multiple archives the project existed as several types of experience, each with its own temporality and unique characteristics.¹⁰⁸ In allowing all of these avenues to operate in tandem, the project created its own new lines of flight. Not one of the documents encapsulates the project, but together they allude to its spirit. Acknowledging that the artwork is a live encounter or ‘collision’ between beings, and therefore always in flux, it was impossible to draw a definitive conclusion about the project. Emerging from this was a new recognition that the comprehension of impossibility might be conclusive in itself.

The project that followed more deliberately staged these multiple viewpoints and furthered an exploration of the ‘do-it-yourself’ artwork. As part of a curated exhibition, *Chance*, at Sawtooth ARI, Launceston (May 25 – June 17, 2012), I revisited *Sky Watching Instruments* for the third time, producing the remaining five kits to complete the edition. I would recruit five new participants on opening night, asking them to build and fly the instrument during the three-week exhibition period, and subsequently return to the exhibition to ‘report’ on their experience however they saw fit.¹⁰⁹



Figure 56 *Sky Watching Instruments*, install view and detail, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ The gallery ‘performance’ lasted only three weeks and was, as mentioned, quietly liminal. Comparatively, the (longer-lasting) blog was dense with text that shed light on the ideas behind the project but lacked the ‘buzz’ that the physical space afforded. Commissioned photographs communicated the visual component of the project, but perhaps dramatised it untruthfully, while the *Book of Work Done* recounted my practical tasks, but offered little insight into less tangible processes. Finally, the several post-project works offer a distanced reflection on the project that are either removed or absurdly comical in their systematic analysis.

¹⁰⁹ I also made contact with the UK owner of the first kit, who hadn’t yet assembled or flown her instrument, and she agreed to participate in the Sawtooth project long-distance, following the same guidelines as the new recruits.

The packaged kit components were suspended from the gallery's ceiling grid,¹¹⁰ along with a sign that read *SKY WATCHERS WANTED*. Under this sat a desk with several administrative objects, including University Ethics Clearance forms,¹¹¹ and a Polaroid camera. On opening night I sat waiting at the desk, dressed smartly with a hint of Air Force official or flight attendant to my manner. Just like in *Lines of Flight* an empty chair, now opposite me, acted as an invitation to sit.



Figure 57 *Sky Watching Instruments*, opening night.

Conversing with participants, making an agreement and briefing them on their ‘duties’ was as serious as it was playful. The transition between these two moods echoed Anna Dezeuze’s remarks on play in the ‘do-it-yourself’ artwork, which she argues suspends participants in the intermediary space between non-discursive thought and logical consciousness.¹¹² Once the administration was complete, participants ceremoniously ‘cut the ties’ of their designated kit. Against a nearby white wall I photographed the participants holding their kit, and together we watched the Polaroid develop. The element of anticipation and surprise in this process contributed to a sense of shared, albeit brief, encounter – we were embroiled in the art making together. The photographs were suspended in the place of the kits as evidence of our agreement, awaiting the return of the initiated kite.

110 A far more elaborate configuration than the Inflight Auction. In hindsight it was perhaps a little overplayed in its reference to kite strings.

111 As I was now explicitly involving the public, and intended to use their photograph, the University required that I submit the project for ethics clearance. Although laborious, this had a positive impact on the project, forcing me to consider how I planned to involve the public and the implications their participation would have, for both themselves, and the work. The official nature of this protocol also lent a level of absurdity to the work, which played out through the performative element and formalised participation beyond a casual encounter.

112 Dezeuze, *Do-It-Yourself*, 213.

I recruited two father-daughter teams, two older men who recalled stories of building or flying kites as a boy, and a younger female concerned about her ability to commit within the time period, but intrigued enough that she was unable to walk away empty handed. The kites evoked nostalgia in the participants, which was reinforced by the use of Polaroid film and old-fashioned brown paper packaging. In retrospect, this nostalgic element was perhaps a little overplayed.



Figure 58 *Sky Watching Instruments*, Polaroid photographs (Polaroid #1 was taken while meeting with the UK participant over Skype, which accounts for the indistinct image in comparison to the other Polaroids).

The enthusiasm on opening night waned over the three weeks, with a disappointing three out of six participants completing the task and returning to the gallery. Their reports were mainly photographic representations of flying the kite, and with a very short time frame left before the close of the exhibition I was unsure how to deal with reinstating these in the installation. Awkwardly re-hung, the responses (and lack there of) attested to the difficulties in transferral of experience, but also the inflexibility of the artistic 'frame' (that is, the installation itself) to effectively deal with the varied responses. For example *Report #4*, the standout response from a particularly diligent participant – comprising video, email correspondence and

photographs¹¹³ and titled *f(light)* by the participant himself – was not easily re-hung in the context of the exhibition, and with just a few days remaining of the exhibition, fell short of its potential.



Figure 59 *Sky Watching Instruments*, final day of exhibition.

This third iteration of *Sky Watching Instruments* suggested that the potential embodied in the kits, and the interaction with participants, was (as in *Lines of Flight*) perhaps of more interest than the results produced in the context of the Chance exhibition. It also suggested the complexities of introducing new individuals' aesthetic responses into an established aesthetic framework. In the submission this issue can be re-addressed in the re-contextualisation of the material and the development of a new installation that takes into account the various stages of *Sky Watching Instruments* as an entirety.

113 The participant's email to me best summarises his response: "After an initial struggle with assembly ... I managed to complete a customised sky watching instrument after some mathematical recalibration and some judicious intervention with a handsaw! Lack of wind locally caused a fairly lacklustre attempt at actually flying, so I took the instrument around to Ocean Beach on the west coast. Still no decent wind but did manage to get it airborne briefly by hand. Ultimately it flew well and high with the support of vehicular assistance. That is, I towed it down the beach with a Landrover. On return I experimented a little, seeing the instrument as something else. Perhaps a light fitting? I was thinking of the notion that if it was 'light' enough perhaps it would fly."



Figure 60 *Sky Watching Instruments report #4: f(light).*



Figure 61 *Sky Watching Instruments report #4: f(light).*



Figure 62 *Sky Watching Instruments report #4: f(light).*

Resolution and synthesis – a return to the personal

Perhaps as a response to the difficulties encountered in *Sky Watching Instruments* the following works withdrew some of the open authorship and instead returned partly to the solitary observations the project had begun with, negotiating a middle ground for communicating personal experience.

The preliminary rainbow recording exercises culminated as an installation for the group exhibition *...come to life...* at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston (13 July 2012 – 17 February 2013). Titled *Sightings relating to the refraction and reflection of sunlight in certain circumstances*, the work had now grown to include over sixty individual voice recordings. During a research presentation I had accidentally played five of these tracks simultaneously, and saw how it indicated the scope of the collection in an immediate way. Considering how this personal collection would be shared with others, the *Sightings...* installation oscillated between simultaneous playback and singular, more intimate listening.

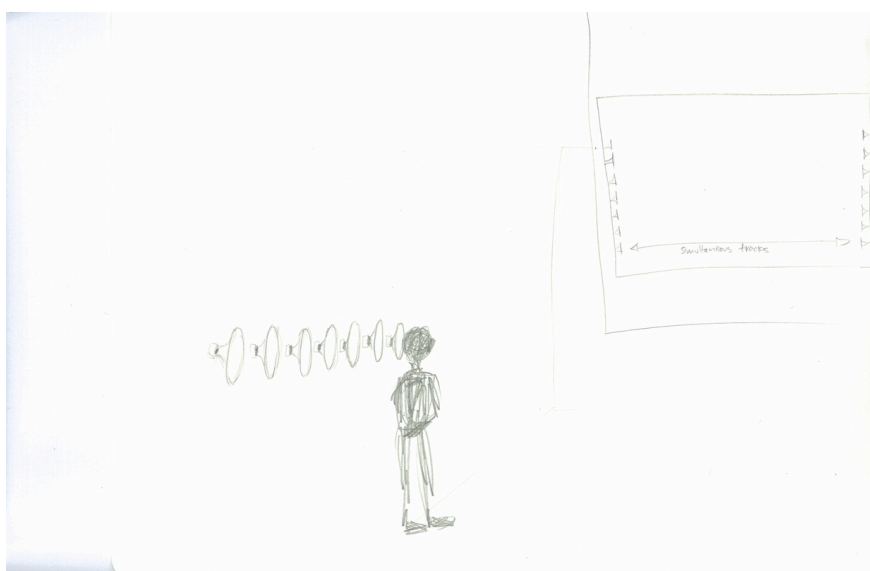


Figure 63 *Sightings...* preliminary sketches for QVMAG install.

After research into museological categorisation, the recordings were grouped into seven ‘species,’ based on the characteristics of the rainbow described in each.¹¹⁴ I worked with a scientific glassblower to manufacture trumpet-shaped glass speakers and the grouped recordings were distributed as a seven-track audio piece, with each speaker labelled – *spectra duplus*, *spectra typicalis*, *spectra evanescere*, *spectra partialis*, *spectra obscura*, *spectra praedicere*, *spectra*

¹¹⁴ Categorising the recordings reiterated my approach to the exercise (from the outset) as a personal collection that could be organised and arranged in different ways. The categories were somewhat arbitrary, and the recordings could in fact have been rearranged according to several different taxonomies, however the index as a tool for providing a framework to an otherwise boundless potentiality resonated with many of the theories that contextualise the research. It also drew on the Romantic roots of the project, exemplified particularly in Joseph Banks’ monumental *Florilegium*, a catalogue of 743 plants collected during Captain Cook’s Endeavour voyage around the world, 1768–1771.

esquater – using pins and strips of paper. The seven speakers allowed for overflow between the audio tracks, while their cone shape, just large enough to cup the ear, intuited closer listening. Glass provided a particular sound clarity and a translucency that was unobtrusive to the content of the work. It also had the potential to create the spectrum if light were angled through it correctly.¹¹⁵ The speakers were set into the gallery wall with minimal visible fittings, and shaped in an arc. Obviously relating to the shape of a rainbow, this arcing gave way to a new interactivity, requiring people to bend down or reach up high to the speakers.



Figure 64 *Sightings...* glass speaker construction detail.



Figure 65 *Sightings...*, 7-channel sound, glass and Mylar speakers, install view, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, 2012.

¹¹⁵ It was unlikely that the rainbow phenomenon would be actualised in the installation, but the fact that glass embodied this potential was significant.

While the installation synthesised a number of the research concerns, it also presented some logistical challenges and technical issues that were largely related to the conditions of exhibiting in a very public gallery. For safety reasons the speakers were embedded 7cm into the wall. The tapered form of the speaker (an important aesthetic component) was thus diminished, and the sound clarity unique to the glass speakers was lost, making the content at times inaudible. Here, the spontaneous and playful element to the collection was stagnated and perhaps too forcefully resolved. Again, the submission exhibition presents an opportunity to re-work the installation in a more playful or looser form.



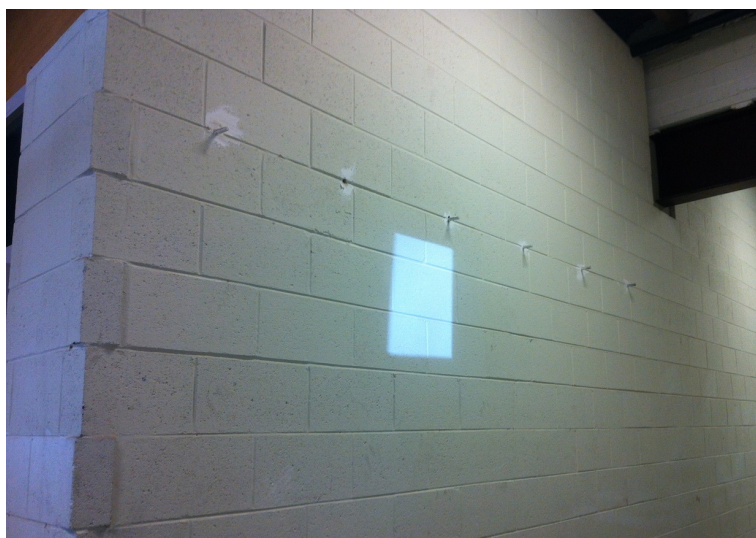
Figure 66 *Sightings...*, install detail.

A second work, now titled *White Square on Wall*, also came into being around this time. Within the research project it represents a clearer synthesis between first-hand observation, the position and role of the artist, and non-representational ways of communicating an experience. The work demonstrates a conscious restraint, in contrast to the unrestrained exploration of audience potential in *Sky Watching Instruments*.

White Square on Wall responded to the fleeting appearance of a square of pale light in the corridor near my studio. The encounter was remarkable for two reasons: in my 18 months of occupying the studio, I had never seen it, and; in this dark and narrow corridor there was no apparent light source. My immediate response was to sit down to watch it, a gesture of attention reminiscent of the *Lines of Flight* project. Sitting formalised the observation in a slight but direct way, marking the event by simply suggesting, “there is something to look at here.”

The gesture attracted the attention of all four passers-by during the 49 minutes the light was visible. They each stopped to ask what I was doing, and when I pointed out the square of light, they all attempted – some more intently than others – to find the cause of the phenomenon.¹¹⁶ Acknowledging the poetic simplicity of the encounter, I typed a brief statement describing what happened. This, accompanied with a photograph of the light, was mounted in a modest white frame, and stands as the single document of the event.

The white square did not appear like this again, though a second more dynamic sighting was recorded early one morning, documented through photographs, sketches and a written log.



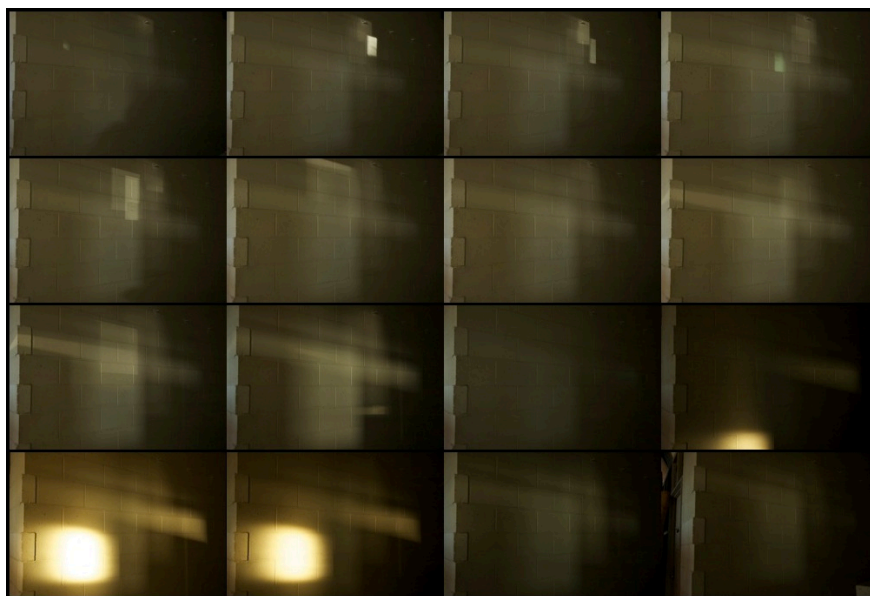
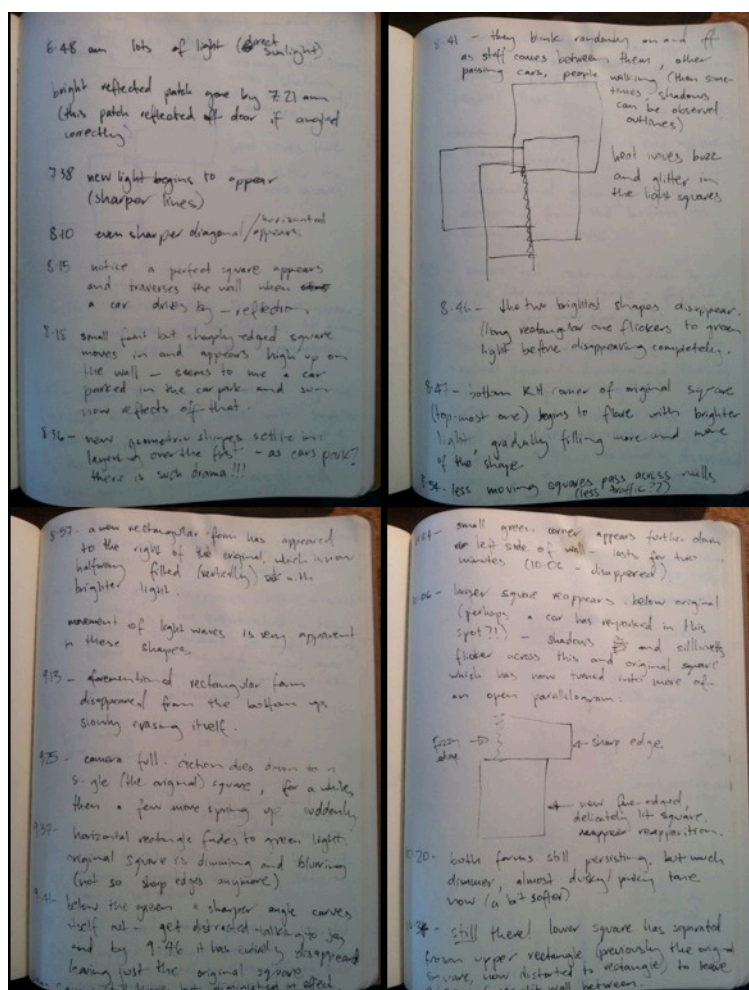
On Thursday September 27, 2012 at 10:17am I walked through the corridor that leads to my studio. On this morning, the wall had acquired a perfectly geometric square of pale white. Putting my hand up to it produced a shadow – it was a square of light, projected from a mysterious, unidentified source.

Due to a concurrent, unrelated crisis in a neighbouring studio, the corridor saw increased pedestrian activity during this time. Sitting down I watched the square. 4 people attended the viewing by accident for lengths of time ranging from 20 seconds to 1 minute, 30 seconds. The viewing lasted 49 minutes and 50 seconds.

One viewer felt compelled to investigate the source of the light, which was identified approximately halfway through the viewing as a projection of a reflection through a window in the adjacent room.

Figure 67 *White Square on Wall, first sighting*, photograph and text, 440 x 310mm (framed).

¹¹⁶ Which was eventually discovered to be an alignment of light, hitting the windscreen of a car that was parked outside the building, shining through the window in the adjacent room, squared off by a jumble of chairs and desks piled up in that room, projected through the slightly ajar doorway, onto the corridor wall diagonally opposite.

Figure 68 *White Square on Wall, second sighting*, digital photographs.Figure 69 *White Square on Wall, second sighting*, notes.

A third unexpected sighting occurred on Tuesday, October 30 at 9.20am, similar to the original square of light. This time, an email to the art school database formalised the observation. With an attached photograph of the light, the email invited a wider audience to share in the experience “RIGHT NOW.” I sat once more in the corridor, and placed a second stool beside me.

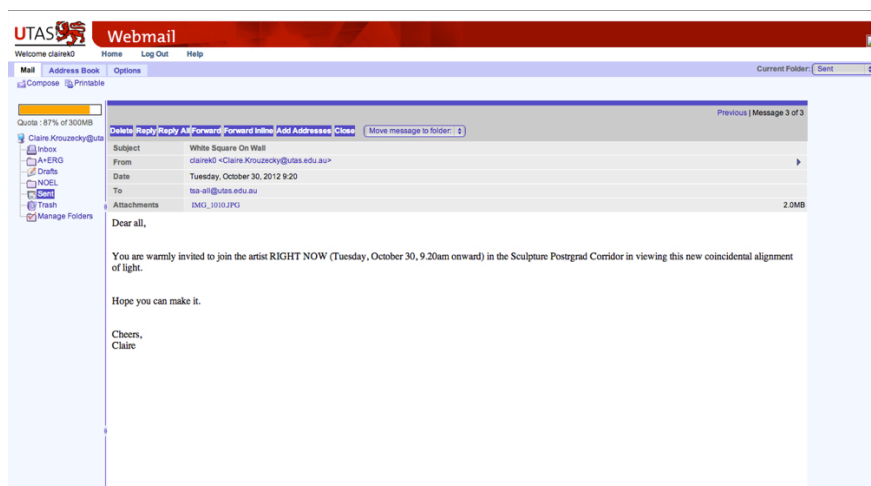


Figure 70 *White Square on Wall, third sighting*, screen shot of email.

A small number attended the viewing, and while some interesting conversations arose, the ‘event’ felt somewhat lacklustre. Revealingly, I received several enthusiastic email responses from people unable to attend. The interplay between the anticipated and the real again emerged as an integral element to the work, where the imagined potential seemed more potent than the somewhat banal actuality. This iteration of *White Square on Wall* demonstrated that these experiences are not easily fabricated, staged, captured, or even easily communicated. But in making space for its own ‘failure,’ the work acknowledged a sort of humility in the face of intangible aesthetic experience.

Catching oneself in the act of looking

As a preliminary gesture at the beginning of the research I turned my studio into a camera obscura. Through street-facing windows, the camera obscura harnessed outside activity, wrapping and inverting the view (and passing pedestrians, cars, and bicycles) around the studio walls. The perspective provided by the angles of the walls meant that although this was a direct projection of real time and space, ‘reality’ was distorted and accelerated in its mediation. Being physically situated *within* the camera obscura exposed to the intuition that the visible was interwoven amidst a spatiotemporal sphere – a reminder that perception was far from stable. However, aware of the long and well-researched history of the camera obscura in art, I moved on to other works, unsure what I could contribute to the existing field.



Figure 71 *Camera Obscura*, Tasmanian College of the Arts, 2011.

Despite this, over the course of the research project I continued to experiment with small lens projections¹¹⁷ and ideas for a larger camera obscura, which served as personal reminders of the fundamental experience of wonder that had initially sparked the research.

Discussed in much of my contextual research was the idea that art, or at least the particular type of art this project was interested in, played an important role in rupturing habitual modes of perception, therefore showing us alternate ways of being in the world. However the paradox of vision is, as Renaud Barbaras points out, “insofar as it opens us to a world, giving us access to the infinite riches of the real, we tend to forget it in favour of the spectacle that it introduces us to.”¹¹⁸ Barbaras, echoing Alva Nöe’s argument on the transparency of perception, suggests the “difficulty is thus to detach oneself from what is seen in order to consider seeing as such.”¹¹⁹ The camera obscura was a step in the direction of seeing oneself seeing, as it spatialised vision, enlarged its mechanics, and also allowed for these mechanics to be manipulated.

I experimented with making a second large-scale camera obscura in Entrepôt gallery, Hobart, in February 2013. Using cut squares of cardboard, the gridded windows of the gallery were covered one-by-one. Cardboard scraps were wedged into the gaps and black tape covered larger holes. While these

¹¹⁷ These experiments stemmed from work developed during my Honours year, which involved focusing light from a window through optical lenses onto a screen or surface.

¹¹⁸ Barbaras, Renaud, “Invisibility at the Heart of Appearance: On Perception, Art and Desire,” in *Paradoxes of Appearing: Essays on Art, Architecture and Philosophy*, eds. Michael Asgaard Andersen and Henrik Oxvig (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2009), 170.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

were humble, at-hand materials, they were thoughtfully and carefully applied. The image produced was unfocused and dim, but experimentation with optical lenses provided brighter and clearer (though much smaller) images. The space was not open to the public, but provided insight into how the camera obscura operated within this particular context. Like my studio, Entrepôt fronted onto a street and busy thoroughfare. The camera obscura filled the inside space with the outside world. In this context, the image could be intuitively understood as a direct mediation of reality because of the corresponding noise (traffic, overheard conversation) but the image was separated, upturned, distorted, *theatricalised* in the darkened space. Leaving the gallery, experience was once again synthesised, but inside the camera obscura perception of both sight and sound was heightened.

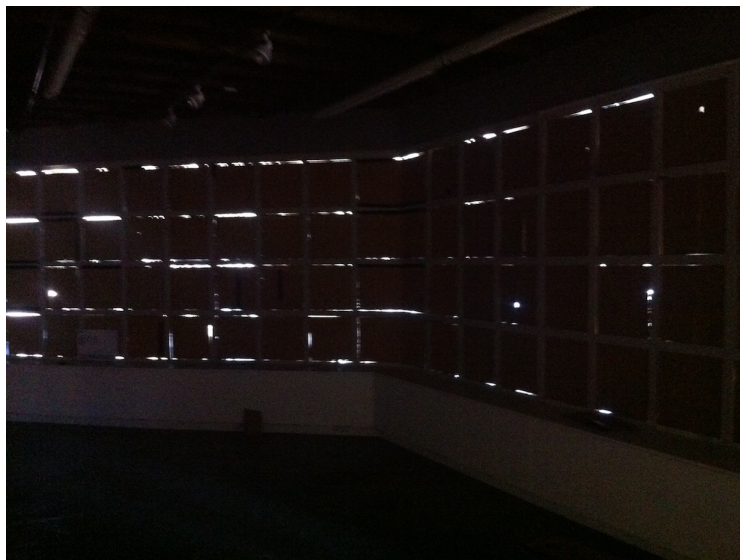


Figure 72 & 73 *Camera Obscura*, exterior and interior view, Entrepôt Gallery, Hobart, 2013.



Figure 74 *Camera Obscura*, 2013, detail.

My late return to the camera obscura reinstated in the project the core research concerns, with this visual instrument operating as a vehicle for activating the experience of wonder. The re-construction of the camera obscura at the end of the research could also be considered a strategy for renouncing progress and conclusion, instead reiterating that one does not need to look far to access the necessary tools for having an elemental aesthetic experience, only that we perhaps need to be reminded. Like much of the research, the camera obscura draws on a familiar, common device. Its newness is not in what it does, but in what it continues to show the senses – in the way it re-news perception.

Supporting this argument, photographer and well-practiced camera obscura artist Abelardo Morell recounts his teaching experience:

I've been teaching art for a bit over 20 years now and one of the nicest things with introducing classes to the idea of the camera was [to] actually ... put them inside one. So I would turn the classrooms into a camera obscura. And it's guaranteed, every time: very savvy, hip, visual people are ecstatic; they're dumbfounded ... It proves to me that there's something very deep and primitive about it. It's not like something that one has invented ... this is totally natural.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Morell, Abelardo, in "Fixing the Shadows," *The Genius of Photography*, episode 1 (United Kingdom: BBC, 2009) <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v6979965Z5ZpMaRd?h1=Genius+of+Photography+-+1> (accessed 28 March 2013).



Figure 75 Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura: View of Central Park Looking North – Fall*, long exposure photograph of camera obscura, 2008.

The camera obscura persists as a common theme in art for the very reason that it elicits our intuition, responds well to play and performativity and reminds us in a provisional way of how we see the world around us. Furthermore, its functioning is not at all guaranteed but contingent on the environmental conditions in which it is experienced. The potential aesthetic experience, therefore, is itself never fixed but always and necessarily intrinsically connected to the external environment, and indeed at risk of failure. In this project the camera obscura is the node around which the research circles. As it was my personal reference point, it may also be understood by the viewer as a reference point within the greater ‘experiential field’ of the practical outcomes of the research.

In this chapter, it is possible to see the development of various stages of the project. The following chapter, **Conclusion**, elucidates further the approach to the final exhibition, and how the multiple components that make up the development of the research come together to provide a holistic *experience* of the research, as opposed to a final outcome.

4

Conclusion

In the present exhibition ... we do not come to look *at* things. We simply enter, are surrounded, and become part of whatever surrounds us, passively or actively according to our talents for 'engagement,' in much the same way that we have moved *out* of the totality of the street or our home where we also play a part.¹²¹

The project evolved as a kind of fieldwork with an intention to explore diverse approaches to apprehending aesthetic experience and through this, understanding how it functions. Beginning with the acknowledgement that these experiences are often intangible and elusive, the focus of the fieldwork turned intuitively to encounters with light and air in everyday surrounds. These elemental processes have long-standing histories with artistic investigations into aesthetic experience, but are also characteristically just beyond our reach, always eluding our grasp. Light and air are also fundamentally connected to our everyday experience and have the capacity to incite wonder within it, a crucial distinction in the research that grounds the project in the here-and-now and differentiates it from other air or light-based artworks that aim for transcendence.

The methodologies and processes developed during the project period were chiefly non-representational, and strategically open-ended. Rather than developing discrete works, I devised frameworks and systems that propelled the research toward diverse outcomes. These frameworks functioned as prompts or triggers – sometimes for me, sometimes for other people – for having an experience, and in turn becoming aware of this experience. The project explored the different levels at which these frames can operate, and the spectrum of their effects, as opposed to striving to achieve a 'target outcome.'

¹²¹ Kaprow, Allan, "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art (1958)," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

Ultimately, the fieldwork pointed to the complex fragility of aesthetic experience, and the ensuing fragility of a framework that attempts to transcribe and facilitate such types of experience. In many cases during the project, the failure of this artistic ‘armature’ to capture, heighten or transmit aesthetic experience folded into the effect of the work itself. To this end, the work speaks of the inherent loss associated with revisiting primary experience through an artwork. Arguably, however, the *attempt* at translating experience (failure in itself) articulates aesthetic experience from a different angle, one that opens divergent avenues into understanding it anew.

Emma Cocker writes that failure, when used as an artistic strategy, suggests a “critical indifference” – an affirmative point of “creative pressure or leverage against which to search for unexpected translations or performative loopholes.”¹²² In certain artworks, she continues,

Failure of the action is not only inevitable but is rather encouraged – a desirable deficit which inversely produces unexpected surplus, the residue or demonstration of wasted energy. In examples of the artists’ work, “performances” appear to oscillate or remain poised between a genuine attempt at a given task and a demonstration of its failure.¹²³

Failure in this project was reinforced, indeed pre-empted, by the provisional nature of the materials and devices employed. Used as an immediate mode of response that enabled a lightness of touch, this provisional impermanency paradoxically meant the frameworks were often on the verge of collapse both literally and figuratively – where interventions were so minimal or invisible their effect was only noticed by a small number of people, where objects relied on the alignment of several uncontrollable factors at once (eg. wind, light, time) in order to function, or when the translation of informal sketches into a formal gallery context simply was not very effective because of its recontextualisation.

Furthermore, the direct implementation of myself within the work raised rich dilemmas about the artist’s role, which often oscillated between receiver and transmitter, as well as artefact or object in itself. Although this dilemma would have been simplified had I chosen a specific stance, in the refusal to do so and the insistence on contradictory approaches, the work reciprocated the complexity of the initial experience, rather than providing an effortless or straightforward distillation.

The insistence on art that provides an ‘untidy’ experience instead of transmitting a ‘neat’ message is supported by Jörg Heiser who in *All of a Sudden* (2008) writes on the strategy of self-diffusion in the ‘open artwork.’ He ponders the reflexive question this kind of artwork raises about its own

¹²² Cocker, “Over and Over,” 279.

¹²³ Ibid., 272.

status, the way it challenges transcendent modes, and reiterates that responsibility for making ‘meaning’ is passed on to the viewer through their encounter with the work:

Is it just a self-sufficient object in space like some extraterrestrial apparition, designed for rapt contemplation? Or is it to be used, even if only for some potential, imagined purpose? In a word: instead of constantly emphasizing its unity, its inapproachability, its autonomy – like the tabernacle of some sacred idea – interesting art does the exact opposite and throws itself without restraint into the arms of my perception. It leaves me with the joyous dirty work of thinking and criticizing. It doesn’t tell stories; it generates them.¹²⁴

A further dilemma emerged in relation to the presentation or display of the research – how to present the resulting ‘ephemera’ of complex experiences that are themselves ephemeral? This larger ‘problem’ is one that also arose on a smaller scale in several of the projects undertaken during the research, particularly *That which is breathed or blown* and *Lines of Flight*. At the time, the difficulty I perceived in these projects was that the boundaries defining where the ‘artwork’ began and ended were continually expanding. My approach to contending with this ever-opening artwork, the organisation or categorisation of any resulting ephemera, and the subsequent documentation of all their component parts as well as the whole, was to understand the individual elements as just that – elements within larger, all-encompassing art-making parentheses that carved out a space or time in which several processes could freely play out.

It is this strategy that I have applied to the final submission, bracketed by the time period in which the research was undertaken. Through allowing several components to ‘perform’ their processes together in the same space, the exhibition is proposed as a site where artist, viewer and artefact continually switch roles and functions, continually forming new relations. Accordingly, the submission operates on an axis between two ‘poles’ – primary material (live, active experiences), and secondary material (in a dormant or resting state, shown as documentation) – amounting to a culmination of the multiple ‘lives’ of the project. Importantly in this overarching open framework, these dormant elements also have potential to be reactivated in the future.

Making use of the open outcome as a kind of concluding *strategy*, the submission does not hierarchise different types of experience, but suggests that in encountering them as an aggregate, a more holistic understanding of aesthetic experience can be had. Through this, the research does not denote a single end-point or, indeed, conclusion but instead proposes a framework

¹²⁴ Heiser, Jörg, *All of a Sudden: Things That Matter in Contemporary Art*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2008), 21.

for exhibition that, like those implemented during the project, contains but also expands these processes.

The aggregation of elements of the research also keeps the exhibition open to speculation, indeed to risk. In spite of my intentions, it is important to note that just as in many of the works undertaken during the project period, the exhibition is itself vulnerable to collapse and failure. These inevitable components of the research must be embraced rather than denied; as the fieldwork has shown, the element of unpredictability can enhance the poetic potency and vitality of experience.

The project thus expands on existing models of art practice that resist definition and permanence, and emerges with a strategy for contending with open-ended processes, contributing a new experiential body of work. Further, it proposes that the *aggregating effect* can be one of re-newed experience, where the exhibition operates as its own totalising encounter capable of producing a set of new relations between its component parts and the viewer who encounters them together in the gallery. In this way, the gallery is a space where complexes aggregate together, where participants are invited into a creative, affirmative arena that is self-organising, and that re-configures their relationship to the world.

Finally, in declaring open frameworks as not only a strategy for artistic production but also for its presentation, the research proposes a resistance to conclusions and to making 'meaning' in art. Rather, it sets *experience* in motion. The project, thus, does not arrive at objective knowledge but instead a place of subjective awareness, proposing this place of un-knowing might be conclusive in itself.

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Curriculum Vitae

Born in Perth, Western Australia, 1986

Lives and works in Hobart, Tasmania

Web

www.intercollective.com.au

www.nucleitasmania.com

Education

2011 Tasmanian College of the Arts, M.F.A. (under completion)

2010 Tasmanian College of the Art, B.F.A. (1st Class Hons.)

2008 University of Western Australia, B.F.A

2007 University of Western Australia, Dip. Modern Languages (Italian)

2007 University of Bologna, Italy, International Student Exchange

Solo exhibitions

2012 *Lines of Flight*, Blindsight ARI, Melbourne

2011 *That Which Is Breathed Or Blown*, Top Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart

2010 *Rounds*, Free Range artist-run space, Perth

2008 *Light Reservoirs*, UWA University Club, Nedlands

Selected group exhibitions

2013 *The Writing Project launch*, FELTspace ARI, Adelaide

2012 *...come to life...*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston

2012 *Chance*, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston

2011 *Hatched 2011*, National Graduate Exhibition, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth

2011 *SAAS Presents...*, Inflight ARI, Hobart

2010 *Magner & Magister*, 2010 Honours Graduate Show, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart

2010 *In Transit*, Foodchain Perth video and new media project, Wellington St Bus Station, Perth

Collaborative projects

2012 *perspectus*, site specific slide projection installation, Queenstown Heritage and Arts Festival, Queenstown, TAS (with Raef Sawford)

2011 *Alla Tna*, participatory performance, CAST 18th Birthday Party and Members' Exhibition, CAST, TAS (with Inter Collective)

2011 *An Operation Preserving Isomorphism*, performance, Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne, VIC (with Inter Collective)

2010 *Je Me Presente*, live installation and performance, Rhonda Voo With The Crew, Entrepôt Gallery, Hobart, TAS (with Inter Collective)

- 2009 *Pop Art*, live installation, PICA Carboot Sale (Nov), Cultural Centre, Northbridge; and Semi- Permanent after party (Oct), Ezra Pound bar, Northbridge, WA (with Inter Collective)
- 2009 *No Knead*, Love Is My Velocity Cookbook II launch installation, Hellenic Centre & Old Bank Building, Northbridge, WA (with Inter Collective)
- 2008 *Site-Fiction*, residency at former Arcane Bookshop, Northbridge, WA (with Inter Collective)

Commissions

- 2012 *Motion: The Drowned World*, edition of 100 individual artworks and case design for CD release

Awards/prizes

- 2013 Australia Council for the Arts JUMP mentorship (with Paul Ramírez Jonas, USA)
- 2012 Arts Tasmania Assistance to Individuals grant (for *Nuclei* as part of The Writing Project)
- 2012 The Writing Project grant (through FELTspace, Adelaide and Australia Council for the Arts)
- 2012 Tasmanian Graduate Research Support Scheme
- 2012 Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship
- 2011 Tasmanian Graduate Research Scholarship
- 2011 MCA Craig Walsh Digital Odyssey Master Class
- 2011 Tasmanian Regional Arts Quick Response Grant (for *Hatched 2011*, PICA, Perth)
- 2010 Finalist in Birchall's Tertiary Art Prize, NEW Gallery, Launceston

Bibliography

- 2012 Peter Waller, 'The Feeling Of An Idea...' Catalogue essay for *Lines of Flight*, Melbourne

Writing projects

- 2013 *Once upon a time... Heather & Ivan Morison's Mr Clever Project*, Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania, (forthcoming)
- 2013 "Bethany J Fellows 'The Hobart Urban Illumination Project.'" In *Iteration: Again*, edited by David Cross. New York: Punctum Books.
- 2012 *Nuclei Volume 1*, for The Writing Project, double-sided full colour broadsheet (in collaboration with Fernando do Campo, Laura Hindmarsh and Alex Nielsen)
- 2012 *The Black Mirror, The Basement, The Studio, The Hunter*, words to accompany Neil Haddon solo exhibition The Black Mirror, The Basement, The Studio, The Hunter, Inflight ARI, Hobart
- 2012 *In a Silent Way*, Artlink review, Vol. 32, No. 4

- 2012 *Lines of Flight Project Report*, Das Platforms,
 <http://www.dasplatforms.com/das_five_cent/lines-of-flight/>
- 2012 *Sarah Jones: You'll Always Be My #1*, Artlink review, Vol. 32, No. 2
- 2011 *Bethany J Fellows 'The Hobart Urban Illumination Project'*, 'Critical Response' for Iteration:Again, CAST International Art Program, Hobart <<http://www.iterationagain.com/archives/1389>>

Volunteer

- 2010 Committee member for Free Range ARI, Perth, WA