

MATERIAL IMMATERIAL (or the space in between)
Unstable Objects and Photo Media Assemblage

Louise Allerton

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Abstract

In this exegesis I discuss the ontological instability of objects, as they emerge through an interplay of the material and immaterial, these tensions unpacked through the paradoxical qualities of photography. I discuss the material and immaterial juncture at which objects are defined, providing a cross cultural context for this inquiry. This exegesis positions my studio-led practice within a contemporary arts framework, while drawing on historic cultural explorations of materiality and immateriality, such as the nineteenth century Spirit Photographers, and modernist experiments with the readymade. Drawing on diverse arts practices such as Helen Marten's sculptural installations, Veronica Janssens' ephemeral and disorienting mist sculptures and Dan Graham's multi dimensional Pavilions, my photomedia based practice experiments with multi-dimensionality, hybridity and fluidity of meaning and value. My final studio work reflects an evolution from the representative to the abstract, informed by the poststructuralist strategies of Jacques Derrida. Through experiments in the paradoxical realm of stereoscopic photography, I seek to highlight the uncertainty of objects, and their transformative, unstable but vibrant characteristics.

Keywords materiality, immateriality, objects, instability, paradoxical, transformation, deconstruction, Derrida, Bennett

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INTRODUCTION

Objects are not reducible to the material, perceptible, and consumable goods we commonly refer to as 'objects.' The world of objects, however 'ordinary,' is a trove of disguises, concealments, subterfuges, provocations and triggers that no singular, embodied, and knowledgeable subject can exhaust. - Anthony Hudek

The aim of this research project is to explore the meaning and transitional state of objects (or 'things') as they alter according to context. Through my work I seek to explore and navigate the unstable terrains of both the material and immaterial, through a non-representational and deconstructed approach to photography.

I began this research project by examining objects and their transformation following an owner's death. However, my theoretical and studio-based explorations directed this project towards the idea of *transformation* itself, as it operates within the material/immaterial dichotomy that haunts photo media's compelling status as a trace multi-faceted image.

I explore the enduring dual nature of photo media, its indexical and uncanny possibilities, and with this, its fixity and anxiety.¹ I consider how photography evades stable and finite definition, being a field of constant technological change in which ontological discussions of the medium have proliferated. It is in the context of this continuous flux that my studio research has emerged.

¹ Heidi Zuckerman, Matthew Thompson, Anne Ellgood, Jenelle Porter, *The Object Lost and Found in The Anxiety of Photography*. (Aspen, CO, Aspen Art Museum, 2011):75

CHAPTER 1

This Chapter establishes a theoretical and philosophical framework through which to contextualize and complement my studio investigation on the instability of material objects. I outline a lineage of philosophical argument surrounding objecthood from Immanuel Kant, to the deconstructionist notions of Jacques Derrida. This debate highlights the contested and complex field of materiality, and the instability of the object, and has become a contemporaneous and reignited topic via theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Jane Bennett.

The major theoretical framework which has informed my creative practice-led enquiry is Post-Structuralism, as it gives rise to notions such as ‘multiplicity,’ ‘instability,’ ‘open systems,’ and ‘ambiguity’ that resonate with my experiments in photomedia. Post-Structuralist theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida have shaped my approach to interrogating the unstable realm of objectivity.

Post-Structuralism destabilises the foundations of Empirical realism,² positing that the concept of ‘self’ as a singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct.³ The Post-Structuralist thinkers rejected Structuralist ideas that ‘truth’ was determined by a static system of relations, and instead argued that meaning is culturally and historically constructed, layered and context dependent. Its style of reasoning focuses on the moment of slippage in our systems of meaning, using this as a way to identify and understand our complex social environment.⁴ Derrida in his essay ‘Parergon’ (in *Signature Event Context*),⁵ discusses the idea of the frame, a metaphor for context. Derrida destabilizes the notion that the frame determines the limits or border of a painting, by arguing that the frame is supple, there are multiple factors that influence the limits of understanding or framing a work.⁶ Additionally, in his essay Derrida notes that context is critical when understanding an artwork, that there are factors including how, who and why a work was made and suggests that context is ‘ever expandable and critical in all aspects of reading a work.’⁷

² Aishling MC Morrow, *Introducing Post Structuralism in International Relations Theory*, Feb 13, 2018. Accessed in <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/13/introducing-poststructuralism-in-international-relations-theory/>

³ https://www.philosophybasics.com/movements_poststructuralism.html

⁴ Bernard E Harcourt, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Post structuralism?* (University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper No. 156, 2007):1

⁵ Malcolm K. Richards, *Derrida Reframed*: 34

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Richards: 34

The Derridian understanding of context was a foundational point of reference for my research project, as the impetus for my creative work emerged through a twenty year period of cross-cultural immersion, living and working with southern Pitjantjatjara people (*anangu*)⁸ from the Western Desert. Through an experience of familial death, I encountered an immediate contrast between the anangu value of material things and my own western consumerist treatment of objects during bereavement. In the Western Desert, immediately after death the family members divest themselves of all material possessions of the dead, such as blankets, clothing etc. Interestingly, immaterial references to the deceased are also removed, including footprints, the deceased's name and any photo and audio media material.⁹ Such is the case across the Western and Central Deserts of Australia, where the deceased's smaller possessions will be burnt and close relatives will immediately vacate the house or camp.¹⁰ Experiencing this dichotomy between the anangu and a western-consumerist approach to artefacts associated with the dead, raised several enduring philosophical questions for me, concerning materiality, value of material objects and the multi-faceted nature of meaning.

The parameters around object meaning are broad, contested and engaging. The Cambridge online dictionary defines an object as “a thing that you can see or touch...solid/material/physical.”¹¹ Through my research I have identified two broad streams of theoretical and philosophical thought addressing objecthood that have further expanded my studio research. The first is a notion of the object derived from Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism, which is described by Quentin Meillassoux as ‘correlationist and subject dependent.’¹² Kant posits we can never fully comprehend objects because they are separate from us, outside of ourselves and that we only cognize them as ‘appearances.’¹³ Appearances refer to the signifiers of an object, or what we culturally understand by an object. Kant cannot imagine an object without a subject, and believed that the object is external and only exists in relation to

⁸ Pitjantjatjara word for *Aboriginal people*

⁹ My research here is primary, from lived experience of 20 years. There is a limited amount of research in the Western Desert in general, where most research has been done in Arnhem Land and Central Australia. I therefore provide a reference not from the WD but from the Walpiri of Yuendumu, whose practices as desert people are generally consistent with the WD peoples and connected via cultural and complex kinship channels.

¹⁰ Glaskin, K, Tonkinson, M and Musharbash, Y., *Mortality, Mourning and Mortuary Practices in Indigenous Australia*. Routledge. 2008: 39

¹¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/object>

¹² Marcus Steinweg. ‘What is an Object?’ 2011 in *The Object*. Whitechapel Gallery, London & MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. 2014: 42

¹³ *Appearances* refer to the signifiers of an object, or what we culturally understand by an object. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/#TranRealEmpiIdea>

our understanding and relationship to it. For Kant, the object is unavailable.¹⁴ Kant's words suggest he believes not in object agency itself, but in relation to physicality and dimensionality, as understood by human perception: (translated from the German) 'they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves [*nicht als Dinge an sich selbst ansehen*], and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves.¹⁵

The second stream, now a major contemporary wave in theoretical, philosophical and art critique,¹⁶ builds upon Martin Heidegger's philosophy, wherein the *Dasein* mode of being-in-the-world troubles the subject/object separation.¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze's transcendental empiricism¹⁸ hinted at rupturing the Heideggerian trajectory, evoking a subject-independent space for objects. A Deleuzian perspective posits that separation between subject and object represents the *Other*, a space for the 'narcissistic wound.'¹⁹ Contemporary movements following Deleuzian thoughts on materiality, which move away from Heidegger's *Dasein*-centrism,²⁰ are variously known as *speculative realism*, *object oriented ontology* or *Vibrant Materialism*, as contemporary theorist Jane Bennett refers to it. My work draws on notions from both the aforementioned theoretical streams, gesturing in particular towards Bennett's vital materialism.

Contemporary theorist Joshua Simon departs from the Kantian subject/object interdependence and argues that objects are independent entities, inanimate and capable of power. Simon argues the object is 'first and foremost a presence,²¹ a compelling and lively extension of the Kantian view. He believes objects have their own social lives and trajectories, that 'have us included in it'²² rather than objects being at the behest of human authority. I acknowledge this deeply engaging discourse known as *Speculative Realism* and *Object Oriented Ontologies* and have been inspired by Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Materialism* notion of objects and agency. Bennett, in defense

¹⁴ Steinweg: 43

¹⁵ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/#OneObjNotTwo>

¹⁶ Anthony Hudek, 'Detours of Objects' in *The Object*: 15

¹⁷ Marcus Steinweg What is an object? in *The Object*: 42

¹⁸ *ibid*: 42

¹⁹ *ibid*: 43

²⁰ *ibid*: 42

²¹ Joshua Simon, "Neo-Materialism, Part One: The Commodity and the Exhibition." *e-flux* journal #20. November, 2010 :2

²² 'Commodities and the Politics of Value' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, quoted in Joshua Simon, *Neo-Materialism, Part One: The Commodity and the Exhibition*. *e-flux* journal #20: 5

of object autonomy, argues we need to respect the ‘agential powers of natural and artificial things, develop greater awareness of the dense web of their connections with each other and with human bodies, and finally, a more cautious, intelligent approach to our interventions in that ecology.’²³ As objects rapidly outnumber humans, we need to rethink our relationship with objects.

While acknowledging the seminal theories that have inspired Speculative Realism and Object Oriented Ontology, my own research leads me back to the field of semiotics for its focus on the signifying dimension of objects. According to semiologists, objects are only ever signs of themselves built into recognizable forms and coded in a language system which we are complicit with. We understand our social environment through signs – which, as Roland Barthes suggests, ‘include images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these.’²⁴ Signs construct and maintain reality.²⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce argues that not every characteristic of the object is relevant to signification: only certain features of an object enable a sign to signify it.²⁶ For Peirce, the relationship between the object of a sign and the sign that represents it, is one of determination: the object determines the sign. Conceptual artist Stephen Willats’ *The Lurky Place* project is a case in point. The Lurky Place is an area of wasteland amidst an industrial London housing suburb that is activated through its relationship with state housing occupants.²⁷ Willats argues that the movement of objects from the urban setting to the wasteland interior, ‘represents a fundamental point of perceptual transformation.’²⁸ This transformation occurs both when the object is given a different use and when its intended use is freed from its inhibiting prior socio-cultural conventions.²⁹ Additionally, the escape of an item from its former context allows a manifestation of another consciousness for the person who does the moving. Willats believes that the change is both psychological and physical, and that the end point is a manifestation of the transformer’s imagination.³⁰

²³ Jane Bennett, *The Force of Things: Steps Towards an Ecology of Matter*. Political Theory journal, Vol. 32 No. 3 (Jun., 2004): 349

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Sociology*, Hill and Wang, New York. 1967: 9

²⁵ *ibid*: 9

²⁶ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/#Obj>

²⁷ Stephen Willats, in his website, www.stephenvillats.com/work/lurky-place

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ Willats, *ibid*

³⁰ Willats, *ibid*

In addition to these theoretical influences, my inquiry into the transformable state of objects and materiality includes a sociological dimension, due to the role played by social and cultural context as a key element in shifting values and meaning of material things. Sociologist Margaret Gibson investigates this phenomenon through literary research, and dozens of interviews regarding objects in the context of death. In her book *Objects of the Dead*, Gibson examines the power and meaning of objects within the western consumerist context, arguing that death mediates our relationship to them. Objects outlive their owners, leaving others to deal with their disposal or redistribution.³¹ Objects of the dead are instantly transformed at death, where once ordinary, utilitarian or decorative objects become identity markers of the deceased. These things become hallowed and ‘act as bridges that displace the palpable sensations of loss, erasure and our ultimate mortality.’³² Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey argue that memory is often seen as the facility to remember and as the trace of that which is remembered. Moreover they describe memory, in western terms, as a possession or object, akin to something we keep and preserve like an object in a museum.³³

French theorist Jean Baudrillard writes from a neo Marxist perspective on consumer driven society and the success of the linguistic sign in dictating what and how we consume. In his essay *System of Objects*, he examines the possibility that consumption has become the chief driver of social order and its internal classifications³⁴ and that material goods are not just objects of consumption but are ‘merely the objects of need and satisfaction.’³⁵ Similarly to Gibson, Baudrillard argues that objects and our relationships have become more compelling and binding and are markers of social status and mediators of social value.

As discussed throughout this chapter, defining materiality and the object requires us to engage with a widely contested, ambiguous and deeply philosophical set of definitions and vibrant discourse. My understanding of the fluid and unstable nature of materiality has expanded and clarified through engaging with literary, philosophical and theoretical analysis, particularly Derrida, deconstruction and the application of these theories to my studio research. This

³¹ Margaret Gibson, *Death and the Transformation of Objects and Their Value*, in *Thesis 11* journal, 103 (1) Sage, UK. 2010: 55

³² Margaret Gibson, *Melancholy Objects*’ *Materiality* journal, Vol. 9, No. 4, November 2004: 290

³³ Elizabeth Hallam, and Jenny Hockey, ‘Remembering as Cultural Process’ in *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, ed. Robben, Antonius C. G. M: 53

³⁴ Poster, M., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*:2

³⁵ *ibid*

analysis has afforded me new areas for experimentation with material, non material and unstable terrain.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter I discuss materiality and its destabilization through a number of disparate references such as the nineteenth century spirit photographers and Marcel Duchamp's readymade, discussed further in Chapter 4. I discuss Spirit photography in light of the scientific and cultural nexus of the 19th century era, which provided a fundamental context for its successful development and influence. Its fusion of optical trickery and auratic caper disrupted and destabilized its materialism, an action not unlike Duchamp's readymades in the modernist period. Duchamp dematerialized the art object through a shift in context, an act which indelibly altered the course of the object in an art context.

The photograph: material evidence of the immaterial

Across the western world, the 19th century ushered in a new era of positivism with modern changes in technology, science and new discoveries in chemistry and biology – but this happened alongside a concurrent and burgeoning spiritualist movement. Electricity, telegraphy and the telephone were developed in this era, and interestingly Alexander Bell who invented the telephone also had an interest in Spiritualism. Bell believed that the telephone provided the possibility of spirit contact,³⁶ whilst electrical engineers applied their skills towards the more entertaining and performative end of the Spirituality spectrum, using unusual and sudden sound to accompany the séance.³⁷ This era saw the development of the seminal Daguerreotype, named after its inventor Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre,³⁸ and introduced photography to the masses. The combination of revolutionary scientific discoveries, a rise in Spiritualism and the democratization of photography provided the context with which the spirit photographers emerged.

The Daguerreotype itself was a nexus of materiality, chemistry and illusion³⁹ which managed to embody both scientific theory, indexicality and the uncanny.⁴⁰ It was both a venerated object

³⁶ Tom Gunning, 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny' in Patrice Petro, ed., *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995 via (Ronell 99)46

³⁷ Gunning via (Marvin 57) 46

³⁸ <http://www.daguerreobase.org/en/knowledge-base/what-is-a-daguerreotype>

³⁹ "Ere the substance fade: photography and hair jewelery, Batchen, G." in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*. 2004 (28)

⁴⁰ Gunning: 42

and an index of human presence captured on a silver coated copper plate,⁴¹ commonly known as the mirror with a memory.⁴² Daguerreotypes paved a path for the proliferation and discourse of photography, at a time of new scientific rationalism and metaphysics. The Spiritualists saw their movement as modern, in contrast to what they saw as outdated Calvinist beliefs, and seized on photography as a way of expanding new forms of spiritual manifestation.⁴³

One of the most infamous Spirit photographers was American William Mumler, who from the 1860's developed a commercial business from portraiture with 'extras.'⁴⁴ Using double exposures and superimposition, Mumler created portraits with ghostly apparitions who hovered close to his subjects (Fig. 1). Early cinema houses also became sites for the merging of science and spiritualist trickery. Demons and ghouls were projected onto smoke and screens in packed cinema houses in Europe with the use of the well known 'Magic Lantern' a precursor to the 20th century slide projector.⁴⁵ These events were also known as Phantasmagoria and incorporated frightening sound effects as early as 1770, an early example of a mixed media event.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly these entrepreneurs generated a substantial following but were later accused of fraud in the early 1860's.⁴⁷

For the patrons, this new form of entertainment backed by the scientific guarantor of photography, energized their interest in the spirit world and provided proof of ghosts and spirit contact. Claims for spirit photography as evidence of an afterlife rest on the indexicality of photography, since the sensitivity of the photographic process was perceived as recording ghosts, invisible to the human eye.⁴⁸ Photography, as a reliable instrument of science, supported by the new era of scientific discovery, left no doubt for the masses that the projected ghouls and ghostly 'extras' were true manifestations of spirit (Fig. 2).

⁴¹ Batchen: 28

⁴² Bathchen via Oliver Wendall Holmes Sn.: 28

⁴³ Gunning: 47

⁴⁴ Extras was the term used for ghosts that appear in Spirit Photographs

⁴⁵ Ruffles: 16

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ Gunning: 48

⁴⁸ Gunning: 64



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1 One of Mumler's most famous images with Mary Todd Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln's ghost, 1872

Figure 2 Spirit Photography by William Hope, 1920

The Readymade Art Object: Interplay between the Material and Immaterial

In an obverse fashion to spirit photography's de-material manifestations, Duchamp's readymade interventions subverted the materialist paradigm of modern art. Duchamp used context as a way to destructure and destabilize the art object's static modality. *The Urinal*

ironically dematerializes, despite its physical weightiness, through a context shift, and demonstrates ‘the inability to concretize reality.’⁴⁹ By presenting a real or literal object like the urinal, and placing it in an art gallery, it becomes unable to maintain its prior status as art object.⁵⁰ The new context upends the meaning, status and value of the object, so that these readymade objects ‘refuse to stay themselves and become their own doppelgänger.’⁵¹ Duchamp thus de-materialised the art object, and transformed it into an idea, a concept (Fig.3).



Figure 3 The Fountain Archives. *Crach, Milos, "L'art en jeu: Marcel Duchamp - Porte Chapeau." Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1992*

Stephan Willats, as discussed in the previous chapter, continues the destabilization of the object in *Transformers*, where objects are representatives of social relations and authoritative power. When relocated to the Lurky Place, an object’s status as icon becomes replaced with the perception of the object functioning as an agent integral to social relationships and the forging of power.⁵² (Fig. 4). Willats demonstrates the powerful influence of context over object agency, status and value.

⁴⁹ Kelley, M., ‘The Readymade and the Double’ in *The Object*: 59

⁵⁰ *ibid*: 80

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² Willats, ‘Transformers.’ 1989 in *The Object*:77

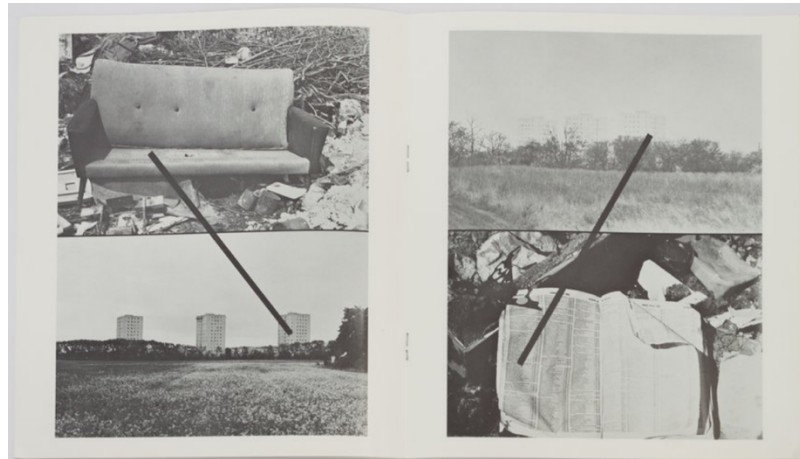


Figure 4

Stephen Willats, *The Lurky Place book*, 1978

A seminal exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, 1985 staged by French philosopher Jean François Lyotard, foregrounded this subject/object relationship and constituted a turning point in the role of technology in art.⁵³ This exhibition was a major event in France at the time, occupying an entire floor of the Pompidou Centre in Paris (Fig. 5). With works by artists including Giovanni Anselmo, Daniel Buren, and Dan Flavin,⁵⁴ the space was filled with computers, artificial skin, Kevlar and virtual environments, all examples of immateriality and future speculation on material relationships. In a labyrinth-styled space, the works were performative and interactive. Viewers were required to engage with the artworks via new technologies, some which picked up radio frequencies via headphones, and visual displays paired with audio text from Antonin Artaud and Frank Kafka to Paul Virilio.⁵⁵ Lyotard sought to interrupt the dominant sense of sight, and instead, activate the entire sensorium by using devices including darkness, grey screens and a labyrinth of sound and text. In de-objectifying the exhibition space and presenting instances where the traditional subject/object interaction was modified by machines, Lyotard proposed a time where humans and robots may live within a collaborative and non hierarchical space. With an aim to disrupt and interrogate the relationship between humans and materials, Lyotard proposed the question as to whether ‘immaterials’ leave the relationship between

⁵³ Jean-François Lyotard, “Les Immatériaux,” *Art & Text* 17 (1985), 48.

⁵⁴ McDowell, T., *Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard and Bernard Blistène* for Art Agenda. 2014

⁵⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, “Les Immatériaux,” *Art & Text* 17 (1985), 48.

CHAPTER 3

My research has navigated a wide arc primarily of contemporary artists whose practices interrogate the terrain and limits of materiality. The eccentric assemblages of Helen Marten, the ambiguity of inner and outer space in Dan Graham's Pavilions and the disorienting sensations of Ann Veronica Janssens mist sculptures all emphasize the immaterial and material dichotomy. Each of these artists explores multi dimensionality and unorthodox material combinations, interruption of sensory perception and the provoking of viewer engagement through alternate and multiple viewpoints.

Since the 1960's there has been intensified debate over objects, object status and their role and engagement in art practice and discourse. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler announced the 'dematerialisation of the art object'⁵⁷ where performance, happenings and time-based Fluxus events manifested as types of *anti objects*.⁵⁸ Although dynamic and widely influential, immateriality became overshadowed by a wave of art practices engaging with new technologies. Known as 'technical objects,' these new materials included computers, automated machines and cybernetic devices, objects capable of mediating between humans and machines, where the subject relationship might be rendered obsolete.⁵⁹

According to American curator Amelia Jones, the dematerialization of art took hold strongly in the 1980's and 1990's when it moved further towards abstract concepts of critique, often implemented through appropriated imagery or objects that lacked 'material.'⁶⁰ Two of the *Pictures Generation*⁶¹ artists, Barbara Kruger and Sarah Charlesworth, are worthy of note in relation to dematerialization and destabilization in their work. These artists reposition the forms and ideas from previous works of art, to invest them with new meanings in new contexts.⁶² In a virtual world, where words and images appear as a constant and continuous barrage, we begin to disconnect from the presented words. Words become dematerialized and less understood in

⁵⁷ Hudek:18

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ Amelia Jones, *Material Traces: Time and gesture in Contemporary Art*: Exhibition at Ellen Gallery, Canada., catalogue text. 2013

⁶¹ The Pictures Group, a group of contemporary female artists from the 1960's to the 1980's. worked mainly in film and video

⁶² Jordana Sagesse Moore, *The Pictures Generation* in <https://smarthistory.org/the-pictures-generation/>

this context, and we are less able to recognize their subtle influence over our lives.⁶³ Kruger confronts us with short and punchy phrases that we are familiar with such as “I Shop Therefore I am,” replacing René Descartes’ philosophical 1634 announcement “I Think, therefore I am.”⁶⁴ Replacing the word ‘think’ for ‘shop’ effectively displaces the immateriality of thought and reason with the materiality of mass consumerism of the commodity and objects.

The Influence Machine, 2000, was a multi media installation by Tony Oursler, who says the underlying theme of the installation was the connection between cultural and scientific production and how the two connect.⁶⁵ Drawing on the historic spectacle of the 19th century spiritualists, TIM was Oursler’s first work using smoke and projection methods and was staged in New York’s Madsion Square Park. A series of video projections, each with its own audio track, is projected onto a building and trees that surround the park (Fig. 6). In addition to the material projections, smoke machines are used to create plumes of smoke, onto which video⁶⁶ is projected, creating a sense of technological haunting. On the one hand, the combination of looming, talking heads evokes an over-arching presence, while on the other, the absence of any tangible body or enduring art object reminds us of the instability of this presence. Oursler aims for viewers to be immersed in the ephemeral, with a heightened state of consciousness as they move through the work, experiencing its different elements and dimensions.⁶⁷ He links his process with the Spiritualists who combined technology and Spiritualism and tuned radios to dead frequencies to communicate with the deceased, and demonstrates his interest in the way objects can mediate the tangible and the invisible.⁶⁸

Oursler comes from the tradition of conceptual art and was one of the first to use video as a medium, after breaking down the strictures between different mediums, and ultimately cross pollinating between many.⁶⁹ His sculptural video works such as *Thaw* (2003) and *Star* (2005), show fragmented faces accompanied by scrambled and incomplete audio text. The works exude disconnectedness and instability, for instance where a pair of eyes moves out of synch with the other and the gestural movements of a mouth move unrelated to the eyes. According to Kaye,

⁶³ Rosenbaum, R, Smithsonian Magazine. July 2012

⁶⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*. Leiden Publishers, The Netherlands (1656)

⁶⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzcuLP2vkWg>

⁶⁶ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/oursler-the-influence-machine-t13860>

⁶⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzcuLP2vkWg>

⁶⁸ <https://www.tonyoursler.space/in-the-studio-withtony-oursler-a-sculptor-of-the-air-with-video/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.tonyoursler.space/focus-new-york>

‘Oursler stages these uncanny presences which engage with psychological and perceptual responses to mediatized forms and signs.’⁷⁰

Oursler has continued the theme of alienating relationships between man and his cultural production throughout his career in media art.⁷¹ He uses video media to hone the theme of exponential production of images which overwhelms and confuses spectators, blurring the line between fiction and reality⁷² and has continued to experiment with the ephemerality of the virtual image.⁷³ He admits to pursuing new technologies in the production of his works explaining they are at their best before they become ‘fixed’ and therefore static in their destined roles.



Figure 6

Tony Oursler, *The Influence Machine*, 2000

⁷⁰ Nick Kaye, Video Presence: Tony Oursler’s Media Entities *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Jan., 2008) :15

⁷¹ <http://galeriemitterrand.com/en/expositions/presentation/103/tony-oursler#1>

⁷² JGM Gallery, Paris. 2011 Press kit

⁷³ <https://ocula.com/artists/tony-oursler/>



Figure 7

Tony Oursler, *Star*, 2005

Oursler likens video to the immediacy and directness of drawing. In the editing process where aesthetic choices such as colouring, bleaching, and ‘painting’ can be enacted. Oursler says the shimmering electronic quality of them, is, in terms of art history, just part of the continuum⁷⁴ (Fig. 7).

Boundary Extensions and Morphologies

British artist Helen Marten creates immaculate, labour intensive assemblages and sculptures using a multiplicity of materials, objects and meanings, whilst drawing references from ‘the contemporary to the historical, and the everyday to the enigmatic.’⁷⁵ Marten transforms found materials, and self-fabricates object parts reminiscent of Duchamp’s Readymades. She transforms both found materials and object parts whilst meticulously fabricating other parts herself, assembling and reforming ‘in a process of *Alice in Wonderland*-style haptic dissolution.’⁷⁶ The hybrid sculptures appear familiar and incongruous at the same time, gathering chaos together to form order. I find the contradictions in this work particularly interesting – for example, it appears chaotic and haphazard but is exceedingly refined, it is familiar yet unfamiliar, and it is clearly very well resolved but stops short of a recognizable and answerable sculptural

⁷⁴ Michael Kimmelman, *In the studio with Tony Oursler*, NY Times. 4/27/01

⁷⁵ <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2016/turner-prize-2016-about-artists/turner-prize-2016>

⁷⁶ Kathy Noble, *Helen Marten*. Frieze Magazine, Issue 153, March 2013

form. Marten admits she likes to surprise and destabilize viewer assumptions, responding in an interview 'I suppose I'm trying to upset the expected rhythms of daily circumstance.'⁷⁷

Flow and transformation are embodied through the use of complex shape and form. Whilst appealing to the body, as the eye wanders along the lines and paths in the work, arrival at a predictable destination never materializes, and 'like flow charts and route maps, the pleasure of Marten's sculptural arrangements is in going from one part to another, to be arrested and to set off again.'⁷⁸ Marten's work has been influential to my studio practice for its destabilizing of the object, deconstruction of familiar material form, and for the way in which the work ultimately evokes transformation. Despite the assemblages being comprised of a multiplicity of materials, their non recognizable forms destabilize the familiar associations we have with material objects.

Hybridity, dematerialization and destabilization have been a constant and important feature throughout American artist Dan Graham's practice. Graham was influential in the 1960's Conceptual art movement, notable for its rebuttal of object-making. He engaged with installation, performance, video, sculpture and photography, drawing on diverse and radical influences. Although most well known initially for his text based artworks published in a magazine format, Graham has since become most notable for his Pavilions, self described as 'heterotypes.'⁷⁹ Throughout his practice, medium hybridity has allowed Graham to forego mainstream and limiting artistic zones. Similar to Oursler he confesses to a strong interest in materials and genres that cross boundaries, and experimenting with materials and material uses reserved for specific purposes, such as his magazine text works, and the Pavillions which border on the architectural. He admits he prefers borderline situations, rather than definitively one thing.⁸⁰

Graham pursues the idea of the multiple viewpoint, and juxtaposing content and context alongside dominant modes of arts practice. He pushes boundaries and borders with his practice, engaging with inter-subjectivity⁸¹, where ordinary perceptions and flow are interrupted. In an interview he notes on inter-subjectivity: 'I'm interested in exploring how a person, in a precise

⁷⁷ <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/london-helen-marten>

⁷⁸ Adrian Searle: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/dec/05/helen-marten-an-artist-who-thinks-differently-from-the-rest-of-us>

⁷⁹ <http://au.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2014/january/14/what-is-it-about-dan-grahams-pavilions/>

⁸⁰ <http://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/dan-graham-mirror-complexities>

⁸¹ <https://farticulate.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/14-december-2010-dan-graham-selected-sculptures-interview/>

and given moment, perceives themselves while at the same time watching other people who in turn are watching them.⁸² In his installation *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976) (Fig. 6) produced for the Venice Biennale in 1976, Graham contrasts two perspectives where viewers perceive and become the artwork at once, confusing subject and object⁸³ and interrupting an assumed perspective. The audience are divided in two parts by a glass partition, where each group viewed the other as well as their own reflection. The viewers could see their own reflections in the mirrored back wall opposite, which seem to mingle with the actual people on the other side of the glass. An odd combination of intimacy and detachment⁸⁴ arises from this exploration of outer and inner space .



Figure 8

Dan Graham, *Public Space/ Two Audiences*, 1976

⁸² Interview with Pietro Valle http://architettura.it/artland/20020515/index_en.htm

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/scott/dan-graham7-7-09.asp>



Figure 9

Dan Graham. *Pavilion-Sculpture for Argonne National*, 2010

The Pavilions began to evolve in the 1970's, first appearing like semi-functional sculptures combining curved mirrored glass and steel, and could be mistaken as architectural forms. They incorporate semi-enclosed elements similar to a bus shelter, and the reflectiveness of the skyscraper, which Graham describes as 'somewhere between architecture and art.' A play of materiality and immateriality is brought to bear with the two-way mirror, a constant feature of the Pavilions. Simultaneously transparent and reflective, the solidity of material is challenged, as light changes, and the viewer's reflection merges with the outer landscape and with other viewers inside the transparent spaces (Fig. 9). As seen throughout Graham's diverse, multi disciplinary career he purposefully engages the viewer and diverts pathways of habitual action and thought, inviting viewers to explore spaces and dimensions. As the viewer moves through the spaces, the work becomes performative. Graham suggests 'they only truly make sense once visitors move in and out of them.'⁸⁵ The viewers find themselves engaging with multiple dimensions and multiple viewpoints as they move from exterior to interior space. Perspective constantly changes, invoking a sense of inclusion, exclusion, and the merging of boundaries. Acting as bisecting structures and interventions in urban spaces, they provide a break from the continuum

⁸⁵ <http://au.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2014/january/14/what-is-it-about-dan-grahams-pavilions/>

of everyday space, offering viewers a point of reflection and interaction with space, form and dimension. They ‘function as a bridge between art and architecture.’⁸⁶

Whilst these artists focus on tangible materials, I am also interested in the way Ann Veronica Janssens aims to ‘to escape the tyranny of objects’⁸⁷, and what she describes as their ‘overbearing materiality.’ Janssens is a British visual artist whose work often manifests itself through immateriality and spatio-temporal experience.⁸⁸ Her work foregrounds the body’s perception of the world and itself in it⁸⁹ using non-material mediums such as light, mist or sound to reveal the transitory conditions of particular situations. Most well known for her ‘mist sculptures,’ these works are sensorial installations that fill spaces with washes of colored light and dense vapor clouds that envelop viewers in gradations of colored light such as pink, yellow and blue (Fig. 10). Janssens employs this device in order to create a heightened sensory awareness amongst viewers, where they must rely on other senses to navigate through the altered space.⁹⁰ Moving through, figures become silhouettes moving in and out of sight, fading into spectral forms before disappearing.⁹¹



Figure 10

Ann Veronica Janssens, *Yellow Blue Pink*, Mist Sculpture from *States of Mind* exhibition, 2015

⁸⁶ <https://frieze.com/article/social-spaces>

⁸⁷ Isabella Smith, *Ann Veronica Janssens: Illuminating the Masses* in *Another Artmag*, 2016

⁸⁸ 27 September – 12 November 2017, ‘Inside the White Cube’, Bermondsey

⁸⁹ Smith, *ibid*

⁹⁰ Smith. *ibid*

⁹¹ Antonia Wilson. *States of Mind: Ann Veronica Janssens’ Yellow Notebook*. *Creative Review* (October, 2015): web. [ill.]

Janssens aims to push limits⁹² and like Dan Graham, her work has historically been open and changeable, and interrogates perception and context. Her work is an immaterial manifestation of Derrida's notion of ever expanding context, as she investigates 'the permeability of contexts'⁹³ and deconstructs and fragments the viewer's perception of these contexts. Material is unfixed and unstable in Janssens' work. (Figs. 11,12)

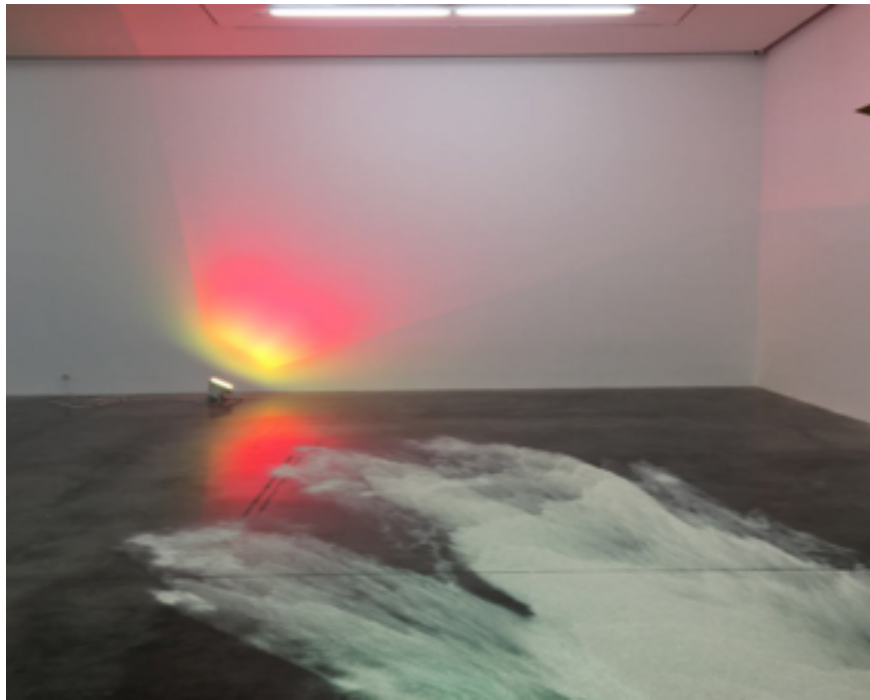


Figure 11

Ann Veronica Janssens, *Inside the White Cube*, 2017.

⁹² Wilson, *ibid*

⁹³ *Inside the White Cube* Catalogue text, White Cube Gallery.

https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/ann_veronica_janssens_bermondsey_2017



Figure 12

Ann Veronica Janssens, *Inside the White Cube*, 2017

The exhibition *Inside the White Cube* (2017) explores the permeability of contexts,⁹⁴ reads like an intriguing and ever changing science experiment with nine works that examine optical phenomena. Multiple viewpoints are a feature of Janssens work, as this body of work attests. As viewers move throughout the space, unexpected views appear, caused by reflection and refraction. A large spillage of white glitter lies across the floor, which reflects the other works and the viewer's own reflection from every angle. In the 'Dichroic Projection' light series, each light in the series is fitted with a different filter, evoking different perceptual effects and psychological moods, and allowing for multiple interpretations.⁹⁵ In this exhibition Janssens engages a multiplicity of materials such as glass, glitter and solid plastic, each of these materials pushing the limits of perception and experimenting 'with the possibilities of rendering fluid the perception of matter.'⁹⁶

Janssens' sculptures exemplify the instability of matter, pushing the boundaries of materiality as she uses light to infiltrate matter such as physical structures and architecture. It is undertaken with a view to provoke a perceptual experience wherein materiality is made unstable, its resistance dissolved.⁹⁷ Janssens' works overthrow the object's objective boundaries⁹⁸, and like

⁹⁴ *ibid*: White Cube Gallery text

⁹⁵ Holly Patrick, for *Smiths Magazine*, UK December 26, 2017.

⁹⁶ 'Inside the White Cube' Catalogue, White Cube Gallery

⁹⁷ *ibid*

⁹⁸ Ursula Meyer, 'De-Objectification of the Object' in *The Object*. Meyer is discussing Dan Flavin's works here but I borrow her phrase to discuss the same objective in Janssens' work:129

Graham's is widely appreciated for its performativity, interactivity and fun. For Jansens however, her work is a serious interrogation of light, matter and perception, and foregrounds the instability of matter and the changeability of context that affects our perception.

CHAPTER 4

STUDIO METHODOLOGIES

*... if a shadow is the projection of a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface, then the three-dimensional object is the projection of a four-dimensional entity in the three-dimensional space. Everything that exists in the three-dimensional world is only the 'projection', the 'representation', the 'reflex' of invisible things existing in another world with a higher dimension.*⁹⁹

Duchamp described the world as a projection problem, and this statement by Duchamp seems to aptly draw together some of the principle themes that occur throughout my studio research. He engages philosophically with the paradox of objecthood, its relationship with dimensionality through light and shadow, whilst making reference to the Kantian theory of the object as an 'appearance.' The projection reference echoes my research on 19th century spirit photography and their auratic cinema tricks (Fig. 13).



Figure 13 Duchamp's Hat Rack, 1917

⁹⁹ Herbert Molderings, 'Objects of Modern Skepticism', in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve, MIT Press, p.254; sourced from Jeffrey Fereday, *The Object of Photography*. 1994

My studio methodology has undergone some significant transitions throughout the course of this research project. My intention has been to rupture and push the boundaries of my previous process, which often involved a more immediate and anecdotal approach. By applying research methodologies such as critical engagement with contemporary art practices, and surveying trajectories applicable to these artists, my practice has developed a more complex structure. Engaging with a wide arc of contemporary studio practices beyond photomedia has also been vital to the development of my process, as my studio-led experiments evolved in response to techniques and methodologies reflected in their work. As discussed in Chapter 3, these artists include Helen Marten, Veronica Janssens, Dan Graham, Tony Oursler and the 19th century Spirit Photographers.

American video pioneer Tony Oursler influenced my decision to experiment with fog and smoke. Reprising the smoke and ghostly spectacle of the Spirit Photographers of the 19th Century, Oursler continued the conjunctions between the diametrically opposed worlds of science and spiritualism in the 1980's.¹⁰⁰ His staged video projections onto smoke in outdoor locations echoed the Spirit Photographer's audacious incorporation of 'extras' into portraiture. This juncture between ghostly ephemera and the science of the photo medium similarly interested and inspired me to experiment, producing the series 'Spectral Impressions' (Fig. 14). Working with the immateriality of fog was challenging, due to the elusiveness of the fog substance. Fog is an ephemeral substance subject to rapid change and deterioration dependent on conditions, which in my case, were environmental as the work was undertaken outside the studio in a rural location. Transformation and instability of form and matter were immediate. Using a monolithic eucalypt as a backdrop, the tree acted as a form and surface with which the fog could interact. Other physical characteristics, such as the wind, affected the direction and trajectory of the fog without my control.

This interplay between stable and unstable properties provided a relevant metaphor for the real and the unreal but also for material matter being outside our control, a material form with agency. In this series (Fig. 15) my aim was to achieve transformation through movement of the material. and to use the fog material as an agent of transmutation itself, rather than as a screen on which to project. This experiment also drew on what was embedded from my years living in

¹⁰⁰ Lisson Gallery text. www.lissongallery.com/artists/tony-oursler

the Western Desert, where smoke is a key element in symbolizing transformational states during some ceremonies.¹⁰¹ Ultimately a collaboration with unruly matter, the smoke works acted as a vehicle by which to relinquish stability, control and expected outcomes, to accept matter as subject-object interdependence as discussed by Joshua Simon.



Figure 14 Louise Allerton, *Spectres*, Digital print on Habnemülle, 2017



Figure 15 Louise Allerton, *Spectres and Extras*, Digital print on Habnemülle, 2017

Working with fog encompassed numerous key theoretical concerns for my studio research, pushing the boundaries of objects, permanence and indexicality. It was a method of disrupting predictability and deconstructing form and matter as discussed.

¹⁰¹ This is primary research. I have looked for scholarly articles in this area and cannot find any from the Western Desert. Most articles on this subject are from urban areas relating to opening events, which is entirely different to cultural ceremony in the WD

Building on the transformation and extension of material of the smoke experiments, I began working with anaglyph photography (Fig. 16). The altered dimensionality produced by anaglyph relates to Dan Graham's *Pavilions*, with their altered perspectives. Graham explores multiple dimensions through his various angled two way mirrors in the Pavilions. The mirrors reflect a multiplicity of view, the viewer's self, the environment and often someone on the other side of the two-way mirror. Identities and object stability merge in this way, and object boundaries becomes blurred. In my 3D works I similarly recognize there is more than one view, so that in one image it is possible to blur real and virtual space and create a shimmer between the two. The transparent layers (circles) that lie over the top of solid objects result in an ephemerality and an immaterial object, contrasted against a solid, fixed object. This creates flux and instability and relates back to the transformation of objects when faced with a changeable context. Objects are transmutable and subject to perception and usage. This 3D experiment marked a significant and enduring shift in my work, albeit unplanned. At this point in my research I did not recognize the anaglyph's significance to my studio research and hence began to further investigate photography's dual identity as discussed by Tom Gunning.¹⁰²

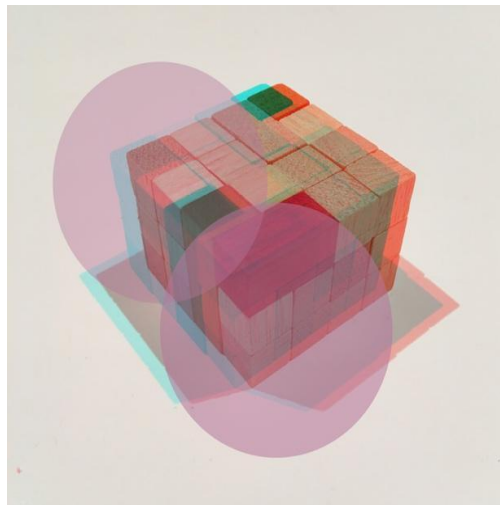


Figure 16 Louise Allerton, 3 x 3 x 3, Digital Print, 2017

Doppelgänger (Fig. 17), dematerializes the solid materiality of an object. Similarly, when I duplicate the original, in *Doppelgänger*, its power is diminished, and its stability becomes questioned. I deliberately selected giant rocks for this series for their monumental presence, sense of stability, solidity and antiquity. Rocks and boulders are relics and remnants which evoke temporality and the passing of time – but as already mentioned, by repeating their image, their monumental intensity decreases and lessens their stature as an iconic presence.

¹⁰² Gunning: 43

The layer shift in *Doppelgänger* duplicates and echoes the original, creating movement and the *action* of past-ness, which in turn creates a trace. In doing this I understand the paradox that occurs while de-materializing the object and solidifying a trace at the same time. A trace in itself is immaterial and ephemeral while a de-materialized object also becomes ephemeral. I am exploring the in-between spaces. Derrida discusses trace as a present/absent dichotomy in semiotic terms where ‘a trace is not a presence but the empty simulacrum of a presence.’¹⁰³ In *Doppelgänger* the object trace has both presence and indeed the emptiness of a presence as Derrida implies. Finally, during this process, the technology and software programming have ironically and coincidentally offered up digital traces in some of my images. Through deletion and manipulation of image areas, fine outlines and traces of the original object form have remained, a process outside of my control.



Figure 17

Louise Allerton, *Doppelgänger*, Digital print, 2017

Doppelgänger also applies to photography’s dual identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, photography was historically widely perceived as a guarantor of visual certainty recording the nature of material reality whilst dematerializing it into a ghostly double.¹⁰⁴ Its scientific process

¹⁰³ Amanda Bell, *absence/presence* sourced from <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/>

¹⁰⁴ Gunning: 43

qualified it as a bearer of “truth,” free from the ‘unreliability of human discourse.’¹⁰⁵ Photography is both an icon and an index, while at the same time, being able to freeze a moment in time, an uncanny phenomenon.¹⁰⁶ Gunning remarks that the uncanniness undermines the unique identity of objects, endlessly reproducing their appearances as objects.¹⁰⁷ Roland Barthes would later refer to this as a melancholy object for its recording of past-ness, and ‘recognizing what was and never again will be.’¹⁰⁸

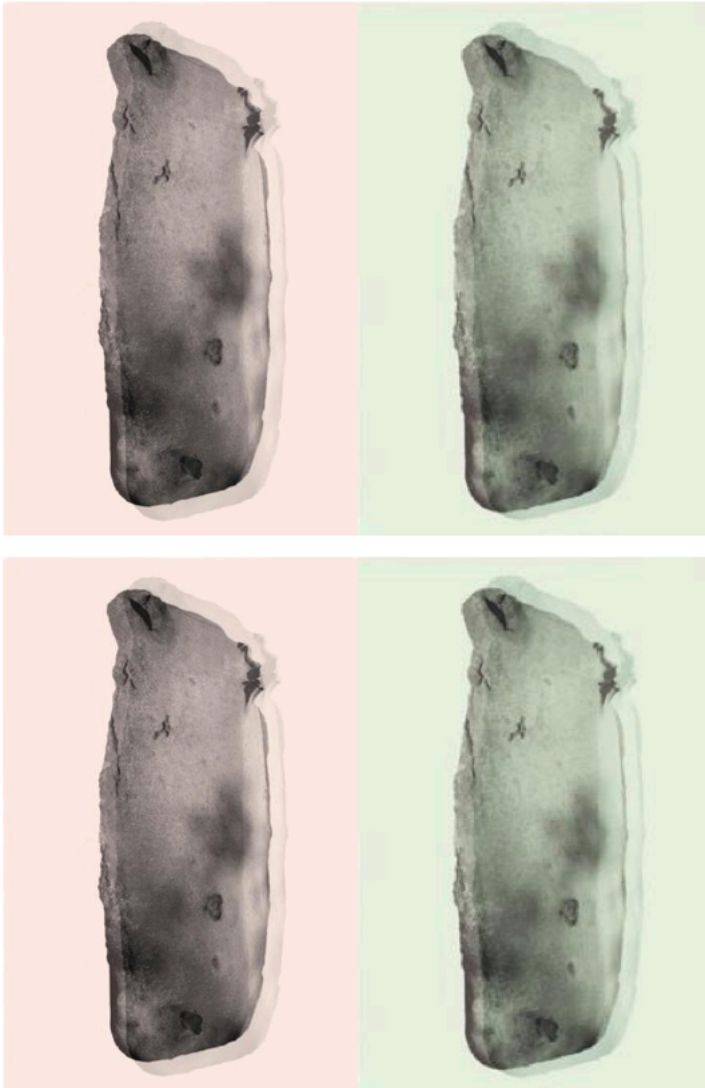


Figure 18 Louise Allerton, *Doppelgänger, Series II*, *Digital print*, 2017

¹⁰⁵ Gunning: 42

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*: 43

¹⁰⁸ Gibson *Objects of the Dead*: 85

The idea of context has been an important driver for my studio research, since it was context that provided the personal impetus for my research inquiry. The Doppelganger series explores the trace and doubling through repetition of the image both within the frame and as a series. This repetition diminishes the power of the single, unique object, diminishing its aura and rendering it a mere copy of itself (Fig. 18). Whilst considering context, in a Derridean sense, I experimented with alternate backgrounds to examine how they altered impressions of the object. Continuing with the rock monuments, I repeated the image again to diminish the power of the boulder, but focused more on variation of tonal backgrounds. Derrida in 'Signature, Event, Context' discusses a similar concept known as *Iterability*. Iterability refers here to language - the capacity to use elements of language in a multitude of different contexts, which demonstrates that the meaning of syntagma cannot be fixed, that 'there are only contexts without any center of absolutely anchoring.'¹⁰⁹ Repeating the image but modifying the background re-contextualizes and repositions the object, resulting in a perception shift, and as Derrida explains, context is never fixed. Each different tone acted as an alternative context and broadly affected the relationships with neighboring colors and overall composition. In the essay 'The Truth In Painting,' Derrida outlines his notion of the parergon or the frame.¹¹⁰ Context is personal experience, institutional, cultural and social. A work of art can be viewed within all these contexts and appears differently to each person depending on their context. There is no limit to the possible contexts in viewing artwork or texts. Context is highly subjective, and never finite, and as Derrida suggests 'ever expandable, never exhausted, never finished'¹¹¹ This series engages with the infinite contexts that subconsciously shape our cultural, social and political frameworks. I use the multiple background tones as metaphors for diversity in cultural and societal meaning whilst the central figure remains constant but alters through its relationship to its altered context (Fig 19).

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context' from *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago : Chicago UP, 1982: .32

¹¹⁰ Richards: 34

¹¹¹ Richards: 53

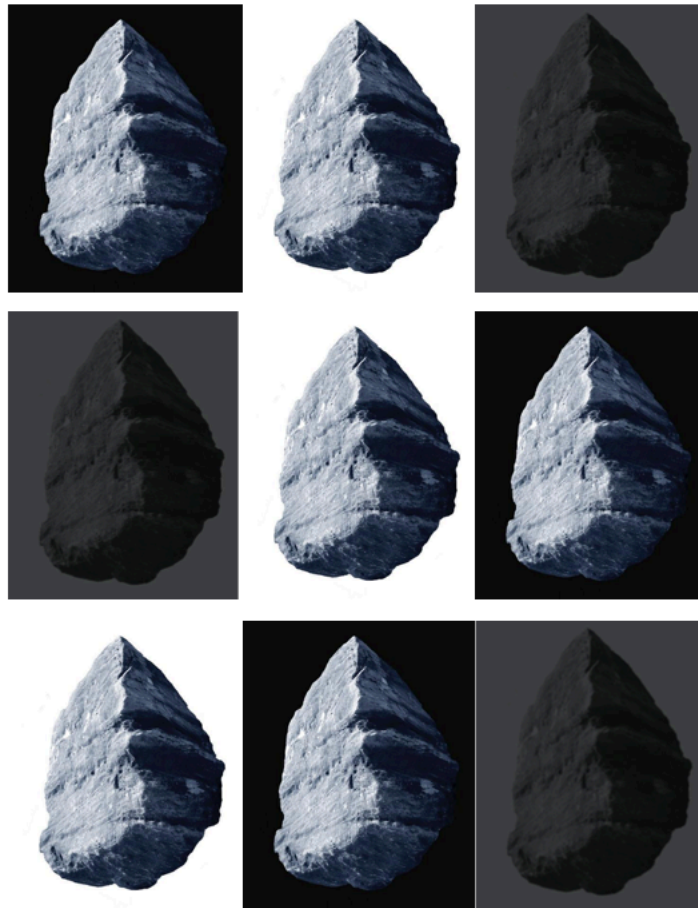


Figure 19 Louise Allerton, Digital prints on Hahnemülle, 2017

The abstraction of my artwork has developed largely due to the deconstructing and destabilizing of material value. In this process I have used found objects from the natural environment to guide image content, both in my earlier work and current work. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida, introduces the idea of deconstruction, the taking apart of a concept or idea and rearranging it to make something anew.¹¹² I consider the rearranging of found, fragmented parts to be a act of deconstruction, reforming and assembling something anew in my photomedia assemblages. In addition, I realized a connection with the readymade works, where whole objects were transported into new environments and presented with a new order and with agency. I also adopted what I understood as readymades, but transported them into the digital environment and manipulated and created their new assemblage relationships.

The natural landscape has often been part of my process and offers me an expansiveness which is conducive to clear thought and ideas. As Jane Bennett states ‘the landscape offers up an

¹¹² *ibid*: 12

ecology and an assemblage called a *natura naturans*,¹¹³ a vibrant dynamic network of activity and matter-energy.’ Bennett’s words echo the process which led me to a significant shift in my artwork, concerning the 2D and anaglyph assemblages I have made.

Over the autumn 2018 term break, I was invited back to Tjuntjuntjara Community in Western Australia to run a community arts project. During this time, I found building material in the form of detritus lying around the community. These cast off object parts appeared as ready made sculptures, with readymade compositions made from interesting and vibrant metallic materials. Through the lens of Jane Bennett, each of these objects is individuated, but also located within an assemblage, and as having a relationship with the other parts.¹¹⁴ Bennett also argues here that human context is irrelevant, that these parts have a relationship with each other and their immediate environment, rather with her, ‘with my vision, or my cultural frame.’¹¹⁵ This is also how I viewed these objects, inanimate yet vibrant in a type of frozen animation, and separated from their original context.

I have been greatly inspired by Marten’s choice of found and manufactured object material, but also by the continuous and meandering assemblages she creates in rhizomatic fashion. The vibrant desert detritus I found became the subject of my own photo media assemblages. I transported these cast offs into new contexts – generally pulling them apart, distorting, augmenting, and incorporating them into virtual assemblages – in some ways similar to Helen Marten’s complex assemblages. Marten’s works often seem to have no starting and no finishing point, allowing the eye to navigate a terrain of unorthodox combinations and rhythms (Fig. 20). I have been impressed by the freedom with which her work transforms shape, form and meaning and does not conform to conventional or even recognizable standards. I similarly see the anaglyph works as embodying transformation, since they work as an intermediate point being neither one nor the other, epitomizing a paradoxical character.

¹¹³ Jane Bennett, *The Force Of Things: Steps Toward and Ecology of Matter Ecology*, in *Political Theory*. June, 365

¹¹⁴ *ibid* :351

¹¹⁵ *ibid*



Figure 20 Helen Marten, *Guild of Pharmacists*, 2014



Figure 21 Louise Allerton, *Blow Up*, Digital print on Platine, 2018

As a concept, transformation implies an aspect of motion. For this reason, my work has incorporated forms and objects that evoke movement. The movement in my work is inspired by the notion of energy transference, through which matter changes from one thing to another. In the context of death, objects physically move from person to person or place, but they also transform metaphorically in value and meaning. During my time in the western desert, I witnessed objects being destroyed directly after death as previously discussed, but in an everyday context and particularly during ceremony with visiting family, objects are ritually passed and shared from person to person. Objects and material possessions are continually on the move according to Margaret Gibson, who argues that objects are nomadic. Just as humans are increasingly on the move across the planet, so are their objects.¹¹⁶ Finally, movement in my work (Fig. 22) relates to the movement of the spirit, as it de-materializes from the physical to the spectral, continuing on its ancestral journey, as discussed concerning anangu from Tjuntjuntjara Community.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Gibson, *Objects of The Dead* :13

¹¹⁷ Interview with Stephen Stewart, formerly of Tjuntjuntjara Community. May, 2017



Figure 22 Louise Allerton, *Hyperflux*. Digital print. 2018

In Marten's assemblages, movement is created by the viewer's perception of continuous shapes, texture and linear elements across all elements of the composition. Through this, these works embody transformation and flux, despite the actual stasis of the sculptural elements (Figs. 23, 24). I see my own works as 2D assemblages, where their separate parts, location and my intervention have worked together to form a synthesis of the whole. Employing Derrida's deconstructive strategies I re-structure found parts as a positive act, rearranging them to understand something anew.¹¹⁸

Working with photography as a medium to create 2D assemblages plays on the idiosyncrasy of photography's dual identity and capacity. The works become both an icon or resemblance of a new object and as an index, or trace of their former selves. The parts remain the same but they have rematerialized into a new composition, but dematerialized through becoming two dimensional.

¹¹⁸ Richards:12

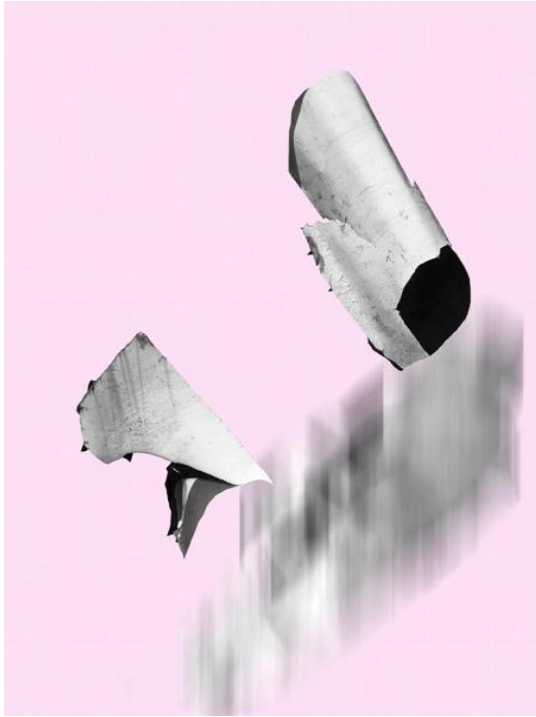


Figure 23 Louise Allerton, *In Flux I*, 2018



Figure 24 Louise Allerton, *In Flux II*, 2018

Whilst my inquiry into objecthood has explored ideas of transformation and de-materialization, these have culminated in a more detailed experimentation with alternate dimensionality. No experiment during my studio research has worked as fittingly as the anaglyph method for creating ambiguity and extended dimensionality. For this reason, I adopted the anaglyph a second time, applying the method to the cast off ready-mades I found in the desert. Returning to anaglyph photography pushes the boundaries of object parameters and opens up a multiplicity of meaning for its paradoxical character as a signifier of depth and dimension on a flat surface. I explore the anaglyph through a post-structuralist approach, where the idea of 'truth' as a singular and coherent entity is challenged and utilize it as a playful intermediary. The found detritus was interesting source material for its sculptural quality, vibrancy and its suitability for the anaglyph works (Fig. 25).



Figure 25 Louise Allerton, *Border Shift*, Digital print on Platine, 2018

Techniques for making anaglyphs vary widely, from automatic digital anaglyph maker programs to a manual approach in Photoshop which is the technique I use. I am not overly interested in the technique apart from its application. At present, stereoscopic art is quite rare outside of the medium of cinema¹¹⁹ My method involves duplicating a layer, and assigning red and cyan to those layers. The layers are then separated to create the double effect that corresponds to the eye separation. Interestingly, the effect does not come into play until the red/cyan 3D glasses are applied, which introduces a performative element to the work. The images become multi-dimensional and can vary according to the number of layers and depths are created. There is also a degree of sideways movement in the image that occurs when the body moves from side to side. As discussed, the anaglyph produces varying levels of depth and dimension, which correlates to object stability and de-materialization. An additional aim is to disrupt viewers' assumptions about vision, and to engage them in the act of seeing, an act we often take for granted. As with Janssens' mist sculptures, the reduced visibility of the work reminds viewers

¹¹⁹ Kevin R. Brooks, *Depth Perception and the History of Three-Dimensional Art: Who Produced the First Stereoscopic Images?*:2 See also Ferragallo (1974) and Wade (2007, 2009)

that sight often takes precedence over other senses. Disrupting this flow activates other the senses of touch, hearing and navigation. As with Graham's Pavilions, viewers become aware of multi dimensionality, and find themselves relying on other sensory systems. Reflection turns the view back onto the self in Graham's Pavillions. With the anaglyph's ability to create depth, in combination with transparent layers, the materiality of the object becomes almost palpable. Through these optical effects, physicality and dimension become heightened, whilst creating uncertainty about sight and reality (Fig 26.) The damaged surfaces of the readymade parts offer a visceral link to the real whilst the transparency of the layer destabilizes this reality, leaving the viewer with possibilities rather than certainties. The viewer becomes aware that reality is not fixed but changeable (Fig 27).

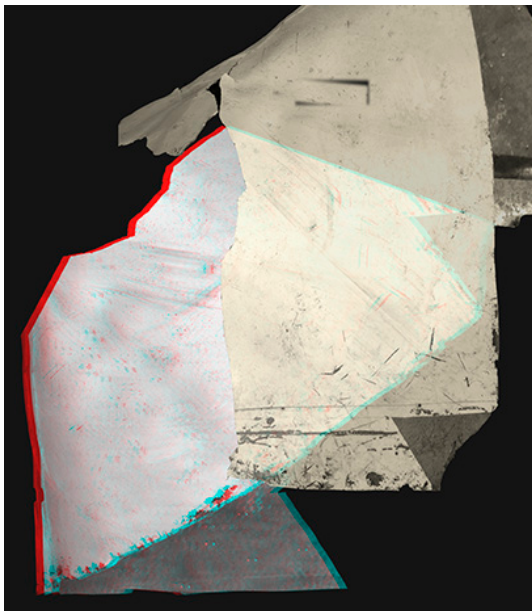


Figure 26 Louise Allerton, *Interstices I*, 2018

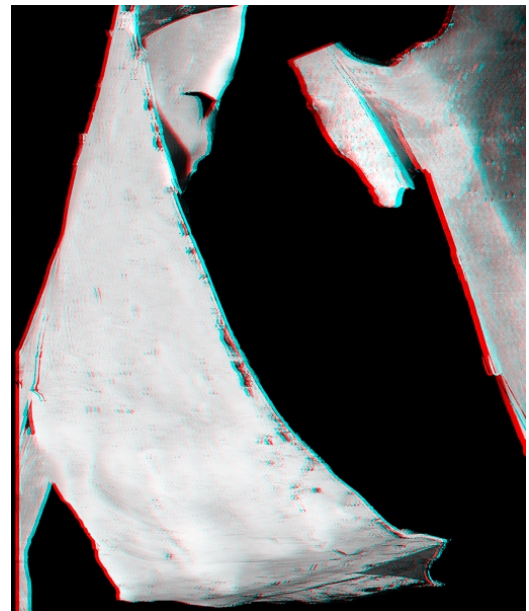


Figure 27 Louise Allerton, *Interstices II*, 2018

The installation of my work expresses the tentative and fluid relationship we have with materiality as well as the instability of material itself. As Derrida stated repeatedly, there is no absolute meaning and no transcendental signifier. The paradox of the present is that there is always something missing or absent and that every present is permeated by a non-present.¹²⁰ My work is printed on a fibre based, non protected inkjet paper and hung without structural backing or support apart from two metal pins that hold it to the wall. It is therefore not permanent in the sense that it is fragile and may be damaged, but the nature of photomedia is such that it can

¹²⁰ Steinweg:42

be repeated any time. It sits away from the wall about four inches, so casts a shadow to evoke the spirit photographer's projection spectacles of the 19th century and Duchamp's modernist projection philosophy.

In keeping with the sentiments of Dan Graham, my aim with the anaglyph work is to create a light-hearted portal into material ambiguity, where viewers can engage with a performative space and be 'About fun'. But I don't want it to be 'easy fun'. I think some of this fun should be difficult."¹²¹

I have interrogated the realm of materiality through the lens of a number of viewpoints including Kant, Derrida, Deconstruction and other Post Structuralists. I relate to these theorists most strongly due to their emancipatory notions. Terms such as multiplicity, 'open systems, 'complexity,' 'disruption,' 'instability,' and 'ambiguity' ¹²² help to describe the process of understanding the instability of materiality. The medium of photography uniquely gives rise to these notions through its dual identity, and its multiplicitous functions. Photo media can be material in shape and form and yet immaterialize its subject, it can be ambiguous in its ability to be an icon, a bearer of trace and to freeze past-ness at the same time. My work for this project has been informed and influenced by these notions, resulting in a deeper engagement with the medium and breaking through previous structural and aesthetic boundaries.

¹²¹ <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/scott/dan-graham7-7-09.asp>

¹²²Andrea Hurst, Post-Structuralism. Sourced from <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0008.xml#obo-9780190221911-0008-div1-0004>

CONCLUSION

My studio research has navigated a broad and disparate range of theoretical and artistic references to explore the object's position between the fixed and unstable. In the tradition of philosophical inquiry, objecthood has proven to be an unstable and contested terrain, oscillating between Kant's certitude of 'appearances' to Derrida's ever changing contextual notions and multiplicities. Artistically, the work of Dan Graham illustrates the multiple dimensionality of perception and the instability of material 'realities,' whilst Ann Veronica Janssens' has subverted a material paradigm with sensorial ephemera.

Derrida's Deconstructionist strategies of re-arrangement that contest prevailing binaries, along with Helen Marten's uncompromising originality in assemblage, have deeply inspired the deconstruction of my studio work over the course of two years. From an approach in which my earlier works were based in a more representative field, I have experimented with multiple backgrounds, new fields of color, abstracting the foreground and deconstructing found object fragments.

Integrating found object parts in the second half of my studio research project intensified my investigation into the instability of materiality. These parts were cast offs, once part of some other functioning assemblage that seemed to offer themselves structurally and compositionally to collaborate. Perhaps the combination of these unorthodox readymade sculptural remnants against a natural western desert landscape provided an obvious paradox which foregrounded their materiality. Their twisted forms, which were previously solid and stable, offered a new way of looking at these objects, reminding me of Bennett's *Vibrant Materialism*, which proposes a new approach to looking, interacting and coexisting with already present objects.

My inquiry into objects and the material condition has opened up a new and compelling theoretical and philosophical terrain for my practice, and importantly, developed a space for my reconfigured and renewed studio approach. Through a variety of photomedia experiments, I found my way to the multi dimensional anaglyph image — an exciting uncharted territory in my practice that enables a newfound deconstructive performativity within my work, opening possibilities for further experimentation and extension.

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