

Breaking Objects:
Activating Artworks Toward New Modes of Thought

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Abstract

This research has emerged from the intersection between two ongoing preoccupations: how to exhibit spatiotemporal art practices in such a way that the artwork remains *active* as opposed to *static* or *on display*; and, an engagement with the knowledge that reductive thinking about things in the world—from complex and interrelated to simplified and separated out—is part of the human condition.

In order to better understand these oppositional factors and how they operate both theoretically and practically, I have come to define a number of key terms that I use to describe different modes of thinking alongside our capacity to flip or switch between them. These terms—*Object*, *broken Object*, and *an oscillation in thinking*—also describe the research methodology I have used in my practice-based research.

I have developed this methodology across my literature research and dissertation by looking closely at what factors contribute to a mode of perception where things in the world appear to be *active*, *in motion* or *complex*. I have reviewed how this mode of perception might relate to and operate within spatiotemporal artworks and exhibition contexts by considering the physiological, psychological and philosophical factors that contribute to how we perceive the world, and what we think is *going on*.

However, I have also considered factors that influence a more abstract mode of thinking about the world; one whereby we reduce, condense or separate-out complex and interdependent phenomena. This abstract mode of thinking has philosophical, sociological and political as well as physiological bases; all of which influence the way we perceive the world around us. I have considered one particular mode of thinking, **Object-Thinking** as being dominant in the West, and throughout my dissertation I reflect upon the possible socio-political consequences of this.

In my creative, practice-based research I have applied the methodology of *making* and *breaking Objects* as well as proposing methods that might facilitate an *oscillation in thinking* across several research outcomes including: *Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extended)* (2015),

The Possibility of Performance (2015), *Work (in Progress)* (2016), *Cross-Section* (2017), *Tool-Things* (2017), *Set Elements* (2019).

My final practice-based outcome, *No Single Thing* (2019) was exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery between the 26th February and the 1st of March 2019.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) *the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters except where indicated in the Preface,*
- (ii) *due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,*
- (iii) *the thesis is 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.*

Katherine Lee

Preface

Several projects undertaken during this research project have involved collaboration and the generous participation of others.

Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extended) (2015)

This artwork involved collaboration with Andrew Sainsbury, who developed three lighting components for this work in discussion with the artist.

Even a Stopped Clock (2017)

This artwork involved collaboration with Andrew Sainsbury who developed a lighting scene for this project in discussion with the artist.

Cross-Section (2017)

Thank you to Arabella Frahn-Starkie and Emma Collard for their participation in the public performance event *Cross-Section*.

Set Elements (2019)

Thank you to Arabella Frahn-Starkie for her contribution performing in *Set Elements* and to invigilator/performers: Zoe Bethell, Luke Fryer, Anika De Ruyter, Nia Johnson, Simone Nelson, Oonagh Slater and Camille Thomas. My thanks to Andrew Treloar for his work on the costumes.

No Single Thing (2019)

Thank you to Arabella Frahn-Starkie for performing in the works *Set/Reset* and *Here and There* and the generous participation of the performers *In Vigil*: Nick Archer, Beth Arnold, Brigit Griffiths, Melanie Irwin, Kari McInnery-McRae, Camille Thomas, Robert Downie.

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I wish to pay my respects and acknowledge that this research was conducted on the unceded ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri and Boonwuruung people. I acknowledge the First Australians as the traditional custodians of the land on which I have conducted this research, and whose cultures are among the oldest living cultures in human history. I pay my respect to the Elders of the community and extend my recognition to their descendants. I wish to acknowledge that the creative practices, technologies and knowledge held by the Wurundjeri and Boonwuruung people have been developed over thousands of years. I also wish to acknowledge that Object-Thinking has had a destructive impact on these knowledge systems, and to declare my research has been conducted with a sense of respect and acknowledgement that Indigenous knowledge systems vastly outdate those I describe in my dissertation.

Untangling my ideas around Objects and broken Objects has taken four solid years of mind mapping. Anyone who knows me will have seen me grappling to separate out the interwoven nature of my thoughts and the role they have played in the constitution of my artworks onto larger and larger pieces of paper. I have many people to thank for their unlimited patience in helping me to apply structure to my thoughts.

I could not have done this without the intellectual and moral support of Andrew Sainsbury. Saying *thank you* does not even begin to express my feelings of gratitude, nor the respect I have for your knowledge and understanding of our shared interest in abstraction (in all its forms).

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Thanks for the support of my co-supervisors—Dr Tessa Laird and before her, Dr Toby Juliff—who were so generous in their reading of my work and their capacity to see my

fuzzy logic applied through the lens of theory, to art. I feel very lucky to have worked with you both.

Thank you to the VCA School of Art for the opportunity to complete this project, and to the staff at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery who supported the exhibition of the practice-based component of my research. Thank you to the technical help and friendship of Mark Friedlander and Brigit Ryan who made possible the research outcome *No Single Thing* in 2019.

Thank you to the outstanding artists and dancers who performed in some of my projects. In *Cross-Section* (2016) I would like to thank Emma Collard and Arabella Frahn-Starkie. In the project *Set Elements* (2019) my acknowledgement and thanks go to Zoe Bethell, Luke Fryer, Anika De Ruyter, Nia Johnson, Simone Nelson, Oonagh Slater and Camille Thomas. In *No Single Thing* (2019) I thank Kari McInnery-McRae, Bridget Griffiths, Camille Thomas, Nick Archer, Robert Downie, Melanie Irwin, Beth Arnold, Nia Johnson.

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NB: Please note any images without attribution are by the artist.

Introduction

Background

This research project has emerged from an ongoing preoccupation I have had that lies at the intersection between two key concerns. The first: how to exhibit spatiotemporal¹ art practices in such a way that the artwork maintains a sense that it is *active* as opposed to *static* or *on display*? And the second (conversely): what methods can be used in making and exhibiting art works that engage the fact we often *do* reduce our thinking about things in the world from complex and interrelated to simplified and separated-out?

These concerns have preoccupied me since my first experiences of making and exhibiting spatiotemporal artworks. On one hand, I have looked for ways to maintain a sense of contingency² within the elements of an installation and between the viewer and the artwork. On the other hand, I have considered ways to reference the social, psychological and political manifestations of more rigid and abstract modes of thinking through the forms and objects that make up my sculptural and spatial arts practice.

In order to better understand these oppositional factors and how they operate both theoretically and practically I have examined closely what might contribute to a mode of perception where things in the world appear to be active, in motion or complex. I have reviewed how this mode of perception might relate to and operate within spatiotemporal artworks and exhibition contexts by considering the physiological, psychological and philosophical factors that contribute to how we perceive the world, and what we think is *going on*.

¹ By spatiotemporal I mean spatial and time-based practices such as sculptural objects, installations, moving image, performance and sound artworks.

² By contingent I mean from the Latin *contingere* 'to happen': A) Liable to happen or not; of uncertain occurrence or incidence. B) Incidental (*to*). C) Happening or coming by chance; not fixed by necessity or fate; accidental, fortuitous. D) Subject to or at the mercy of accidents; liable to chance and change. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v "Contingent, Adj. And N," accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40248?redirectedFrom=contingent>.

However, it has also been necessary to examine closely the factors that might influence a more abstract³ mode of thinking about the world; one whereby we reduce, condense or separate-out complex and interdependent phenomena. In regard to this aspect of my research I have considered a range of forms this kind of abstraction can take philosophically, socially and politically; as well as literally, including the way we perceive objects, spaces and systems. I have considered one particular mode of thinking that I call *Object-Thinking* as being dominant in the West, and throughout my dissertation I reflect upon the possible socio-political consequences of this.

Finally, it has been necessary to find ways to reconcile these oppositional and contradictory perspectives. This has been important in two ways: theoretically, to gain a better understanding of how and why we might switch between using both complex and abstract modes of thinking; and practically, in order to reveal possible methodologies that might help articulate these oppositional concepts within my spatiotemporal artworks and reference both of these perspectives, at once.

Making and Breaking Objects as a Method of Practice

In my research I have come to define a number of key terms that I use to describe different modes of thinking alongside the capacity to flip or switch between them. These terms also describe the methodology I have used in my practice-based research.

One key term that I have coined is *Object*. I use the capitalisation of the word ‘Object’ to refer to a specific mode of thinking whereby we perceive something in the world in an abstract way. For example, when we are thinking of something as an Object we might perceive it to exist fully formed, rather than being the result of durational or complex processes.⁴ As I will expand further throughout this dissertation, perceiving something as an Object is not restricted to any particular kind of entity. Objects can be objects, (chairs

³ There are many relevant uses of the term abstract in relation to my project, however when I refer to abstraction in relation to Objects or Object-Thinking I mean it according to the following definition: “The action of considering something in the abstract, independently of its associations or attributes; the process of isolating properties or characteristics common to a number of diverse objects, events, etc., without reference to the peculiar properties of particular examples or instances.” This is opposed to:

“Something considered or expressed in abstract terms; something which exists only as an idea or in theory; an abstract concept or idea.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, “*Abstraction, N.*” Accessed 20.04.2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/766?redirectedFrom=abstraction>

⁴ An example might be the way we commonly perceive packaged meat in the supermarket separate to the animal it comes from, or timber furniture as separate to trees.

or tables); things (trees, apples); people (the Prime Minister or your parents); they can be concepts (time) or even beliefs (truth, right, wrong, or God). Objects can appear to be Objects temporarily, or our perspective of an Object can be enduring. What is common to my use of the term Object is that it refers to a mode of thinking that is abstract.

However, I argue it is possible to *break* Objects. Following my terminology, to *break an Object* is simply to reveal (momentarily or otherwise) an expanded perspective or way of thinking about an Object; for example, by showing how complex processes have formed that Object, or by revealing an expanded potential beyond the Objects perceived ubiquity. It is important to note that to break an Object, is not a negative act. On the contrary, to break away from thinking of something as an Object can be a liberating expansion in habitual or normative patterns of thought. Breaking Objects can also be humorous, as the disruption potentially shifts and changes long held conceptions about Objects. I explore throughout the dissertation, to break out of this habitual way of thinking can also be an act of resistance.

The focus of this research is not to advocate for one way of thinking over another. Rather, it is the capacity we have to flip or shift between different modes of thinking that I am most interested in. I have called this shift *an oscillation in thinking* and, as I argue, we have oscillations in our thinking all the time.

These concepts—making and breaking Objects, along with creating an oscillation in thinking—have formed the basis of my research methodology. They are informed by a review of literature across a broad range of areas, including: philosophy, anthropology and the cognitive and physical sciences; as well as through the study of existing artworks, and historical art movements. I have also applied them to my practice-based research, which has influenced the form, media and exhibition contexts that I have used, each of which works to test the making and breaking of Objects in different ways. These considerations have generated a particular vocabulary of forms and materials in my sculptural and spatial practice in order to make (or at least make reference to) commonly perceived Objects, along with the contexts that might lead to their creation.

An underlying concern within my research is the *activation* of an artwork. It is important to point out that I consider breaking Objects (even momentarily) and creating an oscillation in thinking, to be forms of *activation*. Rather than changing the external condition of an Object, I am more interested in agitating or complicating the perception of *what is going on*, what the Object is *capable of*, or how it *fits into the world*. Therefore, throughout this research project I have looked for strategies within my art practice that might encourage a viewer to consider an artwork as an active set of conditions subject to change, rather than something fixed, static or *on display*.

This possible shift in perception addresses broader concerns within arts practice about the ontological conditions, or operating principles within an artwork being exhibited. By naming these ontologies and identifying what supports or forecloses their operation in an exhibition context, I hope to know more about methods that facilitate an audience's perception of an artwork as something that is *happening*. This shift may mean questions such as "*what does it represent?*" become "*what is going on?*" In my research, this is reflected by an interest in indexicality and representation; and to a preoccupation with performativity. Although these perceptual conditions are described in relation to encounters with artworks, throughout my dissertation I link this exploration to the way we orient ourselves in the world generally, along with possible socio-political consequences of this understanding.

It is important to note that Objects exist as constructions of the perception of the subject, rather than being inherent to the object itself. Therefore, whether something is an Object and whether it has been broken remains subjective. Rather than declare a particular Object to be broken or claim that I have changed it in any way, my research has instead sought to identify a number of influencing factors that are acting on our perception of Objects and broken Objects, and to develop strategies within an art practice that might set up the conditions for an oscillation in thinking to occur. This means the possibility exists that audiences of my work may not perceive that anything is *happening* or *has happened*—at all. In some cases, the only distinction between two states (for example something *in-process* versus something *complete*) is our perception of it being one way or the other, rather than any inherent characteristics in the phenomenon itself.⁵ Rather than considering this to be a problem, I have addressed this phenomenon using particular methodologies of practice

⁵ See Appendix One: Oscillations in Thinking.

and literature research that similarly diminishes a dominant anthropocentric position. I argue that *not seeing* is as significant as *seeing*; it is the *seeing* and *not seeing*, along with the ensuing complications this generates, that form the basis of my research.

Research Questions and Contribution of the Research

The discourse of modern art has long since shifted from its view of sculpture as “...objects of display in galleries and museums”.⁶ However, despite the rich history of artists working throughout the twentieth century to shift our perception of art works as simply *objects on display*, the conditions we encounter artworks within (namely galleries), as well as our own habits of perception, seem to stubbornly re-constitute them as such unless strategies are continually put into place by both artists and exhibition makers.⁷ Central to this conundrum is the fact that many times sculptural forms *are* static objects.

This research is important because our capacity to perceive something as complex and active—or not—shows that we operate with different modes of thinking. These modes of thinking are active in the context and phenomenon of exhibiting artworks, as well as in the way we perceive the forms, spaces and social conditions of everyday life. These everyday environments—along with our capacity to tune in and out of perceiving their complexity—underpin the kinds of encounters and formal conditions I am drawn to and which are reflected in my artwork.

This orientation has shaped the literature that I have reviewed for this research as I sought to understand physiological, psychological and philosophical knowledge about how we perceive the world around us; and helped me to consider how the factors that shape and influence the way we operate in the world are mirrored by the kinds of form and spaces that we create. As a result, my dissertation identifies a particular kind of spatiotemporal practice that ties together how the shifting nature of our perception can be considered in a socio-political context, and draws on frames of reference common to sociology, anthropology, and political theory.

⁶ Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination; Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). 1.

⁷ By which I mean to include curators, exhibition designers, gallery directors and arts professionals in general.

I ask:

What are the implications for our tendency towards Object-thinking? And: How can spatiotemporal artworks work to reveal these tendencies?

However, as I have described above, it is possible and common for us to shift our perspective away from Object-Thinking and activate greater degrees of complexity in our thinking.

I also ask:

What factors might cause a shift between different modes of thinking?

And: How might these contribute to a methodology of practice that helps position an artwork as active?

Theory and Practice Informing the Research

Perceptual dilemmas are not new to artists—sculptors, in particular. Marcel Duchamp could be said to have made the first broken Object when he exhibited the ready-made *Fountain* in 1917. Likewise, the desire to shift the viewers focus from the art Object to encompass a perception of surrounding space, time and context was well chronicled throughout the 1960s and 1970s by both artists and critics.⁸ Seminal texts include Rosalind Krauss's *Sculpture in The Expanded Field* (1979) and Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973) alongside the writings of artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Robert Smithson. All stipulated that a general shift had occurred in the practice of sculpture; that what was now being put forth as sculpture was no longer the historical notion of a representation (a sculpture of *something else*) but that instead sculpture, along with the conditions in which it was situated, *was* the thing itself.⁹

⁸ In *The Sculptural Imagination* (2000) Alex Potts describes the history of this conundrum in the practice of sculpture going much further back to the eighteenth century whereby it was observed that sculptures limitation to the “rendering of fixed shapes” made painting a much more suitable medium with which to “capture transitory appearances.” See Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination; Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, 3.

⁹ Robert Morris, *Continuous Project, Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: MIT Press, 1993) and, Rosalind E. Krauss “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” *October* Vol. 8. Spring, (1979): 30-44.

Artworks associated with the art movement Minimalism claimed to include the role of the perceiver as a component of the artwork. By incorporating the viewer's experience as part of the work itself, even a *static* work was located within an active and temporal framework—that of the viewers.¹⁰ This background, along with the writing and artwork of Morris and Smithson have been instrumental in my consideration and reflection upon the various factors that affect audiences perception of artworks both within the context of the white cube gallery space, but also through methods these artists employed to escape it.¹¹ This is because both artists acknowledged the abstracting influence that exhibition spaces can have on the perception of artworks; I discuss this in greater depth later in this dissertation.

Also of significant influence to this project have been artists associated with the art movement Arte Povera.¹² This is because a number of artists associated with Arte Povera employed strategies in their practice that resulted in works having contingent qualities, despite the fact they were often still exhibited in traditional gallery spaces, (and now museums). In particular the works of Jannis Kounellis, Giovanni Anselmo and Giuseppe Penone have influenced my thinking in relation to the perception of sculptural artwork being *live* or *active*. While most of the Arte Povera artists were said to share a preoccupation with contingency,¹³ Kounellis and Anselmo both utilise particular strategies I have found particularly relevant within the form of their work. For example, Kounellis used live fish, horses, parrots, gas flames and candles, and in the case of Anselmo, a head of fresh lettuce.

In developing my performance and choreographic work, I have been influenced by the artists associated with The Judson Church Dance Theatre, an experimental group of artists and dancers working in New York City in the 1960s.¹⁴ In particular I have been influenced

¹⁰ See Robert Morris Notes on Sculpture I,II & III in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1993), Hal Foster “The Crux of Minimalism” in *The Return of the Real* (1996), Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in The Expanded Field” (1979) and Alex Potts *The Sculptural Imagination* (2000)—in particular, “The Performance of Viewing” (235-268).

¹¹ The rejection of representation for Smithson culminated in a large body of outdoor works and Smithson declaring that working in and with nature allowed for a “...physical rather than a representational condition.” Robert Morris, *Continuous Project, Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: MIT Press, 1993). 28-33. See also Andrew Inkpin’s essay “The Complexities of ‘Abstracting’ from Nature” In Paul Crowther and Isabel Wünsche, *Meanings of Abstract Art: Between Nature and Theory* (New York, London: Routledge, 2012).

¹² My interest in this movement resulted in a research trip to Michelangelo Pisotello’s Foundation Citadellarte in Biella, Italy in 2016, where I was artist in residence for 8 weeks. See Appendix Two.

¹³ Germano Celant, “Arte Povera,” *Flash Art* No. 5 (1967).

¹⁴ See Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Durham and London: Duke University

by the collaborative work between dancers and non-dancers, along with the occupation of installation artworks as a method for animating and activating work, such as developed by Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Tricia Brown and Robert Morris.¹⁵ I have been particularly interested in how these artists and dancers negotiated the presence of audiences and the gaze,¹⁶ as well as works that were performed outdoors and in public space, such as Tricia Brown's *Roof Piece* (1971) and Stuart Sherman's *Spectacle Series* (c.,1970s). The legacy of work from this time continues to influence a great deal of contemporary practice, including the prevalence of dance work within art galleries which I have also followed closely throughout my research project in the local context as well as internationally.¹⁷

Finally, Robert Smithson's and Nancy Holt's works have been an important precursor. Partly, it is Smithson's attitude toward the white cube gallery that has been formative, however it is also the various ways that Smithson and Holt were able to capture themselves in the very act of perceiving. For example, in photographic and video documents such as *Hotel Palenque* (1969) and *Swamp* (1969), Smithson and Holt catch and share the process of looking and making meaning, along with the possible shifts and slips that occur along the way. Holt and Smithson developed methods of practice to maintain contingency in their artworks, to show that they, the artists, were in motion, perceiving things in the world that were likewise in motion.¹⁸

Press, 1993); and *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ See Robert Morris's exhibition at the Tate in London 1971, Michael and Sylvester Compton, David, "Robert Morris," ed. The Tate Gallery (London: The Tate Gallery, 1971).

¹⁶ See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*, October Books (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2008).

¹⁷ See RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Now: Live Art for the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018); Maren Butte et al., eds., *Assign and Arrange: Methodologies of Presentiation in Art and Dance* (Berlin: Sterberg Press, 2014); RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 3rd ed. (United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson, 2011); Anne Marsh, *Performance, Ritual, Document* (Melbourne, Australia: Macmillan, 2014); Stephanie Rosenthal, ed. *Move Choreographing You: Art and Dance since the 1960s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011).

¹⁸ See Nancy Holt's film, *Pine Barrens* (1975). Holt says of this work, "Pine Barrens is concerned with evoking through film a barren wilderness in south-central New Jersey. The camera is always in motion — tracking, pivoting, and walking through the landscape. Though they are never seen in the film, the voices of the local people, the 'Pineys,' are heard relating their feelings about the land, their attitudes about city life, their myths of the area, etc..." — Nancy Holt from *Electronic Arts Intermix*, "Pine Barrens, Nancy Holt," (New York, New York 1997-2019).

Literature influencing the Research

As I have outlined briefly above, there are rich historical precedents within twentieth and twenty-first century art theory and practice that have already shifted general attitudes about what art is, what it includes, and how it is encountered. However, the fact remains that humans have perceptual tendencies that also influence how we interpret the world around us and what we think is *going on*. These perceptions are affected by sociological, psychological and physiological factors which influence the way we perceive the world *and* the way we perceive art.

In order to better understand what contributes to our perception, I have reviewed literature that sheds light on the human tendency to think about the world in abstract terms. That is, the ways in which we shift our perception of matter or object entities in the world, away from having physical and social complexity, toward a condensed and often reduced version that I call *Object-Thinking*. This concept can be approached from a variety of perspectives and from an equally broad number of academic disciplines. During my candidature I have reviewed a wide range of literature, all of which make important contributions to this field of knowledge including: studies in perception, anthropology, complexity theory, psychology, neuroscience, New Materialism, phenomenology, process philosophy and object-oriented ontology. Rather than a traditional literature review of any single field or discipline, I have reviewed a breadth of material that crosses disciplines and that is, at times, contradictory. This has helped me address my research questions specifically, and made significant contribution to my creative practice and to my practice-based research outcomes.

In order to focus the range of literature I have reviewed, I have selected writers and thinkers whose work specifically addresses the way humans think in both fixed *and* dynamic terms, oscillating between the two as part of the natural condition of being in the world (although not without consequence). This particular selection of resources directly informs my creative practice and orients my research in general toward a multi-disciplinary body of work that I draw upon and activate within my practice-led research. (In order to more fully elaborate this cross-section of literature and the fields of research to which it belongs, I have included an expanded bibliography at the end of this dissertation.)¹⁹

¹⁹ See Appendix Seven.

In this regard, the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) has been particularly relevant, in particular his famous tool analogy and the way that he accounts for a shifting awareness of how things are in the world, based on our perception of their integration into systems and notions of *equipment*. Heidegger's famous example of the broken tool (a hammer) has influenced my own term—broken Object.

The work of British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) is also central to this research. Although Whitehead is most well-known for his thinking on and development of Processes Philosophy,²⁰ it has been his text *Modes of Thought* (1938) that has more directly influenced my research. In this text, Whitehead accounts for multiple and changing orientations in our thinking and traces the way that more rigid modes of thinking have developed throughout the history of Western philosophy.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold also traces the legacy of Western philosophical thinking and its impact on human behaviour today, particularly the influence of Aristotle. Particularly helpful is Ingold's writing on the way we so easily forget processes, instead seeing static and stable forms. Likewise, Manuel DeLanda's work in this area, particularly his writing on material complexity, has also been key to further understanding these notions.

The work of Edgar Morin, in particular his book *Complexity Theory* (2008) has been foundational. This is because Morin is committed to applying scientific concepts, like systems theory, to sociological contexts. These insights demonstrate both the human desire for certainty and stability alongside a comprehensive analysis of the world's vast complexity.

The various writings of Shaun Gallagher, Alva Nöe, and several authors contributing to the book *Kinaesthetic Empathy* (2012)²¹ have been critical to my understanding of the physiological and neurological aspects of perception, in particular the way that bodies come to know things about the world. These authors, in different ways, show how perception is both learnt as well as deeply biological and physically innate.

²⁰ See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality; an Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

²¹ Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason, *Kinaesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2012).

James J. Gibson, Caroline Levine and Sara Ahmed have all been central to my understanding of how we perceive form, in particular the affordances and capacities different forms have, and the way that these affordances and capacities effect and affect us. These authors show the interwoven nature of perception to be both physiologically and socially constructed. Levine and Ahmed's work also shows how rearranging and orientating forms (including bodies), can be an act of resistance to normative patterning.

Finally, various writers have offered great insight into alternative modes of thinking to Object-Thinking. Graham Harman's research and scholarship on object-oriented ontology has been influential to my thinking, especially where it builds on Heidegger's philosophy. Harman develops his philosophy away from an anthropocentric conception of the world, decentralising the human perception of *what is going on*. In an object-oriented ontology Harman argues, complex relationality occurs not just between humans or between humans and objects, but also between objects themselves, and these relations happen whether we notice them or not. Harman's work has helped me to clarify my ideas, in particular the notion that it does not matter if people *notice* the work's operant qualities, or not. These ideas are in direct contrast to those expressed by the Minimalists, who advocated that it was the viewer who completed the work. I advocate for a position in which the artwork is active and where the viewer enters *in the middle*.²² To contextualise this middling position, I will refer to several research outcomes that I have produced during my candidature.

Other authors associated with post-human or object-oriented philosophy have influenced my thinking.²³ In particular the work of Karen Barad has been critical to expanding my concept of what constitutes performativity. This expanded concept of performativity is further contextualised by the work of Australian artist and academic Barbara Bolt. These ideas have been important in investigating methodologies to make

²² Many would associate this broad spectrum of ideas and influences with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and there is direct lineage to their work through many of the above authors. Whilst a thorough elaboration of Deleuze and Guattari's work would enrich the ideas articulated within this dissertation, I have focussed my writing (according to the limitations of this dissertation) on the work of authors that have helped me to articulate concepts that have emerged from my practice-led research. Therefore, although Deleuze and Guattari's scholarship on *inter alia* abstraction, complexity, relational dynamics and affect are important to the scholarship underpinning many of the philosophical concepts and authors that I draw upon, it is through practice-led research strategies, rather than through the study of philosophical fields to which Deleuze and Guattari are central, that have driven my selection of authors, philosophers and texts. Further I have prioritised authors whose work specifically addresses the *shifting between* dynamic and stable modes of perception.

²³ See Appendix Seven.

and exhibit artworks that might appear *active* as opposed to *static* because their work considers an expanded concept of what it means to perform.

Because I argue other cultural and personal ontologies and ways of thinking have been dominated by Object-Thinking, my dissertation maintains an underlying tension. In final chapters I introduce the expanded writing of the above authors along with Bundjalung-Murrawari-Kamilaroi artist and academic Dr Brian Martin, to show how different ontological perspectives radically reimagine the world in ways that are *not* Object based. Finally, I introduce a concept I call *Landscape-Thinking*, which I use to help conclude and summarise my practice-based research methodologies. The concept of Landscape-Thinking merges and applies my interest in Objects *and* broken Objects and offers the possibility of an alternative, shifting mode of attention that perceives in and out, close to hand and beyond, or that continues to move in-between.

An Outline of the Chapters

Chapter One: *Abstract Thinking*

This chapter defines my terms Object, Object-Thinking, broken Object and an oscillation in thinking by applying them to Robert Morris's artwork *Untitled (Box for Standing)* (1961). I then show the genesis of my terms, developed through practice-led research methodologies, with reference to key thinkers and texts that have informed the development of my ideas. This review of literature links Objects and Object-Thinking to broader concerns, in particular why humans use abstract modes of thinking, along with some of the consequences. I critique how, as a dominant mode of thinking, Object-Thinking has had a colonising effect on other modes of thinking and knowing, and therefore positions breaking Objects as a form of resistance.²⁴

²⁴I am not referring to this review of literature as a 'literature review' because I am not signalling a comprehensive survey of the relevant literature on this broad range of topics, but instead will show how I have brought together a wide range of literature in order to frame my practice-led investigation, and create a very particular framework for considering particular kinds of spatiotemporal artworks.

Chapter Two: *Objects*

Chapter Two further defines the way Objects are formed and explores particular strategies of practice-based research to help *break* them. I introduce the work of Shaun Gallagher to consider ways that the body can become an Object, before introducing Heidegger's famous tool analogy to show how an oscillation in thinking can help reformulate our perception of Objects into what I call broken Objects. I further consider the capacity we have to shift our awareness or have an oscillation in thinking using the writing of North American Philosopher Alva Noë (1964-) and consider how shifts in our perspective can apply to the viewing of artworks.

In the second part of this chapter, I introduce a theory of perception developed by American psychologist James. J. Gibson (1904-1979) that describes how perception itself can be considered a form of abstraction. I use Gibson's theory of *affordances* to show how we tune into things in our environment according to how useful we perceive them to be. I consider other applications of Gibson's concept of affordances, referring to the work of Manuel DeLanda, an artwork by Jannis Kounellis, and with my own project *Work (in Progress)* (2016).

Chapter Three: *Object World—Sculpture as Apparatus*

In this chapter I consider the human capacity to create cohesion in our perception of the world more broadly and understand the world as if it were an invisible networked system, or what I call an *Object World*. I consider Heidegger's writing on 'world-ing' and in particular analogies Heidegger makes to perceiving the world in equipment-like terms. I refer to the work of Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles to show ways that this networked Object World might be revealed through a spatiotemporal art practice, and how this can also reveal the politics that operate within systems and networks.

In the second part of the chapter I revisit James J. Gibson's theory of affordances to explore the relationship between the body and utilitarian objects. I then introduce research into kinaesthetic empathy to further consider how a proclivity towards movement and things that appear useful play a role in creating the Object World, along with methods of my own practice-based research that engage this intersection of ideas.

Chapter Four: *A Particular Kind of Form*

In this chapter I revisit my concept of Object-Thinking to further reveal the critical and political implications of the term. I use the work of Whitehead and Morin to trace the legacy of a particular orientation towards knowledge and the dominant role that science has played in the Western history of thought. I then show how this has resulted in formal references to particular kinds of Objects in my own practice. I further position breaking Objects and creating an oscillation in thinking as a form of resistance, revealing a political leaning within my own spatiotemporal arts practice.

Chapter Five: *Object Event*

This chapter considers the *Object Event* as another form of Object-Thinking, one that focuses on abstract notions of time and space. However rather than show how the Object Event is constructed, I introduce other ontological positions that expand Object-Thinking and show that it is not the only way to conceive of Objects or Object Events. I use the work of authors already cited such as Alfred North Whitehead, Edgar Morin and Tim Ingold, whose main body of philosophical work more often considers expanded, complex, process-based ontologies rather than Object-Thinking. I then further elaborate on my project *Cross-Section* (2016) to show methods of practice-based research that I have used to help break the Object Event including a *distributed edge* and the concept of *middling*.

Chapter Six: *Landscape-Thinking*

In the final chapter, I conclude the various practice-based methods I have developed within my final term, *Landscape-Thinking*. I show how Landscape-Thinking operates in the gallery through a closer reading of my exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019) and analyse a number of other strategies of practice including *Performances with No One Watching* and *Performing the Installation*. I show how these practice-based research methods developed by further referencing the work of authors not associated with Object-Thinking, including the philosopher Graham Harman and Bundjalung-Murrawari-Kamilaroi artist and academic Dr Brian Martin. I explore an expanded notion of performativity offered by North American scientist and feminist philosopher Dr Karen Barad (1956-) and Australian artist and academic Barbara Bolt (1950-). The work of these artists and philosophers enables me to consider the contribution of *things that happen*, but which are not necessarily *seen*, and to acknowledge that all kinds of work can be *performed* with and without anyone noticing.

Appendices

In order to unpack the interwoven nature of this field of research I have necessarily separated-out elements within my practice-based research in order to show how certain parts operate. In the appendices, I put some of these parts back together again. Appendix One documents two important moments that predate my research and show how my thinking emerged from the conditions of exhibiting artwork, alongside experiences in everyday life. Appendix Two and Four document important research trips that I undertook during my candidature. Appendix Three, Five and Six elaborate three major practice-based research outcomes through visual documentation. Appendix Seven is an extended bibliography of works that although do not appear in my dissertation, have directly influenced my practice-based research. I consider this bibliography to be a significant research outcome, as it brings together a large number of texts that define this field of research.

Chapter 1: *Abstract Thinking*

Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not others, by the immobility of our mind confronting them.

– Proust²⁵

How do Objects become Objects?

Human beings have a tendency to perceive the world as a given. We easily forget the processes involved in the construction of the world both materially and socially and instead tend toward seeing our everyday environment as consisting of stable Objects and as part of cohesive systems.²⁶ This mode of thinking, I argue, is a form of abstract thinking. It is not necessarily consistent. Nor is it always reductive. Instead, it forms part of a broad spectrum of thoughts and perceptions that we have about the world around us. Thoughts that constantly shift and change as we go about our daily lives, often without conscious thought. At times this abstraction in the way we think operates as a temporary, fleeting limitation. However, it can also contribute to broader and more enduring perspectives, a mentality capable of creating distinct ideologies and beliefs that can influence how we see the world around us politically—or even what we consider to be *real*.

In this chapter I introduce some key theoretical and philosophical concepts that account for how and why we might perceive the world in abstract terms. I begin by defining terms that I have coined, that describe particular modes of thinking including: An Object, a broken Object, an oscillation in thinking and Object-Thinking. I establish how these terms relate to artworks, by applying them to the example of Robert Morris' 1961 work *Untitled, (Box for Standing)*.

I then review the writing of a selection of philosophers and writers whose work shows not only how and why we think in abstract terms, but also that these abstract frameworks can be unstable—that they can shift and change. I link this literature review to the context of art using Brian O'Doherty's seminal text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of The Gallery Space* (1986) and consider how these ideas apply to this research project using writing by Robert Smithson from the 1970s.

²⁵ Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swann's*, trans. Lydia Davis and Christopher Prendergast (London: Penguin, 2003). 9.

²⁶ Tim Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World," *Environment & Planning A*, no. 8 (2008). 1796-1797.

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Figure 1: Robert Morris, *Untitled (Box for Standing)*, 1961.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons



Figure 2: Robert Morris, *Untitled (Box for Standing)*, 1961.²⁷

Introducing the Terms

I begin by way of an example. The above photographs are a documentation/artwork by North American artist Robert Morris (1931-) called *Untitled (Box for Standing)*, 1961. This artwork consists of two photographs. In the first, we see a large, crate-like wooden box standing empty in a room. In the second, the artist is standing inside the box, revealing it as being perfectly scaled fit to his body. The first image, when viewed a second time, now inadvertently includes the absent body of Robert Morris. However, the expansion in our thinking about the box is not limited to the absence/presence of Morris's body alone. With the simple act of inhabitation, Morris has shifted our perception of the box from its *form*, to

²⁷ The box is sometimes exhibited in galleries alongside the image of Morris inside the box. This room is Morris's studio inside the Judson Church studios.

its *potential*. In doing so, I argue, Morris has also shifted our perception from an archetypal concept—an Object (in this case a wooden crate box)—to an object that has a peculiar and expanded capacity—to enclose the human form.

Objects

Nothing about the box is actually different; no illusion has been disrupted, its functionality has not changed, and our previous perception of the box was not incorrect or mistaken. What has changed is our comprehension of the box's capacity. And therefore, what has also changed is our habitual perception of the box as particular kind of fixed Object. It is this habitual way of perceiving that I refer to as an abstraction; in this thesis when considering an object in this way, I will refer to the object as an Object.²⁸ With this in mind what we saw in Robert Morris's first photograph, was actually an *Object-box*.

Broken Objects

The abstraction of the Object is disrupted when we subsequently see Morris standing inside the box. Through the presence of Robert Morris's body and the revelation of the box's expanded potential, we become aware of the capacity of the box to, among other things, house, crate or be occupied by some *thing*.²⁹ Throughout this project when referring to the abstract perception of an Object having been expanded, I will refer to the Object as having been *broken*. In this example Robert Morris's act of inhabitation broke the Object-box. It is worth noting that to break an Object is not to ruin or change it, but simply to break (*out of*) a habitual way of thinking about an Object. Therefore, breaking an Object can be considered a liberating expansion of a habitual mode of thinking.

An Oscillation in Thinking

Robert Morris's *Untitled (Box for Standing)* reveals to us that we can operate with different modes of thinking. An expanded awareness about the Object is brought to mind by the intervention—Robert Morris's body. Rather than changing our idea about boxes *per se*, it simply shows us that we are capable of changing our perception—full stop. In other words, Morris's work reveals to us that our perception can shift and change; from moment

²⁸ Another relevant precursor to these ideas is Karl Marx. Marx describes the capacity of an object to become reified and integrated with cultural and social value not only material or use value. Marx's concept of the commodity and the reification of objects, describes a transformation in the way that objects appear to us. See Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, *The Object Reader, In-Sight* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

²⁹ In some cases, it is useful to refer to a broken Object as a 'thing' in order to distinguish it, however to fully expand upon 'thing theory' takes the research in a very different direction. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the terms object and thing along with their differentiation is the topic of much philosophical debate and that writing about these ideas can consequently lead in many different theoretical directions. I have included references to thing theory in my expanded bibliography—see Appendix Seven.

to moment; from person to person; from Object to broken Object. This shift in our perception is what I call an *oscillation in thinking*—whereby we switch or flip between thinking of something as an Object to other modes of perception.

As I have shown using Robert Morris's work *Untitled (Box for Standing)* this shift in our perception does not have to be a major epiphany that forever changes our perception of reality. Rather it can be a subtle, momentary sensation—a simple expansion in our habits of thought. It is precisely this I argue, when artists create an *oscillation in thinking*, that can *activate* a work.

Why Abstract?

...material culture virtually explodes the moment one gives any consideration to the vast corpus of different object worlds that we constantly experience. Within an hour of waking we move from the paraphernalia of interior furnishing through the decisions to be communicated over choices of apparel through the moral anxieties over the ingestion of food stuffs out into the variety of modern transport systems held within vast urban architectural and infrastructural forms. Each of these domains possess considerable specificity in comparison to the others, and in turn generates considerable internal diversity.³⁰

This passage by Daniel Miller from his book, *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (1997) immediately reveals the complexity of human experience and introduces the idea that in order to navigate this complexity, humans necessarily filter out certain information. What we choose to home in on, and how our attention and comprehension of our surrounding environment phases in and out of focus, is a complex amalgamation of social, psychological and physiological factors.

Take for example, the relatively simple act of travelling from home to work. To achieve this, most people negotiate dense and complex physical and social landscapes—often whilst barely attending to what is going on around them. If one were to be constantly swept up in individual moments or the details of our external world, we would simply never get anywhere. Some would say this is what it is like walking with small children, who have not yet learned to *filter out*. Therefore a capacity for *generality*; to see things at a distance, or even to blinker out particular sensory inputs, allows humans a particular kind of facility.³¹

³⁰ Daniel Miller, *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (London: UCL Press, 1997). 6.

³¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938). 1.

However the notion that we filter out particular information, or that we do not see a whole world reveals an apparent dichotomy between things as they *appear* versus things as they *really are*, and this conundrum has preoccupied philosophers for centuries.³² Furthermore, that we often walk past or *do not see* the experience of others or the environment around us, has serious social consequences.

A Philosophical Overview

In his book *Matter and Memory* (1913) French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) describes the way we perceive matter as facing two potential extremes. At one extreme Bergson argues, matter is considered a construct of our mind. According to this way of thinking matter does not exist with the same qualities as we perceive it to have, independent of our perception of it. This position Bergson says, is held by idealists.³³ At the other extreme, matter can be considered a phenomenon that is entirely responsible for creating or producing perceptions in us. That is, we perceive the world as if it is furnished by stable elements that we navigate and react to, that both affect us and are effects of us. This position Bergson refers to as being held by realists.³⁴ As Bergson says,

It would greatly astonish a man unaware of the speculations of philosophy if we told him that the object before him, which he sees and touches, exists only in his mind and for his mind or even, more generally, exists only for mind.... Such a man would always maintain that the object exists independently of the consciousness which perceives it. But, on the other hand, we should astonish him quite as much by telling him that the object is entirely different from that which is perceived in it, that it has neither the color ascribed to it by the eye nor the resistance found in it by the hand. The color, the resistance, are, for him, in the object: they are not states of our mind; they are part and parcel of an existence really independent of our own.³⁵

Bergson wished to place his philosophy of matter in more of a middle-ground. As Bergson described it, perception can be considered to exist partly as a construct whereby our body/mind puts together a representation of an external world; and partly as a stable, objectively concrete, existing, reality. As such, Bergson considered the way we perceive matter to be what he called "...an aggregate of images."³⁶ According to Bergson, images

³² Ernesto Spinelli, *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2005). 6.

³³ Bergson is referring to extreme positions such as those held by George Berkley, whose ideas located the reality of matter entirely within the mind.

³⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004). 9.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

are greater than mere representations or apparitions of reality but, "...less than what the realist calls a thing."³⁷

According to Bergson, our perception of matter in the world shifts between a broad understanding of reality beyond our immediate perception and a more *working knowledge* of how things are in the world. In this *common sense* approach to perception, as Bergson described it, most ordinary people simply get on with the business of living their lives, and our perceptions, illusory as they may be, operate functionally as we navigate a complex world.³⁸

However, that we *can* shift our perception and idea of reality still requires closer attention. Because although Bergson points out it is possible to put to one side the complications introduced by philosophers and scientists who try to understand the way we perceive the world more definitively,³⁹ it is also true that peoples' perception of what is going on in the world can become fixed and rigid. And when it does, humans can become blind to a broader and more complex *reality*.

A Sense of Importance

Despite the overwhelming occurrence of variation in the world, we humans do in fact have the capacity to direct our thoughts and to consider the world around us in both vast general terms as well as in highly specific instances.⁴⁰ In his collection of essays entitled *Modes of Thought* (1938) Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) introduces the lecture series by saying,

The doctrine dominating these lectures is that factors in our experience are 'clear and distinct' in proportion to their variability, provided that they sustain themselves for that moderate period required for importance.⁴¹

In this sentence, with great economy, Whitehead introduces three key concepts. First, he establishes that we have the capacity to direct our attention, to home in and see something in our experience as clear and distinct. Secondly, that this capacity to unify our experience or single something out, is in proportion to the immense variability that

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., viii.

³⁹ Ibid., ix.

⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 2-4.

⁴¹ Ibid., vii.

experience (and the world) may in fact offer. And finally, that there is a system of preference that directs our attention (importance), and that this is in itself, variable.

These three concepts immediately reveal the complexity of human experience and introduce the idea that in order to navigate this complexity, humans necessarily filter out certain information. That is to say that although the world may consist of infinite variations beyond our capacity to comprehend, humans necessarily navigate this variance selectively, according to sophisticated systems of preference.

According to Whitehead, what we initially home in on is directed by an over-arching sense of what he calls *importance*. Whitehead explains that having a sense of importance is an ongoing process of selection and therefore one of relativity. That is, as we go about the world we make selections as to what to attend to or notice, what we consider *important*, *difficult* or *lovely*.⁴² These large general attitudes lack specificity and yet they direct us constantly toward "...this rather than that".⁴³ That we have this personal selection process renders a *sense of importance* political, because it indicates a value judgement about what we consider to be important in the world, whether we do so consciously, or not.

In further defining the specificity of his term importance, Whitehead acknowledges that having a sense of importance can be thought of, in part, as analogous to *interest* or *perspective* because what we direct our attention toward indicates a system of personal preference.⁴⁴ However he goes on to clarify that these terms as we generally use them do not fully encapsulate his concept, because a sense of importance actually refers to something far more global or fundamental as well as to something far more specific. That is, a sense of importance refers to both a general sense or understanding about the unity of the universe, as well as to a process of directing our attention to the individuality of the details within it.⁴⁵

Whitehead makes this clear by using the example of a scientist who has a particular "zeal for truth."⁴⁶ This zeal shows a desire to uphold the doctrine of his particular

⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

specialisation—to pursue “...objectivity in scientific thought.”⁴⁷ Whitehead argues that this position can only be sustained by an overarching sense of importance. This sense of importance extends beyond an ‘interest’ or ‘perspective’ because, Whitehead explains, it is possible to have an interest in something without being motivated to uphold its doctrine.⁴⁸ Instead, the sense of importance the scientist has, colours their entire understanding of the world. According to Whitehead, to reduce a sense of importance to the notion of perspective or interest alone, is to try to grasp and abstract “...mere fact from the living importance of things felt.”⁴⁹

Whitehead's concept of importance establishes not just a set of values that one might consciously prefer, but a whole orientation towards the world that colours and directs all of our interactions within it; although it might be selective, it is not necessarily reductive. Nevertheless, having a sense of importance is still a form of abstraction, because it reduces the scope of what we attend to, what we tune-in to.

Once we are concentrating on a particularity, Whitehead considers we are then attending to *matter-of-fact*.⁵⁰ To consider something as matter-of-fact is to isolate a single element within the greater complex picture and understand its essential qualities. By considering something as matter-of-fact, we are cognisant of its fundamental and elemental nature within the universe, however at the same time we may still recognise it as enmeshed within and running parallel to, other complex processes. The capacity to attend to something with “...concentrated attention means disregard of irrelevancies”.⁵¹ To consider something matter-of-fact is to separate out part from whole.

Whitehead believes that this capacity to generalise concepts is actually the basis of our civilisation. In other words, our capacity to organise the vast complexity of the world into what Whitehead describes as a “...closed group of primary ideas”⁵², is a systematised way of thinking particular to humans and this separates us from other species. In fact, it is this capacity to both see a complex world—and not become lost in specific instances at the expense of the bigger picture—that is the basis to human sophistication.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Ibid., 3-4.

That we have different modes of thought like those described by Whitehead, offers one explanation as to how and why we might come to consider something as an Object. That is, by habitually selecting and processing information according to how it fits within our general world view. Moreover, to have a sense of importance indicates an ethical dimension to our being in the world, and a political aspect to our orientation within it. Conversely, Whitehead's ideas also offer insight into how Objects might be broken. This is because Whitehead explains, by remaining cognisant of the fact that we are, or simply that we *can* operate with different modes of thinking, that it is possible to shift our thoughts from the general to the specific. Therefore, I argue it might also be possible to *break* Objects (in whatever form they take) by encouraging this shift in our attention and by considering how Objects can fit into a broader, more complex perspective (or vice-versa).

As we saw with Robert Morris's artwork *Untitled, (Box for Standing)*, by shifting our mode of thinking from the general (the ordinary function of a box) to the particular (an intimate way of relating to a form through the body), we gain a momentary glimpse of another way of perceiving an Object and by breaking Objects of thought in this way, we may also glimpse the fact that we have been perceiving habitually.

Complexity Theory

French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin (1921-) is well known for his writing on complexity theory and in particular the way he links it to social theory. For Morin, complexity theory is able to address the inseparable constituents that make up the phenomenal world, "...events, actions, interactions, retroactions, determinations, and chance."⁵³ These complex forces can appear to be uncertain and ambiguous, and Morin believes it is this sense of *disorder* that rational scientific thinking has sought to dispel. Thus, despite the vast knowledge we have of the universe through the sciences, Morin observes, it is the processes we have applied to *organising* knowledge, that are problematic.

All knowledge operates through the selection of meaningful data and the rejection of data that are not meaningful. It does so by separating...and unifying...and by organizing into hierarchies...and centralising (around a core of master notions). These operations, which use logic are in reality driven by "supra-logical" principles of organisation of thought, or

⁵³ Edgar Morin, *On Complexity Advances in Systems Theory, Complexity, and the Human Sciences*. Trans. Robin Postel. (Cresskill, N.J. : Hampton Press, 2008). 5.

paradigms: the hidden principles that govern our perception of things and of the world, without our being conscious of them.⁵⁴

Morin relates the way we apply these organising principles to an extremely complex social phenomena—the politics of the Soviet Union’s communism and the development of the concentration camp system, the gulag—to show that the way we account for and hierarchise events can change our understanding of *reality*. For Morin, we cannot rationalise the complexity of what happened during this time in history, without reducing it. To reduce complexity to a one-dimensional concept, is in his words, to mutilate and disfigure *reality*.⁵⁵ Yet this is what humans do, both in social, and scientific contexts, all the time.

In Morin’s work complexity acknowledges both the *planetary* and the *personal*.⁵⁶ This is because complexity represents both macro and micro phenomena, and these are not separated out, but rather linked and co-constituting. Morin uses the analogy of a holograph to describe this aspect of complexity because “...the smallest point of the hologram image contains the quasi-totality of information of the represented object.” In other words, “...not only is the part in the whole, but the whole is in the part.”⁵⁷ To explain, Morin uses the example of a cell in an organism, which “...contains the totality of the genetic information of that organism”.⁵⁸ These ideas can be applied socially as well as politically. In a social context, Morin equates these *parts* to social norms that we learn when we are children in the home, “...cleanliness, dirt, being polite.”⁵⁹ These individual behavioural standards can be seen in whole social systems of behaviour, values and cultural norms. In a political context, these cultural norms become applied through systems that govern behaviour and regulate what is considered *right* or *wrong*.

Morin’s concept of holographic thinking is similar to Whitehead’s concept of importance, whereby we can try to understand more about a global sense of importance by driving down into the elemental parts. However, it is still important when considering these parts, to remember the whole that is also present, despite the details. Whitehead and Morin both acknowledge a contradiction at play between the macro and the micro, whereby at some level, we are aware that we have imposed a structure in the face of, and

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶ Alfonso Montuori in *ibid.*, xii

⁵⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

perhaps because of, the vastness of the universe. This vastness of endless variance and complexity is what Morin calls, *the real world*.⁶⁰ And for both Whitehead and Morin, the play between matter-of-fact, reason and the *real world* is in constant flux. This flux is what I have called *an oscillation in thinking*. And it is these oscillations or shifts between the micro and the macro *and* the way that they can relate to both physical or material phenomenon *and* reference larger social and political concerns, that are central to my own art practice, and to the practice-based research within this project.

In applying these ideas to Robert Morris's *Box for Standing*, we can ask: What broad social context can we know more about by considering how Robert Morris has occupied the space within the box? One interpretation could be to consider the absence of bodies from everyday spaces and how we have learnt through habitual association, to behave and orient our bodies in particular ways in relation to objects we encounter in our everyday environment. By taking up occupation inside the box, Morris transgresses some habitual forms of behaviour and by doing so reveals to us the relatively sedate and controlled way in which we step around and between Objects in the world. We may rarely, if ever, stand on tables, chairs or climb inside boxes. Alternatively, we might recognise a general capacity for human adaptability, an innate and deeply instinctive habit to measure the world around us according to our own scale. That something is big, small or just right is always considered as relative to us, the human form.

Phenomenology, Introducing Martin Heidegger

Phenomenology as a field of philosophic enquiry can be considered an attempt to untangle the abstractions or subjective interpretations of our environment. The term phenomenology derives from the Greek word *phainomenon* and means *appearance*. Hence the study of phenomenology could be said to be the study of things as they appear to us (compared to how they really *are*).⁶¹ Although other philosophers⁶² used the term phenomenology in their writing during the eighteenth century, it was the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) to whom it is attributed the founding of Phenomenology as a school of philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. The attribution of Phenomenology to Husserl is largely because Husserl was determined to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁶¹ Spinelli, *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology*. 6.

⁶² Such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, see *ibid*.

locate the concept of phenomenology within a particularly rigorous model of thinking—one that uses a highly specific methodology known as the *phenomenological reduction*.⁶³ This process of reduction aimed to strip away habitual forms of thinking and perceiving, and for Husserl this ‘bracketing out’ of sense data was in order to better understand reality. By using this method, Husserl thought it was possible to strip away interpretational layers, or as he puts it, “...all prejudices alien to them” to arrive at “...the things themselves.”⁶⁴ In other words, Husserl wanted to strip away the world’s variants, to arrive at a “...clearer understanding of its invariants.”⁶⁵

After this process of reduction, Husserl advocated for a description of phenomena that did not offer any explanation or theories, instead trying to engage “...a concretely based descriptive examination of the intentional variables which make up our experience.”⁶⁶ It is perhaps unsurprising that Husserl’s concepts of the reduction and the subsequent description have been criticised as impossibly idealistic because as most philosophers now agree, “...no description is altogether free of explanatory components.”⁶⁷ In other words for humans, all things involve relatedness and connection.

Martin Heidegger was Husserl’s assistant in 1917-1918 at the University of Freiberg and during this time he was greatly influenced by Husserl’s ideas.⁶⁸ However Heidegger soon shifted his thinking about phenomenology away from the strict confines of Husserl’s reductive bracketing strategies, to encompass our capacity to be self-reflexive and embedded in the world as part of the phenomenological condition he sought to describe. Eventually, Husserl and Heidegger came to differ in their opinion of what we can really know about the world around us. Husserl maintained a position that privileged human consciousness rather than the world itself.⁶⁹ Heidegger’s ideas followed the same tradition as Kant; both upheld the idea that humans will never truly know what lies outside the construct of human experience.⁷⁰

⁶³ Also known as the phenomenological *epoché*.

⁶⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014). 36.

⁶⁵ Spinelli, *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology*. 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁸ See Graham Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing* (USA: Open Court, 2007).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

Like Whitehead, Heidegger's philosophy helps to show that how we orient ourselves in the world shifts and changes according to our situation and proposes that it is this perspective (one that I call an abstraction) which affects our perception. That is: it literally affects what we *see*. In fact, Heidegger considered that objects and the world around us are not able to be determined by their presence at all, because, "...things are always partly withdrawn into shadow, and exceed all visibility and all concepts we might have of them."⁷¹

Another way to consider Whitehead's idea of importance is as an *orientation*. In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) British/Australian scholar Sara Ahmed (1969-) proposes that we orient ourselves in the world, and our particular orientation is reflected by how we *turn towards* objects (or not). According to Ahmed we gravitate towards objects that help us locate ourselves and feel comfortable in our environment, and shy away from objects that repel us and make us feel uncomfortable. The way Ahmed describes it, we are in a constant negotiation with objects because objects "...gather on the ground, and they create a ground upon which we can gather."⁷²

Ahmed uses phenomenology as a framework because phenomenology makes orientation central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed *toward* an object, and its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl called the *living body* (Leib).⁷³ To be directed *toward* indicates a selectivity (this over that) and therefore reveals the way that we can abstract our environment by making selections and privileging one thing over another, also and including through the body.

Ahmed's work on phenomenology is an important extension of Whitehead and Morin's ideas; by introducing the body as central to orientation, abstraction becomes spatiotemporal and embodied as well as conceptual. By framing orientation through phenomenology, Ahmed opens up a space in which bodies and emotions as well as our intellect "...move us 'toward' and 'away' from... objects."⁷⁴ Whether we become conscious of this or not, Ahmed's phenomenological *orientation* acknowledges that "...repeated

⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

⁷² Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006). 1.

⁷³ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

habitual actions [shape] bodies and worlds”.⁷⁵ Therefore habits of thought and habits of body can reveal ways in which *a sense of importance* and our perspective can shape “...what we come into contact with”.⁷⁶

In relation to Robert Morris's inhabitation of the box, Morris physically occupies the interior space of the box in such way that may in turn reveal our own embodied orientation (or lack thereof) towards similar objects and spaces in the world. That we might shy away from occupying particular spaces or avoid becoming more visible through physical transgressions, might reveal how we are oriented in the world.

Introducing Object-Thinking

According to Whitehead a further abstraction can occur in our thinking, whereby a singular concept (a matter-of-fact) is considered a *mere fact*, separated from and unconnected to other processes.⁷⁷ For Whitehead the capacity to conceive of and hold onto a mere fact is the “...triumph of the abstractive intellect,” because in actual fact, there is no reality in which there is no connectedness.⁷⁸ To separate out the connected essence of all things is to perform a high-order mental act—an abstraction.⁷⁹

According to Whitehead we only get into trouble when we seek to lock down these insights and make universal truths, for example “...the simpleminded use of the notions ‘right’ or ‘wrong’”.⁸⁰ These universal truths Whitehead maintains are a construction, and he therefore considers that we must always keep in mind:

The concrete truth is the variation of interest; the abstraction is the universe in perspective; the consequent science is the scheme of physical laws which, with unexpressed presuppositions, expresses the patterns of perspective as observed by average human beings.⁸¹

Whitehead believes that we have inherited the desire to seek out stable forms of knowledge from Western civilisations, or as Whitehead calls them “...the ancient world of Greeks, Semites, and Egyptians.”⁸² All three civilisations, Whitehead considers

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 9.

⁷⁸ This concept forms the basis of Whitehead's ideas on Process Philosophy. See *Process and Reality; an Essay in Cosmology*.

⁷⁹ *Modes of Thought*. 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 6.

“...emphasise the ‘matter-of-fact’ world around us”.⁸³ Furthermore, Whitehead points out that in order to create these systems of knowledge over the last several centuries of philosophical and scientific thought, a particular kind of mental filter was necessarily applied—one that systematically put aside notions that did not fit.⁸⁴

Morin similarly reflects this criticism and like Whitehead, considers the lineage of this thinking to be directly related to Western civilisation. For Morin, it was René Descartes’ (1596-1650) influence that shaped our abstract ideas about the world by, “...disjoining the thinking subject... and the thing being thought of... in other words disjunctive thought itself.”⁸⁵

Morin believes that underlying our desire to abstract the world into more and more simplified narratives is *the quest for certainty*; he is not unsympathetic toward this human desire, nor to its contribution to the sciences. However like Whitehead, Morin points out that we exist within a paradigm of simplification, which is governed by the principles of, “...disjunction, reduction and abstraction”.⁸⁶ Like Whitehead, Morin also describes our general capacity to home in and rationalise knowledge—he describes this as a form of reason. For Morin reason, “...corresponds to a will to have a coherent vision of phenomena, of things, of the universe.”⁸⁷ However when reason becomes *rationalisation* he believes anything that, “...contradicts this coherent system is put aside...forgotten, seen as an illusion or appearance.”⁸⁸

My term Object-Thinking therefore refers to this particular overemphasis on matter-of-fact thinking or rationalisation and points to a more critical leaning both within my literature research as well as within my practice-based work. This is because in tracing the development of this kind of thinking Whitehead and Morin are identifying the historical beginnings of a particular orientation towards knowledge, one that many philosophers claim has now permeated our perception of objects in the world.⁸⁹ Furthermore because of the dominance of Object-Thinking in the West, one that favours stable Objects of thought

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁵ Morin, *On Complexity*. 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

and privileges matters-of-fact,⁹⁰ many other forms of knowledge—indeed other sensibilities and sensitivities—lack representation. And it is not just broad global concepts like right and wrong that are abstracted by this dominant mode of thinking, it can also be materials, space, time and bodies.

The work of U.K anthropologist Tim Ingold (1948-) is also helpful in considering the legacy of Object-Thinking and, like Whitehead and Morin, Ingold traces Object-Thinking back to the ancient Greek philosophers, in particular Aristotle.⁹¹ In his book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (2013) Ingold describes how Aristotle determined that, “...any substantial thing... is a compound of matter and form, which are brought together in the act of its creation.”⁹² This action of form (*morphe*) over matter (*hyle*) is what is known as the ‘hylomorphic model,’⁹³ and according to Ingold,

...in the subsequent history of Western thought hylomorphic thinking became even more entrenched. But it also became increasingly unbalanced. Form came to be seen as imposed by an agent with a particular design in mind, answering to his or her purpose, while matter—thus rendered passive and inert—became that which was imposed upon.⁹⁴

Ingold argues that this Aristotelian way of thinking has permeated, if not taken over the Western way of thinking about materials and materiality, and in doing so—eclipsed other ways of understanding the processes of formation, the forces and flows of transformation and the ecologically embedded nature of materials.⁹⁵ Instead Ingold argues, Western culture has taught us to see materials as inactive and unchanging; as stable forms brought-forth by human intervention. Ingold’s writing identifies another form of abstraction, one whereby we have historically and now habitually come to perceive materials such as wood or metal as *simple*. Through this habit of thought, we stop seeing the emergent complexity of matter and materials and instead see materials as homogenous mediums or in other words, Objects.

⁹⁰ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 7-15.

⁹¹ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013). 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹³ French philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992) also refer to Aristotle’s Hylomorphic form in their co-authored book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). They link hylomorphism to a broader distinction they make between two modes of governance or operant power. These two approaches to power permeate broader operations of order and control and the methods by which they are acquired, and distinguish alternate positions on science, order, power and states of flow. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987). 353-369.

⁹⁴ Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. 37.

⁹⁵ *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011). 210-211.

Ingold describes this habit of thought as being like a form of amnesia that when it takes hold causes us to forget, for example, that the timber we use to make furniture or to build our houses was once a living tree, inhabited by other living organisms, part of a living ecosystem; that the matter of timber is not a standardised, predictable material that comes in a geometric format like a plank at the hardware store, but that it has individual character, knots, veins and a grain created by its “...previous history of growth”.⁹⁶ Ingold uses an image of a ladder made out of drift wood, to show an example of an object that might in some way reconcile and provoke a connection between its form and its complex material origin.



Figure 3: Benjamin Just. Image, Katie Lee (2016).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ibid., 211.

⁹⁷ This was carved by French artist Benjamin Just in the bush during his residency at the Bundanon Artist in Residence. When I encountered it on my daily walk, it reminded me of Ingold's idea because it was difficult to maintain the sense you were sitting on a *tree* when you were perched on the hard edged carved-out *seat*.

The Logic of Inversion

Ingold also explains how German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) influenced a tendency towards Object-Thinking in Western culture.⁹⁸ In particular Ingold claims Kant's ideas have resulted in what he calls *the logic of inversion*.⁹⁹ According to the logic of inversion, people quickly abstract the way they think about entities in the world to consider them as bounded and contained, rather than dynamic and in process. That is, our perception easily slips from seeing things in movement or in flux to seeing things as static and divided.



Figure 4: Katie Lee, *Chalk/Circles*, 2016 (video still).

To show our inclination towards this mode of perception, Ingold invites us to pick up a pen and draw a circle on a page. He asks us to consider this line as a simple record of a gesture. That is, an index of our hand and arm moving in a circular fashion over the

⁹⁸ Locating Kant's ideas in their historical and philosophical context provides insight into how these ideas have become so influential. In relation to the study of nature, Kant's intellectual endeavour came after the scientific revolution in which Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), René Descartes (1596-1650) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) all directly preceded him. Kant's intellectual project was to provide a framework for human reason that was capable of justifying what we 'know' unequivocally, outside empirical knowledge. For further reading see James O'Shea, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014). 4 and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Macmillan, 1934). 9.

⁹⁹ Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World." 1796.

surface of a page and trailing behind it a line of ink. Ingold points out that it does not take long before we have shifted our perception of this mark, and when we do, it becomes a circle. This now-circle has been transformed from a mark or impression made by our hand in motion, to an Object that has a neat perimeter with clearly defined boundaries. This circle now clearly demarcates an inner and outer zone.¹⁰⁰

According to Ingold, the logic of inversion has “... a central place in the structure of modern thought.”¹⁰¹ This is because the propensity to shift our perception from a movement-line to contained inner-outer zones, Ingold equates to the dominant logic of humans to consider the world as “...furnished by already existing things.”¹⁰² This means that we more often see the world as having Objects in it that we perceive as being static and fixed, formed whole rather than made, and divorced from materials, processes, ecologies or environments. Ingold links this phenomenon to Kant’s ideas about space in which he locates himself on the earth, “...as a flat surface, with a circular horizon.”¹⁰³

As he moves, so does the circle around him...In this Kantian cosmology, creatures do not find themselves on the inside of a clearing that has been opened up, but on the outside of a globe that is already sealed.¹⁰⁴

In his book *The Perception of The Environment* (2000) Ingold uses these arguments to put forward the idea that Western school children have been taught to think of the earth as if it were an Object, a globe, that can be looked upon as if from outer space.¹⁰⁵ Ingold claims that the development of this kind of thinking about the earth affects the way we conceptualise our inhabitation of it. Rather than thinking of the world as an environment, we are taught to visualise it as a solid round object, painted up to appear like there are divisions between countries, states and even oceans. Ingold contrasts this with the alternate notion of a *life-world*, a world that we come to know from “...actively participating in our surroundings.”¹⁰⁶ Instead, as a consequence of this mode of thinking (the logic of inversion, or Object-Thinking) we see the earth in our minds eye much like an astronaut would from space, “...an object of contemplation”¹⁰⁷ or in other words, an abstraction.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1796-1797.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1796.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1797.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1798.

¹⁰⁵ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling & Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000). 209.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 212.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 210.

Objects in the Gallery

Irish art critic Brian O'Doherty (1928-) has written about such abstractions of thought particularly in relation to the contemporary (or what he termed *modern*) art gallery. Aptly, O'Doherty introduces his book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1974) using the same analogy as Ingold—a depiction of the world as viewed from outer-space.

A recurrent scene in sci-fi movies shows the earth withdrawing from the spacecraft until it becomes a horizon, a beachball, a grapefruit, a golf ball, a star. With the changes in scale, responses slide from the particular to the general. The individual is replaced by the race and we are a pushover for the race—a mortal biped, or a tangle of them spread out below like a rug. From a certain height people are generally good.¹⁰⁹

O'Doherty continues the analogy to encompass this habit of thought (what I call Object-Thinking), as it applies to history, the history of modernism in particular, and the *laws* under which it supposedly progressed. These laws from the unifying distance of outer space, are now perceived as having marched forward unrelentingly. And yet, from this distance, O'Doherty observes, the actual artwork becomes hard to see. What does endure in the view from intergalactic heights is "...an evenly lighted 'cell' that appears crucial to making things work: the gallery space."¹¹⁰

The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the resource of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life'. The discreet desk may be the only piece of furniture. In this context a standing ashtray becomes almost sacred object, just as the firehose in a modern museum looks not like a firehose but an aesthetic conundrum. Modernism's transposition of perception from life to formal values is complete.¹¹¹

What O'Doherty's argument shows, is that within the rarefied confines of a gallery space it is nigh on impossible to have objects remain objects. Galleries transform objects into Objects whether we like it or not.

Art-Objects

What is interesting in relation to the gallery is that this context is capable of turning not just ordinary objects such fire-hoses into Objects, but also artworks into *artwork-Objects*. To

¹⁰⁸ See also Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (California: London: University of California Press, 1999). 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 15.

distinguish this perceptual shift could be considered close to splitting hairs, however it is important to establish this idea clearly as it later becomes critical to my practice-based research concerns. So, what distinguishes an art object from an art-Object?

In order to explain how artworks might also become artwork-Objects it is useful to consider Robert Smithson's writing on the museum. In his short essay *Some Void Thoughts on Museums* (1969) Smithson rails against the nullifying impact of museums on artworks within them. He says:

The museum undermines one's confidence in sense-data and erodes the impression of textures upon which our sensations exist...Sight becomes devoid of sense, or the sight is there but the sense is unavailable...Art settles into a stupendous inertia... Things flatten and fade. The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that immobilise the eye.¹¹²

Smithson is describing the ontological condition of viewing artworks within the context of the gallery wherein as he describes, whole senses become unavailable for audiences to recruit. Under this influence art objects become inert and no longer have operational qualities. In this context, I argue they become art-Objects, separated from life and the forces that operate within it. Therefore, in galleries artworks become something to be viewed with as Smithson described it, *an immobilised eye*. Or as I would describe—*on display*.

It is important to note that I am not claiming this condition within the gallery to be a complete crisis. Plenty of artworks happily exist in these conditions, some even thrive. In fact, to recruit active forces or re-animate artworks within these conditions can be considered an opportunity. Because without the art gallery providing the framework in the first place, it is harder to reveal Objects within the gallery—it is harder to break them.

While Smithson was obviously highly critical of museums and their capacity to nullify space and audiences, he also acknowledged that these same forces in operation within the museum could be used as part of the work. Therefore, unlike other contemporaneous artists who more completely rejected white cube gallery spaces (for example Allan Kaprow), Smithson's attitude remained in part, ambivalent. In conversation with Kaprow, Smithson explained this distinction:

¹¹² From "Some Void Thoughts on Museums" in Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations* (New York: New York University Press, 1979). 58

I think the best thing you can say about museums is that they are really nullifying in regard to action, and I think that this is one of their major virtues. It seems your position is one that is concerned with what's happening. I'm interested for the most part in what's not happening, that area between events which could be called the gap.¹¹³

This gap is made visible inside the museum framework and therefore the opportunity exists to further expose this through various forms of resistance. If it were not possible to see inert space, it would perhaps not be possible to *break it*, and establish an *oscillation in thinking*. Therefore, rather than rejecting the gallery outright, the very forces within galleries turning objects into Objects and art-Objects can become an active element in revealing them. This also helps make visible the strategies that might be used to break Objects. It is now my intention to show how some of these strategies have been developed and applied to my own research-based practice.

¹¹³From *What is a Museum?* In *ibid.*, 60.

Chapter 2: *Objects*

...one of art's tasks is to afford us just this opportunity to catch ourselves in the act of encountering the world, and so to let us encounter ourselves in a way that we otherwise never can.¹¹⁴

—Alva Noë

As part of our everyday perception, Objects can suddenly appear differently to us, either because something about them has changed, or simply because we have come to see them (momentarily or otherwise), in a different light. In this chapter I will further define how abstract thinking can lead to perceiving Objects and consider various ways these Objects might be *broken*. Shifting between these modes of thinking I refer to as an *oscillation in thinking* and as I will show in this chapter, these oscillations in our thinking occur all the time.

To expand upon these concepts, this chapter will first examine how our own body can become an Object and refer to the writing of Irish American philosopher Shaun Gallagher (1948-). I review the way complex physiological processes—even an awareness that our body exists at all—can disappear from consciousness as we turn our attention toward the environment in which we are enmeshed or become lost in our thoughts. I then use Martin Heidegger's famous tool analogy to show our capacity to shift our thinking from an Object to a broken Object. I further consider the capacity we have to shift our awareness or have an oscillation in thinking using the writing of North American philosopher Alva Noë (1964-) and consider how shifts in our perspective can apply to the viewing of artworks.

In the second part of this chapter, I introduce a theory of perception developed by American psychologist James. J. Gibson (1904-1979) that describes how perception itself can be considered a form of abstraction. Gibson's theory claims that our perception selectively tunes-in to what he has coined the *affordance* of things. I use Gibson's concept of affordances to consider how we implicitly understand form and materials in the world as they relate to the human form. I then apply this to a method of art practice whereby shifting Objects affordances might help break them.

¹¹⁴ Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wing, 2015). 80.

I then show how Mexican-American theorist Manuel DeLanda (1952-) has also referred to an expanded condition of affordances (not in reference to Gibson's term), along with the capacity objects have to explain how things are networked through their virtual affordances as well as their operational affordances. I draw parallel between these ideas and the artwork *Untitled (Bowl & Fish)*, (1991/2011) by Jannis Kounellis. I link Kounellis's work to the art movement Arte Povera to show how artists from this movement realised contingency in their spatiotemporal practices.

Throughout these considerations I refer to methods I have used in my own practice-based research during my candidature, including works from my confirmation exhibition *Work (in Progress)* (2016) and the application of these ideas to a range of materials and forms that I reference within my practice more broadly.

The Body Object

If we review my definition of an Object as a mode of perception whereby we perceive something complex in the world in an abstracted or reduced way, then it is not hard to imagine how bodies can be considered Objects. The fact is, we are often so consumed with what is going on situationally that we are not attending to the complexity of what we are doing physically.¹¹⁵ It is not uncommon to pay little or no conscious attention to the mechanical function of our bodies and it can be quite a shock when our awareness suddenly shifts and we realise we have been on autopilot whilst carrying out complex and even dangerous tasks—driving a car, riding a bike, or navigating our way through the city. Meanwhile our thoughts and attention have been focused on something else entirely.¹¹⁶

In his book *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2005) Shaun Gallagher explains that the internalised, unconscious knowledge held by our bodies that enables us to function dynamically whilst attending to other matters is known as a body-schema.¹¹⁷ Our body-schema operates for the most part, outside conscious thought and in this mode I argue, we are a body-Object. Gallagher explains:

¹¹⁵ Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2005). 27.

¹¹⁶ For further reading see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962)—especially page 102.

¹¹⁷ Gallagher notes that body-schema is also sometimes known as body-image. See Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. 21.

In most instances, movement and the maintenance of posture are accomplished by the close to automatic performances of a body schema, and for this very reason the normal adult subject, in order to move around the world, neither needs nor has a constant body percept. In this sense the body-in-action tends to efface itself in most of its purposeful activities.¹¹⁸

Gallagher also points out that a recognition of our own body movement or posture sometimes “...rises into consciousness.”¹¹⁹ This can happen suddenly, such as when we feel an itch or a strange physical sensation. Or we can deliberately direct our attention to our body, for example in a medical exam, or if we are in a particular limit-situation (like extreme fatigue or because we are injured in some way).¹²⁰ Whatever it is that draws our attention, when we concentrate on the body in this manner, the invisible body-Object is broken and instead, our body becomes a specific, located, and complex system.

I have often reflected upon the body’s capacity to rise in and out of consciousness as part of everyday experience, not only in relation to the body’s internal complexity, but also in relation to the positions with which we hold our body, our posture or facial expression—all of which can oscillate in and out of our awareness. I often have oscillations in thinking such as these when in particular limit-situations well known to city commuters—crowded public transport. On one hand I consider my body in public space to be separate from other bodies and in this mode, I operate as body-Object. On crowded morning trams, however, while my face is millimetres away from someone’s back or arm, and others press against me, my attention can oscillate, and I suddenly see us as strangers physically pressed against each other in public space.

While most people find this kind of experience unpleasant, in some ways these moments are extraordinary as well as rather intense (perhaps it even explains why they are intense). This is because to have an oscillation in thinking can suddenly open up and reveal something about how we are relating (or ignoring), *seeing* and *not seeing* other bodies and objects—in space. Making these relationships visible within spatiotemporal artworks in the gallery reveals something intense about the way we live; this influences my choreographic practice as well as my sculptural one.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 27.



Figure 5: Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Performance with Arabella Frahn-Starkie. Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 6: Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Performance with Arabella Frahn-Starkie. Image, Christian Capurro.

This kind of coming to sense, or as Gallagher refers to it—*rise to consciousness*, influences my art practice because to reveal the oscillations in our awareness, is to acknowledge the complex shifting sensations that form part of our everyday experiences. Therefore, transplanting relations between Objects and broken-Objects out of the everyday realm and into the gallery may also work to draw attention to these oscillating sensations, as well as to the social norms that create Objects and the way we are so conditioned to see/not-see. This has influenced my interest in placing bodies within artworks as a way to reveal the relationship between bodies and Objects and as part of the complexity of our experience as it is in the world (see Figure Five and Six).

Heidegger's Hammer

Martin Heidegger's tool analogy describes the possibility of an oscillation in thinking. Famously, Heidegger uses the example of a hammer as an example of a ubiquitous Object that we most commonly use without any kind of prior theoretical reflection. In Heidegger's terminology anything that we use without theoretical reflection is *ready-to-hand*. Heidegger's argument is that the act of hammering brings us closer to knowing the hammer in its ready-to-hand way because it is not a theoretical object that we consider at a distance, but something that we simply pick up and use. This kind of 'handiness' as Heidegger described it, shows a more general attitude that humans hold about all objects in the world, an attitude he referred to as *circumspection*.¹²¹ As Heidegger said, "No matter how keenly we just look at the 'outward appearance' of things constituted in one way or another, we cannot discover handiness. When we just look at things 'theoretically,' we lack an understanding of handiness..."¹²² According to Heidegger what is particular about handiness is actually its invisibility. "What is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy. What everyday association is initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work."¹²³

In the state of being ready-to-hand, entities we encounter are for the most part operating as part of a system in such a way that we do not observe their separate parts. We don't consider the hammer to be made from a wooden handle, a forged metal head, held

¹²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh. (Albany, U.S.A: State University of New York Press, 1996). 65.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). 70.

together by a steel pin (for example). However, Heidegger also describes another possible state of being whereby something we are using breaks, malfunctions or perhaps goes missing. When this happens, the Object we are using suddenly becomes present to us in a different way. When the object is apparent to us in this more theoretical way, it stops being simply handy or ready-to-hand, it becomes what Heidegger refers to it as *present-to-hand*.¹²⁴ The Object as it was, has become dislodged from its invisible background or system and we are forced to attend to its individual characteristics in order to ascertain what has gone wrong with it.

Although this is a very abridged summary of Heidegger's concept, it is nevertheless of central relevance to this research project because what Heidegger is describing is how things we perceive in the world can disappear and manifest to us according to *our own* changeable mode of being in the world. At times Objects are embedded within systems and seem invisible, we observe the world with circumspection; while at other times, objects suddenly stand out to us, they become *broken*.¹²⁵

The World Shows Up

Whereas Heidegger's theories emphasise how things in the world *withdraw* from consciousness, Alva Noë prefers to consider how they show up.¹²⁶ In his book *Varieties of Presence* (2012) Noë is critical of Heidegger, whom he sees as privileging one mode of being over another. Noë maintains that what is *present to us* along with the capacity to shift our comprehension of things in the world, is simply a natural quality of human consciousness. Therefore, rather than thinking we are limited or defined by what is withdrawn, Noë believes instead we must focus on tuning-in to the way that things appear.¹²⁷

For Noë, even though presence can be made to show up, it is nevertheless fragile. And although he acknowledges that all angles of complexity are not manifestly obvious to us at all times, he maintains that we can work to bring an expanded version of the world into

¹²⁴ Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*, 176.

¹²⁵ My own term, broken Object borrows from Heidegger's concept of a broken tool, in that it signals a shift in perception has occurred between one state (familiar and embedded) to another (somehow strange or foreign). However the way that I use the broken-tool analogy differs from Heidegger's because in my broken Object analogy I argue breaking the Object defamiliarizes it, and that this shift allows us to know something different about the way we have been perceiving, rather than knowing more about the Object itself. I extend these ideas in Chapter 3, Object World.

¹²⁶ Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012). 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

focus.¹²⁸ Therefore as his book title suggests, it is the *varieties of presence* “...and the differences in the ways we go about achieving access to what is there that is important.”¹²⁹

Noë helpfully uses the example of viewing a work of art, to note the way our perception shifts and changes based on the information we have access to, or simply, to what we are aware of at any given time.¹³⁰ He describes an initial encounter with an artwork, which for whatever reason may be underwhelming. The piece may seem opaque, or uninteresting—maybe you just don’t *get* it. Then, due to one of many possible factors, something further is revealed. Maybe you read something, have a discussion with a friend, or hear the artist speak. Consequently, your perception of the work begins to transform, you can now *perceive* something that you previously did not have access to. Physically, of course, the artwork has not changed. What Noë is describing I would call an *oscillation in thinking*.

An example of this can be illustrated by North American artist Ben Russell’s video piece *TRYPPS #7 (BADLANDS)* (2010). On first viewing the video work it appears to be an intimate portrait of a woman standing in front of a desert landscape (see Figure 7 and 8). Though beautiful to watch it would seem that nothing really *happens*, she simply stands facing the camera, occasionally shutting her eyes. However, upon reading further about the artwork you subsequently learn that the woman is having a psychedelic experience—she has taken LSD. Your perception of *what is happening* in Russell’s work shifts and transforms with this new perspective, as does my perception of the woman within it. This shift itself is the power of the work, as you come to realise that the woman’s own state of mind, though invisible outwardly, is similarly shifting.

Noë believes art is particularly helpful in encouraging an expanded presence to show up.¹³¹ Of particular relevance to this research, Noë also thinks that art reveals something about the way humans inherently organise their thinking. These organisational principles, Noë believes, can be seen in the way humans habitually pattern the world in a myriad of complex but recognisable ways. These patterns and behaviours apply to all manner of activities, from our personal habits, bodily functions to social events and the way we

¹²⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹³¹ See Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*.

organise our environment. As Noë says, “...organization, fundamentally, is our biological condition, our existential condition. To be alive is to be organized¹³².”

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons



Figure 7: Ben Russell, *Trypps #7 (BADLANDS)*, 2010 16 mm film (video still).

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Figure 8: Ben Russell, *Trypps #7 (BADLANDS)*, 2010 16 mm film (video still).

¹³² Ibid., 6.

These patterns of organisation also apply to things we do for fun and to cultural expressions. For example: dancing is a form of organising our bodies to the sound of music, and music is another form of organising sound. Therefore, art can in a philosophical way, also help reveal these underlying organisational structures by showing them to us explicitly or by re-ordering them, or, as I would argue— by *breaking* them.

Noë uses the example of this operating within choreographic practices. Choreography he argues, shows the way the organising principles we use to physically move around in the world, including to dance, is *re-organised* by the philosophical application of choreography. Rather than simply showing audiences that humans dance, or how well they can train their bodies, choreography applies a kind of *meta* or *hyper* organisation to the body and makes this underlying organisational habit that we already have, explicit. As Noë says, “Choreography puts the fact that we are organised by dancing on display”.¹³³ Noë also uses Heidegger’s tool analogy to further demonstrate this concept:

Art is interested in removing tools from their settings and thus in making them strange and, in making them strange, bringing out the ways and textures of the embedding that had been taken for granted. A work of art is a strange tool, an alien implement. We make strange tools to investigate ourselves.¹³⁴

I argue that making *Strange Tools* is also what I do within my spatiotemporal practice, in order to reflect upon how we perceive; ourselves, materials, objects and experience. I will explore this further in Chapter Three, *The Object World—Sculpture as Apparatus*.

Affordances and Capacities

Despite Alva Noë’s refreshing analysis on perception and the variety of ways that things show up (rather than withdraw), there are still complex sociological and physiological reasons why things do not always *appear*. Another explanation for why we only tune in to particular things within our environment can be introduced by a theory of perception developed by North American psychologist James J. Gibson (1904-1979). Gibson was particularly interested in visual perception, or how we make meaning from what we see *out there*. His ideas shifted significantly during his career from a concept of visual perception

¹³³ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 30.

that was based on the retinal image (a scientific or mechanical understanding of the eye), to one whereby he considered perception to require what he called an *ecological* approach.¹³⁵

We are told that vision depends on the eye, which is connected to the brain. I shall suggest that natural vision depends on the eyes in the head on a body supported by the ground, the brain being only the central organ of a complete visual system.¹³⁶

Gibson developed his theory of ecological perception as a way of stitching back together what he believed the physical sciences had abstracted or separated out in the attempt to better understand the mechanics of the eye, and even though optical scientists had learnt more and more about the eye, could cure disease and prescribe glasses, Gibson came to believe that how we perceive what is *out there* in the world was still not being accounted for by this kind of knowledge.¹³⁷ According to Gibson the mechanics of vision could still not explain why things appeared to us in a meaningful way and how it was possible to extract “...invariants from the stimulus flux.”¹³⁸ According to Gibson, the best laboratories in the world could still not help to understand the way we perceive our environment because separating out the elements or mechanics of how we see, was not the key.¹³⁹

Instead Gibson considered that it is through understanding the enmeshed relationship between the environment and the perceiver or what he termed the *ecological* nature of perception that we gain insight into what it means to see the world around us in all its complexity. As he put it, “Physics, optics, anatomy, and physiology describe facts, but not facts at a level appropriate for the study of perception.”¹⁴⁰

Gibson’s theory of ecological perception offers another explanation for how we come to see objects as Objects and as such is greatly relevant to this research project. Gibson’s theory of perception accounts for how and why we tune-in to particular things in our environment at the expense of others, by proposing that what we perceive is selective and

¹³⁵ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Classic ed. (New York; London: Taylor and Francis, 2015). xiii.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid. xiv.

¹³⁹ In artificial intelligence research this is known as ‘the Frame problem’. See Daniel Dennett, “Cognitive Wheels: The Frame Problem in Artificial Intelligence”, in Christopher Hookway, ed. *Minds, Machines, and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 129-150

¹⁴⁰ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. xi.

dependent upon on what different phenomenon *afford* us. Gibson summarises his expanded concept of *affordance* in the following passage:

The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animals, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb to *afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.¹⁴¹

According to this idea humans and animals literally perceive the world and then orient themselves accordingly, based on what their environment affords them. Considering the actions of babies and infants, Gibson puts forth that their engagement with things, both objects and other living forms, is in order to test their affordances. Babies quickly learn that other human and animal forms afford responsive behaviour, compared to non-living things. Likewise, certain objects afford grasping if they are scaled to the hand, and it is towards these invariant affordances that we are innately attuned, rather than to a “...combination of variables.” This is a form of abstraction because as Gibson points out, “...one might guess that it is easier to perceive such an invariant unit than it is to perceive all the variables separately. It is never necessary to distinguish *all* the features of an object and, in fact, it would be impossible to do so. Perception is economical.”¹⁴²

In summary, the affordances of something are constitutionally part of, but not fully representative of, the physical properties of an object, entity or environment. According to Gibson, we never really fully perceive the physical complexity of objects or environments because instead we only really tune into the affordances that they can offer us.¹⁴³ For example when we perceive a surface as *stable* or *supportive* we only perceive it as such based on its capacity to afford us a surface to walk upon. This is different to determining the qualities of the surface according to its actual physical properties, such as we might if we were to consider it according to geometry or physics.¹⁴⁴ In order to determine the surface as stable we need to make a series of assumptions that are relative to our own physical form. Can it bear our weight? Is it flat enough? Is it extended? Although there are physical properties that we can use to measure this (for example horizontality or rigidity), the

¹⁴¹ Gibson in Jen Jack Giesecking, Mangold, William, et. al., ed. *The People, Place, and Space Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014). 58. Emphasis original.

¹⁴² Gibson in *ibid*.

¹⁴³ This is reminiscent of Heidegger’s position that we do not fully comprehend the presence of things.

¹⁴⁴ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. 120.

capacity to support us is relative to what the surface affords our individual physical form. As Gibson says, “Support for water bugs is different.”¹⁴⁵

Gibson’s thinking demonstrates that our perception of the affordance something has is relative to us, and therefore what we see is literally rendered based on its perceived relevance. I argue that this act of perceiving is what forms Objects. That is, we perceive only part of something’s constitution according to its capacity to be useful, with its full representation not immediately visible due to our abstract mode of perceiving. However what Gibson’s theory also shows is that it is possible to open our minds to other qualities inherent in objects, things and environments that are not immediately apparent through our tendency towards ecological perception. To use Gibson’s own example—to consider the surface of water as a support surface for water-bugs—*breaks* the Object, water.

Furthermore, it is not just an object’s materiality that has affordances and capacities beyond our perception of them—affordances are also embedded within form. When we perceive form, Gibson proposes that we are attuned to the affordance the form offers us, not its inherent physical properties. For example, if a supportive surface like that described above is also “...knee-high above the ground it affords sitting on, we call it a *seat* in general, or a stool, bench, chair, and so on...”¹⁴⁶ Gibson’s argument shows that the capacity to perceive this affordance is not necessarily a behaviour that we have learned through past experience but more simply that we *see* the affordance *to sit* as part of our capacity to see at all. Gibson points out, that in order to look ‘sit-on-able’...

It may be natural like a ledge or artificial like a couch. It may have various shapes, as long as its functional layout is that of a seat. The colour and texture of the surface are irrelevant. If it can be discriminated as having just these properties, it should *look* sit-on-able. If it does, the affordance is perceived visually.¹⁴⁷

Gibson also reminds us that affordances are relative to the individual perceiver. For example, what is “...knee-high for a child is not the same as knee-high for an adult, so the affordance is relative to the size of the individual.”¹⁴⁸ Gibson’s theory of affordances confirms that in the act of perceiving, we assess objects in relation to our own scale.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Gibson's theory of affordance shows that this is because we literally perceive Objects in a particular way if they reflect a useful affordance to the human form.

The scale of objects in relation to the human form is a significant strategy in many sculptural art practices,¹⁴⁹ and one that I have been interested to locate within Gibson's theory of perception. Within my practice I have often instinctively used the human form as a scaling device to ensure my work maintains a reference to a world recognised as *utilitarian*. Gibson's theory of affordances shows how this strategy operates. For example, in my exhibition *Work (in Progress)* (2016) I was interested in drawing a relationship between the Object form of a seat (or stool) and the implicit reference that it makes to the human bodies that might use them (see Figure 9). In this practice-based research I trialled three different heights for the stools I made, to test if this would implicitly reference the different heights of humans (for example between adult and child). In order to further test the concept of a broken Object, I increased the scale of one stool to a height greater than the average human could easily use (approximately 200 mm). I observed that this relatively small increase in scale caused the stool to immediately fall-out from being perceived as utilitarian or useful as a stool, and instantly began to resemble a pot-plant stand or in the context of the gallery, a plinth.

American academic Donald Norman (1935-) makes reference to Gibson's theory of affordances in his writing on design theory. In particular Norman is interested in the psychology of design and how we instinctively perceive the way an object might be used. In *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988) Norman describes how we have learnt how to orient ourselves towards things physically through our understanding of the material's affordance, in other words, what the material allows us to *do*. Therefore, if something is operating well from a design point of view, Norman considers it should not need any explanation as to how it should be used because we will instinctively understand it¹⁵⁰. Norman describes how this perception of an object promotes particular behaviours because we use things in the world based on what they afford. "Knobs are for turning. Slots are for inserting things into. Balls are for bouncing. When affordances are taken advantage of, the user knows just what to do."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ For further reading see Rachel Wells, *Scale in Contemporary Sculpture: Enlargement, Miniaturisation and the Life-Size* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

¹⁵⁰ Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1988). 9.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.



Figure 9: Katie Lee *Work (in Progress)* (2016). Image, Christian Capurro.

By describing the way humans behave towards Objects based on their affordances Norman also offers a glimpse into how we might break Objects by pushing affordances to their limit or changing their affordances altogether. Norman gives these examples:

A chair affords ('is for') support, and therefore affords sitting. A chair can also be carried. Glass is for seeing through, and for breaking. Wood is normally used for solidity, opacity, support or carving. Flat, porous, smooth surfaces are for writing on. So wood is also for writing on. Hence the problem for British Rail: when the shelters had glass, vandals smashed it; when they had plywood, vandals wrote on and carved it. The planners were trapped by the affordance of their materials.¹⁵²

Revealing these expanded affordances that materials offer beyond their form is another strategy that can be used to break Objects. These ideas can be seen in relationship to practice-based research work that I made in 2015 and 2016 using fans.

In most contexts, fans are Objects. They belong to the utilitarian domestic or office world and any expanded affordance held in their form is easy to overlook. Occasionally, however, as part of my oscillating thoughts in relation to Objects, I began to tune-in to an expanded affordance of fans, that of the blades' ability to *cut*. When sitting in meetings or simply at home with the fan whirring around, every now and then I would shudder as I inadvertently brought to mind this expanded capacity. When exhibiting the fans as part of my artwork, I hung them upside-down from the ceiling on extended timber poles and removed the front covers that usually protect us from the affordance of the fan *to cut*. This combination of actions, I argue, broke the Object-fan.

Obviously, fans can cut more easily if they are not protected by their covers, but I contest that even to be able to *see* the capacity of the fan to cut at all is difficult when habitually considering the fan an Object. However, when shown in the gallery and by foregrounding its expanded affordance this along with the momentum caused by its oscillation in suspension, *broke* the Object-fan.

Manuel DeLanda has also written about materials affordances and their related capacities in a variety of philosophical contexts. In particular, DeLanda discusses emergent affordances and capacities to show that the world is not reducible to stable concepts such as concrete *wholes*.¹⁵³ This is because the idea of a stable *whole* means that nothing emerges

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Manuel DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (London, UK: Continuum

from interactions between *wholes* and historically the term was used to identify irreducible concepts such as *life* or *deity*.¹⁵⁴ DeLanda demonstrates that the latent potentiality of an entity's affordance means that the idea of an organic totality (or whole) is too limited. Instead DeLanda proposes what he calls *assemblages*.¹⁵⁵ Assemblages are ontologically open (rather than closed like an Object) because the constitution of an assemblage acknowledges that its active properties are constantly open to reciprocal relationships with other things.

Manuel DeLanda shows how the phenomena of latent or virtual capacities operates in the following passage:

There is, on the other hand, the capacity of the knife to cut things. This is a very different thing because unlike the property of sharpness which is always actual the capacity to cut may never be actual if the knife is never used. In other words, a capacity may remain only potential if it is never actually exercised... In addition, when the capacity does become actual it is not as a state, like the state of being sharp, but as an event, an event that is always double: to cut-to be cut. The reason for this is that the knife's capacity to affect is contingent on the existence of other things, cuttable things, that have the capacity to be affected by it.¹⁵⁶

He goes on to show how these capacities hold open the idea of objects rather than foreclosing them to be Objects:

...We can enumerate, for example, the possible states in which a material entity will tend to be (solid, liquid, gas, plasma) or the possible ways in which it may tend to flow (uniformly, periodically, turbulently). But capacities to affect need not be finite because they depend on the capacities to be affected of innumerable other entities: a knife has the capacity to cut when it interacts with something that has the capacity to be cut; but it also has the capacity to kill if it interacts with large organisms with differentiated organs, that is, with entities that have the capacity to be killed.¹⁵⁷

Therefore, I argue, the latent affordances and capacities of an object can be used to break Objects. Take for example the artwork by Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Bowl and Fish)* (1991/2011). This piece consists of a timber chair, a white bowl filled with water, a kitchen knife and two goldfish (see Figure 10). All of these elements are often considered Objects. Chairs are ubiquitous, likewise bowls are often invisible to us when they operate within the domestic sphere, as are knives. Goldfish are probably the most common household pet-Object often used as a child's first attempt to see if they can care for something and keep it

International Publishing Group, 2011). 3,185.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵⁵ The concept of an *assemblage* was established in Deleuze and Guattari's work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

¹⁵⁶ DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 3-5.

alive. This is presumably because it is easier to keep goldfish in the realm of an Object than something we perceive as more sentient (like us). All of these elements in Kounellis's work fit within systems that are often invisible to us, operating as part of a silent background. So, what happens when they are brought into relation?

The most immediate characteristic that becomes visible is the affordance of the knife through its capacity *to cut*. However, it also reveals the affordance of the fish, to swim, move and be cut. Further, it reveals the affordance of a bowl, to hold. Not just hold food, but to hold something infallibly—because the fish depends on its capacity *to hold* in order to support their life. So, we also see the affordance of water to support life. The affordance of a chair is expanded because it is rendered beyond its role to be just sat upon, and instead shows its capacity to isolate and protect.¹⁵⁸ All of these affordances are not operating. They are not cutting or bleeding or failing to hold. They are not diagrammatic or illustrative of their potential affordance. Instead, what they do in their relation is make visible the latent affordances of the individual elements. And making this latent capacity operate visibly, I argue, breaks Objects. Furthermore, the breaking of Objects in this way activates the artwork and breaks the artwork-Object.

DeLanda also considers the ways we abstract our thinking about the world, particularly in relation to materials. Like Whitehead and Ingold, DeLanda has traced this mentality back through the history of Western scientific thought. In a chapter named *Material Complexity* (2004), DeLanda reflects on the way that human knowledge of materials has become more and more segregated and separated out.¹⁵⁹ Instead of seeing materials as interconnected and co-constituting, DeLanda observes that we have consistently separated-out our study of materials into siloed areas of specialisation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ It could also be argued that it reveals its capacity to be an artwork.

¹⁵⁹ DeLanda in Neil Leach, Turnbull, David, Williams, Chris, ed. *Digital Tectonics* (Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Whitehead would call this the study of matters-of-fact.



Figure 10: Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Bowl and Fish)* (1991/2011). Image, Katie Lee.

Whilst these developments greatly contributed to specific knowledge (such as the knowledge of chemical properties, or the laws of physics) the simplification over time “...was accompanied by a ‘not insignificant loss’.”¹⁶¹ For example what was already known about materials empirically was put to one side in order to locate information about the materials that was consistent, stable and exact. DeLanda reflects that consequently what we consider to be *knowledge* of materials and their properties changed over the last few thousand years; shifting from an intimate and often physical understanding of material and form, to separated centres of *pure science* in the “...newly founded departments of engineering and material sciences.”¹⁶²

In contrast, early human knowledge of the variability of materials was formed through observation and experience over hundreds and thousands of years.¹⁶³ As DeLanda explains, an understanding that materials don’t behave in a uniform manner was well known to craftsmen, “...whose eyes had seen and whose fingers had felt the intricacies of the behaviour of materials during thermal processing or as they were shaped by chiming, cutting or plastic deformation”.¹⁶⁴ In other words, through handling them.

Aristotle’s famous four elements, fire, earth, water and air... were very familiar to a metallurgist... As metaphysical speculation gave special meanings to these four elementary qualities their original physical meaning was lost and the variability and complexity of real materials was replaced with the uniform behaviour of a philosophically simplified matter about which one could only speculate symbolically¹⁶⁵.

One material that I have used for its affordances and capacities throughout my art practice is rubber. Most often I use rubber for its latent qualities and I am drawn to its expanded potential, even when it is an Object form such as inner-tubes for a bicycle or car tyres. Rather than seeing the Object-rubber I often tune-in to the potential rubber has to stretch, to snap back, to make black marks on roads, squash courts and white gallery walls.

Beyond these latent qualities, I also believe we often take for granted the material complexity of rubber when we consider it an Object. For example, we rarely think of car tyres in relation to their material source, a rubber-tree.¹⁶⁶ In 2014 I travelled to Indonesia

¹⁶¹ DeLanda in Leach, *Digital Tectonics*. 2.

¹⁶² DeLanda in *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶³ DeLanda in *ibid.*, 14-15

¹⁶⁴ DeLanda in *ibid.*, 15

¹⁶⁵ DeLanda in *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Tires contain around 30% natural rubber. See: The Michelin Group, "The tiredigest.Michelin.Com,"

and Malaysia to trace my interest in rubber and my curiosity about this abstraction in thinking to its source, visiting rubber plantations in Central Java and Malacca. I visited small, family run rubber-tree farms, and filmed the process of tapping rubber from the trees. I also visited small cottage industries on the outskirts of Jogjakarta that re-use rubber tyres and inner-tubes to make various other products, including furniture.

In my exhibition *Work (in Progress)* (2016) I exhibited a video work that was made from footage recorded on this research trip. The video was shown behind a perforated partition wall¹⁶⁷ on top of which was a large spool of rubber ribbon made from strips of car and bicycle inner-tubes. Squeezing behind the partition, the viewer entered a darkened room where the video was projected (see Figure 10 and 11). The video work showed a cut rubber-tree dripping its white rubbery sap into a small black bucket, accompanied by the sound of insects in the plantation droning loudly and incessantly. Several other sculptural elements were in the room, including 12 long sheets of black plastic film that hung from ceiling to floor, and a steel pole supporting a spotlight.

By referencing the source of rubber back to the rubber-tree this strategy was used to *break* rubber. And, by implication, to break all the Object-materials and manufacturing processes that are used to create plastics, steel, rope, wood; all materials I use to make my work. This act of *breaking* in turn forges new, forgotten connections about the relatedness of things; introducing actions, processes, ecologies and complexity to the materials we use to make Objects.

The way we perceive the world around us and what shows up or recedes from our consciousness is complex and variable. Philosophers, cognitive and physical scientists all have different theories about how and why we perceive the world the way we do, and indeed what the world really *is*. As well as the common habit of Object-Thinking that influences our perception of an Object's materials source, Gibson's ecological theory of perception shows that we perceive material's latent and expanded capacity through registering its affordances. Gibson's theory also shows that our perception of a material is not related to its constituent properties, however it can include an embodied awareness of

<https://thetiredigest.michelin.com/an-unknown-object-the-tire-materials>.

¹⁶⁷ This sculptural work also referenced an Object (an office-style partition wall), which I broke by perforating it. Although this seems a literal reference of the action *to break*, I mean it in the sense that a partition wall with holes in it is no longer an Object because it has been adapted in a strange or unfamiliar way. There are many ways to break Objects and they do not refer to literal acts of breaking.

material and formal capacities. Therefore, our understanding of the affordance of rubber holds within it a contraction: on one hand we forget the complexity of the material through the habits of Object-Thinking, whereas on the other we may be corporeally aware that it has an expanded capacity through the way we perceive it. Therefore, these contradictions indicate that we regularly tune-in or have oscillations in our thinking, to the expanded potential held by materials and forms, even if this understanding is still a form of abstraction.

Using a material like rubber in an artwork also makes reference to these *active* latent states because implicitly we are aware of the capacity of rubber to stretch, bind, or soften as well as to mark, skid, tear, or burn. DeLanda shows that through the assemblage of materials and forms in relation (in reciprocity) to one another that things become activated or hold open their potential, rather than shut down or reduce, even if they are not engaging these potentialities.

Therefore, when artworks use a material detached from a recognisable Object-form, audiences may still perceive and understand the affordance of the material/form along with its expanded capacity. We *know* something about materials through the embodied act of perceiving. Without an Object-form to attach the material to, it is the sensation of its affordance that remains, and perhaps it is this sensation that also helps to dislodge and break Objects and activate artworks.



Figure 11: *Work (in Progress)* (2016). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 12: Katie Lee, *Work (in Progress)*, 2016 (installation detail). Image, Christian Capurro.

Chapter 3: *Object World (Sculpture as Apparatus)*

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how's the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

—David Foster Wallace¹⁶⁸

In this chapter I will consider the ways in which philosophers have accounted for the human capacity to create cohesion in our perception of the world more broadly and understand the world as if it were an invisible networked system, or what I call an *Object World*. This is distinct from my previous chapter on the Object, which considered ways that Objects could appear as abstract wholes, and broken Objects might appear to be made up of component parts. In this chapter my emphasis is on how Objects have relations outside themselves, and therefore to break the Object World emphasises, or makes visible the network rather than the Object within it. I do this by showing how Heidegger considers the way we encounter things in the world as being akin to *equipment*. I relate this to my own work using the example of a large site-specific project *Cross-Section* exhibited at the Abbotsford Convent in 2016. I then consider other methods that artists use to reveal the Object World and make specific reference to several works by the artist Cildo Meireles. I further expand upon my own practice-based research using examples of what I have come to call *tool-things*.

In the second part of this chapter I revisit the work of James J. Gibson to consider how our perception of the world relates objects to the body, and therefore shows that things that appear useful to us can also play a role in revealing the Object World. I look at the role kinaesthetic empathy plays in extending our understanding of perception to include a proclivity towards movement and things that show potentiality. Further, I consider how this might be referenced in spatiotemporal artworks using examples of my own methods and practice-based research, citing works that I refer to as *apparatus*. I apply this thinking to my large-scale performance installation *Set Elements* (2019).

¹⁶⁸ David Foster Wallace, Kenyon College Bulletin (Archive), “This is Water” Accessed April 20, 2018, <http://bulletin-archive.kenyon.edu/x4280.html>

Equipment

One of Heidegger's most famous philosophical propositions relates to the way we encounter things in the world as equipment. This means our primary mode of experiencing things in the world is to simply use them, not analyse the individual characteristics of how things work or how they fit together into a cohesive whole. This notion goes beyond the individual Objects within the system (such as in Heidegger's example of a broken hammer) to encompass the whole concept of the world itself. In other words, it describes the ontological position that allows the unbroken hammer to be an Object in the first place.¹⁶⁹

This broader concept of a *world* Heidegger points out, often gets "...passed over..."¹⁷⁰ and instead the concept of a world is more often considered theoretically by analysing the individual entities that are within it.¹⁷¹ For Heidegger, this is to overlook the pre-existing notion of a world to which these things already belong.

Living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, everything has the character of world. It is everywhere the case that '*it worlds*'...¹⁷²

This mode of thinking—whereby we take for granted the cohesive concept of a world—I have coined the *Object World*. In the Object World, the factors that make things appear to hold together are overlooked and everything operates as if in a *silent equipmental background*.¹⁷³ Heidegger considers the mode we encounter things in the world to be like *equipment* because they all fit together in an apparently cohesive whole. In this state things fit together as if they somehow already belong to a world, and little scrutiny is paid to how they got there, or to what it is that holds them together in this apparent sense of a wholeness. This ontological position Heidegger likens to equipment because as Heidegger put it;

...there is no such thing as 'an' equipment. To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is.

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger calls this state ready-to-hand.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: New York: Continuum, 2000). 61.

¹⁷¹ *Being and Time*. 93.

¹⁷² *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*. 61.

¹⁷³ This term belongs to Graham Harman see his *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002).

Seeing the world in equipment-terms not only relates to processes that we undertake or tools that we use, it influences the way we see everything. For example Heidegger says, “...what we encounter as closest to us...is the room; and we encounter it not as something ‘between four walls’ in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing.”¹⁷⁴ Or, as philosopher Graham Harman (1968-) who has written extensively on Heidegger says,

In any given moment, most of us are not thinking about the chair we are sitting in, the floor that supports it, the solid earth beneath the floor, the oxygen we breath, or the heart and kidneys that keep us alive. Instead, we take these things for granted and focus our attention elsewhere.¹⁷⁵

Significantly, according to Heidegger, the concept of *equipment* means that we are able to recognise that something belongs to a system or world even if we don’t know exactly what it is. In another famous example, Heidegger makes reference to the furnishings in the theatre where he was delivering his lecture. He points out that from entering the room, navigating their way to their seats and now using their pens and notebooks, the audience had likely taken for granted the objects that were in the room, proposing that they had been “simply used, not consciously seen”.¹⁷⁶ He then asked them to consider the point of view of a hypothetical person who had never seen these objects before, or anything like them. This person, Heidegger claimed, despite not knowing what the objects were used for (and hence not taking them for granted in a habitual way), would nonetheless see the objects in the room—the podium, desks and chairs—as potentially useful objects, not just mere perceptual data, or “...brown surfaces at right angles to one another...”. Instead Heidegger proposed, they would encounter the room and the objects within it as a kind of “...instrumental strangeness.”¹⁷⁷

This sense of instrumental strangeness is, I argue, the moment that we have revealed the system to which we implicitly understand the objects to belong. It is the moment we have revealed the Object World exists, because we recognise a system, without necessarily understanding specifically what the entity that we are seeing within it *is*. Therefore, if something is not immediately recognisable it does not revert to mere phenomena, but remains embedded in the Object World to which humans always and already belong. At this time as Harman puts it we see “...visible things emerging from a dominant silent

¹⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*. 62. Harman’s own philosophical contribution to these ideas will be considered later in this dissertation.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*. 61.

background of equipment.”¹⁷⁸ Creating this condition of equipmental strangeness in my artworks is one of the methods I employ to reveal the Object World. Because, I argue—making artworks that fit into our complicit understanding of networked things, but that are unfamiliar (like the podium and desk were to the hypothetical person in Heidegger’s example)—*breaks* the Object World¹⁷⁹. Remembering that to break the Object World is simply to recognise that something fits into a World, even when we don’t know how. To test this methodology in 2016, I developed the project *Cross-Section*.

***Cross-Section* (2016).**

Cross-Section was a site-specific project that I made for the Abbotsford Convent in 2016. I proposed the project to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation because of the unique position the Convent holds both as a contained campus or precinct, as well as an open public-space that receives a diverse cross-section of visitors. This includes people who visit the Convent’s multiple arts venues, as well as those who come for the many other services that include a primary school, radio station, various restaurants, businesses, markets and special events. This diversity means that there is always a broad range of visitors to the site who may or may not be there to see art. I surmised that the precinct operated as a complex (micro) version of an Object World, one in which many different kinds of activities operate along with their concurrent *equipment*.

I proposed to spend two weeks in and around the grounds of the Convent, setting up my own equipment-like Objects in an ongoing performance work, that I called a *performance-installation*. This performance-installation was performed each day to a cross-section of visitors, with very little sign posting or advertising—allowing me and the equipment that I made—to become part of the Convent’s Object World.

The Convent was the perfect location for this project because in addition to its current use, the Abbotsford Convent site has a complex history. It is located on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people near the junction of the Merri Creek and Yarra River and is a significant meeting place for the Central Victorian Tribes of the Kulin Nation. Today the site houses the Wurundjeri Tribe Cultural Heritage Council. In 1838 the site was sold in the first land release that expanded the footprint of Melbourne’s central district. In 1850

¹⁷⁸ Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*. 63.

¹⁷⁹ One of the best comments made to me about my installation *Drawing Boundaries, Walking Lines* (2009) was that the installation looked like an underfunded gymnasium with equipment that didn’t make sense.

it was sold to the Sisters of the Good Shepard, and nuns from this order owned and operated the site until 1975. In addition to the Convent, the site housed a Magdalen Laundry which was built as part of the Magdalen Asylum's principles—to provide refuge and rehabilitation for girls who might be sent to the Convent for "...acting outside of the strict social mores of the day". In addition to the Magdalen Laundry there was also an industrial school, that was built to take in, "...neglected, orphaned or abandoned children" to teach them a trade and "keep them from adversity".¹⁸⁰ The reference to this heritage is both well signposted and visible in the architecture (inside and out). Therefore, the sculptural forms that I made aimed to draw from, and then reflect back, the Objects and equipment-like forms from the Convent's past: monastic, disciplinary and routine. Reflecting on this history as one that was also deeply pedagogical, the sculptural objects I made for *Cross-Section* referenced Objects from the Convent's past Object World—stools, partition boards, chalk boards, score boards and brass bells—equipment that had both pedagogical and game-like resonances. The sculptures were all operational, though they lacked an explicit utility. In fact, most of the equipment was in some way illogical. Because of the huge variety of activities that occur at the Convent each day, it was unclear what the Objects I made were for, or to which specific *World* they belonged. Therefore, despite the reference to the Convent's past, the Objects maintained currency though their ambiguity.

¹⁸⁰ For more on the Convent's history see, "The Abbotsford Convent History", Abbotsford Convent Foundation, Accessed February 20, 2019. < <https://abbotsfordconvent.com.au/about/history> >



Figure 13: The Abbotsford Convent.

As a practicality I mounted all of my Objects on wheels to make things easy to move around the grounds. To my amusement this incidentally included the actions of *wheeling* and *pushing* into the contemporary Object World of the Convent, because I soon discovered, everyone who works in the carless Convent precinct also pushes heavy things they need to move around on wheels. This meant I was even less conspicuous on the site, as we (the tenants and I) all went about our business, pushing different equipment around the site. This also meant that it was not just the sculptural objects or their reference to the Convent's Object World that merged my artwork with the Object World but also the actions I performed. Because in fact it was the endless setting-up that *was* the performance in my work. And these actions; *moving, arranging, testing, pushing* also fit into the World of the Convent at work.

During my time at the Convent I began to think of the performances as *Performances with No-one Watching*. Of course, there were people who saw me, but often they were not overtly *watching*, and this helped me work more seamlessly within the Object World.

Various people spoke to me while I was on site and because I was outside all the time, visitors often stopped to ask me for directions. But very few asked me what I was *doing*. And no-one ever stopped to watch me as if I were an artist *performing*. This meant that by becoming part of the Object World of the Convent, I had in part, *broken* the art-Object that is formed by putting work into galleries.

The main difficulty I had as an artist *performing* was when people came to the Convent deliberately to find me and see my work. At this point, some visitors wanted to know *where I was*, and *what I was doing*. Upon finding me, people who knew me usually considered me to be available to chat or have a coffee, because it appeared that I was not busy doing a *performance* at that time.



Figure 14: The Abbotsford Convent, *Rolling*.



Figure 15. *Performance with No One Watching*, (2017).



Figure 16. Katie Lee, *Performances with No One Watching* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 17. Katie Lee, *Performance with No One Watching* (2017). Image, Clare Rae.

As well as merging with the Object World, I was also interested in trying to find ways to share glimpses of what I was doing as an *art practice* with the residents of the Convent; I wanted to do this without advertising the performances officially or flagging them as *performance artworks*. One strategy I used was to make occasional video-recordings of myself working—dragging the equipment around and setting it up (Figure 15). I occasionally caught people on camera interacting with installations I had set up and left around the site, mostly children. At the end of each day I would edit the footage and add it to one of five video-stations I had dotted around the Convent. Like the performances, I did not want these video works to be *on display*. Therefore, I embedded them back into the Convent in places that would only really be seen by regular passers-by. Two video-stations were projected in hallways, one of which unglamorously led to the toilets. One was on a monitor in the Bakery Café (Figure 17). Another was rear-projected on a window in an empty room (Figure 16), and another was locked into an outdoor utility cage. This meant that the accumulating footage on these video-stations was likewise embedded into the Convent rather than put in any obvious art context.

The project was useful in terms of my research, because by merging with the Convent's Object World, I was able to break the art-Object at the same time reveal the past Object World that the Convent operated in.

Breaking the Object World—the Artwork of Cildo Meireles

Cildo Meireles (1948-) is a Brazilian artist whose work often makes reference, explicitly or otherwise, to the manifold networks that exists around Objects. He is often thought of as a conceptual artist, however the particular orientation he has to conceptual material often focuses specifically on the way we abstract our thinking in relationship to objects.¹⁸¹ Meireles refers to this interest as one that seeks out paradox, stating,

I am interested in this kind of inversion... the paradoxical relationship between Objects. I believe that even when I try to avoid it, things sometimes make themselves quite explicit to me through paradox, through the relationship between thesis and antithesis. I am forever trying to look for this hypothetical synthesis.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Brett and Todolí in Guy Brett, *Cildo Meireles* (London: Tate Publishing Ltd., 2008). 10.

¹⁸² Meireles quoted in *ibid.*

His work often takes spatial, sculptural or installation-based form and he is interested in both the physical and psychological perception of space.¹⁸³ As such, his work often seeks to reveal the nexus between an abstract mental construct and a sensory experience. The way he reveals these concerns in his work results in a broad range of material and formal outcomes that are experiential, poetic and whimsical and at other times overtly political. Although his work can be used to reflect on Object-Thinking in various ways, it is the way that he reveals and *breaks* the Object World that I will make reference to in this chapter.

One example can be found in a body of work Meireles made in the 1970s, *Inserções em Circuitos Antropológicos*, (*Insertions into Ideological Circuits*). This collection of work was made during a time of great civil unrest in Brazil, when overt political content within artwork was potentially dangerous, especially artwork that referenced the very network or *World* that held the political power. By inserting his work directly into the networks that he was critiquing, Meireles was able to reveal and *break* the powerful systems operating in society. For example: in one *Insertion* he printed provocative questions and political statements onto money, that he then put back into circulation. In another, he transferred text onto the glass of Coke bottles that were likewise recirculated. As he said of this work, “I was no longer working with the metaphorical representations of situations; I was working with the real situation itself.”¹⁸⁴

In other pieces Meireles worked directly with Objects in ways that show how abstract our perception of *value* can be in the Object World, including the value of money, and the monetary value of art. In *Money Tree* (1969) Meireles tied together a wad of bank notes to create an artwork that he priced more highly than the currency itself was worth. In another, *Ocasão* (*Occasion*) (1974/2004) he made audiences conscious of their own behaviour around money by leaving an open bowl of currency in a room made of two-way mirrors. On leaving the mirrored room, viewers could watch others as they encountered the same tempting scenario.

It is Meireles’ spatiotemporal installations that are the most relevant for the purposes of my dissertation; in these works, he recruits not just symbolic reference to systems and networks but perceptual and experiential networks that Objects are held within as well. For example, the title of his installation *Através* (*Through*) (1983-9) alerts us to the possibility of

¹⁸³ Brett, *Cildo Meireles*. 12.

¹⁸⁴ Meireles quoted in *ibid.*, 64.

navigating within the artwork, which on first inspection appears to consist of open thresholds, transparent walls and corridors. Nothing blocks an audience from journeying *through*, yet despite this—the work denies its own invitation. As the writer Bartomeu Mari said of their experience,

You have to go in. Even though it may not appear inviting, you have to dare to enter and begin moving around inside; you have to disregard that initial sensation that induces a certain sense of danger and discomfort. Just seeing this work fills you with unease and misgiving as you move around the perimeter trying to understand how the piece functions and what it is composed of. *Through* both invites and repels at the same time. It causes us to remain still and alert as if confronted by an active threat, an animal that might bite us.

Mari uses the word *active* to describe the way Meireles' work operates in a state of perceptual flux. The space Meireles offers is recognisable as a navigable space, like those familiar to us in the Object World, yet at the same time it is somehow *fallen*. Meireles has shown us the recognisable world of corridors and windows, and with them constructed a space to move *through*. Yet at the same time, he has simultaneously *broken* them. Walls are transparent, floors smashed. We recognise their order, but they don't make sense.

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Figure 18: *Through* (1983-89), Cildo Meireles

Brazilian writer Ferreira Gullar has said of Meireles that:

...instead of focussing only on the rental field of perception, [Meireles] concentrates on a 'syntheses between sensorial and mental relations', so that the sense and the reason stimulate each other to project together, the cognition of inhabited or merely conceived spaces.

This intersection of concepts is perhaps at its most complex in Meireles' 1970-5 work *Eureka/Blindhotland* (Figure 19). In this spatiotemporal installation, Meireles works across the various modes of perception that we recruit to understand the world around us. The work is surrounded by a curtain, an Object familiar to us for creating a contained space or divide. Yet the transparency of the mesh means that we can still see the interior from the exterior, therefore there is no clear interior/exterior divide. Within the curtained space lie over 200 rubber balls, casually distributed in a way that resembles some kind of game. This seems to invite participation, although there is no clear use for the balls to be put. Nor is there any clear indication if the installation is interactive.

Within the installation is a set of scales, raised up high on a metal pole. On each side of the scales sits a cluster of balls. Despite the fact there are an odd number on each side, the scale is clearly balanced. This is because, although the balls are all physically the same size, they actually consist of 50 different weights. As part of the installation a soundtrack plays—a recording of balls, of different weights, falling from different heights and at different distances from the microphone. All of these strategies dislodge any sense of constancy usually found in form. Although the whole artwork looks like a familiar game, upon closer inspection any logic the game holds, falls away and is *broken*.

Of this work, Meireles says:

This project is the natural development of an experiment which constitutes, in my view, the basic nucleus of my work. It is an investigation of space in all of its aspects: physical, geometric, historical, psychological, topological and anthropological... [with] the aim of creating a continuum of perceptual information... *Blindhotland* ... is the generic name given to a series of works begun in 1970, in which the dominance of the visual gives way to a 'blind' perception of reality through the senses of hearing, smell and taste; through awareness of density, heat, and so on.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Meireles quoted in Dan Cameron, Herkenhoff Paulo, Mosquera Gerado, *Cildo Meireles* (London: Phaidon, 1999). 23-24.

What Meireles is describing is the Object World. One that is held together through multiple networked systems of perception; philosophical, theoretical, conceptual and psychological. By presenting an artwork that at first seems to have the same internal logic as the Object World we are familiar with, but which denies the obvious checks and balances, Meireles manages to break it. Instead he presents a world in which the order is tipped, but the scales are balanced.

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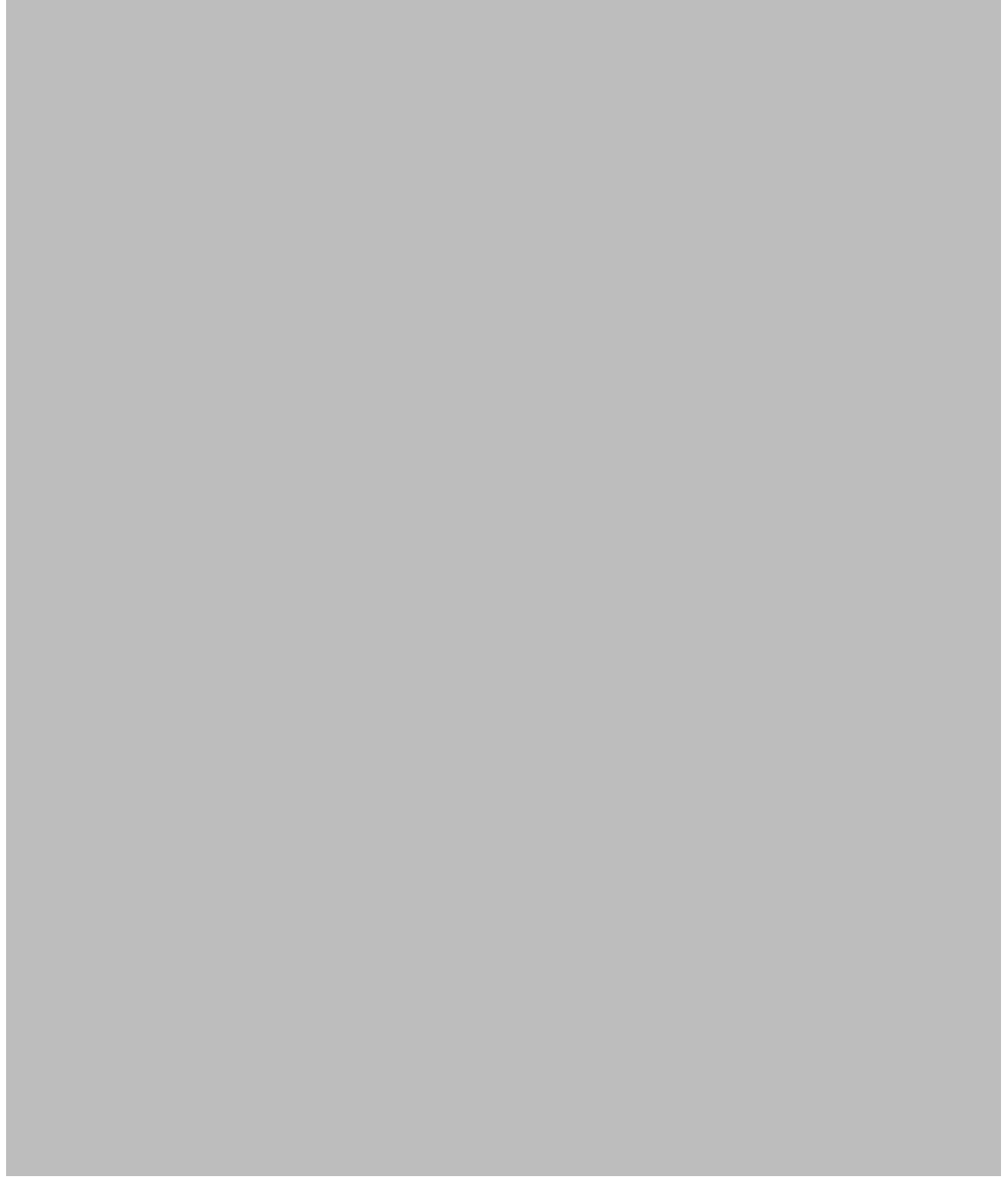


Figure 19: Cildo Meireles, *Eureka Blindhotland*, (1970-1975).

Tool-Things: Some Practice-Based Strategies

In order to make reference to the Object World within my spatiotemporal practice I have intuitively developed a range of sculptural works that I have come to refer to as *tool-things*. Tool-things mimic networked and equipment-like forms, however they do not necessarily have an assigned purpose. Instead they materially and formally take on the pragmatic logic of equipment. This equipmental strangeness *breaks* the Object World.

For example, in my work *Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extended)*, I used the notion of a tool-thing in constructing the sculptural element in the version *Extension #1* (Figure 20). The object served to hold a coiled strip of rubber; this function was of primary concern, rather than any particular aim to aestheticise it. However, the fact this *tool* did not fit into a known system, dislodged it from the invisible background and instead revealed the Object World to which tools more generally belong. That this tool-thing was accompanied by a domestic fan helped to locate the work within the Object World's equipment-like system. Despite the changes that I had made to the fan, it nevertheless still operated as a fan, an Object that we are familiar with and that usually functions invisibly in the Object World. Thus, the fan lent its equipment-like ontology to the tool-thing I had created, incorporating them both in the same world. Because it is not immediately clear what my tool-things are for within the equipment world as we know it, they reveal it. Therefore, the nature of tool-things can break the Object World.

Within my exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019) each sculptural form was a different kind of tool-thing. The incandescent lamp at the front of the gallery illogically provided energy to a solar panel, which when charged powered an extraction fan mounted into the gallery wall, which when operating propelled air into the gap between the wall and the window (that was revealed by the cut-out in the wall) (Figure 21). The large bronze pendulum that hung from the ceiling by rope was accompanied by a *tool* that could be used to measure out and draw a chalk circle below it, for no particular reason (Figure 22). A mirror mounted on the wall of the gallery was a *tool* to view the pendulum. In the rear gallery there was a whole array of tool-things that all operated together in an extended, yet non-functional system (Figure 23). In this way I argue tool-things help to break the Object World, by revealing a non-specific yet cohesive and operating system.



Figure 20: Katie Lee, *Chair in Cooperation with Orange*, (*Extension #1*). Image Christian Capurro.



Figure 21: Katie Lee: *Stop/Start* (2019). Image Christian Capurro.



Figure 22: Katie Lee: *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* (2019). Image Christian Capurro.



Figure 23: Katie Lee: *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.

I also exhibited a collection of sculptural work entitled *Tool-Things* at Daine Singer Gallery in 2017. This body of work explored tool-things as separate sculptural works rather than within an installation format. In this context tool-things became an archived collection of fragments taken from the Object World. This aspect of the work—reflecting back the world in parts—is another strategy I have formed to break the Object World. The reflection of the world through broken parts, or the literal breaking apart of the Object World draws the work of broken Objects into an anthropological framework. By collecting bits and pieces of material and form that we use to construct the Object World, the Object World itself is made visible for reflection. It is the jumbling back together of this fragmented World into collections of unrelated parts—that I claim, helps to *break* it (Figure 24 and 25).

I have also found that simply taking an existing piece of *equipment* from the Object World and reframing it within the context of the gallery can also be an effective strategy to break the Object World. Take for example, my recent use of ladders within my installations (Figure 26). Ladders are quite literally a piece of equipment. Although common in galleries, in the context of an exhibition they are usually tucked away in a storeroom once they have served their practical purpose. By including the form of the ladder as part of the artwork itself I am not breaking the Object of the ladder—the ladder is still a ladder— and we remain no more aware of its constituent parts. However, we *are* made conscious of the invisible *system* to which ladders usually belong. As a result, it is this system (the Object World) that is rendered visible.

Another frequent example of this strategy within my practice has been my use of stools. Stools, or more broadly chairs or seats, are found in most spaces that humans occupy. Although largely invisible, they actually reveal a permitted behaviour within the particular Object World they are within—one that includes the permission to dwell in that place for a period of time. In fact, these equipment forms can give us a great deal of detail about the Object World, or the social system to which they belong. For example: the number of allocated seats might reveal the amount of human activity anticipated in a space, along with a limit or capacity. Taken even further, the height and material construction of the seat may reveal the size of the person expected, or the height at which their activity might occur, and therefore also indicate what kind of happening or event might be going on. Therefore, to have stools or seats as part of an installation, performs a reference to the equipmental-act of dwelling. To make the seating part of the artwork disrupts the usual

‘world-ing’ of the gallery space which frequently eliminates this kind of equipment, because it is not normally permitted for people to sit within an artwork.¹⁸⁶ By placing the seat back into the gallery as part of the artwork I reveal the system to which seats belong, through their incongruity with the ontology of artworks. That these seats are handmade further complicates their role in the installation. This is because they *fit* within the grammar or vocabulary of the other sculptural works. This means that they implicate the sculptures into the World of the stools and the stools into the World of the sculptures.

Sculpture as Apparatus

As I described above, my use of tool-things incorporates the artwork into the functional equipment-like Object World. More broadly, this approach has led me to consider my sculptural artworks operating as a kind of *apparatus*. Like *tool-things* I consider my *sculptural-apparatus* to be potentially operational, although not necessarily logical. And through the implied operational nature of the apparatus, the artworks make direct reference to the body. This reference back to the body shows our corporeal orientation to things in the world that operate; and this orientation plays a central role in our perception of an Object World.

James J. Gibson describes his theory of perception as *ecological* and he uses the term to argue that what we *see* is that which is meaningful to us, and (like equipment) it appears to form a complete environment. As he describes it:

We are told that vision depends on the eye, which is connected to the brain. I shall suggest that natural vision depends on the eyes in the head on a body supported by the ground, the brain being only the central organ of a complete visual system.¹⁸⁷

According to Gibson’s ecological perspective we do not necessarily observe constituent or elemental forms that make up the world. Instead we see a system-like world, an ecology, of useful things *to us*. This makes Gibson’s theory of perception relate equally to my concept of the Object World. The Object World is the environment that humans *see*. It is not necessarily the environment that *is*. As I related in the last chapter, Gibson’s theory of perception also shows that we tune-in to the affordances and capacities objects and our environment have. In the very process of looking, we consider if something can be used as part of the way we make meaning. It is through this embedded and embodied knowledge

¹⁸⁶ I am referring to installations in contemporary galleries, not to the kind of seating that is often found in museums.

¹⁸⁷ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Viii.

that we make sense of our surroundings.

Moving Things

The potential for things to be grasped and used by the human body implicates them in the Object World. However, there are other physiological responses to the world that also affect our understanding of what is going on in our environment. For example, Gallagher shows we have an innate orientation to things that move which is evident when we are first born:

When we first open our eyes, not only can we see, but also our vision, imperfect as it is, is already attuned to those shapes that resemble our own shape. More precisely and quite literally, we can see our own possibilities in the faces of others. The infant, minutes after birth, is capable of imitating the gesture that it sees on the face of another person. It is thus capable of a certain kind of movement that foreshadows intentional action, and that propels it into a human world.¹⁸⁸

This anthropocentric orientation to a *human world* means that we are programmed to tune-in and recognise animate beings; by extension we quickly learn that things that move, react and respond to us, require attention. This research is helpful because it shows that we have a physical response and a particular attunement not only to things that we can grasp and that are useful to us, but also to things that move.¹⁸⁹ I argue that movement signifies to humans that something is part of our usefully networked Object World, or at least that it requires our attention.

Movement has taken various forms within my spatial practice. Sometimes I add kinetic elements to works, such as oscillating fans or swinging pendulums. At other times I add movement to my installations by occasioning a performance or body within them. I often hang works from the ceiling—rather than mounting them to walls or having them free-standing—because this increases their potential for movement. What is interesting and of relevance to this aspect of my practice-based research is that this strategy is not only *effective*, further research shows how it is *affective* as well.

¹⁸⁸ Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. 1.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.



Figure 24: Katie Lee, *Hanging Things* #1-4 (2017) Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 25: *Untitled (Pendulum Trials)* (2017). Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 26: Katie Lee *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2019). Image, Tim Mummery.

Kinaesthetic Empathy is a term that is used across the sciences as well as the arts to describe a physiological mimicry that occurs when we observe movement.¹⁹⁰ In the sciences, kinaesthetic empathy refers to a process whereby mirror neurons are triggered in the brain, which Gallagher explains is caused “...either by the subjects’ own motor behavior *or* by the subject’s visual observation of someone else’s motor behavior,” and this Gallagher says, “...has important implications for explaining how we understand other people.”¹⁹¹

However, research also demonstrates that it is not just in moving subjects that mirror neurons are activated; even static forms can trigger internal kinaesthetic reactions.

There is good evidence to suggest that in certain cases, when we observe an object, even when we are not specifically required to reach for it or pick it up, ‘canonical neurons’ in the ventral premotor cortex (area F5) responsible for the motoric encoding of actions such as reaching and grasping are selectively activated...The visual observation of such objects automatically evokes the most suitable motor program required to interact with them, and the activation of motor preparation areas in the brain form part of what it means to perceive such objects.¹⁹²

In the context of my practice-based research, these static forms that I call apparatuses, are things that simply have the potential to be used by humans. Beyond their capacity to fit-in to the Object World, the form alludes to a potential use factor that requires human movement, which I argue also changes the work’s kinaesthetic affect, causing static work to become *active*.

***No Single Thing* (2019)**

Many things in my exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019) moved, and depending on when you came in to the gallery, many did not. Upon entering the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, the first thing a viewer might see was in fact a swinging pendulum. This bronze form (*There’s No Such Thing as*) *Perpetual Motion* was suspended from the ceiling by rope and kept in constant motion by a series of eight performers¹⁹³ who each took turns keeping watch of and maintaining the swinging motion of the pendulum—a performance work I called *In Vigil* (Figure 27).

¹⁹⁰ See Reynolds and Reason, *Kinaesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*.

¹⁹¹ Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. 9.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹³ Thanks to the artists who performed: Nick Archer, Beth Arnold, Brigit Griffiths, Melanie Irwin, Kari McInnery McRae, Camille Thomas, Robert Downie.

Embedded in the gallery wall, was an extraction fan. Depending on when the viewer entered the gallery, this fan was either turning or not, as it was activated by a solar panel which only charged when an incandescent light was switched on. The light was on a timer that went on and off in 15-minute intervals.

In the rear gallery a collection of tool-things formed part of an installation called *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* and were intermittently used by myself and/or my co-performer. In this installation there were various apparatuses that all either moved or had the potential to move, including swinging metal circles, hanging brass bells, or various other sculptural forms that could be suspended from the apparatuses along with tool-things that made up the work (Figure 28 and 29).

When these tool-things were not in motion, they still hung from the ceiling or from the apparatuses designed to support them. In this form, their potential for movement still activated the kinaesthetic empathy response. This research has helped me understand why *hanging things* is so central to my spatiotemporal practice, because hanging things implies potential activation. It is the potential activation that I am so interested in, even more than the full expression of the potential action. This is because the potential activation breaks the Object World in a particular way—a way that I often find *activates* an artwork even more than it would if it were in full motion.

Set Elements (2019)

Set Elements (2019) was a performance-installation exhibited in curator Kelli Alred's exhibition *Temporal Proximities*. For this work I made an installation of sculptural-apparatuses and tool-things that, through my performed actions (alongside Arabella Frahn-Starkie), would never come to rest.¹⁹⁴ During the performance, Frahn-Starkie and I worked together constantly setting-up the work (Figure 30-32). Each of us would busy ourselves putting something together, rearranging, organising or moving something—all improvised and non-specific. We would build things, hang things, sweep and climb ladders. We would arrange things in various ways, perhaps according to size, colour or the way they fit together. We used my sculptural equipment like a large, endless game, to which neither of us had the instruction manual.

¹⁹⁴ I elaborate on this work in Chapter Five, *The Object Event*.

What my literature research and my practice-based research has shown, is that humans have a fine-tuned capacity to ascertain that something fits in to a *World of useful things*. Heidegger considered this phenomenon—the condition of believing in a cohesive world that exists outside of the things that are within it—to be the primary ontological condition for being human. Gibson also considered the way we perceive our environment to be chunked together into a cohesive network of things that we perceive to be useful to us. This was the basis of his concept of an *ecological* perception along with our embodied participation in perceiving our environment. Even though some of these ideas are conceptual, other forms of abstract thinking are in fact embodied. Research into kinaesthetic empathy has revealed that we are in fact *wired* to perceive movement as being particularly important; we react to things that move, as well as to those that *might* move in ways that affect our perception of what is important.

By making artworks that activate the embodied knowledge we use to make sense of the world, it is possible to complicate what we consider an artwork to be. More specifically it may encourage the viewer to consider what an artwork is capable of *doing*. By drawing on our kinaesthetic responses to materials, forms, movement and potentiality, it is possible for artworks to activate a viewer's sense of kinaesthetic empathy. This is because our embodied sense of kinaesthetic empathy—telling us how something fits into the Object World and whether we should pay attention to it or not—operates whether we think of the object as an *artwork* or not.

Therefore, my strategy of placing sculptural-apparatuses within the framework of an exhibition helps link the artworks to the *real* Object World rather than art-Object world. This is because my sculptural apparatuses resemble functional and familiar objects which hold the same potential for action and weds them to the ordinary Object World in which we *live* rather than watch *on display*.



Figure 27: Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion) + Stop/Start* (2019). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 28: *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 29: *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 30: Katie Lee; Set Elements (2019). Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 31: Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Figure 32: Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.

Chapter 4: *A Particular Kind of Form*

...of metals, of horses, of roads, navigation¹⁹⁵

—Alfred North Whitehead.

In the first three chapters I have outlined different philosophical foundations that have informed my use of the terms Object and Object-Thinking and showed ways that we conceptualise Objects and our perception of a cohesive environment or Object World. In this chapter I will further demonstrate how the legacy of Object-Thinking can produce a particular kind of form—in the world and also within my spatiotemporal art practice. It is important to further contextualise this aspect of my practice-based research because as my introduction made clear: Objects as I have defined them, can take any form. However, in my practice, Objects often take a particular kind of form, one that is influenced by the legacy of Object-Thinking and the dominant position it holds in the West.

As I have shown, Objects are not inherently Objects; they are formed by our perception—itself a process interweaving physical, psychological, social and historical factors to render stable Objects. As a result, the formation of Objects as *Objects of Thought* opens up a number of ways that stable structures (Objects) can be broken. As I have previously suggested, creating *an oscillation in thinking* offers one possible strategy to break an Object. In this chapter I will consider another methodology for triggering a shift in our perception of form; in so doing, I will propose a way to resist the legacy of Object-Thinking.

To elaborate on these ideas I return to the works of Alfred North Whitehead and Edgar Morin and their critique of what they considered the privileging of the sciences in academic discourse. I will then provide an example of how this critique has found form within my own arts practice with specific reference to my work *Even a Stopped Clock* (2016). I then refer to the writing of Caroline Levine to show how form itself can be considered political. This section will show how Levine framed the political aspects she considered to

¹⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 66.

be infused in forms by using James J. Gibson's theory of affordances, thus providing another method to break Objects. I consider how this method applies to a number of my own artworks, as well as to examples from artists associated with Arte Povera. Finally, I consider how this particular methodology of breaking Object-forms holds a political resistance even when the form itself is not overtly political in its referents.

Object-Thinking (a-Recap)

As I described in chapter one, Object-Thinking is a term that I have coined to describe the capacity—and tendency in specific conditions—of humans to separate out and over emphasise singular phenomena from complex processes. To return to the work of Alfred North Whitehead, considering something as matter-of-fact is a process of focusing-in and separating-out single elements from the greater complex picture; in doing so you gain greater understanding of its essential qualities. This in itself is not a problem. In fact, Whitehead believes our capacity to think in this way is part of the sophistication of humans.¹⁹⁶ However in Whitehead's opinion a further abstraction—a universal truth—is required when a matter-of-fact is considered a *mere fact*. To reduce the world to *mere facts* is not possible for Whitehead. However, it is possible to be particularly oriented towards matter-of-fact thinking through a 'sense of importance' or as Whitehead phrases it: "Those people who in a hard-headed way confine their attention to matter-of-fact do so by reason of their sense of importance of such an attitude." It is this hard-headed orientation towards the matter-of-fact that informs what I have coined Object-Thinking.

In *Modes of Thought* (1938) Whitehead reflects upon how this development in matter-of-fact thinking emerged from the speed of progress that marked the scientific revolution. In order to grasp radical and fast changing 'civilising' technologies, Western philosophical thinking became preoccupied with trying to determine a stable sense of 'truth' or 'knowledge'.¹⁹⁷ This knowledge, steadily accumulating over the last thousand or so years, contributed to the 'golden age of human civilisation.'¹⁹⁸ However, this period of human civilisation also left behind an orientation towards the matter-of-fact which became firmly located in our systems of thought and general attitudes about the world. In particular

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Whitehead argues that these attitudes are recognisable in the very form of our language and continue to influence the very structure of modern thought.¹⁹⁹ As an example, Whitehead explains how Greek philosophers (in particular Plato) insisted on the possibility of the *completely real*:

According to this doctrine, as the result of this discard of the factor of transition we rivet our attention on the eternal realm of forms. In this imagined realm there is not passage, no loss, no gain. It is complete in itself.²⁰⁰

In contrast Whitehead points out, “The environment surpasses us in every physical dimension. Thus matter-of-fact is tinged with the notion of compulsive determinism.”²⁰¹ This compulsive determinism for Whitehead is the contradiction between an environment that we understand empirically, yet at the same time realise it lies beyond our capacity to fully grasp. Consequently, we apply matter-of-fact thinking to systematise that which is beyond our empirical understanding. According to Whitehead to take this mode of thinking even further results in a further abstract notion—a mere-fact. The mere-fact Whitehead contests is the mistaken concept of a simple truth, one that no longer acknowledges that a matter-of-fact still sits within broader and more complex operations.

Like Whitehead’s concept of a mere-fact, Edgar Morin considers rationalisation to be the extreme application of the order and structure imposed by reason. By becoming attached to the idea that we can reconcile complexity within logical structures, Morin observes that all aspects outside our theory are, “...put aside, forgotten, seen as an illusion or appearance.”²⁰² Like Whitehead, Morin also acknowledges that our mental capacity for reason, rationality and even rationalisation are not in themselves bad. Furthermore, they originate from “...exactly the same source, but in developing, they become enemies of one another.”²⁰³

Like Whitehead, Morin is critical of the long legacy of reductivism that has greatly influenced our society and which he associates with the development of rational scientific

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. For example Whitehead considers these influences to include the notion of absolute wholes embedded in the structure of written language such as ‘completely-real’, ‘perfection’ and ‘certainty’, see 68.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 68.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 7.

²⁰² Morin, *On Complexity*. 47.

²⁰³ Ibid.

thinking.²⁰⁴ Whilst no doubt contributing to advancing the modern world, these developments also resulted in a separating out of science into different areas of expertise, thus creating disjunction among complex and inter-related phenomena:

Hyper-specialization tore up and fragmented the complex fabric of reality, and led to the belief that the fragmentation inflicted on reality was reality itself. At the same time, the idea of classical scientific knowledge was to discover, behind the apparent complexity of phenomena, a perfect Order, regulating a perpetual machine, (the cosmos), which was in turn made up of micro-elements (atoms) diversely assembled into objects and systems.²⁰⁵

This mechanistic *order* requires equipment by which to measure and understand it. Hence, this orientation toward knowing the world is likely implicated by our orientation and implicit understanding of equipment.

Scientism

An emphasis on the value and contribution of science compared to other disciplines or forms of knowledge is often referred to as scientism.²⁰⁶ A critique of this position has strongly infused my own practice taking its form most commonly in an underhanded or comic mimicry of the suppositions that science values so highly. Alongside these knowledge systems associated with the sciences sits a rather fetishised collection of devices and instruments with which to measure and calculate this realm of *quantifiable* entities. These forms, accompanied by the role they have played in history, are firmly located in the realm of Objects. In my arts practice, I borrow from this formal grammar and reference the role science plays in the formation of Objects; and I try in an underhanded way, to break them.

Lessons in Science (Light is Faster than Sound) (2017) is a single-channel video work that shows footage of me in the bushland surrounding the Bundanon Artist in Residence where I was a resident artist in 2017 (Figure 33 and 34). The footage shows me crouched in the bush using a small mirror to reflect and bounce light into the lens of the camera. The artwork demonstrates the basic scientific concept of light being faster than sound because, by slowing down the video footage, the shimmering light appears visibly unaffected while the natural bird sounds and insect noises from the surrounding bush are transformed into a series of long, guttural whale-like sounds.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁶ Tom Sorell, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1991). x



Figure 33: Katie Lee, *Lessons in Science (Light is Faster than Sound)* (2017). (Video Still).



Figure 34: Katie Lee, *Lessons in Science (Light is Faster than Sound)* (2017). (Video Still).



Figure 35: Katie Lee, *Lessons in Science (Tool Things)* (2017). Image, Clare Rae.

More generally in my practice this critique of and reference to scientism is found in forms that I refer to as *Institutional Objects*. These Objects are commonly inspired by instruments of measure, furniture associated with institutions (such as universities, government departments and hospitals), or refer to scientific and quasi-scientific equipment and their terms and phrases. Throughout my practice-based research these references have taken sculptural form as windsocks, blackboards, score-boards, flags, partition boards and framed glass lenses.²⁰⁷ I have also considered these ideas from a more ontological perspective, critiquing not just the form that scientism takes but the reverence towards scientific evidence over and above other empirical and cultural references and forms of knowledge. This makes my reference to *breaking* Institutional Objects as another form of resistance that I consider, political.

Foucault's Pendulum

I first saw a Foucault pendulum in 2015 at the Musée des Arts et Métiers (The Museum of Arts and Crafts) in Paris. The Museum collection focuses on the history of scientific and industrial innovation and classifies its collection according to: scientific instruments, materials, construction, communication, energy, mechanics and transport.²⁰⁸ These innovations categorise the central preoccupations of science; they are generally considered the foundations of civilisation's *progress*.

The Foucault pendulum is named after Léon Foucault (1819-1868) and reveals the rotation of the earth. By suspending a pendulum from a fixed point and indexing its plane (for example by using a grid below), Foucault's experiment in 1851 showed the world for the first time how a pendulum in motion will remain in a single plane with the north or south pole, while the earth beneath it rotates. This discovery was hugely controversial because it put to rest centuries of debate about whether the earth was still or in movement.²⁰⁹ Plato and Aristotle in particular had firmly maintained that the earth was stationary and around it the heavens moved.²¹⁰ These ideas were taken up and then defended vigorously by the Church who taught that this Earth-centric conception of the

²⁰⁷ In my practice-based vocabulary Institutional Objects can also be tool-things. The terms do not cancel each other out.

²⁰⁸ <https://www.arts-et-metiers.net/Musée/visitor-information> accessed 16 May 2018

²⁰⁹ Amir D. Aczel, *Pendulum: Léon Foucault and the Triumph of Science* (New York, New York: Atria Books, 2003). 17.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

universe was part of God's perfect design. During the Inquisition, any idea to the contrary was punishable by death.²¹¹ Although many scientists and thinkers before Foucault believed that the earth rotated, none could find a way (or dare) to prove it empirically. Therefore, Foucault's experiment in 1851 was considered the first time that the rotation of the Earth was proved unequivocally. Ironically, the Musée des Arts et Métiers' collection is located in what used to be a Medieval church, Saint-Martin-des-Champs. A Foucault pendulum is installed in its vaulted ceilings, surrounded by marble floors, arch windows and low filtered light. Within the Church, just as with white cube gallery spaces, scientific objects are ceremoniously transformed into Objects. The paradox of this in relation to the Foucault pendulum particularly captured my imagination. Despite Foucault's effort to show the world in rotation (as active and animated rather than still), the Foucault pendulum housed in Saint-Martin-des-Champs has in fact become an Object—in this case an Object of science. As I watched the visiting public gaze upon the pendulum with such reverence, I began to wonder, what kind of object were they seeing? Was the pendulum breaking the Object-Earth as Foucault had intended, revealing the phenomenon of the Earth in rotation? Or was this beautiful brass pendulum swinging silently in the Saint-Martin-des-Champs just as abstracted as the Earth's rotation?

My curiosity at seeing the Foucault pendulum was piqued, not because it broke the Object-Earth as it might have done in Foucault's time but precisely because I surmised that it did not. Furthermore, it struck me as comical that evidence of the Earth's rotation was still observed with such awe. I became interested in thinking about other indexes of the *active* environment which revealed the same phenomenon not through science but through nature. There are many things that occur in our environment that also index and therefore reveal the active and cyclic nature of the world. For example: the shadows that cast longer and then shorter as the earth moves around the sun; or the circadian rhythm of living beings, plants, animals, fungi and cyanobacteria that have adjusted themselves to this cycle.²¹² Knowledge held by non-Western cultures, gathered over centuries and centuries of careful observation of the world, and passed down from generation to generation in stories, paintings and oral traditions attest to these cycles.²¹³

211 Ibid., 18.

212 "Overview of Circadian Rhythms," NIH, accessed 15 May 2018, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh25-2/85-93.htm>.

213 See Duane W. Hamacher, "Stories from the Sky: Astronomy in Indigenous Knowledge," *The Conversation* 2014.

The central premise to my work *Even a Stopped Clock* (2017) (Figure 36-38) was to create my own version of a Foucault pendulum, but in my version the pendulum would remain still. And, like the reference to clock-time in the title,²¹⁴ whether the pendulum was operational or not the world would still turn; correspondingly, the index described by the pendulum would still be occasionally *correct*.²¹⁵ I then introduced other elements that could amplify and highlight cycles that occur in the surrounding environment. I made an audio field-recording outside the gallery that lasted as long as the gallery's opening hours (10am to 5pm). This recording was played back each day at the same time as the original recording. It captured both human and natural sounds and rhythms: the cycle of air traffic above, the whistles and sirens from the local sports centres, the evening chorus of birds.

In the installation were three large slumped glass discs that were framed in steel and brass and placed on the ground in a semi-circle. These were quasi-science Objects because although they resembled lenses, they were not focused. Instead they were designed to be located in parts of a gallery that would be hit directly by sunlight at different times of the day, turning the gallery space into a kind of clock or sun-dial, (Figure 37). The specific conditions of exhibiting the work at the Incinerator Gallery (which is south facing), required an artificial lighting design in order to stage this aspect of the work. I worked with lighting designer and artist Andrew Sainsbury to create a lighting scene that included a moving beam of light that was projected onto the floor (like the sun) and that moved slowly in an arc on the floor over a seven-hour period. This imported *sun*, like the imported field recording from outside the gallery, still alerted people to the fact we *forget* the moving sunlight just as we *forget* the outside sounds when we are within the gallery. Doing so, this strategy maintained my methodology of *breaking* Objects.

In the morning at 10am the lighting scene had a warm red glow with the yellow 'sun' focused on the first glass 'lens'. It passed through the second 'lens' at 12pm and by this time of day there was a blue hue cast over the gallery. By 5pm the sun-light beam would come to rest on the third *lens* and the room returned to a warm red glow. At 5pm every evening (when the gallery closed) the lighting scene changed to a midnight blue colour and the

²¹⁴ The full expression is: 'Even a stopped clock is right twice a day'.

²¹⁵ Please note this is not supposed to be illustrative, and hence it is not an entirely accurate way of thinking about indexes or the way that Foucault pendulums work.

yellow *sun-beam* turned to white coming to rest on the floor like the moon. The pendulum hung *still*.²¹⁶

This condition of the *still pendulum* also enabled me to point to my underlying preoccupation with the ontology of spatiotemporal artworks and the way that galleries transform art objects into art-Objects. In this case the deliberate stillness of the pendulum emphasised this aspect of the gallery, stubbornly refusing interactivity despite its potential. What changed was: the light, the sound and the activities that surrounded the gallery—amplified by the audio field-recording of the environment outside played back inside the quiet space of the gallery.

Whilst my work, along with the theoretical concerns of Whitehead, Morin, DeLanda and Ingold, is critical of science's privilege in the hierarchy of knowledge, neither I nor any one of these philosophers are claiming that science is irrelevant or wrong. Rather, what each of these thinkers acknowledge is that to separate-out knowledge into singular areas leads to creating *specialised knowledge* that remains incomplete. As Whitehead observed, all the epistemologies and ontologies we create, recreate and refine in many ways are simply attempts at what he calls *translation*;²¹⁷ an imperfect and unachievable attempt to create an index that corresponds to the reality of the immediate world. These "...purely formal relations...then masquerade as the final reality."²¹⁸ Whitehead considers confining thought to purely formal relations to be an abstraction:²¹⁹ "This is why science, in its perfection, relapses into the study of differential equations. The concrete world has slipped through the meshes of the scientific net."²²⁰

²¹⁶ Stillness is of course another conceit, which I have explored in previous artworks. For example, my performance work *We Will Never Be Still* (2014) contested the concept of stillness as a form of abstraction.

²¹⁷ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 13.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.



Figure 36: Katie Lee with Andrew Sainsbury *Even a Stopped Clock* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 37: Katie Lee with Andrew Sainsbury *Even a Stopped Clock* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 38: Katie Lee with Andrew Sainsbury *Even a Stopped Clock* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.

Form and Politics

In addition to perceiving the existing environment according to what it affords us, James J. Gibson also pointed out that humans have spent thousands of years adapting the environment in ways that make “...more available what benefits [them] and less pressing what injures [them].”²²¹ These adaptations include the transformation of natural materials into human resources, for example “...bronze, iron, concrete and bread”²²², but also a myriad of forms that include highways, office towers, football fields and bridges. All the changes we make to our environment afford humans greater strength and make our survival easier. In this way we have slowly shaped our environment to benefit our survival, often to the great detriment of the other (human and non-human) entities that we share it with.

However, the principles we use to order and transform the environment not only relate to material form but also extend to non-material processes of ordering and shaping our environment. Professor of Humanities at Cornell University, Caroline Levine (1970-) writes about the complexity of form and the different shapes it takes in her 2015 book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. As Levine says “...‘form’ always indicates an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping.”²²³ In this way, Levine’s definition of form extends beyond any particular material to include all “...shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference.”²²⁴ It is the role of form, Levine concludes, to make order.²²⁵ And to declare form as responsible for making order, is to reveal form as “...the stuff of politics”.²²⁶

Political struggles include ongoing context over the proper places for bodies, goods and capacities: “...Sorting out what goes where, the work of political power often involves

²²¹ Gibson in Gieseking, *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. 56.

²²² Gibson in *ibid*.

²²³ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015). 3. Emphasis original.

²²⁴ *Ibid*.

²²⁵ *Ibid*.

²²⁶ *Ibid*., p3. In this reading of form “... as a matter of distributions and arrangements”, Levine acknowledges makes reference to French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s “distribution of the sensible”, which in turn expands the concept of form as Levine uses it to include the idea that what we are capable of apprehending through the senses is likewise subject to forms of inclusion and exclusion. See Jacques Rancière and Gabriel Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Bloomsbury Revelations (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). 89.

enforcing restrictive containers and boundaries—such as nation-states, bounded subjects and domestic walls.”²²⁷

The organising principles evidenced by form can be both sociological and material. For example, social forms are created by abstract ordering principles that create forms such as governments, schools, timetables or even the way language is structured within various forms of literary texts.²²⁸ In a material sense form also creates order through the range of possibilities it offers as well as its limitations. Levine provides the following example:

Things take forms, and forms organize things. The prison cell cannot do its work without the hard materiality of metal or stone, but it also operates as an iterable way of organising experience, a model of enclosure that can and does travel across many contexts... we can begin with the immaterial, abstract organizing principles that shape material realities, or we can begin with the concrete, particular material thing and abstract from it to general, iterable patterns and shapes. From either perspective, forms travel across time and space in and through situated material objects.²²⁹

Helpfully, like my own research project, Levine’s work on form has drawn from James J. Gibson’s theory of affordances noting also how it reveals both the capacities and the constraints of form. Levine refers to affordances in her consideration of what forms are capable of doing; she applies her thinking to both material form and dematerialised forms such as rhythms and hierarchies, networks and her own area of specialisation—literary form.²³⁰

Like my own notion of breaking Objects, Levine considers the rearrangement of forms—based on their affordances—to create new activations of the latent potential held by forms, and sees this as a way to push the limits of formal constraints.²³¹ Because no form exists in isolation, Levine points to the critical importance of considering how the arrangement of forms enable—and likewise disable—a form’s affordance. She again uses

²²⁷ Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. 3.

²²⁸ In relation to this area of my research I acknowledge (as does Levine) Michel Foucault’s work, in particular *Discipline and Punish* (1979). I have referred to this aspect of Foucault’s work extensively within my Masters’ research which explored the disciplinary nature of urban form. I have found Levine’s reference to such a broad range of forms, along with her consideration of how affordances contribute to the sociological application of form, directly relevant to this research.

²²⁹ Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. 10.

²³⁰ For example, she asks, “...what is a rhyming couplet capable of doing?” Ibid. 6.

²³¹ Ibid., 7.

the example of a prison cell to show how the intersection of affordances can interrupt as well as facilitate:

Even a prison cell... does not enforce its simple, single order in isolation. The cell itself is a straightforward enough form; it encloses bodies within surrounding walls. But the prison always activates other forms as well; prisoners are subjected to temporal patterns...educational trajectories; and the length of the prison term itself. They take part in networks that operate not only within a given prison, but also reach outside the confines of prison walls, including illegal smuggling rings, gangs and correspondence networks. ... As these forms overlap, some may disrupt the prison cell's containing power. The enclosure of the cell itself does not readily afford expansion or breakdown, but the temporal form of the prison sentence affords shortening or lengthening. And one surprisingly literary form has occasionally cut short the time of a prison term; a story of remorse or redemption can sometimes prompt a pardon. Thus the arc of a narrative can in its own way pry open a cell's enclosing walls.²³²

Levine's broad application of Gibson's theory of affordances reveals the way intersecting forms activate each other and can literally change each other's affordance and related capacities. Therefore, to rearrange forms in surprising or unexpected ways makes possible the destabilising of historic and powerful patternings that forms are held within.²³³ Or to use my own phrasing: *break them*.

Levine points out that form has long been held in binary opposition to *formlessness* as the only way to complicate or break down the power held by form. Following this, to resist the power of form Levine observes, an emphasis has been placed instead on the value of "...fissures and interstices, vagueness and indeterminacy, boundary-crossing and dissolution." However, Levine does not wish to escape from the necessity of form entirely: "...it is impossible to imagine a society altogether free of organising principles."²³⁴ This follows my own sentiments as my research has revealed: our physiological and psychological body is constituted in such a way that even if our ideology rejects the ordering principle of forms, they continue to stubbornly reappear through our corporeal, psychological and sociologically constituted faculties of perception. Instead of banishing form, it may be possible to consider the affordances of forms as being malleable through

²³² Ibid., 10.

²³³ This also relates to Rancière's concept of redistribution of the sensible, in particular through the capacity art has to make form visible through redistribution. See Rancière and Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. 40. This also relates to DeLanda's assemblage theory. For further reading see Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2006).

²³⁴ Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. 9.

their arrangement; if this is the case, we can begin to tweak the perceived power held by forms and bend them out of their rigid shape.

This rearrangement of the affordances held in forms can be applied at different scales and to different effect. As Levine says, these shifts in form can be “...as small as punctuation marks and as vast as multiple narratives or national boundaries.”²³⁵ Rather than work to topple the regime, resistance to dominant form may also be about activating our awareness (between Objects and broken Objects)—all forms oscillate and shift. What if, Levine asks “...we were to see social life instead as composed of ‘loosely and unevenly collected’ arrangements, a ‘makeshift, pasted together’ order rather than a coherent system that can be traced back to a single cause?”²³⁶

In my own arts practice I acknowledge the power held in a broad range of forms; not just in institutional Objects but also in the less obvious ways that form organises our experience of the world. For example, I consider the way our bodies are organised by furniture, or the way we harness and control energy through fixings and brackets.

In my installation *No Single Thing* (2019) I created a series of apparatuses that were capable of *tethering*. The idea for these artworks came to me when I was browsing at a leather supplier and found what is called a *breaching staple*. This simple metal form is designed to be a tie-down point for horses or to lash ropes to, and it is used in the equestrian world as well as the building industry. The very name *breaching staple* brought to mind such an agitated state of potential. I was particularly struck by the way this small brass form was designed to stop the wild potential of horses, wind, and gravity from escaping our control. A form designed to *tether* is in itself a powerful indicator of latent potential. Following this, in my work *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2019) I made enlarged versions of breaching staples out of cast bronze, to tether ropes to for no particular reason. These lashing points had nothing to resist them, revealing a grossly over engineered solution to the potential for energy to escape.

²³⁵ Ibid., 13.

²³⁶ Ibid. Levine is quoting Brazilian legal theorist Roberto Mangabeira Unger.



Figure 39: Katie Lee: *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.

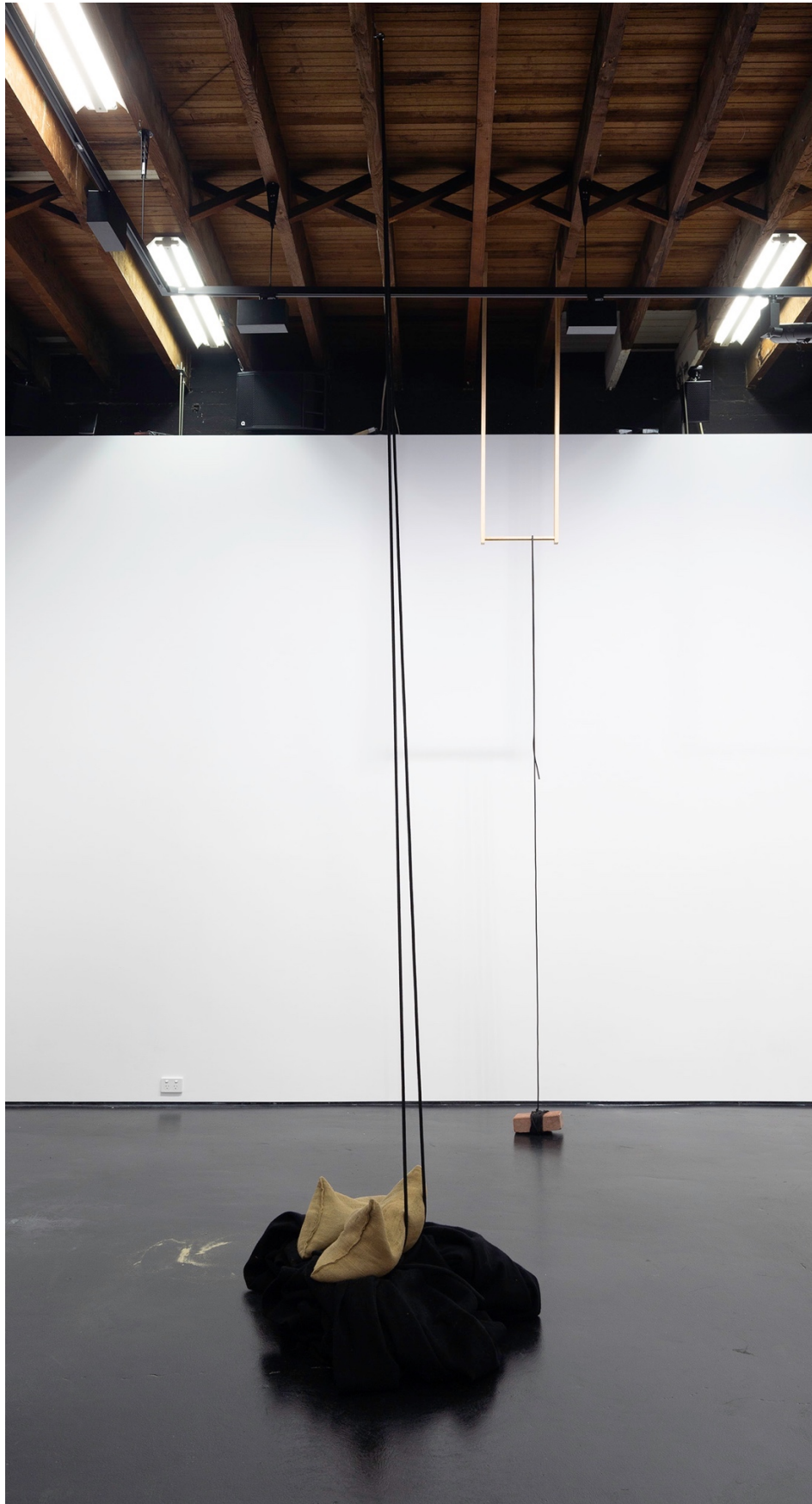


Figure 40: *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.

The way artists associated with Arte Povera use materials also reveals their work as political. Arte Povera is most commonly associated with the political climate of post WWII that saw artists across Europe and America react against the dominant economic and cultural system. Arte Povera artists rebelled against the “...traditional aesthetic norms... rejecting bourgeois values and post-industrial capitalism”²³⁷ evident in their use of everyday materials and pared back “...unadorned, ‘poor’ propositions and gestures.”²³⁸

Not only did these artworks disrupt the distinction between what was considered high and low art at the time, certain Arte Povera works from this time continue to act politically in the present. Although the artists associated with the movement were radical in their contribution to a new kind of art, I believe the political power of their work can also be found in the way the artists arranged and rearranged forms in relation to their affordances. The latent potential and new affordances that are revealed through the rearrangement of these forms have not changed during the 50 or more years that have passed since the *Arte Povera* artists first made these works. Therefore, these works continue to operate politically despite no longer being contextualised by the specific socio-political time in which they were made.

A good example is Giovanni Anselmo’s *Senza Titolo (Struttura che mangia)* or *Untitled (Eating Structure)* (1968) (Figure 41). The work consists of two stones of granite separated by a head of fresh lettuce and held together by an encircling wire. The work relies on the head of lettuce being fresh. If the lettuce wilts, the tension between the stones fail, and the smaller rock, along with the lettuce, will fall. At the time it was made, this work may have been seen as radical as it included food as an art material. However today we are used to artworks consisting of diverse materials and conceptual content. What still operates politically in the work is the way it draws attention to the surprising *affordance* of lettuce. The arrangement of stone with lettuce *rearranges* lettuce to have a powerful role in relation to granite. The affordance of lettuce has inverted the historic associations we have with the monolithic power of stone, through the vegetable’s simple capacity *to wilt*. By showing the unlikely relationship between lettuce and rock, it brings to mind a surprising expanded capacity of rocks and lettuce to act upon each other—activating their latent potential in relation.

²³⁷ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999). 20.

²³⁸ Ibid.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons



Figure 41: Giovanni Anselmo, *Senza Titolo (Struttura che mangia)* (1968).

In this chapter I have shown how the dominance of Western values, passed down throughout the Scientific revolution, has resulted in a particular kind of form, through which it continues to press against and arrange bodies, space and time. Various habits of thought, along with Western science's preference for stable forms of knowledge, have left a huge range of Objects that continue to assert their political orientation even as they often remain invisible to us as Objects. What is more, form can take both material, and immaterial forms. As Caroline Levine has shown, even literary forms hold within them powerful conventions. However, the opposite of rigid form does not necessarily have to be

formlessness. Instead it is possible that arrangements and rearrangements might also break open the power held by forms and *break* them.

In my own practice these forms have become a kind of grammar or vocabulary; by using this particular kind of form, I consider my work to operate politically. Though the work sometimes makes reference to particular forms in science or what I have called ‘institutional Objects’ form does not need to be overtly political in order for an artwork to operate with resistance. This is because as Levine (and DeLanda amongst others) have pointed out, through rearranging forms, it is possible to shift the power they hold in relation. By expanding the affordances they hold, and by simply revealing the way they can operate in surprising ways, it is possible to break rock with a lettuce.

Chapter 5: *The Object Event*

Life; a field of relations.²³⁹

—Tim Ingold

In this chapter I will use the concept of the *Object Event*—another example of abstract thinking, this time in relation to our understanding and comprehension of space and time. As I argue, a common conception born from the habits of Object-Thinking is that events occur with beginnings, middles and ends. This is particularly relevant to white cube exhibition contexts: usually formal environments that have *openings* and many architectural and social theatrics that emphasise the exhibition and gallery space as sequential. In this way, most galleries that we visit today could be said to be as heavily inscribed with Object-Thinking—as they were when O’Doherty wrote his critical text *Inside the White Cube* (1986).²⁴⁰

Rather than highlight the ways that the Object Event is constructed, in this chapter I build my argument by considering some alternatives to Object-Thinking that embrace alternative perspectives to the hegemonic modes of thinking in the West. This includes non-Western cultural perspectives, philosophers, artists, sociologists, anthropologists and scientists who demonstrate diverse ways and modes of thinking about the world. These perspectives are not new; however, these perspectives have not been dominant. Therefore in this final chapter I draw from a broader body of knowledge to consider other methods of practice that might enable a continued resistance to Object-Thinking and help assert that perceiving Objects is not in fact, objective.

To elaborate on these ideas I turn to the flip side of a number of authors I have already cited in my explication of Objects and Object-Thinking, who orient their own philosophical work towards a more complex concept of *what is going on* in the world. These authors include Alfred North Whitehead, Tim Ingold and Edgar Morin, whose expanded literature demonstrate oppositional and contradictory perspectives to Object-Thinking in relation to the Object Event. I consider these ideas in relation to my own work, in

²³⁹ Tim Ingold, "Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials," University of Aberdeen, www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/publications/workingpapers/. 2.

²⁴⁰ Essays in this book originally appeared in *Artforum* magazine in 1976 and 1986.

particular a method that I call *the distributed edge* and *middling*, and show how I have used these methods by revisiting my work *Cross-Section* (2016) and *No Single Thing* (2019).

The Object Event

Events, even Object Events, are complicated. Consistent with the terms defined in this dissertation, the Object Event is simply another example of Object-Thinking—combining all the Objects and forms that Object-Thinking can take—in action—at once. In this chapter I distinguish between the event and the Event. The capitalised version of Event is shorthand for an Object Event. Take for example the Event of seeing an artwork. We arrive at the gallery door—most likely considering the building to be a solid structure, abstract in its form and separated in our thinking from its previous history of use. We enter through a door into an ‘interior space’. Inside we are greeted by all manner of people: security guards, docents, invigilators, guides. All of these people behave in a very particular way, tell us where we can and cannot go and inform us of what we can and cannot do. Some of these people have knowledge of the artwork in the gallery, while other people are there to regulate our behaviour. Drinks, food and often bags or backpacks are removed from us and cloaked in special cabinets. Then we usually cross some kind of threshold, at which point we begin to experience the artwork.

Or do we? When did this artwork-Event actually begin? Did it begin with the knowledge gained from our social privilege—of knowing where the gallery was or how to engage with the artwork within it? Did it begin with a story we heard about the artwork from friends, history books or on the Internet? Did it begin when we decided what time to get up that morning, what to wear or how we might travel to see the exhibition? Did it involve the weather that we experienced on the way in? Or the moods and behaviours of the people we stood next to on the tram?

Edges

The problem with trying to define Events is that they are multi-modal and surpass the confines of what Object-Thinking has taught us to expect: that objects should hold together in a network of definable relations in space over definitive periods of time.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ For further reading see John Law, "Objects and Spaces," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (5/6) (2002).

However as British philosopher Jonathan Bennett (1930-) points out, even this simple definition still encompasses a diverse range of intermingled phenomena:

According to good dictionaries, an 'event' is 'anything that happens; an incident or occurrence.' So weddings and explosions are events, as are attacks of nostalgia, quarrels, avalanches, fights, fires, traffic jams, reconciliations, slumps, elections, strolls, births, deaths.²⁴²

A common way to try and distinguish events is through understanding their occupation of space and time. Whereas objects are commonly seen to be discreet individual entities with "...crisp spatial boundaries...events by contrast, would have relatively vague spatial boundaries and crisp temporal boundaries."²⁴³ However even this conceptualisation does not really help, because as American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) shows, it is possible to simply reorient our consideration of duration and instead consider the duration of any entity to be simply be more or less. In other words, the only thing that distinguishes our idea of an object or thing from an event is our perception of it enduring through time. As Goodmans says,

What we think of as a phenomenal thing is distinguished from what we think of as a phenomenal event or process only in the pattern of differences among its temporal parts. A thing is a monotonous event; an event is an unstable thing.²⁴⁴

Seen in this light, a chair is simply a monotonous event.²⁴⁵ It still consists of parts coming together in time and space. However, from the perception of the human, the chair does not offer the same dynamic range that we have come to expect of events.²⁴⁶ However the further we try to define events as Events, the more and more they become the realm of semantic debate. As Bennett says, to define Events is essentially a conceptual question, "...no empirical work such as geographers or physicist or psychologist do is relevant to any of them. If you want to understand what distinguishes events from substance or to know whether two events can fill the same region of space-time or the like, you must get your answers by thinking; there is no other way."²⁴⁷

²⁴² Jonathan Bennett, *Events and Their Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). 1.

²⁴³ Roberto and Varzi Casati, Achille, "Events," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta (<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/events/>>.). paragraph 1.

²⁴⁴ Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, Third Edition ed. (Boston, U.S.A: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1951). 259.

²⁴⁵ See also Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

²⁴⁶ I explored this concept in my work *Chair in Cooperation with Orange* (2015) by contrasting the way we perceive the temporality of two Objects; a piece of fruit and a chair.

²⁴⁷ Bennett, *Events and Their Names*. 1.

Therefore it seems that the attempt to define the Event is one that is preoccupied with trying to determine its edge: where it begins and ends in both time and space. Taken independently, time and space have been easier for us to define as Objects. We regularly use clocks to measure time, and both the sciences have various highly scientific measures for space.²⁴⁸ But how, Bennett asks, do we begin to tell the "...dancer from the dance?"²⁴⁹

Daniel Stern (1934-2012) was a North American psychiatrist and theorist particularly interested in understanding how our memories conflated with our experience of multiple complex happenings to form cohesive Events.²⁵⁰ Stern believed that to get a better understanding of what is *actually* going on, it was important to try to develop insights into the complexity of a given moment as it occurred in the *now*. In his book *The Present Moment* (2004) Stern described working with patients to untangle their perception of Events within a therapeutic interview session that he came to refer to as the *breakfast interview*.²⁵¹

Stern would begin these sessions by asking his clients what they recalled about the experience of having breakfast that morning. During the interview process, Stern would ask his client to recall the Event step by step, and try to relay *exactly* what it was they remembered. For example:

Well, I remember picking up the teapot to pour my tea. Actually, I don't remember picking it up, but I must have done that. Anyway, while I was pouring, I had a memory of something that happened last night. Just then, the telephone rang and I became conscious of pouring the tea because I wondered if, I should finishing pouring to the top of the cup or put the teapot down and get the phone. I put the pot down, got up, and answered the phone." (All this took about five-seconds.)²⁵²

Though we rarely break down our experience of events in such detail, it becomes immediately obvious when we try that the density of our experience sits at the edge, or even beyond the ability of language to accurately recount. What happened in five-seconds in the example above, took Stern an hour and a half to extract using language. In trying to verbalise this memory, the interviewee needed to break down what had become a simple combined memory of the Event-breakfast into physical actions, simultaneous thought

²⁴⁸ For further reading see Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2015).

²⁴⁹ Bennett, *Events and Their Names*. 1.

²⁵⁰ This is my use of the term *Event* not his.

²⁵¹ Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004). 9.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

processes that included present, past and future speculations, alongside an interaction with Objects.

By getting his clients to stop and try to unpick what seems to be a single Event (having breakfast) Stern revealed how our perception of a single moment or Event is actually made up of countless mental and physical processes that we may or may not even be aware of.²⁵³ Consequently, the interviews also reveal how incredibly complex and dense our experience of an event actually is.

James J. Gibson preferred to ignore the feathered edges of events and regarded them resolutely as Events. This is because for Gibson the event—like all perception—is a matter of selection. Even though Gibson advocated for an understanding of perception that is not purely scientific or mechanical, his so called *ecological* approach is nevertheless ruthlessly anthropocentric. Gibson's ecological mode of perception is one that reconciles events into Events. This is because Gibson considers events to be made up of a combination of temporal components: some that change and others that he considers persistent, variants and invariants. Gibson believes it is beneficial to separate out events as they might occur in say, physics (on a particle level), as different to those that occur for humans. This is because, Gibson claims, the analysis that is relevant to humans is only that which is on the scale of animals; "...this is the world at *our* level."²⁵⁴

However, it is precisely this thinking that complicates our position or understanding of the world. Using this kind of thinking it is possible to conceive that, as Gibson asserts, the Earth is an unchanging surface.²⁵⁵ And it could be said that it is this version of our inhabitation of the Earth that has led humans to be careless with our environment. Tim Ingold points out the foundational error in thinking that occurs if we were to take Gibson's perspective. Rather than revert to conceptualism to try and define the Event, Ingold asks us to leave behind the arm chair philosophising and simply go outside:

Let us now leave the seclusion of the study and take a walk outside, in the open air. Our path takes us through a woodland thicket. Surrounded on all sides by trunks and branches, the environment certainly seems cluttered. But is it cluttered with objects? Suppose that we focus our attention on a particular tree. There it is, rooted in the earth, trunk rising up, branches splayed out, swaying in the wind, with or without buds or leaves, depending on

²⁵³ Ibid., 8.

²⁵⁴ Gibson in J.T Fraser and N. Lawrence, eds., *The Study of Time II*, vol. 2 (New York, Heidelberg, Berlin: Springer, Verlag, 1975). 298.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 297.

the season. Is the tree, then, an object? If so, how should we define it? What is tree and what is not tree? Where does the tree end and the rest of the world begin? ...Is the bark, for example, part of the tree? If I break off a piece in my hand and observe it closely, I will doubtless find that it is inhabited by a great many tiny creatures that have burrowed beneath it and made their homes there. Are they part of the tree? And what of the algae that grow on the outer surfaces of the trunk or the lichens that hang from the branches? Moreover, if we have decided that bark-boring insects belong as much to the tree as does the bark itself, then there seems no particular reason to exclude its other inhabitants, including the bird that builds its nest there or the squirrel for whom it offers a labyrinth of ladders and springboards. If we consider, too, that the character of this particular tree lies just as much in the way it responds to the currents of wind, in the swaying of its branches and the rustling of its leaves, then we might wonder whether the tree can be anything other than a tree-in-the-air.²⁵⁶

In Process

Ingold's example shows that in fact we do have an expanded capacity to understand the world in process and, like Stern, that this kind of experience if we stop to consider it further—rather than closing down—expands exponentially. Even if, as Gibson claimed, we don't *see* change occurring at the degree of atoms, Ingold's example of an experience in the world shows that, if we stop to shift our mode-of-thinking, we are in fact aware of far more *action* than first thought.

This thinking is consistent with Edgar Morin's analysis of complexity and his insistent acknowledgement that complexity might appear as *a mess*. Yet rather than try and find a solid and singular building block from which to build order, we must in fact "...face messes (the infinite play of inter-retroactions), interconnectedness among phenomena, fogginess, uncertainty, contradiction."²⁵⁷

Alfred North Whitehead's lecture series *Modes of Thought* has been invaluable to my research and helped me to define Objects and Object-Thinking. Whitehead continues to be celebrated today for his contribution to a field of philosophy known as *process philosophy*, that focuses on the dynamic and continuously changing nature of reality. Rather than trying to endlessly define the world in terms of static reconcilable parts, process philosophy instead focuses on the experience of dynamicity or *becoming*.²⁵⁸ Far from being a contemporary philosophy, the history of process philosophy extends "...far into antiquity,

²⁵⁶ T. Ingold, "Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements," *Realities*, no. Working Paper #15 (2010). 3-4.

²⁵⁷ Morin, *On Complexity*. 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

both in Eastern and Western thought...”²⁵⁹ and despite Whitehead’s contribution to process philosophy being significant, in fact the field of process philosophy is itself a highly diversified field that reaches beyond a single position or methodology.²⁶⁰

Whitehead’s best-known work *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*²⁶¹ was delivered as a lecture series to the University of Edinburgh between 1927-1928. In it, Whitehead declares this philosophy a *speculative philosophy*: defined as capable of encompassing the whole of experience in action rather than abstracting any single part out from this whole. Whitehead says, “In other words, it is presupposed that no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe, and it is the business of speculative philosophy to exhibit this truth. This character is its coherence.”²⁶² This coherence for Whitehead is such that it can accommodate inconsistency. Whitehead observes what he considered the failings of philosophies that try to index and reconcile a set of un-mappable data. Instead, he advocates for a philosophy that can accommodate that which is not easily rationalised.²⁶³

Central to the science of philosophy Whitehead declares, is language. And it is this tool that Whitehead declares *breaks down* at the exact moment that it is required to address the “...very generalities which metaphysics seeks to express.”²⁶⁴ In other words, the system of language itself is too wrapped up in its own system to provide an adequate index to that which is all encompassing—our experience of the world in process.²⁶⁵ In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead points out the inadequacy of language which he observes easily reverts back to generality, omitting the particularities and complexity of events (or vice-versa, getting lost in details at the expense of the bigger picture). In order to illustrate this, Whitehead cites an example in Samuel Coleridge’s autobiography *Biographia Literaria* in which Coleridge expresses dismay at a tourist who, after encountering a great torrential waterfall, exclaims: “how pretty!”²⁶⁶ The simplicity of this expression Whitehead points out, no doubt “...lets down the whole vividness of the scene.”²⁶⁷

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

²⁶¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality; an Essay in Cosmology*.

²⁶² Ibid., 6.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

²⁶⁵ Stern’s breakfast interview also shows this failing.

²⁶⁶ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. 5.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Whitehead believes it is the task of great literature to help replenish our understanding of both the great and the particular and to try and evoke a feeling that goes beyond words:

For the generality, when stated, is too obvious to be worth mentioning. And yet it is always there, just not the edge of consciousness. But good literature avoids the large philosophic generality which the quality exhibits. It fastens upon the accidental precision which inevitably clothes the qualitative generality. Literature is a curious mixture of tacitly presupposing analysis, and conversely of returning to emphasise explicitly the fundamental emotional importance of our naive general intuitions.²⁶⁸

This understanding of a knowledge that sits outside the capacity to index through language has great implication for the arts. For example the concept of embodied cognition (as I described in chapter 3 *Object World* using the work of Shaun Gallagher) recognises that our experience of the world is one of interaction or co-constitution with the environment.²⁶⁹ It is not simply that our mind controls our body, but also that our body shapes our mind.²⁷⁰ Thus the interface and experience that we have in the world is not just built up through our intellect and capacity to interpret the world around us, but is also known through and with our bodies in exchange with our environment.²⁷¹ Thus, as I explored in chapter 3, bodies can grasp the intensity and complexity of the world beyond language, and respond, react and be affected by events in the world as they occur in complex ways. This offers the field of art²⁷² a compelling invitation: to impress directly on bodies a complex experience, rather than offering an ‘interpretation’ or attempting any translation of the conflation of events as they operate—all at once.²⁷³

When artworks go back inside gallery spaces, the structures that create Object Events can influence the audiences experience of an artwork. It is worth reiterating that for many artists this is not a problem. However in relation to methods of practice that resist Object forming conditions, certain signposts that galleries use can inadvertently affect an audience’s perception of an Object Event, triggering habitual forms of thinking about

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Seibt, "Process Philosophy." 33.

²⁷⁰ Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. 1.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

²⁷² This is not an argument for needing to see works in person. This embodied cognition can occur in various ways—see chapter three: *Object World*. However because my project has focused on spatiotemporal practices, I do not elaborate between an ‘art image’ and ‘object’. The kind of work that I am considering here is either spatiotemporal work or photographs that document spatiotemporal works, such as Robert Morris’s *Untitled (Box for Standing)*.

²⁷³ Heidegger also considered the limits of language. Given that Heidegger’s philosophy declared the full nature of things as being partly hidden or withdrawn in our perception of them, for Heidegger, language simply reasserts this set of assumptions. See “Understanding and Interpretation” in *Heidegger, Being and Time*. 188-195.

Events and art-Objects. Rather than considering this to be wrong, it is simply worth acknowledging that other kinds of experiences can be shut down or made less *available* by the influence of the conditions that create an Object Event.

In order to elaborate, I will briefly compare two artworks that were shown in *The Object as Score* curated by Nathan Gray and exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery in March 2015. These were a collaborative work by choreographer and dancer Shelley Lasica and myself, and a sculpture/performance by choreographer and dancer Matthew Day.²⁷⁴

From the outset Lasica and I wanted to test ways to construct a performance work in the gallery without it becoming an Object Event, as well as to resist becoming art-Objects ourselves.²⁷⁵ In other words we wanted to find a way that we (the performers *and* the audience) could remain *active* rather than *on display*. Lasica and I determined that in order to achieve this, we would need to *generate* something in the space rather than perform a set of rehearsed movements to be watched. We wanted to include the audience in this process, to encourage people not only to look *at* us, but to actively speculate upon the possibility of their own actions and gestures. Rather than focus on us, we wanted the audience members to remember and imagine spaces and actions that also exist beyond the gallery walls.

From this starting place, Lasica and I developed *The Possibility of Performance* (Figure 42 and 43) which consisted of us both sitting at a table in the gallery folding what are sometimes known of as *Paper Fortune Tellers*. Whenever anyone approached us or looked curious, we would stop folding the paper, and tell them what we were doing. Then, we would invite them to play the game.²⁷⁶

The outer layer of the origami made reference to different measures of time: seconds, days, hours etc. The second and third layers revealed possible actions, places or intentions.

²⁷⁴ Gray's exhibition consisted of a number of works that all highlight the various ways that objects and artists perform within the gallery. See: <https://bespoke-production.s3.amazonaws.com/vca/assets/21/01d6d0d29b11e499a14da6d9481119/The-Object-As-Score-poster.pdf>

²⁷⁵ This was early in my candidature when I had not yet formed the language *Object* or *Object Event*; however, in our conversations Lasica and I referred to this as a form of *spectacle*.

²⁷⁶ Lasica and my work *The Possibility of Performance* echos 'event scores' used by artists such as John Cage, Yoko Ono and Georges Brecht. The history of artists whose work is associated with the Fluxus art movement is relevant to my research, however I have not elaborated on this art movement more generally as I found it beyond the scope of this dissertation. For further reading see Natasha Lushetich, *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality* (Amsterdam, New York, N.Y.: Rodopi, 2014).

Combined, all three formed an instruction: *to imagine the possibility of that performance*. For example, by selecting a prompt from each of the folded layers, an audience member might generate the performance:

1 Day...outside the gallery...standing.

Or,

2 hours...pressing these walls...constantly.

Through our direct engagement with the audience and our invitation to generate something speculative, we hoped audiences would experience an *oscillation in thinking*; from the Event inside the gallery space (formal and pre-determined) we wanted the audience to imagine the possibility of actions that extended outside the gallery in space and time. We hoped this would create a dematerialised event that incorporated: the audiences' own corporeal experience of the space, the architecture, the divide between the *inside* and *outside*, and time.

Matthew Day took a very different approach. His work *Weighted* (2015) (Figure 44) consisted of three sandbags and a large timber sleeper that lay propped over the bags.²⁷⁷ Each Saturday at 2.30pm according to an advertised schedule, Day would come to the gallery and perform. Day's performance involved standing completely still on top of the timber sleeper using his weight to counterbalance the beam like a see-saw over the sandbags. The performances were well attended and lasted for around an hour. People would arrive early and begin to mill about, waiting expectantly for Day's performance to begin. While Day performed, the audience clustered around him or sat on the floor of the gallery watching him stand, completely still and in silence.

On one of the Saturdays Day performed, Lasica and I were also scheduled to perform *The Possibility of Performance*. We set up our table and began folding the paper into the origami forms and writing prompts on each side of the paper folds. When Day entered the space to perform, Lasica and I were somewhat surprised when Gray (the curator) began turning off all the other artworks in the gallery (many of which were video and sound based

²⁷⁷ In this configuration, Day's work was very much like a tool-thing or sculptural apparatus.

works). The gallery lights were dimmed and, as audience members gathered and sat in silence, Day and his work were transformed into what I now refer to as an Object Event. Shelley and I were somewhat perplexed that instead of having overlapping works where our actions complicated and influenced the other, Gray and Day staged *Weighted* in enforced isolation. As audience members accumulated and gathered around Day, the tension within the gallery became increasingly heightened. So much so that some visitors began to glare at Lasica and I as we continued to fold, scribe and drop our catchers on the floor, or if we dared, catch people's eye and invite them to play.

Distributed Exhibition Strategies

As mentioned previously, determining the theoretical limitations of an Event often seems to be about locating the edge. It is also possible to encourage the perception of an event as having a non-permeable edge through various architectural and social theatrics. It is possible to create the perception of an Event in any context or environment, inside or out. Therefore, in order to try to counteract the habit of perceiving the Object Event, I have considered various methods of practice that attempt to *distribute* the *edge* of an exhibition, and *break* the object Event. One such example is described above in *The Possibility of Performance* (2015); another is through my use of language in artworks and exhibition titles, such as *Work (in Progress)* (2016). However, the most significant body of practice-based research that I produced to test these ideas in my candidature can be best summarised by three exhibitions, two of which I have already introduced, *Cross Section* (2016) and *Set Elements* (2019), in addition to my final project exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery *No Single Thing* (2019) which I will explore in more depth in the final chapter *Landscape-Thinking*.



Figure 42: Katie Lee and Shelly Lascia: *The Possibility of Performance* (2015). Image, Kay Abude



Figure 43: *The Possibility of Performance* (2015). Image, Kay Abude.

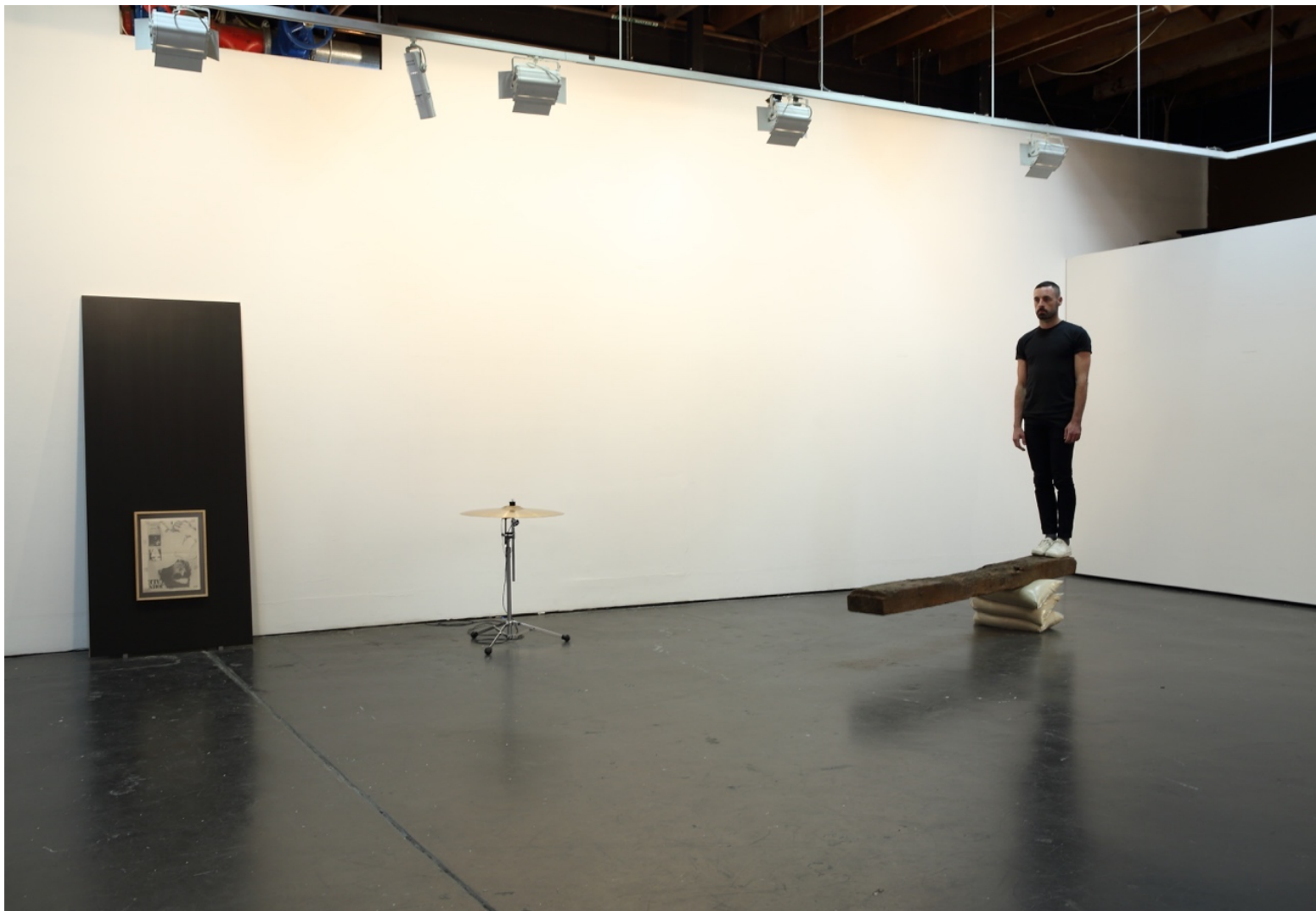


Figure 44: Matthew Day, *Weighted* (2015). Image, Kay Abude.

***Cross-Section* (2019) Revisited**

As previously outlined in the chapter *Object World*, this site-specific project was created for the context of the Abbotsford Convent. This opportunity was particularly relevant because the project was not located in any defined space or section of the Convent. In addition to some of the buildings, I also had access to the wider grounds, including the surrounding gardens adjacent to the Collingwood Children's Farm and Merri Creek. This extension from the Convent's grounds into the surrounding natural environment helped my performance-installation have a permeable edge.

I accentuated this extension of the project into the surrounding area by installing three large coloured windsocks that were intended to link the Convent to the surrounding spaces (Figure 45 and 46). I placed a black windsock in the heritage garden and a red one in the lower paddock. A third, white windsock was placed on one of the balconies on the main Convent building facing the entrance. The presence of the windsock tool-things created a link or broken site-line that extended from the Convent buildings across the grounds to the paddocks and creek beyond—pointing outward to include the vista, the landscape beyond and the wind.

As previously mentioned, *Cross-Section* was predominantly designed for everyday visitors to the Convent, not for an invited art audience. However I inevitably found that some people wanted to know where I was and *what was going on*. In order to try and help visitors locate some of the interventions I made in and around the site, I used an online mapping system that could be updated regularly.²⁷⁸ This map was essentially a version of Google Earth, which to my great delight, allowed me to scroll further and further out from the Convent and implicate my work into a wider and wider context (Figure 47-49). If zoomed in, the map clearly showed the various places I had located work within the Convent grounds that day, but by scrolling further and further out you could see the work in the context of the broader suburb of Abbotsford, then Victoria, then Australia or as a tiny dot in the context of the whole, wide, world.

²⁷⁸ Thanks to the technical wizardry of Felix Friedlander.



Figure 45: Katie Lee *Cross-Section*, 2017. Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 46: Katie Lee *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 47: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. (Screen-grab, online map)



Figure 48: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. (Screen-grab, online map)



Figure 49: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. (Screen-grab, online map)

As previously described *Cross-Section* consisted of various equipment-like apparatuses or tool-things that made reference to Objects. As part of this series I made 40 small red, yellow, black and white flags which I located around the site to create *boundaries* or to draw attention and create a sense that *something was happening*. (Figure 50 and 51). I found the response by the public to these flags particularly interesting. Many asked, “What is going on here?” Some children were particularly concerned by the black flags, one child in particular thinking they had discovered the burial site of a dead animal. It also fascinated me that children instinctively knew what to do with the flags; many would pull them out of the ground and begin to use them in elaborate games that involved staking out territory and marking finishing lines for races and games. Even toddlers would pick them up and seemed to delight in placing them back into the ground marking out territory or X marks the spot.²⁷⁹ Sometimes I would use them myself, as part of my *Performances with No One Watching*, simply standing with a flag in my hand looking out over the view, paying respect to the landscape and all the things that were happening and that had already happened.²⁸⁰

During the two-week long performance-installation I invited a number of guests to come down and develop performances with me; periodically I was joined by the artists Emma Collard, Arabella Frahn-Starkie or Melanie Irwin.²⁸¹ These artists would come and work with me: improvising together or independently setting up equipment around the site. Occasionally we would come across each other as we worked or—my personal favourite—find evidence of an action or interaction that had occurred sometime earlier (Figure 52). Frahn-Starkie and Collard also began developing a semaphoric language with the flags, keeping each other in sight by jumping up and down and waving the flags as they got further and further away from one another.

²⁷⁹ I also took these flags and used them to develop performance works in the landscape around the Bundanon Artist Residency. I would leave the flags set up at various places around the grounds. I have some great footage of Kangaroos dismantling particular flags by pulling them off their stakes, particularly it seems... the red colour ones.

²⁸⁰ The flags are Objects that are particularly relevant to the Australian Colonial history. The colours of the flags in *Cross-Section* were deliberately made in the colours of the Australian Aboriginal flag. I included white flags because of the historical reference white flags have to the act of surrender or to peace. Although I was not using these flags symbolically in my performance work, there was a nice moment in *Cross-Section* when an Indigenous kid pointed to the flags as he was playing in the gardens, and I overheard him say to another kid, “They’re my colours”.

²⁸¹ Each of these artists have independent installation and performance-based practices with similar research interests and outcomes. See in particular Emma Collard’s curated exhibition at the Substation Gallery *Rooms With a View* (2016), Collard and Frahn-Starkie’s collaboration, *How many colours and shapes can you spot in the room? Are we unified or are we flat? Can you find the best way to see?* (2016) at Kings Gallery and Melanie Irwin’s *Action with Compass and Coordinates* (2017-ongoing) and *The Appendages series* (2013-ongoing).



Figure 50: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 51: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 52: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Clare Rae.

In the final days of my performance-installation, I worked with Collard and Frahn-Starkie to create a loosely choreographed performance that could be advertised to the public. My choreographic strategies focused on ways that I could maintain the key concept of *Cross-Section* having a distributed edge whilst at the same time enable an invited audience to directly engage with the performance.

In the advertised version of the performance-installation people were invited to join us at the Convent over a two-hour period, during which they could, “come and go as they pleased”. Collard and Frahn-Starkie began in the Sacred Heart Courtyard, pushing the equipment and periodically stopping to use it (Figure 53-55), as they slowly made their way to the Rosina Auditorium. Other audience members came in to find me already working in the Rosina Auditorium (Figure 56 and 57). I had a variety of tall ladders set up in the space and I spent a lot of time speculating as to where things might go, holding them up, measuring them with and in relation to my body, and looking upward to gauge where they might be hung. I would then measure out long lengths of rope and go about hanging the work from the beams or putting things together in various equipmental-arrangements. I would regularly stop to sweep the space, sit on a stool and look at the arrangements, or coil ropes and untie the knotted bundles that were part of my kit.

After about 40 minutes, Collard and Frahn-Starkie joined me as we worked together in the space and continued to improvise with the equipment (Figure 58). During the performance we each maintained a separate logic with our arrangements and occasionally we would change each other’s work as we disassembled parts in order to take something we needed elsewhere in the room. We kept up a tempo that was speculative, yet industrious. None of the actions we performed were rehearsed or designed to communicate anything other than the task at hand. In the last 15 minutes of our time together in the hall we began to take turns stopping work and looking out of one of the windows or opening the different doors at regular intervals (Figure 59-61). This was the only pre-organised action, and we used it to indicate that our attention was oscillating out to the space beyond the hall as well as inwardly on the tasks we were performing.



Figure 53: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie.

Emma Outside. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 54: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie.
Arabella Outside. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 55: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Emma Outside*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 56: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie.

Katie in Rosina Auditorium. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 57: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie.
Katie in Rosina Auditorium. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 58: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Katie, Arabella and Emma in Rosina Auditorium*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 59: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Arabella Looking Out*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 60: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Emma Looking Out*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 61: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Katie Looking Out*. Image, Clare Rae.

After around 30 minutes, Frahn-Starkie and Collard gathered together a collection of flags and exited the hall from a rear door (Figure 62). This door led to a path winding down to the creek and the Collingwood Children's farm. Some audience members stayed and continued to watch me work in the space, while others looked out the windows following Collard and Frahn-Starkie with their gaze, and others continued to follow Collard and Frahn-Starkie as they made their way down to the creek (Figure 63).

On their journey Collard and Frahn-Starkie set out a trail of coloured flags,²⁸² and although some audience members stopped following them, Collard and Frahn-Starkie continued signalling to each other as they traversed the grounds making their way out of the Convent and down to the edge of the creek. Eventually I left the auditorium as well and set up another equipment station at the rear of the convent. The audience was now distributed all around the grounds (Figure 64-66).

Frahn-Starkie and Collard and I eventually made our way back to meet at the rear of the Convent to conclude the performance. We did this by signalling to each other with flags—me on the grounds of the Convent and them far away by the creek; we jumped and waved, constantly keeping each other in sight as we moved (Figure 67 and 68). The performance finished for the invited audience when we gathered together at the rear of the Convent placing our flags atop a large stack of bricks (mimicking a claim for territory) before walking away (Figure 69 and 70). In reality, I just walked away to continue working on my performance-installation as it usually operated—with no one watching.

²⁸² These flags were also used in my final exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019). Each day I would distribute flags outside in the park and on the nature strips surrounding the Margaret Lawrence Gallery. The work also references *Roof Piece* by Trisha Brown (1971) in which performers standing on rooftops in New York City copied one another's improvised actions passing them on to one another in a chain that travelled across the SoHo rooftops. *Roof Piece* could not be viewed in its entirety from any single point.



Figure 62: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Emma Leaving Rosina Auditorium*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 63: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section*, 2017. Advertised performance *with* Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Audience Looking Out*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 64: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Arabella Leaving the Convent*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 65: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Arabella Signalling to Rosina Auditorium Audience*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 66: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Emma Signalling to Arabella (at the Children's Farm)*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 67: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Arabella and Emma Signalling to Katie From the Creek*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 68: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Katie Signalling Back*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 69: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *Meeting Point*. Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 70: Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Advertised performance with Emma Collard + Arabella Frahn-Starkie. *After the Advertised Performance (Performance **with** No One Watching)*. Image, Clare Rae.

***Set Elements* (2019) Revisited**

Arabella Frahn-Starkie and I also worked together performing a work within my performance-installation *Set Elements* (2019) that was exhibited in curator Kelli Alred's exhibition *Temporal Proximities*. This piece furthered the concept of a distributed edge in several ways. Both through my own choreographic and installation decisions, but also in relation to Alred's curatorial premise, this piece explored how different kinds of temporal artworks inter-operate across an exhibition or, as the title suggests, in proximity.²⁸³

Temporal Proximities consisted of eight artists whose work could be considered to operate performatively across a wide variety of different media.²⁸⁴ Rather than separating out these works, Alred was interested in the nuanced ways these individual pieces might overlap through proximity to create new resonances and complicate the temporal logic inherent in each artist's work. As a curator, Alred was also interested in considering the whole exhibition as a single *score*. This temporal rhythm was designed by Alred and activated via a range of complex processes including an overall lighting schedule designed by artist Andrew Sainsbury, along with programming decisions such as holding the exhibition according to the natural fall of light (the show was open for three hours over three evenings from dusk until sundown). Instead of inviting the audience to see each performance work discretely, Alred was interested in audiences being able to see across and through the exhibition. Therefore it was important to Alred to show *Temporal Proximities* in a space that was open and relatively permeable because she wanted to generate long sightlines enabling each artist's work to be in proximity, not just to their neighbour, but to the collective.²⁸⁵

My work *Set Elements* considered the distributed edge as a major part of my choreographic and installation strategy. This influenced the way I interacted with the apparatus and tool-things; however, it also led me to scrutinise the role that invigilators play in exhibitions. In my experience of viewing exhibitions, invigilators are often positioned on what I can only imagine is supposed to be *the edge* of the artwork or gallery. This *outside observer* is a necessary part of compliance with security and occupational health

²⁸³ This exhibition is also the subject of Kelli Alred's current PhD research. For further information about her research see: <http://temporal.proximities.pepperfactory.net/>

²⁸⁴ The eight artists were: Angelica Mesiti, Bridie Lunney, Clare Rae, Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano, Helen Grogan, Jill Orr, S.J Norman, and myself with performances in my work by Arabella Frahn-Starkie, Zoe Bethell, Luke Fryer, Anika De Ruyter, Nia Johnson, Simone Nelson, Oonagh Slater and Camille Thomas.

²⁸⁵ The exhibition was held (coincidentally) at the Abbotsford Convent in the newly opened Magdalen Laundry multi-event space.

and safety requirements in exhibition spaces, however their very presence is often overlooked, or given scant regard and not considered as a component of the exhibition.²⁸⁶ However, even if we are complicit in the need for an invigilator, I consider the presence of the invigilator just as much a part of the artwork as the architectural details or the broader context of site within site-specific artworks or exhibition designs.

With this in mind in relation to *Temporal Proximities* I surmised that, if the *edge* of my performance-installation was to be distributed and truly extend beyond boundaries, those employed to guard those boundaries could and should be enfolded inside the context of the work rather than remaining on the *outside*. It also seemed that the idea of invigilators were antithetical to the open and permeable edge of Alred's curatorial premise. Therefore, in conversation with Alred and the staff at the Convent, we agreed to include the invigilators who were required by the Convent (as part of their occupational health and safety requirements) to become part of the permeable edge of *Set Elements* and further, that they would be embedded within and contribute to Alred's overall score.

Seven invigilator/performers took part in *Set Elements (Temporal Proximities)*.²⁸⁷ Each performer came to the work as an independent dancer, performer or artist. Their role in *Temporal Proximities* was both as an invigilator and as an artist/performer. They were not outsiders but instead contributed to the overall exhibition and specifically to my work. The invigilators wore T-Shirts printed with the word *Temporal* or *Proximity* either on the front or the back to incorporate them into Alred's score.²⁸⁸ This reference continued to prompt viewers to consider everything in *temporal proximity*; I saw the T-shirts as an extended word poem that kept pointing out and rearranging the relationship between time, space, the artwork, the audience and each other.

I established seven invigilator *stations* distributed around the exhibition and marked by one of my stools or by a brass bell (Figure 71). Referencing one of Alred's overall score lines, each performer/invigilator would stay at their designated station for 20 minutes.²⁸⁹ Each time a performer moved on they would displace the next performer from their

²⁸⁶ Even in less formal galleries, for example artist run spaces, this still happens. Often there are desks within the exhibition and people sit at them sharing the space with the artwork.

²⁸⁷ The performers were: Zoe Bethell, Luke Fryer, Anika De Ruyter, Nia Johnson, Simone Nelson, Oonagh Slater and Camille Thomas.

²⁸⁸ Thank you to Andrew Treloar for assistance with costume design.

²⁸⁹ Alred considered 20 minutes to be a typical duration that audience members would spend watching a performance or in an exhibition.

station, who would in turn, move the next performer on. One performer was always out of rotation and would exit the exhibition space and rest.

In relation to the choreography of the invigilator/performers, Frahn-Starkie and I discussed with the artists ways that they could *perform* their role, inviting them to bring their own performance practice to the work in whatever way they wanted to.²⁹⁰ For some performers these performative intentions were as subtle as holding the determination to *keep vigil* while others created a series of gestures that they improvised or moved through each evening. We would begin our performance before the audience arrived; starting the work as a distributed group and holding the space together through a sense of awareness of each other working together. Twenty minutes later, our first rotation would commence as audience would begin to arrive.

Finally, in a further gesture towards breaking down the edge between the invigilators and my work, one performer, Oonagh Slater, would occasionally enter *Set Elements* and work with Frahn-Starkie and I performing the installation.²⁹¹ Sometimes this would mean Frahn-Starkie or I would exit the rotation and rest. At other times we would become invigilators, taking up position at one of the invigilator stations. Sometimes, all three of us would work together until Slater would go and join the other invigilator/performers in rotation once again (Figure 72 and 73).

One of the refreshing things about the format Alred used in *Temporal Proximities* was the way that it so successfully broke the Object Event. Although there was a start and finish time, it was not something people came to see *start* or *end*. Each work within the exhibition had its own rhythms and cycles. This allowed audience members to come and go as they pleased. Even when they sat and watched us perform, the presence of other works, temporalities and audience members whose attention was elsewhere, never created the sense of a single unified *Object Event*. When the audience arrived, the work was already in performance; no one saw a beginning and we continued performing after they left. Therefore the audience arrived *in the middle*.

²⁹⁰ In relation to their role as invigilators, they were invited to remain in a performative mode unless they saw fit to intervene in some way necessary to their role as an invigilator.

²⁹¹ I would have liked to have all the performers rotate into the installation component of the Set Elements work. Unfortunately a lack of funding prevented the development of this aspect of the work.



Figure 71: Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Clare Rae.



Figure 72: Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019), Oonagh Slater and Luke Fryer Invigilator/Performers.

Image, Anne Moffat.



Figure 73: Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Clare Rae.

Middling

In addition to the distributed edge, I have also used a strategy of practice I call middling.²⁹² In my artwork, *middling* describes a condition whereby *the event* is positioned as already in occurrence at the point of encounter. I began to formulate my thoughts around this strategy when considering my contribution to the group show *A Material Turn* curated by Dr Rebecca Coates and exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery in 2015.²⁹³ As I have previously outlined, my work *Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extended)*²⁹⁴ uses a number of strategies to try and break Objects, however the context of a group show required my consideration of methods that might also help me break the condition of an *Object Event*.

Group shows can be a challenging environment within which to show spatiotemporal artworks. This can be attributed to most group shows having a range of different kinds of artworks in them, all operating with different conceptual and perceptual modalities. Each artwork within the group has different methods of locating its own *edge* and these *edges* can be contested for a variety of reasons. *The Material Turn* consisted of a diverse range of artists practicing across different mediums including (amongst others) several video works on monitors, a sculptural work exploring the limits of its own materiality, a seductively displayed and lit presentation of striated dust, and a painting on canvas.

Given these differing modalities, I was curious how audiences might shift between the different modes of encounter that each work invited; furthermore, how I might counteract

²⁹² In developing these ideas, I have turned to and been influenced by the writing of Canadian artist/philosophers Erin Manning (1969-) and Brian Massumi (1956-). Manning and Massumi write extensively and have co-authored several texts, that both use and describe process-based philosophical concepts that middle (see extended bibliography). Manning and Massumi's ideas are directly influenced by the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, William James and Alfred North Whitehead, all of whose philosophical work elaborate the concept of middling. This would seem to make the relevance of Manning and Massumi central to my research. However, while they have been formative to my understanding of middling, my project has focused more directly on the condition of an oscillation in thinking, and this oscillation occurs between Object-Thinking and methods that can be used to break Objects. Therefore my research into middling has been more practice-based than it has been formed by the above literature, and constrained by the scope of this dissertation, more than by any perceived lack of relevance.

²⁹³ The philosophical and conceptual framework of New Materialism provided a particularly relevant provocation through which to further consider my idea of Object-Thinking, in particular the way New Materialist philosophies (in general) critique a humanist tendency to abstract complex and active matter into static form. Many New Materialist texts have influenced my thinking however to fully expand upon New Materialist ideas is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For further reading, please refer to Estelle Barrett, Bolt, Barbara, *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, New Metaphysics (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2012). Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991., 1991).

²⁹⁴ *Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extended)* consists of three separate installations which I refer to as: *Chair in Cooperation with Orange*, *Extension One* and *Extension Two*.

any inadvertent triggers that might prime the viewer to encounter *Objects on display*. Therefore a primary consideration in situating my work, was the presence of other artworks and their corresponding display strategies.

In situating my work, I was careful to find locations that were not immediately visible when first entering the gallery. I created spaces for the work that sat outside of, behind or in the periphery of the main galleries. *Extension One* was located behind a temporary wall that I positioned at the rear of the gallery, in turn creating a small crank-space between the back of the wall and the staircase. *Extension Two* was positioned on the other side of the staircase in a dead-end corridor that led to a storeroom, and *Chair in Cooperation with Orange* was installed in a small dark side gallery usually used as a screen room (Figure 74 and 75). By situating my works in these spaces, audiences would not immediately see my work. This also allowed the work to be heard before it was seen. Thus, these strategies enabled audiences to arrive *in the middle*.

I also used the strategy of *middling* in the title of my exhibition *Work (in Progress)* (2016). In fact, the work was not *in progress* in any overt or process-based way. For example, I did not come in and change any elements within the exhibition as the title might have suggested. Rather, I simply wanted audiences to arrive with an expectation that something *might happen* rather than that the art-Event was *complete*.

Another version of *middling* was tested in the development of *Performances with No One Watching* in the project *Cross-Section*. This method, which I elaborate on further in the next chapter, involved setting up works that had no start or finish times; this meant audiences would always encounter the performances *in the middle*.

Even using the usually definitive *Object-Thinking*, events are notoriously hard to define as *Object Events* because what constitutes the edge of an Event is difficult if not impossible to distinguish. Nevertheless, humans have an inclination toward embodied and psychological habits of perception (Gibson, Stern) that tend to collapse complex events into reconcilable Events. Although there is great philosophical speculation around what constitutes events, there are plenty of philosophical grounds to contradict the notion of a clear Event.



Figure 74: Katie Lee, *Chair in Cooperation with Orange (Extension Two & Extension Three)* (2015).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Figure 75: Katie Lee, *Chair in Cooperation with Orange* (2015). Image, Christian Capurro.

As Daniel Stern showed with his *breakfast interview*, if we tune into our experience we can determine multiple and simultaneously occurring instances that are more limited by our capacity to recount them in language than they are through our capacity to experience them. Likewise Tim Ingold showed that by paying closer attention to the objects we are familiar with we are in fact quite aware that trees (for example) are not simply *environmental furniture*, as Gibson might describe them, but edgeless entities that are just as much constituted by the wind and the ecologies that the tree is part of, than they are an object in and of themselves. Alfred North Whitehead and Edgar Morin also insist that the world is exponentially complex and that any description of it must necessarily encompass all of the processes and in-betweens— what Morin describes as ‘a mess’—in order for it to resemble the world itself.

Nevertheless, artworks are often put back into galleries as though Events are clearly defined; there are many aspects of the theatrics and presentation strategies that some artists and exhibition makers habitually use that reconstitute complex events as Events. Therefore it is important, even if we establish an ideological or conceptual understanding that events are complex, to continue to put into place strategies of practice that help articulate artworks as complex and open-ended rather than reduce them, accidentally or otherwise to art-Objects.²⁹⁵

In my research I have tested a range of strategies to try and disrupt the Object Event, including *distributing the edge* of an artwork and a concept I refer to as *middling*. In the next chapter I will consider how all of the strategies introduced thus far might operate all at once.

²⁹⁵ Some artworks exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery in *No Single Thing* (2019) were also exhibited within the performance installation *Cross-Section* (2016) which was held outside on the grounds of the Abbotsford Convent. As I have previously mentioned, the gallery itself is not something I seek to escape, rather galleries simply manifest a set of conditions that must be taken into account when evaluating strategies to *make* or *break* Objects. No two galleries have the same conditions and therefore it is not possible to generalise different approaches between indoor (gallery) artworks and outdoor (public) artworks and performances. For example, I included ‘*Performances with No-One Watching*’ in the title of the work (*Set/Reset*) in *No Single Thing* because the conditions of the Margaret Lawrence Gallery heightened the Object Event so much that I didn’t perform when there was an audience present. In contrast I performed live during the exhibition *Set Elements* in *Temporal Proximities* and outside at the Convent in *Cross-Section*, both of which had a large audience. For each project and even for different times within the same project, I respond to the specific conditions that contribute to making Objects and that also present opportunities to break them.

Chapter 6: *Landscape-Thinking*

Nothing happens on the screen, a man sleeps for twelve hours; there is nothing on the canvas, just the canvas itself or its frame, the sea is made of blue water, an ice cream melts and its cherries make deafening noises as they fall, a fire is made of a lighted gas jet, a drama is played out by means of poses and movements drawn from life, a floor is a number of tiles to be polished constantly, a pile is made of plastic tubes placed on top of each other, a room is the sum of four corners.²⁹⁶

—Germano Celant

In the previous chapter I addressed the problem of how audiences contribute to an Object Event when they watch performances or consider artworks as Objects. I introduced a number of strategies that I use to problematise the Object Event including what I have called the *distributed edge* and *middling*. In this final chapter I will introduce my term *Landscape-Thinking* and summarise a number of related strategies of practice that have involved, at times, even more discreet conditions for showing artworks.

This includes further elaboration of a body of work that I affectionately call *Performances with No One Watching*. I began referring to my performance work in this way when I was in residence at the Convent for my performance-installation *Cross-Section* in 2016. The performance was ongoing over the two-week period and therefore performances did not *start* or *end*. I assumed at times my performance were invisible to audiences either because people who were at the Convent for other reasons did not realise that I was *performing* or because, quite possibly, there was actually no one (human) around. As my research developed, this working title gained significance—because it links my practice-based research to another body of literature that has been influential in the development of my ideas, especially those that offer alternatives to Object-Thinking.

Hence, in this chapter I continue to look at other ontological frameworks that can be used to consider objects. In particular I refer to the work of Bundjalung-Murrawari-Kamilaroi artist and academic Dr Brian Martin, and the object-oriented ontology of Graham Harman, along with an expanded notion of performativity offered by North

²⁹⁶ Germano Celant, *Arte Povera: Histories and Protagonists* (Milan, Italy: Electra, 1985). 31.

American scientist and feminist philosopher Dr Karen Barad (1956-) and Australian artist and academic Dr Barbara Bolt (1950-). The work of these artists and philosophers enables me to consider the contribution of *things that happen* but that are not necessarily *seen*, and to acknowledge that all kinds of work can be *performed* with and without anyone noticing. These frameworks also invite speculation about what differentiates an artwork from the processes that are undertaken to make it, and the necessity for humans watching (performances, artworks or anything) to verify that something has happened, or to make that something *valuable*.

Landscape-Thinking

Throughout my research I have argued perceiving Objects is not necessarily bad, given that the world may be too complex for us to comprehend if we constantly attend to the dynamic and simultaneous occurrences operating at any given time. However at the same time, I acknowledge that Object-Thinking has, and continues to, cause great damage to other modes of thinking that operate culturally and personally. Therefore my project has embedded within it a form of resistance that I acknowledge as political.

Rather than advocate for permanently broken Objects or dare to hope for an end to Object-Thinking, the concept of Landscape-Thinking invites another approach. This modality privileges and tries to facilitate what I have called *oscillations in thinking*, whereby our attention and understanding continues to shift and flip, home-in or broaden-out, or even hover-between perceiving Objects and broken Objects. This flexibility of mind is one that can be exercised and, in its continued application, resist habitual modes of thinking that simply accept Objects and Object-Thinking.

The term Landscape-Thinking is not a theoretical one, but instead has emerged from my practice-based research which occurred in both urban and natural environments (cities and the Australian bush), as well as simply inside and outside. As I have previously established, anything can be considered an Object including nature itself, therefore the term Landscape-Thinking seems an appropriate neologism that holds within it the same inherent contradiction, or oscillation between, different modes of thinking (Objects and Broken Objects) that has informed this project.

The term Landscape-Thinking does not reconcile the issue of Object Thinking, but rather encapsulates the contradiction. A landscape presents to us a vista, or as the dictionary defines it: "...a portion of territory that can be viewed at one time from one place."²⁹⁷ This definition reinforces the idea that Landscapes are endless, that there is always something beyond. Rather than coming to a landscape with a sense that we are encountering something that is only just beginning, I argue we are more open to arriving *in the middle*. We expect to see ecologies *in action* at different scales and we more readily understand that the environment has been happily existing before we arrived to view it. However, Landscape-Thinking is not as utopian as it may sound. For me, the word landscape also inherently offers a warning, implying that the land is a 'scape' to be viewed from afar rather than understood as something that we are embedded within. Given our capacity and tendency for Object Thinking, it is still possible and indeed common, for people to consider nature an Object. This is particularly relevant to the Australian colonial context, as I will discuss later in this chapter. My concept of Landscape-Thinking therefore contains reference to Objects and Object-Thinking (Landscape) at the same time offers the glimpse of an escape, or an oscillation away from Objects, towards action (Thinking). Therefore embedded within the term, I hope is a less stable form of perception that may continue to shift, shimmer, or change.

In relation to my practice-based research, Landscape-Thinking is applied as an intention, whereby I continue to *try* to merge-with, draw-attention-to and care-for an environmental approach.²⁹⁸ What remains is more often *an oscillation in thinking*, revealing forms that reference Objects and Object-Thinking—but which are put into battle with methods that might break them. This oscillation in thinking makes constant reference to other places, bodies, times, sequences, and events—in no particular order.

I hope that embedded in Landscape-Thinking is a sense of joy and of care that extends outward toward broader perspectives; that opens up a way of thinking about the world that can encourage, or at least remind us, that beyond one view lies another.

²⁹⁷ Meriam Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Landscape," accessed 10 November 2018, //www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/landscape.

²⁹⁸ Not to be confused with Gibson's *ecological* approach.

At the same time, this awareness demonstrates the ways Object-Thinking has colonised environments and turned complex ecologies into Landscapes.

Not Object-Thinking

Bundjalung-Murrawari-Kamilaroi artist Dr Brian Martin has written extensively about the problematic way that Western ontologies result in ‘representationalist thinking’, particularly the way that Western ontologies separate out *culture* from *everyday life*. If culture and everyday life are separated, then art can only hope to *represent* rather than present, or be in reciprocal and dynamic exchange with, life. Martin describes how this fundamental Western ontological position is antithetical to an Indigenous world view:

In Indigenous terms, one “belongs to country”, not the reverse and there is a reciprocal relationship between people and “country”. This also reveals a way of thinking in terms of a dynamic ontology that exists within Indigenous cultural ideology where this reciprocity is grounded in country.²⁹⁹

Martin considers that in general, Western culture has become *tranquillised* by a world view that has forgotten the interwoven nature of lived experience. This results in a form of *amnesia* whereby Western culture has become “...complacent and apathetic about its own surroundings.”³⁰⁰ According to Indigenous ontologies, Martin says, it is not possible to separate out life from the surrounding environment, or from culture. Instead, “...Country informs people of their identity and it is Country’s active role of informing us of our whole belief system that relays its importance to culture.”³⁰¹ Therefore, within Indigenous ontologies it is not possible to separate out art from the concept of a *real world*.

In contrast, Martin observes that Western culture often views ideologies and cultural expressions such as art as separate from our lived experience, and this perspective can render art as *stationary* or static.³⁰² Martin’s views on Western ontologies are in keeping with what I have termed Object-Thinking—whereby reciprocal and complex processes that produce and co-constitute complex objects are, to use Martin’s term, tranquillised. This causes us to forget the relationship between objects and what complex factors have actively

²⁹⁹ Martin, B. in Barrett, *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts*. 185.

³⁰⁰ Martin, B. In *ibid*.

³⁰¹ Brian Martin, "Methodology Is Content: Indigenous Approaches to Research and Knowledge," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, no. March 2017 (2017). 5.

³⁰² *Ibid*.

contributed to making them; rather we see entities, environments and artworks as Objects. Martin considers the way artworks, objects (everything) are instead grounded in *the real*. Understanding this means that artworks, images and objects all have *real* effects.³⁰³ This distinction is fundamental because it means that the notion of the immaterial and the material do not possess an ephemeral relationship to the world or one that is built up over an underlying concept of *nothingness*. Instead both the material *and* the immaterial are founded in the “...real existence of country”.³⁰⁴

It can be said that one of the problems Western cultures have with the idea of the *real* is that it is not always visible.³⁰⁵ However as Graham Harman points out, even when material is visible, it is still common to overlook the full capacity and agency that materials have or that materials *are*. In a short essay that Harman wrote for the German art exhibition *documenta 13* in 2012, Harman introduces his own philosophy which he declares as object-oriented.³⁰⁶ In this, he helpfully provides an abridged definition of this philosophical orientation, often referred to as *speculative*, or abbreviated to OOO,³⁰⁷ (object-oriented ontology). He illustrates his summary of OOO by applying object-oriented thinking to a famous lecture about a table, delivered by astrophysicist Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington in Edinburgh in 1927. Eddington’s lecture began with his declaration that it is possible for all objects to be considered in duplicate. Rather than one table, one chair or pen, Eddington instead declared there to be two. These two tables consisted of the one rendered by our perception in *everyday life*, and the other table that exists not to our eye, but

³⁰³ Martin acknowledges these ideas relate to Barbara Bolt’s account of ‘a radical ontology that sees the image as having “real material effects.” For further reading see Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2004). For examples of Indigenous art practices that Martin uses to exemplify his ideas see Martin in Barrett, *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts*. 196-204.

³⁰⁴ Martin in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts*. 203.

³⁰⁵ Martin shows in contrast how Indigenous frameworks manifest the immaterial in the material conditions of existence, see Martin, B. in *ibid.*, 187.

³⁰⁶ For an expanded text on Harman’s object-oriented Ontology see Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (New York: Open Court, 2011).

³⁰⁷ Harman’s abridged version of OOO is as follows: “First, philosophy must deal with every type of object rather than reducing all objects to one privileged type: zebras, leprechauns, and armies are just as worthy of philosophical discussion as atoms and brains. Second, objects are deeper than their appearance to the human mind but also deeper than their relations to one another, so that all contact between objects must be indirect or vicarious. Third, objects are polarised in two ways: there is a distinction between objects and their qualities, and a distinction between real objects withdrawn from all access and sensual objects that exist only for some observer, whether human or inhuman. Finally, the basic problems of ontology must be reformulated in terms of the fourfold structure that results from these two polarisations in the core of objects.” Harman in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, et.al, “Documenta 13: The Book of Books,” ed. Documenta and Musedum Fridericianum Veranstaltungen-GmbH (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012). 540.

to the principles of the "...scientific world revealed by physics".³⁰⁸

Both these tables, Harman declares are "... a sham".³⁰⁹ Instead, Harman opens up this long-held binary between what appears *real* through our cultural or everyday thinking compared to that which is declared *real* by science to a third way:

The real table is in fact a third table lying between these two others... What we call the third table cannot be reduced downward to the scientific one... We also cannot reduce it upward to its theoretical, practical or causal effects on humans or on anything else... Our third table *emerges* as something distinct from its own components and also *withdraws* behind all its external effects. Our table is an intermediate being found neither in subatomic physics nor in human psychology, but in a permanent autonomous zone where objects are simply themselves.³¹⁰

Significantly, Harman says to position the table in this third realm, "...can be verified in no way at all, whether by science or by tangible effects in the human sphere."³¹¹ And this Harman says, is the point. Because if we reduce the table to a verifiable Object, we have imposed upon it a system of thinking in order to know it, and this system of thinking belongs to the system, not to the thing itself.³¹²

According to Harman, this does not make objects completely inaccessible, rather it simply means that to access them we need to be "*indirect*".³¹³ This indirect third realm, Harman sympathetically acknowledges, is where artists have long dwelled. Because rather than try to pin down theories of physical reality or mimic the objects of everyday life, artists instead "...attempt to establish objects [as] deeper than the features through which they are announced, or allude to objects that cannot quite be made present."³¹⁴ In other words, *break them*.

In another essay, *Art Without Relations* (2014) Harman again applies OOO to the realm of contemporary art by critiquing the idea of *relationality*.³¹⁵ Reflecting upon the role that

³⁰⁸ Eddington quoted in Harman, *ibid*.

³⁰⁹ Harman in *ibid*.

³¹⁰ Harman in *ibid.*, 540-541.

³¹¹ Harman in *ibid.*, 541.

³¹² Harman in *ibid*.

³¹³ Harman in *ibid.*, 542.

³¹⁴ Harman in *ibid*.

³¹⁵ Graham Harman, "Art without Relations," *ArtReview*, no. September (2014), https://artreview.com/features/september_2014_graham_harman_relations/.

relationality has played in contemporary art, Harman acknowledges the term has marked an overall, "...sympathy for dynamic relations over dreary substances..."³¹⁶ However, for Harman the term is no longer liberating because to emphasise relationality continues to "...reduce things to their pragmatic impact on humans and on each other".³¹⁷ The idea of relationality is too simple, because as Harman has shown in his essay *The Third Table*, it continues to assume we (humans) have access to all that objects and things can be. OOO defends objects as existing "...deeper than their relation to humans"³¹⁸ thereby making it critical to surpass a simpler understanding of *relationality* as has previously been celebrated in the arts.

Harman also relates the limited perspective of previous philosophical thinking and its human-centric orientation in arguments that have long been playing out in the history of modern art. For example, Clement Greenberg's attack on *academic art* which Harman summarises as Greenberg trying "...to dupe us with explicit content while paying no heed to the background structure of the medium itself"³¹⁹; or Michael Fried's famous critique of the minimalist artists in his essay *Art and Objecthood* (1967) in which Fried accused Minimalism of theatricality. Harman reminds us Fried considered the Minimalists theatrical because of what he deemed an "...observer-centred literalism".³²⁰ This, in other words, made the physical presence and experience of the observer central to the work of art.³²¹ According to these concepts, if there is no-one in the gallery watching then there is *nothing happening*. However this human-centric concept is longer viable under the framework of OOO because things continue to act upon each other if we are there to see them or not. The relationality (or not) of objects does not need a witness.

It is these ideas that I have found resonate with my practice-based research, especially ideas formed around *performances with no one watching*. The power of declaring these performances to have happened without an audience lies in the disregard for humans in rendering it a work of 'art'. This attitude also marks a distinct point of difference philosophically and historically between this research, and other artists whose work may

³¹⁶ Ibid., para 2.

³¹⁷ Ibid., para 6.

³¹⁸ Ibid., para 11.

³¹⁹ Ibid., para 10-11.

³²⁰ Ibid., para 11.

³²¹ See Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination; Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*.

have also broke Objects and art-Objects. For example, Duchamp famously wrote, “All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”³²²

Performances with No one Watching Revisited.

One simple solution to this (my tongue firmly in-cheek) was to begin to do *Performances With No One Watching*. While on one hand, this was a humorous take on the problem of audiences creating Objects and making Object Events, on the other, more seriously—the methodology enabled me to engage with the conditions I am explicitly making reference to. That being the world *as it is*, rather than the world as I might *present it to be*. By this I do not mean the world as it is without humans in it per se, but rather the simultaneously occurring unpredictable complex events that I could not easily separate out and put back *on display*. By taking the performance-installation *Cross-Section* (2016) into public space without explicitly announcing it, I hoped I could belong to the same complex interactivity that *constitutes* environments and worlds rather than *recreates* them.

Performances with No One Watching began at the Convent in 2016; however, my thinking about this body of work as a methodology of practice has been useful for framing past actions as it has contributed to further research, in particular to what an extended notion of *performativity* might mean for spatiotemporal arts practice. I continued my practice-based research into these ideas at the Bundanon Artist Residency where I spent 6 weeks in December 2017.³²³ During the residency I continued working outside in the landscape *performing*. This included setting up flags in the bush, leaving video cameras alone recording until they ran out of batteries; using shards of mirror to bounce light; or performing a series of gestures I choreographed in the studio, as I walked around a bush track at the rear of the property each day.

³²² Duchamp, M. “The Creative Act,” in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand Du Sel)*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).140.

³²³ See Appendix Four.



Figure 76: Katie Lee, *Performances with No One Watching*, 2017. Video Still.

The Role of Video and Field-Recordings

One important aspect of this body of research was to develop methods of practice that enabled me to combine a sense of being *here* whilst still acknowledging *over there*; or to develop a way to present simultaneously occurring events *as they are*. One method I have used to explore this within my practice-based research has been the use of field-recordings. By making field-recordings in both audio and video formats, I have attempted to gather large chunks of *things as they are* and import them into another place; to sit beside and therefore complicate the hermetic notion of a single place.

To call video work a field-recording marks a distinction; rather than an intention to capture something editorially it instead shows an intention to capture something with an apparent neutrality—that is to capture *what is happening*. In making video and audio field-recordings I set up cameras and audio equipment and leave them for as long as I can. When I edit the footage, I do so only to add it together into a single file, not cutting it into any narrative form. My field-recordings however are not purely archival in that they do not attempt to preserve linear aspects of time, or provide any data about what and where they were taken. I introduced this strategy earlier in chapter two by describing the capacity for a video field-recording of a rubber-tree to *break* rubber. In addition to revealing the

source of rubber, the video also operated by simply presenting *another place* like an open portal to *somewhere else* far away from the white-cube gallery.

Throughout my performance-installation *Cross-Section* I made field-recordings of my performance-installations as well as of the site and the surrounding environment, including nearby locations along the creek. I did not distinguish between performances with humans in them and performances without. I thought of all the field-recordings as *happenings* and *matterings* with and without someone watching. Each evening I added footage to five different video-stations around the site. As with the performances and daily installations, I did not want the video footage to unfold sequentially. Rather, my intention was to share the accumulation of actions that had occurred over a period of time on the site—both my own and those of the environment. Some of these actions may have been observed by others; others, likely missed completely. The videos were not edited together in any particular order and this confused a sense of when things had happened. Therefore the strategy of using video documentation also facilitated a non-sequential experience of the work.³²⁴

Expanded Performativity

Also embedded in the irony of the title *Performances with No One Watching* is an implicit understanding that there is no such thing as *no one watching*. As I argue, to *perform* is to perform in or with the world—not necessarily to the humans within it. What I mean by *perform* is not necessarily clear here. However by considering the work of Karen Barad and Barbara Bolt, I have come to understand an expanded notion of performativity.

In an interview with Adam Kleinman in *Mousse Magazine* (2012) Karen Barad explains a common phrase she uses in her work, *intra-action*:

The usual notion of interaction assumes that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. By contrast, the notion of “intra-action” queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism the belief that there are individually constituted agent or entities as well as times and places). According to my agential realist ontology... “individuals” do not preexist as such but rather materialise in intra-action. ... Phenomena are the entanglement.

³²⁴ See also Jonas Mekas’s film, *As I was Moving Ahead, Occasionally I saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000).

Like many of the philosophers I have mentioned, Barad believes that language is not up to the task of presenting a reality in which this intra space might exist because it is too dependent on the underlying structure of its own system of representation.³²⁵ In a book chapter from *Material Feminisms* (2008) entitled *Posthumanist Performativity* she proposes, "...a performative understanding of discursive practices."³²⁶ This shift, she says allows a focus to be placed not on trying to describe or mirror reality (representation), but instead to "...matters of practices/doings/actions."³²⁷ The emphasis here is placed on a dynamic *matter*ing rather than a static rendering, and accordingly the world is constituted of continuously reconfiguring phenomena. Hence a performative reality is not, Barad says, "...composed of things-in-themselves or of things-behind phenomena, but of 'things'-in-phenomena."³²⁸

Things-in-phenomena include the dynamic entanglement (intra-actions) as substantial aspects of the world and not just bounded Objects and their relational interactions. Hence the dynamic nature of this intermingled notion of continuous occurrence (the world) is *performative*. It is considered posthuman because the categories that have previously been foundational in understanding entities as separated and bounded are no longer clear. As Barad says:

The posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman', examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilised and destabilized.³²⁹

Australian artist and academic Barbara Bolt has also written extensively on ways that a concept of *performativity* can take the place of representational practices; and helpful for the purposes of my research, Bolt applies her scholarship directly to the example of art practices. In her 2004 book *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, Bolt explains that central to debates about representationalism in the arts, is the contested

³²⁵ Much of Barad's philosophy supports a critique of what I have called Object-Thinking, and her work expands upon many of the philosophical arguments I have previously outlined—including the limitations of both social and scientific systems of knowledge. Regrettably, the limitations of this dissertation only permit a select focus on Barad's notion of performativity. Please see expanded bibliography for further relevant works.

³²⁶ Barad in Stacy Alaimo, Hekman, Susan, ed. *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008). 121.

³²⁷ Barad in *ibid.*, 122.

³²⁸ Barad in *ibid.*, 135.

³²⁹ Barad in *ibid.*, 126.

notion that the *real world* can be copied through practices employed by artists.³³⁰ As Bolt says:

What is at issue is not so much representation itself, but rather how, in the modern world, representation has come to be understood as the structure that enables representationalism to dominate our contemporary way of thinking. Representationalism is a system of thought that fixes the world as an object and resource for human subjects.³³¹

Bolt elaborates using the work of Martin Heidegger who offered a critique of representationalism that was based on what he thought was a fundamental error in thinking and the notion “...that the world becomes picture is one and same event with the event of man’s becoming *subjectum* in the midst of that which is.”³³² Or in other words, that which the *human* is trying to picture has already been filtered through the fact that they understand reality from the embedded perspective of being *human*. For Heidegger a picture was not a simple image as we might conceive of it, but rather as a “...regime or system of organising the world, by which the world is reduced to a norm or a model. In this mediation, the world is conceived and grasped primordially as a picture.”³³³

Bolt goes on to explore the many philosophical counter-arguments that have resisted representationalism³³⁴; but it is her conclusion that through the enactment of *practice*, or practice *in movement*, that we can begin to escape this bind of representationalism that most directly applies to my research. Bolt argues that this is because rather than seeking to *set something out* before an audience, we can continue to handle things—to continue changing and shifting relations *in practice*.³³⁵ As Bolt says, “Handling is a relation of care and concernful dealings, not a relation where the world is set before us (knowing subjects) as an object. It does not set forth the things that we encounter and place them in an epistemic relation to self.”³³⁶ The notion of artwork as one in constant and changing relation means that the human (artist) is no longer the sole agent in creating an artwork. Rather it is the

³³⁰ Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. 12.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Heidegger in *ibid.*, 13.

³³³ Ibid., 18.

³³⁴ Bolt’s work reviews the philosophical contributions of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Bruno Latour, Jacques Derrida and in depth—Heidegger. Throughout my dissertation my arguments have been limited to the authors who best summarise oscillations in thinking. The authors who contest representationalist thinking do so adamantly and wholly and to adequately cover the alternative to Object-Thinking extends beyond the scope of this dissertation.

³³⁵ Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. 50.

³³⁶ Ibid., 52.

artist in co-operation with the materials and contributing “...elements that make up the particular art ensemble.”³³⁷

Performing the Installation

It is common in an exhibition of artworks for the processes of making and installing the artwork to be cleaned up and erased— and the final exhibition is presented devoid of the gestures and speculative acts that contributed to the works production. Within the process of making and installing the artwork, the evidence of countless accumulations of unseen labour are tidied away in service to the spectacle of the *finished* exhibition.

However, many gestures can be found within the making and exhibiting of artworks: acts that show the intention and attention to detail, ordinary acts such as sweeping, sanding, painting and pacing around, climbing ladders, holding up objects, eating, drinking, resting and thinking, can also elaborate and extend the language of the work. Further, these general acts of labour relate the artwork to other ordinary processes involved in the constitution of complex, everyday environments, rather than Objects.

In another practice-based methodology I have developed during this research project, I have looked at ways that *Performing the Installation* can operate as a method to break Object-Thinking. This methodology emerged out of *Performances With No One Watching*; however, in the case of *Performing the Installation* the audience may or may not be present, arriving as they do *in the middle*.

All at Once: No Single Thing

In the exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019) presented at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery there were several iterations of *performing the installation*. I also used methodologies such as *the distributed edge* and *middling*, along with *tool-things* and *apparatus*. Hence to conclude this chapter I will provide a fuller description of the way in which various methodologies described throughout this dissertation operated in what was the final exhibition of my candidature.³³⁸

³³⁷ Ibid., 53.

³³⁸ See Appendix Six for documentation.

No Single Thing (2019) consisted of several overlapping and inter-dependant works. *Here and There* (2019), a three-channel video work, was located in the rear hallway of the Margaret Lawrence Gallery near the toilets (Figure 77). Each of the three channels consisted of footage filmed both inside and outside the gallery and shot in the months leading up to the exhibition. The videos played simultaneously and the soundtrack from each of the three videos was mixed to a single channel audio-track which played through a single pair of headphones. With the merging of tracks there was no clear way of telling if the sound was from *here* or *there*. As you watched one monitor, you would hear the actions captured by all three.

I also recorded footage outside the gallery in the surrounding parkland in order to *distribute the edge* of the performance work within *Here and There*. I captured Frahn-Starkie using flags along with footage of her simply standing facing the camera in the wind. During the exhibition I placed flags outside the gallery in various locations around the surrounding parks and on the nature strip—mirroring and pointing to occurrences both inside and outside the gallery as well as inside and outside the videos.

Footage within the gallery shows Arabella Frahn-Starkie and I working together *performing the installation*. The sculptural elements we used consisted of various tool-things along with a combination of elements from other projects (blackboards, scoreboards, bricks, stools, hessian sandbags and ropes) and new elements (swinging metal circles, lowered timber brackets, bronze breaching-staples, an oscillating fan, ladders, brooms and a transistor radio).



Figure 77: Katie Lee, *Here and There* (2019), 3-channel video. 45'15". Film, Tim Mummery, Katie Lee.
Image, Christian Capurro.

Like the work Frahn-Starkie and I performed in *Set Elements* (2019), *performing the installation* in *No Single Thing* was improvised and consisted of *real* processes— constantly setting up, moving around and experimenting with different ways tool-things could be used. The choreography was simple: to test, arrange, set and reset the affordances and capacities of tool-things.

During the exhibition, Frahn-Starkie and I continued to *perform the installation* on various occasions throughout the duration of the show. We did not announce these performances; within the exhibition *No Single Thing*, the installation was titled *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)*. From the hallway where *Here and There* was installed, it was possible to see the installation and simultaneously watch the various previous iterations it had undergone in the footage. This helped break the art-Object by revealing the processes undertaken in its formation.

Various tool-things that I made for *Set/Reset* revealed different temporalities. For example the metal circle was employed as a timing device, or clunky analogue metronome. Frahn-Starkie and I used it to keep track of our own rhythms, and as a way to pull our focus (oscillate our thinking) from the part we were working on, out to the whole. Periodically we would stop and check-in: to look at the metronome to see how attentive we had been to the overall installation, or check whether we had become lost in the details of what we were doing. Sometimes we would stop and talk, see what elements the other was working on, or consider what needed to be done to set or reset the work.

One of the new elements I used in *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* was a transistor radio. This was used to help facilitate oscillations in thinking—a way to acknowledge other places and times external to the space of the gallery. The station was tuned to ABC news radio, which constantly updates the national weather, the time around the country and any national or international breaking news. Frahn-Starkie and I would turn the radio on or off whenever we felt like it. Sometimes we used it to puncture or perforate a sense of introspection in *performing the installation*. It was not uncommon for me to be working away on *Set/Reset* only to find my thoughts tune-in or oscillate to a car accident in the streets of Brisbane; a heat-wave in Perth; or the congestion on the West-Gate freeway experienced by commuters on their way home. At other times my attention

would oscillate to global politics; or the far away actions and behaviour of Donald Trump would interrupt me, often causing one or the other of us to switch-off the radio so we could work in silence again. Sometimes neither of us would hear what was on the radio at all.

Another significant element in *Set/Reset (Performances With No One Watching)* was the introduction of a regular metronomic ticking sound; this was sourced from a form of psychotherapy called *bilateral stimulation*. Bilateral stimulation is used in a form of psychotherapy called EMDR³³⁹ which involves exposure to rhythmic left-right patterning by either audio or visual stimuli. EMDR therapy is based on research that shows exposure to bilateral stimulation can help your thoughts to be less *stuck* on one idea or problem. Therefore, exposure to bilateral stimulation can increase a *distancing-effect* in your thoughts, "...meaning that the problem seems smaller and further away."³⁴⁰ I was curious about this therapeutic strategy in relation to Object-Thinking (in general) and the possibility of bilateral stimulation to disperse a form of singular attention or thought (Object-Thinking). My use of these ideas are strictly artistic, not therapeutic, and their effect would not be significant in the format of the exhibition. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this research, the intermittent bilateral sound provided another temporal rhythm which complicated the other temporalities contributing to *No Single Thing*.

The work titled *Stop/Start* consisted of a solar powered extraction fan and an incandescent lamp and was a *broken Object*, a *distributed edge* and an example of *middling*. The solar-cell was charged by the lamp (rather than the sun), which was set to turn on and off every 15 minutes. When the solar-cell was charged by the lamp, the extraction fan (without its cover) embedded in the gallery wall would turn on. When the light was off, the fan would be off as well, and reveal the puncture that I had made in the gallery wall; upon closer inspection this also revealed that the gallery walls covered up windows and any access the gallery had to natural light. I considered this action to be a *distributed edge* because it punctured the sanctity of the gallery's *interior* space. I considered the fan being either on or off when the audience entered to be an example of *middling*.

³³⁹ Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing.

³⁴⁰ Grant, Mark, "What is Bilateral Stimulation", Anxiety Release App, <https://anxietyreleaseapp.com/what-is-bilateral-stimulation/>. Accessed 16.01.2019

The more overt reference to middling came from the work *In Vigil* and *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)*. *In Vigil* was a performance artwork in which eight performers kept the pendulum-work *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in motion for the duration of the opening hours of the show. This meant that when visitors entered the gallery the first thing they would see was the pendulum-in-motion *middling*. When the performers were *In Vigil* but not swinging the pendulum, they were invited to sit on a stool in the gallery and read. This created another internalised world, like the radio, another *place* for the mind to oscillate to and from. In order to give the performers some freedom to turn their back on the audience, I also installed a mirrored tool-thing³⁴¹ they could use to check the pendulum without feeling obliged to face the audience.

In addition to the swinging pendulum, when audiences entered the gallery, the fan and light may or may not have been on. Frahn-Starkie and I may or may not be *performing the installation*. Various tool-things in *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* may or may not have been moving or coming to rest; the radio may or may not have been on. On their way in and out of the gallery, audiences may or may not have seen flags on the lawns of the surrounding parklands. In fact, audiences may have seen all of this. Or they may have seen nothing at all.

Conclusion Landscape-Thinking

There are plenty of alternatives to Object-Thinking. However, as the work of Martin has shown, since Object-Thinking has been a dominant modality in the West, it risks drowning out other forms of knowledge. In an Australian context, this has had a detrimental effect on the broader recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems and ontologies. To resist Object-Thinking is inherently political. Nevertheless Martin, along with Harman and Barad have shown that the philosophical tide is turning—away from human centric concepts—towards those held by New Materialist and object-oriented Ontologies.

Throughout my dissertation and practice-based research I have put forward a number of possible strategies that might break Objects and Object-Thinking and encourage an

³⁴¹ I made the mirror from gridded safety glass, which was a quasi-Institutional Object because it placed a formal grid over the reflective surface. This was completely unnecessary but strangely fitting.

oscillation in thinking. These concepts are summarised by my term *Landscape-Thinking*, which I have deployed to assist answering the questions initiated by this research, and to help articulate possible solutions to the strange incompatibility I was experiencing in my practice which combined making—chalkboards, glass lenses, fans and stools—with field recordings—things being moved by the wind, dripping rubber-trees and bird song. To operate with the modality of Landscape-Thinking encourages a constant oscillation in thinking—acknowledging and using forms that reference Objects and Object-Thinking at the same time employing possible methods that might break them—and making reference to other places, bodies, times, sequences, and events. Through a continued application of the methodologies I have developed in my research, I hope to further explore possible ways I might open up Landscape-Thinking within art contexts, and stage complex encounters that continue to resist the dominant legacy of Object-Thinking, by *performing* complexity.



Figure 78: Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)*, 2019.

Image, Christian Capuro.

Conclusion

How then, to begin?³⁴²

—Susan Buck-Morss

This research project began as a schism that I perceived to exist in my own spatiotemporal arts practice as well as within the conditions of exhibiting artworks in galleries—an underlying tension between something being perceived as static compared to being perceived as dynamic or subject to change. This underlying contradiction I understood to be both an ordinary part of the way we experience the everyday world, at the same time wholly political.

In order to identify habitual and abstract modes of thinking that result in a stable perception or conceptualisation of *invariants* from the vast field of *variance* I have coined the term *Object*. This term identifies the human capacity to abstract the complexity of the world into stable forms, including through the way we perceive the external world (Gibson), our embodied interaction with the world (Gallagher), or simply through our habits of thought (Whitehead). The term *Object* is not inherently critical—rather it aims to reflect the capacity humans have to perceive the world in a stable way.

I have also described how these stable forms of perception shift, either due to our naturally changing modes of thinking (Nöe) or because something shifts our mode of thinking (Heidegger) or *risks to consciousness* (Gallagher), rupturing our perception of an *Object*. I have coined this shift in perceiving an *Object*, a *broken Object*, and throughout my research I have sought various methods of art practice that might help break *Objects*. This is because, although I have argued that perceiving something as an *Object* is a natural way of orientating ourselves amongst the vastly complex world, this mode of perception does not actually *reflect* the complexity of the world. Nor does it necessarily reflect the various ways we experience the world, which are often far more complex than we might first acknowledge (Ingold) or have the language to recount (Stern).

³⁴² Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press, 1989).

My research project is critical of what I argue to be a dominant orientation towards perceiving Objects, and this habitual mode of thinking I have coined: *Object-Thinking*. Object-Thinking describes a particularly rigid orientation toward perceiving Objects, which especially in the West, can also reveal a desire to understand the world in a stable and rationalised way (Ingold, Whitehead, Morin). Therefore to *break* Objects provides a liberating rupture—away from a dominant mode of perception and toward a perspective that is far more complex (Harman, Ingold), intertwined (Martin, Barad, Bolt) and even, messy (Morin).

Although I have described Objects in opposition to broken Objects, rather than arguing for a binary condition, I have introduced the idea of *an oscillation in thinking*. To have an oscillation in thinking means that our mode of attention and perception of *what is happening* can shift or change back and forth between perceiving the world as stable to other ways of thinking about or understanding the world. Exercising this mental state of flux in which our perception of Objects and broken Objects continue to oscillate, I have termed *Landscape-Thinking*.

Responding to the Research Questions

After establishing the terms—Object, broken Object, Object-Thinking and an Oscillation in thinking—I have asked:

What are the implications of our tendency towards Object-thinking? And: How can spatiotemporal artworks reveal these tendencies?

And:

What factors might cause a shift between different modes of thinking?

And: How might these contribute to a methodology of practice that helps position an artwork as active?

In order to answer these questions in Chapter One, I first examined how and why humans operate using abstract modes of thinking, selectively tuning-in to certain

phenomena and rendering the world accordingly. In order to better understand this duality, I have looked closely at the philosophical work of Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Edgar Morin, Martin Heidegger, Sara Ahmed and Tim Ingold. These authors' philosophical and anthropological perspectives have provided context and insight into the human capacity to home in and reduce our thoughts, just as they expand them out. While the ability to see both generality and specificity is part of a human's sophisticated system of thinking (Whitehead), it is not without prejudice. Therefore I have argued that the human capacity to be selective and order our world through *a sense of importance* (Whitehead) shows that our patterns of thinking are inherently political because they reveal an underlying system of value. That this process is selective, however, also means that our abstract thought patterns are subject to change. This capacity to shift our thinking between specificity *and* generality has guided my selection of literature throughout the dissertation. This is because to flip, shift or oscillate-between, has formed the basis of a methodology of art practice which I have argued, can be used to resist the dominant mode of *Object-Thinking*. Within my practice, this resistance has a political dimension.

In the final part of the Chapter One I established my concept of Object-Thinking as an ingrained and habitual mode of thinking that has evolved throughout the history of Western thought. Using the work of Morin, Whitehead and Ingold I have shown that whilst Object-Thinking originates from our general capacity to think in abstract terms, it has become rigid and over determined. Particularly in the West, this has permeated and influenced the way we perceive the world as static and fully formed (Ingold). I have shown that when applied to art contexts, abstract ways of thinking, especially Object-Thinking, continue to influence the way we encounter art within white cube gallery spaces (O'Doherty). I have also shown that these conditions are able to be resisted and *broken* by making them visible through various methods of practice (Smithson). Therefore I argue, breaking Objects within artworks can help break dominant modes of thinking.

I have introduced the term *Object* in order to better locate and understand the abstract thought processes that *reduce* complexity. In the second chapter *Objects*, I have explored how and why we have this selective capacity, which at times is simply a form of focused attention and at other times can be overly reductive. Firstly, I considered how abstraction is not just a psychological or conceptual framework, but also part of our embodied and physiological constitution. Referencing the work of Shaun Gallagher, I introduced the idea

that our body affects our perception of the world, as the world in turn affects our body. I then considered the idea of embodiment *in action* through the work of Heidegger, using his famous tool analogy. This reference to Heidegger's broken hammer helped me develop my concept of an *oscillation in thinking*. This oscillation describes a capacity to switch between different modes of thinking. I have argued that when we shift our thinking, momentarily or otherwise, we expand our mode of Object-Thinking and in doing so can *break Objects*. I have used the work of Alva Noë and described artwork by Ben Russell to show how perceptual shifts and changes are part of the human condition and that certain prompts can help certain presences *show up*.

These everyday oscillations in thinking have been a central preoccupation in my own practice, and one that has been important for me to locate within the framework of this research, because these ordinary oscillations in perception— between seeing and not seeing—are also political. This is because humans *forget* and reduce the scope of our attention. Humans also have moments of awareness, however, where an expanded perception *rises to consciousness*. These oscillations in our thinking happen across a range of modalities; corporeally, as we realise we have been on autopilot; systemically, as we experience amnesia about where our food comes from; socially, as we step past people in need on the street, or ignore hardship that we see in our communities. But by the same measure, we also *tune-in*. We have moments of awareness of our body-in-action; we tune-in to our part in the whole or feel great empathy as we observe and notice what is going on around us. We become aware of our proximity to someone else on a crowded tram. We see the birds nesting in city buildings, we enjoy the moment something is taken up by the power of the usually invisible force of the wind. For me, this tuning-in process has been equally important to understand because as I have upheld throughout my dissertation, perceiving Objects is not necessarily something we can permanently avoid, but it may be something we can habitually *break*.

I have argued that our capacity to tune-in and out is equally applicable to the way we *see* as it is to our modes of thinking, because we abstract the world around us through embodied perception as well through our habits of thought. In the second part of Chapter Two I have used the work of James J. Gibson to further elaborate this aspect of embodied perception. Gibson considered perception to be what he termed *ecological*. By this Gibson meant that we see the world as *whole* rather than a series of fragmented or unrelated parts

because of our embodied human perspective. Gibson's theory suggests that we literally *see* the world as a system that suits our human needs. I have argued that ecological perception is another form of embodied abstraction with environmental and social consequences because it is an obviously human-centric point of view.

Gibson's theory of perception nevertheless demonstrates that we have a particular corporeal attunement to the *affordances* of things in the world. This means that we have an embodied capacity to register what things are *for* and what they can *do*. I have argued that our attunement to affordances can be used to produce artworks that both mimic as well as *break* habitual modes of perceiving through utilising and drawing attention to the expanded affordances materials and forms have embedded within them.

To show how an expanded concept of material affordance might be used in artworks to foreclose Object-Thinking I have referenced the work of Manuel DeLanda. In particular, I have used DeLanda's concept of assemblages to argue that latent affordances have the capacity to activate artworks. I applied these concepts to an artwork by Jannis Kounellis and to the way I use materials in my spatiotemporal art practice, for example in my use of rubber. In particular I have reflected upon how the expanded affordances and capacities of rubber can be sensed corporeally at the same time that their material complexity is forgotten, thus addressing the perceptual conundrum expressed in my introduction:

...how to exhibit spatiotemporal art practices in such a way that the artwork maintains a sense that it is *active* as opposed to *static* or *on display*? At the same time (conversely); to determine methods that can be used in making and exhibiting art works that engage the fact we often *do* reduce our thinking about things in the world from complex and interrelated to simplified and separated-out?

I have argued that revealing the Objects source, (the rubber tree) can *break* the *Object*. At the same time, the material of rubber and our corporeal sensitivity to its expanded capacities can be used to trigger expanded sensations and likewise help *break* Objects.

In Chapter Three I considered the way Object-Thinking operates in broader terms, whereby we not only see Objects but whole systems or *Worlds* as cohesive. I introduced this concept through the idea of an *Object World*, and revisited the work of Heidegger whose philosophical position upheld that humans have an underlying cohesive concept of *world-ing* that precedes our perception of anything we may think of as belonging to it (the world).

This means that we see the world like *equipment*. I have used Heidegger's work to introduce methods of practice whereby I make *tool-things* or *sculptural apparatus* to show how, even when we don't know what something is *for*, we still recognise the system to which we suppose it belongs. When this form of *equipmental strangeness* occurs, I claim we have *broken* the *Object World*.

I applied this research to the work of Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles and explored various methods of practice that he has used to reveal operational systems and networks. I have also demonstrated how these principles operated in a large-scale performance-installation of mine, *Cross-Section*, that was shown at the Abbotsford Convent in 2016. In this work I showed ways that I merged my work with the Object World of the Convent in order to resist performances and artworks becoming art-Objects.

I also considered the Object World from a corporeal perspective, revisiting the work of Shaun Gallagher to show that humans have an ego-centric spatial orientation in the world. I introduced the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy to show we have neurological responses to our environment when we perceive other humans, and that this reactivity extends to forms that move or when we recognise something as possibly interactive. I extend my own sculptural methodology of *sculpture as apparatus* to show that these corporeal and kinaesthetic perceptions affect our comprehension of *what is going on* and potentially help *break Objects*.

Although perceiving Objects and using Object-Thinking is partly an economical way of dealing with the complexity of the world both physically and socially, it is possible for Object-Thinking to become habitual and even ideological, and that the prevalence of this mode of thinking has important political implications. In Chapter Four I have shown how Object-Thinking has been dominant in Western cultures and that this has resulted in a particular kind of form. I referenced Foucault's pendulum to show how science has been revered in the West and that this orientation towards knowledge has occluded the knowledge held by different cultures and other ontological modalities. I demonstrated how my critique of Object-Thinking manifested formally in my sculptural work, citing the project *Even a Stopped Clock* and the development of what I call *Institutional Objects* in my practice.

I then showed how rearranging form and the affordances within forms can be politically agitating, using the work of Caroline Levine and applying these ideas to work by artists associated with the art Arte Povera movement. I have argued that the political agency in Arte Povera's work outlives its specific historical context. This is because it is the rearrangement of *affordances* that has political agency, and these arrangements are not related to a particular time in history, but instead to our broader understanding of how power relations are held within forms' affordances.

Despite the fact I have argued that Object-Thinking renders our perception of complex events as *Object Events*, in Chapter Five I have also shown that this mode of thinking is limited by conceptual and semantic definitions, and that these do not always match our *experience* of a complex world. Therefore, I have revisited the work of several authors who were introduced in the first half of my dissertation, whose main philosophical work also offer far more complex and expanded ways of understanding the world. In the first part of Chapter Five, I have used the work of Daniel Stern and Tim Ingold to show that we do in fact perceive unbounded complexity, even if we have a difficult time in recounting our experience of this using language. I then went on to show how Alfred North Whitehead and Edgar Morin advocated for an understanding of a complex world that could incorporate all the in-betweens and *mess* of complexity as part of the world, rather than as something we consider unreconcilable, or continue to force into categories. I then put these ideas into battle within the conditions of exhibiting artwork in galleries to show that despite the capacity we have to perceive expanded events, that the theatrics around many galleries encourage our perception of Events. I used several examples of my own work to show these strategies in action, including a performance work developed with Shelley Lasica *The Possibility of Performance* (2015), *Cross-Section* (2016), *Set Elements* (2019) and *No Single Thing* (2019).

Throughout my research I have argued that perceiving Objects is not necessarily *bad*, and that the world is too complex for us to comprehend if we were to constantly attend to the dynamic and simultaneous occurrences operating at any given time. At the same time, I have acknowledged that, as a dominant mode of thinking, Object-Thinking continues to, cause great damage to other modes of thinking that operate culturally and personally. Therefore my project has embedded within it a form of resistance that I acknowledge is political. In response to this position I introduce the term *Landscape-Thinking* in the final

chapter, as a way to merge the condition Object-Thinking with the capacity to break Objects and encourage an oscillation in thinking. I have argued that Landscape-Thinking maintains the problematic aspects of Object-Thinking *and* offers the possibility of thinking outside this modality, by constantly oscillating between the two positions. To establish this, I have first elaborated on some other ontological positions to further reveal the limitations of Object-Thinking. I have made reference to the work of Dr. Brian Martin to show how Indigenous ontological positions are antithetical to Object-Thinking. I have also introduced alternative ontological positions such as those held by object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman. Harman's OOO, along with Karen Barad and philosophers associated with New Materialism are often considered post-human because their philosophical positions de-centre categorical divides as well as casting doubt that humans necessarily understand how the world *really is*. For example, Harman's declares that humans cannot prove OOO, and nor should we try. I have used these alternative ontologies to introduce Barad and Barbara Bolt's expanded notion of performativity, which framed my own research methods, *Performances with No One Watching* and *Performing the Installation*.

Whitehead, Heidegger, Ingold, Manning, Noë, Harman, Martin and Bolt all acknowledge the capacity of art to push through the habitual limitations with which we often consider the world. For Whitehead, it was through literature and the capacity of writers to shift our awareness from broad generalities to instances of great specificity; for Heidegger, it was poetry; for Martin, the act of being on country and drawing; for Bolt, the *movement* of and in *practice*.

Applying the Research

Finally, I summarised many of my research methods and practice-based strategies through a closer reading of my exhibition *No Single Thing* (2019). This involved applying methods such as: identifying and making reference to *Objects* by using forms that seem familiar or that we take for granted; making reference to equipment or presenting artworks that seem to have utilitarian purpose; and making Objects that reference the scale of the human body. I focused on ways to encourage audiences to *tune in* to the expanded or latent affordances within the materiality of an Object, whilst maintaining references to *Institutional Objects* and scientific *equipment*. This interplay between an expanded embodied

understanding and the shifting and tweaking the normative associations to Objects affordances and capacities maintains the political resistance in my work.

This has resulted in artworks that have a sense of *equipmental strangeness* or to make what I have called *Tool-Things* or *sculptural apparatus*. These artworks along with the presence of live performance and things that potentially *move*, also trigger kinaesthetic empathy which may further complicate our innate sense of *what is going on*. My creative practice-based research also applied the idea of a *distributed edge* and *middling* to my spatiotemporal installations, which along with the use of video and audio field recordings helped to complicate the perceived sequential nature of an Event. This was further emphasised by having performances occur when no one was there to watch them and having elements of the work in constant motion, stopping and starting regardless of whether an audience was there to observe.

Contribution of the research

My research project has drawn together range of literature and philosophical perspectives on human perception, and proposes methods of art practice that can reflect and resist habitual modes of thinking. My approach, which has been particularly broad in its scope, has considered physiological, philosophical, psychological and anthropological implications of habits of perception, along with how these habits can be reflected within artworks, and/or impact the viewing and experiencing of artworks (both inside and outside the gallery). Although the breadth of my approach means I have not been able to elaborate on some ideas within my dissertation to the depth I would have liked, it has allowed me to bring together an original cross-section of literature and research, and show how this range of ideas manifests within certain spatiotemporal artworks and practices. By identifying this intersection of research and linking it to particular operations and methodologies within spatiotemporal art practices, my research has shown the way various spatiotemporal practices contribute to this body of knowledge and various ways that creative arts practices align to this existing literature and research. Revealing and explicating the links between this cross-section of existing literature and research to creative arts practices addresses a gap in existing scholarship making this project a valuable contribution to the field.

In particular, my research project is important because it provides a framework through which to view particular types of spatiotemporal art practices; practices that engage with various modes of human perception; and that reflect how perceptual modalities can influence the forms and spaces we create and operate within. Further, by variously referencing how perception can operate within innate, embodied and culturally specific ways, these artworks and practices are able to show how habits of perception can become entrenched within culturally dominant attitudes and orientations, and lodged within forms; forms that exist both within artworks and within our everyday lives.

Another major contribution my research makes is in the development of several key terms that I use to refer to this constellation of ideas, namely; *Objects*, *broken Objects*, *Object Thinking*, *an oscillation in Thinking* and *Landscape-Thinking*. By coining these terms, I have created an economical way to reference this broad cross-section of research around perception, abstraction, complexity theory, anthropology, psychology and the physical sciences, along with their embedded histories. These terms are particularly useful because as I have shown, the research and philosophical concepts that sit behind these terms is complex, and in some cases even contradictory. While my dissertation has not resolved any of the incongruities that exist within the different bodies of literature I have reviewed, I have been able to show how these concepts can co-exist and apply to a range of spatiotemporal art practices. Therefore, although this cross-section of ideas may possess contradictions as well as resonances, my research has shown that they may be able to sit in conversation with each other within various artworks and art practices.

Furthermore by revealing methods of art practice that aim to maintain contingency and activation, my research articulates ways that spatiotemporal artworks might politically agitate against entrenched perceptual modalities by simply remaining *active*. I have located this research within both the philosophical and physical sciences, showing the intersection between how we think habitually and the different ways that bodies hold knowledge and reflect particular orientations. This makes my research and these terms highly relevant to artists and creative practitioners because, I argue, artists are attuned-to and draw-upon embodied knowledge and research as well as traditional forms of knowledge and research, in making artwork and expressing ideas (creating new knowledge). Furthermore, artists are often conscious that these insights and the sharing of these insights through their creative work, is in and of itself, political—even when it is not overtly so.

Part of the complexity of Objects and Object-Thinking lies in the fact that these modalities can be innate and embodied ways of thinking and operating in the world as well as habitual and cultural ones. Therefore the terms in and of themselves, do not refer to a binary condition where Objects are bad and broken Objects—good, but instead reveals the unreconcilable complexity of experiencing the world in flux. Here I make another contribution through the specificity of the term *Landscape-Thinking*. Landscape-Thinking is a perceptual modality that continually shifts focus and resists stabilisation, without rejecting it outright. Landscape-Thinking and *an oscillation in thinking* allows for what Brian Martin calls *a shimmering* to occur between one thing and the next, fixing upon *no single thing*.

By locating this complex intersection of ideas and coining these terms my research can be applied to a wide, albeit particular range of art practices, making it a significant body of research for those interested in the intersection between body, space and objects and the political implications that arise from their complex and ever changing inter-relation.

In addition, by exploring the implications of Object Thinking using the example of creative art practices, I have reflected upon how different modes of thinking colonise and intrude upon creative institutions such as art galleries and exhibition spaces. I show how Object Thinking can influence an encounter with spatiotemporal artwork, using examples of my own practice-based research outcomes as well as examples of historical and contemporary artists' work.

This aspect of my research is helpful because it articulates the ways that artworks and art Events are framed (as Objects), and the consequences these frameworks can have on audiences' encounters with spatiotemporal artwork. While this research also refers to existing literature and references artists and art movements that have previously resisted Object Thinking and Events in overt ways (for example Land Art or Happenings), it is important to continue to refresh these ideas and apply them broadly. This is because Object Thinking can also operate in very subtle ways, and therefore continues to be pervasive. By revisiting and making explicit how Object Thinking can create Objects, art Objects and Events within a range of exhibition contexts, my research also shows how the practices and processes employed by artists can continue to resist Object Thinking and Events within exhibition contexts in subtle ways as well as more overtly. By continuing to

explore the impact of the Object Event within exhibition contexts it is my hope that exhibition makers continue to tune-in to subtle shifts in perception and orientation and acknowledge the way audiences bring their own embodied and cultural forms of knowledge, (including Object Thinking) when they come to see artworks. With this in mind, it is important to continue to find ways to challenge habitual modes of perceiving, as well as the colonising effect and affect that Events and art Objects can have on audiences.

In conclusion, research for this dissertation links modes of perception as they operate in our daily lives, with the often over-emphasised Event-world of the art gallery. Therefore my research helps articulate *what is going on* when things seem *static*, *nullified* or *on display* in galleries. It also helps explain the reason some artworks maintain a sense of *contingency* and appear *activated*. It has helped me understand why Robert Morris's artwork *Untitled (Box for Standing)* has had such an impact on me and why it seems politically active even though its content is not; and why artwork from the Arte Povera movement still seems as relevant today as it did when it was first made. It has helped me understand what is *operating* when there seems to be nothing *operating* at all, and how simple forms of perceptual rupture and reorientation can be powerful and politically effective as well as affective.

Although I argue it is almost impossible to get rid of Objects and Object-Thinking completely, we *can* and *should* acknowledge the capacity Object-Thinking has to take over other modalities of knowing. Furthermore, it is vital that we continue to recognise and resist the way Object-Thinking has historically shut-down other modes of being in the world. As I have shown, through developing an awareness of our capacity to perceive Objects and apply Object-Thinking, it is also possible to break these habits of thought. This can be either by acknowledging that our modes of thought are unstable and constantly shifting, or, as I have demonstrated, can be encouraged through the use of particular strategies and triggers.

Perhaps it is too much to hope that other modes of thinking will take over from our perception of Objects and Object-Thinking altogether. It may be possible, however, to remain open to more flexible ways of thinking about the world. Landscape-Thinking invites us to tune-in to oscillations in our perception; to catch ourselves in one mode as we shift and change, or remain open to another. In this field—the landscape—we have space to move freely between Objects, broken Objects, and whatever it may be that lies in

between. The power of this methodology is in the subtle ways that resistance can be applied to normative patterning; a resistance that can simply involve tweaking, flipping or switching between different ways of tuning in and knowing the world.

This research is important because it provides a framework through which to view particular types of spatiotemporal art works and practices, specifically those that engage with various modes of human perception, and that reflect upon how these modes of perception influence the forms and spaces we create and operate within. By mapping this complex and sometimes disparate range of ideas onto a variety of spatiotemporal art practices, I have been able to show how this unreconciled constellation of concepts, manifests within artworks and within my own practice and practice-based research methodologies.

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Appendix One

Oscillations in Thinking

This appendix can be considered as an expression of my research project which has emerged from the interweaving conditions of exhibiting in galleries, along with perception as it operates in everyday life, and recounts several events that occurred before I commenced my research.

Building a Scaffold for Democracy (2011)

It was June 2011 and I was in the process of setting up an exhibition in what was then called Platform Artist Group Inc.³⁴³ Platform consists of twelve large window displays-boxes and is located underground in an arcade underpass that leads directly to one of Melbourne's busiest inner-city train stations. Consequently, the audience is comprised of thousands of commuters who, somewhat incidentally, stream past these window-box exhibition spaces on their way to, and from, catching a train.

It was the incidental nature of this audience that first drew me to exhibit at Platform. Rather than deliberately inviting people to a white-cube exhibition space, Platform offered the possibility of an audience who would be streaming past on their way to *somewhere else*. Consequently, their experience of the artwork, I imagined, would be in glances snatched as they walked past, in much the same way their attention might be drawn to seeing (or not seeing) any other thing that they walked past in the city.

In preparing to install my exhibition *Building a Scaffold for Democracy*³⁴⁴ I employed a small army of friends to help me prepare the window-boxes for the show. Install day was a Sunday and I had the car loaded with equipment, people and artwork. The city was stopped-still with traffic. I pulled up at the final intersection, the corner of Elizabeth and Flinders Street in central Melbourne. We only needed to turn the corner,

³⁴³ The exhibition space that Platform used to run in the Campbell Arcade still exists, and is now called The Dirty Dozen. Therefore, despite the fact that Platform no longer manages the space in the Arcade, I will continue to refer to that space as Platform, as well as use the present tense.

³⁴⁴ The title of the show and the artworks were made in response to a series of words taken from Urban Planning theory. The work was also in response the fact that the audience in this context was truly democratic, and were not the usual art audience who are often 'insiders'.

then we could all pile out and begin our first run down to the space with the gear. Two lanes of traffic led up to the lights. I pulled into the left-hand turning lane and put on my indicator. Three or four cars were in front of us and we sat watching pedestrians stream across the intersection. The traffic was so congested only one or two cars got through each cycle of the lights. We didn't move. As we sat motionless, I remember watching sea gulls hovering above the car. I remember feeling the nervous anticipation of trying to get a parking spot, unload, and get everything done on time. Another cycle of the lights went through; green, orange, red. We still didn't move. Although cars in the lane beside me were stuck as well, their lane was moving slowly, each time the lights turned green a few cars crawled past us. I tried to see up ahead past the cars in front of us, what was holding us up? Distracted, we fell back to chatting and waiting. Once again the lights changed from green to red. This time I craned my head even further to see what was going on. Suddenly it became clear that I had pulled in behind *parked* cars. The cars ahead of me were empty. We weren't *waiting*, we had *stopped*.

The strange reorientation of my sense of *what was going on* felt like a reorientation of the universe. Even though we had been sitting in the car and not moving, I had perceived our situation to be *active*. However the moment I realised we were sitting behind parked cars, this sensation instantly changed. Suddenly I was overcome with a different feeling—it was perceptual, but the reorientation of my senses also seemed to have a physical dimension—we had all become *static*. The seagulls still hovered above us, and we all began to laugh.

Amerta Movement

Years later in 2013 and 2014 I participated in a number of *Amerta Movement* workshops in Indonesia with the founder of this movement practice Surprapto Suryodarmo (Prapto). Prapto has developed Amerta Movement from a cross section of disciplines including Vipassana meditation and Javanese dance.³⁴⁵ Central to his practice are concepts that lie very close to my interest in perception and tuning-in to an awareness of *what is happening*. In one particular workshop I attended in 2014 just before beginning this research, I was particularly struck by the way that Prapto

³⁴⁵ For further reading see Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter, and Sandra Reeve, eds., *Embodied Lives: Reflections on the Influence of Suprapto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*, (Devon, England: Triarchy Press, 2014).

distinguished between the terms *waiting* and *awaiting*. *Awaiting* he told me, was like a form of “moving in not-moving”. It was not a passive form, he explained to me, but was activated by an awareness, a sense of care. “Imagine your mum,” he said, “...awaiting while you play.” This sensation of *awaiting* was considered in contrast to the sensation of simply *waiting* for something or someone to stop.

These slight shifts in perception are difficult to locate as we rush about in everyday life. However it is possible to catch yourself, to tune-in to them and when you do, it is possible to see that there are distinctly different *modes of being* or perceiving. These modes of attention—of anticipation, of expectation and intent—all present very different physical sensations within the body.

Switching between and tuning-in to different levels of awareness in a constant cycle of movement and change is central to Prapto's *Amerta Movement* practice and, as my teacher, he has greatly informed the way that I think about these ideas. In conversation about his Vipassana meditation practice, Prapto joked with me that he had always wanted to sit down with Buddha and have coffee and a cigarette, not necessarily sit in stillness. For Prapto, it is joining-in with the constant movement and shifting awareness, that is the value of a meditative practices; to practice tuning-in to our moving bodies in and amongst a vast and moving Universe. Therefore, rather than resist movement as some meditation practices encourage, the practice of *Amerta Movement* encourages us to—in our embodied state—join the stream.

What the recounted experiences of working with Prapto and of installing the artwork at Platform highlight, is that both the world and our perception of *what is going on* shifts and changes. It is not always things themselves external to us, that shift and change, it can also be our own perception and awareness that phases in and out. Sometimes we find ourselves tuned into the environment around us, attending closely to what is going on, at other times, things slide past us, unnoticed. The exhibition *Building a Scaffold For Democracy* at Platform explored one possible solution to manage the problem of asking audiences to enter into a gallery space, stop and look at static artwork. Instead the exhibition conditions allowed the viewer to pass by the artwork—stop, look, or simply keep going—distracted, disinterested or while continuing to think of other things.



Amerta Movement Practice Workshop, Solo, Java, 2014.



Amerta Movement Practice Workshop, Solo, Java, 2014.

Appendix Two

Artist in Residence, The Pistoletto Foundation (2016).

This appendix documents and contextualises the research trip I made to Biella, Italy in 2016 where I was artist in residence, and spent time looking at Arte Povera artists and artworks in the region.



Artist in Residence at Citadellarte—Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy, 2016.

In 2016 I visited the Arte Povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's Foundation *Citadellarte* in Northern Italy. It is here Pistoletto established a multi-arts and creative-industry precinct and host to various educational and community projects. It is also where Pistoletto lives and houses his personal Arte Povera library and art collection. During my time in Biella and nearby in Torino I visited many Arte Povera works held in museum and private collections in this region of Italy. I studied in Pistoletto's library and viewed his private collection which includes Giovanni Anselmo's work *Senza Titolo* (*Struttura che mangia*) (1968).

I also took part in a course *Sound, Space, Body* at Unidee (The University of Ideas) a global education network that is run from the Pistoletto Foundation. This master-class

was facilitated by Italian sound-artists Attila Faravelli and Enrico Malatesta, and considered sound and its modes of perception and production, specifically in relationship to the body and space.



Michelangelo Pistoletto's Library—Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy, 2016.



Unidee-University of Ideas, Sound, Space, Body Module, 2016.

Appendix Three

Katie Lee, Cross-Section (2017)

A performance-Installation, mixed media, 5-channel video.

Guest Performances by Emma Collard, Arabella Frahn-Starkie and Melanie Irwin.

Exhibited at The Abbotsford Convent.

This appendix collates together documentation of my exhibition *Cross-Section*.



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Clare Rae.



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Images, Clare Rae.



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Images, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017). Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017).



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017).



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017).



Katie Lee, *Cross-Section* (2017).

Appendix Four

Artist in Residence, Bundanon, NSW (2017).

This appendix provides further visual documentation of the research trip I made to the Bundanon Artist in Residence in NSW. During my residency I used the dance-studio to work on choreography, the landscape to perform with, and continued to develop *tool-things* in the studio.















Appendix Five

Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019)

A performance-installation with Arabella Frahn-Starkie and Zoe Bethell, Luke Fryer, Anika De Ruyter, Nia Johnson, Simone Nelson, Oonagh Slater and Camille Thomas. Costume design, Andrew Treloar.

Curated by Kelli Alred in *Temporal Proximities*

Exhibited at the Magdalen Laundries, The Abbotsford Convent.

This appendix collates documentation of the performance-installation *Set Elements*.



Set Elements (2019). Image, Clare Rae.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Anne Moffat.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Aleks Danko.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Aleks Danko.



Katie Lee, *Set Elements* (2019). Image, Aleks Danko.

Appendix Six

Katie Lee, *No Single Thing* (2019)

Exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery.

This appendix collates all the documentation of my final practice-based research outcome *No Single Thing*. This exhibition was examined in March 2019 as part of my PhD submission.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset* (*Performances with No One Watching*) in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).
Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* in *No Single Thing* (2019).
Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *In Vigil + There's No Such Thing as (Perpetual Motion)* and *Stop/Start* in *No Single Thing* (2019). Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019). Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).

Video Still, Tim Mummery.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).
Video Still, Tim Mummery.



Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).
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Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).
Video Still, Tim Mummery.



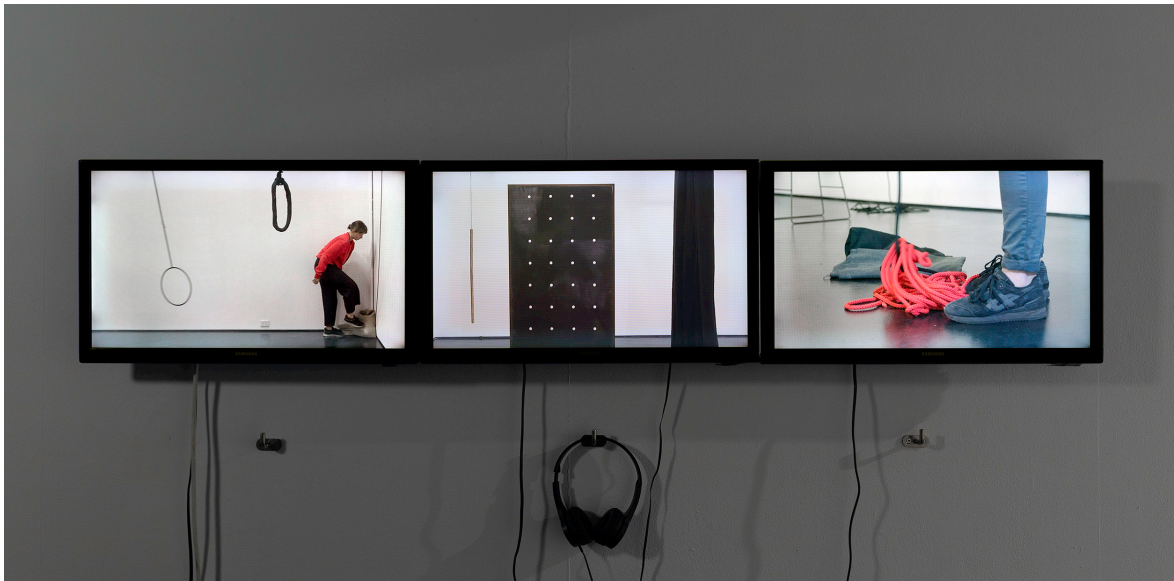
Katie Lee, *Set/Reset (Performances with No One Watching)* in *No Single Thing* (2017-2019).
Video Still, Tim Mummery.



Katie Lee, *Here and There* in *No Single Thing* (2019). Video Still.

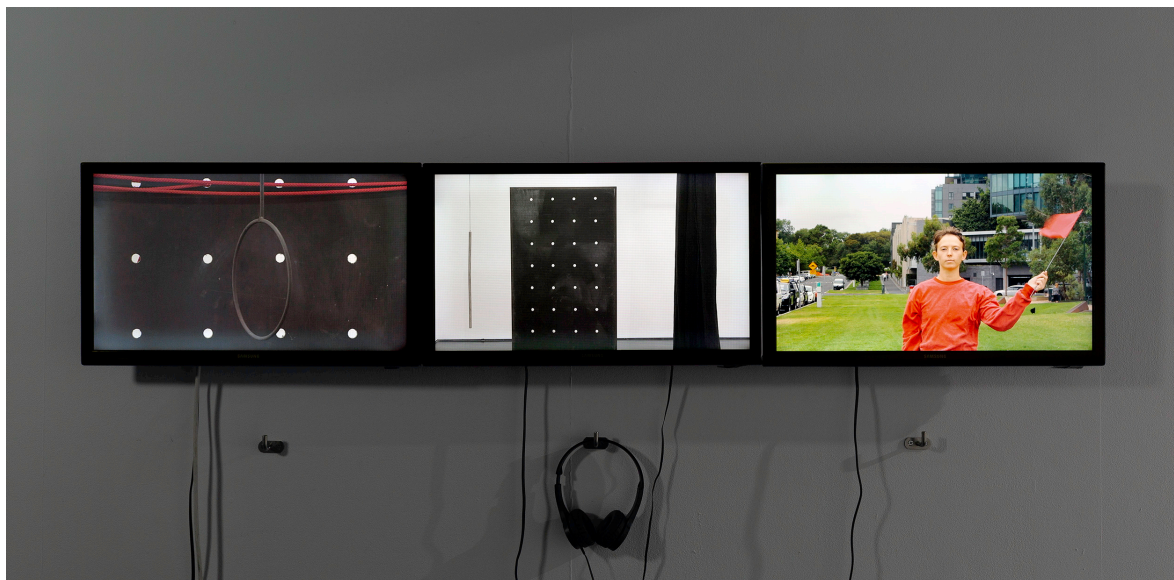


Katie Lee, *Here and There* in *No Single Thing* (2019). Video Still.



Katie Lee, *Here and There in No Single Thing* (2019). Video, Tim Mummery.

Image, Christian Capurro.



Katie Lee, *Here and There in No Single Thing* (2019). Video, Tim Mummery.

Image, Christian Capurro.

Appendix Seven

Extended Bibliography

This appendix outlines all the texts that have informed my research. I have not directly referenced these texts in my dissertation, however they have significantly influenced my practice-based research and been instrumental in defining the field of research to which my project aligns.

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