

## **COLLECTING TASKER**

by

Joseph Clement

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Collecting Tasker

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Collecting Tasker* is a study in the creation and documentation of 'aura'. It tackles the question of authenticity and reproduction as posed by Walter Benjamin and investigates this through the medium of documentary cinema, the vehicle for this interpretation. The location of aura in a particular place or environment is unique; in turn provoking an individual response. A product of close observation and involvement in an environment, aura is fueled by the individual imagination. It is a visceral, physical feeling, rooted in the authenticity of objects and the observers' prior experience, in response to a given environment. This places aura in a realm beyond emanation and casts it into the role of communication. Access to past histories through close observation feeds aura, while allowing it to communicate and inspire new beginnings, creating "a dialogue between an incomplete reality and the imagination of the spectator" (Trigg, 139).

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## **PREFACE**

“The account of a city given by a native will always have something in common with memoirs” (Benjamin in Jennings, Eiland, Smith, 262).

For as long as I can recall I have been walking through cities, exploring private and public spaces with little regard for whether I should or should not be where I found myself. This walking was a form of relaxation, a way to satisfy my mind’s appetite for new environments, the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable. Lost, trapped, scared, these were feelings that I was actually seeking out, a way of escaping the mundane and boring repetitions of everyday life, of the expected and the required. Partly a fascination with decay, partly a fascination with my own imagination, I constructed these adventures in a filmic fashion. In my mind’s eye I was always exploring as if I was watching a movie, conjuring up the next event based on the experience of the current place.

As a young kid I would drive everyone around me crazy with thousands of questions, never able to satiate my curiosity. I was particularly fascinated with what I saw as aberrations in the urban environment. Places where fissures occurred in the “normal” existence of domestic life were a particular fascination. I could never get a straight answer about these places. Nobody could ever provide a satisfying explanation as to how and why these places came to be. I quickly developed an intense interest for the forgotten and neglected aspects of the urban environment. Inhabited places that were run down and dilapidated were most interesting to me. Abandonment was a complete failure in the social contract to the structure and to the city, a clear sign of total disinterest. Re-development, re-construction, it was clear the place was gone, soon to be a pile of rubble. Often these places were still functioning, still inhabited, but forgotten and neglected and they posed a different situation, a whole series of unanswerable questions (Figure 1). What was it like inside if the outside and grounds have not been





FIGURE 1:

Although this house may appear to be abandoned, close observation reveals a light illuminating the second floor window.

touched in decades? Why can't the owners maintain this place? What kind of person lives in this environment? What kind of collections exist in this place? My mind would fill with images of these interiors.

Slowly I began to make a mental map of my city, locating each and every house that fit my criteria in the various neighbourhoods from Oakville to Scarborough and everything in between. I began documenting these places as sure enough one-by-one they quickly began to disappear. At this point, in the early nineties, it wasn't unusual to find places that had not been touched since the late fifties. As generational shifts have begun to take place, many of these relics of this past era have begun to disappear. This real connection to histories and decades long before my arrival was a valuable source of information to me. It offered actual clues as to the culture, styles and habits of that time. Close analysis of these environments provided me with huge amounts of inspiration and information about a history close enough to relate to yet far enough away to be on the fringes of conscious memory.

These places have never left me, either through photograph or sketch or a memory that will, blessed or cursed, never forget an image. For years I have carried this information with me, this passion, this fascination, with little understanding of why it existed, what drew me in beyond the surface appearance. I continued to pick up other such places as I moved to cities around the world, always, inevitably finding those that evoked the exact same response, even though the context, culture, style and material was completely different. There was a common thread, a link that bridged continents and time periods.

This thesis is an exploration of this fascination, this obsession—a desire to know the lives of the people who inhabit these domestic environments. To capture this experience, to understand this fascination, I turned to a medium, which previous to this endeavor was completely foreign to me. Documentary film seemed a natural vehicle for my

exploration. As I explored the city I was always constructing, editing, creating stories from the visual clues that I would uncover. *Collecting Tasker* is the resulting film that explores one such house, a place that encapsulates all that has fascinated and intrigued my imagination (Figure 2). The exploration of aura and a particular type of authenticity underpins this discovery. It provides a lens through which to view this work, a lens through which I have always viewed places such as this. The results of this exploration are analyzed through theoretical texts on subjects ranging from documentary, aura, decay and authenticity, to the psychological and physiological relationships we have to the notion of home. The documentation of Dr. Tasker's house, of a way of life, and the resulting collections and history, bridges my life long fascination with objects, the homes they are contained within and the individuals who are the stewards of their stories and histories.



FIGURE 2:

Dr. Tasker's house as seen from the ravine approach. The view through the opening in the foliage, the rambling vines, covered porches and dormers give the imagination many places to develop.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over centuries the subjects of 'aura' and 'authenticity' have been examined through many perspectives. I refer to contemporary scholars and writers such as Dylan Trigg and his work on decay and authenticity; Andrew Potter's explorations of the meaning of authenticity in a contemporary context, and Adam Sharr's summation of Heidegger's writings on the auratic qualities of space. As a consequence we have strongly developed notions around the meaning and use of these terms: 'aura' and 'authenticity'. This thesis and documentary are both concerned with these concepts as explored through a self-reflexive process of interpretation and understanding. These terms, both highly constructed yet obviously nebulous, are used in this thesis in a manner that may be situated outside the familiarity of the reader. This chapter is designed to familiarize the reader with the conceptual underpinnings I have used in the creation of the documentary, and as an explanation of my interpretation of both 'aura' and 'authenticity' in these environments, to which I am so strongly drawn. In order to bridge this gap I will provide a series of definitions before expanding into the paper, but first, I must explain how I came to rest on the concepts of 'aura' and 'authenticity' before defining them.

During the development of this thesis, the question has been raised on several occasions "Why is this notion you are investigating constructed as aura—and not mood?" I will attempt to clarify this distinction using the Oxford Dictionary's definitions. The dictionary definition of aura, provided here, is not the definition that I have constructed. I have used the dictionary definition to provide a foundational understanding of the differentiation between these two terms and my subsequent interpretation of aura as opposed to mood. Mood is defined as "The atmosphere or pervading tone of something" (Oxford, 476). Where aura is defined as, "A distinctive atmosphere or quality that seems to surround and be generated by a person, place or thing" (Oxford, 44). Both of these definitions rely heavily on the term atmosphere: the first atmosphere being the *tone of something*

the second atmosphere being *generated by something*. Both of these definitions depend on the respective terms, 'of' and 'by' something. 'Of' denotes a relationship between a part and a whole. 'By' is an identifier of the agent performing an action. In the definition of mood the use of tone describes the something as being a *part* of a character or characteristic. Whereas the definition of aura uses "generated" to describe the something as a *producer* of a character or characteristic.

Therefore, I conclude that mood is a relationship to something, a part of something, whereas aura is a product, the result of something. My aim is to explore the production of this product or atmosphere, through the close examination of Dr. Tasker's home and its contents, in relationship to the life he has lived. This examination does not seek to observe the affect of atmosphere and its component parts, it attempts to understand how it is produced. All aspects, working together, creating one overall atmosphere, produce the aura of a place.

With this differentiation of terms clarified I will provide several definitions for terms that act as the foundational spine on which this paper and the documentary are developed. This paper specifically looks at the creation and existence of aura in the domestic environment through the close analysis and observation of authenticity (another term to be expanded upon), and through the medium of documentary film. In order to locate and explain the existence of aura, it is necessary to identify the key aspects of its embodiment, of which authenticity is the main construct. This paper does not engage in the topics of phenomenology, the phenomenon of haunting, or design trends, to name a few. These topics that may be relevant, would be impossible to analyze within the scope of this research paper. Instead, I focus on the ability of the authentic object and its patina, through the tenets of decay, to inspire imagination, by virtue of their direct access to past histories (Figure 3,4). This relationship is explained further in Chapter Four. Contributing to this is the unknown or unknowable of the private realm. The inability

or difficulty in accessing places that produce vivid emotional and imaginative reactions feeds this concept of aura. Their perpetuation in the imagination completes the circle that allows aura to exist as a nebulous construct.



FIGURE 3:

The horizontal wooden beam protruding from the gable of this garage would have originally been part of a pulley system that hoisted bales of hay into the upper loft of this carriage house. This architectural remnant stimulates my imagination, conjuring up images of the history this building has experienced and the transformation of its use from housing horses to cars.



FIGURE 4:

The wear from hands on this trim indicates years of heavy traffic out of the kitchen and into the servant's stair well. The layer of dirt on top of these wear marks highlights the fact that the traffic through this doorway has ceased in the past years.

This wear also brings to mind images of a house filled with life, children running up and down the back staircases, into the kitchen to visit with their mother, grab a snack and run out the door again.

## I. DEFINITIONS

**Aura** - The term aura exists in numerous contexts and fields of inquiry and possesses a high degree of mutability based on personal and individual interpretations. This can lead to some confusion on the subject matter of aura. To be clear, I am not writing this term in relationship to qualities associated with the body. The concept of aura is unique in that its existence in a particular place will provoke individual responses. A product of daydreams, the aura is fueled by possibilities. For me it is a visceral, physical

feeling, rooted in authenticity, prior experiences and imagination, in response to a given environment. The aura of the domestic environment (both interior and exterior) is a complex construct interweaving social, ideological and physical aspects of place into a powerful yet nebulous essence pertaining to space, time and emotion.

**Authenticity** – The word authenticity itself conjures notions of superiority, absolutes, and most of all nostalgic references. In the world of fine art, this term is simply used to refer to the originality or provenance of a piece of artwork, as is aptly explained by Walter Benjamin in his 1934 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In this paper, however, the term authentic is used to describe an embracing of an existence, our existence in the modern/contemporary world. It is an understanding our relationship to the past, not as a heart warming trip down nostalgia lane or as the status-seeking re-embodiment of this past time, but rather as Andrew Potter, author of *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* describes it, as: “an epistemological distinction because the determination of authenticity hinges on our knowledge of a fact of the matter” (Potter, 9). In my interpretation this involves close analysis and observation of material, objects, patina etcetera of a given environment. It is then possible to understand the existence of a past in the present, a connection to a previous time, close enough to bear relevance to our culture but far enough away that it has faded from the broader societal conscious. The desire to understand the presence of history in the present is a desire to have a culturally relevant perspective that isn’t based on what is happening yesterday, right now, or tomorrow, but rather an interest to develop a broader understanding of where we as individuals situate ourselves and are situated by the current world that we are living within. I think this perspective, fueled as it is by imagination is neither retrospective nor futuristic, but a perspective that looks at all different possibilities of past presence and present pasts as a source of inspiration for creating anew. In this respect, authenticity is not about an experience, a way of living one’s life, a quest for a more authentic “reality.” It is not something to be achieved, it



is something to be observed. Potter further substantiates my definition for authenticity when he relates it to, "An individualism that makes its peace with the modern world while allowing for a meaningful life free of nostalgia, reactionary politics, or status-seeking" (Potter, 16). Authenticity is an individual observation that is made through an attempt to understand one's place in contemporary society.

**House/Home** – My interest in the aura of domestic environments is a direct response to my relationship with residential architecture which lies outside the realm of the mass-produced. By mass-produced I am referring to homes built as part of a company town, a sub-division, or houses constructed along typical period floor plans. This definition is neither based on a particular architectural style or location. I am chiefly interested in homes that display a unique configuration, originality, materiality, massing or siting.

**Space vs Place** – for this differentiation I will rely on Trigg's summation of Casey's definition which states "Unlike space, which is geometrically defined and homogenous, place is local" (Trigg, 121). "'Place' Casey writes 'is what takes place between body and landscape.' The experiential quality of place secures the involvement of the body in place." (Ibid,122). Simply put, space is defined as a volumetric construct where as place is defined as the lived experience in a space.

## **II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How might the notion of an 'aura' of the interior and domestic environment be investigated, conceptualized, constituted, described and captured?
2. How can an aura be effectively represented and documented through the medium of documentary film?

## CHAPTER 2: THE DEVELOPMENT AND DOCUMENTATION OF AURA

### I. AURA AS A CONCEPT

This paper may appear to be developing as a series of qualifying statements, and, in part, it is. This however, is necessary for me as the author and you as the reader, to understand how I situate myself in a topic that has no real boundaries, no absolute definitions, and is open to an extensive amount of interpretation. My prior education and career in landscape architecture has also deeply influenced my understanding, appreciation, and development of the concept of aura. This past life, which is with me here in the present, provides the backbone to this concept. "Landscape—this is what the city becomes for the flâneur. Or more precisely, the city splits into its dialectic poles. It becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlor that encloses him" (Benjamin in Jennings, Eiland, Smith, 263).

Along with Benjamin, Martin Heidegger establishes the important link between quality and space as a non-quantitative function. Architect Peter Zumthor discusses his relationship to these theories in Adam Sharr's book, *Heidegger for Architects*. Throughout my design practice I have used the term aura to discuss a relationship to specific environments, both interior and exterior. In the field and classroom the notion of 'aura of place' is widely used as both a descriptor and medium for which the architectural design process is rooted. The practice of using the auratic qualities of an environment as a physical and conceptual framework is a well-established process in the design community. Sharr, speaking of Zumthor's practice, states; "Only once the qualities of prospective places emerge, for him, is building construction configured around them. Only then do the mathematically-scaled drawings of plan, section and detail acquire purpose. The measuring of body and mind the navigation by intuition and judgment which for Heidegger makes sense in sparks

of insight becomes a way of designing for Zumthor, helping him imagine future places on the basis of remembered feelings" (Sharr, 95). Sharr further elucidates the relationship between design and aura when he states, "[Zumthor] ...suggests his concern to work outward from imagined experiences; to design by projecting what places should feel like based on his own memories of past places, trying to configure particular theatrical and phenomenal experiences in architectural form" (Ibid, 95). Zumthor uses aura as a medium through which to construct environments that produce a quality of being, when one is in those spaces. The process of designing through auratic interpretation is how I produced my work as a landscape designer. The interpretation of space, place, and atmosphere as a guide to design is an innate process. It was only logical for me to embrace this philosophy as it was an ingrained perspective which I developed at some point early in my life, at a point so far back I can't consciously remember thinking about space in any other way.

This unconscious method of observation informs my discussion of the subject matter. It also informs the way in which I write about it. Aura is something that cannot easily be described in a straightforward manner. Any attempt to over analyze or theorize the subject effectively destroys its tenuous nature, the constant tension between knowing and not knowing (Figure 5). Consequently writing on this subject is a complicated matter. For the body of this thesis, in Chapter Four, I have decided to allow both texts, the theoretical and self-reflexive to stand separately in juxtaposition to each other. In a style similar to Wayne Koestenbaum's essay, *Hotel Theory*, the texts both tell a similar story but from two perspectives, thus allowing the writer to subvert and the reader to escape the confined and linear process of traditional academic writing, in an attempt to allow the delicacy of the subject matter to be exposed, while providing critical and theoretical analysis.



FIGURE 5:

For as far back as I can remember this house, in a perpetual state of decay, has inspired my imagination, dreams and my developing fascination with aura. Recently discovering this house empty and accessible I went inside and thoroughly documented the space. To my dismay, the knowing of the previously unknown, the thorough documentation of the space and repetitive viewing of this documentation has resulted in a diminished aura for this place. The over exposure has now taken away a key component to aura: the unknown.

Benjamin, who coined the relationship between objects, authenticity, and aura, most notably discusses this tenuous relationship. His concept of aura is used as a foundational underpinning, as he establishes that it is something that emanates from objects, in juxtaposition to its more traditional function of emanation from a living being. This work has been thoroughly analyzed and criticized in the many decades following its publication and those critiques are valuable insights to the concept. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* clearly outlines the relationship between aura and authenticity through the identification of the "original." "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (Benjamin in Arendt, 222). This paper expands upon the authenticity in relationship to the work of art, as it is applied to objects, which as stated earlier, do possess an accessible origin and therefore a possible authenticity.

## II. THE INTERPRETATION OF AURA THROUGH DOCUMENTARY FILM

In order to evoke the powerful presence of aura in the domestic environment I decided to use a style that is a hybrid of cinéma-vérité and traditional documentary. This hybrid relies on the observational technique of cinéma-vérité while inserting traditional techniques such as voice-over, the presence of the documentary filmmaker, and minimal direction of the subject. According to Stella Bruzzi in her book *New Documentary*, the vérité style is considered “a more casual, observational style that had as its premise the desire to follow action rather than dictate it, to see and record what happened to evolve in front of the cameras” (Bruzzi, 74). The documentation of aura is something that evolves through observation and consequently is affected by time and movement, but also cannot be captured all at once, requiring some direction in order to produce an evocation of aura. This is how the hybridized approach developed. The cinéma-vérité technique relies on an ease of maneuverability and access, as provided through minimal and portable equipment. This is key in minimizing the influence and presence of the camera on the subject (Figure 6).



FIGURE 6:

Jackson Parrell cinematographer for *Collecting Tasker* with a portable Super 8 camera. Our presence in the space was minimized by the use of portable and minimal amounts of equipment.

However, since the aura of a place is the product of many objects, stories and histories that cannot be simultaneously captured on camera as the human eye can do, it is necessary to use some traditional techniques to evoke the qualities of the overall place. Stephen Mambar is quoted by Bruzzi on the subject of vérité's virtues: "At its very simplest, cinéma-vérité can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held camera and live, synchronous sound. This is a base description, however, for cinéma-vérité should imply a way of looking at the world as much as a means of recording" (Mambar in Bruzzi, 75). The development of a hybrid form was also an attempt to distance myself from traditional vérité philosophies that believed this style was completely devoid of any influence on the documentation of the subject and was a "pure" form of documentary. The Maysles brothers are quoted by Bruzzi as stating, "I regard our films as the purest form of cinema" or "We don't impose anything on the people we film" (Bruzzi, 76). I diligently managed this production in order to minimize our influence, but was completely aware of our presence and our consequent impact on the film.

The production evolved over the course of a year from March 2010 – March 2011. Consequently, there was plenty of time spent with my subject Dr. Tasker, his house and the many layers of information and history uncovered, along with the discovery of a multitude of collections and objects. In an attempt to build upon this peeling back of layers I developed a style that reveals its layers to the viewer. Numerous mediums were used in the recording, including HVX, 5D, 8mm & 16mm film, and still photography. This multiple medium hybrid technique was used to physically build layers into the film, adding a richness and texture that replicates the varied environments within Dr. Tasker's house. The choice to subtly over-expose (Figure 7) and under-expose (Figure 8) the documentation of environments is an attempt to evoke the aura of the space and highlight the inherent contrast between the various places of activity and non-activity in this house. This style was loosely based on the technique of over and under saturation used in Tom Ford's film *A Single Man*, in which the emotional state of the main character is reflected through the saturation of the image.





FIGURE 7:

Screen capture of an over-exposed scene that is used to highlight the intensity of the work being performed by Dr. Tasker.



FIGURE 8:

Screen capture of an under-exposed scene demonstrating the lack of attention Dr. Tasker pays to some aspects of his collections and home.

The duration of this research and filming has allowed experimentation with various methods of sound recording, some more successful than others. The idea was to build in these layers, to represent the experience of Dr. Tasker's house and the history, through the use of various qualities of sound. This treatment alludes to the tonal qualities as experienced inside this house and represents the fluctuations between Dr. Tasker's enthusiasm or lack thereof for particular subject matters. The muted and hollow sounds of the study and the clear and crisp tones of the greenhouse add to the auratic experience of this place as well as allowing for fluctuations in Dr. Tasker's voice as an attempt to allude to some of his character traits. Audio was recorded using a Marantz, Tascam, and a laptop recorder in an attempt to reproduce the auditory qualities of Dr. Tasker's house.

The decision to document the existence of aura through authenticity using the medium of film turns on capturing the experience of movement. My interest in this subject stems from a deep and powerful response to Dr. Tasker's home. The overwhelming feeling I experienced while discovering this old house is not something that I can accurately or effectively convey through any other medium. It is an experience born out of a visual, corporeal reaction to a place as affected by subtleties of the surrounding environment. It is the bleak, late winter afternoon, the sky a solid and oppressive shade of dark grey, contrasted by the warm and subtle tones of grey and brown in the landscape and the house. The beauty of this subtlety was disrupted by the shock of emerald green, captivating and stirring, that seduced me down that garden path (Figures 9,10). To convey that experience without movement would compromise the ability of the viewer to reconstruct the auratic experience. The desire is to provide for the viewer an experience of that place, of the movement through that environment, in an attempt to reconstruct the development or experience of the aura. The medium of film offers a unique place for the spectator to enter, to construct a visual path through space and time. Giuliana Bruno explains this in *Site-Seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image*: "Film viewing



is an imaginary form of *flânerie*, a modern gaze that wanders through space" (Bruno, 2). Without physically entering the space it is impossible to understand the extent of the aura.

FIGURE 9,10:

Approaching Dr. Tasker's house on a grey, late winter day with the greenhouse beyond.



Film does have its limitations, but of all available mediums in which to explore the construct of aura, it allows the greatest access to the subtle changes offered by physical movement through a place. Again, Bruno aptly describes this process: "The camera becomes the vehicle: it becomes, literally, a spectatorial means of transportation" (Ibid, 5). Here we can see how Bruno is linking the relationship between the spectator and the camera as a way of transportation and in the case of aura, experience.

The opening one-shot sequence in the film is a physical exploration of this notion of the spectator as camera. Wandering up from the ravine and through the house before any introduction to the story or to Dr. Tasker, it puts the spectator in a situation similar to my first visit: partially overwhelmed and partially confused as to what will be seen and what is being missed, while laying the foundational aspects for the experience of aura.

Transporting the viewer allows for an experience of place, a level of intimacy that allows one to see yet keeps them from seeing everything. It fuels the imagination and gives life to the aura. It allows it to function as a medium that communicates histories, memories, and imagination, allowing them to establish their actual presence.

This paper is an attempt to support the visceral, physical reaction to a place like Dr. Tasker's home, as documented through the use of documentary film. The exploration of Dr. Tasker's way of life and his personal history contributes to the overall understanding of this home's aura as well. It is an attempt to communicate the experience of aura through discovery, the peeling away of layers, of my own process of getting to know one such place. There's no exact science or repeatable step-by-step process. The process is observation, conversation, and exploration (of and with my subject), in whichever way is possible and to whatever extent is allowed.

### **CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELEVANT FILM**

Examining the work of a broad number of artists, philosophers and theorists united by the common thread of aura and the domestic environment has allowed me to traverse the gap between research and production throughout the process. As the final outcome of the studio based aspect of this research project is a documentary film, I undertook an analysis of films that have inspired my idea of aura. My research is focused on two filmic constructs of aura, those documented and those constructed. The intent was to understand how my interpretation of aura was affected knowing the two differing styles used in its portrayal. As mentioned in the introduction, authenticity plays a fundamental role in this thesis, so this aspect was integral, but also a valuable way to understand the cinematic interpretations of aura as a way of understanding its power to communicate ideas, concepts and emotions.

## I. PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL TEXTS

Understanding the origins of aura, authenticity, decay, collections/collecting and the domestic environment laid the foundation for my theoretical research. In order to get deeper into these films I began to explore the above constructs in relationship to my tangible experiences with aura. The following summation of key critical texts is laid out in order of significance rather than a temporal map of how I came to develop the framework. This review will provide a brief overview to the importance these authors have for my research and the development of my thesis.

It would be negligent to write a thesis on the topic of aura without referencing Walter Benjamin, particularly as this paper traverses subjects of perception, movement in space, flânerie, and of course aura and authenticity. It should be noted that Benjamin's writings are used to develop a conceptual framework for the fundamental aspects of this paper, placing it into a broad theoretical context in which other works will support or challenge aspects of his writing. The discussion surrounding the 'aura of authenticity' as explored in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, provides an argument for my placement of aura in the environment as a response to an accessible authenticity as derived from multiple sources. "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin in Arendt, 223). In *The Return of the Flâneur*, Benjamin draws a relationship between the viewer and the landscape, further supporting my writings on observation and movement as a method of interpreting the aura of an environment. His writing on this subject matter places my innate process of walking and observing as a research method into a theoretical framework. This allows for reflexive process to stand alone in this thesis as my theoretical approach. "Now, if we recollect that not only people and animals but also spirits and above all images can inhabit a place, then we have a tangible idea of what concerns the flâneur and of what

he looks for. Namely, images, wherever they lodge. The flâneur is the priest of the genus loci" (Benjamin in Jennings, Eiland, Smith, 264).

Having positioned the relationship between authenticity and aura I began to appreciate the place of decay and entropy, particularly in relationship to the home. I immersed myself in Dylan Trigg's book *The Aesthetics of Decay*, a thorough account of how we experience decay and ruination. "...the connection between a dominant past now absent and the notion of dwelling in the present which is nevertheless determined by its past" (Trigg, xxvii). His fascination with the ruin and decay, not preserved or monumentalized but allowed to exist, as is, in its continually evolving state, clarifies my own appreciation of decay and my situation of the origins of aura. His research in this field has provided the foundation for which I developed the notion of authenticity as provisional to the opportunity for history to communicate through the processes of decay. Countering some of Benjamin's formalism on the notion of the 'aura of authenticity,' Trigg's work allows the necessary room to push this concept beyond the object itself and to apply this way of thinking to our surrounding environments.

To contextualize the existence of aura, I undertook an extensive and in-depth exploration on writings about space, place, architecture and above all, the domestic environment. Adam Sharr's summation of Heidegger's philosophies on architecture was expertly summarized in his book *Heidegger for Architects*. The discussions surrounding Heidegger's notions of experience of space over its quantification and volumization are particularly illuminating. These theories expand on the notion of experience as being a fundamental aspect of understanding and interpreting architecture, and notes how we define personal space as a result of this construct. Expanding on this, Sharr discusses Peter Zumthor's, "Vals Spa" project, as noted in the introduction, which is envisioned using the concept of experience, aura and atmosphere as tools for design. "For Heidegger, the scientific project, and its tendency toward mathematical abstraction, was inadequate

because it failed to address the daily implications of emotion. The appreciation of space following the mathematical increments of dimension was, for Heidegger, an unwelcome symptom of this flawed reduction" (Sharr, 61). Heidegger's main concern for the non-quantitative aspects of space and place help enforce Trigg's concept of decay and authenticity as a method of communication. Sharr's summation of Heidegger's theories on architecture and space allow this work to situate itself between the abstracted notions on the decay of ruins and Bachelard's poetic writings on the memory and influence of the home on the human psyche.

Gaston Bachelard explores this intimate relationship between people and the domestic environment in his book *The Poetics of Space*. This investigation focuses on the qualitative aspects of place as a product of imagination, memory, dreams and daydreaming. His interpretation of architecture, being the place holder for memory, speaks to the notion of aura and the ability for its attachment to objects and places to be evocative of experiences long past, as experienced in the present. Bachelard's theories on the home as containers for memories allows for a further expansion upon my notion of the domestic environment being a place for the development of a narrative, as constructed through the observation of decay. The notion of fractured temporalities that are a common thread in Bachelard speaks to the power of aura to communicate and make cohesive different histories and times. "To localize a memory in time is merely a matter for the biographer and only corresponds to a sort of external history for external use, to be communicated to others. But hermeneutics, which is more profound than biography, must determine the centers of fate by ridding history of its conjunctive temporal tissue, which has no action on our fates" (Bachelard, 9). The authenticity that is accessible through this close observation of multiple temporalities feeds back to the imagination and therefore allows for the placement of memory in these containers. This placement is key to the occurrence of aura.

Andrew Ballantyne expertly summarizes Deleuze and Guattari's writings on architecture in his publication *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*, furthering this notion of architecture as a communicator. The writings tie in nicely to both Heidegger and Bachelard as they speak of the ability of buildings to carry meaning based on their occupancy and use, furthering the notion of experience. The power of architecture as a normalizing and stabilizing tool is also explored in some depth, with discussion about the building as machine, producer of meaning and ideologies. "The architecture helps us to do the things that need to be done, and reinscribes the established order" (Ballantyne, 58). This notion of the buildings as a stabilizing force in society speaks to the power of structures to communicate, to produce physical and emotional responses. Ballantyne describes this relationship between the observer/participant and architecture.

"When I encounter a building, it produces in me certain affects – lines of flight, deterritorializations, whatever. Precisely what affects it produces in me will depend on what I bring to it as a part of me – my experience, ideas that I have picked up from reading, stray images that the building calls to mind. Part of this baggage is personal. Perhaps the building reminds me of a place I knew as a child, where I was happy; or perhaps it evokes a place where I was attacked out of the blue. If it happens to do such things then the building might produce in me powerful affects that are a real part of my response – my pulse rate might quicken, I might hyperventilate – and that might be the overwhelmingly important part of the response so far as I am concerned; but such a response would not have any wider significance. It would have been no part of the designer's intention and others would not share it. I feel it as a real response – it's my response – but you tell me that I'm just imagining it. And of course, in a manner of speaking, that's just what I am doing. I'm imagining it, but I'm imagining it because of what the building is doing to me, which makes it real enough for me" (Ballantyne, 41-42).

Finally the writings of Susan Steward in her book *On Longing*, bridge the concept of the collector/collection and the temporality of this habit and its affect on place. Her writing unites the work of Trigg, Benjamin and Bachelard through a succinct analysis of

the power of the collection to influence the notion of time, consequently affecting the interpretation of place. Steward's exploration of the differentiation between collecting versus accumulating offers a perspective that allowed for my own discussion between the everyday object and the prized object, both possessing aura, but in two distinctly different ways.

These key texts highlight the direction of research undertaken as a means of grasping the nebulous aspects of aura and its relationship to the domestic environment. Through this research it has become clear that aura is a product of authenticity, which is itself, a product of age. This signals a direct relationship to collections, accumulations, decay and entropy all within the envelope of the domestic environment. It is this construct, which I define here as my interpretation of aura, which has guided the research thesis and the production of the documentary.

## **II. DOCUMENTARY AND DRAMATIC FILM**

In the Masles brother's *Grey Gardens*, Barry Braverman's *Murita Cycles*, and Megumi Sasaki's *Herb and Dorothy*, the viewer is taken on an intimate journey into the private realms of the collector, the hoarder, and the reclusive. The Masles brother's candid and honest glimpse into the lives of two women living in a derelict Hamptons estate, masterfully captures the power of authenticity of the original, through the simplicity of observation (Figures 11, 12). Barry Braverman also highlights the relationship between the object and the individual showcasing the powerful affect hoarding can have on an individual and their environment. Finally, Megumi Sasaki's glimpse into the lives of avid art collectors and the occupation of their apartment by their collections unites a common theme between the objects and possessions and, their affect on the environment, and consequently the affect this environment has on the inhabitant (Figure 13).





FIGURE 11:

Screen capture of the exterior of Grey Gardens from *Grey Gardens*, 1976.



FIGURE 12:

Screen capture of the Beales inside their home from *Grey Gardens*, 1976.





FIGURE 13:

Screen capture of Herb and Dorothy Vogel with part of their art collection in their New York City apartment. *Herb and Dorothy*, 2008

Walter Benjamin astutely sums up the relationship between objects and the collector in his essay *Homo Scriptor*, when he states:

“At the extreme of its virulence and arbitrariness—in its pure state, one might almost say—collecting is directed not so much at books, which have a special status of their own, as at very humble objects, those that owe everything, or almost everything to the idiosyncratic interest of the person who has selected them...” (Benjamin in Missac, 44).

These documentary films elucidate the real life occurrence of these relationships and their affect within environments where collections, accumulation, decay and entropy have come together in varying degrees, united by an authenticity born from the age of the objects, places and inhabitants.

There is an embodiment of this aura that is a fictional creation, yet remains highly evocative of the documentary films covering the ‘real’ occurrence of this aura. The fictional

manifestations of Hal Ashby's *Being There*, Woody Allen's *Interiors*, and both Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* and *Rosemary's Baby*, produce this same affect. The 'Old Man's house' in *Being There* is pivotal, as this particular house (set) was the first piece of artistic expression to bridge my fascination with temporal atmospheres (regarding the existence of past histories existing in a present time), while simultaneously broaching aspects of the collector/collection and notions of the interior and exterior domestic environments (Figure 14). Both these notions will be explored further through the writings of Susan Steward in her book, *On Longing* and Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*.



FIGURE 14:

Screen capture of Peter Sellers character, Chauncy Gardiner, as he tends to his collection of orchids. Inside this D.C. townhouse exists a time warp from the early 20th century. *Being There*, 1979.

The domestic interiors in Woody Allen's *Interiors*, are constructed in a rigid and highly controlled manner, with each object having been purchased, placed and shown for a very specific reason. The treatment of interior domestic environments as a tool of social manipulation, provokes an aura driven by austerity and cold comfort (Figure 15). This aesthetic has less to do with decay than it does with the relationship and impact individuals have on their environments and vice versa. The resulting aura is inescapable, oppressive and driven partly by the existence of the original and authentic objects consumed and displayed by the mother, the matriarch and controller of the environments.



FIGURE 15:

Screen capture of Geraldine Page's character Eve, a neurotic and controlling interior designer who's compulsion comes to rule her life and define her relationships and her eventual death. *Interiors*, 1978.

In both of Roman Polanski's films, decay is the vehicle in which aura presents itself. Here we see both decay of the social order and the physical environment, but in this instance, the domestic interiors are the focus. Part of Polanski's 'apartment trilogy', both *Repulsion* and *Rosemary's Baby* demonstrate the evocative power of decay and entrapment. Both accurately depict a typical scene of the 1960's where late 19th and early 20th century

apartment houses are found in a state of dereliction. (Figure 16) shows the decaying interior of “The Dakota” renamed as “The Bramford” for the film. Again, these evoke an aura of originality that builds on the notion of authenticity through age.

Taken together as a whole, this grouping of films, fictive and documentary, illustrates the power of aura to communicate meaning beyond the verbal and textual expressions. Here we see aura demonstrated as a medium, not unlike the clay of a sculptor or the words of a poet, used as document and conveyor, the aura created is powerful and revealing. The ability for it to exist in both mediums speaks to its power as a tool for communication.



FIGURE 16:

Screen capture of John Cassavetes and Mia Farrow coming to check out an apartment in The Dakota, known as the Bramford in the film. From *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968.

## CHAPTER 4: COLLECTING TASKER

### I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The production of *Collecting Tasker* developed over the span of a year through numerous visits and many hours spent with Dr. Tasker exploring and discussing his life, habits and home. This process of inquisition, interpretation and acquisition of knowledge is referred to as the hermeneutic methodology. My innate process is most closely aligned to alethic and existential hermeneutics. The alethic methodology is based in the idea that knowledge is gained through understanding. This is seen as a basic tenant of being in the world (Alvesson, skoldberg, 95).

This is further expanded upon in existential hermeneutics which implies that it is our relationship to the factual world which we are surrounded by on a daily basis, that informs our understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

### REFLEXIVE METHODOLOGY

This project began as an exploration, as a walk, as a break, as a chance to get some fresh air. This is my method, this has always been my method. The continual draw to one particular environment for the sake of studying details, observing changes and understanding how subtleties like weather and season affected my perception of that place fit particularly well into this category of hermeneutic research methodologies. Initial research revealed a well-documented field of study that described my own innate way of being with great accuracy. I have an obsessive mind that fixates on odd things like aura for instance. Maybe the fixation exists because there is no definitive answer. I seem to like things that have no answer that can be analyzed indefinitely. Making a claim about something that doesn't belong to me, something that is essentially an interpretation, is a fraudulent attempt to make a claim of authority. This is regarding something that no one person

"The really important concern is the ordinary world in which we live, before all abstractions, rationalizations and theoretical constructions" (Ibid, 117.) The space provided for this type of individual interpretation is necessary in developing an understanding of the mutability and individuality of aura. It is also prerequisite to interpreting a subject, understanding the delicate balance between the autonomous individual, (ie. Dr. Tasker), and the individual (again, Dr. Tasker) as influenced by my presence. The understanding and interpretation of this relationship is key to accessing information in the most honest and natural way. It is a subtle process that has no hard and fast beginning and conclusion, but rather exists as a series of encounters and conversations for the sake of gaining and interpreting information (Figure 18).

will see the same way I do, or your friend does, or even the way the owner of that house does. It is a difficult position to take and can only be defined as "being" in the aura of place. This method is nothing more than an innate process that we all perform in one way or another. As with the interpretation of aura, no one person will ever see the same thing, experience the same feeling, or necessarily be drawn back to a place over and over again, as I have been (Figure 17).





FIGURE 17:

The Ashley residence, as pictured above, was a neighbourhood house that always had a mysterious quality to it that would draw me back repeatedly.



FIGURE 18:

Screen capture of Dr. Tasker and me working in his study. December 2010

The fundamental practice of negotiation between the whole (the aura) and the parts (the component aspects which combined, result in aura) is the process for interpreting information. In the case of this paper, the research preformed for the documentary informed the direction of the textual research for the paper. Uncovering and interpreting theories around my construct of aura, in turn, guided the development of the documentary and the way in which I interacted with Dr. Tasker.

As noted earlier, I've been returning to Dr. Tasker's house for over a decade, visiting in the hopes of entering, visiting as a source of inspiration, but each time leaving with something new; new information, new feelings, new questions. I would take my camera and photograph aspects of the house and property. Details such as plant material, hardscape, building material, light, shadow, weather conditions; wet or dry, they all had a certain meaning in its place, in its context. I would look for opportunities to enter the property or ways to get into the ravine



The construct of aura, as a result of close observation of the material environment, becomes apparent in part due to my own pre-understanding as a former landscape architect, collector, photographer and flâneur. Apparent is my bias and advantage of a knowledge base which allows me to see and interpret the surrounding environment in a decidedly unique manner, revealing to myself the existence of the aura. The research into topics of aura, collections, domestic environments/architecture, decay and imagination allow pre-understanding to develop into understanding while simultaneously moving back and forth between an interpretation of the parts and the whole.

behind. Visiting was research; research about how to better see the property and house, research for clues to answers, research for clues to questions not yet considered, research for stories about lives lived and time passed. Everything is open to interpretation, up for grabs or quickly dumped. I mean, who really cares that the driveway is gravel? I do. Who really cares that there is moss on the garage roof? I do. These are all clues open for interpretation. Hermeneutics happens to give us a common method and language to argue the validity of these interpretations and observations.

Turning this process into a working method was a reflexive process that relied on the continuation of my innate desire to discover, uncover, ask and raise questions. As I gained greater access to the house and Dr. Tasker, I extended the line of interrogation and observation, trying every way possible to dig up information. Sometimes this was fruitful other times I was shut-down. This can happen even when you're observing from a distance, sometimes a place just stops offering up

clues, the interest dries up and you move on. This happened during the interview process with Dr. Tasker. However, I began to realize that this interrogative approach planted these concepts in his mind and upon subsequent returns he would often offer up information, formerly 'verboden' in previous interviews. It is a bit of give and take, especially when you are in somebody's home, asking them questions about their work and life, but more often than not the information comes to light. I spent a lot of time observing Dr. Tasker's mannerisms, habits and attitudes, which was a great benefit in knowing how to approach him (Figure 19), how to present questions and receive information that was useable. I assume this is a natural process for professional interviewers, but as an amateur, this was a live and learn experience, a lot of back and forth, understanding where to push and when to give space. It is an art form like any other. Fortunately I've spent much of my life in conversation with people, pulling and teasing information from them in an attempt to know more about their houses and the lives in those houses.

Consequently, I developed a good grasp on the give and take of conversation. The whole notion of the parts and the whole, the back and forth, is really about trial and error, yet again another aspect of human nature we all experience.



FIGURE 19:

Screen Capture of Dr. Tasker sitting at his desk in the study. This is where I would find him on most visits.

The concept of authenticity provides the foundational framework that bridges the past, present and future. We construct the future based on knowledge of the past and we make decisions in the present based on projections of the future, therefore the construct of authenticity has the effect of developing an aura which is

When I began making the documentary it seemed only natural to continue along this same avenue of questioning, but this time with a camera in hand. Structurally the documentary is designed to provoke questions, offer some answers and leave a good deal of interpretation up to the viewer. It is designed as a bridge between

rooted in the present yet is a projection of the past, hence the captivating quality of the aura is developed. The notion of the future is also relevant to the legacy of Dr. Tasker and the lasting effect his collections will have on society and culture and this, therefore, completes the circle by linking the present practices and processes to future possibilities which would otherwise remain fractured if its only result was an aura. The examination of aura is explored through remnant sources and source criticism, relying on my pre-understanding as part of the framework for the research.

the past, present and future, highlighting the authenticity of objects through a close observation of their materiality. Witnessing past histories in present time is the fuel to the imagination that is fundamental to aura. It is the glimpse into a way of life, into a personal home, into an environment of objects, artworks, artifacts and collections, the parts of the whole. The collections that are found throughout this house, the quality of the spaces, light and volume, the materials that filled them, all represent and construct the aura. The challenge was to show this place in such a way as to convey my experience of it (Figure 20, 21).



FIGURE 20:

Dr. Tasker's study showing butterfly cases, slide boxes, library and butterflies in process of identification on his desk.



FIGURE 21:

Dr. Tasker's living room showing various collections of art and artifacts.

Logically, Dr. Tasker is, himself, a great source of information. Similar to peeling off layers of paint, revealing the stories of a life lived, situates that life and place into a context that can provide a foundation for the aura (Figure 20, 21). The intimate knowledge gained from observing Dr. Tasker in his home and observing the interior and exterior environments allows for the witness of a symbolically powerful aura that is both subtle and bold. Together the above process and

There were a lot of conversations, a lot of quick glimpses into drawers and then a lot of personal time exploring, and close-up analysis of these collections. The documentary captures this through various long shots of bookcases, walls of collections and notes, drawers of butterflies, etc., but this is also explored through the many up-close detailed shots of the plants, butterflies and artwork.

The opening sequence seeks to invoke a similar experience, an abridged version of my discovery of Dr. Tasker and his house. This experience exposes everything of Dr.

the resulting information construct a symbolic relationship between Dr. Tasker's practices and the development of aura. The existence of the greenhouse, the dogged seventy year development of the butterfly collection, the overflowing study still busily occupied by the prolific analyst and taxonomist, an extensive art collection both inside and out are all symbolic of a scholarly and cultured individual who prizes knowledge gained through process based practice, in opposition to monetized and aestheticised practices. This level of observation is approached in a thorough manner in relation to Geertz's hermeneutic ethnography that relates this type of symbolism to any advanced art form that informs the spectator and the participant about their society and themselves. The life and place of Dr. Tasker's residence is analyzed through "thick description," a term used by Geertz to describe the process of cultural observation (Ibid, 131.)

Tasker's house that I know, yet like my first experience, you see everything, yet nothing at the same time. You are left with an essence of an overall experience, all the parts coming together to create the whole, the aura of the place.

The production of this film spanned roughly a year. It was these continuing return visits that helped us build a relationship, helped Dr. Tasker become comfortable with the crew, become comfortable with the idea of us filming himself and his home. If we went in with a two-day deal, we would have left with far less information, far less interesting content. Much of the research happened on the spot, during the casual conversations between takes, over lunch or during coffee. It was these moments, the unplanned conversations that helped develop a comfortable relationship that ultimately produced the most natural responses and some of the best information. The act of documentary filmmaking, particularly in someone's home, is an intrusive process, one that puts a spotlight on some delicate and private aspects of one's life and existence.

It showcases the flaws, the beauty and the mundaneness of a life lived, of a continued passion. It is these basic observations, the witnessing of a way of life that tells so much of the story, which also shows the complexity of human beings.

## II SITE SELECTION

The act of being-in-the-world, (Ibid, 116) as described by Heidegger, points to the relationship between an environment and ourselves. This relationship between the life we find ourselves in and our individuality is the fundamental building block of existential hermeneutics (Ibid 118). The ability to take control of our lives, to allow our intuition to be the guiding force is what Heidegger refers to as "original but forgotten unity and oneness." (Ibid) This absent yet understood oneness is a powerful feeling, difficult to put into words, but it is the kind of feeling I experience when I discover a place like Dr. Tasker's house, it's the kind of feeling that keeps me coming back time and again.

Many visits have been made to this house Dr. Tasker's home, to be inspired, to absorb the atmosphere and to experience the aura. Most of all however, I would go to see if there was any opportunity to get inside this house, to meet the person behind the façade. I was most acquainted with returning to one of these houses to find it in some state of massive renovation or total demolition replaced by polished marble, neatly pruned boxwood hedges and immaculately manicured lawns. It was this fear of losing this place, this unique environment that was only possible through a specific combination of age, atmosphere and objects, which together produced this aura, that provoked me to walk up to the front door and knock. I never trust doorbells. You never know



if they actually work, so I always used the knocker. This was always an intense experience, a moment of panic ensued after lifting the heavy bronze knocker and banging it down on the metal insert plate of the solid wood door. Waiting was the worst part, waiting for that door to open, desperately listening for sounds of movement behind the threshold. For years, well over a decade, I went through this ritual many times without ever eliciting a response, never a shuffle behind the door, never a light turned on and never a sign of life (Figure 22).

My own process, related to my innate being, is one of openness, openness to possibility, openness to environments and to situations. Alvesson and Skoldberk passionately describe my experience of banishing fear and embracing potential that allows for these kinds of discoveries to occur: "What matters under these conditions is to 'resolutely' take our responsibility, stand up to our fate and make decisions in a kind of heroically defiant attitude. The worst thing we can do is simply surrender ourselves to the

In March of 2010 I was out exploring when yet again I found myself standing in front of this house. I stood there observing some details that had escaped my observation in previous visits and as is natural with my curiosity, it began to pull me down the garden path without my even realizing. I got to the door, now a ritual of habit, lifted the knocker and brought it down firmly on the metal insert plate. I stood there, not really paying attention, not really expecting a response, but suddenly my ears piqued. I heard a

circumstances and deny our possibilities of free choice.” (Ibid, 118)



FIGURE 22:

Dr. Tasker's front door

This openness to 'being' has, without my conscious knowing, been a part of my interaction and participation with the people and environments I surround myself with. Merleau-Ponty and Husserl speak to the importance of discovering the history in situ, the parts that make up the whole, the truth that correlates to the experience of being (Ibid 119.) It is this connection, the ability to understand the existence and the significance of these various attributes of place that have allowed me to make my way into homes like Dr. Tasker's, and

shuffling behind the door. I could hear the hand fumbling with the lock, anxious stress wrenching my stomach as I hurriedly tried to think of something to say.

I have been doing this my whole life, making my way into peoples houses, but I can never seem to get away from this fear. I imagine it's what an actor feels like as they are about to step on stage; fear, excitement, joy, anxiety all in one neat ball, planted firmly in my stomach.

Finally the door opened and not the usual three inches with a nose and sliver of a face appearing but opened all the way, exposing the interior behind the gentleman standing in front of me. I

further, has provided the foundation for my development and interpretation of aura.

introduced myself by name and explained I was a former landscape architect now working on my MFA at OCADU and that I was interested in his greenhouse.

### **III. DISCOVERING AURA**

#### **- The Aura of Authenticity**

Humans have an innate relationship with architecture, particularly domestic structures. The ability of these environments to be containers for memories and producers of experience imbed these places deep in our sub-conscious. There are subtle clues that empower these places with an aura that is communicative. This chapter will examine the specific attributes that form the foundational constructs of aura.

Dr. Tasker's house is a modified centre hall plan facing into a huge side yard, turning its face inward from the street. Almost entirely punctuated by French doors, the ground floor opens up to a flagstone patio (Figure 23).



FIGURE 23:

Dr. Tasker's house as seen from the garden.

I have observed, in varying degrees, three broadly defined levels of condition of the inhabited domestic residence. First, there are old homes that are dutifully maintained; second, there are those that have been lovingly restored and then third, there are those that have been maintained with a minimum investment in upgrades and maintenance.

It is this latter category of home that I find possesses this auratic quality (Figure 24). This type of house can usually be

The second floor was raked with a multitude of double hung sash windows evenly spaced, organizing the asymmetrical main floor and on top, pushing its way through the steep pitched roof was a massive dormer. Glimpsing the house only through the perforation in the perimeter hedge where the flagstone path wound its way out to the street my vision was always arrested by the large greenhouse extending from the front façade. A life long fascination, greenhouses inspired images of by-gone eras, houses filled with

distinguished most readily by a landscape that is particularly harried, such as overgrown vegetation, often consuming part of the home itself.

collections and artworks and a way of life almost entirely extinct in today's culture.



FIGURE 24:

The wild and overgrown landscape of a Forest Hill mansion in Toronto.

It is notably different than surrounding gardens by the type of plant material inhabiting this place and by the sheer size and age of the material, all indicators of a landscape of great age and little maintenance.

It seems nobody builds greenhouses let alone has a greenhouse overflowing with plants, so lush, with leaves pressed firmly against the glass, you can't see beyond the outer skin. My imagination was so excited by the possibilities. I was curious to know if these plants had been there for 80 years, if they were survivors from another occupant, maintained by





FIGURE 25:

The wild and overgrown greenhouse interior.

There are subtle clues to be found on the house as well. Often times, slate roofs can be found, in a mild to severe state of disrepair. The current prohibitive cost of a slate roof is a good clue to the originality. If one is to make a close examination of the windows, you could see possibly, if it is a winter month, that the house does not possess metal storm windows, but in fact wooden, true divided light, mullioned, storm windows. If you can get close enough, you may also be able to observe that the glass itself is hand blown. Look

subsequent owners but abandoned in their control (Figure 25). As my gaze begins to drift across the rest of the façade more subtle details begin to emerge. The house finished in roughcast stucco, painted mocha brown with shutters, doors and trim, a dark chocolate brown was so subtle, particularly when I happened upon this place in winter. During these grey and overcast months the house almost appeared to be a part of the forest, a call to the landscape that wrapped its way up the embankment of the ravine, consuming the house.

On top of this stucco finish clung the densely woven mat of branches fiercely holding onto the exterior, embedding its tentacles deep into the stucco. It almost looked like the roots of the trees had hit the foundation and began an upward ascent, truly trying to consume the building. When I visited in the summer months, however, it was quite a different sight. Scrambling across every surface; windows, doors and dormers alike, was this dense, lush cover of trumpet vine spilling off the façade in cascades of vegetation with huge orange flowers (Figure 26).



FIGURE 26:

The French doors being taken over by the Trumpet Vine. Where the vine has been pulled off the wood, I was able to see the layers of paint. This helped in my determination of the original paint colour.



for small air bubbles or waves in the glass. This is a tell tale clue. Look for a piece of trim work. If you're lucky enough you can find some peeling paint. This is usually an indicator that the house hasn't been painted in a great many years. Pull off a curl of paint and examine the layers. It's possible that you could even determine the original colour. As Curtis notes, "Exploring an old, unfamiliar house is an activity that involves engaging with the strangely familiar. It is often its 'character', its anthropomorphism and idiosyncrasy, that tempts its new owners or investigators up the drive, or path to its door" (Curtis, 31).

It takes a keen eye and a love of sleuthing to determine the extent of originality in a home, but it is doable. All these clues that are being offered by the house and the property speak to an untold history, a history that lies in the authenticity of the materiality of the place. Benjamin is quoted as saying, "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history

No longer just a surface, this vine truly consumed the house and yet returned this place to the surrounding of nature. It all spoke to me in such a powerful but subtle way.

There was a definite aura to this place; something spoke to me on a deep level. I kept staring at this place, at the materials. There was something in the materials of this house and of this environment that kept bringing me back. The beautiful Japanese Maple and Austrian Pine are both close to a hundred years old. The shutters and doors looked to be original as well but I couldn't quite tell from as far back as the road.

which it has experienced” (Benjamin in Arendt, 223), (Figure 27).



FIGURE 27:

On the back of Dr. Tasker’s house there is a window that has been painted over. On the interior it has been plastered over. This would have been done in order to accommodate the Jack Bush painting. This window speaks to the transformation of the house as the requirements for more space to hang art, pressured the Tasker’s. In this case the painted over window is a testimony to the history of the Tasker’s occupation penchant for collecting.

The authenticity of these environments can be teased out through close observation of material and patina. This is not easily accomplished and often it can be difficult to assess what exactly is original. It is the

Closer inspection revealed my suspicions about their originality. Some green paint exposed behind the chocolate brown, hinting to another life. I peel a curl of paint off the stucco revealing a white base, all indicators

ability to observe and to detect what was original which lends to this understanding of authenticity. Again, Benjamin calls into question the authority of authenticity through alteration, "and what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object" (Benjamin in Arendt, 223). I counter this statement by highlighting the ability to access the original from the source. Here Benjamin is referring to a piece of art, however, this principle can be applied to places. This is used to highlight the mutability of the term authenticity and the importance of the original 'object'. "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (Benjamin in Arendt, 222).

The access to authenticity through decay can be represented through mechanical means and this representation is capable of producing 'aura'. The object cannot be represented as possessing 'aura' but the ability to observe its presence allows for 'aura's' representation through film. The camera does not portray a complete picture or a complete space. This leaves

that this house was not originally this colour. I dig deeper and poke around the base where the stucco is coming loose. There are many layers of paint all white from day one with one thin layer of mocha sitting on top. It was here that I was able to see and access 'the past,' to know what came before and what came first! It was all these details coming together, the aged landscape, the peeling paint, the access and intuition to dig deep and prod into these matters, this is what it was about, this is where the aura came from. It was an ah ha moment, a culmination of a life's intense focus into disparate parts that culminated in the cohesive whole, the concept. It turns out that this concept, aura, is also the culmination of all these disparate parts. The circle was complete!

the necessary room for imagination to dominate with the access to authenticity playing the supporting role of 'reality'. Film can capture and/or convey the 'aura' of an environment in a cognitive way the same way the human eye sees the confines and understands the existence of the hidden and the unknown spaces in a corporeal way. Benjamin discusses this distortion of reality through photography as a way of interpreting the existence of realities that escape our naked eye. "And photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision" (Benjamin in Arendt, 222.)

### **-The Architecture of Meaning**

To commence the exploration of aura in domestic architecture it is necessary to understand the power of the home as a container for memories, a producer of experiences and the embodiment of ideologies. Architecture has the ability to produce strong affects on the human psyche that are partly rooted in our desire

to see architecture fulfill a normalizing and stabilizing role in our lives and in society. Deleuze and Guattari speak to this relationship: "Architecture," they write, "helps us to do the things that need to be done and reinscribes the established order" (Ballantyne, 58). Here, there is an open acknowledgement of the important role that structures play in the organization of people and society. While this is hardly a new idea, think of such significant structures as the Pantheon in Rome or the Acropolis in Greece or even the suburban shopping mall. This organization leads to a stability which helps to eradicate fear of the unknown and displacement. Bernard Tsumi is quoted in *The Aesthetics of Decay*, stating "Each society expects architecture to reflect its ideals and domesticate its deeper fears" (Trigg, 189).

The argument that Trigg notes is useful. It is the provision of a stable and comfortable environment free of fear that allows the imagination to take hold. Provided a safe space the mind is freely capable of existing within those boundaries without repudiation. For where Deleuze

I stood at the door; straining to observe every detail of the interior, trying to carry on some type of focused conversation. All the while bracing myself for the inevitable moment when I would be dismissed and sent back down the path.

This time was different however. After a few moments of conversation I was invited inside to see the greenhouse. I crossed the threshold and the door was shut firmly behind me. I hunched over to take off my boots on the glazed brown terracotta flooring and as I stood up, I came face

and Guattari describe this as a form of territorialization, Bachelard puts it into a far more poetic relationship. "All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home." He writes. "The imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter" (Bachelard, 5). Here, Bachelard is describing the ability of imagination to take hold and find a place to rest these images. This place exists through the comfort or peace of mind found from having lassoed boundaries around a space of habitation.

to face with a wall of masks. "What are these?" I asked, to which the gentleman replied, "These are tribal masks I collected in Papua New Guinea" (Figure 28). I immediately knew I had found a fascinating character, an incredible house. He introduced himself as Dr. Tasker.



FIGURE 28:

Tribal masks mounted in the vestibule.

The ability for imagination to take hold in a place of domestic habitation is in

As we ambled our way out of the vestibule and into the front hall, I was struck by the

part an appreciation of the mental space provided for this freedom of thought, but also as a safe place for the storage of memories. Heidegger writes about the experience of place and imagination, summarized by Sharr when he states, "the ongoing identification of places at a variety of scales involved individuals in sensitivities of emotion and experience. Intuitive and shifting, such identification activities resisted reduction to the mathematical measurement of precise control. Crucially, to him, they involved people's imagination" (Sharr, 62).

white walls and trim set off by an intense red/orange carpet, an almost Kubric like combination (Figure 29). To the left I observed a living room, walls lined with paintings and drawings. Every surface, every table appeared to have a piece of art crowded in with old Christmas cards. These objects represented a history and taken together, begin to reveal the aura of this place. We made our way into the dining room where I was confronted by bureaus and shelves lined with archeological artifacts, sculptures and objects of interest (Figure 30). Ancestral oil paintings hung in-situ with abstract inspired pieces, some half finished, in a state of perpetual incompleteness. As I looked around I noticed the French doors that I've spent years viewing from the outside. I paused momentarily and my mind took a mental photograph of that view, of the light filtering through the branches, casting a dappled light into the room.

The wood trim and deeply paneled doors were rich with detail and as we passed from room to room the solidity of this



great house makes itself more apparent. We passed through the kitchen and into a former breakfast room, now the foyer to the greenhouse.



FIGURE 29:

Dr. Tasker's Kubric-esque main hall.



FIGURE 30:

A collection of Inuit artifacts ranging between two and five thousand years old. Collected on travels to the Yukon.

Again, Bachelard offers assistance in building a bridge between space and place, especially in his discussion of architecture's ability to hold memories. "If the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (Bachelard, 8). This quote offers theoretical support to my innate fascination with homes. I am often drawn to old, elaborate houses, supplanting my own stories and filling the space with my own imagination of what exists beyond.

The floor was tiled with ½" x 2" black herringbone tiles, with a metallic, matte finish. The heavy doors of the greenhouse slid open and as we stepped inside. I immediately became relaxed and calmed by the familiar but long missed smell of the damp, mossy air so typical of greenhouses. As I stood in the midst of this overwhelming jungle, Dr. Tasker started to point out plants. "That's a Cycad I got in Trinidad in the 1960s and that over there is a Dendrobium I collected in the lowlands in the Darien Gap in the early 60s." I quickly began to realize that this amazing jungle of a greenhouse was really a slice of a fictitious jungle, a menagerie of plants collected across time and space for us to see in the here and now. There I was, standing in front of this man, Dr. Tasker, in awe of what he had created. This collection of plants, for the most part, were not purchased through horticultural societies or local plant growers; these plants were selected from their environment, were specifically sought and delicately transplanted half way across the globe to exist in this greenhouse (Figure 31). I was loosing

my ability to comprehend the extent of what I was looking at. I began to soak in the atmosphere, the knowledge of these plants, once existing in the far reaches of jungles, some of which to this day are inaccessible to most people. Yet here they were, collected and existing as evidence of their origins from places I might only imagine.



FIGURE 31:

Screen capture of Dr. Tasker in the greenhouse telling me about the origins of his plant collection.

Somewhere deep in the house a phone rang. It is an old sound, the ring of a rotary phone. As he made his way out of the greenhouse and into the kitchen I followed behind, keeping some distance

for the respect of his privacy. Since I was a stranger in this man's house I figured I should keep myself in eyeshot, for his own comfort. As I stood outside the door of his study I noticed the walls were lined with books and slide boxes (Figures 32,33,34). As I scanned the room I noticed maps rolled up, spread out, and all over the study. I noticed



FIGURE 32:

Screen capture of Dr. Tasker in his study.





My imagination is fueled by an ability to place personal memories within old homes. The ability to fabricate narratives as stimulated by the architecture continually provokes my imagination and renews the desire to revisit and re-fabricate a tale. This habit produces daydreams about what lies beyond, what exists behind those doors, turrets and dormers. The elaborate architecture allows a place for this imagination to exist. It was this narrative that kept me coming back to Dr. Tasker's house. I was fascinated by the overgrown gardens, brimming greenhouse, and a façade complete with extensive numbers of French doors, windows and dormers.

these large cabinets with two-inch high drawers that I assumed contained more maps. I began to assume that I had met some sort of geographer or geologist, a person who turned on knowing the world through empirical and scientific knowledge. The phone was placed down on the cradle abruptly. I had come to realize with Dr. Tasker that the conversation ends and the conversation ends, no good-bye, just the click of the receiver being placed back in the cradle. He got up from his desk and began to walk back towards the kitchen. "If you don't mind me asking, what do you do as a profession?" I asked, again expecting the geographer, geologist type response. Instead I'm told that he was a neurosurgeon, practiced in the field of stereotactic neurosurgery. I was momentarily dumbfounded by this response. If that's the case how did this collection, this place, these objects come to be here? "I thought all those drawers in there would be full of maps." He laughed quietly, "No, no. That's my butterfly collection" (Figure 35).





FIGURE 35:

Screen capture of Morpho butterflies, some of the first specimens Dr. Tasker showed me.

### **-Decay's Contribution**



FIGURE 36:

Interior of an abandoned school house, Lower East Side, New York City.

Much of what I refer to here could be classified under the heading of decay because of its reliance on the process of deterioration as a way to access the past. As objects begin to deteriorate, the processes of their construction, the subsequent changes that have occurred and the general presence of the materiality allows for a deeper level of observation and analysis, an entry point beyond the surface. The concept of authenticity through age is born out of this entropic occurrence as the decay provides access (Figure 36). This is, for the most part, viewed as a negative evolution or development. In *The Aesthetics of Decay*, Trigg notes that decay is a delicate subject matter, where if too much attention is

I spent about an hour in the greenhouse, photographing everything I could, every plant from every angle, every perspective, inside and out. It was an exploration that was immense and deep. Not only was I documenting this space, I was experiencing the atmosphere, the aura provided by the plants, the stories, the gentleman behind the collection, the greenhouse, and the house it was attached to. I stood there, not moving, simply watching the sun as it moved through the late afternoon sky. The trees outside were still bare, allowing for maximum daylight penetration. Wire mesh shelves were coved in epiphytic orchids that had long burst out of their pots and clung ferociously to the mesh. Some fallen over, some breaking out of their pots and others consuming less adventurous plants (Figure 37). I stood there staring at individual plants, plants in combination, plants no longer organized, but instead returning to their natural jungle habitat. The floor in places was inches deep in soil from years of decaying plant matter, now supporting new life: a forest floor. Again, I found myself so saturated with information that it became uncertain

paid to it, it is destroyed through noble intentions and misguided actions, and if ignored, succumbs to the wrecker's ball as it falls haplessly into the philosophical realm of 'decay as death', something to be avoided and eradicated at all cost. "It is precisely that veneration of decay that seems to be taking place in today's philosophical landscape. And this is problematic for the reason that veneration confers a monumental quality to decay, and the philosophical value of decay is its resistance against representation and stasis" (Trigg, 2).

The objective to be avoided is a confluence of decay as a valuable resource that should be preserved in all its glorious decrepitness, as this leads, inevitably to a nostalgic reverie. My thesis work seeks to showcase decay as a valuable asset or tool in the production and determination of aura. The mutability of decay as a physical process is a part of this aura, something that, if halted or frozen in time removes the present from the object, effectively destroying the aura.

as to what I should be photographing. I had to take a break from this space.



FIGURE 37:

Bromeliad's breaking out of their pots in the greenhouse.

I place decay on an interchangeable level of importance with authenticity. The two go hand in hand. The authenticity that arises through the observation of decay elucidates a clear and direct connection to the past in the present time. Trigg's use of the ruin, in speaking of decay, adequately demonstrates this relationship; "the ruin is the trace of a past, fragmented and unable to be situated in an overarching narrative, fusing with the ruin's decay in the present. Existence has become mediated through the work of decay. The delayed recognition of the active past, thus not only becomes known, but also resounds vividly, as that same presence begins to vanish. A double bind, then: the presence of an absent past becomes crystallized by dint of its temporal distance, emitting a greater resonance the more it disappears" (Trigg,133), (Figure 36). What Trigg is eluding to here is the ability for decay to become a means of communication. The more it decays and disappears the more powerful the object becomes. This provides a direct link back to the concept of authenticity being a tool for communication as observed through the decay of objects.

I stepped out of the greenhouse and into the side yard. I found an old stone bench to perch on and took in the surrounding environment. I looked back at this amazing greenhouse in awe and wonderment at its transformation and the beauty that had arisen from its neglect. I thought to myself, "Here in front of me is this incredible collection, plants that were descendants from species that only knew the jungle as their home, only knew a mountain top in Trinidad or a lowland in Panama, yet here they are, nestled into this glass vitrine in Toronto." The decaying plants inside, death and loss to some, signified to me the vibrancy and reality of this greenhouse. It was less contrived, more an ecosystem, evolving and moving forward in an ever-marching conquest.

The confluence of past and present renders the objects and finishes of the domestic environment as more than aesthetic elements, instead bringing a deep meaning and relevance to their existence. "In the ruin, these objects come alive by deforming their boundaries" writes Trigg. "A change takes place, which recalls the origin of those objects. They return to their original spontaneity, and yet are wholly decaying, rotting, and fragile to the touch" (Trigg, 132). I supplant Trigg's use of the ruin with the perceived ruination of objects of the domestic environment as they proceed through the same metamorphic processes of decay.

The ruination of this orderly and contrived greenhouse had completely erased all boundaries of its initial purpose and morphed into this wild and undefined thing. This place simultaneously referenced past histories and practices of plant collecting and exploration while breaking out into a wholly new and undefined kind of greenhouse where nature ruled all.



FIGURE 38:

A crumbling and unused greenhouse in an advanced state of decay.

### **- The Power of Not Knowing**

Authenticity and decay provide an entry point situated through observation. The ability to access and situate imagination into a place can be derived from both the actual occurrence of history in the present (as explained in the previous section), through the ability for elaborate architecture to harness memories, but also through an inability to know what actually exists beyond. It is this unknowable aspect that accounts for a great part of the relationship between observer and the private domestic environment. The inability to know fuels the questions and imagination as to what lies beyond the exterior façade (Figures 39, 40, 41). The imagination is already piqued by the condition of the exterior, an inhabited state of decay.

I wandered back, through the kitchen into Dr. Tasker's study where I found him diligently working. I traced the same path as last time, following him to his study. I gently knocked on the door and he invited me in. I leaned my arm on the top of a cluttered filing cabinet and looked at Dr. Tasker, sitting at his desk working away. I noticed he was holding a butterfly by a pin and inserting it into a board. "What are you doing?" I asked. He told me he was spreading the wings so that he could properly identify, label and insert the butterfly into his collection. I asked him where he keeps his collection and he pointed to the cabinets to his right and behind him, and mentions he has six or eight in the living room, front hall and dining room. Somehow, I missed these on the way in, I thought to myself. "This isn't much here." He casually states. I haven't seen many, but just the drawers in front of me must contain many hundreds, I assumed.





FIGURE 39: Abandoned Rosedale Mansion

I cautiously asked if I could see what was in the drawers and Dr. Tasker gladly obliged. He turned around and pulled out the top drawer of what looked to be a mahogany cabinet with polished brass pulls. The drawer quickly opened and I was confronted with an array of breathtakingly beautiful butterflies. I was left somewhat speechless as that drawer closed. The next one opened, more incredible than the first. He started pointing to some of the specimens telling me how he collected them on their property on Manitoulin



FIGURE 40:



FIGURE 41:

Island. More drawers were opened up, more specimens described and their location of capture began to paint a very interesting picture of global exploration. Dr. Tasker leaned back in his chair and told me casually that “somewhere in all of this are some butterflies that I caught in the Don Valley in the thirties.” “This can’t really be happening.” I’m thought to myself as more and more amazing stories and histories began to unveil themselves.

Dr. Tasker took me into the dining room and began opening more drawers. Under old oil paintings I stood, surrounded by the ancestors of this gentleman, watching as he unveiled decades of stories and information in a revealing and captivating narrative. “These here are from Panama. Most of these *Morphos* are from the Darien Gap.” Iridescent butterflies, shades of blue and green, unlike anything I’ve seen are presented in large quantity, delicately spread and pinned in the glass jewel boxes which were these drawers.

I explained to Dr. Tasker how fascinated I was by this and suggested that I may want to develop something regarding his

This authenticity and decay of the home creates an atmosphere unique amongst most neighborhoods. They are qualities that capture my attention and draw me towards these homes. What keeps me attached to many of these houses is an aspect of their occupancy. As part of the foundation for my concept of aura, these houses must be lived in, not abandoned. Consequently it can be very difficult, even impossible to see inside. The inability to know what actually exists beyond the façade fuels my imagination. Bachelard puts this scenario into perspective, although through discussing interior space, his construct speaks volumes regarding my exterior reading of homes:

"It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature and poetry to say that we 'write a room,' 'read a room,' or 'read a house.' Thus, very quickly, at the very first word, at the first poetic overture, the reader who is 'reading a room' leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past. You would like to tell everything about your room. You would like to interest the reader in yourself, whereas you have unlocked a door to daydreaming" (Bachelard,14).

My reading of the closed door is the writing of a room, as the unknown/unknowable is

plant and butterfly collection as a part of my graduate studies. He seemed puzzled and unsure of why I would want to do this, but agreed. I suggested we meet again so I could interview him and determine how all of this came to be. What I was about to discover was beyond my wildest expectations, beyond anything I could have ever imagined.

This house filled with these collections and artworks developed over a lifetime told so much of a history yet left so much to be discovered. Each object, every door, every room filled with collections had a story behind it, a physical remnant of a history, a story, and a place. This house was such an incredible container and incubator of stories, fuel for the imagination. Each room left a trace, presented an aura and linked the present

the key which unlocks daydreaming and the imagination.

The existence of authenticity, decay, collections and the outmoded activates the imagination to unknowable summations or questions about what this place has been a witness to, the people who have lived and died here, crossed the threshold, enjoyed afternoon parties and evening soirées. This decay brings about possibilities that arise from our own experiences of the domestic environment. Utilizing these physical occurrences of past histories in the present time allows the imagination to construct its own creative narrative. The ability for the mind to recall history as a tool for constructing the present (Trigg, 2006) unites these aspects of the physical, which together define the foundational elements of my definition of aura.

moment to past experiences. Months of my time were spent inside these confines, daydreaming, absorbing the aura of the place, the history of the objects. As well as I came to know this place, I never left the ground floor, leaving second floors and attic rooms, basement corridors all unexplored. Each door unopened remains a mystery and captivates my attention. I leave this place wanting to know more, keeping it alive in my imagination.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Defining the aura of the domestic environment is a process that is temporally observational in its reliance on repeat visits by the observer. Each visit reveals new information, be it through a change in perspective or lighting, the ebb and flow of the observer's whims of intrigue and daringness to push the boundaries, or even the cloud cover or pending weather; these aspects and many more in varying degrees and combinations have a direct and powerful affect on aura. In order to get a grasp on this situation it was necessary to develop a framework for analyzing the genesis of the construct of aura.

The framework begins with the examination of architecture's ability to carry meaning and memory and to embody ideology. This establishes a placeholder for these constructs. The information added to these places through the guise of authenticity as produced through access to originality enables the bridge between past and present. The lens of age provides a framework for the existence and close observation of the processes and results of decay (Figure 41). Trigg speaks to this notion in a discussion about philosophy's reluctance to embrace this relationship. "My rationale has been inspired by philosophy's reluctance to address the connection between a dominant past now absent and the notion of dwelling in the present which is nevertheless determined by its past" (Trigg, p. xxvii). The reliance on imagination continues throughout as a fundamental underpinning, a contiguous theme that spurs the notion of the unknown and the unknowable. The resulting affect is nebulous, un-scientific, and highly individual, it is what I have defined and determined to be the aura of the domestic environment.

The power of this aura is beyond an emotional construct as it functions as a tool for communication. The ability to bridge past histories within the present time is a powerful ability that is made possible by the presence of, or access to the authentic. Access to this past, which exists in the present, is possible because of the living aspect of decay. The





FIGURE 42:

A decaying but occupied storefront in Brooklyn, New York.



mutability of an object, the continual process of decay and morphosis is the voice through which this history is communicated (Figure 42). The ability for objects to possess an auratic quality themselves is reliant on the notion of authenticity which here gives voice to the past that speaks to the imagination of the observer. There is much to be said for the experiential analysis of space and place beyond the pure mathematical quantification, as is made abundantly clear by Heidegger. It is partly the aim of this paper to give insight to the finite qualities of the domestic environment and their power to communicate ideas past and present.

This paper and the documentary are an attempt at building knowledge on the power of aura and the auratic experience of environments through the observation of habitation and the resulting accumulations. The notion of aura has long been associated with specific objects or individuals. The aim of this project is to contribute work that explores the existence of aura in space as a product of many objects and histories. This project also documents a transition and demonstrates the process of summarizing my previous life's work and body of knowledge in landscape architecture and developing a theoretical and practical springboard for pursuing a new creative direction in the field of film. *Collecting Tasker* demonstrates the visual world I have operated in for all of my conscious life. It highlights my fascination with the experience of environment and demonstrates how subtleties of place and space contribute to the understanding and observation of our surroundings.

There were numerous challenges in crafting this project, but none ended without resolve. The documentary was constructed as an observational film, allowing for and creating situations for the development of aura. The future prospects of this project come through the development of a framework through which the reader can observe aura in environments and interpret it in their own manner through their own life experiences and observational prerogatives. The contribution of this work spans many disciplines

and is intended as an inspiration, a jumping off point for new perspectives on our surrounding environment. The interdisciplinary nature of the work allows it to be relevant and contribute to fields of documentary filmmaking, art direction/design, aesthetics, architecture, and landscape architecture. This work places itself as a counter to the wholesale demolition and destruction of the colloquial in residential architecture. These environments provide insight into our histories as well as containing non-quantitative qualities such as aura. My hope is that this work will allow for an understanding of the importance of the subtleties and qualities of the environments in which we live. This work is an attempt to demonstrate the power of aura to convey histories, meaning and emotion to a given place.

The first research question seeks to understand the working definition of aura, a multifaceted and nebulous construct. What is highlighted in this project is the power of subtleties as produced by the aura of the environment. A careful analysis of Dr. Tasker's home through the lens of critical texts has demonstrated that aura can be defined by the individual observer only as each person's life experience, the situational experience of discovery of place, and even the observational habits or aptitude of the viewer to define the ability for the 'aura' to exist. The examination and depiction of this occurrence has limited impact as a direct relational case study, it is more about a way of observing environments. What I think and hope is depicted in this project is a framework for observing aura, and a doorway into the power that these environments hold. It's partially a demonstration of how present pasts provoke a response akin to nostalgia (possibly), but rooted in reality rather than fantasy or recreationism. The hope is that in broad terms, the observation of aura will allow for an appreciation of old, antiquated or outmoded ways of life and places of habitation. This is a way in which we can avoid interpreting these environments as something to be cleaned-up, restored, removed or disposed of, instead, observing them for what they tell us, and what histories are present in these places that can be read or discovered through the observation of aura.



FIGURE 43:

The never inhabited third floor of Spadina House in Toronto displays an interesting pattern showing the original lath through the paint. Only one coat was ever applied to these walls consequently ninety years of coal soot has created a structural palimpsest, demonstrating how these walls were constructed.

The final research question looks at the effectiveness of representing and documenting aura through the medium of documentary cinema. In order to capture aura through this medium it is necessary to use evocative techniques that physically produce effects visible to the naked eye, representing the emotive and auratic qualities of the space being documented. The recreation of the limited visual perspective of any given environment through the physical and corporeal functions is replicated through the limited, instant, comprehensive view of the camera. The development of imagination, as produced through a stimulated imagination, is a cognitive reaction to the corporeal response of the place. Since aura is an interpretation, the use of various techniques to achieve particular effects will only achieve a sense of aura that the producer or director are themselves experiencing and attempting to convey through the medium of film. The eye of the cinematographer and the stylistic choices of the editor also affect this outcome. Their interpretation of aura and the environment will influence the way in which the camera is manipulated and the reasoning behind cutting sequences together in the manner which the editor sees fit in order to communicate this idea. Aura emanates and therefore evokes responses. You can't see an environment in its entirety on film and therefore the full impact of the emanations/evocations of distant objects, views through doorways, subtle changes in light and atmospheric conditions must be represented in order to accurately reconstruct that experience. My attempt to represent the aura of Dr. Tasker's house, both interior and exterior, is true to my experience of the place and evokes the emotions and reactions that I recall in that environment. To my eye and my senses, this documentary film accurately and effectively translates the aura of Dr. Tasker's extraordinary home.

The value of this construct of aura is immense. It is a delicate occurrence, easily erased, impossible to replace but most fascinatingly, something that is continually present throughout time. The mutability of aura is what makes it hard to pin down, to make an exact claim as to its validity, use value, or even the breadth of its occurrence. This

paper's aim is to demonstrate how aura comes about, as I see it. The reliance on the 'I' in this document is extensive but necessary, as this is a framework constructed through hands on personal experience. The existence of the 'I', becoming the 'you', is also immensely important to this subject matter. My construct of aura is not your construct of aura, and this is where the beauty, intimacy, and confusion lies. What is presented here is an account of the how's and why's of my own determination of aura, which I expect will vary from yours. This mutability is the very essence of aura.

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Brach, Gerard; Polanski, Roman; Stone, David. *Repulsion*. Directed by Roman Polanski. Compton Films, 1965.

Ford, Tom; Searce, David. *A Single Man*. Directed by Tom Ford. Artina Films, Depth of

Field, and Fade to Black Productions, 2009.

*Grey Gardens*. Directed by David Maysles, Albert Maysles Ellen Hovde & Muffie Meyer, Maysels Films Incorporated Production and Portrait Films, 1976.

*Herb & Dorothy*. Directed by Megumi Sasaki. Fine Line Media, 2008.

Kozinski, Jerzy . *Being There*. DVD. Directed by Hal Ashby, Lorimar Films Entertainment, 1979.

*Mrita Cycles*. Directed by Barry Braverman, 1979.

Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*. Directed by Roman Polanski. William Castle Productions, 1968.

### **ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL**

The following accompanying material is available upon request from the OCAD University Library: *Collecting Tasker* documentary. Anyone requesting the material may view it in the OCAD University Library or pay to have it copied for personal use.