

THE PERFECT, SINGULAR MOMENT,
WHEN REALITY LOOKS BACK AT YOU TO SHOW, EXACTLY,
WHAT SHE HAS BEEN HIDING ALL THIS TIME:

NOTHING

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ABSTRACT

This research process is rooted in a material practice and in the temporal apprehension of objects and everyday materials, extending and complexifying the concept of the readymade (as first introduced by Marcel Duchamp). The focus on materiality separates this research from more traditional time-based art practices such as video, sound, or performance, as I seek to investigate the temporal properties of a sculptural experience. The complexities involved in the object-subject relation are at the core of my research.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	v
INTRODUCTION	2
{language}	5
{meaning}	26
{the actuality of colour}	34
{gravity}	41
{continuous presence}	52
{studio space}	57
{moments of infinite duration}	63
{particulars and universals}	71
{positions and orientations}	75
{encounters and situations}	84
<i>The distance from the Sun</i>	93
WORKS CITED	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Excluding Works Cited)	107
APPENDIX: Exhibition images and concluding reflections	111

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Ill. 1. Leo Matiz, <i>Peacock of the Sea</i>	3
Ill. 2. Writing method	3
Ill. 3. Bethan Huws, Screenprint	6
Ill. 4. George Brecht, <i>Three Lamp Events</i>	10
Ill. 5. Studio space	14
Ill. 6. Studio wall	22
Ill. 7. Paper bag	26
Ill. 8. <i>Things themselves</i> . Found situation	29
Ill. 9. Plexiglass panel, strap, screws	34
Ill. 10. Found situation	36
Ill. 11. <i>Orange/white stripes</i> . Sketchbook	38
Ill. 12. <i>Orange/white stripes from wall to floor, from floor to wall</i>	40
Ill. 13. York University campus	41
Ill. 14. <i>Object for rethinking the Universe</i>	43
Ill. 15. <i>Thoughts</i>	45
Ill. 16. Descending tape roll. Sketchbook	47
Ill. 17. <i>Thoughts</i> (6 hours later)	49
Ill. 18. <i>White bucket</i>	55
Ill. 19. Plexiglass, shoes, rope, painting table, floor	58
Ill. 20. Note	59
Ill. 21. Studio floor	64
Ill. 22. Specific bucket. Sketchbook	73
Ill. 23. Found cigarette butt	76
Ill. 24. Giovanni Anselmo, <i>Direzione</i>	78
Ill. 25. <i>Untitled (Alignment)</i>	79

Ill. 26. Found concrete block	80
Ill. 27. Objects leaning against the studio wall	82
Ill. 28. Hardware store front, College Street West, Toronto	84
Ill. 29. Hardware store front, Dundas Street West, Toronto	87
Ill. 30. Hardware store front, Dundas Street West, Toronto	90
Ill. 31. Sketchbook	94
Ill. 32. Sketchbook	95
Ill. 33. Sketchbook	96
Ill. 34. Sketchbook	97
Ill. 35. Sketchbook	98
Ill. 36-39. Storage room, Nov. 18, 2017	99-102



INTRODUCTION

The initial focus of this investigation was nothingness, and I set myself in the process of tracing its origins in the visual arts. After some research, I traced it down to two main sources: Marcel Duchamp's idea of the readymade object, and Kazimir Malevich's encounter with infinity through the medium of painting. I discovered a surprising temporal coincidence: that the origin of the readymade object and the birth of Suprematism date back to the same year, 1913. And I found yet another, more interesting, coincidence: it took two years for both Duchamp and Malevich to become fully aware of their discoveries.

As Calvin Tomkins pointed out, the readymade idea materialized when Duchamp encountered and bought the winter shovel in a hardware store in New York, two years after he had put together *Bicycle Wheel* in his Paris studio (*Duchamp: A Biography*, 157). Similarly, Aleksandra Shatskikh has argued that *Black Square*, which was made in 1915, was preceded by a drawing by two years, which was the reason why Malevich insisted on dating the painting 1913 (*Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism*, 34).

With this in mind, I began conducting a series of experiments with materials found in the vicinity of the studio and also with acrylic paint, mostly orange in colour. Parallel to these activities I regularly carried out random walks on the streets of Hamilton and Toronto, taking photographs of elements that caught my attention. I also followed a sketchbook in which I draw on a regular basis.

As I advanced further in my research the difficulty of articulating what nothingness meant to me became apparent. I started to move away from the notion of nothingness as a concept and I began to approach other subjects such as language, colour, gravity, materiality, and eventually time. As I came to discover, in one of his personal notes Marcel Duchamp described the readymade as an encounter, a “rendez-vous” happening at a particular time. This focus granted the material object a spatio-temporal nature.

In this investigation I have explored the encounter with everyday objects and materials. I have focused attention on the temporal aspect involved in encountering everyday objects as well as useless three-dimensional things.

Through this process I have interrogated the Western obsession with materiality, the default separation between subjects and objects, and the crystallization of these habits through the pragmatic use of language.

Writing process

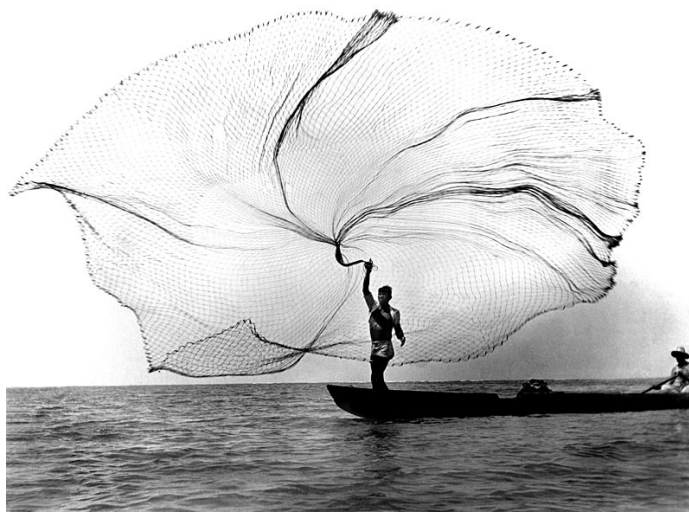
The written component of this thesis developed during four years, between 2014 and 2018. It is composed by 10 short essays that interweave written text, drawings and photographs.

I have approached writing as a research process, as a practice that extends from studio practice. Rather than following one single argument at a time my writing spread out among different subjects simultaneously. In retrospect I think of the writing process as a slow-motion fishing net opening up. This idea came to me when I saw the photograph of a Colombian fisher spreading his net. The net opens at once with each point having a different position. Each point in the net

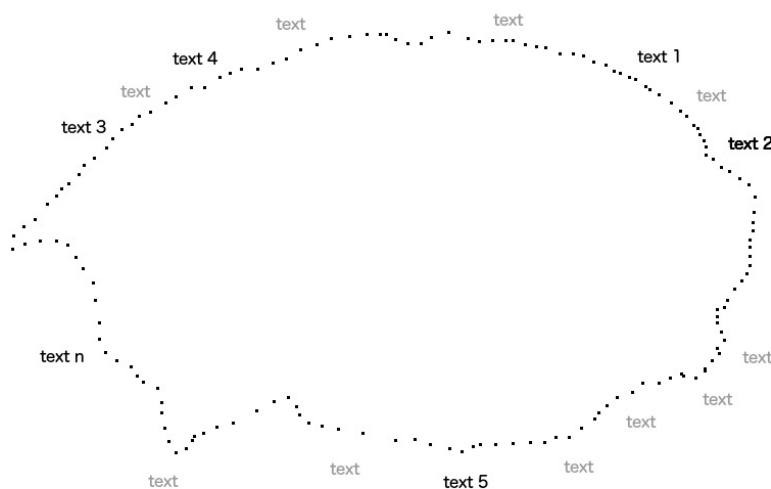
could be equated to a different textual element. The net delineates a circle, which implies a beginning, but it can be located in any place.

Along with descriptive and analytic passages I also included short notes and reflections that were initially written only to myself. At the expense of sounding cryptic, I opted to keep these passages as they offer an entry point to my internal ruminations and the undercurrent of reflections that were also guiding this research.

The final text is not fully finished, neither unfinished. It exposes its present state as one possibility among others. In principle, it can be approached in any order or sequence, inviting the possibility of finding new connections between its different components.



III. 1. Leo Matiz, “*Pavo real del mar*” / *Peacock of the Sea*, Ciénaga Grande, Colombia, 1939



III. 2. Writing process

This research is complemented by the exhibition *The distance from the Sun*, which will take place at the Gales Gallery on the York University Keele campus, between May 7 - 12, 2018.

{language}

*if each object in space is equated to a single letter;
their language cannot be translated,
it can only be actualized
by the presence of the spectator.*

personal note, February 6, 2017

A couple of years ago I wrote:

Thinking out loud

Over the past three years my practice has changed. I no longer consider myself as someone who makes objects but as someone who moves objects. This shift from making to moving has a direct connection with my ongoing question about how to make art. Before, my main concerns revolved around the cultural implications of science and technology, but as these questions were gradually replaced by others, I began to be more attentive to my experience of the everyday. In this new trajectory, a particular interest about the nature of language began to manifest.

Monday, March 21, 2016

Etymologically speaking, said Marcel Duchamp in an interview, art means to make, hand make. And his quest was not directed towards defining art, but framing possibilities for its making. Art can be good, bad, or indifferent, but anything we make is ultimately art, he concluded.

The need to write this dissertation combined with the activity of going regularly to the studio provided the necessary conditions that moved me to consider language in a more attentive way. This simultaneous consideration (of the written and the physical) has led me to start exploring language outside its traditional understanding as a translating technology acting between two different realities (the physical and the imagined), and to start embracing it in a broader way, closer to a fluidic mass in flux, carrying meanings and non-meanings alike.

The work in the studio has benefited at large from the readings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger and Alfred North Whitehead, and also from my encounter with the poetry and personal notes of Daniil Kharmis, a Russian poet deeply influenced by Suprematism. But most importantly from the works and words of Marcel Duchamp (his published writings and interviews) and from those of Kazimir Malevich. This trajectory of investigation placed me in direct contact with the language of abstraction.



Ill. 3. Bethan Huws, Screenprint. 38 × 46 cm, 2012

Encountering “empty” things

When Wittgenstein asked “what is the meaning of a word” (*The Blue Book*) he opened the possibility of considering meaning in relation to language. In asking this question language became suddenly separated from meaning. The thickness of language, its materiality, became visible.

Wittgenstein concluded (in the *Philosophical Investigations*) that the meaning of a word was its use.

Sect. 43: For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.

But what happens with the notion of meaning when, instead of considering written or oral language, we consider physical presences as language?

Robert Smithson is often quoted for having said that his sense of language was that it was matter, not ideas, for example, “printed matter”. And he looked for a sense of language in the territory. *The Spiral Jetty*, as it exists today, is an echo of the event that made it. It is like a word that was once said and then forgotten.

Michel de Certeau approached everyday life as a “linguistic space”. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, de Certeau indicates that the language of everyday life can be compared with the “prose of the world”. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* he wrote:

We are subject to, but not identified with, ordinary language. As in the ship of fools, we are embarked, without the possibility of an aerial view or any sort of totalization. That is the “prose of the world” Merleau-Ponty spoke of (11).

De Certeau also argued that our “ways of doing” can be compared with “ways of speaking”, in this way making a relation between everyday life actions and spoken language.

If I take the “prose of the world” to be composed by the objects, spaces and actions that I encounter on a daily basis, these elements may constitute its grammar. In this way, encountering domestic objects on the sidewalk in front of hardware stores is like encountering physical sentences.

The “now” of the world, which creates a separation between past and future, can be equated with the process of reading or hearing a word, and with the particular moment of being in the present reading or hearing a word.

The idea that the world “speaks” as it unfolds (the “world worlds”) is encountered in Martin Heidegger. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” he wrote:

World is not a mere collection of the things—countable and uncountable, known and unknown—that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are

present. World worlds [...] World is never an object that stands before us and can be looked at. World is that always-nonobjectual.

Cited by Lee Ufan in “Beyond Being and Nothingness”, 256.

In his lecture “Die Sprache” given in 1950, Heidegger also said:

Language in its essence is neither expression nor a human deed. Language speaks.

Graham Harman, “Language and the Thing”, in *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, 175.

From another point of view, Alfred North Whitehead offers a temporal approach to language and meaning. Meaning is a temporal event. He writes:

For the sake of simplicity, only spoken language will be considered here.

A single word is not one definite sound. Every instance of its utterance differs in some respect from every other instance [...] Thus a word is a species of sounds, with specific identity and individual differences. But what we have heard is merely the sound. When we recognize the species, we have heard the word.

If the meaning of the word be an event, then either that event is directly known, as a remembered perceptum in an earlier occasion of the percipient's life, or that event is only vaguely known by its dated spatio-temporal nexus with events which are directly known.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, emphasis not in original, 182.

If from Wittgenstein one can get a sense of the materiality of language, from Whitehead one gets the sense of its temporality. Every word is a sequence of sounds. At a particular moment these series of sounds add up to make a word. The meaning of a word is an event, the event of meaning. This event emerges as we connect the sound with a referent which is somehow present in our memory.

This logic of operation, of creating meaning by assigning a known reference to the sound being heard, is disrupted when I take into consideration the physical world as language. In approaching the physical world as a linguistic space, there are no words that are being heard or read individually, but physical and simultaneous presences coming into existence.

Maurizio Lazzarato pointed out that with the readymades Marcel Duchamp sought to liberate himself from the constraints of language, which he saw as “one of humanity’s errors”.

In order

(t)o achieve emptiness, total anaesthesia, the condition for creating new sets of possibilities, the significations language conveys must be suspended, significations which like good or bad taste are no more than habits crystallised by repetition.

Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work, 24.

With the readymades, meaning comes not from encountering the object alone but from the process of making a relation between their physicality and their assigned title. The readymades are named, “baptized” and offer a play of meaning that moves from their title to the physical object. The title operates as a linguistic frame that separates the object from its pragmatic reading as an industrial object. In doing so, the mind keeps rotating.

For example, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), the title given by Duchamp to a winter shovel found and bought in a hardware store in New York, the meaning of the work is created by the coupling of title and object. By projecting our imagination into a possible (unwanted) future and stopping right before an event takes place (our unhappy accident), we are invited to come right back to the present and confront the material presence of the object. There is a play between the (un-happy) future created on the basis of written language (its title) and the material presence of the object.

Still, the question of meaning is worth being asked once again, this time outside the play of meaning that is created by attaching a name or title to an object. What does it mean to encounter the physical world as language itself, and what possibilities does this offer to a sculptural practice?

At a given point, while walking down Yonge Street, I noticed the way in which I was making sense of the world as “by default”: I was interpreting reality in a pragmatic way. But, at certain moments, as exemplified by my encounter with particular situations, like when I encountered the mops, brooms and other objects outside hardware stores, the pragmatic *reading* of my environment was momentarily suspended. The moment of the encounter offered a sudden suspension of interpretation. My experience was that the “now” of the world was suddenly extended. At that precise moment, looking for meaning lost its meaning, as the encounter itself became meaningful.

Objects as events, events as objects

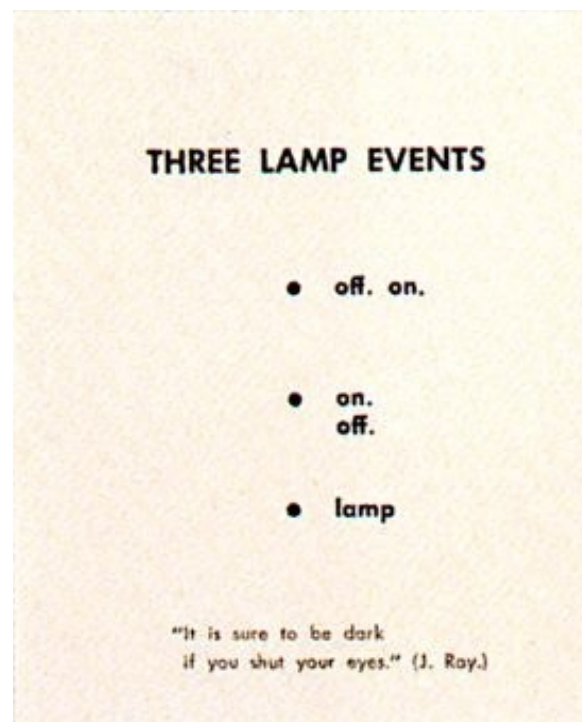
George Brecht's *event scores* extended the notion of the score from musical notation into any action performed in everyday life.

Brecht was a student of John Cage at the New School for Social Research at the end of the Fifties. Although not a musician himself (his father was), Brecht found inspiration in Cage who saw sounds as 'events in sound-space'. Brecht expanded this notion beyond the territory of music to incorporate everyday objects and actions. As Anna Dezeuze points out, for Brecht, the main characteristic of an event is that it exists in time. ("Brecht for Beginners", non pag.).

The event scores are articulated in words and they offer multiple possibilities for being interpreted. They open the potential that exists in a given word to be interpreted differently. For example, the instruction 'table' included in the score *Table* was interpreted by Brecht's Fluxus colleague Larry Miller by reading the periodic table.

As Dezeuze indicates, later in his career Brecht began to produce objects before the scores. "The score is an event; so is finding an incident for it", he recounted in an interview. This is an important clue, as it brings attention to the moment of the encounter, which connects directly with the nature of this research.

Brecht's approach to objects seems very close to Whitehead's philosophy. In another interview, Brecht mentions that every object is an event, and that every event has object-like qualities, therefore, they are pretty much interchangeable. (Ibid.).



Ill. 4. George Brecht, *Three Lamp Events*, 1961

Thinking out loud

I have tried to avoid a personal narrative in favour of an exploration in search of an opening, a gap, an empty island in the present landscape of functional meaning, where the viewer can encounter himself, herself.

Everyday objects play a significant role. What are they? How is it that they are there? How do they persist in time?

In most cases objects are activated by an action. This action may come from someone, from another object, from the forces in their vicinity.

Any object is already an action: the action of being itself. A bucket is the action 'bucket'. A bucket is constantly bucketing, being a bucket. A rock is constantly being a rock. We would be surprised if a bucket turns into a rock, or if a rock turns into a bucket.

We take for granted that what we call *reality* actually exists. Any object is an open secret. We may not know what it is, we may never know it. A bucket is what a bucket is. And this is enough to activate its secret. What a bucket is doing is being a bucket. What things are is what they are doing. A rock is doing what rocks do, buckets do what buckets do.

World-sentences

When we combine individual objects we start to create sentences. A bucket can be filled with potentially anything. A bucket is a potential in the same way a letter or a word is a potential. The future is present in a bucket every time we look at it. An individual object is like a word. When we place something into a bucket we actualize its future. 'A bucket with rocks' is an actualization.

The action of the two together is a world-sentence. Poetry can happen anytime we notice a world-sentence.

Aaaaaaaa!:

Can be actualized as a sequence of buckets containing or not containing rocks.

The vocabulary of things is partially present and partially potential (André Breton: *Je vois, j'imagine: Poèmes-objets*). An actualization (a bucket full of rocks) is the end of the potential and the confrontation with its presence.

The letter A before being the letter 'A' was the potential of a sound pronounced by a human mouth. Before arriving at their visual form 'A's existed as potential utterances in the combination of mouth and lungs as potential sounds. Out of all the potential sounds we can produce with our mouths and lungs, only a limited number of sounds ends up composing our vocabulary. We intuitively expand our vocabulary by using our hands when we talk.

When we look at the word we are seeing its actualization as the whole sentence of the world.

Poetry happens when certain combinations, or individual entities, are noticed (Rimbaud, *Voyelles*).

...

6 buckets

Some inside the gallery some outside

One empty

Sep. 27, 2015

Hamilton

Writing event

When one is faced with the task of investigating something, an inevitable method would be to seek to classify its occurrences in the world, to embark on a sort of encyclopaedic endeavour of all the possible manifestations of that *something* that one is trying to study. This is perhaps a good method when the subject of study is something concrete and manifested in the world. Linnaeus, for example, devised a classificatory system for the occurrences of the natural world. His system assumed a particular notion of what nature was and what it was not.

Approaching something in this way is a rational/scientific endeavour of classification: a way of relying on all the possible characteristics of something, whatever it is, in the phenomenal world. This belongs here, that belongs there —a way of approaching and studying the world that is ultimately practical. A kid is trained to place cubes to fit into square slots, spheres to fit into circular slots and so on. This goes here, that goes there.

This practical approach is fine when training oneself to navigate the practical world, to fit nicely into the gears of the economic system, and to deal with the pragmatics of life: going from place 'a' to place 'b', doing this, not doing that; behaving in this way, not behaving in that other way.

Rather than attempting a pragmatic classification of the subject (not only because I am not interested in pragmatics but also because the nature of my subject is in itself "not outside in the world", not necessarily "present out there"), I would like to explore it from the corners of what it is not. From the shadows it projects onto things. So rather than attempting a classification of appearances, I will attempt to encircle it, by trying to capture its shadows.

I am not sure if Wittgenstein would be of any help at this moment, but maybe. Wittgenstein started his "Blue Book" with this question: "What is the meaning of a word?" This question seems very interesting. It points to something that is beyond the physical reference of the word. In a way, by asking this question, he separates the word from the world. The word, a word, any word, becomes a floating element in the mental space, and he asks, "What is its meaning?". It seems to me that Wittgenstein's question transforms the word into an arrow and our quest is to find out what that arrow's target is (in case there is one, or in case there is more than one target.)

To find the direction, or directions, of this arrow, we can explore the particular word we are enquiring about. Is there something in the word itself telling us what the target is? Do we need to go back to the world and find the phenomenal entity which this word has "hatched" from and try to find its meaning? In other words, does the meaning of a word reside in the word or in the physical world? The world is full of things and events, but not of words.

Why am I interested in this? Because by starting to ask about the meaning of a word it is possible to start approaching words as real entities: as "pure" vibratory meanings, vibration in themselves, regardless of their 'anchor point' in the physical world. But also, because reversing this process, the world itself can be approached as a language, a poetic language.

Words can be severed from their connection with the physical world and become open for exploration to play with like individual mental entities (Marinetti's *Les Mots en Liberté* come to mind). This trajectory seems like a promising entry point towards exploring the world of objects in the physical world. And we can ask a similar set of questions: What is the meaning of an

object? What is the meaning of a ball? What is the meaning of a table? What is the meaning of a chair?

The thingness of things is their own language. For example, if I take a basketball apart and open it up and flatten it out, what does it mean? Poetic language is intrinsically in the nature of things that are out in the world.

What is the potentiality of wood to become a chair?

What is the potentiality of a chair to become something else?

What is the object of study?

“Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project”. (Leo Stein, A-B-C of Aesthetics)

The approach to things stated by Stein is very interesting. It seems to intercept, or more precisely, short-circuit Wittgenstein's question. Wittgenstein was interested in meaning; his quest was ultimately an epistemological one. Stein was talking about objects in the world, not words.

We try to make sense of a word and to make sense of the world through words, as if the world could be mapped entirely onto language—communicable, expressible by language. But what is language?

In the same way that there is no one single meaning for a word, there is no one and single meaning for any object. Every object, every word, is like an open secret. Each one is concrete and elusive at the same time.

For scientists, feelings have no concrete reality because they can not be seen 'outside' in the world. Descartes dissected animals when they were still alive and when he heard them screaming he justified his act by saying that it was the sound of a machine falling apart. We are still under the shadow of the mechanistic view of the world. But scientists enjoy poetry and art.

What is the meaning of a "molecule"? What is the meaning of an orange? What is the meaning of life? Allan Kaprow's 'Happenings' approached this mystery. There is no meaning in the surface of things. There is no meaning in looking for meaning. When Kaprow brought his consciousness to the act of brushing his teeth he was amazed at discovering the rotational movement of his elbow reflected in the mirror. This was perhaps the most interesting result of his research into the ordinary: a solitary discovery whose meaning is probably available to no one but himself. As he says, "away from the pressure of art and curators ..."

Beuys was in the same line of agreement: “Everything is art, including peeling a potato if it is done in a conscious way”.

What is the object of study?



III. 5. Studio space, Sep. 27, 2017

Occurrences

For everything that happened, many other possible things that could have happened didn't happen.

In continuing with the need to fill this space with words, letters come in very handy. There are a's b's c's d's e's r's n's w's m's w's z's... A whole world can be created with them. Also the world can flow through them. Words act as intermediaries between the phenomenal world and the imaginary world. But they have their own existence and they can emancipate themselves whenever they want.

How do things come into existence?

The form of things

Formalism:

Form follows function —a practical way of coming into existence

the form of a knife

the form of a rock to be used as a "knife"

Form follows feeling

Form follows desire

Form follows colour

Form follows vibration

Form follows form

the form of the flower is similar to the sexual organ of the wasp that fertilizes it

(trans-species forming force)

The form of dreams

The form of anger

The form of a dollar bill

The form of a candy

The form of a tractor

The form of a belly

The form of a towel —wet —dry

The form of a pocket

The form of a sailing ship

The form of a hand

The form of a can of tuna

The form of a letter —like the letter A, or b, or c, or d

The form of the letter S

The form of things

Although idealism has been a necessary counterpoint to materialism, it seems that the problem with idealism is the assumption that because the world is ultimately mental, it might therefore have a meaning: a meaning that can be grasped by the mind. This is the general assumption of mathematicians, and was the general guiding principle for Einstein: "Mathematics are the language of nature": Mathematical realism. In general, any scientific endeavour that aspires to move beyond its empirical field of study and make a larger claim in the world relies (in one way or another) on the general assumptions of mathematical realism.

Mattering

Seeing matter as a process does not rule out materialism nor idealism as ways of approaching reality. It simply acknowledges the becoming of the world as a process, as a flux. Karen Barad's notion of mattering reflects an old metaphysical doctrine already present in Heraclitus: "We never swim in the same water twice". This same approach is at the base of Whitehead's metaphysics.

Thinking the world through language is limiting. These are the limits of philosophy, but also the potentials of poetry: a type of poetry based on language —a combination of phonemes

and morphemes (atomistic language entities with meaning). But poetry can also be liberated from the constraint of words: poetry is to be found outside in the world.

The potential

Gilbert Simondon characterizes the imbrication of the future within the present as a (technical) gesture that opens the potentialities of the future. This way of approaching the future from the present in terms of “technical becoming” is not separate from any other human endeavour or way of acting in the world. Being motivated by an image of the future can bring creative potentialities into the present, rather than the pragmatics of the past. By letting ourselves be moved by forces outside ourselves we start a poetic exploration of the world. To let the future "leak out" by making "cuts into the present" (W. S. Burroughs). A process ultimately proximate to the early dadaist methods for making poetry employed by Tzara.

What does it mean to apply the same "cut into the present" when we explore the nature of things in the world?

A bucket has the potential to be filled with:

Water
Excrement
Cement
Gold
Air

{Image: bucket with basketball}
May 12, 1:54 pm

...

Everything is an event. To write is an event. To cook is an event. To swallow is an event. To pee is an event.

Everything is as cosmic or as banal as we want to see it: Nothing is banal (cosmic view).
Nothing is cosmic (nihilist view).

...

Very fast

Very slow

Rotations and lines

...

Cosmology is a way of being in the world. Not so much restricted to a science based on Hubble, but a poetic and singular endeavour; closer to psychology than to physics.

Cosmology is more personal and subjective, rather than rational and empirical:

Every object is a cosmological phenomenon.
Every act is meaningful.
Every act has cosmological significance.
Every object and every act actualize the becoming of the universe.
In this respect there is nothing that is more or less poetic than anything else.

But there is a kind of meaning or significance that is not graspable in a rational way.
In part because its significance is not so much in the present but in the future.
But also because it lies on the psychological side of things, not in the physical.

The simultaneous experience of everything happening at the same time, emphasized by one single gesture, brings at the same time the physical and the psychological.

A single gesture can draw attention to everything. Nothing connects with everything. The feeling of nothing is like the feeling of everything at the same time. "Heraclitean enantiodromia".

enantiodromia

/əˌnʌn(t)ēəˈdrōmēə/

noun rare

the tendency of things to change into their opposites,
especially as a supposed governing principle of natural
cycles and of psychological development.

The meaning of an event is not necessarily apparent in the present but is felt as something deeper. As a "cut into the present" where the future leaked out. When we move something here, it affects something else over there, physically and psychologically. When I put something here and not there, I am affecting this and not that. The significance is not only on the surface of physical things but also deeper into layers of more subtle connections. When someone perceives that change it creates a new image on his or her mind. It displaces things, it connects other things. Sometimes you only need to make a very small change, or a very small and gentle proposition, to produce an avalanche of images, and those images move you deeply and you are not sure why.

...

Basketball on bucket: cosmic event.

...

Acts in a gallery space are events.
Acts outside of a gallery space are also events.
(Brecht's 3 *Chair events* come to mind)

...

We are being felt by the planet at all times. This impulse, this force towards the center is like the force towards the center that the planet feels towards the sun, and the sun around a larger center, and that larger center around a larger one and so on. Until everything folds into itself. Curving itself into itself. Coming into itself. Swallowing itself, defecating itself.

...

List of words that have been gradually losing their meaning and I will try to forget:

Atoms
Molecules
Gravity
Matter
Art

The vibration of things and the nothingness of the readymade

A flow of language that moves from "behind" the objects through objects themselves *as* language, moving into the naming of things as the human dimension of this flow.

Language as the flow of things that communicates its internal language to the human mind by the act of naming. Walter Benjamin alludes to the notion of Logos as used by Heraclitus and the Stoics.

For Benjamin the world of things is mute. Their language is silent. As it is not a sound language, is it then a visual language? This raises the obvious question: Is the language of things their phenomenal and sensual qualities? Benjamin doesn't go into this. As can be gathered from his writings, the language of things is not related to their sensual qualities, but to a type of force (imbued directly by God). Therefore their language is not only mute but invisible, at least it is not a language to be captured by the senses, or by the senses *alone*.

The language of things is a type of sacred language. From rocks, to chairs, to fish, to balls: each thing in the world is a manifestation of its secret language—each thing is its own language.

The internal language of things is amplified, or diminished, by the subjective, emotional and arbitrary gesture of choosing.

The readymade is a cut into the world, but at the same time, it is an actualization of the potential of a new language to emerge to the surface. The readymade is always alive as it is a product of the culture of its own time: a vibratory emergence, a time-condensation, a material-vibratory-emotional-irrational-sensual language.

The readymade is a new language every time it is actualized but it is also nothing more than the oldest language. Both simultaneously present. Mute and loud at the same time. A readymade is silent but also shouts its own nature. Its language is the world, the world looking at itself from within itself. The nothingness of the readymade is its presence.



Monosyllabic objects

The work that is being developed in the studio constitutes the basis for this investigation. It is composed of a series of elements of different natures. There are vertical, horizontal and inclined elements; opaque, reflective and transparent surfaces; heavy and very light materials; raw, naturally coloured as well as painted surfaces.

Each element has been finding its particular place within a system that has been evolving gradually without following a predefined direction or plan. With a lost plan, the elements are placed intuitively in space and in reference to themselves. With every movement the entire constellation of objects changes and needs to be rearranged.

This way of working, as François Jullien says in his *Treatise of Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, brings attention to the potential inherent in the situation at any given moment. “(I)ntead of setting up a goal for our actions, we could allow ourselves to be carried along by the propensity of things. In short, instead of imposing our plan upon the world, we could rely on the potential inherent in the situation.” (16).

Working without a plan means that the overall direction of the work is not known, only felt. This way of working is like a way of navigating a language that is constructing itself from within. It is an endless construction. Once the system has been put into motion (at a moment which I cannot definitively pinpoint in time), the various elements that have been arriving are “attracted” and organized according to their own nature.

Considering the whole constellation of objects as the system for an abstract language, each element in itself could be seen in relation to a single letter. A letter by itself does not refer to the world outside itself but to itself. Each letter by itself is free from the weight of signification it acquires when arranged to form a word. Each letter represents the potential of meaning in the future. This potential is what Duchamp referred to in one of his notes related to the *infra-thin*:

The possible is an *infra thin*.

The possibility of several tubes of colour becoming a Seurat is the concrete 'explanation' of the possible as *infra thin*.

Marcel Duchamp: Notes, 21.

In the same way, when one element is put closer to another element, and in certain relation to space, both start to stutter as the result of this relation; they start to mumble a silent language. It is like getting closer to a primordial language of things and relations.



III. 6. Studio wall, Oct. 17, 2017

Identity in contradiction

The search for a moment of suspension has brought me in direct contact with the vocabulary of abstraction. It has been an uncertain and dubious process.

Art historian Cecilia Fajardo-Hil in her analysis “Contemporary Abstraction in Latin America” refers to abstraction as a problematic form of art which presents itself as a contradiction:

The notion that modern abstraction could transcend ideology made it ‘ideologically problematic.’ It is this contradictory idea of being beyond ideology and at the same time being a form of resistance that still today makes us believe that abstraction is a problematical form of art, because it may be seen as apolitical or disengaged with the world.

Fajardo-Hill insists that the definition of abstraction through the conventional opposition between abstraction and representation is inadequate. Rather, abstraction may be interpreted as an investigation of reality.

Quoting from Briony Fer’s *On Abstract Art*, Fajardo-Hill indicates that abstract art since its inception is characterized by a duality: “The relationship between matter and ideal, between presence and absence, the visible and the invisible [...] a magnetic field of attraction and repulsion.” (Fer, 154).

Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida conceived reality as “unity in contraction,” an inseparably interwoven unity of subjective and objective elements. He wrote: “Everything that is regarded as being real is subjective-objective. That which we perceive through our senses transcends our consciousness, but is, at the same time, our own sensation”. (*Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*, 5).

His approach to reality resonates with the search for a vocabulary which, like that of abstraction, is intrinsically contradictory. For Nishida, it was mostly action that formed the centre of the subjective-objective world. This is “because action is the expression of the subjective will, as well as an occurrence in the objective world” (Ibid., 6).

The difficulty of approaching this abstract language, which forms a unity of opposites, lies in not falling onto one side or another. It means to inhabit, with one’s actions or inactions, a place that is neither fully objective nor fully subjective. A material or object that is manipulated is disposed in such a way that it maintains its openness, its individuality. It is a bit like walking on a tightrope.

If abstraction is to be compared to a language, it would be closer to a language of forces rather than to an indexical system.



contemplation

/kän(t)əm'plāSH(ə)n/

noun

the action of looking thoughtfully at something for a long time.

{meaning}

*Choosing a material or an object,
placing it in one place and not in another place,
in one way and not in another way...*

If every decision adds meaning, how to expose only their existence?

personal note, November 09, 2017



Meaning as use

Neither the shape, nor the weight, nor the other physical and chemical properties of the stone have changed. Its colour, its hardness, its crystal formations have all stayed the same —and yet it has undergone a fundamental transformation: it has changed its *meaning*.

Jakob von Uexküll, “A theory of meaning”, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 140. Emphasis in original.

Jakob von Uexküll, as Wittgenstein, approached meaning as use. Uexküll gives us the example of a rock found on the road. If the rock is used as a projectile, its meaning will change, even as its external characteristics like hardness, texture and weight remain the same. He says: “As long as the stone was integrated into the country road, it served as a support for the hiker’s foot. Its meaning was in its participation in the function of the path. It has, we could say, a “path tone”. That changed fundamentally when I picked up the stone in order to throw it at the dog. The stone become a thrown projectile —a new meaning was impressed upon it. It received a “throwing tone.” (Ibid.).

Following Uexküll, a paper bag found on top of a trashcan has another meaning in relation to its meaning as a functional container. Found in a particular situation, where it is not in proximity to the human hand that was holding it seconds before, the paper bag, as Uexküll’s stone, undergoes a fundamental transformation: its meaning changes. In this process its materiality remains the same but it becomes apparent and also the forces acting upon it.

Meaning and its frameworks

One of the lessons gained from *Fountain*, the mass-produced porcelain urinal introduced by Marcel Duchamp at the “First Annual Exhibition” of the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917, is that a play of frameworks (linguistic, spatial, ideological, social, temporal) were acting simultaneously and affecting in their own way the meaning of this quotidian object. With this gesture Duchamp opened the tradition of art practice (at the time characterized by painting and sculpture) to its own contextual framework of validation and legitimisation.

At the expense of oversimplification, I will point to the most evident frameworks: linguistic (its title: “Fountain”, and the addition of the ‘author’s signature: “R. Mutt”); spatial (the physical reality of the architecture in which the exhibition took place: the Grand Central Palace); ideological (the laws and norms of the Society as an institution that validates what art is and what it is not); social (the socio-economic conditions surrounding the exhibition); and temporal (the specific time-frame during which the exhibition unfolded: April 10-May 6, 1917). The linguistic frame can be seen as the more specific (it was that particular urinal that was named and signed and not any other one) while the temporal frame, which locates the physical object within an unfolding historical narrative, can be seen as the more encompassing one.

A lineage of different forms of art practices that continued exposing the mechanism of context in the process of validating modes of aesthetic perception became known as

institutional critique. Closer to this research is the notion of “situational aesthetics”, which is considered as its predecessor. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, writing about the work of Michael Asher, gives an account of this term:

The idea of “situational aesthetics” (a term coined by the English artist Victor Burgin) implied that a work would function analytically within all the parameters of its historical determination, not only its linguistic or formal framework. Three concepts would become crucial for the definition of “situational aesthetics”: first, the notion of material and site specificity; second, the notion of place; and third, that of presence.

“Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture”, *Michael Asher*, 66.

Presence, place, and material and site specificity are addressed in this writing. For example, the notion of presence is explored in {continuous presence}, {the actuality of colour} and also in {moments of infinite duration}; place is addressed more directly in {studio space}; and material and site specificity are explored in {positions and orientations}, {gravity} and also in {encounters and situations}.

The fifth meaning of an object

Daniil Kharms, a Russian poet deeply influenced by Kazimir Malevich, once wrote in his diaries what he conceived to be the five different meanings that can be recognized in any single object.

The first four meanings Kharms identified as “working meanings”, they are: graphic (or geometrical), utilitarian, emotional and aesthetic. All of the four working meanings concern the beholder’s perception of the object. (Branislav Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms: Writing and the Event*, 54)

Kharms sharply distinguishes the *fifth meaning* which he calls “essential”. The fifth meaning is defined by the very fact of the existence of the object. It lies outside the connection between the object and a human and serves the object itself. The fifth meaning is the “free will of the object”. “Kharms’ principal area of investigation is the object’s meaning. Still, the assertions he makes do not ultimately pertain to a theory of language or a theory of meaning. His central insight deals precisely with the ontological status of the object”. (Ibid.).

The “fifth meaning” of an object, as described by Kharms, can be employed to approach indistinguishably any given object, be it an ordinary everyday one, or an art object. Before receiving any given definition such as “commodity”, “painting”, or “sculpture”, these material objects exist. To recognize their existence is to “understand” their fifth meaning.

This fifth meaning is harder to acknowledge because it is *too present*, too close, therefore it is taken for granted.

I would say that this notion encountered by Daniil Kharms resonates with contemporary continental philosophy, and in particular with object-oriented metaphysics (as developed by Graham Harman), and its attempt to re-think the ‘things themselves’ outside the human mind. (I explore this notion more in “Object-oriented metaphysics” in {moments of infinite duration}).



III. 8. *Things themselves*. Found situation. The Gales gallery, York University, Nov. 2016

Meaning and affect

In “The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation”, Simon O’Sullivan approaches the question of the “nature” of affects. He conceives affects as *immanent* to matter, *immanent* to experience, but located in a place that is prior to signification (even prior to feelings). Affects are “extra-discursive and extra-textual”, not having to do with meaning.

Following Massumi he writes: “affects are moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/or the body at the level of matter. We might even say that affects are *immanent* to matter.”

And following Spinoza he writes:

we might define affect as the effect another body, for example an art object, has upon my own body and my body’s *duration*. As such, affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed, they occur on a different, *asignifying* register.

In fact this is what differentiates art from language—although language, too, can and does have an affective register; indeed, signification itself might be understood as just a complex affective function (*meaning would be the effect of affects*). (126).

Elsewhere, O’Sullivan has proposed that Buddhism, as a methodology for quieting the mind, can be understood as an “ethico-aesthetic strategy for accessing the virtual realm of affects” (O’ Sullivan, “A Life between the Finite and Infinite”, 262).

Meaning as existence

Another clue to this enquiry on meaning comes from Jean-Luc Nancy. In *The Gravity of Thought* Nancy compares existence with meaning. He says:

meaning does not have the sense of an answer, and not even of a question; in this sense it has no meaning. But it is the event of an opening. (78).

meaning is first of all that by which, or rather that in which, or even that *as* which, there is a being [*être*] of meaning or an entity [*existant*] whose existence is by itself, from the outset, in the element of meaning, before all signification. (60).

We are meaning. Before all produced or disclosed meaning, and before all exchanges of meaning, our existence presents itself to us as meaning. (62).

when

each object and each material is given its freedom

when

each element achieves its unique individuality

its unique significance

*in order to achieve this position each object, each material,
needs to be free, needs to become an opening into the
present*

when

*every material, every object, every colour, achieves the same
intensity of presence*

collected notes, undated



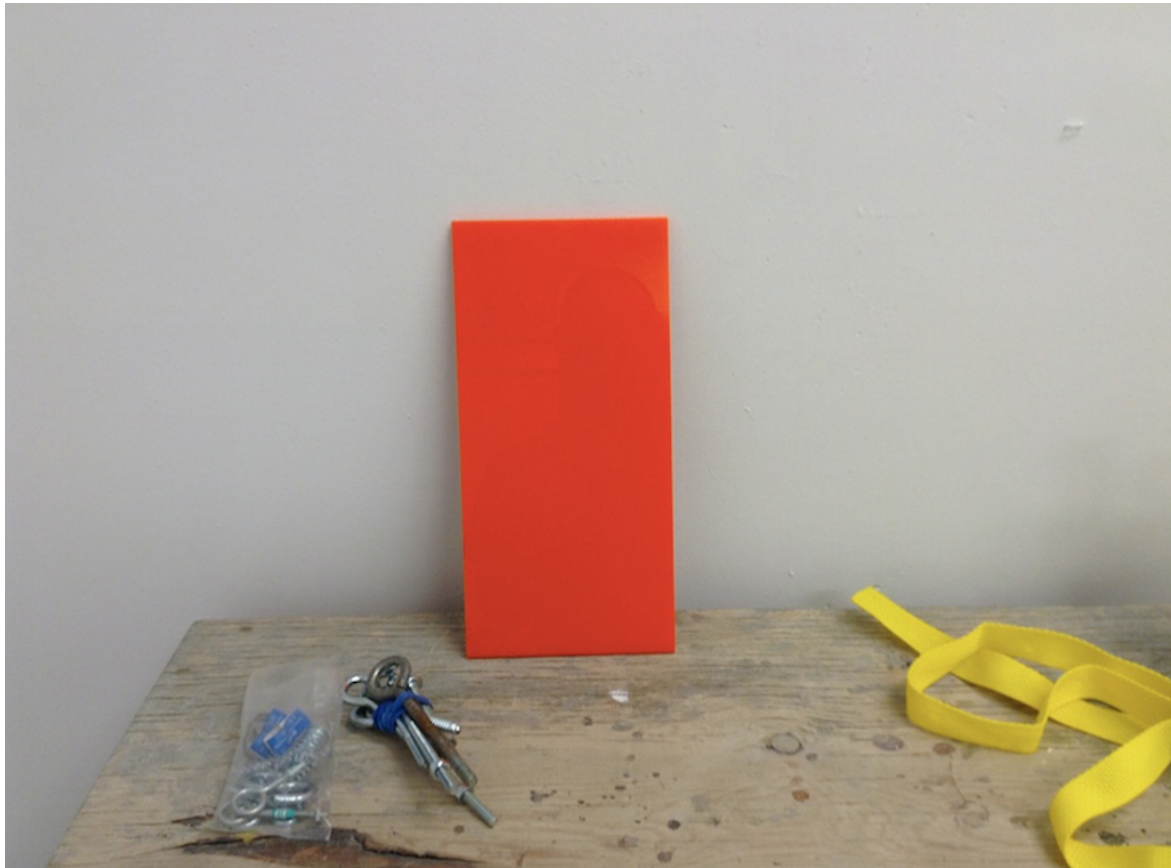
At the moment of contemplation
our distance with the object
becomes smaller
until it dissolves

Jan. 2015

{the actuality of colour}

What I am investigating keeps hiding from me. In an attempt to articulate it here in words, the closer I can get to it is by saying that what I am investigating is the relation between presences and time; or perhaps, what I am investigating is just one thing: Time. But what is time? Time is not a property of an object and it is not a concept: an object persists with its presence at the moment of looking at it, but what is this vibrant orange in front of me? What is the time of orange? How many times are in orange? Is this what we may call infinite?

personal note, March 15, 2017



III. 9. Plexiglass panel, strap, screws, 2016

[...] that which sees becomes coloured itself, so to speak

Aristotle, *On The Soul*, quoted by Hans Blumenberg in "Light as a Metaphor for Truth", *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, 33.

The colour orange and the creation of a moment of suspension

Colour is a too broad and slippery subject. As David Batchelor has written, colour is an ambiguous terrain that exists in the periphery of language (*The Luminous and the Grey*, 13). Batchelor also cites Baudelaire for whom "colour had perhaps the greatest power of all: the power to be autonomous" (*Chromophobia*, 55).

Kazimir Malevich approached colour as a vehicle to arrive at infinity. His conclusion was that in order to accomplish this task, colour needs to be free from representation.

I have broken the blue boundary of color limits, come out into the white, besides me comrade-pilots swim in this infinity. I have established the semaphore of Suprematism. I have beaten the lining of the colored sky, torn it away and in the sack that formed itself, I have put color and knotted it. Swim! The free white sea lies before you.

"Catalogue 10th State Exhibition", Kasimir Malevich, Moscow, 1919; quoted in *Autocritique: Essays On Art and Anti-art, 1963-1987*, 71.

The autonomy of colour, its place outside language, and its potential for creating a moment of suspension, are my main interests in colour.

Encountering orange

Coming to the York University campus every week during four years I have been surrounded by construction sites. A construction site carries its own time that separates itself from the ordinary pace of time of everyday life. In a construction site various temporalities overlap: The past, its immediate present (its actual state), and its future (which is invisible). A construction involves the careful materialization of a predesigned plan whose final state is not obvious in the surface (specially during its early stages), keeping one side on the concrete and another in the abstract.

Orange is found in the periphery of construction sites where it is used pragmatically. It indicates in advance the encounter with a disruption. It is a sort of alert, a warning sign.

Orange is used to cover flat surfaces that range from large rectangles to octagons. It is also found in objects such as cones and barriers and sand bags used to prevent fences and signs from being blown over.

In panels, the way in which it is applied varies, from hand-painted areas to reflective surfaces created by cutting-edge technology that shows no trace of the human hand.

Orange is also encountered in stripes, usually interchanged with white or black. This arrangement is used for creating barriers that prevent or block a particular entrance.

If a construction site is a disruption in the spatio-temporal flux of daily experience, orange panels, cones, and sand bags accomplish this role by announcing it to passers-by in advance.

Although I have referred to orange in general, orange is found in a wide range of tonalities. Even in the same object, like in the case of sand bags, many different tones of orange exist due to a gradual degradation in hue.



III. 10. Found situation. York University campus, April 12, 2018

Studio practice

In the studio I have been exploring ways to create a moment of suspension, a moment of suspension of interpretation, a disruption in the mechanism of naming things while we perceive them.

I have been using acrylic orange and acrylic white which I usually apply with a brush over various surfaces, from flat wooden panels to cylindrical mop sticks. To demarcate the limit between orange and white I use masking tape. Sometimes I use transparent gel medium to make this line sharper but not always.

In addition to acrylic I have gathered some orange objects. The first orange objects were Plexiglas rectangles. Orange Plexi panels are very appealing and they seem just like the solid, and odourless, version of the fluidic acrylic. I recently collected other orange objects: a small cut-out from a Pizza Pizza cardboard box that I found in the garbage can right outside the studio and some lids that are used to close the ends of PVC pipes.

Selecting these materials for their colour allows me to bypass the difficulty of choosing based on a given form. This is an unresolved question: would any form do as long as it is orange? I haven't arrived at a final answer in this respect. Perhaps this clear criteria is not necessary. Perhaps it is precisely this "not-knowing" that keeps the work happening, that keeps the work alive.

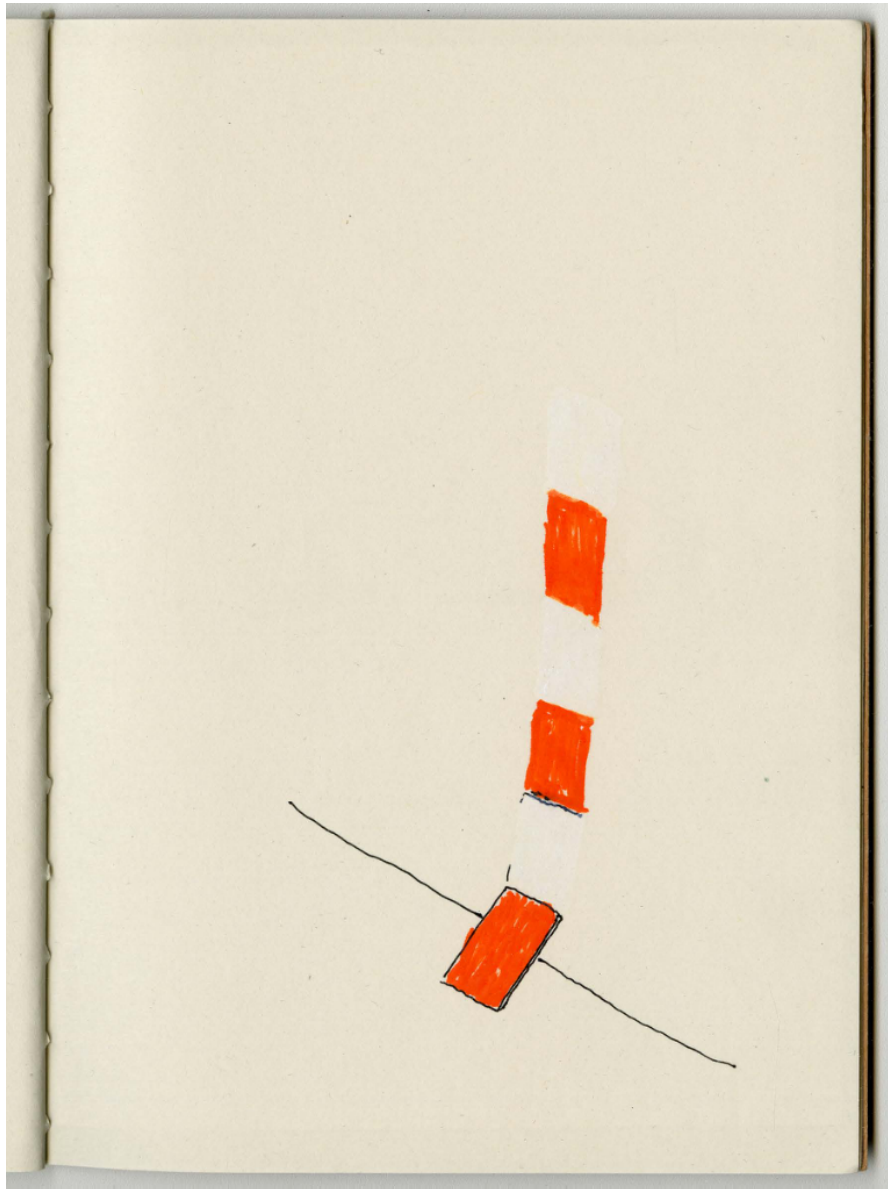
Orange/white stripes from wall to floor; from floor to wall

As more elements continued to be brought into the studio and more actions continued to take place, a particular anxiety in trying to define the limits of the work, both temporally and spatially, started to be manifested.

A crucial moment happened when I started experimenting with a sequence of orange stripes on the wall. The idea manifested initially in a drawing: a sequence of orange rectangles descend from the wall and move onto the floor, at the floor level, connecting the wall with the floor, colour materializes. The colour rectangles move in gradual intervals. The sequence of rectangles can also be seen in the opposite direction, colour moves from the floor onto the wall, losing materiality. The materialization of colour, its articulation of the wall and floor, is taking place through the location of an orange plexiglass panel, 6 inches height x 12 inches wide, at an angle against the wall.

To make the rectangles on the wall I first marked their height by following the vertical projection of the inclined Plexi panel. I kept identical intervals between them in a clock-like manner, leaving the white space of the wall in between them. Then I used masking tape to delimit the periphery of the rectangles. I then applied acrylic paint with a flat brush, at a rapid and steady pace. I was not concerned about the edges as the tape was keeping guard of them. I let the work dry and went home. When I came back to the studio the next day I looked at it and I realized I was very attracted to the way in which the orange strokes extended into the masking tape. This moving over of the colour onto the tape made the rectangles lose their defined geometry as their edges were blurred by the brush strokes. The rectangles with sharp edges were there, covered by the masking tape, but they were invisible. They existed but underneath the tape. This created a

very interesting tension. I wanted to peel off the masking tape and see those sharp lines and investigate with almost scientific curiosity the places where the paint could have gone underneath. At that moment I stepped back and looked at the rectangles. I realized that I liked that moment more than its “finished” state. I left the work in this condition and it has remained like this for the last six months.



III. 11. Orange/white stripes. Sketchbook, undated

Actuality

I understood something there: that I was drawn to a particular moment. That I was drawn to the potential more than to the finished state (this resonates with the notion of seeing the individual arrangements as “monosyllabic objects”, which are potentials rather than realized meanings). Nothing would potentially prevent me from one day looking at the work to get close to it and peel off the masking tape. Having accepted it as it is, in this unfinished/finished state, has been like being close to a work that is still alive, that still breathes.

I also realized, and this perhaps took me more time, that seeing this work in this unfinished/finished state was drawing attention not so much to its past, to the moment when the brush strokes were applied, but to its actuality, to the tension of the unfolding moment. And the encounter with this particular work in its current state was drawing attention to the viewer’s embodiment and presence in front of the work.

This experience of actuality became very important. The viewer in order to experience the work has to be there in the room in front of it. In looking at the drawing in the sketchbook this tension did not exist. I understood the difference between the drawing as a potential and its actual realization as a concrete fact in space, even though its actualization meant to leave it in this unfinished/finished state.



III. 12. *Orange/white stripes from wall to floor, from floor to wall, 2017*

{gravity}

I am holding a rock in my hand and I am feeling its weight. This force is the force between the earth and everything that exists in its surface. I have lifted the rock and the earth pulls it down. While I am holding the rock my hand is placed between it and the earth. What I am feeling is my interposition between the rock and the earth as I lifted it and separated it from the earth. If a rock is placed at a particular distance between the earth and the moon it will have no weight. Weight is not intrinsic in things. What we call weight is the result of relationships. The earth attracts everything towards itself. A rock is made from the same materials that constitutes the earth. If a meteorite falls, it will be attracted in equal way as this rock in my hand.

personal note, February 11, 2017



Gravity unites sculpture and spectator in a common dependence on and resistance to the pull of the earth. Materials and structure, volume and space, the unity and proportions of sculpture, do not speak for themselves but articulate a complex and profound sense of our own being in the world.

William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture*, 145.

Gravity concerns me. It ages things. It pulls on things and causes things to falter and fall. It works on objects and people the same way.

Tom Burr, "Gravity Moves Me", *Mousse*, 182.

About three years ago (the summer of 2014) I felt the impulse to place a tape dispenser on the wall (Ill. 14). It was an experiment conducted within the predictable banality of the everyday. However, it turned out to be a fantastic experiment. An experiment that any kid would do, but perhaps very few wouldn't, for being too boring.

After performing this gesture I observe: Will the object suspend itself?

I went out for a walk and a couple of hours later I came back. When I looked at the object something unexpected had happened. It was still on the wall but it was not in the same place, it had descended a very small distance.

I focused my attention on the object: Can I see it moving? No. I could not detect any trace of movement. Its movement was not only imperceptible in a visible way, there was also no sound. Its movement was invisible and inaudible. The perceptible physical was overlapping the imperceptible physical. It was static and dynamic at the same time. Kshana.

(Kshana is a Sanskrit word that refers to an extremely short period of time; the 90th part of a thought, the 4,500th of a minute, the 75th part of a second, during which from 90 to 100 births and as many deaths occur on the earth, according to Hindu legends. It is generally considered to mean 'moment'. Usually a beautiful one.)

The nature of this movement is worth describing in more detail:

As the object, at a extremely slow pace, descends in a perfectly straight line towards the floor, its interior rotates. But as it happens with its vertical motion, its internal rotational movement is also inaccessible by sight. It can only be imagined.

It is imaginary movement and also factual movement. The transparent nature of the object allows this projection of the imagination to happen.

I was only able to notice its movement in comparison with its previous position after a period of time had passed. Every time I tried to see it moving I never succeeded. I was able to see the effect of change but not that change taking place.

The object had transformed its nature, it suddenly entered the fabric of the everyday with a new identity: from a mass-produced object to a poem; from tape to sculpture; from functional dispenser to *nothing*.



III. 14. *Object for rethinking the Universe*, 2014

Gravity and time

I am going to use the tape dispenser as it moves slowly down the wall as way to think about time.

Once the tape dispenser is placed on the wall, attached to it with its internal, transparent, tape material, it becomes subject to two conflicting forces: gravity on the one hand, which pulls its material down in a vertical way towards the centre of the earth, and its internal resistance and cohesiveness on the other hand, which delays its immediate surrender to the force of gravity. This interplay of forces presents the exhaustion of the material cohesive force as it slowly surrenders to the triumph of the gravitational pull.

As the tape dispenser descends slowly on the wall, time is unrolling at every step. It is a gradual analogical unfolding of time. There are no interruptions like in a digital file of binary dualities. Time unrolls from the *inside* of the tape dispenser. The future, at least in potential, exists already in the present. The tape dispenser is able to descend because this future has more tape to feed in. In the same way, its past, its accumulation of instances is carried into the present. The future existed in the past, and keeps *unrolling* in the present.

Alfred North Whitehead defined "moment" as "all nature at an instant". In contrast to duration, a moment has no extension. "A moment is a limit to which we approach as we confine attention to durations of minimum extension" (*The Concept of Nature*, 59). In this way, Whitehead's notion of duration is not so different from Bergson's, as durations are commensurate units of experience.

For both philosophers, time is not limited to its commensurability, it carries in itself a metaphysical component and this component is not subject to be measured. "In some sense time extends beyond nature" (Ibid., 66), and by nature Whitehead meant the phenomenal world.

The tape dispenser, as it moves imperceptibly towards the floor, by the inner interaction between its material resistance and the persistence of gravity acting upon its matter, articulates a series of durations that together offer to the viewer a particular moment, a moment which is the result of the unfolding of its continuous presents.

Following Whitehead we can also say this: that without events, there is no time. "There is time because there are happenings, and apart from happenings there is nothing" (Ibid.). Time in this scenario is created by the descending tape dispenser, which is an event in itself, as it moves down on the wall following the force of gravity.



III. 15. *Thoughts*. Painting table, tape rolls, time, 2015

*Un mètre de fil droit, horizontal, tombe d'un mètre de haut.
(3 Stoppages étalon; appartenant à Marcel Duchamp. / 1913-14)*

Which translates:

*A straight horizontal thread one meter in length falls from a height
of one meter.
(3 Standard Stoppages; belonging to Marcel Duchamp. / 1913-14)*

Original inscription printed on the back of each canvas strip.

Gravity is an essential element in the vocabulary of sculpture. It is intrinsic to its nature. Different from science, the relation between sculpture and gravity is not that of an object outside to be studied, but an internal component of its language (Tucker).

My series of explorations with different descending tapes started with the impulse to place a tape dispenser on the wall. Later I felt the same impulse to put two tapes at the edge of a painter's table. Their descending, imperceptible, movement transformed the table into a sort of miniature cliff.

But what is gravity? Gravity is not a presence in the same way that a rock has presence or is present. Gravity is closer to something fleeting like a sound but not exactly either. Sounds are temporal and durational entities, whereas gravity is not, gravity persists. Gravity is neither like a cloud or a gas and it affects both clouds and gases no matter how light they may be. The force of gravity exercised by the earth keeps clouds close to the surface, preventing water particles from “falling out” into outer space.

We are used to talking about gravity as something real and present in the world. However this way of talking about gravity does not account for its reality. It simply stabilizes its meaning and takes the mystery of its existence away.

It is interesting to note that in his correspondences with the reverend Richard Bentley, Isaac Newton granted gravity a mysterious existence, considering it the result of the “arm of God” acting in the world. Newton finishes one of his letters this way:

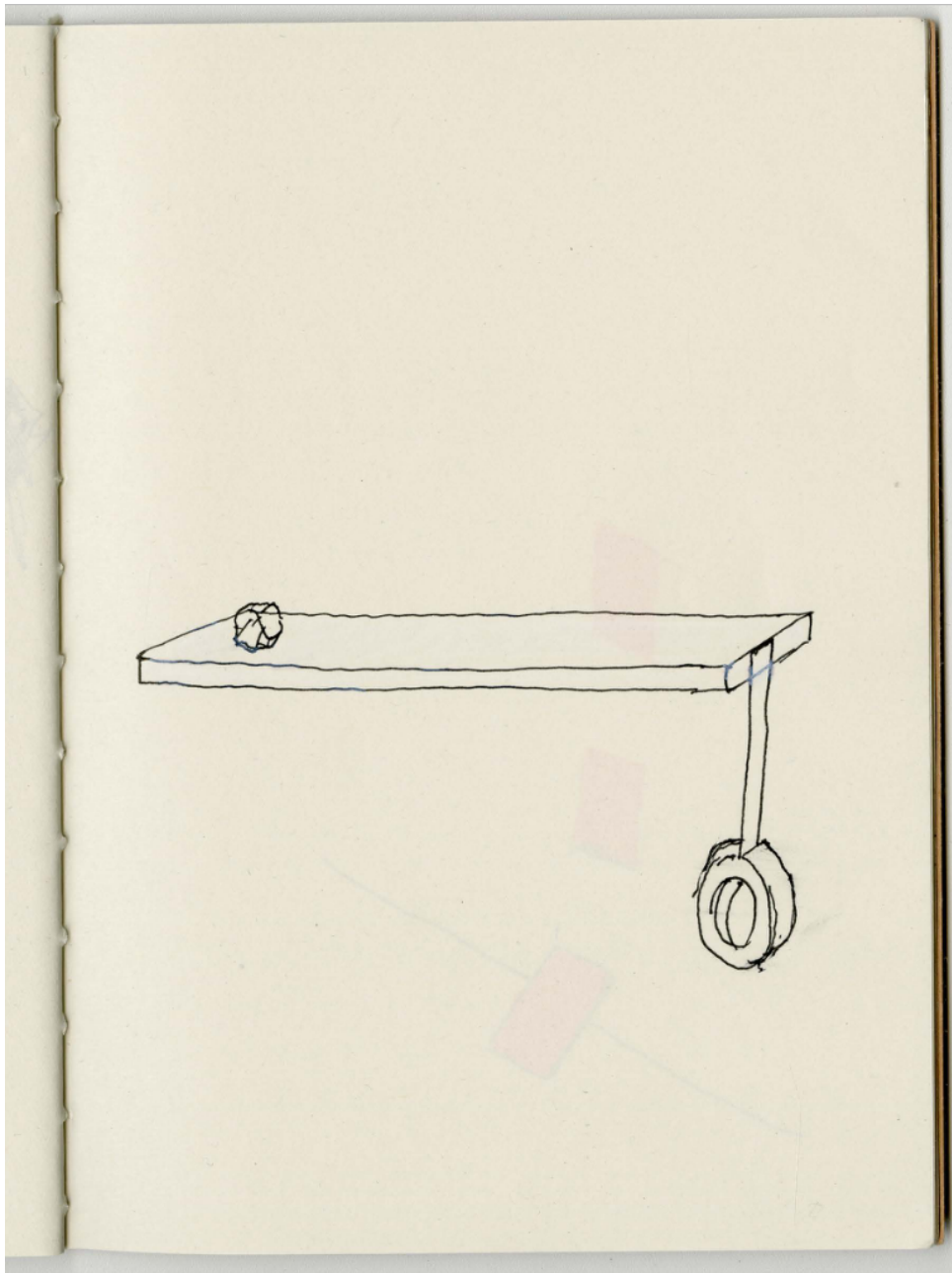
[...] I do not know any power in nature which could cause this transverse motion without the divine arm.

[...] You sometimes speak of gravity as essential & inherent to matter: pray do not ascribe that notion to me, for the cause of gravity is what I do not pretend to know, & therefore would take more time to consider of it. [...]

Sir I am Your most humble Servant

Is. Newton

<http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00255>
Consulted Dec. 23rd, 2017.



III. 16. Descending tape roll. Sketchbook, undated

The weight of air

Today I was thinking about how sensitive gravity is.

This room is full of air but I do not consider the effect of gravity upon air. It is only when air "materializes" (when it becomes water or ice), that I start to notice the effects of gravity. Water can be found in liquid, solid and gaseous form, but it is in this last state, which we call air, that I find the extreme sensitivity of gravity at play.

Gravity is a mysterious and extremely sensitive force: it has an effect on every single material or substance, including air.

I arrived to this point by imagining the earth moving in the vastness of space. If gravity would not be attracting each one of the tiny particles of air, water would be slowly decreasing from the surface of the earth. Without gravity the small particles of water would flee into "outer space", leaving a path of air molecules along the earth's orbit. But this doesn't seem to be the case. From the point of view of science we have been told since we were kids about the water cycle: water changes states, but its amount remains unalterable.

If the amount of water remains unalterable, gravity is exceptionally sensitive, it affects every single particle of air keeping them close to the earth.

Every molecule of air in this room is affected by the force of gravity in the same way that my body is.



III. 17. *Thoughts* (6 hours later)

An object exists in front of you

It breathes

You close your eyes

You open your eyes

The object remains

2014-12-25



{continuous presence}

If an object is moving, it is easy to tell how the object differentiates itself from one moment to the other. This difference can be easily gauged because it takes place in contrast to the background upon which the object is moving. A quick look at *Nude Descending the Staircase* is enough to grasp this difference: as the *nude* moves against the unmovable background of the canvas she leaves a series of traces of herself. But, what if the object is not moving? How can we tell if it is different from one moment to the next?

Marcel Duchamp invites us to look at the same object one second later and to ask ourselves what the difference is. Is the object still the same? He proposes this idea as an example of his concept of *infrathin*, a concept that is not actually a concept, that can only be expressed by means of examples.

Note 7 from the 46 that refer to *infrathin* says:

Semblabilité / similarité
Le même (fabricat. en série)
approximation pratique de la similarité
Dans le temps un même object n'est pas le même à 1 seconde
d'intervalle.
Quels rapports avec le principe d'identité?

"Inframince", Marcel Duchamp: Notes, 21.

Translation:

Semblability / similarity
The same (mass produced)
practical approximation of similarity
Within time the same object is not the same one second later.
What is the relationship with the principle of identity?

If the object is not moving, what could be the *background* against which we evaluate how it changes from one second to the next? Imagine an empty bucket in a gallery space. Nothing is being poured into it, nothing is happening to it, except that the bucket keeps being there in front of an audience, like a musical note that is being played continuously without any noticeable variation. Since time feels like a flow, the bucket, like the note, keeps existing, and it navigates the unfolding of time with its existence. But, unlike the note, which can cease playing at any giving moment, the bucket continues to exist. How can we tell that it is different from one second to the next?

Tracing an object's identity through time

In *The Persistence of Objects*, philosopher Eli Hirsch approaches the problem of identity in relation to physical objects as they persist through time. His investigation is basically the opposite of my question. Rather than asking how we can tell that the object is different from one moment to the next, Hirsch wants to know how we can tell that its identity is the same.

Hirsch asks questions such as: ‘What does the identity through time of a physical object consist in,’ or, ‘What is it for a physical object that exists at one time to be the same object as a physical object which exists at another time?’ (*The Persistence of Objects*, 1). He asks these questions in relation to familiar objects such as tables and cars, mountains and stones, trees and flowers, cats and dogs, chunks of clay and bits of wood (Ibid., 2).

Hirsch approaches these questions from the point of view of *sortals*: “it is part of our concept of object-identity that throughout all its changes an object must at least remain an object of *the same sort*” (Ibid., 14). By *sortal* he refers to a particular classification of the world based on linguistic terms: “let us say that such words in our language as “car”, “tree”, and “trunk” are *sortal* terms.” (Ibid.).

After analysing how *sortals* are made and used Hirsch concludes that they are inadequate as they do not fully account for all the complexities that an object's persistence through time can endure. For example when a car is crushed and transformed into scrap metal, the “car” *sortal* no longer applies as it needs to be replaced by another *sortal* (“scrap metal”). However, the material components of the car persist through time. He suggests that particular *sortals* could be created that account for certain durations of physical objects until a certain discontinuity (in time or space) occurs; however this would be ultimately a problem circumscribed to language, that is, about the way in which we describe the world as we experience it, and there is not one privileged language better than any other that can account for our experience of the world.

Let’s go back to our question: if the object is not moving, what could be the *background* against which we could tell whether it has changed from one second to the next?

Science would tell us that one object is different from one second to the next because something *inside* the object is constantly changing. This “something” science calls atoms, electrons, quarks, quantum fluctuations, etc. These variations are never made directly available to our senses, only indirectly through the use of a particular arrangement of experiments, laboratory conditions and instruments.

Following Heidegger in his approach to time, whose metaphysics resonate with Buddhist notions, we arrive at the answer differently. The background upon which the bucket in the gallery presents itself anew every moment is Nothingness.

In this sense, an ordinary object that persists in time is different from one moment to the next, against this infinite background. So even if the object looks alike from one moment to the next, it would require a new name at every moment to properly address its constant coming into existence.

The viewer, like the object in front of him, is also unfolding in time, his biological body is coming into existence, and so is his mind and his feelings produced by encountering an empty bucket.

When Duchamp asks about the difference between the same object one second later he surely didn't have Heidegger's notion of time in mind (he might never have read him) and perhaps neither Buddhist metaphysics, however, Jacquelynn Baas had suggested that Duchamp might have read some Buddhist texts.

In *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art*, Baas writes: "After he returned to Paris, Duchamp studied to become a librarian, working at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève from spring 1913 until he left for New York in 1915. Although he never detailed the precise focus of his reading during these two years, he mentioned studying perspective and reading Pyrrho of Elis, a painter-turned-philosopher who had traveled with Alexander the Great to Buddhist India and advocated the cultivation of indifference toward life and alertness to the passing moment" (85).

According to Baas, Duchamp might have also read Asian philosophy. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp mentions how in Sanskrit, the language of Mahayana Buddhism, the word "art" connects to the idea of "making" (Ibid.). The author also proposes that Duchamp's interest in ancient philosophy might have been sparked by his friendship with Constantin Brancusi, whose interest in Buddhism was well known.

Regardless of his awareness of Eastern metaphysics, Duchamp's interrogation about time is in tune with the writings of XIII century Japanese Buddhist monk Dōgen.

Uji, 有時 (*Time-Being*)

Dōgen's reflections on time constitute one of the 95 essays gathered in the *Shōbōgenzō*. *Uji* is composed by the elements *U*, which refers to 'existence' or 'being'; and *ji*, which has a close equivalent to 'time', 'a time', 'the time when', or anything temporal. "Being-time" means that time is being; i.e. "Time is existence, existence is time."

In *Uji* we read: "the shape of a Buddha statue is time. Time is the radiant nature of each moment; it is momental everyday time in the present."

All things exist in ourselves. Every thing, every being in this entire world is time. No object obstructs or opposes any other object, nor can time ever obstruct any other time (...) (T)here is no difference between your mind and time.

The entire world is included in ourselves. This is the principle "We, ourselves, are time." (...) Each instant covers the entire world.

A Complete English Translation of Dōgen Zenji's Shōbōgenzō. 68-72. (Written during November, 1240 at Kōshōhōrinji and recopied by Ejō during the summer training period of 1243).

Dōgen differentiates between time and the "passing of time." He says: "Do not think of time as merely flying by; do not only study the fleeting aspect of time. If time is really flying away, there would be a separation between time and ourselves. If you think that time is just a passing phenomenon, you will never understand being-time." (69).

Time is the radiant nature of each moment; it is momental everyday time in the present.

Coming back to the 20th century, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy articulates the following relation between presence and time:

Presence is what is born, and does not cease being born.

[...] To be born is the name of being, and it is precisely not a name. (2) .

[...] Hegel names this "the experience of consciousness." (3).

The Birth to Presence, 1993.

In the *Timaeus* Plato refers to *Chora* as a receptacle that connects being and becoming. A “pregnant nothing” that takes any shape but has itself no shape. It is neither in heaven nor in earth and it has no existence. Plato associates it with space:

“And there is a third nature, which is space, and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended without the help of sense, by a kind of spurious reason, and is hardly real; which we beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence.”

Plato, *Timaeus*

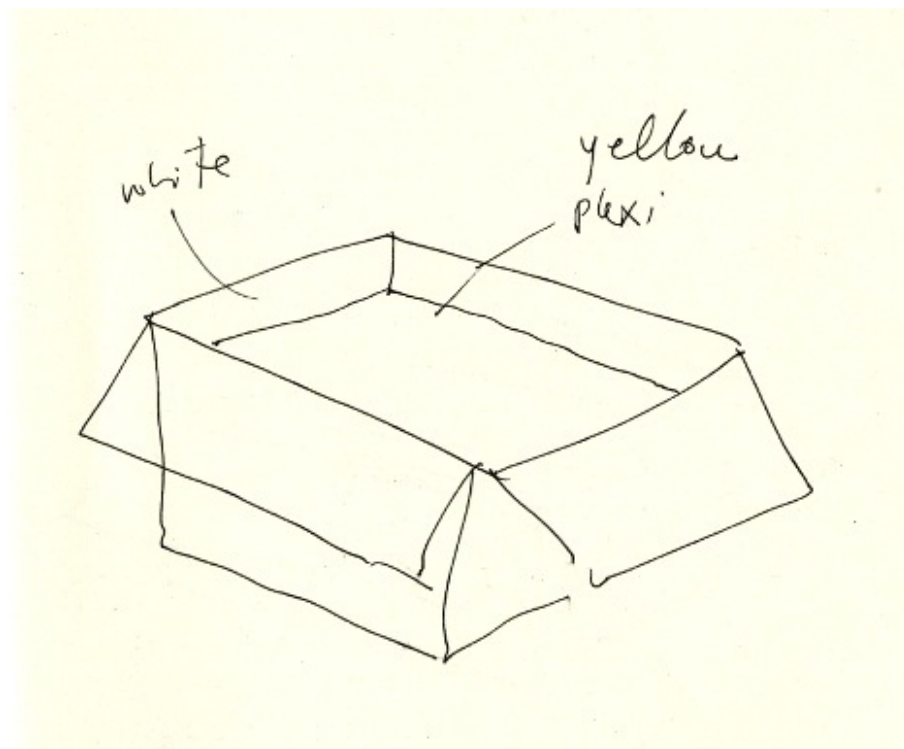


III. 18. *White bucket*. Still image from video recorded at the Special Projects gallery during the exhibition *The wold is happening*, York University, October 21-31, 2015

A box in a gallery is a container within a container, so it immediately resonates with its environment. The limits of the box are indices that relate to the limits of the gallery space. The gallery space is a container within the whole container of the universe.

In front of a box we are at the same time inside and outside it.

personal note, Oct. 23, 2016 4:01 pm



{studio space}

1.

I am in the studio looking at the objects I have gathered here. Some of them are scattered on the floor, others are leaning against the wall, some others are hanging from nails on the wall. I have two plastic buckets, a cinder block, beams of wood of different lengths that I have found in the recycling bins, various plexiglass panels I have bought, two plexiglass mirrors found also in the recycling bins, various straps and ropes, a painting table, rolls of tape, two rocks [...] I noticed my old shoes under the table.

These various objects are here because I brought them. They were taken from their previous place and brought inside this room. Each one has arrived at a different time. My old shoes look strange in relation to the other objects. Not because I might have been wearing them when I brought them here but because they have a particular connection with me that the other objects don't have. The shoes are more "personal" than the other objects. Their history is attached to my feet, to the places I have been with them. The shoes are under the painting table and there is a yellow rope attached to one of its feet. I have attached that rope there for a purpose one day but I don't remember what its purpose was. Now devoid of its previous purpose it looks like a yellow line falling by its own weight on my shoes. This line connects the shoes with the table. On top of one of the shoes I placed one of the two plexiglass mirrors that I found in the recycling bin. It still has its protective plastic film so it is not actually a mirror but an opaque surface that reflects the room in its unique way. It "abstracts" the room and creates a simplified version of it.

In looking at this plexiglass "mirror" placed there on top of my shoes I realized that the room exists, that this container in which all these different objects are gathered, including myself, exists.

In order to remind myself about the "existence" of the room I decided to write a note. Every time I enter the studio I will be aware of its existence: "The work is everything in the room including the room". I printed it and pasted it on the wall.



Ill. 19. Plexiglass, shoes, rope, painting table, floor, October, 2016

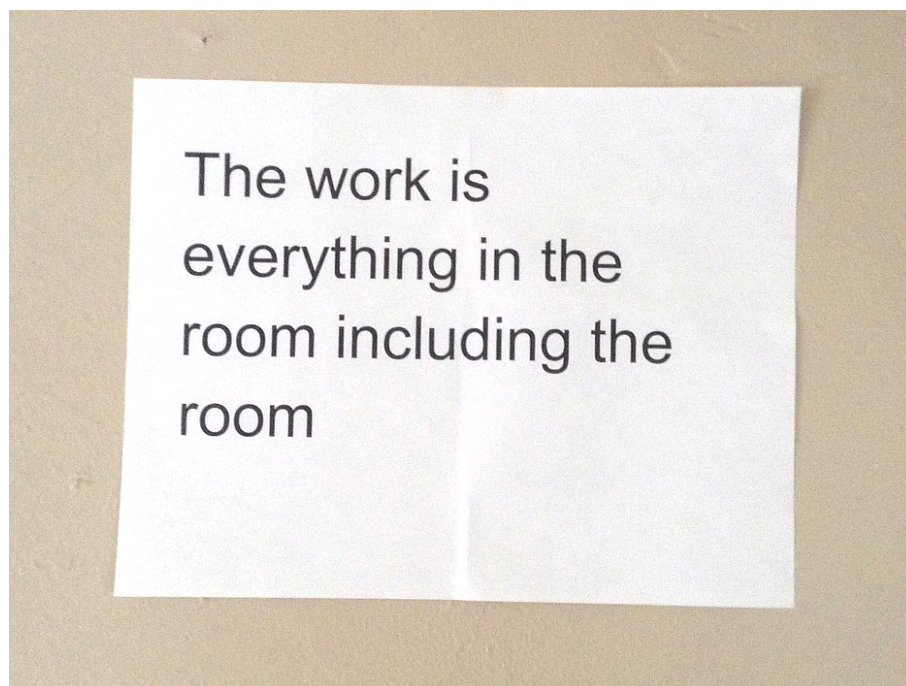
As time went by I forgot the note existed. I did not look at it anymore. Also the objects changed position, I attached the rope somewhere else, I put my shoes on, I moved the table to another place. But the plexiglass “mirror” in its new place leaning against the cinder block kept reminding me of the room. This opaque reflection of the room contained in a small rectangular version is the room itself.

When looking at some of the wood beams, I saw their relation to the wall. I noticed the “necessity” of the wall keeping them in their particular positions.

I saw the floor and noticed all the objects that were lying there, as if “attached” to it by their own weight. I realized that the floor reminded me about the weight of things.

I realized that I no longer needed the note. The objects themselves were already “indices” pointing to the room.

I untaped the note from the wall and brought it to my home where it still is, in the kitchen close to the window. In its new context, the note keeps playing an active role, asking me to be aware of the minuscule details of my existence. I am aware of the dust that accumulates in the corners, I am aware of the cracks on the walls, I have discovered stains on the floor which I appreciate in their uniqueness. I have noticed that when the light enters from the window, it changes everything in the room.



Beams of raw wood lean against the white walls. They are spaced in even intervals just as the yellow and orange marks on them are painted regular intervals. The timing of the room is of a metronome. Consistent regular pulse is present is the echoing of objects; the twin stacked buckets reinforce a stable physical world. The tempo of Alejandro Tamayo's studio is curiously odd in its regularness.

Ashley Culver. Studio visit March 2017.

2.

There are no windows and there is no clock in the studio. If I do not look at my phone or the computer clock, the only way to tell the passage of time is by the descending red tape roll that I have attached to the wall. Its displacement can only be noticed after a very long time has passed.

The studio has its own contained time. A time produced by the ticking of itself.

The descending tape roll has become a sort of analogue clock that works in hours not in minutes. But the hours do not have the same length. Each moment of this clock has its own living time.

I feel bored and anxious but somehow being in this room also calms me down.

I have changed the position of one of the buckets. For a certain reason it began to bother me. Perhaps it was too obvious, too present, too boringly present.

The wood beams, on the other hand, please me. I enjoy looking at them and seeing how they lean on the wall. The beams articulate a diagonal, a 'moment' that connects the wall with the floor.

The small plexiglass panel, with half of its protective plastic peeled off, reflects the orange brush stroke that I applied on one side of the wood beam a couple of weeks ago.

I don't know why I like this brush stroke so much. I did it very fast almost without looking at what I was doing. I want to forget that I did it, but it remains there, reminding me that I did it. I guess that I like it because it created a new moment, a new possibility for that discarded beam of wood. It created a new "stratum", a micro, nano stratum in the whole history of the universe. A very tiny change. Insignificant.

Looking at that brush stroke reflected on that plexiglass mirror calms me down.

The room feels oppressive. There is nothing going on here and at the same time a lot is going on here.

Nov 21, 2016.

In the studio I was confronted with arrangements of quotidian objects and building materials: wood, rope, buckets, tape, plexiglass. The provisional nature of the arrangements is such that some of them defy outright any intellectual scrutiny, forcing me to depend on my embodied sensibilities to unravel their logic. I have to alternate between making intellectual appeals to known categories and making sensuous measurements in the here and now, without historical baggage, in order to navigate them. Some of the arrangements are so hermetic that my mind passes over them, only to loop back later as some relationship is discerned by my intuitive understanding of gravity, perspective, adhesion, translucency, chroma, light, and shadow. A critical part of these arrangements is that some of them remain completely opaque to reason. These opaque arrangements form a horizon of sense that oscillates as it circumscribes the arena of understanding we operate in on a daily basis. The experience that I get from this collection of work is the ability to witness that horizon of understanding as movable, and unpredictable, but always present as an inextricable part of embodied existence.

Neil Harrison. Studio visit February 5, 2017.

3.

Malevich saw infinity in the “empty field” of the white canvas. With this awareness in mind, I started looking for infinity in other monochromatic surfaces.

When I look at the space that makes up my studio I see all the white walls as monochromes, and the room itself as a 3-dimensional monochrome.

What is the time of this room?

The studio has no windows, so when I close the door the studio becomes totally dark. When I turn the lights on I can see everything again. The only light that illuminates the objects is artificial. It comes from the neon lamps on the ceiling.

Closed from the outside, bathed in this artificial light, the studio seems to have its own time, almost a “no-time”.

But many times coexist here. The times of all these objects, the time of each object entering the room, the times of the walls, the floor, the ceiling, my own biological time, my expectations about the future, my memories. They all compose this “present” in which I am writing this text in this space.

I like to imagine that everyone coming into this room will start to resonate with all these different times, and with these two times in particular: the “no-time” of the space and the biological time of their own body.

July 17, 2017.



{moments of infinite duration}

In another note, this one referring to the *Large Glass*, Duchamp proposes a different concept of time, this one having a direct reference to Bergson's concept of duration. In this note, Duchamp approaches the question of the present moment as being constituted by multiple extensions: "à chaque fraction de la durée (?) se reproduisent *toutes* les fractions *futures et antérieures* — Toutes ces fractions passées et futures coexistent donc dans un présent qui n'est déjà plus ce qu'on appelle ordinairement l'instant présent, mais une sorte de présent à étendus multiples," which translates as:

= at each segment of duration (?) *all* the *future and past* segments are reproduced — All these past and future segments coexist, then, in a present that is no longer what one would ordinarily call the present instant but a kind of present of multiple lengths.

"Le grand verre", *Marcel Duchamp: Notes*, note 135.

How many different lengths of time can exist in the same present?

When I encountered certain objects during my random walks on the streets of Toronto or, when working in the studio, I placed certain objects in certain locations or in certain orientations in relation to the space in which they were located, their pragmatic meaning was momentarily suspended and I sensed that a sort of opening in the present has taken place. For lack of a better word, I would refer to these moments as "events".

During an event something special happens. A suspension is sensed, things are encountered as *they are*. I think this is what Daniil Kharmis, writing in the 1930s, and deeply influenced by Kazimir Malevich, referred to as the "fifth meaning" of the object (I explore this point in more depth in {meaning}). During an event I become aware of this 'fifth meaning'. This moment happens only in the presence of objects, but the fifth meaning is not their presence. The fifth meaning is *immanent* to their presence. And I become aware of it in special moments when my mind is sensitized to the outside. When I become aware of what I am looking at in its "existing" moment, in its own temporality that coincides with mine.

In these special moments I become "entangled" with what is *not* me. It is a non-human becoming. This happens when a suspension of the desire to approach reality through the filter of meaning takes place.

During an event, the object-subject gap dissolves for an infinitesimal moment, and I encounter an access point to the *emptiness* that lies *beyond* the presence of things.

Object-oriented metaphysics

Graham Harman contends that the Kantian gap that separates the things-in-themselves from perception cannot be crossed. Real objects (another name for the things-in-themselves) withdraw into an unreachable metaphysical background. There is always a separation between real objects and the subject, and this separation cannot be crossed. "Access to the things themselves can only be indirect" (Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 73).



III. 21. Studio floor, Sep. 2016

Even though real objects withdraw into an unreachable depth, Harman offers the promise that it is still possible to *think* how they relate to each other, which as he says, happens indirectly, by vicarious causation. Object-oriented philosophy promises the impossible: to think the relation between things-in-themselves and to do so *outside* the intervention of human *Dasein*.

Harman accepts the Kantian breach, the acceptance of an unreachable gap in reality, the acceptance of a transcendental reality not approachable directly, a realism of things themselves receding into an inaccessible background.

When Harman directs his philosophy towards art, what he calls an “object oriented aesthetics”, he raises the strange notion of “art without humans”. “Object-oriented philosophy renews the question of what the world is like beyond human access. This raises the well-meaning question: ‘What would an art without humans be like?’”(Graham Harman, in *A Questionnaire on Materialisms*, 51). This is indeed a weird question. If the scenario proposed by Harman eliminates both poles of the aesthetic game, the art object (made or selected by a human) on the one hand, and the spectator (another human) on the other hand—if there are neither producers nor spectators—why bother still calling it ‘art’?

Contrary to what might be expected, Harman seems sympathetic towards relational aesthetics. He continues: “We can reassure Bourriaud by agreeing that humans should not be excluded from art. It is conceivable that great art could be made by theatrically staging encounters between strangers in a gallery. All we add is that for such a genre to be effective, it cannot be identified with its *literal* effect on participants and observers, but remains partially impenetrable to understanding” (Ibid., 52). Harman is addressing Michael Fried’s well-known criticism of Minimalist artworks who underlined their “literal”, “theatrical” interpretation. What Harman seems to be defending is that the theatricality of the encounter does not exhaust the totality of what the object is. That there is, always will be, something that remains “inaccessible to understanding”.

Experiencing duration

On one level, Fried’s attack on Minimalism can be understood as a defence of the purity of the genre (of either painting or sculpture), which “degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre”. Theatre was the “negation of art”. Fried saw Minimalist works, specially the work of Donald Judd and Robert Morris, as intrinsically theatrical.

Fried linked theatricality with the notion of non-art (a condition of being neither a painting nor a sculpture). Citing Clement Greenberg he wrote: “Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper.... Yet it would seem that a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment.” (825). It bothered both Fried and Greenberg to *read* an everyday object like a door, a table or a sheet of paper (and for the same token, a winter shovel) as art.

On closer reading, one finds that there is yet another factor that bothered Fried: the openness offered by Minimal art works which also include the beholder in the situation. Fried wrote: “Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work”, and: “the experience of literalist art is of an object *in a situation* - one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*.”

[...]” (Ibid.). It was precisely this point which he found intolerable, that the beholder could experience the work according to his/her own time:

The literalist preoccupation with time - more precisely, with the *duration of the experience* - is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical.

Ibid., 832. Emphasis in original.

In “Installing Duration: Time in the Sound Works of Max Neuhaus,” Christoph Cox says: “what vexes Fried about Minimalism and installation practices generally is not really objecthood at all, since such works may be void of objects. What aggravates him is something else, namely the conception of *time* affirmed in such work, namely the experience of temporal “endlessness”, “inexhaustibility”, “persistence in time”— in a word, “duration” (120).

This is a fundamental point, and I want to suggest that it is precisely this “theatricality”, this art/non-art dichotomy, which Fried encountered and rejected in Minimal works, that offers the potential to open a gap, a suspension of interpretation. In doing so, the beholder is not only invited to discover the work according to his/her own time, in other words, to experience *duration*, but also to encounter himself/herself encountering the work. In doing so, the arrow of interpretation rotates back to the human subject experiencing the object.

I believe this has precisely been my experience when encountering the various arrangements of mops and brooms on the streets in Toronto. This is a reversed version of the problem of theatricality: the experience of encountering non-art as art. (See {encounters and situations}).

Emptiness and Process

From the point of view of Buddhist metaphysics the unbreachable gap between subjects *themselves* and objects *themselves* is dissolved at the level of practice. Nagarjuna, the Mahayana philosopher, employs argumentation to bring language to the limits of itself, and invites the mind to take a silent retreat in order to enter in sync with the unfolding present.

This approach is also encountered in Whitehead’s philosophy. For Whitehead, the present can only be accessed by a *feeling*. Whitehead *anchors* his philosophy in experience and on the account of “feelings”. He says: “whatever is found in ‘practice’ must lie within the scope of the metaphysical description. When the description fails to include the ‘practice,’ the metaphysics is inadequate and requires revision” (*Process and Reality*, 13).

From the point of view of process philosophy, which is based on subjective experience, the anthropocentric ghost that haunts contemporary continental philosophy (and Object Oriented Philosophy in particular) is taken into account. The human body, the human mind, and all the spectrum of human feelings (not only destructive tendencies but all other hidden potentials), are part of the same process that includes bacteria, bee pollen, rocks, tornados and galaxies, the whole process of the Cosmos coming into existence.

Whitehead conceives reality as a process and in this sense does not engender an insurmountable gap between mind and matter. Both mind and matter are part of the same

process, the whole process of the Cosmos coming into existence. Whitehead's philosophy offers an alternative to move beyond Cartesian dualism.

Whitehead writes:

(T)he actual world is a process, and...the process is the becoming of actual entities" (22). These actual entities "are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real" (18). An actual entity is not an inert and permanent substance, but a relational process of becoming: "how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is. [...] Its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming' (23).

Process and Reality, quoted by McFarlane, Thomas J.

Whitehead is helpful for approaching the notion of the encounter with an object as a temporal event, wherein a particular *entanglement* between subject and object (mind and matter) takes place.

In this sense, Duchamp's "visual indifference", which he claimed was a fundamental prerequisite for selecting the readymades, gains a new light. Visual indifference can also connect with the process of silencing the mind, a process that allows one to enter in sync with the unfolding becoming of the world.

An eternity that is here and now

In "A Life between the Finite and Infinite: Remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Western Buddhism", Simon O'Sullivan refers to Buddhism as a "technology of the self," borrowing this term from Foucault. As O'Sullivan indicates, Buddhism is not a philosophy *per se*, however it still makes ontological claims, "of a kind of groundless ground of being" (258).

The main point of O'Sullivan's essay, which I see connected with this investigation, is that it offers a relation between the terms "actual" and "virtual" developed by Deleuze with the experience of eternity in the present, an experience that can be accessed in everyday life, albeit only temporarily.

Following Bergson, Deleuze differentiates the dual terms "real" and "potential", which he sees as inadequate, and proposes instead "actual" and "virtual". Actuality and virtuality are more appropriate for giving an account of the becoming of Nature and the creative process of evolution.

The "virtual" is radically different from the "possible". The possible has no reality (although it might have an actuality); conversely, the virtual is not actual, but *as such possesses a reality*.

Bergsonism, 96. Emphasis in original.

In Bergson, as in Deleuze, both actual and virtual are fully real. The difference between these two terms is that the former has a concrete reality whereas the latter does not. The possible, on

the other hand, is conceived as a “false notion, the source of false problems” (Ibid., 98). The possible acts by repetition, — it is conditioned by the real, whereas the virtual acts by differentiation.

While the real is in the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual, on the other hand does *not* resemble the virtuality that it embodies. It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization.

(I)n order to be actualized, the virtual must *create* its own lines of actualization in positive acts.

[...] Evolution takes place from the virtual to actuals. Evolution is actualization, actualization is creation.

Ibid., 97, 98.

An idea that exists in the mind is fully real and can be actualized as a concrete reality in the world in possibly many different ways by creating its own lines of actualization.

We can also take an existing drawing in a virtual sense. In this way it can continue following a process of actualization by opening new creative possibilities. In this sense, a finished drawing is not only the potential for something to happen in the future—like the creation of a painting or a three-dimensional object inspired by it—but a virtual possibility that can find its own lines of actualization. In becoming *actual*, a single line may not resemble a drawing at all. A drawing can be actualized in the form of a gift, like a kiss, or it can inspire an entire mobilization, even the suspension of acting.

Buddhist practice, O’Sullivan writes, allows access to this virtual realm: “Buddhism allows access to an outside, to that from which our subjectivity has itself been formed or folded. [...] (I)n Deleuzian terms, this is to ‘access’ a certain virtual realm.” (259), to access the time of Aion that is hidden behind the habitual sense of time (the time of mechanism, clock time):

In Deleuzian terms we might say, Buddhism provides instruction on how to access – and in a sense determine – this groundless ground of our being: meditation, for example, that allows for a contact with an infinite potentiality that lies behind our habitual, and finite, being (following Deleuze’s thesis in *Difference and Repetition*, we might say that this is contact with the third synthesis of time – the time of Aion, ‘hidden’ behind the first synthesis – the habitual sense of time formed by the reactive mechanisms of the organism).

[..] Buddhism suggests that the very virtual itself might be directly ‘experienced’ in some sense, albeit this experience will have to be ‘translated’ once a subject ‘returns’ to the actual. (Ibid.).

And by comparing Deleuze-Spinoza’s three forms of knowledge (as presented in Deleuze’s lecture ‘The Three Kinds of Knowledge’ (2003)) with the three kinds of bodies of the Buddha (the *trikaya* doctrine), O’Sullivan puts in parallel the third kind of knowledge (immediate, instantaneous or direct knowledge to use his own terms) with the experience of eternity, describing an “embodied” experience of eternity. That is, emphasising that Buddhism is not a philosophy of transcendence but of immanence. The

experience of the infinite, which he also refers to as the “generic” and the “universal” (273) is ultimately experienced by a finite being in a material body.

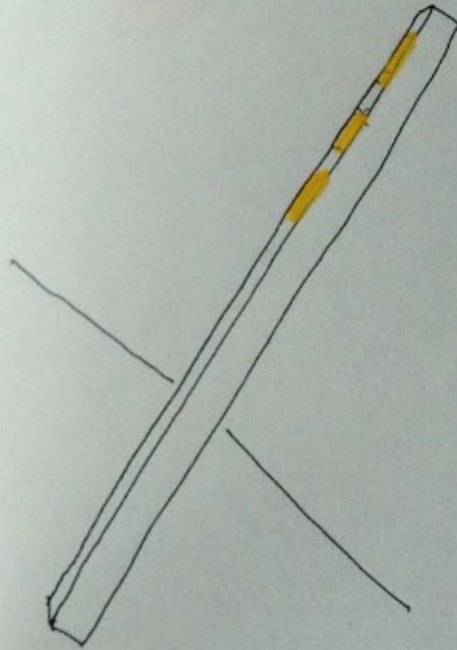
I will finish by quoting the entire paragraph:

(W)e might usefully compare Deleuze–Spinoza’s three bodies with the traditional three kinds of body of the Buddha (the *trikaya* doctrine): first, the *nirmanakaya* or ‘created body’ that functions on a human/historical level (this is a transitory mode of being, subject to change); second, the *sambhokaya* or ‘body of mutual enjoyment’, an archetypal body that ‘represents’ different aspects of Buddhahood (we might say that this is the joyful body of the second kind of knowledge); and third, the *dharmakaya* or ‘body of truth’, an ‘aspect of Absolute reality’ that ‘exists’ in eternity (see Sangharakshita 1988: 6–11). The *dharmakaya*, like Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge, is an experience of eternity (or, again, more precisely, *sub specie aeterni*) that is discontinuous with time but also coterminous with it. It is in this sense that Buddhism is not exactly an eternalism (believing in an immortality of the soul or, as it were, an afterlife for that soul), but rather, like Spinoza, posits an eternity that is here and now, albeit occluded (269).

the
age

what degree of articulatory preparation the signifier had to undergo in order to cease to be a physical sound and become an acoustic image. Chevreul similarly left to the physicists and the physiologists, on the one hand, and the experimental or Gestalt psychologists, on the other, the task of determining with precision the

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{particulars and universals}

Every number is one, since it is brought before the mind by a simple intuition and is given a name.

Henri Bergson, "The Multiplicity of Conscious States. The Idea of Duration", *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 76.

In this investigation, the *problem of universals* gives philosophical perspective to both the notion of the ready-made object as well as to the notion of abstraction.

I arrived at the *problem of universals* by asking questions about the meaning of the various objects I began collecting and bringing gradually into the studio: buckets, mops, brooms, beams of wood, ropes, cinder blocks, etc. Some of these objects exist as single entities, whereas others exist as multiplicities (several beams of wood, various buckets, etc.).

In philosophy, the *problem of universals* is considered a metaphysical problem. It questions the reality, or existence, of universals. Philosopher Kelly Ross indicates in his essay "Meaning and the Problem of Universals", that a universal can be associated with a type (a bucket, a mop, a beam of wood, etc.), a property (being blue, hard, transparent, etc.), or a relation (larger than, taller than, etc.). The problem lies with the reality and location of these universals, for example, the bucketness shared by all buckets, the mopness shared by all mops, the cinder-blockness shared by all cinder blocks, etc., and whether they exist *a priori* to the perceptible world or not.

The *problem of universals* can be traced back to ancient Greece and two major theories: The Platonic theory of Forms (also known as the theory of Ideas), and the Aristotelian theory of universals.

The Platonic theory of Forms separates the world of perceptible objects, which are subject to change, and the real world of Forms, which are immutable. Plato argued that, because the sensible world is constantly in flux, we are limited to producing opinions about it. However, if we are looking for knowledge, we can only arrive at it through the world of ideas, of eternal Forms.

Aristotle, on the other hand, stated that universals exist only when they are instantiated; that they exist only *in* things, and never apart from things. His theory is that universals do exist but they are "immanent" in the objects we perceive.

As Ross indicates, both Plato's and Aristotle's theories are Realist theories. For Plato, Universals have *real existence*, as much as, if not more than, the individual objects of experience. Aristotle also had a Realistic theory of universals, but did not *separate* the universals, as objects, from the objects of experience. He "immanentized" the Forms. This meant that there still were Forms; it was just a matter of where they existed.

Ross goes on to say that Aristotle used one of Plato's terms, *eîdos*, to mean the abstract universal object within a particular object. *Eîdos* is more familiar to us in its Latin translation as "species" and in modern discussions it has been called the "form" of the object. But what Aristotle meant

by the form of an object is more complex than interpreting it as its appearance. Ross interprets Aristotle's "form" as something different from its "matter", and closer to its "actuality". Which brings attention to form in a temporal way. It is worth quoting the entire paragraph:

The Aristotelian "form" of an object, however, is not just what an object "looks" like. An individual object *as* an individual object is *particular*, not universal. The "form" of the object will be the complex of all its abstract features and properties. If the object looks red or looks round or looks ugly, then *those* features, as abstractions, belong to the "form." The *individuality* of the object cannot be due to any of those abstractions, which are universals, and so must be due to something else. To Aristotle that was the "matter" of the object. "Matter" confers individuality, "form" universality. Since everything that we can *identify* about an object, the kind of thing it is, what it is doing, where it is, etc., involves abstract properties, the "form" represents the *actuality* of an object. By contrast, the "matter" represents the *potential* or possibility of an object to have *other* properties.

However, Ross clarifies this point: "These uses of "form" and "matter" are now rather different from what is familiar to us. Aristotelian "matter" is not something that we can see, so it is not what we usually mean by matter today. Similarly, Aristotelian "form" is not some superficial appearance of a fundamentally material object: It is the true actuality and existence of the object."

Ross indicates that in Aristotelean terms "understanding" comes when the mind moves from the particular object (the primary substance) encountered in experience to the universal present in it (the secondary substance). Aristotle called this act of the mind "abstraction". Ross articulates it clearly:

The abstract "form" of an object, the universal in it, Aristotle called "secondary substance." So if what we see are individual things, the primary substances, how do we get to the universals? Aristotle postulated a certain mental function, "abstraction," by which the universal is comprehended or thought in the particular. This is the equivalent of understanding what is perceived, which means that we get to the meaning of the perception. The "form" of the thing becomes its meaning, its concept, in the mind.

Heraclitus, who lived before both Plato and Aristotle, and who had a much less rational mind than the latter, saw no problem in holding two contradictory notions simultaneously: "the one is in the many and the many are in one". Heraclitus found identity in the contradiction. The one is also many and many are one.

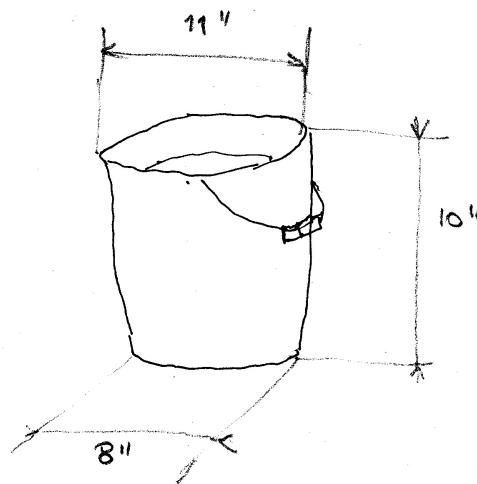
Nominalism

According to Ross, the *problem of universals* was confronted again in the Middle Ages with a new perspective. This new perspective rejected the existence of universals indicating that only particulars existed. Universals were no more than "names", *nomina*, "puffs of air".

Nominalism, as this doctrine came to be known, rejected Realism. The greatest exponent of this approach was the Englishman William of Ockham (1295-1349).

To the Nominalists, the individuality of the objects of experience simply meant that *only individuality* exists in reality. Universals are the products of abstraction from individuals by the human mind and have no extra-mental existence, they do not "exist" at all and are no more than words (*flatus vocis** in Roscelin's nominalism) that describe specific objects.

* The universal is reduced to an emission of sound (*flatus vocis*), in conformity with Boethius' definition: *Nihil enim aliud est prolatio (vocis) quam aeris plectro linguae percussio*, which translates: for the utterance (of the voice) is nothing other than the striking (percussio) of air with the instrument of the tongue. Roscelin's universal corresponds to what is now called the *universale in voce* in opposition to *universale in re* and *universale in intellect*.

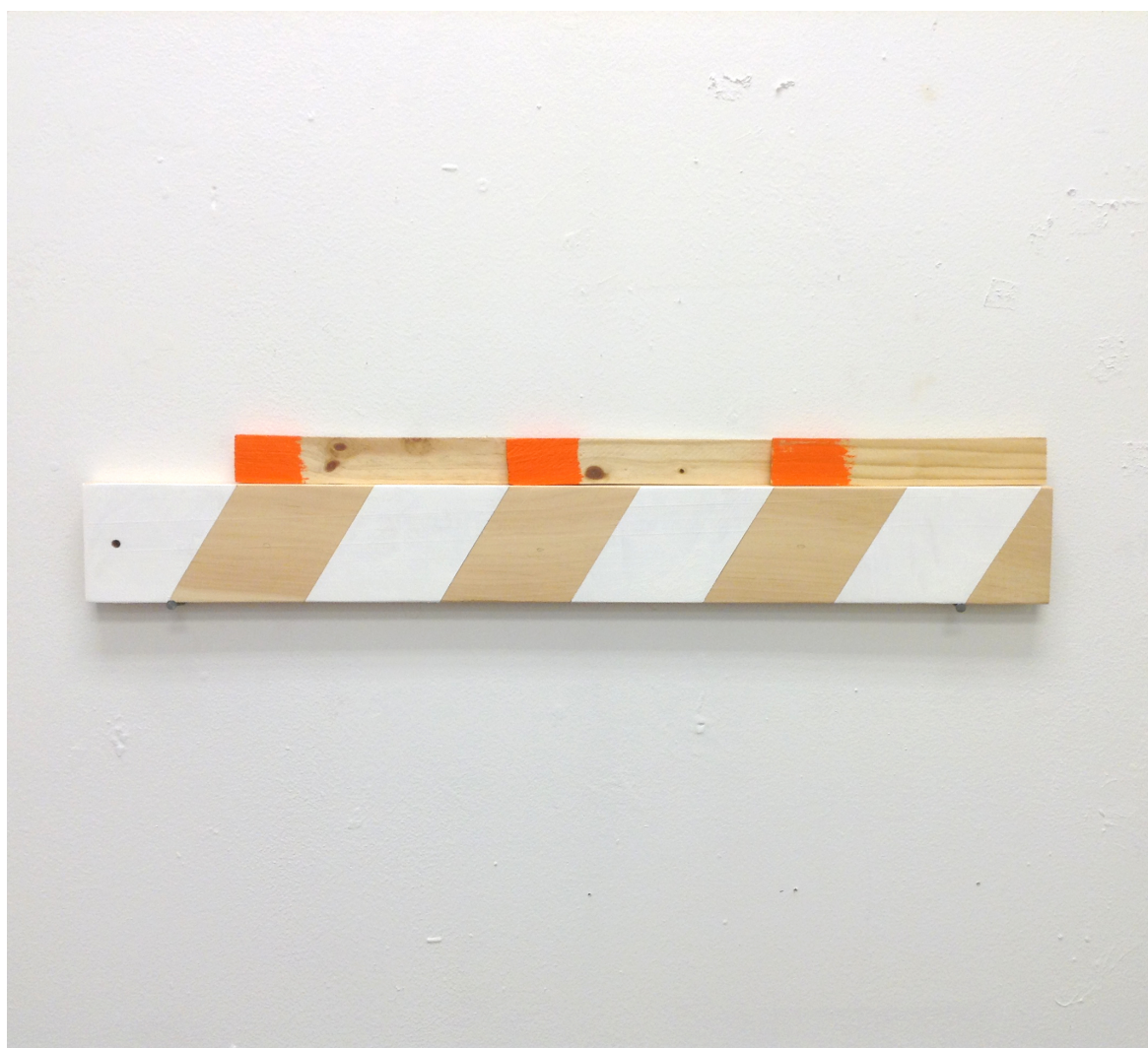


III. 22. Specific bucket. Sketchbook, undated

While the Aristotelian notion of abstraction appears very close to Malevich and the development of Suprematism as a vehicle towards infinity, nominalism is closer to Duchamp and the introduction of the readymades. Philosopher Thierry de Duve interpreted the development of the readymades from a note Duchamp wrote in 1914, included in the *White Box*. The note simply said "pictorial nominalism". De Duve argues that the readymades came as a result of Duchamp's rejection of the notion of painting as having a fixed and essential essence (de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, forward xxii).

While readymades, on the one hand, bring attention to the particular and specific physical object, which is physically near and present, and carries the weight of its commodity status; abstraction, on the other hand, takes the opposite direction: it invites a movement from the particular to the

universal, from the concrete and material presence to the immaterial, from what is limited in time and space to the unlimited, from that which is seen to that which can be imagined.



{positions and orientations}

Five years I ago I placed a chair on three custom-made wooden blocks and directed it towards the constellation of Sagittarius. According to the constant movement of the Earth the position of the chair would have needed to be constantly adjusted if it were to be facing the constellation at every given moment. Although this could have been arranged in practical terms, either by adjusting it manually at regular intervals or by orchestrating an automatic mechanism, it would have added a performative or a technological aspect, a situation I was not interested in. I was interested in the object being static to perception but in constant movement at the same time as it is attached to the Earth. The chair was aligned towards the constellation of Sagittarius, which also points in the direction of the galactic center, at the moment that coincided with the opening of the exhibition, the time when the public encountered it. If kept in position, it will be aligned again one year later when the revolution of the Earth aligns again with the constellation. (Ill. 25 shows this work).

In this investigation I have been more aware of the position and orientation of found objects rather than purposefully articulating them myself. Also, I have begun to acknowledge the orientation of architectural elements which I tended to take for granted.

For example, the walls of my studio have a particular orientation. This orientation responds to the orientation of the building. The studio is aligned almost perfectly with the four cardinal points: the door faces West, whereas the other walls face North, East and South. For many months coming into the studio I didn't notice this orientation. It was only when I started noticing the particular direction of certain found objects on the streets (cigarette butts and concrete blocks for example) that I began to ask questions about the orientation of the objects in the studio.

The objects in the studio have an intrinsic connection with the space, and they reinforce the orientation of the walls either by leaning against them or by being affixed to them.

In reflecting on the readymades, some of them are displayed in particular positions and orientations. For example, *Fountain* was placed so as to be encountered on its side and *Trébuchet* (trap) was a coat hanger affixed to the floor. In this case it was important that the object was left in a horizontal position, lying on the floor of his apartment. Duchamp mentioned in an interview that he kept constantly kicking this object indadvertedly and that he was too lazy to put it on the wall, so one day he decided to affix it to the floor with some nails, transforming the object into a readymade.

Another object that has a particular orientation is *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, usually displayed hanging from the ceiling. In this way we can say that it has a vertical orientation.



Ill. 23. Found cigarette butt with compass indicating the North-South direction. Hamilton, Ontario, May 12, 2017

Meaning

In this investigation, direction and orientation are considered as problems of meaning. Either placed and oriented in a deliberate way, or by chance, an object in a room will generate a particular meaning which is different in each case. If seen as part of the language of sculpture, the inherent orientation of an object lends a particular meaning to it.

American artists who based their practice on an exploration of the phenomenological encounter with particular presences in space, like Robert Morris or Donald Judd, experimented with the exact placement of various objects that activated the floor, the ceiling and corners of a given room. Although in their writings their focus was placed more explicitly on aspects related to the figure-ground dynamic, the mind/body problem (Morris in particular) or on challenging ideas associated with the Gestalt theory of perception, the notion of direction and orientation was sometimes embraced

In *Notes on Sculpture Parts I and II* (1966), Robert Morris offered a detailed analysis of the perceptual experience of form and scale bringing notions from Gestalt theory and from his own embodied experience. An acute awareness of placement is considered, exemplified by this concluding remark: "in much of the new work in which the forms have been held unitary, placement becomes critical as it never was before in establishing the particular quality of the

work. A beam on its end is not the same as the same beam on its side.” (*Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 20).

In *Notes on Sculpture Part III: Notes and Nonsequiturs* published one year later, Morris approached orientation more directly as a critical factor in maintaining the autonomy of regular forms (like the cube or other forms that involve a right angle): “The way these forms are oriented in space is, of course, equally critical in the maintenance of their independence” (Ibid., 38).

Working in relation with the landscape, Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76) presents a direct relation between placement and orientation. It consists of four large concrete cylinders arranged in a cross pattern in Utah’s Great Basin Desert. The cross aligns with the sunrise and sunset on the summer and winter solstices.

The *Sun Tunnels* are framing devices which direct attention to the changing position of the Sun’s raising and setting points during each year cycle. Pierced with smaller holes representing the stars of four constellations: Draco, Perseus, Columba, and Capricorn, this work suggests a connection with the language of an ancient astronomical observatory.

Giovanni Anselmo, contemporary with Holt and Morris, and who was active within the *Arte povera* movement in Italy, also made direction and orientation the focus of his work. He emphasized the orientation of concrete blocks by inserting a compass in some of them, making obvious their alignment in space at the moment of encountering their presence according to the north and south poles of the earth.

Anselmo’s *Direzione* (1967-8) consists of a granite stone which has been carved on one of its two flat surfaces to allow for the embedding of a magnetized needle. The block is then oriented in the north-south direction according to the direction given by the needle. The fact that the needle works is fundamental. It works as a poetic mechanism that renders visible the invisible force acting in the environment, a force that is amplified and made visible by the orientation of the block. In an interview conducted in 2006, Anselmo talks about the relevance of orientation in his work:

The invisible energy of magnetic fields, influenced by solar storms and by cosmic radiation, pervades us. The magnetic needle of the compass, because of this energy, assumes the north-south direction, indicating directions in space. I don’t invent this energy, because it exists ‘already’, in this as in every other space.

Giovanni Anselmo in conversation with Andrea Vilani, Turin, 15 June 2006, in *Giovanni Anselmo*, 222.

In *Direzione*, the presence of the granite block is inseparable from its direction. Orientation is not left loose but attached to its presence and rendered concrete as the object itself. Its orientation is attached to its existence as an object in time and space. By creating a tautological circle the problem of orientation is directed towards itself.



Ill. 24. Giovanni Anselmo, *Direzione*, Stone, magnetic compass, glass, 1967-8

Imagination

Orientation requires an act of imagination to bring into the present the distant, non local, place according to which one is trying to be oriented. Orientation is a dimension of experience, in which notions of place and time are complemented by an act of imagination: one is oriented, or disoriented, in relation to *something else* that is not present at hand. By orienting oneself according to this otherness, one is invited to maintain at the same time a sense perception of the here and now with an act of imagination that brings to the present the referential point according to which one is orienting oneself, be it another place or object, the earth as a whole, a particular constellation or star, or the cosmos as a whole.

J.J. Gibson considers orientation a fundamental fact associated with perception. “The perceiving of the world entails the coperceiving of where one is in the world and of being in the world at that place. This is a neglected fact that is neither subjective nor objective” (J.J. Gibson, “The Problem of Orientation”, in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 190).

As a human, I orient myself different from the way a bat, a mouse, a pigeon, magnetotactic bacteria, or a tree orient themselves. Biologists would hardly interpret these acts of orientation as a function of imagination; they would explain them, at best, as internal ‘intuitions’ based on chemical responses that move these organisms accordingly, like the magnetised needle in a compass.

A poetic quality

The particular position and orientation of a given object or space can be discovered over time. If light from the Sun is entering the space and casting shadows on a particular object, by following the movement of this shadow one can get a sense of the trajectory of the Sun and infer the particular orientation of object or room. If the situation occurs at night, or if one is asked at a given moment what the orientation of this particular object or space is, this information, or quality, might not be accessible at an instant of perception. An instrument, like a compass, would be necessary.

A compass would render this quality of perception in an instantaneous way, almost like a watch is used to give the "present of time" at a given moment. The instantaneity of direction offered by a compass has something in common with the instantaneity of time offered by a mechanical watch. But there is a fundamental difference between these two instruments, and it lies in the fact that the compass needle is rendered into position by the very force according to which it is aligning itself accordingly. This entanglement of the compass needle with the force that is moving it separates its instrumentation from the mechanism of watches. While a watch is only the imperfect, mechanical translation of one dimension of time —clock time—the direction given by a compass, its needle responding with its actual sensible matter to the invisible force orienting it, holds the poetic of the moment.



III. 25. *Untitled (Alignment)*, 2012. Chair aligned towards the galactic centre, Bogotá, Aug. 23, 4:30 P.M.



Ill. 26. Found concrete block showing a particular orientation, Hamilton, Ontario, June 6, 2017

Devices for orienting thought differently

Husserl's phenomenology is based on the notion that the mind is always oriented towards an object. Sara Ahmed adopts this notion to develop the concept of a “queer phenomenology”, and makes the point that our environment straightens particular orientations rather than others (*Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*). Ahmed focuses her argument on nearness, on what is ready-to-hand: “we are affected by ‘what’ we come in contact with.” In this sense, the chair and desk of the philosopher are “orienting devices”. Ahmed articulates the idea that familiar photos displayed on living room tables showing heterosexual “happy” scenes are mechanisms that “straighten” and orient behaviour. They are objects that work as “orienting devices” that point behaviour in a heterosexual direction.

Like Ahmed, Kitaro Nishida also challenges phenomenology, but from a diametrically opposed perspective. His criticism of the basic premise of phenomenology—that the mind is always oriented towards an object—is questioned from the point of view of Buddhist metaphysics and Zen practice. Differently from Ahmed, who sees a heteronormative environment at play, and in so doing takes for granted the object-subject separation, Nishida recedes a few steps into the background, into the infinite background of nothingness where the duality between objects and subjects ceases to exist. In his essay “The Intelligible World,” he writes: “Husserl started from Brentano’s position who saw the essence of consciousness in intentionality; that is why Husserl’s phenomenology has not yet freed itself from this standpoint. Such a standpoint must make it impossible to become conscious of an object of thinking, not to speak of an object of will.” (*Intelligibility and The Philosophy of Nothingness*, 98).

According to Nishida, Nothing is the ultimate resting Place of consciousness, where Being ceases to exist. In this final Place the mind is neither oriented nor disoriented, there is only “place” and “nothingness” (Ibid., 35).

Nothingness in Nishida’s philosophy means the exact opposite of void and emptiness. Japanese Buddhism emphasizes that this nothingness is alive. (Ibid., 47).

Following Ahmed, the various objects encountered in the studio are directional devices. Taken in their physical sense, they direct attention to particular places or reinforce particular orientations; following Nishida, the presence of objects can be seen as directional clues that render attention to an infinite nothingness that lies beyond their presence.

With this in mind I can conclude that, if encountered in certain situations, everyday objects can also be seen as “orienting devices” that have the potential to orient thought differently, even if this happens momentarily. Everyday objects can lead the mind away from their pragmatic and literal meanings and open the possibility for a different sense of meaning to emerge. A sense of meaning that is intrinsic to the viewer’s own experience of the encounter, where differences in the speed of the passage of time are experienced.

This was my experience on encountering a group of rubber bands accumulating slowly in my window handle, which I momentarily experienced as “something else”, and also when I encountered for the first time the mops and brooms on display outside hardware stores. (I continue exploring this notion in more detail in {encounters and situations}) .



III. 27. Objects leaning against the studio wall, 2017



{encounters and situations}

When I place an object, where it finds its natural position, I have the feeling that it has the same effect of adding a brush stroke. Placing an object activates space which starts to vibrate in the presence of the object. Painting activates a surface which starts to vibrate in relation to the brush stroke. The relation between object and space, and between painting and surface is an encounter; the encounter activates a situation that is perceived by the viewer.

personal note, January 23, 2017



III. 28. Hardware store front, College Street West, Toronto, 2016

The readymade is neither an object nor an image. [...] It isn't necessary to see, you need only know that an operation, a gesture, has been carried out.

Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, 22.

On the streets of Toronto, different kinds of mops, brooms, and other domestic objects are displayed outside hardware stores and they offer the possibility of a relevant and unexpected encounter.

The mops and brooms are displayed upside-down, that is, in the opposite direction in which they would normally be used (unless one is going to use them to mop or broom the ceiling). They are often encountered in a casual arrangement which changes on a regular basis, every time someone stops to buy one of these objects.

This purposeful arrangement offers an unpurposeful effect: the possibility of encountering these objects as *abstract* entities. During the encounter, at the moment of noticing them for the first time, I sensed a suspension of the ordinary passage of time. The habitual sense of everyday time, clock-time, was interrupted.

After this moment of suspension ended, one is again reminded that their arrangement and placement on the street is the result of sale strategies and that those multicolour, thin cylinders placed on the sidewalk are commodities waiting to be bought.

But, for a moment, they were not perceived as functional objects, their identity was somehow transmuted. The objects suspended momentarily from their functional and socioeconomic meaning were encountered in an *abstract* way, and an opening, a gap in experience, took place.

In one of the notes included in the *Green Box*, Marcel Duchamp approached the readymades as an *encounter*, as a "rendez-vous" taking place at a particular time and place.

Préciser les "Readymades".

en projetant pour un moment proche à venir (tel jour, telle date telle minute), "d'inscrire un readymade". — Le readymade pourra ensuite être cherché (avec tous délais). —

L'important alors est donc cette cet horlogisme, cet instantané, comme un discours prononcé à l'occasion de n'importe quoi mais à telle heure. C'est une sorte de rendez-vous.

Inscrire naturellement cette date, heure, minute sur le readymade, comme renseignements.

aussi le côté exemplaire du readymade.

Translation:
Specifications for "Readymades".

By planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date such a minute) "to inscribe a readymade" — The readymade can later be looked for (with all kinds of delays). —

The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour. It is a kind of rendezvous.

Naturally inscribe that date, hour, minute on the readymade as information.

Also the serial characteristic of the readymade.

Marcel Duchamp, *Green Box (1934)*, cited by Hector Obalk in "The Unfindable Readymade".

Approaching the readymades as an encounter is a very relevant clue. This notion displaces attention from the physical, material aspect of the object, and from the socioeconomic conditions that rendered it available in the form of a "commodity", and brings attention to the temporal, to the moment of encountering the object. The complexity of the object-subject relation is brought forth.

In approaching the readymades as an encounter, I start seeing them as temporal events. At the moment of the event, the event of the encounter, the flow of time in which I am habitually immersed is disrupted. A difference in perception, a gap, takes place. The passage of time (and therefore my experience of space) resonates in a special way. I encounter myself encountering. My experience of time and space is anchored to the here and now.



III. 29. Hardware store front, Dundas Street West, Toronto, 2015

*a situation is a collection of events
but sometimes an event is itself a situation*

personal note, August 24, 2017

When I encounter a situation, all the elements involved in that situation are ticking at the very same pace: the tick of the present, the tick of the moment in which I realize or notice that particular situation. However, every particular element involved in that situation carries a unique time, and they are unified by an overall idea that renders all of them accessible to my senses at the very same time, creating what we call 'the present'.

personal note, Sep 29th, 2016

The mops and brooms on the street comprise different situations. In a broader sense, each situation can be seen as a collection of events: taking the mops out on the street, placing them in a particular order, in a certain way and in a particular context.

Japanese artist Kishio Suga describes his installations as “situations”. This is another important clue in this investigation. Suga wrote the following with regard to his 2017 exhibition:

Each thing and space had belonged to particular worlds of their own before they were hand picked up by the artist and in these worlds they all had preconditioned orders labelled by nature or by people. Orders here mean ranked situations or hierarchy, whether they have certain parts in the place or not, their values, demands, qualities or quantities...my final point in making artworks is to introduce ways to see and learn about things, to perceive an existing space differently so that viewers can experience a new kind of order. If they can apply their experience with art into their daily life, the new order may find settlement there. I would like to introduce a new way of reacting (to situations) in all viewers.

Kishio Suga quoted in *Karla Black and Kishio Suga: A New Order*, 22 October 2016 - 19 February 2017, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, exhibition catalogue.

There is a relation between the notion of *situation* as characterised by Suga and the notion of *environment* articulated by J.J. Gibson in his “Theory of affordances”, in particular, how a situation, or environment, can offer a particular set of affordances. Gibson says:

The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.

J.J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 121.

According to Gibson, animals perceive the world (their environment) in terms of *affordances*, a kind of coupling between the particular animal and the environment. He developed his theory from Jakob von Uexküll who conceptualized the notion that perception is fundamentally species-specific.

A flea, for example, would perceive the environment according to chemicals, heat and “furriness”, what the flea needs for its survival. Affordance theory is a biological theory of perception based upon survival.

Interestingly, the experience of time is also species-specific, and each member of the species has a subjective notion of time. I cannot know how time passes for a flea, for a dog, or for a bacteria, but I can infer something about my own species.

Following Gibson, I could say that the mops and brooms placed outside hardware stores articulate a particular environment to which I respond in a subjective way. Also, to stage a situation in a gallery is to create an environment.

The environment created by an exhibition affords a particular coupling and this coupling articulates possibilities for action. These possibilities are particular to each person encountering the situation.

By possibilities of action, I don't mean that the situation is intended as "interactive", meant to be manipulated, or used in real time. What I mean is that the possibilities for action articulated by a situation are proper to each individual to be enacted in his or her own time. So there is an implicit *delay* before the possibilities of action become actual in the viewer's own time and life.



III. 30. Hardware store front, Dundas Street West, Toronto, 2017

The absence of “works” and the habit of the gallery space

What if we take the action of the hardware store owner that places the mops and brooms on the street as a model for proceeding as an artist with regard to the exhibition space?

If I place an object in a gallery I am demonstrating my intention to use the object's presence as a bait that awaits its viewer. My intention in placing the object awaits the intention of the viewer to encounter it. This situation can be seen as theatrical, and one could add, not only on the part of the artist alone, but also complemented by the viewer.

On the street we are confronted with a mixture of intentional and unintentional events. The brooms and mops placed in front of hardware stores are placed there intentionally by the hardware store owner or employee. They are there 'awaiting' a viewer to find them, and eventually buy them (for whatever purposes they need them for). When I find them on the street I am not looking for them and I am not interested in buying them. Somehow their presence articulated in me a sort of 'aesthetic echo' when I first encountered them and I felt compelled to take a photograph. I captured their disposition on the street as an object of momentary contemplation, rather than as a functional object that I would bring home to accomplish a particular task. And this is not their purpose for being there. The owner's intention was not to articulate a moment of contemplation that provides passers-by with a momentary suspension of their current states of mind. These objects are placed there on the street as *equipment*, and are expected to be 'read' (and bought) as equipment. But they also have the potential to not only be perceived in that way, as "ready-to-hand", as their presence is also momentarily abstract. Their presence opens the potential to be seen as "something else", beyond their functionality and beyond their intention for being there. Their poetic aspect was opened and released into the atmosphere regardless of the pragmatic intention the store owner had for placing them there, regardless of their pragmatic existence as functional, everyday objects.

To produce this complex dynamic of everyday life in a gallery space is a challenge. This is so because of the expectations embedded in the gallery space, where everything placed inside it is suddenly transformed "into something else" by the simple weight of the gallery's context and historical baggage. This historical habit is maintained by the artist's self-awareness as an artist, which supports the artist's intention to produce art, and by the viewer's own history, his/her particular predisposition towards encountering objects in galleries.

Duchamp: [...] in other words, art means action, activity of any kind. Anyone, Everyone. But we, in our society, [have] decided to make a group to be called "artists", a group called "doctors", and so forth, which is purely artificial. [...] Instead of being singularised in a little box like that, with so many artists in so many square feet, [art] will be universal, it will be a human factor in anyone's life, to be an artist but not noticed as an artist.

Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Joan Bakewell (BBC UK Television, June 5 1968), quoted by Maurizio Lazzarato in *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, 40.

As Brian O'Doherty has written extensively about, artists have explored different ways of disrupting the habits of the gallery space. The most radical strategies are perhaps those that turn the gallery itself into the art object, in other words by exhibiting "nothing". The tendency to get rid of the art object started to be felt strongly in the art of the 60s and 70's, as a reaction against

“the tyranny of commodity”, as Lucy Lippard signalled in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*.

An early precedent is Yves Klein’s *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l’état de matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Le Vide*, made in 1958. Klein removed everything in the gallery except for a large cabinet and then staged an elaborate entrance procedure. The opening attracted more than 3,000 people who had to queue before being able to enter into an empty room. Exhibiting ‘nothing’ but *space* can be effective to disrupt the expectation of the gallery space as a space for displaying “objects”.

Measurement Room (1969), Mel Bochner’s strategy, was different. He invited viewers to experience the emptiness of the gallery space but added something else, the measurements of the gallery itself. Meticulously attending to the height and width of doors, the size of walls and the distance between the floor and the ceiling, he attached vinyl black numbers and arrows that indicated all of the gallery’s internal distances; in a way reproducing on top of itself the same mental image of the gallery’s architectural maquette, a maquette that one, as a visitor, was actually inhabiting.

While Klein conducted visitors to the empty space of the gallery, in so doing bringing attention to the gallery as a concretization of real space, a metaphysical notion of space, we may say, Mel Bochner’s focus was placed on the concreteness of the gallery’s walls, the physicality of the container.

Art & Language’s version of “empty” gallery space focused on another experiential element of space: its enclosed temperature. In one of their works they focused their attention on the possibility of an infra-thin difference, setting the air conditioner at a temperature only a tad lower than the current atmospheric condition. The effect of the air conditioner was barely perceivable by the body, however the artists’ subtle intervention was grasped by the mind thanks to a series of texts that were both intended to be published and exhibited. In one of them they wrote: ‘It is necessary actually to install air conditioning as described in the text, or will the text do just as well?’ (Art & Language’s ‘*Air Conditioning Show*’ (1966-67)).

Michael Asher consistently challenged the notion of the gallery space as an ideological framework that affects meaning. One radical example is his work for Galleria Toselli in 1973, which consisted in the removal of the accumulated layers of paint and plaster from the gallery’s walls, floor and ceiling. This gesture exposed the viewer to nothing more than the raw materiality of the container, suspending the auratic reading of the gallery.

Martin Creed’s *Work No. 227, The Lights going on and off*, presented at Tate Modern in 2001, offers a more recent example. The work consisted exactly in what the title indicates: the lights in one room of the museum were attached to a timing circuit making them turn on and off at a fixed interval.

For my part, I would like to proceed as the hardware store owner who, although being unaware of it, offers passerby the possibility of a moment of suspension every time the mops and brooms are brought out onto the street.

The distance from the Sun

The exhibition with which this research concludes will take place at the Gales Gallery between May 7th to 12th, 2018.

The show will be composed by materials that relate to the gallery and which exist in the storage room.

Initially, I contemplated the idea of moving the materials present in the studio to the gallery space, but I have rejected this idea. I realized that what is present in the studio is a series of situations intrinsic to the dynamic of the studio (a place of experimentation where finished and unfinished works coexist), and with the studio's location inside the sculpture area. By transposing these materials into the gallery, the situations that exist in the studio would lose their meaning. This is so because the gallery follows an intrinsic set of rules, and a different general logic, than a studio space. Even if all the materials are transposed following the same positions and orientations, their meaning will be different.

For this reason I decided to work only with materials that are intrinsic to the internal dynamic of the gallery space, and to develop a situation that relates to its logic of operation, namely, the setting up of an exhibition.

At the end of the show all the materials will return to the storage room, giving as a result the production of an exhibition that has no material leftovers.

The public will encounter objects with which they are familiar, but defamiliarized in the global situation of the gallery.

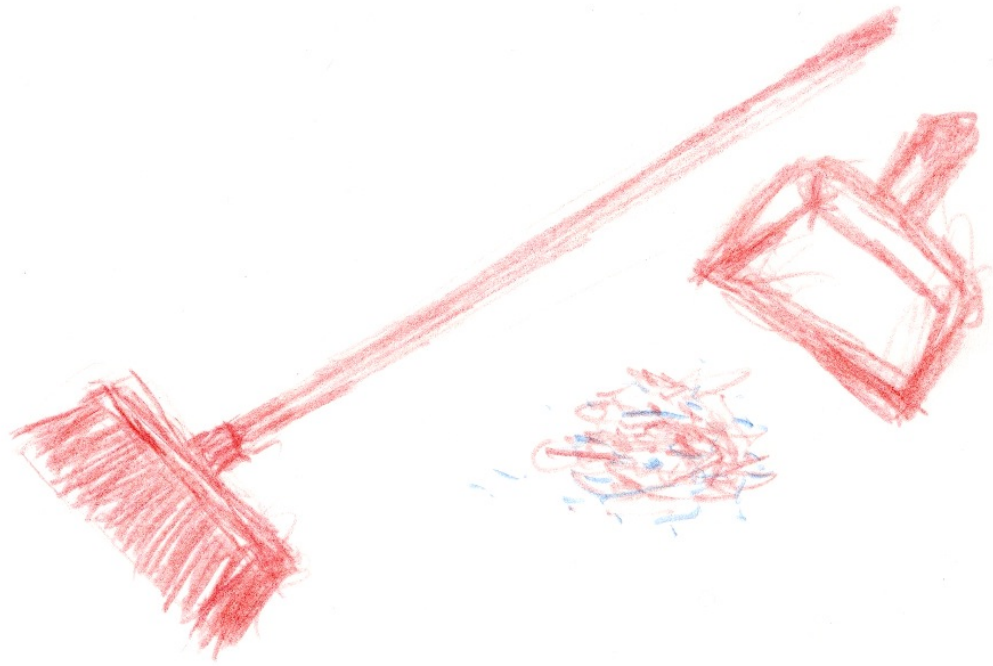
The space of the gallery is intrinsically related to the existence of all these objects, which are used for the preparation of exhibitions. The intrinsic relation between all the objects, which differ in form, colour, material and size, and between the objects and the space, which are all connected as with an invisible umbilical cord (the gallery's own mechanism of operation), will be one of the immediate apprehensions offered to the visitor.

The general situation does not offer a clear sense of a finished state or an ideal point of observation, nor will there be an ideal moment for encountering the exhibition. The public will encounter a situation that develops over time, until it incorporates all the objects in the storage room.

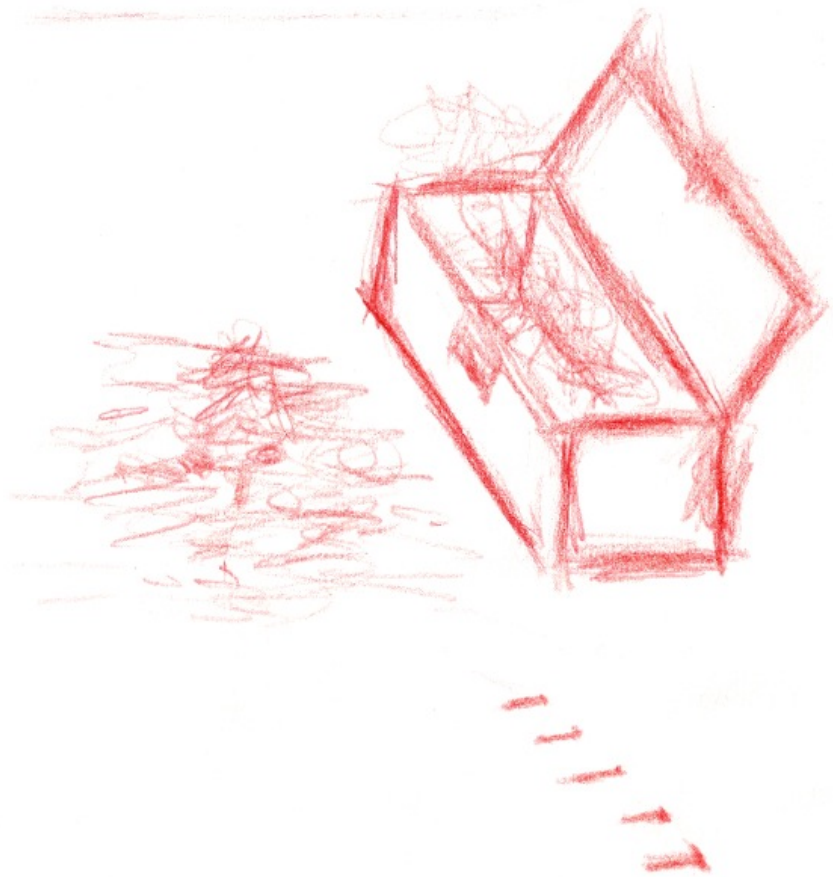
The making of drawings has been helping me to envision possibilities that can be enacted during the exhibition. However, the final arrangement and the exact position of objects are not predetermined. These will be eventually dictated by their intrinsic relations and from the relations they establish with the space once they are transported into the gallery.



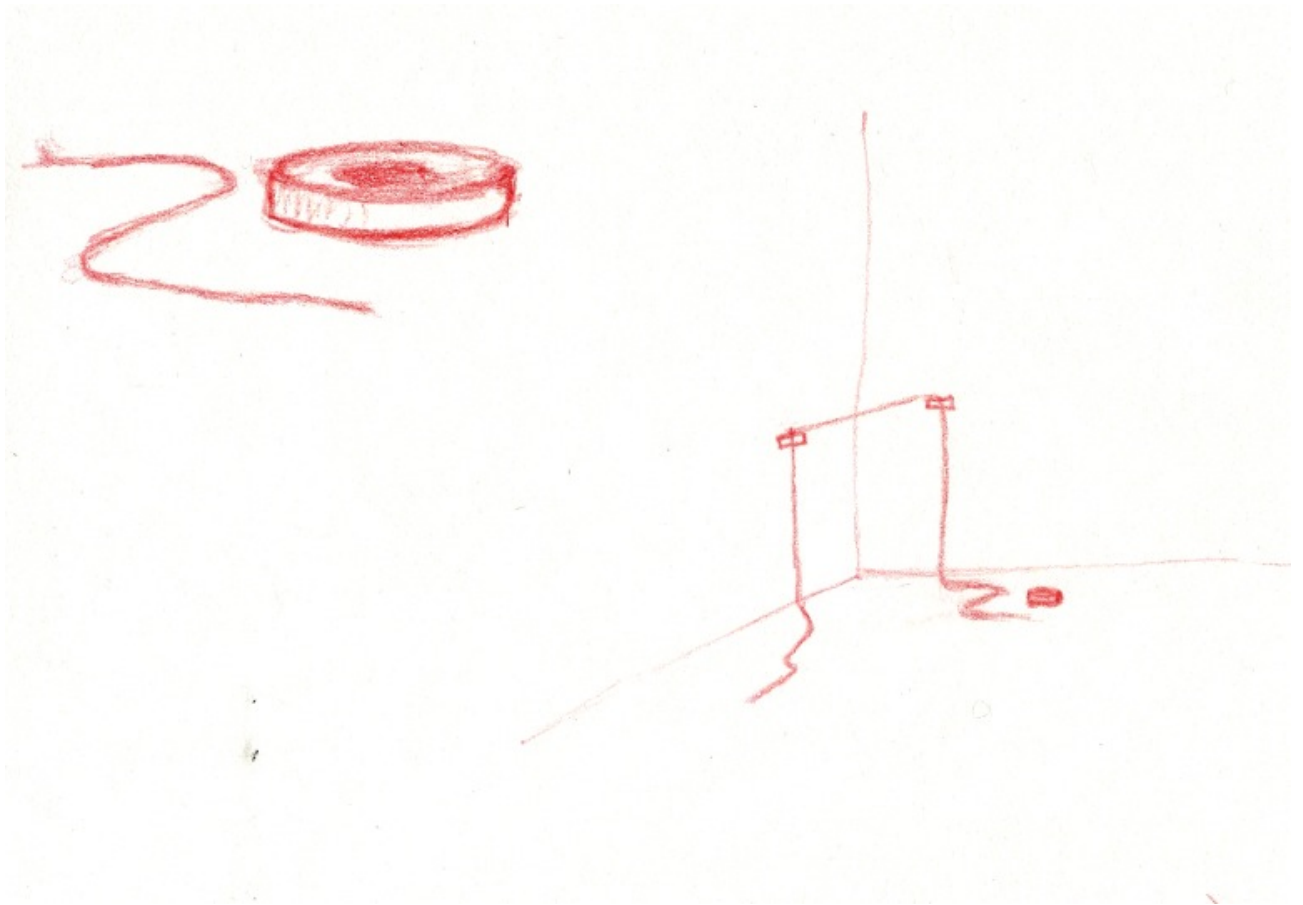
III. 31. Sketchbook, March 2, 2018
Situation involving step ladder, wet cloth, lamps, etc.



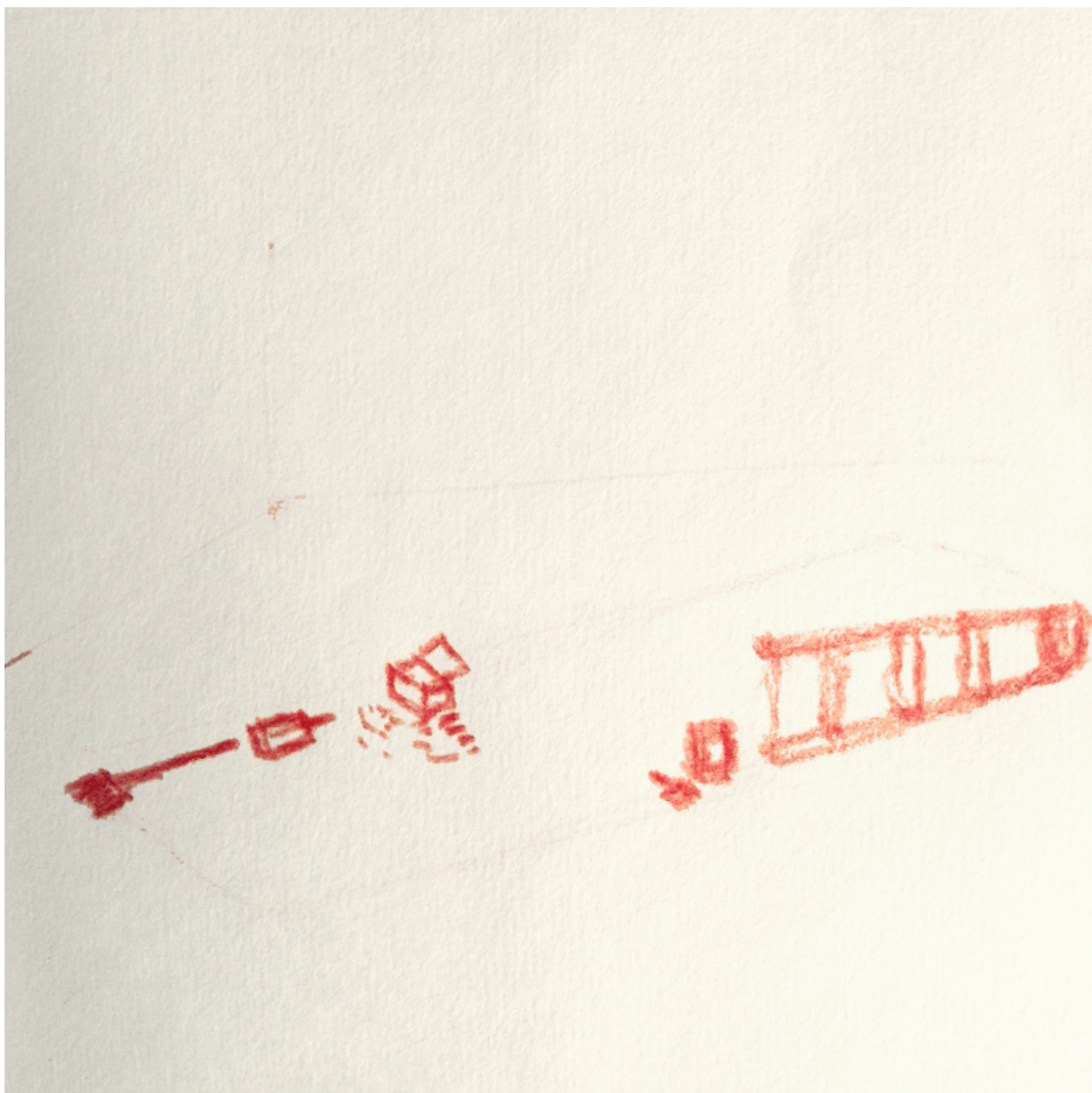
III. 32. Sketchbook, March 2, 2018
Situation involving broom, dustpan, floor and dust



III. 33. Sketchbook, March 2, 2018
Situation involving toolbox and all its contents

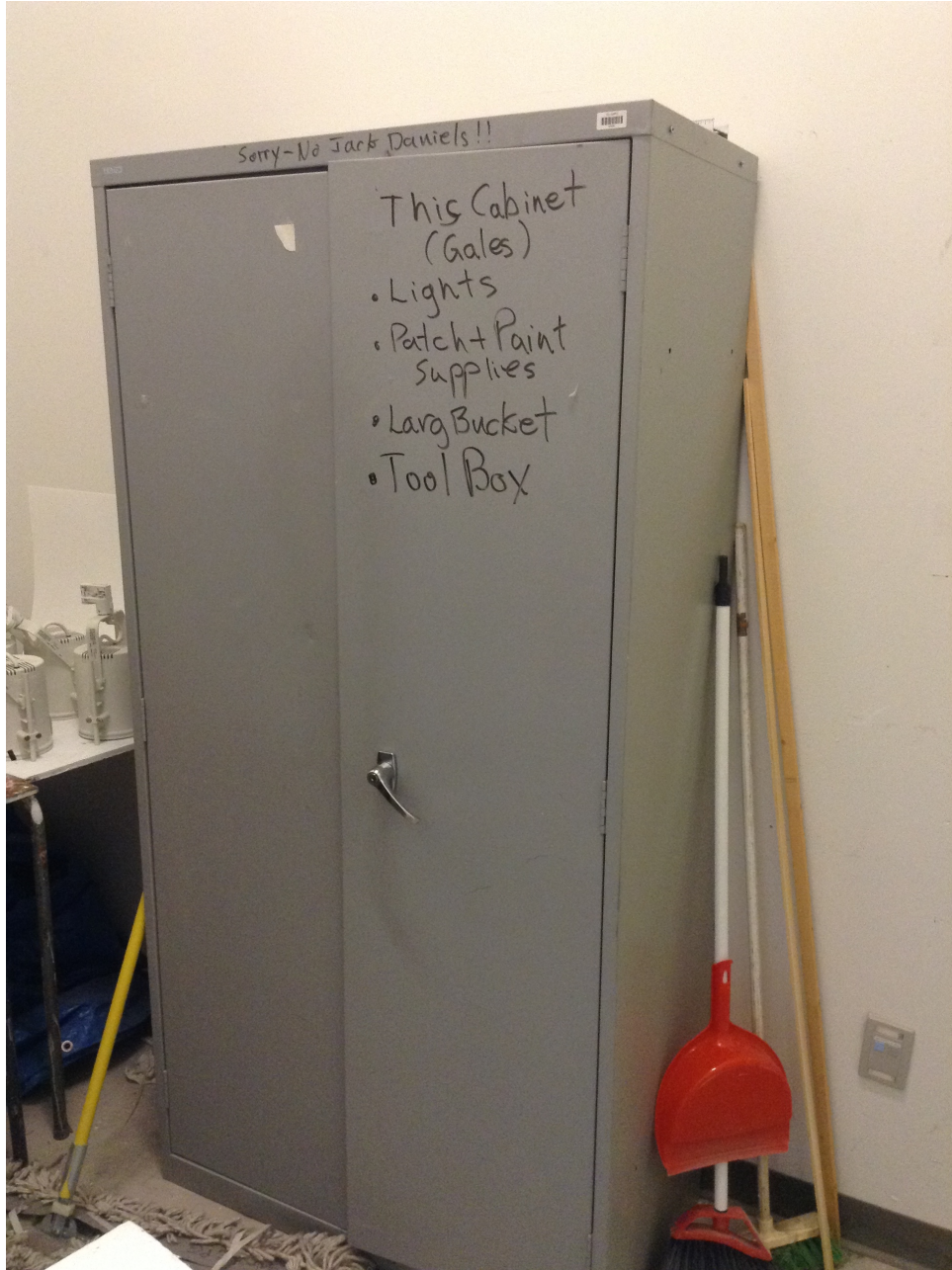


III. 34. Sketchbook, March 5, 2018
Situation involving string, tape roll and corner



III. 35. Sketchbook, April 7, 2018
Global situation





Ladder Must Be Stored + Secured HERE!

[illegible]



III. 36-39. Storage room, Nov. 18, 2017

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APPENDIX: Exhibition images and concluding reflections































The day I received the keys, I opened the storage room and made a photographic record of its content. It was Wednesday, May 3rd, 4 days before the opening of the show. I measured the distance between some objects and registered their orientation using a compass. I also photographed the walls and ceiling. I printed these photographs as working material for myself and made a small booklet with them which became available for consultation to the public. These images offered a sense of the recent past of all the objects in the show. At the same time they offered a view of their near future as, at the end of the show, I returned all the objects and placed them in their previous positions using these images as reference.

Although I initially envisioned that the exhibition was going to consist in a gradual movement of all the objects from the storage room into the gallery, the situation encountered its own stability before all the objects were moved. I will conclude by offering an account of this process.

The plinths

The storage room had 8 plinths of different heights, each one showing a variety of marks and signs of deterioration. The expected function of these objects in the gallery is to perform as “invisible” actors raising art works. I decided to articulate a series of playful arrangements placing them in different positions. Four plinths were placed on their side, three others were placed upside down revealing a close connection with containers, which I engaged with by placing objects inside, while one was used in its upright position. By relieving most of these objects from their intended purpose, their reality as physical objects became evident.

Orientations

The walls of the gallery are oriented at a 45 degree angle from the North-South coordinates. This means that the meeting point between the NorthWestern wall and the NorthEastern can be seen as an arrow that points to the magnetic North. I emphasised this orientation of the architecture by aligning a group of steel “L” supports. A magnetic compass was left next to this arrangement.

To emphasise awareness on orientation I also taped some objects in order to momentarily fix their orientation. I performed this gesture on two different objects: a broom and a hammer.

Lighting

The lighting of the exhibition was uneven. Certain areas of the gallery received a bright light whereas other areas had less light. This lighting condition was not dictated directly by the positioning of the objects but by an unexpected event. As the tools in the show remained available to students in the MFA program, on Tuesday morning, before the show started, the lights were switched on at random by one of the students as some materials were needed (I expand on this event at the end of this text). Upon my arrival I discovered this new lightning arrangement. It was a happy accident which I decided to keep for the remaining time of the exhibition. As a result, some objects were directly lit whereas others were left almost unlit. This lighting condition emphasised an unfinished state, inviting the viewer to question if there was an area that had more importance than any another.

The covering of the gallery's door

Because my experience in the studio took place in a closed environment, where I had no direct access to the temporal flux of activity happening in its immediate surrounding, I decided to operate a similar effect in the gallery space. So I planned to cover its double glass door. I looked around in

the proximity of the gallery and found a large office whose glass door and windows were covered with kraft paper using green tape for its attachment. I decided to proceed in a similar way.

The following day I came prepared with a roll of kraft paper and green tape. Each door had a metallic handle bar attached in two different places. This handle could only be removed with a special procedure which I was unaware of. A friend figured out a way to overcome this problem, which consisted in cutting out two identical circles on the paper and making a straight cut to connect them. We simply had to carefully slide the paper across the handle bar. The procedure worked smoothly for one side of the double door. I had to leave the space to attend a meeting and I left the work unfinished. When I came back the following day I noticed that the various pieces of paper left on the floor were in themselves an abstract work. This aesthetic reading, created by the gallery framework, was superimposed by its reading as a functional material, specially because the tape and scissors that were used the day before were still there. I left the situation as it was and opted to leave the second half of the door uncovered.

Having one side of the door covered and another uncovered created a zone in the gallery that was not completely available by sight from the corridor. The objects that had a stronger material presence like the ladder, the grey and dusty platform and a large blue tarpaulin found their natural place in this area.

The grey platform

With the help of a friend I moved this object into the gallery keeping the same position it had in the storage room and keeping all the marks it had on its dusty surface. A spray bottle half-filled with water found on one of the shelves was placed on the right-hand side of the platform in a suspended position. The platform offered the viewer the possibility of reading it in reference to the mark-making tradition while at the same time exposing its presence as a functional object.

The toolboxes

Two different toolboxes were found in the cabinets. I placed them on the floor and opened them up completely to expose their contents to the viewers. In one of them, I found a collection of magnets which had attracted various nails and screws over time. I made this arrangement visible by attaching it to the side of one of the tool boxes.

The table arrangement

I found two painting tables of slightly different sizes. These tables had multiple acrylic marks left by students who used them in their painting classes over the years. Their presence in the storage room was related to their common use in openings and closings where they function as handy platforms for food and drinks. I decided to keep their orientation as tables but I placed one on top of the other. I found two other platforms in the storage room. These platforms were abandoned custom-made shelves. One of them had two "L" shapes attached to it which were traces of its previous usage. I used them for suspending the shelf on one side of the tables, extending their surface in a 90-degree angle towards the floor. The second shelf, also white-painted, was almost twice as large and almost equal in width as the first shelf. I placed it on top of the tables, extending them lengthwise. At the moment of the opening of the exhibition, I attached a tape roll at the end of this shelf, which started its slow descent towards the floor. The purpose of this gesture was to make the viewer aware of the temporal record of the exhibition as it unfolded during the week. The tape roll touched the floor the second day of the exhibition and a second roll was added the third day.

The levels

The storage room housed two silver levels. One level was 36 inches long, the other 48 inches. I placed the shortest level on the floor in a vertical position and the largest one inclined against the South-West wall. By placing the first level on the floor it entered in direct contrast with the horizontal plane of the floor creating a perpendicular mark in space. In this position, the level uncovered the slightly sloped nature of the gallery's floor.

The blue tarpaulin canvas

This object was moved into the gallery preserving the form it had in the storage room. My only intervention consisted in removing some of its dust to emphasise its texture. My intention was to invite the viewer to encounter its three-dimensional condition, which shares a commonality with the traditional language of sculpture, while at the same time to be able to discern its nature as a flat "two-dimensional" material.

The ladder

The storage room housed one large step ladder which allows access to the rack of lights in the gallery. I displayed the ladder in its upright position under a group of lights and placed a rectangular cloth on one of its rungs. The cloth curved itself around the step by its own weight. When the show started, I taped a roll of tape to the upper tray of the ladder which started a very slow descending movement. This gesture mimicked the placement of the roll of tape in the table arrangement, creating a connection between these two separate objects.

The storage room

Having the image of the hardware store owner in mind, who places the mops and brooms outside on the street, I replicated this gesture by placing some objects out in the corridor keeping the exact arrangement they had inside.

On Monday May 7th at 10:30 AM both the gallery space and the storage room were open to the public.

Tuesday May 8th

When I arrived this morning I noticed that someone had been in the gallery in my absence. The lightning was different and the large gallon of patching paint was missing. When I opened the storage room I noticed that the red container for mixing paint was also missing. I was puzzled by what could have happened. Whoever took them was very gentle because nothing else had been moved. The disappearance of these objects activated the space differently. I thought that it was perhaps a suggestion made by one of the sculpture teachers. But I could not figure out who. About two hours later, while I was still puzzled and actually happy with the new arrangement of objects and lightening condition, Sara (Sara Kay Maston) arrived carrying the missing objects. It was a fantastic revelation. She had arrived before myself to the gallery to unmount her MFA thesis show that was located in the SPG gallery across the building. When she opened the storage room she couldn't find all the materials. She then opened The Gales Gallery (the two spaces share the same key), turn on some of the light switches from the panel, and took the objects and materials she needed. When she arrived she apologized for having taken them from the show. I said that there was no reason for apologizing, that it was what those objects were meant for. I thanked her for the new lighting arrangement which allowed me to look at the work differently. Sara placed the objects on the floor close to the entrance and left hurriedly. Not only the objects that were missing returned, but also other objects that were not in the storage room the day I received the keys. Most specifically, the green broom and the red dustpan, which I remember seeing on the floor during the setup of a show about a year ago.

I realized that something interesting happened at that moment. That in bringing them back Sara brought not only the objects but the action of placing them. The objects remained in the same place where she left them for the rest of the exhibition. It was a casual positioning without any preconceive intension. It was, one would say, a "true positioning". A true gesture coming from everyday life within the artificial context of the show. Amongst this gesture my other more theatrical gestures reside side by side. So among the objects in the room some were placed without the intention of being encountered by the public while others were carefully placed to be encountered. The intention behind the gestures is not the same, however they are almost indistinguishable.

In the exhibition the public was not only encountering objects but the previous action of placing them. This gesture, the act of placing, is like a silent note, that persists in time.

At the end of the exhibition all the objects were returned to the storage room and placed in the same position they had before the show.









