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## Exploring the Philosophical Character of Contemporary Art through a Post-Conceptual Practice

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EXPLORING THE PHILOSOPHICAL CHARACTER  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART THROUGH A  
POST-CONCEPTUAL PRACTICE

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Dublin Institute of Technology

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GradCAM

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## ABSTRACT

This enquiry seeks to explore what philosopher and critic Peter Osborne identifies as the philosophical character of contemporary art. The purpose of this enquiry is not to resolve the ambiguous relationship between art and philosophy that he observes in contemporary art, but to address the complex engagement between them in a focused manner by examining how philosophy comes into play in my post-conceptual practice.

This enquiry emerges from and is orientated by an ongoing post-conceptual practice. The central questions of the enquiry ask: What is the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice? How might my artworks raise philosophical ideas and thought? What is the nature of this thought?

The primary component of the research project consists of three specific event-based art works: *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* (2008), *Mystical Anarchism* (2009-2012) and *Metaphysical Longings* (2006 -). Through the development, enactment and critical reflection on these works I explore how my practice provides a domain to engage with philosophy and how the artworks that unfold out of this might implicate philosophical ideas and engender thought. These works seek to enact an *other space*. I use the term *other space* to articulate a temporary, experiential and/or symbolic space that differs from the quotidian. I develop my understanding of the philosophical character of art by exploring how philosophical ideas might be implicated in these works in an experiential manner by considering how these works *invite* thought. Through the research project I assert the proposition that the thinking raised by art is essentially *affective*.

Alain Badiou's inaesthetics provides a theoretical guide. Although inaesthetics defines a reciprocal engagement between artistic practice and philosophical enquiry, the correlation of these disciplines is described from the vantage point of the philosopher and no examples from the area of contemporary art are provided within his thesis. Rather than repeating the procedures associated with traditional modalities of aesthetics that privilege the critic/philosopher, this research project provides a paradigm within artistic practice to explore how philosophical meaning is implicated through the development and enactment of artworks.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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I dedicate this research project to my late father, Bob Emoe.

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## INTRODUCTION

This enquiry seeks to address the complex engagement between art and philosophy by examining how philosophy comes into play in my post-conceptual art practice. The enquiry focuses on three specific artworks that exemplify my practice, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* (2008), *Mystical Anarchism* (2009-2013) and *Metaphysical Longings* (2006-). These three event-based works constitute the research project and provide examples of contemporary art through which I explore its philosophical character. Peter Osborne, the art critic and philosopher has identified an “immanently philosophical character of contemporary art” and the consequent of whether “philosophical meaning of the work can be wholly abstracted from its material means”.<sup>1</sup> He asks, “can the constitutive ambiguity characteristic of the deployment of philosophy within the artistic field ever be resolved?”<sup>2</sup> Instead of seeking to resolve this “ambiguity” this enquiry addresses the complex engagement between the disciplines by asking; What is the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice? How might my artworks raise philosophical ideas and thought? What is the nature of this thought?

This enquiry emerges from and is orientated by an ongoing post-conceptual art practice which is disclosed herein from the perspective of the artist/researcher. The thesis functions on a number of levels that are essentially linked, but are distinguished below in seven points to clarify the role of the thesis for the reader. (i) The thesis reveals the motivations for the enquiry by outlining how it emerged from art practice. (ii) The thesis functions to outline how the research project developed out this practice. (iii) The thesis presents the key terms of the enquiry, disclosing how terms such as *entwinement*, liminality and *other space* emerged and were employed in the research project. (iv) The thesis acts as a narrative to give detail on the research project as it unfolded. (v) central to this narrative is a depiction of how the primary questions of enquiry are addressed through the critical reflection on the three event-based works. My critical reflection is informed primarily by Osborne, Foster and Danto’s separate but converging readings of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics, Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art," *Art History*, March 2004, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 61.

contemporary art and Badiou's inaesthetics (discussed later). These particular readings are presented and analysed because they expand the enquiry from a specific focus on my own practice to a more general understanding of contemporary art. (vi) The thesis relates the key insights that emerged from this enquiry and presents how they contribute to the wider field of contemporary art discourse and aesthetics. (vii) The thesis presents what is to be gained by conducting an enquiry into contemporary art through a post-conceptual practice.

The motivations for the enquiry are detailed in Chapter Two through a three reflective discussions on key works that were produced prior to embarking on the formal enquiry. These key works are two text-based drawings, *The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations* (2003) (hereinafter *The Clear Apprehension...*) and *Mapping Nihillion* (2006) and the event *Metaphysical Longings* (2006). This chapter also introduces the key terms of the enquiry: *entwinement*, liminality and *other space*. A reflective discussion on *The Clear Apprehension...* and *Mapping Nihillion* analyses how philosophy (primarily existential philosophy) is used in my art practice and how the particular engagement between artistic processes and philosophical enquiry performed in my practice differs from a linear engagement, where philosophy is deployed to interpret the meaning of the artwork post-facto or where philosophy informs the artwork so that it merely illustrates philosophical ideas. I use the term *entwinement* to define this dynamic, symbiotic engagement that I observe in my post-conceptual practice. I also detail how this *entwinement* of philosophy and art in practice causes me to think in a particular way and how this observation motivates me to explore how a post-conceptual art practice might provide a domain to engage with and raise philosophical ideas. This analysis introduces liminality as a key term of the enquiry, detailing how I use this anthropological term in my practice to engage with the existential question of being. Liminality stems from the Latin word *liminal*, meaning threshold and is used in ritual theory to designate a temporal, experiential and/or symbolic space that exists outside of and beyond normative structures.<sup>3</sup> Liminality is regarded as "other" because it is

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites of Passage* (1909) is now recognised as a key thinker within ritual theory because of his identification of the tripartite structure of ritual centred on the liminal state. However he was not widely known, prior to Victor Turner's re-introduction of liminality through his seminal text, *The Ritual Process* (1969) mainly because Emile Durkheim, the most prolific ethnographer who also espoused theories on ritual ostracised van Gennep from academic circles in France. For more on this please see Rosemary Zumwalt, "Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of Bourg-la-Reine," *American Anthropologist* (American Anthropological Association), 84, no. 2 (June 1982): 299-313

understood to arise when normative structures are symbolically played with, suspended and transformed.<sup>4</sup> This analysis reveals how my engagement with liminality is crucial to the development of the research project because it informed an emergent concern with thought and experience and instigated a shift in my practice from the production of art objects to the enactment of event-based works.

How the research project developed out of my practice is also detailed in Chapter Two. How the event evolved and became the primary methodology of the research project is detailed through an analysis of the first iteration of *Metaphysical Longings* in 2006. This analysis relates how the event offered an apposite artistic framework to develop works that foreground experience and thought on an inter-subjective level by shifting the site of production from the solitary realm of the studio to a more expansive and collective space. This analysis also details how the term *other space* informs the working definition of the research project and how my ambition to enact an *other space* through event-based works emerged out of my engagement with liminality in *Metaphysical Longings*. I introduce the term *other space* in the discussion on *Metaphysical Longings* to articulate a temporary, experiential and/or symbolic space that differs to the quotidian. Because this term has also recently been used metaphorically by Alberto Toscano to describe art and articulate its capacity to engender thought, it provides a working definition to reflect on the possibility of my event-based works to implicate ideas and raise thought.<sup>5</sup>

The research project through consists of three event-based works, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and later iterations of *Metaphysical Longings*. The thesis provides individual accounts of these works and reflects on how they seek to enact *other spaces* on an experiential and symbolic level through their engagement with liminality. These temporal artworks are predicated on a gathering of people together and foreground experience. *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* incorporates three events that include group meditation, an audio/visual performance and a screening of a documentary. These events were enacted over three evenings in June 2008. *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* do not take place over a

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<sup>4</sup> Colin Turnbull, "Liminality: A Synthesis of Subjective and Objective Experience," in *By Means of Performance*, ed. Wila and Schechner, Richard Appel, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Alberto Toscano, "The Sensuous Religion of the Multitude, Art and Abstraction in Negri, ," *Third Text* 23 no. 4 (2009): 369-382.

specific time frame but were enacted over a protracted period of time. *Mystical Anarchism* designates a midnight lecture, a film (of which is accompanied herein), an event centred on the screening of this film and an installation. *Mystical Anarchism* was developed and realised in collaboration with the philosopher Simon Critchley. In this analysis I reflect on how the work sought to enact an *other space* where the philosopher's thoughts on the "dividual" might be 'felt' or experienced.<sup>6</sup> *Metaphysical Longings* designates an ongoing artwork that to date has consisted of six events centred on the practice of yoga nidra, (a technique of guided visualisation that is claimed to disengage the active, instrumental self or ego). *Metaphysical Longings* seeks to enact *other spaces* to explore the philosophical question of being on an experiential level.

There is a paradox in giving *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* single titles because each of these works are constituted by multiple iterations. However, this paradox articulates that these artworks are not autonomous artistic forms that are complete but that they are open processes that evolve through the different iterations and enactments that develop over time.<sup>7</sup> The thesis outlines how the research project develops through the development and enactment of these three artworks as they unfold.

The thesis outlines how the primary questions of the enquiry are addressed through critical reflection on the development and enactment of *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings*. While this is a practice-based enquiry, specific theories on art and philosophy, detailed in Chapters One and

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<sup>6</sup> Critchley uses this term in *Mystical Anarchism* to describe the mystics involved in the *Movement of the Free Spirit*. A transcript of the paper *Mystical Anarchism* is provided as an appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) exemplifies this strategy of using a single title to designate multiple forms. The title *Spiral Jetty* designates the seminal land art piece, his essay reflecting on this work and the film documenting its construction at Salt Lake, Utah. Osborne draws specifically on this work, observing how this work exemplifies the transcategorical nature of contemporary art by encompassing a range of processes and disciplines. Osborne also reflects on the multiple iterations of *Spiral Jetty* to demonstrate the orientation of Smithson's practice on process. This focus on process is also sustained in Hélio Oiticica's post-conceptual practice. He articulates this when reflecting on the *Parangolé's*, claiming the *Parangolé's* do more than define "a series of typical works" in the form of the capes, banners and tents but articulate a "definitive formulation" that fuses together the "color [sic], structures, poetic sense, dance, words, photography ... all the definitive principals formulated, including that of the *nonformulation of concepts*, which is the most important." Like Smithson and Oiticica, I also approach my post-conceptual practice as a process, a process of enquiry that is mirrored in the works that configure the research project. Like Oiticica, my process of enquiry cannot prescribe a specific concept or thought because it is also orientated around the experience of others. For more on this see: Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso), 99-117. Oiticica's statements are taken from his essay *Position and Program*, July 1966. It was first published in the catalogue for the exhibition "Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto" (Rio de Janeiro, 1986), and republished in Guy Brett, *Hélio Oiticica* (Rotterdam: Witte de With; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1992), 100-105.

Three, respectively inform the development of the enquiry. Peter Osborne Arthur C. Danto and Hal Foster's readings of contemporary art are presented in Chapter One to contextualise the questions that the enquiry seeks to address from an art historical perspective. These readings reveal how the question of the relationship between art and philosophy and the proposition that art is a domain for thought emerged out of developments in art practice that problematised the role of aesthetics for contemporary art. These converging analyses of the development of contemporary art through art practice are presented to substantiate my decision to conduct an enquiry into contemporary art through art practice. Osborne's reading of "contemporary art as post-conceptual" is also detailed to support my decision to conduct this enquiry through a post-conceptual practice.<sup>8</sup>

This enquiry engages with a larger conversation surrounding the relationship between contemporary art and philosophy. Chapter Three details how this conversation surrounding the relationship between contemporary art and philosophy and the proposition that art is a domain for thought has been initiated in continental philosophy through Alain Badiou's re-interrogation of aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> This chapter reveals how Badiou proposes inaeconomics as "necessary" for contemporary art by analysing how inaeconomics asserts an alternate, reciprocal engagement between art and philosophy and how this new schema relocates thought from the external source of philosophy to the immanent space of art.<sup>10</sup> This chapter outlines how Badiou formulates inaeconomics as an alternate to *speculative aesthetics*, (a term he coins to designate the general reading of aesthetics as philosophy's discourse on art) and his insistence that philosophy is not to interpret, but to reveal that art is "itself a form of thought".<sup>11</sup> The analysis presents how inaeconomics offers a theoretical guide to explore the nature of artistic thought. It through this schema that Badiou distinguishes the thinking in art from philosophical thought. (He maintains this regime of thought is "irreducible to philosophy" because he sees philosophy as "devoted to the invention of concepts alone").<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Osborne, "Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual" (paper presented at: Fondazione Antonio Ratti, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010), 19-30.

<sup>9</sup> For a general overview of the designate 'continental philosophy' see Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, Second (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994) and Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeconomics*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeconomics*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeconomics*, 9-19.

Chapter Three details how Badiou registers the “*intraphilosophical effect*” of art as a “special regime of thought” through his reflections on literary examples, in particular the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Although the research project does not consist of poems, or indeed more generally poetry, I develop the argument that Badiou’s method of exploring the nuances of artistic thought through poetry enables me to reflect on the thinking that my event-based artworks may engender. I develop this argument through Jan Verwoert and Jörg Heiser’s curatorial project *Romantic Conceptualism* (2007) which re-evaluates conceptualism by aligning it with the romantic fragment (a poem exemplified by Novalis) and Peter Lamarque’s poetic treatment of conceptualism. For my analysis the proposition that specific artworks engender thought on a perceptive level reaffirms my provisional claim in Chapter Two that the thinking in art is bound with experience. The readings presented in Chapter Three are key to the enquiry because they develop my understanding of the nature of artistic thought and inform the insight that art *invites* thought.

This enquiry engages with Badiou’s inaesthetics by examining the engagement between contemporary art and philosophy within my post-conceptual practice. This enquiry engages with inaesthetics from the perspective of art practice rather than from a purely theoretical perspective of the philosopher or art critic. The thesis demonstrates a ‘performative contradiction’ in the way that it uses philosophy in a conventional manner to explore how philosophy is *entwined* into a post-conceptual practice and consequently through the enactment of the artworks. For example, although I collaborate with Critchley in the artwork *Mystical Anarchism*, I do not collaborate with Badiou in any of my artworks. Critchley’s direct participation in the research project rather than Badiou is not an incongruity. This performative contradiction is crucial because it reaffirms that my practice is not centred on illustrating a specific philosophical system of thought such as, inaesthetics, but that it provides a domain to engage with thought. Inaesthetics provides a theoretical guide to explore how artworks like *Mystical Anarchism* offer a way of engaging with philosophical ideas in an extra-textual manner. Identifying this performative contradiction in the research project enables me as a researcher to distinguish the thinking that unfolds when one encounters and perceives art from a systematic way of thinking that is performed through the analysis of the research project.

The insights gained from my engagement with inaeesthetics and art theory inform the critical reflection on the development and enactment of works that configure the research project. The purpose of this reflective aspect of the enquiry is not to evaluate the experience of those present at each art event as one would a focus group, but to contribute to an existing and expanding understanding of contemporary art by analysing how these examples of contemporary art might raise philosophical ideas and *invite* thought. Theodor Adorno's method of self-reflective evaluation from a personal, subjective position is used to develop the enquiry. This aspect of the enquiry that reflects on the three event-based artworks is developed over three discussions in Chapter Four. The first discussion reflects on each event, analysing how artistic processes and philosophy becomes entwined through enactment. The second discussion focuses on the working definition of the research project, analysing how the works seek to enact *other spaces*. This discussion introduces the term *staging*. In theatre staging defines the use of temporary backdrops to create alternate, imaginary realms on an experiential and symbolic level. The term *staging* is used to define the process used throughout the research project to enact *other spaces* on an experiential and symbolic level. The analysis details how *staging* refers to the choice of location, the timing of the event, the mode of presentation, (for example the technique of guided visualisation used in *Metaphysical Longings*), the method of assembly and the use of props, (namely a large handmade mat measuring 17 metres by 7 metres that features in all three works) and how it also refers to the process used to mirror of the tri-partite structure of ritual in the enactment of *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings*. The third discussion analyses how these artworks operate as open processes might *invite* thought on an experiential, perceptive and imaginative level.

The four chapters present key stages of the enquiry from the perspective of the artist/researcher are summarised below.<sup>13</sup> These chapters address the questions driving the enquiry that ask: What is the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice? How might my artworks raise philosophical ideas and thought? What is the nature of this thought?

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<sup>13</sup>Adorno maintains, "the aesthetic success is a function of the skill of the trained artist to awaken the residual contents." For more see Marie-Noëlle Ryan, *Towards a Critical Theory of Works of Art* (University of Moncton, 2007).



Chapter One contextualises the enquiry in a series of discussions that reveal the complex engagement between contemporary art and philosophy. This chapter focuses on Osborne, Foster and Danto's readings of contemporary art to present and analyse how the interrogation of aesthetics was played out in art practice. A brief précis on aesthetics outlines how it emerged as a discourse of art in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and how the general understanding of aesthetics as the philosophical discourse on art emerged. This discussion functions to disclose how this general understanding of aesthetics privileged philosophy as the site for thought. An analysis of Osborne, Foster and Danto's readings of contemporary art reveals how developments in art practice asserted contemporary art as a domain for thought. An analysis of Osborne's identification of the "philosophical character" presents the conceptual and the sensible/experiential aspect of contemporary art. This analysis of Osborne's reading of contemporary art as post-conceptual also functions to substantiate the research methodology of an enquiry through a post-conceptual practice.

Chapter Two moves from an analysis of the field of art practice and art criticism to a reflection on my own post-conceptual practice. This chapter discloses how the enquiry emerges from and is orientated by my own ongoing art practice. This chapter focuses on three works, *The Clear Apprehension...*, *Mapping Nihilion* and *Metaphysical Longings*, to disclose how I engaged with existential philosophy in my practice and how I formulated the term *entwinement* as a key term of the enquiry. This chapter also introduces the anthropological term liminality, outlining how it informs the *entwinement* between artistic processes and philosophy by providing an entry point to engage with the existential question of being in my work. This chapter presents the provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience. An analysis of *Metaphysical Longings* outlines how the event emerged as an artistic form that enabled me to extend philosophical enquiry to others in an extra-textual, experiential manner. The analysis of *Metaphysical Longings* also introduces the working definition of the research project to enact *other spaces*.

Chapter Three moves from the field of art practice to philosophical enquiry. This chapter details how inaesthetics provides a theoretical guide to investigate the *entwinement* between art and philosophy that is sustained by my practice and to reflect

on the nature of artistic thought. As in aesthetics is informed by Badiou's evental philosophy, a summary account of Badiou's reading of *event* is presented. The term event cannot be used in an equivocal manner because it is also prevalent as a theme within philosophical systems of thought.<sup>14</sup> Badiou's *event* is very particular and this account outlines how his reading infers novelty as a radical transformation in thought. The word *event* is italicised when referencing Badiou's philosophical project so as to differentiate it from my definition as an artistic form. This summary of Badiou's *event* is presented to explain how this philosophical system relocates thought from the external space of philosophy to the immanent space of art. Moving from evental philosophy to in aesthetics, the discussion outlines how in aesthetics designates a new schema between art and philosophy, and how this "knot" between the disciplines is posited to reveal the thinking particular to art.<sup>15</sup> The second discussion teases out what is meant by an "*intraphilosophical effect*" so as to engage with the specificity of artistic thought. While Badiou provides no definition of this term, I argue that this term suggests a philosophical character by inferring how an artwork raises philosophical ideas on an implicit level through the artistic form. I also draw on Jan Verwoert's and Jörg Heiser's revisionist readings of conceptualism through their curatorial project *Romantic Conceptualism* and Peter Lamarque's poetic treatment of conceptual art to further investigate how art implicitly activates thought on a perceptive level. This chapter introduces a key insight that emerges from the enquiry, my proposition that art *invites* thought.

Chapter Four presents the main body of the research project, three event-based artworks: *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings*. These artworks provide case studies through which I explore the *entwinement* between contemporary art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice and explore how philosophical ideas might be implicated through enactment. I consider the insights relating to thought and experience that emerge through my engagement with

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<sup>14</sup> Badiou observes how *event* has become a common term for a large number of contemporary philosophers. He claims this has emerged through the *event's* relationship to the notion of the Outside. While the philosophy of *event* forms the thought systems of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-François Lyotard and is associated with the later Heidegger and Derrida in his reading of a philosophy of *différance* (a deliberate misspelling of *différence*). Badiou's *event* is configured in a different manner to these systems of thought. He clarifies his concept of *event* as novelty through his analysis of the Deleuzian event that is expounded in *The Logic of Sense*.

Alain Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze," *Lacan.com*, accessed March 5, 2008, <http://www.lacan.com/baddel.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of In aesthetics*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3.

inaesthetics and art theory to reflect how my event-based artworks might *invite* thought. I reassert my propositional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience, detailing how I develop the proposition that the thinking raised by these works is *affective* in nature. The term *affect* articulates a specific way of thinking that is bound up with the artistic form, the encounter with this form and the subjects' experience. As affect is subject to a range of bodily sensations, it ensures that all senses, including the higher sense of perception that is activated through the encounter with the event-based works, and are thereby accounted for. This recognition of *affect* in the mediation of idea is the most significant insight to emerge from the research project because it affirms how art raises philosophical ideas in an implicit manner.

This enquiry is distinguished by adhering to the protocols that proceed from art practice rather than those determined by the protocols of philosophers or art critics. I have throughout the research project endeavoured to maintain a candid and honest reading of these works so that this enquiry fulfils its task of contributing to the discourse on contemporary art and the development of contemporary aesthetics. The thesis concludes by relating five key insights that emerge from the enquiry. By detailing these insights the thesis seeks to disclose how an enquiry through a post-conceptual art practice can provide an appropriate and under-examined site to investigate the philosophical character of contemporary art.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE COMPLEX ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHILOSOPHY

### 1.0 Overview

This chapter contextualises the enquiry by analysing contemporary art through a series of discussions that focus specifically on its complex engagement with philosophy. The term contemporary art is a specific designator and this analysis focuses on three theorists' separate but converging readings of contemporary art; the Marxist philosopher and art critic Peter Osborne, the art critic and theorist Hal Foster and the philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto. These theorists observe how the contestation of traditional aesthetics through developments in art practice informed a contemporary reading of art. By addressing the complex engagement between contemporary art and philosophy this analysis of contemporary art introduces the notion that art is a domain for thought.

The first discussion provides a précis of aesthetics from its emergence as a philosophical discourse in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This précis draws on Paul Oskar Kristeller's analysis of aesthetics and his more recent critic Jonathon Rée to outline how the general understanding of aesthetics as a philosophical discourse on art emerged and how this in turn privileged philosophy over art as the domain for thought.

The second discussion focuses on Foster's seminal essay "The Crux of Minimalism" and Osborne's analysis of conceptualism to analyse how developments in art practice troubled aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> This discussion details how the neo avant-garde (a term coined by Foster to designate minimal and post-minimal art practices that include pop and conceptualism) interrogated the modernist interpretation of art as an idealised form and consequently introduced the notion of art as a domain for thought.

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<sup>16</sup> Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" in *The Return of the Real, The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge/London, Massachusetts/England: The MIT Press, 1996).

The third discussion focuses on Osborne's reading of contemporary art *as* post-conceptual to detail how post-conceptualism presents a new form of engagement between art and philosophy than that designated by traditional aesthetics. This discussion reveals what Osborne means by the "philosophical character" of contemporary art by detailing four key insights that he identifies as the legacy of conceptual art that collectively designate a post-conceptual practice.<sup>17</sup> This discussion contextualises the research project by presenting a post-conceptual practice and also substantiates my decision to conduct an enquiry into the condition of thought in contemporary art through a post-conceptual practice.

The fourth discussion details how thought emerged as a condition for contemporary art through an analysis of Danto's *End of Art* thesis. This discussion outlines how Danto configures his thesis that asserts the condition of thought in art in response to Hegel's End of Art thesis by relocating thought from the external source of philosophy to the immanent site of art.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.1 Aesthetics and the Engagement Between Art and Philosophy

This précis outlines how the general understanding of aesthetics as a philosophical discourse of art emerged as a particular relationship between art and philosophy. Because philosophy is understood to interpret art, this general reading of aesthetics locates thought in the realm of philosophy. The current interpretation of aesthetics as 'the philosophy of art' is a comparatively recent configuration, established by Hegel in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> The term aesthetics has repeatedly been misused, or rather used insufficiently, to describe the formal qualities of an art object. This conventional interpretation of aesthetics glosses over its complexity. Osborne identifies an ambiguity surrounding aesthetics. He maintains this ambiguity stems from the numerous interpretations that arose since its emergence from philosophy to a discourse in its own right in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Osborne notes how the subjective nature of aesthetics, which will be outlined shortly, undermined its academic status and maintains that a desire to

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<sup>17</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* (Dec. 1998), 135, accessed January 27, 2011, 16.

<sup>19</sup> This series of lectures was delivered in Berlin and compiled in 1835 by his publisher, Heinrich Gustav Hotho.

develop a more coherent discipline of academic worth led to the different interpretations of aesthetics since it first emerged as a genre of philosophical enquiry. Mario Perniola furthers this point by identifying “turns” that have occurred within the development of aesthetics since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He observes how interpretations of aesthetics emerged, and continue to emerge, through a series of ongoing ruptures within previous aesthetic categories.

As the discourse of aesthetics is multifaceted and still evolving, it is necessary to look at Paul Oskar Kristeller’s analysis of how aesthetics became connected to art and also Jonathon Rée’s more recent pronouncements on Kristeller. Kristeller’s influential survey of the arts from antiquity to the 18<sup>th</sup> century reveals the emergence of art in its modern sense as coinciding with the emergence of aesthetics.<sup>20</sup> Philosophical reflections on beauty and art had been around in Western thought prior to the emergence of aesthetics. The Third Earl of Shaftsbury and the Scottish Enlightenment thinker Francis Hutcheson looked to Plato’s insights that connected beauty and morality to form their own theories.<sup>21</sup> However, although Shaftsbury and Hutcheson are credited with writing on issues surrounding aesthetics, Kristeller proposes Alexander Baumgarten as the founder of aesthetics in its modern conception insofar as he conceived a general theory of the arts as a separate philosophical discipline. Kristeller observes that Baumgarten secured the term aesthetics from the Greek *aisthānesthai* in his academic thesis *Meditationes Philosophica* (1735) (Reflections on Poetry) and his unfinished textbooks *Aesthetica I* (1750) and *Aesthetica II* (1758).

Kristeller proposes Baumgarten as the founder of aesthetics in its modern conception. Kristeller credits Baumgarten with reinvigorating the term aesthetics by focusing closely on its etymological meaning of “sensuous knowledge”, which, translated from the Greek means ‘perceive sensuously’. The enquiry into sensuous knowledge was further developed through J.G. Hamann in *Aesthetica in Nuce*, (1762). Baumgarten’s texts were used in an academic context to teach students how *aesthetica* “ought to be spoken or written about.”<sup>22</sup> Kristeller notes that in the decades after 1760 interest in aesthetics

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics,” in *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (London: Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> For more see The Third Earl of Shaftsbury and Francis Hutcheson *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), written as two treatises; the subject of the first is aesthetics – *Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* and the second morality – *Concerning Moral Good and Evil*.

<sup>22</sup> Rée, “The Aesthetic Theory of the Arts,” 58.

increased and courses were offered in universities on the subject and in literary criticism. However Baumgarten failed to develop this doctrine with reference to any of the arts other than poetry or eloquence. The composer Felix Mendelssohn criticised Baumgarten on this shortcoming and suggested that these aesthetic principles should be formulated so as to apply to visual art and music.

Jonathan Rée describes how Baumgarten's term aesthetics became connected with the fine arts. He identifies Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as re-launching Baumgarten's term to refer not just to the discipline of 'representing' sensory matters in discourse, but as a theoretical attempt to connect the different bodily senses to the various fine arts, including the non-discursive arts that Baumgarten had failed to consider.<sup>23</sup> Rée identifies Lessing's Laokoön linking the *bildende Künste* - the 'formative' or plastic arts of sculpture and painting - with aesthetics.<sup>24</sup> This link between the fine arts and aesthetics that we know today was further advanced by Kant's comprehensive attempt to integrate the system of the five fine arts (which had recently been expanded from the previous three that were established during the Renaissance) with judgments of beauty and the sublime through his theory of sensory experience in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790).<sup>25</sup>

Kant's public and highly prolific response to Baumgarten's thesis furthered the discourse, connecting it with the speculation of the nature of art. An acknowledgment of sensuous knowledge in Kant's *third critique* complicates quantifiable scientific analysis. By positing the notion of "disinterestedness", Kant's critique increased the gap between the discourse of art and empiricism. Kant's notion of "purposiveness without purpose" ran counter to the previous role of art and enabled a more complex understanding of the previous Platonic connection between beauty and the good.<sup>26</sup> The subjective nature of a discourse on sensuous knowledge was not without issue as it complicated the straightforward Platonic interpretation of the didactic function of art.

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<sup>23</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoön; An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Rée, "The Aesthetic Theory of the Arts," 58 - 59.

<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that Kant rejected the whole idea of a theory of arts or artistic value in his first critique, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

<sup>26</sup> For more on this see Andre Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, second (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 2.

Rée distinguishes Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* (posthumously published in 1835) as instituting aesthetics as a philosophical discourse on art through his synthesis of Plato, Lessing and Kant's philosophical conjectures.<sup>27</sup> Hegel's interpretation of aesthetics is key to establishing philosophy as the domain for thought because it asserts the Platonic conception of philosophy as the locus of truth. Although Hegel is associated with Romanticism through his contribution to *The Oldest System Programme for German Idealism* (1796), his End of Art thesis (which will be discussed in greater detail shortly) articulates his departure from the Romantic conception of art as the source of truth.<sup>28</sup> Although Hegel claims that art invites intellectual consideration, he maintains it is "not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is".<sup>29</sup> By claiming the possibility of philosophy 'knowing' art, Hegel affirms the Platonic conception of philosophy as the locus of truth and places thinking within the sole jurisdiction of philosophy. Privileging philosophy as the domain for thought advances a hierarchical relationship between the disciplines. Under these terms the relationship of philosophy to art is that of interpretation.

This very brief précis on aesthetics invariably glosses over more nuanced interpretations theorised by Kristeller and Rée. However, it is offered as an outline of how the conception of aesthetics as the philosophical interpretation of art emerged. To recap, Baumgarten is essentially accepted as proposing a theory of sensuous knowledge as a counterpoint to logic as a theory of intellectual knowledge. The interpretation of aesthetics as an enquiry of beauty and taste is generally associated with the British school, which includes Anthony Ashley Cooper, The Third Earl of Shaftsbury, Francis Hutcheson, who wrote *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and later David Hume.<sup>30</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's seminal *Laokoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) can be regarded as the first to link sensory knowledge with the fine arts. Following which Kant developed this link in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790). The development of aesthetics as philosophy's discourse

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<sup>27</sup>Rée, "The Aesthetic Theory of the Arts," 58.

<sup>28</sup> It is acknowledged that this manifesto is handwritten by Hegel, however many consider the work to be that of Schelling. Please see Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, second (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 55. This statement can be found in Robert Kudielka, "According to What: Art and the Philosophy of the "End of Art," *History and Theory*, Dec. 1998: 87-101.

<sup>29</sup> *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. by T. M. Knox. Oxford; The Clarendon Press, 1975, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), n.p.



on art was firmly established by Hegel in his lectures which were posthumously published as his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1835).

It is important to note that developments in philosophical thought and art practice, most notably literature, prompted further interpretations of aesthetics. For philosophers and poets associated with Jena Romanticism ideas relating to the emergence of subjectivity were bound with aesthetics. This position is articulated by the German politico-philosophical manifesto *The Oldest System Programme* ... which places the ‘aesthetic act’ as the ‘highest act of reason’.<sup>31</sup> Although Hegel is understood to have contributed to this manifesto (along with Schelling and Hölderlin) his assertion of the Platonic conception of philosophy as the locus of truth departs from the Romantic notion of art as the ultimate bearer of truth.<sup>32</sup> The Romantic notion of art as Absolute asserts art as a potential site for thought. The association between contemporary art and Romanticism derives from the fact that our understanding of art in its contemporary sense is informed by the conception of art advanced by Jena Romanticism.<sup>33</sup> This association will be discussed in greater detail through an analysis of *Romantic Conceptualism* in Chapter Three.

## 1.2 The Troubling of Aesthetics in Art Practice

Looking back at the canon of art in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we see how a Hegelian conception of aesthetics as the philosophical interpretation of art was contested by practices associated with the early avant-garde, most notably Dada. Performances at the *Cabaret Voltaire*, Kurt Schwitter’s sound poems, (which he described as “psychological collages” and Duchamp’s *ready-made*) explicitly attacked the notion of aesthetics as the discourse of art. It was impossible to thematise Dada art

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<sup>31</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Osborne raised this point in a round table conversation held in NCAD in January 2014 with Declan Long, and PhD researchers Alison Pilkington, Rebecca O’ Dwyer and myself. No transcript of this informal discussion exists. However, this insight is captured in Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London/New York: Verso, 2013). There is an issue worth flagging: although Mallarmé is not a Romantic poet, his poetry operates in a similar manner to the Romantic fragment in that it operates as an open process that requires, or ‘demands’, the reader’s engagement. Like the Romantic fragment, Mallarmé’s poems have an indeterminate quality that requires the reader to complete these works through the faculty of perception and imagination. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

works and gestures through aesthetic categories, for instance, Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) resisted traditional aesthetic interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

In his essay "The Crux of Minimalism" Foster observes how this attack on aesthetics re-emerged in the late 1960s through minimalism. Foster's analysis of the neo-avant-garde through minimalism informs his reading of contemporary art. Foster names this retroactive process of returning to previous artistic configurations as *anti-aesthetic*. Although the term *anti-aesthetic* undoubtedly acknowledges the early avant-garde (exemplified by Duchamp's anti-aesthetic gesture of the *readymade*), Foster does not use this term to describe a position. He uses it to describe a practice that encourages more critical engagement with previous artistic forms and ideas from the field of art and theory. Foster formulates his contemporary reading of art by re-evaluating minimalism in relation to practices associated with the early avant-garde.<sup>35</sup> Like Duchamp's *readymade*, artworks defined as minimal, which were often fabricated in industrial factories, resisted interpretation as they did not comply with the aesthetic requirements of the idealised art form. Foster focuses on the practices of Robert Morris, Donald Judd and Tony Smith and observes how by disrupting the modernist reading of art as autonomous minimalist practices contested the relevancy of aesthetics. Morris and Judd's practices also included critical writings on art upon which Foster draws in his analysis. He notes how Judd's redefinition of the artistic form as a "specific object" complicates modernist aesthetic categories by undoing the modernist interpretation of art as an idealised autonomous form.<sup>36</sup> Judd's definition is logical when we learn that his works, like those of his fellow minimalists, were fabricated in an industrial factory.<sup>37</sup> The departure from

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<sup>34</sup> As Stephen C. Foster observes, "The fabrication of Schwitter's collages is not simply a combinational task of fitting elements together; nor is it just an assembly of discovered materials. It is a more complex process of the constant reinvention and exploration of dialogues." Stephen C. Foster, "Event Structures and Art Situations," ed. Stephen C. Foster (London: UMI Research Press, 1988), 277.

<sup>35</sup> Although the prefix 'anti' suggests the elimination of aesthetics, Foster hesitates to do this completely, claiming, "The adventures of the aesthetic make up one of the greatest narratives of modernity." Foster's appreciation of the critical capacity of aesthetic enquiry aligns with Rancière, who also registers aesthetics as not just a regime for identifying art, but one that "carries a politics, or metapolitics, within it." Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009). Foster develops from Adorno, who considers "aesthetic as subversive, a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world." However, claiming the criticality of aesthetics is illusive, and responds to Antonio Gramsci's critical demand for a new strategy of "interference". Foster draws attention to the requirement for an expansion of the privileged aesthetic realm by identifying the emergence of new aesthetic experiences not readily thematised by conventional aesthetics, formulating anti-aesthetics to reactivate the space of aesthetics as a critical interstice. In his anthology, Foster presents anti-aesthetics as expanding the privileged realm by "signalling a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature, that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic (i.e. feminism) or rooted in the vernacular." In this way anti-aesthetics does not close down but instead expands aesthetic enquiry so that it might capture more critical and multifarious forms of art practice. For more see Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955-1968* (New York: D.A.P., 2002).

<sup>37</sup> The company that fabricated *Die* (1967) had a sign that read, "You specify it; we fabricate it."

an overarching emphasis on the medium-specificity of the artwork that had been generally preserved since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century undermined formal traditional aesthetic categories that were no longer equipped to engage with Judd and his cohort's "specific objects".

Foster analyses this complication of aesthetics by minimalism, observing how Morris viewed this as productive in his essay *Notes on Sculpture, Parts I and II*. Morris ends *Part I* claiming that the emergence of aesthetic terms that are not thematised by formal aesthetics potentialises a "new freedom" in artistic practice.<sup>38</sup> This sense of freedom can be registered in the radical shift from previous artistic concerns instigated by minimalist practices. In *Part II*, Morris responds to Tony Smith's comments on the scale of his *Die* (1968).<sup>39</sup> By claiming "The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic", Morris shifts the priority from the art object to an emergent concern with the encounter as the subject/object dynamic.<sup>40</sup> Foster points to Smith's famous anecdote of his night ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike published in *Artforum* in 1966, "The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized" where Smith articulates how this experience did "something for me that art had never done." This emphasis on experience is reasserted when he states, "I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most paintings look pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it."<sup>41</sup>

By disrupting a visual bias associated with late modernism, the minimalist concern with experience instigated a radical shift away from a modernist reading of art as an idealised and autonomous form. As Rée notes, this bias creates a habit of seeing the world with a false kind of impassivity, "as if it was a kind of picture."<sup>42</sup> Foster reads this shift as informing the foundations for a contemporary reading of art. The minimalist emphasis

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part II," in *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 230-235 (LA, California: University of California Press, 1996), 229-230.

<sup>39</sup> "Q. Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer. A. I was not making a monument. Q. Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top. A. I was not making an object. Tony Smith's replies to questions about his six-foot steel cube." Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part II," 229-230.

<sup>40</sup> Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part II," 232.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," in *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1968), 386 and *Artforum*, Dec. 1966, quoted in Robert Storr's essay, "A Man of Parts," in MoMA's catalogue of the Tony Smith exhibition

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Rée examines the bias towards vision in his commentary on 20th century modernity. Rée looks to German philosopher Oswald Spengler's theory of culture in *Decline of the West* (1918). Spengler notes the underlying principles differ from culture to culture and observes through the development of perspective that the principles in the West became oriented by vision. Jonathan Rée, "The Aesthetic Theory of the Arts," in *From an Aesthetic Point of View, Philosophy, Art and the Senses*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Serpents Tail, 2000).

on the subject's experience over the formal qualities of work prompted minimalism's most vocal critic, Michael Fried, to charge minimalism as the "negation of art".<sup>43</sup> Fried articulated how minimalism threatened the "disciplinary order in modern aesthetics."<sup>44</sup> Fried coins the term theatricality to wager his claim that minimalism negates art because it denies the viewer a proper aesthetic experience by initiating an immediate encounter with their physicality. Foster reflects on Fried's analysis that argues that these physical forms of engagement situate the viewer's experience in a palpable presence of the here and now. Fried maintains that it is impossible to approach these artworks as complete because, he maintains, "the contingency of perception" undoes the "purity of conception." Fried claims minimalism disrupts an idealised notion of art by identifying the "special complicity that a work exhorts from the beholder."<sup>45</sup> Although Fried coined the term theatricality as a term of derision, Foster observes how Morris reinterprets theatricality to define the overarching minimalist concern with the subject's experience. Instead of approaching contingency as problematic, this quality was deemed productive because in the way that it relocated the act of thinking from the privileged domain of philosophy to the domain of the subject through their encounter with the work. Like Morris, Foster sees the value of this "dialectical moment" which returns the viewer to their own subjectivity in the way that it disrupts a transcendental idealised aesthetic experience. As he observes, "Thus far from idealist, the minimalist work complicates the purity of conception with the contingency of perception, of the body in a particular space and time."<sup>46</sup>

Foster also uses the term neo-avant-garde to designate conceptualism. This movement that developed out of minimalism further problematised traditional aesthetics. The conceptual mandate of Art as Idea that reassigned the role of the art object as a functionary to mediate idea radically undermined the hegemony of philosophy in aesthetics. The various processes associated with conceptual art practice, such as Joseph Kosuth's use of philosophical enquiry, Art and Language's archival practices and Robert Barry's gestures in which thought was the primary medium demonstrated clearly how formal aesthetics lacked the critical resources to thematise these works which

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<sup>43</sup> Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 40.

functioned primarily to mediate idea.<sup>47</sup> In his essay “Art After Philosophy” Kosuth discusses how conceptual artworks demonstrate the separation between aesthetics and art. He presents his case by arguing that “art’s existence as a tautology which enables art to remain ‘aloof’ from philosophical presumptions.”<sup>48</sup>

Osborne observes how conceptualism profoundly challenged aesthetics by introducing a new engagement between philosophy and art. Kosuth’s direct use of philosophy in *One and Three Chairs* (1965) complicates aesthetics by shifting the role of philosophy from the external realm to the internal domain of art, demonstrating an alternative role of philosophy from that of interpretation. Osborne describes how this seminal work *One and Three Chairs* literally performs Wittgenstein’s philosophical theories of language by presenting the relation between language, picture and referent. It is generally accepted that Kosuth’s “Art After Philosophy”, established the term conceptualism to define an artistic movement whose primary motivations were to “question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art’s nature.”<sup>49</sup> Kosuth argues that the explication of philosophical ideas through presentation affirms the philosophical status of the artwork so much so that he claims “art is analogous to an analytic proposition.”<sup>50</sup>

Osborne draws attention to the difficulty of this relationship between art and philosophy that “verges on complete identification.”<sup>51</sup> Although Kosuth makes the general claim that art *is* philosophy, Osborne observes that Kosuth’s understanding of philosophy is particular. Kosuth’s conceptual mandate rests on the principles of certain analytical philosophy, being derived directly from A.J. Ayer’s logical positivism.<sup>52</sup> Osborne concedes the problem with a dependence of conceptual art upon a specific philosophical

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<sup>47</sup> Art and Language was a collaborative project developed by Michael Baldwin, Mel Ramsden, David Bainbridge and Harold Hurrell in 1968. This British conceptual collaboration drew on linguistic philosophy to examine the ideological presuppositions underlying art institutionalisation. They presented this enquiry through discussion and the exhibition of their archive of research material displayed as indexes and their journal *Art and Language* through which they formed a network with US conceptual artists such as Kosuth.

<sup>48</sup> Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy After*, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 56.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 158-178 (Boston, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 161.

<sup>51</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 58.

Kosuth’s definition of conceptual art has also been questioned by critic Jörg Heiser. Heiser draws attention to the problematic of a canon that excludes from the conceptual art system anything that might complicate the logical, analytical mandate of art as idea. However, although Heiser identifies this shortcoming, he appreciates why certain conceptual artists such as Kosuth and Art and Language established such rigid tenets because the movement was vehemently contested from the outset.

<sup>52</sup> Osborne furthers this argument by making an arguable claim that logical positivism is now “long discredited”. “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 58.

system because it rules out the range of philosophical systems of thought such as ontology, phenomenology and existentialism which are within the framework of the continental tradition.<sup>53</sup> As Osborne notes, “After Wittgenstein, Kosuth assures us, ‘continental philosophy need not seriously be considered’.”<sup>54</sup> Kosuth’s position is therefore dependant on a tautological definition of art and dependant on a particular philosophy of logic. The problem with the dependence of analytical or strong conceptual art upon “specific (often highly problematic, but also inadvertently socially representative) philosophical standpoints” is its reduction to a particular reading of art and that his reading is based on a particular philosophical theory.<sup>55</sup> For Kosuth, conceptual art is “an art that *recognizes* that ‘art’s “art condition” is a conceptual state’ in that the artistic form is “conceptually irrelevant to the condition of art.”<sup>56</sup> Osborne interprets Kosuth’s proposition as a “*regulative fantasy*” because it collapses art’s identity as analytic propositions. Osborne argues that this conflation of art and analytic philosophy simultaneously introduces and forecloses the semiological character of visual art by “abstracting from all questions of medium, form, visibility, and materiality, while nonetheless continuing to pose them implicitly in his presumption of art’s difference from other forms of signification.”<sup>57</sup>

Not all conceptual artists subscribed to this “exclusive” or “strong” reading of conceptualism that Kosuth advanced.<sup>58</sup> Adrian Piper articulated her dissatisfaction with these restricted parameters by claiming, “If we have to be concerned with one particular concept to be a conceptualist, something’s gone badly wrong.”<sup>59</sup> Although Piper

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<sup>53</sup> For more continental philosophy see Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, Second (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994) and Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 58.

<sup>55</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 57.

<sup>56</sup> Osborne identifies three main components that define Kosuth’s conceptualism, they are, “*linguistic reduction, psychologism and the collapse of the distinction between art and criticism.*” This collapse of the artwork and art criticism is exemplified by the artistic gestures of Art and Language, which “took the ultimate form of the attempt to efface the categorical difference between art and criticism in the polemical presentation of critical discourse as itself art, in the journal *Art and Language.*”

Osborne describes how conceptualism sought to transfer the “*cultural authority*” of philosophy, upheld since the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the locus of meaning to the artwork. As outlined in Chapter One, in this way conceptualist practices developed the critique of aesthetics by their “wholesale rejection of the modernist paradigm” that was asserted by minimalism. Their departure from the principles of modernism, evidenced by mandate art as idea, extended the horizon of contemporary art by attesting the primacy of art for thought. By using more communicative and didactic artistic processes conceptualism undermined the hierarchical role of art criticism. However, Osborne describes the conflation of the discipline of art and the discipline of analytic philosophy as a “*regulative fantasy*”, observing how “exclusive” conceptual practices sought to uphold intellectual adequacy and retain autonomy

<sup>57</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 59.

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 49.

<sup>59</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” 55 – 56.

contests a strict conceptual reading of art as an analytical enterprise her practice sustains a rigorous engagement with philosophy. It is noteworthy that Piper, now philosopher, had little interest in the idea of an ontology of art.<sup>60</sup> Although Piper's practice does not adhere to Kosuth's conceptual reading of art as analytical enterprise, her work provides a domain for thought. As Osborne notes, her artistic and philosophical interests are not invested in the philosophical conception of what art is but explore the "broader metaphysical notions of space, time and self-hood."<sup>61</sup> Like Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), Piper's work, such as *Funk Lesson* (1982-84), raises philosophical questions, but unlike Kosuth, these questions are linked with philosophical traditions associated with the continental school of philosophy. By confronting issues of race and gender, Piper's practice expands the 'strict' reading of conceptualism towards a post-conceptual reading of art.

Comparing Piper's approach to philosophy with Kosuth's reveals the nuances that delineate the multifarious relationships between art and philosophy. For example, Kosuth claims art *as* philosophy. Conversely, Art and Language read philosophy as art. The expansion of Piper's practice into Kantian philosophy demonstrates the profound bind in her practice with philosophy. Piper considers herself as both an artist and a philosopher. An acknowledgment of Piper's status as a professor of philosophy within the discursive space of contemporary art demonstrates how philosophy is acknowledged within the rubric of art. This is distinguished from her reception in domain of philosophy where her status as a conceptual artist is treated separate from her academic status by philosophy scholars. This symbiotic relationship between art and philosophy continues and recent contemporary practices, such as that of, Thomas Hirschhorn, demonstrate that philosophical enquiry is at the core of art practice. Hirschhorn works in close collaboration with the philosopher Marcus Steinweg to develop monumental installations that are dedicated to thinkers and philosophers. These works include *Spinoza Monument* (1999), *Deleuze Monument* (2000), *Bataille Monument*, (2002) and *Gramsci Monument* (2013).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Although Piper is most widely recognised as a conceptual artist she is also a philosopher who has taught at Georgetown, Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, and UCSD. She became the first tenured African American woman professor in the field of philosophy in 1987. She was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus by the American Philosophical Association in 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," 55 – 56.

<sup>62</sup> These monuments have to date been constructed in areas of social housing with participation from the local community.

This analysis details how developments in art practice complicated a reading of aesthetics as the philosophical interpretation of art and relocated thought from the external domain of philosophy to the immanent space of art troubling of aesthetics through art practice. These developments in art practice are consequential to a contemporary understanding of art that asserts thought as a condition of art.

### 1.3 Contemporary Art as Post-Conceptual

When Osborne speaks of contemporary art he does not use the term contemporary as a chronological descriptor to define present artistic practices. Instead Osborne sees contemporary art as being premised on a “complex historical experience” that followed the destruction of the ontological significance of previous artistic conditions.<sup>63</sup> Osborne maintains the term contemporary is one that imposes critical demands on art by asserting a continued interrogation of the meanings and possibilities of art that was initiated by conceptualism. By advancing contemporary art *as* post-conceptual, Osborne presents contemporary art as developing from the legacy of conceptualism. The four insights that Osborne observes as defining the conceptual legacy are detailed to elucidate how they collectively designate both contemporary art and a post-conceptual practice. These insights also reveal what identifies the “philosophical character” of contemporary art by presenting the complex bind between contemporary art and philosophy that this enquiry explores.

The first insight Osborne identifies is the “ineliminability but radical insufficiency of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork.”<sup>64</sup> By challenging the aesthetic definition of the artwork Osborne posits the conceptual legacy as instituting a conceptual aspect in a contemporary appreciation of art. However, the failure of conceptualism to completely eliminate the artistic form demonstrates how the inevitability of the artistic form and how the sensible aspect of form affect how we encounter works. Osborne captures this dualistic engagement that takes place through this encounter by describing contemporary art as the reflective mediation of concepts and affects. Although

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<sup>63</sup>Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 27.



conceptual art places emphasis on the idea, the reception of idea is ultimately communicated through a sensible medium.<sup>65</sup> Osborne registers how post-conceptualism critically re-evaluates the notion of the dematerialised art object by acknowledging the inevitability of form and making use of the distinguishing features.<sup>66</sup> Osborne's first insight draws attention to the unavoidable sensible dimension of the artwork and that this aspect informs how ideas in art are mediated.

The second insight that Osborne identifies in the legacy of conceptualism is the necessary conceptuality of art. As noted in the previous discussion, the conceptual mandate of art as idea, and the understanding of the artwork as functioning within the mediation of idea asserted the primacy of art for thought. However, rather than presenting thought as an analytical enterprise, as Kosuth promotes, Osborne's observation of contemporary art as the reflective mediation of concepts and affects reinstates the sensible dimension of the work as playing a part in its conceptual framework. In this way, the philosophical character of contemporary art is not merely dependant on the philosophy that is employed, but on the manner in which it is employed through the formation and presentation of the artwork.

The third insight that Osborne registers is the critical requirement of the anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials. This is a development from Osborne's first insight by registering a "movement from an absolute anti-aesthetic to the recognition in post-conceptualism of its own inevitable form." This awareness of form, be it a text, utterance, gesture, object, etc further affirms how the sensible dimension cannot be overlooked because it plays a fundamental role in the conceptuality of the work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 43.

<sup>66</sup> Sol le Witt advanced the conceptual mandate of Art as Idea in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967). The conceptual mandate was developed by Joseph Kosuth, who claimed in his manifesto essay "Art After Philosophy" (1969) that "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work." Osborne observes although Le Witt's essay was not the first to identify a particular kind of art as distinctly conceptual, it was through Le Witt's *Paragraphs* that the idea achieved an extended critical thematisation. Le Witt's *Paragraphs* "took hold in the US art world as a unifying framework for the self-understanding of an emergent body of work." (Osborne notes how the term 'concept' had been used previously in 1961 by Fluxus artist Henry Flynt to describe a constituent material of an artwork, "of which the material is *concepts* as the material of e.g. music is sound." Furthermore, George Maciunas credits Flynt with formulating this notion as early as 1954 in his *Genealogical Chart of Fluxus* (1968). Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) p.52. Sol Le Witt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, 1969," *Artforum*, June 1967. Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy (1969)," in *Art After Philosophy After, Collected Writings 1966-1990*, ed. Gabrielle Guercio (M.I.T. Press, 1991).

<sup>67</sup> Peter Osborne, "Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual" (paper presented at: Fondazione Antonio Ratti, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010), 11.

Osborne's fourth insight is the post-conceptual awareness of the multifarious forms that constitute art. Osborne reflects on the numerous forms that constitute art to identify an essential "transcategorical" nature of post-conceptualism.<sup>68</sup> The term transcategorical not only captures the range of forms and processes that constitute a post-conceptual practice, but also the range of disciplines that are now incorporated into the framework of contemporary art. To explain this quality Osborne reflects on Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), observing the title *Spiral Jetty* does not refer to a single, discrete art form, that is the artwork sited in the Salt Lake in Utah, but is also used to refer to an essay reflecting on this work and a film documenting its construction. Smithson's gesture of using a single title to refer to multiple artistic forms does two things: it asserts the artwork as an open-process, by acknowledging a work that is constituted by multiple forms while inscribing 'non-artistic' disciplines within the framework and legacy of art practice.

These insights that Osborne identifies within the legacy of conceptualism collectively designate post-conceptualism and accordingly contemporary art. By acknowledging the problematic relationship between contemporary art and aesthetics, Osborne discloses the complexity of the "philosophical character" of contemporary art. Instead of positing aesthetics as redundant, Osborne sees the troubling of traditional aesthetics (as the philosophical interpretation of art) in the conceptual legacy as informing its contemporaneous status. By positing contemporary art as post-conceptual Osborne registers contemporary art as maintaining a complex (albeit contentious) relationship between art and aesthetics that was paradoxically sustained through its contestation by conceptual art. Acknowledging how the artistic form (be it object or non-object based temporary art forms such as conceptual propositions or events) informs one's experience of art demonstrates that it could be deemed unproductive to completely eliminate some form of aesthetics that accounts for sensation from the framework of contemporary art. The inevitability of the artistic form prohibits a definitive rejection of aesthetics because sensory knowledge invariably comes into play in the reception of idea. Although Osborne does not explicitly identify thought per se, his insights gesture towards this condition by demonstrating how one engages with contemporary art.

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<sup>68</sup> Osborne, "Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual," 10.

#### 1.4 Asserting the Condition of Thought in Contemporary Art

Unlike Foster and Osborne's analysis, Danto's thesis explicitly asserts the condition of thought in contemporary art by positing that the essence of post-historical art is its primacy for thought. In this way Danto captures the insights from Osborne's and Foster's analyses in a single thesis. Like Foster and Osborne, Danto also responds to the question of aesthetics through a retrospective analysis of developments in art practice. By liberating art from the "philosophical disenfranchisement of art", Danto repositions meaning from the external site of philosophy to the internal realm of the artwork.<sup>69</sup> However, this theoretical movement of distancing philosophy from art is not without issue, as some argue, his thesis performs a double movement that transforms art into a philosophical enterprise.<sup>70</sup> Danto's perceived conflation of art with philosophy reaffirms that the relationship between contemporary art and philosophy is complex.

Although Danto does not use the term contemporary, his term *post-historical*, which describes post-minimal practices from the late 1960's such as pop art and conceptualism, aligns with Osborne's contemporary reading of art. Danto's reading of art rearticulates to some extent what Osborne identifies as a transcategorical quality. The term post-historical articulates the conclusive fact that there are no longer any qualifications for art. Danto develops the term post-historical by reflecting on specific artworks that resist categorisation. For Danto Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) exemplifies this moment because of the impossibility to differentiate it from non-art objects. Without stylistic or philosophical constraints Danto proposes that the final moment in the meta-narrative of art has been marked. However, instead of refuting those that resist categorisation as the end of art and approaching the post-historical as a situation where the institution of art becomes dismantled, Danto argues that this resistance to philosophical interpretation reveals a new capacity for art – the potential for art to think itself.

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<sup>69</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* (Dec. 1998), 135, accessed January 27, 2011, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00182656%28199812%2937%3A4%3C127%3ATEOAAP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7>

<sup>70</sup> A volume of *History and Theory*, is dedicated to "Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art". For more see: Noel Carroll, "The End of Art?," *History and Theory*, Dec 1998: 17-29 and Jane Forsey, "Philosophical Disenfranchisement in Danto's 'End of Art'," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59, no. 4 (Autumn 2001), 403-409.

In *The End of Art* thesis Danto asserts the primacy of art for thought in response to Hegel's homonymous thesis. In order to explicate how Danto re-conceives the role of art within the historical narrative it is necessary to briefly outline how Danto revisits Hegel's thesis of the "exaltation of philosophy over art" and the implications of this in relation to aesthetics and art.<sup>71</sup> Danto's thesis develops from Hegel's philosophy of art to engage with the complex engagement between art and philosophy in his own zeitgeist and reassert thought within the domain of art.

Hegel's philosophy of art focuses on different forms of engagement between the disciplines of art and philosophy that inform his zeitgeist. Because Hegel's philosophy of art identifies the various phases of art within its *classification* it is regularly interpreted as a history of art. However, Danto maintains that the real focus of Hegel's philosophy is not an analysis of the history of art, but a philosophical enterprise seeking to develop the conception of *Geist*. Hegel uses this term to define the capacity of self-understanding, identifying art as an expression of *Geist*. Hegel's End of Art thesis broadly focuses on the progress in self-understanding by examining the stages within the overarching narrative of art history.

Hegel registers the adaptive nature of art by noting how the function of art changes over time. He identifies three different stages in the narrative of art history to present the emergence of self-understanding, classifying these as symbolic, classical, and romantic.<sup>72</sup> Hegel's associate Schelling had previously conducted a similar enterprise through his *categorisation* of the arts. The first stage, which Hegel identifies as symbolic, corresponds with Schelling's identification of a Platonic category, as both are mimetic. The terms classical and romantic used in Hegel's *classification* conform with Schelling's use of these terms within his *categorisation*. Both philosophers read Aristotle's classical stage as sustaining the cathartic capacity of art. Similarly, both philosophers conceive the romantic understanding of the faculty of art as a touchstone to or an embodiment of the Divine. Hegel identifies art's "highest vocation" in

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<sup>71</sup> Arthur C Danto, "Hegel's End of Art Thesis," in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. D.E. Wellbury and J. Ryan, 535-40 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>72</sup> Hegel's *classification* of the arts corresponds with categories previously configured by his associate Friedrich von Schelling in *The Philosophy of Art* (1802-03).

Romanticism because he observes these practices allow “man’s rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object.”<sup>73</sup>

Danto maintains that Hegel approached art as a “staging area in the epic of self-knowledge”.<sup>74</sup> When Hegel talks about Romanticism, he maintains, “The impression they make is of a more reflective kind, and what they arouse in us needs a higher touchstone and a different test”.<sup>75</sup> Hegel’s *End of Art* defines a new development of self-understanding in his zeitgeist.<sup>76</sup> Hegel identifies an adjustment from the romantic relationship to art, articulating this in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which state, “Art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it.”<sup>77</sup> From Hegel’s statement it is clear that he no longer sees art as capable of developing *Geist*. Hegel develops this argument by claiming that, “The peculiar nature of artistic production and of works of art no longer fills our highest need. We have got beyond venerating works of art as divine and worshipping them.”<sup>78</sup> By calling an end to art, Hegel declares philosophy as the sole discipline capable of a developed engagement with self-knowledge and more transcendental forms of thought.

Danto interprets Hegel’s End of Art thesis as the “exaltation of philosophy over art” because it concludes the role of art within an overarching philosophical narrative.<sup>79</sup> Although Hegel is associated with Schelling and other German romantic philosophers and poets such as Schiller and Novalis, Hegel’s thesis identifies the limitations that he observes in art, maintaining a counter position to a romantic understanding of art as superior to philosophy. Hegel observes his zeitgeist as heralding a departure from a romantic understanding of art because of an emergent interest and preoccupation with taste associated with 18<sup>th</sup> century British aesthetics.<sup>80</sup> Hegel distrusts this preoccupation, maintaining that it demonstrates a schism in the previous relationship with art, stating, “Taste is directed only to the external surface on which feelings play,” and continues,

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<sup>73</sup> George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans T.M Knox (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), 5 & 31

<sup>74</sup> Danto, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 31

<sup>76</sup> Danto, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 296-297

<sup>79</sup> Danto, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis*, 6.

<sup>80</sup> Aesthetics as an enquiry of taste and beauty was advanced by British philosophers including David Hume, The Third Earl of Shaftsbury and Rev. Francis Hutcheson.

“So-called ‘good taste’ takes fright at all the deeper effects of art.”<sup>81</sup> As a consequence, Hegel believes art could no longer be conceived as a “touchstone” to the Absolute when treated as an object of study. Furthermore, by defining art as the “sensuous appearing of the *Idea*” Hegel positions art as inferior to philosophy because it is reliant on the sensuous and thus transient. In the Hegelian sense, only ideas and speculative philosophy can sever this connection and remain absolute.<sup>82</sup> By drawing a conclusion to romanticism, Hegel posits art as a transitional stage within the history of self-knowledge. Through this movement Hegel posits philosophy as superior to art by claiming philosophy as the only discipline capable to engage with transcendental forms of thought. Hegel defines his zeitgeist as “announc[ing] a new age of reason, in which thought is the substance of spirit.”<sup>83</sup>

Although Danto claims that one usually writes a narrative from a retrospective position, he observes Hegel’s philosophy as coextensive. Like Hegel’s enquiry into art, Danto’s is also coextensive as his philosophical defence of his thesis, titled *After the End of Art*, similarly “belongs to the same history that it analyses.”<sup>84</sup> Like Hegel, Danto also defines the master narrative of the history of art as a series of eras identifying the first as one of imitation and the following constituted by ideology. Danto develops this by reflecting on his zeitgeist and observes that there are no longer any qualifications for art. By defining his zeitgeist as post-historical Danto presents the end of this particular historical narrative. However, rather than approaching the end of art as a nihilistic project (in relation to the domain of art) he does not read this end as one of closure. Instead he considers the post-historical as an end to art as it was previously configured, one that liberates art from the constraints set by the terms of the previous artistic configurations. If thought is the substance of spirit, as Hegel maintains, then the role of art within the historical narrative may not necessarily be concluded under the new terms of art.

To explicate how the post-historical situation opens up the possibilities of art Danto looks to Warhol’s *Brillo Box* because it exemplifies an artwork that is impossible to

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<sup>81</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 166.

<sup>83</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 31.

<sup>84</sup> To contextualise “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense,” Danto references Hegel’s “great commentator” Alexandre Kojève who observes the coextensive aspect of Hegel’s philosophy. Danto, “The End of Art,” 128.

differentiate from a non-art object. As Danto explains, “nothing need mark the difference, outwardly, between Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the Brillo boxes in the supermarket.”<sup>85</sup> For Danto Warhol's *Brillo Box* defies aesthetic interpretation in the way that it complicates what qualifies as art. He articulates this simply by stating, “So what couldn't be an artwork for all one knew? The answer was that one could not tell by looking.”<sup>86</sup> Danto also looks to conceptual works, such as Piper's participatory work *Funk Lesson*. This work took place over two years as a series of social events where the artist, who is of black extraction taught white people the moves and history of funk. Rather than offering a discrete form that might be readily interpreted through conventional aesthetic categories *Funk Lesson* problematises the nature of art and simultaneously complicates the role of aesthetics by introducing forms of activities such as dance lessons that might be more readily associated with everyday activities.

Danto identifies a defining sense of disorder when describing the post-historical as a situation in which “anything goes.” However rather than approaching this “period of information disorder” in a pessimistic manner, Danto reflects on the emancipatory capacity of the post-historical moment.<sup>87</sup> Through the artworks resistance to categorisation, Danto conceives the primacy of art for thought. Within the aesthetic entropy of the post-historical moment Danto identifies a single universal essence in the plurality of contemporary art. This is outlined in his philosophical defence of his *End of Art* thesis in 1999, which explains a contradictory aspect of seeing the “possibility of a single, universal concept” only when “extreme differences” were available in art.<sup>88</sup> By reflecting on the multifarious categories of art Danto identifies a “single, universal essence of art.” Rather than seeking to entice the beholder with its “external surface on which feelings play,” Danto maintains the universal essence in the post-historical is precisely it's capacity for thought.<sup>89</sup>

Danto explains art's primacy for thought by observing how specific artworks such as Marcel Duchamp's *readymade* embody their own meaning. Although Duchamp's first

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<sup>85</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *After The End of Art, Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (USA: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>86</sup> Danto, “The End of Art,” 131.

<sup>87</sup> Danto, *After The End of Art*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Danto, *History and Theory*, 128.

<sup>89</sup> A similar reinterpretation of Hegel's End of Art can also be registered in Kosuth's essay, “Art as Philosophy” (1969), which switches the terms of Hegel's thesis by advancing art as the only discipline capable of a developed engagement with abstract thought.

*readymade* pre-dates the artworks that Danto uses in his configuration of the post-historical, he references this seminal artistic gesture because it heralds a new dialogue between philosophy and art.<sup>90</sup> In presenting objects that could not be determined by taste as good or bad, Duchamp's *readymade* set the conditions that mark the redundancy of formal aesthetics. Danto reflects on this moment in art practice as the liberation of art because it can no longer be conceived under a metaphysical jurisdiction of philosophy. Similarly, with Warhol's *Brillo Box*, Andre's *Bricks* and Piper's *Funk Lesson* it is impossible to know the meaning of art insofar as appearances are concerned because "anything could be a work of art."<sup>91</sup> Danto observes that this resistance to philosophical interpretation "liberates" art from "philosophical oppression" and in so doing asserts its primacy for thought.<sup>92</sup>

Danto's philosophical defence of his *End of Art* thesis published in 1998 claims, "[t]his is as much as philosophy can do for art – to get it to realise its freedom."<sup>93</sup> However many of Danto's commentators claim his thesis can be read as transforming art into a philosophical enterprise. For example, Horowicz and Huhn claim Danto conflates art with philosophy. They argue that instead of contesting Hegel's thesis as the "exaltation of philosophy over art" Danto's thesis conversely inscribes philosophy within the realm of art by asserting that the philosophical concerns informing the *readymade* are inscribed within the work itself.<sup>94</sup> Instead of seeing this artistic gesture as a "philosophical liberation" they describe it as a form of "philosophical infection."<sup>95</sup> They claim that in departing from an aesthetic model, which places philosophy outside of art, it paradoxically reasserts philosophy within the immanent space of art.

Forsey examines the double movement in Danto's thesis in a comparative analysis of *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* and *After the End of Art*. Forsey observes how in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* Danto claims art becomes enfranchised when distanced from the constraining demands of philosophical analysis.

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<sup>90</sup>As Danto states, "I owe to Duchamp the thought that from the perspective of art, aesthetics is in danger, since from the perspective of philosophy art is in danger and aesthetics the agency for dealing with it." Danto, *History and Theory*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Danto, *After The End of Art*, 13.

<sup>92</sup> Danto, "The End of Art," 131.

<sup>93</sup> Danto, "The End of Art," 134.

Gregg Horowitz and Tom Huhn, *The Wake of Art, Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 1998).14.

<sup>94</sup> Forsey, "Philosophical Disenfranchisement in Danto's 'End of Art'," 403.

<sup>95</sup> Horowitz and Huhn, *The Wake of Art*, 20.



In *After the End of Art* she maintains Danto reduces the artwork to a philosophical enterprise by describing art as “looking into the mirror and seeing philosophy as its own reflection.”<sup>96</sup> Although these papers were published at the same time they were not considered in conjunction within the philosophical academic arena. Despite the apparent contradictions, Forsey maintains that Danto had intended that they be considered together, quoting Danto who claimed that these papers “form a natural narrative order as though they were chapters in a single book with an overarching theme.”<sup>97</sup> Forsey suggests that these papers were disassociated from each other because they were assumed to be contradictory. Forsey’s analysis of these papers reveals that the engagement between art and philosophy in art practice is complex by identifying how Danto simultaneously conceives an ejection and integration of philosophy within his reading of art.

There are different readings of the relationship between art and philosophy that conflate the discipline. In the previous discussion I identify three, they are Kosuth’s reading of art as philosophy, Art and Language’s reading of philosophy as art and Steinweig’s understanding that both are analogous. Similarly Danto’s thesis can be approached as conflating art with philosophy. The problem with Danto’s thesis for a contemporary reading of art is that he disavows experience from the realm of art by claiming that to find art’s meaning one has to “turn from sense experience to thought.”<sup>98</sup>

By disavowing the role of experience in the reception of work and the formation of thought, Danto’s thesis can be approached as aligning with a “strong” or “exclusive” conceptual reading of art as an analytical exercise. As detailed previously Osborne raises the issue with an “exclusive” conceptual reading of art as an analytical enterprise because it closes down the possibility of art to engender thought on an experiential level. As outlined in the previous discussion Osborne’s observation of the difficulty in abstracting thought from the artistic form and Foster’s identification of the role of perception in the encounter with art demonstrates a link between thought and experience. These readings, coupled with my reflections on my post-conceptual practice

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<sup>96</sup> Forsey, “Philosophical Disenfranchisement,” 403.

<sup>97</sup> Forsey, “Philosophical Disenfranchisement,” 408-409.

<sup>98</sup> Danto, *After the End of Art*, 14.

detailed in the following chapter present the counter argument that thought engendered by art that is determined by and dependant on experience.

## 1.5 Summary

By examining how developments in art practice instigated a radically new relationship between art and philosophy than the engagement designated by aesthetics, this analysis of contemporary art is presented to contextualise the questions that the enquiry seeks to address, namely, what is the engagement between contemporary art and philosophy, how might we approach the artwork as activating thought, and what is the role of experience?

The précis on aesthetics provided at the start of this chapter does not seek to present or argue for a definitive framework for aesthetics but seeks to present how the discourse emerged and continues to evolve. This précis also aims contextualise the contentious, but constant, bind between art and aesthetics.

Reflecting on the fraught and undeniable relationship between art practice and aesthetics through Osborne, Foster and Danto's readings inform the development of the enquiry by addressing the complex engagement between contemporary art and philosophy. The discussions in this chapter reveal the impossibility of resolving this complexity, by detailing a tendency by some to conflate the two domains, and the desire by others to fulfil the impossible task of separating them. However, as detailed in this analysis, this ambiguous engagement between art and philosophy presents the possibility of art as a domain for thought.

That art is a domain for thought is suggested by Osborne's identification of the "conceptuality" of contemporary art, Foster's recognition of perception within our encounter and Danto's theoretical manoeuvre of relocating thought from the realm of philosophy to the domain of art.<sup>99</sup> As noted, Danto's disavowal of the role of experience in the reception of work and the formation of thought necessitates further investigation

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<sup>99</sup> Osborne, "Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual," 10.

into the experiential dimension and its potential bearing on thought which I undertake in the following chapter through an analysis of my post-conceptual practice.

This analysis of the complex engagement between contemporary art and philosophy also ensures a more robust and informed analysis of my post-conceptual practice and the research project. By relating how aesthetics was interrogated through art and how the notion that art is a domain for thought was realised through art practice, this chapter also aims to substantiate the methodology of this enquiry through practice. The following chapter focuses on my post-conceptual practice to examine the complex engagement between art and philosophy.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE ENTWINEMENT OF ART AND PHILOSOPHY IN A POST-CONCEPTUAL PRACTICE

### 2.0 Overview

This enquiry originates from a post-conceptual art practice and it is carried out through such a practice. The thesis presents the motivations for conducting this enquiry and details the questions driving the enquiry that ask: What is the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice? How might my artworks raise philosophical ideas and thought? What is the nature of this thought?

This chapter reflects on three key artworks that exemplify my practice prior to the research project. There are broadly two parts to this chapter, each part containing an account of artworks and two reflective discussions. The first part focuses on the drawings *The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations* (2003) and *Mapping Nihilion* (2005). Two discussions detail my post-conceptual practice through these works. The first reflective discussion introduces the term *entwinement*, a key term of the enquiry to articulate the specific engagement between art and philosophy that is sustained by my practice. I reflect on my practice as a space for thought because it allows me to engage with philosophical ideas. In observing how the thinking engendered through my practice is specific I introduce the provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience. The second discussion introduces the term liminality and describes how I use this anthropological term in my practice to engage with the existential question of being. I detail how this term provides sufficient latitude to reflect on the content of my work (the existential thought that informs the content of the work and representations of indeterminate states, such as black holes, star clusters, etc.) and the context of my work (the experiential state that arises out of the activity of my practice). I outline how my engagement with liminality initiated an emergent concern in my practice with experience.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the first iteration of *Metaphysical Longings* (2006). The first discussion reflects on this work to outline how the event developed from a subsidiary feature of my practice to an artistic form in its own right.

The second discussion discloses how the working definition of the research project evolved from the ambition to enact *other* spaces. I outline how I formulated this term by reflecting on the processes used in *Metaphysical Longings* that seek to enact a space of thought for others through a more direct engagement with liminality. I focus on two processes that are used in *Metaphysical Longings* to enact an *other space*: a technique of guided visualization that I borrow from the practice of yoga nidra and a process of *staging*. These processes that emerge out of my practice are described in detail because they are employed and developed in the subsequent event-based works that constitute the research project.

## 2.1 The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations and Mapping Nihilion

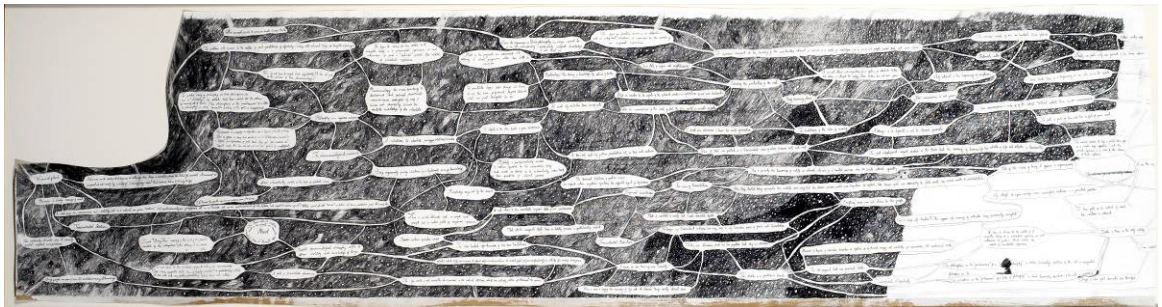
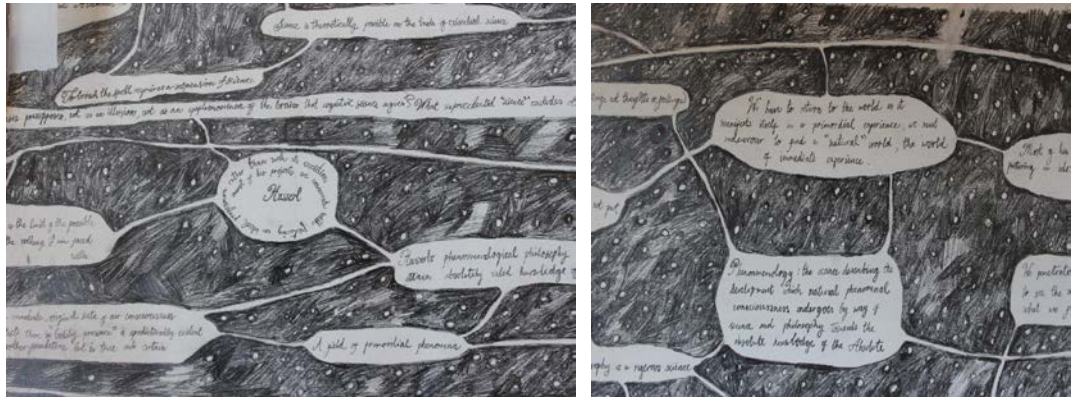


Figure 1: *The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations* (2003).  
Unframed drawing (43.5 cm x 140 cm).

*The Clear Apprehension...* is a long, narrow length of paper that is heavily rendered with intricate graphite marks using a .25 mm clutch pencil (*Fig.1*). This drawing comprises over seventy-five philosophical statements on the subject of being, existence and knowledge. These statements are carefully linked together in a mind map. This strangely rendered web of proclamations floats over a surface of tiny stars that appear from clusters of erratically rendered graphite marks. The name Husserl transcribed in the bottom right corner suggests a link with phenomenology (*Fig. 2*). The statement circling his name reads, “Most of his projects are concerned with picturing an ideal programme rather than with its execution.” This quote appears to be lifted from some form of introduction to phenomenology. Other statements that relate to phenomenology

and are more than likely quoted from Husserl's writings, include, "There is no original root, no single basic concept but an entire field of original experience" and "We have to return to the world as it manifests itself in a primordial experience, we must endeavour to find a 'natural' world, the world of immediate experience" (Fig 3).<sup>100</sup>



Figures 2 & 3: *The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations* (2003) (detail).

Juxtaposed with these statements on phenomenology are others referring to truth and knowledge, existentialism, critical theory and eastern philosophy; for example, the term "Empirical knowledge" links to a statement that describes a psychological position, "The crises of disorientation." This in turn links Baudrillard's statement, "This is precisely the haemorrhage of reality, as internal coherence of a limited universe when its limits retreat infinitely," taken from his essay "The Orders of Simulacra", which then links to a retrospective anecdotal conjecture from an unknown source of the fallout of the atom bomb: "When they started doing experiments the scientists were wary that the atomic explosion would cause every atom to explode, like domino effect, and ultimately the whole world, nay universe, would be annihilated," this statement links to another statement associated with Buddhist philosophy: "Part of the essence of being it appears is impermanence," leading to an existential statement that floats in an empty space in the bottom right-hand corner that reads, "Why attempt to repair meaning when meaningless existence is guaranteed?" To counter this position a statement by the psychologist in Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* reads, "but we need secrets to preserve simple

<sup>100</sup> I cannot reference these quotes because their source was never recorded. I cannot locate them now because they have been transcribed incorrectly. This actuality is recorded and will be reflected on in the following discussion that analyses how my approach to philosophy through art practice differs from an academic approach to philosophy.

human truths (Fig. 4, 5, 6).<sup>101</sup> *The Clear Apprehension...* appears incomplete - not only because it is presented unframed and pinned to the wall but also because the bottom right corner suggests that the task of transcription appears to have been abandoned.



Figures 4, 5 & 6: *The Clear Apprehension of One's Own Limitations* (2003) (detail).

*Mapping Nihilion* is a framed drawing on a large 167 cm by 68 cm sheet of gridded paper (Fig. 10). Like *The Clear Apprehension ...* this drawing also is composed of erratic marks made by a .25 cm clutch pencil that depict a section of the universe. The drawing takes up only a third of the surface area of the paper. However, although the paper is predominantly empty the drawing of the universe is more complex than *The Clear Apprehension...* because it not only depicts stars but phenomena that include supernovas and black holes. A hand-drawn outline demarcates the drawing on three sides, but no line demarcates the top of the drawing, giving the impression of incompleteness. This is enhanced by an empty space in the centre of the drawing that bears the trace of heavily rendered marks that appear to have been frantically erased. (Fig. 7, 8 & 9)



Figures 7, 8 & 9: *Mapping Nihilion* (detail).

<sup>101</sup> Stanislaw Lem and Fridrikh Gorenshteyn, *Solaris*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972.





Figure 10: *Mapping Nihilion* (2005).  
Documentation of drawing in progress, artist's studio, VCCA, Virginia, USA

There is less text in *Mapping Nihilion* than *The Clear Apprehension...*, instead of seventy-five disparate statements this work features a single short paragraph that is carefully transcribed in a scroll in the bottom right-hand corner. This scroll has the appearance of those represented on early maps predating the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, unlike captions on maps, which provide factual information, the caption on this scroll is a quote (*Fig. 11*). This quote is transcribed from a translation of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1969). A heavily pencilled dark blob obliterates the top edge of the scroll and partially covers some of the letters.<sup>102</sup>



Figure 11: *Mapping Nihilion* (detail).

<sup>102</sup> The text in the scroll reads: "The Being by which Nothingness appears in the world must nihilate Nothingness in its Being and even so it still runs the risk of establishing Nothingness as a transcendent in the very heart of immanence unless it nihilates Nothingness in connection with its own being ..."  
The text is recorded in this footnote as it appears in the drawing. Note the misuse of capital "N".  
Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Origin of Negation," in *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, (Northampton: John Dickens & Co. Ltd., 1969), 23.



### 2.1.1 A Post-Conceptual Practice - An Entwinement of Art and Philosophy

My post-conceptual practice is not centred on the production of works of art. I approach my practice as a way to engage with the question of being, a question that is also addressed through existentialism and phenomenology. I describe *The Clear Apprehension* and *Mapping Nihilism* artefacts because they attest to my endeavour to engage with philosophical ideas. In this way the drawings are best understood as an open process because they emerged out of a practice that is motivated by experimental forms of enquiry over the creation of ‘artworks’.<sup>103</sup> This practice is distinguished by a multi-layered process encompassing drawing, reading and reflecting on philosophy. The tripartite process, of reading, rendering and reflecting can be approached as a symbiotic engagement where activities associated with art making and those associated with philosophical enquiry are equally weighted and necessary. I identify this particular engagement between art and philosophy in my practice as an entwinement.

*The Clear Apprehension... and Mapping Nihilism* present a radically different engagement between art and philosophy that is designated by aesthetics. Philosophy is not deployed to interpret these works. Philosophy is implicit in their production. This is made explicit by the statements in each drawing and by the titles that are borrowed from philosophical texts. It is also important to note that philosophy does not merely inform the work. *The Clear Apprehension ... and Mapping Nihilism* do not illustrate particular philosophical thoughts or ideas but attest to my working through particular philosophical ideas.

This process of working through philosophical ideas is revealed in *The Clear Apprehension...* Although Husserl’s name features in *The Clear Apprehension...* this work does not systematically present or illustrate Husserl’s thoughts (Fig. 12) or provide a diagrammatic rendition of phenomenology. The expansive range of ideas encompassing phenomenology, existentialism, scientific thought and eastern philosophy

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<sup>103</sup> This understanding that process constitutes the artistic form is exemplified by Morris’s exhibition *Continuous Project Altered* (1969). Describing this work, Morris maintains that the “process becom[es] part of the work itself.” This notion of the artwork as a process has been described succinctly by Morris in his reflections of *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969), at Leo Castelli Warehouse Gallery, New York. He states, “As ends and means are more unified, as process becomes part of the work instead of prior to it, one is enabled to engage more directly in the world of art making...” Robert Morris, “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated”, 92, quoted in Jon Bird, “Minding the Body: Robert Morris’s 1971 Tate Gallery Retrospective,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird, 88-107 (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 96.

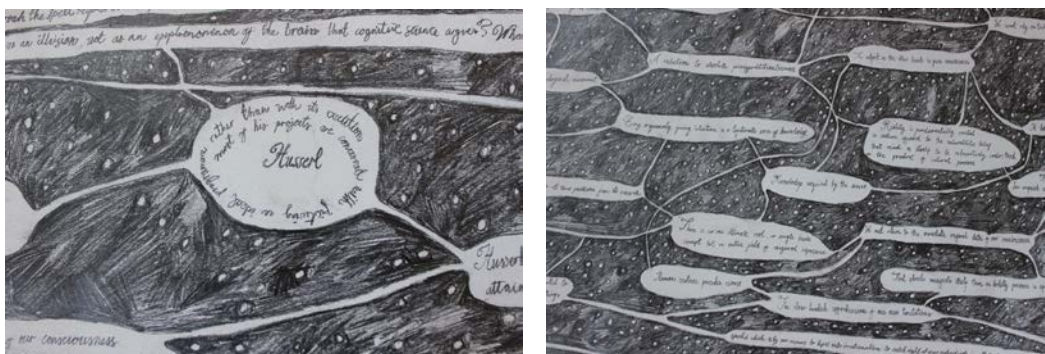
further complicates matters. *The Clear Apprehension...* reveals a notable difference between the practice of making art and undertaking theoretical research, philosophical or otherwise. The sources of the seventy-five statements that feature in this work are not specified or referenced correctly as demonstrated by my inability to reference Husserl's statements transcribed in the work (see footnote 102). It is important to record this because it demonstrates how my engagement with philosophy differs from an academic approach to philosophy that demands a strict practice of referencing. This omission demonstrates how an engagement with philosophy in my art practice differs from an engagement with philosophy in the academy, as it does not strictly adhere to the protocols associated with the discipline of philosophy. I have been unable to locate these two particular statements of Husserl's because they have been transcribed incorrectly. In an academic context this lack of rigour would make the work redundant, however, within the domain of art this in fact plays a role in the operation of the work. Because *The Clear Apprehension...* was made almost ten years ago it is difficult to source the seventy-five quotes rendered on the page for this formal enquiry. There are other crucial aspects of work that distance it from a strictly academic or fully rational enterprise. Unlike an academic text the primary source material and secondary sources are given equal weight. For example, the statement reading, "With the consciousness of the death of God, the true world is revealed as fable" is not a direct quote of Nietzsche, but Simon Critchley's analysis of Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism in *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (2004). The inclusion of quotes from films and my own sentiments complicates a clear reading of this work.

Although covering a wide range of discourse seems an unconventional method of conducting philosophical enquiry, this approach allows me to immerse myself in a freer and more explorative mode of enquiry. My enquiry through practice is not carried out to prove a point, argue a philosophical position or stake my claim to a theory. Through my practice I seek to explore and consider our place in the world and the indeterminate nature of existence. The drawings attest to and emerge out of the tripartite process of reading, reflecting and rendering allowed me to distil ideas and develop my thoughts around the notion of being the and indeterminate nature of existence.

I maintain, that this notion of indeterminacy that is bound up with the human condition and which I explore through my practice became manifest in the drawings as they

emerged. In order to engage with the existential question of being I devised a method of capturing key ideas by transcribing quotes and statements onto large sheets of paper. Capturing these abstract thoughts gave me sense of control by allowing me to reflect on them without the worry of their disappearing (as they would if I had confined them to memory). The more philosophy I read, the more apparent it became how little I actually knew. These drawings attested to my attempts to grapple and engage and with these philosophical ideas.

In the case of *The Clear Apprehension ...* giving these abstract thoughts a physical presence enabled me to reflect more deeply on the indeterminate nature of existence by aligning these statements with others. Through drawing I formed new associations that became manifest in the web-like structure. The drawing offered an alternate perspective from which to engage with the notion of indeterminacy by connecting ideas associated with phenomenology, existentialism and eastern philosophy. In this way, statements such as “Human existence precedes essence” were literally linked with the claim that “The subject on the other hand is pure consciousness”(Fig. 13).<sup>104</sup> The drawing provided a point of entry to reflect on the indeterminate nature of existence by juxtaposing ideas associated with phenomenology, existential discourse and eastern philosophy in a more immediate and physical capacity.



Figures 12 & 13: *The Clear Apprehension of One’s Own Limitations* (2003) (detail).

Phenomenology and existentialism are separate systems of philosophical thought. However they are linked in that existentialism is informed by and develops from

<sup>104</sup> As noted in footnote 102 as I was not in the practice of referencing quotations, as say an academic scholar, I am now ten years later, unable to locate the source. This omission demonstrates how an engagement with philosophy in my art practice differs from an engagement with philosophy in the academy, in the manner that it does not strictly adhere to the protocols associated with the discipline of philosophy.

phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to avoid presuppositions by locating the source of knowledge in the subjects' experience. Existentialism is also centred on the agency of subject and through the premise that the individual is free establishes that there are no universal truths.<sup>105</sup> During this period I was also developing my understanding of truth by looking to Eastern philosophy, focusing on the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, who famously rejected the notion of truth.<sup>106</sup> I was looking also to the teachings of the Buddhist scholar S.N. Goenka to develop my understanding of existence, through his interpretation of impermanence.<sup>107</sup> This notion of impermanence and indeterminacy at the core of Buddhist thought can also be registered in the concerns of existentialism.

The notion of indeterminacy is suggested by the reference to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in *Mapping Nihilion*. Sartre's complex articulation of being and nothingness confounded me in a similar manner to the notion of impermanence and indeterminacy that I perceived when contemplating the limitlessness of the universe. My uncertainty of Sartre's existential conception of uncertainty mirrored the uncertain nature of the universe. This notion of indeterminacy is also articulated by the word 'nihilion' that I borrow from Simon Critchley's preamble "Travels in Nihilion" in his book *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (2004).<sup>108</sup> *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* outlines the central motivations of the philosopher's meditation on death and his attempt to find meaning to human finitude. This book engages with nihilism through the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger and writings of Blanchot and Beckett. The term nihilion articulated my experience of attempting to grapple with the philosophical question of being while providing an appropriate term to describe my chaotic drawing that depicted an expansive and vast universe.

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<sup>105</sup> See Kearney, "Phenomenology", in *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, 1-113.

<sup>106</sup> The Order of the Star of the East was founded in 1911 to proclaim the coming of the World Spiritual Leader J. Krishnamurti was made head of the order. On August 2, 1929 at the inauguration of the Annual Star Camp at Ommen, Holland, Krishnamurti dissolved the order before the three thousand members who had gathered. The following quote is taken from his speech: "I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect ... Truth being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path." For more on the life and teachings of Krishnamurti see Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: the Years of Awakening* (Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1975), 272.

<sup>107</sup> This interest in yoga and meditation stems from my sustained practice of yoga and meditation since 1998. I had also been exploring Vipassanā meditation through the non-sectarian teachings of S.N. Goenka. Vipassanā meditation is performed in order to observe at the deepest level the constantly changing nature of the mind and body. S.N. Goenka describes *anicca* (impermanence) as fundamental to existence. He references the Bubble Chamber, an instrument that demonstrates how in one second a single atomic particle arises and vanishes.

<sup>108</sup> Simon Critchley, "Preamble: Travels in Nihilion," in *Very Little, Almost Nothing* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

*Mapping Nihilation* was produced three years after *The Clear Apprehension* ... while on residency at the VCCA, (Virginia Centre for Creative Arts), US. Prior to this research trip, I had developed a process of imagining the universe by drawing exploding comets, black holes and sections of the night sky as a way of approaching ideas of being and existence. My intention for the six-week residency was to dedicate myself to drawing the night sky using a systematic approach, placing myself in the same location each night to ensure an accurate representation. However, although I was based in the countryside there was so much light pollution that it was impossible for me to see any constellations. I found a tiny black-and-white photograph of the Milky Way (4cm x 9 cm) and set myself a new task of mapping this onto a large sheet of gridded paper measuring 167 cm x 68 cm (*Fig. 14, 15*).<sup>109</sup> I used a magnifying glass to carry out the time-consuming and slightly absurd task. After some days I began to question my motives – what was the purpose of this work? What was the purpose of recreating an image that already existed? Annoyed at undertaking such a purposeless project I frantically began erasing the drawing, deciding it would be better to have a drawing of nothing. Erasing the heavy pencil marks was difficult and tiring and after a short period of time I stopped. On returning I was confronted by an ill-defined gap that ruptured the drawing to form a void (*Fig. 7*).



Figure 14: Work in progress, mapping image onto a large sheet of gridded paper.  
Artist's studio, VCCA, Virginia, USA.



Figure 15: Published photograph: J.R. Eyerman, News Bureau California Institute of Technology – Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories.

<sup>109</sup> This image can be found in David Bergamini and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *The Universe*, ed. David Bergamini and the Editors of Time-Life Books (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973) 166.

Why present an unfinished drawing as a map, and why caption this 'map' with a literary quote relating to the ontological problem of being? Although the cartographic motifs lend a map-like appearance to this drawing, it is clear that *Mapping Nihilion* cannot serve the function of a conventional map because it lacks the necessary requirement of precision and exactitude. The hand-drawn lines, the roughly rendered depictions of stars, the erratic marks, the strange rupture in the centre of this incomplete drawing coupled with the fact that the 'legend' presents Sartre's statement on nothingness renders this map ineffective. The fact that this drawing does not map a particular place enhances the irrational quality and Sartre's quote intensifies the strangeness of a drawing that attempts to map such an indeterminate realm.

Although *Mapping Nihilion* originally sought to map a physical space (the milky way), the juxtaposition of artistic processes and philosophical enquiry disrupts a clear reading of this work. Instead of producing a clear cartographic map, this drawing portrays my grappling with the scale of the universe coupled with the existential notion of being and nothingness. The sense of indeterminacy becomes revealed through the drawing's execution. The unedited mistakes in *Mapping Nihilion*, the blot of the scroll, the erased marks and the naively rendered stars also undermine a sense of certainty. The rupture in the centre of the drawing can be read as presenting an interruption to the process, a hesitation to completing the work. However, that the work is incomplete is not a shortcoming, on the contrary, this quality lends to the logic of the work.

I approach the unedited and incomplete quality of both *Mapping Nihilion* and *The Clear Apprehension...* as advancing the internal logic of these works - a logic that occurs through the process of art making itself. The drawings present the limitations of my personal enquiry of existential philosophy. The illogical web-like structure in *The Clear Apprehension ...* also conveys a sense of disorder that articulates my grappling with this philosophical system of thought. I construe the pieces of text floating in an unfinished depiction of the universe act as symbolically representing forms (both planetary and abstract ideas) beyond my reach. The fact that the drawing stops in the right-hand corner of the work gives the impression that the task has not reached fruition, that there is more work to be done and that these thoughts need further development. The incompleteness of these works implicitly suggests the notion of indeterminacy that existentialism addresses.

My practice provides a domain or space where I can engage with philosophical ideas and questions. However, I differentiate the thinking that takes place in and through my practice from more analytical forms of enquiry by reflecting on the processes in my practice that lead me to think. Rather than presenting an idea that is developed through a system of logical analysis, my processes of reading and rendering over protracted periods of time generated a way of thinking that differed from rational thought processes. The curator Hendel Teicher describes a similar process through the practice of Emma Kunz (1892-1963) (Fig.16). Teicher raises the notion of “thinking through drawing”, proposing that Kunz generated her own form of thinking through this physical activity.<sup>110</sup> It is significant that Kunz also approached her practice as a form of enquiry, a process of research and discovery. She describes this in her self-published books *Miracle of Creative Revelation* and *New Methods of Drawing* in 1953<sup>111</sup> (Fig. 17). By this Kunz was referring to the result of her combined process of action and contemplation, which resulted in complex geometrical forms.

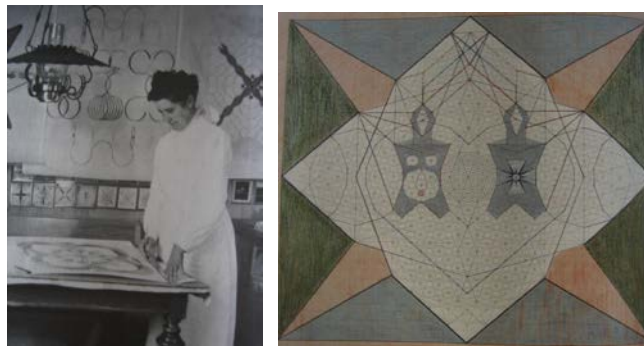


Figure 16: Emma Kunz at her worktable, Waldstatt, 1958.

Figure 17: Emma Kunz, *Work No 086*, n.d.

Drawing: Pencil, coloured pencil and oil pastel on graph paper.

Similarly my process of action and contemplation, the transcription of philosophical statements coupled with the process of rendering stars allowed me to further contemplate and explore notions of being and existence. The process of rendering intricate stars, formed as tiny empty gaps between tiny pencil marks, carved out a

<sup>110</sup> The subtitle of the exhibition is derived from the title of Kunz book. Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher , eds., *3 x Abstraction, New Methods of Drawing, Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin*, ed. (New York, The Drawing Centre and Yale University Press, 2005)

<sup>111</sup> de Zegher and Teicher, *3 x Abstraction*, 129.

specific time where I could engage on a deeper level with philosophical thought. My compulsion to render vast tracts of the universe resulted in my working into the early hours of the morning. Kunz also worked through the night working to a state of near exhaustion in order to produce her drawings in a single session. Unlike Kunz I failed to complete my drawings in a single session. However, like Kunz, who regarded her practice as a means to channel energy, I also consider the active and contemplative attributes of the processes as absolutely necessary. This time consuming process of reading and rendering intricate text and stars enabled me to approach ideas relating to existence and impermanence in a more direct capacity by allowing me to experience a strange existential state of distance and remove. In a way, my practice carved out a temporality that not only gave me time for reflection and also induced me to think in a very particular way. The particularity of my thought was bound with my experiential state, inducing a more perceptive and imaginative form of thought. Although this way of thinking is not systematic, it is specific in the way that it unfolds in an indeterminate manner.

Because these drawing directly reference philosophical ideas, they could potentially raise these ideas in others who might encounter these works. However because these ideas are presented in the context of a drawing they invariably encourage a different form of engagement with these ideas than an academic text. Because *The Clear Apprehension ...* and *Mapping Nihilion* do not make clearly worked out arguments, as one would expect in an academic text. The juxtaposition of fragments of philosophical thought suspended in the night sky in *The Clear Apprehension ...* and the caption on a map that allude to nothingness in *Mapping Nihilion* resists logical analysis. Instead of engaging with these works in a purely logic or rational way, these drawings require another form of engagement and require a different way of thinking. As noted above, I register that my art practice provides a space to think about philosophical ideas in a particular way. These insights gained from reflecting on my practice and my drawings prompt the question driving the enquiry that asks, how might an artwork offer a space to think about philosophical ideas and what would be the particularity of such thought?



### 2.1.2 A Post-Conceptual Practice - Engaging With Liminality

As noted in the previous discussion, I use my practice to explore and engage with the indeterminate nature of existence. Liminality, as conceived in anthropology offered a valuable resource to engage with the existential question of being driving my practice.<sup>112</sup> The discussion also outlines how this term provided enough latitude to reflect on the content of the work, (the philosophical ideas that I was recording and also the physical spaces that I was rendering) and my art practice in general.

The French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first used the term liminal in *Les Rites de Passage* (1909).<sup>113</sup> Although there was a range of similar studies on ritual conducted during this period, van Gennep identified forms of ceremonial rites as marking significant transitions to the social status of individuals. Van Gennep observed these rites as both demonstrating and authenticating transformation in an individual's status and proposed that embedded within the structure of the ritual is a systemic pattern that enacts and enables these rites of transition. Van Gennep identified the structure of the ritual as constituted by three stages: separation, segregation, and integration. This movement is affected by a particular moment that is made manifest in the ritual. Van Gennep identified this tri-partite structure as the liminal stage, the pivotal moment in ritual. Van Gennep marks the liminal stage as the crucial stage within the ritual by naming the stages before and after as pre-liminal and post-liminal. For example, in the case of a teenage boy undergoing rites to initiate him into adulthood, the pre-liminal designates the initial stage of ritual where the initiate is removed from the space of the everyday and the post-liminal stage, or final stage of ritual which facilitates the reintegration of the transformed individual back into the social order. As noted in the Introduction, the term liminal is derived from the Latin *limnal*, meaning threshold. Transgression is implied by this term that foregrounds some kind of departure or crossing over of boundaries. Van Gennep observed how key stages in ritual symbolically removed initiates from their everyday experience. This movement is mainly initiated through an intensification of experience. Because the liminal stage in

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<sup>112</sup> Tina Kinsella, "Deep Mapping the City: A Matrixial Topography of Liminality." Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014. <http://tinakinsella.wordpress.com/deep-mapping-the-city-a-matrixial-topography-of-liminality/>

<sup>113</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 2004). Van Gennep is now recognised as a key thinker within ritual theory because of his identification of the liminal. However, prior to Turner's re-introduction of liminality van Gennep was not widely known, mainly because Emile Durkheim, the most prolific ethnographer, ostracised Van Gennep from the academic circle in France. For more on this please see Rosemary Zumwalt, "Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of Bourg-la-Reine," *American Anthropologist* (American Anthropological Association), 84, no. 2 (June 1982): 299-313.

ritual designates a temporal, symbolic, indeterminate state that exists outside of and beyond normative structures it is understood as “other”.<sup>114</sup>

However, liminality did not gain currency in the field of anthropology and the wider cultural domain until the late 1960s. The Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner re-introduced and elaborated liminality in *The Ritual Process* (1969).<sup>115</sup> Turner introduced the term *structure* to designate the values and the normative mode of social interaction and the term *societas* to describe an interpretation of a standard form of community. “The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of political-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’.”<sup>116</sup> As their respective counterparts he proposes *anti-structure* and *communitas*. Turner maintained the concurrent formation of *anti-structure* and *communitas* in the symbolic liminal stage. Turner observed that within ritual the participants undergoing the initiation rites are literally “stripped” of the vestiges that symbolically represent their position within society.<sup>117</sup> Without physical trappings and through their collective display of an abandonment of status the participants unite to form a non-hierarchical social group. *Communitas* designates a communion of equal individuals. This disregard of status forms an *anti-structure* where normative social values no longer apply.<sup>118</sup> Turner’s extension of the term *communitas* (which he had originally coined to designate participants undergoing ritual initiation in a tribal context) to specific groups within contemporary western society, such as the counter culture movement of the 1960s, extended the currency of the term liminality beyond anthropology to the wider field of socio-political and cultural theory. His interpretation of liminality as “betwixt and between” further extended the applicability of the term for

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<sup>114</sup> Colin Turnbull, “Liminality: A Synthesis of Subjective and Objective Experience,” in *By Means of Performance*, ed. Wila and Schechner, Richard Appel, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>115</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction, 1969). This publication is based on Turner’s fieldwork while living with the Ndembu tribe of North Western Zambia.

<sup>116</sup> Victor Turner, “Liminality and Community,” in *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Melbourne, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 148.

<sup>117</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 108 & 169.

<sup>118</sup> Turner maintained the concurrent formation of *anti-structure* and *communitas* in the symbolic liminal stage. Turner observed that within ritual the participants undergoing the initiation rites are literally ‘stripped’ of the vestiges that symbolically represent their position within society. Without physical trappings and through their collective display of an abandonment of status the participants unite to form a non-hierarchical social group. *Communitas* designates a communion of equal individuals. This disregard of status forms an *anti-structure* where normative social values no longer apply. Turner extended the term *communitas* (that he originally coined to designate participants undergoing ritual initiation in a tribal context), to specific groups within his own contemporary western society, such as the counter culture movement of the 1960’s. In this way Turner instigated the currency of liminality beyond the field of ethnography and anthropology to the wider field of socio-political and cultural theory. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.

disciplines ranging from theatre studies, gender studies, sociology, geography, geopolitics, etc., to interpret situations of indeterminacy.<sup>119</sup>

The liminal has been instrumental within the area of performance art and performance theory.<sup>120</sup> The theatre director Richard Schechner looked to Turner's research and his development of liminality to thematise aspects of experimental theatre and later collaborated with Turner to explore the overlap between theatre and ritual. This collaboration resulted in the emergence of performance studies in the 1970s.<sup>121</sup> Performance art of the late 1960s / early 1970s can be positioned within the dialogue between performance studies and critical artistic practice. Emerging performance practices during this period which engaged directly with liminality are exemplified by Marina Abramovicz, Chris Burden and the Viennese Actionists: Günter Brus, Otto Mühl and Rudolf Schwarzkogler.<sup>122</sup> By subjecting themselves to situations of danger and/or mutilation these practices are understood to induce trance like state through an intensification of experience. These gestures physically display a form of abandonment, presenting the body in an indeterminate state that Turner describes in ritual theory as "betwixt and between".<sup>123</sup> The term liminality articulated this state that was presented,

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<sup>119</sup> In the Foreword to *The Ritual Process* Roger D. Abrahams describes how Turner's identification of "betwixt and between" states became a theoretical resource to describe other cultures. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, viii. The expansion of the term liminality to other areas of discourse is the subject of the conference *Liminality and Cultures of Change*, 2009, hosted by Cambridge University. This conference is dedicated to "the exploration of the liminality paradigm as a conceptual tool and theoretical perspective for grasping moments of transformation of social, political and cultural life (Harald Dr. Wyd, The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/page/333/february-liminality.htm>. (May 31, 2011). Bjorn Thomassen's recent typology also demonstrates the expansion of the term. His typology outlines the different applications of liminality, through its conceptual foundation in anthropology to the understanding of it in relation to civilisation dynamics. He observes how the theoretical use of the term ranges from describing the individual to whole societies and polities. Bjørn Thomassen, *The Encyclopaedia of Social Theory* (London, USA: Routledge, 2006). The term liminal is now frequently used in the area of the social sciences to interpret situations of political/social flux (i.e. borders, war zones, refugee camps, etc.) and other more abstract spaces of online activity. For more on liminality in relation to war zones, refugee camps and borders, see Jasper Balduk, "On liminality, Conceptualizing 'in-between-ness'," Master Thesis of Human Geography (Nijmegen, June 2008) and in relation to online activity and social networking M. Savin-Baden, "After the death of privacy: Liminal states and spatial identities" in *Threshold Concepts Symposium* (Ontario: Queen's University, Kingston, 2008).

<sup>120</sup> For example see: Susan Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Performance and Theory* (London, New York: Cassell, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> Schechner set up the first department of Performance Studies at the New York University in 1970.

<sup>122</sup> For more on the theorization of the Viennese Actionists and liminality see Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts*, 99-109

<sup>123</sup> In the Foreword to *The Ritual Process* Roger D. Abrahams describes how Turner's identification of "betwixt and between" states became a theoretical resource to describe other cultures. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, viii. The expansion of the term liminality to other areas of discourse is the subject of the conference *Liminality and Cultures of Change*, 2009, hosted by Cambridge University. This conference is dedicated to "the exploration of the liminality paradigm as a conceptual tool and theoretical perspective for grasping moments of transformation of social, political and cultural life (Harald Dr Wyd, The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/page/333/february-liminality.htm>. (May 31, 2011). Bjorn Thomassen's recent typology also demonstrates the expansion of the term. His typology outlines the different applications of liminality, through its conceptual foundation in anthropology to the understanding of it in relation to civilisation dynamics. He observes how the theoretical use of the term ranges from describing the individual to whole societies and polities. Bjørn Thomassen, *The Encyclopaedia of Social Theory* (London, USA: Routledge, 2006). The term liminal is now

both on a physical and symbolic level through these performative gestures.

Liminality is instrumental in my post-conceptual practice because it offers an additional perspective to engage with the notion of being, particularly the quality of indeterminacy that I had been exploring through philosophical enquiry. My interest in liminality developed out of an engagement with the philosophical category of the sublime.<sup>124</sup> Although the sublime experience and the liminal state are not interchangeable terms they both suggest an intensification of experience in the subject that is described as a state of suspension. This likeness in meaning is not unfounded as they share the term *limnal* in their etymology. How natural phenomena such as expansive night skies, vast oceans and magnificent mountain ranges induce a feeling of suspension and indeterminacy has been theorised in philosophy, primarily in the writings of Edmund Burke (1729-1797), scientist and physician Thomas Addison (1793-1860), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who developed the category of the sublime by systematically linking it with an experiential state. Addison designates the sublime a feeling of terror and awe, neither one feeling nor the other but an unsettling amalgam of two distinct experiences. Susan Broadhurst's elaboration of Turner's notion of the liminal state as "betwixt and between", as a moment when "feelings close to disquiet and discomfort are experienced" can be read in close alignment with Addison's description of the sublime experience.<sup>125</sup> I am not trying to conflate the sublime with liminality. I am merely reflecting back on my practice during this period to outline how the research project emerged.

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frequently used in the area of the social sciences to interpret situations of political/social flux (i.e. borders, war zones, refugee camps, etc.) and other more abstract spaces of online activity. For more on liminality in relation to war zones, refugee camps and borders, see Jasper Balduk, "On liminality, Conceptualizing 'in-between-ness,'" Master Thesis of Human Geography (Nijmegen, June 2008) and in relation to online activity and social networking M. Savin-Baden, "After the death of privacy: Liminal states and spatial identities" in Threshold Concepts Symposium (Ontario: Queen's University, Kingston, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> The sublime has been thematised in literary art forms and certain novels, for example, a paragraph from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1892) informed my solos-show *I Am Somewhere Here* (2006), Temple Bar Gallery and Studios. This paragraph is printed on the pamphlet for the exhibition: "I don't know about ghosts," she was saying, 'but I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive.' The dairyman turned to her with his mouth full, his eyes charged with serious inquiry, and his great knife and fork (breakfasts were breakfasts here) planted erect on the table, like the beginning of a gallows. 'What--really now? And is it so, maids?' he said. 'A very easy way to feel 'em go,' continued Tess, 'is to lie on the grass at night and look straight up at some big bright star; and, by fixing your mind upon it, you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o' miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all.'" Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London, Penguin Classics, 2003), 147.

<sup>125</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, viii, 95, 107, 138.

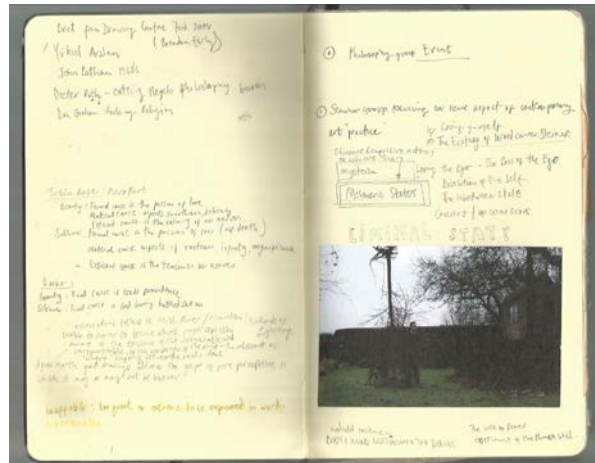


Figure 18: Research/Working Notebook.

Liminality provided a useful perspective to reflect on my work. The openness of this term enabled me to reflect on the content of my drawings in two ways. Firstly it allowed an additional entry point to engage with the indeterminate quality of the immeasurable universe that I was attempting to render in *Mapping Nihilion* and *The Clear Apprehension...* Other works such as *The Anticipation of the Nothing that I am Faced With*, (Fig.19) a drawing of a postcard featuring a black hole and *The Searchers* (Fig. 20), mountaineering expedition moving slowly towards a void could also be considered as depicting liminal zones. Liminality enabled me to thematise my work without closing it down to further interpretation. As noted above, the term liminal can be used to designate real and/or symbolic spaces. The threshold state defined as liminal provided a theoretical perspective to engage with the phenomena depicted in *Mapping Nihilion* and *The Clear Apprehension...* as real or imaginary realms. Secondly, liminality enabled me to reflect on the subjective state of indeterminacy that unfolded through my drawings. This subjective state was literally presented in the in the transcribed statements. It could also be registered in a less explicit manner in the drawings. For example *The Anticipation of the Nothing that I am Faced With* and *The Searchers* suggest liminal states on a symbolic level. The black hole in the *Anticipation of the Nothing that I am Faced With* suggests the indeterminate state of subjectivity. The four mountaineers in *The Searchers* seem suggest this subjective state. Like the void in this drawing, these figures emerge as empty spaces surrounded by densely rendered intricate pencil marks.

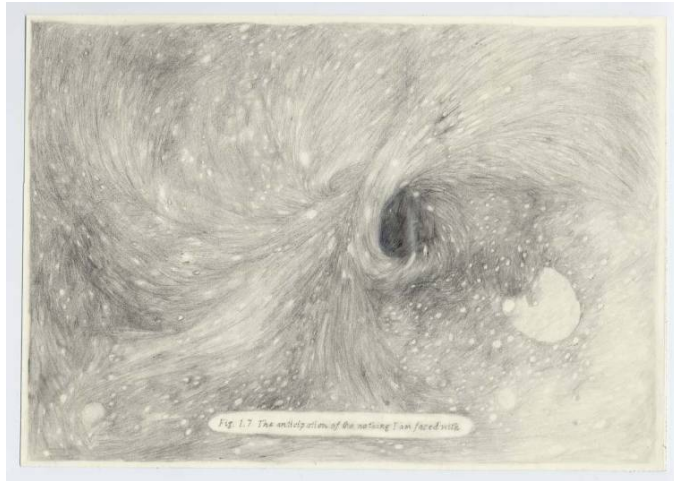


Figure 19: *The Anticipation of the Nothing that I am Faced With* (2006).  
Drawing (14.5 cm x 11 cm), Mark Gary, private collection.



Figure 20: *The Searchers* (2002).  
Drawing, (120 cm x 70 cm), University of the Arts Collection, London.

Liminality also provided a theoretical perspective to engage with my own experience and my art practice because it provided a term to thematise the particular temporality that my art practice carved out. Liminal states are understood as temporal experiences that are “other” than our everyday experience of time. The anthropologist Colin Turnbull describes liminality as “a timeless state of being ... that lies parallel to our ‘normal’ state of being, or is perhaps superimposed on it, or somehow coincides or coexists with it.”<sup>126</sup> Liminality is understood to subvert chronological time. This subversion of time can take place on an experiential level, for example the everyday experience of time might be stretched or compressed through altered states in the liminal stage of ritual and on a symbolic level where the notion of time itself becomes inconsequential. As noted in the accounts of *Mapping Nihilion* and *The Clear Apprehension...* the time-consuming process of conducting these enquiries that informed these works necessitated my working through the night into the early hours of the morning.

Working over this protracted period of time induced a sense of disorientation and remove – the jangled feeling one gets with sleep deprivation or a hangover, prompting a disengagement of the active, instrumental self. Although my experience was less extreme than trance-like states associated with those undergoing initiation rites, Turner’s interpretation of liminal state as “betwixt and between” articulated a similar “in-between” experience I had when making these drawings.<sup>127</sup> Engaging in this practice carved out a temporal space that was different to and in this way set apart from my quotidian experience. The realisation that an art practice might institute an *other space* as an alternate experience and temporality is crucial to the enquiry because it informs the working definition of the research project.

How I used liminality as a term to reflect on my experience while in the process of making these drawings is significant to the development of the research project because it initiated a turning point in my practice from a concern with the object to a greater concern with experience and how the process of conducting this particular form of enquiry through practice affected me. Reflecting on my experience provoked me to consider how a similar experiential state might invoke others to think about the

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<sup>126</sup> Turnbull proposes this interpretation of liminality in Turnbull, “Liminality,” 80.

<sup>127</sup> See footnote 6

indeterminate state of existence. Instead of producing artworks for others to reflect on I became more concerned with extending my enquiry into subjective experiential state so that others could partake. This emerging concern with experience instigated a shift in my practice, moving the activities from the solitary realm of the studio to a more expansive and collective space. My seeking to extend philosophical enquiry through the rubric of liminality to others marks a turning point in my practice that led to the emergence of the event.

## 2.2 Metaphysical Longings

I approach *Metaphysical Longings* as an open process because this event-based work encompasses four iterations. For clarity these are named *Metaphysical Longings II, III, IV and V*. This work features as one of the three artworks that constitute the research project. The original event was first enacted in Pallas Heights in March 2006. Pallas Heights (now named Pallas Contemporary Projects) was located in five disused flats on the fourth floor in a social housing complex in Dublin's inner city.<sup>128</sup> I was invited by the directors to produce work specifically for this space prior to its demolition. When developing *Metaphysical Longings* my primary aim was to initiate a liminal experience. The intention of this work was to create a site-specific installation that would capture liminality by presenting the results of a collective experiential state that could be described as liminal. The event *Metaphysical Longings* was developed as a meditating/drawing session to support the synonymous exhibition in the flat as a site-specific installation. This installation would be configured by the drawings produced by the group who had participated in the collective act of meditation. The event *Metaphysical Longings* was developed so that others might experience a threshold, indeterminate state associated with liminality directly. Although the framework of the event that was developed to support the production of the installation, it also sought to extend my engagement with philosophical ideas on the notion of indeterminacy to others. An open call for participants was advertised in the VAI, inviting thirteen individuals to visit the flat and participate in this event at dusk<sup>129</sup> (*Fig. 21*).

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<sup>128</sup> Pallas Heights, now Pallas Contemporary Projects, is an artist-run gallery and studios in Dublin. As this complex was due for demolition Dublin City Council offered this to artists/directors Brian Duggan and Mark Cullen.

<sup>129</sup> The add in the VAI read: "An invitation to experience the infinite. Engage in an evening of esoteric exploration and share your experience. This twenty-minute meditation session suitable for both seers and sceptics will be





Figure 21: Invitation in the VAI Broadsheet (Visual Arts Ireland).

Rather than engaging with liminality on a theoretical level, *Metaphysical Longings* sought to extend my exploration of indeterminacy to a wider collective. Using techniques associated with yoga nidra, this event sought to furnish a collective engagement with liminality more directly through processes used to intensify an experience that is “other”. The demolition of the site could be seen from the balcony adjacent to the room where the event took place. In advance of the event, the room was prepared by covering the entire floor with blankets (*Fig. 22, 23*). There is no documentation of this event because it was essential that the participants could fully immerse themselves in the process. The process of psychic sleep would be under-mined if the group realised that they were being photographed, let alone being watched. It is also important to note, that at this time, I did not see the event as an actual artwork, but as one of the processes used to support the development of what I believed at the time was the “actual” artwork – the site-specific installation. Very soon after the enactment of this event I realised that this was in fact a work in it’s own right (which will be the focus of the following discussion).

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followed by a picture drawing session. Tea and biscuits will be served to enhance endeavour. This event will take place at Pallas Heights on: Wednesday 22 March 6.30pm – 7.30. For booking and more information please contact Clodagh on 01-4741444 / emoe@ireland.com. (As Pallas Heights is soon to be levelled, limited space and time is available, booking is essential). This event is organised in conjunction with the exhibition ‘Metaphysical Longings’, preview on Friday 24 March at Pallas Heights.



Figure 22 & 23: View from balcony and interior of Pallas Heights, Dublin 1.

Following the forty-minute yoga nidra session the group opened their eyes, finding themselves in a room bathed in salmon pink light. They remained on the floor while I distributed tea, drawing boards and coloured pencils and sheets of paper that read along the top, 'Share your Experience' (Fig. 24). The group was asked to respond through the process of drawing. While making these drawings they chatted openly about their experience. These clusters of conversations became more intimate as people disclosed to one another their own personal understanding of their being in the world. As the room got darker I lit candles and when the group were eventually ready to leave at nightfall I thanked them for coming and collected their drawings.

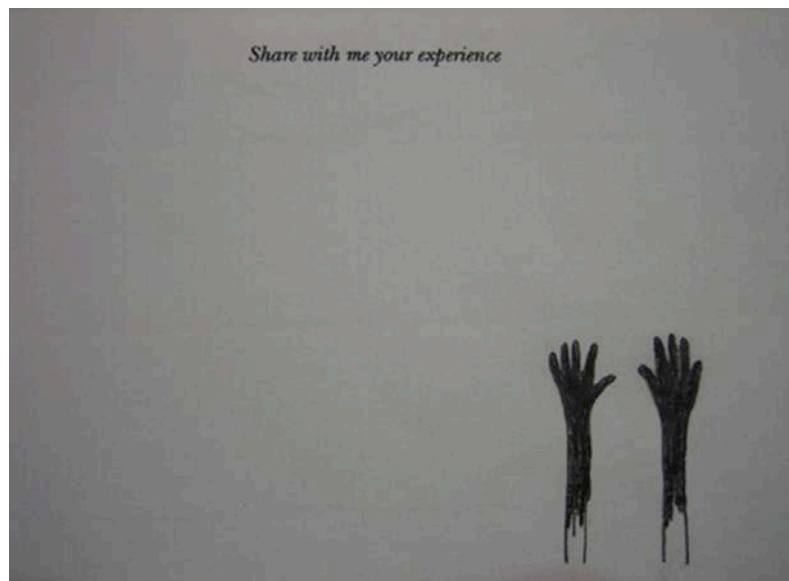


Figure 24: Paper distributed to group during *Metaphysical Longings*.

The exhibition *Metaphysical Longings* as a site-specific installation opened three days later. The downstairs room in the flat where people had gathered three days previously to practice meditation and create drawings remained untouched. The blankets remained covering the floor. The drawings that were produced by the group were presented in a room upstairs. I presented these drawings as a series of slides projected on an old-fashioned screen using a defunct slide projector (*Fig. 25*). The room was filled with mismatched chairs (borrowed from a nearby school) rendering the room inaccessible to an audience. The audience were required to encounter this work through a chink in the door (*Fig. 26*).



Figures 25 & 26: *Metaphysical Longings* (2006).  
Site-specific installation (detail).

### 2.2.1 *The Emergence of the Event as an Artistic Form*

*Metaphysical Longings* marks a pivotal moment in my practice, where the event shifted from a supplementary feature of my practice to become an artistic form in its own right. Prior to embarking on the formal enquiry in 2008, I considered the event as supplementary to my practice, organising the event to support the exhibition of artworks. These events fulfilled a didactic role, offering further insight to the motivations and intentions of the work from the perspective of the artist. For example, events such as a public conversation with artists participating in the show *I Am Here Somewhere*, Project Space, IMMA (which ran concurrently with my solo exhibition *I Am Somewhere Here* at TBGS), functioned to provide the audience with further insight

into the concerns and intentions motivating my work.<sup>130</sup> Such events are now a standard and are regarded as an essential feature within the overarching structure of a contemporary art exhibition. This is demonstrated by series of talks and seminars that feature within the scheduling of exhibitions, from artist-run spaces to large-scale biennials. It is also noteworthy how the presence of philosophers in large-scale biennials has proliferated globally over the last twenty years.<sup>131</sup>

Recent art practice demonstrates a crossover between the event (discursive, didactic or otherwise) and the artwork.<sup>132</sup> This is also exemplified by early post-conceptual practices, such as Piper's *Funk Lesson*, and Helio Oiticica's *Parangolés* (1964-1968) (2006) which uses dance to convey their message and both works deal with inclusivity by directly confronting issues surrounding race, gender and class. To recap, *Funk Lesson* was a series of social events where the artist, a woman of black extraction taught white people the moves and history of funk. Similarly, *Parangolés* repositioned the samba (a form of dance associated with carnival and the lower strata of Brazilian society) from the *favella* to the institutional, bourgeois space of the museum.<sup>133</sup> Instead

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<sup>130</sup> *I Am Somewhere Here*, Project Room, IMMA, March 2014. Participating Artists: Anna Barham, UK, Naomi Bishop, Australia, Colin Crotty, Ireland, Vera Lossau, Germany, Camilla Lyon, UK, Belen Uriel, Spain, Tom Wolseley, UK. The Press release reads:

"I am Here Somewhere, Clodagh Emoe's current solo show at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, articulates the inherent desire to succumb to the void whilst exposing the constraints, both physical and mental, of the human condition. I am Somewhere Here is a direct response by some of Clodagh Emoe's peers to this show and their dialogue on themes that pertain to the notion of the void. Naomi Bishop's paintings of observatories highlight the desire to connect with the unknown, while Colin Crotty's work is concerned with memory and perception. Intrigued by nostalgic and idealistic senses indicative to that found in certain 20<sup>th</sup> century literature he establishes associations between the "parochial tale" and the classic novel. Belen Uriel's photography and video work reference the sublime by capturing on film the dissipating landscape. By referencing the formal beauty of modernist architecture Camilla Lyon places emphasis on the often failed ideals that they represent. Anna Barham's installation and sculptural objects enable for multiple possibilities, and for a bleeding between; relations seem to evolve in time. Tom Wolseley combines different media to make visible the linguistic manoeuvres he finds necessary to define himself, while Vera Lossau's work could be understood as a dutiful awareness of self which is a persistent joy of enquiry into nothingness."

<sup>131</sup> This has been observed by Osborne, who claims that there has been a "resurgence of interest in explicitly philosophical discourses about art over the last decade" by way of "a more affirmative turn towards the conceptual resources of the post-Kantian European tradition." Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 8. This is also explored by the critic Dorethea Von Hentelmann, see essay "The Rise of the Exhibition," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, ed. Armen Avanessian & Luke Skrebowski, 249 (Berlin: Strenberg Press, 2011). p.178.

<sup>132</sup> The use of this discursive framework is demonstrated explicitly by works such as *Cinema-in-the-Round* (2008), the video lecture by Mark Leckey; *Museum Highlights* (1989), in which Andrea Fraser staged a tour of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Joseph Beuys' *Organization for Direct Democracy* (*Cinema-in-the-Round* describes the relationship between object and image through film, television and video and featured in Leckey's Turner prize winning exhibition *Industrial Lights and Magic*. By subverting the structure of the guided tour Fraser's *Museum Highlights* performs institutional critique by encouraging the visitor to re-think the museum. For *Organization for Direct Democracy* Beuys established an information office that was open to initiate conversations on a range of topics including politics and art. Through this performance Fraser encourages the audience to re-think the museum.) For other examples of discursive practices see *Curating the Educational Turn*, ed. Mick Wilson and Paul O'Neil (Open Editions, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> The critic Anna Deuzeze observes, "The irruption of the poor into the bourgeois atmosphere of the museum caused such a scandal that the director had them evicted." Anna Deuzeze, "Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics, Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés*", *Art Journal*, 63, no.2, Summer 2004, p.59.

of presenting the *Parangolés* as art works for exhibition, Oiticica invited dancers from Mangueira favela to wear these strangely fabricated capes and dance the samba for the opening of the exhibition *Opinão 65*, at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio.<sup>134</sup> Although dancing the samba might not on the face of it seem to raise issues of inclusivity, Oiticica's gesture of inviting this ostracised group to the privileged, bourgeois space of the museum and the counter decision of the director of the museum to evict the dancers raises issues of hegemony, control and inequality in a non-didactic manner.

In 2006 I began to consider how the event might be used to frame and perform an enquiry in a non-didactic manner.<sup>135</sup> As part of my solo show *I Am Somewhere Here* I developed a stargazing event with Astronomy Ireland on the rooftop of Temple Bar Gallery and Studios. The event *Losing Ourselves* sought to provide a space where the audience might engage with the philosophical category of the sublime which informed the works in the exhibition. *I Am Here Somewhere* was primarily informed by the aesthetic category of the sublime. My enquiry developed through these works to focus on the void, linking notions of nihilism and the unknown. This exhibition consisted of works that included *The Change of Heart (After Yves Klein)* (2006), a re-enactment of my attempting Klein's famous *Leap into the Void* (1969); *The End is in the Beginning* (2006) (Fig. 28), a video piece documenting my fraught attempts to climb over walls; *The Approach*, a collage depicting a configuration of stars burnt into pages from a first-edition publication; *Approaches to Philosophy* (1932) by J.F. Wolfenden and *Comet (The Human Being is Death in the Process of Becoming)* (2006), an etching of a comet that was projected to fill the gallery wall.<sup>136</sup> (Figs. 27 - 30) reveal the *entwinement* of art and philosophy in my practice explicitly. The subtitle of *Comet* (that also captions the image of the comet, that was projected onto the wall from an etching on lens of the

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<sup>134</sup> *Parangolés* are textile-based structures that are designed to be worn and activated by the wearer. *Parangolé* is a slang Portuguese term that translates as spectrum of ideas and events related to "idleness, a sudden agitation, an unexpected situation, or a dance party." Gilles Deuzeze, "Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics, Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés*," 59.

<sup>135</sup> *Losing Ourselves* exemplifies the internal logic in art and how meaning becomes enacted through process. It is worth noting that the stargazing session did not take place on the rooftop as intended, as there was ninety-five per cent cloud cover on the scheduled night. Instead, David Moore, the founder of Astronomy Ireland (not to be confused with the renowned astronomer Sir David Moore), presented a slide show projecting photographic documentation of the planets and stars in a studio space in TBGS. How the event unfolded as a substandard stargazing session articulated the physical restraints inhibiting awe-inspiring or transcendental forms of experience.

<sup>136</sup> The caption "The Human Being is Death in the Process of Becoming" that featured in this piece is a direct quote of Critchley's relating to his reading of nihilism through Heidegger. Like *Mapping Nihilism* this work is also informed by Critchley's publication *Very Little Almost Nothing* (2004). It is worth noting my engagement with Critchley's philosophical thought in my practice prior to embarking on the formal enquiry was through my reading his works. Through my developing events as art works, my engagement with this philosopher was furthered through our direct collaboration on *Mystical Anarchism*.

projector) is a quote borrowed from Critchley that summarises his analysis of Heidegger's notion of being. The event *Losing Ourselves* aimed to draw out the ideas informing the work through suggestion rather than explicate the meaning of the works. Although I did not consider the event *Losing Ourselves* an artwork, my gesture of titling the event like one would an artwork indicates a developing awareness of the significance of the event and my realisation of its potential to do more than operate as an addition to, or a support mechanism for an exhibition.





Figure 27: *The Change of Heart (After Yves Klein)* (2006).  
Photographic print.



Figure 28: *The End is in the Beginning* (2006).  
Video, looped with sound (still).





Figure 29: *Approaches to Philosophy* (2006).



Figure 30: *Comet (The Human Being is Death in the Process of Becoming)* (2006).

As noted at the start of the discussion, *Metaphysical Longings* marks a pivotal moment in my practice where I became aware of the event as an artistic form. *Metaphysical Longings* developed the experimental and participatory approach that was used in the event *Losing Ourselves*. As outlined the original intention of *Metaphysical Longings* was to support the production of a series of drawings that would document a liminal experience. These drawings would be used to produce a site-specific installation. As noted in my reflections on the drawings, the notion of indeterminacy and impermanence that I was seeking to comprehend through my practice was simultaneously engendered on an experiential level through the process of working over a protracted period of time. In this way, making these drawings induced an experiential state that seemed disengaged from my everyday experience, a feeling of indeterminacy or “in-betweenness” that I came to associate with forms of meditation, particularly the meditative practice of yoga nidra. The task of *Metaphysical Longings* was to turn this process on its head in an attempt to induce in others a similar experiential state through yoga nidra and to capture the outcome of this experience in a series of drawings.

The premise of these drawings was to capture and present a liminal state as experienced by each individual who had practiced yoga nidra. For example the feeling of losing oneself that a person is said to experience practicing psychic sleep is indicated in the drawing by the black disembodied hands (*Fig. 25*). However, although many images were evocative, I realised the impossibility of fully capturing a liminal experience on paper. This insight informed my decision to present these drawings at a remove, in a space that could not be fully accessed. On reflection I realised that the event proved a more appropriate framework to allow others engage with liminality than my previous method of presenting my interpretation of liminality through drawings, because it provided a more dynamic and immediate framework for others to engage with liminality. The event offered a more dynamic and immediate framework by furnishing the possibility of experiencing a meditative state poised between sleep and wake through the practice of yoga nidra. However, I also realised that the event was a more appropriate form to *capture* a particular experience, than a series of drawings presented in the form of a site-specific installation. The event offered an artistic form that, albeit temporarily, captured liminality by enacting a space that furnished experiences one would associate with this threshold state. I realised what was most compelling was not the outcome, but the event itself.

### 2.2.2 *Enacting Other Spaces*

Through *Metaphysical Longings* I sought to extend my engagement with philosophical thought to others by engaging with liminality. However, rather than engaging with liminality on a theoretical level, *Metaphysical Longings* sought to engage with liminality directly by initiating a temporality that is *other* to the everyday experience. This discussion presents how I formulate the working definition of the research project that seeks to enact an *other space* by describing the processes used in *Metaphysical Longings* to initiate an alternate temporality on an experiential and symbolic level.

Specific processes are used in *Metaphysical Longings* to initiate an alternate temporality where others may engage with liminality directly. I focus on two, the technique of guided visualisation that I borrow from yoga nidra, and a process I have come to term as *staging*. In ritual theory, the liminal state is understood as an experiential state that moves beyond the structured realm of the ego. Forms of meditation associated with yoga nidra are also understood to disengage of the active, instrumental self or ego. Yoga nidra was developed by Swami Satyananda Saraswati as a technique to attain transcendental levels of consciousness and awareness. Yoga nidra is translated as psychic sleep and designates trance and other meditative states not constituted by sleeping and dream work. Teachers and practitioners claim psychic sleep is beyond or subtler than the imagery and mental process of the waking and non-lucid dreaming states. Psychic sleep trains the mind to become aware of the movement as the emergence and subsequent disappearance of specific thoughts, feelings and experiences. Through guided meditation the physical body is relaxed in order to activate consciousness, heighten awareness and in turn disengage the ego. This movement from the structured realm of the ego to an unstructured sub-conscious state occurs through an intensification of experience. It is claimed that practicing yoga nidra induces a greater sense of engagement and being with the world because it temporarily disengages a preoccupation with the self through an intensification of experience.

I propose the meditative processes used in *Metaphysical Longings* can be registered as enacting an *other space* in the way that they initiate an alternate temporal experience for the practitioners. *Metaphysical Longings* employs the technique of guided visualisation associated with yoga nidra to lead to this disengagement with the self, refocusing the

attention from quotidian concerns that consume the mind through processes that re-focus the awareness to the breath. Focusing on the breath relaxes the body and, in so doing, the mind. This process of letting go encourages the participant to enter into an alternate state of consciousness. Because psychic sleep is a meditative state that cannot be attained through regular sleep, the instruction “*Do Not Sleep*” is stated by the disembodied voice of the yogi throughout the session.<sup>137</sup> In this way yoga nidra keeps consciousness active, creating an alternate experiential state where new forms of thought can unfold. Following this preliminary stage of the process of guided visualisation a series of instructions were given to the group to retrace their memory and consciousness backwards from the time of the present to first waking. This process of travelling back through time is performed in the mind of the participant by reflecting on the feelings experienced and the thoughts that arose over a specified time frame. By stating, “*The past is part of time and time is part of your mind,*” the voice invokes the capacity to initiate an alternate temporality.<sup>138</sup>

The process of enacting “other” temporalities is furthered by the yogi’s instructions to visualise specific places and objects. Instead of engaging with these sets of instructions in a strictly cognitive and logical manner these forms can only be encountered through feeling, awareness, emotion and imagination. This raises the possibility of these temporalities to encourage ways of thinking about our being in the world on a perceptive level. Engaging with the notion of being through meditative processes radically differs from a philosophical approach that would require a lucid thought. *Metaphysical Longings* sought to offer a temporal *other space* for a group to gather and collectively re-engage with their being in the world through the collective activity of lying down together and practising meditation.

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<sup>137</sup> For this first iteration of *Metaphysical Longings* I used a recording from a yogi that I had on tape cassette.

<sup>138</sup> It is also interesting that the ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time the latter signifies an alternate temporality, an ‘in-between’ moment. *Kairos* implies a moment in which something significant might occur. For more on this see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 64.



Figure 31: Research/Working Notebook

By revealing the possibility of an alternate way of being in the world, *Metaphysical Longings* can also be seen to initiate an *other space* on a symbolic level. As outlined, yoga nidra re-shifts the focus from the individual to the collective or ‘dividual’ through the meditative process that is understood to disengage the ego. Critchley coins the term ‘dividual’ to articulate a shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective.<sup>139</sup> His focus on the ‘dividual’ differs from the focus on the individual that is endorsed by the dominant political framework of liberal democracy.

This notion of the ‘dividual’ that can be engaged with through the meditative processes used in the work is also played out through the presence of the collective. It is generally accepted that sharing an experience can enhance a sense of collectivity. This sense of collectivity became manifest in the dynamic following the groups’ participation in yoga nidra. This transformation to the dynamic amongst the group of strangers became apparent in the body language, as they remained reclining together on the mats, and the

<sup>139</sup> Critchley uses this term in *Mystical Anarchism* to describe the mystics involved in the *Movement of the Free Spirit*. A transcript of the paper *Mystical Anarchism* is provided in the appendix of this thesis.

intimate conversations that opened up amongst the group. While the group were drawing they openly discussed their experience, not only the sensations they perceived during the meditation, but other experiences relating to their own personal lives. In this way *Metaphysical Longings* can also be seen to initiate an *other space*, albeit temporarily for the thirteen strangers that had gathered together.

*Staging* designates the second process used in *Metaphysical Longings* to initiate an *other space*. I use the term *staging* to define the processes that institutes interplay between content and context. As noted in the Introduction, the term staging in theatre implies the use of temporary backdrops to create alternate, imaginary realms. Although *Metaphysical Longings* is not a performance, its enactment ultimately involves what the performance theorist Paul Thom observes as a “performance setting – a space set apart from the space of everyday life.”<sup>140</sup> Thom also identifies the “performance occasion – a period of time structured for the purpose of that performance.”<sup>141</sup> I have come to use the term *staging* to describe a process that acknowledges and plays with these particular elements, i.e. the location and the timing of the event. The process of staging in my work is not to transform the appearance of a space but to enact an *other space* on an experiential and symbolic level, and in so doing furnish interplay between content and context. The location plays a key role in how this work is encountered, experienced and potentially thought. My decision to enact this event in a flat that would soon cease to exist enhanced the symbolic meaning of the work, further implicating the notion of transience and impermanence on a subliminal level. The timing for *Metaphysical Longings* was also a crucial factor and it was purposefully scheduled to take place at 6pm so that it would conclude at dusk. Enacting this work during the ‘magic hour’ also operates on a symbolic level, a particular moment when something significant might happen.<sup>142</sup> This strategy of enacting the event at dusk also enhanced the experiential aspect of the work – on waking the group found themselves in a room that had been

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<sup>140</sup> David Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 174.

<sup>141</sup> Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 174.

<sup>142</sup> The ‘magic hour’ is described by the cinematographer Nestor Almendros as, “a euphemism, because it’s not an hour but around 25 minutes at the most. It is the moment when the sun sets, and after the sun sets and before nightfall. The sky has light, but there is no actual sun. The light is very soft, and there is something magic about it.” It is clear the significance of this moment when Almendros observes that, “It limited us to around twenty minutes a day, but it did pay on the screen. It gave some kind of magic look, a beauty and romanticism.” Arnold Glassman, Todd McCarthy, Stuart Samuels (1992), “Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography”. Kino International. The ‘magic hour’ was used as a cinematic device in *Days of Heaven* (1978) directed by Terrence Mallick, who worked in close collaboration with the cinematographer Nestor Almendros and modelled the filming using little or no studio lights, a pared-back technique not used since the silent movies of the 1920s.

radically transformed by the peach glow from the setting sun. Techniques of *staging* were also employed to prepare the space for the event. This modest intervention of covering the entire floor of the room in blankets operates on a practical and symbolic level by demarcating a space for a collective gathering.

The possibility of *Metaphysical Longings* to initiate an *other* space on an experiential and symbolic level is key to the development of the enquiry because it reveals how an artwork might raise philosophical ideas in a non-didactic manner. This insight suggests how an artwork could potentially engender thought while allowing me to reflect on the thinking that might be raised through this work and how it differs from a way of thinking associated with the discipline of philosophy as it is academically practiced. As outlined, the meditative process rules out certain ways of thinking associated with the academic practice of philosophy, such as theory building and argumentation demanding less rational, more perceptive and imaginative forms of engagement. I also observe how the process of *staging* used in the enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* informs how the work is encountered and perceived. These insights support my provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience.

### 2.3 Summary

The reflective discussions on my early work contextualises the enquiry by providing an entry point into my post-conceptual practice. The first part of this chapter presents the motivation for my undertaking an enquiry into the philosophical character of contemporary art. Through this discussion I introduce and explain the term *entwinement* that I use to describe the engagement between the domains of art and philosophy in my practice. By presenting *The Clear Apprehension...* and *Mapping Nihilion* as artefacts that reveal my engagement with philosophical enquiry I clarify how I approach my practice as offering a temporal space for thought. A discussion focusing on liminality is offered to introduce the term liminality as it was first conceived in the field of anthropology, how this term extended into other fields of practice and how I employ this term in my practice as an alternate perspective to engage with the existential question of being. I outline how my engagement with liminality introduces a new concern in my

practice with experience and motivates a desire to extend a space of thought to others on an experiential level.

The second part of the chapter presents the foundations of the research project and describes how the event emerged as a framework that enabled me to extend my engagement with philosophical thought to others and concurrently enabled others to engage with liminality more directly through actual experience. Through a reflective analysis I describe the processes used in *Metaphysical Longings* to initiate an experience that could be defined as a liminal state. I reflect on how these processes might raise the philosophical notion of being.

These discussions invariably demonstrate that the process of reflection is integral to my practice and accordingly the research project. It is worth noting that registering the motivation for the enquiry and the development of the research project is only possible when there is distance from the work. It is important to stress that my decision to use the event as the framework to explore the philosophical character of contemporary art by examining the engagement between contemporary art and philosophy and investigating how artworks implicate and potentially activate philosophical thought not a concerted decision but emerged through my practice. These decisions, which are registered in this chapter, were not made in a definitive manner but rather emerged in an intuitive way through the process of making and presenting work. This differentiates the methodology of the research as explorative in that it does not strictly adhere to a linear form of pre-planning. As demonstrated through the lineage of my work, the development of the research project was not planned in advance of embarking on the formal enquiry but rather emerged and unfolded out of and through the practice. This insight is significant to the enquiry because it reveals that the thinking raised through a post-conceptual practice follows a similar process of unfolding.

By describing how philosophical enquiry, liminality, event, experience and thought are all integrally linked within my practice this chapter contextualises the research project as the development and enactment of event-based works that seek to enact *other spaces*. Although my practice reveals an *entwinement* of artistic processes and philosophical enquiry, the processes used in the enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* are not those readily associated with the discipline of philosophy. The enactment of *Metaphysical*



*Longings* presents the possibility of raising philosophical ideas implicitly in a non-didactic, nuanced manner in the manner that it is determined by and dependant on the artistic form of the event. This insight is key because it informs a provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience.

## CHAPTER THREE: INAESTHETICS AND THE REVELATION OF THOUGHT

### 3.0 Overview

This chapter is organised in three parts to present how inaesthetics provides a theoretical guide to explore the philosophical character of art. This exploration is undertaken by investigating the possibility of art to implicate and activate a particular form of thought. Although Badiou does not identify a philosophical characteristic in art, through inaesthetics he registers art (via the poem) as “itself a form of thought”.<sup>143</sup> Because Badiou recognises this form of thought as specific, in that it is “inseparable from the sensible” and that it “grants itself the right to the inexplicit”, inaesthetics provides a theoretical guide to explore the capacity of art to implicate thought, without conflating the domain of art with that of philosophy.<sup>144</sup>

My reading of inaesthetics is predominantly informed by Badiou’s *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998), a series of his papers and secondary readings that disclose how inaesthetics reveals the thinking raised by art.<sup>145</sup> The first part of this chapter provides an account of inaesthetics, outlining how it designates a new schema between art and philosophy that is against *speculative aesthetics* and proposes to reveal thought in art. *Speculative aesthetics* is a term Badiou uses to designate the Hegelian model of aesthetics as philosophy’s discourse on art.<sup>146</sup> Because this reading of aesthetics infers the interpretative role of philosophy in relation to art, philosophy is understood as the locus of truth and accordingly the bearer of meaning. Badiou’s radical reappraisal of the role of philosophy is outlined in a brief account of evental philosophy, his overarching system of thought that establishes the theoretical foundations of inaesthetics. It is important to note that Badiou’s philosophical reading of *event* as novelty is different to my reading of event as a term that designates a specific type of artistic form. However,

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<sup>143</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> My research also focuses on Badiou’s papers, including *Philosophy and Desire*, presented in Sydney in 1999 and *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*, 2003, presented at the Drawing Centre, New York. I also look to commentaries on Badiou’s evental philosophy and inaesthetics by Peter Hallward, Gabriel Riera, Sam Gillespie, Jean-Jacques Lecercle, Alberto Toscano and A. J. Barlett.

<sup>146</sup> To read more about speculative aesthetics see Ellie During. During argues that inaesthetics fails to undermine speculative aesthetics, claiming inaesthetics essentially performs the same task as what it is claimed to resist, see During, E. (2005). How Much Truth Can Art Bear (M. Wilkens, ed.) *Polygraph*, 17 (The Philosophy of Alain Badiou), 143-155.

although both readings differ, it is essential to analyse Badiou's *event* because it informs inaesthetics by asserting the possibility of artistic truths. Although this enquiry is not seeking to explore artistic truths it is necessary to clarify how Badiou asserts the possibility of artistic truths to engage with the primacy of art for thought. The discussion explicates how Badiou's *evental* philosophy asserts the primacy of art for thought through a re-conception of philosophy so that it may be conditioned by art, and not vice-versa. Through *evental* philosophy Badiou relocates thought from the external site of philosophy to the immanent space of art. Moving from *evental* philosophy I outline how Badiou formulates inaesthetics as a new schema to engage with the condition of thought in art. These discussions that constitute the first part of this chapter function to substantiate my decision to use inaesthetics as a theoretical guide for the enquiry.

The second part of this chapter presents an explorative analysis of the term *intraphilosophical effect*, a term that he asserts in the epigraph. This task is not without difficulties because Badiou does not provide a definition of this term. Instead he discloses its meaning through his reflections on the poetry of Mallarmé in the *Handbook*.<sup>147</sup> Although the research project does not consist of poems, I maintain that Badiou's method of registering the *intraphilosophical effect* of the poem as an "operation" that activates the "sensory perception of a regime of thought" can be deployed to explore how thought may be engendered through the event-based works that constitute the research project.<sup>148</sup> This is mainly because our general reading of art in its contemporary sense is informed by the Romantic conception of the poem.<sup>149</sup> I support the applicability of this method by looking to Osborne who maintains that our general reading of art in its contemporary sense is informed by the Romantic conception of the poem.<sup>150</sup> I also look to Heiser and Verwoert curatorial project *Romantic Conceptualism* that deploys a similar method through their poetic treatment of conceptualism.<sup>151</sup> Just as Badiou reflects on the "operation" as an open process in

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<sup>147</sup> Badiou focuses on Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* [The Throw of the Dice] (1897) and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, [The Afternoon of the Fawn] (1876). He also looks to the writings of Rimbaud, Celan, Milosz, ben Rabi'a, Rimbaud the novels of Pessoa and the plays of Samuel Beckett.

<sup>148</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics, Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art," 22.

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<sup>151</sup> Verwoert also asserts the position that our general reading of contemporary art is informed by what he terms as the "event of Romanticism". Verwoert names it as such because he reads the artistic and philosophical discourse of Romanticism around 1800 as the "threshold to the modern age –." Verwoert, *Romantic Conceptualism, Romantic Conceptualism*, ed. Ellen Seifermann and Christine Kintisch. (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2007), 165-175.

Mallarmé's poem, Verwoert performs a similar poetic analysis, revealing how specific conceptual artworks similarly "operate" as an open process that activates thought.<sup>152</sup> (It is worth noting that Verwoert's revisionist reading of conceptualism reveals Novalis's use of the term "operation" anticipates Mallarmé.) *Romantic Conceptualism* is significant for this enquiry because it presents the possibility of art to *invite* thought while supporting my provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience. I outline how this revisionist reading asserting experience within the mediatory process of conceptualism and in so doing opens up a narrow reading of conceptualism as a "purely logical inquiry [sic.]" by focusing on Verwoert's reflections on Robert Barry's conceptual propositions and Heiser's interview with Susan Hiller. I also look to Peter Lamarque's poetic treatment of conceptual art to develop my proposition that the thinking raised by art is perceived through the encounter. These insights are brought to bear in the following chapter in the analysis of the event-based works that configure the research project.

### 3.1 Badiou's Event – Novelty, The Possibility of Truths and Setting the Conditions for New Regimes of Thought

Because the event is a prevalent theme within philosophical systems of thought, this term cannot be used in an equivocal manner. While the philosophy of *event* forms the philosophical systems of Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-François Lyotard, the later work of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida's philosophy of *différance* (a deliberate misspelling of *différence*). Badiou's *event* is configured in a different manner to these systems of thought. Badiou describes how the *event* has become a common term for a large number of contemporary philosophers, identifying this in Heidegger as *ereignis* and in Wittgenstein's understanding of "the world as everything which happens."<sup>153</sup> Badiou's *event* departs from these readings by articulating a point of interruption, describing the structural dimension of the event as *novelty*, through the appearance of the supernumerary term. Badiou's interpretation of *event* as novelty is predominantly informed by Gilles Deleuze.<sup>154</sup> Deleuze interprets novelty as the emergence and

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<sup>152</sup> Verwoert, *Romantic Conceptualism*, 174.

<sup>153</sup> Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze,"

<sup>154</sup> For more on Deleuze's *event* see Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

enactment of new forms through which we engage and think about the world. Deleuze designates *event* as the appearance of things in the world. Under these conditions the framework of the world is conceived to generate novelty, and thus the source of *event*. Badiou's commentator, Sam Gillespie observes that Badiou's reading of novelty departs from Deleuze in relation to locating the emergence of these forms. Badiou inverts the source of the Deleuzian *event* and locates it outside of the "contemporary world".<sup>155</sup> This is because Badiou maintains a steadfast conviction that the contemporary world in its current neo-liberal configuration is "hostile to truths."<sup>156</sup>

It is necessary to address the complex issue of truths because this underlies Badiou's *event*. It seems extraordinary to encounter a contemporary philosopher adhering to a notion of truth following developments in post-modern thought. However, Peter Hallward argues that Badiou's adherence to the concept of truth is not "merely nostalgic commitment," but is more radical in its resolve to respond to the condition of our times.<sup>157</sup> To explain, Badiou's adherence to truth is not an adherence to totality, because it sustains the post-modern position that there is no absolute and singular Truth.<sup>158</sup> Instead Badiou adheres to a notion of *truths*. By acknowledging the possibility of truths, Badiou presents a new reading of philosophy that departs from the three *orientations* (traditions) that he identifies in contemporary philosophy. Badiou identifies these as hermeneutic, analytic and post-modern and proposes that underlying each is a concern with meaning. Badiou claims the hermeneutic orientation centres on meaning through its focus on the interpretation of being and affiliates this orientation with German Romanticism and the work of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamar.<sup>159</sup> Badiou

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<sup>155</sup> Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty, Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 14.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>157</sup> Peter Hallward, "Introduction," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), xxiv.

<sup>158</sup> Like Jean-François Lyotard, Badiou registers the impossibility of a single construct to reconcile the "plurality of registers and language in thought [and] in action." Badiou acknowledges "... the post-modern orientation holds the aim of philosophy to be the deconstruction of the accepted facts of our modernity. In particular post-modern philosophy proposes to dissolve the great constructions of the nineteenth century to which we remain captive – the history of the historical subject, the idea of progress, the idea of revolution, the idea of humanity and the ideal of science. Its aims show that these great constructions are outdated, that we live in the multiple, that there are no great epics of history or of thought; that there is an irreducible plurality of registers and languages in thought as in action; registers so diverse and heterogeneous that no great idea can totalize or reconcile them. At base, the objective of post-modern philosophy is to deconstruct the idea of totality – to the extent that philosophy itself finds itself destabilised." Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought, Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Feltman and Justin Clemens, trans. Oliver Feltman and Justin Clemens (London/New York: Continuum, 2005), 32.

<sup>159</sup> "The hermeneutic orientation assigns philosophy the aim of deciphering the meaning of being, the meaning of being-in-the-world, and its central concept is that of interpretation. There are statements, acts, writings and configurations whose meanings are obscure, latent, hidden or forgotten. Philosophy must be provided with a method of interpretation that will serve to clarify this obscurity, and bring forth from it authentic meaning, a meaning which would be a figure of our destiny in relation to the destiny of being itself." Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 32.

maintains that the rules of meaning are the predominant concern of the analytic orientation, seeing this emerging out of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap's theories on language.<sup>160</sup> Badiou identifies the concern with meaning in the post-modern orientation through Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard's contestation of the Grand Narrative.<sup>161</sup> Because Badiou claims these philosophical traditions centre on meaning, he argues contemporary philosophy in each of its guises performs a departure from a "truth-orientated philosophy" to a philosophy that becomes a meditation on language, an enquiry into "techniques of utterances and sites for enunciation."<sup>162</sup> The problem with this departure from the classical ideal of truth for Badiou is that philosophical problems become grammatical problems. According to Badiou, this emphasis on language implicitly debilitates thought.<sup>163</sup> The commitment to the possibility of *event* and its capacity to transform the current socio-political situation demonstrates Badiou as an interventionist thinker.<sup>164</sup> From this position, Hallward argues Badiou's *evental* philosophy as offering a new philosophical system to engage with the contemporary condition.<sup>165</sup>

Although Badiou's reading of the contemporary world appears nihilistic, his adherents claim *evental* philosophy offers a system to re-engage in a more optimistic and ultimately more proactive level with the contemporary world.<sup>166</sup> Badiou deploys the mathematical term the "state of the situation" to designate what is permitted representation in the world.<sup>167</sup> The state of the situation articulates what is presented or

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<sup>160</sup> "The analytic orientation holds the aim of philosophy to be the strict demarcation of those utterances which have meaning and those which have not. The aim is to demarcate what can be said and what it is impossible or illegitimate to say. The essential instrument of analytic philosophy is the logical and grammatical analysis of utterances, and ultimately of the entire language ... the central concept is not the interpretation, but the rule." Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 32.

<sup>160</sup> Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 37.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "Badiou's Poetics", *Think Again, Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London, New York: Continuum, 2009), 208.

<sup>163</sup> Badiou seeks to resist the linguistic turn demonstrated in the analytic school by Wittgenstein or the continental tradition by Heidegger through hermeneutics in which language determines enquiry as in Badiou's opinion "... language is not the absolute horizon of thought." Badiou, "The Desire for Philosophy."

<sup>164</sup> This form of intervention is evidenced by Badiou's understanding of philosophy as the space of revolt, claiming that "the desire of philosophy implies a dimension of revolt: there is no philosophy without the discontent of thinking in its confrontation with the world as it is." In order to activate this point of interruption and to sustain the task of revolt in philosophy there needs at least one unconditional requirement - the necessity for the "reconstruction or re-emergence of the category of truth." Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 36-37 and Hallward, *Think Again, Alain Badiou*, xxiv.

<sup>165</sup> Hallward, *Think Again: Alain Badiou*, xxiv.

<sup>166</sup> Riera, *Alain Badiou, Philosophy and its Conditions*, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Badiou draws on Cantor's mathematical axioms to define how the emergence of truth originates from within the "state of the situation" (but not yet registered) to transform it. The axiom of the *void* articulated in Cantor's set theory is fundamental in the formation of Badiou's conjectures on ontology. It is important to outline that the void is not identical to nothingness; rather, the axiom of the null set demonstrates that although appearing empty, the empty set has a property that can be identified as designating a set to which no elements belong. In short, the dualistic aspect of

what can be represented in the world as it is configured, while concurrently acknowledging the forms such as thought that are not yet represented. This mathematical term defines the presentation of sets and the structural relations that validate their presentation.<sup>168</sup> Badiou borrows this term to articulate what can be presented in the world as it is socially and politically constructed. Through this term, Badiou concurrently acknowledges the forms (be they physical entities in space or temporal abstract ideas) which are not represented. In this way Badiou's *event* differs from the Deleuzian *event* through its emergence within gaps that are not registered by the "state of the situation". In relation to art, Badiou claims the state of the situation endorses and maintains formulaic artistic configurations.<sup>169</sup> These formulaic artistic configurations conform to standardisation that Badiou maintains is indicative of the regulative forces of the global market. Badiou links this flattening of culture with the loss of political agency because, he argues, the proliferation of generic artistic forms represses the development of more critical forms of practice and thought through exclusion and repression. Badiou articulates the state of the situation in the *Handbook* by claiming, "there is only one politics, or as they say, 'there is no alternative'."<sup>170</sup>

However, rather than accepting that there is no alternative, Badiou engages with this challenge by presenting the possibility of truths as moments of confrontation with the "state of the situation."<sup>171</sup> Bearing witness to these forms not yet represented requires a

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the void advanced in set theory as a "universally included set that belongs to no one in particular" asserts a "radical infinity beyond all possible proofs of construction." Within set theory the void or null set  $\{\emptyset\}$  designates the gaps that are not registered by the state of the situation. As the null set can be thought and located within the state of the situation, inconsistency of this state is demonstrated. This radical infinity beyond all possible proofs of construction enables an understanding of the emergence of the *event* as the presentation of the void which had been previously prohibited by the state of the situation. The *event* as truth procedure enables this ever present but prohibited void to emerge through its recognition. The *event* points to the inconsistency within a situation held together and through its enactment marks a rupture that enables the emergence of a previously imperceptible truth. In this way an *event* is understood as the supplementation of apparition (*l'apparître*) outside of the state of the situation transforming it by overturning a given state of affairs. Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 36-37 and Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty*, 14

<sup>168</sup> What is distinctive about Badiou's system of thought is not only an adherence to the possibility and actuality of truths, but his use of mathematics to conceive of truths. Badiou refers to mathematics as the place of ontology because he argues it as sustaining an objective enquiry into being. Badiou identifies mathematics as offering technical and conceptual tools to register the inconsistencies in how the contemporary world is presented. Mathematics provides the resource to engage and elucidate the anomaly articulated by the state of the situation and to conceive of the emergence of truth as transforming this state.

<sup>169</sup> He articulates this, claiming, "The name 'culture' comes to obliterate that of 'art'." Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, The Foundations of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>170</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 52. Badiou's sentiment is also articulated by the term *capitalist realism*. Fisher's publication is aptly subtitled *...is there no alternative?* Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (UK: Zero Books, 2009). Fisher re-appropriates the term capitalist realism from Michael Schudson, who coined the term in the mid 1980s to describe the realism of advertising as advancing the lifestyle of individual consumerism over social integration and the betterment of community. Fisher co-opts this term to describe the overriding sense of resignation with the current socio-political situation.

<sup>171</sup> Alain Badiou, "Aristotle Book II Being: Excess, State of the Situation, One/Multiple, Whole/Parts, or  $\hat{1}/\hat{1}$ ," *Being and Event* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2007). How Badiou conceives this concept is explicated succinctly by

new way of thinking. This new way of thinking is precisely how Badiou conceives novelty. Novelty suggests a critical and transformative position because it challenges the limitations to thought by re-thinking and engaging with the contemporary world. By locating novelty in the point of interruption Badiou registers truths to rupture existing knowledge. A.J. Bartlett describes how this break with doxa performs novelty by setting the conditions for new regimes of thought.<sup>172</sup> Bartlett describes how Badiou's *event* presents the link between the possibility of truths and the capacity to engender thought by identifying truths as *evental* sites that witness and re-think the world. Badiou sees *evental* sites as points of interruption that radically reconfigure previous forms of thought.

Badiou locates *evental* sites in mathematics, politics, art and love because in each of these sites Badiou observes the possibility to radically reconfigure previous forms of thought. Although my enquiry is focused on art and not maths, politics or love, it is necessary to register that Badiou treats these four non-philosophical fields as *evental sites*, because it presents philosophy in a radically new way. The significance of this for the enquiry is that under Badiou's system of thought, philosophy can no longer be regarded as the domain of truth, since philosophy "deals with truths it does not produce."<sup>173</sup> By registering the truths in mathematics, politics, art and love Badiou overwrites the privileged realm of philosophy as the locus of truth. Under these terms philosophy cannot impose meaning on the artistic form because it may only operate as the "go-between in our encounters with truth."<sup>174</sup> Badiou outlines, if philosophy is to contest the state of the situation "philosophy must examine the possibility of a point of

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Riera. Riera, *Alain Badiou, Philosophy and its Conditions*, 11.

<sup>172</sup> Badiou elucidates novelty through his reading of the *Pauline event*. Although Badiou is a confirmed atheist he draws on the conversion of St. Paul to describe how a truth procedure interrupts the order of knowledge by attaching itself to the void within a situation. In the case of the *Pauline event*, the void of the situation is revealed as Christ's resurrection, a fable or myth becoming the truth for an emergent community sustained by St. Paul's fidelity to this truth in his Messianic vocation. The universal address of St. Paul reveals an inconsistency in the state of the situation in relation to community, through the previous separation of Jew and non-Jew. This inconsistency is reversed in the *Pauline event* by St. Paul's inclusive address to all. Badiou registers novelty in the *Pauline event* through the acknowledgement of an indiscernible multiplicity.

<sup>173</sup> Under these conditions philosophy can never be the source of the event, but functions to expose the truths as the 'void' of the situation which was previously hidden. A useful way to demonstrate an event in art is by looking to the critic Thomas Hess, who observes that "abstract art has always existed, but until this century it never knew it existed." This observation demonstrates how philosophy can be seen to operate under the condition of art. Rather than imposing meaning on abstract art through interpretation, the philosophical role is that of registering the emergence of an artistic truth through the *event* of abstract painting. By identifying the *event* of abstract painting Hess's analysis also demonstrates how a truth procedure emerges – not as or through a single artwork but through the accumulation of these 'forms' as configurations. Art and philosophy are thus interlinked through the enactment and recognition of truth as a regime of thought that transforms the previous situation. Hess, *Abstract Painting*, 131 quoted in Danto, *History and Theory*, 127-143.

<sup>174</sup> Riera, *Alain Badiou, Philosophy and its Conditions*, 69.



interruption” so that thought can “extract itself from this circulation and take possession of itself once again.”<sup>175</sup> As outlined in the overview the task of my enquiry is not to examine the truth in art, but to explore the condition of thought in art. In advancing artistic truths Badiou’s evental philosophy advances the primacy of art for thought. This insight plays a determining role in Badiou’s configuration of inaesthetics.

### 3.1.1 Inaesthetics – A New Relation of Philosophy to Art

“By ‘inaesthetics’, I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.”<sup>176</sup>

Inaesthetics presents a radically new engagement between art and philosophy that departs from *speculative aesthetics*. As outlined in Chapter One the troubling of aesthetics in art practice was instrumental in the development of a contemporary reading of art because it initiated the emergence of thought as an essential condition of art. Why might this departure from aesthetics be important to Badiou and how does this bear on the condition of thought in art?

Badiou claims the critical value of inaesthetics because it ensures the revelation of new regimes of thought, presenting inaesthetics as a philosophical project that departs from the task of defining art. By positing inaesthetics “against speculative aesthetics” Badiou confronts the problematic relation between contemporary art and aesthetics. By stating inaesthetics “makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy” Badiou registers a new task for philosophy that overwrites philosophy’s interpretative role. Badiou positions inaesthetics against speculative aesthetics because he sees this schema as imposing a false truth on art. Badiou configures inaesthetics as a new schema that

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<sup>175</sup> Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 29.

<sup>176</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Epigraph.

disrupts this imposition and sustains a new engagement between the domains so that philosophy instead reveals the truths engendered in the way that art thinks.<sup>177</sup>

Badiou uses the metaphorical term “knot” to define inaesthetics. He configures inaesthetics as a schema that sustains reciprocity between art and philosophy. He formulates this schema in response to three previous schemata that are, didactic (platonian), classical (Aristotelian) and Romantic (hermeneutic). Badiou identifies these schemata as designating particular relationships between art and philosophy, claiming they sustain “closure” because they are lacking the resources to reveal truths. Badiou maintains that these schemata further undermine the fulfilment of new regimes of thought by imposing a false truth on art. Badiou’s three *schemata* follow Hegel’s *stages or categories*.<sup>178</sup> Like Hegel Badiou defines each schema by the relationship of art to philosophy, using Hegel’s categories (although he uses the term didactic to designate Hegel’s symbolic stage). It is worth noting that Badiou makes no reference Hegel. I venture this omission of Hegel is not an oversight on Badiou’s part, but rather an ineffective strategy to distance inaesthetics from a Hegelian aesthetics.

Badiou maintains that contemporary art cannot be approached philosophically through the previous schemata because they prohibit reciprocity between art and philosophy which is essential for the possibility of engendering of thought.<sup>179</sup> According to Badiou the didactic and classical schemata undermine arts primacy for thought by privileging philosophy as the site for thought. Badiou outlines how this occurs in the didactic schema that is informed by a Platonic understanding of art as a form of mimesis. Rather than reading art as an imitation of *things*, i.e. a form of representation, the Platonic understanding of art is that it is an imitation of *truth* itself. Under these conditions art is not the locus of truth but as a semblance of truth. “The charm of the semblance of truth” indicates a false truth, and as a false truth art must be placed under the control of philosophy.<sup>180</sup> This suspicion of art is articulated by the explicit rejection of art from

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<sup>177</sup> Toscano claims, “Badiou’s approach is committed both to declaring the autonomy of artistic procedures (poetic or literary, cinematic or theatrical) and to registering what he calls their “intrap philosophical effects.” (See the epigraph to this volume)” Alberto Toscano, “Introduction” *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), x.

<sup>178</sup> Danto, Hegel’s End of Art Thesis, 7.

<sup>179</sup> He describes the current cultural situation as one of “saturation and closure”, referring to the proliferation of artistic forms that delineate and restrict the cultural horizon. Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 2 & 8.

<sup>180</sup> The platonic gesture of excluding art from the polis of his idealised *Republic* demonstrates Plato’s suspicion of art. Plato’s suspicion is indicative of how he interprets art in relation to truth. Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 2.

Plato's *Republic*. Plato rejected art because he maintained truth emerges from the rigorous process of reasoning founded on first principles of philosophy. Badiou outlines how the classical schema undermines art's primacy through the Aristotelian development of Platonic understanding of art as mimetic. In the classical schema Aristotle subverts Plato's suspicion of art as threatening the first principles of philosophy by advancing art as providing a cathartic function. As truth is not immanent to art, the classical emphasis on verisimilitude renders art beyond suspicion. The Marxist philosophy of language, Jean-Jacques Lecercle reflects on Badiou's inaesthetic reading of the poem. Lecercle articulates how *speculative aesthetics* sustains the classical emphasis on verisimilitude by observing, "The poem is no longer a source of knowledge but has become the object of the theoretical gaze of the philosopher, on a par with natural phenomena, and no longer concerned with truth but only verisimilitude."<sup>181</sup> Under the didactic and classical schemata artistic forms require interpretation from an external source because artistic truths are neither singular nor immanent. Badiou maintains that the didactic and classical schema cannot ensure the revelation of new regimes of thought because they do not recognise truth as immanent or singular to art.

Lecercle observes that the Romantic schema corresponds with Badiou's understanding that artistic truth is immanent. The Romantic schema, defined as the age of poets or the "literary absolute" is associated with philosophical aesthetics of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has remained dominant to date.<sup>182</sup> According to Badiou, Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophical system of thought centres around a Romantic conception of the poem being the "natural site for authenticity and the disclosure of being and Truth."<sup>183</sup> However, as a philosopher who seeks to register *truths*, the Romantic belief that art is site of Absolute Truth is unsustainable for Badiou because it prohibits the possibility of *truths* in the alternate non-philosophical fields of mathematics, politics and love.<sup>184</sup> In his *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1999) Badiou describes Romanticism as a moment when philosophy becomes "sutured" to only one of its conditions.<sup>185</sup> Badiou maintains this restricts philosophy from the free play that is required in order to "define a regime of passage, or of intellectual circulation between the truth procedures," in the additional

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<sup>181</sup> Lecercle, *Badiou's poetics*, 210.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, ed. Norman Madarasz, trans. Norman Madarasz (New York: Suny, 1992), 12.

<sup>185</sup> Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 12 -14.

non-philosophical fields that condition philosophy. He further states that, “the most frequent cause of such a blockage is that instead of constructing a space of compossibility ... philosophy delegates its functions to one or another of its conditions, handing over the whole thought to one generic procedure.”<sup>186</sup> Badiou maintains that philosophy must be “de-sutured” from the poem to ensure its free circulation so that the emergence of truths, be they artistic, mathematical, political or amorous, can be registered by philosophy.<sup>187</sup>

Inaesthetics offers a new schema that re-configures philosophy so that it may be conditioned by art. By maintaining a quality of compossibility, inaesthetics sustains the immanence of truth in art in the Romantic schema, while re-asserting the presence of truths in the non-philosophical fields.<sup>188</sup> Badiou borrows the term compossibility from the philosophical system of the mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716). For Leibniz, compossibility describes a situation that permits the existence of properties or elements without one suppressing the other. Badiou deploys the concept of compossibility to define the reciprocal engagement between philosophy and art that underpins inaesthetics. Badiou argues that because inaesthetics sustains a free circulation of meaning between art and philosophy, it furnishes the possibility of the revelation of new regimes of thought. By departing from a one-sided engagement where philosophy’s task is to interpret art, inaesthetics ensures philosophy may reveal the meaning that is implicit to art.

How does Badiou as a philosopher sustain reciprocity between the disciplines? Although Badiou reflects philosophically on the poetry of Mallarmé, he maintains that he avoids interpretation through inaesthetics. Instead of imposing meaning on the artistic form Badiou seeks to reveal the thinking that Mallarmé’s poetry generates. Badiou claims that by departing from a one-sided engagement where philosophy’s task is to interpret art inaesthetics ensures philosophy instead reveals the meaning that is implicit to art. Badiou identifies syntax as the crucial operator in Mallarmé’s practice,

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<sup>186</sup> Riera, *Alain Badiou, Philosophy and its Conditions*, 69.

<sup>187</sup> Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 12.

<sup>188</sup> An enquiry into the revelation of mathematical, political and amorous truths are for another day. For more on the revelation of truths in these three non-philosophical fields please see Badiou, *Infinite Thought, Truth and the Return to Philosophy*.

focusing on this to reflect on the thinking engendered by art, while avoiding falling into the trap of interpretation.

Although Badiou maintains a forthright refusal of speculative aesthetics, Badiou's commentator Ellie During claims that Badiou's claim is problematic. During argues that Badiou's treatment of metaphor in the *Handbook* demonstrate the act of interpretation. Badiou identifies these metaphors in Mallarmé as "the Constellation, the Tomb, or the Sawn" and in Rimbaud as "the Christ, the Worker, or the infernal Groom." In Chapter 9, "Being, Existence, Thought: Prose and Concept", Badiou focuses on metaphors that include the dim, the shade, the void and more visceral forms such as the skull, the clenched eyes, ooze, the old woman, the man and the child in the French translation of Samuel Beckett's "testamental text" *Worstward Ho* (1983).<sup>189</sup> Although Badiou claims these metaphors reveal "a network of thought or shorthand of the question of being," During argues this explanatory process seems uncomfortably proximate to forms of interpretation that Badiou rejects, arguing that the inevitability of speculation within aesthetics and the wider discourse of philosophy is reaffirmed by Badiou's tendency to partake in this inevitable procedure.<sup>190</sup> While accepting During's observation that Badiou's conjectures on the poem could be argued as interpretative, it is clear from Badiou's reading that he does not seek to explicate meaning. By reading the poem as "organis[ing] a consistent dispositive in which the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory [sensible] presentation of a regime of thought: subtraction and isolation for Mallarmé, for Rimbaud," Badiou does not seek to interpret but seeks to articulate how the poem operates in the way that it raises thought. Inaesthetics provides a theoretical framework to support a rigorous enquiry into the philosophical character of contemporary art by giving further insight into how thought might be activated through our encounter with the artistic form.<sup>191</sup> During's observation nevertheless provides a cautionary guide for the enquiry to avoid a potential risk of slipping into interpretation. Attending to this risk ensures that this enquiry is not undermined by explicating the

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<sup>189</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 89.

<sup>190</sup> During argues that the inevitability of speculation within aesthetics and the wider discourse of philosophy is reaffirmed by Badiou's tendency to partake in this inevitable procedure. For more see During, "How Much Truth," 143-155.

<sup>191</sup> Although in some cases his conjectures on the literary configuration of the poem could be argued as interpretative, specifically in relation to his treatment of the metaphor, it is clear in Badiou's discussion on the metaphors that he reads these metaphors in Mallarmé and Rimbaud as "organis[ing] a consistent dispositive in which the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory [sensible] presentation of a regime of thought: subtraction and isolation for Mallarmé, presence and interruption for Rimbaud." Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 20. (The original and English translation of this concrete poem is provided in the Appendix.)

meaning of the artistic forms that configure the research project, but remains focused on its task to explore how philosophical thought is raised through enactment.

### 3.2 Intraphilosophical Effect – The Unnameable and Activating Thought

Although Badiou does not identify a philosophical character of art as Osborne does, I maintain that his identification of an “*intraphilosophical effect*” of art suggests this characteristic in the way that it reveals how art raises thought implicitly.<sup>192</sup> Although Badiou conceives artistic thought as specific and irreducible to philosophy, this form of thought possesses philosophical attributes through its potential to raise philosophical ideas on a perceptive level. By outlining how Badiou formulates the *intraphilosophical effect* of art as a “special regime of thought” this discussion teases out how Badiou conceives art to activate thought.

The task of explicating what Badiou means by the term “*intraphilosophical effect*” is not without difficulties. This is inferred in the first chapter of the *Handbook*, which states, “Most of the consequences of this thesis remain veiled and it demands from us a considerable labour of reformulation.”<sup>193</sup> Although Badiou uses this term in the epigraph to the *Handbook*, he provides no definitive explanation for the term. My task is therefore explorative in nature and I undertake this by considering how Badiou “registers” this effect in the poem by conceiving the poem as an “operation”, an artistic form that sustains an open-process in the way that it presents itself “via the linguistic power of a possible thought.”<sup>194</sup> I mirror Badiou’s process in this analysis by seeking to “register” how he conceives the “*intraphilosophical effect*” of the poem. Through my analysis I observe how Badiou presents the poem as a specific regime of thought by reflecting on its inherent quality of indeterminacy and how this quality asserts a resistance to interpretation. I observe how it is by resisting interpretation that the poem

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<sup>192</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 9.

<sup>193</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> This method of registering informed by Badiou’s translator, Alberto Toscano, who states, “Badiou’s approach is committed to both declaring the autonomy of artistic procedures (poetic, literary, cinematic or theatrical) and to registering what he calls their ‘intraphilosophical effect’.” Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, x. “via the linguistic power of a possible thought.” Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 18.

fulfils its “operation” because it necessitates, or in Badiou’s lexicon, “demands” engagement.<sup>195</sup>

Through his reflections on *Un Coup de Dés* (The Throw of the Dice) (1897), Badiou discloses how the indeterminate quality of this poem ensures its operative dimension by asserting a resistance to interpretation. When reflecting on this poem Badiou states “it is only there, in its powerlessness, that a truth is stated”.<sup>196</sup> Although this enquiry is not focused on the exploration of truths, Badiou understands these truths as the emergence of new regimes of thought. This is because truths perform novelty by causing a rupture to existing knowledge. Badiou observes the complexity of artistic truths, and accordingly, the emergence of new regimes of thought as inherently difficult to register. Because truths perform novelty, Badiou maintains they are unnameable.<sup>197</sup> However, Badiou maintains that it is the task of philosophy to register this *unnameable*. As Lecerle observes, “For language is always, at first at least, the language of the situation, in which the event cannot be named, in which the truths that follow from the event cannot be formulated. And yet the *unnameable* event *must* be named.”<sup>198</sup> Badiou succinctly names this indeterminate quality in the poetry of Mallarmé as the *unnameable*.

Badiou reflects on the *unnameable* in the work of Mallarmé by referencing his claim that “there must always be enigma in poetry.”<sup>199</sup> He considers the enigma of *Un Coup de Dés* as the disclosure of this indeterminate quality, identifying it in this poem as a pure notion constituted in “the moment of this dissolution.”<sup>200</sup> For Badiou, the *unnameable* is the enigmatic nature of the poem that preserves a guarantee that language can neither constitute nor poetically validate, quoting from the poem, “a rock, false manor immediately evaporated, in a mist that imposed limit on its own infinity.” Badiou identifies the task of the poem is to disclose the *unnameable* and maintains to fulfil this task the poem must “break and reconstruct language.”<sup>201</sup> Badiou observes

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<sup>195</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 29.

<sup>196</sup> Jean-Jacques Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, Vol. 4, in *Think Again, Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London, New York: Continuum, 2009), 211.

<sup>197</sup> The truths are unnameable because they designate the ‘void’ of the situation which was previously hidden. See footnotes 167 and 173.

<sup>198</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 211.

<sup>199</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 23.

<sup>200</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 29.

<sup>201</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 211.

how machinations of the poem achieve this twofold movement in its attempt to strive towards the limits of language. Lecerle reflects on Badiou's claim, observing the "powerless nostalgia of the poetic idea" is a failure of language to attend to the task of fully articulating the poetic idea. Paradoxically, the failure of language to articulate the idea is precisely where the value of the poem lies because it suspends meaning. By suspending meaning the poem initiates a radically new regime of thought. Lecerle explicates this by observing what is "demanded of the poem, in order for it to condition philosophy" is a resistance to the "charm and incitement of fiction, image and narrative ... which all too readily makes sense and thereby fosters interpretation." To reaffirm this point Lecerle maintains that the poem should "choose truth which does not make sense in meaning."<sup>202</sup>

As a philosopher of language Lecerle is aware that many of his associates would deem his reading of the poem as moving towards a point where it "vanishes into mere gibberish."<sup>203</sup> Lecerle's analysis instead confirms Badiou's strategy of negation. He does not see Badiou's treatment of the poem as a radical performance of grammatical enunciation but observes how Badiou registers Mallarmé as a striving towards silence. Lecerle advances the productive aspect of this strategy of negation, by describing how Badiou registers the *unnameable* essence of the poem by focusing on its "s syntactical machinations."<sup>204</sup> By syntactical machinations Badiou infers a shift from the conventional interpretative treatment of the poetic metaphor as singular elements in the poem to a more immersive engagement with the "operation" of the poem, a term Mallarmé uses in his reflections when defining the poem.<sup>205</sup> Lecerle maintains that by disturbing the poem, the syntactic machinations suspend meaning and thus permit the poem to fulfil its "operation" by activating thought.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 213.

<sup>204</sup> Badiou reflects on these syntactical machinations in Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 70.

<sup>205</sup> Lecerle describes how Badiou registers syntactic machinations in the temporal nature of the poem by the terms *vanishing* and *cancellation* in the content of the poem and the term *foreclosure* within the poetic structure. The *vanishing* marks the absence of the event in the site of its emergence. Badiou identifies this in the absence of the word "shipwreck" (*le naufrage*) – that which names the *event*, but does not appear. Instead the *event* is revealed through a series of metonyms that include *vanishing*, *cancellation* and *foreclosure*. *Cancellation* infers the mark of undecidability of the *event* as the vanishing of the shipwreck that becomes cancelled in the poem, while *foreclosure* suggests the act of making absence of the "slightest trace." Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 213.

<sup>206</sup> Lecerle describes the productive aspect of this strategy in negative theology. He also sees this strategy of negation in psychoanalysis through Lacan's conception of the Real that might only be approached through its negative description. Similarly, Lecerle identifies a similar strategy of negation in Badiou's truths in that they are *unnameable*, undecidable and indiscernible.



By claiming, “There are revolutions in language as there are in society. Mallarmé is the name for this new operation of the poem,” Lecerle rearticulates Mallarmé’s refusal to rehearse formulaic artistic presentation that would hinder the enactment of new regimes of thought.<sup>207</sup> Badiou’s commentator J.A. Bartlett also reflects on Badiou’s reading of the poem in relation to his overarching system of *evental* philosophy. He also observes the productive aspect of Badiou’s strategy of negation in his reading of the poem as the “edge of the void.” Badiou’s reading of the poem articulates a form of “thought whose intelligibility owes nothing to the regime of existing knowledge.”<sup>208</sup> Bartlett observes how this break with doxa performs novelty by setting the conditions for new regimes of thought.

In relation to contemporary art, the potential in art to interrupt dominant meaning and break with doxa has also been asserted and articulated by Morris in his essay “Notes on Sculpture Part I”. Morris articulates this break with doxa in practice by differentiating the motivations of the iconographer (the practitioner) with the iconologist (the interpreter). Morris observes that “...the iconographer who locates shared elements and themes has a different ambition than the iconologist, who, according to Panofsky, locates a common meaning.”<sup>209</sup> As Morris outlines, the iconologist’s concern with confirming and establishing the dominant meaning is at odds with the concern of the iconographer as practitioner. Rather than locating common meaning, the process of the practitioner reveals novel, uncommon meaning. In this way Morris asserts how common or dominant meaning can be interrupted through art practice. Setting the conditions that can interrupt meaning is understood by Bartlett as critical, because it challenges the limitations to thought by engendering a new way of thinking and a new way to engage with the world.

When reflecting on art (via the poem), indeterminacy does not denote inadequacy because it is through this quality that the poem fulfils its task to activate thought. To reiterate, Badiou articulates how an indeterminate quality in Mallarmé necessitates engagement when he states, “Mallarmé’s poem does not ask to be interpreted, nor does it possess any keys. The poem ‘demands that we delve into its operation’.”<sup>210</sup> The

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<sup>207</sup> Lecerle, *Badiou's Poetics*, 211.

<sup>208</sup> J.A. Bartlett, “Conditional Notes on a New Republic,” in *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens Paul Ashton (Melbourne: re:press, 2006), 217.

<sup>209</sup> Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part I,” in *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology* (LA, California: University of California Press, 1995), 223.

<sup>210</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 29.

“demand” that Mallarmé identifies takes place in the encounter. The encounter with the poem provokes the reader to delve into its operation. Badiou observes how thought is activated by stating, “the enigma lies in this demand ... not in order to know what it means, but rather to think what happens in it.”<sup>211</sup> The necessity that each of us must configure our own thought is asserted by Badiou’s observation of the poem that: “No one is its master, but everyone can come to be inscribed within it.” For Badiou, the value of Mallarmé’s poem is precisely because it is subtracted from the “impasse of the master.”<sup>212</sup> By suspending authorship, the poem permits us to forgo the singularity of meaning, by replacing this with the thinking of this thought.

For Badiou, the significance of this *unnameable* quality in the poem is that it sets the conditions for the emergence of new regimes of thought by activating a form of thought that escapes the existing regime of knowledge. This form of thought that is activated by the poem escapes knowledge because it cannot be qualified, quantified or fully determined. This is inferred by Mallarmé’s request that one must proceed with words that are “allusive and never direct.” Because of its refusal to be determined Badiou names this form of thought *unthinkable*.<sup>213</sup> He develops this further by naming the poem *unthinkable* thought.<sup>214</sup> In this way the poem places a ‘demand’ on the reader by necessitating them to think, but in a manner that is different to the thinking that takes place through reason, logic or analysis.

Because the operation of the poem can only be fulfilled through the encounter, the specificity of thought is determined by the subject’s experience of the artistic form, be it a poem or, in the case of the *Metaphysical Longings*, the groups encounter in a soon to be demolished flat. This form of thought differs to reason, logic or analysis because it is bound with experience in the way that it is determined by the subjects’ engagement with the artistic form. The experiential nature of this thought is articulated by Mallarmé’s definition of the poem as “a happening of *l’Idée* in the sensible itself.”<sup>215</sup> This is further affirmed by Badiou’s claim that “art is the process of a truth and this truth is always the truth of the sensible.”<sup>216</sup> For Mallarmé, this is not the representation of the sensible. The

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 56.

<sup>213</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 134.

<sup>214</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

<sup>215</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 29.

<sup>216</sup> Badiou, *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*, 166.

sensible is what manifests as poetic thought. Rather than considering the poem as a sensible form of idea, affixing a specific idea through linguistic representation, the poem designates a process or an activity of thought. By identifying how Mallarmé conceives his poems as the transformation of the sensible into a happening of the idea, Badiou asserts the poem as an open process that takes place in the moment of the encounter. Badiou's reading of the poem as an operation is aligned with a general contemporary reading of art as an open-process that is explicated in Chapter One in my analysis Foster's notion of the "birth of the viewer" and through my analysis of my post-conceptual practice that is presented Chapter Two. My observation that the thinking in art is bound with experience, which is presented in Chapter Two, is also iterated by Badiou, who describes the encounter with the poem as "the sensory perception of a regime of thought" and, accordingly, enactment of thought as "inseparable from the sensible."<sup>217</sup>

It is remarkable that Badiou does not draw on contemporary art when registering the "*intrap philosophical effect*". As outlined in Chapter One, developments in art practice that led to a contemporary reading of art perform this transformative movement, of the sensible into a happening of the idea, as demonstrated by the conceptual understanding of the artistic form as mediating idea. In addressing this omission I identify a correspondence between Badiou's reading of the poem and the poetic treatment of the conceptual proposition in *Romantic Conceptualism*, Verwoert and Heiser's revisionist reading of conceptualism. Verwoert and Heiser alignment of the Romantic fragment (a poem exemplified by Novalis) with conceptualism supports my decision to explore the capacity of contemporary art to raise thought through Badiou's reading of the poem. It could be argued that my aligning *Romantic Conceptualism* with inaesthetics is problematic because it differs from Romanticism. However, as noted in the first part, although inaesthetics differs from Romanticism by asserting the presence of truths the non-philosophical fields, both schemas essentially sustain the immanence of truth in art and assert the primacy of art for thought.<sup>218</sup> I argue that this difference is inconsequential to my exploration into possibility of an artwork to engender thought.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

<sup>218</sup> For more on mathematical, political and amorous truths see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2007) and Badiou, *Infinite Thought, Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, 32.

<sup>219</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 9.

### 3.2.1 Romantic Conceptualism – A Poetic Treatment of Contemporary Art

*Romantic Conceptualism* provides a context in art practice to develop my exploration of the condition of thought in contemporary art, particularly through a post-conceptual practice, precisely because this re-interpretation of conceptualism more readily aligns with a post-conceptual reading of art. *Romantic Conceptualism* is a curatorial project by Jan Verwoert and the curator Jörg Heiser. This exhibition was first presented at Kunststhal Nürnberg, Nuremberg, in 2007 and later that year at the BAWAG Foundation, Vienna. The exhibition featured the work of twenty-three artists, including Bas Jan Ader, Robert Barry, Ross Birrell, Lygia Clarke, Didier Courbot, Tacita Dean, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Tomislav Gotovac, Rodney Graham, Henrik Hakansson, Mathilde ter Heijne, Susan Hiller, Douglas Heubler, Kollsktive Aktionen, Louise Lawler, Yoko Ono, Kirsten Pieroth, Allen Ruppersberg, Frances Stark, Jan Timme, Andy Warhol, Laurence Weiner and Cerith Wyn Evans. Verwoert and Heiser’s curatorial project informs the development of the enquiry by allowing me to further explore how thought is activated by contemporary art.

Although the coupling of Romanticism with conceptualism is an unlikely theoretical manoeuvre, Verwoert maintains his unorthodox alignment between conceptualism and Romanticism opens up “our view of a specific historical event-continuum.”<sup>220</sup> By describing conceptual art as Romantic, Verwoert and Heiser present an alternative to Kosuth’s rigid definition of conceptual art as “the intention, position, legitimation and institution of art.”<sup>221</sup> Rather than focusing on the *implications* of art as idea (as the state of play art and its discourse) that motivates Kosuth’s proposition, Verwoert and Heiser’s curatorial project focuses on the mediation idea through the artwork. By

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<sup>220</sup> Verwoert defines Romanticism and conceptualism as *events*. Although it is undeniable that Verwoert’s reading of artistic moments as *events* is informed by Kosuth, who engages with this conception of novelty in “Art After Philosophy” when referencing Duchamp’s *ready-made* as an artistic event, I venture Verwoert’s engagement with Badiou. Although he claims that he “can’t stand reading Alain Badiou”, in a recent article “Friends of Foes” in Frieze, March 2010 Verwoert’s interpretation of event as “something has happened which changes everything” and his observation of difficulty in fully realising the significance of the event and that its significance is revealed retrospectively, demonstrates his unavoidable engagement with Badiou’s thought. Just as I note and overlap between inaeesthetics and Romanticism in relation to their shared assertion of the primacy of art for thought, I feel it important to register the overlap in Verwoert’s thought with Badiou’s.

<sup>221</sup> From the onset of his essay, Verwoert cautions the reader that *Romantic Conceptualism* is “significantly vague”; however Verwoert validates his re-interpretation of conceptualism by claiming the term conceptualism itself is equally vague. Verwoert maintains the surrealist poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire had used it some fifty years earlier. Although it is generally accepted that Kosuth’s “Art After Philosophy” established conceptualism as a term that defined the motivations “to question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art’s nature,” the fluxus artist Henry Flynt is recognised as first introducing the term “concept art” to designate art composed as ideas as early as 1960. Verwoert, “Impulse Concept Concept Impulse,” 165-175; Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy”.

exploring the dynamic process between the subject and the artistic form, *Romantic Conceptualism* avoids a rehearsal of conceptualism as institutional critique which ultimately results in a reading of conceptualism's critical legitimacy as "failure".<sup>222</sup> This reading rests solely on conceptualism's inability to challenge and transform the apparatus of the art institution.<sup>223</sup> Instead, by focusing on delineation of art as a proposition that Kosuth advanced Verwoert engages with artistic gestures as actual propositions, opening up Kosuth's mandate of art as idea to reconsider the conception of art as idea.<sup>224</sup>

The significance of *Romantic Conceptualism* for this enquiry is that by reconfiguring the notion of art as idea, it introduces a more comprehensive notion of thought. As noted in Chapter One, rather than disbanding completely with form, a post-conceptual acknowledges the role of the artistic form within the mediation of idea. Verwoert and Heiser's re-interpretation of conceptualism as Romantic provides a theoretical position to develop a reading of the condition of thought in contemporary art by identifying conceptual artworks that are bound to the strictures of "analytical", "exclusive" or "strong" conceptualism art that advance the mediation of idea as a purely analytical enterprise.<sup>225</sup> By presenting specific conceptual works that initiate emotion within the mediatory process *Romantic Conceptualism* opens up a narrow reading of conceptualism as a "purely logical inquiry [sic.]" by acknowledging experience as fundamental to this dynamic.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, ed., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>223</sup> Verwoert observes that Kosuth, like many other conceptual artists and critics, retrospectively regarded the conceptual project as a failure. In his essay *Intention(s)* (1996) Kosuth describes the failure of conceptual artistic gestures to shift the relations of power from critics, gallerists, curators and other representatives of the external world to the artist. Blake Stimson observes that conceptualism's most sympathetic and perceptive critics tend to evaluate the conceptualism as a 'failure'. Stimson is most likely referring to Benjamin Buchloh's essay "Conceptual Art 162-169: from Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions, 1989" (published, among others, in *Critical Anthology*). Verwoert, "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse", 174.

<sup>224</sup> How Verwoert read the proposition as an open form of appeal through the work of Robert Barry differs considerably from Kosuth's understanding of the proposition as a theoretical enterprise into the enquiry of art. "Art After Philosophy" (1969), as a theoretical exercise of the enquiry of art is in essence performing a similar function to Morris's "Notes On Sculpture I, II, III," (1965), outlining the motivations of his work and practice. Although Morris's *Notes* question the nature of art, he does not articulate this motivation explicitly. Kosuth on the other hand makes this explicit by claiming, "Being an artist now means to question the nature of art." This quote is taken from a statement that Kosuth cites from a previous auto-interview published earlier that year in *Arts Magazine*. While establishing the mandate art as idea Kosuth's document also presents the idea of art as the motivating enquiry of conceptualism as he outlines "Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art's nature." In investigating what art might potentially be, the conceptual artwork as proposition expanded the theoretical enquiry from a subsidiary enterprise to constitute the work itself. Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy*.

<sup>225</sup> Osborne uses these terms to describe a rigid conceptual reading of art as an analytical enterprise. He identifies this predominantly in the conceptual practices of Joseph Kosuth and the British group Art and Language. Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy", 65.

<sup>226</sup> Lippard, *Six Years*, 5.

In Heiser's Introduction to the exhibition in the accompanying catalogue, he draws attention to the problematic of a canon that excludes from the conceptual art system anything that might complicate the logical, analytical mandate of art as idea by noting how the many practitioners were "subjected to repeated restrictions" to ensure key players, primarily white, western and male, dominated the field.<sup>227</sup> Heiser argues *Romantic Conceptualism* contributes to the canon by opening up a restricted reading of conceptualism. He identifies curatorial projects that also expand readings of conceptualism, such as Lucy Lippard's 1973 group show, *c 7500*, which disproved the widespread assumption that women did not make conceptual art, and the landmark exhibition *Global Conceptualism, Points of Origin 1950-1980*, Queens Museum of Art, New York/Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis, 1999- 2000. As noted in Chapter One, Osborne also raises the problematic of adhering to the parameters of conceptualism as an analytical enquiry, identifying a tendency in "exclusive" conceptual art to conflate artistic thought with analytic philosophical enquiry.<sup>228</sup> Heiser's revisionist reading of conceptualism reveals an overlooked fact that the majority of conceptual art practitioners did not adhere rigidly to the "strong" conceptual parameters of art as an analytical enquiry.

In her interview with Heiser in the accompanying exhibition catalogue Susan Hiller discusses her dissatisfaction with the boundaries imposed from within the parameters of conceptualism.<sup>229</sup> Hiller identifies a dogmatic tendency in conceptualism to posit art as a cognitive exercise informed by rational logic, outlining the conceptual insistence of the artwork as an analytic proposition. However, she maintains that many practitioners

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<sup>227</sup> It is important to note that Heiser appreciates why certain conceptual artists such as Kosuth and Art and Language defined the tenets of the movement from the onset. The mandate of art as idea affirmed and established the conceptual position that was vehemently contested from the outset. Jörg Heiser, "Opening Remarks," in *Romantic Conceptualism*, ed. Ellen Seifermann and Christine Kintisch. (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2007a)

<sup>228</sup> Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," 58.

Kosuth's definition of conceptual art has also been questioned by critic Jörg Heiser. Heiser draws attention to the problematic of a canon that excludes from the conceptual art system anything that might complicate the logical, analytical mandate of art as idea. However, although Heiser identifies this shortcoming, he appreciates why certain conceptual artists such as Kosuth and Art and Language established such rigid tenets because the movement was vehemently contested from the outset.

<sup>229</sup> Hiller is defined as both a conceptual and a post-conceptual artist. She refers to this precarious positioning of her oeuvre, and describes it as 'paraconceptual'. By paraconceptual Hiller means just sideways of conceptualism and neighbouring the paranormal. This implies a devalued site of culture where women and the feminine have been conversely privileged. She claims in the hybrid field of paraconceptualism neither conceptualism nor the paranormal are left intact ... as ... the prefix 'para' symbolises the force of contamination through a proximity so great that it threatens the soundness of all boundaries." Susan Hiller, "About", accessed September 15 2012, <http://www.susanhiller.org/about.html>

did not adhere rigidly to the parameters of conceptual art as an analytical enquiry.<sup>230</sup> Hiller also draws attention to the dominant role of white male artists in conceptualism and maintains they promoted a reading of conceptual art as an unemotional enquiry. Hiller reads the self-reflexive proposition as limiting subject matter to “what’s already in language” and maintains for her generation of women (and other non-white artists) that this was “not what we wanted to say.”<sup>231</sup> Hiller articulates how her conceptual practice problematises the conceptual insistence of the artwork as an analytic proposition by reflecting on the critical reception of her work, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artist Between 1972-1976*. This work displaying her collection of hundreds of postcards depicting rough seascapes from the British Coast was criticised by *Art and Language* as being “too visual”. Hiller maintains had these images been black and white rather than colour, this criticism may not have been levelled. She claims this work problematised a straightforward conceptual interpretation because it did not adhere to the language of conceptualism, in which the black-and-white image was accepted. Hiller’s observation inadvertently demonstrates an indisputable sensible dimension within strict conceptual art.

Post-conceptualism acknowledges the sensible aspect, critically re-engaging with the post-medium condition on new grounds. It is important to iterate that this appreciation of the artistic form does not designate a modernist return to a prioritisation of form, but rather acknowledges the sensible dimension within the reading of the work. Rather than an exclusive conceptual reading of art that denies experience, *Romantic Conceptualism* acknowledges the sensible dimension within the reception of idea, positing the sensible and experiential quality as essential to the way one thinks through art. Verwoert and Heiser observe how Hiller, Piper and other conceptual artists such as the Brazilian conceptual artists Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clarke, opened up “new possibilities in art” by departing from the strict parameters laid out by the conceptual mandate of art as idea. These practices extended the horizon of conceptualism by asserting emotion, imagination and perception within the artwork’s mediatory process.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Benjamin Buchloh also claims the difficulty in attempting a retrospective survey of conceptualism due to the impossibility of historicising the movement under a single, distinct definition, describing conceptual art as a “complex range of mutually opposed approaches.” Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* (The MIT Press) 55 (Winter 1990): 105-143.

<sup>231</sup> Jörg Heiser’s interview with Hiller in “A Romantic Measure,” in *Romantic Conceptualism*, ed. Ellen Seifermann and Christine Kintisch. (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2007b)

<sup>232</sup> LeWitt articulates his appreciation of less rational forms of knowledge by acknowledging the process of intuition in his *Paragraphs*. LeWitt’s claim that “Ideas are discovered by intuition” inadvertently compromised Kosuth’s

The emphasis on emotion and imagination underpins Verwoert and Heiser's poetic treatment of the conceptual proposition. In the essay "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse" Verwoert focuses on these attributes to reflect on the communicative function of conceptualism. Verwoert draws on the Romantic fragment, a poetic form developed by Novalis. Unlike the classical pursuit of the finite, Romanticism sought the infinite. By definition a fragment is part of something whole that is not present. The Romantic fragment designates a finite part of an infinite whole. The Romantic pursuit to embody the infinite informed this poetic form that departed radically from previous poetic configurations which adhered to structure. Through reductive processes the Romantic fragment sought to express the infinite. Romanticism is distinguished by the emphasis on the imagination, because of it seeks to move beyond the confines of reason and engage with the infinite. Heiser also registers a tendency shared by conceptualism and Romanticism to prioritise the "fragmentary and open over the systematic and conclusive" and maintains this indeterminacy asserts the impulse to imagine.<sup>233</sup>

Verwoert reflects on the communicative function of certain conceptual works by aligning Novalis's reading of the artistic form with conceptualism. Verwoert observes how the impulse to imagine is implied by Novalis's definition of the poem as an "operation". Verwoert observes how this term distinguishes the poem as an open process, a process that transfers the realisation of the work from the jurisdiction of the artist to the subject within the encounter, citing Novalis's claim that "the true reader must be an extension of the author."<sup>234</sup> Novalis claim demonstrates the proximity of a Romantic and a contemporary reading of art because it anticipates a developing concern in contemporary art with the role of the viewer and the understanding that a work is contingent on the perception of the viewer.<sup>235</sup> Verwoert draws attention to this

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understanding of art as an analytical enterprise by introducing a more perceptive interpretation of the thinking in art. This departure from thought processes bound to reason and logic more readily associated with exclusive conceptualism is further iterated in the first of LeWitt's thirty five rules, "1. Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach." LeWitt, "Paragraphs," 79.

<sup>233</sup> Jörg Heiser, "Moscow, Conceptualism, and After" *Alphabet*, accessed November 10 2011, <http://www.marcellosimeone.com/blog/2012/04>

<sup>234</sup> Verwoert, *Romantic Conceptualism*, 165-175.

<sup>235</sup> Foster coins the term the birth of the viewer in his essay "The Crux of Minimalism", to articulate his contemporary reading of art. This understanding of a work being determined by the subject who engages with the work as opposed to the author or critic was advanced around this period in the field of literary criticism by Roland Barthes. In his essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967). Barthes proposed literary criticism as forced projection of the ultimate meaning on a work. Barthes maintains that there can be no ultimate meaning bestowed on a piece of literature as one could infer an ultimate explanation for it. He maintains that the proliferation of meaning in language coupled with the unknowable state of the author's mind renders interpretation impossible. Barthes approaches the notion of the 'knowable text' from a political perspective claiming this to demonstrate the delusion of the grand



communicative function in conceptualism by observing how they, like the romantic fragment necessitate engagement for their realisation.<sup>236</sup> As Verwoert notes, “its supposed intangibility can be made seem tangible for the moment, and in the same moment it can be made to question whatever appears everyday and tangible by opening it up towards an abstract idea.”<sup>237</sup>

Verwoert responds to a number of conceptual and post-conceptual works to describe how they similarly assert the fragmentary and open through reductive processes. For the purpose of examining how thought is implicated in work, I focus on Verwoert’s poetic reading of Robert Barry’s conceptual propositions because thought constitutes the essential medium of these works. Verwoert reflects on Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* (1969), *All the Things I Know but of Which I am not at this Moment Thinking – 1:36 PM June 15 (1969)*, and *Prospect ’69*. Although *Prospect ’69* is not in the exhibition *Romantic Conceptualism*, Verwoert discusses this work in the essay that accompanies the exhibition in the catalogue. Verwoert focuses on these three works to describe how Barry’s reductive process extends the work from a fixed form to an open process.<sup>238</sup>

*Inert Gas Series* consists of framed photographic documentation and short, succinct descriptive texts. *Inert Gas Series, Krypton* consists of three colour photographs and typewritten text that reads, “From a measured volume to indefinite expansion. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969, in Beverly Hills, California one liter [sic.] of krypton was returned to the atmosphere.” *Inert Gas Series, Helium* consists of a slide, a black-and-white photograph and catalogue page: “Inert Gas Series, Helium. Sometime during the morning of March 5<sup>th</sup> 1969, 2 cubic feet of helium will be released into the atmosphere.” *All the Things I Know but of Which I am not at this Moment Thinking – 1:36 PM June 15*, an artwork that is simply the presentation of this statement printed directly onto the gallery wall. *Prospect ’69* was commissioned for the Kunsthalle

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narrative dominant in Western culture. He furthers his claim maintaining that completing the text with ultimate meaning renders it more marketable and thus conforming to the ideology of western capitalism.

<sup>236</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 29.

<sup>237</sup> Verwoert, *Romantic Conceptualism*, 165-175.

<sup>238</sup> Novalis’s first fragments were published in 1798 in the *Athenäum*, a magazine edited by the Schlegel brothers. The importance of the fragment to Romanticism is outlined by Schegel, who claims, “Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written.” S. Sophie Thomas, “*The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre*, 2004, *Camilia Elias*, Review,” *Hyperion*, III, No. 3, 208.

Düsseldorf gallery. However, this work did not appear in the physical space gallery but was presented in the accompanying catalogue.<sup>239</sup> It reads,

Q. What is your piece for *Prospect '69*?

A. The piece consists of ideas which people will have from reading this interview.

Q. Can this piece be shown?

A. The piece in its entirety is unknowable because it exists in the minds of so many people. Each person can really know only that part which is in his own mind.<sup>240</sup>

Verwoert registers Barry's formal reduction of artistic form by observing his artistic gestures "do no more than write a text on the wall or send it as a postcard, or to carry out a simple symbolic action and show a photo or short film about it".<sup>241</sup> For example, Barry's gesture of releasing the invisible medium of gas into the desert literally opens up the artistic form by extending the spatial dimension of art to a temporal one. When describing *Inert Gas Series* Barry describes how it "continues to expand forever in the atmosphere, constantly changing."<sup>242</sup> Verwoert reflects on the indeterminate nature of this work, describing it as an "impulse for an open process of change in which it is realised, but simultaneously also dissolves."<sup>243</sup>

In the previous discussion formulate my reading of the "intrap philosophical effect" as the capacity of art to activate thought. I formulate my reading of this elusive term by observing Badiou's registration of an *unnameable* quality. Although Verwoert does not use the term *unnameable*, his romantic reading of Barry's work reveals this particular

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<sup>239</sup> The structure and intent of *Prospect '69* is comparable to Lawrence Weiner's *Statement of Intent, 1968*, which also features in *Romantic Conceptualism*.

The artist may construct the piece.

The piece may be fabricated.

The piece may not be built.

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist and the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

Lawrence Weiner, *Statement of Intent, 1968*, in *Romantic Conceptualism*, ed. Ellen Seifermann and Christine Kintisch. (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2007).

<sup>240</sup> Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art, A Critical Anthology*, ed. Blake Stimson (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1999), xxxviii.

<sup>241</sup> Verwoert, "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse," 167.

<sup>242</sup> Robert Barry, *Romantic Conceptualism*, ed. Ellen Seifermann and Christine Kintisch. (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2007), 131.

<sup>243</sup> Barry, *Romantic Conceptualism*, 169.

quality. Novalis' describes the poetic operation as one that is "still unknown".<sup>244</sup> By correlating Barry's conceptual propositions with the Romantic fragment to reveal how they activate thought. What is significant about Barry's propositions is that although he uses the strategies that appear to transfer information in a succinct manner, his work delivers very little in the way of information. Instead Verwoert claims his works are saturated with meaning. The sophistication of Barry's propositions is that their simplicity presents something that is difficult to define that is meaningful. This *unnamable* quality is suggested by Barry when asked why he was reticent to explain how his work functions.

I think there is an aspect of the unknown to all of our activities, and attempting to explain it, takes away from what it's about. I find that explanations are very incomplete. I'm still struggling with the mystery of art. The more I think about it, and the more I think I know something about this process that I'm engaged in, the more I realize that I don't.<sup>245</sup>

Barry's reflections articulate the unlikelihood of his propositions to transfer a single discrete idea because they are unresolved. Verwoert observes how this provokes each of us to conjure up our thoughts, he explains, "The idea is actualized through an "appeal" to its recipients to realise it within their own thoughts."<sup>246</sup> Like the Romantic fragment Verwoert registers Barry's work as an operation that necessitates thought precisely because very little is disclosed. Rather than approaching *All the Things I Know ...* as cool or detached, Verwoert claims this work operates on an emotional level by registering an "appeal" from this work to the percipient to enter into this philosophical quandary.<sup>247</sup>

Similarly, *Prospect '69* does not generate a single common idea but rather sets the conditions in which disparate forms of thought might be engendered each time the work is encountered. Verwoert observes how the presentation of *Prospect '69* in the catalogue extends the artistic form beyond the confines of the gallery space, while simultaneously extending the thinking beyond the jurisdiction of the artist. In this way

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<sup>244</sup> Verwoert, *Romantic Conceptualism*, 165-175.

<sup>245</sup> Robert Barry, interviewed by Peter Eleey, *Conceptual Radio*, Flash Art no. 279 (July-September 2011), 169.

<sup>246</sup> Verwoert, "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse," 165-175.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

*Prospect '69* operates like the Romantic fragment in the way that it frees up thought towards a collective process and in the way that it *invites* the viewer to “formulate ideas in an open, fragmentary way.”<sup>248</sup> I use the term *invite* in a conscious manner because, being less forceful than the term “demand” (that Badiou uses in his reading of Mallarmé) it acknowledges the possibility that thought might not be activated. In his analysis of the performance event David Davies’ also observes that a performer cannot be certain that their audience is in actual fact paying attention.<sup>249</sup> He identifies how performances are designated by their “call” for engagement. What is at stake in Davies’ analysis of the performance event is that this “call” designates the *intention* of the work for an audience to engage. As outlined in the previous chapter, by approaching my works as *inviting* thought articulates the *intention* of my artworks without claiming that my works successfully activate thought. The term *invite* further iterates that the thinking that might arise cannot be prescribed because it unfolds on a perceptive level through the encounter. This observation further iterates that the work is contingent on the subject within the encounter. Barry articulates this by claiming, “Part of the nature of art is that it is out there in the community; part of it is in other people’s minds.”<sup>250</sup> When asked about his work in relation to the public reception of idea Barry claims, “what they do with them afterwards is not in my control.”<sup>251</sup>

Heiser also reflects on how art activates the spontaneous unfolding of thought. He looks to Friedrich von Schlegel, who claims good poetry and art in general is characterised by “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Heiser observes how Schlegel aligns this intensification of experience with the thought, quoting Schlegel, “it is equally deadly for the mind to have a system and to have none. It consequently will have to decide to connect both states.”<sup>252</sup> Heiser observes a similar intellectual-emotional combination in Barry’s work. Verwoert develops this point by arguing the impossibility of approaching Barry’s work as a purely analytical enterprise because of its emotional quality. Verwoert argues that this intellectual-emotional combination as the appellative quality in Barry’s work because it encourages further engagement with the work. Both Heiser

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<sup>248</sup> It is worth noting that Kantian aesthetics also captures the capacity of art to institute a collective level of appeal by the term *sensus communis*. *Sensus communis* describes the “universal capacity on the part of every human being to sense from within the plurality of coordinates the flourishing of human life and what favors it.”

<sup>249</sup> Davies, David. *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 142-143.

<sup>250</sup> This quote is taken from a discussion with Barry that was organised by Jeanne Siegel in the WBAI in New York. Lippard, *Six Years*, 129.

<sup>251</sup> Barry, *Conceptual Radio*.

<sup>252</sup> Heiser, “Opening Remarks,” 138.

and Verwoert's observations are confirmed by Barry, who acknowledges the emotional component as integral to the mediatory process in his work.

PE: Is emotion part of your work, or how you make it?

RB: The emotional component is important. You can't just rely on ideas, or play with various art strategies. But I tend to not use the word "emotion" anymore. I like to say "en-gagement," which is usually an intellectual-emotional combination.<sup>253</sup>

The philosopher of art, Peter Lamarque also identifies emotion, experience and perception within the process of communicating idea in his poetic reading of conceptualism. Like Verwoert, Lamarque identifies how conceptual proposition 'suggests' meaning rather than presenting a formulated idea. However, unlike Verwoert, Lamarque treats this indeterminate feature as a shortcoming. Although Lamarque's analysis of conceptualism is highly critical, his proposition that artistic thought differs from an analytical enquiry is valuable to the enquiry because it further affirms my observation of the role of experience in the thinking raised by art.

Lamarque observes how artistic thought differs from certain forms of philosophical enquiry in the manner by which it is *perceived*. Like Verwoert and Heiser, Lamarque's identification of perception renders exclusive conceptual reading of art as an analytical enterprise problematic. Lamarque sees the conceptual mandate of art as idea creates too close an association between the philosophical or the literary (as in literary fiction as distinct from the Romantic fragment) and maintains that it "fall[s] short of both." He claims that the conceptual artwork lacks the critical resources associated with philosophy and literature to fully develop ideas.<sup>254</sup> Lamarque argues his claim by observing how philosophy and literature (excluding certain forms of poetry and undoubtedly the Romantic fragment) demonstrate two paradigmatic ways of developing and working out the idea. Lamarque observes how philosophical enquiry develops ideas through theory building, hypothesis and cognitive analysis. In literature, Lamarque sees this performed through the unification and resolution of a subject, configured through a literary theme. By observing in conceptualism a failure to fully engage with the analytic

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<sup>253</sup> Barry, *Conceptual Radio*.

<sup>254</sup> Peter Lamarque, "On Perceiving Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Goldie and Elizabeth Schellekens (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

or the thematic, Lamarque aligns the conceptual proposition with poetry. Rather than looking to the Romantic fragment, Lamarque looks to the poetic conceit – a form of metaphor associated with the 17<sup>th</sup> century metaphysical poets. The poetic conceit is understood as having a conceptual and thus more tenuous relationship between the things being compared. Lamarque describes how the idea develops and unfolds through the poetic elaboration of the conceit as metaphor. He draws on the metaphysical poetry of John Donne to present the process of the poem as, “the whole frame of the poem is a beating out of a piece of gold.” In claiming “ideas are only of interest when they are articulated, worked out, when something is done to them,” Lamarque maintains such indeterminate forms necessitates the “ingenuity of the spectator.”<sup>255</sup> The necessity of the spectator that Lamarque treats as a shortcoming (in a similar manner to Fried’s relation to minimalist and post-minimalist practices) is precisely its value.

By outlining the difference between the experience of ‘reading’ conceptual artworks and works of literature and philosophical enquiry Lamarque observes the distinctive quality of conceptualism as offering a “curious hybrid of experience.” He maintains that “we should see conceptual art of the paradigmatic kind as offering a curious hybrid of experience having parallels with, but not reducible to, the cerebral reflection of ideas of philosophy.”<sup>256</sup> Lamarque’s observation undermines the conceptual delineation between the intellect and the senses by acknowledging the experiential within the mediation of the conceptual artwork.<sup>257</sup> As outlined previously, it is important to note that experience includes, but is not restricted to, sensory perceptual experience. By aligning the conceptual proposition with poetry, Lamarque introduces other sensory forms, which Verwoert and Badiou identify – not just those associated with the ‘lower’ senses, such as vision, but more radically the ‘higher’ senses such as perception, imagination, feeling

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<sup>255</sup> Lamarque, “On Perceiving Conceptual Art,” 8.

<sup>256</sup> Lamarque furthers this point by stating, “the apprehension of themes or conceits of literature and the perception of sculpture and painting – to prioritise any of these is in many cases to miss what is distinctive.” In aligning the conceptual proposition with aspects of poetry, Lamarque registers how conceptual art is further distanced from a modernist reading of art. Lamarque, “On Perceiving Conceptual Art” .

<sup>257</sup> This distinction between the intellect and experience is articulated by LeWitt, who claimed in order for the artwork to be “mentally interesting works” it must be “emotionally dry”. In this way LeWitt iterates the tenets of conceptualism which claim the formation of idea lies solely in the rational and logical domain of the intellect. It is worth drawing the reader’s attention to the fact that LeWitt problematises this position further on in his *Paragraphs* by claiming, “In terms of ideas the artist is free even to surprise himself.” Le Witt’s claim that artwork must be emotionally dry is further undermined by his statement “Ideas are discovered by intuition.” Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, 1969,” *Artforum*, June 1967. LeWitt’s acknowledgement of the intuition in the creation and reception of work introduce processes that are different to those associated with reason and logic that are associated with “exclusive” conceptualism associated with Kosuth and Art and Language. The irrational is identified two years later in the first of LeWitt’s thirty-five rules, “1. Conceptual artist’s are mystics rather than rationalist. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach”. Le Witt, “Paragraphs” and Le Witt, “Sentences,” 0-9.

and emotion. We can consider this through Barry's *1969 Projects Class* in that it cannot be engaged with logically, because there is nothing to ground our position – it can only be encountered or perceived through the imagination.

Although *1969 Projects Class* is not included in the exhibition *Romantic Conceptualism*, Barry's seminal contribution to Askevold's course for students at NSCAD allows me to conceive the possibility of an artwork to generate thought by provoking the imagination. For *1969 Projects Class* Barry sent a series of instructions that reads:

The students will gather together in a group and decide on a single common idea. The idea can be of any nature, simple or complex. This idea will be known only to the members of the group. You or I will not know it. The piece will remain in existence as long as the idea remains in the confines of the group. If just one student unknown to anyone else at any time, informs someone outside the group the piece will cease to exist. It may exist for a few seconds or it may go on indefinitely, depending on the human nature of the participating students. We may never know when or if the piece comes to an end.<sup>258</sup>

By inviting the imagination *1969 Projects Class* offers an alternative means of negotiating with the wider social order by demonstrating how an artwork can fulfil the potential to free thought towards a collective process.<sup>259</sup> *1969 Projects Class* can be seen to initiate inter-subjectivity and collectivity through the processes required for its realisation that a group of students will come together and decide on a common idea. The spirit of collective creativity which Verwoert registers in Jena Circle, a community of poets, philosophers, dramatists and thinkers, is enforced by this premise. This spirit of creative collectivity is articulated in Friedrich Schiller's *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1798). Although Verwoert does not reference the *Letters* or Schiller

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<sup>258</sup> Concordia, "Canadian Conceptual Art – Projects Class", accessed November 10th 2011. [http://ccca.concordia.ca/resources/searches/event\\_detail.html?languagePref=en&vk=7539](http://ccca.concordia.ca/resources/searches/event_detail.html?languagePref=en&vk=7539).

<sup>259</sup> This twelve-week course was conceived by David Askevold with the support of Garry Neill Kennedy for fine art students at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax. Project Class was described in the college course calendar:

"For students who do not want to specialize in a specific studio discipline. This course deals with traditional and current art concerns and also uses information from other sources. Means of problem-solving are employed which seek to avoid some of the presumptions of traditional media. The medium is considered as a vehicle which carries the content under consideration and naturally poses its own problems." Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Douglas Huebler, N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Lucy Lippard, Joseph Kosuth, Jan Dibbets and Lawrence Weiner were also involved and, like Barry, outlined a specific project on a card that was presented to the class. "Concordia, "Canadian Conceptual Art."

for that matter, who was part of the Jena Circle, his *Letters* inform a Romantic notion of art. I draw on Schiller's *Letters* because they reaffirm Alberto Toscano's claim that art institutes "other" spaces.<sup>260</sup> Toscano, who translated Badiou's *Handbook* from French into English, designates this space as "other" because it is non-authoritarian and maintains this quality furnishes a threshold into a space for thought. Schiller argues that by invoking the imagination artworks have the capacity to inscribe a non-authoritarian space of discourse because they furnish more open forms of experience and exchange.<sup>261</sup> This non-authoritarian space of discourse is instigated by aesthetic determination or *spieltrieb* (play drive). Aesthetic determination is proposed to connect and maintain a balance of reason and the senses and in this way implicates the free play of the imagination. As aesthetic determination is aligned with the imaginary it is understood to encompass and embrace all reality because it is without determinable limitations.<sup>262</sup> In this way aesthetic determination articulates the capacity of art to inscribe a non-authoritarian space of discourse. Aesthetic determination is also useful when considering the multifarious forms of thought that are raised in Barry's work through processes associated with reason and those associated with the senses. Rather than a transference, aesthetic determination bridges matter (sensible) and form (thought), initiating a "transition from the passivity of sensuousness to the activity of thought."<sup>263</sup> Because there are no images of this work, only anecdotal evidence, *1969 Projects Class* can only be encountered or perceived through the imagination. This space that *1969 Projects Class* initiates is not confined to the temporal moment enacted by the group of students in 1969, it extends beyond this moment to anybody who chooses to engage with and experience the mediatory process of this work.

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<sup>260</sup> Alberto Toscano, "The Sensuous Religion of the Multitude, Art and Abstraction in Negri," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009), 372.

<sup>261</sup> Verwoert registers in conceptualism a similar complication of the systematic arrangement of reality that he identifies in Romanticism. He observes the political inherent in this refusal of adhering to strict rationalism because he sees this as provoking new forms of engagement by which to negotiate the wider social order. Verwoert observes the Romantics as developing a "concept of released collective creativity," through the developments in literature, theatre, poetry and philosophical enquiry by the Jena circle. This more open form of creativity as an amalgam of disciplines is demonstrated by an affiliation of German Idealism with Romanticism as evidenced by the *Oldest System Programme of German Idealism* (1796). This programme, attributed to the philosophers Hegel and Schelling, and the poet Hölderlin, outlines a new way of being in the world through philosophical aesthetics by claiming "the highest act of reason, which embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act." By maintaining that the philosopher becomes like a poet and the poet becomes like a philosopher the *Oldest System Programme* demonstrates a coexistence of artistic and philosophical thought. Through philosophical aesthetics the notion of the philosopher as developing an aesthetic sensibility is extended to every individual as "the faculty that places man in relation to the word."

Verwoert, "Impulse Concept Concept Impulse," 167.

<sup>262</sup> By positing aesthetic determination as "the faculty that places man in relation to the world" Schiller articulates the link between the aesthetic and the socio-political in *Letter XIV*. Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetics Education of Man*, German Original 1795, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkenson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

<sup>263</sup> Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetics*, Letter XXIII



### 3.4 Summary

Although Badiou is not an art critic and does not write about specific artworks his formulation of inaesthetics contributes to the ongoing critique of aesthetics that is bound into a contemporary reading of art. Badiou's thought plays a key role in discursive space of contemporary art. Badiou contributes to art journals and also presents his line of enquiry in public art institutions that include galleries, museums and not-for-profit artist-run initiatives.<sup>264</sup> However, although Badiou claims inaesthetics is *necessary* for contemporary art, he makes no reference to any forms of contemporary art practice to support his thesis. Instead he draws on literary configurations to disclose how inaesthetics reveals the operation of the artwork as a specific form of thought.<sup>265</sup>

My engagement with inaesthetics allows me to develop my enquiry into the relationship between art and philosophy and explore how thought might be raised by contemporary art. In detailing my reading of Badiou's "*intrap philosophical effect*" I observe how Badiou's identification of the *unnameable* quality of the poem gestures towards an inherent quality of indeterminacy and how this quality is crucial to the operation of the poem as activating thought. Badiou's identification of the "demand" of Mallarmé coupled with Verwoert's identification of the "appeal" articulate how they read the artistic form to activate thought. These qualities inform my proposition that an artwork could *invite* thought. The term *invite* is introduced as a key term for the enquiry because

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<sup>264</sup> For example, Badiou presented his *15 Theses on Contemporary Art* in December 2003 in conjunction with the publication *Lacanian Ink* at The Drawing Centre in New York. Other lectures include *Does the Notion of Activist Art Still Have Meaning*, presented in October 2010 and *Truth Procedure in Politics Video* in November 2006 at the Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Miguel Abreu Gallery opened in March 2006. The gallery history reads "The gallery stages one-person and curated group exhibitions, and organizes film screenings and lectures by leading philosophers and critical theorists, such as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, François Laruelle and Quentin Meillassoux. In 2011, the gallery's publishing division, Sequence Press, was established as a collaborative enterprise with British publisher Urbanomic and among other titles has released François Laruelle's *The Concept of Non-Photography*, Nick Land's *Fanged Noumena*, Quentin Meillassoux's *The Number and the Siren*, and *Spine* by R. H. Quaytman, <http://www.miguelabreugallery.com/EventsAndPostings.htm> and *The Subject of Art* in 2005 at Deitch Projects. Although Badiou has not as yet contributed within the framework of a biennial (Badiou's peer and critic Rancière has participated in the Venice Biennial in 2011 as part of the Norwegian pavilion and as keynote at Frieze Art Fair in 2005), he is nonetheless embedded in the discursive space of contemporary art.

<sup>265</sup> As noted, Badiou looks mainly to literary configurations to disclose the possibility of artistic thought. He also looks at other artistic forms in the *Handbook*, which include theatre, dance and cinema, albeit to a lesser extent. Osborne also argues a discrepancy in Badiou's analysis by observing that Badiou references essentially modernist art forms to discuss contemporary art, an observation he uses to support his claim that Badiou is essentially a neo-classicist. Jacques Rancière follows a similar trajectory in his criticism. He dedicates a chapter, Jacques Rancière, "Alain Badiou's Inaesthetic, The Torsions of Modernism," in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 63-88 (UK, USA: Polity Press, 2009) (first published in French as *Malaise dans l'Esthétique*, 2004) critiquing inaesthetics as a return to modernity by its desire to categorise and affirm the specificity of art. While accepting these arguments, I see the value of inaesthetics to the enquiry because this schema provides an aesthetic framework to support a rigorous exploration into the condition of thought in art.

it articulates how the thinking raised by art cannot be prescribed because it is dependant on the subjects encounter with the artwork. I also draw on Larmarque who to further my understanding of the perceptive nature of our encounter with art, confirming my observation from my own post-conceptual practice outlined in the previous chapter that my works engage on an experiential, perceptive and imaginative level. This affirms Osborne's rhetorical question that asks if the philosophical meaning of the work be wholly abstracted from its material means by affirming that the thinking raised by art is determined by the artistic form. These insights that arise from my engagement with inaesthetics support my provisional proposition that the thinking in art is bound with experience. These insights are brought to bear in my analysis of the three event-based works that constitute the research project in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLORING THE PHILOSOPHICAL CHARACTER OF ART THROUGH ENACTMENT

### 4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the research project as it is developed through three event-based works, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and the later iterations of *Metaphysical Longings* (designated by the numerals *II, III, IV, V, VII*). As the main body of the research project is configured by artworks the ambition of these works to enact *other spaces* ultimately defines the ambition of the research project. This chapter outlines how the enquiry takes place through the development, enactment and critical reflection on these artworks. Individual accounts detail how these works are enacted. An analysis into the philosophical character of these works is developed over three discussions.

The first discussion examines how the research project intensifies my engagement with philosophical enquiry. Rather than bringing philosophical enquiry and art practice together in an explicit manner, I outline how the artwork as event further intensifies the *entwinement* between the domains of contemporary art and philosophy. I present the possibility of contemporary art to implicate philosophical meaning by reflecting on performative methods used in the enactment of the event-based works.

The second discussion examines how the works advance the working definition of the research project. I consider how these works seek to enact *other spaces* by reflecting on the process of *staging*, drawing on Paul Thom's analysis of performance and on the insights gained from my engagement with ritual theory. I outline how this process of *staging* develops through the research by structuring the event to mirror the tripartite stages of ritual. I focus on *Mystical Anarchism* to reflect on how this process engenders interplay between the content and the context and examine the potential of this to further implicate philosophical thought on an experiential and symbolic level.

The third discussion focuses on the later iterations of *Metaphysical Longings* to explore the possibility of an artwork to *invite* thought. I reassert my provisional claim that the

thinking raised by art is bound with experience by reflecting on the processes used in this work. I draw on Brian Massumi and Simon O' Sullivan's reading of affect to develop this claim and propose that the condition of thought in art is essentially *affective*. The discussion outlines how my identifying the *affective* nature of thought in my event-based works allows me to conceive of the specificity and particularity of the thinking engendered by art.

Before providing individual accounts of the art works I discuss my reading of event as an artistic form. This discussion develops from the analysis of my post-conceptual practice in Chapter Two that details how the event emerged as a framework to perform as the working definition of the research project. This discussion proposes the applicability of the event for this enquiry because it presents the artwork as an open process that has the potential to extend thought from the jurisdiction of the artist to the wider collective. This discussion also introduces the term *percipient* and presents how I formulate this term and argue it as more comprehensive and concise to designate the subject encountering contemporary art than the conventional term viewer. These insights that emerge from the research project - the formulation of the term *percipient* and the proposition that the condition of thought in art is essentially *affective*, are not only significant to the enquiry, but are significant in their own right because they contribute to the wider discourse on contemporary art.

#### 4.1 The Research Project – Three Artworks as Events

The emergence of the event as an artistic form has been hugely significant in informing the focus of enquiry and how the research has been performed. I define *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* as events because they are temporary and require a gathering for their enactment. I use the term event to distinguish these works from theatre and most forms of performance art that are more focused on the actor/performer. I also do not name these events *Happenings* because this is now understood to designate a particular moment in art and cultural history. Although *Happenings* are essentially event-based there are certain criteria that Allan Kaprow stipulated in his essay, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (1965). The first and most essential criterion is stated from the onset: "A. The line

between art and life should be kept fluid and as indistinct as possible.” The third stipulation is recorded as “C. The performance of a *Happening* should take place over several widely spaced, sometimes moving, changing locales. This is to differentiate a *Happening* from a performance, which Kaprow describes as, “A single performance space tends towards the static and, more significantly, resembles conventional theatre pieces....” Because my works seek to create *other spaces*, their intention differs considerably from the intention to blur art and life that Kaprow proposes. That Kaprow later abandoned *Happenings* for the more generic term Activities due to its overuse in popular media also informs my decision to use the generic term “event” in favour of the term *Happening*. I also avoid the terms participatory art and relational art because my artworks do not seek to explicitly coerce participation. Nicolas Bourriaud defines *Relational Aesthetics* as artistic gestures that “take] as it’s theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context” and create alternate interactive spaces and platforms from communication zones which are constructed and imposed.<sup>266</sup> Unlike relational artistic practices that utilise collectivity as the content, the collective operates in my artworks as the context rather than as the content, furnishing the possibility of my artworks to enact *other spaces* on a symbolic and experiential level. I use the generic term event to describe my works because this term admits the “transcategorical” quality of the works while conveying their overarching form.<sup>267</sup>

Because events are temporary this artistic form foregrounds the overarching concern in my post-conceptual practice with thought and experience. The development of the event as the primary artistic form for the research project has resulted in more large-scale ambitious artworks. The event presents an unrestricted artistic form that necessitates others to partake in its enactment and realisation. In this way the event presents an artistic form that moves towards a collective process extending the work from the jurisdiction of the artist to the group. This expansive quality is enhanced through each artwork’s enactment as multiple iterations. The artworks cannot be described as single, discrete events because they are all constituted by multiple iterations, for example, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* took place over three evenings in June 2008 and

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<sup>266</sup>Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction, Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World*. New York: Has & Sternberg, 2002.

<sup>267</sup> Yann Chateigné, Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Pedro G. Romero, Bernard Blistène, *A Theatre Without Theatre* (Barcelona/Lisbon: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Fundação de Arte Moderna e Contemporânea-Coleção Berardo, 2007), 226.

*Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* have developed through numerous iterations over a protracted period of time. The expansive nature of these works permits a reading of the artwork as an open process.

In Chapter Two, I described my artworks (drawings, installations, etc.) as *artefacts* that attest to my engagement with philosophy. The insights gained from engagement with art theory and inaesthetics enable me to reflect on each drawing as an open process. By not presenting a clear philosophical position they necessitate the viewer to formulate their own meaning and become involved in the explorative process of enquiry through their encounter with these works. The event furthers this notion of the artwork as an open-process more explicitly because it provides an unrestrictive artistic form to extend the philosophical question of being to others so that they might engage with this question in a more direct capacity. The event provides an extra-textual framework to develop my overarching concern with thought and experience.

The three event-based artworks, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Metaphysical Longings* and *Mystical Anarchism* seek to raise philosophical ideas in a non-didactic way using performative methods. Although each artwork differs considerably, they ultimately share the same ambition to enact *other spaces*. To fulfil this ambition all three events use a process of *staging*. I focus on this process to explore the possibility that the artworks could implicate philosophical ideas and *invite* thought. Although each artwork differs, each event is *staged* on a large, over-sized hand-stitched mat (*Fig. 32*). This 17 metre x 7 metre mat took over six months to make and is made from two opulent fabrics, cashmere and velvet. Although there was great care taken in making this mat, and its size is monumental, I do not refer to it as an artwork. I consider the event as the artwork and the mat as a *prop* that supports the enactment of this temporary artistic form. The critic Dorethea Von Hantelmann uses the term “prop” in her analysis of Morris’s *Bodyspacemotionthings* (1971).<sup>268</sup> *Bodyspacemotionthings* comprises huge beams, weights, platforms, rollers, tunnels and ramps, with photographs presented beside each object demonstrating how they could be used. Von Hantelmann describes these works as props because they function in the enactment of this work through their

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<sup>268</sup> Dorethea Von Hantelmann, “On the Socio-Economic Role of the Art Exhibition,” in *Corner-Stones*, ed. Nicolaus Schafhausen, Monika Szewczyk Juan A. Gaitan (Rotterdam/Berlin: Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Stenberg Press), 275.

capacity to invite physical engagement. She notes how these objects function to transform the spatial and experiential relation of the subject in the space by “trigger[ing] self-perception or self-confrontation of the subject, rather than an absorption into the object.”<sup>269</sup> Von Hantelmann’s reading of the object as a *prop* “reassigns the emphasis from the object to an “aesthetic of subjective and inter-subjective experience.”<sup>270</sup> Although this handcrafted mat does not share the same industrial quality of the minimalist objects in *Bodyspacemotionthings*, it follows the same functionary role as the objects in Morris’s work. The purpose of installing this mat in a gallery was not to exhibit an object for a viewer to behold but to support the event by demarcating the space and furnishing this space for a group to gather. The conception of the mat as a *prop* reasserts the emphasis on thought and experience that underlines the research project.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> The idea of the art object as a ‘prop’ is also exemplified in Brazilian conceptualism through Hélio Oiticica’s *Parangolés*. Although the *Parangolés* appear as fabric forms, Oiticica made these with the intention that they be worn as capes. The intention of the *Parangolé* is to mobilise specific experiential states in the participants, as articulated by the title, slang Portuguese that translates as “idleness, a sudden agitation, an unexpected situation, or a dance party.” Oiticica produced the *Parangolés* with the specific intention that they be worn to perform the samba. Rather than art object, the *Parangolés* would be better approached as a temporary experience that becomes enacted each time the cape is worn, used and handed on to another dancer within the gathering (Oiticica fabricated them in such a way that they could be easily removed). Like Morris’s components in *Bodyspacemotionthings* and Oiticica’s *Parangolés* the mat functions within the overarching task of each work to structure experience. How the mat functions in the enactment of the event reaffirms the shift in my practice from a concern with artistic form to a concern with experience thought and the critical demand of contemporary art.

<sup>270</sup> Von Hantelmann, “On the Socio-Economic Role of the Art Exhibition,” n.p.

<sup>271</sup> The mat was made specifically for the enactment of *Gatherings*, (*Transitory Encounters*). The purpose of installing this mat in the gallery was to provide a platform for the series of events. On reflection the mat modified the conditions of the gallery on the opening night and during the enactment of *The Materialisation of the Phantom Muse* and the screening of *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*. The experience of being in the public space of the gallery in stocking feet altered the visitors’ interaction with the space and, more significantly, with one another. The softness of the fabric underfoot, being made of cashmere and moleskin, compelled people to sit and recline in the formal space of the art gallery. This slight modification to each individual’s physical attitude informed the dynamic in the space disrupting the normative mode of interaction that usually occurs on the opening night of an exhibition. The presence of the mat disrupted the social hierarchies that are often presented in the art world. The presence of the mat seemed to effect the dynamic in the gallery on an inter-subjective level as curators, established artists, emerging artists and art students sat/reclined together on the mat in their stocking feet.



Figure 32: Hand-made mat of cashmere, moleskin, cotton (17 m x 7 m).



In Chapter Two I outlined how the event emerged as an artistic framework that could enact an *other space* to *invite* thought. This notion of the artistic event is proposed by Schechner who reads the art event as a space to engender thought, describes how they, like ritual, “make[s] the space, or create[s] isolated nodes of spatial meaning.”<sup>272</sup> This reading of art as a space for thought is extended by Toscano by his claim that art enacts *other spaces* to engender thought. Through my reflections on *Metaphysical Longings* in Chapter Two I formulate the proposition that the event provides an applicable artistic framework to conduct an enquiry into the philosophical character of art. This proposition is reasserted in this chapter by presenting how the non-discursive performative processes particular to this artistic event allow me to explore how philosophical ideas might be implicated in art.

My reading of event is primarily informed by my art practice. It differs from Badiou’s philosophical interpretation of *event* that is based on the concept of novelty. The everyday reading of ‘event’, something that affects change, mediating a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ in three-dimensional time, is both temporal and narrative. As outlined in Chapter Three, Badiou’s *event* is indeed a moment of change – a fundamental change in that it is understood to have *no relation* to the situation in which it occurs. It is conceived not as a link in a narrative chain, but as an absolute novelty, a pure beginning, which is literally “unnameable” in the language of the situation.<sup>273</sup> Because Badiou’s *event* is something that occurs unexpectedly it cannot be staged.<sup>274</sup> This differentiates my reading of event from Badiou’s because my events are *staged* in specific designated locations and at particular times. However, although these events are *staged* they are centred on furnishing others to encounter a liminal state as an experience that is “other” to our quotidian experience. These temporary artworks exemplify a reading of the artwork as an open-process because they are dependent on the collective. Although the philosophical interpretation of *event* in Badiou does not regard *event* as cultural phenomena, it is worth noting that Badiou proposes a requirement of contemporary art as “the construction of a new collective.” Badiou maintains that the artwork’s ability to

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<sup>272</sup> Richard Schechner, “An Interview with Allan Kaprow,” in *Happenings and Other Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 188.

<sup>273</sup> Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 36-37 and Hallward, *Think Again, Alain Badiou*, xxiv.

<sup>274</sup> Paul M. Livingston observes that both *Being and Event* (1988) and its sequel *Logic of Worlds: Being and Event II* (2009) posit if the event is to be truly transformative it amounts to the “sudden, unpredictable advent to appearance of a kind of phenomenon that could not possibly be discerned within the previously existing situation.” Paul M. Livingston, “Logic of Worlds: Being and Event II,” *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, accessed April 2 2014, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24192-logics-of-worlds-being-and-event-ii/>.

construct such a collective is essential because the “idea is experienced and investigated through the presence of the public.”<sup>275</sup> This enquiry uses the event as an artistic form to explore how philosophical ideas might be raised on a collective, experiential and perceptive level.

The events that configure the research project are premised on a gathering and prioritise subjective and inter-subjective experience. The research project raises an issue that I identify in contemporary art discourse with the term ‘viewer’. I propose that this term is insufficient to designate the subject who encounters my artworks as events. I formulate the term *percipient* in response to this issue, arguing that this term is more comprehensive and concise than the conventional term “viewer” to distinguish the subject engaged in the artworks within the research project. The act of looking accounts for one of many ways we encounter these works and contemporary art in general. As noted in Chapter Two, contemporary art incorporates a vast array of artistic forms that might not necessarily be encountered on a visual level, for example, there is no visual framework to engage with Piper’s *Funk Lesson*. Similarly Barry’s *1969 Project Class*, detailed in the previous chapter, can only be encountered through imagination and perception. Similarly, little, or rather no emphasis is placed on the act of looking in my artworks as events and in the case of *Metaphysical Longings* the act of looking is prohibited as the instruction to “close your eyes” is relayed in each iteration of this work. Like *Metaphysical Longings*, the emphasis in all the artworks that configure the research project is on experience and ultimately thought.

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<sup>275</sup> In this way the event serves as a useful framework to furnish a consideration of the collective directly. The collective links the temporal forms (i.e. the now) with the spatial forms (i.e. the here – the presence of a crowd in place). Elie During, “A Theatre of Operations, A Discussion Between Alain Badiou and Elie During,” in *A Theater Without Theater*, 22-27 (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009), 25.

#### 4.1.1 Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)

*Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* marks the first public presentation of the research project. This work took place over three evenings from 6pm – 9pm as my contribution to the group exhibition *Trapezium* at The Lab in June 2008 (Fig. 35). *Trapezium* also featured the work of three other Irish artists, a series of paintings by Orla Whelan, a collage constructed out of hundreds of small individually etched labels by Sinead O’Reilly and suspended paper balloons by Janine Davidson. For *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, the public was invited to the gallery for three events that sought to engage with liminality as an experiential and psychological state. Rather than engaging with liminality explicitly, *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* sought to develop alternate methods of engagement that might instigate a collective form of enquiry in an extra textual manner. (Fig. 33, 34)

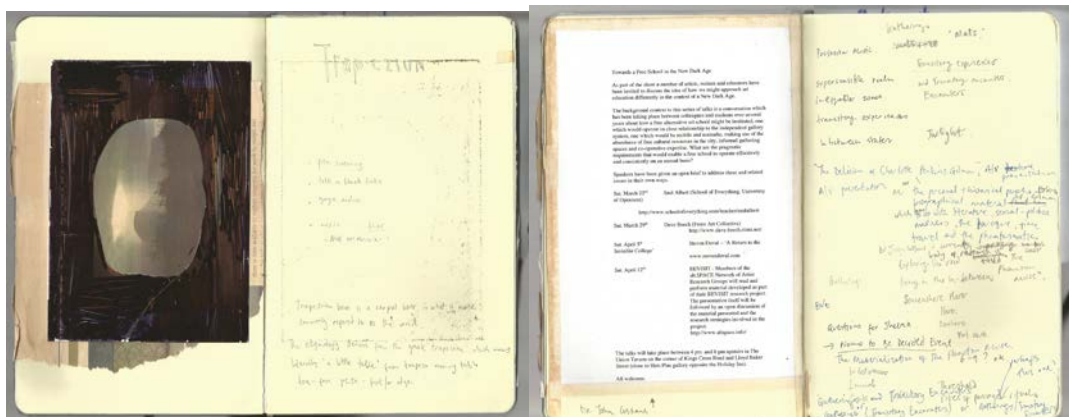


Figure 33 & 34 Research/Working Notebook

A large mat measuring 17 metres by 7 metres was produced in the developing stage of *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*. Because the mat covered the entire space, (the dimensions of the mat mirrored the dimensions of the gallery) the visitors were required to remove their shoes when entering the gallery. The three events were enacted on this mat. A yoga nidra session was facilitated to inaugurate the first event. The second event *The Materialization of the Phantom Muse*, incorporated an audio-visual performance by Dr. John Cussans, and a musical performance with Neil McAvinia and his band *VooDoo Wray* (Fig. 36, 37). A screening of *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner* (1974), a documentary of the world ski-flying champion Walter Steiner directed

by Werner Herzog, marked the final event.<sup>276</sup> The mat remained in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition.



Figures 35: *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* (2008).

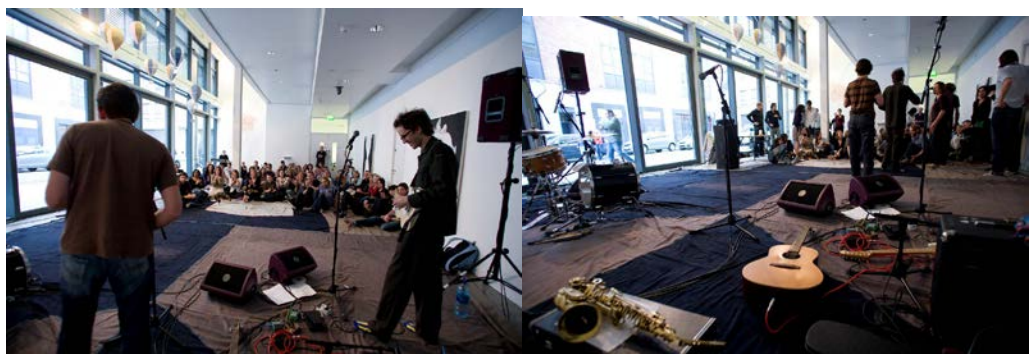


Figure 36 & 37: *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* (2008).

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<sup>276</sup> The screening of *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner* was kindly supported by the Goethe Institute.

#### 4.1.2 *Mystical Anarchism*

*Mystical Anarchism* designates an event that was first enacted on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009 in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (Fig. 39). This event as a secret midnight lecture, was developed and realised in collaboration with the philosopher Simon Critchley. It was held without authorisation from the National Park. Over one hundred people were gathered together on a mat in a forest by the upper lake to hear Critchley's lecture that invoked the *Movement of the Free Spirit*, a group of 13<sup>th</sup> century mystics. Critchley focused on Marguerite Porete through her strange handbook, *The Mirror of Simple and Annihilated Souls (and Who Remain Only in Wanting and Desire of Love)*. Critchley disclosed how this handbook led to Porete's charge of heresy in 1310 and her refusal to disavow the message of her handbook led to her execution at the stake. Critchley recounted the seven stages that Porete maintained necessary to annihilate the soul and bring about a transcendental encounter with the divine. In his lecture Critchley observes the political implications of the process of self-deification, outlining how this process captures the ethos of the movement by presenting the self as a 'dividual'. In its departure from the individual, the 'dividual' subject enables a consideration of more socially bound forms of collectivity. In maintaining the spirit is free then "all conceptions of mine and thine vanish," Critchley proposed the tenets of the *Movement of the Free Spirit* as offering a new way of being in the world that adheres to notions of freedom and equality.<sup>277</sup> Critchley described this process as both mystical and anarchistic because the internalisation of religious authority that these mystics practiced effectively undermines the hierarchies of the Church and, by extrapolation, the State. Following the lecture a conversation was opened out to the group. This conversation was drawn to a close after forty minutes due to rain.

*Mystical Anarchism* also designates a thirty-minute film that documents this intimate lecture. A DVD of this film accompanies the thesis. Nothing can be seen in this film bar Critchley's face, which is illuminated by his head torch, and a momentary glimpse from a camera flash illuminating the forest where he stands. *Mystical Anarchism* also incorporates an event that took place in Dublin on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 in a semi-constructed, vacant commercial building in the Smithfield area of Dublin's city

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<sup>277</sup> A transcript of the paper *Mystical Anarchism* is provided in the appendix of the thesis.

centre.<sup>278</sup> The intention of enacting *Mystical Anarchism* three years after the original event in Glendalough was to screen the film and in this way resume the conversation in the forest by the upper lake that had been curtailed by rain. There were three stages to the event (Fig. 39). Firstly Edia Connole hosted *A Taste of Faith*, a last supper for over two hundred and fifty people.<sup>279</sup> For *A Taste of Faith* Connole conceived a menu based specifically on key ingredients that are referenced in medieval mystical texts (Fig. 40, 41). Connole outlined the significance of each dish, for example explaining the single hazelnut on each plate referenced Porete's claim that God had revealed the universe to her in a hazelnut. Following supper the group were led through the building to the second floor. The mat used in the original enactment of *Mystical Anarchism* was laid out for the screening of the film. Following the thirty-minute screening the conversation between Simon Critchley and over two hundred and fifty people on the mat that lasted over three hours. (Fig.42)

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<sup>278</sup> I worked with Block T, an artist-run studio to secure this space for the event.

<sup>279</sup> Brian Hunt, David Fagan and Kathy Tynan participated in this event. This supper was multi-layered, the food appeared as 'slop' – referencing prison slops and the notion of a last supper that is offered to those who are about to be executed (think Porete) Although delicious, the formlessness of the food had an abject quality about it. This was an important element in relation to the premise of this work in which the participants' 'faith' in Connole, (the chef) was 'tested'. A transcript of the paper is provided in the appendix of the thesis. Connole played a major role in the realisation of *Mystical Anarchism*. Connole also features in the film *Parodos* as one of the thirteen silent masked members of the chorus and subsequently facilitated the public conversation with Mark Fisher following his lecture as part of *The Long Dark Night*.





Figure 38: *Mystical Anarchism* (2009).  
An unsanctioned midnight lecture with Simon Critchley, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow.





Figure 39: *Mystical Anarchism* (2012)  
*A Taste of Faith* hosted by Edia Connole, screening and public conversation with Simon Critchley



**A TASTE OF FAITH  
THE HELL WITHIN**



**Brod durch Gott**

Bread for the sake of God

**Munster Gerome Fourme d'Ambert**

A selection of premodern cheeses for the blessed Marie Alacoque

**Our Father Who Art in Humus**

Hummus with ground lamb and almonds

**A Hazelnut for all of Creation**

**Tongues of Fire**

Braised pork tongue in a spicy vinaigrette

**Quyke Blode of Catherine of Sienna with a  
Stalke of Fynel**

A mortreux of chicken brawn in peverade sauce served with fresh fennel

**Mystelium Pies**

**Lenten Pudding**

Rice pudding with almond milk and raisins served with toasted pine nuts

Figures 40: Menu, *A Taste of Faith*, Edia Connole and Scott Wilson



Figure 41: *Mystical Anarchism* (2012).  
*A Taste of Faith* - a last supper for 250 people.



Figure 42: *Mystical Anarchism* (2012).  
Conversation on the mat.

The final iteration of *Mystical Anarchism* (differentiated from the previous iterations by the additional title, *The Closing of Mystical Anarchism*) ran from 18<sup>th</sup> October 2012 – 13<sup>th</sup> January 2013 in the Hugh Lane Gallery, as part of an ongoing project, *Sleepwalkers: Production as Process, An Experiment in Exhibition Practice*, curated by Michael Dempsey.<sup>280</sup> The first gallery featured the original design of the mat used on the invitation. The film *Mystical Anarchism* was also screened in this space, a small-scale projection directly onto the wall. A parabolic speaker was positioned above a small structure that housed the projector and functioned as a bench for two people. A passageway painted in yellow ochre leads from the first gallery to the second gallery hidden from view by heavy yellow ochre velvet curtains. The mat that was used in the original event in Glendalough and for the subsequent screening in Block T was laid out in the gallery. This gallery was dimly lit by a salmon-peach glow and infused with a heavy scent reminiscent of the musky smell in a forest. Unlike the previous iterations of *Mystical Anarchism* the philosopher was not present (*Fig. 43*).



Figure 43: *The Closing of Mystical Anarchism* (2012/13) (detail)

<sup>280</sup> *Sleepwalkers: Production as Process, An Experiment in Exhibition Practice*, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery. Artists: Clodagh Emoe, Sean Lynch, Gavin Murphy, Jim Ricks, Linda Quinlan and Lee Welsh. Curators: Michael Dempsey, Logan Sisley and Maryisia Wiekiewicz-Carroll. <http://hughlane.wordpress.com>

### 4.1.3 *Metaphysical Longings*

*Metaphysical Longings* has evolved since its first enactment in 2006. To date *Metaphysical Longings* has taken place in four different locations. Although each iteration differs they follow the same structure in that a group gathers in a particular space and a particular time, lies down, together on a large mat, closes their eyes and listens to an audio relaying pre-recorded instructions. These instructions are informed by a technique of guided visualisation associated with yoga nidra. There are four stages in this instructive process: the first draws attention to the body in space (by focusing on particular parts of the body through visualisation and feeling); the second seeks to bring awareness of the body in time (by reflecting back on the entire day, focusing on particular activities, events, people, objects, etc.); the third stage brings the awareness of the world (by imagining particular objects) and the final stage brings the awareness to the subject as part of collective (by returning to the here and now and re-engaging with the body within group). In the third stage specific objects are listed for the *percipient* to visualise. In yoga nidra these objects are typically linked with images associated with the yogic tradition, for example a lotus flower, a shiva lingam, an elephant riding on a rat, etc.<sup>281</sup> The audio has developed since the first enactment of this work becoming more specific so that the content of the audio links with the context (the location and time of the event).

*Metaphysical Longings II* was enacted in the public museum, the National Gallery of Ireland, at 8pm on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010 as part of the curatorial project *Invisible* (Fig. 44, 45).<sup>282</sup> I placed an open invitation in the VAI, limiting the group to thirty. The group was requested to meet at the back entrance of the museum. On arrival the group were welcomed and led through the darkened length of the Milton Wing to a dimly lit empty gallery where a mat was laid out on the floor.<sup>283</sup> Once the group had removed their shoes and laid down on the mat the audio began. The series of objects relayed in the

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<sup>281</sup> The deity Ganesh is represented as half elephant, half human and is claimed to ride on a rat.

<sup>282</sup> This project was supported by the Black Church Print Studio in Dublin and was curated by Oliver Dowling, John Graham and Mags O' Brien. I had identified an empty gallery in the museum for the event some time ago and following up with the authorities learned that the atmospheric conditions deemed it unsuitable to house precious artworks.bngv

<sup>283</sup> The atmospheric conditions of this room adjacent to the Millton Wing are unsuitable for paintings.



third stage of the instructive process referenced the images depicted in the paintings hanging in the Milton Wing. For example, “apples on the grass” referenced *Walter Osborne’s Apple Gathering, Quimperlé* (1883) and “a bolt of lightening” referenced the famous *Francis Danby painting The Opening of the Sixth Seal* (1828). The image of the lightening bolt is evocative to many because it was revealed in the following the restoration of this work. After ‘waking’ the group remained on the mat for some time conversing quietly amongst each other.



Figure 44 & 45: *Metaphysical Longings II*.  
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

Hi Clodagh,

I have been invited to curate live@8 on March the 30th by Vivienne Dick and Maeve Mulrennan ( Galway Arts Centre ). I Hi Clodagh,

I have been invited to curate live@8 on March the 30th by Vivienne Dick and Maeve Mulrennan ( Galway Arts Centre ). I would like to invite you to show a piece there..

Here are some rough ideas I am working out for a theme.. the following text will need polishing though..

It seems that the body has its own sensitivity and memory, its own way of storing and expressing experience through the senses. Roberta Mock describes that ' the senses operate not so much as receptors but analogous to tentacles and feelers' (Mock.p95.2009) Our subconscious beings explore another way to conceive experience. The artist may have the position with which to act as a raw and experimental sensory instrument, attempting to fragment or disrupt the accepted linear forms of understanding.

In this event at live 8, the notion is to move from cerebral dominated forms of intellectual understanding into the realm of sensation and bodily knowledge, artists taking part will be using experimental forms of text, visual media, audio, movement, touch, taste and smell in response..

Looking forward to hearing from you, Ruby

Look forward to hearing from you, Ruby

--  
 Ruby Wallis  
 PhD researcher NCAD/GradCam, Dublin  
 Photography theory lecturer - Griffith College Dublin  
[www.rubywallis.com](http://www.rubywallis.com)would like to

Figure 46: Invitation to participate in Live@8 from Ruby Wallis.

Metaphysical Longings IV took place at 8pm on 30th March 2011, in a pub in County Galway. Metaphysical Longings IV was the first of a series of performative works that were enacted for Live@ 8, curated by Ruby Wallis (Fig. 46, 47).<sup>284</sup> Metaphysical Longings IV developed from the previous iteration at the NGI and played with the notion of developing the National Programme to a pub in Co. Galway. The National Programme involves key institutions lending artworks to regional galleries. Metaphysical Longings IV sought to initiate a space so that a group might collectively encounter the paintings from the Milton Wing in the National Gallery of Ireland. Rather than bringing the paintings to the pub, Metaphysical Longings III sought to furnish the group's encounter with these works on a perceptive level. For example, the evocative statement "bolt of lightning" referencing *The Opening of the Sixth Seal* (1828) enabled the group to perceive this painting on a collective level. For Metaphysical Longings IV the pub was prepared in advance of the event. All the chairs and tables were removed

<sup>284</sup> *Live@8* was a bi-monthly interdisciplinary live event in Galway, presenting new contemporary art performance, video, film, sound and music in a social context. Organised by Vivienne Dick, Maeve Mulrennan and Áine Phillips it ran from April 2008 to June 2013. *Live@8* has shown and presented the work of hundreds of live artists, film makers and musicians, with each event guest curated by notable Irish and international curators and artists. <http://live-at-eight.blogspot.ie>. This particular event included a monologue by Paul Timoney, a live sound work by Suzanne Walsh and an audio-visual piece by Alice Maher and Vivienne Dick.

and the mat was laid out covering the entire floor. On arrival to the pub the visitors were requested to remove their shoes. When everybody had settled, Metaphysical Longings IV was introduced as part of the National Programme. As with the case of the previous iterations, the group lay down on the mat, closed their eyes and listened to the instructions (Fig. 48). Following Metaphysical Longings IV the group remained on the mat, which functioned as an auditorium/stage for the proceeding performances that ran until midnight. At the end of the night the audience helped me roll up the mat and fit it into my Mazda 121.

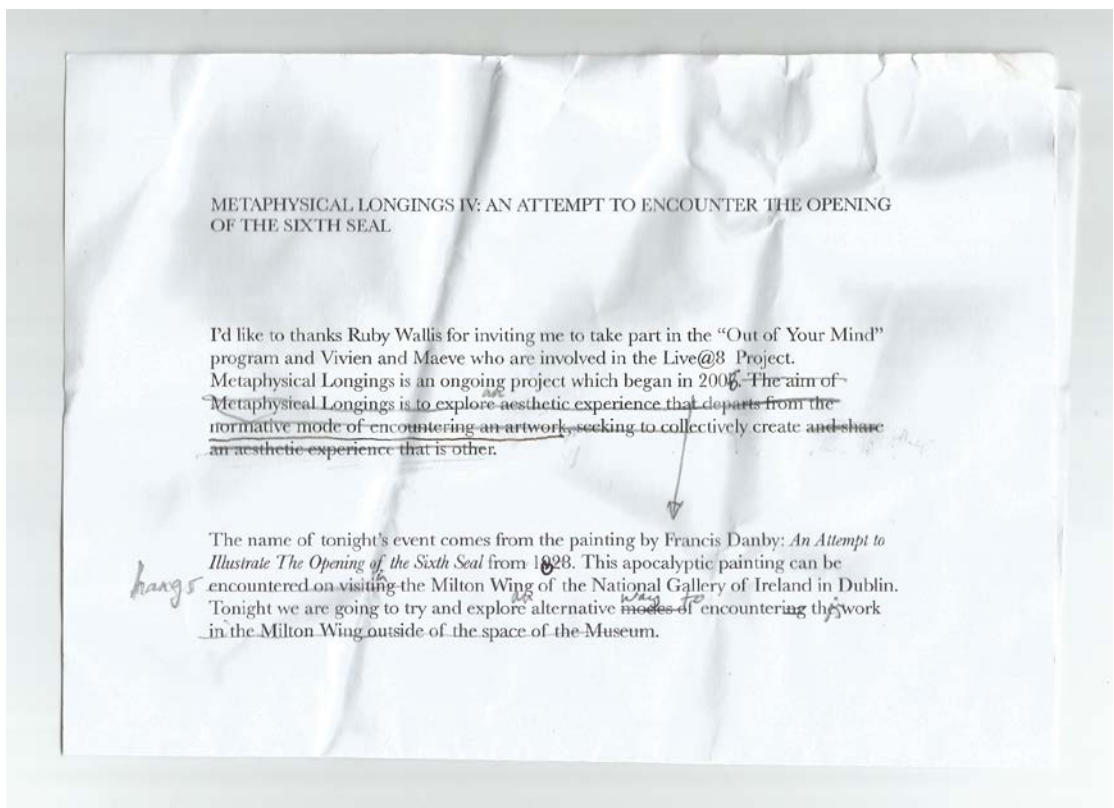


Figure 47: Introduction to *Metaphysical Longings IV*



Figure 48: *Metaphysical Longings III*.  
Live at 8, Bar 8, Co. Galway.

*Metaphysical Longings III* was enacted at midday on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010 in the Gallerie Sint-Lukas with students from the MA Transmedia course at the Hogeschool Sint-Lukas, Brussels as part of a two-day workshop. Rather than outlining how the notion of indeterminacy and alternate temporalities could be explored through art, *Metaphysical Longings III* operated as an alternative to a standard lecture to disclose this notion through enactment. *Metaphysical Longings III* sought to enact a space where the students might experience the previous exhibition on a perceptive level. In preparation for the event I visited the gallery to see the previous exhibition, taking note of features that stood out in the exhibition and that were peculiar to the space. These objects relayed in the third stage of the audio track which listed features that I identified in the exhibition. When it was time to present a lecture I led the group out of the classroom into the darkened gallery where the mat was laid out. *Metaphysical Longings III* lasted for forty-minutes. Following this session the group helped roll up the mat.



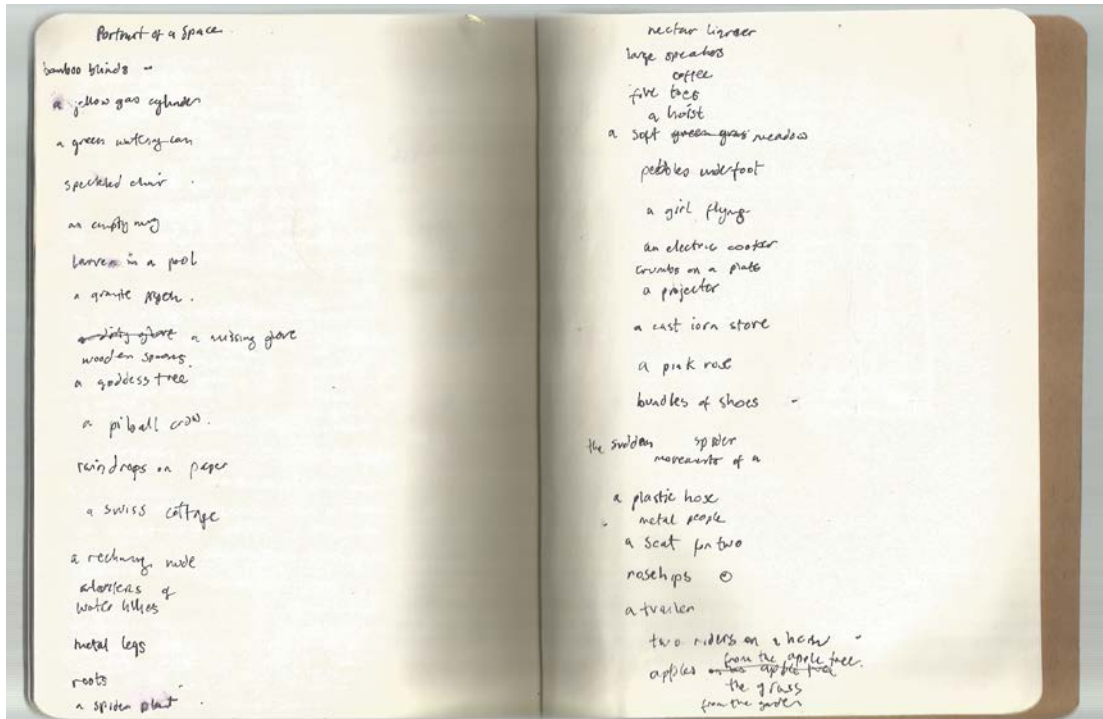


Figure 49: Research/Working Notebook.

*Metaphysical Longings V* took place at midday in a suburban garden in County Dublin as part of a three-day site-specific project *Portrait of a Space*, 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011.<sup>285</sup> This project was curated by Teresa Gillespie and Rose Lejeune and took place in Clonlea Studios. These studios are located in a beautiful garden and include a yoga studio and a foundry.<sup>286</sup> In preparation I visited the site of Clonlea Studio with Teresa in advance of the event, taking note of specific features such as the water lilies floating in the pond by the studio, a bronze sculpture of a woman that was installed in a tree and a strange-shaped tree described by Teresa as a ‘Goddess Tree’. These features informed the list of images referenced in the audio (Fig.49). *Metaphysical Longings V* was scheduled to follow Jan Verwoert’s lecture at midday. Verwoert’s lecture “The Devils in the Thing Talks to the Devils Out There [sic]” details Verwoert’s perception of sculpture as an action performed with things in space. Verwoert posed two questions relating to action: What kind of action? And what this space might designate, physical space, social space and/or the space of history? After Verwoert’s lecture Teresa ushered the group out from the lecture space to the garden, asking them to lay the mat on the

<sup>285</sup> *Portrait of a Space* took place in September 2011 and was curated by Teresa Gillespie and Rose Lejeune. <http://portraitofspace.wordpress.com> Participants include critics and theorists, Jan Verwoert, Andrea Philips and Francis Halsall and international artists Thomas Kratz, Sally Ginger Brockbank, Jesse Jones, and Boyle and Shaw.

<sup>286</sup> Clonlea Studio was established by Teresa’s Father, Ronan Gillespie, an Irish sculptor who specialises in bronze casting.

lawn in between two large speakers. In this iteration of *Metaphysical Longings* the source of the audio was present. The group lay down and listened to the instructions. When the group “awoke” they remained reclining on the mat for some time, after which they rolled up the mat and squeezed it into my Mazda 121. (Fig 50, 51).



Figure 50 & 51: *Metaphysical Longings V*.  
Jan Verwoert reclining and rolling up mat.

#### 4.2 The Research Project – Entwining Art and Philosophy Through Enactment

Since embarking on the formal enquiry, philosophy has become further integrated in the activities that constitute my practice. These activities include my participation in a reading group focusing on the philosophical interpretation of *event* and my convening *The Experiential*, a bi-monthly aesthetics reading group. I see these activities as part of my post-conceptual practice, because they are crucial to the development of my work. These activities also inform the development of the research project because they offer point of entry to further engage with philosophical enquiry and have led to collaborations with philosophers and thinkers that include Dr. John Cussans, Edia Connole and Simon Critchley. This discussion outlines how the research project as the development and enactment of event-based works, intensifies the *entwinement* between art and philosophy

*Mystical Anarchism* marks a significant development in the research project by intensifying the *entwinement* between art and philosophy through my collaboration with Simon Critchley. As detailed in Chapter Two, I had been reading Critchley’s philosophical writings. Through my involvement with the *Event Research Group* I had the opportunity of meeting him in February 2009. He accepted my invitation as keynote

speaker for a seminar *Critchley on Ethics, Politics of Resistance in the Contemporary World* that I had organised with the group.<sup>287</sup> The aim of the seminar was to offer further insight into Critchley's book, *Infinitely Demanding, Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007).<sup>288</sup> In this book Critchley considers the possibility of re-inscribing new ways of thinking about the world, by looking to artistic and political methods that remobilise subjective and political agency and overcome the diminishing utopian impulse in thought imposed by the neo-liberal situation. Through this seminar I sought to extend Critchley's enquiry to others and overcome the diminishing utopian impulse in thought imposed by the neo-liberal situation I invited the philosopher Aislinn O' Donnell, who was at that time working at the NCAD (National College of Art and Design) to respond to Critchley's keynote paper.



Figure 52: Declan Clarke, *Critchley on Ethics, Politics of Resistance in the Contemporary World*, 2009

Figures 53 & 54: Shane Cullan, *Critchley on Ethics, Politics of Resistance in the Contemporary World*, 2009

I also invited artists Declan Clarke and Shane Cullan to contribute to the seminar because their work offered examples of how art and art practice might engender political agency. Clarke spoke about his recent exhibition, *Loneliness in West Berlin*, (2009) Goethe Institute Dublin. This exhibition centred around the experience of a former member of the June 17<sup>th</sup> Movement, and as part of the exhibition Clarke had transcribed an interview with this member in a pamphlet that was made available at the exhibition (*Fig. 52*). Cullan spoke about his artistic/political gesture of presenting a memorial for the civilians who had suffered the Second Massacre at Quana in 2006

<sup>287</sup> The Event Research group was convened by Dr Tim Stott, and included Dr. Glen Loughran, Dr. Connel Vaughan, John Buckley and Edia Connole. This peer-led research group ran from 2008-2010. *Speaking Matters* is the name for a series of seminars organised by researchers at GradCAM.

<sup>288</sup> Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding, Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2007).

(Fig. 53,54). Following this presentation he slowly relayed the thirty names of the civilians, including children, who were killed in the massacre.

Although *Critchley on Ethics...* was held in NCAD it was open to the wider community and attracted students of philosophy and a wide network of friends who were not necessarily associated with the disciplines of art or philosophy but were nevertheless interested in the issues informing this public lecture based on the possibility of subjective and political agency.<sup>289</sup> Presenting a philosophical enquiry into the possibility of re-imagining the world in conjunction with specific artistic projects that might present this possibility opened up the enquiry by extending the parameters of the discursive space.

Although I do not approach the seminar *Critchley on Ethics ...* as an artwork, I do see the development and planning of this seminar as one of many activities that constitute my practice. This activity further *entwines* philosophy into my practice and consequently informed the development of *Mystical Anarchism*. Firstly, my observation that the conversation following *Critchley on Ethics ...* was dominated by academics prompted me to question the appropriateness of an academic framework to engender a more inclusive conversation. This observation plays a key role in developing the research project because it prompted me to develop *Mystical Anarchism* as an alternate framework that might extend philosophical enquiry to others through more experimental modes of address. Secondly, the opportunity to meet Critchley led to our collaboration. This collaboration emerged out of a series of conversations following his engagement with my practice and my engagement with his enquiry, specifically his paper *Mystical Anarchism* (that was in a developmental stage). *Mystical Anarchism* focuses *Movement of the Free Spirit*, an exemplary millenarian movement based in the low countries of Europe during Medieval period. Instead of looking to contemporary examples, as he had for *Infinitely Demanding...* Critchley uses a historical lens to re-

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<sup>289</sup> The statement advertised on the GradCAM website demonstrates how the concerns of contemporary art were entwined in this lecture: Simon Critchley on Ethics, Politics of Resistance in the Contemporary World: At a time of widespread economic crisis and growing social instability, critical thought and practice can work to address the political nihilism that results in an apparent poverty of alternatives. What figures, relationships, and models of praxis still have relevance and possibility within our situation? Drawing on current attempts to rethink convergences between cultural practices, political agency and philosophy around matters of concern to us all, and motivated more broadly by an examination of correspondences between philosophy and culture, the Event Research Group will stage an afternoon of presentations and discussion that takes as its point of departure philosopher Simon Critchley's important contributions to contemporary problems concerning ethics and political resistance [http://www.gradcam.ie/speaking\\_matters/simon\\_critchley.php](http://www.gradcam.ie/speaking_matters/simon_critchley.php)

engage with the past in order to propose the possibility of an alternate, more collective model of community. I observed how my practice and Critchley's enquiry aligned. My work sought to engage with liminality in a direct experiential way. Critchley's area of enquiry, Marguerite Porete's handbook seemed to suggest this state. For example, the intensification of experience that Porete describes in her handbook could be approached as a liminal state because she claims this threshold state is transformative, in that it eventually leads to deification. I also observed that the *Movement of the Free Spirit* exemplified *communitas*. In his paper *Mystical Anarchism* Critchley observes the socio-political implications of the transformation of the individual to the 'dividual' and how this informs the communist sensibility of the *Movement of the Free Spirit*, where "all conceptions of mine and thine vanish".<sup>290</sup> Through our conversations I realised how our specific enquiries aligned, not only in relation to liminality, but also in the way that both enquiries considered the potential of the collective to forge new states of being in the world and consequently new ways of thinking about the world. These insights informed our decision to merge the enquiry of the philosopher with that of the artist through the development of the event *Mystical Anarchism*. (Fig. 55, 56, 57, 58)



Figure 55, 56, 57 & 58: Research/Working Notebooks

<sup>290</sup> A transcript of the paper *Mystical Anarchism* is provided in the appendix of the thesis.



The film *Mystical Anarchism* also develops the *entwinement* between philosophy and art by presenting an additional artistic form to engage with philosophical ideas. The footage of this lecture captured by Thomas McGraw Lewis was originally intended for archival purposes. Because the lecture was shot in near darkness all that can be seen is Critchley's face (illuminated by his head torch) emerging out of the darkness (Fig.59). From my perspective, the footage evoked the esoteric nature of the content of Critchley's lecture while capturing a quality of otherness that the event sought to enact. I felt it necessary to produce a film that could be publically screened. This film also presented an opportunity to recommence the conversation between the group and the philosopher that was curtailed by the rainfall in Glendalough furthering the *entwinement* and extending the work through the collaborative event in Block T.



Figure 59: *Mystical Anarchism* (2011).  
Still from 30 min. film.

*Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* can also be approached as *entwining* philosophy with art. By departing from a didactic formal mode of explicating liminality and relaying ideas pertaining to this intensive experiential state, the three events in *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* sought to implicate philosophical ideas associated with the notion of liminality through enactment. Instead of using the didactic methods that are used in an academic seminar, (i.e. presenting a papers, and using PowerPoint, etc.) *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* sought to engage with liminality through more

performative methods. The process of psychic sleep that was deployed in *Metaphysical Longings* inaugurated the first stage of the three stages that constitute *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*. Through techniques of guided visualisation associated with the meditative practice of yoga nidra this first stage of the work sought to temporarily disengage a preoccupation with the self and initiate a collective experience. The second stage of this work, titled *The Materialization of the Phantom Muse* also uses a performative method. Instead of speaking directly about the link between this psychological state and liminality, Cussans suggested this experiential in-between state by holding a virtual séance with the late feminist writer Charlotte Perkins-Gillman.<sup>291</sup> Perkins-Gillman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) describes the misdiagnosis of a woman suffering post-natal depression and the trauma that resulted from the 'rest cure' (requiring the patient to avoid intellectual or emotional stimulation). This semi-autobiographical piece of fiction articulates the psychological trauma of confinement as it manifests as a vision of a woman trapped behind wallpaper. The performance of the séance literally enacted a threshold that linked the here and now with the ghost of Perkins-Gillman through the interface of the computer that was projected onto the wall. More performative methods of engaging with liminality were further developed through *VooDoo Wray's* blues performance. The notion of a liminal state that is neither here nor there, caught "betwixt and between" was suggested through the set that began with *You Got to Move* a traditional negro song about death (as a departure from this world into the next and/or escaping from the Southern United States) and ended with songs that include *Preachin' Blues (Up Jumped The Devil)*, by Robert Johnson, *Poor Black Mattie* by R.L. Burnside, and *Black Widow* by Townes Van Zandt (*Fig. 60*).<sup>292</sup> Johnson, Burnside and Van Zandt's lives can be interpreted as liminal. Turner's notion of "betwixt and between" is exemplified by the myth of Johnson, who is believed to have sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads. Similarly, Burnside was convicted of murder having killed a man at a dice game and Van Zandt, an alcoholic and a drug addict, had no long-term memory due to insulin shock therapy he had received for bipolar disorder.

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<sup>291</sup> Dr. John Cussans' research is predominantly focused on wayward imagination and mystical belief systems that have been pathologised by normative psychology.

<sup>292</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, viii.

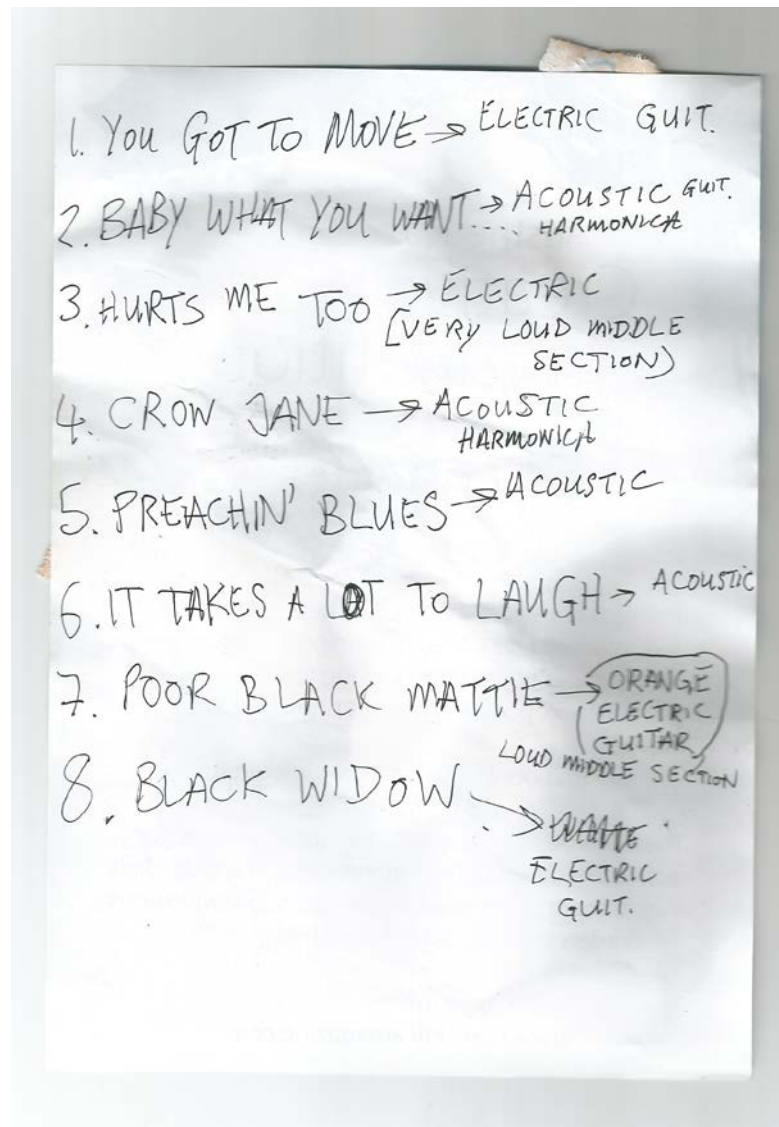


Figure 60: Voodoo Wray set list.

The third stage of *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)* also suggests the subjective experiential state of liminality in an extra-textual manner. Although Herzog does not use the term liminal in his documentary *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*, his documentary capturing the inner turmoil of Steiner during the 1975 Ski-flying World Championship also articulates the liminal state as “betwixt and between”. Throughout the competition the ski federation authorities continually extend the length of the jump and although Steiner realises the dangers of this jump he has an unremitting desire to perform this potentially life-threatening act. Herzog’s documentary captures an intensification of experience, the psychological state of a man in a state of suspension –



caught between his confounding experience of fear and desire. This intensification of experience that is disorientating and is classically described as “being outside oneself” is evoked through the mesmerising slow-motion footage of Steiner literally suspended in mid-air (Fig. 61).<sup>293</sup> Although *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, does not bring philosophical enquiry and art practice together in an explicit manner, the performative processes used in the three events sought to implicate philosophical ideas associated with the notion of liminality through enactment.



Figure 61, *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*, 1975 (film still).

Like *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Metaphysical Longings* does not bring philosophical enquiry and art practice together in an explicit manner. There is no philosopher present in this enactment of this work, nor is there a philosophical message, only a disembodied voice relaying a series of straightforward instructions. Although the first enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* was more modest in scale than the seminar *Critchley on Ethics ...* (in that only thirteen people participated, as opposed to over eighty people attending the seminar) and less ambitious in scale than *Mystical Anarchism* I maintain this artwork offers a more sophisticated, framework to engage with philosophical notions of subjectivity. As argued in Chapter Two, although *Metaphysical Longings* was enacted on a patchwork of blankets in a small disused flat, it nevertheless offered a more direct way where a group might engage with the

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<sup>293</sup> Because intensive emotional states are disorientating they are classically described as being outside of oneself, in that the person's experience seems 'other' to their normal state of being. Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* (University of Minnesota Press), no. 31 (Autumn, 1995), 83-109.

existential question of being in a more experimental and ultimately a more expansive manner. *Metaphysical Longings* offered a more direct way to engage and explore the notion of being through the group's direct experience.

I propose event-based artworks can offer alternate and potentially more inclusive framework to explore philosophical ideas. The conversations following these three event-based works was more inclusive than the conversation that followed the seminar *Critchley on Ethics*. I also propose that this *entwinement* can potentially offer new ways of thinking. The intention motivating *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Metaphysical Longings* and *Mystical Anarchism* was not to present knowledge and relay philosophical ideas through the explication of theory but to extend enquiry to others in a non-didactic manner through enactment. These works sought to offer an alternate entry point to engage with philosophical ideas on subjectivity by engaging with liminality in a more explorative, experiential way. The following discussion further examine how an *entwinement* between art and philosophy is performed both explicitly, and, more pertinently, implicitly by focusing on the process of *staging* used in the event-based works to enact *other spaces*.

#### 4.3 Enacting Other Spaces – Staging and Mirroring the Tri-Partite Structure of Ritual

This discussion reflects on the possibility of the event-based works to implicate philosophical meaning on an experiential and symbolic level. Moving from an analysis of the *entwinement* of art and philosophy, this discussion reflects on the process of *staging* used throughout the research project. In theatre staging designates the use of temporary backdrops to create alternate, imaginary realms. This discussion examines how the process of *staging* developed through the research project and how I employed this method to enact an experiential, symbolic realm that I define as an *other space*. By reflecting on the development of the research project I outline how I sought to enact an *other space* by mirroring the tripartite stage of ritual in the event-based works.

*Gatherings, (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* are defined as events and not performances, however, their *staging* ultimately involves

what the performance theorist Paul Thom observes as a “performance setting – a space set apart from the space of everyday life” and a “performance occasion – a period of time structured for the purpose of that performance.”<sup>294</sup> *Staging* designate key features in the enactment of my event-based works that include: the choice of location, the timing, the and the use of props, namely a 17 metre x 7 metre mat that is used throughout the research project.

*Gatherings, (Transitory Encounters)*, designates the first public enactment of the research project. Although I consider the inaugural event (a public yoga nidra session) of this work a failure, acknowledging and reflecting on this failure (in comparison to the success of the first enactment of *Metaphysical Longings*) has informed the development of the research project by affirming that *staging* is essential to the experiential and symbolic reading of event-based artworks and crucial to enacting an *other* space. Thom’s assertion that a consideration of location and time are essential to the enactment of performative event is substantiated when comparing the success of *Metaphysical Longings* with the inaugural event of *Gatherings, (Transitory Encounters)*.

Although spatial and temporal conditions might seem superficial, these are crucial to establishing a “performance setting” and a “performance occasion” and inform how we encounter the work. In the first enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* in Pallas Heights the spatial and temporal conditions were highly considered, i.e. locating the event in a derelict housing complex and timing it at dusk. These conditions informed the experiential dimension of the work. As outlined in Chapter Two, the event was timed so that the setting sun would bathe the domestic interior space with a peach glow when the group “awoke”. The transformation of this room enhanced and seemed to mirror the intimacy that was initiated by the shared experience of the group. The spatial and temporal conditions also informed the conceptual dimension of the work. A condemned building can be read as a liminal zone and dusk can be read as a liminal moment in time. Experiencing a transitional experiential state in a liminal zone at dusk might enhance the notion of impermanence. I hoped to further implicate the subjective state of indeterminacy through my gesture of extending an invitation to “experience the infinite” in this particular location at this particular time.<sup>295</sup> *Staging Metaphysical Longings* in

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<sup>294</sup> Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 174.

<sup>295</sup> Fig. 21, Invitation to *Metaphysical Longings*

this particular location also intensified the experiential dimension of this work. The requirement to travel to this demolition site at dusk, climb four flights of stairs in an empty inhabited social housing complex and enter a room in an empty flat with twelve other strangers bracketed off an intensive experience that differed from the quotidian experience. I had timed the event *Metaphysical Longings*, so that when the group “woke” the atmosphere of the room appeared transformed by the peach glow of the setting sun.

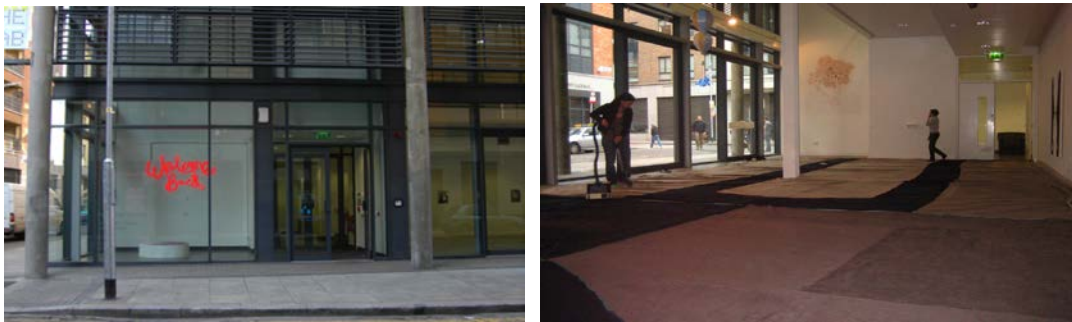


Figure 62 & 63: The Lab, Dublin City Council, Foley Street, Dublin 1.

In the case of the inaugural event of *Gatherings, (Transitory Encounters)*, the “performance occasion” and the “performance setting” was not fully considered. This lack of consideration undermined the crucial experiential dimension, which in turn led to the failure of this work. The spatial conditions at the gallery space of the Lab on the night of the inaugural event differed considerably from the domestic space of Pallas Heights, detracting from the enactment of the event on multiple levels (*Fig. 62, 63*). On a practical level, the large gallery space at the Lab was much colder than the cosy room at Pallas that was heated by a Superser (*Fig. 23*). As noted in Chapter Two, in order to practice yoga nidra effectively the mind and body must be totally relaxed. The requirement to remain still over a period of time causes the temperature of the body to drop. This distracts from this practice that seeks to transfer awareness from the logical and rational to the perceptive. In Pallas Heights the audio could be clearly heard from the cassette tape because the space was so small. However, the small cassette player was inadequate in the large space of the Lab. Having to concentrate trying to hear further distracted from the process of letting go. The spatial conditions can also be seen informing the work on a symbolic level. Because the gallery space at the Lab was considerably larger than Pallas Heights the small group who arrived for the inaugural

event lay down at a considerable remove from one another undermined the possibility of instituting a collective experience and transforming the dynamic in the space.

The process of *staging* developed through the research project and for *Mystical Anarchism* the location and timing of this event was highly considered (Fig. 64, 65, 66). Glendalough, a national park situated approximately fifty miles outside of Dublin's city centre, designates the "performance setting" and midnight designates the "performance occasion". This process of *staging* sought to engender an inter-play between the content of Critchley's lecture with the context of the event. The intention of enacting *Mystical Anarchism* in this "significant place at this significant time" was to intensify the experiential dimension and inform the conceptual framework of this work.<sup>296</sup> The name Glendalough is derived from the Irish *Glenn dha Lough* (the valley of the two lakes). This site is geographically significant, being formed by a fault line in the earth's crust. Glendalough is also culturally significant, being an ancient monastic settlement established around the following of St. Kevin, a hermit monk who had previously resided on the banks of the upper lake. St. Kevin's mendicant lifestyle mirrors that of Porete's and the *Movement of the Free Spirit*. The intention of enacting the event in Glendalough was to symbolically invoke the community in Critchley's lecture.

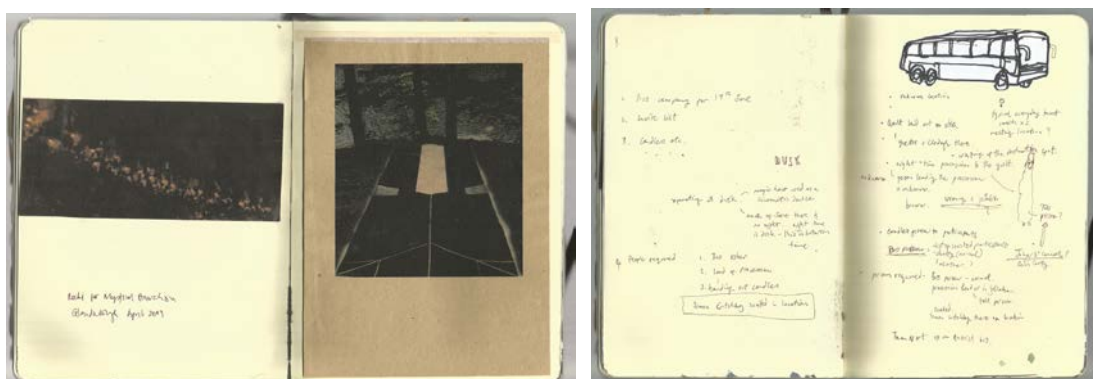


Figure 64 & 65: Research/Working Notebooks

<sup>296</sup> To begin the lecture, Critchley welcomes the group to "this significant place at this significant time". See DVD that accompanies this thesis.



Figure 66: *Mystical Anarchism* (2009).

The liminal state is anthropologically conceived as a “timeless state of being ... that lies parallel to our ‘normal’ state of being, or is perhaps superimposed on it, or somehow coincides or coexists with it.”<sup>297</sup> By enacting *Mystical Anarchism* at midnight I sought to *superimpose* the artwork so that it might *coincide* or *coexist* with the dynamics of the site. The dynamic of Glendalough radically changes at night. This national park is no longer busy with tourists, hill walkers and families. The darkness obscures the amenities and man-made structures such as signs and maps. At midnight the park seems to revert back to a mystical site. I sought to gesture towards the element of secrecy associated with Porete’s esoteric text and the community of mystics by enacting the event in a forest at midnight. Although I did not seek permission from the National Parks Authority for a practical reason (namely because they would probably have refused my request), the secrecy of the event might also be read as engendering an interplay between the content of Critchley’s lecture with the context of the event.<sup>298</sup> Midnight is a significant time, often understood as a time of potential, a time when we might think differently. Badiou’s peer Jacques Rancière also observes the potential of night in his essay *The Nights of Labour*. In this essay Rancière reflects on how the auto-didactic

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<sup>297</sup> Turnbull, “Liminality,” 80.

<sup>298</sup> The decision to not ask permission from the state authorities was also practical decision. I anticipated they would refuse my bringing one hundred people to the banks of the Upper Lake at midnight. This observation demonstrates how art practice often necessitates the artist to operate in an anarchistic manner.

activities of the proletariat instrumentalised an alternate temporality carving out a space where they could institute their own subjective agency.<sup>299</sup> By enacting *Mystical Anarchism* at midnight I sought to initiate an alternate temporality, where the ideas of the philosopher might be extended to the wider collective.

The collective gathering is crucial to all of the events in the research project. However, in his analysis of the performance event Thom fails to register the method of assembly. I propose that the way the group gathers together in my work also informs its experiential dimension and the symbolic meaning. This method of assembly in *Mystical Anarchism* mirrors the tri-partite structure of ritual. This process of *staging* was developed through a process of reflecting back on the structure of *Metaphysical Longings*. Although I did not plan to mirror the tri-partite structure of ritual in this work the three phases – pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal, can be recognised in this event. In ritual initiates are symbolically removed from their everyday experience. The requirement of each individual to travel to a condemned building at dusk can be read as marking the pre-liminal stage of the event. The collective act of lying together, the intensification of experience through the process of yoga nidra and subsequent transformation to the dynamic of the group can be aligned with the liminal stage and the departure of the group from this space as a newly formed collective following this process can be aligned with the post-liminal stage.

By mirroring the tri-partite structure that Van Gennep identifies in ritual, *Mystical Anarchism* sought to enact *another* space where Critchley's philosophical enquiry would converge in the enactment of the work. The method of assembly is initiated from the outset, by the hand-delivered invitation to participate. Partaking in the invitation to travel to an undisclosed location, departing from the familiar location of the National Gallery in Ireland, in Dublin's city centre where they began their journey can be aligned with the pre-liminal stage. Their return to the city in the coach marks the post-liminal stage.

Within ritual theory it has been recognised that a shared experience is crucial to activating the liminal state. This sharing of experience is thematised by Turner's term

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<sup>299</sup> This pedagogical process can also be registered in Irish history through the phenomenon of the hedge school, a secret educational system that literally took place in the hedges during the late 16<sup>th</sup> /17<sup>th</sup> century in Ireland



*communitas*.<sup>300</sup> Although it might seem grandiose to extend Turner's term *communitas* to the gathering participating in *Mystical Anarchism*, the mirroring of ritual in this work instituted a shared experience which is understood to enhance commonality. The method of assembly affects how the work is encountered on an experiential level, as the collective spirit intensifies the experience, enhancing the feeling of anticipation, the feeling that something is bound to take place. *Mystical Anarchism* also operates on an inter-subjective level amongst the group, who collectively share an intensive experience of being brought by coach to an unknown location, being directed along a dirt track to encounter a huge handmade mat laid out in a clearing in a forest, where they would gather together to listen to Critchley relay his intimate lecture in darkness. By performing philosophy through enactment, ideas on collectivity and utopian forms of community were not only suggested through the enactment, but might also be "felt" as a shared experience. This notion of inclusivity, universality and collectivity that Critchley describes is literally performed through the method of assembly and the enactment of the event that implicates all *percipients* within its realisation and enactment.<sup>301</sup> By creating a space where a group could gathering together for a discrete period of time, *Mystical Anarchism* sought to extend Critchley's philosophical ideas on the possibility of utopian forms of community to others so that they might be engaged with these ideas a more immediate and meaningful capacity.

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<sup>300</sup> During, *A Theatre of Operations*, 25.

<sup>301</sup> This observation is developed from von Hantelmann's reading of Daniel Buren's monumental 65 x 32-foot striped canvas which was produced specifically to fill the centre space of the Guggenheim's rotunda in 1971. This work was dismantled before the opening as a result of pressure from other exhibiting artists who felt this work caused obstruction to their work. For more see Von Hantelmann, "The Rise of the Exhibition," 186.



#### 4.4 The Artwork as an Open-Process - Inviting Thought and Affective Thought

The first discussion in this chapter introduces the event and outlines how this artistic form permits a reading of the artwork as an open-process. I outline how the event extends the work from the jurisdiction of the artist because it necessitates others to partake in its enactment and realisation. This discussion focuses on *Metaphysical Longings* as an open process, considering the insights gained from my engagement with inaeesthetics and art theory while reflecting on how this work operates. By analysing how this works *invites* a particular way of thinking I develop my provisional claim that the thinking in art is bound with experience to assert that proposition that artistic thought is essentially affective.

In the previous chapter I detail how Badiou formulates his understanding of the poem as an open process that “demands” our engagement through Mallarmé’.<sup>302</sup> Badiou identifies the *unnameable* quality in Mallarmé’s poem as placing the “demand” on the reader. In this way Badiou observes that the indeterminate quality that permeates the poetry of Mallarmé does not denote inadequacy, but ensures that the poem fulfils its task to activate thought. I also detail how Verwoert extends this notion of the artistic form as an open process to contemporary art. Verwoert identifies how the reductive processes in conceptual artworks, namely Barry’s conceptual propositions, provokes each of us to conjure up our thoughts, as he explains, “The idea is actualized through an “appeal” to its recipients to realise it within their own thoughts.”<sup>303</sup> I also observe how Davies follows this logic in his analysis of the performance event by identifying how these artistic forms are designated by their “call” to engage.

Davies analysis of the performance event is useful when reflecting on the research project because it allows me to reflect on the potential of my event-based works to *invite* thought. In his analysis Davies distinguishes how we encounter artistic forms from forms that might also be associated with aesthetic contemplation, such as natural phenomena, i.e. landscapes, mountains, etc. Davies maintains that we become interested in performance events because they are enacted and realised with intention. He claims that once we engage with the artistic form as something intentionally made, or the event

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<sup>302</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeesthetics*, 27, 29, 52, 63.

<sup>303</sup> Verwoert, “Impulse Concept Concept Impulse,” 165-175.

as something intentionally enacted, our interest becomes interrogative. Davies maintains that the “call” activates thought by necessitating a distinctive regard to engage with the artistic form in that it “requires *close attention* to the details of its artistic vehicle.”<sup>304</sup> Davies observes how the expressive quality of the artwork communicates the higher content of this work.<sup>305</sup> In this way the “details” inform how the artwork is received and how the “higher level content is articulated through lower level content.”<sup>306</sup>

Davies analysis is also useful to the enquiry because it affirms my provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience. Davies’ analysis reasserts Badiou’s inaesthetic reading of artistic thought as “inseparable from the sensible” by describing how thought is determined by our encounter with the artistic form.<sup>307</sup> As Davies observes, our encounter with the artistic form (be it object, proposition or event) has an ephemeral quality. Like Badiou and Verwoert, Davies maintains this transient quality does not undermine “the artistic status of that thing.” He sees this indeterminate quality as its determining feature which furnishes the “the higher level content” to unfold in the work by extending a “call” for the audience to engage.<sup>308</sup> Davies looks to Thom’s analysis of the performance event to distinguish how the attention solicited by this artistic form is not passive but active. Thom describes the act of attending to the event as “playful beholding” (a notion that aligns closely with Schiller’s play drive).<sup>309</sup> For Thom, playful beholding involves the audience engagement with the actions performed in the here and now and those recollected. In this way, such playful beholding attests to how an audience might equally attend to what might not necessarily be presented to them, such as comparing aspects of the performance with other performances or events in their own lives. By identifying engagement as “playful beholding” Thom distinguishes how the encounter activates thought and that this thought is perceptive.

Reflecting on the processes used in the enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* allows me to explore how the thinking by art differs from a way of thinking associated with the discipline of philosophy as it is academically practiced. The meditative process of

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<sup>304</sup> Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 14.

<sup>305</sup> Davies draws on Keith Jarrett’s *Köln Concert*, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1975, noting how the sequence of sounds produced and the richness of the timbre serve to communicate meaning. Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 135.

<sup>306</sup> Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 142.

<sup>307</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

<sup>308</sup> As Davies notes, although our encounter with the artistic form may be of an ephemeral nature, the transient quality does not affect “the artistic status of that thing.” Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 143.

<sup>309</sup> Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, 174.

guided visualisation used in the enactment *Metaphysical Longings* informs how the work is encountered and ultimately perceived. Like Barry's *1969 Project Class*, the objects in *Metaphysical Longings* can only be encounter through the imagination. Barry's *1969 Project Class* demonstrates how the thoughts that are potentially raised by his works cannot be prescribed and are determined by the *percipient*. This emphasis on the subject, or in my lexicon *percipient*, is asserted by Barry, who when asked about the reception of his conceptual propositions maintains, "what they do with them afterwards is not in my control."<sup>310</sup> Barry's reflections articulate the unlikelihood of his propositions to transfer a single discrete idea because they are unresolved. I approach my artworks in a similar manner because they not institute an idea that I authorise but instead seek to enact an *other space* where thought might unfold. *Metaphysical Longings* emphasises the role of the *percipient* by removing the presence of the philosopher from the enactment of the work. There is nothing in this work that evidences the 'mastery' of the philosopher or the 'mastery' of the artist, because I also participate in these works as a member of the group.<sup>311</sup> In addition, the audio track offers no clear philosophical message. There is no didactic message, only a series of instructions from the disembodied voice.. These aspects of *Metaphysical Longings* necessitate the *percipient* to configure the meaning. In this way the thought that is potentially engendered by *Metaphysical Longings* is determined by the artistic form and dependant on the *perceptions* encounter with this form. *Metaphysical Longings* operates through its performativity – not only through the processes used to enact these works but, more significantly, by its very nature as an process in and of itself. In the four iterations of *Metaphysical Longings*, the performance of philosophy is not explicit, but performed in each event in an implicit manner. Perception and imagination are foregrounded in these events which require the group to visualise particular images and situations, demonstrating the possibility of approaching philosophical concerns relating to the subject and our being in the world on an experiential and collective level.

The notion of the 'dividual' and the potential of the collective that is raised on a performative level in *Mystical Anarchism* is advanced further in *Metaphysical Longings* through the form of meditation associated with yoga nidra. Each iteration of

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<sup>310</sup> Barry, *Conceptual Radio*.

<sup>311</sup> The content of the audio is further developed in *Metaphysical Longings V* to further distance the artist as the author of this work. Specific pre-recorded instructions that manage the group i.e. the instruction to step onto the mat, remove shoes, find a space, lie down, etc. ensures that there is no requirement for the artist to speak.

*Metaphysical Longings* uses the process of psychic sleep, a form of meditation associated with yoga nidra. As noted, it is claimed that practicing yoga nidra induces a greater sense of engagement and being with the world because it temporarily disengages a preoccupation with the self through an intensification of experience. In order to experience a threshold state that activates consciousness and heightens awareness it is absolutely necessary to disengage the ego through a process of letting go. In each enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* all *percipients* are bound together by trust through this collective process. The process of guided visualisation used throughout *Metaphysical Longings* necessitates the group to engage on a perceptive level. In this way *Metaphysical Longings* might potentially enact an *other space* where more open, less bounded ways of thinking may flourish.

I develop my provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience by proposing that the thinking potentially engendered by *Metaphysical Longings* is essentially *affective*. Affect has also been theorised by Brian Massumi and Simon O’ Sullivan through the philosophy of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. O’ Sullivan maintains that affect is a “bloc of sensations {sic.}” that are activated by the subject/percipient.<sup>312</sup> As affect is subject to a range of bodily sensations, it ensures that all faculties that become activated through the encounter with this work are accounted for. For example, the experience of arriving to a particular location, the sensation of lying together on a soft cashmere mat, the act of listening to instructions are as important, if not more so, as the ‘appearance’ of the work. This is crucial to a comprehensive and considered reading of works like *Metaphysical Longings* which do not operate on a visual level, but on a perceptive level. Because the term affect is not only restricted to physiological capacities, such as sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and audio it ensures that the ‘higher’ senses that are implicated through the enactment of this work are captured.

The difficulty to grasp affect on a conceptual level is theorised by Brian Massumi, who argues that there is no cultural or theoretical vocabulary specific to affect. Simon O’ Sullivan develops Massumi’s claim that affect is extra discursive, being outside

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<sup>312</sup> For more see Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Colombat, “Deleuze and the Three Powers,” 207-223 O’ Sullivan, “The Aesthetics of Affect,” 125-36.

discourse, and extra-textual because it does not produce “knowledge”.<sup>313</sup> Massumi looks to Deleuze and Guattari and draws on the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, who claims “an affect or passion of the mind is a confused idea” and who claims thought determined by affect differs from thought associated with logic and reason.<sup>314</sup> As outlined in Chapter Two the thinking that *Metaphysical Longings invites* radically differs from rational forms of thought associated with analytical enquiry. I propose that the thinking that *Metaphysical Longings* potentially *invites* is *affective* because it is not bound with the strictures of reason but instead adheres to the logic of experience, perception and the imagination. As outlined, *Metaphysical Longings* seeks to engage with liminality in a more direct, experiential level to potentially attain a greater awareness of being and collectivity. The intentions that motivate the enactment of *Metaphysical Longings* are not disclosed to the group before the session, nor are they divulged when the session is complete. This decision not to specify the intentions is to ensure that the meaning of the work remains open. By resisting specification *Metaphysical Longings* allows more perceptive and imaginative forms of thought to unfold. This is further asserted in the enactment of this work that has no clear philosophical message but seeks to engage through experience. The inherent complexity surrounding affect, being bound with subjective (and sometimes intensive) experiential states captures nuances of the thought that *Metaphysical Longings* potentially *invites*.

#### 4.5 Summary

In presenting the development of the research project as it is performed through three event-based works, this chapter discloses how the enquiry is carried out through a post-conceptual practice. The chapter outlines how philosophy is further *entwined* in my practice through the development of the research project. This chapter also presents the value of the event for the research project. I outline how I develop this artistic form to advance the working definition of the research project by reflecting on the potential of the artworks to enact an *other* space.

This chapter reveals that the process of reflection is integral to my practice, the

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<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. W.H. White and A. H. Stirling (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2001), 158.

development of the research project and the performance of the enquiry. As noted in Chapter Two, my decision to use the event as the framework to explore how thought is raised by art was not a concerted decision but emerged through my practice. The working definition for the research project to enact an *other* space to activate thought also developed through the research process. This chapter reveals that the process of *staging* and the mirroring of the tri-partite structure of ritual in the latter part of the research project was not conceived in a definitive manner but rather emerged in a pre-verbal, intuitive level through the process of making and presenting work.

This chapter develops from Chapter Two by bringing the insights gained from my engagement with inaeesthetics and art theory to bear when reflecting on the research project as the development and enactment of event-based works. It is through the process of developing and enacting event-based works that I seek to explore the philosophical character of art. I undertake this explorative enquiry by reflecting on the entwinement between art and philosophy as it is performed by the research project, by analysing how philosophical ideas might be implicated through the research project (by registering the explicit and implicit presence of philosophy) and by examining the potential of the artworks that configure the research project to *invite* thought. It is through the process of developing and enacting event-based works that key insights emerged, these include my realisation of the process of *staging*, my formulating the term *percipient* and my proposition that the condition of thought in art is essentially *affective*.

## CONCLUSION

It is only when there is distance from the work that the research project can be thoroughly analysed. The process of critical and retrospective reflection reveals that many of the key decisions that inform the development of the research project were not made at the onset of the formal enquiry but emerged through my immersion in my art practice. My decision to use the event as the primary framework and the working definition that these events might enact *other spaces* was not pre-planned, but rather resulted from the changes that occurred in my practice. Similarly the process of *staging* and the mirroring of the tri-partite structure of ritual that was used in each work to enact *other spaces* were not formulated as a methodology in a definitive manner but rather developed in a pre-verbal, intuitive level through the process of developing, making enacting and critical reflecting on actual art works.

Five key insights emerged by addressing the questions driving the enquiry which asked: What is the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice? How might my artworks raise philosophical ideas and thought? What is the nature of this thought? As these insights are interwoven within the thesis it is important to identify each insight and distinguish how it emerged through the research project. By detailing how each insight contributes to the discursive space of contemporary art and contemporary aesthetics. This Conclusion to the thesis aims to present the value of conducting an enquiry into contemporary art through a post-conceptual practice.

Examining the relationship between art and philosophy in my practice led to the first insight, my identifying an *entwinement* between art and philosophy in my practice. In the Introduction to the thesis attention is drawn to the ‘performative contradiction’ of this enquiry that uses philosophy in a conventional manner to analyse the relationship between art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice. Identifying this performative contradiction affirms that my use of philosophy in my practice is particular. The term *entwinement* articulates the particularity of the engagement

between the disciplines in my post-conceptual practice that I identify as symbiotic. The reference to Badiou's "knot" suggests the enquiry's engagement with inaeesthetics.<sup>315</sup>

The discussion in Chapter Two detailed how I identify the *entwinement* between art and philosophy in my practice by reflecting on the drawings, *The Clear Apprehension... and Mapping Nihilion*. My analysis of how these works emerged out of my working through particular existentialist philosophical ideas presents a radically different form of engagement between art and philosophy than the linear form designated by aesthetics. As explained in this analysis, philosophy is not deployed to interpret these works nor do these works seek to illustrate philosophical ideas. Instead artistic processes and philosophical enquiry become *entwined* through my working through ideas of impermanence and indeterminacy. Identifying the *entwinement* is crucial because it informed my observation that philosophical ideas might be further explored through the process of art making and revealed a particular way of thinking that unfolded through this process. This was tested in the event *Metaphysical Longings* in its aim to expand the philosophical questions of being to others in an extra-textual, non-didactic manner through their direct participation in the process of enacting work. This process of analysing the *entwinement* of art and philosophy in this event-based work provided an entry point to reflect on the capacity of an artwork to implicate philosophical ideas. This methodology of reflecting on the *entwinement* to explore how philosophical ideas are implicated was developed and used to analyse the event-based works that configure the research project.

Analysing how philosophical ideas are implicated in my event-based works leads to the second insight, that art *invites* thought. As outlined in Chapter Three, I use the term *invite* to acknowledge that an artwork has the potential to activate thought, but that such thought might not necessarily be raised, as it is essentially determined on the subject within the dynamic. This insight that art *invites* thought is informed by my hesitancy to co-opt Badiou's term "demand" (that he uses when reflecting on Mallarmé) which I read as too definitive. Instead, by considering more open-ended terms, such as the "appeal" that Verwoert observes in Barry's conceptual propositions and the romantic fragment and the "call" that Davies observes in the performance event I formulate a

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<sup>315</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeesthetics*, 3.



way of articulating the *intention* of the artwork to engage and engender thought while avoiding making a definitive claim that all artworks successfully activate thought. The value of this insight for a more general understanding of contemporary art is that it engages with Foster's notion of the birth of the viewer by asserting that such thought is contingent on the subject within the encounter.

My provisional claim that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience leads to the third insight, that artistic thought is essentially affective. This insight is most significant to the enquiry because it addresses the challenging question raised in the enquiry which asked, what is the nature of artistic thought? The term *affect* articulates a way of thinking that is particular to art. As outlined in Chapter Three, Badiou distinguishes artistic thought from the thinking raised by philosophy by registering it as "inseparable from the sensible" and "*unthinkable*". He confirms this by arguing this form of thought is "irreducible to philosophy", because he sees philosophy as "devoted to the invention of concepts alone."<sup>316</sup> As outlined in Chapter Two, I observed that my practice generated a particular way of thinking that was bound with experience. As noted, I observed how my thinking was bound up with the process of making work, a process of action and contemplation and how the transcription of philosophical statements coupled with the process of rendering stars allowed me to further contemplate and explore notions of being and existence. However, as detailed these thoughts were not governed by reason nor are my thought processes systematic. Instead the thinking that unfolds from my practice is perceptive and imaginative.

I also observed a link between thought and experience in the encounter with artworks, and how the artistic form informed the way one might think. Although my drawings directly reference philosophical ideas, they do not present ideas that are fully resolved because the strange juxtaposition created by the drawing disrupts such a reading. However because these ideas are presented in the context of a drawing and because they have not been developed through a system of logical analysis they invariably encourage a different form of engagement. This way of thinking that these drawings *invite* cannot be prescribed because it is dependant on and determined by the *percipient* and their encounter with the sensible dimension of the artistic form.

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<sup>316</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 9-19.

This observation that thought is bound with experience and that it is dependant on and determined by the artistic form is developed in Chapter Four by analysing of the process of *staging* and the mirroring of the tri-partite structure of ritual that was used to enact *other spaces* on an experiential level. As noted, within ritual theory it has been recognised that a shared and intensive experience is essential to activating the liminal stage in ritual. As detailed, I sought to enhance the experiential dimension of *Mystical Anarchism* by *staging* this work at midnight in a secret location and sought to initiate a shared and intensive experience through the mode of assembly. I also sought to initiate a shared and intensive experience through collective meditation in *Metaphysical Longings*. As outlined in Chapter Four, the inherent complexity surrounding affect, being bound with subjective, and sometimes, intensive experiential states, is valuable when reflecting on these works because it captures the nuances of thought that these works might *invite*.

By defining artistic thought as *affective* reaffirms that the thinking that unfolds through the encounter with art is not bound to the strictures of reason or logic. As detailed in Chapter Four, Massumi asserts this point by claiming that affect is extra discursive, being outside discourse, and extra-textual because it does not produce ‘knowledge’.<sup>317</sup> The difficulty to grasp affect on a conceptual level is theorised by Massumi, who claims that there is no cultural or theoretical vocabulary specific to affect. In response to Massumi I argue that contemporary art provides a unique “vocabulary” to engage with affect by observing how the artworks in this research project operate on an *affective* level. As affect is subject to a range of bodily sensations, it ensures that all senses, including the higher sense of perception that is activated through the encounter with the event-based works, are accounted for. By registering that artistic thought is essentially *affective* articulates that the thinking raised by art is bound up with the artistic form, the encounter, the *percipient*, and their experience.

The fourth insight, the formulation of the term *percipient*, developed from my awareness that vision is not necessarily the predominant way that we encounter contemporary art. Identifying that perception is the predominant way that we

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<sup>317</sup> Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique* (University of Minnesota Press), no. 31 (Autumn, 1995), 83-109. Massumi observes the difficulty to grasp affect on a conceptual level and claims that there is no cultural or theoretical vocabulary specific to affect. The research project provides a context to explore how contemporary art could provide a ‘vocabulary’ specific to affect through event-based works.

encounter all forms of contemporary art (from my analysis of art theory detailed in Chapters One and Three and from my reflecting on my own work) informed my developing the term *percipient* as a more comprehensive and precise alternative to the term viewer. Although the term *percipient* does not appear until in the fourth and final chapter, the necessity for a new term to define the subject of contemporary art is raised in the first chapter of the thesis.<sup>318</sup> My analysis of art theory detailed in Chapter One reveals how the radical transformations in artistic practice, (through minimal, conceptual and post-conceptual practices) necessitated different forms of engagement than just vision alone. As Foster observes, the minimalist's concern with the subjects' experience that instigated a radical shift from the modernist reading of art as an idealised form disrupted the visual bias that had been upheld by formal aesthetics. Danto also reflects on developments in art practice and how works like, Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and Piper's *Funk Lesson* could no longer be thematised by traditional aesthetic categories that focused on the visual aspect of the artwork. In the case of *Funk Lesson* Danto observes how the overarching concern with equality and inclusion is brought to bear through the work itself and observes how the meaning of the work is essential.

If meaning is essential how might we engage with this fundamental aspect of contemporary art? Although the enquiry does not explicitly pose this question the insight that artistic thought is essentially *affective* asserts perception as the primary mode of engagement. Perception is introduced in Chapter One through Foster's analysis of minimalism, a moment that he defines as the *crux* of contemporary art. As outlined, Foster maintains that the emphasis on experience in minimalism relocated the act of thinking from the privileged domain of philosophy to the domain of the subject and their encounter with the work. As thought and experience come into play in this encounter he argues that minimalism operates on a perceptive level. My understanding that contemporary art in all its multifarious forms is ultimately perceived, is also guided by Osborne's reading of contemporary art as the reflective mediation of concept and affect. Through this reading contemporary art cannot be engaged with on a purely analytical level because it acknowledges the experiential within the conceptual framework. This observation that the sensible dimension of the artistic form is essential to the reading of the work and that this necessitates more perceptive forms of

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<sup>318</sup> It is remarkable that Morris also retained the term viewer in his writings on art when these texts dealt primarily with the external relations of art and the physical nature of the encounter with art.

engagement is developed in Chapter Three through Verwoert and Heiser's revisionist reading of conceptualism. As detailed, Heiser's observation of an intellectual-emotional combination in key conceptual artworks that restrict them from operating on a purely cognitive level as strict conceptualists would assert. Verwoert develops this insight by observing an emotional quality in Barry's conceptual propositions. Lamarque's poetic treatment of conceptualism also asserts perception as the overarching mode to engage with the conceptual proposition because it suggests meaning rather than presenting a formulated idea. Similarly, Badiou also acknowledges perception in his reading of the poem as an "operation" that activates the "sensory perception of a regime of thought".<sup>319</sup> All of the artworks referenced in Chapters One and Three differ significantly in their form, I observe that they ultimately share the same mode of engagement. For example, the minimalist object differs significantly from the dematerialised conceptual proposition, as does the participatory art events that incorporate dance and music from the poem. However as detailed in Chapters One and Three the meaning of these diverse artistic forms are ultimately engaged with through perception.

When compiling the accounts of *Gatherings (Transitory Encounters)*, *Mystical Anarchism* and *Metaphysical Longings* for the final chapter of the thesis it became clear that the term viewer was not appropriate to describe the people gathered together for each event. It seemed inappropriate to define those present at *Mystical Anarchism* as viewers when detailing that the first iteration of this event, was for the most part in near darkness. Furthermore, in its form as a midnight lecture *Mystical Anarchism* was primarily engaged with on an aural level. However, as detailed in the account, there were many aspects to this work, for example the act of meeting in Dublin's city centre and travelling on a coach with others to an undisclosed location, the arrival at a dark forest and the requirement to follow a dirt track to a large mat that was laid out under a canopy of trees. It is believed that darkness can enhance other senses, for example the sounds in the forest became more amplified at night and the scent of the vegetation can become more intensive. Darkness also enhances the sense of touch, and as people try to negotiate their way in the dark, they inevitably move closer to one another. These

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<sup>319</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19.

crucial aspects do not necessitate sight, but instead necessitate more perceptive forms of engagement. The inappropriateness of the term viewer becomes more apparent when noting that those present at each event are explicitly instructed to close their eyes.

Although photographic documentation of the artwork is provided in the thesis, they do not provide an adequate framework to fully engage with the complexity of these works. This is because the emphasis of my events is not on their appearance but on the way that they are experienced and perceived.<sup>320</sup> The term *percipient* acknowledges the perceptive faculties such as feeling, and imagination that are mobilised through the artworks as events i.e. an awareness of physicality, the realisation of the passage of time, the transformation to the dynamic between individuals or within a group, a feeling of commonality etc. and provides a more appropriate term to describe those present at each event. The term *percipient* also articulates how the artworks depend on others to achieve the overarching aim to enact *other spaces* on an experiential and symbolic level. As argued in my analysis, in order for a work to exist it must be realised and perceived.

The term *percipient* ensures that the conceptual aspect of contemporary art and its experiential dimension is acknowledged. Moving from my specific enquiry to a more general reading of contemporary art, I maintain that the term *percipient* provides a more apposite term to define the subject of contemporary art. Furthermore, I see the term viewer as upholding a modernist reading of art as an object to be beheld by the viewer's gaze. The term *percipient* overcomes this issue by ensuring that all forms of engagement initiated by the multifarious range of artistic forms are accounted for. In this way, the percipient provides a more comprehensive term to engage with contemporary art because it articulates the overarching way we engage with contemporary art in all of its multiple forms, be it an minimalist object, a conceptual proposition, a temporary event-based work or a poem.

The fifth insight, my claim that in aesthetics is an expansion of, rather than a departure from aesthetics has not featured in the thesis up until this point, mainly because it does

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<sup>320</sup> The photographic documentation is provided in the thesis to illustrate how these works were *staged* and to provide an archive of the iterations of the artwork as they developed. The photographic documentation of *Metaphysical Longings II* and *Metaphysical Longings IV* (Fig. 43, 44) were re-staged to avoid disrupting the enactment of this work. Similarly the photographs archiving my research/working notebooks are provided to enhance the reflective process by presenting the development of the research project.

not directly address the three questions driving the enquiry. However, this insight ultimately emerges from undertaking this enquiry, and is significant to the enquiry because it opens up how we might approach aesthetics for contemporary art. Although my reading of inaesthetics as expanding aesthetics differs from Badiou, who maintains it is *against* aesthetics, I propose inaesthetics opens up aesthetics for contemporary art. As detailed in Chapter One, Osborne, Foster and Danto, acknowledge the necessity for a new aesthetic configuration for contemporary art by observing how aesthetics lacked the critical resources to engage with developments in art practice. These readings also demonstrate how the lineage of contemporary art is bound up with the question of aesthetics. I maintain this bind further necessitates the configuration of a new aesthetics for contemporary art. Although Osborne claims that the turn to European philosophical tradition has “failed to achieve a convincing theoretical purchase on *contemporary art*,” I argue that inaesthetics achieves a “theoretical purchase” in the way that it engages with the complicated relation between art and aesthetics that underlines contemporary art.<sup>321</sup> Although Osborne takes issue with Badiou (claiming that he is a neo-classicist), I argue that inaesthetics contributes to aesthetic discourse by troubling the interpretative role of philosophy, which in turn re-asserts the possibility that we can think through art.<sup>322</sup>

We might see inaesthetics as developing from Danto’s thesis that raises the inadequacy of aesthetics for contemporary art by asserting the possibility that we can think through art. Although Danto dismisses aesthetics as a viable enquiry for artistic practice, it is clear that expanding aesthetics is within his remit, when he states, “I feel that expanding this range will itself be a philosophical project. But it falls outside of the range of defining art...” Although Danto does not undertake this task, his *End of Art* thesis nevertheless highlights the requirement for a new schema that redefines the relationship between art and philosophy. Although Badiou makes no reference to Danto, I approach inaesthetics as fulfilling Danto’s demand to “expand the range” of aesthetics for

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<sup>321</sup> Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics,” 9.

<sup>322</sup> Although Osborne is critical of Badiou’s overarching philosophical system of thought, his reading of contemporary art also acknowledges an alternative engagement between art and philosophy that is designated by the general reading of aesthetics. Osborne maintains that Badiou’s articulation of a “(re)turn to philosophy” in *Being and Event* presents a neo-classical interpretation of philosophy, citing Adorno’s sense of neo-classicism as “a historical regression to means and forms that no longer have any social objectivism, however formally ‘objectivist’ they may appear.” Peter Osborne, “Neo-classic: Alain Badiou’s *Being and Event*,” *Radical Philosophy* 142 (March/April 2007): 19-30. For a counter position on this criticism see, Hollis Phelps, “Between Rupture and Repetition: Intervention and Evental Recurrence in the Thought of Alain Badiou,” *Parrhesia*, no 5 (2008): 60-72.

contemporary art by proposing a fourth schema that re-orientates the role of philosophy in respect to art.<sup>323</sup> As detailed in Chapter Three, by undermining the interpretative role of philosophy, inaesthetics re-orientates the role of philosophy in respect to art and configures a new schema that sustains a productive rather than a contentious bind with contemporary art because it advances the primacy of art for thought.

Although Badiou's epigraph prefacing the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* presents inaesthetics as against aesthetics I see it as unavoidably situated within the discursive field of contemporary aesthetics. This argument has also been advanced by Jacques Rancière. He claims, "Even as it tries to ward off aesthetics perhaps inaesthetics thereby enters into a new dialogue with it." Although Rancière is critical of inaesthetics, he nevertheless argues that, inaesthetics puts aesthetics "back into play, if not into question, the operations through which it sought to challenge the logic of the aesthetic regime of the arts."<sup>324</sup> I argue that inaesthetics ultimately presents a new aesthetic configuration by challenging the general understanding of aesthetics as the philosophical interpretation of art. As outlined in the brief précis in Chapter One, aesthetics is not a rigidly defined discipline, but one that is continually evolving. As noted, Perniola observes that interpretations of aesthetics emerged, and continue to emerge, through a series of ongoing ruptures within previous aesthetic categories.<sup>325</sup> He notes that these ruptures do not necessarily close down aesthetic enquiry but ultimately reactivate and expand our engagement with the discourse on a critical level.<sup>326</sup> By rupturing the interpretative role of philosophy in the general conception of aesthetics, I approach inaesthetics as reactivating a critical engagement with aesthetics and ultimately expanding the discourse.

An expansion of discourse is not only achieved by a future trajectory of conjecture, discourse can also be expanded by a retroactive reflection on past configurations and

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<sup>323</sup> Although Danto's claim for the unequivocal separation of art and philosophy is ostensibly in contrast to Badiou's inaesthetics (as an amalgam of these disciplines), both philosophers are profoundly sceptical of the interpretative role of philosophy in aesthetics. Danto, "The End of Art," 131 -134.

<sup>324</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-Aesthetics," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward, 218-232 (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 231. Rancière's criticism of inaesthetics as a return to modernity and a desire to affirm the specificity of art is levelled in the chapter "Alain Badiou's Inaesthetics", in *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, (2009), (first published *Malaise dans l'Esthétique*, 2004).

<sup>325</sup> Mario Perniola, "Cultural Turns in Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics," *Filozofski Vestnik* XXVIII, no. 2, (2007): 39-51.

<sup>326</sup> Perniola, *Cultural Turns in Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics*, 39.

interpretations. This process is exemplified by Foster's *anti-aesthetic* practice that informs his reading of contemporary art. Foster proposes *anti-aesthetics* revises the eclipsed space of aesthetic enquiry in the way that it responds to the closure to more critical experimental forms of art practice in the mid 1980s, (see footnote 35) Badiou similarly formulates inaeesthetics in response to a similar "closure" to more critical experimental forms of art practice that he identifies in the mid 1990s.<sup>327</sup> However, by reasserting the underlying principles of philosophical aesthetics that inform Romanticism, such as the formation of the subject, our being in the world and world making in general, I maintain inaeesthetics also revises the eclipsed space of aesthetic enquiry so that it can re-engage with contemporary art. Although Badiou configures inaeesthetics as an alternate to Romanticism because it de-sutures truth from art (to ensure that truth is no longer "sutured" to only one of its conditions) it nevertheless asserts a Romantic conception of thought being immanent to art. Inaeesthetics also reasserts sensuous forms of knowledge that Romanticism espoused as demonstrated by Badiou's reading of Mallarme's poems as "a thought inseparable from the sensible."<sup>328</sup> By rearticulating key principals associated with philosophical aesthetics through a new schema, inaeesthetics does not perform a complete departure from aesthetics, it expands aesthetics for contemporary art.

I maintain that inaeesthetics has the critical resources to engage with the condition of thought in contemporary art that previous forms of aesthetics lacked.<sup>329</sup> My use of inaeesthetics as a theoretical guide to explore the specificity of artistic thought that my event-based works could *invite*, reveals its value to the artist/researcher. As noted previously, inaeesthetics enables me to identify and reflect on the *entwinement* of art and philosophy in my post-conceptual practice and in the event-based works that configure the research project. In this way inaeesthetics provides a guide to engage with the specific form of thought that my works *invite* and informs the key insight that emerges out of this enquiry, that artistic thought is essentially *affective* .

As detailed in Chapter Three, although Badiou claims inaeesthetics is *necessary* for contemporary art, he makes no reference to any forms of contemporary art practice to

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<sup>327</sup> Badiou, *The Handbook of Inaeesthetics*, 8.

<sup>328</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaeesthetics*, 19.

<sup>329</sup> Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 9.



support his thesis but focuses draws on literary configurations to disclose how inaesthetics reveals the operation of the artwork as a specific form of thought.<sup>330</sup> Just as Badiou's use of literary configurations is informed by his personal and direct engagement with the literary form, being a novelist, playwright and a philosopher, my personal and direct engagement with contemporary art practice informs this enquiry. Although Badiou claims inaesthetics as necessary for contemporary art he offers no examples from contemporary art practice to assert his claims. This lacuna in his thesis reveals the value of my enquiry into contemporary art because it is centred around actual art works that I develop and enact. Through inaesthetics Badiou reflects on a particular engagement between philosophy and art from the vantage point of the philosopher. Through this enquiry I reflect on the particular engagement between art and philosophy that is performed through a post-conceptual art practice. This distinguishes the reflective aspect of this enquiry as one pursued from the perspective of the artist.<sup>331</sup>

The value of an enquiry through practice is affirmed by the configuration of 'new knowledge' through the curatorial project *Romantic Conceptualism*. Through a curatorial practice and the framework of the exhibition Heiser and Verwoert formulate a new reading of conceptualism as romantic. Similarly, the insights yielded from this enquiry affirm that an enquiry through art practice can produce 'new knowledge' that contributes to contemporary art discourse and contemporary aesthetics. Situating an enquiry into the philosophical character of contemporary art in a post-conceptual art practice provides a context to reflect on the relationship between contemporary art and philosophy and more rigorously examine the particular form of engagement between these disciplines as they are played out through art practice. Had this enquiry been carried out through theory alone I might not have observed that the thinking raised by art is bound with experience or conceived the artwork as *inviting* thought and that such

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<sup>330</sup> As noted, Badiou looks mainly to literary configurations to disclose the possibility of artistic thought. He also looks at other artistic forms in the *Handbook*, which include theatre, dance and cinema, albeit to a lesser extent. Osborne also argues that there is a discrepancy in Badiou's analysis by observing that Badiou references essentially modernist art forms to discuss contemporary art, an observation he uses to support his claim that Badiou is essentially a neo-classicist. Jacques Rancière follows a similar trajectory in his criticism. He dedicates a chapter, "Alain Badiou's Inaesthetic, The Torsions of Modernism," in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 63-88 (UK, USA: Polity Press, 2009) (first published in French as *Malaise dans l'Esthétique*, 2004) critiquing inaesthetics as a return to modernity by its desire to categorise and affirm the specificity of art. While accepting these arguments, I see the value of inaesthetics to the enquiry because this schema provides an aesthetic framework to support a rigorous exploration into the condition of thought in art.

<sup>331</sup> Riera, *Alain Badiou, Philosophy and its Conditions*, 80.

thought is *affective*. Similarly, the term *percipient* that I use in the analysis of the research project might not have emerged without my having to reflect on the event-based works. I also maintain that my engagement with inaesthetics from the side of art practice instead of theory alone offered a new perspective that informed my re-interpreting inaesthetics as an expansion of aesthetics because I could apply this reconfigured aesthetic framework to engage with the conceptual and experiential aspects of my work.

My struggle with writing this thesis, of trying to adhere to a systematic form of argumentation and theory building demonstrates explicitly how thinking through practice differs radically from the thinking required to explicate clearly the nuances and development of a research project. However, in undertaking this research project I have come to realise the requirement to capture these insights that are raised through practice to extend and develop our general understanding of contemporary art. Although I note that the lineage of contemporary art is informed by the developments in art practice, it is necessary to acknowledge how specific readings of these practices also play a crucial role in extending the horizon of contemporary art. This is demonstrated clearly in the thesis through Osborne, Foster and Danto's readings of contemporary art and Verwoert and Heiser's revisionist reading of conceptualism. Although this conventional method of exposition seems at odds with my practice, it provides a framework to present how such an enquiry through practice reveals a particular way of engaging with philosophical ideas and a particular way of thinking from the perspective of the artist. In this way the thesis reveals the more systematic process of critical reflection, analysis and evaluation that I use in the later stages of the enquiry. I hope to have presented how the diverse processes that configure the post-conceptual practice and accordingly the research project informs a more robust if not at the very least an alternative form of enquiry. I also hope to have demonstrated my endeavour to maintain a candid and honest reading of my practice through specific artworks so that this enquiry fulfils its task of contributing to the discourse on contemporary art and the development of contemporary aesthetics.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: UN COUP DE DÉS, STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

UN COUP DE DÉS

JAMAIS

DANS QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ  
CIRCONSTANCES DES  
S ÉTERNELLE

DU FOND D'UN NAUFRAGE

Soit  
que  
l'Abîme blanchi étale furieux  
sous une inclinaison planche  
désespérément d'aile  
la  
sienne retombée d'un mal à par avance le  
vol dresser les  
et couvrant  
jaillissements coupant au ras les bords  
l'intérieur résume très à  
enfouie dans la profondeur par cette voile alternative l'ombre  
jusqu'adapter sa béante  
profondeur entant que la coque d'un bâtiment  
de l'un ou l'autre bord penché



LE MAÎTRE hors d'anciens  
 calculs où la manoeuvre avec l'âge  
 oubliée surgi jadis il  
 empoignait la barre inférant de cette configuration à ses  
 pieds de l'horizon  
 unanime que  
 se prépare s'agite et  
 mêle au poing qui  
 l'étreindrait comme on menace un destin et les vents  
 l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un  
 autre Esprit pour le  
 jeter dans la  
 tempête  
 en reposer la division et passer  
 fier hésite cadavre par le  
 bras écarté du secret qu'il détient plutôt que de jouer en  
 maniaque chenu la partie au nom des  
 flots un envahit le  
 chef coule en barbe  
 soumise naufrage cela direct de  
 l'homme sans  
 nef n'importe où vaine

ancestralement à n'ouvrir pas la  
 main crispée  
 disparition par delà l'inutile tête legs en la  
 à quelque'un  
 démon ambigü l'ultérieur  
 nulles immémorial ayant de contrées  
 avec induit le vieillard  
 probabilité celui la  
 son ombre puérole caressée  
 lavée assouplie par la vague et  
 soustraite aux durs os perdus entre les ais  
 né

d'un ébat la mer par l'aieule tant ou l'  
 chance oiseuse Fiançailles  
 dont le voile d'illusion rejailli leur hantise ainsi que le fantôme d'un  
 geste chancellera s'affalera  
 folie

RA

N'ABOLI



*l'héroïque*  
*irrésistible* *mais*  
*contenu*  
*par sa petite raison virile*

*en foudre*

*soucieux* *expiatoire* *et*  
*pubère* *muet* *r*  
*ire*

*que*

*SI*

*La lucide et seigneuriale aigrette* *de*  
*vertige* *scintille* *au* *front*  
*invisible*

*mignonne ténébreuse* *puis ombrage* *une stature*  
*torsion* *debout* *en sa*  
*sirène* *de*

*temps*

*de souffleter* *par d'impatientes squames*  
*ultimes* *bifurquées*

*un roc*

*aux manoir*

*tout*

*suite*

*évaporé en brumes*

*qui*  
*imposa*

*une borne à l'infini*

*NOMBRE*  
*stellaire*

*C'ÉTAIT*

*issu*

*LE*

*EXISTÂT-IL*

*qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie*

*autrement*

*COMMENÇÂT-IL*

*ET*

*CESSÂT-*

IL  
que  
apparu  
          enfin  
          par  
rareté

nié

et

clos

sourdant  
quand

quelque

profusion

répandue

en

### SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la  
somme pour peu qu'une

ILLUM  
INÂT-  
IL

*CE  
SERAIT  
non  
moins  
autant*

### LE HASARD

*davantage*

*pire*

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*ni  
mais*

*Choit*

*la*

*plume  
que  
sinistre*

*suspens*

*rythmi  
du*

*s'ensevelir*

*aux*

*originelles  
d'où  
cime*

*sursauta*

*son*

*délire*

*jusqu'à*

*écumes  
naguères  
une*

*flétrie  
par la neutralité identique du gouffre*

### RIEN

de la mémorable crise où se  
fût l'événement accompli en vue de tout résultat  
nul

humain

LIEU  
élévation ordinaire verse l'absence

N'AURA EU  
une

E LE LIEU  
quelconque  
vide

comme

pour

inférieur clapotis  
disperser l'acte



s'arrêter  
à quelque point dernier qui le sacre

te pensée émet un Coup de Dés

de

Tou

## A THROW OF THE DICE

NEVER

THE  
ETERNAL

OF A SHIPWRECK'S DEPTH

EVEN WHEN TRULY CAST IN  
CIRCUMSTANCE

Can be  
only  
the  
raging whitened stalled beneath the  
desperately sloping Abyss  
incline of its  
own wing  
flight through an advance falling back from ill to take  
and veiling the  
gushers  
restraining the surges  
gathered

far within the shadow buried  
 deep by that alternative sail almost  
 matching its yawning  
 depth to the wingspan like a hull  
 of a vessel  
 rocked  
 from side to side

THE MASTER beyond former  
 calculations where the lost manoeuvre  
 with the age rose  
 implying that formerly he grasped  
 the helm of this conflagration of the  
 concerted horizon at his  
 feet  
 itself that readies  
 merges moves and  
 grips it with the blow that  
 as one threatens fate and the winds  
 the unique Number which cannot be  
 another Spirit  
 to hurl  
 it into the  
 storm  
 relinquish the cleaving there and pass  
 proudly hesitates a corpse  
 pushed back by the arm from the secret rather than taking  
 sides a hoary madman on behalf of the  
 waves one overwhelms the  
 head flows through the  
 submissive beard straight shipwreck that of the  
 man without a  
 vessel empty  
 no matter  
 where

ancestrally never to open the  
 fist clenched  
 vanishing beyond the helpless head a legacy in  
 to someone  
 ambiguous the  
 immemorial ulterior demon having non-existent  
 regions led d then towards this ultimate meeting  
 with

probability his childlike shade this  
 rendered shielded supple by the wave and  
 from hard bone lost between the planks  
 born  
 of a frolic making a vain  
 sea attempt whose dread the veil of illusion rejected an Engagement  
 gesture tremble will as the phantom of a  
 madness collapse

WILL

NEVER ABOLISH

AS IF

*A simple insinuation*  
*into silence entwined with*  
 irony  
*or*  
*the*  
 mystery  
*hurled*  
*in some close howled*  
*whirls swirl of mirth and terror*  
*round the*  
 abyss  
*without*  
 scattering  
*or dispersing*  
*and cradles the virgin index there*

AS IF

*a solitary plume overwhelmed*  
 midnight encounters untouched grazes that a cap of  
 and  
 fixes in crumpled  
 velvet with a sombre burst of laughter that rigid



*whiteness*

*derisory*

*in opposition to the  
too*

*heavens*

*much*

*so*

*to*

*signal*

*not*

*closely*

*any*

*bitter*

*prince of the reef*

*heroically*

*adorned*

*with*

*it*

*indomitable*

*but*

*contained*

*by his petty reason virile*

*in lightning*

*anxious*

*expiatory*

*dumb*

*and*

*pubescent*

*laughter*

*that*

*IF*

*The lucid and lordly crest  
on the*

*of vertigo  
invisible*

*brow*

*sparkles*

*then shades*

*a slim dark*

*tallness*

*upright*

*in its siren*

*coiling*

*at*

*the*

*moment*

*of striking*

*through impatient ultimate*

*scales*

*bifurcated*

*a rock*

*a*

*deceptive manor*

*suddenly*

*evaporating in fog*

*that*

*imposed*

*limits on the infinite*

*NUMBER* *IT* *WAS* *THE*  
*outcome* *stellar*

*WERE* *IT* *TO* *HAVE*  
*EXISTED* *other*

than as a fragmented agonised hallucination

*TO* *HAVE* *BEGUN* *WERE* *IT*  
*ENDED* *AND*  
surging that denied and closed when  
visible at

last some sparseness profusion spreading by in

WERE IT TO HAVE AMOUNTED

to the fact of the  
total though as little as one  
*WERE*  
*IT TO*  
*HAVE*  
*LIGHT*  
*ED*

*IT* *WOULD* *BE*  
*worse* *no* *more* *nor*  
*less* *indifferently* *but* *as* *much*  
*CHANCE*

*plume* *Falls*  
*ic* *suspense* *the* *rhythm*  
*disaster* *of* *the*

*itself* *to* *bury*  
*in* *the* *original*  
*foam* *formerly* *leapt* *from* *which* *its*  
*delirium* *to* *the*  
*summit*

*faded*  
*by the same neutrality of abyss*

NOTHING  
 of the memorable crisis where the  
 event matured accomplished in sight of all non-  
 existent human outcomes  
 WILL HAVE  
 TAKEN PLACE a  
 commonplace elevation pours out absence  
 BU  
 T THE PLACE some lapping  
 below as if to scatter the empty  
 act abruptly that otherwise  
 falsity by its  
 would have  
 plumbed perdition  
 in this  
 region of  
 vagueness  
 in which all reality dissolves  
 EXCEPT at the  
 altitude PERHAPS as far  
 as a place fuses with beyond  
 outside the  
 interest signalled regarding  
 it in  
 general with such obliquity through in accord  
 declination of such  
 fire towards  
 be what must  
 Wain the  
 North also  
 A CONSTELLATION  
 cold with neglect and  
 desuetude not so much  
 though that it fails to



## APPENDIX II: MYSTICAL ANARCHISM BY SIMON CRITCHLEY (2009)

The return to religion has become perhaps the dominant cliché of contemporary theory. Of course, theory often offers nothing more than an exaggerated echo of what is happening in reality, a political reality dominated by the fact of religious war. Somehow we seem to have passed from a secular age, which we were ceaselessly told was post-metaphysical, to a new situation where political action seems to flow directly from metaphysical conflict. This situation can be triangulated around the often fatal entanglement of politics and religion, where the third vertex of the triangle is violence. Politics, religion and violence appear to define the present through which we are all too precipitously moving, the phenomenon of sacred political violence, where religiously justified violence is the means to a political end. The question of community, of human being together, has to be framed – for good or ill – in terms of this triangulation of politics, religion and violence. In this essay, I want to look at one way, admittedly a highly peculiar and contentious way, in which the question of community was posed historically and might still be posed. This is what I want to call ‘mystical anarchism’. However, I want to begin somewhere else, to be precise with two political theories at the very antipodes of anarchism.

### Carl Schmitt – The Political, Dictatorship and the Belief in Original Sin

Let’s return to that return to religion. Perhaps no thinker has enjoyed more popularity in the last years and seemed more germane than Carl Schmitt. The reasons for this are complex and I have tried to address them elsewhere.(ref ID) In his *Political Theology*, he famously writes, ‘All significant concepts in the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts’. This is not just true historically, Schmitt insists, but systematically and conceptually. The omnipotent God of medieval Christianity becomes the omnipotent monarch, for example in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. Until the late 17th Century, the general will was a theological term of art that referred to the will of God. By 1762, in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, the general will had been transformed into the will of the people and the question of sovereignty was transposed from the divine to the civic. Of course, this entails that the will of the people is always virtuous and those who

oppose it can be legitimately exterminated as evil. The politicization of theological concepts leads ineluctably to the attempt to purify virtue through violence, which is the political sequence that begins with French Jacobinism in 1792 and continues through to the dreadful violent excesses of 20th Century politics that we can summarize with the proper names of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler through to what some might call the 'Islam-Leninism' or 'Islam-Jacobinism' of al Qaeda and related groups.

But such an argument does not exonerate so-called liberal democracy. On the contrary, Schmitt views the triumph of the liberal-constitutional state as the triumph of deism, a theological vision that unifies reason and nature by identifying the latter with divinity. As can be seen most obviously in the deism of the Founding Fathers, American democracy is a peculiar confection of Roman republicanism and puritanical providentialism, enshrined in the John Winthrop's sermon about the 'Citty (sic) on the Hill' (that Sarah Palin ascribed to Ronald Reagan), the upbuilding of the 'New England'. At the core of American democracy is a civil religion which functions as a powerful sustaining myth and buttresses the idea of manifest destiny. Obama's political genius was to have reconnected classical liberal constitutionalism with a motivating civil religion focused around the idea of belief and a faith in change and progress.

Schmitt's problem with liberalism is that it is anti-political. What this means is that for the liberal every political decision must be rooted in a norm whose ultimate justification flows from the constitution. Within liberalism, political decisions are derived from constitutional norms and higher than the state stands the law and the interpretation of the law. This is why the highest political authority in a liberal state rests with the supreme court or its equivalent. Political action is subordinated to juridical interpretation. For Schmitt, a truly political decision is what breaks with any norm, frees itself from any normative ties and becomes absolute. This is why the question of the state of exception is of such importance to Schmitt. The state of exception is that moment of radical decision where the operation of the law is suspended. This is what the Romans call *iustitium*, and which Agamben has written about compellingly. What the decision on the state of exception reveals is the true subject of political sovereignty. Schmitt famously writes that, 'Sovereign is who decides on the state of exception' ('Soverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet'). That is, the sovereign is the person who is exhibited by the decision on the state of exception. The question 'who?'

is answered by the decision itself. That is, the decision on the state of exception, the moment of the suspension of the operation of law, brings the subject 'who?' into being. To put it into a slogan, the subject is the consequence of a decision. The subject that is revealed by the decision on the state of exception is the state and the core of Schmitt's theory of the political is to show that the true subject of political is the state and that the state must always stand higher than the law.

Schmitt makes the fascinating remark that the concept of the state of exception is the jurisprudential analogue to the concept of the miracle in theology. The triumph of liberalism as the triumph of deism is the hegemony of a religious view of the world that tries to banish the miracle, as that which would break with the legal-constitutional situation, the order of what Badiou calls the event, and which at time he compares with a miracle. Liberal constitutionalists, like Locke, Kant or Neo-Kantians like Kelsen seek to eliminate the state of exception and subject everything to the rule of law, which is the rule of the rule itself, namely reason. Schmitt criticizes the rationalism of liberalism in the name of what he calls – and here we find echoes of Dilthey in Schmitt that will resound further in the young Heidegger – a philosophy of concrete life. Such an existential approach embraces the exception and breaks with the rule and the rule of the rule. Schmitt writes, thinking explicitly of Kierkegaard, 'In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid through repetition'.

It is not difficult to see why Schmitt's existential politics of passion and concrete life and his critique of liberal democracy should have won him many friends on the left, like Chantal Mouffe. Sadly perhaps, they are not friends that Schmitt would have chosen. He was much happier in the company of Catholic counter-revolutionaries like Joseph de Maistre and Donoso Cortés. What has to be grasped is that Schmitt's argument for the state of exception as exemplifying the operation of the political is also an argument for dictatorship. If the subject of sovereignty is revealed in the decision on the state of exception, then this decision is the act where the constitution is suspended and dictatorship is introduced. Dictatorship, then, is justified when there is an actual or imagined danger to the existence of the state. Roman republicanism explicitly allowed for this possibility and one might ponder as to the conceivability of republicanism as a political form without the possibility of recourse to dictatorship. The condition of

possibility for legality and legitimacy is the political act that suspends it.

Obama writes in *The Audacity of Hope*, 'Democracy is not a house to be built, it is a conversation to be had'. At the core of Obama's liberal civil religion is a resolute defense of the primacy of the constitution, an absolute conviction that all political decisions have to be derived from norms, and that the procedure for decision making is deliberation. It's enough to make Habermas burst into a break dance. However, Schmitt would be turning in his grave. For him, the idea of everlasting conversation is a gruesomely comic fantasy. If liberals were presented with the question, 'Christ or Barabas?', they would move to adjourn the proceedings and establish a commission of investigation or a special committee of inquiry that would report back sometime the following year. Within liberalism, everything becomes everlasting discussion, the glorious conversation of humankind, the sphere of what Schmitt calls with a sneer 'culture'. Such a culture floats like foam over the socio-economic reality of the liberal state which Schmitt, following his teacher Weber, compares to a huge industrial plant dominated by capitalism and scientism and incapable of political action. For Catholic counter-revolutionaries, like Donoso Cortés, faced with the hegemony of a depoliticized liberalism powerless in the face of a capitalist economy, the only solution was dictatorship. Faced with the toothless liberal constitutionalism of Weimar Germany in the 1920s and the fact of economic collapse, it is not difficult to understand the appeal the argument for dictatorship had for Schmitt with the rise of the National Socialists. The only way to restore the true subject of the political, namely the state, was the suspension of the constitution and the decision to declare a state of exception.

The political theology of liberalism is the pervasiveness of a weak deistic God. The liberal, like Obama, wants God, but one that is not active in the world. He wants a God that permits no enthusiasm and who never contradicts or overrides the rule of reason and law. That way, it is assumed, leads to the prophetic radicalism of Jeremiah Wright. In short, liberals want a God that cannot perform miracles. Against this, Schmitt wants to revivify the political by restoring the state of exception and the possibility of the miracle. But, as Schmitt makes crystal clear, this requires a belief in original sin.

For Schmitt, every conception of the political takes a position on human nature. It requires some sort of anthropological commitment: human beings are either naturally good or evil. Schmitt thinks – and I agree – that this leads to the two most pervasive



political alternatives to liberalism: authoritarianism and anarchism. Anarchists believe in the essential goodness of the human being. Their progenitor is Rousseau and his belief that wickedness is the historical outcome of the development of society towards greater levels of inequality. By contrast, on this view, political legitimacy can be achieved by what Rousseau frequently referred to as 'a change in nature', from wickedness to goodness, of the kind imagined in *The Social Contract*. Although this is a caricature of Rousseau and he could in no way be described as an anarchist, this view is more accurately developed by Bakunin: namely that if human beings are essentially good, then it is the mechanisms of the state, religion, law and the police that make them bad. Once these mechanisms have been removed and replaced with autonomous self-governing communes in a federative structure, then we will truly have heaven on earth. We will come back to this view below, but it is worth noting that arguments for anarchism always turn on the idea that if human beings are allowed to express what comes naturally to them, if the force of life itself is not repressed by the deathly force of the state, then it will be possible to organize society on the basis of mutual aid and cooperation.

By contrast, authoritarians believe that human nature is essentially wicked. This is why the concept of original sin is so important politically. For Donoso Cortés and de Maistre, human beings were naturally depraved and essentially vile. There is something essentially defective in human nature which requires a corrective at the political and theological level. It requires the authority of the state and the church. Thus, because the human being is defined by original sin, authoritarianism, in the form of dictatorship say, becomes necessary as the only means that might save human beings from themselves. Human beings require the hard rule of authority because they are essentially defective. Against this, anarchism is the political expression of freedom from original sin, that a sinless union with others in the form of community is the realization of the highest human possibility.

The idea of original sin is not some outdated relic from the religious past. It is the conceptual expression of a fundamental experience of ontological defectiveness or lack which explains the human propensity towards error, malice, wickedness, violence and extreme cruelty. Furthermore this defect is not something we can put right, which is why authoritarians think that human beings require the yoke of the state, God, law and

the police. Politics becomes the means for protecting human beings from themselves, that is, from their worst inclinations towards lust, cruelty and violence. As Hobbes shows, any return to a state of nature is an argument in favour of the war of all against all. We can find numerous post-Christian attempts to rethink the concept of original sin. For example, Freud advances the Schopenhauerian thesis that there might simply be a disjunction between eros and civilization, between the aggressive, destructive workings of libidinous desire and the achievements of culture. This disjunction is only held in check through the internalized authority of the super-ego. Again, Heidegger's ideas of thrownness, facticity and falling were explicitly elaborated in connection with Luther's conception of original sin and seek to explain the endless human propensity towards evasion and flight from taking responsibility for oneself. Although such a responsibility can be momentarily achieved in authentic resoluteness, it can never arrest the slide back into inauthenticity. The concept of original sin is still very much with us.

#### John Gray – The Naturalization of Original Sin, Political Realism and Passive Nihilism

The most consequent contemporary defence of the idea of original sin can be found in the work of John Gray. What he gives us is a naturalized, Darwinian redescription of original sin. To put it brutally, human beings are killer apes. We are simply animals, and rather nasty aggressive primates at that, what Gray calls *homo sapiens*, rapacious hominids. Sadly, we are also killer apes with metaphysical longings, which explains the ceaseless quest to find some meaning to life that might be underwritten by an experience of the holy or the numinous. Today's dominant metaphysical dogma – and this is Gray's real and rightful target – is liberal humanism, with its faith in progress, improvement and the perfectibility of humankind, beliefs which are held with the same unquestioning assurance that Christianity was held in Europe until the late 18th century. As Gray makes clear, progress in the realm of science is a fact. Furthermore, it is a good. De Quincey famously remarked that a quarter of human misery resulted from toothache. The discovery of anaesthetic dentistry is, thus, an unmixed good. However, although progress is a fact, faith in progress is a superstition and the liberal humanist's assurance in the reality of human progress is the barely secularized version of the Christian belief in Providence.

The most extreme expression of human arrogance, for Gray, is the idea that human beings can save the planet from environmental destruction. Because they are killer apes, that is, by virtue of a naturalized version of original sin that tends them towards wickedness and violence, human beings cannot save their planet. Furthermore, the earth doesn't need saving. This is where Gray borrows from James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. The earth is suffering from a disseminated primatemaia, a plague of people. Homo sapiens is ravaging the planet like a filthy pest that has infested a dilapidated but once beautiful mansion. In 1600 the human population was about half a billion. In the 1990s it increased by the same amount. This plague cannot be solved by the very species who are the efficient cause of the problem, but only by a large scale decline in human numbers, back down to manageable levels, say half a billion or so. This is the wonderfully dystopian vision at the heart of Gray's work: when the earth is done with humans, it will recover and human civilization will be forgotten. Life will go on, but without us. Global warming is simply one of many fevers that the earth has suffered during its history. It will recover, but we won't because we can't.

Gray writes, with Schmitt explicitly in mind, 'Modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion'. Politics has become a hideous surrogate for religious salvation. Secularism, which denies the truth of religion, is a religious myth. Specifically, it is a myth of progress based in the idea that history has a providential design that is unfolding. Now, such myths are important. They enable presidents like Barack Obama to get elected. But it doesn't mean that they are true or even salutary. What most disturbs Gray are utopian political projects based on some apocalyptic faith that concerted human action in the world can allow for the realization of seemingly impossible ends and bring about the perfection of humanity. Action cannot change the world because we are the sort of beings that we are: killer apes who will use violence, force and terror at the service of some longed-for metaphysical project. For Gray, the core belief that drives utopianism, on the right as much as the left, is the false assumption that the world can be transformed by human action and that history itself is progress towards such a transformation. As Gray makes explicit, his critique of utopianism derives in large part from Norman Cohn's hugely influential book, originally published in 1957, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

It is Cohn's analysis of millenarianism that is so important for Gray. This is the idea that salvation is not just a possibility, but a certainty which will correspond to five criteria: salvation is collective, terrestrial, imminent, total and miraculous. In his later work, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, Cohn traced the roots of this millenarian faith back to Zoroaster's break with the view that the world was the reflection of a static cosmic order defined by cycle of conflict. On the Zoroastrian view, sometime between 1500 and 1200 BC, the world was moving, through incessant conflict, towards a conflictless state. A time would come when, during a final bloody battle, God and the forces of good would defeat once and for all the armies of evil. Thus, a marvellous consummation is at hand, the moment when good will triumph over evil and the agents of evil will be annihilated. After that time, Cohn writes, 'The elect will thereafter live as a collectivity, unanimous and without conflict, on a transformed and purified earth'.

This idea finds expression in certain Jewish sects before finding its most powerful articulation in Christian ideas of the Apocalypse, the Last Days and the Millennium. On the basis of the authority of the Book of Revelation, it was believed that after Christ's Second Coming, he would establish a kingdom of God on earth and reign over it with his elect, the company of saints, for a thousand years until the Last Judgement and the general resurrection of the dead. Early Christians, like St Paul, believed that the Second Coming was imminent and that they were living in the end times. The search for signs of the Second Coming obviously took on enormous importance. The key clue to the beginning of the end times – and this is crucial – is the appearance of the Antichrist: the prodigious, evil, arch-enemy of God. The Antichrist is what Ernesto Laclau would call a 'floating signifier' in millenarian political theology. He is endlessly substitutable can be personified the great Satan, the Pope, the Muslims or the Jews. What is crucial here is the identification of the Antichrist as the incarnation of evil that presages the reappearance of Christ or a similarly messianic figure and leads to a bloody and violent terrestrial combat to build heaven on earth. This, of course, is the deep logic of the Crusades, which began with Pope Urban II's plea to the Church council of 1095 to go to Jerusalem and, in his words, 'liberate the Church of God'. This lead directly to the 'People's Crusade' or the 'Peasants' Crusade' in 1096-97 and to the formation of a Christian fighting force in Asia Minor that was between 50,000 to 70,000 strong. It is a compelling and disturbing historical fact that the recruitment of soldiers for the

'People's Crusade' in France, Germany and the Low Countries established a disturbing new and seemingly addictive habit in Western life: pogroms against the Jews. It would appear that the idea of the people requires the external identification of an evil enemy who can be legitimately annihilated in the name of God. Such has arguably always been the justificatory logic of Western military intervention: it is right to exterminate the enemy because they are the incarnation of evil. Such views have always vindicated crusaders from the 11th Century through to their more recent epigones. From the time of Saladin's destruction of the Third Crusade in the last 12th Century, the response has always been the same: jihad or war against infidels. It is perhaps not so surprising that Saddam Hussein sought to depict himself in propaganda alongside Saladin. After all, they were both born in Tikrit, despite the awful irony that Saladin was a Kurd.

What is implied fairly discreetly by Cohn and rather loudly trumpeted by Gray, is that Western civilization might be defined in terms of the central role of millenarian thinking. What takes root with early Christian belief and massively accelerates in medieval Europe finds its modern expression in a sequence of bloody utopian political projects, from Jacobinism to Bolshevism, Stalinism, Nazism and different varieties of Marxist-Leninist, anarchist or Situationist ideology. Much of John Gray's *Black Mass* attempts to show how the energy of such utopian political projects has drifted from the left to the right. The apocalyptic conflict with the axis of evil by the forces of good has been employed by Bush, Blair et al as a means to forge the democratic millennium, a new American century of untrammled personal freedom and free markets. In the past decade, millennial faith has energized the project of what we might call military neo-liberalism, where violence is the means for realizing liberal democratic heaven on Earth. What is essential to such neo-liberal millenarian thinking is the consolidation of the idea of the good through the identification of evil, where the Anti-Christ keeps putting on different masks: Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Kim Jong-il, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, etc. etc.

We saw how Schmitt's critique of liberalism led him towards an argument for dictatorship underpinned by a belief in original sin. Where does Gray's naturalization of the concept of original sin leave us? He powerfully identifies the poison within liberal humanism, but what is the antidote? This is what he calls 'political realism'. We have to accept that the world is in a state of ceaseless conflict never far from a state of war. In

the face of such conflict, Gray counsels that we have to abandon the belief in utopia and try and cope with reality. This means accepting the tragic contingencies of life and the fact that there are simply moral and political dilemmas for which there is no solution. We have to learn to abandon daydreams such as a world of universal human rights, or that history has a teleological purpose that underwrites human action. We even have to renounce the Obama-esque delusion that one's life is a narrative that is an episode in some universal story of progress. Against the grotesque distortion of conservatism into the millenarian military neo-liberalism of the neo-conservatives, Gray wants to defend the core belief of traditional Burkean Toryism. The latter begins in a realistic acceptance of human imperfection and frailty, a version of original sin. As such, the best that flawed and potentially wicked human creatures can hope for is a commitment to civilized constraints that will prevent the very worst from happening. Political realism is the politics of the least worst.

The most original feature of Gray's work is the way in which a traditional conservatism underpinned by a deep pessimism about human nature is fused with a certain strand of Taoism. As Gray points out, 'Nothing is more human than the readiness to kill and die in order to secure a meaning for life'. The great human delusion is that action can achieve a terrestrial salvation. This has led to nothing but bloodshed, the great slaughter bench of millenarian history. Killer apes like us have to learn to give up the search for meaning and learn to see the purpose of aesthetic or spiritual life as the release from meaning. If seeing one's life as an episode in some universal narrative of meaning is a delusion, then the cure consists in freeing oneself from such narratives. Maybe we just have to accept illusions. What interests Gray in the subtle paradoxes of the greatest Taoist thinker, Chuang-Tzu, is the acceptance of the fact that life is a dream without the possibility or even the desire to awaken from the dream. If we cannot be free of illusions, if illusions are part and parcel of our natural constitution, then why not simply accept them? In the final pages of *Black Mass*, Gray writes, 'Taoists taught that freedom lies in freeing oneself from personal narratives by identifying with cosmic processes of death and renewal'. Thus, rather than seek the company of utopian thinkers, we should find consolation in the words of 'mystics, poets and pleasure-lovers'. It is clear that for Gray, like the late Heidegger, the real source of human problems resides in the belief that action can transform the world. Action simply provides a consolation for the radical insignificance of our lives by momentarily staving

off the threat of meaninglessness. At the core of Gray's work is a defense of the ideal of contemplation over action, the ataraxia of the ancients, where we simply learn to see the mystery as such and do not seek to unveil it in order to find some deeper purpose within.

Schopenhauer, often read in an abridged aphoristic form, was the most popular philosopher of the 19th Century. Nothing sells better than epigrammatic pessimism. It gives readers reasons for their misery and words to buttress their sense of hopelessness and impotence. Such is what Nietzsche called 'European Buddhism'. John Gray is the Schopenhauerian European Buddhist of our age. What he offers is a gloriously pessimistic cultural analysis which rightly reduces to rubble the false idols of the cave of liberal humanism. Counter to the upbeat evangelical atheism of Dawkins, Hitchens et al , Gray provides a powerful argument in favour of human wickedness that is consistent with Darwinian naturalism. It leads to the position that I call 'passive nihilism'.

The passive nihilist looks at the world from a certain highly cultivated detachment and finds it meaningless. Rather than trying to act in the world, which is pointless, the passive nihilist withdraws to a safe contemplative distance and cultivates and refines his aesthetic sensibility by pursuing the pleasures of lyric poetry, bird-watching or botany, as was the case with the aged Rousseau. In a world that is rushing to destroy itself through capitalist exploitation or military crusades (usually two arms of the same killer ape), the passive nihilist withdraws to an island where the mystery of existence can be seen for what it is without distilling it into a meaning. In the face of the coming century which in all likelihood will be defined by the violence of faith and the certainty of environmental devastation, Gray offers a cool but safe temporary refuge. Happily, we will not be alive to witness much of the future that he describes.

I have looked at two interrelated responses to the thought that the modern concepts of politics are secularized theological concepts. Schmitt's critique of constitutional liberalism as anti-political leads him to a concept of the political that finds its expression in state sovereignty, authoritarianism and dictatorship. Gray's critique of liberal humanism and the ideas of progress and Providence that it embodies leads him to a political realism of a traditional Tory variety. He fuses this, in an extremely

compelling way, with what I have called passive nihilism. Both conceptions of the political are underpinned by ideas of original sin, whether the traditional Catholic teaching or Gray's Darwinian naturalization of the concept. The refutation of any and all forms of utopianism follows from this concept of original sin. It is because we are killer apes that our metaphysical longings for a conflict-free perfection of humanity can only be pursued with the millennial means of violence and terror.

### Millenarianism

Is the utopian impulse in political thinking simply the residue of a dangerous political theology that we are much better off without? Are the only live options in political thinking either Schmitt's authoritarianism, Gray's political realism or business as usual liberalism; that is, a politics of state sovereignty, an incremental, traditionalist conservatism or varieties of more or less enthused Obamaism? In order to approach these questions I would like to present the form of politics that Schmitt and Gray explicitly reject, namely anarchism. Now, I have sought to outline and defend a version of anarchism in some of my recent work. This is what I call an ethical neo-anarchism where anarchist practices of political organization are coupled with an infinitely demanding subjective ethics of responsibility. However, for reasons that will hopefully become clear, I want to present a very different version of anarchism, perhaps the most radical that can be conceived, namely 'mystical anarchism'. The key issue here is what happens to our thinking of politics and community once the fact of original sin has been overcome.

Let's return to Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. What Cohn tries to show is the way in which millenarian Christian belief took root amongst significant sectors of the rootless and dislocated poor of Europe between the 11th and 16th Centuries. The belief that these were the Last Days led to a revolutionary eschatology, where a series of messiah figures, prophets or indeed 'Christs' would spontaneously appear. Cohn gives an extraordinary catalogue of these messiahs, from Tancheln, the Emperor Frederick, the Pseudo-Baldwin, through to John Ball, Hans Böhm, Thomas Müntzer and terrifying and bloodthirsty Jan Bockelsen, better known as John of Leyden. What unites these figures is not just their heretical fury and utter self-belief. It is rather their capacity to



construct what Cohn calls, non-perjoratively but put psychoanalytically, a phantasy or social myth around which a collective can be formed. The political structure of this phantasy becomes complete with the identification of an enemy. It is always in relation to an enemy that the eschatological phantasy finds its traction. This enemy is always the Antichrist, whose identity floats in different historical manifestations of millenarianism. It can be the Moslems or indeed Jews for the Crusaders, but it is more often simply the forces of the Catholic church and the state. A holy war is then fought with the Antichrist, where violence becomes the purifying or cleansing force through which the evil ones are to be annihilated. Terror is a common feature of life in the New Jerusalem.

Revolutionary millenarianism desires a boundless social transformation that attempts to recover an egalitarian state of nature, a kind of golden age of primitive communism. This required the abolition of private property and the establishment of a commonality of ownership. Justification for such views would invariably be Biblical, usually the Garden of Eden. As a famous proverb from the time of the English Peasants' Revolt puts it, possibly recited by the hedge priest John Ball,

‘When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then a gentleman?’.

The task of politics was the construction of the New Jerusalem and the model was always paradise, the Garden of Eden before the occurrence of original sin. There was a perfectly obvious reason why such forms of revolutionary millenarian belief should arise amongst the poor: they owned nothing and therefore had nothing to lose. Thus, by destroying private property, they had everything to gain. The only extant fragment from John Ball, preserved and probably embellished by chroniclers, makes the point powerfully,

‘Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until all goods are held in common, and until there will be neither serfs nor gentlemen, and we shall be equal. For what reason have they, whom we call lords, got the best of us? How did they deserve it? Why do they keep us in bondage? If we all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can they assert or prove that they are more masters than ourselves? Except perhaps that they make us work and produce for them to spend!’

Yet, the poor, as the saying goes, have always been with us. What seems to be novel in the earlier part of large historical panorama that Cohn describes is the emergence of the urban poor in the rapidly industrializing textile-producing towns of Flanders and Brabant from the 11th Century onwards. Thus, it is not simply that millenarian belief arises amongst the poor, but specifically amongst those groups whose traditional ways of life have broken down. Millenarian belief arises amongst the socially dislocated, recently urbanized, poor who had moved from the country to the city for economic reasons. Although Cohn says nothing on this topic, it is interesting to note that the socio-economic condition of possibility for revolutionary eschatology is dislocation, the same category that Marx employs to describe the formation of the industrial proletariat during the industrial revolution.

(Perhaps a similar hypothesis could be used to explain the formation of millenarian sects in the United States from the time of settlement onwards. I am thinking in particular of the explosion of millenarian faith in areas like the 'burned-over district' of upper New York State during the late 18th Century and the first decades of the 19th Century in groups like the Shakers. It is not exactly difficult to find the living descendents of such millenarian religious belief all across the contemporary United States. There seems to be a powerful correlation between evangelism, social dislocation and poverty. Yet, what is sorely missing from contemporary American millenarianism is the radical anarcho-communism of groups like the Shakers. For the latter, all property was held in common, without mine and thine. An ethos manual labour was combined with spiritual purification achieved through taking the vow of chastity. With hands at work and hearts set to God, the Shakers attempted to recover the communistic equality of Eden without the sins of the flesh. This was further radicalized through the revelations of the founder of the Shakers, Ann Lee or Mother Ann (1736-84), from Manchester who brought a select band of persecuted Shakers (more properly, The Church of Believers in Christ) from England to New York 1774 before setting up communities in upper state New York and Western Massachusetts. Various divine visitations led her to declare celibacy and the imminent second coming of Christ. She was seen by some as the female equivalent of God, the female complement to the divine male principle. For the Shakers, to be a believer in Christ was to participate in the dual nature of divinity, both male and female.)

Medieval revolutionary millenarianism drew its strength and found its energy amongst the marginal and the dispossessed. It often arose against a background of disaster, plague and famine. As Cohn notes,

‘The greatest wave of millenarian excitement, one that swept through the whole of society, was precipitated by the most universal natural disaster of the Middle Ages, the Black Death.’

It was amongst the lowest social strata that millenarian enthusiasm lasted longest and expressed itself most violently. For example, the flagellant movement first appeared in Perugia in 1260 as an apparent consequence of the famine of 1250 and the plague of 1259. It swept from Italy into the Rhine Valley in the 14th Century, where great crowds of itinerant flagellants went from town to town like a scourging insurgency becoming God-like through acts of collective imitatio Christi. Such extreme self-punishment was deemed heretical because it threatened the Church’s authority over the economy of punishment, penitence and consolation. The poor were not meant to take the whip into their own hands. But the centerpiece of Cohn’s book is the description and analysis of the dominant form of revolutionary millenarianism: the so-called heresy of the free spirit. It is to this that I would now like to turn.

### The Movement of the Free Spirit

We know very little about the movement of the Free Spirit. Everything turns on the interpretation of Paul’s words, ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom’(2 Corinthians 3:17). There are two possibilities here: either the Lord’s Spirit is outside the self or within it. If the Lord’s Spirit is outside the self, because the soul languishes in sin and perdition, then freedom can only come through submitting oneself to divine will and awaiting the saving activity of grace. Such is the standard Christian teaching, which explains the necessity for the authority of the Church as that terrestrial location or, better, portal to the Lord’s Spirit. But if – and here is the key to the heresy – the Lord’s Spirit is within the self, then the soul is free and has no need of the mediation of the Church. Indeed, and we will come back to this presently, if

the Lord's Spirit is within the self, then essentially there is no difference between the soul and God. The heretical Adamites who moved to Bohemia after being expelled from Picardy in the early 15th Century, are reported as beginning the Lord's Prayer with the words, 'Our Father, who art within us...'. If a community participates in the Spirit of God, then it is free and has no need of the agencies of the Church, state, law or police. These are the institutions of the unfree world that a community based on the Free Spirit rejects. It is not difficult to grasp the anarchistic consequences of such a belief.

The apparently abundant and widespread doctrinal literature of the movement of the Free Spirit was repeatedly seized and destroyed by the Inquisition. Very few texts remain, such as the fascinating *Schwester Katrei*, apocryphally attributed to Meister Eckhart. At least one of the extant manuscripts bears the inscription, *That is Sister Katrei, Meister Eckhart's Daughter from Strasbourg*. Although this is a huge topic that I do not want to broach here, the relation between Eckhart's thinking, deemed heretical posthumously by the Pope at Avignon in 1327, and the movement of the Free Spirit is hugely suggestive. Of the documents related to the Free Spirit that remain, I'd like to focus on Marguerite Porete's extraordinary *The Mirror of Simple and Annihilated Souls and Who Remain Only in Wanting and Desire of Love*, to give the text its full and indeed ambiguous title. The text was only discovered in 1946. It seems clear that Eckhart knew Porete's *The Mirror* and responded to it explicitly or implicitly in his texts and sermons. For example, Michael Sells claims that when Eckhart returned to Paris in 1311, one year after Porete's execution, he stayed at the same Dominican house as William Humbert, Porete's inquisitor. One can only wonder at the content of their conversations. *The Mirror* is an instruction manual of sorts that details the seven stages that the soul must pass through in order to overcome original sin and recover the perfection that belonged to human beings prior to their corruption by the Fall. *The Mirror* seems to have circulated in multiple manuscripts and translations in the Middle Ages and Porete appears to have had many followers as far away from her native Hainaut in northern France as England and Italy. We know relatively little with certainty about Porete, although there is a surprising amount of documentation related to her trial and execution for heresy. She was a learned Beguine, which was the term that was used to describe semireligious women who lived alone or in Beguine houses or Beguinages. These began to appear in the southern Low Countries in the late 12th and early 13th Centuries and were effectively communes or experimental associations for

the sisters of the Free Spirit and their brothers, the Beghards, from which we derive the English word 'beggar'. Marguerite seems to have led an itinerant mendicant life of poverty accompanied by a guardian Beghard. Her book was condemned, seized and publicly burned at Valenciennes, but she refused to retract it. When Porete came to the attention of the Inquisition in Paris, she was imprisoned for eighteen months, but refused to recant or seek absolution. She was burnt at the stake in 1310. The fact that she was treated with relative liberality and not immediately executed seems to suggest that she was from the upper strata of society and she had some powerful friends. Although it is not my topic here, it is truly fascinating how many women were involved with the movement of the Free Spirit and their relatively high social status. Scholars of mysticism like Amy Hollywood and poets like Anne Carson have rightly identified Porete and the Beguine movement as a vital precursor to modern feminism. It is highly revealing that, in the proceeding of her trial, Porete's work is not just referred to as being 'filled with errors and heresies', but as a 'pseudo-mulier', a fake woman.

### Becoming God

I'd like to identify the core of the movement of the Free Spirit by recounting the seven stages of what Porete calls 'the devout soul' outlined in Chapter 118 of *The Mirror* (the book contains 139 Chapters). What is described is nothing other than the process of self-deification, of becoming God.

1. The first state occurs when the Soul is touched by God's grace and assumes the intention of following all God's commandments, of being obedient to divine law.
2. The second state mounts yet higher and Soul becomes a lover of God over and above commandments and laws. Regardless of any command, the Soul wants to do all it can to please its beloved. In this second state, and one thinks of St. Paul's argument in Romans here, the external becomes internal and law is overcome by love.
3. In the third state, consumed by love for divine perfection, the Soul attaches itself to making 'works of goodness'. These can be images, representations, projects and objects that give us delight in glorifying God. But Porete insists, and this is a theme that

Eckhart will take up in his extraordinary German sermons, the Soul ‘...renounces those works in which she has this delight, and puts to death the will which had its life from this...’ The Soul no longer wills, but undergoes a detachment from the will by obeying the will of another, namely God. The Soul must become a ‘martyr’; that is, a witness and victim to God by abstaining from works and destroying the will. Porete’s language here is extremely violent, writing that, ‘One must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which Love will want to be’. This is the beginning of the painful process of the annihilation of the Soul, where suffering is necessary in order to bore open a space that is wide enough for love to enter. Anne Carson rightly compares this process of annihilation with Simone Weil’s idea of decreation, ‘To undo the creature in us’.

4. In the fourth state, when I have renounced my will and hewn away at myself, when I have begun to decreate and annihilate myself, I am filled with God’s love and exalted ‘into delight’. Porete’s wording here is extraordinary, the Soul, ‘...does not believe that God has any greater gift to bestow on any soul here below than this love which Love for love has poured forth within her’. In the fourth state, the Soul is in love with love as such and becomes intoxicated, ‘Gracious Love makes her wholly drunken’ (emphasis mine).

Excursus: In his wonderfully capacious and open-minded investigation of mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James discusses the relation between mystical states and drunkenness. This is what he calls the idea of ‘anaesthetic revelation’, which he links to his own experiences with nitrous oxide or laughing gas, which had been a drug of choice amongst scientists, poets and intellectuals throughout the 19th Century. Nitrous oxide, James recounts from personal experience, induces a feeling of reconciliation or oneness at a level deeper than that of ordinary waking consciousness with its separation of subjects and objects. Indeed, James goes further and compares this mystical experience of reconciliation, or cosmic consciousness, with what he sees as Hegel’s pantheism. This is, for James, the ‘...monistic insight, in which the OTHER in its various forms appears absorbed into the One’. On this reading of Hegel (and, of course, other readings are possible), the key to dialectical thinking is the unity of the Same and the Other, where what Hegel calls the Concept would be that movement of thinking which grasps both itself and its opposite. James adds that, ‘this is

a dark saying', but he insists that 'the living sense of the reality' of Hegel's philosophy 'only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind'. In others words, Hegel can only be understood when one is drunk on laughing gas.

Drunkenness is always followed by a hangover. Such is the condition of what Porete calls 'dismay' and which other mystics commonly call distress, dereliction and distance from God. The error of the fourth state - and by implication James's analysis of mysticism - is to believe that the progress of the Soul is complete in its beatific union with God. Such a conception of unio mystica is common to many mystics and was tolerated and even encouraged by the Church, when and where it could be controlled. Porete, however, is engaged in a much more radical enterprise, namely the Soul's annihilation. This brings us to the fifth state.

5. The dismay and dereliction of the fifth state arises from the following sober consideration: on the one hand, the Soul considers God as the source of things that are, that is, of all goodness. But, on the other hand, the Soul then turns to consider itself, from which all things are not. The free will that God put into the Soul has been corrupted by the Fall. Insofar as the Soul wills anything, that thing is evil for it is nothing but the expression of original sin and the separation from the divine source of goodness. As Porete puts it, 'The Soul's Will sees...that it cannot progress by itself if it does not separate itself from her own willing, for her nature is evil by that inclination towards nothingness to which nature tends...' How, then, can I will not to will? I cannot, for every act of will, even the will not to will, is the expression of separation from divine goodness and therefore evil. As we saw in the third state, the Soul has tried to cut away at itself, to bore a hole in itself that will allow love to enter. But the momentary exaltation of the fourth state, drunk with divinity, was illusory and transitory. The fifth state, Porete writes, '...has subdued her (i.e. the Soul) in showing to the Soul her own self'. It is here that we face what Porete repeatedly calls an 'abyss', 'deep beyond all depths', 'without compass or end'. This abyss is the gap between the willful and errant nature of the Soul and divine goodness. It cannot be bridged by any action. In the fifth state, two natures are at war within me: the divine goodness that I love and the evil that I am by virtue of original sin. As Paul puts it, 'The Good that I would I do not, but the Evil that I would not that I do'. Faced with this abyss, in the fifth state I become a paradox. The Soul wants to annihilate itself and unify with God. But

how? How can an abyss become a byss?

6. This is the work of the sixth state, which is the highest that can be attained during terrestrial life. In the sobriety of the fifth state, the Soul knows two things: divine goodness and the errant activity of the will. In making 'her look at herself again', in such painful self-scrutiny, Porete adds that,

'...these two things that she sees take away from her will and longing and works of goodness, and so she is wholly at rest, and put in possession of her own state of free being, the high excellence of which gives her repose from every thing'.

Having gone through the ordeal of the fifth state, the Soul finds repose and rest, what Eckhart will call an experience of releasement.

The reasoning here is delicate: the abyss that separates the Soul from God cannot be byssed or bridged through an act of will. On the contrary, it is only through the extinction of the will and the annihilation of the Soul that the sixth state can be attained. That is, the Soul itself becomes an abyss, that is, it becomes emptied and excoriated, entering a condition of absolute poverty. It is only in such poverty that the wealth of God can be poured into the Soul. In the fifth state, the Soul looked at herself and experienced dereliction. But in the sixth state, '...the Soul does not see herself at all'. Not only that, the Soul also does not see God. Rather, and these words are extraordinary,

'God of his divine majesty sees himself in her, and by him this Soul is so illumined that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself, from whom all things are...'

When the Soul has become annihilated and 'free of all things', then it can be illumined by the presence of God. It is only by reducing myself to nothing, that I can join with that divine something. As Porete insists, in this sixth state the Soul is not yet glorified, that is, a direct participant in the glory of God. This only happens after our death, in the seventh state. But what happens in the sixth state is even more extraordinary than glory.

Let me quote at length the key passage,

'...this Soul, thus pure and illumined, sees neither God nor herself, but God sees himself of himself in her, for her, without her, who - that is, God - shows to her that there is nothing except him. And therefore this Soul knows nothing except him, and loves nothing except him, and praises nothing except him, for there is nothing but he.'



Which means the following: the annihilated Soul becomes the place for God's infinite self-reflection. The logic here is impeccable: if the Soul has become nothing, then it can obviously see neither itself nor God. On the contrary, God enters into the place that I created by hewing and hacking away at myself. But that place is no longer my self. What the Soul has created is the space of its own nihilation. This nihil is the 'place', or better what Augustine might call the 'no place', where God reflects on himself, where 'God sees himself of himself in her'. God's love fills the annihilated Soul, in a movement of reflection which is at once both, 'for her' and 'without her'. The only way in which the Soul can become for God is by becoming without itself. In its nihilation, the no-place of the Soul becomes the place of God's reflection on himself, in-himself and for-himself.

As Anne Carson rightly asks in her inquiry into how it is that women like Sappho, Simone Weil and Marguerite Porete tell God, 'What is it that love dares the self to do?' She answers that, 'Love dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty'. Love is, thus, the audacity of impoverishment, of complete submission. It is an act of absolute spiritual daring that induces a passivity where the self becomes annihilated; it is a subjective act where the subject extinguishes itself. Become a husk or empty vessel through this act of daring, the fullness of love enters in. It is through the act of annihilation that the Soul knows nothing but God, 'and loves nothing except him'. Once the Soul is not, God is the only being that is.

7. As I already indicated, the seventh state is only attained after our death. It is the condition of 'everlasting glory' of which we shall have no knowledge until our souls have left our bodies.

### Communistic Consequences

It is time to draw the significant consequences from Porete's sinuous argumentation. Why was *The Mirror* condemned as heresy? For the simple reason that once the Soul is annihilated, there is nothing to prevent its identity with God. By following the itinerary of the seven states described in *The Mirror*, the Soul is annihilated and I become

nothing. In becoming nothing, God enters the place where my Soul was. At that point, I – whatever sense the first person pronoun might still have – become God. When I become nothing, I become God.

As William James shows, varieties of this claim can be found in the mystical tradition. But perhaps everything goes back to St. Paul's words in Galatians 2:20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'. That is, when I annihilate myself, that is, when I crucify myself in an imitatio Christi, then Christ lives within me. In other words, the I that lives is not I but God. This might also be linked to the Henry Suso's words, 'The spirit dies, and yet it is alive in the marvels of the Godhead'. Or indeed, we could make a connection to the differenceless point of the Godhead at the heart of Eckhart's theology. Yet, Porete is more radical still. The heart of the heresy of the Free Spirit is not some Neo-Platonic idea of the contemplative union of the intellect with the One as the source of an emanation, God, the bliss of contact with the divine. Rather, as Cohn writes, 'It was a passionate desire of certain human beings to surpass the condition of humanity and to become God'. What Porete is describing is a painful process of decreation: boring a whole in oneself so that love might enter. It is closer to Teresa of Avila's piercing of the heart that takes place when she is on fire with the love of God, 'The pain was so great, it made me moan'. This desire for annihilation unleashes the most extreme violence against the self. For example, Angela of Foligno writes, 'There are times when such great anger ensues that I am scarcely able to stop from totally tearing myself apart. There are also times when I can't hold myself back from striking myself in a horrible way, and sometimes my head and limbs are swollen.'

The consequence of such a process of self-deification is to overcome the condition of original sin and to return to the freedom that human beings enjoyed before the Fall. As the founder of the Quakers, George Fox, has it, 'I was come up to the state of Adam in which he was before he fell'. It is not difficult to see why the Movement of the Free Spirit posed such a profound threat to the authority of the Catholic Church and the governmental and legislative authority of various states in which it manifested itself. If it was possible to overcome original sin and regain the Edenic state of intimacy with the divine, then what possible function might be served by the Catholic Church, whose authority as a mediator between the human and the divine is only justified insofar as human beings live and travail in the wake of original sin. As we have seen in our

discussion of Schmitt, all forms of ecclesiastical and governmental authoritarianism require a belief in original sin. It is only because human beings are defective and imperfect that church and state become necessary. If human beings become free, that is, perfected by overcoming the sin and death that define the post-Lapsarian human condition, then this has dramatic political consequences.

To begin with, as we saw in our allusions to John Ball and the Peasants' Revolt, if the spirit is free then all conceptions of mine and thine vanish. In the annihilation of the Soul, mine becomes thine, I becomes thou, and the no-place of the Soul becomes the space of divine self-reflection. Such an experience of divinity, of course, is not my individual private property, but is the commonwealth of those who are free in spirit. Private property is just the consequence of our fallen state. The Soul's recovery of its natural freedom entails commonality of ownership. The only true owner of property is God and his wealth is held in common by all creatures without hierarchy or distinctions of class and hereditary privilege. The political form of the Movement of the Free Spirit is communism.

Furthermore, it is a communism whose social bond is love. We have seen how Porete describes the work of love as the audacity of the Soul's annihilation. Clearly, there can be no higher authority than divine love, which entails that communism would be a political form higher than law (Marx repeats many of these ideas, imagining communism as a society without law). We might say that law is the juridical form that structures a social order. As such, it is based on the repression of the moment of community. Law is the external constraint on society that allows authority to be exercised, all the way to its dictatorial suspension. From the perspective of the communism of the Free Spirit, law loses its legitimacy because it is a form of heteronomous authority as opposed to autonomously chosen work of love. Furthermore, and perhaps this is what was most dangerous in the Movement of the Free Spirit, if human beings are free of original sin, where God is manifested as the spirit of commonality, then there is no longer any legitimacy to moral constraints on human behaviour that do not directly flow from our freedom. The demands of the state and the church can simply be ignored if they are not consistent with the experience of freedom. To be clear, this is not at all to say that the Movement of the Free Spirit implies immoralism. On the contrary, it is to claim that morality has flow from freedom by

being consistent with a principle of that is located not in the individual but in its divine source, the Free Spirit that is held in common.

The Movement of the Free Spirit has habitually been seen as encouraging both moral and sexual libertinage. One cannot exaggerate the extent to which the alleged sexual excesses of the adepts of the Free Spirit obsessed the Inquisition that investigated and condemned the Movement, destroying its literature and executing or incarcerating its members. Most of what we know of the Movement is mediated through the agency of the Church that outlawed it. Such evidence is clearly difficult to trust. In particular, the various inquisitors seem obsessed with cataloguing instances of nakedness, as if that were evidence of the most depraved morals. But what are clothes for, apart from keeping the body warm? They are a consequence of the Fall when we learned for the first time to cover our bodies for shame. If that shame is lifted with the overcoming of original sin, then why wear clothing at all? Furthermore, this tendency to prurience is continued by the Movement's modern inquisitors, like Cohn, who takes great delight in describing the 'anarchic eroticism' of the adepts of the Free Spirit. For example, he takes evident pleasure in describing the excesses of the Nuns of Schweidnitz in Silesia in 1330s, who claimed that they had such command over the Holy Trinity that they could 'ride it as in a saddle'. On this view, the Movement of the Free Spirit allows and even encourages sexual licentiousness where adepts throw off the moral prudery of the Church and run amok in some sort of huge orgy.

It is, of course, impossible to assess these claims of erotic libertinage. After all, the accusations are made by the accusers and it would be somewhat odd to trust them entirely. In the case of Cohn, the curiosity about the sexual antics of adepts of the Free Spirit is perhaps explained by the *Zeitgeist* in which he was writing. In the Conclusion to the 1970 revised edition of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Cohn argues for a continuity between medieval practices of self-deification and 'the ideal of a total emancipation of the individual from society, even from external reality itself...with the help of psychedelic drugs...' But I see little evidence for the suggestion of such narcotic or erotic license. On the contrary, what one finds in Porete and in many other mystical texts from the period and later is not some wild unleashing of repressed sexual energy, but rather its subtle transformation. Texts like *The Mirror* testify to a passion transformed from the physical to the metaphysical, to a certain spiritualization of desire.

Some might call this sublimation. What is most striking in the writing of the mystics, particularly female mystics, is the elevation of the discourse of desire in relation to the object cause of that desire, which is the beloved: God usually in the person of Christ. What the female mystic wants is to love and desire in the same place and this requires both the articulation of desire and its transmutation into love. To reduce mystical passion to some pent-up sexual energy is to miss the point entirely. It is to mistake sublimation for repression. If anything, what seems to mark texts like *The Mirror* is an experience of passivity and an emphasis on submission. The movement of the Free Spirit is not about doing what you want. On the contrary, it is about the training and submission of free will in order to recover a condition of commonality that overcomes it, namely love.

Indeed, the emphasis on submission and quietism that one finds in Porete and others seems more likely to lead to chastity than license. Unrestrained erotic exuberance would simply be the false exercise of the will. The point of Porete's seven-state itinerary is the disciplining of the self all the way to its extinction in an experience of love that annihilates it. To my mind, the Movement of the Free Spirit finds a greater echo in the chastity of groups like the Shakers than the exhaustive and exhausting cataloguing of sexual excesses listed that took place in the Chateau de Silling in the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*.

Do not kill others, only yourself

There is no doubt that the Movement of the Free Spirit is deeply antinomian, refusing the metaphysical, moral, legislative and political authority of both church and state. As such, it constituted a clandestine and subversive movement of resistance. The earliest appearance of the many alleged heresies linked to the Free Spirit comes from an investigation held in Germany in the 1260s. The first of the accusations is extremely revealing, 'To make small assemblies and to teach in secret is not contrary to faith but is contrary to the evangelical way of life...' Note the emphasis on size and secrecy here. The great threat of the Movement of the Free Spirit was a secret network of small activist groups linked together by powerful bonds of solidarity and love. It was also a highly mobile network and what seems to have constantly worried the Church was the

itinerant nature of the Beguines and Beghards and the way in which they moved from town to town and state to state. In addition, the rallying cry of these mendicants was 'Brod durch Gott', 'bread for the sake of God' and they preached, as did the Franciscan Spirituals, a doctrine of the poverty of Christ. As William Cornelius is reported to have said in the mid-13th Century, 'No rich man can be saved, and all the rich are miserly'. The point is not lost on Cohn who writes that, at its height, the Movement of the Free Spirit, 'had become an invisible empire' held together by powerful emotional bonds. Devoted to undermining the power of church and state, abolishing private property and establishing what can only be described as an anarcho-communism based on the annihilation of the self in the experience of the divine, the ruthlessness with which the Movement was repeatedly crushed should come as no surprise.

What kind of assessment can we make of the Movement of the Free Spirit? Cohn sees millenarianism as a constantly recurring and dangerous threat that is still very much with us. What finds expression with the heresy of the Free Spirit is, he writes, '...an affirmation of freedom so reckless and unqualified that it amounted to a total denial of every kind of restraint and limitation'(148). As such, the Free Spirit is a precursor of what Cohn calls 'that bohemian intelligentsia' that has plagued the 20th Century and which has been living from the ideas expressed by Bakunin and Nietzsche '...in their wilder moments'. The Free Spirit was 'the most ambitious essay in total social revolution'(149), which finds its continuation on the extreme left and right alike.

'Nietzsche's Superman...certainly obsessed the imagination of many of the "armed bohemians" who made the National-Socialist revolution; and many a present-day exponent of world revolution owes more to Bakunin than to Marx'.(149)

This is not the place to show either the erroneousness of such readings of Nietzsche and Bakunin or the chronic limitation of such arguments by insinuation that allegedly connect the Free Spirit to Nazism via Nietzsche. Let's just note that, as we saw with Porete, the Free Spirit is not a 'reckless and unqualified' assertion of freedom that denies all 'restraint and limitation'. On the contrary, Porete is arguing for a rigorous and demanding discipline of the self where individual acts of arbitrary freedom are directed outside themselves to a divine source which is the basis for commonality. To say it once again, the Free Spirit is not about doing what you want. Neither is it amoralistic; rather, it is a stringent and demanding ethical disciplining of the self.

Cohn uses the standard ‘depth psychology’ talk of the 1950s and 60s to diagnose the malady that drives the desire for mystical anarchism. He explains mysticism aetiologically as a ‘profound introversion’ of ‘gigantic parental images’(176). This is both a defence against reality and ‘a reactivation of the distorting images of infancy’. Thereafter, two possibilities are possible: either the mystic emerges from the process of introversion successfully, ‘as a more integrated personality’, or he ‘introjects’ these images unsuccessfully and ‘emerges as a nihilistic megalomaniac’. Cohn catalogues the repeated occurrence of such megalomaniacs in great historical detail and there is no denying the existence of forms of sophism, obscurantism and charlatanry that are allied to the Movement of the Free Spirit. However, I am not only suspicious of the validity of such aetiological explanations, but would also want to interrogate the normative presupposition that such explanations invoke for the emergence of phenomena like mysticism. Cohn simply assumes that ‘integrated personality’ is an unquestioned good, along with related ideas of reinforcing the ego and encouraging it to adapt to reality. What Porete is describing is what we might call a creative disintegration of the ego, an undermining of its authority which allows a new form of subjectivity to stand in the place where the old self was. Rather than seeing Porete as a retreat to some alleged illusory infantile state, the process of the Soul’s annihilation might be seen as the self’s maturation and mutation where it is no longer organized around the individual and his self-regarding acts of will. Rather than integrating some given personality, what Porete is describing is the emergence of a new form of subjectivity, a transformation of the self through the act of love.

As we saw above, John Gray makes explicit what is implicit in Cohn’s approach. He extends the condemnation of groups like the Free Spirit to any and all utopian movements. The burden of a book like *Black Mass* is to show the continued malign presence of millenarian, apocalyptic politics in the contemporary world. What is particularly powerful in Gray’s approach is the manner in which he extends Cohn’s diagnosis to the neo-conservative millenarianism of the Bush administration, gleefully embraced by Blair, for whom ‘the clichés of the hour have always been eternal verities’. However, as I argued in detail above, the critique of utopianism does not vindicate Gray’s call for political realism, which draws on his naturalization of the concept of original sin. Relatedly, it is something of an understatement to suggest that Carl Schmitt

would have been out of sympathy with both the theology and politics of mystical anarchism. I'm sure Schmitt would have happily served as Porete's inquisitor and probably personally lit the fire that consumed her and her books.

A very different take on these matters can be found in Raoul Vaneigem's *The Movement of the Free Spirit* from 1986. In many ways, Vaneigem unwittingly confirms all of Cohn's worst fears: he offers a vigorous defence of the Movement of the Free Spirit as a precursor to the insurrectional movements of the 1960s such as the Situationist International, in which Vaneigem's writings played such a hugely influential role. He writes of the Free Spirit,

'The spring has never dried up; it gushes from the fissures of history, bursting through the earth at the slightest shift of the mercantile terrain'.(94)

In Debord's dystopian vision of the society of the spectacle where all human relations are governed by exchange - the dictatorship of a commodity system that Vaneigem always compares to the negativity of death - the Free Spirit is an emancipatory movement that operates in the name of life, bodily pleasures and untrammelled freedom. Vaneigem reinterprets the Free Spirit's insistence on poverty of spirit as the basis for a critique of the market system where life is reduced to purposeless productivity and life-denying work. As such, the most radical element in the Movement of the Free Spirit, for Vaneigem, was 'an alchemy of individual fulfillment' where the cultivation of a state of perfection allowed the creation of a space where the 'economy's hold over individuals' was relinquished. Thus, the Free Spirit's emphasis on love is 'the sole alternative to market society'(254). Wrapped around a compelling and extended documentation of the Movement of the Free Spirit, Vaneigem argues for what he calls an 'alchemy of the self' based on unfettered enjoyment and bodily pleasures. He cites the proposition of Hippolytus of Rome, 'The promiscuity of men and women, that is the true communion'. Vaneigem advances an opposition between the Free Spirit and the Holy Spirit, where the latter is identified with God and the former with his denial. Vaneigem is therefore skeptical of Porete's position in *The Mirror*, arguing that self-deification is too dependant on a repressive, authoritarian idea of God.(246) Although Vaneigem borrows Porete's idea of the refinement of love, which is allegedly the title of one of her lost books, he finds her approach too ascetic and intellectualized. Vaneigem defends an individualistic hedonism based not on intellect but 'a flux of passions'.(195) It has a stronger affinity with Fourier's utopianism of passionate attraction filled with



phalansteries of free love and leisure than the sort of self-annihilation found in Porete. To my mind, something much more interesting than Vaneigem can be found in Gustav Landauer, the German anarcho-socialist who exerted such influence over Buber, Scholem and the young Benjamin (see Loewy article). In his 'Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism'(1901), Landauer is writing in the context of the anarchist politics of assassination that had seen the killing of U.S. President William McKinley in 1901, itself based on the murder of King Umberto I of Italy the previous year. Both perpetrators identified themselves as anarchists. Landauer asks, '...what has the killing of people to do with anarchism, a theory striving for a society without government and authoritarian coercion, a movement against the state and legalized violence?' The answer is clear, 'Nothing at all'. Landauer argues that all forms of violence are despotic and anarchism entails non-violence. If anarchists resort to violence, then they are no better than the tyrants whom they claim to oppose. Anarchism is not a matter of armed revolt or military attack, 'it is a matter of how one lives'. Its concern is with, 'a new people arising from humble beginnings in small communities that form in the midst of the old'. This is what Landauer intriguingly calls 'inward colonization'.

Yet, how is such an inward colonization possible? Landauer's response is singular and draws us back to the idea of self-annihilation. He writes, 'Whoever kills, dies. Those who want to create life must also embrace it and be reborn from within'. But how can such a rebirth take place? It can only happen by killing oneself, '...in the mystical sense, in order to be reborn after having descended into the depths of their soul'. He goes on, 'Only those who have journeyed through their own selves and waded deep in their own blood can help to create the new world without interfering in the lives of others'. Landauer insists that such a position does not imply quietism or resignation. On the contrary, he writes that 'one acts with others', but he adds that, 'none of this will really bring us forward if it is not based on a new spirit won by conquest of one's inner self'. He continues,

'It is not enough for us to reject conditions and institutions; we have to reject ourselves. "Do not kill others, only yourself": such will be the maxim of those who accept the challenge to create their own chaos in order to discover their most authentic and precious inner being and to become mystically one with the world.'

Although talk of authenticity and 'precious inner being' leaves me somewhat cold, what is fascinating here is the connection between the idea of self-annihilation and

anarchism. The condition of possibility for a life of cooperation and solidarity with others is a subjective transformation, a self-killing that renounces the killing of others. For Landauer, it is not a matter of anarchism participating in the usual party politics, systemic violence and cold rationalism of the state. It is rather a question of individuals breaking with the state's authority and uniting together in new forms of life. Talk of inward colonization gives a new twist to Cohn's idea of the Movement of the Free Spirit as an 'invisible empire'. It is a question of the creation of new forms of life at a distance from the order of the state - which is the order of visibility - and cultivating largely invisible commonalities, what Landauer calls anarchy's 'dark deep dream'. Perhaps this killing of the self in an ecstatic mystical experience is close to what Bataille called 'sovereignty', and which for him was constantly linked with his experimentation with different forms of small-scale, communal group collaborations, particularly in the 1930s and 40s, from *Contre Attaque*, the *Collège de Sociologie* and the *Collège Socratique*, through to the more mysterious *Acéphale*.

#### The Risk of Abstraction

We are living through a long anti-1960s. The various experiments in communal living and collective existence that defined that period seem to us either quaintly passé, laughably unrealistic or dangerously misguided. We now know better than to try and bring heaven crashing down to earth and construct concrete utopias. To that extent, despite our occasional and transient enthusiasms, we are all political realists; indeed most of us are passive nihilists and cynics. This is why we still require a belief in something like original sin. Without the conviction that the human condition is essentially flawed and dangerously rapacious, we would have no way of justifying our disappointment.

It is indeed true that those utopian political movements of the 1960s, like the Situationist International, where an echo of the Movement of the Free Spirit could be heard, led to various forms of disillusionment, disintegration and, in extreme cases, disaster. Experiments in the collective ownership of property or in communal living based on sexual freedom without the repressive institution of the family, or indeed R.D. Laing's experimental communal asylums with no distinction between the so-called mad

and the sane seem like distant whimsical cultural memories captured in dog-eared, yellowed paperbacks and grainy, poor quality film. It is a world that we struggle to understand. Perhaps such communal experiments were too pure and overfull of righteous conviction. Perhaps they were, in a word, too moralistic to ever endure. Perhaps such experiments were doomed because of what we might call a politics of abstraction, in the sense of being overly attached to an idea at the expense of a frontal denial of reality.

At their most extreme, say in the activities of the Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and the Red Brigades in the 1970s, the moral certitude of the closed and pure community becomes fatally linked to redemptive, cleansing violence. Terror becomes the means to bring about end of virtue. The death of individuals is but a speck on the vast heroic canvas of the class struggle. This culminated in a politics of violence where acts of abduction, kidnapping, hijacking and assassination were justified through an attachment to a set of ideas. As a character in Jean-Luc Godard's *Notre Musique* remarks, 'To kill a human being in order to defend an idea is not to defend an idea, it is to kill a human being'. Perhaps such groups were too attached to the idea of immediacy, the propaganda of the violent deed as the impatient attempt to storm the heavens. Perhaps such experiments lacked an understanding of politics as a constant and concrete process of mediation between a subjective ethical commitment based on a general principle, for example the equality of all, and the experience of local organization that builds fronts and alliances between disparate groups with often conflicting sets of interests. By definition, such a process of mediation is never pure.

Perhaps such utopian experiments in community only live on in the institutionally sanctioned spaces of the contemporary art world. One thinks of projects like *L'Association des Temps Libérés* (1995), or *Utopia Station* (2003) and many other examples, somewhat fossilized in a recent show at the Guggenheim in New York, *Theanyspacewhatever*. In the work of artists like Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick or curators like Hans-Ulrich Obrist, there is a deeply-felt Situationist nostalgia for ideas of collectivity, action, self-management, collaboration and indeed the idea of the group as such. In such art practice, which Nicolas Bourriaud has successfully branded as 'relational', art is the acting out of a situation in order to see if, in Obrist's words, 'something like a collective intelligence might exist'. As Gillick notes, 'Maybe it would

be better if we worked in groups of three'. Of course, the problem with such experiments is twofold: on the one hand, they are only enabled and legitimated through the cultural institutions of the art world and thus utterly enmeshed in the circuits of commodification and spectacle that they seek to subvert; and, on the other hand, the dominant mode for approaching an experience of the communal is through the strategy of reenactment. One doesn't engage in a bank heist, one reenacts Patty Hearst's adventures with the Symbionese Liberation Army in a warehouse in Brooklyn, or whatever. Situationist *détournement* is replayed as obsessively planned reenactment. Fascinating as I find such experiments and the work of the artists involved, one suspects what we might call a 'mannerist Situationism', where the old problem of recuperation does not even apply because such art is completely co-opted by the socio-economic system which provides its life-blood.

Perhaps we are witnessing something related to this in recent events in France surrounding the arrest and detention of the so-called 'Tarnac Nine' on 11th November 2008. As part of Sarkozy's reactionary politics of fear (itself based on an overwhelming fear of disorder), a number of activists who had been formerly associated with the group *Tiqqun* were arrested in rural, central France by a force of 150 anti-terrorist police, helicopters and attendant media. They were living communally in the small village of Tarnac in the Corrèze district of the Massif Central. Apparently a number of the group's members had bought a small farmhouse and ran a cooperative grocery store and were engaged in such dangerous activities as running a local film club, planting carrots and delivering food to the elderly. With surprising juridical imagination, they were charged with 'pre-terrorism', an accusation linked to acts of sabotage on France's TGV rail system. The basis for this thought-crime was a passage from *L'insurrection qui vient* from 2007, a wonderfully dystopian diagnosis of contemporary society and a compelling strategy to resist it. The final pages of *L'insurrection* advocate acts of sabotage against the transport networks of 'the social machine' and ask the question, 'How could a TGV line or an electrical network be rendered useless?'(p.101) Two of the alleged pre-terrorists, Julien Coupat and Yldune Lévy, are still in jail and others have been charged with 'a terrorist undertaking' that carries a prison sentence of 20 years. Such is the repressive and reactionary force of the state, just in case anyone had forgotten. As the authors of *L'insurrection* remind us, 'Governing has never been anything but pushing back by a thousand subterfuges the moment when the crowd will

hang you'.(p.83)

L'insurrection qui vient has powerful echoes of the Situationist International and some of the other communist heresies we have examined. The authorship of L'insurrection is attributed to La Comité Invisible and the insurrectional strategy of the group turns around the question of invisibility. It is a question of 'learning how to become imperceptible', of regaining 'the taste for anonymity' and not exposing and losing oneself in the order of visibility, which is always controlled by the police and the state. The authors of L'insurrection argue for the proliferation of zones of opacity, anonymous spaces where communes might be formed. The book ends with the slogan, 'All power to the communes' ('Tout le pouvoir aux communes'). In a nod to Blanchot, these communes are described as 'inoperative' or 'désœuvrée', as refusing the capitalist tyranny of work. In a related text simply entitled Call, they seek to establish 'a series of foci of desertion, of secession poles, of rallying points. For the runaways. For those who leave. A set of places to take shelter from the control of a civilization that is headed for the abyss'. A strategy of sabotage, blockade and what is called 'the human strike' is proposed in order to weaken still further our doomed civilization. An opposition between the city and the country is constantly reiterated, and it is clear that construction of zones of opacity is better suited to rural life than the policed space of surveillance of the modern metropolis. L'insurrection is compelling, exhilarating, and deeply lyrical text that sets off all sorts of historical echoes with movements like the Free Spirit: the emphases on secrecy, invisibility and itinerancy, on small scale communal experiments in living, on the cultivation of poverty, radical mendicancy and the refusal of work. But the double program of sabotage, on the one hand, and secession from civilization, on the other, risks remaining trapped within the politics of abstraction identified above. In this fascinatingly creative reenactment of the Situationist gesture, what is missed is a thinking of political mediation where groups like the Invisible Committee would be able to link up and become concretized in relation to multiple and conflicting sites of struggle. We need a richer political cartography than the opposition between the city and the country. Tempting as it is, sabotage combined with secession from civilization smells of the moralism we detected above.

## Conclusion – The Politics of Love

But what follows from this? Are we to conclude with John Gray that the utopian impulse in political thinking is simply the residue of a dangerous political theology that we are much better off without? Is the upshot of the critique of mystical anarchism that we should be resigned in the face of the world's violent inequality and update a belief in original sin with a reassuringly miserabilistic Darwinism? Should we reconcile ourselves to the options of political realism, authoritarianism or liberalism? Should we simply renounce the utopian impulse in our personal and political thinking?

If so, then the consequence is clear: we are stuck with the way things are, or possibly with something even worse than the way things are. To abandon the utopian impulse in thinking is to imprison ourselves within the world as it is and to give up once and for the prospect that another world is possible, however small, fleeting and compromised such a world might be. In the political circumstances that presently surround us in the West, to abandon the utopian impulse in political thinking is to resign oneself to liberal democracy which, as we showed above, is the rule of the rule, the reign of law which renders impotent anything that would break with law: the miraculous, the moment of the event, the break with the situation in the name of the common.

Let me return for a last time to mystical anarchism and to the question of self-deification. Defending the idea of becoming God might be seen as going a little far, I agree. To embrace such mysticism would be to fall prey to what Badiou calls in his book on St. Paul the obscurantist discourse of glorification. In terms of the Lacanian schema of the four discourses that he borrows (master, university, hysteric, analyst), the mystic is identified with the discourse of the hysteric and contrasted with the anti-obscurantist Christian position that Badiou identifies with the discourse of the analyst. Badiou draws a line between St Paul's declaration of the Christ-event, what he calls 'an ethical dimension of anti-obscurantism', and the mystical discourse of identity with the divine, the ravished subjectivity of someone like Porete. (p.51-52)

Yet, to acquiesce in such a conclusion would be to miss something vital about mystical anarchism, what I want to call, in closing, its politics of love. What I find most compelling in Porete is the idea of love as an act of absolute spiritual daring that

eviscerates the old self in order that something new can come into being. In Anne Carson's words, love dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty and engage with its own annihilation: to hew and hack away at oneself in order to make a space that is large enough for love to enter. What is being attempted by Porete – and perhaps it is only the attempt which matters here, not some theophanic outcome – is an act of absolute daring, not for some nihilistic end, but in order to open what we might call the immortal dimension of the subject. The only proof of immortality is the act of love, the daring that attempts to extend beyond oneself by annihilating oneself, to project onto something that exceeds one's powers of projection. To love is to give what one does not have and to receive that over which one has no power. As we saw in Landauer, the point is not to kill others, but to kill oneself in order that a transformed relation to others becomes possible, some new way of conceiving the common and being with others. Anarchism can only begin with an act of inward colonization, the act of love that demands a transformation of the self. Finally - and very simply – anarchism is not a question for the future, it is a matter of how one lives now.

Is such a thing conceivable and practicable without the moralism, purism, immediacy, and the righteously self-enclosed certainty of previous experiments? To be honest, I don't know.

APPENDIX III: A TASTE OF FAITH I (THE HELL WITHIN) BY EDIA CONNOLE  
& SCOTT WILSON (2012)

Rationale for March 25th 2012 'Food Thing' event held in conjunction with  
Simon Critchley and Clodagh Emoe's Mystical Anarchism at Block T, Dublin.

The more I enter, the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek of Thee. Thou art the Food that never satiates, for when the soul is satiated in Thine abyss it is not satiated, but ever continues to hunger and thirst for Thee. Catherine of Sienna, Dialogo Because Jesus had fed the faithful not merely as servant and waiter, preparer and multiplier of loaves and fishes, but as the very bread and wine itself, to eat was a powerful proverb. It meant to consume, to assimilate, to become God. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* In the anguish or repose or the madness of love, The heart of each devours the other's heart, As he who is Love itself showed us, When he gave us himself to eat ... loves's most intimate union Is through eating, tasting, and seeing interiorly. Hadewijch of Brabant, Letters 'Taste' from Latin *gustus*, described as the sensation of flavour perceived in the mouth and throat on contact with a substance, and as the faculty of perceiving this quality, is genealogically, if not etymologically linked to 'test,' insofar as the act of 'tasting' is also one of 'testing,' of trying or testing the flavour of something by taking a small portion into the mouth, as a sample, on the one hand, and of permitting a brief experience of something, conveying its basic character, on the other. To the extent that this dyad is one of discerning a person's liking or disliking for particular flavours and characters, taste is also genealogically linked to 'morality,' to that which we conceive as 'good' or 'bad.' A person's taste, reflects their conformity or failure to conform with generally held views concerning what is offensive or palatable, with the fact that this or that joke is deemed to be in good or bad taste. Ultimately then, when the very value of truth is called into question, 'taste' is genealogically linked to 'faith,' insofar as the genesis of the concept 'god' is revealed through a genealogy of morality; in fact, in what are commonly referred to as 'dirty' jokes this genealogy reveals itself *ex post facto* - good and bad are derived from 'pure' and 'impure' and from the outset simply referred to a persons cleanliness. In distinction, the impure, dirty, distasteful, and disgusting, from Latin *dis-* (expressing reversal) and *gustus* (taste), had a privileged relation to faith for the medieval mystics. Indeed, Catherine of Sienna



found cleanliness so incompatible with charity, she deliberately drank off a bowl of suppurative matter; the consumption of pus, the perfect corrective for her imperfect piety. And just as Angela of Foligno drank the very water with which she had washed the feet of lepers, savouring a scab of fetid flesh as if it were the Eucharist, for Marie Alacoque, the pungent smell of premodern cheese made its revolting ingestion the most burdensome way to test her faith, and prove her love for God. Cheese, it is claimed, has always provoked uncontrollable revulsion and passionate devotion, precisely because it belongs, in psychoanalytic terms, on the other side of the border - colour, concluded Johann Lotichus, in his 1643 *De casei nequitta* (On the vileness of cheese), is the only difference between cheese and excrement - and for Mystical Christendom, ingestion of such abjection of self was turned into the ultimate act of humility; from Latin *humilitas*, a noun intending 'humble' but also 'grounded' or 'low,' since it derives from *humus* - a homonym of the Levantine Arab dish - meaning of the 'earth,' or 'ground,' and connected with notions of transcendent unity with the universe or the divine, and of egolessness: of liberation, abandonment and 'annihilation' of the soul, who stands in complete 'nakedness' before God (Mazzoni, 2005, 134; 135; Critchley, 2012, 130). Central to this mysticism of self-abandonment, was food, taste, and an economy of masochism. 'Prodigious fasting' [*Inedia prodigiosa* or, *Anorexia Mirabilis*, literally meaning 'miraculous lack of appetite'], the renunciation of ordinary food in favour of the abject and disgusting, or induced vomiting - in the case of Catherine of Sienna, with a 'stalke of fynel' or 'an ofler flinge flat she put in to hir stomake,' - were used to hack and hew at the self to create a space, 'or widen the place,' as Margueritte Porete puts it, 'in which Love will want to be' (Vander Veen, 2007, 118; Critchley, 2012, 125). But such Love is not easy. The modern mystic Therese of Liseux, who lay dying, bleeding from her intestines and unable to keep even water down, was tormented by the thought of banquets, her near contemporary Gemma Galgani too, dreamed of food; she asked her director, Father Germano, in a letter: "Are you happy that I ask Jesus the grace to not let me taste, for as long as I live, any flavor in any food?" "Daddy, this grace is necessary to me," she says, and assures her spiritual father, in return for her lack of taste, "the certainty of her ability to keep food down, to not throw it all up [the object of her disgust] anymore" (Mazzoni, 2005, 162). Modern historians have sometimes thought these women's stories to contain the first documentable cases of anorexia nervosa. Certainly, it is not difficult to think of it in the life of Gemma Galgani, given the timeliness of the diagnosis. An ecstatic, the first stigmatic and Saint of the

twentieth-century, Gemma's brief life (1878 - 1903) bore witness to the coinage of the term 'anorexia nervosa,' as it did to that of 'psychoanalysis,' and of 'sweets,' incidentally; which, through the emergence of a mass consumer culture, were now industrialized commodities available to the poor (2005, 162-163). And Gemma herself was not only partial to sweets, but also to the kind of neurotic behaviour that might allow us to characterise her as mentally, as well as physically and socially, ill (2005, 168). The references to food in Gemma's writing - though mostly to say that she cannot eat, that God will not allow her to eat, or to only hold down food occasionally - testify to a certain 'return of the repressed,' in psychoanalytic terms: chocolate, wine, coffee, mints, all the food given up in fast and abstinence reappears in the details of her autobiography (2005, 165). Christina Mazzoni tells us 'she speaks of treats and speaks of them with delight, with unsuspected indulgence [in fact] - perhaps because they remind her of Jesus' own dolcezza, that sweetness that is [not only] always on her lips [but on the lips of every Christian mystic]' (2005, 168). One imagines Gemma, surrounded by the intricate confections of the late-nineteenth century, gorging and vomiting, luxuriating in sweets until sweets and body are almost synonymous. Then one thinks of her appeal to Christ to not let her taste 'any flavour in any food' anymore (' "I thank you, Jesus, for letting me taste this sweetness; but I am ready to be deprived of it forever, forever"'), such an appeal now seems to stem from a bodily pathology, dictated by self-destructive individualistic mental processes; one thinks, indeed, of anorexia or even bulimia nervosa (2005 170) . And though Gemma Galgani's relationship with food is not exemplary, it would also be misleading to reduce its spiritual complexity to an emotional disorder characterised by an obsessive desire to lose weight. As Mazzoni notes, Gemma places herself, and readers familiar with the history of spirituality can also easily place her, in a genealogical line of Christian holy fasting [or Holy Anorexia, as Rudolph Bell calls it] that in turn had pre-Christian roots in fasting as an expression and exorcism of pain, as a purification of the soul that aids contact with the divine, as a philosophical choice indicating the liberation of the soul from the body, a return to the soul's original purity, and ultimately the refusal of any fleshly bond (2005, 168). Like Mazzoni, Caroline Walker Bynum 'brackets' (to use a phenomenological turn of phrase) questions of cause - as she does modern problems and food obsessions - in her encounter with Christian mysticism. She is similarly only interested in what Christian mystics experienced, and while retaining a historian's skepticism about all evidence, she, also, as a historian, prefers to start her

study of the past with what people in the past said themselves (1987, 8). The philosopher Simon Critchley has drawn on Bynum's work concomitantly with that of Elizabeth Spearing to show, through his exposition of 'Mystical Anarchism,' how the economy of masochism encountered in Christian mysticism, while 'more characteristic of women than men,' stems not from some bodily pathology or ego-psychology but from 'the mutilation of Christ's body in the Passion [which] seems to inspire an echo among female mystics at the level of the body' (2012, 130 - 140). As Bynum has convincingly shown, through her lengthy explorations of the analogies in late medieval theology, that suggest 'woman is to man as matter is to spirit': ... woman or the feminine symbolizes the physical, lustful, material, appetitive part of human nature, whereas man symbolizes the spiritual, rational, or mental ... Ancient scientists had argued frequently that at conception, woman contributes the stuff (or physical nature) of the foetus, man the soul or form. Patristic exegetes had regularly seen woman (or Eve) as representing the appetites, man (or Adam) as representing the soul or intellect (1987, 262). While medieval male theologians used women's association with the appetites to denigrate their 'fleshly weakness,' it also seems to have been taken up, almost unwittingly, by contemporary women mystics, who redeemed the concept by further associating themselves with Christ's physical incarnate humanity; as Bynum explains, 'both men and women ... may at some almost unconscious level have felt that woman's suffering was her way of fusing with Christ because Christ's suffering flesh was "woman"' (1987, 261). Accordingly, these analogies had been presented in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, in the twelfth-century, 'who had explicitly advanced the opinion that "man signifies the divinity of the Son of God, and woman his humanity,"' who argued from an idea rooted in a fundamental implication of the virgin birth: Christ having no human father must have derived his fleshly nature directly from Mary'; in sum, then, as Brian C. Vander Veen notes, in his Doctoral thesis on THE VITAE OF BODLEIAN LIBRARY (2007), 'Whereas men expressed Christ qua God through the intellectual activity of preaching and teaching, holy women could express Christ qua man through their very physical identification with his suffering humanity... [because] the fleshly humanity whose suffering redeemed the world was female flesh' (2007, 84). Sustained fasting, subsistence on the sacrament solely or, in conjunction with a diet that demonstrated extreme abstemiousness; as in the case of Marie Alacoque - dirty laundry-water, mouldy bread, rotten fruits and excrement (she described in her autobiography the ecstasy she experienced as she filled her mouth with the faeces of a sick man), or

Catherine of Sienna, who, even with such meagre subsistence - a diet of 'olde and corrupte cheese', the juice of grapes, or the heads and tails of eels - would induce vomiting, with such violence, 'bitterness' and 'peyne', in fact, 'quykke blode' would 'come oute of hir moup'. This self emptying, that is, as Critchley notes, a stringent and demanding ethical disciplining of the self all the way to its nihilation - as in the case of Mary of Oignes, who starved herself to death until "her spine was stuck to her stomach" - is chosen in a context of self-giving where its figural value (clothes sometimes stood in for the self - as in the case of Angela of Foligno, who, in an exquisitely Franciscan gesture, stripped off all her clothes in order to follow naked, the naked and crucified Christ or, on another occasion, in order to exchange them for food for the poor, suffering and afflicted, so that she may, out of little or nothing, out of herself, like Christ once did, multiply loaves and fishes to feed the hungry) lies in the mystic's imitation of Christ to form a total sacrifice that divinizes even as it annihilates (2012, 132; 2005, 99). The graphic we have devised to over-arch this TOF project - a digitally rendered linocut of a painting by William Hogarth, of one Francis Mathew Schutz (third cousin to the Prince of Wales) in his bed, palefaced and vomiting into a piss-pot - serves to illustrate this. (As the story goes) Norwich castle Museum in England, currently holds in its collection a painting by Hogarth of Schutz in his bed, hunched over and pallid, puking into a piss-pot, as we said. Behind the figure of Schutz, there is a quote from Horace inscribed above a lyre that hangs on the wall - the lyre, incidentally, is the instrument the poet symbolically hung up when he stopped playing the field. The quote reads: Vixi poellis nuper idoneous ('Not long ago I kept it in good order for the girls'). A parody of the sickbed portrait, the painting was commissioned by Schutz's new wife, and was intended to remind Schutz why he had settled-down, by filling him with disgust for his debauched days. Evidently, Schutz' heirs didn't want to be similarly reminded, and following his death in 1779, his daughter had the piss-pot and vomit painted out. In place of his spewing, Schultz appeared to be reading a newspaper in bed, at a rather awkward angle - hunched over as though in need of his glasses. It was only in the 1990's when the painting was restored to its former state that the prohibition was revealed and followed up by critics such as Christopher Turner who, in writing a column for Cabinet that investigates the cultural significance of detritus, noted how this 'desire to substitute words for vomit, logos for disgust, was more than a simple act of Protestant censorship; it unwittingly struck at a knotty problem at the very centre of the emerging philosophy of aesthetics,' for which, the disgusting, unlike the

ugly, the evil, the sublime, or even terrible, was deemed to be unrepresentable. ‘There is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetical satisfaction, and consequently artistic beauty,’ states Kant in his Critique of Judgement (1790), ‘viz., that which excites disgust’ (1951,155). He continues, For in this singular sensation, which rests on mere imagination the object is represented as it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment while we strive against it with all our might. And the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation, and thus it is impossible that it can be regarded as beautiful (1951, 155). It is, therefore, ‘no longer a question of one of those negative values that art can represent and thereby idealize,’ as Derrida notes: ‘The absolute excluded [l’exclu absolu] does not allow itself even to be granted the status of an object of negative pleasure or of ugliness redeemed by representation. It is unrepresentable’ (1981, 21). And yet, Kant does speak of a certain representation regarding it. The key here, as Derrida suggests, is in Kant’s passage above, in which vomit as ‘the object... represented as it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment’ is linked by Kant to *jouissance*, if not pleasure; it forces pleasure, it even represents the very thing that forces us to enjoy in spite of ourselves, and through which, we find traces of that *jouissance* inscribed in the *en corps* [in and of the body, but also a homonym of *encore*, more!] to which mysticism testifies - the *en plus* (excess) of the *en corps*. It is this dimension of ecstasy, as Critchley notes after Lacan, ‘following the line of a transgressive desire into its *askesis*, that we can call love’ (2012, 140). Through our culinary curation/assemblage, we have put together a taste/test in which we have faith that something or rather some new experience may emerge that is ‘anarchic’ in the sense that it is not subject to any law - including the law of taste (what we see, essentially, as a fundamentally phallogocentric philosophy of determinatedness) – and cannot be predicted. Our methodology is formlessness. Perhaps God will be tasted as an outcome of the test, perhaps vomit, these are possibilities. Perhaps nothing. Or perhaps something else entirely about which we know nothing other than it will have been tasted as a retroactive effect of the test. This is the very path we sought at the beginning when presenting you with, in Lacan’s terms, these *objets a*. ‘Regarding one’s [culinary] partner’, Lacan nearly wrote in Seminar XX, ‘love can only actualize what, in a sort of poetic flight, ... I called courage’, a taste that is also a test of faith (144).

