chapter 3

IN wildness

julieanna preston
IN wildness tracks the transformation of an institutional office from a volume of functionalist interior surfaces to a vibrant network of spatial phenomena in the context of a performative and site-specific installation entitled LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE. A liberal application of masking tape to the room’s large glass window wreaks havoc with its literal transparency and an association with modernist tenets and ideals of democracy. Noting the room’s resemblance to a weather station and hunting blind, an eight-hour vigil was held during which I observed the emergence of wildness, an interior climatic weather pattern, conjured by feral forces transgressing the window sill. A visual and textual record was made to qualitatively measure what an interior surface like industrial sheet glass can do when its transparency, and hence, the primacy of vision allied to the "picture window" view is forsaken.

This essay invites those who did not witness this installation into an exegetical space that expands the back story of the project; it avoids trying to represent the installation but tries instead to bring a reader/visitor to a similar slow experience through thick description, metaphoric association and frequent migrations across the boundary that holds wilderness at bay and the domesticated interior safe. This story
is punctuated by a collection of found bits relative to wilderness, wildness, weather, New Zealand, interiors and glass that collectively position the creative work, and in the process, expose my trans-disciplinary tendencies and penchant to assemble conduits between material, theory, factual data, emotions and poetry, thus coalescing a feminist approach to discursive text known as a spatial writing practice. Here one will find the authority of the argument “coming and going,” and “waxing and waning,” in the same tidal tempo as the performative installation. Such a ploy is punctuated by excerpts from *The Waves*, a book by Virginia Woolf, described as “a submarine book, every atom saturated”; “as if it were the product of secluded, disembodied sensibility … [yet] in an exploratory and sensuous narrative”; testing the demarcations between individual and collective experience; following a rhythm, not a plot; inhabiting the body; and, as Virginia Woolf states, its “insistence on substantiality goes along side a sense of how objects warp, bend, deliquesce and how the senses seize a world always irrevocably altered, endlessly contingent.” As in Woolf’s text, there is no outside space for the observer in the scene of *LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE.*
The sun laid broader blades upon the house. The light touched something green in the window corner and made it a lump of emerald, a cave of pure green like stoneless fruit. It sharpened the edges of chairs and tables and stitched white table-cloths with fine gold wires ... Everything becomes softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid.
Something green and slightly sticky

It was prime real estate for a university academic office: approximately nine square metres, adjacent to the studio, private (not shared), and most of all, fitted with a large operable window. Though the radiator and blinds did not work, there was no direct sunlight (the office was located on the south side of the building), the walls were not sound-insulated, and a persistent draught transgressed the unsealed window frame, this was, on all accounts, a significant improvement from my previous office.

The height and the strength of the early spring sun asserted its power into the office by virtue of the heavily glazed apartment building façade a mere twenty metres away. Such proximity accelerated my anxiety over being watched by many of my students living behind its glass face as much as it promoted blinding glare on the smooth white surfaces of the office interior. During the day the glare was so strong it negated my ability to work in the office, a counter-productive factor to office life in general. At night, I was consistently startled by my own (distorted) reflection looming in the glass. Glee with a new office quickly turned into a spatial design problem: How to mitigate the glare, retain the natural light and provide choice as to when and to what extent I chose to view or be viewed? The obvious solution would have been to have the blinds
repaired or to install some other curtain condition. The anticipated number of calls, emails, requests and quotes for the expense and labour was impetus enough for a more inventive solution, one that I could do on my own and at little to no cost.

A roll of low tack adhesive tape lingered on my desk willingly offering itself to the cause. (Fig 1) Left over from the previous installation NEUTRAL, not so, its coiled lime green 25-millimetre-wide and 25-metres-long body expressed practical potential. Relatively inexpensive and able to be purchased in bulk locally, it offers a high holding strength, clean removal, easy application, ready conformity to curves, contours and angles and an ability to mask a very sharp edge. It seemed to me that the pragmatic virtues of this common ordinary masking tape suggested more than a solution to the problem; it offered a green and slightly sticky spatial and political potential to exploit the glass pane’s surface as a threshold between interior and exterior environments. Over the course of several days, I applied the masking tape to the window pane successively targeting those areas that appeared to generate the most glare and those areas over-exposing my work activities to the prying eyes of neighbours. At one point I had to stop to clean the oily grime off the window surface, evidence that the urban atmosphere had already infiltrated my work cell. At first the application was self-conscious of assuming any discernible pattern; this registered an efficiency quota about using as little tape
as possible to cover the area and to do so in response to the tape’s and the window’s rectangular shape. The effect of glare however evades Euclidian geometric regulation and I found myself colouring in the transparency using sharp ripping gestures to produce short and medium-length strips to build up the surface as a textile fabric. This fabric was not the same warp and weft as in weaving looms but of a tangle of matted fibres, much like seaweed coating the shoreline after a southerly storm or the comingling of debris in a landfill. The logic of overlapping segments of tape proved not only to produce a certain visual aesthetic; it provided a solution to the condensation that accumulated on the glass surface as the inside and outside temperatures gradually differed, on the inside my breath becoming warm and laboured. Tape to tape bridged over these moist spots where the glass was sweating. So while there was an overarching rhyme and reason that addressed the problem of glare, something else happened. As Woolf alludes to, as if liquid, everything became softly amorphous. I thought I recognised it as wilderness.

But what is that exactly?
Now, too, the rising sun came in at the window, touching the red-edged curtain, and began to bring out circles and lines. Now in the glowing light its whiteness settled in the plate; the blade condensed its glean.
Wilderness, the great outdoors

In 1845 Henry David Thoreau sauntered into the Massachusetts forest where he reportedly built a small dwelling with his own hands. The makeshift structure has become emblematic for its frugal construction as provisional resistance to the pervasive climate and the tempering demands of civilisation. (Fig 2) As the story goes, the remotely sited, single-room cabin fostered an interior space in which Thoreau could think and write, a space so unencumbered by the ills and noise of everyday life that a work of prosaic philosophy could emerge. Thoreau explains: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

Thoreau’s Walden, or life in the woods is an address upon socio-political consciousness specific to mid-nineteenth century American life. As an introspective diary saturated by romanticism, material economy and social commentary, it is a text that rekindles poetic reflection, self-sufficiency and resilience towards political and cultural conformity. As such, Thoreau’s poignant examination of life and thought in “The New World” pinpoints a transitional moment in western culture’s notion of wilderness.

In the Middle Ages, wilderness prevailed as a form of nature that instilled fear rather
than wonder or pleasure. As landscape architect Linda Pollack states, it was a limitless and lawless state, a physical territory as well as a mental attitude strongly aligned with the rhetoric of the sublime. Landscape historian J. B. Jackson claims that this notion of wilderness was replaced in the early eighteenth century by a view central to American history’s relation to Nature Romanticism, whereby “the belief that any one exposed to the forest for a certain length of time underwent a spiritual awakening, became aware of the Seamless Web of Being, and thereafter renounced the world.”

As the means to possess and cultivate land in the early nineteenth century increased, the concept of wilderness acquired a pastoral and picturesque definition that saw it as an aesthetic and domesticated view hemmed in by wildness; i.e. wildness with reference to un-owned, as opposed to unknown. As early as 1888, American hunting groups with a goal “to promote manly sport with the rifle” formed the tenets of contemporary wilderness experience and land policy. This form of wilderness acquired two distinct identities: one, where “wilderness” implied a state of mind, “terra incognita” (a concept created and held by individuals and groups), and two, a political construct (a specific protected area defined and designated by government decree). A prominent group of US forest ecologists draw the distinction even more decisively: “Land can be described in a space defined by two fundamental qualities: naturalness and freedom … Wilderness
is that portion of land that is most wild, and wildness is a function of both naturalness and freedom from human control. On the other hand, wilderness, as a discrete physical entity, is central to a current legal battle between ecologists wanting to protect the last stands of wilderness from human intervention, and lobbyists sponsored by tourism, recreation and resource developers such as mining and logging, who support freedom of access and enterprise. A spatial and political inversion has occurred; wild lands are now contained and surrounded by domestic lands as *inter alia* i.e. land to be kept and maintained in a state of nature. Wilderness as raw, unruly Nature has been recast as an interior.

In a far more condensed period of time, New Zealand has adopted and adapted to all of these shifts in the notion of wilderness simultaneously. Boasting a stauncher bio-centric policy than the USA, New Zealand’s management of wilderness seeks to eliminate “developments such as huts, tracks (trails), bridges, signs and mechanised access.” And yet, at the same time that New Zealand has committed over thirty percent of its total land mass to conservation, touts itself as a protector of land, birds and water, and advertises itself as “Paradise Lost” and “God’s Own”, it wrestles to balance a sustainable consciousness with a freedom associated with land rights and a desire to capture a flourishing tourist economy. As weather watcher and poet Hugh Barr writes:
New Zealanders have always considered it their birthright to go to the beach, climb or ski mountains, tramp (a New Zealand term for backpacking or biking) the forests and wildlands, hunt for introduced deer, goats and pigs, and fish the rivers for introduced salmon and trout … [It] is a fundamental component to what New Zealanders see as quality of life and part of our identity as a fit and free outdoors people.  

This brief outline of ‘wilderness’ notional transformation establishes two points: First, wilderness is a complex idea grafted with social values and political agendas not singularly defined or uniformly understood. Second, because of its relatively short history of settlement, its allegiance to Western European landscape attitudes and its alliance with American land policy legislation; …

… New Zealand sports an intensified and hybridised wilderness.
The sun fell in sharp wedges inside the room. Whatever the light touched became devoured with fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice. Suddenly tumblers revealed themselves upheld by streaks of light. Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit.
Island weather

From inside his cabin, Thoreau espouses a romantic notion of wilderness as he describes a seasonal shift:

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleetly rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon.

In contrast to this gentle pageantry, New Zealand suggests a hybrid notion of wilderness: wild spirits and mythic creatures lurk in the flora, fauna and waters, yet one soon feels an eerie absence of mammals while tramping in the forest. It is not poisonous snakes, wolves or malaria-ridden mosquitoes that will “get you” but a quick shift in
temperature, wind direction or rugged terrain that claims the lives of more than eight people each year and necessitates many rescue operations. Such differential is due to the islands’ small land area and significant variable topography. Ensuing weather does not linger or gather – it rushes in and out. In a matter of an hour, winds can shift from south to north without hiatus, temperatures can plummet or soar from 8 to 38 degrees Celsius, a fog can brew in the harbour thick enough to close airports, plants can sprout a measurable length right before your eyes, and a year’s supply of rain can storm the drains. Sometimes all of these events happen on the same day. According to regional weather map analysis, New Zealand is merely a minor blip of frictional resistance to large atmospheric forces operating at a global scale.

The magnitude of spatial forces enveloping New Zealand defies even the best forecasting methods. Weather is posited as the most variable and consistent characteristic of everyday life. As contemporary cultural theorists and landscape geographers argue as to the authenticity of New Zealand’s modern landscape, and government continues to sanction large tracts of land and ocean as reserve, weather appears to be the last bastion of wilderness (and a rogue one at that) to elude the grasp of regulation and management. Always present, New Zealand weather lingers, hovers, thrashes and deluges every scene of every day as a high-pitched, dramatic performance.
The assertion that weather is New Zealand’s most wild thing shifts wilderness from a quality or condition attributed only to land—solid ground, earthen matter—to a temporal and relational ecosystem. No less sublime than the wilderness of places such as the Congo Jungle, Antarctica or the Grand Canyon, this wilderness is not an objectified or contained place but a dynamic set of contingent forces. *LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE* took that idea one step further; it observed those forces not from within an interior (via a picture window), but in an interior (by virtue of a resurfaced picture window). As the action or state of being wild, the interior witnessed a transformative live and active state—not wilderness, but wildness.

Wildness is a quality frequently attributed to things untamed and out of (human) control. And yet Thoreau saw great redemptive value in the natural world and animal kingdom:

We need the tonic of wildness— to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast
and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its
decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces
freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely
where we never wander.
The sun struck upon the house, making the white walls glare between the dark windows. Their panes, woven thickly with green branches, held circles of impenetrable darkness. Sharp-edged wedges of light lay upon the window-sill and showed inside the room plates with blue rings, cups with curved handles, the bulge of a great bowl, the criss-cross pattern in the rig, and the formidable corners and lines of cabinets and bookcases. Behind their conglomeration hung a zone of shadow in which might be a further shape to be disencumbered of shadow or still denser depths of darkness.
Calculated observation

The architectural response to the act of watching weather is remarkably similar to Thoreau’s cabin: small and often for solitary occupation, simple and often temporary, and always sited in order to maximise monitoring of the surrounds. As data collection stations, weather observatories are designed to obtain a true and accurate measure of the vicinity’s atmosphere using universally standard procedures. (Fig 4)

The site chosen for exposing the outside instruments should be the most unrestricted area possible. An open space 300 or 400 feet square without buildings or trees and without large areas of concrete bordering the site … would afford the ideal location. To prevent rays of the sun from falling on thermometers used for air temperature measurements, a screen, or instrument shelter, is required. It should be placed near the center of a plot covered by short, level grass, with a minimum area of about 20 feet by 20 feet … The rain gage (sic) should be about 10 feet from the shelter. The plot should be in an area of level ground.

In this case, collecting quantitative data ranks more importantly than inhabitation and comfort: the inside of weather stations is typically small and unadorned. Technologically precise instruments external to the interior space detect cloud direction, cloud height,
temperature, humidity, wind direction, wind speed, pressure and precipitation. As the instruments collect numerical and statistical information through highly sophisticated devices, phenomena such as cloud types, states of visibility and definitions of hydrometeors such as dry haze, damp haze, light fog, ice fog, smoke, dew, dust, frost and drifting snow are qualitatively described and annotated by a human observer. Early twentieth century weather forecaster W. N. Shaw interpreted clouds as “heavy and swelling”, “like waves of the sea”, “in the form of upward hooks ending in a little claw”, “sprouting”, the sky is figured as a stage:

There are occasions on which the sky is serene and the stage is empty, but generally there are clouds to be seen; they move, they change – all on business, with a purpose in their direction and behaviour … The whole stage is full of action, the action which carries on the life of the world, for clouds are the precursors or survivors of the rainfall upon which the world thrives.

Perhaps divulging meteorology’s latent prosaic tendency, Shaw’s metaphor is not a casual one: his weather watching occurred from within a weather station behind a relatively large picture window. (Let’s not overlook the fact that the word “window” results from the combination of “wind” and “eye”, as Teycott suggests, an insulated interior eye separated from the windy exterior. (Fig 5) This large pane of glass served as the...
only hard-edged observational instrument to supplement qualitative interpretation. But sheet glass is not actually that hard-edged, except for perhaps when it breaks. At a macroscopic level, glass is unlike the three ordinary kinds of matter: “A gas is an anarchy of molecules going every which way; a liquid is a tighter but still disorderly society in which molecules constantly dissolve and reestablish weak bonds; a solid is a molecular army in rigid formation. But glass is ... none of the above. It is rigid like a solid, but its molecules are not arranged in repeating crystals. It is amorphous like a liquid.”25 (Fig 6) Myths perpetuating glass’ un-crystallised viscous state claim that over time it slumps into a molten puddle at the bottom of the window sill as its molten body constantly searches for equilibrium. A thin surface tension membrane is all that keeps the guts of the glass from escaping its own skin. The fact that some sheet glass becomes distorted over long periods of time, centuries, is explained empirically only by flaws in the forming process or impurities in the originating silica mix. Though the myth has not been definitively disproven, scientists insist that the transparency of float sheet glass is not at risk of flowing away or distorting a clear view.26

What else might Shaw have observed through the large glass window in the sky as wind squalls invaded London, and much of the developed world at the time grappled with huge changes in labour, industry, and environment? Having published his book
Forecasting Weather in 1911 on scientific matters of weather prediction, might Shaw have been one of the meteorologists in the audience at the London Institution where John Ruskin, an English art critic, patron of the arts, draughtsman, water colourist, prominent social thinker and philanthropist of the Victorian era, delivered his famous lectures *Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*?

Cleverly wooing his audience of meteorologists, Ruskin’s lectures draw parallels between the familiar experience of mist as an aqueous vapour that blurs distinction between cloud types – and social and political orders. In this lecture, Ruskin seems to play out a metaphor that launches criticism of “unfathomable truth” attributed to the physical sciences and his sense that a fragmented harmony was emerging between phenomena and learning through observation. Ruskin’s storm-clouds are not merely gaseous volumes traversing the sky in a manner of everyday atmosphere-forming weather; they are signs of a world that is changing (for the worse).

Even Ruskin scholars cannot agree as to whether or not these lectures were forecasts of environmental doom or socio-political criticism craftily disguised as weather reports. Some critics and historians claim the lectures dwell on England’s encroaching coal-induced pollution, a phenomenon Ruskin noted while watching the colourful effects
of an inverted cloud layer on the sunrises and sunsets. “The black Devil cloud,” “the blanched Sun, – blighted grass,” in Ruskin’s terms, presented an alarming prophecy. This reading bolstered arguments of environmentalism as a precursor to contemporary concern for sustainability. Yet Ruskin’s lectures are also read as a call to clean up, not the outside environment, i.e. the natural environment set apart from humans, but the environ within, the inside, and according to English literature academic Brian J. Day, the site of moral intuition. Day writes, “Ruskin’s distinction between natural human perception and supernatural revelation not only foregrounds human moral agency but also emphasises perception as a moral act that with discipline can become a moral practice … Seeing, knowing, and feeling the world intuitively and morally, human beings come to understand its complex ecological order without recourse to instrumental science.”

Day makes note that while Ruskin’s plea is anthropocentric, it foregrounds a sensate and liberating agency common to human and non-human beings. This is important to our tracking of wildness. For while Day refers to a form of interiority to do with faith (or the lack thereof) in either the supernatural or in the scientific method (both understood to be ultimate, external and all-seeing forces), he leaves the window open just enough …

to let the atmospheric phenomena and political agency of (wild) weather in.
The windows showed erratically spots of burning fire, the elbow of one branch, and then some tranquil space of pure clarity. The blind hung red at the window’s edge and within the room daggers of light fell on the chairs and tables making cracks across their lacquer and polish. The green pot bulged enormously, with its white window elongated in its side. Light driving darkness before it spilt itself profusely upon the corners and bosses; and yet heaped up darkness in the mounds of unmoulded shape.30
Watching from within

The weather watching station is not the only form of a constructed interior built for observation in the wilderness. Designed to blend into the landscape, hunting and bird watching structures known as blinds, stands and hides provide cover from the elements and afford key opportunities for viewing prey. A blind, used for hunting ducks, often consists of a woven mat of local plant material configured as a camouflage screen. It is frequently left open to the sky. A stand, typically used in hunting deer, is a makeshift perch for one person situated in a tree. While it does not offer much enclosure or area in which to move about, it provides exceptional overhead viewing while reducing the chance of detection by scent. Bound by minimal size, material and aesthetic considerations, each of these forms of observatory demonstrates a basic condition of an interior: to support the power of vision emanating from the inside out.

Hides, on the other hand, sequester bird watchers in a fully enclosed interior space immersed within the environment. Usually roofed and fitted with seats for patient waiting, hides are often blended into the foliage by using materials gathered from the immediate site or paint colours approximating the local palette. I sought out and tested my observation skills at a hide nestled into the grasses of a local New Zealand tidal inlet. (Fig 7)
This experience enunciated a slight shift in my understanding of the relationship between weather-watching and LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE. As a hut set apart from other dwellings, as a shelter from climate, and as a disguise that facilitates immersive observation, this hide suggested more than fortuitous viewing. It welcomed interior occupation by a commemorative plaque adorning its lintel, the accoutrements of its internal furnishings (latches, benches, ledges, ventilation flaps), and the smooth and oily surfaces demonstrating use – marred only by graffiti carved into the timber’s salt-leached patina. The hours I spent alone in that hut – sometimes with the viewing flaps up but mostly leaving them down – brought me to a mute state of interiority; my audible voice was silent, my thought voice was active but a slave to sounds and smells permeating through and from the timber cladding. I knew then what the impulse to cover my mouth, to not speak out loud, in the performative installation effected: Editing (my) noise in order to blend in (to the walls, inhabit the margin); to listen.

Before applying the tape to the window pane I had never really heard the walls belch, the electric outlet hum or the girls in the studio giggle. It was just environmental chatter, easily ignored, even dismissed, I suppose, because the large window commanded my attention to view out, like every picture window is geared to do. Would it pay to remember that
the glass surface was implicated in the picture window and the glass curtain wall façade as modernist architectural elements? Much of twentieth century architectural practice has adhered to the tenets of modernist theory canonised by the International Style exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City in 1931. As a primary principle, the concept of transparency bestowed material surfaces with the responsibility of honestly expressing the space of architecture (the interior) through direct experience; i.e. vision. Architectural volumes were to be “enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidity.”

Volumes were to be surfaced in a homogenously manner, “unbroken in effect, like a skin tightly stretched over the supporting skeleton” and yielding textile-like surface tensions stretched in all directions. These qualities underscore the power of glass: to see in and to see out, to be smooth, clear, uniform and (almost) seamless. No more hiding inside. My neighbour’s house or office is as accessible to me as I am to them. All is made intelligible through virtues of float glass.

Material bound up with aesthetic and political democratic space.
The red curtains and the white blinds blew in and out, flapping against the edge of the window, and the light which entered by flaps and breadths unequally had in it some brown tinge, and some abandonment as it blew through the blowing curtains in gusts. Here it browned a cabinet, there a reddened chair, here it made the window waver in the side of the green jar.
Letting in

There is one exquisite site-specific interior installation that helped me follow what I would admit started as an intuitive process. I came upon it by accident when considering how acts of editing – crossing out, over-writing, replacing, patching, red-lining, erasing – could be generative and affirmative rather than critical, judgemental or corrective in a disciplining sort of way. How could acts of covering up, filling in, and blocking out the view given by a glazed window enable a feminist interior practice?

In the late 1960s, Turrell transformed an abandoned hotel in the small seaside town of Ocean Park, California, into a studio and exhibition space. In an effort to master the art of light projection, he painted over and covered all windows on the outside with gypsum board walls, insulated all spaces with acoustic deadening material, and surfaced everything in a pure white plaster finish. (Fig 9) These efforts effectively severed all spatial and temporal ties between the inside and outside. Upon realising that the external environment was an untapped resource of fine grades of light experience, Turrell set out to mine the interior space of the hotel as a spatial instrument. As a site-specific orchestration of temporal values, Mendota Stoppages existed as a progression of ten night spaces and two day spaces for either side of the 1970 equinox. A musical score was
Fig 10. Turrell’s drawings of the interior light performance show a carefully plotted orchestration of windows, doors and interior elements as apertures and surfaces.


produced to annotate the performance to reflect small shifts in sunlight angles and light intensities.\textsuperscript{38} External events were filtered through apertures created in the body of the building and cast upon the walls, floors and ceilings surfaces.

*Mendota Stoppages* was significant because it was a site-specific sensing space: a space where the visual qualities within such space – its density, grain, tone, sense of surface, and where vision lost its distinction of being “out there” and “in here” – were explored.\textsuperscript{39} (Fig 10) Both of Turrell’s biographers, Noever and Adcock, credit the installation as a founding work of Turrell’s continuing re-conceptualisation of space as something that could be felt and generated by merely closing one’s eyes.\textsuperscript{40} *Mendota Stoppages* lends credence to understanding interiors as vessels for receiving, observing and appreciating exterior environment, especially those spatial factors associated with weather. It highlights the manner in which interiors harbour a threshold: weather in the form of wildness that is cajoled across the sill and transformed by the process of falling upon an interior surface.

Turrell’s signature is an infusion of light around, upon and against a surface, such that the edge of what is concrete vaporises. This poetic technique is reminiscent of the luminists, a group of late nineteenth century landscape painters known for inducing
silence and stillness into a perfect, miniature universe that triggered monumentality through scale rather than size. As a sequence of scenes couched in spatial duration, Mendota Stoppages is an introspective re-conceptualisation of interior. More phenomenal than political, more sensual than technological, it is a work more intimate and immersive than a large glass window could possibly offer.

The performative installation LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE officially began on 9 September 2009 at 8:00 am New Zealand time. I had used several days leading up to this one to apply the tape. This process was recorded by a web cam mounted to my computer and set on a desk in the middle of the room. During these initial days I worked at the desk and watched the window through the web cam. (Fig 11) For some inexplicable reason, the web cam picked up a wider spectrum of light, and therefore colours, which enabled me to capture glaring moments in a time-stamped image quickly followed by an effort to use the tape to cover up the portion of window it came through. My back was to the window, full glare on the computer screen and I faced the door to anyone that might enter. On the day of the actual event, I turned the computer around on the desk and sat facing the window which was now fully surfaced with tape. I used the web cam to watch the door, the corridor and studio behind me and selectively photographed that view throughout the day. A computer monitor and
keyboard were positioned in front of me. They served as my technological writing pad which I used to record my observations and communicate with visitors who came through the door. Remember there is tape across my mouth as well as the window; two forms of deprivation.

Even with the din of pre-dawn street lamps, the room was aglow in an indescribable green hue. Many of my observations tried in vain to describe it. It just was. The expressions on people's faces offered the best description. As the observations notes attest, my thoughts migrated from pondering on close-at-hand details to contemplation on abstract issues. I was surprised at how the green induced people in the room to be quiet. It prompted the materials of the room, the people outside of the room, the building, the city to become resoundingly more present. The office felt larger than ever even when there were people coming and going, standing at the door, leaning against the wall or sitting on the floor watching with me. What they could not see though was the way that the web cam saw more, or differently. Somehow more sensitive and yet more pixelated, it harvested this wildness into exotic fields of colour. The edges that typically define the difference between body and environment became spots of colour indiscriminately migrating across the human: non-human divide to favour of tonal vibration over cultural hegemony. The door served as a threshold through which many
chose to venture and others walked past. For some the wildness was too great to cross the threshold; I saw them looking from the safe distance of the studio, its strangeness within the Architecture School’s setting and culture too much to risk. Imagine yourself as one of the many visitors welcomed into Henry David Thoreau’s humble cabin on a cold winter evening in the wilderness of Walden, Massachusetts amongst spirited company and politically charged conversation:

I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society … One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words … If we are merely loquacious and loud talkers, then we can afford to stand very near together, cheek by jowl, and feel each other’s breath; but if we speak reservedly and thoughtfully, we want to be farther apart, that all animal heat and moisture may have a chance to evaporate. If we would enjoy the most intimate society with that in each of us which is without, or above, being spoken to, we must not only be silent, but commonly so far apart bodily that we cannot possibly hear each other’s voice in any case … As the conversation began to assume a loftier and grander tone, we gradually shoved our chairs farther apart till they touched the wall in opposite corners, and then commonly there was not room enough.
Here Thoreau not only speaks to the virtues and ideals of wilderness as a philosophical and practical inoculation to all things that he deems ail mid-nineteenth century society, he also offers a simple spatial model that links the cabin’s interior volume and dimensions with the sociability of spatial experience and liveliness, a sociability that he extended to all woodland creatures, materials, sounds and weather phenomena. A small domestic interior gives rise to public and civic space. This schema to “let things in” served as a modus operandi to the project and this essay.

As if the cabin/room was not already amply occupied by visitors, wild and not so wild, I am indebted to two other scholars for inspiring this boundary-crossing activity. In an essay that traces the affects of weather on healthy living in early eighteenth century Britain, Vladimir Jankovic calls for a form of virtual citizenship between indoors and outdoors. As a historian in atmospheric sciences, Jankovic reminds us that weather is a private and public condition, not a measurable entity.

One learns important things about the historical meanderings of meteorological interests if one sees them as related to social and somatic attitudes towards the weather as a milieu … Seeing the weather before it is assembled and appropriated as a subject of a shared discourse based on rational discussion and exchange of comparable data
— as in some way a boundary object straddling conceptualizations — is like seeing a soil before it is cultivated. What is cultivated depends on the nature of the soil.46

Jankovic’s investigation of intimate climates via medicine, health and social preconceptions around dampness, draughts, fresh and stagnant air is an inquiry on domestic atmosphere, a subject which he notes is marginally addressed in historical research. “We possess no studies on bathroom monsoons, attic drizzles or the oven Scirocco.”47 LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE took his challenge to heart. I found interior weather in one of the most unlikely places of all: a twenty-first century cellular workplace office fitted with common interior materials and finishes on the dark side of a renovated warehouse building (trying hard to be a modernist international style piece of architecture) in the middle of a densely populated and developed urban landscape.

The idea of “letting in” is one that I developed through the creative process of preparing and performing LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE informed by my reading of contemporary British social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey’s philosophy on space and place. Her works have become touchstones within what is known worldwide as the spatial turn; they are recognised as pivotal to geography’s
central role in imagining and giving action to spatial politics focused on contingent forces forming, not patterns or flat representational surfaces mistaken for space, but space in its lived capacity. For Massey, place is neither essential nor static: places have multiple identities, places are the continuous effect of dynamic processes, and places are not enclosures with definitive insides and outsides. Her empirical research offers a critique of globalisation and defends hanging on to the specificity of places but only if understood through a spatial lens which acknowledges mutual co-production across scales, continents, governments and historical events. As a strong advocate for relational theory, Massey rethinks the territorial as a philosophical and conceptual issue that gravitates towards the political rather than the economic.  

If I am honest, this project presents a conundrum for me in terms of Doreen Massey’s philosophy, a philosophy I hold dear, at least intellectually. Throughout my study I have held to the importance of three notions: 1) That interiors are not discrete objects or mere volumetric residue of an external structural envelope; 2) That the material that presumes to enclose an interior is but thickened live surface participating in the dynamic processes of life; 3) That the coincidence of 1) and 2) could imagine an interior as an active political geographic territory. “Letting in” registered a desire to bring interiors, interior design and interior design theory into a larger field of concern, not with the aim
to adopt any sort of grand narrative but, as Massey says, to engage the big stories of the moment. In this way, I am participating as a speculative force exploring how the world might shed its cloistered assumptions about interiors as domesticated environments. Dispelling wilderness as a locale free from human intervention and recognising that its inhabitant is a qualitative state of wildness, in an interior, was a finding I could not have predicted when I set out to mediate glare with low tack decorator’s masking tape. But, there is a reason that this is the third of five chapters and LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE was the second work in a suite of four projects; there are unresolved matters at hand. The fact that the performative installation used time-stamped still photography to record the event and then play it back as a segmented history, a representation of space as time, raises a question about the extent to which I have fully ingested and translated my understanding of Massey’s For Space through the creative work. This self-critique exposes the experimental aspect of this project but underscores how paramount it is for me to explore what the role of “surface” means or offers the overall study, even if necessary, to abandon it as a fashionable folly within recent architectural discourse and practice. For though I consistently work at full scale employing materials, objects and processes in concrete ways, the matter of bringing you, the visitor, to the work after its intensity has waned has only repeated the representational
surface as space that Massey’s works disavow and I dream of transcending. If anything, *LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE* revealed a way that boundaries (especially those defended by the solidity of concrete, glass and steel) are as permeable to transgression and migration, and in the end, putting into doubt surface as a hard and fast edge that divides world and things.

Chapter 4 waits.

2 Earlier versions of this essay have featured as a keynote presentation and conference paper at Atmospheres Symposium 2009, University of Manitoba, Canada and then as a full length peer-reviewed journal article “The Great Outdoors” in IDEA 2010. It has been significantly reconsidered and augmented for the sake of this chapter to reflect on the creative work LOW TACK/LOW TECH/HIGH TACT GLARE.


4 Woolf, The Waves, 60.

5 Thoreau reports that the cabin was approximately 10 x 15 feet. This has serendipitous coincidence; the office was very nearly the same size.

6 Henry David Thoreau, Walden, or Life in the Woods (New York: Thames & Hudson: 1854), 73.

12 P. H. C. B. Lucas, Preface to The State of Wilderness in New Zealand, ed. by Gordon Cessford (Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Conservation, 2001), xi.

Woolf, The Waves, 89.

Thoreau, Walden, 243-244.


Thoreau, Walden, 248.

Woolf, The Waves, 123.


Haynes, Techniques of Observing, 80-98.


There is a future essay to write solely focused on the responses and reflection about having a piece of tape over one’s mouth. I originally thought that the greatest political impact of the installation was to turn a highly sought after office space into a “green” space, an electronic yet natural garden. Instead what I found was that not being able to speak to me directly made people uncomfortable, alarmed, and put off as well as more likely to touch me, want to write to me rather than speak themselves, or just ignore me all together. This deserves more thought and exploration after this study as it presents a form of non-violent civil disobedience of a next degree. (However, some of my visitors told me that they thought to take away my spoken voice is not only anti-feminist, but very self-violent!)


37 Woolf, The Waves, 152.

38 Peter Noever, ed., James Turrell: The Other Horizon (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1999), 88.


42 Outside the door next to the poster, a notice read: “Welcome, come in! Please be aware that this event is being photographically recorded.”
All of these facets reinforce what landscape theorist Jacqueline Labbe describes as the
gendered condition of the (male) prospect view – legitimate, authoritative, abstract – in
contrast to that of the (female) detailed view – low, confined, concrete. With the aid
of Luce Irigaray’s perspective on Labbe further distinguished the detailed view with
that of the landscape, as if in the landscape rather than standing above it looking down
from a summit. (2) Amongst many interesting insights into “the sitedness of looking”
and particularly germane to the subject of IN wildness, is Labbe’s discussion on refuges,
small, enclosed, earth bound space, particularly the domain preferred by women. See
Jacqueline Labbe, Landscape, Gender and Romanticism (New York: St. Martin’s Press

Thoreau, Walden, 111-112.

Jane Bennett’s book, Thoreau’s Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild (Rowman &
Littlefield, 2002) develops an expanded view of this notion.

Vladimir Jankovic, “Intimate Climates: From Skins to Street, Soirées to Societies,”
IN Intimate Universality: Local and Global Themes of Weather and Climate, ed. by
J.R. Fleming, V. Jankovic and D.R. Coen (Sagamore, Massachusetts: Science History
Publications/USA, 2006), 3.
47 Jankovic, “Intimate Climates,” 3.