In Pursuit of Puzzlement:
How Architecture Can Pose Questions

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Scott Andrew Elliott

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Abstract

Through building site-specific architectural interventions, this PhD develops an artistic practice that draws out puzzlement and tentativeness in the relationships between body and architecture. This research proposes that posing spatial questions through the construction of puzzling environments and interventions allows an open-ended engagement with surroundings to develop over time.

Rather than questioning rhetorically through language and reflection, questions are posed through the space and materials of engagement, by extending elements from a given architectural environment that becomes inflected and destabilized. These extensions create material encounters that begin to reveal the contingent relations between body and architecture. Rather than foreclosing with conclusions, the aim is to generate a puzzlement that opens up the potential for reconstructing body-architecture interdependencies.

These aims are extended into a dissertation composed of letters written to a range of thinkers/practitioners — where questions concerning the practice are discussed and developed. Like the creative work itself, no answers to these questioning letters are expected.

This doctoral research, conducted through artistic practice, occurs within the field of architectural art installations, and is informed by specific lineages in art practice and philosophy that explore relations between body and architecture. These include the artists-architects Arakawa and Madeline Gins, Robert Kocik, Gregor Schneider, Mike Nelson, Jane Bennett and Brian Massumi. It offers a contribution to art practices that engage with architecture, through proposing and developing approaches that employ tentativeness and puzzlement as a way to dehabituate ingrained actions and behaviours. This research proposes how art can intervene into and inflect our relationship with built surroundings to not only reveal contingencies between body and architecture, but also open up potentials for rethinking and recasting this relationship.
Dear Reader,

This dissertation takes the form of a collection of letters which I have addressed to other writers or thinkers who have influenced my practice and research. As the letters are intended to be read by others, I thought it appropriate to address you, the unnamed reader, as another intractable part of the composition. I write this letter as an addition to that which was submitted for examination, to address issues raised by the examiners as well as to include you in this conversation.

This research project, In Pursuit of Puzzlement, is focused on how architecture can pose questions. The creative works that are part of this research came about through a process of posing questions through built structures, finding puzzling functional or utilitarian architectural elements and environments and using artistic, creative means of extending and fully expressing these questions.

The form of this exegesis seeks to extend this process of questioning towards puzzlement. As a result, writing in relation to the creative work could not comfortably take the form of a standard exegesis. Instead I have chosen an epistolary format where the relationships between the form and function of the exposition as well as the positon of the addressee are in question. The puzzling form aims to lead towards an investigatory engagement, to invite a taking part in the puzzling out. In this way, the form of the letters – particularly when folded and sealed in envelopes (as they were for the examiners) – pose questions to the reader, such as whether or not one
should be opening and reading the letters, and what the function of these letters might be.

This letter form offers a window onto a series of conversations between the writer and specific recipients; onto a relationship that is directed, and in this way functional as a particularity of the intimacy of a direct address. At times, this directedness and intimacy establishes a set of relations and referents particular to the writer and recipient, and as such can be somewhat closed to a reader outside of this conversation. It is only through engagement and a process of puzzling out that these relations and referents of the conversation begin to be revealed and understood. This parallels the encounter between a person and a utilitarian architectural element whose function is unknown to the person. It is only through a direct engagement that relations are built, again through a process of puzzling out.

The selection of recipients was a partial outlining of a community of thinkers that I wished to address with this research, to continue from and perhaps build on the research they had already contributed to the emerging domains of inquiry in which I seek to take part.

This epistolary form that I have chosen does not present a traditional form for a dissertation with an introduction, chapters and a conclusion, although this letter could stand – to some degree – as an introduction, and the final ‘Report’ to Madeline Gins acts as something of a conclusion. However, as with the creative works, the mode of address and the processes of discovery and experience made available by a questioning modality are foregrounded over the more generic structure of exegetical writing, which maintains a (precariously) measured distance.

While the dissertation has to be archived as a digital document, the examiners were given the collection of
letters as a physical artifact that was presented in one large manila envelope containing sealed envelopes (letters 2-8) and one open envelope (letter 1, the manifesto as an open letter). The person who received it would have to open the sealed letters, making a choice at that point in time to intervene into and take part in the project by becoming a participant through this act of opening. This digital version is identical in content to that physical artifact, but can only approximate its form.

The dissertation letters are but one part of this PhD. It includes three projects, documented on the website (www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com), as well as a final exhibition installation and presentation, documented in a video (https://vimeo.com/22551548). In the verbal presentation, another letter was included, which is not part of either the physical artifact or this digital version. This letter was addressed to my great grandfather, George Fowler, and questioned his reasons for designing and building the house that I knew as my grandmother’s house. My reasons for reading the letter in the PhD presentation were to unpack the formative childhood experiences in this house that took root and developed into my artistic sensibility and approach to architectural puzzlement. With its hidden passageways and mysterious forbidden areas, my grandmother’s house presented both doubled access and inaccessibility. This domestic environment puzzled me, as I questioned what function such architectural elements might have been designed for. This sensibility developed over the course of my practice, and has led me to consider function, and in particular utilitarian architectural elements and environments, rather than focus on domestic architecture.

My projects extend from architectural sites using the same forms and materials as the surrounding architecture, but the processes through which the selection of site, materials, and form are made, and the experience that is
designed for a visitor, are artistic processes for raising critical questions and taking part in a discourse about how we relate to surroundings. These extensions are not practical solutions, not habitations or functional facilities. Instead function is questioned, and critical attention is given to the surrounding architecture and one’s relation to it.

The emerging field of inquiry in which this research seeks to take part is a collection of practitioners who work across art and architectural forms and processes, and whose works do not seek to establish a distance of positionality that set into place prefigured relationships. Such distance can serve to stabilize the domain of meaning in which a work operates, but these practitioners instead avoid a prepackaging of the experience in order to step outside of clear disciplinary boundaries in search of novel forms of engagement, to forefront experience and sensation. This diffusion of categories for such work allows for a focus on materiality and experience, and it is a shared mode of inquiry into the experience of built surroundings that links together practitioners who might otherwise be categorized as artists or architects.

In this research project, questions are posed through non-linguistic means, and are asked instead directly through features of environment. This mode of questioning is informed by approaches practiced in art and architecture. Through letters I aim to delineate a field of inquiry across these disciplinary boundaries through a focus on modes of inquiry and shared concerns with materiality, experience and processes that practitioners in both art and architecture develop in different ways. My focus is on function and the utilitarian, a focus which often is seen to divide the fields of art and architecture. I have found a shared approach of in-situ research, and the prompting of new relationships with environments. In this inquiry, a focus on functional and utilitarian elements finds a potential in it for rethinking how we
relate to architectural surroundings. The particular instance of the encounter with functional architectural elements offers a relationship that reveals a condition that may be present in other architectural encounters. Making this condition more apparent through installed interventions might open up the possibility to recast this relationship as well as notice what is present in that encounter in the ongoing process of relating-to our surroundings.

The idea of function that is present in architecture is suggested by Jane Rendell as division between the disciplines: “Art and architecture are frequently differentiated in terms of their relationship to ‘function’. Unlike architecture, art may not be functional in traditional terms, for example in responding to social needs, giving shelter when it rains or providing a room in which to perform open-heart surgery, but we could say that art is functional in providing certain kinds of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking and social change.”¹ While the distinction between what counts as ‘art’ or ‘architecture’ is certainly arguable and slippery, it seems true that art can more readily question function or functionality through its critical reflective processes. Function, and our relationship to it, continues to play out in our daily activities and movements, in our interaction and participation with architectural surroundings. This research project seeks to question function, to critically rethink how function can be selected through action rather than adapted and conformed to. Creative practice can allow for the development of new functions, and in this way create potential change through the critical rethinking and novel development of functions, placing function at the service of the body as a kind of malleable material.

In regards to the differentiation of practices between architecture and art, Rendell writes,

Today, definitions and categorizations of art are occurring

across multiple disciplines rather than within one, requiring new terms and modes of thinking that allow us to identify the particularities and differences of the various related practices in ways that go beyond opposition. To do this I propose that we need to understand artworks as products of specific processes, of production and reception, that operate within a further expanded and interdisciplinary field, where terms are not only defined through one discipline but by many simultaneously. If artists choose to operate at sites within, at the edge of, between and across different disciplinary territories, for example art, architecture, design and landscape, then they do so by adopting methods that call into question disciplinary procedures.  

The methods that call into question disciplinary procedures that I have found across a select group of practitioners are modes of inquiry into our process of relating to surrounding environments. The beginnings of this extension of one modality through another can be seen in early exemplars evident in the production of total works of art, surrealism, land art and contemporary installations. The lineage of these methods of questioning through built environments, if we limit our attention to the last century, could be traced back to Kurt Schwitters’ “Merzbau” (1923-43) as an example of an architectural environment built to be encountered as an artwork rather than as architecture. Continuing his practice of collage into the creation of a built environment, found objects and ephemeral items were integrated into an architectural space somewhat like a cubist sculpture. This questions where the sculpture ends and the architecture begins, and poses this question through the built environment. Contemporaneous installations were made by Marcel Duchamp, in his “Twelve-hundred sacks of coal hung over a stove” in 1938 and his “Mile of String” in 1942. These questioned where the artwork is, if it is everywhere and ubiquitously present, and questioned also through repetition and replication of quotidian materials. Alan Kaprow’s ‘environments’, such as “Apple Shrine” (1960) and “Words” (1962) furthered what Schwitters
began, questioning the merging of objects and built environments, as well as continuing Duchamp’s questions posed through quotidian materials, and Kaprow added interaction and engagement to the methods of inquiry through demanding audience participation in the case of his ‘happenings’.

The capacity for built environments to evidence systems of belief or ideologies was questioned in Paul Thek’s installations (for example, “Pyramid” 1971), and the narrative representational capacity put into use by Ilya Kabakov (for example, in his “Ten Characters” installation in 1988). Such capacities were further explored in Mike Nelson’s contemporary body of work. However, certain artists have created installations that do not present narratives. Instead, they use the materials and forms of architectural environments to evoke critical reflection. Glen Seator’s installations are non-narrative and reproduce existing architectural sites, continuing the replication and repetition begun by Duchamp, and works towards a critical rethinking of our encounters with these specific environments. Continuing in this field, Gregor Schneider has created a body of work that recreates existing architectural environments (these works are discussed in the letter to Brian Massumi).

Separate from this narrative installation, the Land Art movement of the 1960s led to the development of site-specificity, with works by Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer and others. Smithson began experimenting with site-specificity, exploring potential that exists in the transformation of natural landscapes by industrialization. This led to works that were made outside of galleries at sites related to industrialization, and made with industrial machines (dumptrucks, excavators). Transformation of natural sites by way of such invasive machinery.

This concept was paralleled by the West Coast Light and Space movement in the late 1960s with projects by
Robert Irwin, investigating the potentials for sites to be participants in a way in the process of creating the works of art, with his term ‘site-determined art’. Irwin explored potential of interior environments for making site-specific works. He described how the site determines the work that will be made there, by what it offers as potential. Rather than a work adapted to fit with a given site, the site is selected first before anything else, and the work develops out of the interaction with that site. This approach is to investigate the site, to work with it, to create work out of the potentials found.

The methods employed through these practices of installation, land art and light and space art allow for a questioning of the relations between person and built environment. This questioning is used to advance the efficacy and functionality of their work. A shared interest in this relationship between person and architectural environments lead to common processes of inquiry that put questioning into use across varied practices. Across these practices, ubiquity of quotidian or common materials (in landscapes or interior architectural environments), repetition and replication, and engagement offer a collection of methods to investigate how this relationship between body and surroundings functions.

Finally, the recent work of Madeline Gins and Arakawa offers habitable architectural environments that raise critical questions about our relationship to built surroundings (discussed in the letter to Question Mark). Puzzling the senses through carefully composed assemblages of bright colours, unusual forms and materials, confusing orientations, planes and layouts, their works destabilize habitual relations to built surroundings, and pose questions across modes of sensing.

The mode of questioning, and the form of the direct address present in these letters, is informed by this preceding range of disciplines and methods of inquiry.
This research project is focused on further developing such methods, to find new ways of posing questions through built structures and environments in order to reveal potentials that exist within this relationship between body and surroundings. Foregrounding these potentials may lead to some being taken up, and to the formation of novel emergences or recastings of this relationship. The conversation that unfolds in the letters to follow will hopefully engage you to take part in the continuing process of puzzling out.

Sincerely,

Scott Andrew Elliott
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| 7. Letter to Brian Massumi  
   - on getting lost | The feeling of disorientation and the process of reorientation are questioned as to how architectural installations can create the conditions to evoke such an event. Questions are also raised about how they might hold open this experience and process long enough to develop new ideas and actions from their potentials. The works of Mike Nelson and Gregor Schneider are discussed as well as my own projects as examples of art practices that draw out such potential through installations. |
| 8. Letter to Question Mark (?)  
   - how architecture can pose questions | This letter questions whether architecture can pose questions. The writing and architecture of Madeline Gins and Arakawa is discussed towards identifying how architecture can pose questions directly to the body through architectural gestures that evoke puzzlement. Their "architectural body hypothesis" is outlined, as well as their philosophical proposal towards procedural architecture as a way to increase tentativeness through built architectural environments. Questions that could not be posed through language can be posed by architecture in a way that holds a question open long enough to offer an opportunity for rethinking our relationship to architectural surroundings. Change can come about in attempts to find an answer to the question through further inquiry, by taking up potentials present in an environment, or reconfiguring our relationship to surroundings. |
| 9. Summary of report  
   - Findings. | |
Most ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENTS don't set out to pose QUESTIONS.

They aim to keep things moving along,

to continue UNPERTURBED,

UNQUERIED,

UNINTERRUPTED,

effortlessly carrying FORWARD TOWARDS

ease of FUNCTION,

OPERATION

and INTENTION.
This research proposes an architecture that doesn't afford effortless movement but rather continually disrupts habitual movements and relations.
It is an ARCHITECTURE of and for PUZZLEMENT:

less CERTAINTY

and more TENTATIVENESS

Lack of CERTAINTY leads to new QUESTIONS.

PERPETUAL PUZZLEMENT BETRAYS PROMISE FORECLOSURE.

There is no end state or RESOLUTION here.
Rather than constructing complete ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENTS like BUILDINGS or HABITATIONS that can increase and sustain PUZZLEMENT and TENTATIVENESS, I have found that there are sufficient POTENTIALS in existing built ENVIRONMENTS that can be INFLECTED towards this same goal.
The invention of new systems of ARCHITECTURE leads to the development of NEW HABITS.

They become familiar.

Alternatively, TEMPORARY STRUCTURES come and go – appearing in existing ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENTS to DEHABITUATE architecturally ingrained ACTION and BEHAVIOUR.
The PUZZLEMENT that comes about through such ADDITIONS may invoke this

**TENTATIVENESS**

and lead to a process of inquiry.

*TOWARDS BENEFICIAL UNCERTAINTY,*

*TOWARDS a TENTATIVENESS in THOUGHT and ACTION,*

PUZZLEMENT can lead not only to inquiry but also to

**RENEWAL and REINVENTION.**
Dear Ted,

It’s been a long time since we last met, maybe 15 years has passed and there’s a good chance that you won’t remember me – you have taught so many students since then. I’m writing you about something that you noticed, and about what has resulted from that act of noticing. At the moment I’m working on completing my doctoral dissertation about my art practice and interests in my field of work. This is one of many letters that I have written to fellow thinkers and practitioners about how architecture can raise questions, in pursuit of puzzlement. These investigations have taken an epistolary form as a kind of address: addressing letters to particular people and particular ideas that they have brought about that offer insight into the questions that I am asking. Though I don’t expect a reply, my hope is that by writing this letter I can start to parse out how I came to what is now my current practice of making architectural installations.

The last art project that I made as your student, and as a bachelor degree student, was in 2001. Inspired by childhood experiences in abandoned houses as well as in my grandmother’s house, I built a free standing room. The walls were layered with wallpaper and, as well as the linoleum floor, stained to look old. After a kitchen renovation at my parents’ home, I collected the old cabinetry and included pieces of it into this small kitchen. Antique objects from my grandmother’s house were included in the space. Finally, an 8mm film
was projected onto a rear-projection screen built as a window in one wall. This film told the story of a woman living in a country house, presenting a character who might live in the house with this kitchen.

Something I tried out for the first time in this installation was inspired by being in abandoned houses with weak water-damaged floors. I had built a sub-floor for this kitchen with two-by-sixes, raising it above the installation room floor. In one part of the floor I used very thin plywood so that it would bend under the weight of someone who might step there. The feedback you gave me was that this was the most affective aspect of the work, that you momentarily believed you might
fall through the floor, and felt anxious as though there was more than a six-inch drop to the gallery floor below. This served as a revelation for me, and began to drive my work to focus more on the sensations that body-material engagements might evoke. The encounter between the body and this weak floor, the sensation of sinking just a little bit, and the difference between that one floor board and the rest of the floor, called attention to a relation that was otherwise operating in the background of experience. Before that moment, a visitor was focused on the ephemeral objects, the surface treatments, the furnishings, or the film playing on the window. The physical interaction between body and architectural environment was taking place through a sensorial negotiation with the small space, but this weak floorboard removed a degree of certainty upon which these other sensory operations were contingent. You said that you weren’t able to shake this feeling of uncertainty, and that a tentativeness in moving around the space became paramount in the experience of the room. The narrative aspects of the installation, these ephemeral objects and film projection, fell into the background, and focus was drawn to this direct physical interaction and relation to the space. You also said that you noticed the walls and ceilings were skewed so the room was not rectilinear (though the walls were standing straight, 90 degrees to the floor). I’m not sure whether you noticed this before or after the incident with the floor, but I suspect that it came afterwards, as this skewing was subtle.

What this incident illustrated for me was that there was a potential in that direct relationship between body and architecture, and that this potential was present in elements as simple as basic things like floorboards. The potential I found was to offer a situation that evoked a degree of uncertainty or tentativeness, to raise doubt about the architectural environment and
perhaps to question one’s relation to that architectural environment or element. This potential exists in various, if not all, encounters with our surroundings. There is always an aspect of trust, of giving the benefit of the doubt, to the certainty of what surrounds us. Part of that is pragmatic, necessary for continuing forward in our intentional manner, directed towards a task that demands most of our attention. But more significantly, in the tentative relationship that such an encounter engenders, there exists a window into our process of relating-to our surroundings. Opening this up through such an experience affords a bit of space for looking at and reflecting on this process.

When I made the decision to install a thinner section of plywood as a floorboard on top of the subfloor, it was a conscious decision with the intent to effect this uncertainty. But I had doubts that it would have any effect, that it would be too subtle or minimal a gesture to evoke any emotive response. No one else who visited that room paid any attention to this weak floorboard, perhaps assuming it was a mistake. All other comments from my classmates were about the film and objects placed in the kitchen, or about the lack of cladding on the exterior of the room which made it look unfinished. Had it not been for your comment, I don’t believe that I would now be making the work that I do. Your act of noticing this element, and questioning me whether it was intentional, showed me that such gestures can make significant differences and do hold a potential for manipulation and expression. Furthermore, it made me start paying more attention to my own relationship to architectural surroundings, and placing greater import on such encounters with architectural elements that evoked similar tentativeness.
It took some time until I focused my practice specifically on this kind of relation between body and architecture, on the interactions that take place in this relationship. In the works that I made after “Kitchen” in 2001, such as “Crawlspace” (2005), “Room 511: Archives” (2007), and “The Space Within” (2010) (if you're interested, more documentation can be found at www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com) I built structures that presented domestic spaces, including ephemeral household objects.

Figure T.3: "Crawlspace" (2005)

Figure T.4: "Room 511: Archives" (2007)
My intention when I began making installations was to recreate spaces that would tell a story. These projects included objects that suggested a kind of narrative, or suggested characters or people generally who might have used the space, but in each case, this narrative aspect was given little attention. Although the idea to use such narrative aspects were considered from the outset, in practice nearly all of my efforts went into creating spatial relations through built environments. The ephemeral objects became superfluous to these relations, and were an afterthought rather than primary to the meaning of the works. My change in focus towards building things that are not representational or evocative of a narrative have led me to an investigation of the relations between body and surroundings, and the role that additions to architectural spaces can make to these relations. This perhaps also reflects my art historical influences at the time, such as Ilya Kabakov and the collaborative works of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy. The change in my practice also led to a change in my interests in other art practices, towards those less focused on narrative and more on the relations between body and architecture.
What began with the weak floorboard in "Kitchen" continued through these projects in other forms and in new iterations. From forcing particular movements and body positions in response to low ceilings and variable angular surfaces to demanding interaction and exploration through hidden passageways or doors that lock behind the visitor, the works I made began to focus more and more on the interactions and process of relating-to architectural surroundings. Walls, floors, ventilation ducts, laboratory equipment, doors and corridors all came to my attention as full of this potential for investigation and expression towards looking into this relationship we have to our architectural surroundings. As the narrative aspect diminished, this other aspect came into prominence. Reflecting on my practice, and noticing this change of focus, led to some questions being raised. At the beginning of my doctoral studies, my research question was: what architectural elements can create an awareness of our embeddedness in an environment? With further examination through building projects and reflection on my practice, a focus on utilitarian architectural elements came about. New questions were raised, such as how do utilitarian architectural elements or designs operate on and change me? Or, if I am within functional architecture, am I a functional body? Rather than finding answers to these questions, what I have found is that it is possible to raise these kinds of questions through the production of an artwork - where the question is posed by, say, a coordinated array of elements in an architectural installation rather than in words.

My recent projects aim to raise questions through intervening into existing architectural environments, adding gestures that undermine the certainty of our relation to the surroundings, similar to the example of the weak floorboard. Such gestures instil a sense of
tentativeness, first in that direct encounter with the particular material or element, but also permeating the environment and the relationship between body and built surroundings. Interactions and perceptions that are predicated upon a base of direct contact with an environment, on habits of movement and relating-to physical surroundings, are questioned, but also questions are raised about what is our relationship to this architectural environment, perhaps extending to what is our relationship to architectural surroundings more generally. Extending from architectural environments, and creating situations in which this tentativeness can come about, has the potential to raise such questions. My hope is that, by raising these questions, this relation that is at the same time individual and ubiquitous in everyday action and behaviour might be reconsidered, and potentially recast.

I hope that you are well, and that we might meet again someday. I plan to make a project in Canada again soon, I will be sure to invite you to visit it.

Yours,

Scott
Dear Robert,

Recently I’ve been thinking about the idea of function in the relationship between the body and architecture. This thinking has come about from making some projects which have made me question what might the role of function be within this body-architecture relation. And as you’ve written about function in "Overcoming Fitness,"¹ I thought maybe you could help me address some of the questions that are on my mind. During our residency at the watermill center in 2007 with Daria, Alan, Riikka, Christina and Elina, I remember that you made a model of what you would later name your “Stress Response Building”. In your text about this project, you wrote about how in taking a particular design approach to architecture, built surroundings could function as transformative devices, or at least operate towards transformation of the body. Back then, we made some rammed-earth bricks out of different materials, testing

out what might be possible to use as building materials for architectural structures, but also questioning what the material relationship between the structural components and experience of the materials might be. Years later, I have returned to these ideas in my own practice, so I thought I should write to you about how my ideas have developed from where we started so many years ago. In November 2014 I built an orgone accumulator, following Wilhelm Reich’s plans (pictures of my accumulator, and other constructions, are on the website www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com). It was to stand as an example of an attempt to change a body through a constructed body-surrounds, part of a course that I was teaching with Pia Ednie-Brown and Jondi Keane in Tallinn. I had my doubts about building it, whether it was frivolous or whether something might come out of it. If you’re not familiar with the idea, Reich believed that by sitting in this box, a person would ameliorate their health (physically and psychologically) through the

Figure R.2: Microscopic images of the materials of Wilhelm Reich’s "Orgone Accumulator"
accumulation of positive orgone energy that he believed was a ubiquitous life-force in the universe.

The device is made up of an outer layer of ‘upsom board’, something like MDF today, and then interior layers of alternating steel wool and fiberglass, finishing with an inner layer of zinc treated sheet metal (see microscope images). His idea was that the steel wool would attract the energy and the fiberglass would insulate it. How it would pass through the layers of insulation into the inner chamber I don’t know, but that was the theory. It seems quite a ridiculous claim he made, but building it was curious, as it made me wonder what might be the potentials of these materials. The particular design, to create layers of materials that would be left invisible within the walls of the accumulator, showed a degree of care and intention that made me rethink the possibility of this device having any effect on the person within it. Without knowing the interior composition of these walls, would a person sitting inside feel something? Would there be less echo, more sound dampening? Or more static electricity from all of the steel wool and sheet metal? Would it be cold or warm? Furthermore, what does it feel like to sit in a dark box made of metal? Certainly there is some response that comes about through the claustrophobic dimensions and shiny-smooth-coldness of the metal.

We asked students to sit in the box for as long as they wished, and to time their duration. Afterwards, we discussed their experience inside the box, and across the group the responses were pretty similar. Many said that they felt isolated, wrapped up, warm, that sounds from outside were muffled, and all three believed that they were inside the box for a much shorter duration than they actually were (ratios of 5min:10min, 6min:20min,
Nobody seemed to believe that the accumulator functions in the way that Reich believed it to. Perhaps it functions instead as a time machine? Time passes faster outside the box than inside, so if you would stay inside for a year before getting out, two years would have passed? The crucial test would of course be to see if people who sat inside the accumulator for very long periods of time would live longer, meaning that it truly is a time machine. But the payoff is only that you get back in extra time the same time that you put in—not such a great time machine then. Maybe it could be used in waiting rooms to make people feel like their waiting time is shortened? I have heard similar responses from users of sensory deprivation tanks, that time passes at a different rate inside, that it is sped up, so I don’t believe that this effect came from the materials in this particular combination.

Despite the concurrence among our group on the durational experience this construction brought about, the effect or change this device was designed to create was to compensate for an element found to be lacking in the human organism. Reich’s identification of what is lacking in the organism, and the creation of a device to compensate or replace what is lacking, derives from his research into the function of the human organism, and furthermore into the function of any living organism. He came to believe that all life operated in a cycle of “biological pulsation”. This came about through two opposing movements, one of contraction and one of expansion, which themselves came about, for contraction, through a combination of anxiety and sympathetic innervation, and for expansion, the combination of pleasure and parasympathetic innervation.² This was the basis for a rhythm of life, a pulsation that operated across organisms.³ What is particularly interesting here is his extension of

2. The human autonomic nervous system is divided into two parts, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The sympathetic nervous system accelerates heart rate, raises blood pressure and also constricts blood vessels, whereas the parasympathetic nervous system slows heart rate, relaxes the sphincter muscles and increases glandular and intestinal activity.

psychological experiences, anxiety and pleasure, in combination with parts of the autonomous nervous system (parasympathetic and sympathetic systems) towards a specifically mechanical result. Reich writes:

what we feel as pleasure is an expansion of our organism. In pleasure corresponding to vagotonic expansion, the autonomic nerves actually stretch out toward the world. In anxiety, on the other hand, we feel a crawling back into the self: a shrinking, a hiding, a constriction ("anguistiae," "Angst"). In these sensations, we are experiencing the real process of contraction of the autonomic nervous system.4

The expansion or contraction offers a clear mechanical function of these elements of human interactions with their environments through the affective elements of pleasure and anxiety. This presents a simplified causal system to explain an ultimately complex system of endless relations that is not necessarily causal. This assumed causality, and in particular the presentation of the organism as mechanistic, affords the potential for further causality and mechanism in regards to the organism’s relations to its surroundings. This is where the orgone accumulator enters the picture, a functional, mechanistic contraption that operates to cause direct change in the organism: “the orgone accumulator charges living tissue and brings about an expansion of the plasmatic system (vagotonia).”5

A further example of Reich’s functionalistic theory is represented by his symbol of orgonotic functionalism. In regards to this system, he describes how his orgone therapy is able to treat the entire human organism, as composed of psyche and soma, through addressing this pulsation of expansion and contraction. This perspective is one that attempts to avoid the medical separation of psychology and physiology. Explaining this graphic, he writes,

Every prolonged energy stasis in the biological plasma system


5. Reich, Selected Writings, p237.
(autonomic system, a) inevitably manifests itself in somatic as well as psychic symptoms (b1 and b2). Psychotherapy [sic] is directed at the psychic symptoms, chemical-physical therapy at the somatic symptoms. Orgone therapy proceeds from the fact that soma and psyche are both rooted bio-energetically in the pulsating plasma system (blood and autonomic system). Thus orgone therapy influences not the psychophysical function itself but rather the common root of psychic and somatic functions.6

This focus on the function of an organism, and the mechanistic description of this organism, reflects some aspects of the philosophy of medicine. Furthermore, this idea that the body within the accumulator becomes filled with positive orgone energy reflects some of the purification rituals of various cultures, including the culture of medicine. Firstly, the sauna comes to mind, as in Scandinavian and Baltic countries there is a cultural belief that it is a purifying process. But going back to medicine, this image of an autoclave (below, this model constructed with perforated steel walls to allow steam to pass through) is not so different in appearance, and possibly in function, to Reich’s orgone accumulator. This mimicking of the process and procedure of medicine, this use of the techniques of medicine such as measurement,

diagnosis and treatment, make me think of your text "Overcoming Fitness." In that text, you propose a variety of techniques, procedures or abilities that would provide what is lacking, or in your words, what is 'omitted'. These various examples create the possibility for a transformation into an organism that functions differently. Current impossibilities are made possible, or are realised, through these procedures. Following Reich's orgone accumulator system, an organism could accumulate what is needed for proper functioning, but also create behaviours for which there are not yet functions, realising potential functionality. One of the techniques or procedures that you propose is the "Bureau of Missing Behaviors", which would assist with coming up with novel and potentially beneficial behaviors. In relation to Reich's therapeutic device, this 'Bureau' would ameliorate the health of an organism through providing what is missing:

**BUREAU OF MISSING BEHAVIORS**

**DEFINITION** Just as certain building types remain missing because their functions are yet unknown, certain functions are unknown because their behaviors are still untried. Which way of acting will bring about the unbelievable benefit? All the disciplines of the fictitiousness of theater used to attain real being.7

This idea of 'functions [that] are yet unknown' begins to turn function on its head. Reich's process of investigation was a pseudo-scientific determination of how an organism functioned, thus from the outset the functions already existed, and he developed a method of treating the body to allow it to function properly. Your proposal instead seeks to develop functions that might be beneficial to the organism by using fiction as a creative process and turning the system around by creating behaviours before determining what their function might be. By doing this, I think that you are raising the question of how an organism could potentially function, but also what relationship we have to this

idea of function within the body or human organism. Rather than offering solutions to improper functioning, you have proposed more functions.

Thinking about what might be developed through such a process as a kind of progression or evolution, this brings to mind the concept of “exaptation” as described by Gould and Vrba in regards to Darwin’s theory of adaptation. “Exaptation” denotes changes in an organism that can be beneficial towards its survival, but that come about accidentally, meaning not adapted in response to an environmental condition (as a 'nonaptation') or that have come about through adaptation for another use: “We suggest that such characters evolved for other usages (or for no function at all), and later ‘coopted’ for their current role, be called exaptations”.8 These features that promotes fitness offer an organism potentials for the development of beneficial abilities in a way that is not dependent on the particularly slow process of natural selection. The selection can be made by the organism by directly taking up what comes into being by chance. They write, “the enormous pool of nonaptations must be the wellspring and reservoir of most evolutionary flexibility. We need to recognize the central role of ‘cooptability for fitness’ as the primary evolutionary significance of ubiquitous nonaptation in organisms. In this sense, and at its level of the phenotype, this nonaptive pool is an analog of mutation – a source of raw material for further selection.”9 In this way, new functions can be co-opted towards beneficial result, making the idea of correct functioning dependent upon what functions are taken up.

Returning to your call for testing out untried behaviours, as a proposal for the form that this 'Bureau' might have, imagine that this box Reich designed would operate as the 'Bureau of Missing Behaviors'. This would shift the focus from Reich’s compensatory support device (the


orgone accumulator) to a creative potentialiser (the 'Bureau of Missing Behaviors'). Could it be a place where individuals could come up with new behaviours whose functions are yet unknown? On a meta-level, would the overall function of the orgone accumulator remain the same, namely, to address what is missing, or to fill an organism with a vital life energy? Could we rethink this orgone accumulator through this lens of function in order to see critically what role function plays within the organism and its relations to what surrounds it?

Six months after building the orgone accumulator, I built my own response in the form of a small laboratory. Influenced by a survey I did of laboratory workers’ experiences of their lab, I built a small room just large enough to sit inside, lined with zinc treated sheet metal, as in Reich’s orgone accumulator design. In the ceiling there was a ventilation hood, and air was drawn in through the floor via a duct with a HEPA filter, operating as a kind of biosafety cabinet big enough for a person to get inside. This continued the idea of purification and cleansing, though more about the environment than the user. Inside this small room was a laboratory notebook where people could devise experiments to conduct on the relationship between body and environment. In a way this reflects your 'Bureau of Missing Behaviours,' as people could come up with actions that could potentially develop into new behaviours, or new ways of being, for which we do not yet know a function.

The survey that led to me building my own laboratory was conducted at the University of Helsinki bioscience labs. The ideas and questions raised by Reich’s obsession with measurement, scientific processes, and scientific quantifiable data to support his claims, led me to these labs to see what effect the laboratory environment
had on the people working there. My survey attempted to determine how much attention the workers gave to their environment, questioning how they remembered the space they work in as well as general impressions of their environment. The responses were pretty boring, I didn’t get anything out of the survey process apart from learning that it was not going to tell me anything new about how people relate to their environment, at least not with my lack of skills at making questionnaires. In the end, the process (ethics approval, serious discussions with people in the labs, their earnest filling out of the questionnaire) and its ineffectual outcome became absurd, and seemed comedic in its overburdened pathos. Asking questions through building a small environment was much more productive than any questionnaire I could assemble.

My own mini-laboratory, or my own accumulator, began with a comedic notion; I wanted to build a laboratory, but not knowing what I could test in such a lab, I built a lab to test what I could build a lab to test for. This might be a dilatatio ad absurdum, if I can coin such a term. Opposite to a reduction, it offers an expansion or extension to the point of absurdity. To return to your text, and the idea of compensating for what is omitted, you wrote:

Fire must be fought with something hotter than fire. These counter agencies proposed [...] undercut omisssive society with the same commercial, material and organizational tools and tactics with which the omissions are typically committed. The weapon ‘hotter than fire’ is of course comedy. These are to be buildings put in place with a great deal of levi ty (defiance of the forces). I agree that through using the same tools and tactics as what you are combatting can offer a great potential to undercut it, and a key part of this is comedy. I wonder though if it is specifically satire? The satirical critique is presented with the same tactics or form as what it is
criticizing, and as a result it is able to illustrate the fallacies present not only in the ideas it is criticizing, but also those present in that shared form. In this particular case, Reich’s insistence on the measurement of energies goes to the point of absurdity. For example, in seeking out a measure of the Libido, he connected an oscillograph to a copulating couple in order to get a reading of their electrical charge during their state of sexual arousal. Pure scientific comedy! Unfortunately for him he was deadly serious, and as a result no one took him seriously. Perhaps if he had had a sense of humour about it all, things would have fared better for him?

Arthur Koestler’s text The Act of Creation offers some insights into the way in which satire operates to highlight absurdities. He writes:

The comic effect of the satire is derived from the simultaneous presence, in the reader’s mind, of the social reality with which he is familiar, and of its reflection in the distorting mirror of the satirist. It focuses attention on abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we were no longer aware; it makes us suddenly discover the absurdity of the familiar and the familiarity of the absurd.12

It is this revelation of familiar absurdities that begins to raise doubts about what we encounter as familiar in our environments, and perhaps to raise a critical voice against them. This might create enough space for the development of new forms or relations, or new functions, as you put it.
In more recent works that I have made, a sense of absurdity is always present, though subtle. It is this subtlety that I am trying to develop. What I have found is that the comedic gesture, the absurdity, must be plausible. In fact, that’s what makes it funny. There is something absurd and unusual in being confronted with something quite out of the ordinary, as a great contrast, but to be truly funny, it has to be plausible yet still absurd. The degree of plausibility is directly linked to funniness, though I won’t go as far as Reich and state that it can be measured. In his book The Logic of the Absurd, Jerry Palmer writes about why we are able to laugh at things that would otherwise cause reactions such as shock, horror, or sympathy, such as the violence present in cartoons such as Tom and Jerry.

We know that what we see on the screen is funny in so far as it is simultaneously plausible and implausible, but more implausible than it is plausible, absurd, in short; it is precisely because it is absurd, more implausible than plausible, that we ‘don’t take it seriously’, that we have the emotional certainty that all will be well immediately after.

It is at this point that I want to enter into that relationship between plausibility and implausibility, specifically to make people take things seriously at the same time as they find it (seriously) funny. If the implausible object is just as plausible as what it is being compared to, or so close that the margin between the two is nearly indistinguishable, then the chance that it can

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13. In relation to the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, which is particularly important in contemporary understanding of what ‘absurd’ might mean, I find some commonalities in the origins of the term as a ‘disharmony’, as described by Esslin: “‘Absurd’ originally means ‘out of harmony’, in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: ‘out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical’” (Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. London: Penguin Books, 1987, p23). The ideas of the senselessness and uselessness of human actions has some resonance with my own use of absurdity in my projects, but I feel also that the Theatre of the Absurd’s continuation of existentialist philosophy and the death of God (or perceived insufficiency of religion to give life meaning) begins to differ from my own interest in examining particular relationships and the logic present within them, rather than stating that all things, events, relations, are illogical.
be taken seriously is much greater. At the same time, the balance could be pushed the other way, allowing one to see its implausibility. In some of my works, I have tried to balance on this line between plausible and implausible with the addition of architectural elements into an environment that are similar to elements already present and part of the surrounding architecture. They are extensions, continuations, furtherances of that original architecture. In extending or furthering them to the point of absurdity, I have tried to create a very close balance between their plausibility and implausibility so that they might be ‘taken seriously’, or seen as part of the original structure. Yet at the same time they are implausible. The fact that they are both creates a tension that permeates the entirety of the architectural environment. Elements that I have not extended or adapted might be seen as implausible, as absurd. A puzzlement about which is which might result from this tension. The absurdity that is present within these original structures is drawn out. These extensions, I would argue, are not caricatures, as they purport to offer a confrontation that is potentially plausible. Koestler’s description of the comedic aspect of the caricature further draws out this distinction, as he writes,

Thus the malicious pleasure derived from a good caricature originates in the confrontation of a likeness, distorted according to the artist’s rules of the game, with reality or our image thereof. But it is a rather harmless form of malice because we know that the caricaturist’s monster with the cucumber nose or enormous belly is a biological impossibility, that it is not real. Illustrations of elephantiasis and pathological obesity are not comic because these distortions of the human shape are known to be real, and therefore arouse pity. The knowledge that the deformities of the caricature are merely pretense acquits us of all charitable obligations and allows us to laugh at the victim’s expense.15

15. Koestler, Act of Creation, p71
Not knowing whether the forms that one encounters in a work such as Adaptations (also on website, www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com) are original to the architecture or have been added as extensions should avoid this comedic caricatureization of architecture. As a result, the comedic gesture is an uncertain one, raising questions rather than affording an outburst of laughter.

This line between plausibility and implausibility that is present in comedic satire is also present in the activity of play. In Brian Massumi’s What Animals Teach Us About Politics, he describes the stylistic gesture that marks the difference between a gesture that stands for an analogue function, and refers to the example of wolf cubs playfighting. This standing-for, or this stylistic difference which he describes as the “-esqueness of the combatesque,” is visible in the way that a wolf cub might nip playfully rather than bite aggressively. He writes,

A gesture plays a ludic function to the exact degree to which it does not fulfil its analogue function, which the ludic gesture places in suspense in the interests of its own standing-for it. If the expressive value of the standing-for is not pronounced enough, if the difference corresponding to the act’s -esqueness is too minimal, if the gap between the arena of play and its analogue arena is opened too slight a crack, if in a word the aesthetic yield is negligible, then the play activity can too easily turn into its analogue.16

This ludic gesture that Massumi describes is thus capable of either standing-for an act, or then if it is not stylistically different enough from what it stands-for, it can fulfil its analogue function. In this way, such a ludic gesture is constantly oscillating between these two. If there is too great a stylistic difference, if the gesture’s expressive value is too pronounced, I would argue that it falls into the category of parody, and as a result might not, in the case of these wolf cubs, inspire the gesture’s recipient to respond in kind with another.

16. Brian Massumi, What Animals Teach Us About Politics, Duke University Press 2014, p11. The term “aesthetic yield” refers to Raymond Ruyer’s definition, which Massumi explains as “the qualitative excess of an act lived purely for its own sake, as a value in itself, over and against any function the act might also fulfill.”
playful gesture. It may, in this case, come across as a statement rather than a question or invitation. In regards to works of art intervention, this playful act raises the question of how similar to the surroundings the intervention should be.

In my recent works, I have attempted to construct them so that a viewer is not quite sure about whether the things they encounter were added as interventions or were original to that environment. In this way, the experience of the work of art is constantly moving back and forth from one side of that line to the other, as one may see some interventions as original, and other original elements as interventions. This uncertainty about which is which begins to build a particular kind of tension that permeates the environment, or perhaps permeates the relationship between a person and their surroundings. This relationship takes on this uncertainty, and questions are raised about forms, materials, and actions that had previously gone unquestioned.

Coming back to your text, you put it nicely: “I am saying that, directly underfoot, there are unidentified functions so ludicrous and suitable that they, by way of their extreme accommodation, are amply disequilibrizing (without knocking us off our feet), more than creative and heritable to boot. That’s comedy! A breeze.” 17 The idea of being disequilibrating I hope will be productive towards further questioning of the functions we are familiar with, and perhaps also towards the accommodation of new functions, as you suggest. Though perhaps it is here that, upon returning to Reich’s accumulator, I would draw a clear distinction: Reich’s obsession with medicine and treatment led him to a clear cause-effect system, manifested in a device that required little to no effort from the patient. Orgone would accumulate into a passive

body, ameliorating its deficiencies mechanistically (through the agency of the accumulator’s combined materials). For both the ‘Bureau of Material Behaviors’ and my own projects, any amelioration comes about through the actions of the patients, participants, or visitors. These architectures perform as instigators for the process, but do not attempt to complete it in the same way that Reich’s accumulator claims to.

This instigation of a process rather than mechanistic amelioration further relates to the idea of humour. Palmer explains how such an instigation towards a process that might reconsider the relations between oneself and one’s architectural environment is an instigation towards a playful or humorous state of mind:

Psychological theories of humour have tended to assume a homeostatic model of the mind, a model in which the normal state of the mind is psychic equilibrium rather than its opposite; in this context humour is seen as a process of paradox creation and resolution, where the paradox creates disequilibrium and its resolution restores equilibrium. The theory of reversals is based on the general hypothesis that there are certain mental states in which disequilibrium is the norm rather than its opposite; these states are non-goal-oriented (para-telic) rather than telic – states of mind such as playfulness and humour. Under these circumstances forms of disequilibrium which would be experienced as unpleasant in a telic state are experienced as pleasant instead.18

Such a state may be this state of disequilibrium that you also write about, in which a process of questioning as well as of proposing new functions or behaviours is possible. Perhaps the 'Bureau of Missing Behaviours', or perhaps the projects that I have described in this letter, are hoping to instigate such a state of mind as Palmer describes?

Returning to the orgone accumulator, Reich’s strategy was to define how a human organism functions, and to surround it with a functional device to improve on that organism's functionality, its ability to function well. Through reading about your 'Bureau of Missing Behaviours', and through developing my own projects, I have come to believe that a more useful strategy may be to raise questions about relations we believe to be functional rather than to seek out to define their systematic operations. It has become clear to me that extending such defined functions with more functionality leads to a kind of absurdity that is often humorous. Rather than being a productive or useful functional extension, the use value exists in this recognition of absurdity and the change in relations that it can bring about. This is productive or useful towards things I don’t yet know, but perhaps it is an 'exaptation', as it is a potential productivity that can be applied through questioning and rethinking, for finding new relations and new behaviours. As Palmer put it, it is 'non-goal-oriented'. Rather than offering a treatment, it could instead instigate the discovery of new symptoms.

Maybe you have some new thoughts about this as well? Greetings to Daria, I hope all is going well with your Commons Choir and I look forward to seeing a performance when I next visit New York.

Functionally yours,

Scott
Dear Peter,

I wanted to write to you to discuss a dilemma that I have been having with my art practice. On my first visit to Liverpool in 2004, when I was working at Jump Ship Rat and had the opportunity to help you with your Futurist project, something changed for me. There was a particular moment when the change occurred, namely when you smashed the Liverpool Biennial’s orange plastic cube signs. These cubes had been glued to the façade of the Futurist cinema you had turned into a work of environmental art. I remember that you were very upset about these orange cubes, as the biennial staff hadn’t asked you if you would mind having them on the building or even informed you that they would be doing it regardless of your opinion. But at the time I was a bit confused about the extent of your anger. I thought, of course the festival organizers want to market their art productions, to get people to come see it and to grab the attention of passers-by. Furthermore, I thought that the artwork would gain a degree of significance by being marked as part of the official Liverpool Biennial program. Despite my reservations, I helped find you a sledgehammer and chair to stand on so that you could break them off from the building’s façade, and I watched as you smashed them, quite gleefully I remember, into tiny pieces on the pavement in front of the cinema. When I helped clean up the pieces, I secretly saved one small piece of that orange box; at the time I wasn’t quite sure why, but it has been important for me to hang on to it.

Figures P.1 & P.2: Fragment from 2004 Liverpool Biennial cube, and video stills from Peter McCaughey’s destruction of the cube attached to his Futurist project.
This orange piece of broken plastic has come to represent a location for me, but not Liverpool nor the Futurist cinema. Rather, this location is the space in which I attempt to make my own artworks. This space is the problem that I am now trying to sort out, the dilemma I mentioned. In my current practice, I create additions to or extensions from existing works of architecture. In this way, they are not situated within a gallery or museum. This location of the projects within non-art environments is particularly important to the meaning that they convey. These extensions or additions that I make are, however, different from what they extend from, and it is this difference that I am now trying to define, hopefully with your help. Through extending out from these architectural structures, I seek to make the apparent difference between my addition and the original structure as small as possible, meaning that ideally a person would not be able to say what was original and what was added. This desire of mine for similarity brings me back to your Futurist project, and to something that you wrote about it. You wrote that your project “was delivered in public, unannounced, unnamed and with the hope of giving the viewer a chance, just a chance, to make up their own minds about what they are seeing. Maybe even to be a little confused, feel a bit of uncertainty but also to be intrigued – like wanting to get on with a busy day but not quite able to let it go”.2 It was this situation that effected meaning in the project. Passers-by could encounter this project while on the way to work, and include the experience as somehow part of their daily activities or routines. It would interrupt their experience of the world, if they noticed it, by interjecting visions of a forgotten space, perhaps evoking the recall of memories of going to that long closed cinema in one’s youth, or at the least offer a moment of pause and inspire curiosity. As you say, “I have always fantasized that it’s the nameless things that lodge in our subconscious and slowly percolate out,

to haunt us into a raised consciousness through some sort of lingering psychic osmosis. We don’t realize we have participated, gotten interactive, collaborated in the work”. It was this situation then, of presenting your work as nameless and unannounced in public, which demanded that you destroy the orange box. In reference to the action taken by the biennial staff, you wrote, “I was incredibly pissed off that the Biennial organizers, with no consultation, mounted two of their orange Biennial cube things on the Futurist. I see that as tantamount to sticking a post-it on a painting, declaring ‘Art Here’.”

For me, this raises the question, what is the exact location of this artwork in the sense of how people react to it? It is not in a gallery or museum, and no reference to an art context (like an orange cube) is permitted, yet if it operates to stop people and draw them out of their busy day, does it really exist in the realm of the everyday world, where people know what a cinema is and how it fits in their worldview? Although people come across it in their everyday routines of coming and going, it is not an everyday experience, and that was very much the point, I believe. But if it is not an everyday thing, how do the passers-by place it? Do they quickly realise that it is in fact a work of art, despite its lack of orange cubes or other art labelling equipment? Or might they think that the cinema has simply re-opened, and that


4. Ibid.
I think that an essential aspect of this project is where it is placed, and here I mean where the visitors or viewers place it rather than your choice of location. Your choice of location was to create a work outside of any gallery or identifiable art context, and that choice leads to the placement by the viewers. What I mean here is that in an experience of any surroundings, there is a process of sensing, perceiving, and recognizing different elements. Seeing a shop, office building, art gallery, or cinema occur through the same sensory process for the most part, but they each are recognized through how we might relate to them. Seeing a work of public art might also have a particular place in that system of recognition, such as seeing an equestrian statue of a historical war hero, or a large abstract metal sculpture. Your work attempts to escape these recognized categories, at least briefly as you say, and in that brief moment of uncategorized experience there is a potential. Being momentarily confused, uncertain, but intrigued creates a space for that positive potential to sense and perceive an aspect of one’s environment outside of the categories we often use for organising our everyday experiences and relating to our surroundings.

This brings to mind the writings and artworks of Allan Kaprow, particularly his ‘happenings’. In "Assemblages, Environments and Happenings", he wrote, “The line between art and life should be kept fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible. The reciprocity between the man made and the ready-made will be at its maximum potential this way. Something will always happen at this juncture”.5 I find it interesting that Kaprow describes this relationship first as a line, as if a multivalent or uncategorized space between art and life, but one that

must be fluid to the point of being indistinct, and also describes it as a juncture. I believe that by creating this moment of confusion, uncertainty, and intrigue (as you put it) creates space, it spreads out this line into a threshold that exists as a location that can be inhabited. This threshold is at the same time a border or point that must be crossed to move from one space to another, a space in-between, as well as a degree of intensity, a limit below which a phenomenon is not perceptible or above which a sensation can no longer be sustained. In this way, it is both a space or location and also an experience or sensation. What you mention about the passer-by 'not being able to let go' is part of a sustained sensation or intensity, present within this space of the threshold.

There is an idea that E. H. Gombrich discusses that I think addresses what’s going on in the situation of this passer-by. In his book The Sense of Order, he describes how skills, as well as manners of perception, are grouped in order to facilitate learning as well as the act of perceiving. He writes,

In the development of skills engineers speak of ‘chunks’, the units of movements from which a larger skill is built in hierarchical orders – thus the five-finger exercises teach the beginner ‘chunks’ of piano playing which he can use or modify in a future performance without having consciously to attend to them. Are there ‘chunks’ also in the perception of structures? The example of reading seems to suggest that there are, and so does the experience of looking at buildings in a familiar style. We can take in the constituent elements, the doors and windows, the columns and the pilasters, with much greater ease than we could absorb exotic buildings.6

Though this offers the potential to develop larger skills, or to speed up perception, it begins to develop at the same time patterns of behaviour, or habits, which can lead to the overlooking of particular aspects of our

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surroundings. He continues,

In the study of perception the force of habit makes itself felt in the greater case with which we take in the familiar. We have seen that this ease can even result in our failure to notice the expected because habit has a way of sinking below the threshold of awareness. As soon as a familiar sequence of impressions is triggered we take the rest as read and only probe the environment perfunctorily for confirmation of our hypothesis. I have alluded to this role of perceptual habits in the preceding chapter when I referred to the notion of ‘chunks’, those units of skill which have become automatic and are thus available to us for the construction of further hierarchies of skills.7

This process of creating chunks, and the habits that might develop out of them, leave blind spots in perception as we are constantly applying these ‘chunks’ to our everyday activities in order to focus on the task at hand, or whatever we are intentionally directed towards at a given moment. This leaves open a number of opportunities to intervene, to create artworks in particular ways that take advantage of this process in order to draw people into the artwork before they know it. Returning to your idea about getting people to participate or ‘get interactive’ with the work before they are aware of it, these chunks, or this process of chunking, can be used to blur this line between what Kaprow calls ‘art and life’. Through the spreading out of this line into a space that can be inhabited, the process of chunking can be delayed.

This action of separating the perceptible world into ‘chunks’ is also discussed by Erin Manning in her book Always More Than One. In it, she discusses a blog post by a woman diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome:

Anne Corwin writes: “I often tend to sit on floors and other surfaces even if furniture is available, because it’s a lot easier to identify ‘flat surface a person can sit on’ than it is to sort the environment into chunks like ‘couch,’ ‘chair,’ ‘floor,’

and ‘coffee table.’” All perception involves chunking, but what autistics have access to that is usually backgrounded for neurotypicals is the direct experience of the relational field’s morphing into objects and subjects. Experientially speaking, there is never – for anyone – the direct apprehension of an object or a subject. [...]iven the quickness of the morphing from the relational field into the objects and subjects of our perceptions, many of us neurotypicals feel as though the world is ‘pre-chunked’ into species, into bodies and individuals.8

Marking your artwork with this orange cube set it up to be experienced as pre-chunked. If the cinema had been left unaltered and shuttered, it would have been experienced through a different chunk. What I think you were hoping for was to avoid either of these chunkings through your intervention, which might afford an un-chunked experience. Making it un-chunked as an uncategorized experience, though likely only temporarily, both allows for passers-by to begin to engage with a work before they know it, and before associating the perceptual event as an art experience. This maintains both the artwork and the viewer within a threshold of knowing, when a decision on how to account for and ‘chunk’ it into a category of known experiences has been delayed and might open up potentials.

If the location for The Futurist project, and perhaps my own artworks, is in this threshold of knowing between chunked categories, what then is the effect of placing artworks here? In a lecture, Alan Kaprow said, “you can steer clear of art by mixing up your happening by mixing it with life situations. Make it unsure even to yourself if the happening is life or art. Art has always been different from the world’s affairs, now you’ve got to work hard to keep it all blurry”.9 Kaprow’s statement that art is different from the world’s affairs reinforces your own position that art tends to be marked as art and as a result encountered in a way that is particular to the


experience of art. Furthermore, if we desire to blur this line between the two in order to take advantage of the potentials afforded by a brief uncategorical experience, what qualities are required to be present in the artwork? Or perhaps more pragmatically, what methods of creation can be employed towards bringing the artwork as close as possible to this line?

In order to address these questions, I have made two recent works, “Building Movements” and “Adaptations” (there are some images and videos of the projects on the website www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com) that deal with these questions. In these works I attempted to locate the artwork within this threshold, this extended space that allows for the experience of our process of relating-to our surroundings. My attempt was made through a process of engaging with a selected architectural environment, and this process was repeated in both projects. These two projects evolved through a similar process of selecting an architectural environment, investigating that environment and the experience of interacting with it, and then finding points of contact within that environment where we might begin to create an extension. In both cases, the environments were interior architectural spaces, both repetitive, and both rather utilitarian in their designs.

Each project began with a process of drawing out a particular threshold of experience, and once this space of the threshold was found, I could make a seam from which an addition could extend outwards. These thresholds were found through interacting with the building, through looking, feeling out, moving through the spaces. There is no physical seam, in both cases we did not cut into the building, all of the extensions are simply touching the building, staying in place by sitting on or leaning
against its surfaces. These were experiential seams, cutting into the continuity of the experience but without breaking it, simply continuing the flow of one moment into the next. The predictable and expected sequence of events afforded by the architectural surroundings is redirected for a brief moment. From these seams we were able to create extensions, new built structures that continued the forms and materials of the architectural environment.

In June 2013, I began the collaborative project "Building Movements" with Chris Cottrell, Olivia Pintos-Lopez and students in the RMIT Interior Architecture program that was to be installed in the RMIT Design Hub. We were given the opportunity to make a project in the Design Hub and so this architectural environment was a 'given' of the project. As this was a new environment for me, I started a process of examining the architectural design of the building, searching for thresholds. Chris and I explored every space we had access to in the building, walked all of the stairwells, used the service elevator, studied the ventilation system, the rainwater drainage system that channelled water from the roof down pipes through the centre of the building, studied the changing

Figure P.5: RMIT Design Hub
air pressure and its relationship to the automatic locking glass doors, and rode the elevators for hours to see how and when they would move as well as how their automatic lights worked. This process occurred over many days, and we experimented with different materials, such as inflatable forms and plastic sheeting, to see how they interacted with the building.

What stood out to us was the repetitiveness of the design, and that this affect established habits of movement and occasionally a sense of disorientation, as many floors or parts of the building look identical. A kind of passivity and ambivalence was effected as a result of these design choices, and these were the normative behaviours that we were interested in exploring or manipulating in our intervention.

What we searched for was a location in the building that would provide a point of contact from which we could create a seam while remaining consistent with the experience of the building. This problematic created for us a new way of looking at the building, as different aspects, forms, and functions became important for our project. This way of looking, this process of investigation, creates for me a new building, a new site, and is particularly important in my practice of creating installations.

Figure P.6: RMIT Design Hub elevator, Sean Godsell Architects 2007-2012.
Through this process of close looking, we landed on the elevator as a point of contact. The experience of being in the elevator offered a singular environment that effected the kind of passivity and ambivalence that we found present in the building’s design as a whole. It also provided a place where we could make a seam into the experience of the building, as when the doors of the elevator open onto a new floor, there is always a degree of uncertainty as to what they will open onto. Returning to the idea of a threshold, the elevator operates as a kind of threshold, existing in an in between space, always between where one departs from and where one arrives. It is not a destination in itself, at least not in common usage as a utilitarian architectural device.

In 2012, Roel Meijs and I began to search for a location in which to create an architectural intervention, which became our "Adaptations" project. In this case, we began with a discussion of the experience of dislocation in regards to the relation with architecture that might bring it about, and sought to find a location that would provide the right circumstances for evoking a particular kind of dislocation. After searching first for a train station or gas station location, which would operate as a point of arrival and departure, an in between space, we were unsuccessful. After I visited a self-storage facility in the city of Espoo, Finland, I felt that it might provide a different opportunity for developing our ideas, as it existed as a large physical structure, an impressive architectural environment, but without a clear sense of location or identity. Items were to be stored there indefinitely, items that were valued enough to not discard as trash, but not valued enough to keep in one’s place of dwelling. In this way, the self-storage facility was another kind of in-between space, location that did not invite dwelling for any more time than was necessary, an ultimately utilitarian space with little
decoration, and as it was unstaffed, there existed as well an architecture of electronic surveillance and electronic key access that removed human bodies from the premises.\textsuperscript{10}

It took until 2013 to gain independent access to the self-storage unit. At that point, we began our exploration and investigation of the site, seeking out points of contact as locations to create seams. Wandering through the numerous white corridors of red doors with white numbers printed on them, we easily became lost in the repetition. Designed to provide a logical system of numbered units, with directions to groups of numbers, as well as a system of security, with locks on each door, the environment was one of contradictions. Each floor had a similar floorplan of corridors and metal storage unit fitout. The building itself had particular elements that did not fit with this fitout: large concrete pillars, ventilation ducts cutting through storage units, plumbing taking up a great deal of space in other units. The layers of the building’s history were made apparent in this contrast and contradiction. The fitout for the storage units was to provide space for storing items, but the building was encroaching on this design, filling some units with its structural elements or utilitarian elements. These contradictions offered points of contact for us to create seams into the experience of this architectural environment. The locks and security system; the repetition of corridors, numbers and doors; the utilitarian elements that operated within the building such as the ventilation system; and the structural pillars all offered a kind of threshold through

\textsuperscript{10} Although this self-storage facility was designed to be inhospitable, there was one woman who was nearly always there, sitting on a chair half-way in her 2 square metre storage unit, which was packed full of possessions. She would be listening to a battery operated radio, eating peanut butter on bread, and each day we saw her she would question us on what we were doing, and then criticize our art project as meaningless and foolish. She was not there at night, I don’t believe that she was sleeping inside her storage unit, but it is quite possible she was. Perhaps homeless, with all her possessions kept in storage, she brought a critical degree of humanity to the environment.
the uncertain relationship they engendered between body and architecture.

In "Adaptations", our installations built upon the experience that we determined was effected by the site, just as they built upon the physical structure of the building. We used the ventilation ducts, walls, windows, concrete pillars, and other functional elements, and extended them into the storage unit space, the empty space intended for renters’ possessions, so that they filled the space. These extensions were intended to merge quite seamlessly with their origins in the structure of the building. This was in order to create confusion about what elements were part of the architectural site, and what elements were built. In some circumstances, visitors were not able to discern which was which, stuck in a threshold of knowing, being uncertain about how the elements in this environment relate to each other. This was reinforced by the uncertainty about how to navigate the building, how to cross thresholds from one space to another, through the complications of access and egress presented by the doors and locks.

Through these two projects, I have begun to develop methods for finding and extending what I understand as a threshold, both as an experience as well as a location.

Figure P.7: Roel Meijis in OmaVarasto, 2013, part of our Adaptations project (2014).
Certain encounters with an architectural environment bring about an uncertainty that momentarily delays the process of chunking and categorization, and it is this experience that can be extended, drawn out as a threshold through interventions. In "Building Movements", this threshold began in the elevator and was extended outwards onto four floors of the building. In "Adaptations", this threshold began in the first confusing moment of encounter with the architectural site at the outdoor keypad (which was original to the site), and was extended into the building in other moments of encounter, with locks, doors, and physical constructions installed into four storage units. The built interventions in "Building Movements" presented a much greater contrast with the surrounding architectural environment than did the built interventions in "Adaptations". This act of creating a seam does not necessarily result in seamlessness. Although the interventions in "Adaptations" were built to merge seamlessly with the surrounding architectural structures, the threshold began with the first interactions and negotiations with the building to establish a confusing and delayed access to the interior of the building. This resulted in a tension of uncertainty that remained prevalent throughout the interactions with both original architectural elements and those that we added as interventions. However, from creating these two projects through a similar process of investigating and extending from a site, I believe that the minimal gestures made in "Adaptations" are more successful in remaining on this blurred line or within this threshold. Such gestures sustain a degree of tension throughout the experience of the architectural surroundings, and have the potential to extend that tension and uncertainty of the uncategorized experience outwards, beyond the art project itself, and into future interactions with other architectural surroundings.
Coming back to what you said, that "it’s the nameless things that lodge in our subconscious and slowly percolate out, to haunt us into a raised consciousness through some sort of lingering psychic osmosis",11 might it be that these categories separating what is chunked are in fact porous? Perhaps by extending this experience of threshold that delays the chunking process, that porosity can be made apparent and potentially change how chunking takes place in future encounters? Returning to the idea of the location of the artwork, what I am proposing is the methods of making seams and extending thresholds as a form of practice that could sustain this uncertainty that you described and sought out in your Futurist project. Extending and sustaining this uncertainty opens up further potentials for engagement with non-art encounters, as there is a chance that, if sufficiently sustained, it might effect a reconsideration of how a person engages with an environment.

After having made my own projects with these methods of thresholding and seaming, I see this fragment of your broken biennial cube as a marker of this porosity, the permeability and tenuous nature of the chunks and categories that can build up to habits of perception. Holding onto it for so many years likely influenced my practice, as it returned me to that moment of puzzlement I felt when you smashed that cube on the street in Liverpool. Keeping it reminds me to be more tentative in my own engagements with what surrounds me.

Uncategorically yours,

Scott
Dear Professor Bennett,

I feel compelled to write to you after reading your article, “Encounter with an Art-thing”.¹ Your text left me with many questions regarding my own artistic practice, particularly in regards to the issues you raise about the encounter between a person and an artwork.

In your article, you discuss a collection of broken artworks, items that have lost their value as works of art and as a result have been demoted to the lower rank of ‘things’. This transmutation from one kind of object to another affects how a person relates to that object, changing what relationship comes about between the two. As I understand it, your premise is that this relationship is different when relating to a work of art as compared to an object that is not art, and I can accept this difference exists in many cases. The idea you present is that a broken art object loses its status as art and is demoted to the status of ‘thing’, thus establishing a difference between artworks and things. What is particularly important is the encounter that each engenders, the encounter with an artwork and the encounter with a thing, and what potential arises from each encounter. The questions that I have are about this difference of encounter, how people relate to artworks and to things, and whether there might be a grey zone where the relationship is to both simultaneously.

This is important to me because the artworks that I make contain objects but are at the same time surrounding spaces, and they are connected to and enveloped within other surrounding spaces that I have not made myself and that are not artworks. The distinction between what I have added and the non-art surroundings is often difficult to discern, and so the encounter might be at the same time an encounter with things and an encounter with an artwork. The encounter that I hope to bring about through my projects is one that begins to raise questions about a person’s relationship to architectural surroundings, and perhaps to discover aspects that both person and surroundings have in common. My belief is that raising such questions can eventuate new forms of relation between person and architectural surroundings as well as a reconsideration of the importance of this relationship in how we position ourselves as part of the world.

Your article considers the consequences of the artwork being demoted to the lower status of ‘thing’ through being broken, as you write,

something really interesting happens when the demotion goes all the way, when the object falls so low, so below the standard as to be rendered irredeemable or, in the language of the insurance industry, a “total loss.” What happens is that it becomes released from the tyranny of judgment – becomes, in my terminology, a thing. The radically demoted object becomes the orphan, who, appearing on the scene without external value or pedigree, floats on the surface of context and bobs over and shrugs off the grasp of established norms and judgments. As thing it paradoxically rises to a new status – that of a more active party in encounters. It becomes a body among bodies with the capacity to affect and be affected. And we now become more sensitive to real forces that previously operated below the threshold of reflective attention.

This subsequent situation of the body among bodies,
as you put it, focuses the encounter on the multiple relationships between bodies that are present rather than a focus on the direct encounter between person and artwork. This raises a few questions, such as, are there artworks or art objects that are encountered and related to as bodies? And, what happens when the artwork is not an object? The encounter that you describe requires that the work of art be contained within an object, something with clearly defined perhaps physical boundaries, such as a sculpture or a painting. Yet there have been many artists that did not clarify this boundary, marking the limit where their artwork ended and the realm of ‘things’ began. Some artists sought to engender a kind of encounter between a person and an artwork that is reminiscent of an encounter with a thing.

One group of artists who I would like to propose to you as having created artworks to engender an encounter between person and artwork similar to what you have described were the Minimalists. In particular, in critical writing about this movement, there were discussions of the presence of the artwork or art object as if it were like the presence of a person. Also, the Minimalist sculptures were meant to operate in an environment with a person as just one element among others, like a body among bodies, or perhaps as part of an assemblage. Evidence of this idea comes up in the writings of the artist Robert Morris and the critic Michael Fried. I’m proposing this because I think that the work carried out by the Minimalists some fifty years ago can contribute to your research into the agencies of non-human entities such as objects and what relationships come about when people begin to take part in assemblages along with such objects.

Beyond this proposition, and returning to the personal
importance of this letter for clarifying the kind of encounter my work engenders, I see my practice as positioned somewhere in between the ideas and forms of Minimalism and the ideas about assemblages and agency that you discuss in your texts. What links these odd bedfellows is their focus on the relationships between bodies. In regards to other art historical contexts, a few other 20th century artists made artworks that were also encountered as “things.” Duchamp’s “Fountain” (1917) and “1200 Bags of Coal” (1938) brought ready-made objects into the museum. When asked to make a portrait for an exhibition in a gallery in Paris, Robert Rauschenberg sent a telegram that read “THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF IRIS CLERT IF I SAY SO. – ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG”, and was presented in the exhibition with the title “Portrait of Iris Clert” (1961). Warhol’s “Brillo Soap Pads Box” (1964) reproduced the graphic design of a well-known soap brand onto wooden boxes of a similar dimension, bringing the aesthetics of consumer culture and advertising into the museum. Also, Sturtevant’s decades-long practice of making copies of other artists’ works reproduced the materials and forms through the same techniques and methods of known

Figures J.1 & J.2: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917, and 1200 Bags of Coal, 1938.
artist's works, thus being simultaneously copies and original works of art which she signed with her name. These artists have all drawn attention to the complex relations that arise when an artwork is also a “thing.” Where the Minimalists differ is in their capacity to draw out both bodily and architectural relations, and it is here that I find an affinity with your writing as well as with my own practice.

Returning to the idea you raised about relations between bodies that can come about from certain encounters, Robert Morris describes the transition towards new relations that can be engendered by the encounter with a Minimalist sculpture. He writes, “The object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less self-important. By taking its place as a term among others, the object does not fade off into some bland, neutral, generalized, or otherwise retiring shape.”

This positioning of the artwork as no more than one “term among others” marks a change in the relationship between person and artwork towards a relationship that is less hierarchical and perhaps more horizontal. This new relationship is markedly different from what was offered by the preceding sculptural movement of Abstract Expressionism, as it sought to create works that


Figure J.3: Andy Warhol Brillo Soap Pads Box 1964.
were independent of surroundings and people viewing them. The meaning of Ab-Ex sculpture was derived from internal relations, between gestures of form contained within the sculpture. As proposed in the texts of Morris, Minimalism expanded the field of sculpture into a relationship between art object, person, and surroundings. By describing the sculpture as simply one element among others, Morris transforms the process of meaning-making from a single relationship between ‘object and subject’, sculpture and person, into a coordination between sculpture, person, and environment. In regards to the relationship to the surrounding space, Morris writes, “the space of the room itself is a structuring factor both in its cubic shape and in terms of the kinds of compression different sized and proportioned rooms can effect upon the object-subject terms. [...] The total space is hopefully altered in certain desired ways by the presence of the object.”

This statement outlines this expansion of relation to be one not limited to a single subject, but rather to both person and the room which surrounds the sculpture. This seems to present a situation for a person to take part in the meaning of the artwork, and perhaps “to begin to experience the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally” as you wrote in Vibrant Matter.

It is key, however, in the history of art criticism on Minimalism, that social relations between people is not included (or is at least not discussed), nor are further contextualisations, social or political, that might be inherent to the gallery space or the space outside of that gallery, included in the relations that produce meaning in such artworks. What is significant, however, is the transformative notion of expansion beyond the physical boundaries of the sculptural object into the relationship between object and person and the surrounding space. These relationships are the artwork, and as a result
the artwork is no longer an object. Rather, the object is simply one part of the artwork.

An outspoken critic of the Minimalist movement, Michael Fried denounced such work as being “theatrical” in his article “Art and Objecthood”. Whereas Morris describes the Minimalist sculptures as one term among others, Fried finds a more bodily presence. He writes,

being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person[...]. Second, the entities or beings encountered in everyday experience in terms that most closely approach the literalist ideals of the nonrelational, the unitary and the holistic are other persons[...]. And third, the apparent hollowness of most literalist work – the quality of having an inside – is almost blatantly anthropomorphic.7

The idea that the encounter with a Minimalist sculpture is in some way similar to an encounter with another person is a curious comparison, but could reveal an aspect of the kind of relations that such work seeks to generate. This encounter with a voluminous material (a steel cube, Figure J.4: Tony Smith Die, model 1962, fabricated 1968, steel with oiled finish)

6. It should be noted that the use of the manufacturing industry for the production of Minimalist sculptures, as well as the choice of materials used for such sculptures, could be seen as commenting on the prevalence of industrialisation in the contemporaneous society. A critique of the influence of industrial practices upon everyday life and in changing the landscape was furthered in the Land Art movement which followed in the footsteps of Minimalism.

for example) instigates a bodily relation to another body, or perhaps to another person, as Fried suggests. As mentioned above, Morris (and other Minimalist artists) did not discuss the social relations between human bodies in the gallery space or environment surrounding their sculptures. This bodily interaction that relates in some way to an interaction with another person is certainly a particular type of interaction that these artists sought to engender. Tony Smith’s work “Die” (1962) was a six foot steel cube. In “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2”, Morris begins with a dialogue between an unnamed interlocutor (presumably Morris himself) and Tony Smith:

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.8

Morris continues to describe the importance of the human scale of Minimalist work: “In the perception of relative size, the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. One knows immediately what is smaller and what is larger than himself.” The selection of a particular size to elicit a particular response through the relation to a human body further entrenches the importance of the person within the artwork. Furthermore, Fried’s comment about the scale of the works being similar to the ‘presence of a person’ becomes more apt. Fried continues with this discussion, stating that “a kind of latent or hidden naturalism, indeed anthropomorphism, lies at the core of literalist theory and practice. The concept of presence all but says as much, though rarely so nakedly as in Tony Smith’s statement, ‘I didn’t think of them [...] as sculptures but as presences of a sort.’”9 Setting aside Fried’s use of this anthropomorphic presence

8. Morris, Continuous, p11.
towards his critique of this work as ‘theatrical’, this similarity of relation, marking the object as having the qualities (or at least a quality) of a person, calls into question the difference between the bodies that take part in this encounter, including the surroundings. The otherness of the material, be it steel, wood, glass or plexiglass, is somehow reduced through the engagement with the sculpture within a given environment. This encounter becomes less one of contrast and otherness and instead one of similarity, of sameness, be it through the scale of the object or through the horizontality of position established through the expansive inclusion of person and surroundings as part of this artwork.

This question of the bodily scale of these sculptures is raised in my own projects through the creation of interior architectural environments that engender direct engagements with architectural dimensions of a bodily scale. Many of my own constructions offer spaces that are just large enough for a body to enter and move through. In "I am a Laboratory" (documentation of all projects can be found on the website: www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com), two constructions are juxtaposed that are large enough for one person to sit inside, but not stand. In "Building Movements", narrow passageways between sheets of metal compress the body, and low ceilings demand crouching to negotiate climbing and descending stairs. Also, the small scale of elements in a waiting area further question how change of scales can engage certain relations between body and architecture, in a way bringing architecture down to a more human bodily size. This aspect of scale is something that I have been developing for many years in my practice, and was present in some earlier works that offered spaces for crawling or small boxes as containers for the body. Similar to the effects of scale in Minimalist sculpture, these shifts in scale might also work towards reducing
the otherness of the inorganic, solid, heavy materials of these constructions, through the intimacy of such engagements.

As you describe the transposition of the object from artwork to thing as effected by being broken, the new position of this object as demoted to the realm of things establishes a new relationship to a person who encounters it. Your description of this object as a body among bodies reflects the personhood attributed to the Minimalist sculptures. I would argue this reflection is of the relationship between person and (art) object, that there is something inherent to both the broken art object and the Minimalist sculpture in regards to the relationship they have with people. (This might make Minimalist sculptures broken art, which is something I am quite sure Michael Fried would agree with, but for different reasons.) In your article, you wrote,

In the face of the artwork, we can become temporarily relieved of the burden of normal subjectivity, of the strenuous effort and bent-back posture of the autonomous agent; we can relax into and inhabit more fully the homely shape of thinghood. This is part of the thrill of aesthetic experience, an affect that may become intensified as the art-object approaches full demotion. [...] The thrill may also involve something like recognition. By this I mean an uncanny feeling of being in the presence of an aspect of oneself — a non- or not-quite-human aspect that is nevertheless intrinsic to one’s flesh and blood and bones — also present in the body of another.10

The idea that there is an aspect of oneself present in the “body of another”, in this case in the art object, relates to Fried’s criticism of the anthropomorphic presence inherent within a Minimalist work. Perhaps through the selection of particular scales of objects and scales of relationships that become more horizontal between person, art object and architectural surroundings, we are given the opportunity to begin to see these

certain aspects of ourselves present in these other bodies. Your idea that there is a certain ‘not-quite-human aspect’ intrinsic to our human bodies, perhaps related to our own materiality, seems to be also called upon in these Minimalist sculptures. A Robert Morris wooden rectangular shape, for example, was designed to be encountered as non-representational, as a thing. The wooden rectangular shape was to be just that; it did not refer to anything but itself, its own materiality and volume. Judgments of aesthetics, of expression or gesture, were not intended to be instigated by this kind of work. Instead, the encounter with the object was most important, perhaps towards this recognition that you describe of acknowledging what a person might have in common with a six-foot steel cube.

What I see as potential in this relationship outlined by Morris is that it extends beyond the person-artwork relationship through the inclusion of the surroundings. This opens up possibilities for revealing relationships to other non-art objects in our surroundings. You also write,

one of the things that a thing can do is expose the presence of a thingness internal to the human, to reveal the animistic presence of an ‘it’ internal to the ‘I.’ The self that acknowledges its thingness is paradoxically a body with newly activated sensory capacities - including the power to detect the presence of material agency.11

This description of the potential present within the encounter between person and art object offers a perspective on a particular kind of (human) subject either produced by or suggested by the engagement with a work of art that is to be regarded as a ‘thing’ rather than as a representation. This subject, body, or person, can be not only activated by their engagement with the artwork, but can be extended by it into a kind of assemblage. Through this encounter, a triangulation of

relations leads to the creation of an assemblage body, one body that includes all three elements. The consequence you propose is an activation of sensory capacities, a new attentiveness to the material agency in the other things we find ourselves surrounded by. This reconsideration of the position of the human subject, and the proposition of a new position, be it in a horizontal relation with objects and surroundings or an extended relation as an assemblage, seems to be suggested by the Minimalist inclusion of the person as part of the artwork. This is further clarified by what you wrote in Vibrant Matter in outlining what you call “vital materialism”:

In a vital materialism, an anthropomorphic element in perception can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances—sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have a hierarchical structure. We at first may see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of "talented" and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self). A touch of anthropomorphism, then, can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations.\footnote{Jane Bennett, \textit{Vibrant Matter}, p99.}

What the Minimalists contribute through their artworks, which have the appearance of being very stable and independent (perhaps even cold) forms is that through an encounter with such forms they call attention to,
or catalyze, our sensibility to these relations between us and between the elements that surround us, such as sculptural objects and architecture.

Such an encounter can begin to call attention to a particular aspect of the relationship between body and architecture. This common ground between person and thing, body and architecture, can draw out what they share, and seeing a thing such as an architectural object or element in the way that a person might see another person could make apparent an aspect of this relationship between body and architecture that goes otherwise unnoticed. What is made apparent is the potential for each to be changed by the other, of their mutual affectivity, of the agency that is present and shared by both through this relationship towards creating change. That change can be brought about by the material agency that you describe, and the materials of the objects or architectural elements can evoke change in the human body. The recognition of this possibility might lead to a rethinking of this relationship, noticing this potential to be affected by this material agency. Seeing oneself as part of an assemblage, as taking part in, rather than observing at some distance, the architectural and material surroundings, has consequences for how our own bodies or persons are defined and identified. If I am an assemblage, taking up parts of what surrounds me through how they might affect or change me at any given moment, I would certainly be more considerate of what I surround myself with, and also begin to doubt the degree of certainty and control I have of my own person. How much is me, and how much is contributed by other assemblage-materials?

Returning to the Minimalists, and how this might play out in the encounter with a sculptural object or
collection of objects in an architectural surrounding, Morris posits that there is no artwork without a person. He writes, “it is just this distance between object and subject that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary”. This extended situation is transformative in the field of sculpture as the viewer is included into the work of art in order for it to have meaning. This is different from saying that a work derives its meaning from a human subject that perceives it and reflects upon what the artist might hope to communicate through it. Rather, there is no (Minimalist) artwork without the human viewer. This inclusion of the viewer in the artwork is further explained:

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision [...]. It is in some way more reflexive, because one’s awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.

This movement away from internal relationships to external relationships opens the possibility for becoming aware of both the sculpture or object as one term among others but also of ourselves as one term among others. Could this lead to what you refer to as acknowledging the “‘it’ within the ‘I’”, or one’s own “thingness”? Are the relations between ourselves and the things that we are surrounded by made more apparent through such an encounter? Does the art object have to be broken to begin to shed light on such relations and positions?

I’m aware that a great deal has developed since Morris and the Minimalists were making their sculptures,
and also that this was a very short-lived movement. This expansion opened the door for forms of art that explored more relations than the physical and material interaction between object person and architecture. Site-specificity developed in the Land Art movement and in urban interventions, installation art, as well as works that questioned social and political relations through performance.\textsuperscript{16} In regards to the philosophical discourses of that time, feminist texts and the linguistic turn in philosophy made apparent structures of power and social relations that permeate and influence action. However, the philosophical discussion about the physical or material relations between bodies (human and non-human) that the Minimalists’ work investigates did not take place when they made their sculptures. In terms of the background to your own philosophical position, Latour’s discussion of “actor-network theory”\textsuperscript{17} and the writing of contemporary New Materialist philosophers have outlined webs of relation that exist between, and are essential to, individuals both living and non-living. Karen Barad, for example, writes, “To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair.”\textsuperscript{18} These more contemporary ideas are inspiring contemporary artists to create new forms of artworks that engage with such entanglements (for example, \begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{stelarc.png}
\caption{Stelarc \textit{Exoskeleton} performance 1999.}
\end{figure}
Stelarc with technology or Madeleine Gins and Arakawa with architecture), though what I would like to propose is that in Minimalism there existed similar ideas that were specific to the relations between person, art object and architecture, and these ideas, though somewhat outdated in their language and terminology, contain useful insight into this specific encounter of three entangled (perhaps not individual) entities.

Although the meaning of Minimalist works is derived from this triangulation between object-person-surroundings, most artists make it clear what objects are art objects as distinct from the surrounding architectural space. There are geometrical shapes made of simple unadorned materials set on a gallery floor or wall, and they are not site-specific as they can be installed (perhaps in different configurations) in different galleries. In this way, although the sculptures may be related to as things more than as works of art, the distinction between what is art and what isn’t is easily marked. However, the plainness or boringness of the shapes and materials is certainly key to being able to relate them easily to the architectural surroundings. They look somewhat architectural, and I have seen many museum-goers try to sit on sculptures that resembled benches before being corrected by the museum’s invigilators. This quality is something that I have always been attracted to in artworks as well as in architecture, and have made projects that bring art object and architectural environments together through shared plainness. This attraction has drawn me to make works with utilitarian architectural environments and elements, which often share characteristics of material and form with Minimalist sculptures.
In one of my recent collaborative projects, we made additions to an architectural environment by extending elements that were already present. In that project (titled "Adaptations", 2014, included on the website), the surroundings were part of the artwork, not unlike Minimalist works. Each addition that we made in some way extended what was already present in that architectural environment. Made of the same materials, and derived from the same shapes and forms, our additions merged with the original environment. Our attempt was to make discernment about what was built and what was added as difficult as possible, with the intent to make the original architectural environment as much a part of our project as what we had built with our own hands. The encounter that we hoped this would engender was with a utilitarian environment, a collection of ‘things’. There were no immediately clear ‘art objects’ in this project. Instead, the architectural environment as a whole was to be encountered and related to. It was the relation between participant and environment that was the locus of the artwork, in the way that a Minimalist work necessarily included a person to complete the assemblage-relations of object-person-surroundings. The original environment, before our extensions were added to it, was somewhat disorienting as a result of its repetition of corridors, doors, numbers and codes. We extended this as well through adding an element of confusion as to what was original and what was created by us artists. In this way, the disorientation was reinforced and amplified. The elements of the architecture that created this sense of disorientation, like the keypads that required the input of a code, and the repetition of identical doors with numbers on them, were not added by us but played an important role in the relations participants had with the building. This affective environment was a ready-made, and it was this encounter with an architectural environment that we built upon and extended.
In regards to the kind of encounter this work engenders, it is perhaps one that is slow and full of effort both physical and contemplative. What we added may be seen as a bit of a let-down. Upon finding the correct unit and opening the combination lock, one might be presented with a wall, a ventilation system, concrete pillars, or an empty storage unit made of plastic. By extending and amplifying what was already present in this architectural environment, the additions draw attention to the relations between elements that are present in that environment. In three of the four installation units, what was extended were elements of the original architectural structure as separate from the storage-unit fit-out that is a more contemporary addition. Our additions extended these original elements (pillars, ventilation system, walls) into the space of the storage unit, in a sense reclaiming it and by so doing drawing attention to the relation between the different architectural elements that make up this environment. The fourth unit was not a typical storage unit in that it was a room built in an earlier period to the fit-out but was fitted with a red door like the rest. Our addition was to build a clear plastic storage unit, extending the more contemporary fit-out into this original room.

The disorientation of the building, and the complexity of access through keypads, locks, codes and unit numbers was a relation that could be felt as a clear force by participants as they interacted with (and got stuck inside of) the architectural site. The additions that extended the physical elements were not relations so much felt by a participant, but rather called attention to other relations taking place within that environment, possibly increasing sensitivity to relations not only between them (as persons) and the surrounding environment of things, but also to relationships between things quite separate from their own experience.
In another project, "I am a Laboratory", Reich's "orgone accumulator" and a variation on it were presented for use and experimentation, raising questions about what potentials for changing the body an architectural surrounding might offer. Reich's pseudoscientific and widely unaccepted understanding of the function of the human body as a cycle of Tension-Charge-Discharge-Relaxation, as well as his experience of what he called orgone energy, culminated in producing an environment whose materials would function to assist in this cycle. In the instructions for its use, a relationship between the physical materials of the orgone accumulator, the body, and orgone energy is explained. Key to this relationship is a sensori-emotive response, perhaps the aesthetic yield that it produces through engagement. The Wilhelm Reich Foundation's instructions for use of the device state:

In relation to the accumulator, the organism is the stronger energy system. Accordingly, a potential is created from the outside toward the inside by the enclosed body. The energy fields of the two systems make contact and after some time, dependent on the bio-energetic strength of the organism within, both the living organism and the energy field of the accumulator begin to "luminate" i.e. they become excited and, making contact, drive each other to higher levels of excitation. This fact becomes perceptible to the user of the accumulator through feelings of prickling, warmth, relaxation, reddening of the face, and objectively, through increased body temperature.19

Designed with a function, though perhaps somewhat different from utilitarian elements, layers of steel wool and fiberglass between an outer layer of pressboard and inner layer of steel attract and hold this positive charge of orgone energy, directing it into the body. These physical materials with the immaterial orgone energy combine with the body towards an assemblage or co-emergence that creates a new body, one that has been

19. Jerome Greenfield, Wilhelm Reich Vs. The U.S.A., New York: W. W. Norton, 1974, pp372-373. Originally produced as plans and instructions for the orgone accumulator by the Wilhelm Reich Foundation. Whatever contribution Reich's accumulator might have made towards our consideration of the agency of materials was derailed for some time by the U.S. court of appeals ruling that all his books and information about the accumulator be destroyed, carried out by the F.D.A. in the last U.S. bookburning, in 1955.
changed by what you might call a ‘confederation’ of agencies. This change is perceived, or if not perceived, marked, by the somatic experience of prickling, warmth, reddening of the face, body temperature, but also of the emotive relaxation, glowing, and ending with what is described as “nothing happening any longer.”

The accumulator was presented along with a text that explained this theory and its instructions for use. The addition to this environment was the idea of orgone energy towards evoking a consideration that the simple, inert materials of steel, wood and fiberglass could possess agency to effect a change in the body. This suggestion aimed to increase sensibilities to materials, to raise questions about our material encounters. It called attention to the potential expression of these materials, and to the agency of the steel-fiberglass-wood walls and how it might be manifested in our bodies, if not by these sensori-emotive reactions, then by the accumulation of this immaterial and perhaps mythical orgone energy. This functional architectural environment meant to be utilized for a given purpose (not an art object) is of course absurd in its presumption of orgone energy, but operated as an example of how we might consider the way we take part in assemblages with architectural materials that surround us towards effecting change. The second construction juxtaposed with the orgone accumulator presented a small laboratory in which a person could devise experiments to conduct on themselves about their relations with architectural surroundings. Together, these constructions aimed to increase a sensibility to the change that can come about in relations to architecture.

Our interaction with these ‘things’ heightened sensitivity to the encounter with architectural ‘things’,
and could potentially increase a person's "attentiveness to the ways things act upon and change us"²¹, as you write in your article.

You write that a broken art-object demoted to the status of 'thing' has the capacity to affect and be affected. Following this idea, our extension of original 'things' in architectural environments transforms these environments by amplifying what is already present therein, engendering encounters with architectural objects and materials to draw out relations. Might this show the capacity of things to affect and be affected? What comes to the fore of attention is the relationship a person has with these other 'things', these environments and elements that a person is surrounded by and takes up as affective material agencies. The physicality of the surroundings take on a different vitality, as you call it, and such situations/relations can lead to a sensitivity to vitalities that are always present in our continuous interaction and participation with our surroundings. The Minimalists' projects give historical precedent for such a practice, working in a similar way to make apparent operative and affective relationships between what were considered to be independent entities by adding their plain, geometrical forms into an existing architectural environment.

I would argue that this form of practice can make us, as you write, "more sensitive to real forces that previously operated below the threshold of reflective attention." This also relates to the architectural practice of Madeline Gins and Arakawa and their theory of the architectural body which defines a human as an entity that is a continuously changing set of relations between body and architecture. In searching for what is common to people, architecture, and art objects, I believe that
methods of practicing art which champion what is shared between them can help to draw out the relations that connect and entangle them.

Vitally and materially yours,

Scott
Dear Brian,

We’ve met a few times – first in Montreal in 2013 and then again in Avoca/Australia in 2014, when I participated in events that you, Erin, and your colleagues in Melbourne organized. In Melbourne in 2013, I made a project as part of the Immediations event and group exhibition, Building Movements. Making that project allowed me to realise a few things about my practice, as did your essay “Strange Horizon.” Both my installations and your essay deal with the experience of being disoriented through and with an architectural environment. You engage with that experience as a way to intricately pick apart the mechanisms through which we perceive surroundings and orient ourselves. These mechanisms are constantly at play, though often below the surface of attention – and I started to wonder more about how the architectural installation work I do aims to raise questions in order to draw attention to these very mechanisms. In short, I have felt impelled to engage with your essay and other texts to help me articulate the value of what my installations aim to achieve.

Your essay describes your own experience of thinking that you knew which street your office window looked onto, but being mistaken. You wrote that, although you were able to make your way from the entrance of the building to your office through a maze of corridors, your proprioceptive and visual systems of orientation somehow did not calibrate. As a result you experienced a moment in which this calibration took place, an active
event of orientation unfolding in the morphing of what you saw with what you were looking at. You write, “The sudden realization that my north was everyone else's east was jarring. True, I hadn't paid much attention to the scene. But I wasn't just not paying attention. When it hit me, I had the strangest sensation of my misplaced image of the buildings morphing, not entirely smoothly, into the corrected scene.”

This description reminded me of something our mutual friend Jondi once recounted to me, when he got out of the subway in New York thinking he was walking the direction towards his destination, and realizing after many steps that he was going in the opposite direction. At that moment of realization, he said that it felt like the street turned back through itself, as well as an internal physical feeling of turning through himself, though no motion took place. Rather, it was his orientation, his coming on-line with the actual direction he was facing. I've had similar experiences, especially coming out of subway exits in not-so-familiar places, and it generally leaves me with a feeling of frustration as I tend to pride myself on having a good sense of direction. But allied to that feeling is, at its beginning, the feeling of being lost. The moment when I realized that I was going the wrong way, that something was amiss. This happens before the morphing you describe, or the turning through itself that Jondi described. Having a good sense of direction, when I'm not in a rush to get somewhere and I do get lost, I tend to enjoy it. You write, “[t]he alarmingly physical sense we feel when we realize we are lost is a bodily registering of the disjunction between the visual and the proprioceptive. Place arises from a dynamic of interference and accord between sense-dimensions.”

The sense-dimensions that you write about in your text are specifically those of vision and proprioception, which you outline as co-functioning towards orientation. I would agree with this explanation of the mechanisms at play in orientation, as well as
with your belief in the predominance of proprioception in the correlation. What this leads me to, however, is a question about the potential arising through this moment of disorientation. Could this potential involve an opportunity for developing a different relationship to the surroundings we are with, and greater awareness of these mechanisms and their operations, present in such an event? Might it be possible to create architectural environments/surroundings aimed towards working with this potential? Certainly, many of my recent works set up conditions for eliciting a degree of disorientation and the need to reorient oneself.

The event of reorientation, finding oneself again after a moment of being disoriented or lost, is something that you also describe in your text:

Cross-sense referencing forms a third hinge-dimension of experience. This 'lost' dimension of experience is where vision’s conscious forms-in-configuration feed back into the vectorial tendency-plus-habit of proprioception, and where proprioception feeds forward into vision. Where we go to find ourselves when we are lost is where the senses fold into and out of each. We always find ourselves in this fold in experience.5

My own projects have aimed to evoke this situation through the coordination of particular architectural techniques, and other artists have also found ways to bring about this dimension of experience through building art installations.

I have thought quite a bit about these issues through experiences of Mike Nelson’s work. In his installation at the Venice Biennial in 2011, titled "I, imposter", he created a circuitous route through the British Pavilion travelling through multiple rooms, up and down flights of stairs. He doubled one room, creating perfect doppelgängers that visitors meet on their journeys

5. Massumi, Parables, p182.
through the building. The installation was built so that there were two small rooms on the second level, which were in either corner of one side of the building. This room has two doors, one at the bottom of a short flight of stairs, and the other on the second level opposite that flight of stairs. Following the circuitous route through the series of rooms, I entered the first of these two rooms through the door at the bottom of the stairs. The second door in that room was locked. Exiting this room from the door I entered next to the stairs, I continued through a series of rooms and finally up another different flight of stairs to enter the second symmetrical room from the 2nd level door, the one that I believed was locked.

The rooms had similar items in them, and the architectural design was identical. This second room also has an identical set of stairs leading down to a door which was locked. This made me wonder whether it was in fact the same room, but that one can only enter through the doors in one direction. For a moment, I was lost, seeing the same room but feeling like I had travelled through the building in such a way that it couldn’t be the same room. It was then that I went through a reflective process, like you describe as rolling one’s eyes up towards the sky to remove the visual cues and reflect on the proprioceptive memory. Retracing my steps, recalling the twists and turns in my path through the building, I deduced that this was a doppelgänger room on the other side of the building from the first. Nelson, in repeating the visual

qualities of that room, creating a perfect duplicate of it, and demanding a journey between the two through other rooms through doorways and around corners, was able to make me feel lost, and so doubt my perceptive abilities. That moment of feeling lost was both uncanny and exciting, but more important for my experience of the piece was that action of reorientation and doubt of my perceptive abilities as it brought out an awareness of my own process of orientation and reorientation.

There were simultaneously two kinds of encounter going on in this doubled room: the first is a direct encounter with the architectural space, materials and ephemeral objects, and the second was the confrontation with my sense of direction, memory, and relation to the architectural installation as a whole. This vertiginous experience of being somehow on unstable ground established a different kind of encounter, one that throws off track the continuing intentional flow of movement and action through and with the building by introducing dissonance into the process of relating-to the surroundings. That feeling of doubt about my perceptive abilities remained with me for some time after leaving the installation. While I came to believe that there were two rooms, having found no documentation about this, it did stay with me that it could have been the same room. I doubted myself and my ability to properly orient within an architectural environment, but this was positive in the sense that I increased my attention to my orientation which was helpful for navigating the maze-like streets and canals of Venice. Some time later, I found documentation that offered some evidence that I was in fact right about the doubled room.

Nelson made this same gesture in another project, "The Coral Reef" (2000), doubling one room. The disorientation
he creates by travelling through a series of small interconnected rooms is taken advantage of when he repeats a room that one has visited earlier, giving the impression that one has travelled full-circle and returned to the beginning of the installation. Reviewing this work, Claire Bishop writes,

At the furthest ‘end’ of the installation, the first room (the mini-cab office) was doubled: many visitors assumed themselves to be back at the beginning, and thus experienced the most unnerving confusion when they next encountered a series of rooms that bore no relation to the ones they recalled walking through only minutes previously. The doubled room also acted as a destabilizing déjà-vu, casting into doubt what one had seen in the rest of the installation.6

This doubling of one room, creating two identical rooms to be encountered at different points of the installation, creates a vertiginous feeling that calls into question one’s sense of orientation. This leads to further questions about the certainty of one’s perception, as Bishop notes. This disorientation, or destabilization, instigates a tentative way of relating to the surroundings. Being unsure of our direction, of what we have moved through and when, establishes a different kind of relating-to our surroundings. In this event, there exists the disjunction you describe “between the visual and the proprioceptive.” The lack of accord creates an uncertainty about our location but also about how to relate to the environment.


This disorientation evokes feelings of entrapment, something often experienced in a maze. Nelson’s manipulation of this relationship between person and surrounding architecture was to mirror his criticism of how ideologies frame our perception and experience of the world, of what surrounds us. In an interview he stated:

If you think what "The Coral Reef" structure purported to offer you and then ultimately did to you, it offers you these different receptions that presumably then would lead to something beyond. Each reception is indicative of a different belief structure. [...] In the end, ideas of escape lead to entrapment, which "The Coral Reef" ultimately does to you as well. You become entrapped within the labyrinth of corridors and rooms while trying to find your way. But, of course, you’re also trapped by the prevalent structure that sits above you.7

Whereas Nelson has made statements about the relationship between feeling lost in "The Coral Reef" and the ideas behind that project, in "I, imposter" Nelson has made no such statements. His reasons for this room repetition are not clear, but the experience of this doubling evokes this same disorientation and destabilization.

The focus on the visual aspect of the spaces he builds serves to draw attention to that sense modality and away from the proprioceptive reckoning of one’s movements through the rooms. Furthermore, the transition from room to room has been shown in recent psychological experiments to lead to forgetting. Radvansky and Copeland8 have shown in experimental situations that walking through doorways causes forgetting, believed to be caused by the spatial shifts affecting cognition that demands that a person update their understanding of the spatial environment they currently find themselves in. Adjusting to a new space causes a cognitive disruption, and so moving through multiple doorways has a (statistically significant) potential to disorient. The

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particular relation between this effect and the visual and proprioceptive dimensions is not yet clear.

Nelson’s works create situations in which a person would feel temporarily lost, and this feeling of being lost would lead to doubt of our sense of perception, and possibly doubt about our ability to sense and perceive an architectural surrounding ‘correctly’. The uncertainty that this instils in a person about the dependability of our mechanisms of perception may not be unique to this feeling of being lost. In artworks by some of Nelson’s contemporaries, the repetition of architectural elements and spaces that Nelson employed towards this feeling of being lost is used towards another similar kind of uncertainty that could help clarify what the use of this uncertainty might be. Whereas Nelson’s doubling of rooms calls attention to our disorientation and to question the certainty of our perception of the world, Schneider denies the possibility of knowing what is an addition or recreation and what is original in order to question whether a difference exists and if this difference is perceptible. These two techniques result in a similar destabilization that can evoke a reconsideration of how we relate to surroundings.

Like Nelson, Gregor Schneider has duplicated identical rooms and environments. Schneider’s doubling operates differently in that it is not being used for making a person feel lost, but nevertheless similarly works at introducing uncertainty and instability into our relationship with the immediate surroundings. Schneider has doubled walls, windows, rooms, houses and their occupants in various projects. In his most famous work, ”Das Totes Haus Ur” (1985-present), rooms were layered so that walls were built in front of walls. In one place, seven windows were built in front of each other.
In this house Schneider has built copies of real rooms, as he states, “many of the works are easy to describe: wall in front of wall, room inside room, ceiling under ceiling. The built rooms are made of walls, a floor, a ceiling, and they are copies of real existing rooms.”9 This instils the architectural environment with a feeling of uncertainty, a kind of doubt. Though the rooms are ‘real’ - built of proper construction materials and without any sense of being a stage set or even an installation - they are permeated with this uncertainty that is somehow destabilizing of what is ‘real’.

In another of his projects, "Die Familie Schneider", two neighbouring row houses in London (2004, Walden
Street No. 14 & 16) were made to be entirely identical by building rooms into the existing rooms. There were also people inhabiting the houses, all twins, so that they were also identical in each house.

Perhaps the culmination of this doubling, at least thus far in his practice, was his work “Neuerburgstrasse 21” (2014, Cologne Germany), in which he repeated the same bathroom twenty-one times in a sequence of interconnected rooms within one large room.10

Glen Seator created doppelgänger installations some years before Schneider, in particular three projects, “Approach” (1996-97) and “Within the line of the studs” (1997) which duplicated the façade of the building in which the installation was built, and “Fifteen Sixty-One” (1999) which replicated a cheque cashing service in east Los Angeles into the Gagosian gallery in Beverly Hills. The method of construction, the materials for the construction, have to be identical across the ‘original’ and replication in Seator’s work – as they are in Schneider’s work.

Rather than an installation towards referencing particular histories, characters, or ideas, the relationship between doubled rooms becomes paramount. In this situation we don’t doubt whether the rooms are doubles, but instead a disorientation develops in that we doubt our perception of the environment. Schneider works to make this difference between doubled spaces

10. Another quality present in Schneider’s and Seator’s doublings is that they raise doubts about the originality of all perceived locations. In reference to Schneider’s works, Susan Gänsheimer writes, “The act of duplicating and hence doubling negates the auratic, highly individual and thus unique character of the original. Doubling calls uniqueness into question and with it our orientation and our sense of security and of what is irretrievable. It seems as if nothing is unique, nothing identical with itself.’ This also connects with Massumi’s notion of “oversight” as discussed in Semblance and Event. See Gänsheimer, Double, Munich: Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2011, pp99-100, and Brian Massumi, Semblance and Event , Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011, p93.
imperceptible, to the point that there is no original or replica, but rather doppelgängers. Whereas a replica is always referencing its original, the doppelgängers can exist in their own right, as two originals that are identical. Schneider questions whether the relationship between the newly constructed and original rooms can be felt or perceived by a visitor. The relationship might be invisible, as the newly constructed room might completely occlude the original room. He states,

> it isn't all important to identify individually which wall, which room, which detail is original and which has been adapted. It is more important to note that the new room, the one in which one is, is accepted over time.[...] The effort to make comparisons wanes over time.[...] The work is there, visible, but it might be maybe completely overlooked. Other works are hidden, invisible, but they may still influence perception. The work is a work which swallows itself.[...] The work must exist, it must be there, even if in some of the works there is no way of knowing whether they really exist or what they are.\(^{11}\)

The disappearance of the artwork, that it could be overlooked, does not prevent it from being sensed and influencing perception. Schneider draws attention to the habit of overlooking, of not sensing what is the difference.

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\(^{11}\) Gregor Schneider, "Invisible Dead Room", lecture.
Such duplication creates a sense of tentativeness in interactions with other environments, as doubt creeps into what we think are trustworthy perceptions of environments. Whereas Nelson’s doubling of rooms calls our attention to our (dis)orientation and to question the certainty of our perception of the world, Schneider’s gesture of occlusion denies the possibility of knowing what is an addition or recreation and what is original in order to question whether a difference exists and if this difference is perceptible. These artists raise questions about how we perceive what surrounds us, and invoke a tentativeness that pervades not only their installations but also a person’s subsequent engagements with other environments.

This raises the question about what potential can be found by placing a person in this situation of being disoriented through what you call ‘oversight’ in relation to duplicated surroundings. Beyond making apparent the limits of perception present in this action of overseeing, what might such an experience lead to? Is it possible to understand this disoriented situation of the body in relation to the environment as positive, rather than one that needs to be quickly rectified? One possibility is put forward by Richard Shusterman, as he writes,

somatic self-examination provides a model of immanent critique where one’s critical perspective does not require being entirely outside the situation critically examined but merely requires a reflective perspective on it that is not wholly absorbed in the immediacy of what is experienced; a perspective better described as positionally eccentric (or decentred) rather than as external. Such perspectives can be achieved by efforts of disciplined wilful attention, but also often arise spontaneously through experiences of somatic dissonance where unreflective coordination is disrupted, which thus stimulates a decentred, reflective critical attention to what is going on.12

What Shusterman calls an experience of “somatic dissonance” could be like your own experience of disorientation (or of uncoordinated sense dimensions) looking out your office window onto the wrong street, or Jondi’s experience going the wrong way out of the subway station and feeling himself or the street fold in on itself, or perhaps my experience in Nelson’s “I, Imposter” of being unsure whether I had gotten lost. I agree with Shusterman that there is a possibility to use such instances to instigate a critical reflective attention, but where he says it is attention “to what is going on”, I would qualify this as what is going on in the relationship between body and surroundings. Extending from Shusterman’s idea of immanent critique, you and Erin proposed what this kind of critique might do, as you wrote, “An immanent critique engages with new processes more than new products, from a constructivist angle. It seeks to energize new modes of activity, already in germ, that seem to offer a potential to escape or overspill ready-made channelings.”13 This idea of continuing what is “already in germ” is where I see a potential for such architectural coordinations to evoke new movements, behaviours, ideas, or understanding. This moment of disorientation, and perhaps also that event of reorientation, could be extended by architectural gestures in order to afford an opportunity to reconsider and inflect subsequent engagements.

This calls to mind the concept of ‘immediation’ that you and Erin have put forward. I recently read the conversation between the two of you and Christoph Brunner where you discuss this concept. In describing your “Immediations” project, Erin said that “in the new project […] we are interested in drawing attention to how the stakes of experience occur in the immediate interstices of its coming to be.”14 This idea of remaining within the immediacy of the event can lead to the development of


new forms of relation, or as Erin put it, “techniques have to be generated in the event, each occasion anew, because if they are not, they simply don’t work.[...] The event generates its own forms of speculation and forms of pragmatism, and you have to be in the event to compose with them.”15 In regards to what Shusterman proposed, this immediation would not require a decentered position to gain perspective, but rather focus on what speculations might be generated within the event, as a participant in that event. In this way, there is no need to establish a distance from what’s actually happening, but rather to acknowledge our implication in an event and take advantage of its potentials. Participating in the event, on equal footing with the other participants (for instance, an architectural surrounding), this somatic dissonance could make available certain potentials for new actions to be carried out, rather than simply an opportunity for critical reflection at a distance. I think you put it nicely when you said, “Our freedom is how we play our implication in the field, what events we succeed in catalyzing in it that brings out the latent singularity of the situation, how we inflect for novel emergences.”16 It is these inflections that can lead to change, that can begin to transform what might come next, or what will be taken up from one event and carried forward into the next.

Remaining within the immediacy of such moments or events holds us back from rushing to a complete, reoriented position, or to a brushing away of tentativeness; to withhold, at least momentarily, from closing down on the sense of disorientation or somatic dissonance, and to be attentive to what potentials might be present. Or perhaps to simply be attentive to what senses are being activated, what is really happening experientially in that instance before reaching a fully-formed state of perception in the coordination of the different sense


16. Ibid., p158.
dimensions into a coherent image of the world. This process of reorientation is important for us moving around in and participating in events, but perhaps to be more tentative in our act of perception – to refrain from ending that process – offers the generative potential I have been talking about. It seems to me that installations that are like tools for encouraging that tentativeness can enhance this generative potential.

In my own recent installation projects (documentation can be found at www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com), I have used this idea of disorientation and destabilization in order to raise questions about how we relate to our architectural surroundings. In the collaborative "Building Movements" project in Melbourne a few years ago, the intention of the two installations I was most involved in was to reinforce a disorientation already at work in the Design Hub building in which the installations were located. The Design Hub repeats a floor plan on seven out of ten floors, and these are the floors most used by students and staff. This repetition makes it common for people to exit the elevator on the wrong floor. In planning our installations, Chris and I wanted to work with and against this evocation of disorientation, with extensions that prevented simple egress from the elevators. As you can see in the images on the website, both installations were placed up against the elevator doors, one on the 8th and one on the 9th floor.

In both installations, visual referents outside the installation environment were either denied or

Figures B.11 & B.12: Sketching out the interventions in front of the elevators.
destabilized: the stairs installation was fully enclosed, and the overlapping perforated steel cubes created a moiré effect when moving through them, distorting vision of the environment outside them. The elevator threshold that was habitually crossed without much effort was made into a physical environment that required effort to negotiate, calling attention to this threshold (and the action of crossing it) through its extension. Taking up the potentials that were afforded by the disorienting design of the building, these were extended, enhanced, and inflected in built form.

Chris and I wrote about our experience of making this project. In that writing, reflecting on our projects and process of making them, we saw this project as seeking to instigate and catalyse attention to the interrelationships between body and architectural surroundings through the act of moving into this threshold-extension, and subsequent movements that required both intention and attention to surroundings.

The elevator functions to move bodies through the building, from floor to floor, and we understood this affective experience to be that of passive tentativeness, in that while inside the elevator we were not certain of our location, the only activity permitted by the elevator is waiting, and the normative behaviour effected is immobility. We sought to extend this tentativeness through action rather than passivity and immobility, taking tentativeness as a positive affective experience. This led to a built proposition for the development of two abilities, ‘thresholding’ and ‘attentativeness’. These reciprocal abilities are ways of transforming a passive condition of being tentative into an action. This notion of tentativeness relates to how Madeline Gins and Arakawa have discussed tentativeness through their
writing and architecture, which I am writing about in a letter to a question mark.

Attentativeness has an inward intention, while thresholding is directed outward. This inward intention directs conscious attention to our state of being tentative. There is a distinction between conscious and unconscious tentativeness in that there is a condition of being tentative when we are unsettled, without clear direction, somehow thrown off-balance. In this condition we often reach out to hold on to something structural, to return to a state of balance, in an automatic or reactive way that is instinctual and done without conscious intention or attention. There is another possibility, however, of not reaching out at this point, but rather to be attentive to our condition of being tentative, to being off-balance. This could be called ‘attentativeness’ (as Chris proposed). This is a dynamic act, directing attention internally and becoming sensitive to the operations taking place within ourselves in this event. There is yet another possibility as well at this point of being unsettled, which is to direct that attention externally into our surroundings yet not in the form of a reaching out to grasp hold of. The act is rather to extend this tentativeness, to remain in this state of being off-balance and attentive to the aspects of our surroundings that effect this state of tentativeness, to attend to the thresholds between spaces, between thoughts, between where we had just been and are moving towards, between those entities we are co-emerging with. In the event of reorientation, in the moment just before the scene outside your window morphing (not so smoothly) into the correct orientation, or Jondi’s the street folding back through itself, when you are beginning to enter what you describe as a fold of experience where reorientation takes place, there exists this potential for attentativeness and thresholding. To remain within
a threshold, to withdraw from arriving completely and to relate to our surroundings with uncertainty is an act that can function as an ability. Rather than rejecting uncertainty, precarity and tentativeness as negative and uncomfortable aspects of our relationships to what surrounds us, this technique of remaining with the tentativeness can open up new potential directions for movement, for thought, for relating to surroundings. By not grasping onto that handrail, bypassing the habitual grasping for stability, new pathways can emerge and new capacities be realised.

In "Adaptations" (2014, also on website), Roel Meij and I built installations into four storage units in a self-storage facility. The navigation through this environment to find our installations was through corridors and tunnels, and demanded the negotiation of elevators and security code systems as well as combination locks. Just as the Design Hub was repetitive to the point of being disorienting, so too was this self-storage facility, with door after door of storage units continuing throughout the building. Our idea was to get visitors lost in the space, to make that negotiation of the environment (an environment designed with a logic of organization) as confusing as possible in order to evoke that feeling of disorientation. As in "Building Movements" we aimed to work with and against this disorientation by amplifying it through extensions. We hoped that this would destabilize the habitual configuring of relationships between visitors and these kinds of environments, to encourage tentativeness to emerge as they engage with these spaces. For instance, in one storage unit located in the centre of the building, we built a brick wall and in front of it built a concrete wall with a small window resembling those of the original building. The brick wall was lit with lights that gave a semblance of daylight, with the intention of raising the question in the visitor
of whether they were looking outdoors, that they were at the exterior wall of the building rather than being in the centre, calling into further question their sense of orientation. As your experience of disorientation led to a sequence of realisations about your orientation and relation to the architectural surroundings, the aim of our incitation of destabilisation was to evoke a similar sequence of realisations (though they would be particular to each individual), to induce a process of reorientation that was slowed down and held open sufficiently long enough for potentials to be taken up, if a visitor wished to.

This effort to elicit a disruption of habits and a realisation of them at the same time was at work in a different way in my project, "I am a laboratory", (see also on website), a small space built as a walk-in biosafety cabinet. Just large enough for one person to sit, the laboratory had no parallel planes nor right angle corners. It was also tipped so that all surfaces were leaning, to varying degree, to one side. Even though a person could only sit in the space, this situation of being tipped and having no planes or corners to establish what is true vertical or horizontal nevertheless demanded a reflection on their vestibular and proprioceptive senses. Spending time in this space, I found that my sense of when I was sitting straight changed the longer I stayed inside. At first, relying on the visual cues the environment afforded, I was leaning in the direction it was tipped. After some time, I could feel in my muscles some strain, and found that I was in fact not sitting straight. Through different compensations and reflections over time, my position continued to change.

In my practice of making architectural interventions, of which these three projects are examples, the familiar
is made strange through these destabilizing encounters, confounding expectations and perhaps giving rise to critical ideas about how the architectural frameworks we operate in shape our assumptions about the world.

There is something in a text you wrote about Lars Spuybroek that I think helps clarify this idea of holding back from perception:

If the tendency to respond determines the perception, then holding back the response while holding onto the tendency postpones perception. The image fails to advance into its own determinateness. Its perception and the action it governs are short-circuited, held, incipiently, in their own potential. The pre-feeling of the affordances and their sequencing continues indeterminately, in intensity.17

While this tendency to respond and determine our perceptions is so deeply ingrained within us, my interest is in how architectural environments can be designed to help us hold back. In this way, in what you called the short-circuiting of 'perception and the action it governs' we might create the possibility for a different action, a novel relationship with our surroundings that differs from what becomes habitually perceived. I believe that architectural surroundings can be designed to work powerfully in that way. Maybe this is what you meant when you wrote

Construction can short-circuit action and perception, in the sense of feeding them into each other on the level of their potential (un)grounding. They can be extracted or abstracted from their content in such a way that their immanent activity and the movement of their potential are vertiginously abstracted into architecture.18

These constructions (as art installations, for example) can not only short-circuit our actions, but they can act themselves. Schneider states:

18. Ibid., p326.
I have tried to work away from image, sculpture and space. In this work I have tried to make something I doesn't [sic] know myself. I am by myself as a person intractable, involved in the work. I am not an actor outside the process. Or rather, the work becomes the actor, making the artist disappear”.19

The notion that the work becomes the actor, and that the artist disappears, comes about through these methods of building architectural structures that have the ability to perform. Beyond the destabilization that we might feel as persons through experiences with these architectural environments, might the structures themselves operate to inflect and result in changes to other architectural structures, outside of our human interaction with them? Chris Cottrell’s PhD certainly raised this possibility in what he called ‘Architectural Judo’, and it was in a collaborative writing project we did together that we stumbled across this idea of it not just being ‘us’ – humans – who become destabilised, but that the architecture itself becomes destabilised. I wonder if this might be one of the implications of the event-oriented concept of ‘immediations’?

I will be returning to Melbourne soon to make another project for my PhD examination exhibition, when I’d like to explore this idea further. As I have been discussing in relation to my previous works, this next project will seek to work with what is already present in the selected site, and to extend them through an architectural intervention that begins to not only call attention to and propose inflections into the relations between person and architectural environment, but also into the relations between architectures and how they might inflect each other.

Forever disoriented,

Scott
Dear Question Mark (?),

Or do I call you by your other name – interrogation point? At one point I hear you were called a question stop. This may be a purely rhetorical exercise, as an apostrophe, though not the punctuation mark that is your colleague but rather the rhetorical gesture of speaking directly to something that cannot answer. Donne’s "Death be not proud" makes this same gesture, as does Juliet’s address to Romeo’s dagger, and although this rhetorical gesture has fallen out of fashion my hope is that by addressing you directly I might come to better understand your role in my art practice. As punctuation you mark a point of pause and a point of departure, a moment for consideration that can manifest potential. Also, you mark both a feeling of puzzlement and an act of interrogation, and it is these characteristics that I often hope to evoke through the installations that I build.

This act of interrogation and also feeling of puzzlement are present in the posing of a question. The most explicitly recognised manner of posing questions is through language, for a person to ask another person a question in speech or in writing. An interrogation assumes (at least) two individuals, one with knowledge of a particular topic and the other without who seeks to know. Questions can also be posed by two individuals without knowledge of the issue at hand, but who attempt to solve their quandary through discourse. A third kind of question can be posed by one individual by addressing
something other than a person, in which case the asking is really of oneself by way of going outside oneself through a personified other, as I seem to be doing in this letter. These situations require a person to do the asking. In your experience in these matters, I wonder how often you have been part of a question asked by an inanimate object? By a wall, or a floor? Or have people asked questions of such things, rather than about them? The latter situation leads to questions that can’t be answered. But in the former, a floor asking a person a question, how does that asking take place? Certainly not spoken or written, this question has to come about through other means.

My practice of making architectural installations raises questions through built architectural surroundings. Although it is true that I am the one who is raising the questions as I designed and built the installation, the question has to be posed to or asked of a person by the architecture that person is in direct relation to. This way of raising questions through architecture may not lead to clear questions or direct answers, but instead might result in the puzzlement that you mark. This raises another question, what might be the purpose of bringing about this kind of puzzlement? Is there a benefit in raising non-verbal questions that don’t lead, at least not directly, to answers? In regards to what kind of questions these would be, how does one understand the prosody, the tone and inflection of voice, which often conveys that an utterance is a question, when it is architecture that is doing the asking? How to discern if the question is phatic, where the question does not request an answer as in small talk, or if it needs a response?
There are others who have worked in a similar way, using architecture towards posing questions to a human body. In particular, Madeline Gins and Arakawa have made numerous works that do just that. They have used one particular overarching question in their practice of making architecture and writing, seeking to find the answer of how not to die as a way of raising many more subsequent questions, as well as different ways of asking this same question with different inflections and intonations. These questions each provide an incremental clarification towards answering this overarching question. They believe that such questions must be resolved through architecture, and it is the architecture that they have designed towards finding this answer that poses questions directly to the body. They write, “A person who is held in the grip of language alone will have lost touch with many other scales of action vital to her existence.”

By building architectural environments that pose questions to the body, they seek to address the particular puzzlement which they believed is inherent to the human organism. Their own writing presents this starting point, as they write,

The average organism that persons (a person) possesses sufficient intelligence to gather that what, or if you like, who she has arrived here as exists as substantially an unknown quantity. [...] Proceeding to do what it is incumbent on any organism to do, an organism that persons arrives at having to perform the impossible task of being precise about an unknown quantity. The puzzle-creature to herself lives as a grand unknown.

This state of living as a ‘grand unknown’ is what starts their process of devising methods for attenuating this puzzlement by deploying it to produce answers that “desist from foreclosing on any possibility.” Recognizing this inherent condition of puzzlement, they have chosen to make their process of inquiry through building


architectural surroundings. This is a process rather than a definitive resolution, as what they build poses questions directly to the body rather than presenting an answer. Returning to the types of questions, phatic and emphatic, in some instances Arakawa and Gins raise questions in order to elicit an answer from the body, but in other instances, questions lead to further questions: “Depending on what activates what in question-posing surroundings, or on what stimulates bodies to move through these surroundings, answers will tentatively surface, or further questions will.”4 These two types of questions, those that will tentatively resolve and those that will raise further questions, establishes a practice that begins to parse out how architecture can pose questions, and to what end.

This practice of architectural questioning begs the question, how does architecture ask? To say that it speaks to the body is to obfuscate through metaphor, as architecture does not have a voice to speak with in the way that a human body does. If not through language-based discourse, what relation between architecture and body might afford the conveyance of a question from one to the other? The relationship that Arakawa and Gins outline as a condition for posing questions through architecture begins with their own definition of the human body as an ‘architectural body,’ stating that there can be no clear separation between architectural surrounds and the human body. They write, “the Architectural Body Hypothesis/Sited Awareness Hypothesis [...] would have it that a person [can] never be considered apart from her surroundings. It announces the indivisibility of seemingly separable fields of bioscleave: a person and an architectural surround.”5 This indivisibility that requires a redefinition of what is a human body leads to the potential for aspects of an architectural surround to be taken up by a person and in this way included in this

5. Madeline Gins and Arakawa, Architectural Body, p 51. N.B.: “bioscleave” is the term Arakawa and Gins have coined to replace “biosphere”, to express “its dynamic nature” (Architectural Body p. 48)
emergent architectural body. The hypothesis also states that “What stems from the body, by way of awareness, should be held to be of it. Any site at which a person finds an X to exist should be considered a contributing segment of her awareness.”\(^6\) The interactions between body and architecture that lead a person to take up part of the architecture into awareness through any and all sense modalities becomes part of that person, as “a person positions herself within her surroundings by taking her surroundings up as her sited awareness.”\(^7\)

As a medium of direct conveyance, this follows Gibson’s theory of affordances, as he writes, “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill[...]. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.”\(^8\) To perceive an environment is to perceive what it affords, and in this way "'values' and 'meanings' of things in the environment can be directly perceived."\(^9\)

The quality of being direct is key here to understanding what Arakawa and Gins call indivisibility between architecture and body. This directness of perception suggests that there is no process of consideration of what might be afforded by the environment; it is taken up through behaviours carried out. A flat surface that is rigid affords support, and so affords behaviours such as standing and walking. This does not involve a reflection or classification, this perception is immediate: "You do not have to classify and label things in order to perceive what they afford."\(^10\) Through such a direct connection and immediate conveyance, questions can be posed directly to a body. Arakawa and Gins suggest “questions that query the degree to which persons are surroundings-bound need to be posed by actually erecting measuring frames around them.”\(^11\) The questions that can address this relationship between body and architecture, what connects them as indivisible, need to be posed through

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10. Ibid., p126.
architecture rather than through language.

If questions can be posed by built surroundings, what kinds of architectural surroundings pose questions directly to the body? Certainly not all architecture is posing questions, as not all architects wish to raise questions. In looking at the works of architecture that Arakawa and Gins created, some clarifications can be garnered. In their "Reversible Destiny Lofts" in Mitaka (Tokyo, Japan), a residential apartment is presented as a device through which a person can come to know better their relationship to architectural surrounds, how the architecture inflects actions taken by residents towards establishing a sense of puzzlement, or doubt, that can lead to change and potentially a reinvention.

It is through living with the architectural environment, being a kind of test subject for a person's own investigation into living as an architectural body, that questions are raised. They write:

The lofts put fruitfully into question all that goes on within them, they steer residents to examine minutely the actions they take and to reconsider and, as it were, recalibrate their equanimity and self-possession, causing them to doubt themselves long enough to find a way to reinvent themselves. These tactically posed architectural volumes put human organisms on the track of why they are as they are.12


Figures Q.1 & Q.2: Arakawa and Madeline Gins, Reversible Destiny Lofts MITAKA - In Memory of Helen Keller (interior view, exterior view), 2005.
This begins to outline how questions are raised, through a kind of steering towards self-examination, but this does not explain how the questions are posed. How does the architecture steer the residents as described? Through living with the questions in this built environment, these questions are posed in the moment of action carried out within the architectural environment, rather than questions pondered in reflection with a critical distance from these interactions. They write, “Depending on reflection alone represents too drastic a reduction, one that unnecessarily distorts the picture, when it is the body that is being queried as to itself.”  


This relates to a letter I recently wrote to Brian Massumi, discussing how puzzlement can lead to in-act responses that take up surroundings without reflective distance. Such acts of ‘immediation’ can lead to changes that would not come about through reflection. This questioning is meant to take place in the process of living, in this instance in these lofts and by the actions taken by the inhabitants: “the architectural surroundings themselves, by virtue of how they are formed, pose questions directly to the body.”  


It is through how the surroundings are formed that they pose their questions, but also, as mentioned above in the earlier quote, the surroundings are “tactically posed”. The forms and tactics begin to create situations in which the architecture can pose questions to the body.
Returning to the idea of the types of question that can be posed by architecture, in particular the way that questions can lead to further questions, architectural surroundings can be ‘tactically posed’ in order to elicit not one action, but a series of actions. Arakawa and Gins call this an “architectural procedure,” as they write, “Architectural procedures disclose, highlight, and explicate the tentative steps by which an organism maintains herself as a person. And so, a sequence of actions (an architectural procedure) eventuates in an investigation into the nature and dynamics of the person performing them.” ¹⁵ This illustrates the two types of questions posed by architecture. The first is answered by an active response to an affordance, to how the surroundings are formed and taken up as an architectural body in actions, movements, and behaviours. The second results in a series of actions that are carried out in an architectural procedure, is a process that leads to raising new questions and sets in motion an examination into one’s actions and relations with architectural surroundings. In this second type, questions posed directly to the body by way of affordances are built up, compiled into a more complicated discourse. These questions do not necessarily need to be answered, but may lead to the development of better questions to be posed with subsequent procedures.

In your capacity as Question Mark and in consideration of what you stand for, does this process fit within your purview? I believe that the point of pause that comes about through reconsidering one’s actions, and the departure into investigations that examine what goes into such actions, mirror the interrogation that you mark in questions posed through language.

If you would accept this, architectural environments would be able to pose multiple questions to a person through the body-environment. Since not all architecture aims to raise questions, some built surroundings seek to encourage and assist actions and behaviours by facilitating a selected function. Describing this difference of built surroundings, they write:

Not all well-organized enclosures weigh in as the highly structured architectural surrounds we term tactically posed surrounds. Space capsules, for example, despite housing purposefulness aplenty, do not merit the term and therefore do not qualify as works of procedural architecture. An architectural surround that is functional, such as a space capsule, and such as the greater part of the built world of our day, facilitates an organism that persons in its actions, extending the senses no questions asked, whereas an architectural surround that is procedural, a tactically posed surround, fills an organism that persons with questions by enabling it to move within and between its own modes of sensing.16

It is this enabling that fills a person with questions, and would result in sustaining doubt “long enough to find a way to reinvent” oneself. In 2007 I had the chance to visit one of Arakawa and Gins’s buildings, the "Bioscleave House" on Long Island, NY. It was still under construction, but most of the work had been completed. The undulating floor presented a landscape not at all floor-like, more of a landscape reminiscent of desert sand dunes. The contrasting colours of the walls and the vertical steel poles that ran floor to ceiling (of differing diameter) created a visual environment which did not allow for a stable impression. Walking around the space I noticed the floor plan of the building displayed throughout the house, for example as the dining table, on the ceiling of the main living area as a skylight, and on the ceiling of the bathroom. What I experienced was at the same time a destabilization and a continual process

In describing his own experience of the Bioscleave House, Jondi Keane wrote,

the disruptions I experienced in Bioscleave House were made more acute, resembling sea-sickness of a land lover alongside the excitement of a flaneur in a self-organizing city. My struggle to identify the indicators responsible for my unbalance, dysmorphia and lack of orientation hinted at the insufficient coordination I possessed for dealing with new learning conditions. Uncertain boundaries and inconsistent points of reference left me no choice other than to assemble alternative modes of measure and engagement.17

These disruptions, effecting a disorientation and unbalance, lead to a situation of puzzlement, and it is this puzzlement that questions. The questions may be multiple, and may be at first imprecise, but they begin to be addressed through some form of change, in Jondi’s case in finding alternative modes of measure and engagement. Returning to this idea of which questions posed by architecture are phatic and which require an answer, Jondi’s account illustrates that his interaction

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with this particular environment left him no choice but to answer, and this answering came about by changing his 'modes of measure and engagement.' What this suggests is that the questions that are emphatic will put a person in a position where continuing without change is untenable.

This idea of puzzlement through disruption and disorientation or destabilization is linked to the idea of tentativeness. Arakawa and Gins write, “constructed to exist in the tense of what if, it presents itself as intentionally provisional, replacing definite form with tentative form, the notion of a lasting structure with that of an adaptive one.” Tentativeness is destabilizing in that it begins to break down habitual flows of movement and action. Puzzled in relation to the architectural surrounding the inhabitant becomes tentative, not quite sure where or how to move next. This begins to open up potential within that relationship, as where habits are interrupted there exists a possibility for change. As Reuben Baron writes,

> Viewed this way, tentativeness – an unfreezing of habitual modes of perceiving, conceiving, and acting – creates an openness that is both a state and a process. It functions as a state between states, an unravelling that is pregnant with new ravellings. In Keane’s (2007) dramatic terms, the 'seamless' status quo must be made 'to stutter, to equivocate' before a person or group can exploit sources of organization that potentially have negative entropic properties.

What begins as a stuttering fills a person with questions or at least a sense of puzzlement, and this begins to open lines of questioning. Arakawa and Gins state that “Tactically posed surrounds will be set up to hold open many lines of questioning at once.” The act of ‘holding’ is imperative here, in that it creates the possibility for engaging with a question that is posed. As there are many situations in which an experience of disorientation

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or destabilization come about, through sense failure or lack of sense coordination, the body will right itself and restabilize, reorient, in order to continue with its habitual intentions. To invoke a shift that would open up new potentials for action, the question produces destabilization and invites tentativeness in order to be held open long enough for recomposition to begin.

The built architectural surrounds can engage this feeling of tentativeness, and by so doing, lead towards a holding open. This may seem counterintuitive towards answering a question, but holding open can reveal what is held onto, and how:

Stay a moment, says the architectural surround to tentativeness. Tentativeness does hesitate and in so doing provides its landings—that which it lands as—with enough time to form sites. On landing, tentativeness becomes a touch less provisional, a mite less hesitant. That hesitancy within which the landing upon something turns a “corner” on itself and comes to hold forth as or to open up as a site must be judged as simply one of the modes of the tentativeness inherent to body-plus-bioscleave. An area of territory held—a patch or a microdot of held territory—can be read as landing accomplished at this site.21

This holding open and holding in place may be two aspects of the same practice. Holding open can allow for a consideration of how a holding onto takes place, in the sense of revealing part of the interaction with the world in finding relations that are otherwise overlooked. Arakawa and Gins raise the question, “How does a person (tentatively) hold the world? What holds that which holds a thought?”22 Such a holding open finds a way to sustain tentativeness that permits questions to be raised and clarified.

At their "Elliptical Field: Site of Reversible Destiny" in Yoro Park (Gifu, Japan), various constructions were
built to create situations for posing questions to an architectural body. One construction was named the Critical Resemblances House, made up of wall segments that create three levels of overlapping labyrinths. In discussing their work on the ideas explored in a series of iterations that include "Elliptical Field", "Critical Resemblances House", and labyrinth drawings, they write:

Neither blocking the view nor significantly limiting it, the multilevel labyrinth helps people get a grip on getting hold of taking a hold of the all-over-the-place architectural body. Within it, it will become possible to hold on longer to what would otherwise be, say, merely a fleeting thought as to what that which is over there in the distance might be.  

Not only is doubt sustained, but fleeting thoughts are as well. In holding on to a fleeting thought, instances

of interaction between body and surroundings that might otherwise not be given sufficient attention can be carefully considered, questioned, and perhaps articulated more clearly.

There is a particular capacity present in architecturally posed questions to afford the opportunity to hold onto a fleeting thought. Language-based questions have limitations that architectural questions avoid. David Foster Wallace put it very clearly in one of his fictional stories, when he wrote,

> you know as well as I do how fast thoughts and associations can fly through your head. You can be in the middle of a creative meeting at your job or something, and enough material can rush through your head just in the little silences when people are looking over their notes and waiting for the next presentation that it would take exponentially longer than the whole meeting just to try to put a few seconds’ silence’s flood of thoughts into words. This is another paradox, that many of the most important impressions and thoughts in a person’s life are ones that flash through your head so fast that fast isn’t even the right word, they seem totally different from or outside of the regular sequential clock time we all live by, and they have so little relation to the sort of linear, one-word-after-another-word English we all communicate with each other with that it could easily take a whole lifetime just to spell out the contents of one split-second’s flash of thoughts and connections, etc. [...] What goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant.24

Translating the lived experience of interacting with an architectural environment into words would not be sufficient to parsing out the immense extent of what is happening within that interaction. The fastness of our consideration of our experience of the world, and the speed at which we fall into habitual patterns of movement and relation in a kind of automaticity that

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begins before we know it is happening, closes doors that might be otherwise prised open. What is presented by Arakawa and Gins are particular methods for finding these doors and then building architectural surrounds that might help us open them a bit wider, potentially to pass through them. At the very least, building in a certain way can allow us to step into the threshold so that we might consider whether crossing through would be a beneficial step.

The implementation of these methods, to build tentativeness into a person’s experiential interaction with an architectural environment, takes clear forms in Arakawa and Gins’s built environments, such as the uneven floors, slanted ceiling, and ubiquitous maps that Jondi and I responded to in "Bioscleave House", or the multi-leveled labyrinth in "Elliptical Field: Site of Reversible Destiny".

One of my reasons for writing you is to clarify an aspect of my own practice of making architectural installations. I also seek to pose questions about a person’s relationship to the surrounding environment, but through quite different forms and methods. How I could pose questions better, or assemble better questions? (Documentation of projects that illustrate this practice can be found at www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com.)

In "I am a laboratory", two small architectural constructions were juxtaposed as spaces to be entered and compared. The project draws out the relationship between utilitarian, functional architectural environments and the body by raising questions about what potentials for changing the body an architectural surrounding might offer. The orgone accumulator and its accompanying
text raised questions about what effect the materials contained within the walls of the device might have on a person sitting inside. This suggests that a potential might be present in the walls of the device for making some kind of change, though the absurdity of the claim certainly raised doubt about its likelihood. The theory presented in the text outlined the possibility that by sitting inside this box one would be filled with orgone energy, which created a situation in which a person might attempt to feel this imaginary energy, attending to one’s sensorium with an intentional focus. But the immaterial nature of that energy, and the impossibility of its measure even through attention to what one is feeling or sensing, raised further questions about the limits of knowing the extent of an environments’ effect through experience, and couldn’t be answered with any certainty. The absurdity of the claims that were made for the operation of this construction imbued the questions with a tone that suggested they could not, and perhaps need not, be answered.

In the second construction, while sitting inside the laboratory there were no visual referents for what was true vertical or horizontal, as all planes were tilted and no corners set at 90 degree angles. The lack of reliable visual referents for giving feedback towards positioning the body in the automatic habit of the righting reflex led to a reliance on proprioception to simply sit comfortably. In this way, confounding habitual ways of positioning the body, the angled planes of the architectural construction posed questions that could be addressed through the employ of proprioceptors made up of the vestibular system’s otolithic organs and muscle spindles along with haptic sensory information. This question was posed to an automatic reaction system (righting reflex/balance), and the body answered slowly due to the conflicting visual information so that there may have been a chance that one could become aware
of this process, perhaps raising further questions about how such a process takes place.

In "Building Movements", questions were posed through the interruption of habitual movements, asking building users what they will do when confronted with architectural obstacles that slowed down movement across a threshold. The elevator itself is a kind of threshold within the building, and the threshold between the elevator and the selected floor was extended into these circuitous routes, through these installations. When attempting egress from the elevator, an action that is most often done automatically, the selected floor’s number appearing on the LCD screen and the recorded voice stating the number of the floor instigate a preparation to exit in thought and in adjusting one’s position to face the doors. These preparations habitually carry forward into movement across the threshold and onto the selected floor. These installations questioned both the expectation and habitual movement through intermediary architectural environments that required either avoidance or physical negotiation with alternative movements. When the doors opened onto these interventions, a different action and movement was then instigated, not quite automatically, but certainly quickly engaged so as not to hold up the other elevator users on their way to other floors. The initial interruption effected a kind of stuttering, a brief moment when one is not quite sure how to move forward, which was a way of posing a question as an interrogative pause. The answer would come about through consideration of one’s action or one’s hesitation, to address the tentativeness with movement and action to be able to continue in the intentionally directed way onto the floor or to avoid the encounter and remain within the elevator.

Further disruptive destabilizations took place through the compression and contortions of the body by the
narrowness of the passage that was created by pushing and pulling the box within a box on the 8th floor, as well as the low ceiling and steep stairs on the 9th. On the 8th, the moiré effect brought about by the overlapping layers of perforations dissolved the most immediate surface in front of the eyes as the effect creates patterns that can be seen beyond that first layer of perforated sheet metal but before what can be seen of the building outside of the exterior sheet metal box, so that there is something to focus on in some intangible middle-ground somewhere within the layers of the perforated sheet metal boxes. This dissolving creates a disorienting situation that posed a question to one’s vision about how to gauge distance, leading to further questions about the process of measuring distance especially in relation to a space in between such as a threshold. This threshold between the elevator and the space of that floor is perhaps imperceptible, and this installation attempted to raise questions about perception of thresholds.

The installation built on the 9th floor offered a more humorous confrontation. Stairs being the alternative for ascending or descending in the building that was not selected by the building user about to exit the elevator, there was a humorous tone in the question that it posed. There was a sense of absurdity in having to climb stairs...
after exiting an elevator, but also that the climbing led to a raised platform with very low ceiling, forcing a person to crouch before immediately descending another flight of stairs, offering no reason for making the ascent and descent. The reception area questioned whether this poorly designed waiting room reminiscent of a private medical clinic, with furniture that was three-quarters full scale, was relegated to this hidden location so as not to disrupt the aesthetic of the rest of the Design Hub. As the Design Hub has no reception, could it have been assumed that navigation of the building would be self-evident due to the functionality of its design?

Entering the elevators through these constructions also posed questions that could only be answered through a consideration of the operation of the elevator and relations to other people in the building. If a person would call the elevator, and of the three elevators the one connected to the intervention came, there would not be sufficient time for a person to move through the construction before the doors would close. A collaborative effort of problem solving could lead to a solution if one person would hold the call button to keep the elevator doors open, leaving that person stuck on the floor. Or an individual could wait and hope that eventually other building users would call the elevator to another floor, giving the possibility for one of the other two elevators to come instead. These questions called attention to relations with other building users through this utilitarian device.

Drawing out this threshold draws attention to the point at which a decision is being made through perception and action. Answering through an initial movement of going forwards into the installation, and moving through contorted positions in physical negotiations of
transitional spaces, brings about a lived tentativeness that can be held open towards further questions about our perceptions of and interactions with this architectural environment.

In "Adaptations", every movement towards the interior of the building was made tentative through a continuous stuttering. The initial inconvenience and delay of making an appointment by telephone, combined with the locked doors and access codes they required, invoked a continuous tentativeness. Each movement forwards was delayed through the complications that we extended, for example by selecting storage units at the extremities of the facility, and listing them in an order that required travelling across the floor of the building through different corridors. All this was planned to create a feeling of being lost or disoriented by the repetition of red doors and numbers, and to make all movement and action carried out by the visitors filled with tentativeness. These encounters that posed questions to be addressed by problem solving with the codes provided, or through exploration, raised further questions about who, or what, was in control. The control of us as artists and choreographers of this encounter, in combination with the control of the building and its locks and doors, questioned the extent of a visitor’s own agency in moving around this architectural environment.

Each storage unit was filled with extensions of the structures already present in the storage facility, though in slightly altered forms. The similarity of appearance of these extensions of the structural pillars, ventilation system, walls and storage unit fit-out materials questioned whether they were original to the architectural environment or whether they had been added by us. The doubt about these structures combined with
the tentativeness of one’s own movements navigating and interacting with the building (answering more simple questions like ‘how do I get out of this elevator?’) led to a pervading sense of puzzlement whose source could not be precisely located. The regulated stuttering access into the building invoked a tentativeness that we extended with our built adaptations and sustained a feeling doubt into all interactions with the building. The additions, or adaptations, that we introduced into this environment in the form of physical extensions engaged with this tentativeness and brought it into material forms that posed questions about the relations between body and architecture as well as between architectural elements. Furthermore, the sustaining of doubt also permitted the questions posed to be held open for consideration, perhaps even beyond the experience of the building adaptations and into experiences that followed. The question about which elements were original and which were built as art interventions we intended to leave open, and hoped that in fact it could not be answered through actions taken by visitors to the building. Instead, this question would lead to further questions about the relations between architectural elements in an environment as well as about the ways that the spatial layout of the environment and access to it controls movements and actions.

Those are some of the ways that I have raised questions in my projects, and posed questions through built architectural surroundings. Whereas Arakawa and Gins build architectural procedures as tactically-posed surrounds, in the form of complete environments for habitation (as in "Bioscleave House" and "Reversible Destiny Lofts") or immersive playful environments like "Elliptical Field", my methods are primarily to extend from an already built environment to draw out questions about the relation between body and architecture as well
as between architectural elements. The questions do not depend upon an elicited sequence of actions (as in an architectural procedure) but rather come about through a sense of puzzlement that permeates the experience of and interactions with a built environment that result in raising further questions. There are already questions present in the architectural environments that I select as sites for my installations, and my installations seek to draw these out and hold them open.

It is in this gesture of holding open that potentials can be found, and this holding open comes about from the tentativeness instilled through partaking in the architectural surrounds. From tentativeness to puzzlement and finally towards an openness, potentials begin to emerge, as Baron writes, "[Arakawa and Gins] want to build tentativeness in our lives and bodies so that our relations to the environment remain 'open and revisable'".25

If the questions are posed in the space and action of living, in the moment of interaction between body and architecture and across sense modalities, what kinds of answers might be brought forward? Arakawa and Gins write,

The body can yield answers through that which it subsists as, through the whole of itself, inclusive of its sequences of actions and the surroundings into which, in a variety of ways, it extends itself. The investigative work that can yield answers cannot be done in the abstract; it must, on the contrary, be done on-site where living happens."26

This on-site investigative work results in a body-wide response, in resolutions articulated through living. The potential to be found in the posing of questions through architecture could be in this form that answers take, in that they could effect a more immediate change, or at
the very least evoke answers that cannot be evoked from questions posed in speech or in writing.

This is what I am proposing to you, or rather, asking you about: could such questions, posed through architecture, open up your purview with greater scope and potential? Do you also see a benefit to posing the questions ‘where living happens’? As not all questions lead to answers but more often to more (hopefully better) questions, the instances of interaction between body and architecture that pose such unanswerable questions could leave a person in a state of puzzlement. A kind of embodied aporia, this puzzlement is lived, and through it an essential tentativeness can be acknowledged that may lead to further questions and potential answers tested through living. Perhaps it is through such a situation as an embodied aporia that change can find its beginnings? The experience of this puzzlement is likely to manifest in a tentativeness to our way of living, being not so sure of the answer, not certain of how to resolve it but through attempting change in the form of new actions or behaviours, or then through developing further questions. Continuing in a questioning way, we might question our relationship to surroundings, making the architecture less certain as well as the body less sure of itself, both easily thrown off-balance. It may result in revealing the tentativeness of being a body as one of its essential conditions.

Inquisitively yours,

Scott
Dear Madeline,

Below is my report cataloging the results of my Pursuit of Puzzlement. The pursuit took the form of built structures (as architectural art installations) and written correspondence.

Through these direct addresses, I have developed methods for introducing puzzlement and tentativeness into relations between bodies and architectural surrounds. I began this research by taking seriously your claims that “people are too damn sure of themselves”¹ and that we are in fact “puzzle-creatures to ourselves”.²

My own experience of puzzlement, especially when induced by my surrounding environment, has been positive, and I have found great value in maintaining

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². From Architectural Body, p27.
puzzlement. Rather than seeking out methods to resolve the puzzlement, what I have come to by way of this research is that through puzzlement it is possible to highlight the tentativeness and contingency that connects body with architecture in a continuing emergent process.

Below is my proposal for a sequence of procedures that can be used for designing architectural puzzlement. This idea of procedures is inspired and informed by how you and Arakawa have used procedures, but is somewhat different. Whereas your procedures would result from a process of invention and assembly, these procedures of mine are a starting point to set in motion a way of engaging with architectural surroundings that might lead to the identification of puzzlement already present in an environment. This would then lead to the process of invention and assembly that you write about, so mine are perhaps procedures towards the invention and assembly of architectural procedures (pre-procedural procedures).

**Procedures for designing architectural puzzlement**

1. When walking through an architectural environment briskly and with ease of motion, beware that you are not in control: that which is functional has motives other than your own.

2. Seek out thresholds. Find a boundary line, bodily or architectural, and extend it.

3. If you hesitate, remain within that hesitation. A hesitation is an opening: find the alternative(s) that it is calling your attention to.

4. Develop the hesitation into tentativeness by attending to what relations with surrounding architecture bring it about.

5. Extend and amplify this tentativeness through built additions that invoke a prevailing puzzlement, using one or more of the methods listed below.
Gradually and tentatively, through this research I have assembled the following methods. These seek to continue engaging with the tentativeness that can be found within architectural environments. I have used these methods in my recent works (documentation can be found at www.inpursuitofpuzzlement.com).

**Methods**

The dilatatio ad absurdum:

Employing comedy and satire towards the revelation of familiar absurdities. Using the same tools and tactics as the architecture one is working with and against affords a potential for additional built structures to reveal familiar absurdities in our surroundings. Extending what is already present through built forms, but remaining similar through the selection of similar materials and forms, establishes a useful plausibility that leads the (comedic) extensions to be taken seriously. The revelation of familiar absurdities begins to raise doubts about the surrounding architecture. Put into practice in a functional architectural environment, this playfulness leads to a puzzlement that questions function, and instigates reconsideration of how new functions can be developed by taking up new behaviours.

Thresholding and Seaming:

Creating the conditions for the emergence of an uncategorized experience. By making seams into the experience of an existing architectural environment, drawing out thresholds of experience, a space can be made sufficient for constructing an installation that will inflect the original structure. Through a close examination of a site, these seams can be found. Puzzlement and tentativeness can be increased through locating the project within a threshold of knowing. Making it difficult to discern what is an artwork and what is original to the structure can afford an encounter that does not fit with the manner in which most experiences are categorized. The pervading tentativeness and puzzlement that arise from this begin to dehabituate perceptual modes of experience.
Sensitizing to relations between bodies:

Engendering encounters that develop sensitivity to similarities between bodies and surroundings. Through shifts in scale, affinities can be drawn out between persons and architectures, leading to encounters with forms and materials as both familiar and strange. Such encounters hold potential for developing sensitivity to the forces at play between body and surroundings, and the identification of separate bodies can be shifted to identification with, and as part of, an ecology of bodies. Puzzlement about what is the extent of one’s own body, and about the capacity to be affected by surroundings, can begin to reveal an entanglement of relations taking place in our encounters with architecture.

Lost and finding:

Evoking a feeling of disorientation leads to a process of reorientation, and this can be brought about through architectural methods. Repetition of forms, elements, and complete environments within an architectural surrounding can trigger a critical reflection about our relationship to built-surroundings. In the moment crossing over from disorientation to reorientation, potentials that are present within an architectural environment can be brought into awareness and taken up in acts of engagement with that environment. This process does not reorient back to a familiar position, but instead results in a position in which the familiar seems out of place. The potentials found and brought forward lead to novel engagements with the environment.

Holding open what language forecloses:

Questions which cannot be posed through language can be posed through other methods. Certain questions are best posed by architecture. The prosody that inflects a spoken question, and the mark that punctuates written questions, can be taken up by architectural gestures. Through the introduction of puzzlement, doubt can be sustained into an extended duration. As a result, a question that is posed by architecture can be held open not only durationally but also in interactions between body and architecture. Such holding open can be manifested as a holding in place of tentativeness towards accepting it as an inherent condition shared by bodies and architectural environments.
Summary of Findings

When architecture does not pose questions, it ignores our condition as “puzzle-creatures” and our inherent tentativeness. Most architecture ignores this aspect of our character, suggesting to us that we should move along, uninterrupted and carry out given functional operations. This research in pursuit of puzzlement has searched for ways to find what little tentativeness might exist in an architectural environment and its material components, and draw it out towards puzzlement. This is simply one way to address our nature as puzzle-creatures. Instead of the construction of complete environments that afford unadulterated influence, to invent a closed world for inhabitants to engage and take part with, existing environments can be inflected towards the development of tentativeness. There is always tentativeness to be found, and puzzlement to take advantage of towards finding ways to change or reconsider.

The temporary nature of these inflections can work against the development of habitual ways of engaging with architecture. Although this temporary nature precludes the potential for long-term repetition of the same question, it allows for more questions to be brought into places that otherwise don’t ask questions.

The built environments you and Arakawa created were complete environments, with the exception of your final work, the Biotopological Scale-Juggling Escalator. Did you also come to this same conclusion that taking up potentials from existing architectural environments and inflecting them towards greater tentativeness was the way to go? Or was this just an exception? Artists like Mike Nelson and Gregor Schneider have constructed art installations that invoke puzzlement and engender tentativeness, also through complete environments. In the rare instances when they make installations within other structures, these work towards concealing that original architectural site.

My proposal is that by creating projects that implement particular strategies for building/making, tentativeness and puzzlement can be brought into the relationship between body and architectural environment while taking place in an engagement with functional (non-procedural) environments. Bringing
tentativeness and puzzlement in at this point spreads that tentativeness out beyond the interventions and into interactions with other environments. This tentativeness can increase sensibility to what is taking place in our process of relating-to and interacting-with these environments is increased. Also, these methods can reveal where tentativeness and puzzlement is already present in an existing architectural surrounding. The potentials that are already present in such environments can be drawn out to the point where they can be (selectively) taken up, and carried forward into new engagements. Using methods that allows architecture to pose questions and to also hold these questions open for sufficient duration affords an opportunity for taking up potentials in action, in the immediacy of the moment of interacting with the architecture.

What I have found through making this research is that such methods of practice begin to reveal the inherent tentativeness in people, architecture, and the relationship between them. The revelation of inherent shared tentativeness makes apparent the ways that we smooth over this tentativeness, to make actions and habitual movements easier. If we are puzzle-creatures, and if environments are often puzzling, is this tentativeness and puzzlement an ontological condition that is common to these entities and relations?

Attached are the letters and documentation of the projects that I have made in this research. I hope that you find value in this report and the methods I have developed. Your work has helped me get to this point, thanks for helping me get this far. You posed many puzzles and raised voluminous questions for me through your writing and constructions. I hope this report tickles the puzzle-creature you continue to hold open.

Eternally puzzled,

Scott
Reference List


---. "Not Untitled", in Parry, Cultural Hijack, 48-79.


