

A SIMULTANEOUS WORLD

ILZE BRIEDE

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Abstract

What if we could experience and see more than meets the eye? What if we could envision a multitude of existing realities being unveiled to us simultaneously? What if we could float in and out through different temporal representations inside the expanded field of our consciousness and retain everything together into one single continuum? What would this multiplicity look like to us?

My artistic practice, a hybrid of video, image and object making, investigates the phenomenon of perception and the constraints and boundaries between the senses and knowing. This support paper maps out the creative influences and experiments behind the four installation pieces presented in my thesis exhibition *Simultaneous World* show at the Gales gallery, York University.

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Introduction

Art enables us to observe the space inside our bodies. It gives a face to the secret life of consciousness.

Barbara Maria Stafford (2007)¹

My art practice is informed by science, philosophy and independent thinking, all converging into a space of interplay and discovery. Though made from physical materials and things these artworks, nonetheless, embody invisible states, laws and principles. The challenge for me is to go beyond what physical form can offer and propose ideas outside the constraints of its materiality. I am aware of and consciously rely on the viewer's perception that becomes a virtual space where one encounters with the work. It is here that; another set of processes begin and continue - the constraints and boundaries of human perception are affirmed then challenged; meanings are established, then questioned; reality is presented only then to be disrupted.

My work encourages deeper looking and requires connecting the multiple pictures of the world that we accumulate into a single newly learned experience. The key idea behind my art is to make people become aware of their perception mechanisms, and, to be able to question them at the same time. The familiar materials that I use in my work, such as VHS tape, fabric, and brick create certain expectations in the viewer's mind about their use and material consistency. Through my work I

¹ Stafford, B. (2007). *Echo Objects: the cognitive work of images*. London: The University of Chicago Press. (p105)

appropriate these material expectations into a new set of arrangements which would alternatively challenge our perception and propose new meanings and learned experiences. I use the *familiar* as means to explore the *unfamiliar*.

This Thesis support paper consists of a comprehensive overview of my artistic practice starting from early influences leading up to my current studio work as a graduate student at York University. The *Artist Statement* establishes a path leading to my current methodology in working with materials, which is further expanded on in the chapter called *Realities and Representations*. In this part of the investigative study, I link my past experiences with still life drawing to my undergoing practice of video projection mapping. This is followed by four chapters that expose the underpinnings of each art piece exhibited in my Thesis graduation show called *Simultaneous World*. Each artwork/chapter title is coupled with a key phrase that underlines the conceptual thinking married with these installation works. I hope that my work can ignite curious minds and coalesce art, science and philosophy even closer.

Artist Statement

[Art] confronts this inner representation with that of the concrete forms of the real world, seeks in turn [...] to seize the object in its generality, and as soon as it has succeeded in doing so, tries to take the supreme step which is the poetic step par excellence: excluding (relatively) the external object as such and considering nature only in its relationship with the inner world of consciousness.

André Breton (1935)¹

I work with simple materials such as fabric and plaster, found and sourced items like bricks and VHS tapes. For me, the process of art-making usually starts with an idea. And yet, this idea is never fixed as the desired outcome keeps changing and morphing together with the materials. The subject matter develops gradually along with stages of development and gets solidified at the very end. At this stage I often then envision the possibilities and boundaries these materials can offer and let the thoughts grow on it. There is a space of creative freedom between the concept and the capacity of the materials; it gets stretched and tested through stages of experimentation. Bridging an ephemeral idea with a physical container is a process of alchemy where materials actively contribute and become a body for the concept. The artist should allow space for this to happen.

Dada, Surrealism and early 20th century avant-garde are the fundamental influences

¹ Mileaf, J. (2010). *Please Touch. Dana and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press. (p95)

on my visual thinking in regards to film, as these movements were the boldest in their experiments and art formats. Films by Man Ray (1920's), Dziga Vertov *The man with the movie camera* (1929), Marcel Duchamp *Anemic cinema* (1926) and Oskar Fischinger *An Optical Poem* (1938) were attempts to create a cinematic language devoid of actors or narratives expanding the themes and content of film medium. Innovations in camera work, subject matter and editing techniques allowed for visually compelling material separating it from the mainstream cinema. This experimental film tradition continued to the later half of the 20th century in works by David Lynch *Six figures getting sick* (1966), Michael Snow *Wavelength* (1967), Bill Viola *Ascension* (2002) continues to influence my practice working with time-based projected media. I continue to explore themes of perception, consciousness and ephemerality through non-human subject matter and creative editing techniques.



Figure 1. Marcel Duchamp, *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Selavy?* 1921

Craftsmanship and analogue approaches to working with materials and found objects would be the most direct way to describe my art practice. This methodology is inspired by Dada cut-outs and Surrealist assemblages, later explored through other new technologies by Fluxus artists. I am drawn to Duchamp's readymades because of his choice of real and ordinary "non-art" things such as a bottle rack,

bird cage, bench and bicycle wheel, urinal, and glass sheet. The non-human agency of these art objects along with material texture and behaviors are able to sustain and embody the meaning envisioned by the artist. *TV Buddha* (1976) by Nam Jun Paik and *Poème objet* (1935) by André Breton remind me of still life assemblages, separated from every-day sensibility, they invite the viewer into their unique world of reality.

Space and time are other essential aspects of my art practice. I draw inspiration from kinetic works by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy *Lightprop* (1922) and durational sculpture such as Man Ray's *Indestructible object* (1965). These pieces are animated by mechanical means creating a sense of "liveliness" to them. Opposite to paintings which live in our imaginary perception, kinetic work acquires immediacy and presence in real space-time. The continuity and duration of these installations merge with the continuity and duration of looking, therefore occupying same time and space as the viewer.

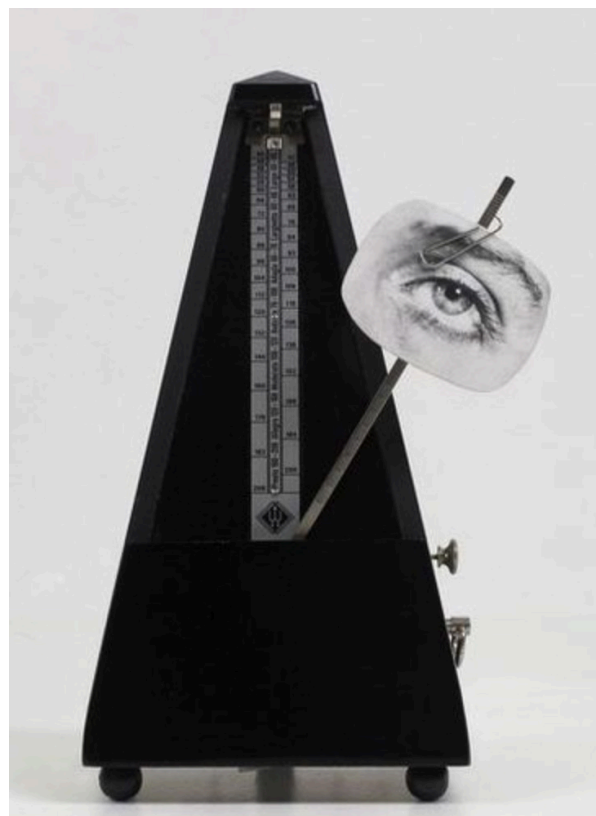


Figure 2. Man Ray, *Indestructible Object*, 1923/65

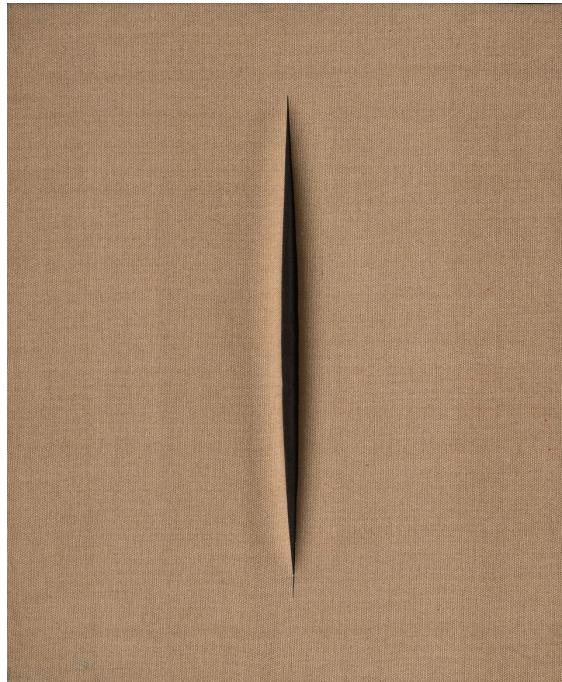


Figure 3. Lucio Fontana, *Spatial Concept, Expectation*, 1968.

And yet, spatial interventions by the Italian artist Luciano Fontana goes beyond the physical constraints of the material surface. The slit canvas is a passage from the material world into the void of potentiality, a space where imagination can roam wild and free, constructing landscapes of possibilities. This realm “between inner and outer representation” for the French writer and co-founder of Surrealist movement André Breton “would depend on the perception of concrete forms being balanced by a retreat into the imagination” (Mileaf, 2010). A video medium presents itself similarly to Fontana’s canvas; it acts as a door for the imagination to enter and reside in this alternative space of images and suggested worlds. The difference is that, in case of a video, this virtual world is readily available.

The art of video projection is built on an already established video art tradition starting to emerge in accord with technology advances of the late 1960s. This form of medium is tightly knitted with the software and hardware developments and becomes a direct embodiment of these technological tools. Artist collectives such as

Kimchi and Chips¹, Random International² and WHITEvoid³ pushes the boundaries of technology by overlapping it with fields of science, performance and architecture. The application of video projection mapping amongst these collectives have been pushing the possibilities and traditions within tradition of video art. Projection mapping for me is like a philosophy of seeing. It is a way to navigate from physical space into virtual and imaginary and vice versa seamlessly and without an effort. To be precise, it offers a between space, what I call a “simultaneous world”. This intervention does not belong to the physical world of existence and is merely an insert, a sort of a still life or theatrical production. Moreover, it draws you in and pulls you out, leaving you suspended between the observation and perception, reality and representation.

1 KIMCHI and CHIPS studio is a Seoul based art studio founded in 2009 by Mimi Son (KR) and Elliot Woods (EN). Their installation art practice includes volumetric images in fog and 3D projections onto non-designed forms. (Text from website: <https://www.kimchiandchips.com/about/>)

2 Art Group RANDOM INTERNATIONAL run a collaborative studio for experimental practice within contemporary art. Founded in 2005 by Hannes Koch and Florian Ortkrass, they explore the human condition in an increasingly mechanised world through emotional yet physically intense experiences. (Text from website: <https://www.random-international.com/biography>)

3 Studio WHITEvoid operates at the interface of art, design and technology. WHITEvoid is comprised of specialists in interaction design, media design, product. (Text from website: <https://www.whitevoid.com/>)

Realities and Representations

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (505 BC) once said: “nature loves to hide.” This paradoxical suggestion was merely pointing out that we are, in part, blind and unable to fully know and understand this natural environment of ours. Plato regarded human attempts to render the absolute and original source of nature futile, by saying “we have only this dream-like sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth.” Little could they know that two thousand years later science (or “arts” as were referred to in antiquity) would unlock most of nature’s secrets and even start reinventing it from scratch. Artists, on the other hand, depend on nature and learn directly from it. Nature is an inexhaustible resource for inspiration and potential knowledge which artists may extract at their will.



Figure 4. Ilze Briede, *Still life drawing*, 2001

1. Still life

Some of my happiest memories are from art school drawing classes where we would attempt to capture still life scenes onto our white paper with just a pencil and eraser. In still life arrangements there would always be a draping fabric, disinterested and yet gracefully arranged hugging some rusty teapot amongst plaster cast geometric shapes and plastic vegetables. The fabric folds would be the ultimate test for our pencil and observation skills.

Fighting with complex textures of various materials and attempting to trap ephemeral light on paper surface with our graphite pencils was a torturous and yet rewarding process. The interplay between the light and shadow captured dimensional landscapes. Different still life objects were being manifested on our drawing boards out of the pure white void that is paper. We were taught to let go of the childish-way of merely outlining things and, instead, establish shapes with continuity of gradients. These authentic material objects were transformed through drawing - emerging out of the different reality of the paper surface. As we were laying down the ranges of shadows, the brightest light, no longer coming from the outside, became the paper itself.

What we were introduced to here was something at the heart of image-making and the problems of representation. Ernst Gombrich, the 20th-century art historian, sees part of the problem with representation and methods of capturing the world in images as being “not only an inability to copy nature but also to an inability to see it” (Gombrich, 1961). This gap between the real and individual perception was apparent during our critiques when every drawing differed from each other. We all started with the same still life and ended up with multiple versions of it. It seemed we captured reality in unique ways objectifying it through form and texture.

2. Video mapping

Yet, I took a detour from pursuing traditional art media and instead became a student of digital media and computer arts. From this, I was given the opportunity to work for the first time with a theatre department and teach set designers the technique of video projection mapping. Working with stage designers and curating video projections brought back memories about the small still life sets at the art school drawing class. This time, however, the still life was in the shape of a theatre stage: rusty teapots and plastic vegetables grew in size and drapes became heavy curtains able to hide a small building. It was the same method of shaping the objects with the help of projected and curated light, this time, out of the blackness of a theatre box.

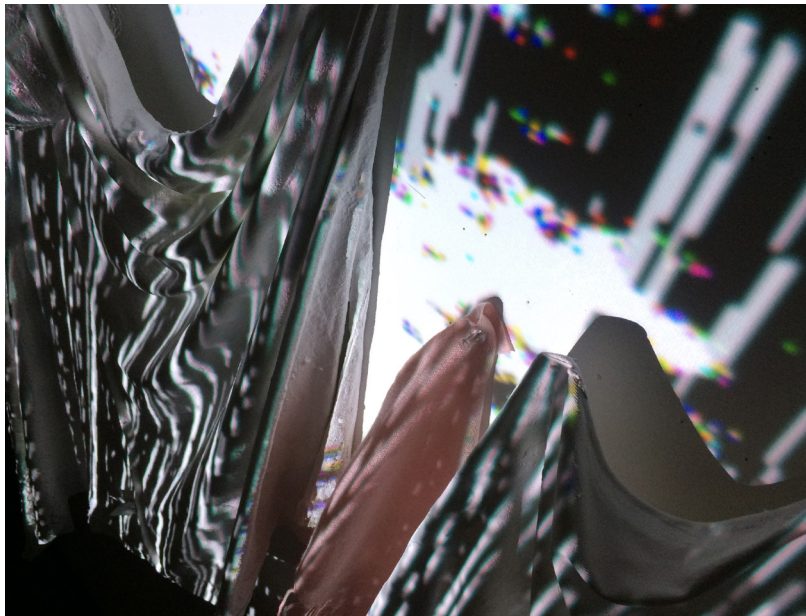


Figure 5. Ilze Briede, *Studio Experiments*, 2017

These out-of-ordinary-life assemblages create isolated “worlds” from various components, usually unrelated to each other. The act of constructing a theatrical stage and then perceiving it as a unified system suggests to me something fundamental about the act of staging images - that it is about the convergence of multiple Things. Deleuze talks about multiplicity being a platform that allows intersections from different fields and thinking models, becoming a “system of

connection between points” (Vartabedian, 2018). “A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980). Multiplicity is a structure, a container able to “consolidate in a virtual idea; it offers, in other words, the conditions by which the internal genesis of an idea is possible” (Vartabedian, 2018). Theatrical stage consisting of physical objects and projected digital imagery is a breeding ground for such virtualities. The theatrical detachment from the real-world invites a spectator into the world of possibilities, emerging and submerging through planes of materiality and thought-forms, rooting and taking place in physical sensorium.

The *process* of making is pertinent with any form of creative output. The evidence and artefacts of the actual making process is fascinating and unveils the artwork itself uniquely, separate from its subject matter. Take a painting as an example; brushstrokes and layers of paint are what creates a physical body of this artwork. These hardened gestures distil the energy and individual moments this painting came to be. They are indexical imprints of the artist at work with materials. Let us take a photograph as our next example: it is a chemical reaction on the top layer of paper that registers the intensity of light reflected off the surfaces. It is analogous to biochemical reactions happening at the back of our eye in the retina when light receptors respond to the incoming stimuli of light. Brushstrokes, light-sensitive paper and the retina are fundamental building blocks which construct the actual of this physical world and encode imagery or a signal pattern available to us for further processing. The subject matter, on the other hand, is a derivative of the observed and emerges as the following process in response to the actual. The aftermath will resemble something out of our drawing class: each person would provide their unique interpretation of the observed, a *subject*-ive representation of the *matter* in front of them.

Brushstrokes, still-life and stage props embody material intentions and what has been called “thing-power”, a term coined by American philosopher and political theorist Jane Bennett. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, she describes the world as being laid out flat as planes of assemblages with no particular centre of attraction nor hierarchy. Physical matter is non-identifiable, therefore impossible to be singled out as separate autonomous objects. Instead, physical matter resembles an electrical grid which vibrates and is saturated with vitality. An *actant* for Bennett “is neither an object nor a subject but the “intervener” [...] being in the right place in the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event” (Bennett, 2010). This becoming and spatial temporality is essential in order for vibration to exist and ripple through this physical realm. These invisible ripples are bonds that tie us all together on a cellular level, autonomous and independent with their powers to shift, influence and charge the viewer. Therefore the intention of the maker can be transported to the viewer through these actants like painter’s brushstrokes and staged still life props, pulsating with thing-power and original intent.

Windows: Pushing Them Clouds

A window is an opening, a thin sliver of nothingness diving two spaces: inside and outside. It is a passage for things to trespass from both sides, technically it is exactly like a door, but smaller and higher up on the wall. Windows have had a recurring presence in my artwork. My first attempts to work with window was in 2015 as part of the collaborative process with British illustrator Donna Enticknap Wilson. We, along with other artists were invited to take over an old English house located in the South West coast of England in a town called Bournemouth. I was one of the twenty-two artists to convert this historic building into artwork from the inside out. These efforts culminated in an exhibition called *Present Past*.¹

I, along with my collaborator Donna Wilson painted our room black with Indian ink. Donna used gold paint to draw intricate illustrations scattered around the room, and I worked with the window. My work was concerned with mapping and shaping incoming light with the help of fuzzy strings of mohair threads nailed to form a geometric tunnel linking window frame to the floor. This piece was a culmination of visual and sensory dichotomy: lightness and darkness, hardness and fluffiness, ephemeral and decaying. Light became a living and visible sensory experience, a blurring boundary between the inside and outside.

¹ Art project Present Past organised by SIXprojectspace art gallery directors Mark & Sarah Harris took place in "Rastgarth", one of the first houses to have been built in Southbourne in 1891, occupied by British landscape painter Arthur George Bell and his family. This one day exhibition took place in 27th June, 2015, a week before full demolition of this building. Video documentation of this project can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/143526138>.



Figure 6. Ilze Briede, *A Tribute to the West Wing*, 2015

A window is a metaphor, not a thing. A window is both a hole and an otherness. I will elaborate:

A hole: in the beginning, there was nothing and everything, a never-ending landscape of world stretching as far as the eye can see. Then there was a wall, which was followed by many others. Walls are pretty dull, so they need a wallpaper, hangable art, or windows. The window is a hole, nothingness, a reduction of the wall, instantiation of previousness. It is undesired part of the wall, which becomes sort of the decoration in itself. That leads me to the next point.

An otherness: in old Chinese architecture, it was common to create different shaped openings in garden walls; a vase shape was one of them. A tourist guide once told me that this is for a person to stop and appreciate the view they are about to enter. The scenery behind the doorway becomes a “painting” on the imagined surface of the vase. This type of approach in seeing the passageway and view together voids it by becoming something else, that which is a non-enterable thing. Once gone past this opening, the magic is gone. So once again, there is no window, just a painting on the wall.

Both approaches to perceiving a window, a hole/an otherness, manifests in my thesis artwork called *Pushing Them Clouds*.



Figure 7. Ilze Briede, *Pushing Them Clouds*, 2019

This installation piece consists of three main suggestive components: a window, a curtain, and a video projection. The window image is that of a video projection of sky, blowing trees and clouds. The form of the curtain hangs in front of shaped and solidified by plaster. All of these items are metaphors of things they wish to embody;

they are not an actual thing what they represent. For example; window here is a plastic screen from an old TV. The only thing that links it to the window is its shared shape. The view “through” the window is a loop of the video. The hanging curtains in front and the illusory backdrop of windy day “outside” helps to situate this plastic material in the context of window glass.

What is a thing? What constitutes its thingness? Things such as “curtain” and “window” in *Pushing Them Clouds* have acquired their thingness through the process of making, shaping, rendering and transforming.

Each of these identifiable items - curtain, window, image - has been appropriated from somewhere else. For example, the object which becomes the window in this work, was originally a TV screen, and the curtain was adapted from a piece of fabric from a bale of cloth. Plaster was used as a fixing agent allowing this generic fabric to become curtain-like. Also, the TV screen becomes a window because of the back-projected video. We perceive the curtain as such through the process of seeing and our brain processes these stimuli as recognised pattern and assigns meaning to it. The “knowing” of these assembled components emerges effortlessly from the depths of neurological networks through the process of “autopoiesis”. According to Chilean biologist, philosopher, and neuroscientist Francisco Varela, autopoiesis is “the mechanism which endows living systems with the property of being autonomous; autopoiesis is an explication of the autonomy of the living” (Rudrauf, 2003). Similarly, art historian Barbara Maria Stafford (2007, p193) talks about the brain-mind being “an autopoietic self-organising system”, like the middle-man allowing us to “inhibit the world in relation to our bodies, other people, diverse organisms and ecology.”

There is a gap between perception and contemplation, a space of passage where we take over from automated reality depiction to manual handling engaging more

analytical approach. There is a departure from the moment of seeing things as they appear towards more in-depth inspection and more engaged looking. This process allows us to inspect the thingness of this curtain at a closer range. The secondary flow of impulses constructs another reality, and we find ourselves trapped in this invisible space between rendered and constructed, autopoietic and comprehensible. If autonomic workings of our physical design support the first process, the secondary process is exercised individually based on unique experiences.

The video of the windy day used in *Pushing Them Clouds* is from a Youtube creative commons database widely available on the Internet. This moving imagery, like all images, is detached from its real place of origin; it is a digitised version of physical space. It is also removed from the author who has shared it widely for reuse. This disposable video (as opposed to copyrighted, authored and guarded intellectual property) acquires independence, an agency of its own, floating in the never-ending landscape of cyber wastelands. This video is *otherness*² which we relive while being grounded in the present moment, like looking through a vase-shaped door we virtually connect with what we see and what it becomes.

These distances measured from the embodied meaning of the curtain to fabric itself or captured video to an actual place is a space where we can learn how to shift and let one move from one state of being to another. Being in the mind-space of transition is difficult as our minds are not able to grasp duration or itself at work. This “grasping” runs parallel to minds continuous existence and processes embedded in time, as if, lifting objects out of the time of their physical existence and seeing them as unique things, singled out of everything else. Even our perception of time is

2 By “otherness” I mean other type of quality of perceived moment. When we look at different videos, we instantly merge with these images and “bring” them into actual space through the act of encounter and experience. However, they still remain “other”, not of this physical moment per se - I.B.

merely a mind-product. We, along with our minds, are embedded in this Space-time continuum, and formulae past+present+future shows how disjointed we perceive this idea of continuity. Philosopher Henri Bergson talks about duration being a mode of rooting oneself in the flowing moment (past-present-future) and becoming one with reality. For him “reality is not solid matter nor thinking mind, but living, creative evolution” (Carr, 1970). Similarly, for Deleuze, the duration is a space of virtuality which is also a void of potentiality becoming manifested in the actual. This space and reality is embodied through work *Pushing Them Clouds* and is built on the illusion and suspended belief, leaving spectator gazing at the wind blowing a curtain.

An Expanded Field of Representation: The Breach



Figure 8. Ilze Briede, *Heather*, 2006

In 2006 I created a small prototype combining a printed photograph and a video projection (Figure 8). I processed this same portrait image through the computerised effect and overlaid it by projecting the digital version on top of the physical print-out. I used sound to modify the digital texture in real time, creating a shimmering and somewhat magical intervention. This piece was a direct inspiration for my Thesis exhibition work called *The Breach*.

I have always been attracted to certain aesthetics when it comes to film, photography and video projection. Appreciation for analog photography has tempered my expectations for different subtle light renderings. The video projector lens is unable to achieve the quality of fine grain with its crude grid of pixelated

information. Therefore it has always been my practice to seek out alternative ways to work with video projection and video mapping, breaking out of confines of the medium itself. The video installation piece *The Breach* (Figure 9) it plays with perception, representation and the element of chance in revealing this feature of disruption between printed image and video mapped projected Image.

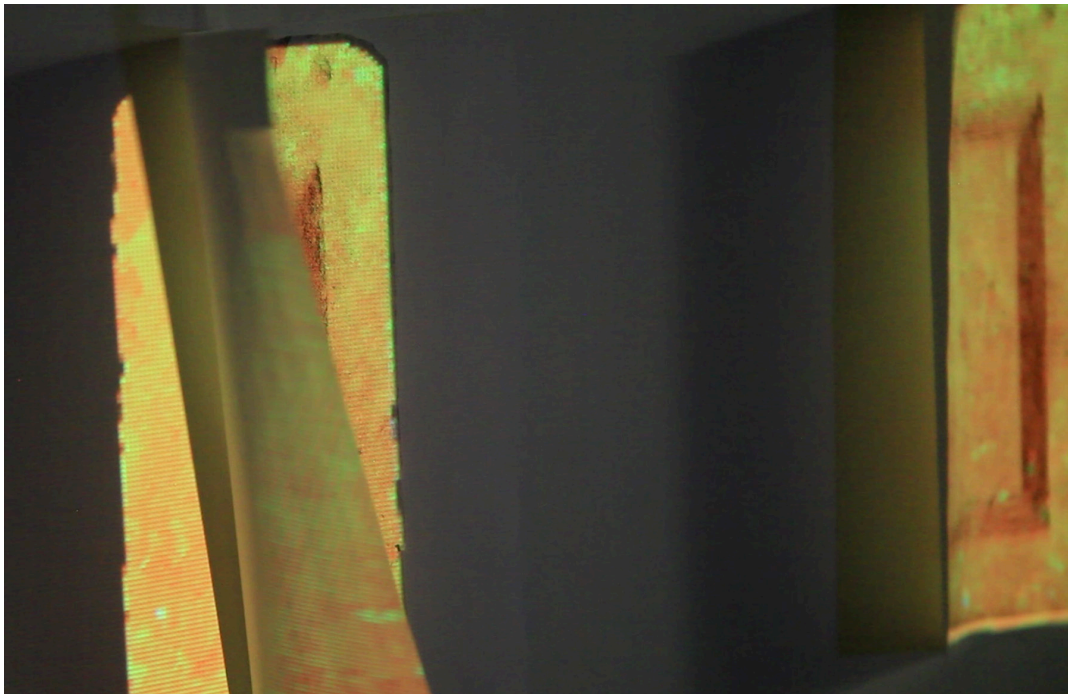


Figure 9. Ilze Briede, *The Breach*, 2018

The projected video mapped images of bricks are duplicates of the printed images, a difference being: the projected images are in colour, the printed images are monochrome. The effect of superimposing a gray-scale Xerox print with a pixelated projection of the same image in colour creates unexpected and new aesthetic quality. I use special mapping software to align these images perfectly. Once this alignment is in place, the two become one. Yet, this unity is disrupted by the introduction of a household oscillating floor fan. The fan creates a sudden gust of wind as it turns and shuffles pages on the wall which disrupts and shifts the mapping surface allowing a beam of light to escape. In the moment of breaching

this designated field and piercing through the paper surface, one can observe the alternative state of being of this projection: effortless, non-referential and free. The fan is an added element to create a moment of chance. American composer, music theorist, artist, and philosopher John Cage advocates chance as a methodology in creating a body of work, allowing “a leap out of reach of one’s own grasp of oneself” (Cage, 1961). This chance is a pre-condition when projection can breach out of its confinement.

This intervention creates an oscillated movement between being (actual) and becoming (virtual). The projection fluctuates between the state of the brick and a state of the light, existing simultaneously. These are two types of encounters: *actual* and *virtual* become connected upon reflection from Deleuze’s and Bergson’s philosophy. I find an explanation by researcher and philosopher Peter Hallward most appropriate to contextualise my work *The Breach*.

The actual is in reality ephemeral and illusory (printed page together with a video projection - I.B.). The virtual alone is real (escaping light - I.B.). A virtual creating is the reality that lives in any actual creature [...] The two dimensions are given as facets of one and the same creative process, two aspects of one and the same ‘expression’. (Hallward, p35)

Murray Favro, Bertrand Lavier and Vija Celmins are individual artists that exploit the same concept of the original and its’ duplicate, each in their unique ways. I want to expand on these artists and cite their specific works that have a direct connection to my artistic vision and approach in doing work. What connects each of our approaches is that these “duplicates” are made with physical materials; however they occupy or extend into a virtual space while being embedded in spatial time continuum. I will appropriate the same method of applying the concepts of *virtual*

and *actual* in order to place these works in context and proximity to each other.

Murray Favro is a Canadian artist, inventor and musician from London, Ontario. He was actively exhibiting his ready-mades, mechanical inventions, aviation prototypes and projection installations during the 1970s. Being a carpenter with a genius of an inventor, Favro builds his works entirely from scratch using wood, plaster, mechanical engines and metal. His concern is “to reconstruct perceptual phenomena (*virtual* - I.B.) and project ‘objectness’ (or *actual* - I.B.)” (Fleming, 1983). My video projection work resonates directly with Favro’s work with slides; the only thing separating us is the difference in technologies used.



Figure 10. Murray Favro, *Synthetic Lake*, 1973-74

His kinetic installation *Synthetic Lake* (1973-74), in my opinion, is his most successful and complex work, combining imagery, movement and sound. Roald Nasgaard³ describes this piece beautifully:

The gap between the rationalised and motorised construction [...] And the

3 Fleming, M.L. (1983). *Murray Favro. A Retrospective*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario. (p63)

film image [...] As well as that between the synthetic reconstruction and our awareness of natural phenomena become metaphorical for an entire gamut of disjunctions between what is directly experienced and what is systematised knowledge about that experience.

This continuous transformation and metamorphosis of the synthetic waveform through visual and audio treatments oscillates from perceivable (intellectual) towards perceived (sensory) and back again in an attempt to find its resting place with a viewer. The strange mix of water imagery and da Vinciesque wooden invention serves as “imperfect analogy in which the viewer’s participation transforms the experience and completes the work” (Fleming, 1983).



Figure 11. Bertrand Lavier, *General Electric*, 1985

French visual artist, Bertrand Lavier's working method is fascinating. He appropriates large household items and renders them with thick layers of paint, resembling something of a painterly sculpture. He paints thick and heavily textured layers of acryl on top of three-dimensional objects creating pictorial representations of things themselves. These items are charged with original intent and purpose before the artist transforms them into self-referential objects of art. His *General Electric* (1985) is a painting of a fridge on a fridge and it "does not speak of things that are outside of itself, imagined or not. However, it is a painting (*actual* - I.B.) that recovers that which it speaks of [...] The copy recovers the original in order to stay inside the tradition of the representational in painting" (Lavier, 2000). The original fridge which is now invisible moves and exists in the space of *virtual*.

Vija Celmins artworks are heavily saturated with physical time and yet they speak of ephemerality, the lightness and ingenuity of nature's designs and compassion. She is a Latvian born American contemporary artist whose work is concerned with rendering life-like textures of surfaces like water, sand, night sky and rocks in oil, charcoal or graphite.



Figure 12. Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, 1977-82

I was fortunate to see her works in the flesh in a 2014 exhibition called “Double Reality” shown in Riga⁴. *To Fix the Image in Memory* (1977-82) is a series of bronze cast rock replicas, hand-painted by the artist to resemble the original as close as possible.

In her interview with Robert Gober⁵, she said that it took her five years to paint these rocks and that she would never do it again. The time invested is physically felt, dense and present. For Celmins this work “is sort of criticism of realistic art [...] You point out that art is always invented, and that there’s nothing real about it the way nature is real.” This work of duplicates is particularly interesting to me as the boundary between authenticity and fabrication is being visibly erased leaving spectator wondering which one is which. From the angle of perception, both rocks are neither real or fabricated as you cannot tell them apart. The original and copy become a body of *actual* together, and the *virtual* is absent in this case. There could be another take on this work when both, *actual* and *virtual* exist simultaneously. Maybe the answer is this, expressed by Vija Celmins (Ibid., p11) herself: “I think the meaning is only in the material [...] we leave the material there as evidence.”

4 Exhibition “Double Reality” by Vija Celmiņa curated by Elita Ansons was shown in Art Museum „Rīgas Birža” in Riga, Latvia. It opened on 10th April, 2014 and was exhibiting Vija Celmins works from 1960s including popart, photo realism and conceptualism artistic expressions for almost two months.

5 Celmins, V. Robert Gober in conversation with Vija Celmins, 2002.

Losing the Point of Reference: Inside/Outside

The processes of our visual apparatus are ambiguous: the eye gathers information vis-a-vis lightwaves reflecting from the surfaces ending up at the back of our retina, and brain correspondingly generates a neurological response to what we physically see. It is a primary method of acknowledging the world before more elaborate mental processes start to kick in: our intellectual capacity to analyse and assign more complex meanings. The first process we cannot control and is usually carried out for us, the second one we are in full capacity to regulate. I am concerned with the first described process herein.

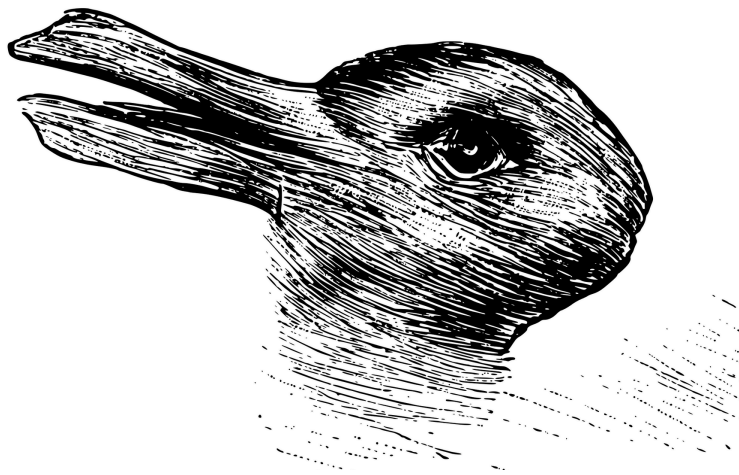


Figure 13, *Rabbit and Duck*, 1892

The rabbit-duck illusion image⁶ suspends a viewer in the space of transition between seeing and recognising two things: a duck in one instance and a rabbit in another. In his book, *Art and Illusion* Gombrich (1956) declares that “it is easy

⁶ This image was originally posted in 1892 in German humour magazine and made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein after using it in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

to discover both readings. It is less easy to describe what happens when the switch from one interpretation to the other”. *Seeing* image as a duck means seeing an aspect of it⁷. When suddenly the duck morphs into a rabbit, there is a shift in seeing these aspects from one to the other, “the expression of a change of aspect is the expression of a *new* perception” (Wittgenstein, p.196). Another example of “reversible images” phenomena is *Necker Cube* and *Thiéry’s* image.

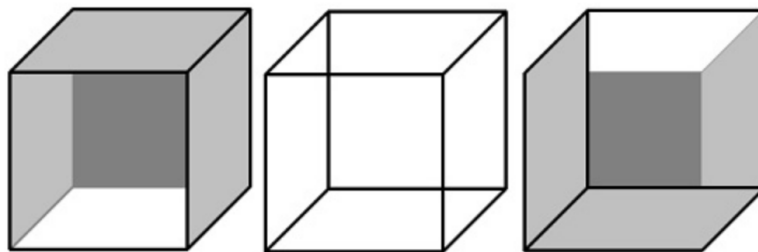


Figure 14. *Necker Cube*

In both instances, the brain is switching spatially between different planes which changes the perception of the object being closer or further. American neuroscientist David Eagleman in his article⁸ *Visual Illusions and Neurobiology* (2001) describes these images as “multistable stimuli that can flip back and forth between different perceptions” (Figure 15).

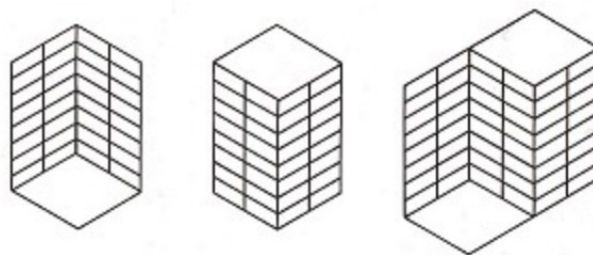


Figure 15. Thiéry's figure

7 For Wittgenstein seeing is produced by the influence of the object itself resulting in a mental copy which can be described in spatial terms. He refers to it as “materialisation” (p.199). Seeing as something is “not part of perception” (p.197)

8 Eagleman, D. (2001). “Visual Illusions and Neurobiology” (PDF). *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*. 2 (12): 920–926.

Similar to the world of images, language is another directory of adding, gathering and distributing meanings, but through epistemological means. A homograph is a word which bears several meanings, like in this particular instance: the word “bear” signifies a meaning to “carry”, or it can also mean “the animal”. Context or visual background is what helps these images and words to settle for one appropriate interpretation, and confusion only arises when these items are singled out and presented solemnly on their own.



Figure 16. Ilze Briede, *Inside/Outside*, 2018-19

The installation piece *Inside/Outside* (Figure 16) is a hand-crocheted cone made out of VHS tape. Its extended height is six and a half feet, however; the full length of this kinetic sculpture moving from one state to another would be thirteen feet.

The base of this sculpture is secured with a metallic pencil-rod circle, that helps to maintain the conical structure and also serves as a support ring suspended static in mid-air allowing this sculpture to invert itself inside out by moving up and down. The movement is achieved with the help of mechanical force driven by a stepper motor and pulley system.



Figure 17. Ilze Briede, *Inside/Outside*, 2018-19

Inside/Outside plays with both, linguistic and spatial perception until the differences start to melt into each other eventually eroding into a continuous state of flux. I aim to expose our perception processes and put us in a face-to-face encounter with them. Gombrich (1956) argues that “illusion [...] Is hard to describe and analyse, for though we may be intellectually aware of the fact that any given experience must be an illusion, we cannot [...] Watch ourselves having an illusion.” That depends on the point of reference which is also space from which we create this assumption, revelation, a thought; this space and point of reference is our body.

We ground ourselves in order to start making sense of this world, we have a close

connection with our being, and we are one with it. This being is a real thinking organism located in physical space with feet on the ground. Our thoughts and interpretations make up our virtual space where we find defining ideas and base our opinions. We need to have some reference base or point in order to contextualise what we see, what we think and what we are. This reference can be a background, a context of the situation, a knowledge of some sorts, something we can start building on. Let us take a look at installation piece *Inside/Outside* and try to contextualise it a bit. This crocheted object is a cone. It is a hollow object without a solid base. It is a three-dimensional object situated in a three-dimensional space as we can physically walk around and under it. We can say that it has an internal space and exteriority. Because this kinetic sculpture is constantly turning inside out and back again, its exteriority becomes internal walls, and it's inside turns out and becomes an exterior of the shape.

Two things are happening at the same time which we can describe using physics and language. This geometric shape has internal space and external surface based on its geometric composition. We use language to assign, and that helps us to distinguish between two states. The definition means recreating this state in mind and accrediting it with a reference. It is a secondary action when mind creates a virtual copy (mental - see Figure 18) and continuously try to sync it with the visible reality (physical).

I have mapped a diagram to display states of my work *Inside/Outside* in relation to *Duck/Rabbit* image and Deleuze's *virtual* and *actual*. I also must note that the density of these circles is from coarse to ephemeral (see graduation in colour) and they do not occupy the same plane. I also attached different forces in place operating within this structure which is displayed with arrows. Mergence is the reality we cannot access with from our bodies or conjure it in our minds, but we do attempt

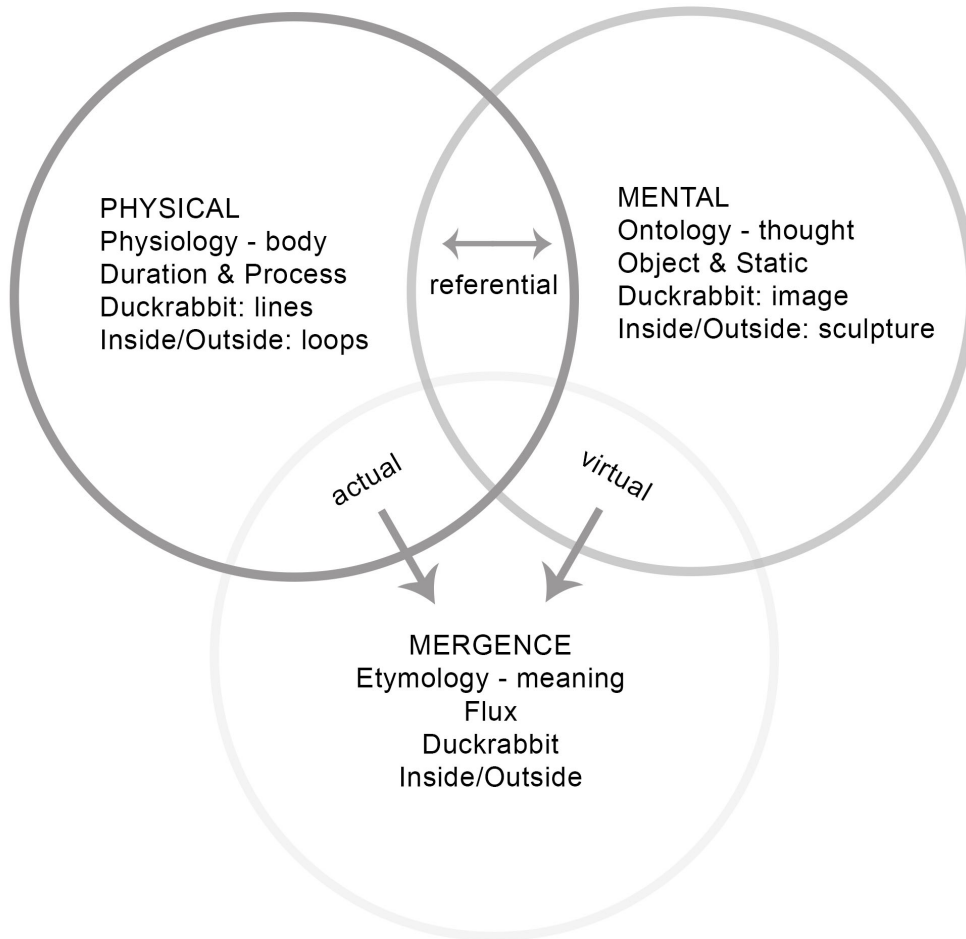


Figure 18. Ilze Briede, *Diagram*, 2019

to, and there is a force of desire pulling us towards it. A magnetic attraction towards the “meaning” is what forces us to cross the boundary in order to merge and become it. As we move towards this state of flux, it manifests different realities of *actual* and *virtual*, both not fully reaching into the circle of mergence but existing in the overlap, a transition space. Mergence, for me, is the moment of alchemy where materials transit into ephemeral states and thought becomes materialised, both at the same time offering a new state of being. A state of flux means the process of being defined and never completed in its definition, connected intersecting but never forming a solid state or singularity.

The installation *Inside/Outside* reveals deep parallels with the *Duck/Rabbit* image. The image and sculpture are static as it has to be taken out of the continuous duration of changing matter (they belong to the physical compound, see Figure 18). These forms and shapes are then transformed into the idea, the mental realm which exists outside continuity, floating in virtual space, being referentially linked to the physical still. Lines of the drawing is what composes a duck and a rabbit at the same time. VHS tapes are looped together using a crochet technique and becomes a body of this sculpture. The same loophole and surface partake in both states: the inside and the outside of this shape. The differentiation only happens when we want to reference the one or the other (duck or rabbit, inside or outside) but not both at the same time. I am arguing that this type of artwork which has two modes of physical being (or more as in quantum physics) is a methodology to investigate, explore and navigate through these states of beings shown in my diagram.

What happens with the language when it stops referencing actuality, and a manufactured copy of the mind becomes out-of-sync? What happens when reality keeps shifting from one state to the other, and the brain finds itself stuck in a loop? Barbara Stafford (2007) proposes a term “eco objects” when referring to the world around us in a state of uncertainty. “When automatic systems can no longer cope with conflicting information, the resulting mental objects echo the focusing process of grappling.” (Ibid.,176.) In the space of a brain’s echo-chamber, language momentarily fails, and the meaning ceases to exist (or it forgets to chase it as there is no need to), therefore making the moment indescribable (entering the mergence circle). It is losing the point of reference and losing oneself by merging with the flux. There is nothing to define and no-need to, as there are no-particulars to use.

Transcending Resence: Shifting The Force

Shifting The Force (2019) is a culmination of my work with plaster and fabrics. From the very beginning of my graduate studies, I started to work with plaster creating sculptured backgrounds for my video projections. These early experiments used an assemblages of things including foam board, fabric, plaster and styrofoam shapes and bricks.

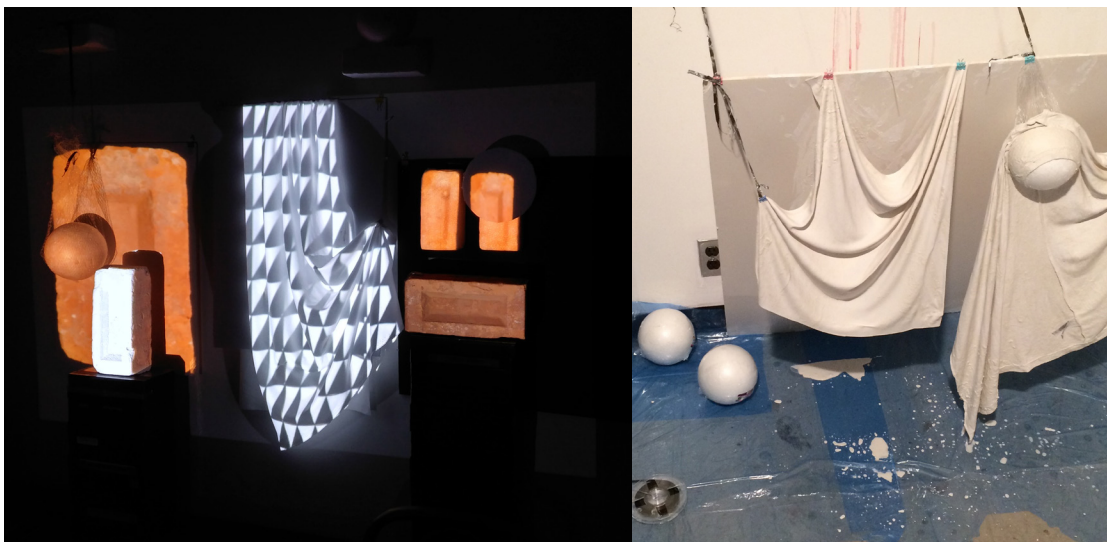


Figure 19. Ilze Briede, *Studio Experiments*, 2018

As I progressed through the studio practice and looked for some inspirational artists, I discovered American sculptor named Peter Agostini. In his earlier artist practice he would cast moulds of every-day and found objects such as balloons, pillows, egg cartons and cardboard. The simplicity and rough renders of non-human subjects are what attracts me most in his work. His approach also defies the materiality of the casted subject. For example, the air inside the balloon in the piece called *Balloon Fountain* (1962) gets replaced with solid and heavy plaster; however, the shape and

presentation still registers a lingering association of lightness and fragility. His other work *Hurricane* (Figure 20) erects and contorts a paper stiffly and figuratively giving this disposable material a monumental appearance. There is a shift from material's usual behaviour towards physically impossible manifestations where plaster allows for such expression.



Figure 20. Peter Agostini, *Hurricane*, 1962

Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery curator Brenna McBride describes⁹ Agostini's sculpting practice:

9 McBride, B. (2006). *Five Sculptors. Exhibit at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery*. [online]. Available at <<http://www.christophercairns.com/portfolio/five-sculptors/>> [Accessed 22nd Feb, 2019].

He made “instant sculpture” whose characteristics were speed, luminosity, and explosiveness that ran the gamut from figurative to abstract. He had a great gift for enlivening inert matter, and fluid control of the unyielding materials he used.

The work exhibited in the Final Thesis show is called *Shifting the Force*. This sculpture is made from a fabric, shaped and hardened in plaster. There is also the use of bricks in this work which is both a part of this sculpture while also playing a role in determining the outcome of this cast shape. Bricks are heavy, and they exert force as a result of gravitational pull. I am interested in working with this force and observe its relationship to the fabric and drying plaster.



Figure 21. Ilze Briede, *Shifting the Force*, 2019

Plaster is a bizarre substance which has three states of being under the same conditions; it is powder, liquid, and a solid. The transition between these states is not determined by the temperature (as it would be with the water and other crude materials), but rather by time. This transitional character adds an aspect of duration

to this unique material.

Plaster also sets the tension created by the weight of the brick and a string pulling the fabric in an opposing direction. Plaster, therefore, preserves a momentum of force working in different directions amongst all *actants* (Bennett - I.B.): fabric, string, and brick. When the fabric completely sets with plaster and is hard, I cut the string and detach the brick. The tension created by brick and string has transcendental quality inside the body of the fabric. This fabric is now vibrating with this tension but in virtuality. The fluidity of plaster is what allows this transportation into the fabric, and the solidifying phenomena freeze this force within itself. *Shifting The Force* implies several activities of force being captured, preserved and detached, finally being contained within. The shifting does not happen with the force itself, but with spaces where such activities are embodied. Maybe there is a way to measure the amount of force being transmitted from brick and string to the plaster substrate with real instruments; however, the physical force has to shift into another realm of being when detachment happens. For me this is where it shifts from *actual* into *virtual*, intangible but physically present and real.

British artist Anish Kapoor captures exactly this shift between virtuality and actuality by bringing one's conceptual models into the void of uncertainty, bewilderment and acceptance. In Kapoor's work *At the Edge of the World* (1998) a viewer engages in an intimate dialogue with emerging form while its "thingness" is shrouded in mystery. Kapoor moves into the expanded field of the object with clever use of space, pigment and architecture, this approach "inscribes *something* that remains nameless, that *something* that moves the material beyond itself" (Bhabha, 1998). His deliberate spaces of emptiness encourage self-discovery and erasure at the same time. I relate to Anish Kapoor practice through the process of fabrication and search for ephemerality in the crudest forms of matter.



Figure 22. Anish Kapoor, *At the Edge of the World*, 1998

To conclude this chapter I would like to make a mention of the Greek artist Takis who's work has been influential on my art practice and making the installation *Shifting the Force* in particular. Being in a room with Takis, art and observing magnetic forces taking place is very different from looking at the pictures of it. I was fortunate to experience his works in person at his solo show *Champs Magnétiques* [Magnetic Fields]¹⁰ in 2015.

¹⁰ This solo exhibition held at Palais de Tokyo was paying a tribute to sculptor Takis who turned 90 in 2015.



Figure 23. Takis, *Champs Magnétiques*, 2015

The most memorable work of his was a black ball suspended from the ceiling and hanging above a large piece of magnet (Figure 23). As a result of the same polarity, the ball kept bouncing around eager to settle still but animated by the magnetic repelling force. Seeing these wild jerks and unexpected movements in this artificially created environment made me think about the authenticity (expressed by laws of nature) and fabrication (staged by artist himself). I was facing the scientific lab run by the artist himself and could not help but feel in tune with this. Takis for me embodies someone who has a gut to mix the sculpture with magnetic forces, and ingenuity to place magnets and paint on the same canvas surface. His curiosity and inventiveness inspire me to be work bold and true to materials.

Summary

Looking back at my creative practice and body of work I trace reoccurring topics such as perception, reality and physicality of materials. My art practice is concerned with broadening and reinventing the art tradition. My methodology and approach are to combine, merge and appropriate material things into self-referential narratives and then present them to a human subject. My time-based installation work is situated in the space of encounter, which is also a meeting ground. It reaches out to the audiences through the space of physical and virtual matter, luring their attention into staged worlds of possibilities. Materials are imperative in constructing both, the body and meaning of the work. My time-based and kinetic work continues explorations in the field of installation and video art, sculpture and performance. All these disciplines seamlessly intertwine and support each other and expand the field of creative expression. This need for outreach brings me to three main components emerging from my art practice.

- Artists tap into other disciplines to seek out new language and methods of making
- Use of philosophy in contextualising art and potentially creating new ideas as a result of a paradigm shift
- Art bridges across disciplines becoming a field of investigative study

I will briefly elaborate on each of these elements and root them into my studio practice.

Artists who tap into parallel disciplines such as science, philosophy and engineering are looking for new ways to make and talk about their work. Once overlapped across different fields of study, a new language is created which communicates in both directions. This phenomenon is directly seen in the specialist software and hardware that bridges the art and technology world directly. *The Breach* uses special mapping software and *Inside/Outside* is driven by open source electronics platform and a motor. These tools would not be possible if engineers would not understand the needs of art installations, and artists also need to learn industry knowledge to use these tools interchangeably.

In the field of art and philosophy, by delving into Deleuze and Bergson models of thinking, I felt inspired to create my system of these philosophical rules, laid out in my three-part diagram (Figure 18). I was compelled to do this in order to explain and further develop my art practice based on these theories. I am also aware that these concepts of virtuality, actuality and duration are just a method current in this time; it might and will be overthrown by others to come. However, it felt appropriate to use these models when deconstructing mine and other artist works.

So how these methods and newly acquired languages can help to build art into this new field of investigative study? The answer can be seen in Takis' exhibition in Paris. It was a space where I could observe beautiful objects doing their own thing. It was a collaboration between materials and artist, working closely together in shaping the body of work. That is why for me it is essential to break out of traditional concepts of art making and then fight back into this tradition with these newly created works. For art to become a field of investigation, it has to be open and receiving new influences. And who knows the way back into the world of art if not artists? We need to learn new things but also feed them back.

I want to go back to the quote by Heraclitus “nature likes to hide”. I think that nature does not intentionally hide from us nor we are too blunt to figure it out. I think that nature prefers it, to operate in the dark, away from our eyes. I keep thinking about the formation and transformation of life. A caterpillar metamorphosing into another body of the butterfly, and that it happens in the darkness of the cocoon. Maybe if exposed to light and exterior such transformation would not be possible? Take a human cell as an example and imagine its journey from the moment of dividing and self-constructing into a complex human body. Again, this process happens deep inside the darkness of human flesh. My thesis question is still very fundamental: what if we could see more than meets the eye? The question here is not if we should or shouldn't, but what would we do with such access and knowledge.

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Appendix: Thesis Exhibition Documentation



Figure 24. Ilze Briede, *Pushing Them Clouds* (installation), 2019



Figure 25. Ilze Briede, *Pushing Them Clouds* (detail), 2019



Figure 26. Ilze Briede, *The Breach* (installation), 2018



Figure 27. Ilze Briede, *Inside/Outside* (detail), 2018-19

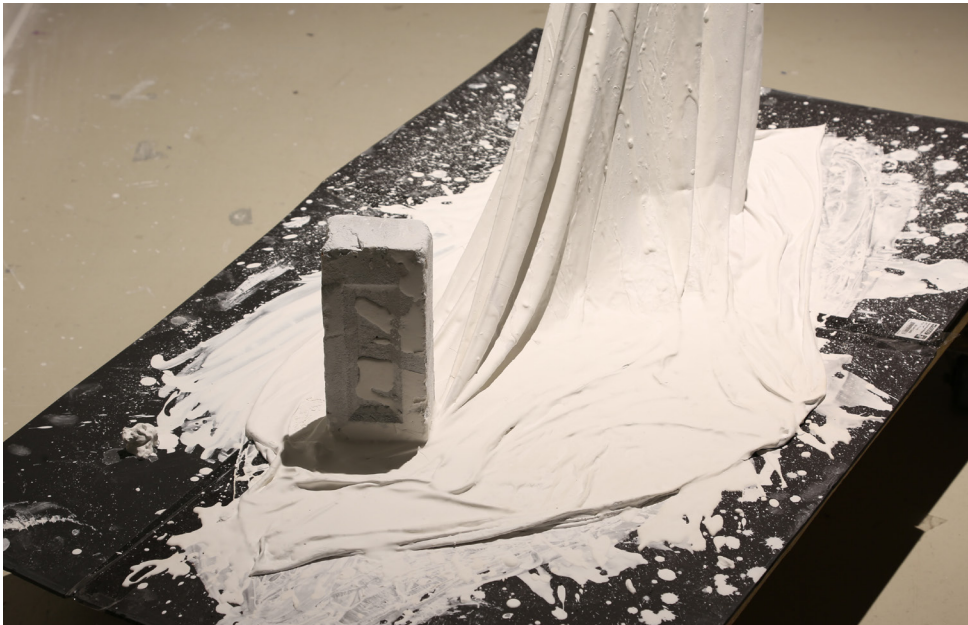


Figure 28. Ilze Briede, *Shifting the Force* (detail), 2019

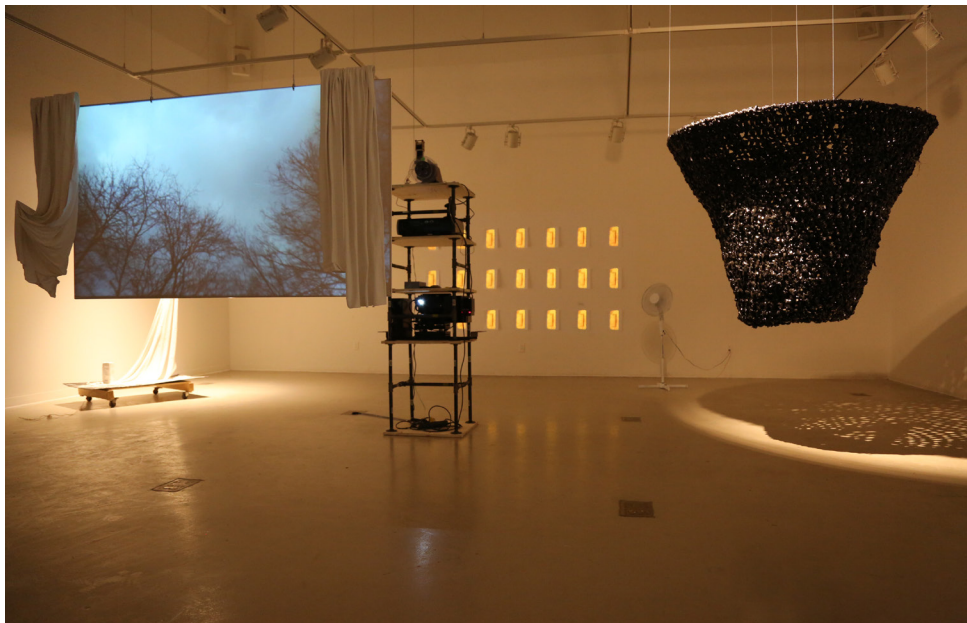


Figure 29. Ilze Briede, *Simultaneous World*, 2019