

# **Sound and Video Installation: Existence as a state of immanence.**

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I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'BM' in a stylized, cursive font.

Bruce Mowson, August 2008.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project aims to produce new material and understandings about audio/visual installation art and immanence. Immanence describes a subjective state that emphasises an embodied sense in time and space. It is explored in the project artworks by using materials and techniques that heighten one's sense of being a receptor – of seeing and hearing, rather than being an identity formed in language. The research works through the derivation of my notion of immanence from my environmental listening experiences. I have used artistic and philosophical material to aid and extend these concepts in relation to their investigation through the practical works.

The research is conducted using non-linear audio/visual technologies to create installation art works that elude narrative sequencing through generative techniques. Typically this involves a computer generated image and sound, projected into space in ways that seek to heighten the audience's sense of embodiment. These works are non-repetitive, and close attention to the materials reveals a structure of non-hierarchical variation, and of continual change. Philosophically, this emphasises immanent notions of the self as being in a state of becoming – of being simultaneously complete in the present moment yet continually in change.

The research explores and reveals a number of outcomes and shifts of position. At a technical level, a number of ways of combining generative sound and image are explored, and methods for creating variation within a continuum are implemented. A number of presentations of the works are made in installation spaces, and these document the tension between the framed format of video and the immersive and surrounding embodiment which is activated in installation practice.

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

In this research project I have engaged with two research questions. They are: “in what ways can immersive sound and video installation practices manifest existence as a state of immanence”; and “in what ways can poststructuralist theory situate this subjective state?” The research has been conducted through a series of audio/visual artworks, which are documented and discussed here with the intention of extending them through writing, enabling processes of reflection and interrogation. Throughout this exegesis I have set out and defined the project’s key terms, scope, aims, significance and methodology. I have also conducted a literature review that encompasses visual and sonic media, and have engaged with relevant theoretical and philosophical texts. The individual project works are discussed in detail, and a number of conclusions are drawn and commented upon in relation to the project outcomes.

### Immanence

Immanence comes from the Latin *immanare*, “to remain within”. I have linked immanence with embodiment and immersion, focussing on ways that space and time are subjectively experienced. It has been a significant topic of the philosophers Giles Deleuze and Martin Heidegger, and is related to the work of Henri Bergson. James Williams makes the following interpretation of immanence in philosophy:

Are the privileged relations in a philosophy of the form of a relation “to” something, or of a relation “in” something? If it is “to” something, it is a philosophy of transcendence. If it is “in” then it is immanence. Deleuze is radical about immanence, that is, his philosophy is to be thought strictly in terms of relations “in” (Williams 2005, p.126).

I have approached immanence from the point of view of aesthetic experience within a perceptual field, and questioned how art can situate the experiencing subject in time and in space.

### Sound and listening

My point of departure for exploring this subjectivity is my experiences of perceiving *within* a living environment, in sound: listening to the energies of various environments, from the

resonance of air in a space, to distant sonic presences such as traffic or crowds which announce the unseen, and from the heightened embodiment of singing, to the erosion of bodily boundaries in noise. Through the research I will be arguing for the way these experiences situate the subject *within* time and space, through connection with the exterior world. In the research, I have worked at encouraging the audience's senses within sound, video and space, and significant to this has been a study of phenomena that are inherent in those media. To this end I have meditated upon what it is to experience, for instance, sound:

We do not in a sense read painting, nor do we hear music with any of the attention reserved for oral recitations; this is why the more advanced and rationalized activity can also have its dream of the other, and regress to a longing for a more immediately sensory, wishing it could pass altogether over into the visual, or be sublimated into the spiritual body of pure sound. (Jameson 1990, p.2)

Though I would question Jameson's somewhat pejorative terminology and hierarchic positioning of activities, his words are evocative, and describe a subjective experience of sound that resonates in my practice and in the research artworks.

Following from this, the state of immanence that I am exploring would manifest in an embodied way, wherein one is not only aware of one's physical form, but also engaged in extending that bodily awareness, in concert with expanding one's awareness of the objects of their attention. A pragmatic example of this type of extension is a listening and awareness exercise conducted by composer Pauline Oliveros (1932-), as part of her Deep Listening™<sup>1</sup> practices, wherein the participants warm up through a series of stretches, before standing with their eyes closed, hands by their sides. They are told to focus their perception from a part of the body, say within the head, and for that perception to move down, transforming into an imagination of roots growing from their feet, deep down into the ground, travelling miles within the surface of the planet. Through this process, one's awareness becomes embodied and extended – the scope of embodied awareness is not limited to the body.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sensation and Embodiment**

The simple pleasure [of motion] is fully exploited in the roller coaster ride. It's a thrill of visceral movement, of being moved. But our soft, squelchy viscera don't need to be flung along wavy paths in order to be mobilised. It happens while sitting still at the

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<sup>1</sup> For further information go to The Deep Listening Institute at [www.deeplisting.org](http://www.deeplisting.org)

<sup>2</sup> This description is of a workshop presented at the Liquid Architecture Festival, Melbourne, 2007.

movies; in gut lurching fight scenes and car chases and in the less violent but no less physically wrenching scenes of love, sex, tragedy and soaring joy. (Ednie-Brown 2003, p.1)

The production of sensations is a key objective of the project works, though not through identification as Ednie-Brown describes above, but through the abstracted technique of touching the body by sound or the stimulation of the optic nerves by the panels of colored light. It is my contention that it is in sensation that we can become immanent, as the outside world calls to us, reminding us of its constant presence, and calling us from our reveries. In this project, sound, video, visual and installation components are to be assembled with the aim of manifesting immanence. These components are diverse, and as we shall see, putting them to this use reveals differing outcomes formed by their differing constituent matter and energies.

In this project I have worked principally with digital sound, focussing on the computer as a machine for generating audio. In this, I have been working with audio synthesis, utilising the flexibility and programmability of the computer as a synthesiser. My direct influences are minimalist composers working with drones, including Eliane Radigue, Tony Conrad and La Monte Young, and I have referred to their work in order to describe and differentiate my own. The discourse of active listening that I have referred to has been discussed by John Cage, Pierre Schaeffer and R. Murray Schafer, and I have derived my thoughts about sound with and in reaction to theirs, and also with a different emphasis upon the acoustic and embodying dimensions of sound as an installation art.

The type of video used in this project is abstract, with lineages to experimental film, structuralist and poststructuralist film and video art. Like sound, video is used here as a material that is formed by the artist, through plastic techniques of repetition, duplication and transformation, in contrast to the photographic imperatives of maintaining the representative content of a captured image. Colorfield, monochrome, minimalist and Op Art painting are also reference points for the imagery, though the project artworks use animation of the compositional elements in real-time, using digital and non-linear means of production.

In the research I am particularly interested in how media is deployed at a physical site of presentation, and how this is significant in offering the audience 'a state of immanence'. I describe the state of immanence as having an immersive quality: the meaning of immanence in Latin, 'to remain within', is similar to immersion's literal meaning of being within a fluid body,

such as being underwater. In order to explore this, I have engaged with installation art as a discourse that deals with the audience's being within an artwork. In the context of sound and video art, however, installation has often meant the adaptation of the exhibition site to best facilitate video projection and sound monitoring, focussing upon locating the video projector, speakers, seating and playback equipment within the space, often in a manner that emulates or recreates the cinematic apparatus. In the research I will deal with tensions that arise between the ways that cinematic and installation practices shape subjectivity through embodiment. As part of this, I will also address audio/visuality in terms of sound/image relationship theory, drawing upon the work of film and soundtrack theorist Michel Chion. Here I will focus upon the ways that the materiality of sound and video differ, and can be juxtaposed.

The contemporary positioning of my work is challenging, as I have elected to work in an area and with methods that are strongly informed by the reductive approaches of the 1960s and the post WW1 period of European Modernism, that sometimes risk appearing simplistic, but for which I will be arguing. In broad terms, my use of digital audio/video technology resembles contemporary practitioners such as Ulf Langheinrich, *Farmers Manual* and other practitioners from the Austrian synaesthetic video 'school'. On the other hand, the aesthetic I have used also resembles the video wallpaper found in the backgrounds of live television such as *Australian Idol*.<sup>3</sup> What might distinguish my practice from these is that I do not use the "synaesthetic" approach, which is the linking sound and video by shared data/control streams, as is a feature of the aforementioned Austrian School. My opposition to this practice is that it homogenises the potential difference of the audio and video, whilst my project is interested in exploring those differences. Conversely, I am not intending that my video appear as an aesthetic backdrop, but rather that it be the focus of attention. Indeed, my approach does draw upon the modernist notion of challenging the audience with its lack of ornament. This 'minimalism' is a conscious strategy, not designed to be didactic, but based upon ideas about materiality, and conviction in the affective value of the minimal approach.

In sonic terms, minimalism has been a significant influence upon the 1990s and 2000s wave of sound art, as chronicled by the U.K. based magazine *The Wire*. Contemporary sound practice is populated by many artists influenced by minimalism, including Ryoji Ikeda, Carsten Nicolai, Oren Ambarchi, Sunn O))) to name but a few of the highest profile practitioners. Again, however, the reference points for this research are in the 1960s, with practitioners I will later discuss.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Australian Idol 2007*, Channel 10, for an example of how video is used in conjunction with lighting to create pattern and texture in the studio set during live broadcasts.

Contemporary generative sound practice is perhaps best described as yet to come of age, and the works of Iannis Xenakis, a leading computer music composer of the twentieth century, could be argued to remain the high water marks with regard to the use of the generative processes of the computer in terms of articulation, vision and sophistication. Since Xenakis's time, however, the potential of real-time computational generation has been realised, and it is in this context of a computer creating material 'in the moment' that the sound and video of this project is produced. In distinction to purely generative techniques, process-based approaches in which the artist interacts with loops, chance procedures, sequences and visual data streams are arguably common in contemporary practice. The Max/MSP/Jitter software language, and similar packages including Supercollider and Pd are popular with emerging artists, and the near future may see an increase in visibility of the practices I am discussing.

### **Becoming and technology**

My art is initially produced on a computer. The quality that interests me about computers is their ability to be configured in the manner of a machine, to enact processes. By using the computer as a type of machine that generates sound and light in real time, using random variables rather than specifics, a continuum can be created, in which the artwork is never defined by what it is at any given moment, but by the evolving processes in which it is constituted. The audience member, then, can be offered the sensation of manifesting potential by the transition of virtual potential into the actual as performed by the machine. My intention in creating these indeterminate and ambiguous generated texts is aimed at opening up perception and awareness of life, rather than of aesthetics in art, and I will discuss this further in relation to my reading of poststructural philosophy.

My reading of poststructuralism has drawn upon the writing of Gilles Deleuze, and to a lesser extent Martin Heidegger. I have engaged principally with a reading of Deleuze as a radical empiricist, and with his notion of Aion and 'the instant'. In Deleuze I find a philosophical articulation of a consistency that I attribute to life, and with which I engage in my art. By this I mean to say that I engage with the external world, but do not seek to represent it. Rather I seek to shape the material with which I work, so as to reveal rather than form it. I feel I have arrived at a similar place as Deleuze through a different modality, and that his writing speaks well of what I find there.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study is the way it positions subjectivity as a state of immanence, found in aesthetics and sound, and through practicing art returning it to subjectivity within the world. My intention here is to engage the subject's manner of being, or becoming, in the world. Jameson speaks of something similar from the context of critiquing global capitalism:

The commodity sheds its independent "being" and intrinsic qualities and comes to be an instrument of commodity satisfaction... the American tourist no longer lets the landscape "be in its being" as Heidegger would have said, but takes a snapshot of it. (Jameson 1990, p.11)

What Jameson speaks of here is an intertwining of sense perception and consumer consumption, in which the object is valued over the experience. Australian academic Warwick Mules discusses a similar situation by closely linking immanence with aesthetics, pointing out that an immanent interweaving of observer and the object of their attention is integral to the original meaning of aesthetics – aesthesis, or "of the senses". He also proposes that modern aesthetics has used sensory experience as "merely" the starting point for a process that is fulfilled by reflection (Mules, 2002). Following from this, my practice-based research into immanence investigates how sensory experience can be situated as the site, rather than pathway, to meaning.

In this project I am using technologies to explore immanence, and as I discuss in the project work descriptions, have engaged with diverse fields of music, sound installation art, video art and cinema, abstract painting practice and installation art, around the key terms of sensation and embodiment. In the discussion of individual projects, I address the specific ways that I have engaged with the contexts of these practices, as I discuss how they might be used in relation to the research questions, particularly the manifestation of immanence. I argue that in doing this, I am offering the audience an experience that is of, but not restricted to aesthetics, and which proposes a different subjective engagement with the world to that described above by Jameson.

### SCOPE, AIMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Throughout this project, I will be arguing for a connection between immanence, understood as 'being in time', and sound. Sound, heard acoustically, is only and always 'in time', and following from this it might be said that sound manifests an immanent subjectivity. Further to this, I am particularly interested in how sound might offer the subjects a powerful sense of their own embodiment within a site. In this discussion, I am responding to recent moves to open up sound to other contexts and spaces, as has been seen in the increased appearance of sound installation art and sound sculpture in visual art settings. Important survey shows such as *Sonic Boom* (London, 2000), *Sonambiente 2* (Berlin 1996/2006) and *Sonic Process* (Paris, 2002) have featured artists seeking alternatives to composition and performance for sound works, and often these incorporate interactivity and site-specificity as strategies for extending the audiences engagement with sound, and the textuality of sound itself. As Philip Samartzis argues, installation is a contested form for sound (Samarztis 2007, pp.43-4), and one that is somewhat in formation as galleries and the visual art systems are asked to accommodate its presence, either for sound installations or for the sonic component of video installations. This research is part of the working through of some salient issues about the textuality of sound in that context. Further to this, I am specifically questioning sound's immersive capacity.

In addition to arguing for the significance of establishing and exploring links between immanence, subjectivity and sound, I wish to engage both visual media, principally video, and visual space, through installation art. It is my intention that by working across these disciplines, juxtaposing materials and affects, I will be able to test and report on the scope and limitations of those media, in relation to a range of outcomes constructed in the practical works.

My engagement with sound, video and space, and the way these are framed by the research, has a strongly material character, and is intended to argue for the importance and potential of materialist practice. My reading of Deleuze argues a philosophical position that can be used to interpret the project works, and is one that engages with art and philosophy, and also 'life': the primary text here is Deleuze's final work, the essay *Immanence: a life* (Deleuze 2005). My objective then has been to work with and think through art, creating machines for becoming, which affirm a way of being in time and space.

## RESEARCHER'S SPEAKING POSITION

I describe my objective as a practitioner and researcher as diversifying and expanding the inputs to my practice, be they philosophical readings, technological processes, and approaches to art practice. In order to do this I focussed upon engagement rather than critique. As Elizabeth Grosz points out “critique is a negative exercise... it is an attempt to remove obstacles to one’s position” (cited in Kontturi 2007, p. 255). In my research I have worked to avoid what I describe as an input-output/artist-critic research model, in which the artist positions herself or himself as creator of input that is fed to the critic for interpretation. The issue here is the potential for self-obstruction and feedback, as the artist struggles to keep each ‘hat’ separate, second-guessing his or her creativity, and applying the often intuitive creativity of artistic production to the analytic role of the critic. Instead, it has been my intention, as an artist researcher, to engage with inputs in the manner described above, proceeding intuitively, logically and positively. Grosz puts this position well, proposing, “the way in which the new world is created... is precisely through revelling in the affirmation of the strengths that art gives us” (ibid, p225). Following from this, I position myself as an artist researcher as positively re-territorialising existing territories in an experimental way.

In my research, that re-territorialising has occurred through engaging with texts across film, music and musicology, philosophy, literature, listening theory and phenomenology and my own experience, juxtaposing and incorporating them through the works and exegesis. In this subtle distinguishing of negative and positive processes, I am pursuing an alternative to means-end models of production, and affirming notions of becoming, which are significant to my research, in which knowledge as well as existence is always in process.

## METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

The making of art and the writing about art are processes and materialities that at first might appear separate, but are densely interwoven in the research process. What I wish to draw attention to here is the complexity of interrelations in the research process, which includes experimenting with technologies and materials, assembling versions, editing and reconfiguring works, thinking, discussing, reading, writing and imagining. Throughout this exegesis I have turned to the geographic metaphor of 'the territory' in order to site my research. It is my intention, then, that this written exegesis, together with the project works, describes the territory the research has traversed, by marking out its key terms and situating it within areas of practice and theory. The exegesis itself is a machine for achieving this description, for its assembly is a way of thinking through my practice as much as my practice is a way of thinking through art.

Following from this, the use of juxtaposition is a poststructuralist methodological position adopted in the project. In her catalogue essay entitled *Juxtaposition*, Elizabeth Grierson proposes the term as meaning "to lay side by side", and signifying co-existence, and explaining that this approach opposes the Hegelian dialectical model of knowledge production, which uses the conflict of ideas, between thesis and anti-thesis, in order to arrive at synthesis.

Poststructuralist critique of this process identifies the suppression and loss of minor terms as a highly problematic outcome of synthesis. Conversely, poststructuralism has been concerned with maintaining the minor, by thinking through juxtaposition, which allows difference to coexist and to inform its neighbouring terms (Grierson 2008, p. 8-9).

In creating the project works I have assembled sound, video and architectural/spatial/sculptural components, not with the intention of resolving them, but in order to generate complex texts, with the objective of achieving the project aims described in the prior chapters. I have used juxtaposition as a key technique of the research, and it is one that has emerged from the multidisciplinary of my artistic practices themselves. Here I am referring to the complexity created by the simultaneous use of sound, video and installation techniques. My thinking about the creative processes appropriate to this complexity are indebted to discourses around sound/image relationships (Brophy 2008, Chion 1994) wherein juxtaposition is discussed with close reference to interdependent materiality, affective capacity and the textuality of sound and moving image.

To describe how this juxtaposition of media might function, I turn to a passage from philosopher Michel Foucault, who finds in a passage by Jorge Luis Borges “a certain Chinese Encyclopedia entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*”, in which animals are divided into:

(a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification (i) those that tremble as if they are mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance. (Foucault 2001, p.10)

Foucault's reaction was “laughter and astonishment at this taxonomy which demonstrates at the same time the “exotic charm of another system of thought”” and “the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*” (ibid). In my discussion of the project works, I have described how the affects of the different media I have used are of differing orders, and how the thinking described above is useful in understanding how they are connected.

This returns to my objectives, of manifesting existence as a state of immanence, and I regard this as manifesting conditions for becoming, rather than identifying a type of being. Deleuze articulates his philosophy in terms such as flow, event and transition, and I have found these appropriate to describing and thinking about my research. The type of motion that I am describing is one of coincidence and contingency, and also of improvisation and necessity, and is a ‘hands on’ or heuristic process, in which knowledge is the result of tracking and reporting on a dynamic, creative process.

## LITERATURE: VISUAL/SONIC/TEXTUAL

In the script to the film *Adaptation* (Kauffman, 2002), a feature film starring Meryl Streep and Nicolas Cage, Orlan, playing the part of author Susan Orlean, ingests a drug extracted from a rare orchid, and in doing so depicts a state of immanence, albeit in a theatrical fashion. She becomes absorbed by surroundings – the view of stars through her window; the smears of oil her forehead leaves on the window; the sensation of brushing her teeth; the close detail of the carpet; the dial tone of the telephone. She calls the operator, asking about the musical note in the dial tone, and moves seamlessly to propositioning him, and when he declines, dials her friend Laroche. Laroche and her do indeed make love. Afterward she says, “I’d never had sex before. Not like that, anyway. I wasn’t guilty about my marriage, or fantasizing about someone else. I was just there. Alive. Adapting. You will not take this away. I won’t go back.” Orlan does not wish to live there – she wishes to live *here*, and only in the *here*, forever. Her condition is characterized by immersion in the present, a sense of embodiment displayed in an exaggerated attention to sensory stimuli and an acceptance of indeterminacy in her reactive but interactive responses to stimuli. This last character is seen in the horizontality of her valuations of phenomenon. Carpet and lovemaking receive equal attention, and while Orlan at first appears uncommitted in her sliding from one phenomenon to the next, she is in fact very committed, as is seen in the way that each phenomenon receives her full attention. Within this context, then, immanence is manifested in an idealised, imaginary way, which nonetheless communicates something about the topic.

The engagement with one’s immediate surrounds is central to the thinking of writer, naturalist and spiritualist Henry David Thoreau (1817-62). Thoreau was a pantheist, a believer of an immanent God that is in the world. One of his most important texts, *Walden: or, Life in the woods*, is a journalistic and pragmatically philosophical account of his experiment of living alone in semi-rural seclusion for two years and two months. Thoreau spent his time in the woods around his cabin, exploring for hours every day, watching the behavior of flora and fauna over many months. In *Walden*, he argues passionately for the richness of his experience, and bitterly against the bureaucratized lives, or perhaps he would say living deaths, of his neighbors.

In the opening sentences of the text, Thoreau states that he will, against the conventions of the day, be writing in the first person, for there is no other subject that he knows so well. Here

Thoreau locates himself, and particularly his own perceptions, as the source of authority in the text in an empirical fashion, yet at no point does he extend these to generalizations of the human condition. Thoreau uses his knowledge to construct arguments against the consumerism emerging with the industrial revolution. Notable in Thoreau's text is his opposition to hierarchies of being and perceptions: the observation of a plant over months is not designed to gain mastery over the plant for cultivation or exploitation, but to see what knowledge is offered. There is a sense of intuition in his actions, and Thoreau embarks upon his experiment speculatively and in response to the changing, industrializing conditions about him. The relationship of Thoreau's text to this project is that while *Walden* seeks to describe and explore the author's experience of immanence, the works of this project seek to manifest it. And while the natural environment is the site of Thoreau's immanence, I have attempted to locate that affect in audio/visual installation.

Interestingly, American composer La Monte Young (1935-) may have experienced something of the environment that Thoreau chronicles, growing up in a log cabin. Tony Godfrey, in his text *Conceptual Art*, notes Young as an originator of both Minimalism and the Fluxus movement, with his 1958 work *Trio for Strings*. The work itself comprises three notes, one per instrument, and the instruction "to be held for a long time" (Godfrey 1998, p.101). Young was arguably the leader of the group called the *Theatre of Eternal Music*, and referred to as *The Dream Syndicate* by violaist and group member Tony Conrad (1940-). Their history is long and contested, but their influence is extraordinary and deep – viola player John Cale's sound in *The Velvet Underground* is unique to that group, which in turn became one of *the* most influential bands of rock music. Their relevance to a discussion of immanence can be seen in Conrad's description of their music.

In his revisionist history of Minimalist music, *Early Minimalism: Volume One*, Conrad described the group as "working 'on' the sound from 'inside' the sound" (Conrad 2002, p.20), and says "We lived inside the sound, for years" (Conrad 2002, p.24). The group created music around extraordinarily sustained notes, over extended periods, at high volume. Conrad's statements describe a spatial-temporal location inside the sound both literally and psychologically, as the musicians focused upon being *within*. This within, however, is a double within, as the music is also inside of them. This immanent relation of music to audience and musicians is put well by Walt Whitman, who comes very close to the elusive description of music, saying "all music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments." (Conrad 2002, p.43).

The sound Conrad describes is immersive, due to the increased ability of audio amplification to saturate a space in the early 1960s. The group worked with electrical amplification at a time when amplifiers were becoming more powerful and more affordable, and their use of drones allowed for higher volume levels, due to the technical handling of a sustained, rather than transient, audio signal: an amplifier can create a louder ongoing volume level through drone than any other shape of sound that can be input. Increasing this volume, and further physicalising the sound, is the phenomenon by which sustained notes can saturate the acoustic space in which they are heard, and at a much lower volume level than other sounds, with the result that immersive affects are enhanced.

The compositions they played centered around the extended intonation of single or dual notes, and Conrad explains that he performed a 'fifth' interval with the singer, but after playing this note for a month or two, suggested to the group that he sometimes play another note (Conrad 2002, p.21). The question of notes and intervals was highly significant to these musicians, who held extensive discussions around any proposed new notes. What is significant to my research is the extremity of attention paid to the material in question: the group slowly moved toward tuning systems that vary from Western standard tuning by as little as a few percentage points of a frequency. Their enterprise records a process of increasing attention, leading to increasing perception, which reveals more phenomenal material, which in turn demands further attention. Further to this, their focus upon so few sounds suggests to me that they were less interested in expression through sound, and more interested in something they perceived in the sound, performing a practical phenomenological survey, not articulated in philosophy but in their music.

The way that the group configured sound, through composition and in performance, might allow them to be re-conceptualized as a machine for producing affect along the lines of the state of immanence that I am investigating here. Whilst the frequencies performed were selected, the durations over which each player sustained a note was based upon maximizing that duration, rather than sequencing with other players. This produces a texture of indeterminacy in the music, as changes of bowing direction, or the ending and beginning of sung notes create small accents. Such music lacks a pulse, or central tempo against which time is delineated. In this way, the music is detached from a human reference point, as the audience is unable to entrain, or fall into time with the music. Instead the listener is presented with a complexity. It is this type of temporality and texture that is explored in my project works *Barney and Melting Moments*.

### **Immanence and listening to the natural world.**

In the midst of my research project, while walking along the Merri Creek, a nature reserve near my home, I experienced a compelling version of the state of immanence. The experience was characterised by a feeling of absorption with my surroundings, and on reflection seemed augmented by the complexity of forms and phenomena produced by the natural structures within which I moved. Here I wish to explain my position in regard to nature, and how it does not posit a philosophical dualism between nature and the artificial.

My previous research in recording and shaping sounds has led me to the understanding that the natural world offers a great variety of sounds, often presenting sounds that are not heard in artificial sound, and surprisingly, offering examples of sounds I had previously considered to be only achievable through artificial means. Phasing, for instance, is an effect produced when a sound is duplicated, slightly altered in speed, and replayed together with its original, and has been a popular use of recording technology. I have heard it produced, however, at a waterfall in a rocky gorge, by standing near the rocky (acoustically reflective) stone face, with the white noise produced by the water crashing into the pool being heard both directly from the fall in one ear, and also from the reflection from the wall through the other. The slight delay caused by the difference in distances between the sound arriving directly and in reflection produces phasing effect. Experiences such as these have led me to the belief that the natural, rather than artificial world offers a greater variation of sounds, through the complexity of processes at work in the world, when compared to the process of a human. I have extended this thinking into my studio practices, leading me to employ reductive art-working practices that allow the complexity within materials to come forth. For example, in manipulating sounds in the process of composition, one uses tools that I believe ultimately homogenise the result.

This approach to creating forms informed my observation and reflection upon how the Merri Creek environment stimulated the sense of immanence – the complexity of forms and elements, derived from the multitude of forces acting within the environment, led to a vast amount of data being available to perception. The principal way that I adapted this understanding was to find ways to create complex, even chaotic processes, in the formation of artworks. As I have intimated previously, this decision was not based upon romantic notions of nature, but upon phenomenological evaluations of the environment. I have discussed the ways that I put this thinking into practice in the discussions on project works.

## KEY THEORISTS AND ARTISTS

In this chapter I will discuss how my notion of existence as a state of immanence has arisen from active environmental listening practices. I also briefly relate this to Heidegger's phenomenology and Deleuze's radical empiricism, his philosophy of Aion, and of pure immanence. These philosophical reference points have assisted me to become clearer about my listening experiences, by way of addressing them from a different perspective. They are used here to contextualise my thoughts within a broader intellectual discourse. In most cases, I have undertaken these philosophical readings subsequent to the production of artworks, and it retrospectively that I use these thoughts. At the end of the research process, however, both works and thoughts come together in a point of departure for further practice led research.

### Listening

The approach to active listening that informs the project derives from two dialogues central to sound art practice. The first of these is the phenomenology of listening developed by Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1955), the French born originator of the art form 'musique concrète', which is based upon making music with recorded sounds rather than from instruments. In his writings about musique concrète, Schaeffer developed 'Acousmatics', a phenomenology of sounds which are heard without visible sources, and that includes four modes of listening (Schaeffer 2004, p.76). The first of these is "pure listening", in which a sound is listened to without its visual counterpart, which serves to isolate what is sonically present. The second is listening repetitiously, in which a sound is repeatedly audited to increase our familiarity with it as a content of our perception. The third is "variations in listening", wherein the auditor, listening repetitiously, also becomes aware of the variations in listening introduced by their own perception. Lastly, the "variations in signal" that can be introduced by replaying the sound in different ways: in parts, at differing speeds and through different filtrations, which allow us to be familiar with the sound in extension. The procedures described here are basic techniques of listening that are useful to those working with sound, in the capacity of composer, designer or engineer, affording them perhaps more extra sensitivity and awareness than they previously possessed. As part of this training, the listener often becomes more aware of their sonic surrounds, by virtue of paying attention to the sounds that are in general filtered out of conscious attention. In this way, the capacity to be 'in' the world via sound may be enhanced.

The second of these dialogues is the practices of *soundwalking*, formalised by Canadian composer, writer and theorist R. Murray Schafer (1933-). Schafer originated the *soundscape* genre of composition, based around active listening experiences and recordings made in natural environments. Sound walks are formally organised around walking through a geographic territory that is defined by *sound marks* – significant and/or interesting sounds heard within that space, such as fog horns, species of birds or waterfalls. Schafer's discourse contained a political positioning, strongly opposing sound that he considered noise pollution, such as aircraft, cars, heavy industry, air-conditioning and other "harsh" impositions on the natural soundscape (Schafer 1994). Schafer's position of distinguishing the natural and artificial is inimical to my own, but his ideas about listening in the world do provide a background to my position.

**Embodiment: visual and sonic space.**

Visual space structure is a production of the Western civilization created by Greek phonetic literacy, and is space seen via the mind's eye when abstracted from the other senses: infinite, divisible, extensible, and featureless; connected, homogeneous and static. Acoustic space is the natural space of nature in the raw, inhabited by non-literate people. It is non-homogeneous and discontinuous; its resonant and interpenetrating processes are simultaneously related with centres everywhere and boundaries nowhere (McLuhan 2004, p.71).

McLuhan's ethnography is taken out of context here, and his mention of non-literate peoples appears to be generalised. However, I have used this quote as part of an exploration of ways that sonic space might offer a different subjectivity to visual space, and how this might be useful in exploring immanence. The spatiality that McLuhan describes is one that I find useful in communicating something of Heidegger's phenomenology, and the way that my reading of it has informed my thinking.

**Heidegger**

Heidegger's role in my research has been a shifting of perception of the way I am located in the world, and in a differing conception of how the world is constituted. I have found Heidegger's phenomenology to be highly sympathetic to a sonically oriented perception of the world, perhaps because of his interrogation of forces and entities that are not comprehensible through the visible, but only through questioning the relations of things within the world. Rather than the

centred, Cartesian model described above by McLuhan, of continuous and contiguous visual space, Heidegger's space is similar to the sonic space, discontinuous and non-homogeneous. Whilst the term embodiment is not explicit *per se* in philosopher Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1926), many relevant questions and propositions that are related to it may be found there. My reading of Heidegger reveals a way of re-interpreting being in the world as becoming in the world, through his observation of the dynamic energies and forces present in it. For example, a broken piece of equipment stands forth within the environment, calling attention to itself (Heidegger 1962, p. 105). In this way of being, the perceiving entity and the equipment are part of the same connected structure of existence, and this is subtly different from the notion that they are separate entities. Heidegger's thinking can be described in terms of his dismantling of the metaphysics of presence, in which he argues against being having transcendent 'beingness', and for being's construction within the contingencies of life (White 1996) as a becoming.

### **Deleuze**

Empiricism "holds that knowledge derives from the senses alone, and stresses the importance of observation and experience in interpretation rather than theoretical constructs." (D'Alleva 2005, p.12)

My artworks might be read in relation to empiricism, and by using texture, excessive repetition, and immersion via loudness and visual saturation I have sought to provoke "observation and experience", rather than references to theoretical constructs. I have also used techniques of abstraction, including negation, displacement and reduction of figurative signification in order to frustrate the audience's processes of reading and interpretation such as through the application of theoretical constructs. A question that I have formed about my work, however, is whether there can be a form of empiricism more acute than that defined above, wherein meaning might be located in the sensory itself. To explore this further, then, let us return to the phrase "knowledge derives from the senses alone" in the quote above. Here we can see an inference that knowledge is *derived* through a transmission process, from the artwork, through the senses, to the audience.

As an artist, I do not set out to create meaning, *per se*, but rather set out to 'make art'. As artist-researcher Lesley Duxbury remarks "the reasons for making [art] work are many and various, however it generally materialises through "doing", through a physical engagement with materials and often reveals the unexpected" (Duxbury 2007, p.17). The question I put to myself as an artist is: who creates the meaning in my own work, myself as the artist or myself as the

audience for my own work? Taking this further, I have tried, as an artist, to situate myself in the same place as the audience, and have done so via strategies that modify and erode my presence in the art-making process. Here I am not suggesting that I am not responsible for my works, but rather I have focussed upon working intuitively *with* the media to create sensations. The artworks I have made have tended to be processed by the question of how can I present this sensation, which I locate in the medium? My objective here, though, is not to establish the nature of the medium, *per se*, but to render sensations from it for the audience. Therefore, I have set out to create machines for abstract sensation. The value of making machines is that whilst writing a book or recording a piece of music or producing a film will produce abstract sensations, a machine will emphasise process.

The functionality that I am ascribing to my work can be further clarified and explored by again returning to the D'Alleva's definition of empiricism, specifically the phrase; "stresses the importance of observation and experience in interpretation rather than theoretical constructs" (D'Alleva 2005, p.12). Here we find an overtly oppositional construction, of "observation and experience" against "theoretical constructs", referring to the valuation of perception over theoretical reflection. There is, however, a covert opposition in the text, wherein meaning is located in interpretation, whether it be based upon observation and experience or theoretical constructs, rather than sense experience itself. As I have said previously, my work emphasises the sensory experience and questions about how meaning might be positioned within that experience, and it is for this reason that I now turn to philosopher Giles Deleuze's ideas of empiricism.

In *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1969, pp. 61-5), Deleuze outlines a form of radical empiricism through his division of time into two types: Chronos, the eternal past and future; and Aion, the moment of the present. In contrast to D'Alleva's interpretation of true empiricism given previously, Deleuze is working toward a radical empiricism, which rather than favouring the interpretation of knowledge gained through experience, points toward an existence of pure experience in time, superseding secondary processes of interpretation. Suggesting that Aion is infinitely subdivisible, but never actually infinite, and contrasting this to the notion that the instant, by running through all of time, is also the largest category, inclusive of all instants along the line of Chronos, Deleuze draws attention to the instant of the present as an important site. It is this conception that can be used in the thinking through of aesthetics and aesthetic experience.

The Deleuzian sense of becoming, a self in constant motion, can be contrasted to ontological notions described as being: becoming as suggestive of process and change, being alluding to an eternal essence. What is significant about this as a philosophical position is that Deleuze is not arguing that one can actually exist in the pure present, but rather that one might work toward existing in it (Ramey 2006, p.96). I have used this notion to argue for the value of the aesthetic in art, as appealing to the senses in the first instance. This is the underlying logic of this project's artworks and is drawn from reflections on listening itself. It is a conception of 'the world' that promotes art as a site for experiencing the instant of the present as we slip through it.

### **Existence and the Plane of Immanence**

Deleuze has described the site of these formations as a plane of composition and a plane of immanence, the site of pure immanence (Deleuze 2006, p.27). Whilst that which exists forms on this plane, he differentiates it from consciousness, pointing out that consciousness is *of* an object *by* a subject, and this distorts the plane of immanence by stepping outside of it. We cannot, therefore, talk of immanence as pure consciousness, for this makes an object of consciousness. Deleuze says that we can speak of and thus access pure immanence only as A LIFE. This life is not the life of the individual, but rather something else, which he describes through a quotation from Charles Dickens *Our Mutual Friend* (1989):

A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found, as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest sign of life. Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this wicked man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviours turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death. (Deleuze 2004, p.28)

Here we can see life divorced from individuality, and in this way conceive of a life as a singularity, distinct from transcendent relations to other beings, and immanent within the possibilities and actualities that compose that life. Deleuze's pure immanence of "a life" is significant to the first research question of this project: "in what ways can immersive sound and video installation practices manifest existence as a state of immanence". I have worked with materials to create artworks that manifest a state of immanence as

existence, not as immanent objects, but machines or processes that create conditions under which immanence might be perceived and experienced. In the project work I have configured the computer as a machine that generates sound and light (video) in real time, based on random processes and ranges of variables. In doing this, I am creating a continuum in which the artwork is never defined as a form, but by the processes in which it is constituted.

## 8

**PROJECT WORKS: INTRODUCTION**

Over the course of the research I have documented six practical projects, undertaken at the rate of roughly one for each of the six semesters. The works sit within the larger picture of my practice as a gradual transition of working as a composer with sound to engaging with audio/visual media in a gallery setting. Immediately prior to this period of research I had undertaken a Masters of Art by research entitled *Current and Emergent Practices in Sound Installation art* (2004), which featured audio focussed installations; *The Shower* (2002-4), a 'walk-in' interactive sound/architecture artwork; *Pink Balls* (2004), an illusory video and surround sound work, and; *The End of the Tunnel is now approaching* (2004), a public-space sound installation work with existential puns. During this period I also served as Artistic Director to the Liquid Architecture International Sound Art Festival, and with the M.A., this was a period of high activity and public visibility.

My activity during the PhD research has a more meditative quality as I have sought a rhythm of working in which artworks emerge in the studio in a more controlled fashion. It must be said, however, that a sense of overarching agency as the creator of works is elusive if not illusory. In the *Dialogues*, Giles Deleuze says, "the abstract does not explain, but must be explained" (Deleuze 1977, p.vii), and this is an apt description for my artistic process, as the art emerges through working and I have used the exegesis as a way of interrogating the works in hindsight, which in turn informs works to come. What is remarkable in the artistic process is the implacable emergence of themes and concerns, and I have often found myself discovering aspects of works that accord closely with ideas of which I became conscious after the time of production.

At the beginning of the research I embarked upon learning the software language Max/MSP/Jitter, which I have subsequently used in several of the works. This software enabled the construction of non-linear audio/visual work at a more sophisticated and articulated level that had been previously available to me, particularly in regard to the simultaneous use of sound and video. During the course of the research, then, I have undertaken extensive self-training in using that software, and whilst it underpins the works, I have not documented this in detail. In contrast to my engagement with digital audio/video, I decided to delimit the degree to which I engaged in installation practice. As I will be discussing, the suitability of architectural and construction practices to the sonic aspect of my practice is an outcome of the research. During

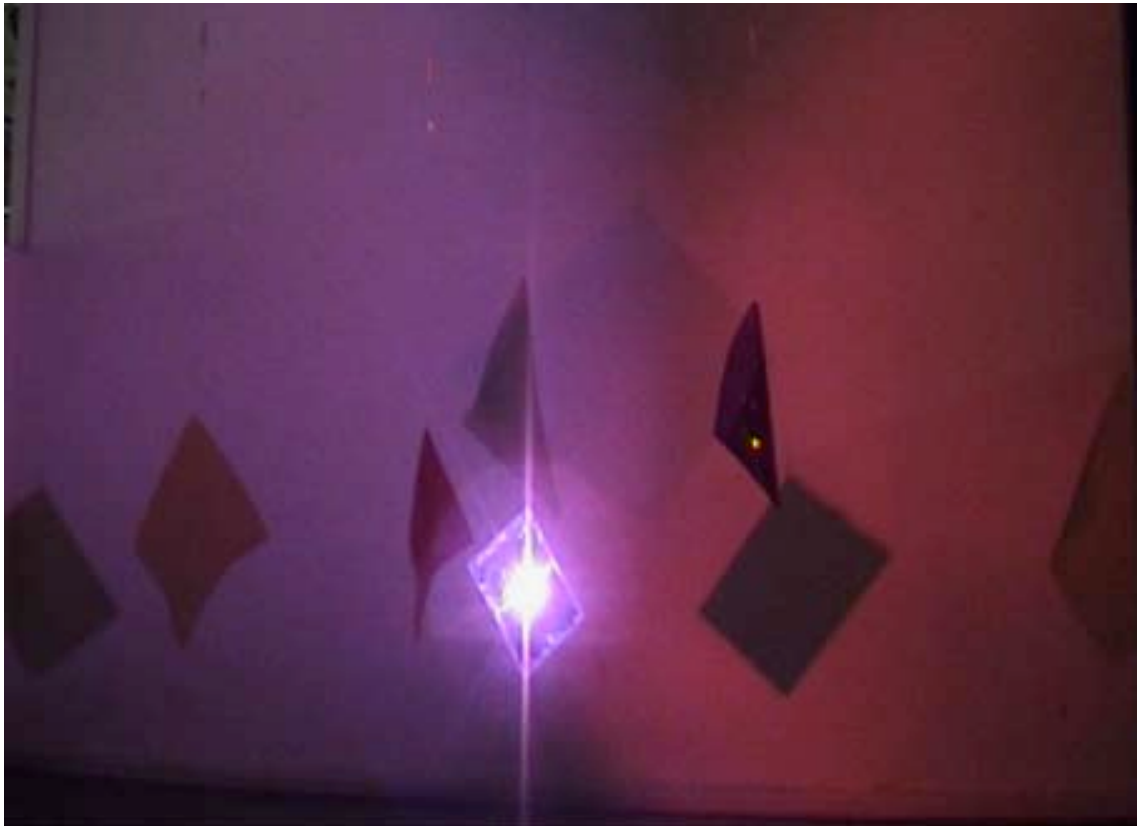
the research I decided to exclude the pursuit of this in order to complete the original scope of the project in a timely fashion. The sculptural underpinnings of installation practice require a research and development period of their own.

I have worked systematically through practices of installing sound and video artworks, composing them with the paradigm of the machine in mind, in order to explore abstraction and immanence. Though I have worked in a visual art context, my work proceeds from a close engagement with sound and sound culture, where materiality is a central concern,<sup>4</sup> in contradistinction to the degree that it is de-emphasised in some areas of visual arts criticism such as that of the influential North American *October* group.<sup>5</sup> As I have previously discussed, I have sought to undertake a philosophical reading that opens up aspects of my experience of being in the world, particularly in relation to sound and listening, and to manifest this through the artworks discussed herein.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Sonic Process* (Van Assche, 2002) for an overview of contemporary approaches to sound that deal extensively with the material qualities of the medium.

<sup>5</sup> See Rosalind Krauss's introduction to *Voyage of the North Sea* (2000) for a description of the ambivalence that materialism encounters in the visual arts in the post 1960s New York school of criticism that the *October* Journal inhabits.

**PINK SLIDES**

*Pink Slides* (2005), installation view. Mirrors, swivels, fishing line, custom slides, slide projectors, lighting gels. Dimensions variable.

**Introduction and Description.**

*Pink Slides* is an audio/visual installation work of variable scale. In this work I was making a sensory survey of the affects of light and motion in contrast to related video phenomena. Motion and kinetic energy were key elements of this multi-component work, which can be understood as an aesthetic machine comprised of sound, lights, mirrors and lighting gels. It comprises a minimal music soundtrack in accompaniment to the visual elements depicted above and in the support material. The work, never formally exhibited, was constructed in a project studio space and experienced by a few art school students and staff. This work shows the trial and error process of research, wherein material ideas persist across iterations. For example, mechanics

in this work, such as the suspension and rotation of objects, reappear at other key points in the research.

The piece is based around reflectors and lenses hanging from the ceiling. Though the movement of individual components is to some extent predictable, the events caused by interactions, such as light glinting from mirrors and gels, or shadows passing one another on the walls, tend to come as surprises born of complexity. The visual materials include color gels (sheets of colored polycarbonate used in theatrical lighting), mirrors, slides and slide-projectors, swivels and fishing line. The set out for the work includes slide projectors with colored slides, positioned to create a broad yet intense wash of light. Within this wash a number of mirrors and gels are hung, so as to create reflections and silhouettes on the surrounding walls. These suspended objects are hung from the roof using fishing line and swivels, giving them a free range of rotation so that any motion of the air in the space causes movement. In order to affect the speed of rotations, I hung weights from the gels, allowing me to broadly determine the pace of the work.



*Pink Slides* (2005), installation detail. Mirrors, swivels, fishing line, custom slides, slide projectors, lighting gels. Dimensions variable.

## Discussion

My aesthetic objective was not so much the exposition of indeterminacy or chance, as in the music of John Cage, but to experiment with the workings of interrelated systems, in the way of a machine. The distinction drawn here is between chance, which in Cage's music was designed to produce surprising and unpredicted listening experiences, and notions of becoming, wherein change signifies the interrelation of shifting flows and forces in time. The spatial motion of this work was caused by air pressure and air movement, and whilst there are sculptural works from Kinetic art<sup>6</sup> that use similar means, my reference points were musical, from the phase/process works of Steve Reich, which were also adopted by Brian Eno.

In order to work in sound with this approach, I have used the *phase space*. Phase pieces in music are based upon repetition and difference; for example, two sound loops play in close synchronisation, until one is slightly slowed. At first the events in the loops are closely matched, and the listener can track the emerging differences. Increasingly, the juxtaposition of events complexifies the overall topography, with new composite sounds emerging from the union of the copies. If this process continues, the loops will gradually come back into time with one another, and will at some point play in unison. This music bears similarities to Western music forms such as the round and the fugue.

Steve Reich's early work *Pendulum Music* (1968) is not his earliest exploration of phase and process, but its use of mechanics makes it a useful example. The work is created by suspending four microphones above four speakers, into which the microphone signal is being sent, creating a signal feedback loop of microphone into speaker into microphone. The piece begins with the microphones being set into motion so that they swing back and forth, over the speakers, in their own time. As they begin to swing, the audio signal is opened up, and the microphones produce a note of feedback each time they pass over the speaker. The piece continues until the microphones come to rest.

A phase space is created in *Pink Slides* through the interrelating motion of the mirrors and gels. Its progress is inexact, as the motion of air in the space is irregular, and the weights and tensions, the exact physics, of each mirror or gel vary. I conceptualised this arrangement as a manifestation of potential, both from the point of view of actualising the kinetic energies of the

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<sup>6</sup> Kinetic Art is discussed in *The Century of Kinesthesia* (Brett 2000).

air in the space, and also the possible permutations of motions that could be observed and inferred by the observer, as they predict how potential events form into actual events. The speed or pace of the work was carefully manipulated to fall within a medium tempo range, between the very slow and the very fast. My intention here was to synchronise with a broadly 'human' pulse, such that the speed of the work did not challenge the observer's body, which would draw attention to the limits of the body, but rather draw attention to how the human body could fall into sequence with an environment.

My intention here is to engage the audience's attention through spatio-temporal operations on the observer's body, by literally moving elements around them. The context for this is my questioning of the spatial embodiment of the observer in video and cinema, in comparison with that of spatial audio. Spatial audio composition techniques, such as are commonly used in electro-acoustic music and in film soundtracks, often use the placement of speakers around the audience so that sound can be projected at the audience from multiple directions. In contrast, cinema and video are stubbornly frontal media, due to the mechanics of their framing. This work, which used projected light, and as such has a relationship to video and film, was a way of breaking through the spatial barrier of frontally displayed video to explore what might be possible through projected visual media.

In contrast to this, the audio explored 'the event' in sound, also using minimal techniques of repetition and variation, but with a focus on 'becoming' and temporality. In *Pink Slides*, I explored the temporality of the sound event in terms of tensions between singularity and continuum. My approach recalls *1-100* by Michael Nyman (Nyman 1976), in which a chord is struck on a piano and allowed to decay into silence, at which point the next chord is struck. The sounds heard in *Pink Slides* occur sequentially, one sound event at a time. Nyman's music, however, was structured around the destination of reaching the hundredth chord, whilst I was interested in exploring each event as a tension between stasis and continuity, wherein each event was experienced as both a repetition and a progression of time. In this sense, I relate my work to guitarist Link Wray's 1958 hit *Rumble*, in which Link, an originator of the distorted guitar, structures his performance around the sensation of the sound, striking and sustaining chords for the longest possible duration. Wray's approach emphasises the sensuality of the sound, by exploring each sound as an end in itself. As such his approach accords with the embodied sense of becoming I am exploring.

In assembling this collective of elements I sought to create a complexity, and by juxtaposing sound and the different visual phenomena, I began to establish my ideas and sense of becoming, as each of the elements formed relations of varying degrees of intensity and duration. The motions of these elements were not orchestrated with a singular design in mind, and remained separate or co-existent. This concept is common to audio/visual relationship theory after Michel Chion, but is able to be extended through the audio/visual installation assemblage, as sculptural/architectural space offers different differences from those between audio and video.

## INFRACINEMA

### Introduction and Overview

*Infracinema* found its final form as a 'live performance film' in the 2005 Melbourne International Arts Festival, having progressed through one other iteration in a research project of the prior year. The material as it stands, however, was produced entirely within this research project. It was a cinematic experience, with audiences seated before a large, wide-screen projection. The media and processes that comprised this 35-minute work, however, were anything but cinematic. With a production staff of one and a half people, a micro-budget, and with the work being performed in real-time, *Infracinema* was an experiment in live audio/visual studio practices. The themes of the work were embodiment and disembodiment within the cinematic experience itself, explored through images of people watching and being watched, through to audio/visual passages designed around 'embodying sensations'.



*Infracinema* (2005), video screen-capture. Infra-red video footage. Dimensions variable.

The form of the work was a sequence of scenes of about three to five minutes duration. There was a high degree of audio/visual intensity in the presentation of the work, derived from the material, the large format projection, but more importantly, a full-range surround sound system, of the type found at concerts rather than in the cinema. In this way, the mechanisms of production of music and cinema were brought together and this juxtaposition was formative of the ambiguity of the work.

This work was created through the first nine months of the research, at a period when terms, techniques, aims and objectives were still in the process of settling, and whilst this work did not feature the indeterminacy of subsequent works, nor was it an installation, it functioned as a prototype and study for them. Deleuzian notions about the configuration of 'the instant of perception', memory and identity are explored in this work, in something of a literal fashion. The early sequences feature depictions of people, which I linked to identity, whilst the latter sequences feature abstract imagery, and with the audio were designed to emphasise 'being in the moment', through an excess of stimulation and sensation that has an embodying affect. Here I was interested to explore how the materiality of sound and light in cinema might create a state of immanence through the raw flow of those energies in time.

### **Embodying sensations: a machine for making sense.**

Pia Ednie-Brown points out that visceral sensations of motion in cinema '*happen while sitting still at the movies; in gut lurching fight scenes and car chases and in the less violent but no less physically wrenching scenes of love, sex, tragedy and soaring joy*'. Whilst one aspect of cinema's affect is the narrative, derived principally from the script, another is its capacity for producing sensation, which is based upon sound and image in real space, wherein real energies amass in volume and brilliance, and at times are experienced in an embodied way. It is the use of scale which is a key to embodied affect, and cinema's use of this can be seen in the expansion of screen sizes over its history, in the introduction of surround sound, which envelopes the audience's body, and low-frequency effects speakers, which produce bass frequencies in a range that is felt as much as heard. In *Infracinema*, I tried to work with and extend sonic sensation and in turn create immersive effects.



*Infracinema* (2005), video screen-capture. Processed infra-red video footage. Dimensions variable.

In order to create sonic sensation, the latter part of the work was rendered with great intensity through high volume surround sound. I used distorted guitar textures and abstractions of single notes and chords to create sound events with long durations, and my intention was to create a series of events that gave a minimal amount of 'forward' movement. I also manipulated the surround sound mix such that the audience was increasingly surrounded by the audio signal. The sound used in the loudest section of the work was a single bass guitar note processed twice with a distortion effect. The combination of bass note and processing produced a sound that was highly compressed such that the timbral pulsing of the component frequencies was made explicit, and sustained over an extended period. The result of these strategies was the foregrounding of the vibratory quality of sound itself. It is interesting to reflect upon how the foregrounding of vibration in *Infracinema* might be related to a materialist concept of immanence as being in time, by highlighting the connection between the micro-temporal vibrations that actually produce the sound within which the audience sits, and a radical immanence of existence as being with the stream of milliseconds.



*Infracinema* (2005), video screen-capture. Computer generated image. Dimensions variable.

Surveying the themes and strategies used in *Infracinema*, it can be seen that there are elements of a phenomenological enquiry. These include the presentation of material such that it can be scrutinised closely; reflection upon the structures of perception, including the means of presentation; the psychological subjectivity of the audience and the relationship of the audience to the subject. The work might also be interpreted as dealing with some of the ontological concerns of phenomenology, through the range of representations of being across optical realism, scientific measurement, portraiture, being as energy, being as psychological subject.

## ABSORBTION

### Introduction

*Absorption*, an installation at the RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, 2005, was an installation based around the audio/video work *Zippered*. In this work I considered 'the instant', sensation and becoming in the experience of immanence, and I extended my use of unpredictability, from the mechanical as in *Pink Slides*, to the digital. I also explored ways that embodiment can function in sound, vision and installation, and how particular historical contexts appear to link reduction in abstraction with purity and Modernism, and disclose different constructions of subjectivity. Whilst a number of minor works were included in the exhibition, I have focused the discussion upon the central work *Zippered*.



*Zippered* (2005), installation view, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne. Computer generated sound and video, Le Corbusier reproduction Chaise-lounge, headphones, video projector, foamcore and fishing line. Dimensions variable.

### **Zippered**

I named this work *Zippered*, in order to playfully reference American Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman's color-field works of the late 1940s and 1950s. In this period, Newman's concerns centered on large canvases divided into planes of color by a thin stripe, which he dubbed a 'zip'. Newman was concerned with creating a sense of spatial immanence in the viewer (Bois 2004), and whilst this is important to my research, I wished to disarm the sobriety with which he pursued this enterprise, by interpreting "zip" in the sense of a zipper that conceals the privates on pants.<sup>7</sup> It was for similar satirical purposes that I incorporated a reproduction Le Corbusier chaise-lounge into the work, and I will discuss this in detail.

The piece comprises a video projection onto a suspended screen, the chaise-lounge and a 'binaural' soundtrack of groans and satisfied intonations, which were heard on headphones. The video of the work is produced with the software Max/MSP/Jitter, and is the first instance of the machinic approach to audio/video that became central to my research. It also marks a beginning of a sustained engagement with color relations. Before discussing the work directly, however, I will discuss the work of German/American painter Josef Albers, whose practice and teachings were influential upon American Minimalism and Op Art, which have in turn influenced my approach to color in the context of art and philosophy.

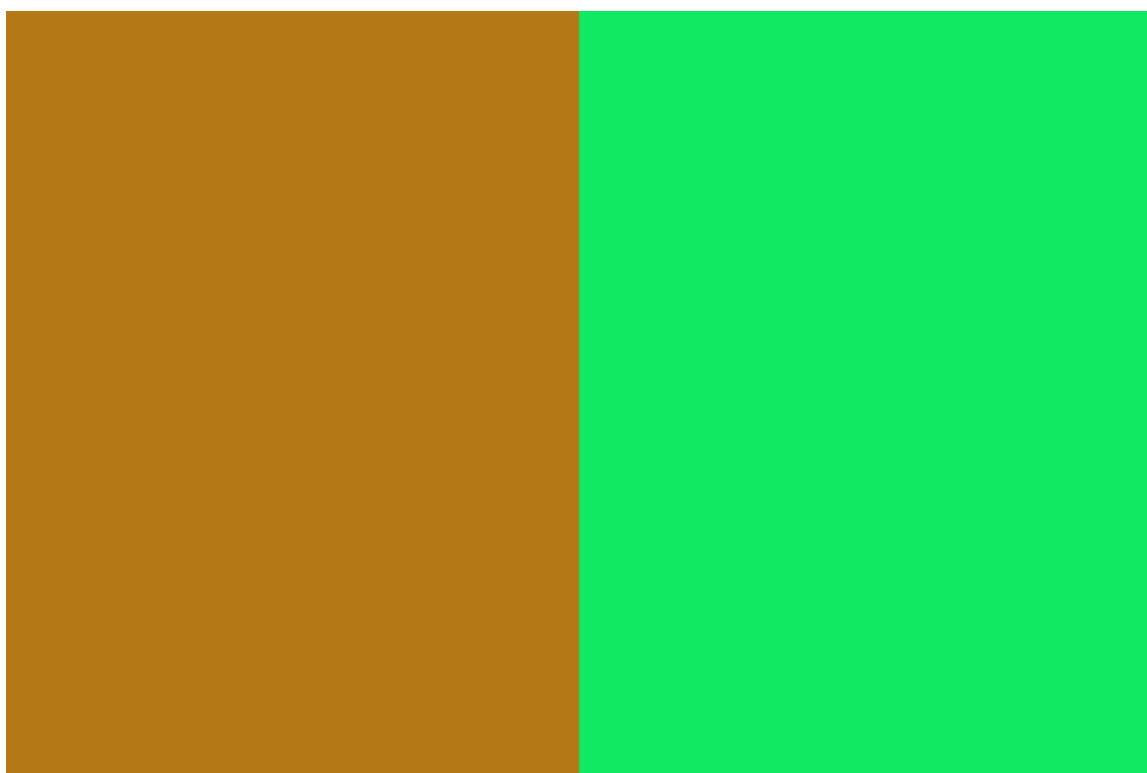
### **Color and Albers**

The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entry for *Color* proposes that color brings out philosophical problems "that are intriguing and hard to resolve", (Maund 2006, p.1) and discusses nine identifiable positions on the subject, amongst which are the "natural" view: that color is what it appears to be in everyday usage; the view that color is integral to substances; that color is entirely perceiver dependent; and that color is a socially and culturally constructed. What can be said about color in this context is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to state any position with absolute authority, and this includes speaking from scientific positions.

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<sup>7</sup> This opposition of abstraction and purity against the libidinal and absurd has been previously noted and explored by Briony Fer in the introduction to her text *On Abstract Art* (1997), and is a theme of Rosalind Krauss's *The Optical Unconscious* (1993).

In the opening sentences of his text “Interaction of Color”, Josef Albers (1888-1976) proposes, “In visual perception a color is almost never seen as it really is – as it physically is.” (Albers 1963, p.1) This statement opens up a number of questions about reality: what *is* the reality of a color, and why can it not be seen; is the physical the real; if a color is almost never seen as it really is, under what circumstances is it *really* seen? These questions bring together art and philosophy with a triangular relationship between color, viewer and reality. Albers frames a response to this philosophical complexity, stating “this makes color the most relative medium in art”, thus positioning the viewer, color and reality by identifying the connector of the terms, relativity, rather than addressing the terms separately. This position gives Albers a site to work with the complexity of color, and I will contend that this is an immanent site, wherein the viewer, reality and colors come together to temporarily situate meaning.



*Zippered* (2005), video screen-capture. Computer generated video. Dimensions variable.

Albers proposes a method for working with color, and that is to place practice ahead of theory, with the aim of developing a feel for color interactions. Albers’ approach to education, both at the Bauhaus (1920-1933), Black Mountain College (1933-1949), and as is detailed in his text *Interaction of Color* (1967), is based around practical experimentation of color combinations, such as arranging sections of colored paper such that two sections of the same color appear to

be different when placed against differing background colors. It might also be said that this educative, practical approach is at work in his art.

His longest and most significant project was the *Homage to the Square*, begun in 1949 and continued to his death in 1976, and in which he worked through over a thousand paintings of different color combinations, dedicated to the increased understanding of color through observing its behaviour in different combinations. The series featured four variants of the arrangement of three or four squares on a ground, is perhaps the most systematic survey of color combinations undertaken by an artist. And whilst there is a sense of formulaic objectivity in the rigidity of this process, it also reveals the impossibility of an objective and categorical defining of color. If one considers 1114 different colors specified in the Pantone™ formula guide that is used to match colors to printing ink formulae, the number of possible permutations of color combinations is beyond systematic realisation. His project, then, is epistemological, seeking to engage the audience with the processes by which we form knowledge. I contend that Albers' seriality works with this aim, as the austerity of his composition has a nullifying affect which leads the viewer to question how color can be the source of affect in the work.

The immanence of Albers' art, particularly his *Homage* series, can be seen in the formation of the work by experience of the work in a time and place, in the presence of the artwork, and this parallels his ideas of the hands-on imperative of art making. In this way, Albers displays an acute understanding of the immanence of aesthetic practice itself. His practice was concerned with questions of existence as well, and he says, "When you really understand that each color is changed by a changed environment, you eventually find that you have learned about life as well as color" (Borchardt-Hume 2006, p. 78). If there is a humanistic quality to Albers' insistence on self-edification as evolution, it is perhaps somewhat eroded by his opposition to American Abstract-Expressionism's insistence on the primacy of subjectivity. In his discussion of Albers' art, Rolf Dieter-Herrmann notes that Albers felt the Expressionists were too confident about the self-certainty of their consciousness, and we must open ourselves to the phenomena around us. (Dieter-Herrmann 1974, p. 68)

### **Relativity, change and materiality**

In the work *Pink Balls* (2004), I projected a circle of pink light on a wall in such a way that it pulsed and fluctuated within the field of vision, and experimented with the affectivity of gradual color changes, wherein which small shifts in color values produce unpredictable outcomes such as felt sensations and visual distortions. To achieve this, I focussed upon several characteristics

of the way that video renders color. Firstly, it is a projection medium, meaning that color is temporarily applied to a surface by way of coloring light. Secondly, digital video is subject to digital controls, which are typically of a highly specific nature and able to be specifically programmed and automated, in real time and recording.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, the video image has a lively character, being composed from a signal that fluctuates via system noise and minute current variations. Fourthly, whilst relative-color phenomena such as that researched by Albers can be staged by placing two colors side by side in the static image, they can be staged using one changing color in a moving image: contrast can be achieved within a shape across time, as well as across space. In *Zippered*, I worked directly with relative colors, by splitting the screen into two panels, and thus was able to work with color combinations across time and space.

For *Zippered* I continued the use of indeterminacy and randomization I had embarked upon in *Pink Slides*, applying it to the generation of colors. In video, the Red/Green/Blue (RGB) palette produces color, and I was able to send these values into constant change, causing unpredictable color combinations to emerge. The software I used (Max/MSP/Jitter) has a mathematics-friendly interface and control system, facilitating the easy generation of numeric values that can be randomly programmed to shift across any duration. Interestingly, I later discovered the work of French mathematician Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), whose pioneering research into chaos led him to conclude that a minimum of three variables could be used to create an unpredictable system (Theisen, 2003, p.302): video is, then, well suited to random control systems.

The produce of this system is affect, as the permutations of the two color planes create an array of optical effects, including illusions of recession and progression and occasionally, of unity, as the colors momentarily match. I think of this process as displacing the notion of the 'being' of an artwork, and instead advance the idea of a 'becoming'. In *Zippered* the character of color interaction is transitory and random, and productive of a range of affects and effects. The mechanism does not allow for selection: specific color matches cannot be inspected in terms of property and cause. It could be speculated that in letting go of the desire for specific colors, and attachment to their properties, a pleasure is found in the automation of the process, wherein the constancy of change offers a sense of immanent becoming.

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<sup>8</sup> Light can also be controlled using theatrical lighting equipment, but for technical reasons video is more easily used in conjunction with sound.

**Minimalism and ambivalence**

With this work I also explored an ambivalence that I perceive in minimalist art, which I understand as having the potential for sensuality, energy and freedom on one hand; and homogeneity, uniformity and repression on the other.<sup>9</sup> In this case, I have created a work containing two planes of color that continually change, and I describe this as minimal. I have previously discussed my practice of minimal interference with the art materials with which I work, which I argue allows the sensuality of the materials to stand forth, rather than the imparting of myself onto the material. I have also mentioned that I am inspired by the external world, and that I find this approach opens up art to the affects I experience when observing diverse external environments.



*Zippered* (2005), video screen-capture. Computer generated video. Dimensions variable.

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<sup>9</sup> See Briony Fer's *On Abstract Art*, pp. 2-3 for an interesting discussion about the tension between Geometric abstraction and Surrealism in Western Europe in the 1920s.

### Corbusier and Purism

By referencing Le Corbusier and Barnett Newman in the work, I wished to explore the reductive strategies I use to achieve affect. Embodiment and sensation have been previously used in minimalist and modern art to pursue distinct objectives. Here I turn to a detailed reading of the French architect Le Corbusier (1887-1965). If Albers was concerned with opening up the viewer to diverse experiences through the relativity of color, Le Corbusier was engaged with locating idea combinations. In his 1925 text *L'Art Decoratif d'aujourd'hui*<sup>10</sup> Le Corbusier posed that “The machine is certainly a marvelous field for experiment in the physiology of the senses” (Rosenblatt 2001, p. 79). Arresting the viewer’s senses was a key objective of ‘Purism’, a movement Le Corbusier founded and continued with painter Amédée Ozenfant through the early to mid 1920s, and purist painting was designed to be received by the viewer in an embodied way (Naegele 1998, p.3). In *L'Art Decoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Corbusier also says “the lesson of the machine lies in the pure relationship of cause and effect. Purity, economy, the reach for wisdom, a new desire: an aesthetic of purity, of exactitude” (Rosenblatt 2001, p.79). Whilst the tone here is expansive and unsubstantiated, Le Corbusier’s interests are signaled in the conflation of the terms: mechanical process, purity and potential, outlining the constituents of his idealistic outlook. Le Corbusier experimented with mechanics and color in 1932 with his *claviers de couleurs*, a series of color collections referencing the systematic arrangement of keys on a musical instrument such as a piano (Schindler 2004, p.198), and which were realized as cardboard color comparison machines. Similarly, Le Corbusier designed the ‘Modulor’, a measuring scale designed around the male body, as a tool for designers to quickly derive architectural dimensions (Corbusier 1961).

What I find notable about Le Corbusier’s position in relation to Minimalism is the interest in specificity, if not perfection. He says of this with regard to his color keyboards: “once one has clearly named the color, one can speak of a certain red with the same exactness as one would of the A of a tuning-fork” (Schindler 2004, p.199). Simon Richards argues that “Le Corbusier was indebted to Enlightenment philosopher Blaise Pascal, who believed the individual should withdraw from society and meditate in solitude on the nature of God and self”, and that “Le Corbusier’s cities were designed accordingly, to separate people in cell-like apartments for the purpose of spiritual self-exploration” (Richards 2003). Indeed, Robert Hughes notes that the occupants of the *Unité d’Habitation*, Le Corbusier’s most thoroughly realized social architecture project, “crammed [their flats] with plastic chandeliers, imitation Louis XVI bergères, and Monoprix ormolu – just the furniture Corbusier struggled against all his life” (Hughes 1980,

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<sup>10</sup> The Decorative Art of Today

1991, p.189). I would argue that it was Le Corbusier's fixation with ideals that led to the failure of this piece of social architecture, as he expected humans to fit into the perfect form that he pursued. I see the non-specific relativity of *Zippered* as the opposite of the universalist thinking above, as it is not this or that color which is important, but the difference and juxtaposition of colors.

### **Newman and the body**

The other overt reference I have made in *Zippered* is to American painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970), and here I was thinking of the artist himself as much as his works, his attitudes about the specific interpretation and primacy of his works, and his falling out with one-time friend, painter Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967). The distinction between the two painters' approaches speaks of different ontological positions, across the concept of being versus becoming. Y. A. Bois describes how Newman appeared to be obsessed with his status as the pre-eminent painter of a black canvas, *Abraham* (1949)(Bois 2005, pp.8-10), and fell out with Reinhardt over this, raising a law-suit against him, and pursuing the matter through published letters, even in the context of Reinhardt's obituary (Bois 2005, p.27). Here we have an obsessive struggle around notions of primacy. In contrast, Robert Morris describes how Reinhardt was detached from notions of the original object, describing how in 1963 Reinhardt received a call from a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, informing him that one of his black canvases had been damaged by a cleaner, and asking him to come down and repair the work. Reinhardt replied to the curator that he would just "send down another one [of the canvases], because I've got one here that is more like the one there than the one there is." Here we can see a notion of becoming in his practice, and this is also reflected in the title of the book in which the conversation is reported, Robert Morris's *Continuous Project, Altered Daily* (1993, p. 265).

The other aspect of Newman's practice that I wished to explore is his use of scale in relation to embodiment. James Meyer says that Newman wanted "the viewer to feel present", and that he pursued this through scaling his works in relationship with the human body (Meyer 2004, p.1). Y.A. Bois affirms this saying of his black painting *Abraham*, that it "catches us in the process of perceiving, and of realizing that the yardstick of scale, by which we measure our own spatial relation to the objects we behold, is what gives us above all a sense of being here, not there" (Bois 2005, p.27).

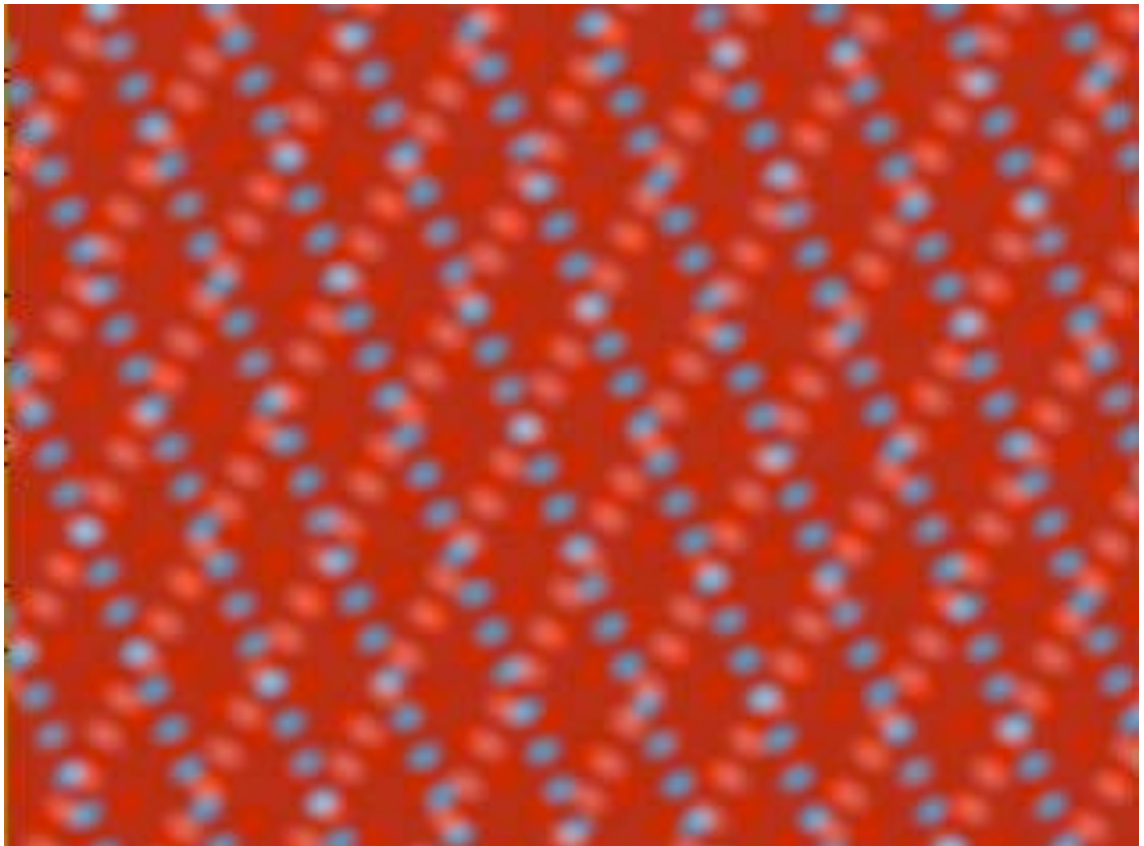
In the installation of *Zippered* I suspended a screen above the audience, and in doing so, considered the scale of the image from the audience's point of view. Through trial and error, I

found a medium size screen facilitated the optical affects of the work perfectly well, and in this I was somewhat surprised, as I had expected that larger scales would have produced greater affect. I say somewhat surprised, because I had composed the work on a relatively small computer screen, where it functioned perfectly well. I found that the affects of this work were sensory, but not just optical, and engaged more than just my eyes, but other parts of my body with sensations of subtle motion and intensity. I partially attribute this to the affects of entrainment, whereby the body falls into time with a rhythm, and the pace of the work, which is very 'medium', in that it does not challenge my body's 'average' speed based upon my pulse rate. In consideration of this I would tend to say that the work engaged the audience temporally more than spatially. I would also say, then, that this durational affect is the significant outcome of the work, in terms of exploring a state of immanence, as it links together sensations of duration with a sense of becoming. The screen, used in this way, has a disembodied sensation, engaging a small portion of the field of vision at the expense of the surrounds. We have, then, an example of different spatial and temporal immanences, derived through the different media.

In order to highlight the disembodied sensation of the image, and thus draw attention to it, I accompanied the video with a soundtrack of 'ooo's' and 'ahh's', performed by the artist (myself). These sounds are heard on headphones, and were recorded using a 'binaural' system in which microphones are worn on the ears, and which create recordings with an uncannily realistic reproduction of the recorded site when replayed on headphones, as if the listener themselves were actually hearing the sound 'live'. I used this soundtrack to give the effect of an impassioned audience member, who is narrating the affect produced by the video, appearing to gasp at particular points in the stream of images. I intended to highlight by overstatement the work's sensation. To this end, I used the headphones, which exaggerated the sense of sensual intimacy conveyed by the soundtrack, and the chaise, which engages with the body through reorientation and relaxation. In this way, sound is used to ground the subject, who is otherwise being led through the color-field video into a durational unity through their vision: in time, but out of space.

**BARNEY****Background**

On Thursday 18th May 2006, I had a vision of a spiral. *The spiral is huge and it spins around a central axis. Slowly, slowly it turns, dragging me deeper and deeper into its embrace.* The vision was a brief, fragmentary imagining, and as I considered this image I remembered another spiral, seen in *The Time Tunnel*, a television series from the 1960s. The *Time Tunnel* itself had the appearance of an op-art installation, featuring a spinning spiral through which the time travellers walked to other times and places. In contrast to the television tunnel that inspired my mental image, my spiral led nowhere.



*Barney* (2006), video screen-capture. Computer generated video. Dimensions variable.

I have since reflected upon the work that I did construct, *Barney*, and reinterpreted it as a clock with multiple hands, marking the passing of time but not its accumulation. In this way the work

continues the project of becoming described by Deleuze, of being in Aion's moment, rather than Chronos' past and future.

Whilst I had explored ongoing visual change or becoming via continually changing color relationships in *Zippered*, here I used a stable color palette based around the complementary colours orange and blue, but worked with the spatial motion of elements within the frame. Here I was interested in the phenomena of a sympathetic spatial embodiment, wherein the audience experiences a sense of rotation. In the piece, a horizon line is continually aligned and tilted, as the rows of dots rotate around an axle. I find that there is an affect of contrary motion, as the rotation is occurring across the three planes, in both clockwise and counter clockwise directions, and this motion tugs at my internal sense of direction, subtly pulling it in two directions at once.

### **Audio**

For the audio composition of *Barney*, I wished to explore how sound might create the optical and physiological sensations that I had been able to achieve with the visual component of *Zippered* (Absorption, 2005). I describe these sensations as shifts of intensity, transitions into events and durations. To achieve this in audio, I embarked on a technically ambitious composition using techniques of minimal drone music within the non-linear processes of Max/MSP. The lineage of my approach, however, is broader than its direct references in minimalist drone music. Of this, Deleuze and Guattari propose that "certain modern musicians oppose the transcendent plane of organization" which has dominated Western Classical music, "to the immanent sound plane... which brings the imperceptible to perception, and carries only differential speeds and slownesses in a kind of molecular lapping" (Deleuze 2004, p.294). They go on to report that Pierre Boulez (1925-) says that the pursuit of the immanent plane is a "question of freeing time", "a non-pulsed time for a floating music... in which forms are replaced by pure modifications of speed" (Deleuze 2004, p.294).

I engaged with this musical project, of opposing the transcendent plane of organization, by using interlinked random processes to controlled modulators. A modulator imposes a measuring grid, the units of which can be modified in real time by altering the modulation. Modulators can be defined by simple mathematical units of addition and subtraction, or by more complex processes of multipliers and divisors, and I used a mix of these in assemblages of multiple modulations. This approach creates complex real-time output, and I employed this to control simple sine-wave oscillators. In particular, I used the phenomenon of 'beating', which is a modulation, and is heard as a wave-shaped rhythm, caused by the interplay of two frequencies of similar speed. I describe the rhythm as wave-shaped, as the sound modulates in regular fluctuations of amplitude, which are heard as smooth attacks and decays, in contrast to

percussive rhythms based around sharp attacks. I utilized five banks of eight oscillators to produce beating effects in five clusters of varying rhythms based around five frequency centres.

In referring to frequency centres I am talking about something similar to the notes of the tempered scale around which the majority of Western Classical music, and from which much of Contemporary music, is derived. I again incorporated random selection techniques in determining the frequency centres of the clusters, and my intention was to emphasise the sonic dimension of the experience, and de-emphasise the perception of the sound in terms of musical structures. In working this way, I strove to create a type of 'floating music', which is well described above by Boulez. My reasons for working in this way, with sine wave oscillators, are to do with the creation of complexity and the immanent temporality of Aion I have previously discussed, and described through the philosophy of Deleuze.



*Engulfed by a million atoms* (2006), installation view, Turbine Rehearsal Room, Brisbane Powerhouse. Computer generated sound and video, LCD monitor, bench and four channel audio system. Photo: Kristi Monfries.

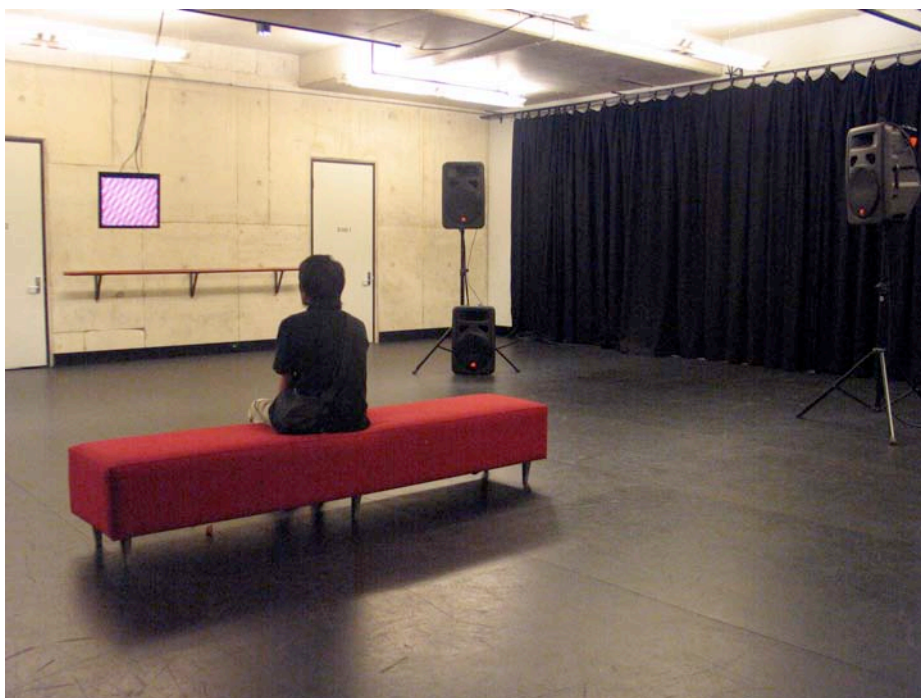
In relation to my use of oscillators, I refer again to the issues that I have confronted as an electronic musician, and the choice between working with recordings of life or synthesis. As I have previously argued, I believe that 'life' (and here I mean the natural world, in a way that does not exclude the artificial as being of a separate order), offers a great deal of complexity of matter. Here I am thinking of the complexity of processes that exist in the bush land near my house, from the water systems and flora species, through layers of insect life, earth forms, atmospheric conditions; not to mention the diversity of people who walk its pathways, and the background sound fields of wind, water, insects, birds, traffic and people. I regard the process that I strive to bring together in my sound machines as aspiring to the complexity of this system. As an electronic musician, I am equipped to make 'field' recordings of this system, and to focus upon any of its components. The issue I confront in doing this, however, is that of signification, as such recordings introduce a range of signification which impact upon my strategy of abstraction and which is intended to test the locating of meaning in the moment of perception, rather than in the ensuing processes of interpretation and reflection.

Here I would like to clarify the issue of meaning with regard to my process and intentions, and in the context of Deleuze's 'plane of immanence'. By creating a hermetic cycle, in which the sound refers back to sound by virtue of not referring to anything else, I am not concerned with creating music about music, or sound about sound. I interpret the sound as not referring so much as manifesting: speeds, differences and intensities; and this is of the possibility of sound, the potential that sound is, prior to it being this or that sound. This potentiality, however, is not singular to sound, but is of the order of matter, and the speeds, differences and intensities which sound manifests are transformational processes of energy and matter in general. Deleuze has described this as a plane of composition, and I interpret this as a plane of potential, wherein matter exists in potential.

### **Installation**

When I presented the work to the public in an installation, I used the name *Engulfed by a million atoms*, as a way of indicating something of my intentions about the work, in that the work offered a type of engagement, engulfment, and on a particular level, the atomic. The work was exhibited at the Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland, from the 9 – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2006. As can be seen in the accompanying image, the video was seen on an LCD monitor hung within a deeply dark space. This dark was not empty, however, but was filled with sound emanating from four speakers placed near the room's corners. I used this arrangement to present the sound in an embodying manner, surrounding the audience and touching them directly through air vibrations caused by the sound.

Comparing the two layers of media, then, we have sound: a physical engulfment which surrounds and touches our body, moving through states across time, and video, a transfixing image which absorbs our gaze, enticing the renunciation of the rest of the world into a limbo of durations without markers. Through this arrangement I have been able to more clearly see the way that each medium generates subjectivity, particularly in relation to time and space.

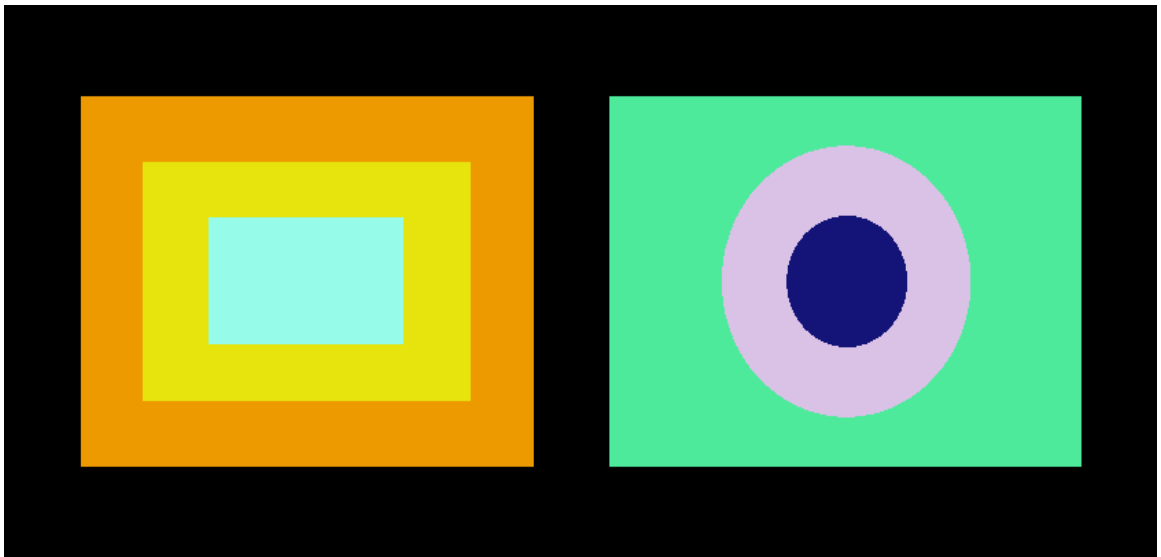


*Engulfed by a million atoms* (2006), installation view (with lights on), Turbine Rehearsal Room, Brisbane Powerhouse. Photo: Kristi Monfries.

In the presentation of this work, I have not tried to synchronise the sonic and visual, but have, rather, allowed them to be juxtaposed, and this has brought forth the different embodiments and subjectivities that I have described above. An outcome of this research, then, is to perceive a limitation of working with the screen, and this is also discussed in the work *Pink Slides*. Reflecting upon this outcome, from the point of view of conducting further research, I began to consider how the tension between embodiment and disembodiment, created by this specific form of audio/visuality, might be addressed. The strategy that presents itself is to negotiate the visual in an architectural, rather than imagistic, fashion – working architecturally with the surrounds rather than forming an image exclusive of them.

## MELTING MOMENTS

### Overview and Description



*Melting Moments* (2007), video screen-capture. Computer-generated video. Dimensions variable.

*Melting Moments* is similar to *Barney* to the extent that it is a self-contained, self-generating audio/video software work for video projection and surround sound. In the video composition I extended the techniques of color interaction established for *Zippered*, but introduced greater complexity through the use of more colors and via the use of two projectors. I had previously explored the use of two screens in the development of *Infracinema*, and I had noted the way in which it splits the audience's attention. Here I was interested in how this splitting of attention could interact with the audience's sense of spatial location, engagement and embodiment. The audio is also similar to *Barney*, based on synthesised tones, but incorporates different approaches to duration, influenced by the work of composer Eliane Radigue (1932-).

### Visuals

In *Melting Moments* I wished to expand the level of sensation and complexity of the patterns of change, I used three concentric shapes within each frame, resulting in six areas of color. In terms of color relationships, the work succeeds in producing a great range, and at an intuitive

level, the relationships formed with three colors are highly satisfactory. I also found that using more than three simultaneous colors tended to create distraction, as my ability to track the relationship was overloaded: three is a very workable amount of colors with which to engage, and this fits with my objective of engaging the viewer in an immanent state of existence, rather than an alienating confusion.

Both compositions, the rectangle and the circle, presumably have many antecedents, and certainly many popular and well-documented ones in modern American painting. The rectangle is quite directly reminiscent of Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* series, and the circle is similar to some of his pupil Kenneth Noland's paintings.<sup>11</sup> I was concerned, however, to avoid the signification of a singular shape, wherein a circle, for instance, generates representative associations such as to the sun, eyes and stars. By bringing the circle into relation with the rectangle, the scope of such speculations is modulated, and whilst the audience will have presumably made their own associations, I connected this formation to a partnership between two people. This association is not problematic, as the complete rebuttal of association is not my objective: rather it is to expand the centrality of sensation and change in the work.

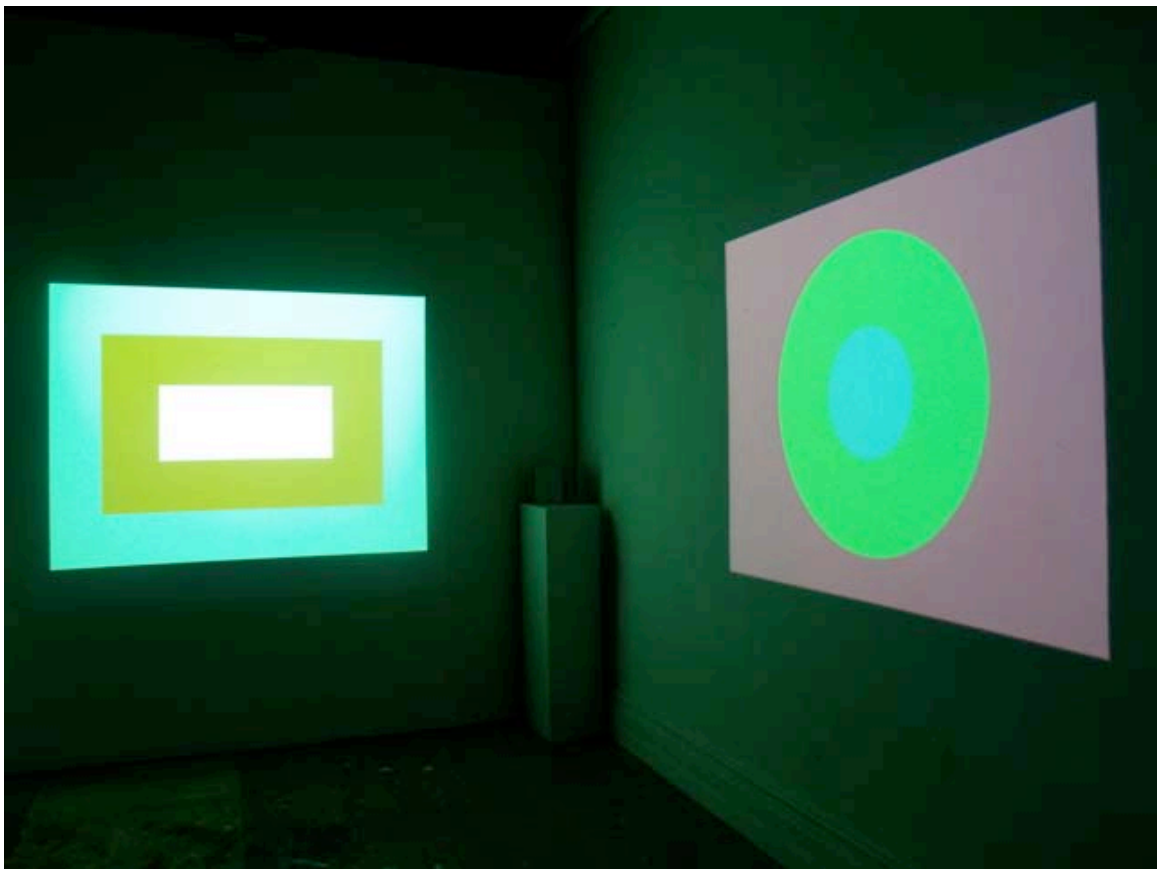
In my experience of the work, I preferred to look at the circular shape. I elected to retain the difference between the two shapes as a point of tension, and proceeded with this in the installation, wherein I was interested to see how the presence of two separate projections might interact with the tendency to focus on the narrowly defined space within the frame in video works. This strategy is a continuation of an audio/visual thematic across the research: whilst *Infracinema* offered a unitary audio/visual experience, *Absorption* posed a distracting soundtrack of moans and groans against the seductive color-field visuals. Whilst *Barney* appeared to offer a unitary experience, a deeper analysis revealed how the work differentiates the ways that sound and image can immerse the audience.

In the installation of *Melting Moments*, I sought to diffuse the spatiality of the screen, which I have found to centralise the audience's attention, by splitting the visual field. I found that this strategy caused me to engage with the work differently, and I found myself viewing the work, in installation, from a very close range, so that the projection filled my field of vision and the other image was excluded. There was a degree of contingency in this method of installation, and I

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<sup>11</sup> See works such as *Mysteries: Afloat*, 2008, at <http://www.kennethnoland.com/> (accessed 18.4.2008).

had placed the projections as I did to maximise the work's visual sensations, which are interdependent with the image resolution and luminosity, rather than opting for the more architecturally harmonious, and visually seductive, approach of expanding the projections to entirely fill the walls.



*Melting Moments* (2007), installation view, Kurb Inc, Perth. Computer-generated audio and video installation using video projection and surround sound, theatre drapes and plinths.

### **Audio**

I designed the audio for *Melting Moments* using similar software techniques to *Barney*, but strove to create greater diversity and complexity by constructing several software instruments that were programmed with different specifications. Overall, the audio composition explored a more event-oriented temporality, somewhat in the vein of *Pink Slides*, and derived from my engagement with the work of Eliane Radigue.

Radigue is known as a minimalist drone music composer who uses sustained synthesiser tones. Her music departs from the general nature of drone music in its embrace of variation, evidencing a structure resembling sentences and phrases, rather than the eternal singular letter, or word, enunciated in the work of La Monte Young and to some extent Tony Conrad, Phill Niblock and Alvin Lucier. While Radigue shares their interest in close, even heightened attention to 'the sound of the sound', it is her exploration of continuum and variation that are particularly relevant to this research, as it manifests a state of being in time.

In the liner notes for the CD publication of the *Trilogy de la Mort*, Radigue explains that in composing, she is developing with sound what she calls "sense". She says that she works on the "inside" of the sound, and "pays a lot of attention to what the sound is actually telling me", and doesn't "compel a sound to go in the direction that would be the most suitable for me" (*Prism-escape* 2008). Working in these ways, Radigue works in the fashion that Deleuze commends, working toward Aion, the instant, away from Chronos, the past and present of identity and ego. She describes her process of creating and mixing sounds with the metaphor of weaving threads together, which gives an impression of almost "flawless continuity". Her approach produces a sense of continuum, and continual change, as the sound subtly and gradually transforms: not a progression of stages, but an ongoing progression. Resultantly it is difficult to identify individual events, stages, places or syntax across the piece, and this manifests a sense of being in time, as the listener is encouraged to observe from inside of the piece.

In the audio of *Melting Moments* I strove to create a sound machine that would manifest this phenomenon, adapting the continuum creating techniques I had used in *Barney* with strategies for producing variation, specifically the use of three independently operating instruments. These instruments are better described as machines, and this shift of terminology confers the independence of their operation. Each of the machines was comprised of different amounts of oscillators, or voices, and was programmed with different processes. The programming utilises basic configurations of oscillators and modulators, and is quite simple in comparison to highly

sophisticated generative music systems such as Iannis Xenakis's GENDYN program,<sup>12</sup> but this simplicity belies the complexity of the output.

### **Audio/Visual**

*Melting Moments* is the work of this research program that most resembles the synaesthetic approach to sound and vision. At a technical level, there is no 'hard' connection between the audio and video, though the two media are programmed to change at similar paces.

Synaesthetic approaches to audio/visual works such as those popular in the early years of this decade,<sup>13</sup> tend to create a monolithic rhythm of sound and video pulsing together. This unity is inimical to the sense of complexity and diversity that I have identified as significant to the manifesting of immanence, which is characterised by chance and event rather than unitary structures. I would argue that a close reading of *Melting Moments* identifies and highlights the differences between audio and video. As is the case with *Barney*, the surround sound composition is designed for a spatial and temporal embodiment, whilst the video offers a temporal embodiment, but through its frame, restricts the scope of spatial embodiment to the relatively small panel of the projection.

Another level of contrast between sound and vision can be found in the approach to audio frequency and color. The sliding of one color to another in the work produces a random incidence of color combinations, as the viewer finds and perhaps prefers one color combination to another. The random change of one sonic frequency to another, however, is perhaps more challenging for the audience. Here the work contends with the Western tempered scale, which sets out the pattern of notes as is found in the piano keyboard, in that the 'notes' heard are randomly selected without regard to the tempered scale. The outcome here is that the musical language of Western harmony, formalized during the common practice period of classical music (1600-1900), is not present in the work. It is for this reason that the color material of the video may be more accessible than the audio, which speaks to the narrower audience of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Art music.

### **Installation**

*Melting Moments* was installed at Kurb Gallery, Perth, from the 25-29<sup>th</sup> April 2007, as part of the Totally Huge New Music Festival. In addition to the approach to projection that I have previously

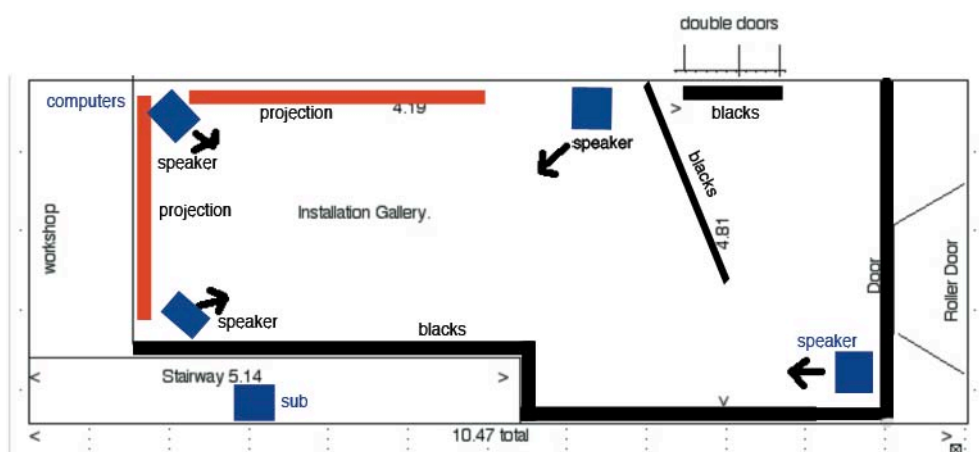
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<sup>12</sup> GENDYN was used to produce the composition S.709 (1992). See: Xenakis: Electronic Music, New York: EMF Ltd., 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See: Sonic Fiction: synaesthetic videos from Austria (2004) and Formula (2004) by Ryoji Ikeda.

described, I modified the acoustics of space by hanging theatre blacks over half the available wall space, and positioned the four speakers on plinths, in order to raise them up to near ear height. This in turn enabled the direct delivery of sound to the listeners' ears. These strategies resulted in a very satisfactory delivery of surround sound.

Though I was able to explore the strategies of continuum and variation that I have identified as significant to my approach to manifesting immanence, I found that the installation of the work again brought forth tensions around the issues of embodiment and disembodiment that I have previously encountered and discussed. I would characterise this installation as posing a tension between the practicalities of the gallery and cinema.



Installation design for *Melting Moments*, (2007). Image: Bruce Mowson.

Considering the type of work that I have constructed, a cinematic format would seem offer the most efficient presentation of the work. As I have discussed, however, the aims of this research are to manifest a state of immanence, which is both temporal and spatial, and the disembodied sensation of 'the screen' erodes the sense of embodiment. However, embodiment is important to that immanence. It is for this reason that I have engaged with installation practices, which offer strategies for activating the audience's experience of a particular space. The installation of this work, then, progressed but did not resolve these issues.

## THE SWING



*The Swing* (2008), installation view. Structural timber, marine rigging and tackle; vintage fabric, plastic container and steel swivel. Dimensions variable. Gossard Project Space, RMIT Melbourne. Photo: James Geurts.

Contrary to its name, *Swing* is not a simple swing, but a balance based upon the double pendulum, and a machine for heightening physicality. The work is constructed from structural timbers, high strength marine rigging and fittings, a twenty-five-litre water container and vintage floral patterned fabric. With the exception of the fabric, the visual aesthetic of the work is minimal, emphasising the functionality of the piece, and idea that the power of the work is located away from the visual, in the kinaesthetic experiences it produces.

As I identified in the discussion of *Pink Slides*, the French polymath Henri Poincare theorised how the double pendulum, in contrast to the single pendulum's mathematically predictable motion, creates a dual feedback system wherein the weight of each pendulum affects the other, which in turn affects itself. In this work, the counter weight causes the motion of the swinger to

become less regular and predictable, as the seat moves through three dimension of motion: back and forth, side to side, and up and down. The unpredictable and multi-directional range of movement produces subtle yet powerful sensation in the swinger, and with one's eyes closed, great motions are perceived, as if one were rushing up and down over an ocean swell, even though one is barely moving. In this way the work engages with questions of subjectivity through embodiment.

The work acts principally upon the human body's vestibular system, which is located within the inner ear. Its key mechanism is the 'labyrinth' that includes three fluid-filled tubes that sense motion in the head across the three axes of movement. This mechanism is crucial for human body, facilitating stable vision by sending information to the neural structures that control our eyeballs, and bodily movement, by feeding information to the muscles that allow us to stand, walk and sit. Pia Ednie-Brown (2003) has pointed out that the simulation of movement is central to the visceral experience within cinema, as images are used simulate sensations of motion. In this way, the vestibular system can be linked to the ways that video can be used to create sensations of embodiment.

From this perspective I pose this work as a form of post-audio/visual installation, a work that is informed by those practices, but which has also reacted to them by casting-off certain limitations of them. Demasio, speaking of a subject's sense of existence says:

To understand how the self is located in the body, we must overcome the limitation of our senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, as it ignores kinaesthesia (the sense of movement derived from proprioception via the musculoskeletal system); it ignores the vestibular system and the sensing of the viscera and internal milieu (pain and temperature) (Demasio 2003, p.33).

This expanded conception of sense perception is relevant to the installation aspect of my research. Having arrived at an impasse between the disembodied propensities of the video frame against the importance of embodiment in manifesting existence as a state of immanence, I have forgone the use of electronic video and sound in this work. In doing so, however, I have sought to throw into relief the contrasting operations of sound and vision, by opening up different ways that the senses can locate the body in space *and* time. Thus *Swing* engages with the embodied dimension of existence to which the vestibular system, highlighting its presence

as an instrument of sensation that is significant to the installation component of my sound and video practice.



*The Swing* (2008), installation view. Structural timber, marine rigging and tackle; vintage fabric, plastic container and steel swivel. Dimensions variable. Gossard Project Space, RMIT Melbourne. Photo: James Geurts.

I conceived this work intuitively and heuristically, though my thoughts were “seeded” by reading about Poincaré’s double pendulum (Theisen 2003). *Swing* is a machine, and it offers a literal approach to embodiment, immersion and interaction by placing the observer *in* the work. The interdependence of the observer with the counterweight offers a dual reading, by actually destabilising the observer’s geographic position, and restabilising it in dynamic and transitory process. I describe this as restabilising, because the observer retains agency and balance within the system, but within a different set of forces that highlight physical immediacy.

To return this work to the context of the research questions of this project, I refer to the definition of immanence described in the introduction: Immanence, coming from the Latin *immanare*, means “to remain with-in”. Whilst I have tended to discuss immanence in relation to examples and works as placing the audience ‘in’ time or space, I see the swing as accenting the

'with', for whilst in the swing, their being in a specific place is disputed, as their body moves unpredictably within the space. This emphasises the observer being *with* space, going along with matter *in* time.

### **The Swing and Existence.**

In his text *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* Deleuze describes pure immanence as *a* life, saying "A life is everywhere, in all the moments that a living subject goes through" (Deleuze 2001, p. 29), suggesting that pure immanence is a sort of ground of life. In his conspicuous use of "*a*" rather than "the", he avoids delineating this or that life, highlighting the superfluousness of identity to immanence. In his review of this essay Richard Swabota notes that the problem of Deleuze's defining of immanence via anti-individualism is its "residual aestheticism", or sense of self-denial and withdrawal, which "Deleuze himself was at pains to avoid" (Swabota 2002, p.104). Deleuze, however, comes at anti-individualism from another angle, saying that children "resemble one another and hardly have any individuality, but they have singularities; a smile, a gesture, a funny face – not subjective qualities", and that "Small children... are infused with an immanent life that is pure power and even bliss". This suggests another way to consider immanence, which can also be related to aesthetics.

The notion of living in the moment, of working one's self away from ego and identity, is difficult if not impossible for a sane adult, who must live within their self and in the world. This is not so problematic for children, however, whose existence tends toward immediacy.<sup>14</sup> Linking sensory immediacy and creativity, American psychoanalyst Richard Winnicott describes how "creativity is inherent in playing", and that "a child's play may be to move the head slightly so that in the interplay of the curtain against a line of the wall outside, a line is now one and now two" (Winnicott 1986, p.64). In the work *Swing*, something of childhood is brought to the foreground, and in relation to Deleuze's immanence, it calls to both life and death. I am thinking here of the playground swing where the free play of sensation is lively and playful. It is also a site of danger however, for children test themselves against the swing, seeing how high they can go. So the swing offers both the potential of both danger and delight, in an experience that brings forth the immanence of existence. It was in response to the liveliness of the work that I used the decorative, floral material for the seat cover. This action, made quite intuitively, was highly satisfying after the rigid monochromaticism of the preceding series of works.

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<sup>14</sup> See *Introducing Lacan* by Darian Leader for an overview of the ways that Lacanian psychoanalysis views sane, neurotic adults as necessarily configured by identifying with their self in language, in contrast with ways that children begin in a pre-linguistic state of immediacy and need.

From a Poststructural perspective, Deleuze's ascribing of a life as immanence is highly de-structured: it posits a process of all constructions and formations of a life on the plane of existence, with the empirical proposition of existing in time as the sole anchor. This metaphor of an anchor is pertinent to the work, *Swing*, wherein the water filled counter-weight acts similarly to a drift anchor that ocean going vessels use to brake themselves in heavy seas, by slowing the boat in space and time. Whilst seated in the work, the body is palpably expanded via its mechanical connection with the counterweight, and is placed in a new and different relationship with gravity. It is the interaction of gravity with the subject and counterweight that forms the sensations of the work, and which slows and intensifies the subject's embodied existence in space and time. This interrelation also gives rise to a poststructural play on the trope of decentring the Cartesian subject (Bishop, 2005) by literally displacing the centre of balance from within the subject's body to a mobile locus outside it. In *Swing*, the existing subject is always in relative motion to an other that is neither simply inside nor outside the body, but with which it is in immanence.

## OUTCOMES

Throughout this project, I have been engaging with the research questions, the first of which is: “In what ways can immersive sound and video installation practices manifest existence as a state of immanence?” Throughout, I have investigated this question through the related terms of sensation, indeterminacy, complexity, pace and duration, embodiment and disembodiment, variation and continuity, the machine as art and the artist as mechanic. The second research question asks: “In what ways can poststructuralist theory situate this subjective state?” My response to this question has been found through a reading of Deleuze’s philosophy of immanence that includes his radical empiricism, philosophy of becoming and temporality. I have used these concepts and methodologies to voice and extend notions from and through my practices, and I have used other aspects of poststructuralist thought to discuss and contextualise the works.

From the beginning of the research, in the work *Pink Slides*, I engaged with becoming as a material reality by working as an assembler of machines that produced sensation, which in turn offer the potential of immersion. Throughout the project I have extended the functionality of the machine in my practice, by interrogating its capacity to produce sensation in different circumstance and configurations. I have applied the machine to the manifestation of immanence, using differing imagery and sounds at different sites, and produced a range of outcomes, from the absorbing of the beholder into a durational continuum through hypnotic visual imagery, to grounding the subject by bodily sonic utterances.

Some of the outcomes that I have reached, as part of the project of manifesting immanence (and thinking through of what immanence is) have been the recognition of the limitations of the frame in video as a mechanism that affects the spatial embodiment of the audience.

Conversely, I have a greater recognition of video’s capacity to engage the audience, through indeterminacy and complexity in an open ended durational embodiment and becoming.

One of the concerns that I have faced in the project is the formalist reading of my works, in which the forms I have used are read as objectives or ends in themselves. Through a selective reading of poststructuralism, I have been able to distinguish between my open-ended approach that acknowledges the ongoing unfolding of potential and becoming, and approaches that pursue transcendent ideals in specific forms. As part of this, I have focussed upon the affect of

sensation, and through experimenting and reflecting upon minimalist strategies in twentieth century art, I have worked through differing visual and sonic composition techniques, and have expanded my capacity to create complexity using variation and juxtaposition. I have also reflected upon approaches to sound/image relationships, and here I have located specific affects of sound and video in installation scenarios, and reflected upon options for combining them.

## SHIFTS OF POSITION

This period of research has had a transformative affect upon my practice in regard to how I define and situate meaning in my artworks. Through the research, I have explored conceptions of the structure of perception. Through my reading and interpretation of Giles Deleuze's radical empiricism, I have researched a conception of how meaning can be displaced from an idealistic, metaphysical position in favour of a contingent and temporal process of becoming. In light of this thinking, I have conceptually resituated the materialism of my art practice as a methodology for manifesting an immanent subjectivity. In this subjectivity, the abstract discloses the energies in which life is constituted, indexing the plane of composition upon which the potential becomes the actual.

The project works have revealed intertwined potentials of machine and material, and this has been accompanied by a shift of thinking about the role of the artist from a maker of works, to a creator of processes. I see the advantage of this thinking as opening up the way for my re-conception of myself as an artist who remains open to potential and within a process, and this can be distinguished from my prior position that was marked by tensions of intention, in which I tended to work toward a notional objective. The issue of this prior position is that notional objectives tended not to equate with the actual outcomes, and this disjunction has been a source of confusion and distraction. By thinking in terms of mechanics, ideas can be thought of as processes and forces to be set into motion, and in this there is a subtle distinction from the idea of art as a form that needs be constructed and the artist as a type of translator. In my new thinking, art is a verb, rather than a noun.

A key aspect of the research has been the consideration of sound/image relationships, and here, too, there has been a shift of position. My previous understanding of this relationship has been centred on film practice, and the theories of added-value conceived by Michel Chion, which tend to focus upon issues of narrative. In creating and reflecting upon the project works, and exploring the conditions of the medium outside narrative functionality, I have come to a different understanding of how juxtaposition of media can open up a complexity. Here the affects produced by sound and image form a composite textuality, which in turn requires a different mode of reading. In the case of my works, the reading has focussed upon the terms of immanence and the key concerns of spatio-temporal embodiment, and this has lead to clearer

conceptions about how sound, video and installation techniques can manifest subjectivities. I think that the best example of this is in *The Swing*, where through the redefining of my thoughts about physiology, I have re-considered how sound and image perception are embodied in different ways, by the whole body, rather than just acting on the ears and eyes.

Over the course of the research I have also shifted my approach to style, and ways of encouraging engagement and embodiment in the audience. My prior strategies drew upon minimalist techniques of extended exposure to reduced materialities, and in some cases this approach risked alienating audiences in the attempt to focus their attention over extended duration. I feel that the project works record a move toward increased accessibility for the audience, in approaches such as the use of the colors to produce seductive affects, an increased diversity of composition based upon reconsidering the relationship between continuum and variation, and strategies for the creation of complexity. These strategies are used in the final work, *The Swing*, which achieves a strong combination of encouraging the audience's engagement, with an immersive immanence derived from considerations of materials, embodiment, the instant, indeterminacy and energy.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Through conducting this research two areas of further exploration have come forth. The first concerns the construction of audio/visual works that more closely engage with architecture. As I have discussed in the individual project works, the framing mechanism of video delimits the spatial engagement of the audience by focussing attention on a small portion of space at the expense of the surrounds. The implication of this is that the spatially embodying phenomenon that I identified as significant to a state of immanence is frustrated. It is for this reason that I recommend pursuing an architectural approach, which engages with the whole space. Within the scope of my practice, however, a useful option is at hand, and this is the use of lighting rather than, or in addition to, video. Recent advances in lighting technology have seen the emergence of LED lights, and these are highly suitable to my practice due to being controllable via computer using Max/MSP software, and having flexible and workable physical characteristics of small size and cool operating temperature are suitable to my studio practice. The other aspect of architectural practice with which I can engage is building, and it is my intention that further projects will benefit from the technical skills I used to create *The Swing*, as well as my extended intervention and invention with physical space through spatial and material construction.

The second area for which my research has implications is that of interactivity, following from *The Swing*. It is a work which can be conceptualised as an interface, and while its affectivity lies in the direct stimulation of the senses, it could be integrated into an interface design that collects and processes spatio-temporal data. The significance of *The Swing* as an interface lies in the ways that its fluid mechanics interact with the body. This range of motion may be harnessed or useful within the contemporary technological context, in which machines such as the Nintendo *Wii* (2006) are offering accessible wireless positional tracking and control mechanisms.

## CONCLUSION

The work of this research has revealed to me what immanence might mean in the context of sound and video installation practice. As I have worked through material practices, in response to the research terrains, each work has illuminated some things that in turn give rise to further speculations. My outcomes have not been what I expected, and at the end of the process I find myself with new beginnings to pursue. This process resonates with Deleuze's concept of pure becoming: "it pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once" (1990, p. 1). Ramey interprets this idea saying "in becoming, the idea of a thing is not given in advance of an event which transforms that idea in a differentiating repetition" (2006, p 4). Thus knowledge is always in motion, being transformed in the present and transforming the present. The project works have sought to manifest the continuing motion of immanence specifically, and explored how it can be significant to aesthetics.

The encounter of the subject and the world is one of complexity: existence is formed in the unpredictable processes of the world, and it is in this becoming that we can talk of a state of immanence as a stance within those processes. In this setting, art is a contribution to the world, formed by the hands of the artist, and in this research, I have worked through with the complexities and ambiguities of sound and video as materials, and identified ways that they can contribute to the subject's sense of embodiment: that which places them *in* the world. In relation to this I have noted that sound's three-dimensional character offers a level of physical traction in time and space that is eroded in video's two-dimensional flatness. This engagement with space and time has the potential to open the subject up to the complexity of the world and in this lays diversity: by calling the subject to being 'here' in time and space. This diversity is significant to the poststructural project of weaning away from conceptions of the singular enlightened human astride the highest peak, toward the specificity of the many humans in many loci across the planet.

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE OF PHD PROJECTS FOR BRUCE MOWSON**

### **Enrolment**

2005-2008      PhD by research project

### **Solo Exhibitions**

2008              Graduation exhibition, School of Art, RMIT Melbourne.  
2007              *Melting Moments*, Totally Huge New Music Festival, Kurb Inc. Perth.  
2006              *Barney*, Sound Polaroids Festival, Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane.  
2006              *Absorption*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne.

### **Solo Performances**

2005              *Infracinema*, Melbourne International Arts Festival, North Melbourne Town Hall, Melbourne.

### **Conference Presentations**

2007              Electricity and the Physicality of Sound: Totally Huge New Music Festival Conference, Perth.

### **Reviews**

2007              Jonathan Marshall, Realtime 79, June-July 2007.  
2005              John Potts, Realtime 70, December-January 2005-6.

## REVIEWS

### Melting Moments

Bruce Mowson's installation *Melting Moments* was another satisfying surprise. Two screens each showed three shapes nestled within each other (three rectangles on one screen, and two circles in a rectangle on the other) cycling through fluorescent blocks of color, while a series of sustained tones, mostly in the upper bass register and mids, suffused the space, complemented by hissy sonic materials which built up and receded. Visually, this was Op-Art rendered as mobile, video candyfloss. Mowson explained in his presentation at the conference that *Melting Moments* aimed at a disconnect between sound and image. Although both the sonics and the visuals gradually evolved and changed, both were random and did not trigger each other. Audiences were invited to construct whatever relationship they wished between these arbitrarily conjoined materials. The very superficiality of the sound and image relationship created an unbounded space for affect, pleasure and interpretation.

Excerpted from: *Vertiginous pleasures of disconnection: Jonathan Marshall at the Totally Huge New Music Festival*.

Johnathan Marshall, *Realtime* #79, June-July 2007, pg. 40.

### InfraCinema

The pop flavour of Harris' music and imagery eschews contemplation in favour of a distracted mode of viewing. By contrast, Bruce Mowson's *InfraCinema* seeks to avoid such distraction by increasingly minimising any sense of a recognisable referent for its projected video images. Mowson has used infra-red technologies to reduce human figures and cityscapes to a level of abstraction often painterly in style but also profoundly (and deliberately) tedious. Gesturing towards the materialist cinema of the last century, the extended sequences of monotonous, only vaguely pulsating color invoke similar visual works by Anish Kapoor and require their audience to reflect upon the ways in which they may engage with the artwork. There is no easy way into this presentation, and it is interesting to consider how similar pieces, such as Anthony McCall's recently toured *A Line Describing a Cone* (RT66, p26), offer their viewer an "easy way out" via their historical and geographical distance, as well as their positioning as notable works through the mechanisms of art history and canonisation.

Excerpted from: *Melbourne International Arts Festival: The Medium is the Audience*.

John Bailey, *RealTime* issue #70 Dec-Jan 2005 pg. 4.

## **PROPOSAL**

### **Abstract**

TITLE OF THESIS/PROJECT: SOUND AND VIDEO INSTALLATION: EXISTENCE AS A STATE OF IMMANENCE

#### SUMMARY OF THESIS/PROJECT:

In what ways can sound and video installation art manifest a state of immanence in the audience? This state of immanence is a manifestation of 'being in time', created through the fusion of the work and the experiencing subject. Project work researching this phenomenon will be undertaken using non-linear sound and video technology. It extends techniques of Western abstract Modernism, particularly Minimalism and Post-Minimalism, into the field of time based art. The written exegesis for the project will situate this work within art theory and criticism, via theories of phenomenology and post-structuralism.

SUPERVISORS AND CONSULTANTS (Please state affiliations):

Senior Supervisor: Philip Samartzis.

Supervisor: Elizabeth Grierson.

Consultant(s):

MODE OF PROGRAM:

FULL-TIME (Normal full-time commitment: 40+ hours per week)

ENROLMENT DATE: 1/1/05

PROPOSED SUBMISSION DATE: 31/12/07

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### 3. THE RESEARCH PROGRAM:

3.1 Title: SOUND AND VIDEO INSTALLATION: EXISTENCE AS A STATE OF IMMANENCE

3.2 Brief Description:

#### INTRO

The hypothesis of this project is that abstract sound and video installation art can manifest a state of immanence in the audience. This state of immanence is a manifestation of 'being in time' (Heidegger), created through the fusion of the work and the experiencing subject. Project work researching this phenomenon will be undertaken using non-linear sound and video technology. It extends techniques of Western abstract Modernism, particularly Minimalism and Post-Minimalism, into the field of time based art. The written exegesis for the project will situate this work within art theory and criticism, via theories of phenomenology and post-structuralism, in particular, those of Lacan on language and subjectivity.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for the project are:

1. In what ways can immersive sound and video installation practices manifest existence as a state of immanence?
2. In what ways can post-structuralist theory situate this subjective state?

#### AIMS

- Propose and articulate the concept of existence as a state of immanence.
- Situate the project work within aesthetic and intellectual discourses.
- Research and develop sound and video installation practices that manifest this concept.

## PROJECT WORK

The project work will be conducted primarily with abstract, non-linear, audio-video installation practices.

Non-linear audio-visual practices are a relatively new artistic form that is technologically and practically related to music concrete and electronic music, film and video art. However, the objective is the formation of the material for aesthetic expression, as in painting or sculpture, rather than creating narrative, as in literature, theatre, film or music.

This research takes up the legacy of Minimalist artists, whose highly abstract approach is characterised by: using materials in ways which display and reveal their nature; radically reducing the number of elements, and significations, in a work; considering the siting of a work as a key aspect of the audiences experience. These techniques are often used along with the typical abstract techniques of repetition and simplification of form.

A significant theoretical aspect of Minimalism is the questions it raised about the role of the audience in the artwork. These are questions taken up by installation art practice. The focal point of these practices is the relationship between the subject and object – the *Mirror Room* of Lucas Samaras, for instance, places the audience inextricably within the visual field constituting the work. This research poses questions about the subject-object relationship generated by the artwork, and will therefore use an installational approach to sound and video media.

The audio-visual nature of this project raises questions about the relations between those two media. The approach used here is taken from Film Sound theory: that of 'added value'. This conception, articulated by Michel Chion, argues that the media are two mutually exclusive languages, best approached independently of one another. In practical terms this means that the sound and image often find their greatest potency when they exist in difference, avoiding duplication of each other's effects. The opposing conception of audio-visuality is a synaesthetic one, in which form and function is similar across the media – light and sound moving in rhythmic synchronisation, for instance.

Conceptually, this project poses the contention that sound and video installation practices can manifest a state of immanence in the viewer. Readings of art theory and philosophy will be undertaken, in order to create a written description and explanation about this concept. The

written discourses pertaining to this include those on: minimalism and post-minimalism, wherein techniques and effects similar to this project's work are discussed; phenomenology, which attempts to elucidate the nature and structure of this type of consciousness; post-structuralism, which deals extensively with the role and nature of languages – verbal, aesthetic or otherwise. Of particular interest are ideas of language articulated by Lacan, which propose the impossibility of existing outside language.

Finally, this research will incorporate a self-reflexive awareness about the state of immanence, examining theories of "the gaze" and attention. The type of attention posed by this research has been discussed within art theory, particularly by the October group – Rosalind Krauss, Jonathan Crary – who have drawn upon both technological histories of modernism, and psychoanalytic theory. These ideas will be surveyed within the exegesis.

### 3.3 Rationale for program:

#### ABSTRACTION

As an artist, my instinctive, habitual and professional practice has been to make such abstract art. Discourse about abstract art appeared to reach a theoretical endpoint with Minimal art. Since then, however, sound art has opened up further questions about abstraction, in ways, which are arguably not addressed by pre-existing discourses. Sound installation brings these sound art practices back to the field of visual art, and in the case of my practice, necessitates revisiting the discourses surrounding minimalism.

#### SOUND AND IMMANANCE

The term Sound Art is used here to describe the changes brought about by the invention of recording technology upon what was previously musical composition. Sound Art offers a depth of listening differing to, and beyond that of music, due to its incorporation of 'real' sound and acoustic effects. It can compel a level of spatial sensitivity that is closer to the animal, instinctual and primal - the existential. It is this level of connection between listener and surroundings that this project aspires to explore – it is in response to experiencing this phenomenon that the question of immanence in aesthetics – an absolute connection to immediate time and space – arises. Conversely, the term immanence is used in this proposal in reference to a particular type of aesthetic experience.

Immanence, in traditional philosophical terms, is the belief that god is *in* the universe, as opposed to transcendence, the belief that god is separate from the universe. An understanding of immanence from Heidegger is that phenomena are perceived and conceived when beings are 'in time' with themselves and the life-world. Heidegger, followed by Gadamer, developed the field of hermeneutics, which focuses upon the interrelation of the subject and object. This phenomenon, a being in time of the observer with the object of their attention, is what the project seeks to achieve.

This project's works strive to propel the audience toward an aesthetic zone outside of, or prior to, language. It does so in the traditional way of removing signs, or content, from the work, and by enhancing, or expanding the works appeal to sensory experience through presenting the medium in its raw state, and with minimal variations, drawing attention to subtle elements of repetition and deviation. In any case, both the possibility of anything existing outside of language, and the desire to place something outside of it, are matters explored by strands of post-structuralism, particularly that after Lacan.

In the case that this research can verify the possibility of immanence as manifest by sound and video installation practice, it then seeks to understand how this might resolve with the discourses discussed. The pursuit of immanence, or concrete reality, has been a hallmark of the late-modernist movement, but the contextualisation of it – standing outside of it to understand what drives it – is an unanswered, but begged, question. Thus this project of practice-based research seeks to manifest one way that this phenomenon can be both experienced and understood.

### 3.4 Methods:

A number of research methodologies are used in the project.

The research will use aspects of Phenomenology as a tool for understanding and defining the aesthetics of the project work. Phenomenology might be characterised by Husserl's slogan "back to the things themselves". The Phenomenological method involves describing particular, concrete phenomena. It necessitates two parts - an experiencing subject and an experienced object – the subject and object are essentially interrelated. A key thesis of Phenomenology, drawn from Brentano, is that consciousness is *intentional*: directed on to objects<sup>15</sup>. Heidegger extends this proposition with the notion of 'being in time'. Taken together, this method suggests an observer who is intently focussed upon *experiencing*, not to *interpreting*. The project work, therefore, is to produce phenomena that encourage intentional conscious engagement with the physical world, highlighting the connection between audience and the object of their attention.

A second methodological tool is post-structuralism. Post-structuralism, after Lacan, critiques linguistic and structuralist theories by arguing that knowledge, truth and reality do not originate in experience, but in language – that there is no absolute reality, rather a structure of realities which we experience as real, for us, at this moment, and which correspond, or conflict, with the realities of other people. This project seeks to create an experience of individual reality that is based upon *being in time and space*, achieved through minimal methods that are interested in the absence of language. It is envisaged that post-structuralist discourse on language can inform this.

The approach to research is heuristic - a trial and error approach, which acknowledges that research in art is produced through experimentation. Art works are often produced from inspirations, intuitions or curiosities – born out of contextual information – and coming into existence in isolation, to be reconciled with their context at a later date. It is a creative process.

Each semester represents a six-month period, broken up into three two-month blocks.

Semester one: beginning                      Program starts: 1 January 2005.

Continue proposal development from initial application.

Research interactive audio-video software/hardware systems.

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<sup>15</sup> Concise Routledge Encyclopedia for Philosophy, Routledge: London, 2000.

Develop skills in software usage.

Initiate program of broad bibliographic research into the concept of absorption.

Semester one: middle Utilise software skills to develop audio/visual presentation system.

Develop concepts relating to the psychological contextualisation of abstraction.

Semester one: end Develop audio-visual materials for initial sketch.

Semester two: beginning Adjust proposal content based on research from Semester one.

Bibliographic research focussing upon history, theory and criticism of abstraction.

Prepare material for InfraCinema<sup>16</sup>, exploring non-representational approaches to the moving image and the psychological contextualisation of abstraction.

Semester two: middle Presentation of InfraCinema.

Semester two: end Develop proposal for submission.

Bibliographic research into experimental film.

Videographic research of experimental film.

Compile documentation of InfraCinema.

Semester three: beginning Bibliographic research into phenomenology.

Sonographic research compiling known relevant audio materials.

Develop technical means for combining sculptural and video elements in an installation setting.

Semester three: middle Continue bibliographic research of phenomenology.

Videographic research into non-representational/abstract tendencies in narrative film.

Develop audio-visual incorporating plastic material into conventional narrative setting.

Semester three: end Continue bibliographic research of phenomenology.

Sonographic research into contemporary abstraction.

Present installation dealing with tensions between non-representational and representational content.

Semester four: beginning Compile documentation from installation.

Videographic research of contemporary abstraction.

Bibliographic research of psychoanalytic theory.

Investigation of multi-channel video projection.

Semester four: middle Bibliographic research of psychoanalytic theory.

Phenomenological analysis of sonographic material.

Development of narrative material for use in multi-channel video projection.

Semester four: end Bibliographic research.

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<sup>16</sup> InfraCinema: 13-22nd October, 2005. An audio-visual installation/performance, presented by Bruce Mowson, Arts House and the Melbourne International Arts Festival at the North Melbourne Town Hall.

Presentation of multi-channel video installation.

Initial development of two works for presentation in fifth and six semesters.

Semester five: beginning          Bibliographic research.

Project development

Semester five: middle      Project development and presentation

Semester five: end          Compilation of bibliographic annotations

Project development

Semester six: beginning      Drafting of exegesis and project DVR.

Project development and presentation

Semester six: middle      Drafting of exegesis and project DVR.

Semester six: end          Final preparation of exegesis and project DVR.

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## PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

### DVD 1

The accompanying DVD includes folders and files containing project artworks and documentation.

#### **Barney, 2006**

*Barney* (5.1), Max/MSP/Jitter standalone application.

*Barney* (stereo), Max/MSP/Jitter standalone application.

*Barney*, installation view 1, digital image.

*Barney*, installation view 2, digital image.

#### **Infracinema, 2005**

Infracinema TS

#### **Melting Moments, 2007**

*Melting Moments* (5.1), Max/MSP/Jitter standalone application.

*Melting Moments* (stereo), Max/MSP/Jitter standalone application.

*Melting Moments* installation view 1, digital image.

*Melting Moments* installation view 2, digital image.

*Melting Moments* installation view 3, digital image.

*Melting Moments* installation view 4, digital image.

*Pink Slides*, 2005, installation view, digital video, 2'33".

*Swing*, 2007-8, installation view, digital video, 2'21".

#### **Zippered, 2006**

*Zippered* (binaural stereo), Max/MSP/Jitter standalone application.

## NOTES AND INSTRUCTIONS

#### **Max/MSP/Jitter standalone applications.**

These applications are independent software items that produce the sound and video in real-time. To launch them, double click on the file.

#### **Infracinema TS**

These MPEG-2/DVD files are encoded for burning to DVD and are suitable for playback using a DVD playing application.

#### **Playback of Melting Moments on various monitor/projector sizes.**

The work is designed for a 24" LCD monitor. To play on smaller monitors, wait until the work has launched and press the "D" key on the keypad. This will open up an adjustment screen, which you can use to arrange the shapes as per p. 58 of the exegesis, and to other patterns. Press the "ESC" key twice to re-enter full screen playback.

#### **Zippered**

Zippered is designed to be heard on headphones where possible, due to the use of a binaural microphone in recording.

### **Stereo Audio**

The sound from the application will default to the Apple core-audio driver, meaning that stereo playback through the computer will happen automatically.

### **5.1 and multi-channel audio playback**

The software needs to be re-configured to playback through multi-channel audio hardware for 5.1 playback.

- i. When application has launched, press the *esc* key.
- ii. Open the DSP control window by pressing the *A* key.
- iii. From the DSP audio window, select your audio hardware driver from the *Driver* menu.
- iv. Press the *esc* key to resume full screen playback.

The output channels of the software are configured to the 5.1 speaker layout standard. Please note that the audio is mixed in quad and no signal appears in the centre channel.

Audio channel 1 Left front speaker.

Audio channel 2 Centre speaker.

Audio channel 3 Right front speaker.

Audio channel 4 Left rear speaker.

Audio channel 5 Right rear speaker.

Audio channel 6 Low Frequency Effects speaker.

### **DVD 2**

*Infracinema*, performed on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2005.

Audio and video in DVD-R format, 34'30'.

This DVD is authored with audio in the 5.1 channel surround sound format. Please adjust playback equipment accordingly. Stereo playback is automatically selected for stereo sound systems.