

DEEP CIRCULARITY

by

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Master of Fine Arts, 2014

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Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

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ABSTRACT

Within the lexicon of our daily lives, *chaos* suggests a state of temporal disarray (undesirable) and *the sublime* suggests exquisite beauty or pleasure (desirable); however, both concepts are more layered and entwined than colloquial usage would suggest.

The focus of my thesis inquiry is the overlap between chaos and the sublime within the arc of duration, with my thesis project situated in the context of an immersive, phenomenological experience. I posit that a constant yet rhythmically fluctuating pulse encompasses a process of both hold and release, one that is at the core of this substantive chaos/sublime/duration relationship. *Deep Circularity* draws upon an array of cross-disciplinary discussions that promote more expansive and also reflective considerations of chaos and the sublime, and, further, responds to the modes that, in tandem, engage us in constant flow, flux, vibration, and emergence as part of the ongoing process of existence.

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DEDICATION

To Allie and Fred, who set the course,
and to Ken, who helps me stay the course.

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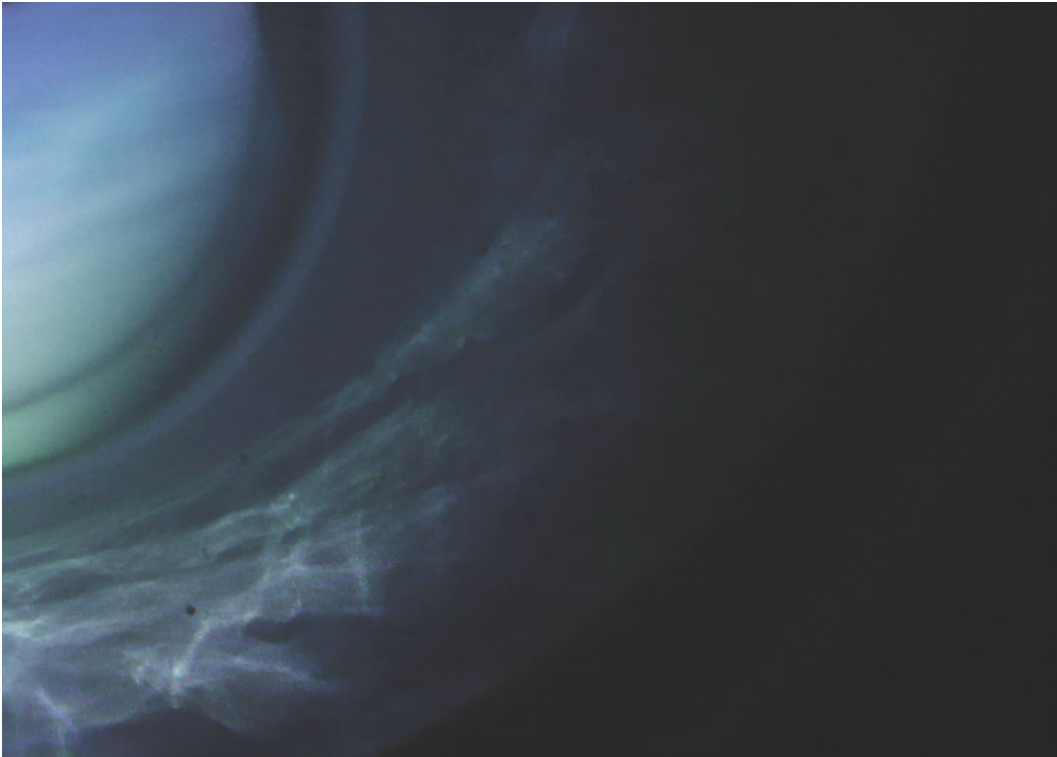
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DEEP CIRCULARITY



I. INTRODUCTION

Context

Seven years ago, I stood in a 360-degree prairie landscape under a conflux of two dramatic storm systems while clear blue skies continued to glow across the horizon. The scene was both magnificent and awesome—and somewhat terrifying in its power and scope (Figure 1). In response to this experience, I embarked on the first of two bodies of large-scale oil paintings, which I called *Boundless: The View from Here* (2007), followed by *Boundless: Sublime Maelstrom* (2009) (Figures 2 and 3). *Boundless* was a fitting title for obvious geographically descriptive reasons, and yet I had a hunch that something more profound was at play. As my paintings became ever larger, panoramic, and encompassing, I also knew that what was compelling me to paint was not the hope of emulating, as Oscar Wilde chides in his essay *The Decay of Lying*, “a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter’s worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasized” (Wilde, 1891/1997, p. 7). There were rumblings in my understanding that were every bit as great as the meteorological rumblings overhead, and, as this was happening, the ground began to shift under my feet.

In preparing for two consecutive solo exhibitions of the *Boundless* series, and prior to commencing my MFA studies, intuitive investigations into the meanings associated with the word *boundless* revealed an auspicious clue by G. de Purucker (1936/1974) to the import of the boundless concept: this was not least due to its relationship with *the sublime* and because *boundless* was described as being a universal concept since the beginning of conscious thinking. De Purucker went on to say that the word *chaos* was also used to describe this limitless space, and he suggested not merely that it represented the primordial void but that the word chaos held a twofold meaning from its origins in the ancient Greek word *cha*, holding and releasing¹.

Further research into boundlessness led me to discover the *apeiron*, a concept developed in the 6th century BC, which was central to the cosmological theories of the time. Rosemary Desjardin, a Platonist scholar, describes the *apeiron* as that which is

¹ *Chaos* was another word used for *Space* in ancient Greek writings, and as originally had the meaning of the Void. (Chaos comes from an ancient Greek root *cha* that has the twofold meaning of holding and releasing; hence chaos is the ‘holder’ and ‘releaser’ of all things.)



Figure 1. *Boundless* photo research. Indian Head, Sask. 2007

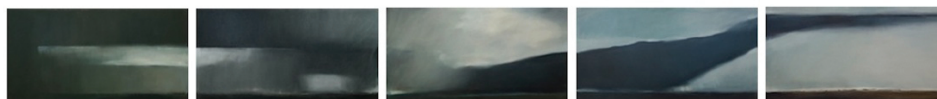


Figure 2. *Boundless: The View from Here*, 36" x 308", 2007, oil on canvas. Photo Cheryl O'Brien



Figure 3. *Boundless: Sublime Maelstrom*, 48" x 96", 2009, oil on canvas. Photo Brian Burnett

eternal and infinite, limitless and boundless, yet which within this continuum generated perpetually fresh materials. Often referred to as the Unlimited, the *apeiron* encompassed the “many and the fewer, quicker and slower, small and grave, pleasant and painful with all brought together under a single description: a continuum whose flow may be characterized in terms of the duality of mutually relative extremes” (Desjardin, 1990, p. 61–62). By extension, it is relevant to consider de Purucker’s description of hold and release as resonant and indeed descriptively akin to Desjardin’s interpretations of boundlessness and hence, chaos.

Desjardin recognizes that more recent contemporary ideas of emergence directed towards the evolution of the organic from the inorganic, the conscious from the non-conscious, and the mental from the physical (p. 193) are inherent within the ancient description of the *apeiron*. This linkage, in and of itself, is a stunning example of the resonance of the “the duration immanent to the whole of the universe. The universe endures. The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new” (Bergson, 1911/1998, p. 11). I would not discover Bergson’s notions on duration and evolution, or those of contemporary chaos theorists, until several years after beginning my project; however, from where I stand now, in retroactive reflection, the reverberation between the ancients, a 19th century philosopher, a 20th century scholar, and 21st century theoretical physicists is compelling. I will return to this thought further in the body of the paper.

These early findings into boundlessness struck a chord and began to affirm the hunch I had had earlier. As a connective thread, I wanted my work to convey the experience of being within infinite physical space that tethers and perhaps diminishes us, yet also exhilarates and fulfills us by igniting the imaginative leap. This intent was true with my *Boundless* series of paintings and remains true in my thesis project today. I have come to regard chaos as a process that is rife with change, wonder, and upset, yet one which is also rich in potential; I have also come to see that chaos operates within a large continuum of time. The sublime, in its unfathomable, provocative, Kantian

“limitlessness”² is integrally part of this chaos scenario, which I will expand upon further within the discussion of my theoretical frameworks.

There is a distinct overlap in the work I have done as a visual artist and the work I have been hired to do as a film and theatre designer. In the latter, a script or directorial vision set the sail, and yet while honouring and operating within those parameters, I sought and developed my own interpretive, scenographic language that tapped into themes with personal resonance. In Chapter IV I provide a limited excavation of the work from these separate yet related disciplines by way of revealing the latent origins of my current inquiry.

In the course of my thesis studies, my inquiry into chaos, the sublime and duration has deepened both theoretically and materially. My theoretical inquiry starts with—and is very rooted in—Bergson, but it extends to many including Kant, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Manuel De Landa, Varela, Homi K. Bhabha, Pallasmaa, and also to science writer James Gleick and theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli. Selected artists whose work figures importantly within my inquiry include Olafur Eliasson, Ann Hamilton, Anish Kapoor, William Kentridge, and James Turrell.

My thesis project embraces an interdisciplinary approach using reflexive and intuitive methodology that builds upon what I already know and considerations that I have sought out, while at the same time allowing for potentially surprising new turns. By moving intuitively between a range of modalities and approaches, my creative process responds to and also informs theory, with my art practice embodying and validating this continuum whereby “neither the parts nor the whole lose their mystery under the glare of analysis. Instead, something else is added as explanations are revealed, connections are made, new forms of understanding emerge” (Sullivan, 2005, p. 72). Drawing upon studio explorations I have done in the past two years and also significantly, from my recent experience on the collaborative, multi-platform installation *The Veil of Nature*, my objective is to create an environment with a suggestive scenario that vacillates between

² As Kant says, “the beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (trans. 1952, p. 91).

harmony and tension, and which suggests a place of immanent possibility.

Deep Circularity is realized in a scale and approach that operates akin to work intended for public space, either temporal or permanent. The project is not specifically *site-specific* nor interventionist, yet it is *site-responsive* and the factory warehouse, which has been made available to me for this iteration of *Deep Circularity*, lends its presence to the experience. In a pervasive way, a venue such as this exists in a liminal zone—physically, historically, metaphysically—between its past purpose and future possibility, This contributes to the potential for theatrical mystery, revelation, and engaging surprise, and invites resonant considerations about our prevailingly mutable and ultimately ephemeral world, and in so doing responds to the concept of duration imbued within the project in its entirety. The site also suggests a compelling macro/micro relationship between the dark, spacious, but inert surrounding warehouse and the gently floating, light-filled quality of the installation. The installation, within the context of the site, invites a layered aesthetic experience in which both ambiguity and recognition invite reflection—a glimpse of ourselves as players within the ‘sensation of time’ (Newman, 1949 as cited in Lyotard, 1988/2010) acting out within the continuum of all duration and all time.

Objective and Research Questions

The objective of my research project is as follows: within the context of an immersive, experiential installation that embraces phenomenological, embodied, and cognitive/perceptual forms of engagement, I am investigating the overlaps and like aspects shared by chaos and the sublime and how these seemingly disparate entities conjoin within the overarching frame of duration. Responding to a range of meanings, sensations and ideas that this triad of chaos/sublimity/duration engenders, the goal of the installation is to convey a dynamic pulse that evokes a simultaneously alluring and unsettling relationship with the world, while also inviting reflection on why and how things happen.

I posit that chaos and the sublime transcend the limited range of popular understanding whereby they are perceived in primarily pejorative or exultant terms; rather, I hypothesize that they share a pulse that contains both hold and release, a

vibration operating in tandem within the totality of existence. The concept of duration, as Bergson (1911/1998) suggests, encompasses the notion of a vast, contiguous, yet ineffable rhythm of evolutions, relationships and events that comprise the continuum of time. Embracing duration as it is inherently described by Bergson, the intent of the project is to weave my three primary thematic concepts into the fibre of the project as inextricably connected ideas, both in terms of the phenomenological, physical experience itself, and also in a way that reflects the larger arc of the personal and the evolutionary creative process. I will refer again to this within the Conclusion.

My research questions are as follows:

1. How are a range of phenomenological, cognitive, and embodied meanings and relationships that respond to my indicated themes brought to expression within an experiential, immersive installation?
2. How can I bring the described ineffable rhythm of duration to expression in a way where materiality informs and embodies this theory?
3. What elements, approaches, and devices can be employed within an experiential environment such as I have described, to effect the pulse and flux inherent in the triad relationship of chaos, the sublime, and duration?

Statement of Significance

The intent of my thesis project is not to illustrate the relationship of chaos and the sublime under the arc of duration, but rather, to respond to a range of meanings, sensations, and ideas that this tri-part relationship engenders. This, in turn, engages the participant in a subtle yet dynamic pulse, an unsettling relationship with the world, throwing them out of balance at the same time as inviting meditative reflection on why and how things happen. My thesis project draws upon an interdisciplinary and multi-sensory array of research, methods, and techniques; it embraces metaphorical and symbolic evocations; and it employs both analogue and digital devices including theatrical material and construction techniques, rear projection, and illusionary spatial dynamics. Phenomenological and perceptual forms of engagement resulting from the combination of the haptic with the ephemeral, and the specific with the evocative, tap into one's physical, perceptive, and psychic potential; one is placed at the centre of an

oblique narrative in which one's own presence is an active player. I believe that experience translates into images, and that images foretell experience in a dance between what is lived and imagined, what is remembered, and what is created. As an artist-designer, my stock-in-trade is to mine the power of images and the icons of experience to help envision worlds in which these operate. I now want to take this further and develop the themes that resonate for me personally at a deeper and more profound level. Bringing the body and the experiential into my practice is part of this process. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002) expounds the importance of the corporal experience within the symbiotic relationship between the act of perception, environment, and meaning; this is substantiated in the upcoming discussions around Pallasmaa and Varela's work.

This underscores the focus on embodied existence that is increasingly being reclaimed by a growing number of practitioners and disciplines, from art and architecture to psychiatry and neurology. I will elaborate on this below in the Theoretical Context and Literature Review sections. I also believe in the potential of the aesthetic experience to inform and transform our lives through its capacity to trump expectations by inviting surprise, reflection, and contemplation and thus revealing to us something we didn't know we knew. *Deep Circularity* exemplifies the role of art investigating life's less tangible aspects while engaging in a shared line of theoretical inquiry posed from a range of cross-disciplinary positions.

Scope and Limitations

Chaos. The Sublime. Duration. With tsunamis and typhoons sweeping across continents, bringing death and destruction to thousands of people, and bizarrely frigid winters blustering across typically temperate and sunny climes, one might believe that chaos reigns supreme as nature overwhelms us with her sublime and limitless force. Yet, in my thesis inquiry I posit that within an ontology encompassing the sublime and duration, chaos is not a fully pejorative state, but rather as part of this conceptual triad, constitutes a universal pulse, a constant vibrational flux and flow between order and disorder, hold and release—in essence, an evolutionary process of emergence.

This concept has become the lens through which I understand the world and my place within it, and which I am using to inform my praxis. What this study will not do is

make an attempt to fully investigate or represent or prove any large, sweeping philosophical or theoretical questions. I'm fully aware of the deep pools of scholarly and existential investigation into these topics, of which I am barely breaking the surface, yet I have become mindful of resonant and repeated thematic murmurings, and it is these which have inspired my practice-based, creative inquiry.

Theoretical Framework

Within my study, the concepts of chaos, the sublime, and duration are drawn from a diverse but limited, interdisciplinary yet resonantly connected, range of voices, from ancient Greek mythology to theoretical physicists, from Immanuel Kant to François Lyotard, from Barnett Newman to Anish Kapoor. My research looks to the metaphysical, perceptual, and physical affect attributed to both chaos and the sublime. Responding to the notions of infinite vibration, my thesis inquiry explores the tangential overlaps and like aspects shared by chaos and the sublime; I explore how they conjoin within the overarching frame of duration and how they are indeed intrinsic to the ebb and flow of existence.

Duration, Bergson (1913) suggests in multifarious ways, is the force and the sense of unending continuance by which the world's evolution is an ongoing creative act. This provides a potent framework for the notion of dynamic opposites operating within a single pulse, fundamental to the understanding I propose in regard to this triad. The intersection of these potentially unwieldy ideas runs through my Master's thesis, emulated by my intellectual and creative journey with its meandering pathways that continually link up, nest within each other, and then open up into new, elucidating directions. A driving theme within my thesis study is the connective thread that weaves together seemingly disparate entities across enormous time frames, while embracing ambiguity and recognition both as signifiers and as part of a process leading to intuitive and embodied knowledge.

My praxis has been fostered and enriched by the theoretical and the practice-based research of the past three years, and I have charted this evolving creative growth as a means of inquiry and illumination more than I have striven for a specific outcome or proof of how and why these relationships exist. In this way, a separate ontology emerges

as my work connects to the paradigm of contemporary work that focuses on the creative process in its entirety versus solely in appreciation of what has been made (Kelly, 1998).

Building on the theme of continuing relationships enabling new possibilities to emerge, Francisco Varela's notions on *deep circularity* (1993) are of fundamental importance. Here he encourages the *enactive* approach that embraces the crucial concept of a mind-body relationship, which nurtures and builds upon a symbiotic flow between thoughtful, necessary cognition and conscious, experienced embodiment. This counters rigid, entrenched notions of a binary mind-body duality (p. 12). Yet again, Bergson (1991) laid ground for this idea almost one hundred years prior when in *Matter and Memory* he discusses *affect* as being "that part or aspect of the inside of our bodies which mix with the image of external bodies [...] there is no perception without affection" (p. 60).

My investigative approach purposes to remain unfettered by firm categorizations or strict definitions that are subject to the same oscillating shifts and evolutions that are central to this inquiry. However, it is appropriate to briefly consider *affect* versus *phenomenology*. By some regard, these are mutually exclusive concepts: affect is rooted in the conscious, embodied perceptions of experience, whereas phenomenology connects to the way we experience life, and the meanings imbued by and in our experience. To Deleuze and Guattari (1994), art is "a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects" (p. 163). Here, affect is both embodied and bound up with consciousness. For my purpose, it serves to consider both affect and phenomenology as significant to the process, realization, and outcome of the *Deep Circularity* experience in which multiple meanings are central to its intent. As a bridging tool between the overlapping theories, methodologies, and practices, I have looked to Bergson's (1896/1988) extensive views regarding *intuition*, which can be understood as a collapsing and an extension of an indelible form of knowledge as well as a form of reflection; and *consciousness*, a state by which we are able to be aware of the two worlds that images and perception operate in, and how they connect yet are also separate.

One of the most helpful guideposts I have consistently referenced since first encountering it is by curator Shirley Madhill in her preface to *Sublime Embrace* (2006). I am struck by how closely she echoes Bergson when she comments that consciousness in

art locates one “hovering on the threshold of ambiguity and recognition” (2006, p. 10). This phrase echoes the form that my practice-based research takes and embraces the theme of shifting perceptions that prevail within the work itself.

I have looked to artists and scenarios that through effective materiality successfully integrate potent ideas into compelling phenomenological, sensorial experiences. In turn, at the heart of my thesis inquiry beats the process and the means by which I have brought these reflections and thoughts to expression.

To recap, my thesis inquiry focuses on the overlaps between chaos and the sublime within the arc of duration, situated in the context of a phenomenological, experiential environment. I believe that vibration, resonance, flux, and hold–release are at the core of this relationship on a multi-sensory and multi-faceted theoretical level, which is part of a vital, deep, and prescient cross-disciplinary discussion about the ongoing paradigm of existence. It is a continuing, invigorating journey. My installation *Deep Circularity* is, in essence, a distillation of these resonant and connected considerations and draws upon my skills as a conjurer to bring these ideas to expression, affirming the important role of art in lifting the veil on life’s less visible aspects.

In Chapter II, Methods, I explain the means and methodologies I employed in the course of this study, theoretically and materially, and how they have intertwined and filtered into the practice-based exploration. The body of my thesis commences with Chapter III, Theoretical Context, which will continue to emulate the movement of nesting, branching, and circling back, which fully suggests the rhythm of my overall research project. This extends to the relevant Literature Review within the same chapter, which has helped inform and guide my practice and research, and which includes a focus on the thoughtful, creative work of others that has informed or lent meaning to my own work.

In a conscious, deliberate, yet natural evolution of my praxis, recent installation work has been eschewing the obviousness of the creative process, the hand of the maker so to speak, and has focused on the marriage of space, body, and emergent meaning. I have been inspired by a varied selection of artistic approaches and outcomes that connect to my own, including installation, site-specificity, site intervention, scenography, sculpture, as well as immersive, experiential theatre and inter-media presentations. As Clair Bishop

(2005) notes, “Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality” (p. 6), and this stands as a clear if broad qualifier when referring to *Deep Circularity*. For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily use the additional terms of *immersive*, *experiential*, and *phenomenological* to describe the over-arching intent of the installation; experiential references the sensorial and situational reality of the event; immersive draws on the origins of the word meaning to ‘dip’ or ‘plunge’ which implies a fully encompassing situation; and phenomenological suggests there are meanings imbued in the experience. I am hesitant to get mired in the semantic variances of these definitions and feel that what is suggested suffices as an introductory description of the installation’s generalized character.

To temper the investigative yet hermeneutical tenor that characterizes much of my research, I have referenced Michael Fried’s comments on theatricality (1967), which offer a critical view of the environmental, phenomenological kind of work that I am making; I do this even if I do not agree with or conform to his opinion. This, in turn, leads to at least a partial commentary on the world of the hybrid, the “interdisciplinary whatnot,” in terms of a) where it is currently situated; b) whether it is currently situated anywhere; and c) how I see my work within that shifting paradigm.

In Chapter IV, The Studio: Research and Creation, I describe several exploratory projects leading up to my primary thesis work, and how this work has indeed been ignited by my theoretical inquiry, which in turn helped me determine means and techniques by which I arrived at the material realization of *Deep Circularity* that I discuss fully in Chapter V. Finally, Chapter V, Conclusion, provides a reflective analysis of my thesis project itself; I consider the challenges and opportunities presented by working in a certain scale and within an unconventional venue. This includes considerations about the ways in which the work benefits, shifts, and evolves in light of those aspects, including the ensuing relationship with technical and/or creative collaborators. I reflect on whether the objectives I set forth were achieved and what can be learned from the outcomes. I address the importance of the project to my research, to my personal praxis, and more widely, to the field.

II. METHODS

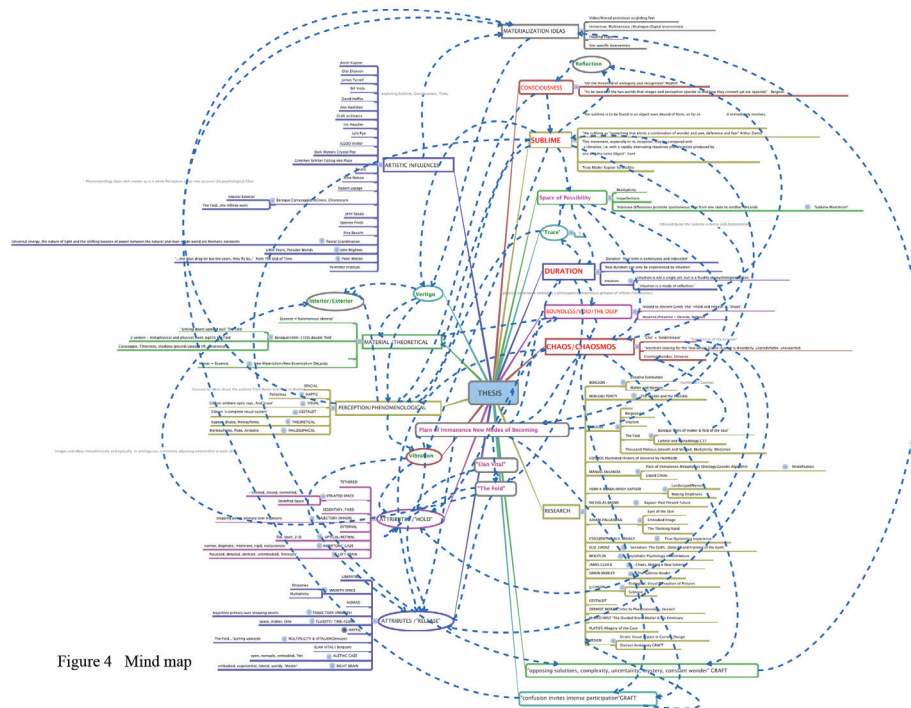
Meandering Reflexivity

The role of practice-based research is implicitly endorsed within the Ontario College of Art and Design University's Interdisciplinary Art, Media, and Design Graduate Program. In his book *Art Practice as Research*, Graeme Sullivan (2005) provides thoughtful and cogent affirmation of the way in which visual experience invokes creative and critical capacities and, in so doing, expands upon and reveals new connections and understandings.

Sullivan acknowledges that among art theorists it has been argued whether practice-based research both as a process and a final entity are as valid as the more traditional research methodologies; he states that “the lack of credentialed faculty at the doctorate level limits the full academic acceptance of the visual arts in higher education” (2005, p. 83). This paradigm is quickly shifting whereby the art institutions are filling up with credentialed, doctorate faculty, yet there remain the compelling voices of champions such as Neil Brown, who believe that artistic artifacts—PhD endorsed or not—provide “access to insights that can be intuitive, mindful and discoverable” (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 87). Sullivan argues that “the purpose of research is to create new knowledge that increases our awareness of who we are and the world in which we live” (Sullivan, p. 74). Brown's endorsement of creative inquiry and Sullivan's bid for increased awareness echo the primary objectives at the heart of my thesis inquiry and inform the methods I have employed as a means to acquiring this new knowledge.

My theoretical and scholarly library has grown exponentially within the course of my thesis inquiry, wading into previously unfamiliar territories such as theoretical physics, neurology, and Gestalt. By charting the course of my theoretical research and creative influences within a mind-map, I have been able to visualize the network of relationships, as resonances and connections have been made, experimented with and also, in some instances, abandoned (Figure 4).

Practice-based methodology is partially based on approaches as identified by Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg (2000) in their influential book, *On Reflexive Interpretation*. Driven by my personal interests and creative insights originating within



See Fold-out for enlarged version.

Figure 4. Mind map, © Marian Wihak

the *Boundless* painting series, I have engaged in self-reflexive research which, in turn, has opened the door onto the rich and diverse field of theoretical investigations which I now weave and interplay in a fully reflexive way. The multi-faceted inquiry inherent in reflexive and self-reflexive methodology fits particularly well with the range of disciplines and voices I am drawing upon in this study. The thematic inquiries shared across interdisciplinary relationships echo the tangential connections between my subject at hand, namely chaos, the sublime, and duration; at the same time, they provide several points of view to help me land a composite position. Through this approach I placed contrasting theories next to each other to see where they were tangential and to see “what it is not capable of saying” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 246).

This form of reflexive methodology relies on my judgment as a researcher and my ability to “see and point something out” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 248); this, of course, draws upon the etymology of the word *intuition*, which, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, is derived from the Latin *intuere*, meaning “look at, consider” (“Intuition,” 2001–2014). This dovetails with Bergson in *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

An absolute can only be given in an intuition, while all the rest has to do with analysis. We call intuition here the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known ... intuition the metaphysical investigation of what is essential and unique in object (1913, p. 616).

The approach I have taken in my literature review echoes my overall process in that it has been diverse and covers varied considerations from the theoretical and philosophical to the phenomenological and scientific, cumulatively presenting expanded possibilities of information and insight. I have charted these readings in several formats: within an annotated bibliography, outlining, and through mind-mapping as noted previously. This has helped me to conceptualize this range of information into visually connected dots, overlaps, and divergences as well as to focus on the most resonant ideas.

Intuitive and Creative

I believe in intuition and inspiration. Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution. It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research (Einstein, 1931).

Throughout the 60s and 70s it was a popular belief that the two sides of the brain determined two very separate modes of operation; the left-brain was deemed thinking and rational, while the right brain was deemed creative and feeling. As an artist, I hoped that my profile fell into the latter, even if it was a rather restrictive codification that relegated one as inept in any substantive intellectual capacity. This notion of a clear divide has been dismissed for some time, however, and neurological studies have proven that the workings of the brain in fact encompass integrated potential where all functions draw upon both hemispheres. Imagination and reason were biologically and neurologically designed to co-exist (McGilchrist, 2010).

In *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, scholar and psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist (2010) presents a much-heralded discussion about the nature of our divided brain, and how its functioning holds up a challenging mirror to how the Western world has evolved culturally, socially, and politically. Eschewing a popular belief that an unbreachable divide exists between the side of the brain that reasons with the side that imagines, McGilchrist argues that the brain's full potential is realized when there is a balance between what is sensed, evolving, and open-ended, *with* that which benefits from organization, cognition, clarity, and systemization. This in turn creates a balanced understanding of the world as a whole. Part of our brain's biological design allows the frontal lobe to provide us a distance from the world that is profoundly creative of all that is human, enabling our empathy with another yet also enabling Machiavellian regard. McGilchrist's passionate argument for a more holistic mode of operating, and for reasserting the intrinsic power of the sensing embodied and experiential brain, is something that closely echoes Bergson, Varela, and Pallasmaa, and that speaks to a relationship of inherent, synthesized duality in the crosshairs of my own work.

Asserting this balance I believe is intrinsic to the purpose and realization of intuition and consciousness in contemporary art; this is seen in a shift in fundamental intent by artists like Kapoor, David Hoffos and Janet Cardiff with George Bures-Miller, to name a few. All of these artists were included in the *Sublime Embrace* exhibition, which I discuss further in Chapter III, Theoretical Context/Visual Guides. I have fashioned a cross-referential and interdisciplinary system in which theoretical ideas and material explorations nest within other ideas and approaches in an ever-expanding and contracting series of relationships and possibilities. As part of my expansive literature review, I have looked to *intuitive methodology*, developed by Bergson and contemporized by Gilles Deleuze in *Bergsonism*, and this has provided a strong guiding hand in grasping how to enter into the core of my investigation. Eschewing any notion of intuition as a flighty artistic delusion, Deleuze (1991) describes it as a distinct methodology that is “neither a feeling, an inspiration nor a disorderly sympathy but a fully developed method, one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy” (pp. 13–15). He offers a fundamental first guideline by citing Bergson: “The truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of finding the problem and consequently of positing it, even more than of solving it” (p. 14). This aligns with what Graeme Sullivan describes as *transcognition*, whereby over the course of time and through iterative explorations, one’s creative process intersects with one’s creative mind as a conjoined mode of inquiry that prompts new discoveries mediated and informed by situational factors (2005, p. 130).

And finally, *visual systems practice* describes the method of inquiry that involves shifting between complexity and simplicity, and represents a large part of the movement and territory within my specific thesis inquiry (Sullivan, 2005, p. 104). Partially driven by the seismic discoveries of Chaos Theory within theoretical physics in the 1970s, the understanding of the connective relationship between chaos and order, micro and macro, and simplicity and complexity (Gleick, 2000, n.p.) has impacted all aspects of our lives, and has been deeply embraced within the lab and the studio by scientists and artists to inform material processes and organizing patterns (Sullivan, 2005, p. 104). In the BBC documentary *The Secret Life of Chaos* (Stacey, 2010), fascinating insights and discoveries made by the chaos theorists explain the mathematically based system which

kick-starts all degrees of evolution. And yet, it is also striking how similar the overarching scientific explanation is to what was posited within a philosophical framework, one hundred years earlier by Bergson (1911/1998) within his seminal book *Creative Evolution*, and subsequently advanced and elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari's theories on *multiplicity and rhizomes*, described as one of "a circulation of states" (1987, p. 23).

In this way Bergson's ideas (1913/1998) continue to resonate, in that he examines and describes the means by which all life forms have evolved from the beginning of time. Insisting that the theory of knowledge conjoins with the theory of life in a continuous, unceasing cycle that gives birth to new evolutions and new, surprising and eruptive events, Bergson (1913/1998) coined the terms *élan vital* and *duration*. The former term encapsulates the concept of the original impetus of all evolution, and the latter the concept that duration is continually in the making. These concepts lend reinforcement to notions of push–pull, hold–release, and simplicity–complexity fundamental to my interpretation of chaos and the sublime, giving rise to new levels of consciousness, emergence, and creative experience. As the chaos theorists have done, Bergson observes the evolutionary importance of repeating actions and patterns yet similarly argues that nothing is ever replicated exactly, except in the abstract. Things are the same... but different, and so it is within creative practice, with predictability giving rise to unpredictability.

Practice-Based Methods

Multi-directional explorations have been established as the norm in my studio-based practice as they have in my theoretical inquiry. Course-related projects have presented opportunities to explore and experiment with a range of approaches, sensibilities, techniques, and materials, as well as to work with ideas about phenomenological, affective, and spatial perception. As an example, *Time* (Figure 5) was a quickly realized installation, which constituted an important threshold in my material and thematic explorations. It was an exercise meant to engage us in the prevailing problem of time, and I devised a simple scenario that brought together elements and approaches from both my design practice and my personal practice. My process involved



Figure 5. *Time*, 2012. Airplane seat & table, canvas, video, iPhone, book, orange peel.

moving freely and reflexively between four different interpretive orientations of practice-based research: grounded theory, hermeneutics, critical theory, and postmodernism. In Chapter IV, Explorations and Actualizations, I address the details of the project more fully, yet in terms of a methodological breakthrough it is important to know that at the time, this presented a new and uncomfortable combination of approaches, and I had trepidations about the outcome. And yet, the outcome and resonant layering that ensued struck a chord both for myself and for those who engaged with it, and it proved to me that moving through discomfort has its rewards.

Maintaining a running journal of sketches and ideas (Figure 6) is a beneficial part of any studio practice, as is archive building and information gathering. This includes amassing extensive digital files of photos and videos captured on my iPhone, chronicling inspirations provided by other artists, investigating thematically resonant cross-disciplinary work, attending a wide range of relevant and important public lectures, recording programs from CBC radio's *Ideas and Sparks*, and collecting excerpts from the newspaper, books, and movies. My modus operandi was, and is, if a path beckons, follow it. When opportunities present themselves, embrace them, be they tours to facilities such as the immersive cave at Christie Digital, or assisting in the organization of large-scale projections of Edward Burtynsky's work for an Esprit Music presentation. This seeking, gathering, and stumbling upon has helped inform all aspects of my process, from preliminary exploratory sketches and maquettes to experiments in material possibilities involving latex sheeting, mirrors, Mylar, stencils, digital printing, paper, fiberglass, and various sculptural techniques, as well as experiments in lighting, projections, and sound.

Design Methods

It would be disingenuous to not draw upon the range of methods developed over the course of my career as a film and theatre designer and extend their application through the filter of a new, hybrid praxis. These methods include historical and visual research into a deep pool of actual and virtual libraries covering a range of disciplines: photography, cinema, architecture, dance and theatre, visual art, history, and anthropology, to name a few. It involves exercises in thematic distillation, conceptual sketching and interpretative visualization, maquette explorations, drafting and drawing,

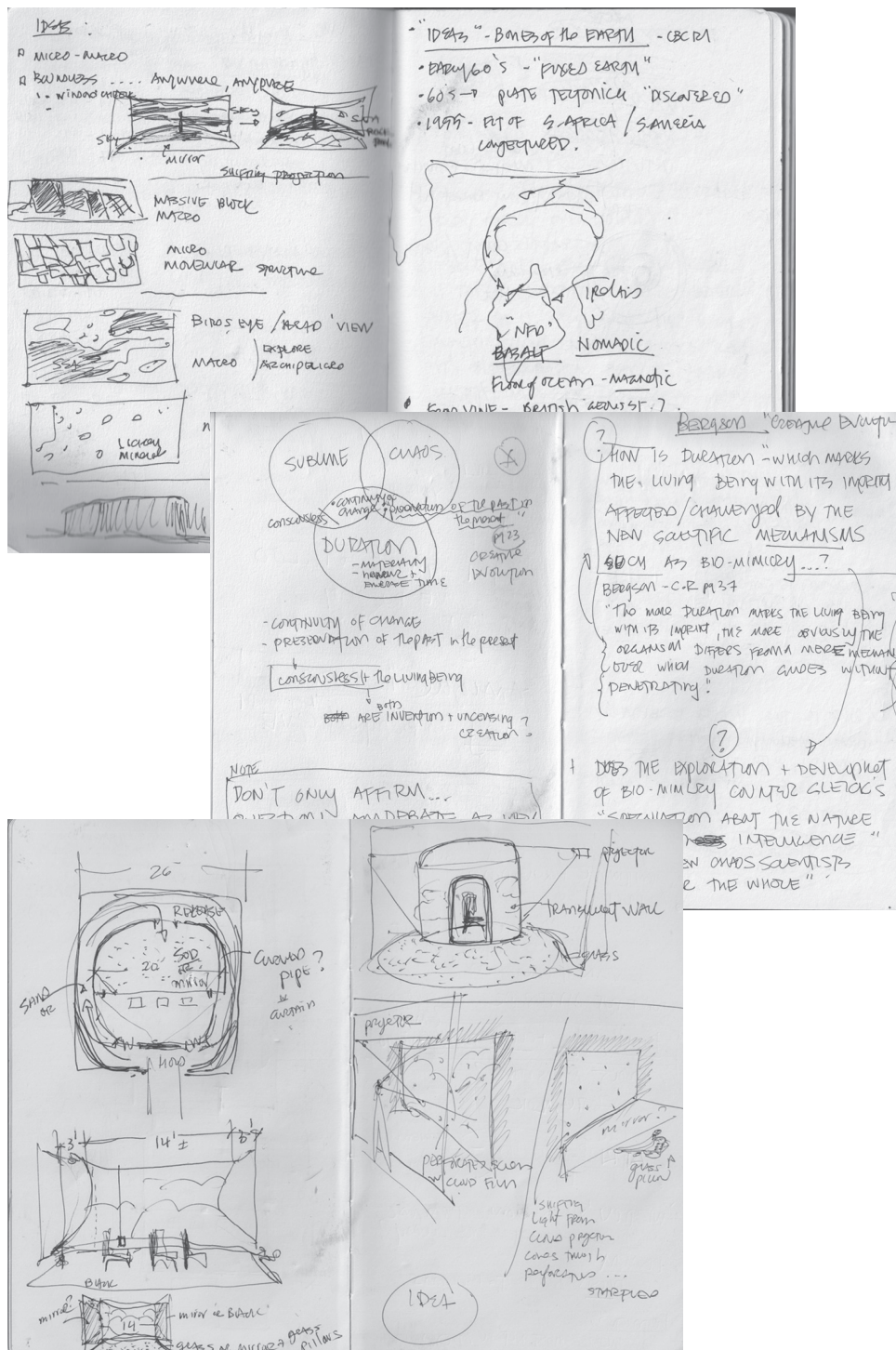


Figure 6. Journals. Excerpts from a sampling of thesis project journals.

material sampling as a means of inspiration and problem solving, and conjuring strategies that employ scenic devices and theatrical tricks.

Empirical data is one of the cornerstones of research, and as an artist working in three-dimensional environments, understanding empirical space is fundamental to the installation-based work that I am making. Whether my work has been devised from the ground up as a stand-alone entity, as in the case of a studio set for example, or more recently for site-responsive or site-specific situations with 360-degree outcomes, forming a clear comprehension of the physical aspects of the space/site is crucial. I am able to draw upon years of experience in terms of perceiving the potential of any given site, but this is always supported through more thorough investigation of the space through surveys, photography, videography, and drawings. Another highly practical aspect of my design methodology, which has more impact on one's creative outcomes than might be realized, has been the organizational tactics of scheduling and budgeting. After years of deliberately keeping many methodological aspects of my design and visual art practices separate, I have started to weave these design skills and experience into my personal practice.

This meandering and multi-layered process has enabled the framing and reframing of the problem, which has resulted in discovering resonances throughout the inquiry. The questioning has shifted at times and has focused on primarily practical methods so as to better grapple with the problems of materiality, yet the major recurring themes have always sat just below the surface, waiting to be brought to expression.

III. THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The course of research and analysis in this study has moved forwards and sideways, looked backwards and skywards, and treaded water occasionally, allowing for a multi-faceted theoretical context to form, inform and frame the core inquiry. Throughout, the intention of the research has been to elucidate and guide possible responses as to how meanings can be made, and how themes might be brought to expression within the context of the described investigation into the chaos, sublime, duration triad.

Distinct yet Related Strands

As stated, an important part of my practice-based research project has been the theoretical readings, which have elucidated my intent and greatly informed the realized project. These readings can be divided into two distinct yet related strands, one to do with philosophical and metaphysical ideas, and the other to do with haptic, physical, and perceptive engagement. I have also engaged in a brief but important foray into a third strand, that of quantum and theoretical physics.

The first strand of research has been fuelled by philosophical and theoretical inquiry grounded in the aforementioned work of Bergson, Kant, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and De Landa, and which dovetails with my interpretation and the scope of my chaos/sublime/duration inquiry. Focusing on specifically framed considerations of Bergson's duration and *élan vital*, related concepts by Deleuze and De Landa regarding *multiplicity*, *space of possibility*, *becoming*, *the fold*, and the *plane of immanence* act as thematic cousins; the invigorating totality nests one idea into the next, while building resonant connections and dialogues as it evolves. In the spirit of unrepeatable continuance, Deleuze re-contextualizes, and De Landa lends fresh contemporaneity to Bergson, with theories of co-existent multiplicities, surges of creation and, evolutionary movement through time (duration); these conjoin to form a potent metaphysical launching pad for continued contemporary discourse and expansion into new, relevant modes of practice, being, and thought. As De Landa posits in his video lectures offered through the European Graduate School, art is "the probe-head and the search" in this evolving discussion (2008).

Through the second strand of literature I have sought studies in cognition, Gestalt, embodied existence, and perception. These are represented primarily by the compelling work of Francisco Varela and Juhani Pallasmaa, whose lucid discussions offer a means of exploring the ways in which chaos and the sublime might be grasped and *experienced* in an exalted, metaphysical, ontological sense that connects to physical sensorial experience. These two theorists come from separate disciplines—Varela from cognitive science and Pallasmaa from architecture—yet the import that they both place on embodied experience as a means of achieving holistic balance and cognitive understanding has struck a chord

in the ways in which I approach and reflect upon my work. They represent important stewards who have guided the theoretical inquiry to a place of material realization.

As mentioned earlier within the Introduction/Theoretical Framework, Varela's (1993) writing on deep circularity is of fundamental importance; he endeavors throughout "to keep in mind our theoretical constructs about structure without losing sight of the immediacy of our experience" (p. 12). This suggests an inextricable relationship not unlike those of hold-release, limit-limitless, and the continuum within the flow and flux of time, central to my thesis inquiry. In turn it brings to mind the aspect of vacillating modes of being, which opens up considerations about, macro-micro, assertoric (rigid) and alethic (embodied) gaze, as well as right brain/left brain functioning, which Pallasmaa (2005) addresses eloquently in his discussions about hapticity and ways of seeing (p. 36).

In *Hapticity and Time*, Pallasmaa (2000) focuses on the connection between experiencing the world as a multi-sensorial, multi-textured entity and our ability to perceive ourselves within the context of universal time. Bringing to mind concerns expressed by Iain McGilchrist and Varela, Pallasmaa challenges and warns of the fact that our increasingly opti-centric world is truncating, perhaps atrophying our capacity to experience and know life in the fullest range of our human capacity. He says, "Haptic experience evokes the experience of a temporal continuum" (Pallasmaa, 2000). The smell of leather, the touch of old wood, the sound of a metal latch settling into its cradle—all lend themselves to the collection of images and sensations that make up and affirm both our individual and collective memory, rendering the passing of time as a necessary and enriching evolution, full of obliquely described complexities and mysteries.

Chaos. The Sublime. Duration.

Chaos

In his book *Chaos: The New Science*, James Gleick says, "To some physicists, chaos is a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being ... They believe that they are looking for the whole" (1987, p. 21). Gleick closely parallels what Deleuze and De Landa express in their theories on the *plane of immanence*, which in turn channels Bergson in *Creative Evolution* and, similarly connects to the 'hunch' I intuited

while storm clouds rumbled above the limitless prairie horizon. And so, although I have situated my research primarily within the realm of phenomenological and aesthetic experience supported by philosophical and theoretical inquiry, my foray into new science, quantum and theoretical physics has helped inform and substantiate my inquiry into how the world works, and I have discovered that similar understandings are coalescing across a variety of disparate disciplines.

Within the scope of this inquiry, the interpretation of the overlapping relationship of chaos, the sublime, and duration is rooted within the meaning it holds as a process of becoming, inherently one of both holding and releasing, disorder and order, limits and limitlessness and emergence. Written in 2009, this is an excerpt from my artist's statement for *Boundless: Sublime Maelstrom*:

I embrace more affirmative definitions of both chaos and maelstrom, as states of being that are rife with change, upset and yet also potential. 'Boundless' defines a metaphysical state of being, inviting us to reflect upon the conscious consideration of daily existence—the passages and journeys we all experience.

Scientist Peter Atkins (2013) offers this interpretation in his comments about the second law of thermodynamics, which states that all natural events cause an increase in the disorder in the universe: "The astonishing feature of this perception of natural change is that the dispersal can generate order: through dispersal in disorder structure can emerge" (as cited in Jha, 2012).

The proximity that Atkins' statement has to that which I made for *Boundless: Sublime Maelstrom* gives me pause, given that our fields of study are diverse and that I lack any familiarity with the laws of thermodynamics. I am not saying that chaos implicitly makes order but I do believe that such dispersal is part of a vacillating pattern inherent within every degree of life and thus a part of the evolution towards new beginnings, new understandings, evermore new hunches.

Carlo Rovelli, a theoretical scientist, echoed the sentiments of Atkins when commenting that science was not about certainty, but rather that "science is about the most reliable information at the time" and that science is not about data but data "...is just a tool to assist in telling us about the world" (2012). He describes science as a

process that can build upon past discoveries, just as much as it questions them in seeking new and future answers. He also speaks at some length about the space–time question and says emphatically that the curved object is the best mode of description for this complicated idea (Edge, 2012). These limited yet compelling investigations into an unfamiliar scientific realm support the intuitively derived decision to use a circular path for the *Veil of Nature* installation last year, and again, as an element in *Deep Circularity*. Similarly, these investigations have encouraged my intent to encompass the conceptual triad of chaos, the sublime, and duration within a shared envelope.

In the same way, within a practice-based approach, the innovative German architectural team GRAFT embrace chaos as a creative tool by engaging in a course of thought and design that is “simultaneously wild and structured” (GRAFT, 201, p. 15). Currently, an influential design firm based in Berlin, Los Angeles, and Beijing, GRAFT is comprised of a group of architects who were students in 1989 when the world was on the cusp of a seismic shift driven by technological and socio-political ruptures. They celebrated the breaking down of barriers, the rapid cross-fertilization of pan-global ideas, and the proliferation of physical and mental “nomadic existences” (p. 6). Drawing upon analogies of matter and energy, chaos and the unpredictable, the firm embraces open, hybrid approaches to design marked by that which is ambiguous, irreconcilable, and inconsistent (2011) (Figure 7). Their philosophy and their material realizations provide interesting parallels to the major critical theories I have been following, particularly Bergson’s *élan vital*, and Deleuze’s multiplicity and space of possibility; however, since they are practice-based designers, it is useful to look at their work as a marker of successful marriage between what is abstract and intellectualized (cognitive) with what is practical and experienced (embodied).

The Sublime

The concept of the sublime is drawn from specific sources and discussions from the pantheon of possibilities available, with the following Kantian proposal setting the tone: “The mind feels itself set in motion in the representation of the sublime in nature. This movement, especially in its inception, may be compared with a vibration, i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction produced by one and the same Object” (Kant,

trans. 1952, p. 107). With Kant, the sublime is also likened to that which is absolutely large that which exceeds our comprehension (p. 104). Infinity. Boundless. Wondrous and elusive.

My argument doesn't propose that a relationship with the sublime is restricted to one within nature, yet the description of what the experience *feels* like, in one's body, one's mind, one's being is aptly conveyed in which sublime, seemingly disparate and vacillating forces make up the whole. This parallels the vibrational relationship I have posited as existing in the tangential zones where chaos and the sublime play out their durational roles. Hold-release. Repulsion-attraction. Push-pull.

In my research I have looked beyond Kant to see what else has been said about the sublime that either aligns with or challenges the interpretations within my thesis framework. Given that my initial embarkation into the chaos-sublime inquiry was inspired by the foreboding sky in that prairie vista, Edmund Burke's 1757 evaluation of the sublime in terms of "vastness" and "terror" lends to the conversation, of course. Similarly, Burke's emphasis on the relationship between the senses and experience is of note, given the import that this inquiry places on sensorial experience. Yet more compelling is the notion of *not knowing*, inherent in Kant's sublime and the impact that this *not knowing* renders on the aesthetic experience (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013). The limitlessness of what seems infinite to us—be it a field in Saskatchewan under a booming thunderhead or the impenetrable field of light in the work of James Turrell—forces a tension as we struggle to both take in and comprehend. This sets our mind in motion as our imagination "strives to progress towards infinity" at the same time as we are held back by our reason. "... this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power" (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013, p. 21).

In his essay *Turned Upside Down and Torn Apart*, Thomas McEvelley (2011) quotes critic Arthur Danto speaking of the sublime in terms of awe and deference referencing Kant's "negative pleasure"; Danto asks, "Does one feel pleasure in looking at Mark Rothko's paintings from his great period? Well, maybe some do, but most of us feel something deeper than pleasure, which holds us in front of the paintings as if waiting for the disclosure of a possibly shattering truth" (as cited in McEvelley, 2010, p. 69). This

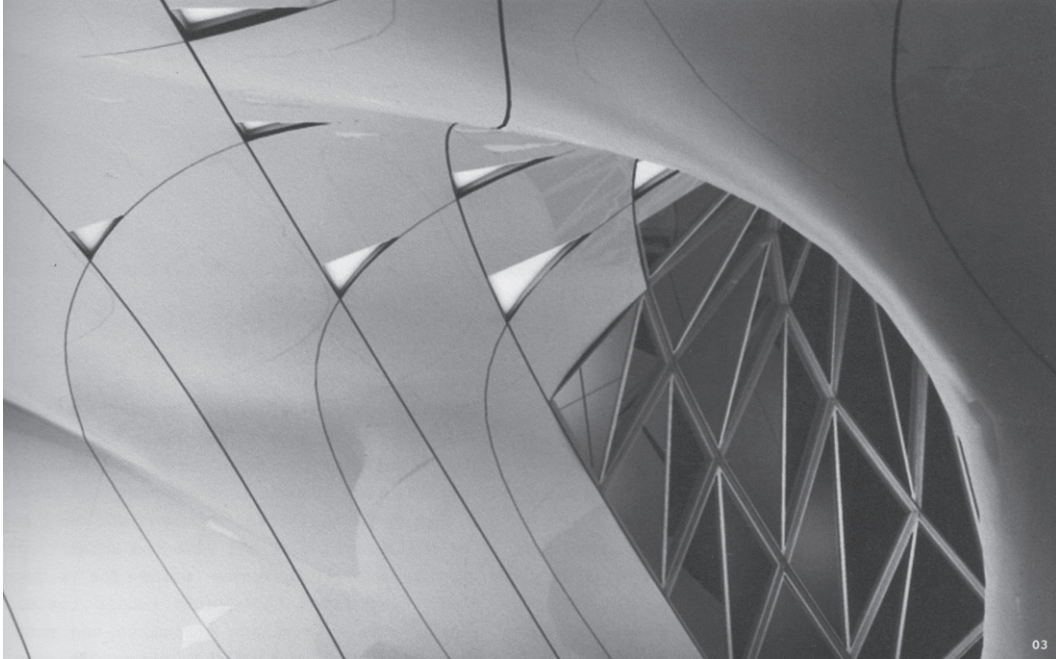


Figure 7. *AO Project*, 2012, GRAFT. Photo GRAFT. *Source: GRAFT (2011).*

suggests the uneasy yet compelling relationship of flux between what is and what might be, between being held tight and being liberated, between limits and the unlimited. The sublime circles back into a symbiotic relationship with chaos, boundlessness, the *apeiron*, emergence, becoming—or are they, in fact, complicit and mischievous bedfellows, ever chasing, sparring, conspiring across the annals of time?

Duration

The scope of duration within the frame of this inquiry has been indicated as part of the evolutionary process of emergence; like the notions of evolution, becoming, and progress, duration does not describe a predictable event. Our scientists, our artists and our thinkers have told us this. They describe a forward movement, a deviation, an event suspended in wait, as well as one that turns back on itself. A variable-speed oscillation in all directions. As I described earlier in reference to the primary intent of the project, duration is woven within and around the concepts of chaos and the sublime (as framed within this inquiry), and though the inter-connectivity of this tri-part relationship is paramount, duration acts as the blood that courses, the breath within, the glue that binds yet with vast elasticity. I believe most importantly in the indivisibility of duration, that it encompasses rather than determines, and that it is relentlessly unquantifiable. Within a theoretical context, the understanding of a continuum that is ever in movement and that generates constant creation is echoed and parsed by a diverse array of voices, among which are voices included within this study.

In his *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant (1792/1952) discusses the relationship between beauty and the sublime and brings us around to a description of durational mode. He distinguishes beauty from the sublime, saying that although there are some perceptive crossovers between them (they both seem to mean something pleasurable), they are, in fact, fundamentally different. Whereas beauty is a qualitative judgment, descriptive of an object found in nature or as the result of man's hand, the sublime is founded only within our ideas formed in response to a qualitative judgment, and only when our ideas surpass every measure of sense previously considered, catapulting us into a place of limitless discomfort and also euphoria. The mind thus set into motion creates a kind of vibration ... an alternating repulsion and attraction. Bergson extends the concept of duration as an

“eternity of life. A living and therefore still moving eternity in which our own particular duration would be included as the vibrations are in light” (1913, p. 54).

Briefly mentioned at the start of this chapter, Deleuze with Guattari, and De Landa expanded upon Bergson’s ideas about creative evolution and duration in their comprehensive and invigorating discussions on *the space of possibility, the fold and multiplicity* in which endless and cross-referential relationships play out within the evolutionary process of becoming, mirroring, echoing, expanding, and retracting upon each other

With fluid and muscular vigor their discussions about how the world progresses and how life happens—in true, material ways—as a result of continual upheavals on both individual and collective levels, are bursting with the sense of new beginnings: interior confronts exterior, the vectors of sinking downward contrast with upward pull, yet all forces work as one, indivisible entity (De Landa, 2012). This parallels ideas expressed by Rudolph Arnheim (2010) that impact and affirm my full inquiry. He notes that the basis of expression is a configuration of forces which impacts the physical and mental world, (where) motifs like rising and falling, dominance and submission, weakness and strength, harmony and discord, struggle and conformance, underlie all existence (p. 433).

The flux and the flow, and the sense of movement that is central to the concepts presented by these discussions, factor importantly in my considerations about the ontology of chaos, the sublime, and duration. Likewise, it has informed and inspired the means, materials, and metaphoric evocations that I am using to bring my thematic work to expression. It has been important not to be seduced into *illustrating* the graphic and sculptural potential inherent in the descriptions of explosive and erratic bursts of creation and the visceral quality of Deleuze’s descriptive language, but rather to allow these considerations to influence and energize my inquiry by filtering through to my creative thinking and doing by a measure of distillation.

As I lead up to a discussion about how my theoretical network is impacting and invigorating my studio practice, conscious avoidance of an unconscious illustration-trap is an important factor. Something I *am* consciously doing in the interest of this creative investigation is blending and connecting philosophical considerations that in an academic

sense might otherwise not be so closely aligned, namely the Deleuzian concepts of multiplicity/becoming/plane of immanence with those of hermeneutically inclined phenomenology and metaphysics. That said, Deleuze was known to have commented about himself, “I feel myself to be a pure metaphysician ... Bergson says that modern science hasn’t found its metaphysics, the metaphysics it would need. It is this metaphysics that interests me” (Smith & Protevi, 2013). Deeply committed to the complexities of the material world, Deleuze found the metaphysics that perhaps was not yet discoverable in Bergson’s time: De Landa—devout Deleuzian that he is—gathers threads across time and posits that 2500 years ago “metaphysics meant the same as ontology,” encompassing all the history and entities of the world, from atoms to stars to human beings, that exist independent and outside of our conscious minds. He believes that the word *metaphysics*, with the fluidity of states inherent in its meaning, should be used once again (2011).

It is this sense of encompassing wholeness that speaks to me on both a cognitive and spiritual level and which, in turn, prompts me to embrace phenomenological approaches to bring my work to expression. Within the following chapter I will describe several of my studio explorations that have been informed by these theoretical considerations, as well as how this labyrinthine process of thinking and doing has led me to *Deep Circularity*.

With the rigorous theoretical inspiration I’ve described, it’s been important to have a firm hand on the rudder and Anish Kapoor inspires this when he says that, as an artist, it is not his job to express something. He says, however, “But it is my role to bring to expression, let’s say, to define means that allow phenomenological and other perceptions which one might use, one might work with, and then move towards a poetic existence” (as cited in Bhabha, 1998, p. 171).

The Triad: Becoming

The disorienting and emergent power suggested as inherently part of the chaotic-sublime-duration triad is well represented in the work of artists James Turrell and Anish Kapoor. Kapoor emphasizes that aesthetic experiences manifested through a work of art are “signs of being ... metaphors for a state of becoming,” or states of flux (1990, p. 92).

The work of these two artists speaks to viewers without words, impacting the eye, body, and mind. Though specifically referencing Turrell, curator Shirley Madhill (2006) describes the puissance that also applies to Kapoor's work which allows "us to see ourselves 'seeing'," and "places viewers in a realm of pure experience prompting greater self awareness." This sparked the idea for her important exhibition *Sublime Embrace* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2007, as an exhibition that "encourages introspection and consciousness, even provokes an eerie sense of being alone in the vastness of the universe, and recognizes the viewer's place in art" (p. 6).

Author and former *New Scientist* editor, Alun Anderson observes, "If we look into the abyss of time ... we may not grow giddy, but we can simultaneously feel our own insignificance in the Earth's 4.6 billion-year history and the significance of the precise moment in this vast span of time in which we live" (as cited in Jha, 2012).

Intuition and Not Knowing

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, I have employed, as thematically complementary tools, intuition and consciousness, because of the way they inform experience and guide new discoveries. It is generally accepted that it is the purview of artists to operate within the world of intuition and to use this innate and cultivated ability unconsciously and consciously to guide themselves and others through the mire of life's complexities. Intuition and consciousness, as described previously by Bergson, are not at odds with the place of *not knowing* that I mentioned in relation to Kant's sublime; for to be an artist or a scientist or engaged in living, is to concurrently accept unpredictability as the inevitable path of evolution. Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum (2013) have amassed an entire book on this very subject and the ways it is embraced as a part of the creative process. In *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, Fisher writes, "The ability of art to invite and defy interpretation simultaneously, to reflect the artist's and the viewers' experiences and yet exist independently, is what sets it apart from other disciplines. Art pursues knowledge and yet resists the assimilative urge to know" (2013, p. 8). In this same spirit Leonard Lawlor and Valentine Moulard sum up Bergson's notions of intuition: "Finally, we can return to the question of intuition. Thanks to intuition, humanity can turn intelligence against itself so as to seize life itself" (2013).

Not knowing, experimenting, ruminating, and intuitive investigation have been central to my research inquiry into how ‘like’ aspects of chaos and the sublime—within the arc of duration—play out in terms of phenomenological, perceptual, and sensorial experience. In the following chapter, I will discuss how and what I have discovered during recent studio-based explorations through which new understandings and revelations have ensued. At this juncture, however, let us turn an eye to the visual literature that has helped to elucidate and illuminate the course of my research.

Visual Guides

Homi K. Bhabha’s (1998) discussions on the sublime are relevant to my inquiry, due to his incisive examination into the work of Anish Kapoor whose superior ability orchestrates movement between form, time, and space into compelling aesthetic experience. As an artist, Kapoor puts stock in the concept of the *truly made* which resonates with Kant’s concept of the sublime and that which is “absolutely great” (Kant, 1998, p. 94), yet Kapoor qualifies that “the idea of the truly made does not only have to do with truth. It has to do with the meeting of material and nonmaterial ... A thing exists in the world because it has mythological, psychological and physical coherence” (Bhabha, 1998, p. 172). Of the *truly made* and of Kapoor’s work, Bhabha observes, “The truly made work finds its balance in the fragility of vacillation. It is the recognition of this ambivalent movement of force, this ‘doubleness’ or ‘otherness’ of the literal and the metaphoric, the empty and the void, their side-by-side proximity that inhabits Kapoor’s work” (p. 175).

In 2007 I visited *Sublime Embrace*, the Madhill exhibition I mentioned earlier. I drove to the Hamilton Art Gallery with the express intention of seeing Kapoor’s work, which was showing alongside an impressive group of international artists, including Janet Cardiff and George Bures-Miller, Bill Viola, and David Hoffos. The following is the journal reflection of my encounter with *Untitled*, Kapoor’s inclusion in the exhibition (Figure 8):

Upon entering the room we viewed the large, luminous and richly-coloured disk floating on the wall. We would discover that its seeming object-simplicity belied its inherent potency. As my friend and I gradually moved towards the work, the



Figure 8. *Untitled*, 2004, Anish Kapoor. Photo David Regen, courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. *Source Madhill (2006)*

smooth, almost iridescent surface continually shifted from magenta to red to fuchsia. As the disc's flatness took on dimension, it teased us between concave and convex, and just as the sunken curvature became apparent, our images, which were reflecting in the lustre of the polished surface, flipped upside down, at the same time as our barely audible whispers grew in resonance and volume. I can still recall the flutter I felt in my solar plexus as a result of the profound assembly of sensory and soul-level experience. We were stupefied, in awe of what we were experiencing both physically and metaphysically. The effect was transformative, and we felt exhilarated and breathless.

Kapoor is an artist in full command of his intent and his materiality, which includes the unpredictable, intangible element of the viewer-participant's experience. Bhaba knows Kapoor's work well and knows that Kapoor embraces *not knowing* as part of the creative alchemy:

... the truly made work does not consist in the triumph of objecthood; it is only when the work enters that third space—'a transitional space, an in-between space'—that the man-made and the self-made, the material and the non-material gather together and tangentially touch in the fevered movement—hither and thither, back and forth—of doubt. The artist's 'doubt' is not about the surfaces of illusion or the veiled nature of reality. Art sows a deep doubt about the mastery of human historical time (Bhabha, 1998, p. 177).

While researching and exploring means of affecting physical and metaphysical qualities common to both chaos and the sublime, it has been useful to revisit a case study I previously made on Kapoor, and yet I have also looked to other artists who successfully integrate complex theoretical ideas with effective materiality. Like Kapoor, David Spriggs, Olafur Eliasson and James Turrell (Figures 9 and 10) create large yet minimal abstract and evocative work with which the viewer establishes a shifting relationship based on viewpoint, light and spatial context (Fried, 1967, p. 125).

These artists, as Eliasson indicates, have "a renewed belief in the potential of the subjective position" (Bishop, 2005, p. 80) to engage viewers within a critical and



Figure 9. *The Mediated Motion*, 2001, Olafur Eliasson. Photo Kunsthaus Bregenz.
 Source: Bishop (2005).



Figure 10. *Wide Out (Ganzfeld)*, 1998, James Turrell. Photo © 2013 James Turrell.
 Source: <http://jamesturrell.com/>

questioning discourse. Kapoor aims for “a certain kind of disorientation that I hope reorients.” He has said, “trying to hold things to a certain stillness ... so that somehow one is forced to slow down enough, to look, to measure with perhaps a little uncertainty in the eye, so that you have to put your hand out to affirm that what you are looking at is really there” (Kapoor, 2014). Alternatively, the enigmatic work of David Hoffos, William Kentridge, and Mike Nelson is haptic, nostalgic, and theatrical. While Hoffos conjures confounding, miniature worlds drawing upon age-old illusionistic and cinematic techniques, Nelson assembles problematic worlds full of found and archived objects imbued with hidden narratives. Kentridge conceives his experiential worlds on an operatic scale as is evidenced by his *Refusal of Time* (Figure 11), seen recently at the Metropolitan Museum. It is bombastic yet magnetic, surrounding and thrusting the viewer onto an inky, theatrical stage, which is punctuated by explosive and dream-like parades of circling bodies, while haunting, cacophonous sounds blast out of loudspeakers. In the centre of the gathering, while a semblance of a breathing machine labours and wheezes, spectators-come-participants sit on randomly placed yet firmly immobile chairs. The overt theatricality of the work invites a discursive and unsettling response. It is a suspension into a fractious time and space informed by the artist’s interest in colonialism, industry and messy history.

These two divergent groups of artists stand as resonant research in my thesis study, perhaps because of the dance of opposites that their two camps offer and the way in which this influences and connects to my thematic and phenomenological interests as well as my past experience as a film and theatre designer. I am drawn by the simplicity/complexity of Spriggs, Turrell, et al., and I am also drawn to the texture and the oblique, mysterious narratives of Hoffos, Nelson, and Kentridge.

Landing between these two areas of influence is another group of artists whose work is poetic, subtle, phenomenological, and multi-layered—and whose work is closest to where I see my own work existing. While I eschew gender typecasting, the work I look to in this camp and most identify with happens to be represented by three women: Sylvia Safdie, Lyla Rye, and Ann Hamilton. These artists understand how to communicate haptic and ephemeral means of embodied knowledge in evocative, layered, and



Figure 11. *The Refusal of Time*, 2013, William Kentridge, Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org>

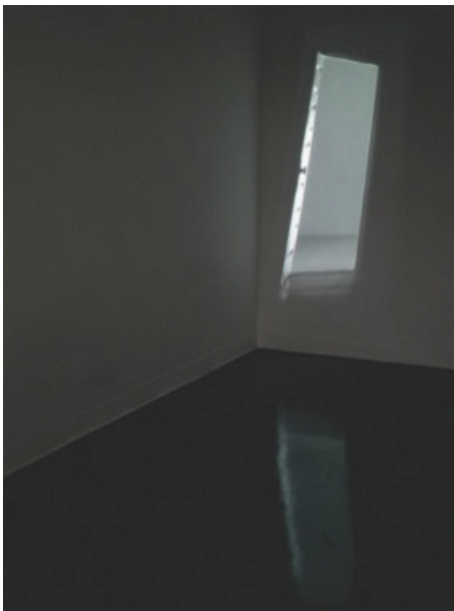


Figure 12. *Erratic Room*, 2012, Lyla Rye
Photo Lyla Rye.



Figure 13. *The Event of Thread*, 2012, Ann Hamilton.
Source: www.annhamiltonstudio.com

compelling ways, and I have recently benefited from seeing Safdie's and Rye's work in person. In the Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, Safdie conceived the entire gallery as a reverent, contemplative chamber for the showing of several video and sculptural pieces. *Reflection/Auschwitz* is a video that shifts between possible interpretations, an ambiguous yet recognizable enigma of light, gently moving water and ephemeral substance. It is mesmerizing but disquieting to be reminded of the problematic history contained within this reflecting pool—a mud puddle, in fact—filmed while visiting Auschwitz, and a sense of reflective pause ensues.

At Typology, part of the new YoungSpace arts complex, Lyla Rye's *Erratic Room* (Figure 12) transformed a small room into one that invited disorienting, cryptic, and fleeting glimpses of elusive yet strangely familiar architecture. Within the dark, tall, chamber-like site, one's body was engaged in the activity of stretching and turning in response to the shifting configurations of projected and reflected images. The visual rhythm is irregular and unpredictable, disorienting yet engaging slipstreams of time suggesting memory and displacement. Ann Hamilton embraces an epic platform in *Event of Thread* (Figure 13), staged in the New York Armory (2013), which unfortunately, I have only seen in video and photographic formats. Hamilton marries thematic intent and materiality with the participant's experience in a sweeping yet haptic pulse from the monumental silk sheet animated in response to schoolyard-like swings, to the intimate tracing of a pen across paper. The artist weaves together a textured amalgam of embodied experiences and metaphoric images to convey "a particular point in space at an instant of time" (Hamilton, 2013).

These artists use a variety of methodologies, scales, materials, technical devices, and points of view to weave elusive and ephemeral yet visceral and haptic events that reference the complexities of life, the movement of time, and the meanings we attach to our presence within the experience.

Interdisciplinarity and Shifting Ground

Shirley Madhill (2006) writes that conscious art making is described as that which has shifted "artists' goals from direct representation of seen reality to the

expression of felt experience” (p. 9). Yet what is shifting? Or is something being repeated? Is this approach to contemporary art making so much a shift as much as reclamation of a balance between body and spirit reflecting a fundamental if fragmented continuum? And on how many levels is something felt? Is this shift part of the movement towards interdisciplinarity? I believe achieving the balance I described earlier in relation to Iain McGilchrist’s *The Master and His Emissary* and to Francisco Varela’s work in the *Embodied Mind* is, in fact, imbedded in the purpose and realization of consciousness in contemporary art and that this is what the ‘shift’ is trying to reclaim.

In terms of how my thesis project fits into the new paradigm of hybrid or interdisciplinary work, I would question whether a new paradigm yet fully exists for this kind of work. The concept of ‘interdisciplinarity’ as a method, a mode of practice, an idea, is still floating around looking for a place to land, and perhaps is not meant to sit comfortably anywhere. I have had conversations on this subject with several curators working in accredited public and commercial galleries across Canada, and they have indicated the quandary as well. Despite the seismic shift wrought by the normalization of digital technologies into all aspects of life and in great evidence in most interdisciplinary practices today, W. J. T. Mitchell (1995) had some interesting comments to make about interdisciplinarity, which I believe are still relevant today. He used the terms *chaos* and *wonder* to describe the essence of that moment before a routine, or a way of doing things ... is re-asserted. A moment of rupture and “indiscipline” (p. 541). Mitchell’s choice of words suggests unknown changes and possibilities on a scale greater than oneself, and larger than one can imagine. A boundless scale. Interdisciplinarity might well be just that, and these words have long been part of my conceptual lexicon and are deeply imbedded within my thesis project. In this way, theory of practice coalesces with theory of content and signifies a place of purpose.

Rupture, indiscipline, order out of disorder, embodied existence, hold–release, operating in conscious connection to the large arc of time. I believe that these ideas and approaches factor significantly in an expanding global zeitgeist, and in turn bring the same portent to my research project.

IV. THE STUDIO: RESEARCH AND CREATION

Theatricality and Becoming

In my practice as a designer and a visual artist, through both collaborative and individual endeavors, my goal in aesthetic and practical terms is to create evocative, stimulating situations, whether they are epic and over-arching or intimate and personal. These situations may be conveyed in words, touch, gestures, light, movement, space, images, scent, and silence. I use the ephemeral nature of light as a primary thematic element, and the sustenance it provides in physical, psychic and symbolic terms (Figures 14–17). My long-standing interest in using multiple frames, layering, and translucency as part of my creative language is now realized through video, projections, sound and space, yet is informed clearly by my experience as a painter and by my experience as a conjurer of three-dimensional, metaphoric, narrative environments. My aim is to invite questions amid confusing pleasure prompting reflection upon one's own state of being in the world and within the larger, encompassing, fluid sense of time. At the core resides my previously stated belief in the potential of the aesthetic experience to inform and transform our lives; through its capacity to show us something we didn't know we knew, it invites surprise, reflection, and contemplation. To quote Etienne Gilson, work (of art) has aesthetic and artistic modes of existence in addition to a substantial one. A work exists artistically qua product of the artist's activity, whereas it exists aesthetically when it is the object of someone's aesthetic (or contemplative) experience" (as cited in Livingston, 2013, n.p.) I'll add that the artist, in the course of his or her creative journey, can fully be that 'someone' who benefits from the aesthetic experience.

Integrating my design and visual art practices was a primary intention of coming into the IAMD program while also expanding my pre-existing interest in the chaos/sublime relationship. When I started my thesis studies, the concept of duration was part of the 'hunch' I had inextricably linked to my interest in chaos and the sublime, yet I lacked the theoretical foundation to identify it, articulate it, or bring it to expression. As my independent practices have evolved into an interdisciplinary praxis, an interesting shift has happened in terms of the object-ness of my work. At the present time, the *object* has almost vanished. While one could hardly call the assemblage that comprises *Deep*



Figure 14.
Dido and Aeneas.
Film Design, 1995

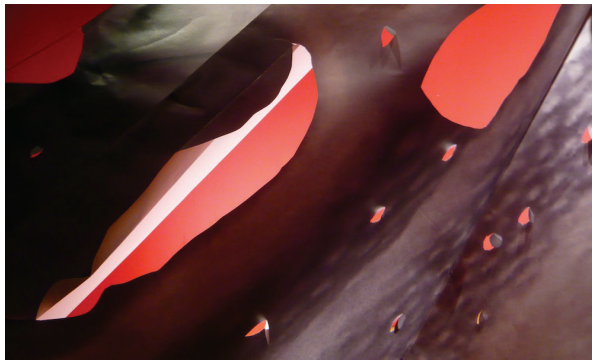


Figure 15.
Tensile.
Installation, 2013



Figure 16.
Bethune.
Theatre Design, 2010



Figure 17.
September Songs.
Film Design, 1994

Figures 14–17. Excavations: Repeating motifs: ephemeral light, frames within frames

Circularity—projectors, screens, platforms, mirrors and a 950-gallon water tank—anything but material objects, they are merely elements that coalesce for a period of time to create a moment, or a series of moments. They lend themselves to the making of a phenomenological experience, and in that way they cumulatively contain meaning, layers of meaning. Individually, the elements hold no substantive meaning and leave only an array of recyclable or reusable construction materials in hand at the end. Freed from the precious yet bulky materiality of large canvases, I find this both practically and creatively liberating, not least because the ephemeral nature of this kind of event taps into the thematic heart of my inquiry that works to connect the dots between a range of experiential and cognitive meanings.

In 1967 Michael Fried wrote an article called “Art and Objecthood” in *Art Forum*, which was a criticism of “literalist” art (an alternate name he used for Minimalist art), and its insistent theatricality. The essay was a not-so-veiled pitch for what he considered the superior work and superior sensibility of Modernist painting (and sculpture), an opinion he shared with art critic Clement Greenberg, who considered theatrical or affective art as ‘kitsch’. Fried suggested that theatricality was inherently fake in that it forced involvement upon the beholder, who is central to the “situation,” because it engages the beholder in its becoming. The beholder’s presence and the object’s presence complete against each other in a relationship of becoming. Despite his best efforts to argue against theatricality in favor of the solidity, gravitas, and materiality of Modernist Art, Fried acquiesces to the fact that we all seek what this kind of work extends ... presentness, interest, endlessness ... becoming (Fried, 1967, p. 147).

Becoming connects to the concept of an endless and progressive event, and in this way, we circle back to the concepts of emergence and duration, an important consideration of Minimalist art just as was eschewing the hand of the maker. Bhahba (1998) is thoughtful about why objectness need not be the primary concern:

The process of ‘making’ does not stop with the manufacture of the object for it is the ambition of the homo faber to make the work that is more than its moment and other than its maker. True making lives on in the invisible, unnamable energy that haunts the double life of the material itself, enabling it to survive beyond what Kapoor calls ‘the end of the process’ (p. 172).

It is perhaps regressive to revive the debate raised by Fried more than half a century ago. Yet in the spirit of honouring the notion of duration and the perseverance of thoughtful discourse leaving its mark across the blur of time, it is important to look at what relevance Fried may still bear. An initial aspect of my thesis inquiry has been to seek out the continuing relevance of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, physically both long gone from this earth, yet both still relevant. Fried's concerns about theatricality in art have since been overtaken in light of the important work being done across the creative world by the kind of artists mentioned in this paper. This said, even Anish Kapoor—a descendent of the Minimalist/theatrical tradition—has cautionary words to offer: "I've always been interested in the magical"... but "it's a short trip from Disneyland to something truly mysterious" (as cited in Baume, 2008, p. 39). As I have moved forward in my work, his words have offered cogent warning.

Explorations and Actualizations

Originally, I had thought my thesis project would expand upon the installation *Time*, referenced earlier and which was completed as a quickly realized project a few years ago. *Deep Circularity* is not an expanded iteration of that project, and yet the thresholds of discovery which I made in *Time* have provided important thesis-based research, and it is thus worth describing more fully (Figure 5).

In the weeks prior to the *Time* presentation I had been reading Juhani Pallasmaa's *Hapticity and Time* (2000) and *Eyes of the Skin* (2005), both of which had tremendous impact. Pallasmaa mentions in the former essay, "Collage invigorates the experience of tactility and time. Collage and film are the most characteristic art forms of our century, and have penetrated into all other art forms ..." (n.p.).

With Pallasmaa's observations in mind, I approached *Time* in a way that represented a new direction in my work. I juxtaposed the ephemeral with the quotidian and, in so doing, the following gestalt equation came to mind: ideas of duration as a continuum of suspended yet advancing time, met with the contextual haptic memory of an airplane seat. This met with notions of beauty and infinity within the surround of a continuously rolling cloud-scape punctuated by the haptic and sensorial pleasure of a freshly peeled orange, and the technology manifested by my iPhone. The rolling

cloudscape projection had originally been filmed on my iPhone, and within this installation, the phone sat on the aircraft tray beside the orange peels, recording the clouds doubly again.

I regard the iPhone as a vessel of time. Charting and condensing my life's activities on a daily/weekly/monthly/yearly basis, it contains my thoughts, my family, my friends, and all of my interests to a degree and scope, which has long been unfathomable. In this way, the iPhone connects to the discussions about technology manifesting as the new sublime in its unapprehended vastness (Smith, 2003). Technology as the new sublime offers a compelling discourse, yet in this study I won't explore it beyond the knowing embrace of my iPhone as the recording device of choice and the use of projections as part of my creative toolbox.

Prior to *Time*, I hadn't made work that might be considered deliberately droll or glib, and I had consciously avoided embracing anything that relied on my film design expertise. Yet if there is a lesson to be learned, it is to use what I know as much as I seek what I don't know. The concept of *time* offers a plethora of theoretical associations and yet the elements of this installation came together quickly, intuitively, hermeneutically, empirically, and reflectively. Using rear projection, spatial organization, scent, lighting, and props, I married my experience in design with my art practice in a reflexive collage of elements and approaches. Thus, an alchemical integration began in which time collapsed and folded back on itself in a resonant and engaging form of presentation. The installation conveyed the affect of an amalgam of sensations and ideas, and in so doing embraced the participant within the ensuing rhythm of time. It touched on Deleuze's Baroque *fold* without any semblance of illustration, and arriving at this understanding proved a useful insight.

Circadian (Figure 18) was a project used as a focused experiment to inform my thesis research and was devised as both a thematic exploration into shared pulses and rhythms and as a technical/material experiment in perception and illusion. I embraced a site-adaptive approach by situating the installation in the glass-walled Anniversary Gallery at 100 McCaul where I was able to experiment with perceptual and thematic concerns offered by the planes of glass, the confusion of reflected light, and the

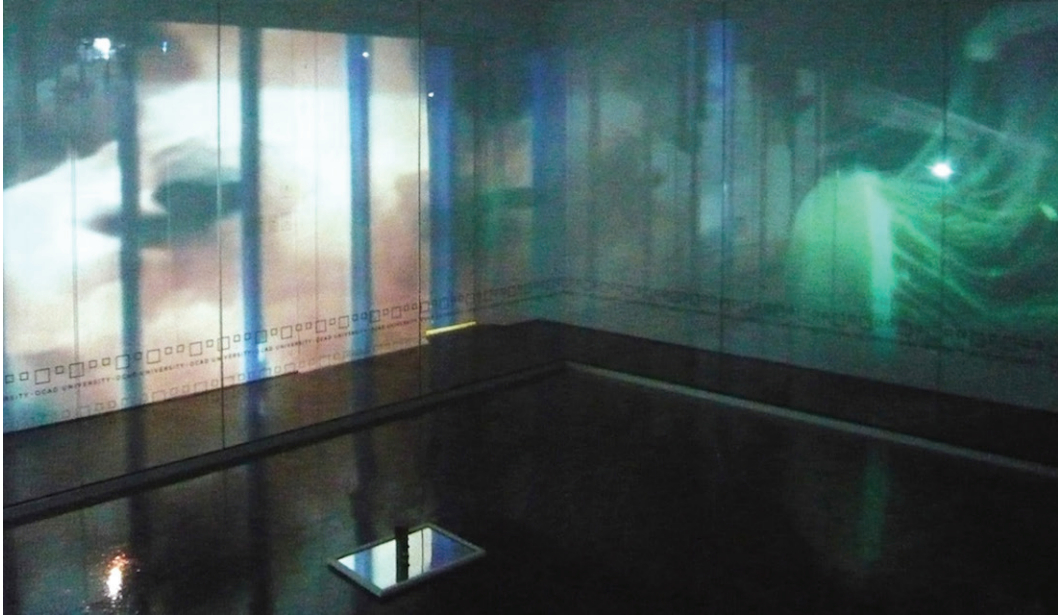
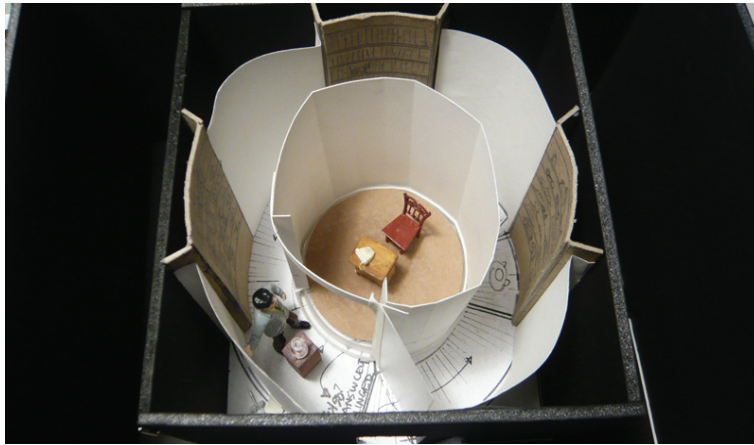


Figure 18. *Circadian*, 2013

subsequent repetition of imagery. Using three projectors, a video capturing the steady yet abstracted flow of a human crowd (*Ebb and Flow*, 2012) was coupled with two videos of the large-scale oscillations of moon jellyfish. By exploiting the multiple and overlapping reflections of these projected images I engaged participants in confusing waves of rhythm and motion that contrasted and connected disparate organisms and entities. While a small metronome tapped out a steady tock-tock, the first level of encounter in the space was visually attractive and enticing yet it was important that the attraction gave way to some degree of perceptual confusion where the sensation of being disoriented became a means of challenging assumptions and prompting questions.

In his prologue to *Chaos: The Making of a New Science*, James Gleick (1987) posits, “The first chaos theorists had an eye for pattern, especially pattern that appeared on different scales at the same time” (p. 5); I likened shared rhythms and pulses of variant life-forces to being a version of this patterning. So, too, was the fact that these rhythms are linked to inner biological clocks as in our circadian rhythms, and are thus affected by exposure to light and darkness in common with all life-forms. This informed my choice of the aforementioned video images which were drawn from work I had been making with my iPhone or collecting via online sources.

Another project which has proved to be invaluable research for *Deep Circularity* is *The Veil of Nature* (Figures 19–21). In the spring of 2013, I was one of three key collaborators on this cross-platform, immersive installation created and mounted in Vancouver with Martin Gotfrit and Patricia Gruben, both professors at the School of Contemporary Art, SFU-Woodwards. My ongoing thesis inquiry—in terms of theory and practice—informs the project, and the reverse is also true. *The Veil of Nature* explores the relationship between science and metaphysics and how an intuitive process guides these sometimes polarized entities to new discoveries and new possibilities of wonder. The project presents an auspicious opportunity because although not specifically connected to my thesis work, it touches on themes related to those within the realm of my inquiry, namely, the nature of mind–body symbiosis; the connective threads that weave together seemingly divergent entities such as chaos and the sublime; macro and micro; science and spirituality. It also examines how within the arc of duration these kinds of relationships exist.



Figures 19–21. *The Veil of Nature*, 2013. Preliminary maququette; exterior of installation interior with curved fossil wall and projections. <https://vimeo.com/83879270>

Using a multi-sensory combination of visual, auditory and haptic engagement, *The Veil of Nature* draws upon an interdisciplinary range of techniques including theatrical illusion, spatial manipulation, analogue, and networked digital devices, alongside sensorial/haptic and ephemeral elements. Importantly, the technical elements, though crucial to the project, invisibly support the tactile, embodied aspects of the experience. Building upon what I learned from creating and executing *The Veil of Nature* to inform how I approach the inquiry and realization of my thesis project, I am aware of the phenomenological and affective results of multi-sensory, tangible elements combined with ephemeral, minimalistic approaches. This mode of juxtaposition engages viewer/participants in a potentially transformative movement between what is familiar and known, and what is an intuited possibility, embracing a holistic view of the mind–body, spirit–matter relationship. The project received positive response including a meaningful affirmation from author William Gibson, who called the experience “transcendent.” We hope to remount the installation again at some point in the future.

V. DEEP CIRCULARITY

Design and Creation

Upon returning from the *Veil* experience in June 2013, I knew that for my thesis project I intended to investigate the vibrational overlaps between chaos and the sublime within the framework of duration; as I mentioned earlier, I had thought I would do this by re-visiting the *Time* installation. Ruminating about the research I had been gathering both theoretically and materially, and the meandering discoveries I had been chronicling, I spent time slowly looking around in all directions. Ideas and observations began to emerge: things that manifested profound and unfolding qualities of inner pulse, stability and instability, attraction and imbalance, harmony and tension (Figure 22). New insights developed.

While walking through High Park last summer I passed by the labyrinth and was reminded of the embodied experience resulting from the circular pathway we devised as part of *The Veil of Nature* installation. In the same week, I passed a large, translucent white water tank sitting in a vacant lot just around the corner from my home, and it



Figure 22. Rhythm. Patterns. Pulses. (Video stills)



Figure 23. Circular structure. *The Veil of Nature* inner chamber under construction.



Figure 24. Sinusoidal wave. Water continues to animate within the water tank while the truck is stopped in traffic.

brought to mind *The Veil's* circular inner chamber that offers the experience of an affective contemplative space (Figure 23). As in contemplative practices, the slowly circling physical movement around and into the space invites a calm, reflective state for both mind and body. A few days later, while inching along in a slow line of traffic, I found myself behind another translucent water tank nestled on the back of a pickup truck. I hardly noticed the truck due to the delightful sinusoidal wave that was animating and bouncing within the confines of the tank, the lively result of the stop/start rhythm of the vehicle (Figure 24). What struck me is that the driver would barely have been aware of the vital world he had helped activate, just as the rest of the busy day-to-day world passed by on all sides, also unaware of this event. I had a special view of this energized world and captured it as a video on my iPhone. This cemented the simultaneously clear yet vague direction my thesis project would take.

These three closely timed experiences were prescient signs of connective, reverberating pulse and emergence, circularity and flow, as discussed earlier, within Chapter III, Theoretical Context. It took several months of journaling, thinking, doodling, and reading to understand how to use this information within the practice-based explorations towards my thesis project; yet the time and the availability of space at OCAD did arrive in mid-November when I was prepared and able to pull the numerous threads together. Delightful as the bouncing wave-tank video was, it didn't offer the necessary hapticity or spatial qualities to fulfill my thesis objectives, yet it did inform how I proceeded to bring to expression the continuum of pulse and emergence, which I have identified as central to the triad's relationship and the essence of my second research question. Rather than a playful, sinusoidal wave, I decided to aim for a subtler, barely imperceptible ripple activated by the presence of the participant, be that myself or another.

The intent for my final installation is an impressive scale in order to work more effectively as an encompassing, phenomenological experience; yet at this early exploratory juncture I chose to work in approximately one-third scale (Figure 25). I found a 20" x 30" 30-gallon water tank as my central element and, using a scenic construction technique I have utilized several times within my film design practice to simulate the gentle movement of a train or a truck placed thereon, I created a low 8' x 8' platform

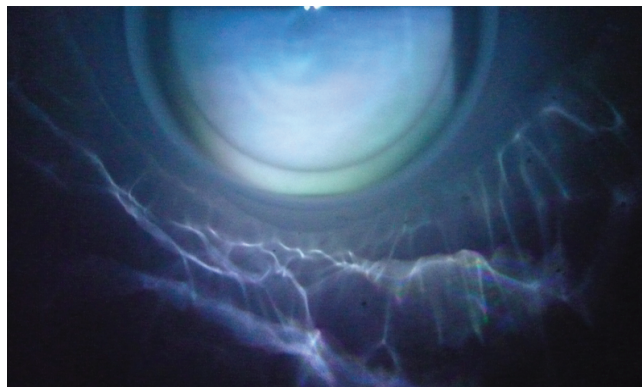
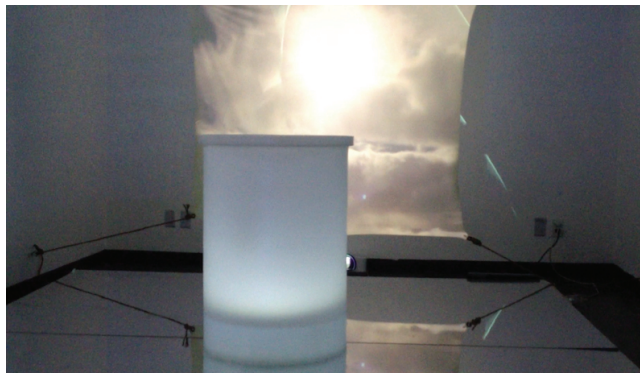


Figure 25. *Deep Circularity studio* exploration with inner tubes, illuminated water tank on mirrored surface, stretched latex with projection, and interior of water tank with refracted light.

supported on a bed of partially filled inner tubes. In seeking to play with the sense of limitlessness at the same time as lending an element of deliberate disorientation, I placed one-eighth inch thick mirror plexi on the surface of the platform, while the translucent white water tank, a quarter full of water with a submersible LED puck light, was placed in the middle. The mirrored platform lent a quality of beauty and infinity, yet gave a sense of vertigo and subtle confusion as a result of the flex underfoot and the reflections all around, thus blending perceptive affect with phenomenological and metaphoric possibilities. Depending on how slowly/quickly or how softly/aggressively one walked around the circular tank, the illuminated water in the tank refracted and spun. I spent considerable time exploring the range of this interface.

I experimented with numerous videos from my iPhone archive front-projected onto the three walls of the studio that surrounded the platform, as well as onto a screen of natural rubber latex, which I had stretched across the far side of the platform. The projected images in turn reflected into the mirrored ground surrounding the tank. For my projection screen, I experimented with the tethered latex sheeting for many days and weeks, wanting to use the material to tap into a material metaphoric evocation of both time and the sensory hapticity of skin. The amber translucency of the natural rubber latex possesses a lot of agency, and though I decided that it was too costly, complicated, and ultimately not integrated enough to utilize as an element with in this iteration, I will use it at some point in the future. For *Deep Circularity* I decided to use stretch tricot screen, which is forgiving, adaptable, and more affordable within the parameters of this thesis installation.

The iPhone video archives I sampled as projections included rain on windshields, leafy shadows, jellyfish, the ocean streaming past the Victoria ferry, and storm clouds colliding; I projected them as described onto the walls and also into the water tank itself. The foremost criteria were that the image be alluring and yet not pretty, that it be recognizable yet ambiguous, and that it should convey a sense of suspension at the same time as one of continuum.

For the thesis installation I decided to use a video of clouds, which I had taken on my iPhone while on a flight between Toronto and Regina, and which was first used in my

Time installation. In *After Effects*, and with the assistance of one of my past collaborators, Gustavo Cerquera Benjumea, the video has been slowed down and greater contrast added to deepen the shadows while lifting the highlights, thereby heightening the sense of ambiguity and recognition. The native footage has some inherent irregularities due to the vibration and movement of the airplane and yet this adds pleasurable confusion, by way of providing a sense of ‘trip or blip’. This, in turn, engages the participants in a dynamic interface whereby they question which elements they are affecting and which ones are affecting them.

Following this phase of exploration and experimentation, I spent considerable time sourcing, deliberating upon, sketching potential solutions to, and finessing the technical, practical, and logistical aspects of the installation; at the same time I continued to reflect on the aesthetic, creative, phenomenological possibilities. Two of the largest challenges in the realization of the thesis project have been locating a water tank that fit the desired bio-morphic/monolithic proportions and material clarity, and negotiating the use of warehouse space itself. These two issues threatened to swallow me whole at times as the perfect tank eluded me and as did the challenges of single-handedly taking on a massive, 10,000 sq. ft., unheated, dormant factory site on Sterling Road (Figure 26). Through exhaustive online sourcing I found the perfect tank for the purpose in Camrose, Alberta—smooth sided, quotidian yet ambiguously beautiful, cylindrical, devoid of any markings—and had it shipped to a business in the Concord, Ontario, which also provided the 600 gallons of water. The intended warehouse site, which is an important factor in the project, presented considerable logistical and financial challenges and went through numerous iterations to ameliorate said challenges, including being conceived as a shared venture.

My experience with the site does, in fact, represent a version of the chaos/sublime/duration experience, with all of the unpredictability that this engenders, and yet what was clear early on is that having *Deep Circularity* as the single entity within the space is most true to the work and to its potential as an affective, phenomenological experience. As it happened, three weeks prior to installing *Deep Circularity* into the warehouse, issues beyond my control arose that prevented me from using the original



Figure 26. Sterling Road: venue # 1.



Figure 27. Vine Avenue: final venue.



Figure 28. *Deep Circularity* proposal rendering for Vine Avenue.

Sterling Road venue, and I had to seek an alternate site. This shifted the relationship of the installation to its surrounding yet it was possible to maintain the integrity and objectives I had set forth for the installation even while it needed to respond to the conditions presented by the new site on Vine Avenue (Figures 27–28). This experience forced me to embrace the very processes I am writing about in this paper, as the process I engaged in the making of the *Deep Circularity*. Things bump and go sideways, whether in the comfort of one's own studio or when working on this kind of scale with potential technical help in hand. One sets out with intent, but unpredictability often sweeps in. I have come to accept these shifts as an integral part of the process, where emergence becomes an ongoing event in itself.

The Installation

A dark and seemingly empty space with remnants of past utilitarian purpose. In the shadowy distance, something emanates a pulsing life force. Moving closer ... a space defined on three sides by drum-tight expanses, fragile yet strong. An almost imperceptible flow of shifting shadows and light glide across this encompassing membrane. Clouds or water or phantoms? At the centre, a cylindrical monolith glows with shifting inner light and appears to float on a sea of air. A long approach through the darkness until one lands in a world of reflections, feeling suspended and out of balance as the ground-now-sky under your feet seems to bend and flex. Compelled to circumscribe the perimeter of the circular, light-filled form in the way that contemplative practices find resonance in circular pathways, one recognizes it as a large vessel containing water. Shimmering and refracting in response to footsteps, the light within spins, and fractures as the water ripples and oscillates the more quickly one moves, the more heavily one steps. One may hold onto the cool, translucent wall for steadiness, perhaps sliding down to sit on the boundless sky and take in the gentle vibration, the shifting scape of which one is now a part. To steady one's bearings, perhaps the eyes close and the feeling of being gently cradled settles in as ... "the present and the absent, the near and the distant, the sensed and the imagined fuse together" (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 45). Employing phenomenological and perceptual forms of engagement vacillating between the haptic and the ephemeral, harmony and tension, *Deep Circularity* challenges

the participant's expectations while engaging them in an oblique narrative that also invites reflection. An experiential installation, the project draws upon a multi-sensory array of methods and techniques, including metaphorical and symbolic evocations as well as digital and analogue approaches: a 16' x 16' mirrored platform supported on a bed of inner tubes sits between four posts; a 5' diameter x 8' tall translucent white water tank filled to eye level and illuminated from within sits in the middle of the platform; three large tricot screens are stretched between the posts along the two sides and across the far end of the platform; a single video image of rolling clouds is fed through a graphic expansion module that allows the image to be spread between three projectors sitting behind each of the three screens.

VI. CONCLUSION

At the outset of my inquiry I posited that chaos and the sublime transcend the limited range of popular understanding and are layered, entwined concepts that operate with, and within the span of, duration. Together the triad comprises a vibration concurrent with the vast, contiguous yet ineffable rhythm of evolutions, relationships and events making up the continuum of time. By way of a reflective consideration on my thesis project *Deep Circularity*, I am returning to my stated Objective and Research Questions. I am also assessing what has transpired that is of personal importance, and more widely, what the project contributes to the field.

The objective of my research project is as described in Chapter 1, Introduction: within the context of an immersive, experiential installation that embraces phenomenological, embodied, and cognitive/perceptual forms of engagement I am investigating the overlaps and like aspects shared by chaos and the sublime and how these seemingly disparate entities conjoin within the overarching frame of duration. Responding to a range of meanings, sensations and ideas that this triad of chaos/sublimity/duration engenders, the goal of the installation is to convey a dynamic pulse that evokes a simultaneously alluring and unsettling relationship with the world, while also inviting reflection on why and how things happen.

I asked myself three research questions and, as was expected, the answers are not definitive, but oblique, intertwined, symbiotic, and evolving. Within the framework of a

phenomenological, embodied experience, how do meanings grow out of the chaos/sublime/duration relationship when brought to expression within an immersive installation? How is the rhythm of duration brought to expression through materiality? What devices and approaches do I use to convey the sense of flux and pulse described as intrinsic to the chaos/sublime/duration triad?

The most conclusive finding is that working through the questions created new hunches and interconnected revelations about the relationship of chaos, the sublime and duration as it plays out in my own life, and in the world before/around/and ahead of me. Given the holistic paradigm encompassing this study, the activities, inquiries and understanding leading up to the actualization of *Deep Circularity* are rightfully part of the same event as the final installation itself. The meanings and revelations I have shared in the course of this paper are imbedded within the project's significance as an aesthetic experience that I, as a maker, have taken in. My hope is that the cumulative effect of my aesthetic experience filters through like an alchemical imprint to be taken in and individualized by the next person.

In a more specific way, devising *Deep Circularity* as an immersive, experiential environment has opened up new possibilities and connections regarding the movement between cognitive understandings and embodied experience and within the scope of my understanding, how this operates on a perceptual, intellectual level. Tapping into conscious, intuitive, and also subliminal knowledge, I devised a series of obliquely related impulses and signifiers which I leave open to sensorial, metaphoric, and intuitive interpretation. Darkness and mystery give way to slowly pulsing light, subtle shifts are activated by circling footsteps, sensations are felt, water refracts and ripples, boundless reflections of gently shifting skies attract and confuse.

Imbedded within the experience of *Deep Circularity* as well as within its contextual site situation, the installation responds to the Bergsonian concept of duration of indivisible movement through time, though importantly, it weaves the three primary thematic concepts of chaos, the sublime and duration into the fibre of the project as inextricably connected ideas. The intent of the installation was not to illustrate any single concept or set up a fully predictable effect or meaning, but rather to offer numerous ways

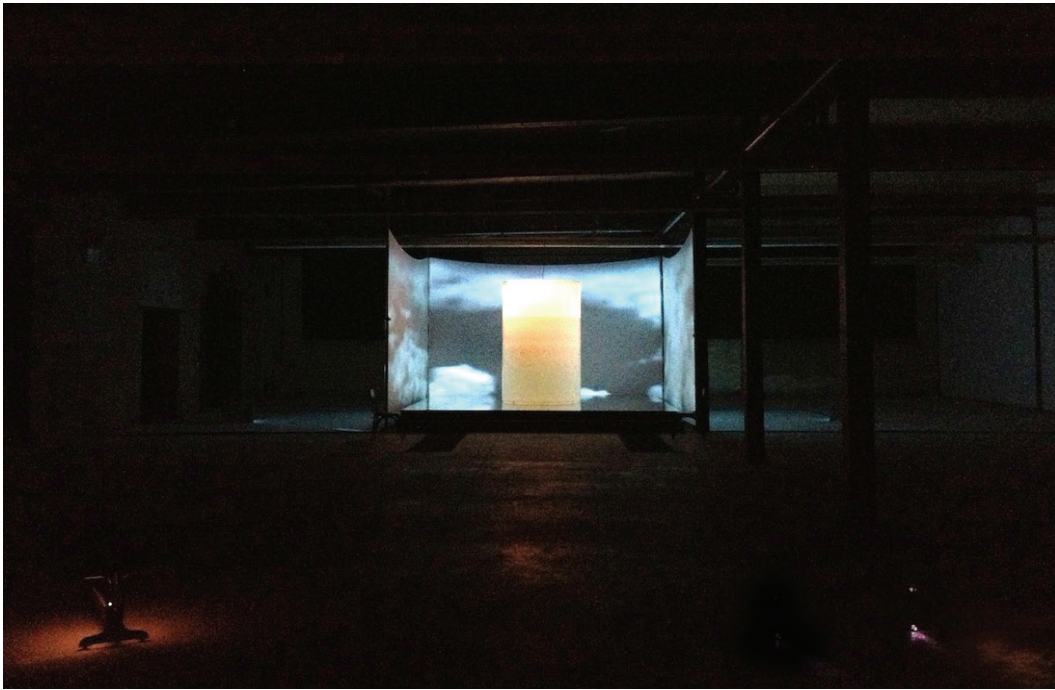


Figure 29. *Deep Circularity* installation within the Vine Avenue factory space.

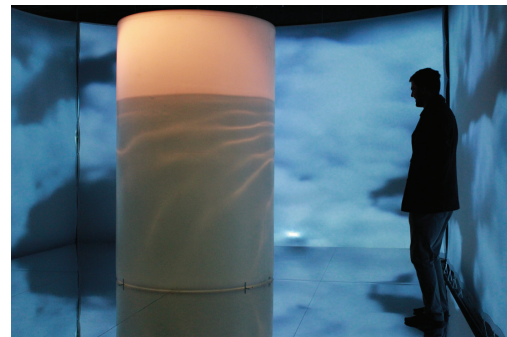


Figure 30. Unsettling and also alluring. Photos Karen Abel.

in which participants could channel the linkages and possibilities within the arc of both the personal and the larger evolutionary creative process.

Reflecting upon the ways in which the final installation transpired, affected, impacted, and ultimately linked back to the original intentions, is an illuminating exercise. The almost palpable yet elusive history of the Vine Avenue factory site that surrounded the primary installation set up a sense of compelling temporality through which one must first journey, in approximate darkness, to reach the beckoning light of the installation (Figures 29). Stretched between near-familiarity and strangeness, this initial level of mystery and suspension within a multi-faceted sense of time and place, enticed some people and made others apprehensive. So too did the experience of stepping onto the mirrored floor, be the reason chronic vertigo, the fear of shattering the mirror's fragility, or the disorienting reflections of the clouds within. The trepidation associated with the initial walk through the darkness combined with stepping onto the mirror confused and obfuscated the sensation of the floating floor at times, though most responded to the shifting ground with surprise and a quality of 'what next'?

While a few people made a rather quick circuit around the large, central vessel others took their time yet still didn't notice the correlation between their footsteps on the platform and the ripples of movement and light within the water tank, or assumed that the movement within the water tank was a projection of some kind. However, most viewer participants, fully immersed themselves within the experience and the range of sensory, perceptual and phenomenological levels of engagement and took delight upon discovering the water connection. The nervousness of the mirrored and shifting ground gave way as the slowly moving cloud world became something to get lost in, to float within or to meditate upon at the same time as taking in the sway under their feet in relation to the shifting mass of contained water (Figure 30).

An average engagement within the installation lasted approximately five or ten minutes, yet many stayed for sustained durations of 20 to 30 minutes; within this time they sat or lay down, closed their eyes, spoke quietly with other participants into space (Figures 31–32). Conversations followed about sensations within their bodies and within their minds, about feelings and sensations of connectedness ... to themselves, to the



Figures 31–32. Contemplative. Photos Karen Abel.

water within the large vessel, to the world as a whole. For some it prompted conversations they'd been having with themselves about life in general, both specific and in broader terms, or conjured references to iconic, mythological stories. The term 'spiritual' was mentioned often, referencing the glowing, oracle-like vessel with its raised dais/altar surround, and though only latently intentional, spirituality is contained within my intended reflection upon and investigation of life's mysteries. Some commented that their bodies continued to pulse for a long time afterwards, a result that could partially be predicted due to the perceptual effects employed within the installation, yet this also related to how a particular person was subjectively experiencing the moment phenomenologically and subsequently interpreting meanings on other levels. Thus, the installation yielded an amalgam of rich and complex experiences and considerations for myself as a creator-participant, and by their own expression, for many others as well. Meanings evolve as connections are made and different versions of an oblique narrative play out. Some of the considerations have had to do with those described earlier by Kant, GRAFT, Gleick, Kapoor, Bhabha, et al.—oscillations experienced on a physical, psychic and cognitive plane between order and disorder, attraction and repulsion, confusion and comprehension, hold and release—an experience that prompts you to reflect, to become aware of latent questions you have not yet asked, to contemplate what your presence means and how it plays within the larger narrative. *Deep Circularity* oscillates between one's presence and the experience of being *in* the situation, and one's active presence *upon* the situation. It becomes an environment of constant becoming as a circular relationship is struck between embodied and cognitive understanding, concurrent with the relationship that circulates between the meaning of the experience and the hapticity of the experience conveyed by the material elements therein. Bhabha speaks about a 'diagonal' event that is at once a meeting place of modes and meanings and a site of the contentious struggles of perspective and interpretation. It represents the ambivalence and vacillation of the material and affects a *mise-en-scene* (Bhabha, 1998, p. 175).

Behind the Scene

The scale of *Deep Circularity* is large and the subsequent fabrication presented

significant technical challenges bringing to mind the feasibility and experience of making this kind of work as a solo artist, and the degree to which one must bring in technical or production collaborators. For myself this is an interesting shift back into familiar territory, due to the years of collaborating on theatre and film projects. The primary difference, and it is an important one, is the contextual intent and the origins of the oblique narrative that ensues. I am the author—or at least the initiator—of a narrative that evolves and emerges as part of the process. On a technical level, I had the good fortune of assistance from Joe Madziak, a film colleague and construction manager *par excellence* who offered to help build the 16' x 16' platform. The existence of the substructure of inner tubes, combined with the considerable weight of 6600 lbs. of water bearing down in the centre, presented considerable challenges, and his skill and creative problem solving has been highly valuable. He suggested the inclusion of two metal plates bridged by a short metal shaft with the bottom edges slightly rounded, under the centre of the platform to help distribute the weight of the water (Figure 33). A company specializing in portable toilet rentals and other sorts of large-scale watering needs delivered the (empty) 950-gallon water tank from the Alberta shipping company, and subsequently filled it with water (Figure 34).

In the week leading up to the exhibition, some technical synching glitches arose, related to disparate resolutions in the three short-throw NEC projectors. This prompted a solution beyond the use of the TripleHead 2 Go splitter that would have effectively 'split' the single, wide-formatted cloud video to play on the three separate screen surfaces. I am thankful to the assistance and knowledge of my Principal Advisor, Patricio Davila, who helped remedy the problem; this included the loan of a computer tower capable of handling the Derivative TouchDesigner software solution (Figures 35–36).

I plan to continue to expand my personal knowledge of the realm of video and technical presentations so as to increase the confidence and versatility with which I can marry it to future work. However, relying on the range of assistance and services mentioned is common within the framework of [my] film/theatre design work, and as an aspect of my personal practice, represents the opening up of new, exciting possibilities rather than any loss of autonomy or authorship.

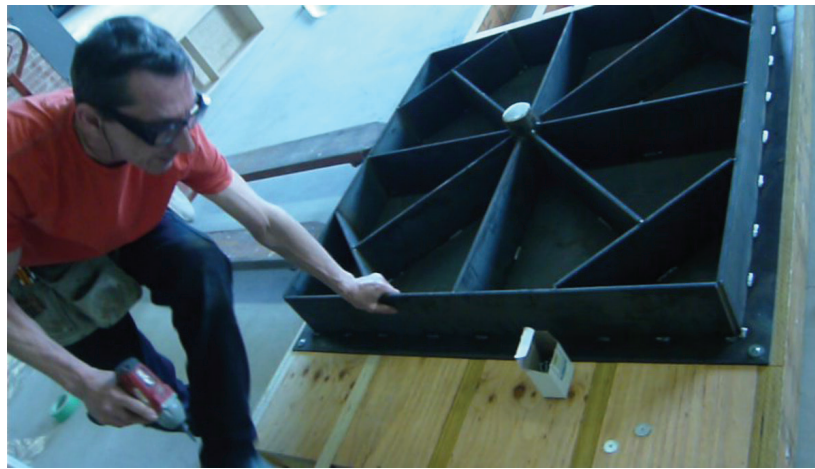


Figure 33. Metal plates help distribute the weight of 7000 lbs of water.



Figure 34. Water truck filling the tank with 700 gallons of water

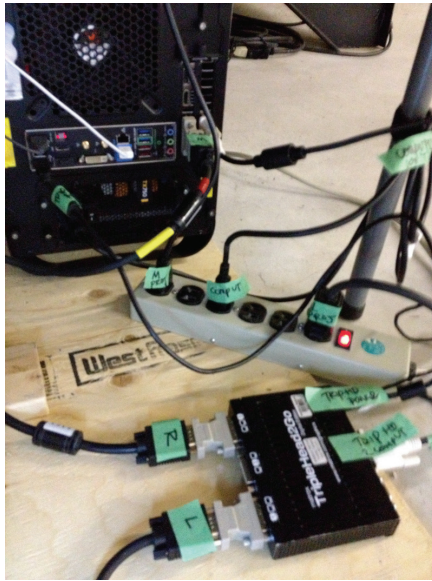


Figure 35. Tech hub with TripleHead 2Go.

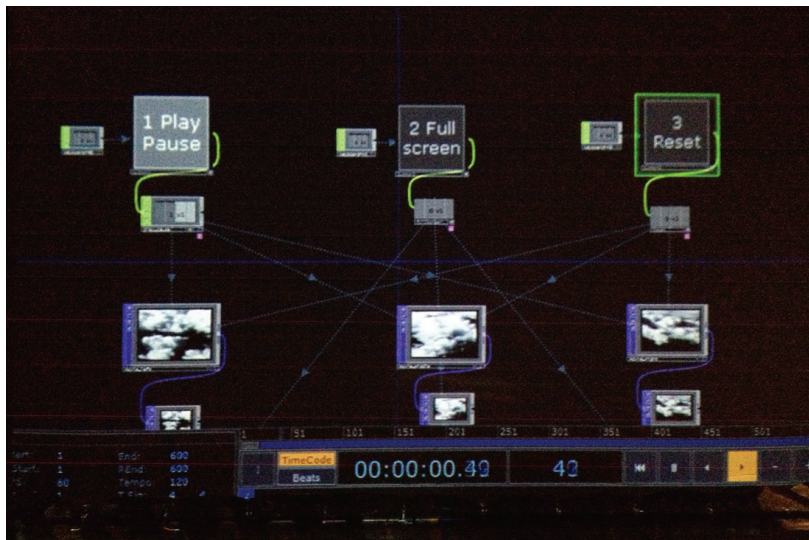


Figure 36. TouchDesigner program screen.

So What?

As I continue to integrate my design and visual art practice into an interdisciplinary praxis, my aim is to engage and activate shifts in cognitive perception and embodied phenomenological experience as a means of opening up new considerations and inviting reflection upon those possibilities. I want to tap into that vacillating overlap, the hold and the release between chaos and the sublime, between harmony and tension. My goal is to create oscillating movement between the evocative and the specific, between ‘ambiguity and recognition’, working in tandem towards compelling, phenomenological and conscious, aesthetic experience. *The Veil of Nature* and now my thesis project, *Deep Circularity*, strive to substantiate the ways that practice-based research can contribute significantly to the growing inquiry across many disciplines into how things work in unquantifiable, unpredictable ways.

This mode of inquiry is echoed in James Gleick’s *Chaos: The New Science*, in Juhani Pallasmaa’s *Hapticity in Time*, and in GRAFT’s *Distinct Ambiguity*, as well as others mentioned in the course of this paper where pertinent topics include the following: connective threads between seemingly disparate entities and across enormous time frames; order rising out of disorder; and embracing ambiguity and inconsistency as part of the process to gain intuitive and embodied knowledge. GRAFT, with full intent, creates ambiguous systems as part of their design practice because “the ambiguity gives birth to an enigmatic element in the work, which creates mystery. A certain incompleteness in the message creates a potential for individual completion, hence, an interaction between viewer and object. The problem remains irresolvable and therefore achieves a potentially eternal state of interestingness” (GRAFT, 2011, p. 17).

My praxis has been invigorated by a wide assortment of approaches, readings, and influences conjoining into a reflexive, process-based methodology. This has helped marry my visual and practice-based work with the theoretical and aided me in distilling and articulating the intent of my work, as well as the range of my inquiry. As Richard Ellman (1984) auspiciously paraphrases Oscar Wilde’s *Critic as Artist* essay, “art today contains thought, criticism, reflexiveness ... we are inheritors of all the previous ages ... the critical spirit and the world-spirit are one” (p. 253). Intuitive inquiry into complex and

inter-connected ideas propels my praxis and the reward is a profound, if oblique, new understanding. This, at least, is my intent. In essence, I start with a hunch going in, with the hope of being rewarded with another hunch going out.

ENDNOTES

One receives according to one's vessel

Latin Proverb

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