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Acknowledgments

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Introduction:

There is a vast history of Art that deals with the sublime and luminescent images and objects, with many contemporary artists, such as James Turrell and Keith Sonnier, making use of the material of light itself within their work.

In the course of my M.F.A. studies I have actively sought out reviews, articles and books which feature such artists and their work. Clearly my own work can be considered within the context of such art.

My aim in writing this paper is to establish the specific events and influences within my life which have been responsible for my "initial" interest in photography and the luminous image and have consequently formed the foundations of my current work.

This paper provides a personal context rather than a broader historical and contemporary context, of which much has already been written.

The sun is high somewhere behind me in a clear blue sky. Children are playing around me in the school yard - skipping ropes, laughing and shouting.

I stand in the school yard, in line with the centre of the main building. It is a single story brick building with a slate roof and open corridor. The trims of the building are painted a creamy yellow. The paint gleams with a dazzling brightness in the lunchtime sun while the inside of the building falls into darkness against the high contrast light.

I keep my eyes open and stare at the scene before me. I can feel the sun warming my clothes and the back of my neck. I listen hard. The babbling sounds of the other children washes over me like cascading water. I feel strangely detached from all this as I make a conscious effort to absorb with all my senses. For several seconds I stare straight ahead, not blinking, breathing slowly and then closing my eyes and pledge to myself that I will hold this moment forever.

I believed if I could capture the entirety of that moment, that I would be able to return to it whenever I wanted, something that I have done many times as the years have passed by. It has become a kind of reference point in my life. It is more than a memory recall, it is an act of transcendence, for in reliving that moment I transcend the present and return to that time in my early childhood. I feel as if I am there, standing still with my eyes closed, a child in a school yard. When I return to the present, I feel like a six year old who transcends his time and jumps into the future becoming what ever age I am in the "now".

Unlike other recollections there seems to be a direct link between that moment and the present with nothing inbetween.

My pledge was a conscious act but not premeditated. I remember it as a moment of purity, a kind of crystallisation which I felt was somehow important. It was also an experiment, the results of which would only unfold over a lifetime.

In some respects it was a "photographic" experience - the framing, the closing of my eyes to capture the moment, the sense of intent; and when I close my eyes and return it is like stepping into a living photograph. However, like a photograph it only recounts a brief moment in time. I don't remember what else I did that day or many other details of that school, but I do experience that moment quite vividly.

Thinking about this now and in relation to my work I believe this act was motivated by a sense of fear - fear of my own mortality. My family were atheists and it had been explained to me that one day we must all die and that death would be the end, with nothing after. There would be no heaven or hell or rejoicing in another life, just nothing. For me the capturing of that moment was an attempt to cheat time, for it was time that was relentlessly pulling me from one moment to the next and ultimately into nothingness.

Roland Barthes suggests that the invention of photography created an unprecedented and revolutionary consciousness of time. That the photograph contains the dichotomy of; "this will be" and "this has been" within the one image. Looking at a portrait of his mother, Barthes observed that she is dead and is going to die. Barthes says; 'Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.'[1] He also argues that the "truth" of the photograph is not in its ability to realistically represent, but rather that it reveals a truth of the "presence" of the subject, its irrefutable existence at some place in time.

The act of photographing speaks of our desire to hold onto a moment, person or place - a desire for a kind of immortality - and in one sense it achieves this but only as a representational image and so for the observer, it must also refer to the passing of time, and hence one's own

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[1]   Roland Barthes, <u>Camera Lucida.</u> trans' by Richard Howard, London, 1984, 96,

mortality. Like the picture of Dorian Gray, the photographic image embodies both the idea of immortality and the finality of death and decay.

Every time I take a photograph I am to some extent re-enacting that childhood experience in the schoolyard. I cannot think of another medium which so closely approximates the relationship between a place and a moment in time and the desire to hold or transcend. Photography is a medium which intrinsically speaks of the passing of time and mortality.

In my current work I am dealing with this sense of mortality and a desire for something beyond. In the images of skin, the flesh is ageing and wrinkled, scarred and mortal. I am trying to create a sense that this is all there is, that our existence is bound to or contained within an all consuming wall of flesh beyond which lies nothing.

The relationship of the sublime to fear forms the basis of Edmund Burke's, Philosophical enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful written in 1756. Burke suggested that the perception of the sublime was to be found in contemplation of subjects that the mind could not entirely comprehend. This in turn creates a sense of anxiety or terror and in response to this we experience a sense of awe. Speaking of the Burkean sublime in his book The Apocalyptic Sublime ; Morton Paley says: 'Its chief source was power, its chief subject matter, terror, its identifying response, astonishment.'[2] Burke argued that the terror response could arise when viewing depictions of the sublime in art. In Burke's words:

> No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of
> acting and reasoning as fear; fear being an apprehension of pain
> or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain.
> Whatever is terrible, therefore, with regard to sight, is sublime,
> too. [3]

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2   Morton Paley, The Apocalyptic Sublime,

3   Ibid, Paley, 1

Many of the nineteenth century romantic paintings depicted the insignificance and futility of mankind in the face of over-whelming natural forces. My current work makes reference to the same elemental forces and the vulnerability of mortal flesh. However rather than presenting a whole scene or narrative, as the romantic painters did, I have isolated the essential elements of water, sky and flesh, presenting them as close up details like sections from some larger picture.

I remember being very young and looking at reproductions of Joseph M.W. Turner's work. I was especially fond of his later works such as; <u>Steamer in a Snowstorm</u> in which the sea and the sky were depicted as powerful elemental forces swirling in a vortex of thick atmospheric light around the obscure and failing impression of a steam ship.

I am particularly drawn to Turner's depiction of light and his subsequent reduction of representation to what verges upon abstraction. In my current work I have allowed my images to also move towards abstraction. Reducing the representational nature of the images allows for the qualities of colour, light and tone to be recognised and experienced in their own right. However, like Turner, my work is never totally abstract. This enables the viewer to also engage in a symbolic reading of the subject matter. A detail from a waterfall can still be seen as water even if it is grainy, blurred and obscure. This is important to me because water symbolises the idea of flow, of always moving to the lowest point - like death - of transformation and cycle, issues that for me refer back to the passing of time and mortality.

The display transparency allows both the representation of qualities of light and the actual material of light to be present in a work. I am particularly interested in the sensory aspects of viewing luminous images, an activity which I find compelling and mesmerising.

As a child I had luminous toys and plasticine that could be energised by holding them close to my bedside lamp. These toys were only moderately interesting in "normal" lighting but when viewed in the dark they were transformed into ethereal glowing phantasms of their former selves. I was fascinated by the strange muted colours that they emitted and remember being excited and scared at the same time. To me they were like ghosts that have continued to haunt my aesthetic ever since.

Compared to photographic prints on paper, the luminous photograph is magical and fascinating because it has its own source of lighting which is independent from the external world. It is more than just a means of photographic representation, it is a phenomenon in itself. (These issues are discussed at length in my second paper.)

My childhood desire for transcendence and fascination with luminosity was also exemplified by the intense belief in U.F.O.'s I had during my late primary and early secondary years. I would spend hours watching the sky, both day and night, hoping to see some glowing extraterrestrial object. It was for me a type of "religious" experience as I stared to the heavens with a deep sense of commitment and faith in the existence of those beyond our world, and with the belief that they had been here before and could return at any time.

I was spurred on by the stories I read in books and magazines and would lose myself in reports of various encounters but even more fascinating and encouraging than those stories was the proof that often accompanied them; the beautiful, blurred and grainy photographs of ethereal space ships, glowing streaks and blobs of light that had appeared in the night-sky, or enlarged details of a metallic saucer spinning above some pastoral vista.

I believe there is an important link between the popularity of the U.F.O. phenomena and photography. It was the so called "photographic evidence" that created a credibility in the minds of many people.

The authors of those books and magazines would present the images as though they had been subjected to the scrutiny of forensic science. Details were blown up to the point of abstraction and lengthy analysis of the images was often included in an attempt to establish the veracity of what was being viewed. In many of those images, the viewer was simply looking at the constituent elements of the photographic medium itself. Believers would gaze into the "noise" and the "hiss" of those granular clumps believing that what they saw was proof of the existence of extraterrestrial visitors. It was therefore in the authors' interests to promote the veracity of the photographs that accompanied the stories.

In the book <u>Flying Saucers: where do they come from?</u> the author; Richard Tembling argues for the credibility of what are blatantly poor images taken by Paul Villa. (See Fig 1)

Tembling says:

> You may laugh, but before you do, look at his photographs. They are clear and sharp colour photographs originally, giving a dimension to the pictures that dispells any idea that they may have been faked. Just look at his photographs! Each of his photographs shows the natural surroundings of the area in relation to the saucer, thus the perspective is excellent. Do you really think that these photographs could have been faked? If you don't think so, then they must be real saucers we are seeing.[4]

It was believed that by enlarging sections of photographs, that one could 'moving in' closer and verify of the authenticity of the image. This was the basis for the credibility of those poorly resolved and grainy images.

When I look at those reproductions now, what becomes evident is the representational breakdown of photography. Such enlargements in fact reveal the basic structure of photography itself. It is interesting that at this microscopic level that we can clearly discern the difference between a digital image and a wet process photographic image. The basic unit of the digital image being the pixel, while for wet process or analogue photograph, it is the particle or grain of silver halide.

In my current work I have enlarged the photographic details to the point where the presence of the grain is overt. I am trying to suggest a movement into and out of the medium itself rather than a shift within the representational space. This allows the work to make reflexive reference to photography itself. For me it also symbolises a kind of futility

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[4]   Richard Tembling, <u>Flying Saucers: where do they come from?</u>, Melbourne, 1967, 108

Another saucer shape photographed by Paul Villa near Sandia, New Mexico. Paul Villa claims that these three different craft come from the galaxy of Coma Berenices.

Fig 1   U.F.O. photograph by Paul Villa, from <u>Flying Saucers: where do they come from?</u> by Richard Tembling.

that arises at the point where things breakdown, the point where life and death merge, a point beyond which our comprehension fails.

As a believer I greatly enjoyed those blurred and grainy images but I also wanted my own proof and so my camera along with pen and paper, binoculars, watch and compass were the equipment that I kept with me when I was ... watching out!

After fruitless years of faithful watching and from sheer frustration I began to fake my own U.F.O. photographs, not with the intention of deceiving anyone, but rather as a way of gaining a vicarious satisfaction, a kind of game. I would make little models and hang them from fishing line or throw them into the air and with the camera slightly out of focus - snap! Eventually some of these fabrications began to look very similar to the images in the books and magazines that I read. Initially I was pleased and greatly enjoyed the whole activity but it wasn't long before I began to doubt the integrity of the so called "undeniable proof".

How ironic that the making and taking of those fake photographs provided evidence against what I believed to be true. What they actually did was to provide proof of what was in front of the camera - models and fabrications of what I desired to be real. I never did see a U.F.O. but I did start to learn about photography's relationship to reality and also its ability to be expressive of my visions.

At about the time that I became disillusioned with the U.F.O. phenomenon I discovered another form of transcendence. At the age of thirteen I began to study Classical guitar. Music had always affected me on a deeply emotional level, it was able to elevate my state of consciousness, dissolving all sense of time and place. I would lie on our lounge room floor with the lights out, my head between the stereo speakers and be totally consumed by the experience.

Learning to play a musical instrument deepened this sense of connection to music, for it became a physical as well as emotional experience. As a performer I not only heard the music, I was intimately connected through the sensation of touch. In playing an instrument, music not only communicates with one's self at a deep emotional level, it becomes an expression of the self; an expression that seems to flow directly

from these emotions without the encumbrance of "language" or symbolic representation.

I remember my music teacher and I spending hours discussing the importance of pauses and silence within music. Sometimes we would spend a whole lesson considering the first note of a piece of music. How the flesh of the finger and the finger nail would engage the string, the sound of the attack of the note, the tone of the note, its resonance and sustain, its volume and decay. We would consider the silence that preceded the note and the silence after the note. This awareness of the importance of silence in a musical context was to become integral to my visual artistic practice.

I see the event of a single note as analogous to that of life, there is silence, birth, growth, death and then silence again. In a piece of music there are also the relationships with other notes and it is these that we perceive as harmonious or dissonant. I am interested in creating such relationships between my images.

My images are quite reductive. They details that do not refer to any specific person or place, rather they refer to the general or universal condition. Through such images I am also trying to imply that which cannot be understood or translated into language, the things that lie just beyond the horizon of our comprehension: the subconscious and death. For me, these are the things that lie within the silence or space between the images. Thus the spaces between the images as well as the images themselves becomes a point of aesthetic activity and contemplation.

I sometimes consider my visual work with these musical sensibilities. Using the images like notes or sounds, I construct relationships between them that result in certain harmonies and dissonance. The separation between the images is intended to create a sense of silence. Some images face each other while others face in opposite directions. Some are quite small while others are relatively large. This creates a type of phrasing with intense moments and solitary pauses. I know similar concepts can be expressed in visual terms, especially with regard to reductive or minimal work. (This is discussed further in my first paper.) However I feel quite comfortable applying the structural framework of music and sound to visual situations. This is probably

because it was within a musical context that I first encountered such concepts.

I find music to be more sensual and emotive than most visual mediums. In fact I find photography to be particularly cool. This may be in part due to the technical nature of the medium as well as the flat and banal surface of photographic papers. What I say here is not meant as a criticism, as it is the technical nature of photography which results in it indexical relationship to reality. The subsequent "transparency" of the medium is one of its greatest strengths, allowing the photograph to become a "window" through which to gaze.

When looking at photography as a "window", it is the content that is evocative, not the presence of the material itself. However in my work I am trying to close that distance between the medium and the content by making work that is "visually tactile", that embraces the materiality of the medium as part of the aesthetic and conceptual concerns. The result of this has been a move towards three dimensionalty in my work

While music played an important part in my earlier life - and still continues to do so - it was not until my undergraduate studies that I became committed to photographic practice. During this period I greatly enjoyed looking at a large variety of works by different photographic artists ranging from Eugene Atget to Sandy Skogland, but the one artist whose work influenced me more than any other was Lucas Samaras. I remember seeing his photographic work for the first time in 1988, the third year of my undergraduate studies, and feeling the intensity of those colours burning themselves into my imagination. I could not escape those images and returned to them time and time again.

In his <u>Auto Polaroid</u> series, Samaras uses himself as the subject and attempts to explore the physical and meta-physical boundaries of the "self". With technical devices such as blur, multiple and time exposure and coloured lights, his body became distorted, obscure, transparent and ephemeral as he frantically tries to defy the boundaries of his mortality. (See Fig's 2 & 3)

Fig's 2 & 3   Lucas Samaras, 'Photo-Transformation', 1976 & 1974.

I was repulsed and compelled by these images and drawn into a state of voyeurism, not simply as an observer of Samaras but in response to my own sense of struggle against the impermanence of life. In this sense Samaras's body became a substitute for my own. In his nakedness Samaras was referring to his essential "self" and the introspection of his pursuit. He was also at his most vulnerable and sensual. He embraced and caressed himself, mutilated and contorted himself, killed and annihilated himself and ultimately transcended his own body.

In his Autobiography, Samaras says:

> I am ready not to commit suicide but to allow nature to force me to relinquish this bit of originality, this bit of pleasure which is me in order to disintegrate into infinitesimal echoes, to mingle with the basic units of earth and air and to get dead.[5]

For me these images represented a struggle for transcendence.

One of the most striking elements in Samaras' work was his use of light and colour, which saturated the images, transforming the natural flesh tones of his body. These colours revealed another world. They were sublime, grotesque, and spiritual, and expressed the desire for something beyond the self. I see the bathing of the skin in coloured and artificial light as symbolising transcendence. From the tones of the skin we can read emotional and physical conditions such as joy, embarrassment, ecstasy, illness, shock and death.

In the open structure of my luminescent displays, the light from the fluorescent tube also invades the environment as it escapes around and beyond the transparencies. This light also falls upon the viewer. The tubes have a green cast which seems to sap the life from the complexion of those nearby. The filtered light from the transparencies also transforms the complexion of the viewer suggesting changes of their physical and emotional state.

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5   Lucas Samaras, Samaras Album: Autointerview, Autobiography, Autopolaroids. New York, 1971, 55.

It was in direct response to the use of light and colour in Samara's images that I began to use simple coloured filters such as cellophane over flash and torch light to illuminate the scenes and objects that I was photographing. This extended my involvement with light, as now the exposures occurred over a long period time and I was directly responsible for the illumination of specific areas of the images.

During the final year of my undergraduate course I spent three months on the D'Entrecasteaux Islands, in Papua New Guinea, where I used intensely coloured lighting in the environments that I photographed. The Islands were very remote in terms of western culture with very little in the way of alcohol, roads, electricity and tourism, etc, and were being explored for gold. I wanted to express something of the imminent changes to the island culture that would occur once mining proceeded on a large scale and so I used coloured, artificial lights to suggest the saturation of western culture upon that of the Islands.

The images that were perhaps the most important in terms of my current work were the 5 x 4 transparencies I took at night. In the dark with the camera on a tripod, facing the required subject, I would enter the scene and build the light up onto the film by firing off hand held flash and shining torches with coloured gels over them. (see Fig's No 4 & 5) The final images had an aesthetic intensity similar to the Samaras images.

In making of those images in P.N.G., the usual separation between myself and the subject did not occur. During the time that the exposures were made I would enter the scene being photographed and illuminate it with coloured lighting. It was this illumination which formed the final exposure. During this activity I experienced light as a material, using it to transform the particular location. However the photographs themselves are only representations of that activity and can never recreate my experience of light as phenomenon.

Although I was pleased with the images from this period I felt that the sense of phenomenon was absent. I wanted to somehow create the experience of light as material for the viewer rather than just present images that were depicting the effects of light.

Fig's 4 & 5   Dan Armstrong, 'Grass & T-Shirts', 'Earth Mover' (Top)
and 'Village Hut' (Bottom), 1990. Cibachrome, 50 x 60cm.

The following year I began the Honours program at the Centre for the Arts at Hobart and experimented with back lit transparencies. This was an important transition in my work for this was a medium which not only represented reality photographically, it created a new reality with the light that it emitted and by presenting the work in the dark it had an intensity that went far beyond the cibachrome images both physically and psychologically.

During the course of my M.F.A. studies I have explored and developed my conceptual and practical understanding and use of the luminous image. Dismantling the light box; as discussed in my second paper; was central to this exploration.

In writing this paper I have tried to reveal the "concealed" or personal context of my work; the experiences and events that form the basis of my fascination and desire to work with such a medium, as well as the concepts expressed within the work.

Underlying my stories is a desire for transcendence of the self. My fascination with luminosity is a part of that desire and although I now seek out information and images from the broader context of contemporary artistic practice, those early, naive events and experiences still form the basis of, and affect my artistic practice.

Issues and problems in practice.

Reflections Upon the Luminous Image.

Introduction:

During my Honours year I produced ten panoramic light boxes that contained images printed onto transparent colour film. The transparencies were lit from behind with fluorescent tubes. All the electrical components were concealed within the box, with aesthetic emphasis placed upon the luminous image. The work was presented to the viewer within a darkened room. The images depicted reductive land and seascapes with small figurative details superimposed. They appeared to float like ethereal visions; the aesthetic was illusory. (See Fig's 6 & 7)

In my current work I have attempted to subvert the mystical nature of the light box display by dismantling the box and revealing the electrical components as part of the final aesthetic.

In this paper I will discuss the implications of the dismantling and the relationship between the material components, the luminous image, and the box itself.
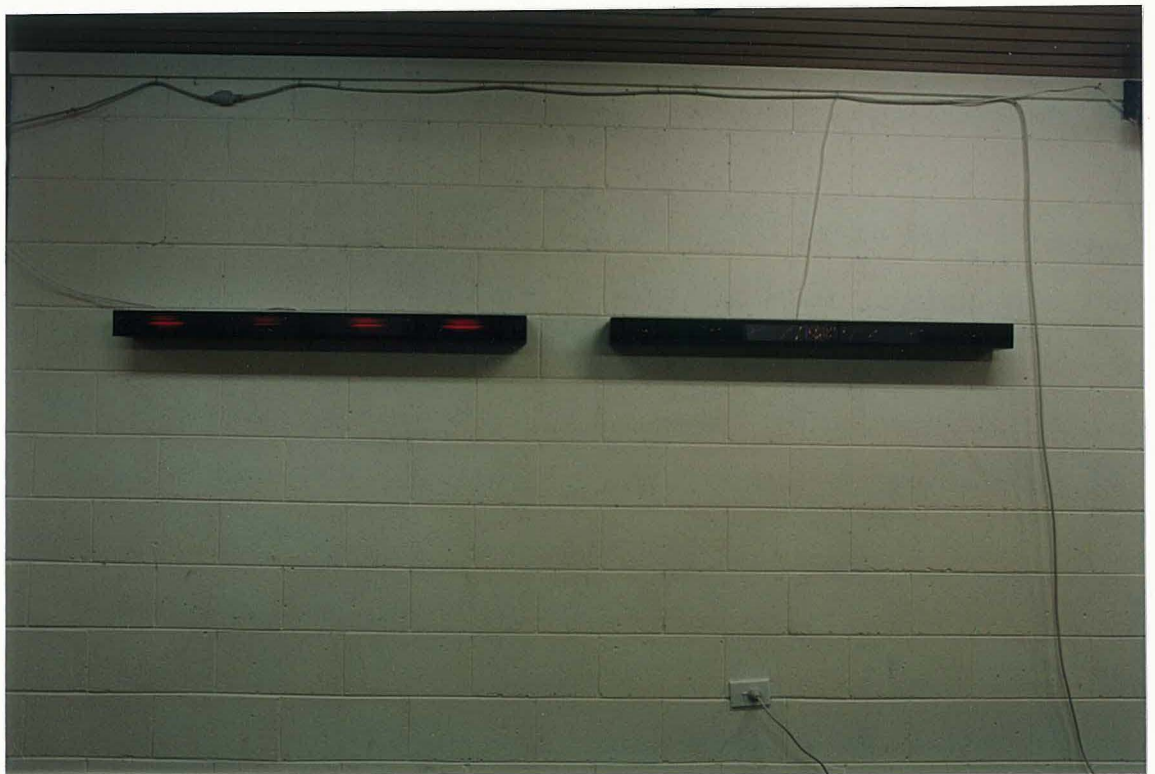
Fig's 6 & 7   Dan Armstrong, Light boxes, Honours work, 1991
Installation at 'Art Space', Burnie, 1992.

I believe the mystique of the light box display or luminous image is the result of a number of formal and aesthetic qualities the medium uses.

The luminous image is often presented within a darkened environment. Under such conditions it becomes the dominant stimulus. This is due to the contrast of the image against its subdued environment.

When we view a scene or object, it is light that reveals the colour, texture and tone thus providing the information for the perception of surface, scale and distance. If the light is subdued, our perception of these qualities is reduced and the space before us seems to become compressed and contracted. This contracted space is the field that surrounds the luminous image, drawing the viewer towards it.

Compared to "conventional" works of art, the luminous image is self-contained and independent from the general or incidental lighting. In seeing "conventional" art forms, such as paintings or drawings, the light that falls upon the artwork originates from the same light source that illuminates the general environment, ie. Sun light or artificial gallery lighting. Therefore the visibility is dependent upon this general lighting and the work can never be brighter than that of the environment. However, the luminous image is independent of its environment and the general lighting as it contains its own source of power and illumination. This independence also implies an independence from the world of the viewer as well. Jeff Wall says:

> But the luminescent image is fascinating because it's lit with another atmosphere. So two atmospheres intersect to make the image. One of them, the hidden one, is more powerful than the other. [1]

The luminous image is apparently brighter when the general lighting is diminished. It therefore has an inverse relationship to the general lighting condition. We are more likely to perceive a luminescent image, such as an advertising display, at night when its iridescence is most apparent against the

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[1]   Jeff Wall, Transparencies, Munich, Schirmer and Mosel, 1986, 99.

darkened surroundings. Reducing the environmental lighting level minimises the distracting effect of other objects in the field of vision and reflections from other objects being seen on the surface of the transparency. It also allows our eyes to dilate and hence perceive the image as brighter. Viewing a luminous image in such conditions has the effect of drawing one into the work, creating an intense and intimate visual experience. It also eliminates many of the spatial cues that normally allow us to perceive position, distance and scale. This can create some difficulty in determining the exact spatial position of the image, giving it a somewhat ethereal appearance.

When the light from the fluorescent tube passes through the transparency, it is encoded with the colour and form of the image within the photographic emulsion. These encoded photons eventually reach the viewer and the image is perceived. However this information reveals almost nothing of the physical surface of the transparency itself, which is smooth, clear and virtually invisible. What information our eyes receive comes from the emulsion that lies beneath the surface and from the light source which lies somewhere behind the image; the image is therefore partly a projection and appears dematerialised. The light source is located elsewhere and is therefore removed from the viewers direct perception and sense of reality. I believe that the viewer's senses the "elsewhere" nature of the hidden light source and this contributes to the intrigue of the luminous image.

Speaking of this concealed light source Jeff Wall says:

> I think there's a basic fascination in technology which derives from the fact that there's always a hidden space - a control room, a projection booth, a source of light of some kind from which the image comes. [2]

I believe it is not just the positioning of the fluorescent tube behind the transparency which creates the sense of mystique, it is the presence of the box or housing which conceals the components that is crucial to the mystical and illusory aesthetic. The box not only conceals the components, it denies the three-dimensional nature of the medium, maintaining the illusion of a two-dimensional aesthetic. It packages the work in a form which reduces its

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[2]   Ibid, 99.

complexity, presenting it as a self-contained unit. It acts as a frame which creates boundaries between the inside and the outside of the work, the environment of the gallery and the material and illusory nature of the work.

In the introduction to Worlds in a Box, Alexandra Noble says;

> We all understand what a box is, because most of our man-made environment conforms to its mode; fridges, videos, computers, TV ('the box'), radios, microwaves, cupboards, even the houses we occupy. [3]

Although the box itself is a three-dimensional object, because of its proliferation within our culture and daily lives, it is easily rendered "invisible" and unobtrusive. In luminous advertising displays, the box is often disguised by presenting it as a simple frame rather than as a housing, and in my Honours work the boxes were painted black so as to reduce their presence within the darkened room of the gallery. (See Fig's 6 & 7)

The box has become an accepted form for co-modification within our society. If we apply Marshall McLuhan's famous postulate; "the medium is the message," then the light box can be seen as a signifier of consumer culture with a message that reinforces the identity of a wealthy consumer society. The placement of luminous advertising displays in locations such as shopping centres, restaurants, service stations, public transport and banks, etc, reaffirms this view.

Alfredo Jarr makes reference to the light box as a metaphor for consumer culture. In the piece Cries and Whispers, (See Fig 8) Jarr recontextualises the image of an impoverished third world person into the light box format. An ageing man sits clutching a leather bag, he appears impoverished and dispossessed. The medium signifies our culture, while the content refers to the economically, socially and racially disadvantaged people of the third world. Jarr utilises the co-existence of these two divergent cultural signifiers to create a dislocation of the viewers' expectations and sensibilities.

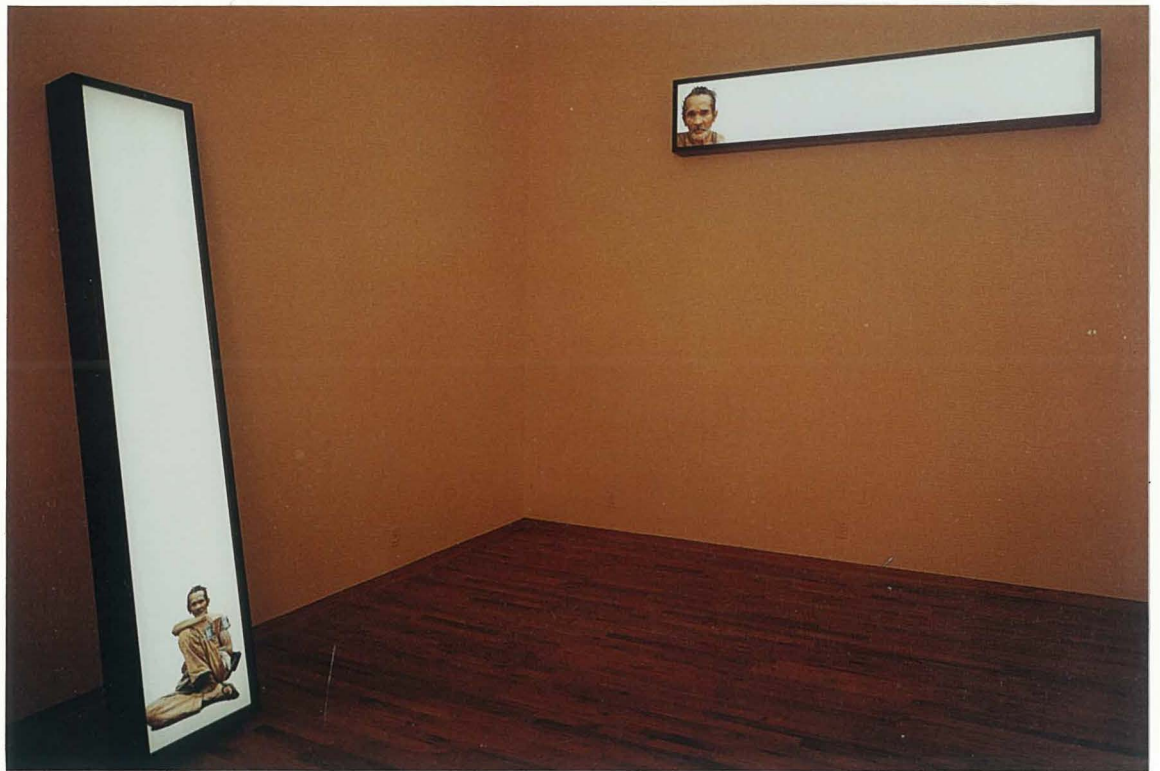[3]   Alexandra Noble, Worlds in a box, London, South Bank Centre, 1994,

Fig 8   Alfredo Jarr, 'Cries and Whispers', 1988

The man's image only occupies a small portion of the box while the rest of the display remains overtly stark; a luminous white void. Because of the small scale of the man within the display, the presence of the light box itself contributes to the aesthetic and message of the work, the light box being a symbol of first world consumer culture. This formal arrangement also expresses the insignificance and disregard for the plight of third world people within the context of capitalism.

Jeff Wall also refers to the hidden light source as a metaphor for capitalism, saying;

> I see it as an analogue of capitalist social relations, which are relations of dislocation. .... To me, this experience of two places, two worlds, in one moment is a central form of the experience of modernity. It's an experience of dislocation, of alienation. In it, space - the space inside and outside of the picture - is expressed as it really exists in capitalism; there is always a point of control, of projection, which is inaccessible. It is the classical sight of power.[4]

In the light boxes I made for my Honours submission, the concealed source of power - the fluorescent lights - were intended as analogous to the forces of nature. They represented the underlying source of power that is present in what Morton Paley refers to as the "natural sublime"[5], which underlies depictions of the elemental forces of nature such as waterfalls, storms, floods and volcanoes. Edmund Burke believed that the awe that one feels in the presence of such forces invokes a sense of the sublime[6]. This sense of the sublime, is a sense of astonishment or elevation which arises from the contemplation or perception of something which is beyond human comprehension. I believe that the presence of the concealed power sources

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[4]   Wall, Opcit, 99.

[5]   Morton D. Paley, The Apocalyptic Sublime, New Haven, 1986,

[6]   Ibid,

within those light boxes, illuminating the dream like land and seascapes, was an effective presence in the compelling nature of those works.

The light from those concealed fluorescent tubes not only illuminated the transparent images, it also illuminated the room and the viewer, creating a transformation of the space around those works - a transformation which was directly connected to the luminous image. The colour, intensity and direction of that lighting was determined by the position of the light box. The colours of the images were saturated and pure, if a viewer was close to a box that contained a seascape image then they would be bathed in blue light. As the viewer moved onto the next box, a different colour would illuminate them and so the viewer would be transformed again. This transformation; by colour and light; of the spectator and the gallery space still form an important part of my current work.

The use of light for the transformation of architectural space and people is found in many situations, such as discotheques, where light and mirrors - in conjunction with music and movement - create an experience of transcendence of the self. However, the type of environment I am trying to establish is more subdued and contemplative, more like the transformation of space that light and stained glass creates within the architecture of the early French Gothic cathedrals. In investigating the relationship between the material and the illusory aspects of the luminous image, I have found the medium of stained glass architecture to have many parallels.

If we view an individual stained glass panel as we might the image within a light box display, then we are considering it as a two-dimensional medium. However, the stained panel also functions as a three dimensional and structural medium within the architecture of the cathedral. Part of its structural function was to fill the area between the tall piers and the reduced wall space of the early Gothic cathedrals. Unlike the tapestries and mosaics that decorated the walls of the Romanesque and early Christian churches, the stained glass panels were placed "within" the structure of the buildings.

As part of the architecture, the windows had to withstand the weather and wind pressure. This was achieved by structurally dividing the windows into smaller sections. Vertical posts, called mullions, separated the window panels; stone tracery functioned as smaller frames within the larger frame of the

window and iron bars were sometimes inserted horizontally across the expanse of the windows.

The pieces of coloured glass became translucent and luminescent against the light of the sky. The iron bars and strips of lead that contained the glass, would appear as black opaque lines, thus enhancing the outlines of the figures and preventing the colours from blurring when seen at a distance.

The glass panels transformed the raw material of sunlight into pure colours, giving the architect and the iconographer complete control over the interior environment. These panels expressed sacred and transcendental concepts while creating a sublime and ethereal environment.

Speaking of the sublime space of the cathedral with its jewel adorned alter and jewel like stained glass windows, the Abbot Suger wrote:

> Thus, when-out of my delight in the beauty of the house of god-the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from eternal cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an analogical manner.[7]

Stained glass architecture was therefore both a structural and spiritual medium and the cathedral represented the unification of the material and the immaterial and therefore of mankind and God.

In my current work the electrical components are as much a part of the final aesthetic as the transparent images, an attempt to establish a relationship between the material and immaterial components of the luminous medium.

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[7]   William Fleming, Art and Ideas, 3rd Edition, New york, 1968, 198.

I am also interested in the relationship between the transparency and the frames or stands, which, like the piers and buttresses of the Gothic cathedrals, form part of the structures which support and contain the luminescent images. In the Gothic cathedrals, the vertical lines of the piers leading up to the high vaults, reinforced the sense of the sublime by suggesting a state of ascending or reaching up to the heavens. In my work, the structural presence of the frames reinforces the three dimensionality of the medium and its material presence and at the same time provides either containment of the transparencies or forms which they can envelop as they establish their own volumetric occupation of space.

What I find particularly interesting within the medium of stained glass architecture, is the co-existence between an illusory aesthetic and the overt materiality of the medium. It seems that while the luminous image requires concealment of components to facilitate an illusory aesthetic, the cathedral succeeds because of its scale; the building itself becomes the equivalent of the box and the viewer is physically enclosed within the space of the medium.

The architectural structure of the cathedral - the rising piers and columns and the high vaulted ceilings - actually enhance the mystique of the stain glass images, where as in my work, the open structure of the frames, etc; demystifies the medium.

When my work is installed within the gallery it can only incorporate its presence within the limitations of being just that - an installation - a temporary event. I am therefore concerned with the way the work and particularly the light it emits, affects the space and the way it is reflected off the surfaces of the gallery and the viewers. The colours of the gallery floor, walls and the viewers' clothes etc, all contribute to the final aesthetic.

In a manner similar to the luminous advertising displays of our culture, the stained glass medium was also a signifier of wealth and culture. The cost of the panels was quite large and their production was dependent on the generosity of various patrons. The smaller windows were usually paid for by individual members of the aristocracy or members of the church hierarchy, while the cost of the larger windows was so great that only the royal bursary and craft guilds could meet their construction costs. As acknowledgment of their generosity the identity of those donors was incorporated into the panels themselves; "signatures" and emblems were set into the bottom of the panels.

For the medieval guilds of crafts people and merchants, these credits or signatures often took the form of small images of a crafts person engaged in the activity of their craft, depicted at the bottom of the panel. (See Fig 9 & 10) Within the windows of Chartres Cathedral some nineteen different guilds are represented including bakers, furriers and barrel makers. This identification served to "advertise" and reinforce the social status of the patron and was no doubt a motivating force in their patronage.

One can imagine the crowd of pilgrims gathered in Chartres Cathedral, bathed in the sombre blue light from the stained glass windows, reading the signatures of patrons and the iconography dedicated to the Virgin Mary, aspiring to be delivered into her heavenly and eternal presence and whenever I am in a large airport, such as Tullamarine in Melbourne, I am reminded of those stain glass windows as I walk past the luminescent displays on the walls of the foyers, emanating their symbols and slogans of persuasion and promise there amongst the crowds gathered within, ascending and descending from the heavens in a physical rather than spiritual context. It seems that the luminous image has found its secular equivalent.

In my Honours work I was always very aware of the presence of power and technology within the light box display as I had designed and constructed the boxes, bought and wired the electric components within and had also been investigating the layout of wiring and electric components within a number of commercially built light boxes.

I found it fascinating that there was a completely different set of criteria and concerns within this concealed realm. These components within the boxes were constructed and arranged according to needs such as: function; safety; transportability and economics; with very little aesthetic consideration, apart from illuminating the transparency in the desired manner. I wanted to explore these materials further for these were an integral part of the medium even though they had been concealed.

The components are not as "seductive" as the transparent images however, they are far more tactile and immediate - a part of the medium that involves the hands and the hardware of construction directly. While the photographic image is always produced with a minimum of direct handling and contact. The negative is held only by the edges, the printing material - be it photographic paper or display transparency - is handled delicately in the dark where the
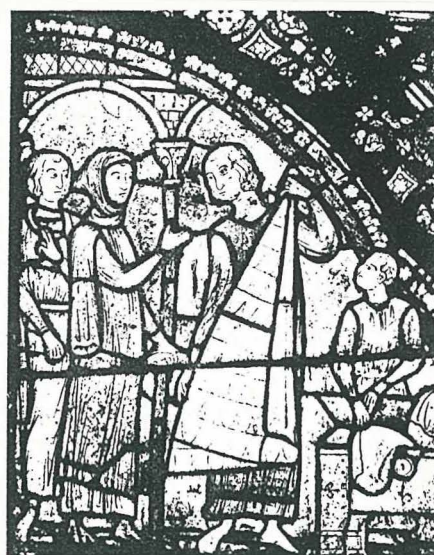
Fig 9 & 10   Bakers (Left) and Furriers (Right), Stained glass windows, Chartres Cathedral, 1250.

image is to be exposed upon it, with its subsequent development occurring in chemical preparations, or in the case of my transparencies, they are carefully fed into a machine which automatically processes the latent image, minimising any physically human involvement. I had already been far more physically involved with the material components of the medium in constructing the work and so I felt it would be interesting to extend that involvement into the aesthetic realm of the work.

Dismantling the box was the means for this exploration. I say dismantling, because in much of my current work the elements and their functions are still evident, only now the viewer can engage in this function and its deconstruction. For example, in the Honours work, the panels of the box can functioned to conceal observation of the fluorescent tubes and to block any extraneous light. The dismantled boxes of my current work includes simple singular panels that hang next to or in front of the tubes. When viewed from one position they conceal the tubes from the spectator and when viewed from another the tubes and their light is revealed. This utilises and demonstrates their basic functional properties within the light box while keeping the work open and thus revealing what was previously concealed.

Like a picture frame, the light box contains the photographic transparency and establishes the boundaries of its form. In the essay titled 'Specific Objects', Donald Judd spoke of the rectangular shape of the frame in relation to painting:

> A rectangle is a shape itself, it is obviously the whole
> shape; it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is
> on or inside of it ... The composition must react to the edges and
> the rectangle must be unified, but the shape of the rectangle is
> not stressed; the parts are more important, and the relationship
> of colour and form occur among them.[8]

In this essay, Judd argues the need for recognition of the imposing nature of the frame, suggesting that artists such as Rothko and Reinhardt recognise

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[8]   Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', Complete Writings 1959 - 1975, ed.
        Kasper Koenig, Canada, 1995, 181. first published as 'Specific Objects'
        Arts   Yearbook 8, 1965.

and acknowledge the form of the rectangular frame within their work. Judd also suggests that a move from two-dimensional work towards 'three-dimensionality' will liberate the field of aesthetic concern. Judd says:

> Much of the motivation in the new work is to get clear of these forms. The use of three-dimensions is an obvious alternative. It opens to anything.[9]

By dismantling the light box, the medium moves from the illusion of being two-dimensional to the reality of being three-dimensional. This creates the possibility of the form of the photographic transparencies and the content of the images, having interaction with the broader material context of the components, the frames and the gallery, for example, laying transparencies freely across horizontal fluorescent tubes.

In both my Honours work and my current work the strategies of the Minimalist movement have been influential. I see the revealing of the components as analogous to the minimalist rejection of illusory representation. Speaking of this issue Judd says:

> Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colours - which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art. The several limits of painting are no longer present. A work can be as powerful as it can be thought to be. Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. [10]

Another of the Minimalist aims was to facilitate the viewer's recognition of the materiality of the objects that formed their work - what Judd called the

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9   Ibid, 181.

10   Ibid, 184

'plain power' or the 'specificity'[11] of the object, referring to surface, shape, colour, light and the material of the object. The minimalists believed that these could be seen in relation to the environment as a whole in the Gestaltian sense and that the work could be purged of metaphor and meaning.

As part of the strategy for objectivity and neutrality the Minimalist artists would often use industrially produced materials, for example Dan Flavin's fluorescent tubes and Cark Andre's use of bricks or they would have someone else manufacture their designs using industrial processes.

Speaking of his installations, Carl Andre says: 'My particles, are all more or less standard of the economy, because I believe in using materials of society in the form the society does not use them.'[12]

Andre believed that his appropriations would facilitate the viewers' ability to view the materials for what they were and to perceive their formal arrangement in relation to the gallery in an immediate way.

By dismantling the light box I am also trying to engage the viewer directly with the light and colour of the fluorescent tubes as a material and to make clear the relationship of this material to the representational image of the transparency.

Unlike the minimalists, I would not expect my work to be viewed in the "Gestalten" sense - that is as a "unified whole" - for any sustained length of time, for there are too many symbolic references within the work. For example the images which are sandwiched between glass maybe seen as similar to samples on a microscope slide and the perspex which is clamped under pressure within the corner of the gallery, may be seen as a reference to the relationship between architecture and the medium of stain glass. Even the electrical components may be seen as referring to industry and commerce.

In the essay titled 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', Anna Chase argues that the industrial origins and processes in Minimal art as well as the

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11   Ibid,

12   Davi Bourdon, Carl Andre Sculpture 1959 - 1977, New York, 1978, 14.

size and weight of the works is ideologically bound to power, authority and technocracy and patriarchy. Chase says:

> By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, Judd and the other Minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the makers of industry and technology.[13]

Chase points to Flavin's use of the ready made florescent lights saying:

> Flavin's 'Diagonal' not only looks technological and commercial - like Minimalism generally - it is an industrial product and, as such, it speaks of the extensive power exercised by the commodity in a society where virtually everything is for sale - ...[14]

Chase suggests that for many people, particularly the lay public, that Minimal art is viewed with 'deep scepticism or unmitigated loathing' and that the source of this loathing lies in a recognition of minimal art as a symbol of the impersonal and dehumanising face of contemporary consumer society. She says:

> ... the face it projects is the society's blankest, steeliest face; the impersonal face of technology, industry, and commerce; the unyielding face of the father: a face that is usually far more attractively masked.[15]

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[13] Anna C. Chase, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', Art in Modern Culture an anthology of critical texts, 1992, 264.

[14] Ibid, 267.

[15] Ibid, 270.

In my work, the removal of the light box is also the unmasking of the face of technology. I acknowledge that the electrical components allude to the technology and industry of our consumer society However, in my work the material of technology is presented in relation to transparent images which depict elemental and natural forces, such as clouds and water. In this sense I am also referring to technology's relationship to nature and our own personal relationship to both the natural elements and our consumer society.

Like the Minimalists, I see my work as a move to 'three-dimensionality' rather than 'sculpture' because all of the components and structures still relate to the transparent image and ultimately their function is to support and illuminate.

In, revealing the components I am attempting to raise the viewers awareness of the forces - electrical, luminous and structural - which are present within the work. The fluorescent tubes and other electrical components are connected into the power points within the structure of the gallery. These in turn are part of the mains power supply and therefore all the associated technology of the mains grid is implicated within the work. This in turn is connected back to the source of power generation at a hydro electric power station.

The forces of nature have been harnessed and converted into electricity which flows through the components and are converted into light which permeates the transparency and the room, entering into the viewers' visual cortex, which results in the synaptic firings of perception, thought, emotion and memory. There is a flow of energy from the external and universal elements through the technology and into the internal reality of the viewer. The revealed components, the content of the images and the reflective perspex are all cues for the perception of this phenomena.

The work could also be considered as kinetic. The electricity which flows through the components and the light from the fluorescent tubes, oscillates at 50 cycles per second, an activity which is imperceptible due to our 'persistence of vision.'

Once the box is dismantled and reconciliation with the three-dimensional nature of the medium takes place, then it becomes possible to explore the materiality of the work accordingly. The components can be spaced further

apart as they are no longer constrained within the housing of the box. They can physically engage the gallery by being mounted directly onto the walls or they can be presented as separate elements remote from the luminous transparency but still connected by the umbilical cord of electric wiring. The wire can now become a line which suggests a visual as well as an electrical flow.

The photographic transparency is released from its illusory two-dimensional presentation and can now engage in a three-dimensional presentation. It can now be bent and curled or it can lie directly across the components for it no longer needs to be contained in accordance with the conventional positioning of the frame, that is on and parallel to the wall.

In the essay titled 'On Post-Photography', Geoffrey Batchen discusses a number of the artists and their work in the exhibition "Constructing Images: Synapse Between Photography and Sculpture". Speaking of Mike and Doug Starn and Sokhi Wagner's engagement of the materiality of the photographic medium, Batchen says:

> What was once a window onto the world is transformed into an opaque, resistant surface volumetrically unfolding in space. In this case we are forced to look at photography, rather than through it. The photograph's thickness, the part of its existence that is usually thought of as mere support, is here made its primary feature. Two-dimensionality is shown up as a fiction that always requires the suppression of a third term.[16]

Dispensing with this illusory aesthetic reveals materiality of the transparency itself. It becomes less mystical, ephemeral and immaterial and its true identity as a transparent polymer with substance, surface and 'thickness' becomes apparent. The viewer can now see it for what it is; a flexible, three dimensional material that can be folded, curved, bent and twisted and thus demands recognition of these properties while still being able to support a representational image.

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[16]   Geoffrey Batchen, 'On Post - Photography' After Image, Vol 20 No 30, October 1992, 17.

In my current work I have been using a clear based display transparency. This material allows the viewer to see directly through the image while incorporating the presence of whatever is physically behind it.

Now a different type of "dematerialisation" takes place, as the representational and the material are compounded together. This creates a situation where the plane that the image occupies is no longer the total point of focus. What is now viewed is a layered and spatial aesthetic. This also implies a contextual "framing" within the gallery and the materiality of the medium, which reiterates the connection of the work to the environment of the gallery and the viewer.

The housing of the light box display positions the work in the pictorial world. Removing the box creates the possibility of extending the work into the material world. It is a return to the unification of materiality and representation that was present in the medium of stained glass architecture. I also am trying to make work which is self reflexive and explores the medium of the luminous image.

I offer a diversity of solutions to this "dismantling", which I see as a rejection of the conventional and formally stylised "body of work". Such formal diversity also serves to highlight the materiality of the medium. If I had presented all the images within the one type of structure, for example between glass and on stands of the same size, then the formal presentation would be more likly to be percieved as a mannerism of the work and hence less apparent.

The box is a geometric structure which implies - amongst other things - containment and control. Dismantling the box has introduced new possibilities and aesthetics into my work with the luminous image. It has also allowed me to gain deeper insight into the nature of the luminous image and the materiality of the medium as well as a deeper understanding of the "box" itself.

Like Pandora, who represents an archetypal need to reveal what is concealed within, the dismantling of the box was not only a means of demystification for me, it has provided new material and the impetus for exploration and discovery.

Documentation.

Outline of proposal:

I see my M.F.A. work as continuing from my Honours work. I intend to gain a deeper understanding of the light box / luminous photographic image. I will be exploring issues related to my sense of mortality and the idea of internal and external duality's. These concerns will be clarified as my work progresses. I intend to apply them to both the formal and conceptual aspects of the work. I will be using reductive, colour details of the human body with land and seascape images, with particular emphasis upon water and sky.

I will also be considering the possibility of including sound and digital imagery within the work.

Response:

My proposal is quite broad and in response to that, I would say I fulfilled my objectives. The work has evolved with the underlying issues becoming quite specific. The concept of duality's has been addressed within the relationship between the material and illusory aspects of the luminous medium. The work also addresses concepts regarding the body as being mortal and the external natural element of sky and water as representing the cyclical and external reality.

I experimented with sound by making recordings at a number of the locations where I was photographing. I then slowed these down and joined short sections of the recordings into continuous loops. I was trying to create short, repetitive sound samples that could be perceived as equivalent to the still image. I presented some of these at my first critique and after some discussion and consideration of the general response, I decided that the inclusion of sound was over complicating the work and that I should concentrate on developing the visual concepts.

I spent some time in my first year with <u>Adobe Photoshop</u> but came to the conclusion that digital imagery was not going to offer any major advantages to my practice, however, it did raise my awareness of, and interest in the analogue or wet process photography, thus one of my concerns became the reflexive investigation of the luminous photographic medium.

I am pleased with the final position that my practice has arrived at and I feel there has been a substantial progression in both the conceptual and formal considerations of my work.

Materials and methods:

For my final M.F.A. work I use Agfa colour display transparency rather than the Fuji 220 transparency film - an E6 process, which I had used during Honours - as this was available in much larger sizes and could be processed using the photography departments RA4 processor. The transparency has a clear base, which allows the viewer to see through it while still rendering the photographic image.

Display transparency is an expensive medium, even for small quantities and so I used cheaper materials during the development of ideas, such as colour photographic paper, SX-70 Polaroid, slide film and black and white processes.

I constructed the frames from mild steel and these were powder coated with a "bright silver" paint. Initially I wanted to chrome finish the work but the costs involved would have been quite considerable. I felt that the powder coating was a most satisfactory alternative. I wanted a finish that would suggest the nature of the material; that is metal, and that would reflect light accordingly. I also felt that finishing the work with the same type of paint would contribute to unifying the diverse set of pieces which form the final presentation.

Having dismantled the light box, I wanted to use the previously concealed components, exploring their aesthetic possibilities. I therefore adhered to using the standard types of fluorescent tubes such as those that would be commonly found in light boxes. I also used glass and perspex as

required. Glass is rigid and in some pieces this was required, while in others the flexibility of the perspex was structurally preferable.

Outline of work process:

Early in the first year of my M.F.A. program I exhibited a series of black and white documentary images which were titled "Hard Rubbish". (See Fig's 11 & 12) The exhibition was at Chameleon gallery, there were fifty images in the show. This was a project that I had been working on for four years prior to starting the program. Completing this work was important to me, as it represented an earlier period of my development. It had involved a sustained commitment and I really felt the need to finish this work so that I could put this "old" aesthetic behind me.

The various local councils across the suburbs of Melbourne organise the collection of larger items of unwanted rubbish such as old washing machines, TV's, refrigerators, etc. These collections usually occur once a year and the residents of the particular municipality place these discarded items upon the nature strips outside their houses to be collected. The documentation of these items formed the basis of this work.

Underlying the 'Hard Rubbish' images were similar issues to those in my current work. For me, the discarded items spoke of our mortality. Things that were acquired and valued were transformed into that which had expired and was disregarded. Raw materials had been converted into commodities, used and were put out to be collected and returned to the earth. In my current work I have responded to the natural environment of Tasmania as a source for such symbols, rather than the man made environment that form the suburbs of Melbourne.

The aspect of journeying through the suburbs and direct encounter with these disused objects that was an important part of photographing the "Hard Rubbish" images. In my current work I still find the need to travel into the environment. I like to visit a water fall even if the image I want is a small section of water that could have been found or created elsewhere, because in travelling to a real water fall and in standing before it, there is the chance of
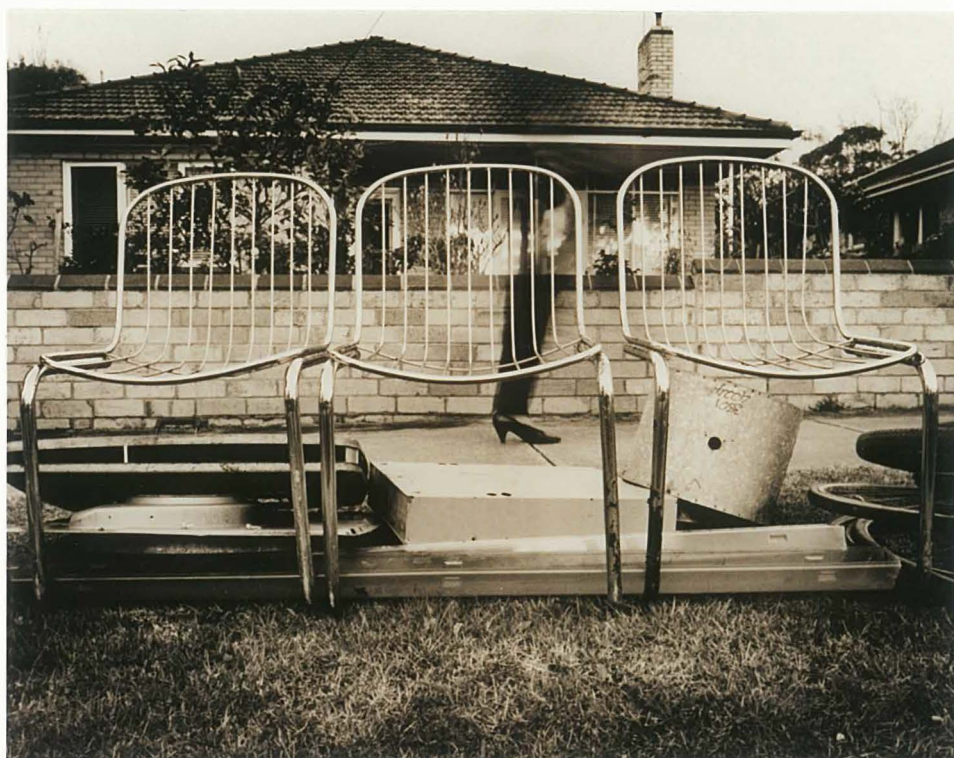
Fig's 11 & 12   Dan Armstrong, 'Hard Rubbish', 1992.
Gelatin Silver, 50 x 60cm

finding something that wasn't expected. There is also an emotional response to the water fall and this stimulates my feeling for the work. I don't believe that it makes any intrinsic difference to the image or to the viewer where the photograph was taken. In fact I will often create images in the studio. It is the inspiration that I derive from experiencing water in the real world that is important, rather than wether the image was made at some particular location or not.

With the "Hard Rubbish" work completed I then proceeded to work with the luminous image.

When I started the M.F.A. I knew that I wanted to build upon what I had achieved during my Honours work. That work was illusory, as the presence of the electrical technology was concealed within the boxes. What was presented to the viewer was an ethereal vision which appeared to float in the dark.

I wanted to understand more about the light box and how its visual mystique was achieved. I began by considering the light box in terms of being a frame. This raised the issue of the relationship between the image and the box. My initial response to this was to try and extend this relationship. I made a series of square black boxes (53cm x 53cm x 17cm) in which a round fluorescent tube was placed on the bottom and a display transparency was set deeply into the box just a short distance above the tube. While 7cm above was a square opening (27cm x 27cm) which was smaller than the transparency, these were placed on the floor. (See Fig's 13 & 14) As the viewer walked around the box there was a parallax shift between the image below and the frame like opening, as well as perspective distortions of the square opening above. There was an optical illusion, as the image of blue sky appeared to be floating somewhere much deeper within the box. Its exact spatial position was difficult to determine.

I built one of these boxes and found it to be an extremely seductive and contemplative piece of work. I then built another eight so that I could construct various configurations such as a grid of three by three.

My intention was for these boxes to be placed on the floor, as this would allow the viewer to approach the work from a large variety of angles. I was trying to usurp the familiar position for viewing the sky and I was interested in disrupting the usual position in which photography is encountered, ie. on the
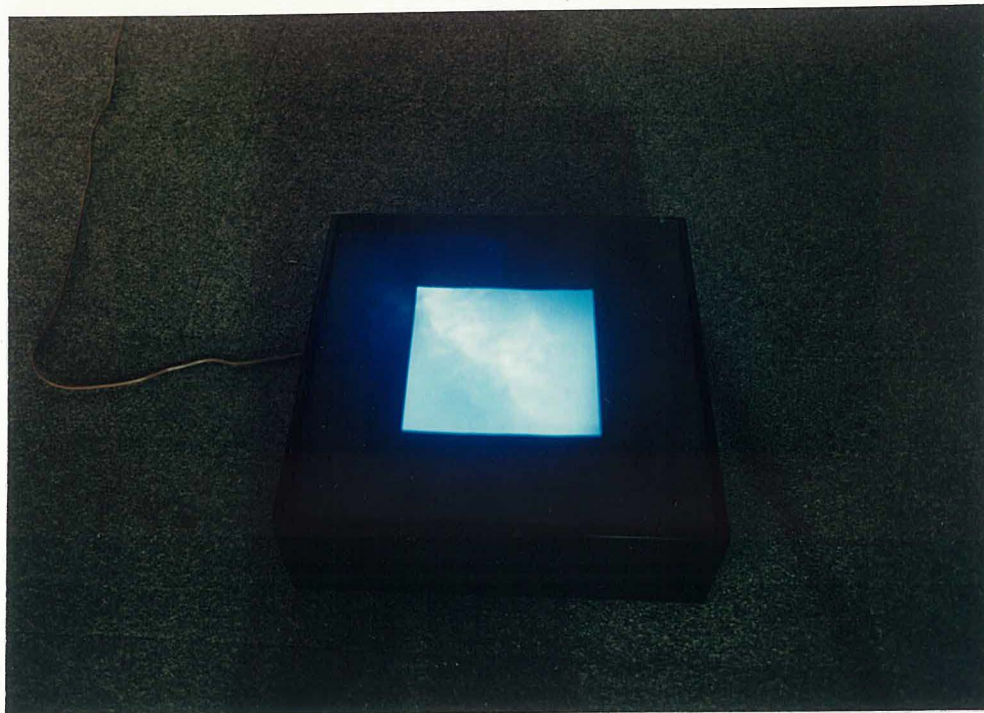
Fig's 13 & 14   Dan Armstrong, Light box with Sky image, 1992
53 x 53 x 17cm,

wall. I felt that such disruptions have the potential to contribute to the aesthetic and conceptual experience of the work, therefore extending the expressive possibilities of the medium. To put work on the wall is to conform to convention. This results in materiality and formal positioning of the of the work becoming transparent, as it is viewed as a familiar mannerism.

The light box has a different relationship to the environment it is exhibited in, as the light that emanates from it illuminates and transforms that space. Placing the work on the floor or in any other unusual arrangement creates a particular lighting condition for that environment as well as an overt reference to its formal structure.

After building nine of these boxes which I presented at a general M.F.A. critique sessions, I realised that only seeing one box was more effective than seeing nine. With one box there was only one point of focus. The aesthetic was quite contemplative, while with nine boxes, there was the tendency to wonder over all the boxes and compare, and so the contemplative gaze was broken. Less definitely said more!

At about this time I was given a discarded commercially built advertising light box. This box was made from sheet metal and had all its electrical components intact but no image. What I found immediately fascinating was the layout of the electrical wiring and components which was strictly in accordance with functional considerations rather than any aesthetic.

It was from considering the components and their arrangement in that light box that I decided to reveal the hidden materiality as part of the final aesthetic. At this point I rejected the illusory nature of the square box with its elevated frame in favour for what seemed to be a more challenging and important dialogue between the materiality and the illusory aspects of the luminous medium.

I started by simply using clear-based transparencies within the boxes so that the internal components were visible through the transparencies. However, this still seemed to hide the components to quite a large degree.

I then experimented with boxes built entirely from clear perspex, thus allowing all the materiality to be visible. While these were quite successful, I found them dissatisfying as they still "contained" the work. (See Fig 15)
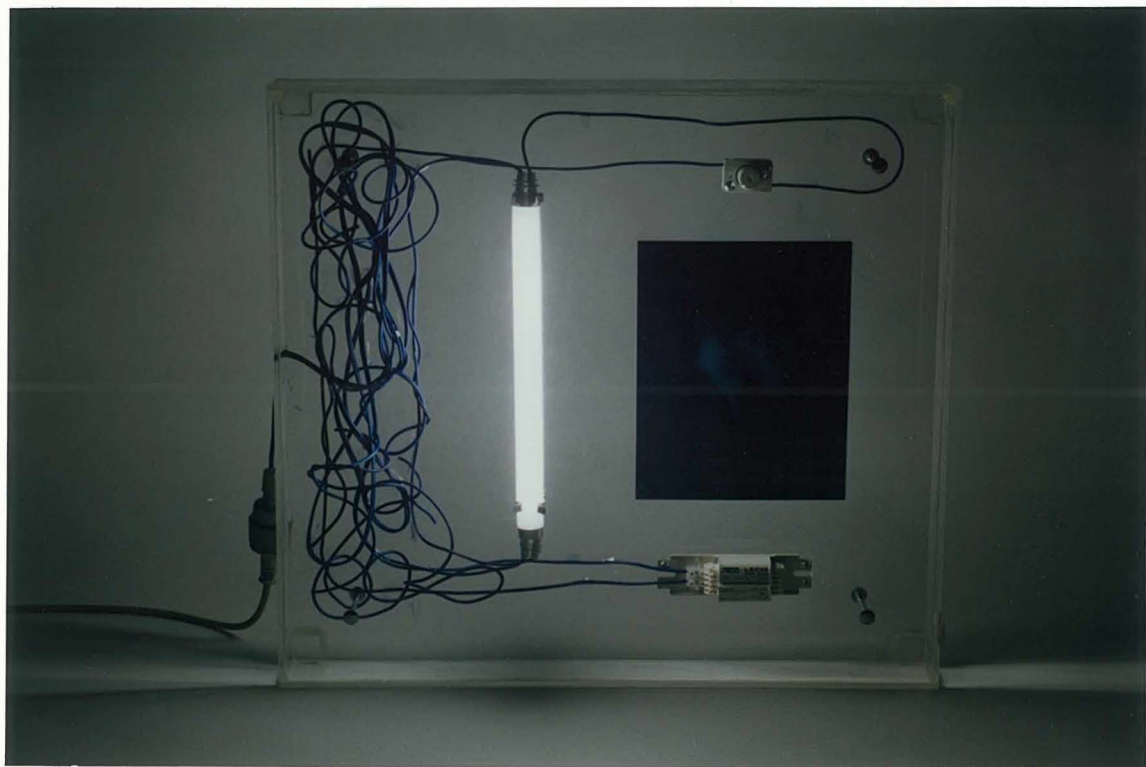
Fig 15   Dan Armstrong, Perspex light box with sky image,
1993, 67 x 53 x7.5cm.

I then proceeded to remove the box completely and started fixing the electrical components directly to the wall and hanging images in front of the bare tubes. I was very happy with this as it incorporated the work directly onto the structure of the gallery while allowing for a more free resolution of formal arrangement. I used this method of presentation for a body of work titled "Descent" which was presented as part of the "Navigator's" exhibition at the Long Gallery during 1993. (See Fig's 16 & 17) The images in "Descent" consisted of enlarged details of water from local waterfalls. I used extremely grainy film so that when viewed closely the images would tend to "break up". My intention was to suggest something of the ephemeral and transient nature of our existence.

I continued to experiment by wrapping images directly onto fluorescent tubes and sandwiching images between perspex and placing these directly over the tubes.

After reading about the use of stained glass within the structure of early French Gothic cathedrals, I decided that I wanted to extend the relationship between the images and structural forces which held the work and relate these to other structures, such as the walls of the gallery. I built metal stands which could hold the electrical components and the images and simple clamps that hold the images and perspex under tension between the walls of the gallery. I see these as being imitative of the relationship between architectural structures - such as the flying buttress and the mullions - and the stained glass panels.

In my final work I have presented a number of formal solutions to my exploration of the dismantled light box. By doing this the materiality and structure of each piece remains overt.

During the course of my studies I was also exploring other ways of producing images. I experimented with fluorescent paints, which were painted directly onto the body or added to water. These were photographed under U.V. (black light) with various types of films. I was not particularly interested in the resultant aesthetic as it seemed to contain cultural references, ie; fluorescent surf clothing; which I did not want in the work. I decided to maintain a reference to the natural elements within my images so that a contrast between these elements and the technology of the medium would be present.
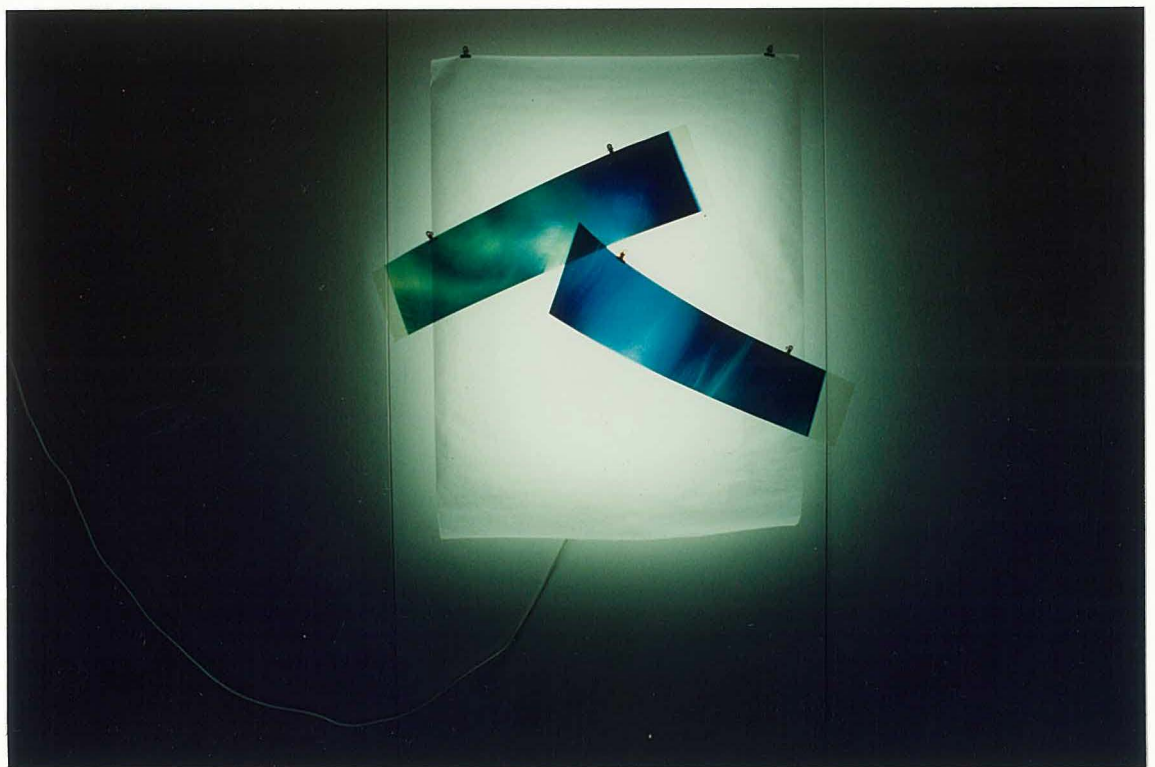
Fig's 16 & 17   Dan Armstrong, 'Descent' - 'Navigators' exhibition
at the Long Gallery, 1993.

I had decided that the images would express issues relating to time and mortality by depicting detail derived from the natural landscape and the human body. My intention was to juxtapose these within one image or to place them separately but next to one another.

I had been considering Bill Henson's use of juxtaposition between street children and Baroque interiors. What fascinated me within Hensons work was the initial sense of contrast between the depictions, followed by a recognition of the similarities between them; usually in the graphic or formal structure of the compositions. I was trying to create a similar dialogue between images.

I used SX-70 polaroid film for this investigation, as it provided instant results and provides very intense colour saturation, which I felt could be achieved with the display transparency. It was also cheaper than printing onto display transparency and so for developing ideas quickly, was an ideal substitute. I photographed various section of the body using coloured lights. The sections were quite large so that one could easily recognise some sort of gesture, such as arms embracing themselves. The Landscape details were photographed through coloured filters. I was trying to use colours that would suggest some sort of mood, such as blue to create a sombre and ominous quality within the landscape and the body sections. (See Fig's 18 & 19)

I completed a large number of these images which were included in the 'Pivot' exhibition at Despard Gallery. I learnt a great deal from this period of my work and decided not to include any direct juxtapositions within my final images as I felt the space between the images was also important. I also I felt the arrangement of the final work would be more flexible if the images were independent. After some consideration I began to reject the heavily saturated colours, preferring to use the "natural" colours with tonal changes achieved at the printing stage - such as "down" printing - to imply different moods within the images.

At the same time that I was working with SX-70 film, I was also experimenting with bleaching colour negatives and layering these during printing. I found the results quite exciting. There was a random or unpredictable element to the process. I like the possibility of chance and the subsequent developments that can arise from experimental processes. In these images I was trying to create a vision that was purely expressive of primordial, elemental forces. For example, in one image I used a negative of blue sky and
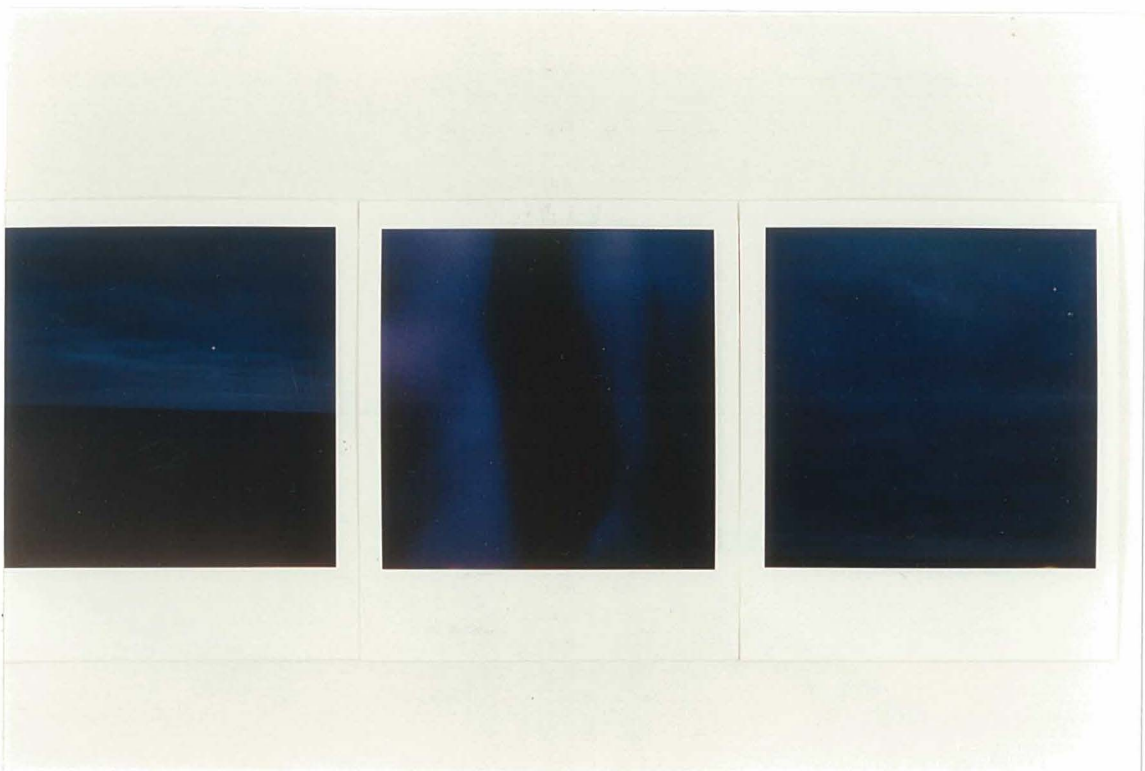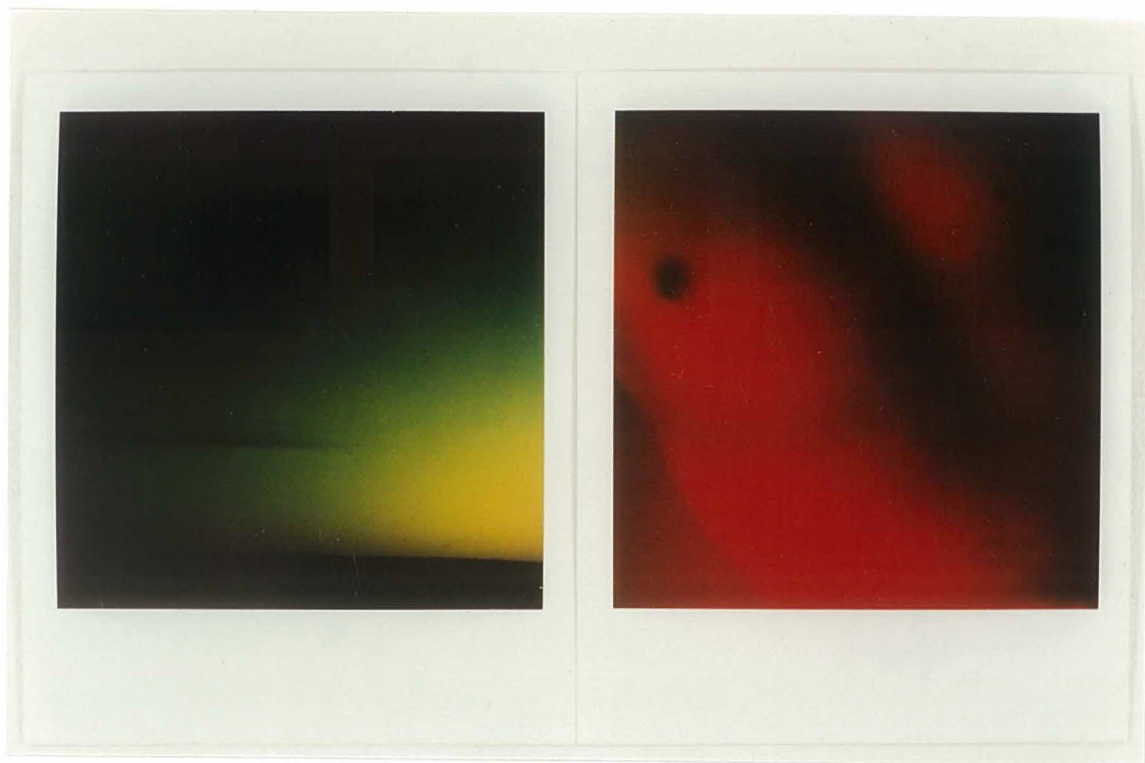
Fig's 18 & 19   Dan Armstrong, Body/Land & seascapes,
Polaroid SX-70, 1992.

clouds which were selectively bleached and overlayed this with another image depicting a rock surface. (See Fig 20)

I was also interested in the stains and fading that resulted from the bleach, which were like a veil or a wash of decay and ageing over the image. This process also spoke of the surface of the negative and the wet process of analogue photography. After developing a number of techniques by which I could selectively control the bleaching and accurately align a number of negatives, I decided to leave this technique and consider the results for a while. My conclusion was that the images were becoming too orientated towards technique and process and that the layering seemed to over "romanticise" the final image. I also felt the work was starting to look a little too much like the work of Doug and Mike Starn and I wanted something that was more objective.

I returned to the issue of content and began to photograph extremely close-up details of skin. Initially I was looking at these skin details in an objective manner, like medical samples that contained some sort of information or truth. However I also came to see them as a diffused planes of light which had specific modulations. The modulations were the wrinkles, blotches, scars and veins which seemed to operate as phenomena of light. As such the body seemed to be devoid of any specific identity of a particular individual, rather these images suggested the general or universal and could be seen as ephemeral and transient.

I was also interested in the symbolic interpretation of the images being derived from as little information as possible. For example, a series of wrinkles in the skin can speak of age, sadness and pathos, while the colour of the skin can speak of vitality, illness or death. I feel that the more simple the images, the more clearly they will operate within the formal structure of the work. To this end I have kept the content of my images uncomplicated, as the other elements of my work, such as the use of grainy film, clear-based transparencies and the open structures of the stands, will also contribute to the final interpretation of the content.

Fig 20   Dan Armstrong, Sky and Rock, superimposed bleached
colour negatives prints, 1993, Type C print, 50 x 60 cm.

Time table of work processes:

1992: <u>Full time study</u>

-'Hard Rubbish' - (The end to an old aesthetic.)
-Field trips for lanscapes images
-Sound recordings, tape looping, etc
-Computer imaging & Adobe Photoshop
-Square boxes, an illusory aesthetic continues
-Experiments with Fluorescent paints & U.V. lights
-SX-70 Body/land & seascapes and 'Pivot' show
-Bleached negatives and layered printing
-Printing through cellophane and other materials
-Light boxes with clear based display transparency
-Investigation and dismantling of commercial light boxes

1993: <u>Full time study</u>

-Removing the housing
-Built perspex boxes
-Feild trips and studio photographing
-Wrapping images directly onto tubes
-Experiments with different colour tubes
-Wall mounted components and hanging images
-The 'Descent' exhibition, images printed onto
 display transparency
-Photographing close up details of body, sky and water
-Experiments with fine grain and large grain films

1994: <u>part-time study second semester only</u>

-Field trips for landscape images
-Studio photographing of body details
-Sandwiching images between glass and perspex
-Design and build small stands and clamps
-Design and build large stands and hanging frames
-Print final images onto display transparency
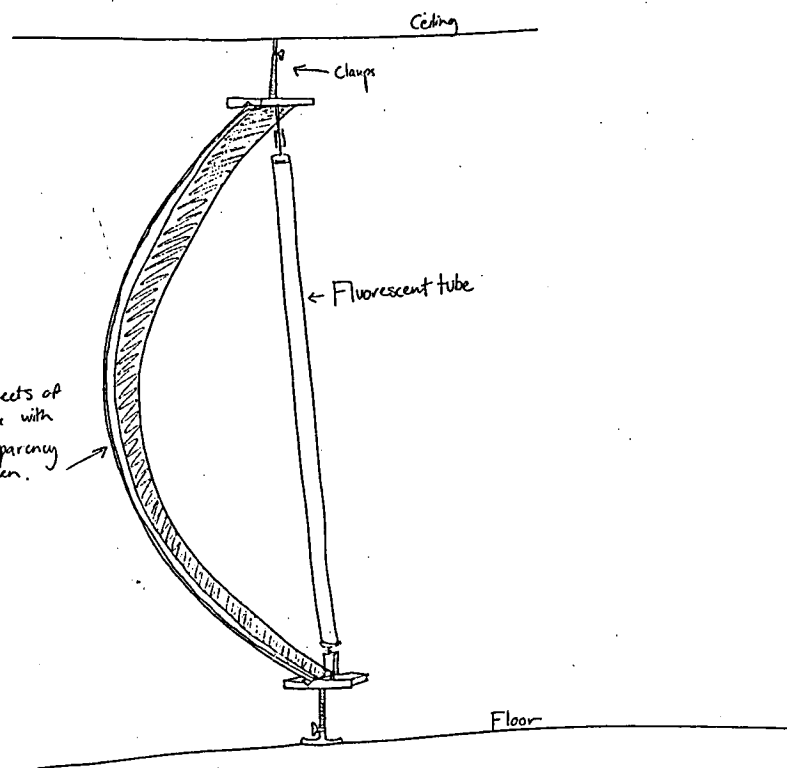-Install final work in the Plimsoll Gallery

<u>Sketches for the final work.</u>

I have included some sketches which I made during the second semester of 1994. I find it useful to sketch out ideas so that I have a record of them. The sketches are only one step in the development of the work and the final pieces have evolved from these, although some pieces remain very close to what was planned.
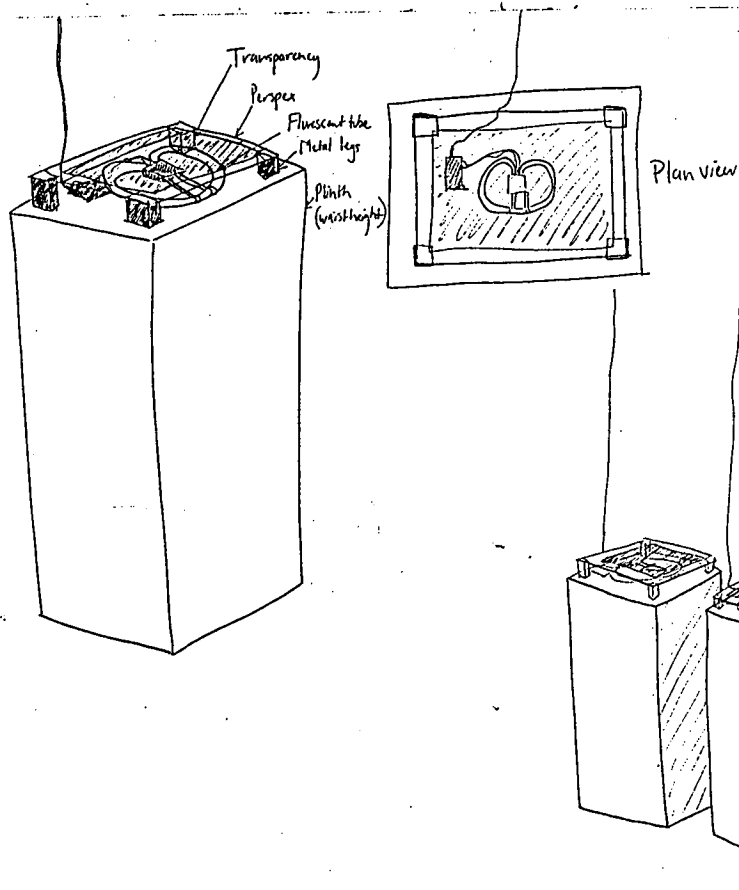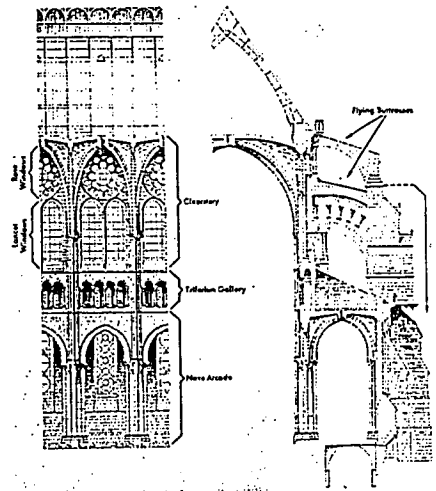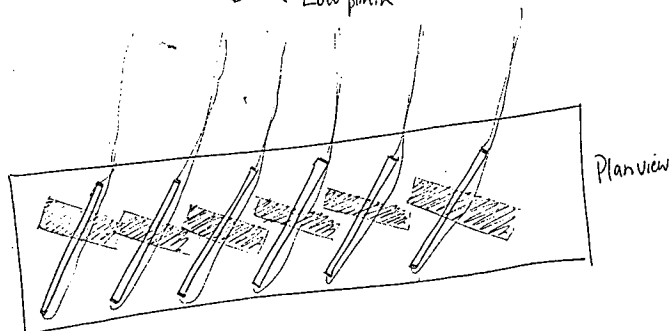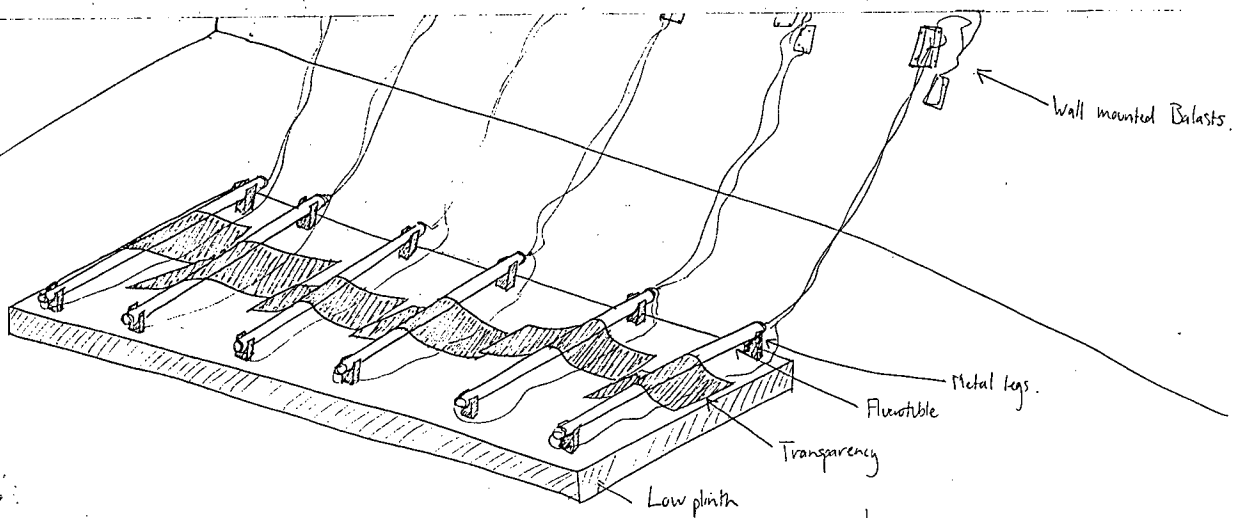
Transparency

Glass

Fluorescent tube.

Metal Frame.

Sky

Suspension wires

Skin on front,
cloud sequence and sky on back.

...ane
...ed to
...board

...scent tubes
transparency suspended in front of tubes and back board.

Front transparency

Back view

Black plane with small transparency details cut through.

↑ Transparency

Back +
...ne supporting
...no-tubes?

Ceiling

← Clamps

← Fluorescent tube

...eets of
... with
...parency
...en.

Skin or water image on transparency.

Rose
Window

Clerestory

Lancet
Window

Triforium Gallery

Nave Arcade

Flying Buttresses

Floor

Transparency

Perspex

Fluorescent tube

Metal legs

Plinth
(wristheight)

Plan view

Skin/body parts, long exposures.

Fluorescent tube

← Suspension lines

← transparency

Black anodized aluminium

Box open at back to allow light from tube to illuminate transparency from corner + walls.

Plan view

← suspended transparency

← metal form containing fluoro tube.

← wall.

← Wall mounted Balasts

Metal legs.

Fluoro tube

Transparency

Low plinth

Plan view
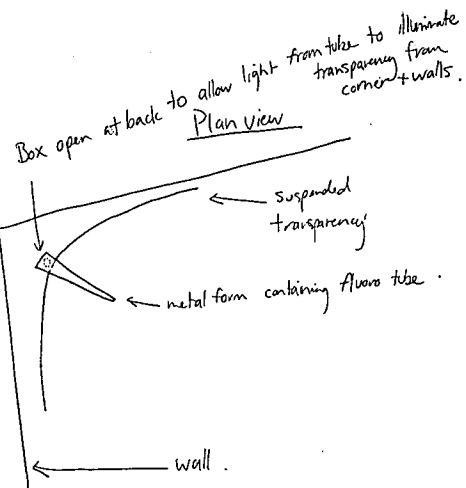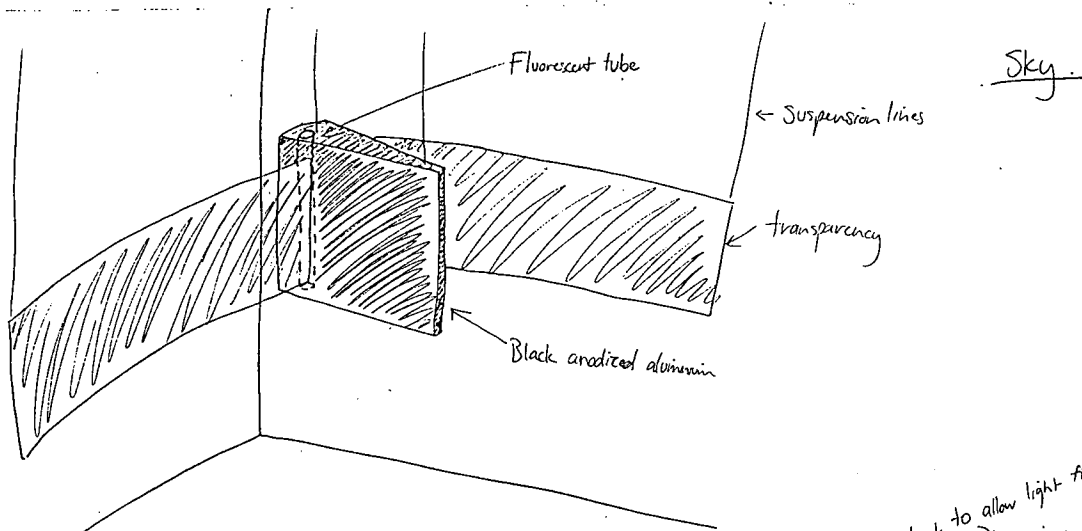
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Appendix 1: Affinities and Influences.

During the course of my studies I collected quotes and images from the writings and illustrations of other artists. I would often pin these to the wall of my studio or keep them in my work book. The inspiration derived from such items has been important to me. Occasionally the images or statements would influence my work directly, other times they would diffuse into my thoughts over a period of time, influencing my practice in more subtle ways. It was also just a matter of enjoying what someone else has said or done.

The following illustrations and quotes are selected from that collection.

Illustration 1   'No'. and 'Bad Goods' by Jeff Wall. My use of the medium of luminous photography is very different from Jeff Wall's however his work and writings are very inspirational to me. I am particularly interested in his unification of content (political and social comment) and the (concealed) materiality of the electrical components. (Metaphor for power in capitalism.)

Illustration 2   'The Painter of Space Hurls Himself into the Void!'
by Yves Kline.

I think Kline was beautifully mad. His vision inspires me, his desire for transcendence. I like this photomontage very much, it reminds me of those U.F.O. images, a fabricated vision of what one desires to be true.

Quote:
To the eye it [the sky] is an inverted goblet, the inside of a sapphire basin, perfect beauty in shape and colour. To the mind, it is immensity: but even the eye feels as if it were [able] to look through with [a] dim sense of the non-resistance - it is not exactly the feeling given to the organ by solid and limited things, [but] the eye feels that the limitation is in its own power, not in the object. ......

......The sight of a profound sky is, of all impressions, the closest to a feeling. It is more a feeling

than a visual thing, or, rather, it is the definitive fusion, the complete union of feeling and sight.

Samual Taylor Coleridge,
Cited by Gaston Bachelard, Air and
Dreams, Texas, 14 ed, 1983

Illustrations 3 to 6   Works by: Mike and Doug Starn, Robert Frank, Joan Brassil and Peter Kennedy.

All these pieces engage not only the materiality of the photography, but also with other materials such as perspex, fluorescent lights and metal stands and frames. They also involve transparent images and allow the viewer to engage with a three dimensional aesthetic.

Illustrations 7 & 8   Jan Dibbets and Graeme Hare.

I am interested in the structural approach to the medium and the resulting abstractions in the works of these artists. I particularly like Greame Hares enlargements and grainy details, which obscure the representational nature of the medium. The variations of size within the simple geometric perimeters of his 'Horizontal Installation' also interest me. The images are like "slices" or "samples" from realty, something which I am trying to construct within my work.

Illustration 9   'Information', by Bill Viola.

It is not so much the image but the way that it was arrived at. I like the lateral approach; the idea of chance and mistakes being creative events. These are things which are constantly happening. This image reminds me to look into my work and the things that I reject as "unsuccessful", and to rediscover. In photographing the images of sky and water, I am constantly selecting from what is available at the time. My control of the form and lighting of the sky or a waterfall is quite limited. When I have my "working" prints, I study them closely and reselect the details that will form the final images, often at this stage I see new things that are better than what I originally intended.

<u>Illustration 10</u>   Yellow sky? by J.M.W. Turner.

I have for a long time admired Turners luminous and reductive images. My favourites being his later works which I find innovativly abstract. The representational reduction and the expressive depiction of light are qualities that I find inspiring and have influenced my approach to photography. Interestingly enough it is believed (though not well supported) that Turner in his later years may have been influenced by photography. In a latter to 'The Times' published on the 15th of August 1929, Walter Sickert referred to Turner's studio as having been 'crammed with negatives'
(See: Aaron Scarf, Art and Photography, London, 1974, 338)

Quote - On the theory of intraocular fire:

Such fire as has the property, not of burning, but of yielding a gentle light, they contrived should become the proper body of each day. For the pure fire within us is akin to this, and they caused it to flow through the eyes, making the whole fabric of the eye-ball, and especially the central part (the pupil), smooth and close in texture, so as to let nothing pass that is of coarser stuff, but only fire of this description to filter through pure by itself. Accordingly whenever there is daylight round about, the visual current issues forth, like to like and coalesces with it (i.e., daylight) and is formed into a single homogeneous body in a direct line with the eyes, in whatever quarter the stream issuing from within strikes upon any object it encounters outside. So the whole, because of its homogeneity, is similarly affected and passes on the motions of anything it comes in contact with or that comes into contact with it, throughout the whole body, to the soul, and thus causes the sensation we call seeing.

Plato, from his theory in the *Timaeus*
See: David C. Lindberg, <u>Theories Of Vision From Al-Kindi To Kepler,</u> Chicago, 1976, 5

I am fascinated by the belief in intraocular fire that originated with the early Atomists and reached its full development as a theory with Plato in the third century A.D.. (The concept of sight as an image which issues forth from the eyes is analogous to the image from a luminous images streaming forth into the environment that it occupies.)
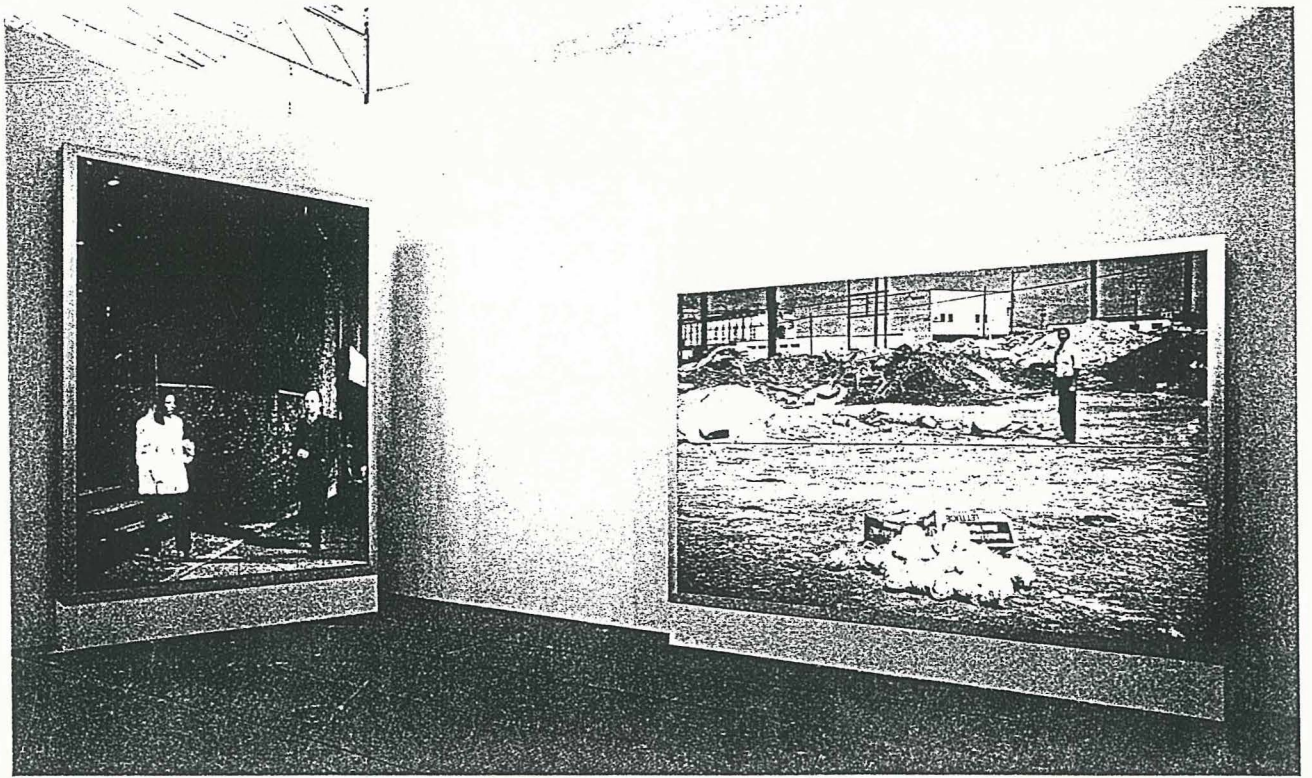
Illustration No 1   No. (left) and Bad Goods (right) Jeff Wall. 1984.

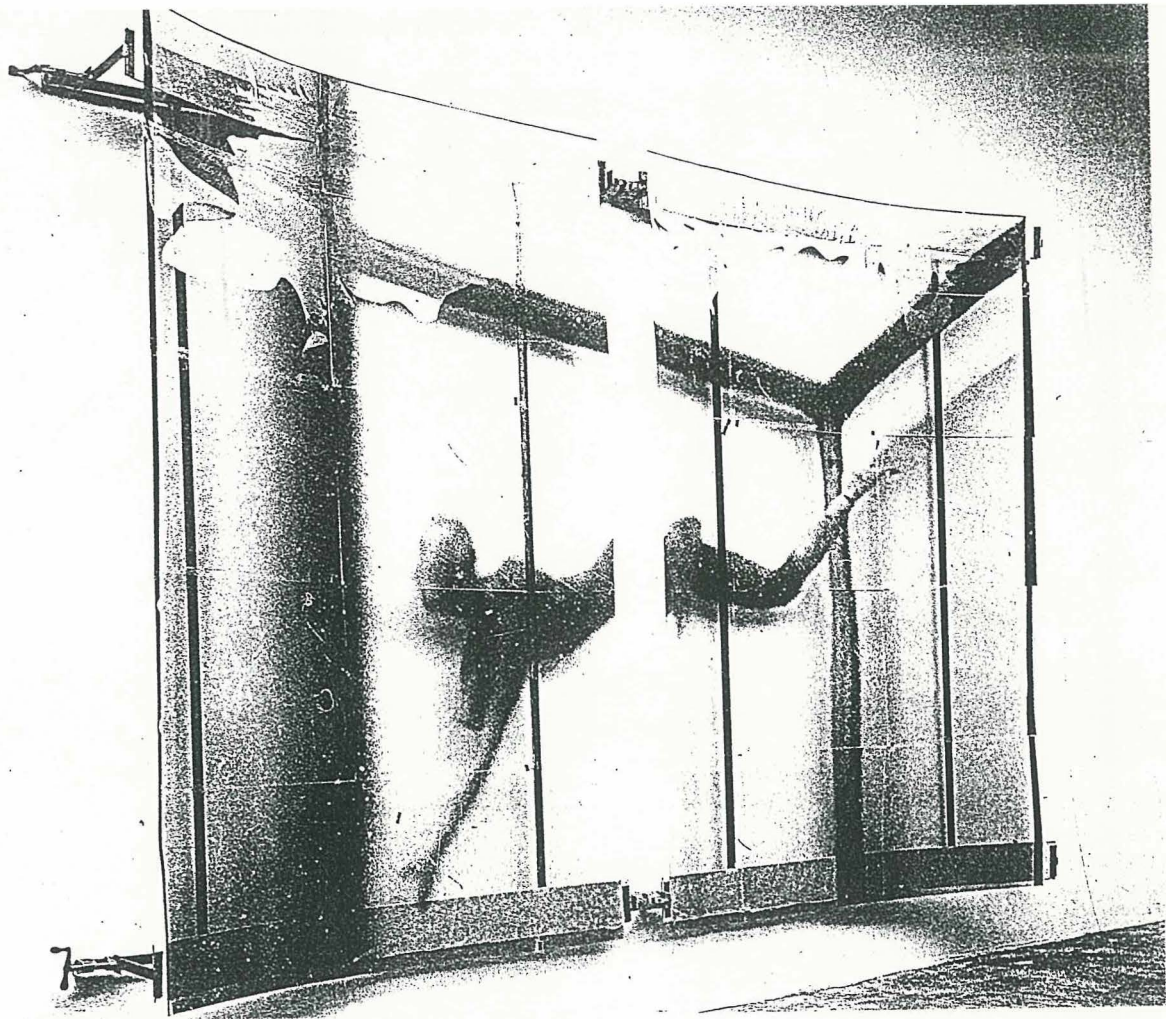'Illustration No 2   The Painter of Space Hurls Himself into the Void! Yves Kline. 1960.

Illustration No 3   <u>Concave Bull Jumper</u> Mike and Doug Starn. 1989.
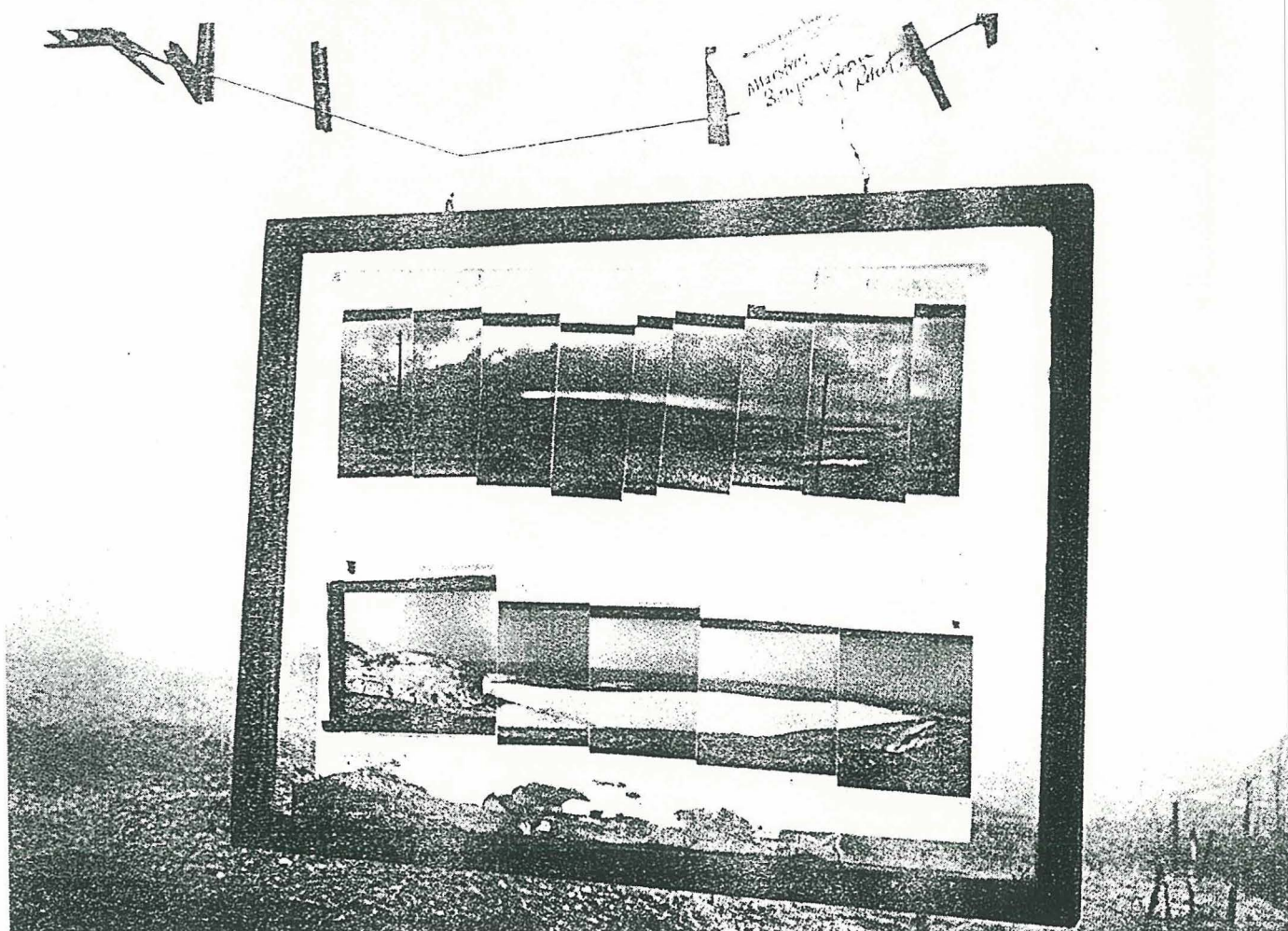

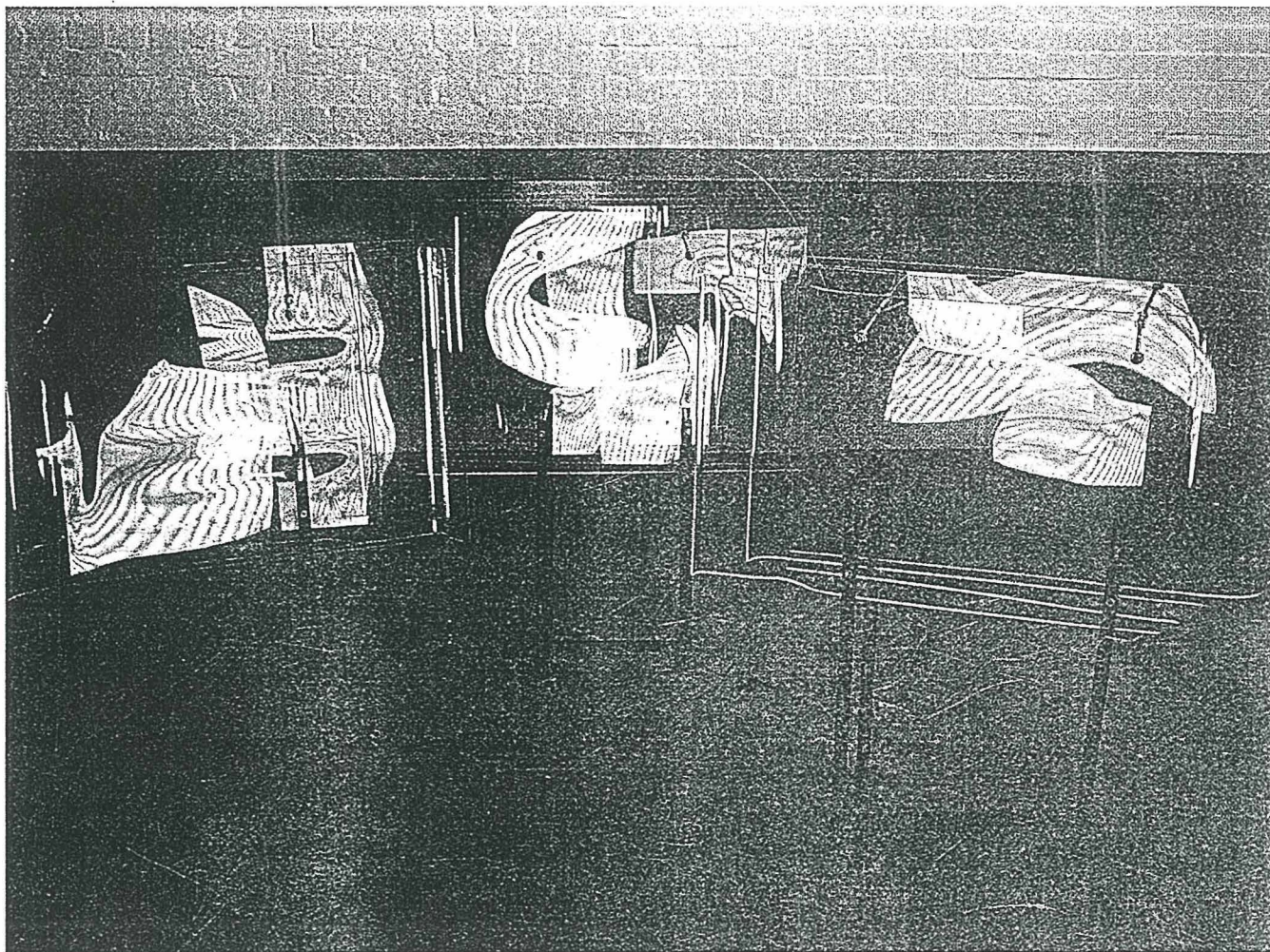Illustration No 4   <u>Good Morning Maestro</u>, Robert Frank, 1974

Illustration No 5   <u>Kimberley stranger gazing</u>, Joan Brassil, 1988
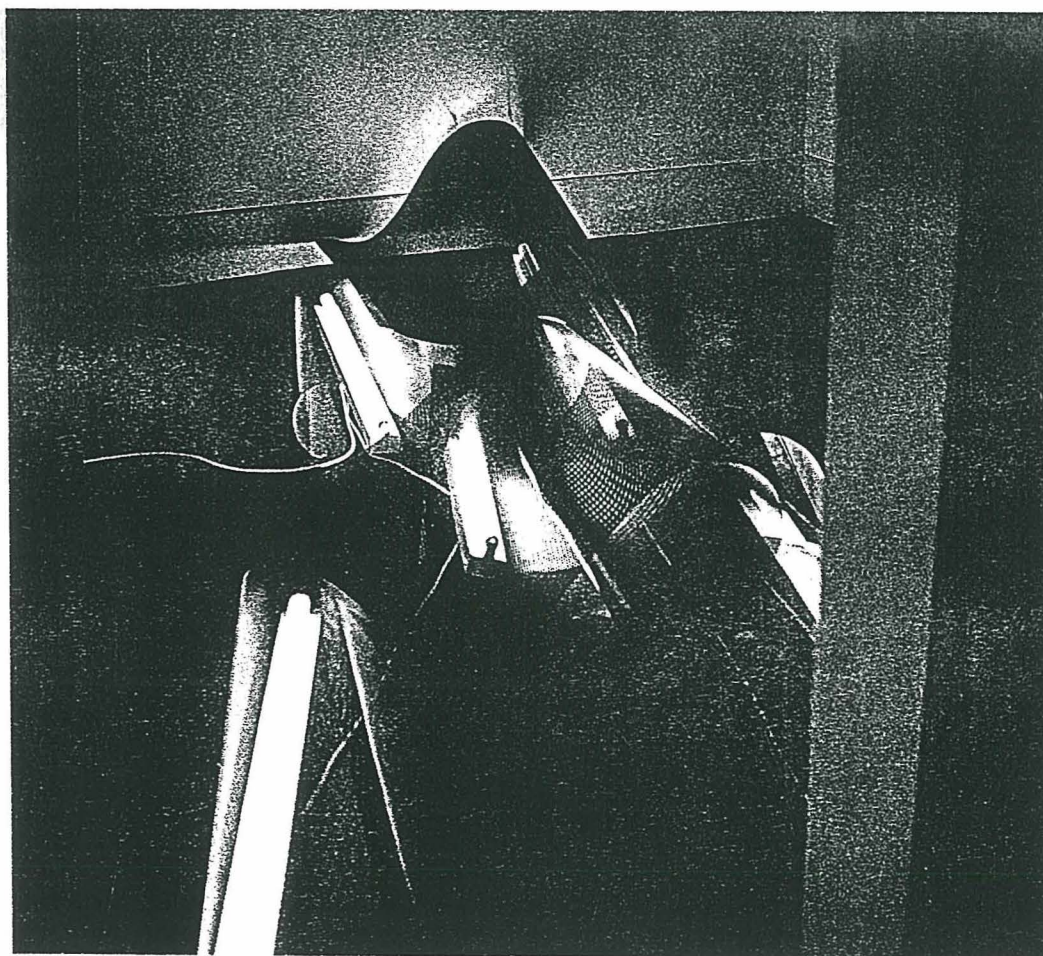

Illustration No 6   <u>Floor Piece</u>, Peter Kennedy, Originally 1970, reinstalled

1993, for the Luminaries exhibition at Monash University Gallery, 1993
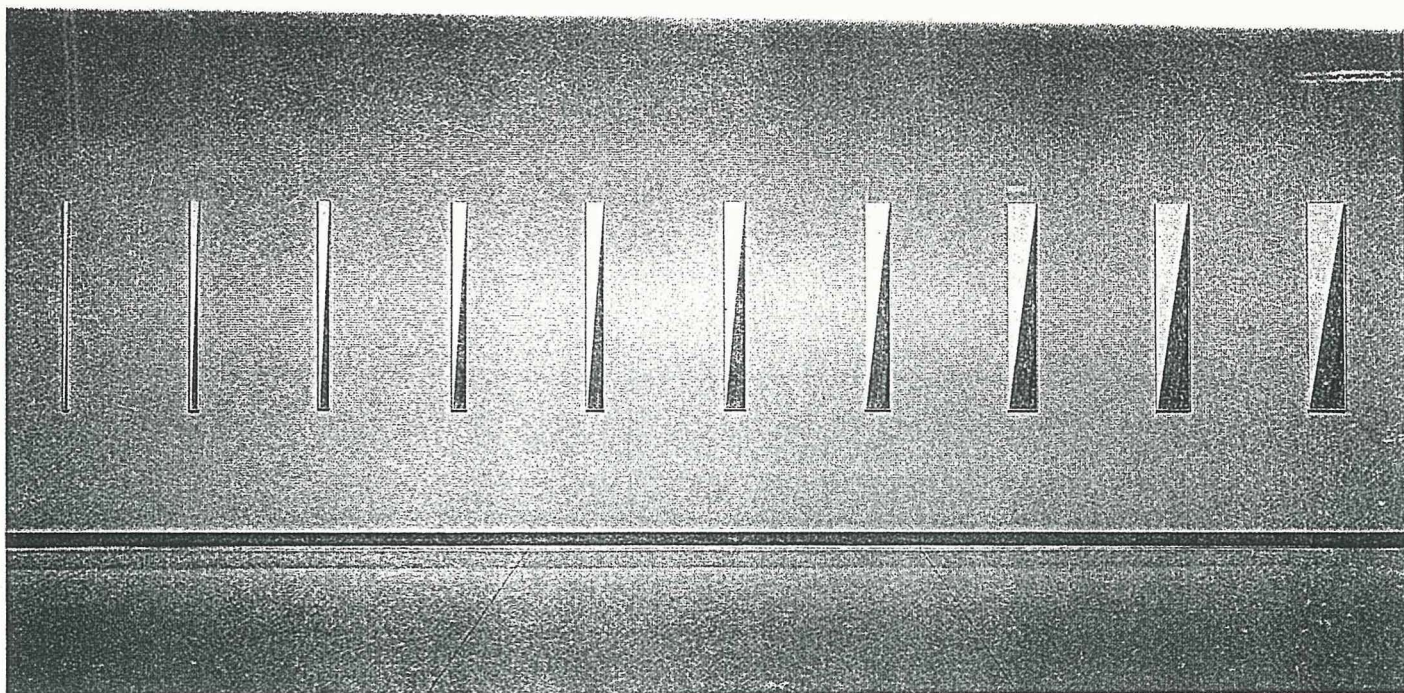
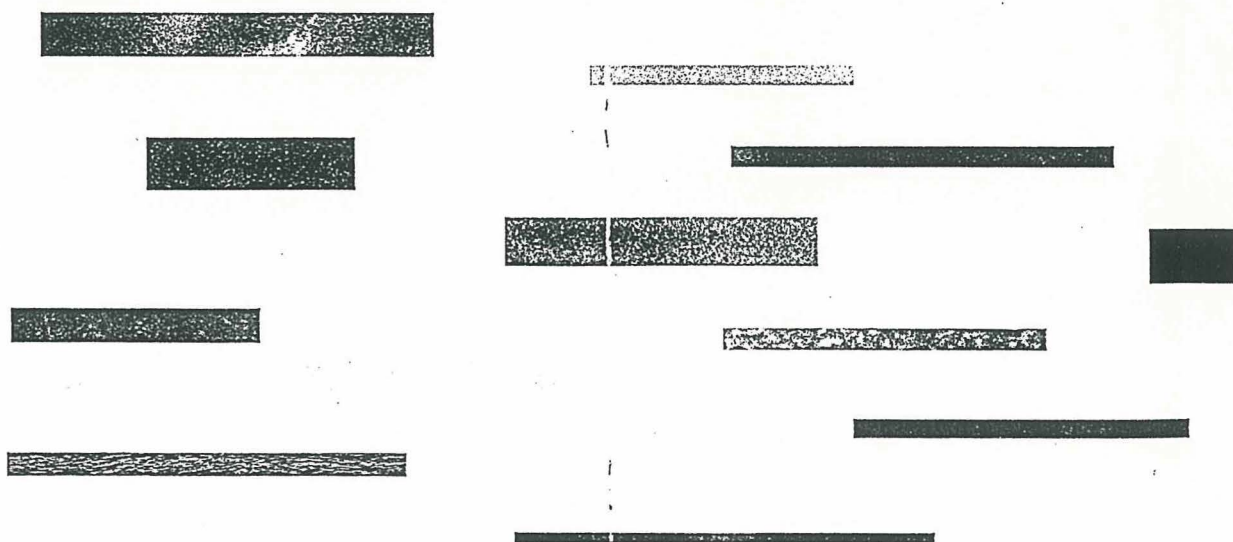Illustration No 7   <u>Horizon 1°- 10°Land</u> Jan Dibbets. 1973

Illustration No 8   <u>Horizontal Installation</u> Graeme Hare, 1992
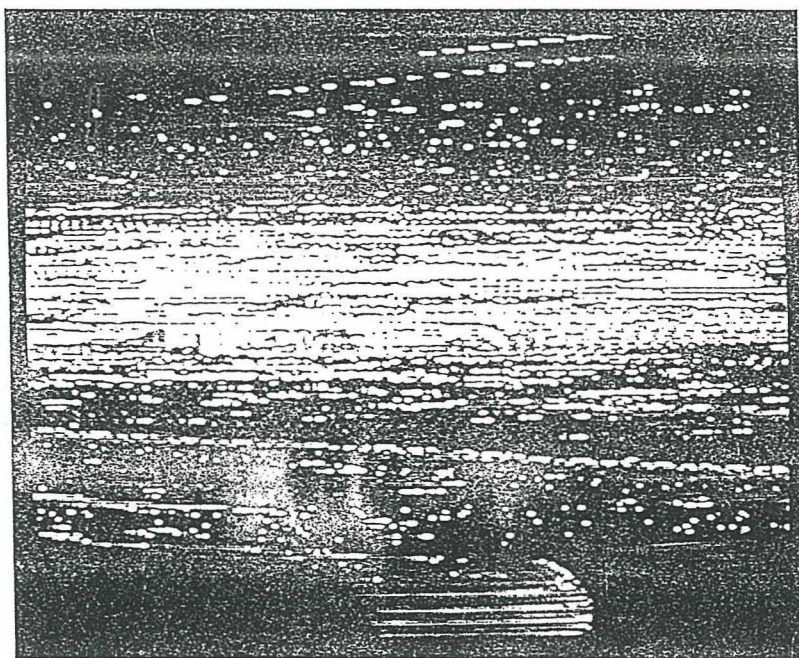
Illustration No 9   Information Bill Viola, 1973

'Information is the manifestation of an aberrant electronic non signal passing through the video switcher in a normal colour TV studio....It is the result of a technical mistake made while working in the studio late one night' - Bill Viola 'Installations and Videotapes' The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1988, 25
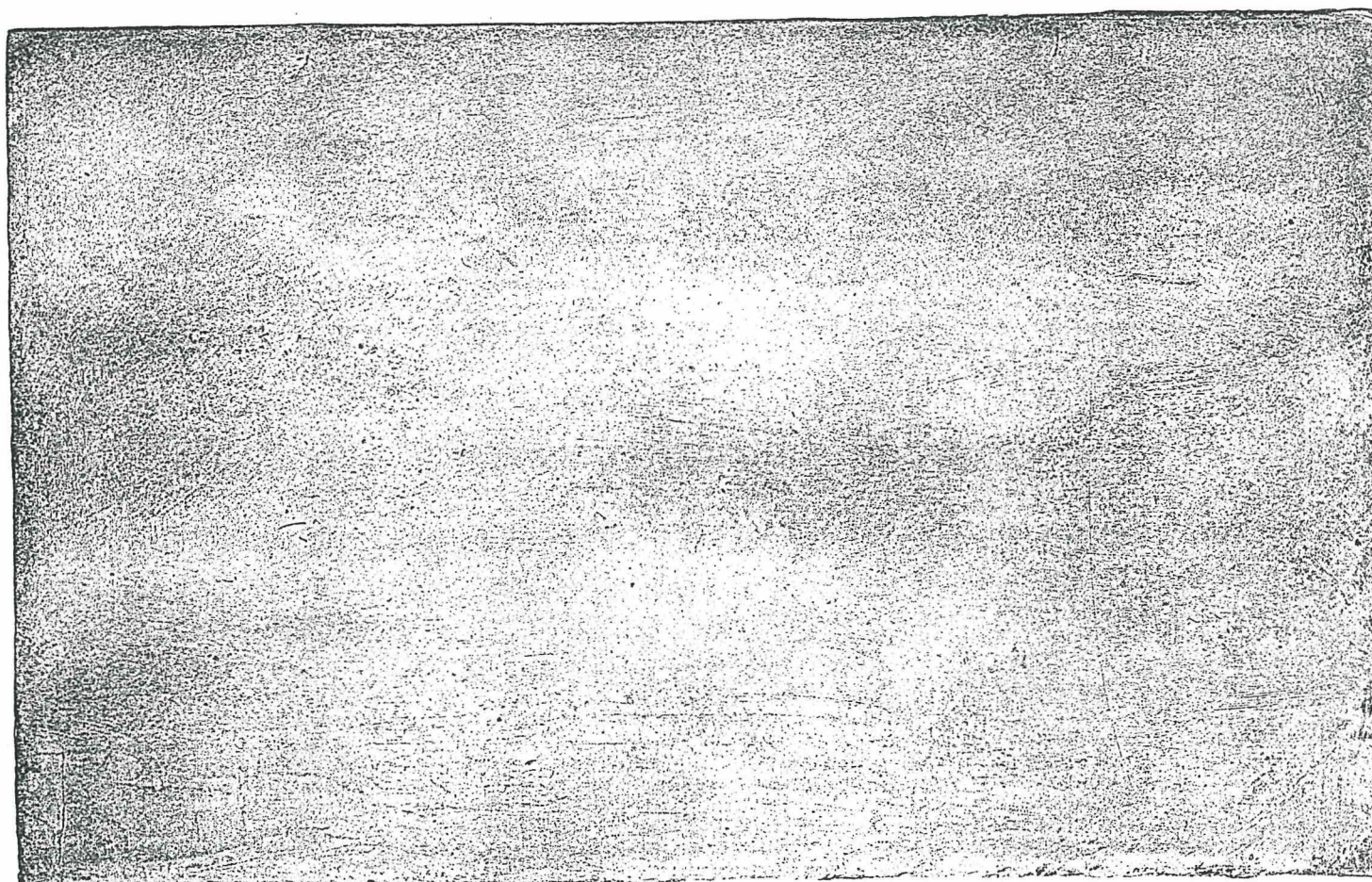

Illustration No 10   Yellow Sky? J.M.W. Turner, 1840-45?

Appendix 2:

**Documentation of the practical submission
Plimsoll Gallery - February 1995**