The Sacred Ground:
Enhancing and Constructing the Transcendent State in the Immersive Installation Environment

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Sadia Sadia

M. Sc. Political Science and Economics, Birkbeck College, University of London
M.A. Design Studies, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts (London)

School of Art
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
June 2019
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 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.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Sadia Sadia

4 June 2019
Notes

This dissertation was produced employing the Chicago Manual of Style (2017) ‘Notes and Bibliography’ citation style. Where a concept is expressed across the entirety of a document, no page number is listed in the footnote. The manual allows the use of ‘ibid.’ while expressing a preference for shortened citations. The use of shortened citations is new to the 17th edition, and this document preferences the use of ‘ibid.’ over the shortened citation format. Websites have been included in the bibliography. Wherever possible URLs across a line break have been broken after a single or double slash. Foreign language words are italicised and placed in inverted commas in the first instance, thereafter they are italicised only. Unless where otherwise noted, copyright of images vests in the artist.

The font used in this document is Avenir Next Regular by Linotype. This clear, sans serif font was chosen for its legibility in both print and online formats.

Copyright Notice

copyright © 2019 Sadia Sadia
# Table of Contents

- Declaration i
- Notes iii
- Table of Contents iv
- List of Figures vi
- Acronyms xii
- Work Undertaken Through Candidature xiii
- Abstract 1

**Chapter One | Introduction**

1.1 Introduction 4  
1.2 The Wow Factor and the Loudness Wars 6  
1.3 Audio, Dynamics and Competitive ‘Loudness’ 7  
1.4 Film Editing as Cognitive Loudness 11  
1.5 Competitive Loudness and Cognitive Fatigue 13

**Chapter Two | Rationale**

2.1 Rationale 17  
2.2 About the Author 20  
2.3 Early Influences 24

**Chapter Three | Previous Relevant Research**

3.1 Previous Relevant Research 32

**Chapter Four | Methodology**

4.1 Methodology 42  
4.2 Virtual Reality 49  
4.3 Consciousness, Neuroscience and Empiricism 51  
4.4 Key Theorists 56

**Chapter Five | The Construction of the Transcendent State**

5.1 The Construction of the Transcendent State 69
Chapter Six | An Outline of the Field

6.1 James Turrell 84
6.2 Olafur Eliasson 90
6.3 Bruce Naumann 94
6.4 Anthony McCall 95
6.5 Bill Viola 97
6.6 Pipilotti Rist 101
6.7 Other Works in the Field 103

Chapter Seven | Works

7.1 Introduction 110

Studio Works | Audio Tests

7.2 Audio Spotlight Field Tests (2015) 111
7.3 ‘Enveloping Field’ Audio Tests (2015) 112

Time-Based Works | Slow Motion Tests

7.4 One Second (2015) 114
7.5 STEEP (2016) 117
7.6 The Descent (Wakako Falling) (2017) 119

Works | Location Works

7.7 Mt Wellington I-II (2017) 122
7.8 Apostle Sea I-IV (2017) 126
7.9 but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree) (2017) 131
7.10 all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea) (2017) 135
7.11 every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill) (2017) 137
7.12 and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground) I-IV (2018) 141

Chapter Eight | Conclusion

8.1 Conclusion 151

Bibliography 155
List of Figures

Figure 1 Sting (Gordon Sumner), *Book Of My Life (Ostinato Mix)*, CD (Art of Peace Foundation, 2015), effect of limiter on audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

Figure 2 Sting (Gordon Sumner), *Book Of My Life (Ostinato Mix)*, CD (Art of Peace Foundation, 2015). Recorded 2002-2003 and 2015, track 1 on The Art of Peace (Songs for Tibet), Art of Peace Foundation, illustration of wave form differential between normal audio (top) and limited audio (bottom), the peaks are same but in the lower version the floor has been raised to limit the audio.

Figure 3 The Doors, *Riders Of The Storm*, CD (Elektra, 1970). Recorded December 1970, single, example of dynamics in audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

Figure 4 David Bowie (David Jones), *Fashion*, CD (RCA, 1980), recorded February & April 1980, track 5 on Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps), example of dynamics in audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

Figure 5 Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Around The World*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1999), Track 1 on ‘Californication’, example of highly compressed audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

Figure 6 The Doors, *Riders Of The Storm*, CD (Elektra, 1970), upper wave form; Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Around The World*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1999), lower wave form.

Figure 7 David Bowie (David Jones), *Fashion*, CD (RCA, 1980), upper wave form. Katy Perry, *Roar*, CD (Capitol, 2013), lower wave form, commercial releases with the peak at 0 dB, illustrating differential in dynamics.

Figure 8 Jackson Pollock, No. 29, 1950, black and aluminium enamel paint, expanded steel, string, beads, coloured glass and pebbles on glass, 121.9 x 182.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada (no. 15462), Ottawa, purchased 1968 copyright Pollock-Krasner Foundation / SODRAC (2013), fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

Figure 9 Zbigniew Blazeje with unknown artwork, possibly an iteration of ‘Audio Kinetic Environment’, 1966, image used under Toronto Star License by kind permission of the Toronto Star Photographic Archive.

Figure 10 Zbigniew Blazeje in his studio on Queen Street in Toronto, Canada in 1981, photo by Colin McConnell, image used under Toronto Star License by kind permission of the Toronto Star Photographic Archive.
Figure 11 Left, the Canadian Pavilion at Expo ‘67 (National Archives of Canada, C-030085); right, ‘Audio-Kinetic Environment’, 1966, installation view, Arts Canada, image used under Toronto Star License by kind permission of the Toronto Star Photographic Archive.

Figure 12 Sadia Sadia, The Memory Of Water (Part I), 2004, single channel installation, surround or stereo soundtrack, projectors, speakers, amplifiers, ACMI Australian Centre for Moving Image, Melbourne, permanent collection. Copyright of the artist, all rights reserved.

Figure 13 Sadia Sadia, Ghosts Of Noise (‘Blend’ channel), 2004, four channel video installation, eight channel soundfield, video projectors, speakers, amplifiers. RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2019, ‘Ghosts of Noise’, The Model Citizen, installation image, RMIT Gallery, by Mark Ashkanasy.

Figure 14 Sadia Sadia, Ghosts Of Noise, 2019, four channel video installation, eight channel soundfield, video projectors, speakers, amplifiers. RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2019, ‘Ghosts of Noise’, The Model Citizen, installation image, RMIT Gallery, by Mark Ashkanasy.

Figure 15 Sadia Sadia, Blackwater I and V, 1997, photographic stills, folio, photographed at Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico, USA. Copyright of the artist, all rights reserved.

Figure 16 Sadia Sadia, All Time And Space Fold Into The Infinite Present, 2014, three channel moving image with eight channel soundfield, video projectors, speakers, amplifiers, QVMAG Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania, permanent collection. Copyright of the artist, all rights reserved.

Figure 17 Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, “Approaching Awe, A Moral, Spiritual, And Aesthetic Emotion”, Cognition And Emotion 17, no. 2 (2003), 305, reproduced for non-commercial purposes or academic use only.

Figure 18 James Turrell, City Of Arhirit, 1976, constructed spaces, light, walkway, James Turrell Museum, Bodega Colome, Salta, Argentina, copyright James Turrell used for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

Figure 19 James Turrell, Seen Unseen, 2017, perceptual cell, constructed environment, lights, MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, 2017, photograph of the installation by the author, non-commercial purposes or academic use only.

Figure 20 Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project, 2003, installation, monofrequency lights, mirrors, mist, Tate Modern, Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, London, England, copyright Studio Olafur Eliasson GmbH, the use or sharing of such images, audio features, video sequences, and texts in other electronic or printed publications is permitted for all non-commercial purposes.
Figure 21 Olafur Eliasson, *Model For A Timeless Garden*, 2011, water, pumps, nozzles, stainless steel, wood, foam, plastic, strobe lights, wall mounts, control unit, Hayward Gallery, London, photo by Marcus J Leith, copyright Studio Olafur Eliasson GmbH, the use or sharing of such images, audio features, video sequences, and texts in other electronic or printed publications is permitted for all non-commercial purposes.

Figure 22 Bruce Nauman, *Raw Materials*, 2004, installation, electrostatic speakers, Tate Modern, Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, London, England, copyright The Guardian-Artnet, used for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

Figure 23 Anthony McCall, *Line Describing A Cone*, 1973, film, 16 mm, projection, Tate Gallery collection, copyright Tate Gallery, reproduction allowed for non-commercial purposes only.

Figure 24 Anthony McCall, *Line Describing A Cone*, 1973, film, 16 mm, projection, Tate Gallery collection, copyright Tate Gallery, reproduction allowed for non-commercial purposes only.

Figure 25 Sankai Juku, *Unetsu, The Egg Stands Out of Curiosity*, 1986, directed choreographed and designed by Ushio Amagatsu, Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, copyright Minako Ishida Fair Use for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

Figure 26 Bill Viola, *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)*, 2014, high-definition video polyptych on four plasma displays, colour, 1400 x 3380 x 100 mm, South Quire Aisle, St Paul’s Cathedral, London, viewed June 23rd 2015, photograph by the author, used for non-commercial purposes only.

Figure 27 Pipilotti Rist, *Pixel Forest*, 2016, in ‘Sip My Ocean’, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, photographs by the author, used for non-commercial or academic purposes only, viewed February 7 2018.

Figure 28 Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirrored Room–The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*, 2013, built environment, mirrors, lights, The Broad, Los Angeles copyright The Broad licensed under fair use for education purposes only by kind permission.

Figure 29 Teamlab, *Moving Creates Vortices and Vortices Create Movement*, 2017, Triennial, NGV National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, photographs by the author, used for non-commercial or academic purposes only, viewed January 8 2018.

Figure 30 Ryoji Ikeda, *Spectra*, 2000, Ryoji Ikeda Spectra shoots a pillar of light into the London Sky to commemorate the centenary of World War One copyright Tom Thorpe Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. Used for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

Figure 31 Ryoji Ikeda, *Test Pattern No 12*, 2017, flashing synchronised lights, projectors, speakers, The Store X, London, England, photographs by the author, used for non-commercial or academic purposes only, viewed November 14 2017.
Figure 32 Sadia Sadia, *Audio Spotlight Field - Environmental Tests*, 2015, location tests of directional speakers, Millside, Real World Studios, Wiltshire, UK, copyright of the artist.

Figure 33 Sadia Sadia, *Audio Spotlight Field - Environmental Tests*, 2015, diagram of audio throw, copyright of the artist.

Figure 34 Sadia Sadia, *Enveloping Field* Audio Tests, 2015, audio software tests, surround sound, delayed and processed voice recordings, Millside, Real World Studios, Wiltshire, UK, copyright of the artist.

Figure 35 Sadia Sadia, *One Second*, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack, copyright of the artist.

Figure 36 Sadia Sadia, *One Second Tests I*, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack, unresolved work in progress, copyright of the artist.

Figure 37 Sadia Sadia, *One Second Tests II*, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack. Work in progress, copyright of the artist.

Figure 38 Sadia Sadia, *STEEP*, 2016, video, single channel installation, fourteen minutes twelve seconds, stereo, full HD, loop, copyright of the artist.

Figure 39 Sadia Sadia, *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*, 2017, three channel video installation, full HD, filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia, copyright of the artist.

Figure 40 Sadia Sadia, *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*, 2017, aspect ratio test, 4:3, filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia, copyright of the artist.

Figure 41 Sadia Sadia, *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*, 2017, aspect ratio test, 5:4, filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia, copyright of the artist.

Figure 42 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington I*, 2017, three channel video installation, full HD, stereo, master, copyright of the artist.

Figure 43 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington*, Centre Panel Bleach Bypass Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 44 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington*, Desaturated Contrast Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 45 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington*, FCP ‘Dream’ Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 46 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington*, Naturalistic ‘Silver’ Test I, 2017, copyright of the artist.
Figure 47 Sadia Sadia, *Mt Wellington*, Naturalistic ‘Silver’ Test II, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 48 Sadia Sadia, *Apostle Sea*, 2017, video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash, filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

Figure 49 Sadia Sadia, *Apostle Sea*, 2017, video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash, still image, filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017, early horizontal test, copyright of the artist.

Figure 50 Sadia Sadia, *Apostle Sea Test II*, 2017, video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash, filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017, horizontal test with digital manipulation, copyright of the artist.

Figure 51 Sadia Sadia, *Apostle Sea Test III*, 2017, video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash, filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017, triple vertical test with digital manipulation, copyright of the artist.

Figure 52 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, 2017, three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD, filmed on location at dawn, Keyes View, Joshua Tree National Park, California in April 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

Figure 53 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, tests I-III, 2017, unsuccessful test, copyright of the artist.

Figure 54 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, tests IV-V, 2017, unsuccessful test, copyright of the artist.

Figure 55 Sadia Sadia, *all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)*, 2017, three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD, filmed on location on the northeastern side of the Salton Sea, Coachella Valley, California in April 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

Figure 56 Sadia Sadia, *all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)*, 2017, location shots, copyright of the artist.

Figure 57 Sadia Sadia, *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*, 2017, three channel video installation, full HD, stereo or surround sound, filmed on location at Box Hill, Wiltshire, United Kingdom in November 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

Figure 58 Sadia Sadia, *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*, 2017, location shot, documentation, copyright of the artist.

Figure 59 Sadia Sadia, *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*, 2017, location shot, documentation, copyright of the artist.
Figure 60 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, version I, original, static centre channel with left and right pans, copyright of the artist.

Figure 61 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, version II, static with mirror image L+R channels, copyright of the artist.

Figure 62 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, version III, pan 1, pan is from left to right, copyright of the artist.

Figure 63 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, version IV. Pan 2, pan is from right to left, copyright of the artist.

Figure 64 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, production stills I-III, copyright of the artist.

Figure 65 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, location still, copyright of the artist.

Figure 66 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, location still, copyright of the artist.

Figure 67 Sadia Sadia, *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, production stills IV-VI, copyright of the artist.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3D</td>
<td>three dimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACMI</td>
<td>Australian Centre for the Moving Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AES</td>
<td>Audio Engineering Society (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>augmented reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>average shot length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECV</td>
<td>behavioural ecology view of facial displays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRPG</td>
<td>British Record Producer's Guild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dB</td>
<td>decibel (as a measure of sound level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FX</td>
<td>sound or visual effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUFS</td>
<td>Loudness Units Relative to Full Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOCAP</td>
<td>motion capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPG</td>
<td>Music Producer's Guild (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBR</td>
<td>practice-based research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLR</td>
<td>practice-led research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QVMAG</td>
<td>Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAI</td>
<td>Visual Activity Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>virtual reality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Undertaken Through Candidature

Conferences (Papers Presented)

‘The Sacred Ground’, VSAC Visual Science of Art Conference, Trieste, Italy, August 2018

‘Catharsis and the Encompassing Environment in Art in the Neo-Digital Age’, Cognitive Futures in the Arts and Humanities Conference, University of Kent, UK, July 2018


Speaking Engagements

‘Sadia Sadia in Conversation with Evelyn Tsitas’, artist’s talk, RMIT Gallery, March 2019

Sound Diplomacy Music Cities Convention, speaker, Melbourne Australia, April 2018


Exhibitions | Screenings

‘Ghosts of Noise’, in ‘The Model Citizen’, three channel video installation with eight-channel audio soundfield, RMIT Gallery, February-March 2019

‘Metamorphoses in ‘A’ Minor’, screening, SLC DanceFilm, Sarah Lawrence College, Westchester County, New York, April 2018

‘Notes To An Unknown Lover’, audio installation, ‘POETRY’ The George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, October 2017

‘San Francisco Redux No.1’, QVMAG (the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery) Launceston, Tasmania, November 2015


Residencies

Artists Residency, Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta, Canada, November 1-28, 2018
Abstract

This study is about why and how people may have profound, life-changing, transcendent experiences within immersive works of art. It seeks to identify the key drivers of this state and questions whether or not it is possible to volitionally enhance such a state in our viewers or participants. This is explored through literature surrounding the experience of the epiphanic, of awe and the transcendent. It draws a relationship from literature through to the immersive installation environment, incorporating but not limited to light, still or moving images, and sound.

The approach is largely heuristic. As part of my research I engage in an element of autoethnography. My work is based on embodiment theories of emotion and on my qualitative and subjective evaluations as an artist. The study is grounded in the pragmatist tradition of art as experience, locating the value of the artwork in its ability to impact the perceptual and emotional life of the individual.

My argument is that there is the potential within emerging technologies to enhance or heighten profound emotional experiences with art, which may be defined as cathartic, epiphanic, transcendental or conversion; that these experiences are innate and universal; and that the immersive or encompassing environment in art may be modelled to enhance such experiences. The investigation goes to the heart of questions about the validity and purpose of art. Most artists want to connect with their audiences as deeply as possible and move them emotionally as fully as possible. This study examines the precursors to that ‘moment’ of communion or connection, as well as identifying conditions that might enhance the likelihood of such an epiphanic or transcendental experience taking place. These conditions have been tested subjectively, iteratively and reiteratively. As artists, we understand that our work can have profound and even mystical effects on our audiences. The study confirms that this connection need not be a matter of chance or accident.

The subject by necessity refers to attitudes and current thinking in the fields of cognitive and perceptual psychology as well as the neuroscience of aesthetics. The definitions of the ‘experience’ are not only highly subjective and deeply personal but variable across literature. The aim is to research these ideas through practice to reach a better
understanding of how they might be enjoined to enhance the viewer or participant experience of the immersive installation environment.

The artworks in this project employ the materiality of light and sound, audio in multiple formats including surround sound, as well as still and moving images incorporated into encompassing installation environments. The research concludes that not only does the phenomenon exist, as reported in literature, it can be incited and excited through aesthetic strategies. These strategies include: the manipulation of time (slow motion and ultra-slow motion); the use of grand vista; and the use of accommodation (the accommodation of the individual to unexpected stimuli, the presence of the 'Unknown') all of which may be mobilised individually or in combination with the aesthetic use of stress or threat to invoke the experience of the numinous.

Keywords: installation art, transcendence, affect, emotion, encompassing art, immersive art, immersive installations, epiphany, awe, empirical aesthetics, neuroaesthetics, artist studio practice, loudness, cognitive fatigue, attention, slow motion, time-based arts.
Chapter 1 | Introduction
Chapter 1 | Introduction | The ‘Wow’ Factor and the Loudness Wars

1.1 Introduction

I begin my argument about how and why viewers or participants may experience extremes of positive valence and affect within encompassing works of art by examining the cultural milieu in audio and film making, and the qualitative and quantitative values indigenous to contemporary cultural production. My assertion is that the tropes of contemporary cultural production are self-defeating, in that they diminish the very reactions and affect they endeavour to encourage. I open by making the point that this is quantitatively verifiable, and then seek to respond to the problem by building a framework on theoretical foundations followed by examining the landscape of possible solutions.

My theoretical underpinnings begin with an examination of the rationale behind this project, the notion that in order to understand experience we must first understand the experiencer, and the struggle between the materialist and philosophical interpretations of the same. It outlines the boundaries of the discussion, what it is and what it is not, and why it is relevant and has a place in the lexicon of knowledge-formation. This is explored through literature surrounding the experience of the epiphanic, of awe and the transcendent. It draws a relationship from literature through to the immersive installation environment, incorporating but not limited to light, still or moving images, and sound.

As part of my study, I engage in an element of ethnography. My background and history are crucially formative to my interest in the subject and I bring to my discipline a firsthand professional as well as theoretical knowledge of gender, experience of race and of Self as the ‘Other’, and an extensive creative practice across multiple disciplines spanning many decades. My early influences bear a direct and palpable relationship to the motivation and the subject matter under consideration, which are examined in the chapter ‘Early Influences’. This text also includes mention of the Toronto Art Scene from 1965-1980 and the influences derived from that period. This is followed by an examination of selected historical works from my own practice. My work is based on embodiment theories of emotion and on my qualitative and subjective evaluations as an artist. The study is
grounded in the pragmatist tradition of art as experience, locating the value of the artwork in its ability to impact the perceptual and emotional life of the individual.

‘Methodology’ then sets the foundation for the structure of the research project. It touches on the reasons why virtual reality strategies were not employed in the research project as well as some of the challenges in regards consciousness, neuroscience and empiricism. The research relies heavily on qualitative methodology, necessitated not only by the subject matter but by the constraints of early-stage technology and competing theories surrounding both affect and consciousness.

The work is anchored in pragmatism, locating the value of art in experience, while at the same time acknowledging the validity of other approaches. It segues into the construction of the transcendent state, examining epiphany, awe and the sublime as closely related to or constituent elements of the state. The investigation goes to the heart of questions about the validity and purpose of art. Most artists want to connect with their audiences as deeply as possible and move them emotionally as fully as possible. I will establish that this connection is not a matter of chance or accident. This study examines the precursors to that moment of communion or connection, as well as identifying conditions that might enhance the likelihood of such an epiphanic or transcendental experience taking place. These conditions are tested subjectively, iteratively and reiteratively. As artists, we understand that our work can have profound and even mystical effects on our audiences. I am undertaking to determine the structure and qualities of this ‘transcendent’ communion in order to enhance it volitionally.

The subject by necessity refers to attitudes and current thinking in the fields of cognitive and perceptual psychology as well as the neuroscience of aesthetics. The definitions of the experience are not only highly subjective and deeply personal but variable across literature. The aim is to research these ideas through practice to reach a better understanding of how they might be enjoined to enhance the viewer or participant experience of the immersive installation environment.
The artworks in this project employ the materiality of light and sound, audio in multiple formats including surround sound, as well as still and moving images incorporated into encompassing installation environments. Following an outline of the field, I will explore groups of artworks, examining surround audio, slow motion and ultra slow motion and the meditative state. I will then discuss a group of works filmed on location in Tasmania (AUS), Victoria (AUS), California (US), Wiltshire (UK) and Alberta (CAN), which bring together strategies that include slow motion and audio manipulation in combination with grand vista.

1.2 The ‘Wow’ Factor and the Loudness Wars

The source of my engagement lies in my professional history with music production and film making. My argument is that we have a cultural problem with ‘loudness’ and that our beliefs about the effectiveness of ‘loudness’ in arousing affect in our audiences and retaining their attention is misplaced. My premise is that rapid editing techniques and dense digital effects in film making are cognitively equivalent to compression and loudness in audio and produce a sensory exhaustion on the part of the audience that defeats the very purpose they are intended to serve, which is to not only capture the audience’s attention but to engage with them on as profound an emotional level as possible.

Every artist wants their art to be effective. Every cultural and entertainment organisation or business wants their output, product or artwork to reach as many people, capture as much attention, and move their audiences as deeply as possible. This is not only good for art, this is good business and these questions go to the core of what it means to function effectively in the social context of the attention economy. So why are they adopting techniques and an aesthetic pathway designed to produce exactly the opposite effect than is intended? This is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of cognitive fatigue.

The competition for attention began with radio and the desire to capture the audience’s attention by making things sound as loud as possible or as allowed, both in absolute and relative terms. While there are ways of making audio sound louder without having to
squash it flat, through equalisation for example, these were largely overlooked in favour of compression. In the 1980s there was a growing battle between television commercials, with commercials vying with each other in the ‘loudness’ stakes, and a host of duplicitous tricks employed to beat broadcasting standards\(^1\). The sound in commercials is very dense, and the televiual broadcast on either side of the advertising would aim to compete with the ads. Advertising, in principle, is now supposed to be controlled by broadcast loudness controls, and although historically TV stations were supposed to use limiters, the problem persists. A similar thing happened with radio. In the US in the 1950s, 60s and 70s TV stations used massive compression on the audio, which the viewer would try to compensate for in advance in order that the broadcast would not be overwhelmed by the advertising audio. There has since been movement within professional organisations to try to equalise everything and I was part of that conversation in what was then the British RecordProducer’s Guild (BRPG) in the 1980s, now the Music Producer’s Guild (MPG), both in the UK.

1.3 Audio, Dynamics and Competitive ‘Loudness’

There has always been a battle to make CDs sound louder. This harkens back to vinyl, where there was always competition to make an album sound the loudest. This, of course, resulted in some exceptionally short albums, since the shorter the album the more bandwidth was available in the vinyl cut to make your album louder still. Make a short album and you could cut your vinyl louder and this is also part of the reason for 12” club mixes on vinyl with the added bonus of running at 45rpm at the same time.

The model changed with the introduction of iTunes, when suddenly you could download any music you wanted to create a playlist. The problem with these playlists is that the source material had varying levels of loudness. If you sequenced a Red Hot Chili Peppers track next to a more delicate, dynamic track you would have to adjust the volume, and this something people do not like to do. To solve this problem, iTunes created an algorithm to keep the level constant and even everything out. Overcompressing audio really changes

the nature of the sound, and compressed sound emerges from the algorithm with mixed results. Here is the effect of a limiter on a track. All the audio in these examples have been processed with the ceiling set to the maximum digital headroom (in other words, the loudest point in each audio clip is at the maximum permissible volume possible with digital audio). This allows for comparison between these music samples. Here's example of the use of a limiter on Sting's 'Book of My Life':

Figure 1 Sting (Gordon Sumner), *Book Of My Life (Ostinato Mix)*, CD (Art of Peace Foundation, 2015), effect of limiter on audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

LINK: File provided for preservation copy

And here we can see the difference in the waveforms:
The peaks are same in both versions but in the limited audio the floor has been raised by 10dB and the signal is much more dense. Modern pop music is by nature very compressed. This is done at source and the sound of modern pop has a very dense, compressed quality, unlike jazz rock or other music styles which contain more ‘space’ and ‘air’. Much has changed since the album format was the norm. Many older well-known tracks that we imagine to be perceptually loud are surprisingly quiet and dynamic. You can see this in the wave form and the higher the LUFS (Loudness Units Relative to Full Scale) the quieter the track is. The peak is at zero but the LUF shows the average below zero, so the lower the number the louder the track.

Figure 3 The Doors, Riders Of The Storm, CD (Elektra, 1970), recorded December 1970, single, example of dynamics in audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

LINK: File provided for preservation copy

Figure 4 David Bowie (David Jones), Fashion, CD (RCA, 1980), recorded February & April 1980, track 5 on Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps), example of dynamics in audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

LINK: File provided for preservation copy

Loudness in popular music and audio has become essential to commanding people’s attention. With the genesis of streaming-friendly pop music, the key has become to grab the listener’s attention in the first ten seconds or at the very least by the first chorus, since streaming only pays the artists and originators if it has been streamed for a minimum of thirty seconds. If you skip the track in the first thirty seconds, no payment will register\(^2\). This is an excellent example of market forces driving a cultural aesthetic.

Here is an example of highly compressed pop audio where the dense and solid formation of the wave form is easily evident.

Figure 5 Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Around The World*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1999), Track 1 on ‘Californication’, example of highly compressed audio, fair dealing copyright provision for research and academic purposes only.

LINK: File provided for preservation copy

The differential in dynamics between The Doors’ ‘Riders of the Storm’ and the Red Hot Chili Peppers’ ‘Around the World’ is evident in Figure 6 (below). These are both commercial releases with the peak at 0 dB, illustrating the differential in dynamics and in perception. The Doors ‘Riders of the Storm’ is perceived as a loud rock track whilst being quiet and dynamic.

Figure 6 The Doors, *Riders Of The Storm*, CD (Elektra, 1970), upper wave form; Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Around The World*, CD (Warner Brothers, 1999), lower wave form.
A similar differential in dynamic and waveform exists between Katy Perry’s ‘Roar’ (Figure 7) and David Bowie’s ‘Fashion’. This exercise can be widely extrapolated as these are only a small handful of examples.

Figure 7 David Bowie (David Jones), *F*ashion, CD (RCA, 1980), upper wave form. Katy Perry, *R*oar, CD (Capitol, 2013), lower wave form, commercial releases with the peak at 0 dB, illustrating differential in dynamics.

It is interesting that film sound has not followed down this path. The best films remain very dynamic, making an impact with the loud moments while not going for ‘loudness’ but rather retaining the dynamic. Films that engage the viewer in the atmosphere of the film draw the viewer in sonically when there is dialogue and overwhelm and blast the viewer for effect as required. Film sound has moved in a positive way and filmmakers have largely retained a dynamic approach. This stands in juxtaposition to what has been happening with film visuals as well as within popular music and advertising.

1.4 Film Editing As Cognitive ‘Loudness’

One might equate the aesthetic and psychic impact of highly compressed pop music to digital film visuals and rapid editing techniques. It is interesting to note that some filmmakers, such as Stephen Spielberg, have often managed to be impressive and create
the ‘wow’ factor through storytelling, holding back the moment in order to imbue it with meaning. Filmed science fiction or fantasy is more invested in showing off digital techniques and imagery, yet there is always the need to surpass previous efforts by ramping up intensity through the use of rapid editing techniques and heightened visual effects.

The Cutting, Brunick, DeLong, Iricinschi, and Candan study of one hundred and sixty English language films over the period 1935 to 2010 found that shot lengths have gotten shorter, that there is more motion and movement in later films compared to earlier films, that there is proportionately more motion in these shorter shots, and that latter-day filmed images have less luminance i.e. they are ‘darker’ than earlier films. These dimensions, ASL (average shot length), VAI (visual activity index), shot-VAI by ASL, and luminance changed linearly and independently and this “strongly suggests that cyclicity and style change are not involved here”.

The colour is saturated, the editing or movement is rapid, and the visuals are FX intensive or at the very least dense. This is the visual equivalent of ‘loudness’ for the cognitive processes of eyes and brain and films suffer from trying to impress the viewer all the time. Filmmaking benefits from having pace and dynamics, yet these are becoming increasingly marginalised in our era of competitive cultural production. The question arises: is this what consumers expect, or are we simply becoming immune to it, tuning it out as we hit the ceiling of sensory tolerance? Certainly within film, these changes would appear to be industry-driven rather than consumer led, “created by filmmakers seeking to control the attention of their viewers”.

In tandem, most remastered reissued ‘classic’ pop and rock albums have the omnipresent compression and added high end frequencies in common, to their detriment. This is not the most effective way of capturing the audience’s attention and enjoining affect, and the cognitive fatigue that arises as a result of these strategies leads to an attentional deficit that is self-defeating.

---

3 James E Cutting et al., "Quicker, Faster, Darker: Changes In Hollywood Film Over 75 Years", I-Perception 2, no. 6 (2011), 569-576.

4 Ibid., 574-575.

5 Ibid., 575.
1.5 Competitive Loudness and Cognitive Fatigue

Competitive loudness in digital audio and visuals produce an exhaustion on the part of the viewer or listener, which manifests in a jadedness and immunity to this form of stimulation. This is not to say that moments of heightened intensity cannot be effective. Fast editing can be effective when used sparingly and in the service of a moment, such as in the first Jason Bourne film, ‘The Bourne Identity’ (2002)6 with the wonderful flow interrupted by a fight or a car chase. Rather than being a constant assault, fast editing is used to engage the audience, to take them on a journey both up and down. High dynamics used sparingly can be effective, and the same is also true of music.

But the ‘wow factor’ of technology, in which we make such a heavy investment, is very short-lived. Evidence of this can most recently be found in the trajectory of 3D film7, and these observations have bearing on how we might produce and consume virtual reality (VR) content as well. It stands to reason that artists and those working in creative industries will find and want to show off new techniques, but the best visions are believable, drawing the viewer into a story, plot, or environment. Within context, there is good use for the technology that we have.

This is to make the argument for a profound engagement with the audience or viewer, rather than simply trying to impress them. It bears a relationship with Susan Sontag’s observation that “the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own”8, underscoring the difference between being a witness and being a participant. Being a witness places one outside of the experience as a record-keeper, or as one who gazes “on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism”9, a task which can become tiresome quite quickly. Being a participant, particularly an engaged participant, is less likely to have such an effect. The

---

9 Ibid., 566.
distancing brought about by being a witness encourages a degree of jadedness or cynicism, since what is impressive today will not carry the same kick tomorrow and there will be a requirement for an ever increasing technological ‘kick’, in much the same way as a drug will need to be administered in ever-increasing doses in order to produce the same ‘high’.

In fact, the equation might look something like this:

\[ \text{intensity (volume/content)} = \text{habituation} = \text{exhaustion} \]

where the intensity of the volume or content results in a habituation to the same and ultimately produces a psychic, emotional, and aesthetic exhaustion in the viewer, listener, or participant. With persistent, interminable, ever-increasing 'loudness', the world goes both literally and metaphorically deaf. Rather than being filled with an ongoing sense of wonder, our exhausted listener or viewer has now become both jaded and cynical. What effect does this sensory overload have, not just on our aesthetic but on our collective psyche as well? Profound experiences with storytelling and art require a suspension of disbelief. Suspension of disbelief is incompatible with cognitive and existential fatigue. The loudness wars produce quite the opposite affect in that they encourage a cynical stance on the part of the audience. The purveyors of this dynamic are ultimately defeating the very ends they set out to achieve.

In our era, competitive culture-making has become the norm rather than the exception. In a world awash in cultural production, where the means of distribution have become almost fully democratised, there is a perverse logic in assuming that those who shout the loudest will be the ones who will be heard. But inducing cognitive and existential fatigue in audiences is ultimately a self-defeating strategy. Is there better way? And, if there is a better way, what might it look or sound like, and what might its qualities be? As artists, can we identify and construct the most effective possible of means of reaching, capturing

---

attention, and creating the most profound possible experience for our audience, participant, or viewer? The answer lies in overcoming sensory overload through the reintroduction of dynamics, allowing for slowness, stillness and space, to give the viewer room to breathe, to connect with their emotions on the deepest levels, and to form aesthetic judgments based on these connections.

In this chapter, I have discussed the cognitive and existential fatigue brought about by a contemporary cultural aesthetic. I assert that the means of cultural production are failing to engage the viewer or participant on a profound emotional level through the use of cognitive 'loudness' as a trope within the attention economy. I argue that these tropes are ultimately self-defeating, and make the case for the need to embrace an aesthetic that will lead the viewer to a more profound emotional experience with art. I will begin Chapter Two by looking at the rationale behind some of these assertions.
Chapter Two | Rationale
Chapter Two | Rationale

2.1 Rationale

Donald Kuspit, in ‘The Emotional Gains of Aesthetic Shock’, writes:

“Aesthetic shock, with what might be called its defamiliarising effect, makes one aware that there is a world of meaning and vitality beyond ordinary meaning and drive. It is the alternative to alienation in the everyday. Indeed, aesthetic shock transforms alienation into transcendence…Aesthetic shock is a kind of conversion experience, that is, a kind of mystical experience, in which appearances become sensuously new and radically changed - more seriously experienced than they ever were before.”

Kuspit’s quote highlights the means by which viewers or participants can undergo life-changing experiences with and within immersive works of art, profound transcendent or cathartic experiences that have such a deep impact on their perception that they would appear to change its structure or very nature at the most profound levels. These experiences may be durational, lasting minutes, an hour, a day, a week, or a month. In some cases the alteration is irrevocable, bringing about a seemingly permanent epiphanic change in the way world and self are perceived. Such experiences have been written about at length in respect of paintings. The suspicion, based on personal experience and observation, that the immersive installation environment might offer a higher ‘hit’ rate for initiating these types of profound, transformative, seemingly mystical events, is one of the motivating factors for this inquiry.

The research questions guiding this study are: Why do people have profound, life-changing experiences within immersive works of art? What is the construction of this affect and how are these experiences enjoined? Can we identify the key drivers of this state and set about to volitionally induce such a state in our viewers? This investigation examines the

---


relationship between heightened states of emotional experience and awareness, more specifically what I will define as a ‘transcendent’ experience, and the immersive environment in art. For the purposes of this project, the ‘immersive environment’ is defined as a multi-sensory space, comprising light in the form of light sources, moving images or projections, sound in surround format or emanating from a multiplicity of points or sources, with the possibility of the senses of smell or touch being addressed or activated although this may be purely psychosensory rather than an actual engagement with the surface of the skin. Any engagement with light or sound engages the surface of the skin, since these are waveforms. Light waves and sound waves strike all of these planes, not simply the eye and eardrum, and so our experience of these is mediated by our entire bodies.

My research focuses on the experiential, although in order to study experience one must also study the experiencer\textsuperscript{13}, bringing us into contact with theories of both emotion and consciousness. The materialist view encourages a neuroscientific perspective while the aesthetic view drives us towards a philosophical interpretation. Psychology looks to the construction of the individual psyche and how the person assimilates aesthetic information, and the principles of valence and arousal are core to our understanding of the emotional processing of aesthetic stimuli. In amongst theories of consciousness, the philosophical, psychological and neuroscientific, lies the artist’s interpretation, a view born not only out of the artist’s observation but out of their first-hand experience of aesthetic forces. My research includes elements of autoethnography and is based in art practice, and so must of necessity revolve to a degree around the more subjective interpretation of the artist, rather than seeking to find a more positivist or empirical truth. Given the current limitations of technology, biometric experimentation and testing has implications for further research, and software solutions and our understanding of the construction of emotion are still in their infancy. There continue to be a number of debates surrounding the psychology of emotion, and the matter is far from settled\textsuperscript{14}. That is not to say that what the artist uncovers, however tempered it may be by subjectivity, is not truth, nor is this a

\textsuperscript{13} Max Velmans, \textit{Understanding Consciousness} (London, Routledge, 2000).

\textsuperscript{14} Jonathan Gratch, Director for Virtual Humans Research, University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies, ‘Ekman vs Fridlund’, personal correspondence with the author, 2018.
discussion about what constitutes either subjective or empirical ‘truth’. The work in the end is practice-based, informed by a reading of the pertinent disciplines.

What my research is not is a survey of neuroscientific literature, although I have briefly touched on the subject if only to expound on a handful of the reasons why I find some of the materialist neuroscientific interpretations of aesthetic joy and the ‘transcendent’ state unsatisfactory. While I have incorporated elements of scientific literature, this is not an investigation into neural processes, or anatomical or mechanical functions, nor is it purely an existential or philosophical treatise on the nature of transcendent, cathartic, or epiphanic experiences.

My investigation goes to the very heart of questions about the validity and purpose of art. The framework must then of necessity be an experiential one, judging an individual’s experience as subjective, qualitative and portable, based in the pragmatist philosophy that art has a purpose and that the purpose of art must lie, then, in the capacity of art to affect an individual’s experience of themselves and the world. The subjective and qualitative nature of the work does not make it any the less valid, and places the notion of personal truth at the heart of the subjective experience. These may be extrapolated to the wider group or audience, which has implications for further research and which could then form the basis for empirical findings and further study.

The works described in this text in Chapter Six have something in common, in that they are democratic in their ability to provoke a reaction on the part of the viewer or participant regardless of whether or not they have experience of or have studied art. The mechanism by which the experience is evoked and the works which bring about these powerful changes is the subject of my investigation.

I fully acknowledge that the sole purpose of art is not necessarily to produce transcendent, cathartic states. Art serves political, philosophical and social purposes as well, some of which may be best enjoined and interpreted through the intellect rather than through affect. Many art forms may not necessarily speak directly to the emotions, and this is in no way to suggest that they lack validity or purpose. But this is not the subject
of my inquiry. I am interested in immersive environments that speak powerfully to the individuals’ emotions, and in uncovering and adding to the debate as to the mechanism by which they go about producing such an effect on a viewer or participant, and whether those conditions are replicable.

Why bother? The British video artist, academic and critic Catherine Elwes says: “The artist clearly has an investment in the efficacy of her practice, in its ability to rouse sympathetic reactions in an audience, whether emotional or intellectual, particularly when that audience is to be guided through a field of multiple elements in the built environment of an installation…So I will end here with a final question: apart from the material advantages of success, what is in it for the artist?” In my case the study goes to the substance of my creative practice. I am most interested in reaching my viewers on an emotional level, of understanding how to alter or influence the way my audience experiences my work through intent rather than accident. As a consequence, it best serves my practice to investigate how this is most effectively achieved.

2.2 About the Author

I bring to this work my forty-two years worth of experience in the creative industries. I was born in Canada, to a Pakistani father and a German mother, who married in 1956 in the days when miscegenation was still a crime in some parts of the United States. This they discovered quickly in 1960, when they moved to Oklahoma, which did not pass its anti-miscegenation laws until June 12th 1967, and which prompted a rapid relocation to small-town Quebec. As the child of an early mixed-race couple, I grew up in solitude, stranded in a no-man’s land of race, culture and identity and certainly isolated from the overwhelmingly white society of racist Quebec in the 1960s, and I do not recall a day passing when I was not told to “go back where you came from”.

I incorporated my first music production company at the age of eighteen and a few years later began my career by becoming one of the first women in the world to be signed to a

---

major label as a record producer. On emigrating to the UK I became the first female member of the British Record Producer’s Guild (BRPG) (now the Music Producer’s Guild (MPG), both in the UK), under the chairmanship of Sir George Martin, and later sat on the Board of Directors under Robin Millar CBE. My work in music has been sequenced to films starring actors such as Dan Aykroyd, Gerard Depardieu and Tom Cruise, to documentaries such as ‘The Corporation’, as well as to films and television programs by Polygram, Miramax, Interscope, Touchstone, CBC (Canada), ABC, Network 7 (Australia) and Universal Pictures.

In an effort to better understand my experience of gender issues in audio control rooms, in 1994 I completed an M.Sc. in Political Science and Economics, with a specialisation in gender. This qualification allowed me to further my engagement with teaching and public speaking, which culminated in my keynote address to the 50th Anniversary Audio Engineering Society (AES) at the Jacob Javits Centre in New York, on the subject of ‘Gender Issues in Audio Engineering and Music Production’ in 1997. The downside of this raising of consciousness and social awareness was that it became almost impossible for me to continue in my practice as a record producer.

My early work in recording studios took place during a formative and innovative period in music and music technology, where I had the opportunity of observing at close quarters the advent of digital and the early days of computing firsthand. I have had a chance to witness a revolution in processing power and software and their associated capabilities and costs, and much of the genesis of my interests today have arisen as a result of experimental work that was begun during those early days. Over thirty years ago, in 1985, I imagined a digital future, a form of multi-media that did not yet exist but unbeknownst to us was on the threshold of transforming both our daily and creative lives. Bearing in mind that I had recently pitched a project to a major record label that included a text, paintings, film, photographs and an album, and been dismissed as a dilettante, revisiting the following artist’s statement seems both touching and prescient.

At the risk of appearing jejune, I include it here:

“The technology in the latter part of the twentieth century has changed to the point that many different aspects of the media affect our lives intimately on a day to day basis. Television, moving visuals...in holography, video,...the emergence and sophistication of the sound recording arts...the emergence of photography as a valid art form...all the different aspects of the creativity, the vision I have been trying to realise, and communicate, are intrinsic parts of the whole: capable of standing on their own, but not fully coherent and/or realised until they are...until they all stand together. I find the process of trying to explain this to most people almost frustrating beyond comprehension. These are all pieces that must fit a whole. Each, on its own, is only the fragment of the vision. The vision is a gift.”\(^\text{17}\)

In 2001, I took a second master’s degree in sensory design studies, studying with Dr. Geoff Crook, the Director of the Department for Applied Imagination and Head of the Sensory Design Research Lab at Central St Martin’s, and this piqued my interest in pursuing sensory design as part of a media-intensive environment.

In 2003, technology changed my life once again and allowed me the fulfilment of my long-held dream to work with moving images, through a bump in computer processing power combined with a reduction in the cost of computing. The AVID editing systems were historically too costly, with an entry point of around £150,000 (based on the 1984 valuation of sterling, £357,500.49 in today’s money, when I first costed it, calculated at an average inflation rate of 2.67%). Early Mac-based Final Cut Pro systems had an entry point around the £10,000 mark (based on a 2003 valuation of sterling, £13,346.16 in today’s money, which proved to be my entry point, calculated at an average annual inflation rate of 2.08%)\(^\text{18}\). This new-found combination of power and affordability allowed me an entry into film making and editing. Across 2003 and 2004, in collaboration with my partners, I produced, wrote, edited and scored the short film-poem ‘The Noon Gun’ (2004), which


\(^{18}\) these figures were accurate as of July 2017.
had its world premiere at the 53rd Melbourne International Film Festival in 2004, as well as my filmed installation ‘The Memory of Water (Part I)’ (2004) which now forms part of ACMI’s permanent collection\(^\text{19}\).

My work has historically been engaged with the politics of freedom on a number of levels. I created a filmed installation ‘Fugue (Die Wende)’ (2014) about the building of walls and the removal of light, in honour of the fall of the Berlin Wall, for the Leipzig Lichtfest 2014. The work also memorialises my mother’s multiple attempts to escape from East Germany, after the border was sealed but before the wall was built, where she was captured and jailed but succeeded in making her way to the western sector of Berlin on the third attempt. The previously mentioned film ‘The Noon Gun’, a work based on footage originally filmed in Afghanistan in 1974, is a study of a lost innocence in a land not far from my paternal homeland.

My interest in the politics of freedom grew even more fiercely from my upbringing in my father’s fundamentalist Islamist household, and evolved into a lifelong search for the ultimate freedoms. These I discovered in the freedom of the individual to transcend body/mind duality through experiential art and encompassing installation works into the space where, rather than the phenomenological approach of the mind interpreting the mind’s and body’s reactions, the body interprets the body’s reactions and takes us into that space of responsiveness that lies beyond language.

\(^{19}\) Australian Centre for the Moving Image, ACMI Identifier B1006598.
2.3 Early Influences

I have experienced what I am defining as a ‘transcendent’ experience a number of times first-hand. It has coloured and influenced my internal landscape and had an immeasurable effect on the course of my life.

One of my earliest distinct memories is of Jackson Pollock's No. 29, October 1950, which was acquired by the National Gallery of Canada in 1967. I remember walking with my mother for hours through the classical painting galleries. My mother was raised in Germany during the Second World War, and while she had a feeling for the Impressionists and post-Impressionists, she held a somewhat jaundiced view of modern art. My legs were heavy and tired, and I remember feeling little and young as the distances in the gallery spread out before me in ever increasing waves, and of course everything feels bigger when you’re small. Then I saw it. Painted on glass, mounted on two brackets set in a stand,
so that the work was transparent and freestanding, shockingly out of place among the heavy paintings of the dead, with Benjamin West's gory and melodramatic ‘The Death of General Wolfe’ (1770)\(^20\) peering down at it from a neighbouring wall. I was transfixed. It was at that point that I recognised that there was hope, that there were other people in the world who might be like me, that there were other ways of seeing and that freedom, a possessed and subversive freedom, was possible. It shot through every cell in my body, I felt it in every atom and fibre of my being, and my life has never been the same since that day.

These types of transcendent experiences can be difficult to quantify. I can only say that, for me, they were always characterised by a sense of oneness, by a feeling that I understood the world on a particulate basis, that my intelligence and understanding was imbued in every particle in the world, and that every particle in the world was also in me. It produced a sense of universal understanding, a sense of timelessness, of time standing still and yet having infinite depth. I now recognise this experience, and the qualities described, as being closely related to Maslow’s ‘Being-values’ as defined in his description of perception in peak experiences\(^21\), while also having qualities in common with the construction of awe as well as the epiphanic experience. These are the states and qualities under consideration here, explored for example in my artwork ‘All Time and Space Fold Into the Infinite Present (Cataract Gorge) (2014)’ and later in related speculative research work.

I am mostly talking about painting, and my research is about the immersive, sometimes digital, almost universally electrically-powered environment. But the Jackson Pollock painting could arguably be said to be three-dimensional, since it was transparent and had depth, was constructed with bits of beads and materials, and (while this is not the subject at hand) the gallery space is of itself an immersive environment comprised of sensory inputs like smell, the weight, feel and depth of the carpeting or flooring, the sensory atmospheric qualities of humidity and air playing on the surfaces of the skin, and the gradations of light, shade and shadows. This encounter goes directly to my motivation for


pursuing art in a professional capacity, and because it was the first time in my life that I was alerted to the fact that such an experience was possible with art.

I have had similar experiences with other media bringing about extremes of affect. I have a memory of sitting in a cafe in Germany at the age of eight, where I had been sent to boarding school, and on a rare Sunday afternoon outing hearing the recently released ‘Mr Tambourine Man’ by The Byrds through the cafe’s tinny and clearly failing loudspeaker system. Nonetheless, I was transported. Later, Mozart’s ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’ produced the conditions for a similar experience. I understand these heightened experiences now through the lens of theories of ‘preparedness’ in relation to the transcendent experience, in the form of stress, threat, and danger, and I can identify these events as having taken place primarily during periods of stress or elevated negative valence/arousal. These experiences have formed a symmetry through my life, a single consistent unifying force, the touchstone from which all other effort derives.

The Toronto Art Scene 1965-1980 | Zbigniew Blazeje

In 1975 I met the Toronto-based, Russian-born Zbigniew Blazeje, the seminal and largely overlooked environmental artist responsible for the installation environments in the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67. Blazeje was an unorthodox and early adopter of electronica, incorporating experimental audio, light, sound and light flicker into his works, and a contemporary of the Fluxus movement in the United States. Through his construction of light-based environments including large-scale light boxes, he was an exemplar of the Canadian equivalent of the early California Light & Space Movement, although at the time it was unusual to find a practitioner so far to the north. In Canada he was the contemporary of artists such as Ted Bieler, Royden Rabinovitch, Karl Beveridge, and Michael Hayden.22

Blazeje was born in 1942 in Barnaul, USSR, and died in Toronto, Canada in 2004. He emigrated with his family from Russia to Toronto, Canada, swept up in the great diaspora that followed the Second World War. This fateful geographical allocation served him and his contemporaries both well and badly.

It served them well in that they were far enough away from the great cultural thought centres such as New York to be forced to think independently, and this independence of thought meant that in many ways they were in advance of the more established avant-garde. It worked against them in that this relative cultural and geographical isolation meant that they were somehow less visible in the world, and as a consequence less well-

known, less seen, less regarded, and consequentially more undervalued. In the days before information moved quickly and interconnectedness was assumed, their isolation bred freer thinking and they were less influenced by their big brother neighbour to the south, which in many ways produced a liberty of thought and experimentation that was fiercely independent. This was noted in the ‘Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989’ (2017) exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario: “Amidst the social and political upheavals of their time, the generation of artists that emerged in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s pushed the boundaries of conventional painting, sculpture and photography, exploring new ways of art making including video, installation and performance.” This period is slightly outside Blazeje’s most creative work and radical thought, which captured the Zeitgeist at its peak in the 1960s and then, while remaining no less relevant to contemporary discourse, gradually faded from view.

These movements in the Toronto and Canadian art scene are often marginalised or overlooked in international art historical discourse and are worthy of further scholarly investigation, and many of the Canadian artists affected by this period became influential in other parts of the globe by virtue of their relocation, carrying both the seeds and traditions of this period to a wider audience.

---

Blazeje is largely overlooked in the canon, and best known on the Canadian art scene for the ‘environmental’ installation artwork ‘Audio-Kinetic Environment’ (1966) at the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67. Blazeje explores ideas surrounding a constructed environment, incorporating the use of ‘musique concrète’, and treating the audio as a sculptural artefact. In 1967, and bearing in mind that this now over five decades ago, he describes his work as follows: “As an environmental artist, I deal with sound, light, the complete surround that people are in. I am creating works of art which people go into and experience.”

The electronic composition accompanying ‘Audio Kinetic Environment (1966)’, realised at the Royal Conservatory of Toronto Electronic Laboratories, employs sine wave generators, square wave generators and pulse generators manipulated by tape recorders to produce the work.

However accustomed we have become to such ideas today, it is important to remember that in the 1960s and the 1970s these experimental thinkers were considered at best a bit


27 Ibid, transcription from the recording.
odd and at worst dangerous radicals. Many artists, such as Blazeje, were regarded with suspicion and ultimately driven to the edges of the societies and cultures in which they practiced, although not all were blind to the hardships and the nature of the struggle, as evinced in this comment from a review published in 1969:

“If Blazeje, Hirshberg and Hayden may be said to fail, then they are brave failures, since there is hardly anyone working in this deceptively simple yet heartbreakingly difficult area of experimental aesthetics who may be said to succeed...we would do well to give sculptors such as Hayden, Blazeje and Hirshberg all the encouragement we can. Those who work in the more traditional sculptural media need encouragement too, but they need less of it because their task is less difficult.”

If what has been said about Robert Rauschenberg is true, that no artist is an island, then credit must be given where it is due, in this case to my formative years in the artistic milieu of Toronto, Canada in the 1970s.

In this chapter I have stated the research questions and established the parameters of what the research is and what it is not. I have explained the justification and provided a rationale for pursuing this project. I have discussed my history in relation to profound, life-changing experiences with works of art, and this background creates context for my motivation in undertaking this research. I have also provided details of some of my early influences, and the historical milieu which influenced my thinking, including my introduction in the 1970s to the nascent fields of environmental art and experimental aesthetics. In the context of these discussions, in Chapter Three I will review in greater detail those elements of my previous research that bear relevance to this project.

---


Chapter Three | Previous Relevant Research
Chapter Three | Previous Relevant Research

3.1 Previous Relevant Research

I have a handful of works which form the foundation of my desire to pursue this subject matter as a research interest. They are divided by time but contain a common thread and I will map out their evolution here in brief.

In the early 1990s, my interests began focusing heavily on ‘commonality’ and the commonality of humankind, based on identifying commonalities and universalities in human experience. These earlier investigations in sound are precursors and relate thematically to the work I am currently undertaking. In 1995 I founded a multi-media world fusion project called ‘Equa’ with the producer, sound artist and composer Stephen W. Tayler. The brief was to find thematic and musical links in samples gathered from the Tropical Belt, the region between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The resulting composition begins with a ‘Departure’ (an extended remix by ‘Tricky’ of Massive Attack featured on the original single) and closes with an ‘Arrival’. The intervening tracks seek to mirror not only the migratory journeys undertaken by the peoples of the Tropical Belt, and reproduced to some degree by the crew collecting the recordings, but the evolution of their music and the development of their instruments as a result of both migration and cross-pollination. Spirituality and politics, in particular animism and the search for political independence, also have a powerful thematic role to play in the work. The composition is intended to reflect the circadian rhythm of each day, as it begins with dawn sounds and closes with the ‘Arrival: Coda Lullaby’, presaging the coming of the night. The subtext underscoring this is not simply the rhythm of each day, but the commonalities within cultures and the cycle within each human life. The project was signed to Polygram Australia in 1995 and ARIA nominated in 1997.

I pursued this idea again in 2003, when I began filming for the installation and accompanying soundfield for ‘The Memory of Water (Part I)’ (2004). The film was shot over

---


a period of ten weeks in 2004, and the participants were chosen to provide the greatest variation in age, status, occupation, ethnicity and nationality. They were asked to sit on a stool and their eyes aligned to a grid in the viewfinder, and were then played a recording of instructions to open and close their eyes over a fixed time period. After usually two or three takes, with their consent, but without prior knowledge of the question, they were then asked for their most significant memory. I then ‘reassigned’ the memories of one person to another. The voices are set against a backdrop of ambient and abstract musical sounds derived from striking glass bells, as well as electronics. The harmonics were then adapted to heighten and create an auditory subtext to the subject’s recollections. The work was originally tested at Westbourne Studios in London in 2003 with a 10.2 surround sound system.

The catalogue for the exhibition describes the work as follows:

“The words and the eyes are played out of synch, so that one person’s voice speaks with another’s gaze. This simple device releases the memories from individual ownership, and the work becomes a gesture towards transcendence. The work explores the relationship between the drop and the ocean in terms of human experience, as well as examining the gaze as a bridge between inner and outer worlds.”

Figure 12 Sadia Sadia, *The Memory Of Water (Part I)*, 2004, single channel installation, surround or stereo soundtrack, projectors, speakers, amplifiers, ACMI Australian Centre for Moving Image, Melbourne, permanent collection. Copyright of the artist, all rights reserved.

---

In a curatorial statement written for ACMI I say:

“The Memory of Water further explores my interest in the formation of consciousness, the nature of experience and memory, and models of the self. I am particularly interested in the commonality of man, what Jung might call the ‘collective unconscious’, and a lot of my work involves investigating what it means to be ‘human’. I am also interested in constructions of the self as an energy process, interconnected with phenomena as opposed to discrete.”

‘The Memory of Water (Part I)’ was acquired by ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image) for their permanent collection in 2004 and ran as part of their show ‘Proof: The Act of Seeing With One’s Own Eyes’, a reference to the 1971 experimental film by Stan Brakhage of the same name, as well as across the exterior screens at Federation Square, Melbourne from December 9 2004 through February 13 2005.

These works mark my historical interest in the recording and analysis of commonly shared experience, ‘peak experience’, and the deconstruction and replication of these ‘peak experiences’, heavily charged affect driven responses that become the defining memories of our lives and hence critical not only in the formation of our perception but also to sense of self. However, my concerns lie solely within the lexicon of aesthetics and artistic practice, and these early investigations form important precursors to my current research. ‘Ghosts’ and ‘Ghosts of Noise’ (2019) embodies the next stage in the evolution of these ideas. Designed to be exhibited across four walls, creating a completely immersive environment, this work marks my first trials with full-body sensory assault, the construction of a wholly image-enveloping environment with a wholly audio-enveloping surround soundfield. The work was built as a reaction to, and as a comment on, the ‘aesthetics of the

---


machine’, in this case the information delivery complex, in which I constructed animated and re-animated ‘Ghosts of Noise’ from layered images of newscasters as well as news channel feeds.

Figure 13 Sadia Sadia, Ghosts Of Noise (‘Blend’ channel), 2004, four channel video installation, eight channel soundfield, video projectors, speakers, amplifiers, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2019, ‘Ghosts of Noise’, The Model Citizen, installation image, RMIT Gallery, by Mark Ashkanasy.

The original work, ‘Static’, forms the genesis of the ‘Noise’ pieces, and is built out of twenty four layered news channels. The audio component for ‘Static’ comprises ninety six layers of news broadcasters’ signature themes and two hundred and fifty six layers of voices, comprising newscasters, interviewees, etc. The ‘Blend’ channel comprises some twenty channels of male and female newsreaders, newscasters, and the occasional correspondent. The audio component for the work is two hundred and fifty-six layers of voices drawn from newscasts. The ‘Male’ channel comprises six channels of layered feeds of male newscasters, while the ‘Female’ channel also comprises six channels of layered feeds of female newscasters. Both works have accompanying two hundred and fifty-six layer voice-based audio soundtracks.
The material for the installation was collected over a period of ten years, beginning with the period surrounding the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 and concluding with news footage of the US government shutdown in January 2019. New iterations of the work arise as the work is updated on a ‘rolling’ basis. The images themselves slip in and out of recognisable form, shape-shifting to confuse as they imprint on the eye, the multiplicity of images and their transient, fugitive nature creating confusion and assault, and inviting layered readings by the participant. The audio appears to comprise static but on closer examination is in fact constituted of a multiplicity of layers, whose threads are then drawn out and dropped back into the noise and may individually be identified by the viewer on closer listening. The flickering effect of the images as well as the sensory assault of hundreds of layers of audio produces a disorienting sensation, removing the viewer from the real world and shifting them through the looking glass into the information-delivery complex. The sensation is not entirely unlike moving from your living room, through the picture plane of your television set, with all the news channels playing at the same time in
black and white. It is a transportation and an envelopment, and both of these themes are under investigation as models for ‘communion’ within the framework of my research. ‘Ghosts of Noise’ received its first full installation as part of ‘The Model Citizen’ exhibition in Melbourne, Australia in 2019, where it was possible for the viewer or participant to experience the full materiality of this effect.

The year 2009 was a significant watershed in my pursuit of these ideas. It marked the production of ‘Metamorphoses in ‘A’ Minor’ a work in the tradition of symbolic mysticism which again examines inclusive or commonly-held experience, in this case the transformative nature of the individual. The work takes place across three movements or chapters, ‘Formation’, ‘Emergence’ and ‘Flight’ employing a cross-disciplinary approach that incorporates both the time manipulation of the moving image in combination with a surround soundfield. The work was filmed at the Kennedy, Miller, Mitchell Sydney Gate motion capture (MOCAP) studio with post production and rotoscoping taking place at The Lab in Sydney, Australia.

The initial movement ‘Formation’ takes place in real time and is rotoscoped, the second movement ‘Emergence’ in half (or double) time, and the third movement ‘Flight’ in ultra-slow motion through the use of a high-speed Panavision (Aus) Phantom HD Gold camera running at 1500fps. In all three movements the performer’s gaze breaks the picture plane, in acts of both of contrition and challenge, varyingingly confessional and confrontational in turn. The work, not unlike ‘The Memory of Water (Part I)’, is a gesture towards transcendence, demanding ever-increasing levels of stillness on the part of the viewer, as the ‘time’ signature of the moving image becomes slower and slower, manipulating the viewer’s internal clock and seducing them with the beauty of the slow-motion image.

The next work germane to this study is ‘All Time and Space Fold Into the Infinite Present’ (2014). The work was created between November 2013 and January 2014 at Cataract Gorge, Launceston, Tasmania, during my artist’s residency in the King’s Bridge Cottage at Cataract Gorge and premiered at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) Inveresk site on January 10 2014. It ran until March 2 2014, and was acquired for their permanent collection the same year.
Its genesis lies in work begun on Anasazi land in New Mexico where I took photographs of one of their sacred rivers and manipulated those photographs to look like deep space. These photographs form the folio ‘Blackwater I-IV’ (1997), as seen in Figure 15, and these themes began to reappear in the Cataract Gorge work.

![Figure 15 Sadia Sadia, Blackwater I and V, 1997, photographic stills, folio, photographed at Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico, USA. Copyright of the artist, all rights reserved.](image)

The work comprises a three channel filmed installation with accompanying eight channel soundfield, inspired by an interpretation of Cataract Gorge, Launceston, Tasmania, and featuring footage of the rapids that I captured in the Gorge. The work is monumental in scale with the three channels set across a single nine foot by forty eight foot screen.

The footage has been slowed down and colour balanced to resemble deep space, while the motion remains that of the water. The accompanying eight channel soundfield is constructed of audio captured in the Gorge. These channels are organised as stereo pairs, the first set representing modern day, and progressing ‘back in time’ as the viewer moves into the gallery. The interior of the gallery was modelled through the convolution processing of a sonic impulse, which enabled the audio characteristics of the exhibition space to be reproduced in my studio in the UK.
“The land whispered, and then roared, and the roar became the sound of the rapids, and the work became the notion of infinite time as interpreted through the movement of water and its link with our forever.”

The work is immersive and plays with time along several axes: horizontally along the depth of the gallery, where the soundfield is modelled to roll back time as one progresses deeper into the gallery, and at right angles to that, through the picture plane where the moving image is processed in ultra-slow motion. The manipulation of time is managed through a handful of strategies: first, through the slowing down of the motion of the water, and secondly, through the construction of the soundfield which begins with the ‘modern’ world at the near end of the exhibition space (that is, recordings of cars, people, traffic, transit from near the bridge) through the natural world and back through the ‘dark ages’ into the prehistory channel, represented by the detuning and manipulation of sounds captured in the Gorge.

As in a number of my other works, this work employs the triptych format. Water has also been thematic throughout much of my body of work, and I employ it as a metaphor for the Jungian notion of the collective unconscious, as I have done in previous works including ‘The Memory of Water (Part I). I believe that some images exist as part of a collective unconscious store of imagery, and for that reason may have the power to trigger

---

associations on a deeper level than that of which we may be ordinarily aware. I tend to use the triptych format a great deal, partially because I find it satisfying, but also for its quasi-religious overtones. This plays into my strategy and again I refer here to our notional cultural reading of the triptych format as a signifier of an intention towards spirituality.

In Chapter Three, I have reviewed my practice as an artist, and the construction of historical works that I have subjectively or intuitively modelled to initiate the key drivers of the state. These include works whose themes revolve around the qualities of universality, peak experience and the deconstruction and replication of peak experience; wholly immersive environments incorporating moving images and sound in the production of sensory assault; and the naturalistic image in relation to slow motion, ultra-slow-motion, and the time-based arts.
Chapter Four | Methodology
4.1 Methodology

The research questions guiding this project are: Why do people have profound, life-changing experiences within immersive works of art? What is the construction of this affect and how are these experiences enjoined? Can we identify the key drivers of this state and set about to consciously induce such a state in our viewers?

This is a methodologically qualitative, practice-based research project, in that it interrogates the subject through practice and a creative artefact or group of artefacts will “form the basis of the contribution to knowledge”37, where “gaining knowledge of an external phenomenon primarily drives the research”38, and whereas “significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes”39. While I acknowledge that both practice-led research (PLR) and practice-based research (PBR) are emerging and contested fields, since the understanding of the outcome lies in the experience of the artwork, this work is practice-based rather than practice-led.

I am by nature and ideology fundamentally an objectivist, yet I am conducting no empirical research and therefore believe that my investigation fits more comfortably within constructionism (symbolic interactionism, ethnography and participant observation) although aspects of the philosophy remain problematic. Subjectivity has its limitations, although one might ask “What does the study of affect have to do with the empirical?”40. As Knudsen and Stage point out “developing affective methodologies is, of course, a huge challenge: how do you identify affective processes and discuss their social consequences through qualitative research strategies if affect is bodily, fleeting and


39 Ibid.

immaterial and always in between entities or nods?". I have an experiential bias in that most of my ideas arise as a result my art practice. Knowledge which I take for granted as intuitive is in fact based in years of artistic inquiry, a point reiterated here by McNiff when he says that “within the arts, tacit or unspoken knowledge permeates virtually every thing we do”.

The focus is on identifying the conditions that give rise to the experience, and the production of artworks that may be likely amplify or give rise to the experience. These are tested iteratively and reiteratively, in order to show that the idea works. The study is fundamentally heuristic in that it will “investigate phenomena with a focus on the inner experience and discovery of the researcher”. There is an argument to be made that the reaction of an audience lies within the scope of the social sciences. In this instance the work will be tested by the artist, her supervisors, and close colleagues. Practice-based research is by its very nature problematic as an academic discipline, but provides one of the few avenues for the legitimisation of an artist’s practice and the transference of knowledge assimilated into the lexicon.

There is an element of autoethnography in the work. This is evident from the self-referential use of the phrase ‘the sacred ground’, which in this case refers both to a poem by the author and one of the later works in the research series, which draws the line ‘every fallen leaf sings on your shore’ from the same work. The initial chapters also refer to my life, experience, and works, including the motivation for such works, as well as my epiphanic aesthetic experience with artworks as a child. The inspiration for the work and the writing is drawn from my embodied experience as a child and as an adult, and the subject matter forms a continuous thread linking through my life and practice. These sudden moments of epiphany, of all encompassing transcendent oneness, infinite insight, inspiration and joy form the core drivers of my creative practice. The construction of these

---

43 Ibid., 113.
45 Ibid.
states as informed by pain, suffering, tension, fear and personal trauma also forms part of this writings’ relationship to my autoethnography, although this was a relationship discovered later in literature in the research process and as a consequence touched on only briefly here.

The emphasis of certain styles of autoethnography on the epiphanic makes it structurally valuable as I return again to my own experience in my qualitative analysis of the works produced. The point is made for me by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner:

“As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography...Most often, autobiographers write about “epiphanies”—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life, times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyse lived experience, and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate “intense situations”...Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyse experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders.”

Various methods were applied to the inquiry, including observation, intuition, prior knowledge, practical application of the literature study and a creative interpretation of qualia. I am engaging with my practice, which involves the creation of filmed and sonic environments, and mediate the practice through observations garnered through literature on the aesthetic, psychological and neuropsychological aspects of the construction of awe as well as the epiphanic experience. This involves a certain amount of subjectivity on the part of the artist, where judgement calls will need to be made as to how the literature

is interpreted. My aim is to evolve a comprehension of the tactile and extramundane effects of sound, structured soundfields and light, in order to explore the sensual nature of work as a trigger for a heightened emotional state, washing over the skin and the body, striking the eardrum, flickering over and through the eye.

Strategies include the time manipulation of moving images as well as audio; the directionality of the ‘gaze’ (if there is a gaze) breaking the picture plane in a direct engagement with the viewer; darkened or open environments; sensory whole-body assaults through the medium of sound and surround sound; film flicker and light flicker; playing with the notion of envelopment, isolation, grandeur, vista and personal space as well as the sensory nature of the surfaces of the body, ear and eye. Some of these approaches I have employed in works in the past, but the idea has been to re-form and adapt them for the purposes of this project as well as restructuring techniques in line with rapidly emerging technologies and software solutions. Not all of the experiments have proven successful.

The intent of the work is encapsulated by Burickson, LeRoux and Moody:

“Intimacy is at the heart of our art practice, and embedded within intimacy is a set of values for living in the world, not just making art. We work with radical empathy, with the belief that deeply moving experiences are each individual’s birthright. Compassion, understanding, and caretaking are at the heart of how we approach our subjects. And within that act of empathy we also try to invite our participants to experience deep transformation. Most of our participants do.”

The artworks accompanying this dissertation have been designed to reflect some of the qualities which have been described in literature as qualities or initiators of the experience of deep emotion with and within works of art. The work asks the participant to be aware of their frame of mind prior to entering the gallery space (a ‘real-world’ baseline

---

observation by the viewer), while in the gallery space (the ‘experiential’ reading), and on leaving (the ‘post-experiential’ reading). The exhibition should allow the viewer or participant to examine an arc of affect experienced in relation to the theories put forward in this dissertation, as well as provide grounds for further study. Once again, I must reiterate that such responses are subjective and, as we will see in Chapter 5 likely to be affected by the internal state and stress levels of the viewer. Another angle is the consideration of the meditative state as a precursor to a transcendental, communion or conversion experience, where I am proposing that these states are induced by the properties of the media employed, as well as the immersive qualities of widescreen projection and the encompassing programming of surround or highly directional sound. I speculate that an understanding of this space may have an impact on how we mediate affect and participation within media intensive environments. If we can locate the structures and devices that enhance the sensual and emotive within the aesthetic environment, then we can begin to explore new paradigms of transmission and reception and expand our creative practices accordingly.

I have considered the possibility of either conducting a survey or gathering biometric data on viewer/participants in response to artworks, including eye-tracking, electroencephalogram (EEG), facial emotion recognition, electrocardiography (ECG) and galvanic skin response (GSR). Although it is possible to gather biometric data via Bluetooth and wifi, it is easier to gather in close-viewing where the participant is stationary, and this tethering is problematic for my study. The very act of wiring a subject up creates an anticipation/arousal brought about by the act of preparing the subject for the collection of data that impairs a baseline reading and as a consequence diminishes the value of the data gathered (this is true of Bluetooth and wifi as well). We have little information about how people move through gallery spaces, but this motion alone does not give us insight into the valence/arousal states of the participants. Emotion recognition software requires the subject to be relatively stationary and is still something of blunt tool, with most emotion software recognition programs measuring the universal ‘big six’ emotions (or ‘big seven’) although they are measuring these across an increasing number of key facial points: joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, fear and contempt. This software is based in Paul Ekman’s theory that emotions are universal and produce distinct
signals that manifest consistently across cultures\(^{48}\). This is problematic since, in order for the data from any emotion recognition software to be useful, the theory behind it needs to be sound and universally agreed. There continues to be ongoing debate between the major schools in emotion research, and the matter is by no means resolved.

Jonathan Gratch, Director for Virtual Humans Research, University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies, puts it as follows:

“That said, I agree that much of the work on affective computing, including my own, is overlooking a fundamental element of emotional experience. Much of what I presented is built on the idea of “emotion as information”. From this perspective, emotional displays communicate information about another parties mental state. Similarly, emotional feelings communicate information about the body state that can inform internal decisions. While this view is true (and there is a good bit of experimental evidence to support it), it seems to miss much of what people see is fundamental to emotion. Emotion is not just information, it is evocative. Anger evokes fear. There is something about feeling yourself transported by an evening song in an old Oxford chapel beyond saying I feel positive valence and low control.”\(^{49}\)

Crivelli and Fridlund argue the behavioural ecology view of facial displays (BECV) theory where “facial displays are not fixed, semantic read-outs of internal states such as emotions or intentions, but flexible tools for social influence. Facial displays are not about us, but about changing the behaviour of those around us”\(^{50}\).


\(^{49}\) Jonathan Gratch, Director for Virtual Humans Research, University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies, ‘Ekman vs Fridlund’, personal correspondence with the author, June 30 2018.

This debate is also highlighted in this paper by Russell, Bachorowski and Fernández-Dols:

“A flurry of theoretical and empirical work concerning the production of and response to facial and vocal expressions has occurred in the past decade. That emotional expressions express emotions is a tautology but may not be a fact. Debates have centred on universality, the nature of emotion, and the link between emotions and expressions. Modern evolutionary theory is informing more models, emphasising that expressions are directed at a receiver, that the interests of sender and receiver can conflict, that there are many determinants of sending an expression in addition to emotion, that expressions influence the receiver in a variety of ways, and that the receiver’s response is more than simply decoding a message.”\(^{51}\)

My testing of emotion recognition software on myself left me with no confidence in the ability of the software to provide workable data for this research. There has also been plenty of work done with still images, immobile subjects and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), but once again this runs into structural problems with cultural preconceptions, some of which I have discussed below. I considered designing a study that might produce empirical evidence of the effects of slow-motion film footage on subjects in triggering the emotional shift into the ‘transcendent’ state, however a theoretical study has already been published on this subject\(^{52}\). The qualitative effects of slow motion are included in the artworks accompanying this project.

I made a decision to focus on qualitative self-reported emotional and aesthetic states, and to leave the investigation of physiological correlates to these states for further research. By then, the technology will no doubt have advanced to the point of giving us not only finer readings, the debates surrounding the facial recognition of emotion will have either been resolved or dissipated, and it will become easier to detect movement when the subject is mobile in a darkened gallery space. The specific details of each of the investigations are


considered further on. As the works are discussed, the method of their creation and development are discussed within the context of each artwork.

4.2 Virtual Reality

This research may be useful to the construction of virtual reality (VR) environments, but I have reservations surrounding virtual reality which I will outline below. Some types of virtual reality are problematic because a person’s eyes will tell them they are moving while their vestibular system tells them they are at rest, and profound emotional arousal is incompatible with cognitive dissonance. Many people can only remain in the virtual world for eight or nine minutes, and the briefness of the time and attention span precludes the effectiveness of the virtual reality environment for the initiation of tropes leading to deep affect and enhanced valence and arousal. This position is also held by the film theorist Torben Grodal who concurs that time is needed to build up profound affect\textsuperscript{53}. Grodal goes on to say that the fascination with VR is not linked to realism but to the arousal created by conflicting information and ‘agency-experiences’, and that fascination with VR may be characterised as ‘rollercoaster fascination’\textsuperscript{54}. In other words, it is swift, short, disorienting, characterised by a loss of agency and cognitive dissonance.

There are also ongoing problems with narration and how to direct the viewer’s attention in VR\textsuperscript{55}. Dr. Lyubov Bugaeva submits that at some point in the future we will be able to go to the mall and have our brains scanned. These scans could then be uploaded to the cinema or movie theatre (with consent asked for and given, of course) and then one might be able to select an enhanced experience exclusively designed for one’s neural signature, in favour of the regular experience. This may sound the stuff of science fiction, but moves are being made in these directions\textsuperscript{56} and we may well see this technology in our lifetimes. There is the possibility that someday an artist may be able to design an environment

\textsuperscript{53} Torben Grodal, “Reality Experiences In VR And Film By Interactions Between The Senses And Feelings Of Agency”, in SCSMI Society For Cognitive Studies Of The Moving Image, (2018). Question asked of the speaker by the author during conference Q&A.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
based on the viewer’s neurological signature that will provide an enhanced affective experience. We are not there yet.

Virtual reality needs to make progress before it becomes a viable means of initiating affect without thoroughly disorienting its users. Currently with VR headphone audio it is only possible for the front centre image to be in the middle the head between the ears. With binaural sound it is easy to create the illusion of sounds behind and around you, but the front element is not realistic\(^{57}\). Once again, I refer to the cognitive dissonance of the VR environment, where sound is ‘almost’ real’ although not quite ‘real-real’. While we may be able to override our unease or sense that something is not quite right for a while, it is impossible to do so for extended periods of time without experiencing the sensation that something is, indeed, wrong with this alternative universe.

These technical problems with VR, which no doubt will be overcome but with which technological research is still struggling, lead to difficulties with both method and methodology that preclude a lengthier discourse on VR in these pages. Immersive and/or encompassing installation environments usually do not produce the loss of agency, dissonance or disorientation that VR produces, since the viewer is invariably able to readily locate themselves in space. Depending on their content they can be tolerated for indeterminate duration, can be modelled through the use of existing method and methodologies, and are currently a more suitable environment for the study of affect enhancement.

AR (Augmented Reality) suffers from its own set of cognitive dissonances, although the problems with AR can be different to those identified with VR. Initiating a transcendent state requires a form of self-forgetting that is difficult to engage whilst the candidate is managing a device or attached to, say, a smart phone. AR most frequently lends elements of live view through a screen, which produces an attentional deficit that is not conducive to the production of profound emotional states. These are the most popular tropes of AR at current writing and as a result have been excluded for the purposes of this study.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
4.3 Consciousness, Neuroscience and Empiricism

Gabrielle Starr, in ‘Feeling Beauty’, writes:

“Neurally speaking, art moves us by harnessing a key system with extraordinary resources, a system that only helps make us who we are but also helps us be aware of who we are. Powerful aesthetic experience makes us return to that state of watchful waiting characteristic of core consciousness, but carrying an awareness of the pleasure of looking at an object and contemplating its worth: perhaps powerful aesthetic experience unites what we didn’t predict with what we were always waiting for.”

My research deals with the qualitative and the subjective. Given all the advances taking place in neuroscience, one might assume that it would be possible to identify the neural structures through which the experience might pass, and develop a scientific study that would prove or disprove the thesis through empiricism. The answer to this is that research into the brain and aesthetics remains in its infancy and neuroscience remains simply too blunt a tool. Studies into the neurobiology of beauty have been conducted by Professor Emir Zeki, Professor of Neuroesthetics at University College London, but since time has passed the research remains problematic on a number of levels. I will discuss it here as it reflects some fundamental difficulties I have with the studies across the field.

It is all very well to deconstruct movements like Cubism or kinetic art, or indeed the work of Mondrian, based on their manifestos and theories. Certainly areas of the brain might light up when we see pleasingly ordered vertical and horizontal lines, but what that does not do is speak to the emotional content of the work. This is not to deny that it is possible to read work on a purely intellectual level, but the space I am discussing is to do with powerful positive arousal and valence responses.

As a consequence of difficulties encountered with available tools and software in structuring a research study based on reproducible verifiable evidence, my research deals with the qualitative and the subjective, and my argument is that certain types of qualitative, subjective findings should and must be given at least equal stature within the current parameters and construction of neuroaesthetic research. Given all the advances taking place in neuroscience, one might assume that it would be possible to identify the neural structures through which the aesthetic, transcendent or epiphanic experience might pass, and develop a scientific study that would prove or disprove the thesis through empiricism. The answer to this is that research into the brain and aesthetics remains in its infancy and neuroscience remains simply too blunt a tool. Conway and Rehding (2013) explain it as follows: “Four experimental-design challenges surface. First, the options are necessarily restricted, and might not include a truly beautiful choice—the study design tests preferences, not beauty. Second, different subjects likely interpret the instructions in radically different ways. Third, the use of different stimulus sets in different subjects makes it difficult to control for differences in low-level stimulus features, which likely drive different patterns of neural activity. And fourth, the experiment requires that a given object retain a fixed preferred status, and one that is not modulated by context, which we know is unlikely.”

Some of the difficulties with the neuroscientific approach lie in our changing cultural construction of ideas surrounding beauty and the challenges that arise in adapting to tropes and constructions of gender that are being reconstructed on an almost daily basis. It is possible, for example, to present a diverse group of subjects with a group of sources of stimuli (reproductions of objects or artworks, musical selections) from which they are asked to select those which they find ‘beautiful’ versus those which they find ‘ugly’ (Professor Zeki contrasts Ingres’ ‘La Grande Odalisque’ (1814) with Lucian Freud’s


60 Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, La Grande Odalisque, oil on canvas (Paris: Louvre, 1814).
'Benefits Supervisor Sleeping' (1995)\textsuperscript{61} as examples of beauty and ugliness\textsuperscript{62}. The very selection of the stimuli is subject to the researcher’s cultural construction of beauty and struggles with the shifting sands of the researcher’s upbringing, gender, and the mores of their times\textsuperscript{63}. Certainly the brain may respond to beauty, and even certain types of beauty, across cultural divides, but surely there must be some acknowledgement that the subject may simply be interpreting the construction of beauty placed on the work by the researcher, or trying to please the researcher. One questions what the results might have been had the researchers chosen an entire sample group of works which they interpreted as ‘ugly’, and asked the the subjects to select those that they responded to as ‘beautiful’ from within that field. Ball (2013) puts it as follows: “For one thing, to suggest that the human brain responds in a particular way to art risks creating criteria of right or wrong, either in the art itself or in individual reactions to it. Although it is a risk that most researchers are likely to recognise, experience suggests that scientists studying art find it hard to resist drawing up rules for critical judgements”\textsuperscript{64}. In these experiments the Western male gaze is predominant, alongside the most traditional constructions of what constitutes beauty and what defines art. It is also important to note that a reproduction of an artwork is not the artwork itself, which speaks to Magritte’s ‘Treachery of Images’ (1929)\textsuperscript{65} in that ‘\textit{ceci n’est pas une pipe}’ (‘this is not a pipe’) but rather an \textit{illustration} of a pipe. In the case neuroaesthetic MRI studies, an illustration of an artwork is subject to all the vagaries of reproduction and scale, and is not the artwork itself. Therefore it stands to reason that the only deductions one might make from such studies cannot be deemed to be in relation to the aesthetics of a particular work, but in relation to a \textit{reproduction} of a particular work, which are two different things entirely\textsuperscript{66}.

\textsuperscript{61} Lucian Freud, \textit{Benefits Supervisor Sleeping}, oil on canvas (Private collection, 1995).


\textsuperscript{65} René Magritte, ‘The Treachery of Images’, oil on canvas (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1929).

You cannot extrapolate your own interpretations of artworks onto other people, and then deduce hard evidence from the results, presenting this method as empirical. Beauty is also a cultural construction that changes over time and varies with the perception of each individual as well as across societies. The structure of the studies are from their inception affected by the preconceptions or unchallenged value systems of the researcher. Ultimately, not unlike quantum theory, by the very act of watching the observer affects the observed reality\(^{67}\), or the Heisenberg effect in which the very act of measurement or observation directly alters the phenomenon under investigation\(^{68}\).

While there is plenty of room for a whole host of disciplines surrounding the study of art, art is not solely a discursive intellectual problem-solving exercise. This is very much a scientist’s view of how artists function, the view from the ‘outside’, an imaginary leap into what a neuroscientist believes or imagines an artist to be. While acknowledging the supremacy of the subjective, Zeki’s “the only truths you can be sure of are objective truths”\(^ {69}\) brings us no closer to understanding the nature of subjectivity or how it relates to the emotional state of either the creator of the work of art or the viewer or participant\(^ {70}\). Fenwick (2001) supports this position on the problems of subjectivity as follows:

“Neuropsychiatry deals with brain science and is based on the correlation of mental states with the complex patterns of activity arising from diffuse nets of interconnected neurones. It is impossible to predict subjective experience by the study of objective firing patterns, and therefore impossible to explain the subjective aspects of mind or consciousness.

---


\(^{70}\) LeDoux, J, Director, The Ledoux Laboratory, Center for Neural Science at New York University (NYU), Henry and Lucy Moses Professor of Science, Professor of Neural Science and Psychology, Director, Emotional Brain Institute, Facebook IM with the author, 2016.
Conscious stuff and brain are different. The idea of a mechanical universe which excludes consciousness is unsatisfactory from an experiential point of view.\textsuperscript{71}

Subjectivity has long been considered the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness, and the reductive materialist view is that at some point phenomenal consciousness will be proved to be nothing more than a function of the brain\textsuperscript{72}. This discourse is problematic in that it fails to account for some of the phenomena described herein. My work is in line with the views of psychologist Max Velmans “naturalistic dualist, and dual-aspect theories resist the reduction of phenomenal consciousness to brain states….Discovery of the neural causes and or correlates would not achieve this for the simple reason that causation, correlation and ontological identity are fundamentally different relationships”\textsuperscript{73}. While current trends seem to adopt the materialist view that mind is “nothing more than a particular arrangement of physical matter”\textsuperscript{74} the reverse philosophical position may also be true, physical matter may be nothing more than an arrangement of mind\textsuperscript{75}. If that is in fact the case, then perhaps what the viewer or participant experiences as a transcendent state when encountering an aesthetic environment is that which most closely resembles a manifested internal state, the most clearly adducible reflection of the inner landscape, the external ‘proof’ of an internal topography.

The difficulties with empiricism and the technological problems with our software and our tools have led me full circle to return to a qualitative research model that includes elements of autoethnography. While developments are being made, my assertion is that this remains the most effective means of adding insight that might contribute to the sum of knowledge through my research at this time.


\textsuperscript{72} Max Velmans, “How to define consciousness - and how not to define consciousness”, in Journal of Consciousness Studies, vol. 16 no. 5 (2009),144.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
4.4 Chapter Four | Key Theorists

My study is about how and why people come to have transcendental experiences within immersive installation artworks featuring light and sound, and whether we can identify prototypical qualities in these artworks that would allow for the duplication of such experiences. For the purpose of this study, I am defining a transcendent experience as a transformational life experience which may be epiphanic, incorporate a sense of awe, including feelings of communion, often subsuming the viewer in a sense of universality.

Mondrian describes the state as follows: “the one thing that counts in art is to reflect aesthetic emotion: to the extent that we feel the purity of colour more intensely, we are able to express colour more purely....once we have begun to see in a more consciously aesthetic way, the task becomes to reflect clearly, that is, determinately, our aesthetic emotion. Then we can break completely with optical vision.”76 Kuspit goes on to define that “complete break is a conversion experience, a fundamental alteration of consciousness.”77 I see Mondrian’s definition of a ‘conversion experience’ as an umbrella, drawing together notions of the transcendent, the conversion experience, and the numinous. Kuspit (2006) draws a straight line from the “abstract, sublime landscapes”78 modernist landscapes of Newman, Rothko and Still through to the transcendent state. It should not be too much of a stretch to extrapolate Kuspit’s discursion on modernist, abstract and colour field works through to light art and immersive art, of which Light and Space Movement works might easily be seen to be extensions. His exposition verges on the mystical, eclectic and esoteric at times, invoking Buddhism, the mysticism of the abstract, and knowledge through the senses.

Susan Gordon, in her paper on Alan Watts and neurophenomenology, notes that “Nothing is known more intimately than conscious experience, yet nothing is harder to explain than consciousness itself. The ‘hard problem’ of consciousness is the problem of

---


77 Donald Kuspit, “Aesthetic Transcendence and Transformation”, Art Criticism vol. 24 no. 2 (2009),104.

78 Ibid.
Alan Watts goes on to describe the materiality of a person’s connection to the universe as follows:

“Every individual is a unique manifestation of the Whole, as every branch is a particular outreaching of the tree. To manifest individuality, every branch must have a sensitive connection with the tree, just as our independently moving and differentiated fingers must have a sensitive connection with the whole body. The point, which can hardly be repeated too often, is that differentiation is not separation. The head and the feet are different, but not separate, and though man is not connected to the universe by exactly the same physical relation as branch to tree or feet to head, he is nonetheless connected—and by physical relations of fascinating complexity.”

In further support of my assertions surrounding valence, affect and their relationship to aesthetics, Coomaraswamy describes the state of ‘samvega’, a Pali word “often used to describe the shock or wonder that may be felt when the perception of a work of art becomes a serious experience”.

He goes on to describe the experience of ‘samvega’ as one of aesthetic shock, which he defines as follows:

“…the experience that may be felt in the presence of a work of art, when we are struck by it…In the first phase, there really is a disturbance, in the second there is an experience of peace that cannot be described as an emotion in the sense that fear and love or hate are emotions…In the deepest experience that can be induced by a work of art (or other reminder) our very being is shaken (samvijita) to its roots…But this shock can be felt only when we have learned to recognise truth when we see it.”

---

82 Ibid., 7.
Samvega is the ‘sacred ground’, where the recognition of eternal truth, awe, epiphany and the transcendent meet in the experience of the aesthetic. Abraham Maslow believed that we are all capable of such peak experiences, only that some choose to deny it. As Maslow puts it: “I finally fell into the habit of expecting everyone to have peak experiences and being rather surprised if I ran across somebody who could report none at all. Because of this experience, I finally began to use the word ‘non-peaker’ to describe, not the person who is unable to have peak-experiences, but rather the person who is afraid of them, who suppresses them, who denies them, who turns away from them, or who ‘forgets’ them.” 83 If we follow on from Coomaraswamy’s definition, this would make the fundamental human condition that of a truth-recogniser, while only a small handful would remain truth-deniers.

My premise is that the ‘conversion experience’ as defined by Kuspit (2009) is an element of the experience of art as epiphanic and transcendental. A key component lies in Sylvan Tomkins’ construction of the ‘communion affect’ as a “surrender to envelopment”84. If “surrender to envelopment” and the “communion affect” are enjoined they may prove liminal to the heightened valence/arousal state which is key to the affect under consideration, and the immersive or encompassing installation space is nothing less than an enveloping environment.

“Tomkins defined himself as neo-Kantian. If, as Tomkins commented, Kant compared the human mind to a glass that imprinted its shape on whatever liquid was poured into it, our concept of space, time and causality must be understood as constructions that imposed the categories of “pure reason” on “things”, thus disguising and pushing their ultimate nature beyond understanding. Kant’s error of omission required repair by the theories of affect and script Tomkins was now to introduce: No matter how reasonable, the engine of analysis is engaged and focused where aimed and sent by emotion; human thought is never dispassionate.”85

Sylvan Tomkins defines the affect system as “the primary motivational system because without its amplification, nothing else matters—and with its amplification, anything can else can matter.”

Alongside a ‘surrender to envelopment’, he breaks down the ‘communion affect’ as: ‘doing things for others as mode of communion’, ‘doing things together as a mode of communion’, ‘controlling others as a mode of communion’, ‘doing things before others as a mode of communion’, ‘drive satisfaction as a mode of communion’, ‘the enjoyment and expression of negative affects as a mode of communion’, ‘attenuation as a mode of communion’ and ‘speech as a mode of communion’. Not all of these are relevant to the study of aesthetics, but an understanding of some of these ‘modes of communion’ provides insight into the qualities informing the construction of the experience under consideration.

The key theorists in this work are pragmatists. The work leans towards the embodiment theory of emotion, as proposed by William James, in that emotions arise from bodily feelings and can therefore be incited or triggered by influences on the body. James espoused ‘radical empiricism’ as an “attempt at legitimating genuine experience-as-experienced, including ‘pure experience’ – that is to say, awareness in the immediate moment before the differentiation of subject and object”, and this reinforces the discussion on the virtues of subjectivity found elsewhere in this study. For James, the body is the ‘storm centre’ in which “the world experienced comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest”, and the centrality of the body and its relationship to experience is shared by Dewey. Among opposing views is appraisal theory, in which “emotions are intellectual things”, are based in intellect and on

---


89 William James, A Pluralistic Universe (Web: Project Gutenberg EBook 2004), 91.

appraisals, and “depend on how we think about an event”\textsuperscript{91}. How do we communicate an idea that exists beyond language through the use of language? If phenomenology is the mind understanding the mind and body’s experiences, how do we define the body understanding the body’s experiences, which surely takes us beyond language? The transcendent experience may be triggered via mechanism in the brain, but the response lies in areas both more visceral and subliminal than those governing language. This is where the experiential comes into play, the direct unspoken knowledge with which a viewer or participant understands their embodied experience on an intuitive level. It engages with the feeling, emotive affect-driven response and therefore locates itself in the realm of the experiential. From a practitioner’s point of view, rather than that of the participant, I also return again to McNiff and his observation that “within the arts, tacit or unspoken knowledge permeates virtually every thing we do.”\textsuperscript{92}

I have shown that subjective reportage of individual emotional truth has validity in the face of scientific or ‘empirical’ truth. Personal truth can also lie in the construction of our own realities, a point made beautifully by the filmmaker Robert Zemeckis in his film ‘Contact, 1997’\textsuperscript{93}, in which the main character Dr. Ellie Arroway, played by Jodie Foster, asks a US Congressional committee to accept on faith the truth of her extra-terrestrial experience. A postmodernist relativist would argue that every individual’s truth is equally valid, but this creates an uncomfortable world which marginalises objectivity in favour of individualism and disavows both accumulated knowledge and wisdom. This is an unsatisfactory model, in much the same way as the assumption that all cultures are ‘equal’, including those that deny some persons fundamental gender or human rights. This is simply not the case. A consensus of observed or shared experience can also form the basis for the collection of qualitative data. We can assign greater value to the opinions, observations and subjective responses of individuals on the basis of their experience, education, capacity for observation and analysis, and personal and professional histories. In this world, one individual’s subjective observations and responses do become more valid than another’s. The approach then falls into the more pragmatic practical application of ideas by acting

\textsuperscript{91} Jesse Prinz, \textit{Beyond Human Nature} (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 242.

\textsuperscript{92} Shaun McNiff, \textit{Art-Based Research} (London: Athenaeum Press, 1998), 132.

\textsuperscript{93} Robert Zemeckis, \textit{Contact}, film (Warner Brothers, 1997).
on them to actually test them in human experience, however qualitative and subjective these observations may be.

I refer here to McNiff on the value of the creative experience:

“The discipline of aesthetics is often simplistically associated with subjectivity and inconsistency, and this notion is paired with the assumption that there is an objective and constant reality at the core of experience. If there is a constant reality which underlies all experience, science has shown that we cannot know it... In keeping with the nature of creative experience, art-based research may sometimes encourage immersion in the uncertainties of experience, ‘finding’ a personally fulfilling path of inquiry, and the emergence of understanding through an often unpredictable process of exploration... Art-based inquiry, like art itself, may often include carefully calculated studies but the truly distinguishing feature of creative discovery is the embrace of the unknown.”

I am also making connections through the classical pragmatist aesthetics of John Dewey. Dewey’s ideas can be defined as follows: art cannot be removed from everyday life, it is essential and interwoven into life itself, and an individual cannot be fully in possession of that which constitutes his ‘individual good’ without an experiential understanding of aesthetics; art, and the appreciation and engagement with art, has the power to transfigure life and should not be isolated as elitist but freely available and democratised; the need for this democratisation means that art is of itself political, a sentiment more recently echoed by Bill Viola when he said “I see the liberation of the soul, as well as the body, as being tied into political realities”. There is a lot of linguistic struggle around Dewey’s definitions of ‘experience’ but the debate does not seem to have affected the legitimacy of Dewey’s notion of the importance of the unified aesthetic experience.

---

95 Ibid.
96 Mark Kidel, The Eye Of The Heart, DVD (Calliope Media Productions, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2003).
Dewey’s writing is relevant to my work in its emphasis on the transformative potential of art through experience, locating the value of the artwork within the actuality of the viewer/participant, insofar as the work of art has value in its capacity to arouse an affective reaction-experience within the life state of the participant (or, more blithely, the notion that the measure of a work of art lies in its capacity to transform the life of the viewer). With these emphases, pragmatist aesthetics appears to form the most elegant philosophical framework for this study.

Some of the critiques surrounding Dewey are encapsulated in the difficulties inherent in attempting to capture, in a verbal formula, the essence of what constitutes ‘art’. Regardless of whether art is rendered as experience or as practice, and both definitions were employed by Dewey, linguistics cannot help but add layers of meaning and interpretation. Language, even when clearly and wholly defined, continues to pose challenges to academics and philosophers engaged in writing about aesthetics, and I have addressed this subject earlier in this chapter. The strata of language seem engaged in a struggle, presenting multiple interpretations which variously draw us closer to meaning and understanding while at the same time pushing us further away.

The philosopher Alan Watts encapsulates the dilemma as follows:

“For what we mean by ‘understanding’ or ‘comprehension’ is seeing how parts fit into a whole, and then realising that they don’t compose the whole, as one assembles a jigsaw puzzle, but that the whole is a pattern, a complex wiggliness, which has no separate parts. Parts are fictions of language, of the calculus of looking at the world through a net which seems to chop it up into bits. Parts exist only for purposes of figuring and describing, and as we figure the world out we become confused if we do not remember this all the time.”98

A great deal of the discourse surrounding Dewey seems to focus on Dewey’s alternative definition of ‘experience’, using the word in an unusual way to describe a unifying

aesthetic experience. Here Koopman illustrates the point I am making about the tension between neopragmatism and classical pragmatism:

“The revival of pragmatism by contemporary philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Robert Brandom has generated a wealth of intramural debates between these upstart neopragmatists and contemporary scholars of classical pragmatism devoted to the work of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Of all the internecine conflicts which continue to rage, perhaps the most ink has been spilled over issues concerning the relative priority of language and experience in pragmatism. While defenders of classical pragmatism defend experience as the conceptual center of an experiential pragmatism, Rorty and many other neopragmatists drop the concept of experience altogether in favour of a thoroughly linguistic pragmatism…This is one issue on which nearly everyone agrees that there is an important split within the heart of pragmatism itself.”

The construction of art as experience becomes problematic, since not all art produces such an experiential aesthetic condition, and not all such experiences are necessarily a product of art. Shusterman responds to this by saying: “If artworks universally flouted the goal of aesthetic experience, then art as we know it would probably disappear or lose its importance in our lives. Defining art as experience, I argue, also has value in widening the realm of art by challenging the rigid division between art and action that is supported by definitions that define art as mimesis, poiesis, or the narrow practice defined by the institutional art world. In other words, I argue that Dewey’s definition of art as experience has a very fruitful transformational potential.”

To place affect-driven empiricism at the heart of aesthetics is a worthy position within contemporary critique. Shusterman asserts that “if art is redefined as aesthetic experience, then simply our experiencing that experience will establish something as an artwork. Thus,


nothing but aesthetic experience is needed for legitimation, and criticism is simply a means to bring the reader to have the relevant experience.\textsuperscript{101} As noted above, neopragmatists find this position troublesome, arguing for the ongoing need for aesthetic criticism as a means of legitimising the aesthetic experience. Again, I return to the notion that subjectively reported experience is valid, although not all subjectively reported experience is equally valid. According to Shusterman, critical attention is essential in investing art with both status and worthiness\textsuperscript{102}, but there is no deficit of critical attention in a qualitative analysis, based either on consensus or the experience of the individual, within the framework of this study.

Metamodernism might provide a more modern take on pragmatist aesthetics as a ‘metaxis’ occupying a space between modernism and postmodernism, swinging between them without wholly inhabiting one or the other, and qualified by the tension between reason and doubt. As a revisionist pragmatist aesthetic, with its emphasis on the end of sarcasm, sincerity, and a redefinition of truth including a return to reason, metamodernism is both promising and problematic. The works Vermeulen and van den Akker associate with metamodernism are all produced by artists involved with emotion, sense, and feeling. They reference David Thorpe’s work as looking at nature for beauty and value, Kaye Donachie for her lyricism, and Michel Gondry as an exemplar of the return to the search for a childlike naiveté. They cite Emerson’s ‘alienated majesty’ but this sits uncomfortably. Emerson was talking about trusting yourself to be certain of your course of action, rather than the questioning ‘swinging’ between poles that they are defining as one of the tropes of metamodernism. The metaphor doesn’t really work. Emerson was decrying this sort of oscillation rather than celebrating it.

Metamodernism rejects the deconstruction, sarcasm and irony of postmodernism while suggesting the new cultural aesthetic as a ‘metamodern’ tension between opposing poles. Whether adopting the postmodern pose of irony, sarcasm and detachment is any more meaningful than adopting a pose of childlike naiveté and sincerity is not addressed, and what both of these tropes deny the viewer is the possibility of encountering truth as

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 30.
anything other than a dissimulation. This is not the way of samvega and the sacred ground does not lie in these tropes. All adopted poses must be surrendered, although the call for sincerity, romanticism, and a return to something more defined and real may have cultural resonance. Through its emphasis on these qualities alone, this may prove valuable in the construction and evolution of a sort of latter-day pragmatist philosophical doctrine.

Instead, and rather than a metamodernism or linguistic neopragmatism, our contemporary pragmatist philosophical doctrine is synthesised as an ‘aesthetic-neopragmatism’, or a ‘samvega-neopragmatism’. Described as a wholly modernising force, that places works of art which may be democratically consumed and understood on an emotional level by all at the core of its epistemology, informed by Maslow’s universal declaration that all are capable of peak experience; placing Coomaraswamy’s aesthetic-shock inspired ability to recognise truth at its core; guided by Dewey’s reflections on the value of art as experience; structurally informed by the body-sense of somaesthetics; recognising the strengths and limitations of contemporary technology in the interpretation of sense-experience and therefore respecting the qualitative and subjective experience of the individual as being imbued with empirical value; a modernising of the philosophy for the tropes and conditions of cultural production in the 21st Century.

In this chapter, I have discussed the methodology governing this project, including practice-based research (PBR) and autoethnography, difficulties surrounding the gathering of biometric data and the empirical value of qualitative observation, and some of the debates surrounding theories of emotion (Ekman, Fridlund, Gratch). I have explained the decision to focus on self-reported emotional and aesthetic states, and to leave the investigation of the physiological correlates to these states for further research. I have expressed some reservations in respect of the vestibular and cognitive dissonance problems surrounding virtual reality, as well as highlighting some of the difficulties surrounding neuroaesthetics. In respect of how and why people come to have transcendental experiences within immersive installation artworks featuring light and sound, and whether we can identify prototypical qualities in these artworks that would allow for the duplication of such experiences, I have referenced (among others) Max Velmans on consciousness, Donald Kuspit on aesthetic shock, Alan Watts on universality
and experience, Ananda Coomaraswamy on the transcendent and eternal truth in the aesthetic experience *samvega*, Sylvan Tomkins on communion and envelopment, and McNiff on the value of the creative experience, in support of my assertions. I have concluded by reviewing some of the debate between neopragmatism and classical pragmatism, to underpin my decision to base my work in classical pragmatism. In Chapter Five, I will examine the construction of the transcendent state.
Intermission

Bay of Martyrs, Nullaware, Victoria, Australia, 24 March 2017

“How will I know?” she asked.

From nowhere and everywhere came the answer “Look to the sky for the language born of clouds”.

![Cloud images]

![Cloud images]

![Cloud images]

![Cloud images]
Chapter Five | The Construction of the Transcendent State

5.1 The Construction of a Transcendent State

The construction, generation and regeneration of the transcendent experience within the context of aesthetics is among the subjects central to this investigation. I am also clarifying whether or not it is possible to set out to enhance this type of experience in an individual viewer or participant through the use of prototypical qualities I intend to identify as being key to the generation of these states.

I am looking at epiphany, awe and the sublime as constituent elements of the ‘transcendent’ experience, and the qualities of time manipulation, envelopment, power, communion, otherworldliness, and threat and fear as precursors to the transcendent or ‘conversion’ experience. It has never been more important to understand the transcendent state, as the world becomes more permeable and barriers between exterior sources (including machines) and the individual become increasingly blurred, undefined and porous.

I begin by addressing the terms I am using. These terms: ‘transcendence’, ‘Level III Truth and Transcendence’, ‘conversion experience’, ‘awe’, ‘epiphanic’ and ‘peak experience’ are all closely related. ‘Transcendent’ is used in keeping with the definitions and references employed herein; ‘Level III Truth and Transcendence’ is described by Rogers as ‘peak aesthetic experiences’ and “a feeling that we have understood something important, something timeless, perhaps for the first time”\(^\text{103}\); Kuspit describes the ‘conversion experience’ as “aesthetic shock…that is, a kind of mystical experience, in which appearances become sensuously new and radically changed - more seriously experienced than they ever were before”\(^\text{104}\); Keltner and Haidt define the structure of ‘awe’ as the “upper reaches of pleasure and on the boundary of fear…central to the experience of religion, nature…art….Fleeting and rare, experiences of awe can change the

---


\(^{104}\) Donald Kuspit, “The Emotional Gains of Aesthetic Shock”, Psychoanalytic Inquiry 26 no. 3 (2006), 348-349.
course of a life in profound and permanent ways"\textsuperscript{105}; McDonald defines the epiphanic as "sudden and abrupt insights and/or changes in perspective that transform the individual’s concept of self and identity through the creation of new meaning in the individual’s life... momentary experiences of transcendence that are enduring and distinct from other types of developmental change and transformation"\textsuperscript{106}; and ‘peak experience’ has been defined by Maslow as historically... “the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer... But it has recently begun to appear that these ‘revelations’ or mystical illuminations can be subsumed under the head of the "peak-experiences" or ‘ecstasies or ‘transcendent’ experiences... perfectly natural, human peak-experiences”\textsuperscript{107}. I will look at the practical application of these definitions more closely in the following chapters.

Many of these definitions are identical in places, and share similar attributes or equivalences. These are subjective states and this is not an empirical discussion, and although I have teased out variations the definitions are permeable and vary throughout literature. Transformational life experiences may be transcendental, cathartic, epiphanic, incorporating a sense of awe and the release of powerful emotion, including feelings of communion, often subsuming the viewer in a sense of universality.

The character and personality traits that an individual brings to the experience of art influences the quality of their experience of the work. Viewer or participants who are more likely to appreciate ‘difficult’ art (in the study, characterised as ‘abstract art’) are defined by the ‘openness to experience’ trait\textsuperscript{108}. Threat and fear also appear to play a significant role in the construction of heightened aesthetic experiences. While I am aware of the many discussions and controversies surrounding the sublime, and this is not the subject of this discussion, Edmund Burke describes a relationship between fear and the experience of

\textsuperscript{105} Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, "Approaching Awe, A Moral, Spiritual, And Aesthetic Emotion", \textit{Cognition And Emotion} 17, no. 2 (2003), 297.


the sublime: "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous"¹⁰⁹, an idea which Eskine, Kacinik, Prinz develop here:

“Fear was the only factor found to significantly increase sublime feelings. Because higher sublime scores were also significantly associated with greater physiological arousal, arousal does generally contribute to aesthetic experiences...But why fear? One potential explanation is that it motivates organisms in an evolutionary significant way...The capacity for a work of art to grab our interest and attention, to remove us from daily life, may stem from its ability to trigger our evolved mechanisms for coping with danger.”¹¹⁰

Transcendent aesthetic experience may be said to be a close relative of the epiphanic experience, defined as “momentary experiences of transcendence that are enduring and distinct from other types of developmental change and transformation”¹¹¹ in which anxiety, threat, stress and fear play a role. Epiphanic characteristics comprise antecedent states of anxiety, depression and inner turmoil; are sudden and abrupt; produce an acute awareness of something new; produce illumination and insight; and unlike the transcendent aesthetic state which may be of variable duration and longevity, would appear to almost universally produce transformation that is permanent and lasting¹¹². Threat is one of the qualifiers of the emotional experience of awe, alongside beauty, ability, virtue, and supernatural causality¹¹³. Keltner and Haidt’s outline of the qualifying


¹¹² Ibid., 93.

central and peripheral features of awe can be found in Figure 17, where the left hand column defines eliciting situations, grouped as social elicitors, physical elicitors, and cognitive elicitors, against the central features of vastness and accommodation in the columns to the right, and the peripheral flavouring features of threat, beauty, ability, virtue and the supernatural in the columns to the far right. This table forms ‘a prototype approach to awe and related states’ (see Figure 17).

Keltner and Haidt describe the phenomena as follows:

“Much as humans are biologically prepared to respond to certain fear inducing stimuli (e.g. fast approaching objects, darkness), we argue that humans are prepared to respond to awe-inducing stimuli (e.g., large stature and displays of strength and confidence). From this perspective, various components of the subordinate’s response to the dominant individual, including passivity, heightened attention towards the powerful, and imitation…are biologically based action tendencies at the core of the experience of awe…The capacity for the experience of awe in response to cues of social dominance then generalises to other stimuli, such as buildings, operas, or tornadoes, to the extent that these new stimuli have attributes associated with power”\textsuperscript{114}.

Here the authors construct awe as qualified by the “removal of threat and the addition of beauty” leading to “the transcendent feelings described by naturalists”\textsuperscript{115}. These ideas are explored in the location artworks that form the research component of this dissertation, working through accommodation (‘Apostle Sea’ (2017)) to include clock-speed encoding and vista alongside awe-inducing stimuli in filmed location works such as ‘Mt Wellington’ (2017), ‘but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)’ (2017), ‘all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)’ (2017), ‘every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)’ (2017), culminating in the work filmed in Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada ‘and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)’ (2018).

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 306-307.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 307.
The view expressed by Keltner, Haidt disagrees with the role of threat in the construction of epiphany as described in McDonald (2008) as well as the model of the sublime in Eskine, Kacinik, Prinz (2012) although Keltner, Haidt (2003) taxonomically locate epiphany as a “member of the awe family”116. Tomkins also speaks to “the enjoyment and expression of negative affects as a mode of communion”117, and so threat and fear may contribute to the preparedness of the individual to enter into a ‘communion’ state with a work of art, that may then become the precursor or the foundation of the experience of the transcendent state.

It is important to distinguish fear from threat, with evolutionary threat (“evolutionarily conserved defensive survival circuits that account for the behavioral and physiological responses to threats, but that are not directly responsible for subjective experiences of

---


fear (“individually experienced state that involves memory, expectation, and consciousness, and thus the most complex circuits in the brain”)\cite{118}. The transcendent state may also be a special “kind of attention, where attention is recruited to keep everything other than the moment out of mind”\cite{121}.

For the purposes of defining the states, qualities and forces at play in the construction of the experience in an immersive, aesthetic environment, it may be generally agreed that evolutionary threat forms one of the component features of the structure of the experience. While most authors appear to conflate evolutionary threat and fear, for the purposes of this study I also propose that fear, regardless of its origin, forms a component precursor or driver of the experience. The religious order Bene Gesserit’s ‘Litany Against Fear’ in Frank Herbert’s science fiction classic ‘Dune’ describes the process of fear as follows: “I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.”\cite{122} I propose that this return to the eternal ‘I’, the eternal self, the “state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended…”\cite{123} is one of the mechanisms by which fear functions in the initiation and production of the transcendent ‘high’.

Emotional arousal also affects internal clock speeds, which in turn result in an overestimation of time, another component in the ‘timeless’ experience of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[119] Ledoux, J. Director, The Ledoux Laboratory, Center for Neural Science at New York University (NYU), Henry and Lucy Moses Professor of Science, Professor of Neural Science and Psychology, Director, Emotional Brain Institute, Facebook correspondence with the author, June 13 2017.
\item[120] Ibid., Nov 2 2016.
\item[121] Ledoux, J. Director, The Ledoux Laboratory, Center for Neural Science at New York University (NYU), Facebook correspondence with the author, November 4 2016.
\item[123] Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, (Piccadilly: N Hailes,1824), 53, Google Scholar.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
transcendent. “The intense involvement in a work of art seems to make us lose track of
time. Though our retrospective judgments of how long such an experience lasts seem to
make us think that time has flown, it is also the case that emotion changes our encoding
and reproduction of memories for time.” Emotional stimuli serve to distort time, and the
duration of the ‘timeless’ experience may be in direct correlation to the strength of the
valence and arousal brought about not only by the encounter with the artwork, but by the
preexisting state the individual brings to the experience of the work of art. This is an idea
explored in my research artwork ‘One Second’\textsuperscript{125}, a ten minute long work representing
one second in time, accompanied by the sound of a ticking clock. A work employing ultra-
slow-motion, each tick represents everything that is viewed on screen over ten minutes,
and the ticking clock is interrupted by gaps of random lengths generated by a random
dice roller. The gaps of random lengths serve to return to the viewer to time-
consciousness, becoming at once aware of the durational passage of time as well as its
malleability.

Rogers (2013) suggests that slow-motion, the slowing down of time, or the suspension of
time within an artwork (or more specifically an immersive artwork installation) is another
key component in the heightened experience of art as ‘transcendent’. These values are
explored in the artwork ‘The Descent (Wakako Falling)’\textsuperscript{126}, the three channel video
installation constructed as part of this research, employing looped images in ultra slow-
motion. It has been reported that slow-motion images speak to a heightened sense of
truth\textsuperscript{127}, and that a “carefully constructed moving image presented to a prepared mind”\textsuperscript{128}
is important to the initiation of what Rogers defines as a ‘Level III’ ‘Truth and
Transcendence’ experience (as distinguished from Level I ‘Sense and Soma’ and Level II

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[125]{Sadia, Sadia, \textit{One Second}. High speed footage (1500fps), stereo soundtrack, full HD, projector, speakers,
amplifiers, Sydney Gate MOCAP Soundstage, Sydney, Australia, 2015.}
\footnotetext[126]{Sadia, Sadia, \textit{The Descent (Wakako Falling)}, 2017, three channel video installation, full HD, filmed at Sydney
Gate, Sydney, Australia.}
\footnotetext[127]{Sheena Rogers, “Truth, Lies And Meaning In Slow Motion Images”, in \textit{Psychocinematics: Exploring
Cognition At The Movies} (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2013): 152.}
\footnotetext[128]{Ibid., 162.}
'Art and Affect'). This definition is significant as it goes to the heart of the phenomenon under consideration in this dissertation, and I will reproduce the core of it here.

Rogers in her paper ‘Truth, Lies and Meaning in Slow Motion Images’ says:

“A ‘Level III’ experience transcends the moment itself and, however briefly, puts us in touch with the beginningless and endless ebb and flow of human emotion, a timeless tide, the boundaries between ourselves and others suspended...I identify the experience with a third level of aesthetic meaning. The truth experienced at these peak moments is a different kind of truth...It is not a truth about the form a droplet takes when it hits the surface of a puddle, or truth about the weight of an object, or truth about the force of an impact. It is not even a truth about the real objects and events that formed the scene before the camera. Level III truths are a feeling that we have understood something important, something timeless, perhaps for the first time.”

A competing theory can be found in Konecni (2011) who proposes a system he defines by the acronym ‘ATT’, the ‘Aesthetic Trinity Theory’ being aesthetic awe, being-touched, and thrills as a structure for peak aesthetic experience. This system is less successful than Rogers (2013). He deliberately avoids discussing music, on the grounds that it is too complex (“This essay will not address music, either with regard to the sublime or aesthetic responses. The reason is that music, especially absolute music, is an exceedingly complex domain...”130), while suggesting by implication that visual art is not. This is an assertion that many visual artists will find problematic. He suggests that ATT is a “fundamental, emotional product of fear and joy”131, whereas I would argue that peak aesthetic experiences may be stimulated by a host of factors; that one “is overwhelmed, but controllably so”132 whereas I would argue one is uncontrollably overwhelmed, and that this lack of control is part of the essential nature of the transcendental experience of the

129 Ibid., 163.


131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.
encompassing artwork; and that aesthetic awe requires “existential safety” or “…feelings of existential security that are indispensable for aesthetic awe to occur”\(^\text{133}\) (and indeed a degree of economic status) whereas it requires quite the opposite, in fact a sense of existential danger or threat. Rogers’ (2013) ‘Level III Truth and Transcendence’ forms the theory more fully supported in contemporary literature.

Maslow proposes that all human beings experience peak or transcendent states, but that some individuals chose to deny them. He points to the similarities between what Rudolf Otto describes as the characteristics of religious experience “the holy; the sacred;…awe before the mysterium tremendum; the sense of the divine, the ineffable; the sense of littleness before mystery; the quality of exaltedness and sublimity…the sense of the eternal and of fusion with the whole of the universe…”\(^\text{134}\) and ‘peak experience’, noting that these experiences “can be accepted as real by clergymen and atheists alike”\(^\text{135}\).

Christopher Hitchens put it as follows:

“\(I\)’m a materialist…yet there is the sense that there is something beyond the material, or if not beyond it, not entirely consistent materially with it, is I think is a very important matter, what you could call the numinous or the transcendent, or at its best I suppose the ecstatic. I certainly wouldn’t trust anyone in this hall who didn’t know what I was talking about. We know what we mean by it, when we think about certain kinds of music, perhaps, certainly the relationship or the coincidence but sometimes very powerful between music and love, landscape, certain types of artistic and creative work that appears not to have been done entirely by hand. Without this we really would merely be primates”\(^\text{136}\).


\(^\text{135}\) Ibid.

Maslow describes the “irreducible, intrinsic values of this reality”\textsuperscript{137} as follows: truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency\textsuperscript{138} and it is his position that the experience of this state quantifies what it means to be human, to be ‘a fully human person’ in that “The fully human person in certain moments perceives the unity of the cosmos, fuses with it, and rests in it, completely satisfied for the moment in his yearning for one-ness”\textsuperscript{139}. Maslow’s modelling of the state relates well to what we understand of Roger’s ‘Level III’ experience as well as Keltner and Haidt’s speculative understanding of the construction of awe.

The experience of the transcendent is egalitarian, and this reinforces my argument that part of the attraction and popularity of works of art that inspire these states is their democratic and impartial availability to the educated and uneducated alike. The experience does not discriminate on the grounds of prior knowledge. By and large, our every approach to ‘gallery’ art is framed in signifiers: the white cube, the attribution, the hushed environment, the indicators of status and meaning, the cathedral or temple-like quality of the environment, what has seeped into our cultural consciousness of the art or artist through the media or representations of the work elsewhere. What would happen if the work were stripped of all these signifiers, if we met it ‘cold’? Would we have the same reaction to it? In responding to these questions, my understanding would be no, and this is what interests me so much about works that initiate, or appear to initiate, the transcendent state or one of heightened valence and arousal. The work will either succeed in inspiring profound affect, or it will not. Were the artist’s name or the museum or gallery stripped away from it, it would make no difference. In fact, some of these works exist in the out of doors or in temporary installation spaces, where cultural attribution and signifiers become looser or less evident. You will either have an emotional response to the work, or you will not, and no prior knowledge is necessary to understand the work at least in part, or have a profound reaction to it. This is an enormously democratic, egalitarian, and


\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} Abraham Maslow, \textit{Religions, Values and Peak-Experiences} (New York: Viking, 1970), 95.
equalising quality, and no doubt accounts for the overwhelming popular success of some of these works.

There is a widely spread, if unattributed, saying in the music business that musicians are paid so much money (at least some of them) because a song has the power to change the way a person feels in the shortest space of time. There is no need on the part of the listener to understand the philosophy, training, or ideology behind the work. The music will either move you, or it won’t. In this way, the study of the transcendent experience within the aesthetic environment has much in common with emotional arousal in response to music. The work will either produce heightened valence and arousal state, or it will not, without the benefit of prior education or the ‘white cube’. In both of these disciplines, the outcome is binary, black or white, on or off, hot or cold.

Persinger argues that low-grade temporal lobe microseizures may play a factor in the sense of “out-of-body experiences, space-time distortions, intense meaningfulness, and dreamy scenes” and that these may play a role in our construction of the state. These experiences are provoked by a variety of stimuli “but personal (life) crises and death bed conditions are optimal. These temporal lobe microseizures can be learned as responses to existential trauma because stimulation is of powerful intrinsic reward regions...”.

Persinger goes on to assert that “mystical experiences are normal consequences of spontaneous biogenic stimulation of temporal lobe structures. The numbers, composition, and intensity of these experiences reflect a continuum of temporal lobe stability. Each human being may be located somewhere along this dimension.”

This supports Maslow’s contention that the experience is universal. This might also explain why some viewers report mystical, out-of-body, or religious experiences in works that emphasise flashing lights, such as Ryoji Ikeda’s works, with the rate of flashing having a possible initiating effect. The effect of personal life crises on our likelihood of experiencing the

---


141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.
epiphanic has also been noted by McDonald (2008), and stress as a contributory factor by Keltner, Haidt (2003) as discussed above.

I would now like to turn my attention to the qualities of communion-envelopment. Human beings feel imbued with agency, yet most of the information we assimilate is on a subconscious level, by some arguments 90%\(^1\). The processes of the subconscious then build up a critical mass until something ‘pops’ to the surface. This may be an explanation for why some report a greater frequency of profound emotional experiences than others. Their unconscious ‘critical mass’ has simply progressed to the point where an external stimulus will produce greater arousal, in other words, they are more psychologically prepared to ‘receive’ the work. This may also provide an additional explanation for why people who are undergoing stress are more likely to have an epiphanic experience or experience awe\(^2\).

What might then be considered the ideal circumstances for enjoining the experience? The viewer’s prior state before engaging with the work would be one of fear, of threat, crisis or some other form of stress. The viewer would then enter the immersive artwork ‘black box’ space. Here they would be greeted by images of vastness, of beauty and would be required to adjust their perception to some degree by way of some unfamiliar element in the environment or the work. The work may be accompanied by some form of surrounded audio, possibly with a hypnotic or repeating pattern or theme. They are suddenly enveloped by the darkened environment, and while there may be other people, they enjoy a measure of privacy of isolation, of unobserved aloneness with their emotions. This may be achieved as part of a crowd in the darkened space of a black box but not necessarily in a more brightly lit white cube. They are now primed to have a profound experience with the work.

---


Sylvan Tomkins defines the ‘communion affect’ as a ‘surrender to envelopment’. We are enfolded, returned to the womb, to our earliest state, to safety, to warmth. “Such early modes of communion are also sought by those who personify nature, especially the starry firmament, the towering mountain and the sea. All of these are vast and may be experienced as surrounding the adult as he was once enveloped within the womb and within his mother’s arms. Many varieties of mysticism for which, in communion, the distinction between subject and object disappears are adult derivatives of the earliest mode of communion.” These models of communion are explored in the naturalistic research artworks accompanying this text.

Is solitude, or a sense of solitude, as in being enveloped in darkness, a prerequisite for profound, intense emotional experiences? The buzz that people get from experiencing the self-forgetting crowd-mind notwithstanding, we are more likely to experience the transcendental when provided with a sense of solitude. Hannah Arendt underlined the need for solitude as ‘la vita contemplativa’, a key to the measure of conscience in the individual, a necessary prerequisite for living an insightful life, in that when we return home to ourselves we return to a state of solitude. James Turrell and Yayoi Kusama construct works that may only be experienced by one or two people at a time. Whether consciously or unconsciously, artists understand the function solitude plays, in the enveloping darkness or simply in the isolation of the individual, in the construction of profound emotion and the capturing of attention as an initiating strategy.

In Chapter Five, I have discussed the importance of this work and definitions surrounding some of the terms I am using, including Rogers’s ‘Level III Truth and Transcendence’, Kuspit’s ‘conversion experience’, Keltner and Haidt on the structure of awe, McDonald on the epiphanic and Maslow on peak experience. I have looked at some of literature surrounding threat and stress in the formation of transcendent aesthetic experience. I have also examined theoretical work around emotional arousal and internal clock speeds, slow motion and the slowing down of time, Tomkins’s qualities of envelopment as inciting


146 Ibid., 88.
communion, and possible physiological correlates like Persinger's low-grade temporal lobe microseizures. I believe that there is a group of artworks that have a higher success rate in inspiring these states, and that these works are notable in their democratic and impartial availability to the educated and uneducated alike. In Chapter Six, I will look at some artists working with immersive and encompassing environments notable for inciting profound affect, and examine some of the strategies they employ.
Chapter Six | An Outline of the Field of Research
Chapter Six | An Outline of the Field of Research

My outline of the field is largely comprised of artists’ works of which I have personal, first-hand experience. Some of these works have been viewed over the period of my candidature. I have long held an interest in this field and have followed some artists’ careers for many decades. As a consequence, some of these works I am recalling from many years ago. The passage of time has not dulled my memory of these works, and I recall them and the effect they had on me as if it were yesterday. These artworks, and my response to them, formed the basis of my desire to explore this subject.

Experiential embodied encounters with the work are important to this analysis and are personal and qualitative. As I have shown earlier in this project, personal qualitative analysis bears a direct relationship to empirical findings and the validity of the qualitative analysis in the context of this research has been established. Works of which I have brief, lesser or only theoretical knowledge are discussed at the end of the outline, along with the rationale for their inclusion, under ‘Other Works in the Field’.

6.1 James Turrell

I first became aware of Turrell’s work long before he became an art world superstar, and so have had greater opportunity to witness the evolution of the artist than most. My experience of his work includes the 2014 Retrospective at LACMA (the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) as well as earlier work such as ‘Air Mass’ at the Hayward Southbank in London in 1993. In 2010 I visited the Hess Art Collection at the James Turrell Museum in Colomé, Argentina, currently the world’s only museum dedicated to his work, where I had the chance to visit nine permanent installations in the company of the curator and one other person, in a 18,034 square foot (1,680 m2) museum. I had the opportunity to observe, interact, and spend as much time with the work as I wished. I have also visited and experienced his recently installed ‘Perceptual Cell’ in the Pharos pavilion at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Tasmania, on March 15th 2018.

The California Light and Space Movement has been around since the 1960s, but seems to be latterly rising in ascendance with a handful of its proponents gaining significantly
greater visibility. While some might put this down to the booming art market and its relentless drive to satisfy ever-growing numbers of collectors, there is something in the Zeitgeist of the early twentieth century that leads me to believe that this may be work whose ethos fits the times. The exhibition of the pioneering work of Thomas Wilfred in the early 20th Century, which took place at the Yale University Art Gallery and then moved to the Smithsonian across 2017 and 2018 would seem to indicate that this is true. While a distinction has already been made in literature between those who essentially work with surfaces and more superficial aesthetics, and those whose works dig deeper into the emotional and visceral realms, I propose a new movement, category, or field, works of communion or of transcendent potential that have a greater than average subjectively reported rate of producing peak experiences. Turrell's work falls into this category and my specific interest is in works that I have experienced that conform to what I am defining as 'communion mode' aesthetics, in this case with reference to Tomkins' notions of "envelopment as communion," and through strategies such as darkness in built or confined spaces and enveloping chromosaturated environments. The first work I want to look at is 'City of Arhirit'.

The work is an early Ganzfeld, “somewhat similar to the Space Division Constructions” in which the viewer is fully immersed or bathed in light of varying hues. Ganzfeld can varyingly be interpreted to mean ‘whole field’ (from the German) or ‘a technique of controlled sensory input used with the aim of improving results in tests of telepathy and other paranormal phenomena’. The work comprises a set of rooms, bisected by a narrow walkway. Turrell has the following to say about the work:

“In these pieces, the room you are in has a surface which is as completely homogeneous as possible in its light quality. Depending on the depth of the physical space, the hue and saturation of the colour, and the scale of light
intensity, the air in the space will seem physically charged with coloured light and seem to come right up against your eyes…Each room was lit by outside light that entered through a small window behind the viewer. The light was controlled in passing through this window so as to create a homogeneous field of pale colour in each of the rooms…As in a normal homogeneous field, colour begins to fade after a few minutes of viewing. In moving from one space to the next, the retinal afterimage of the previous room was mixed with the colour present in the new space.”

The viewer is restricted to and moves along a narrow walkway, variously being bathed in immersive light environments of varying hues, carrying an imprint from the previous space to the next. There is little interactive choice within the work other than the speed with which the viewer chooses to move forwards along the walkway.

I walked the length of the passageway and on emerging burst into tears, consumed by a sense of Maslow’s ‘timelessness’, an embodied sensation of my history intermingling with the history of the world and this history then flowing through me. I felt every person I had ever known and everything that had ever transpired between us. I recall this event with

150 Ibid.
absolute clarity and vividness although the experience is now years old. It raises the question: why was I able to have this reaction? Was it purely the emotional power of strategically arranged light? Was I experiencing Burke’s (1824) fear or stress, or Keltner, Haidt’s (2003) accommodation, as consequence of having flown across continents and then travelled by land for hours into the foothills of the Andes, through a foreign, almost lunar landscape, to reach the museum? The museum was located at an elevation of 8530 feet, was it a result of elevation sickness brought about by a sudden change in altitude? Was it partially informed by my training as an artist? My answer to these questions is that all of these factors played a greater or lesser part in the formation of the experience. I have been visiting art galleries and building a visual lexicon for as long as I can remember. On the other hand, my companion was a neophyte, a professional investor in the commodities markets, with no aesthetic training and by his own admission no visual vocabulary to speak of. He underwent a similar reaction, and while the ‘transcendental’ effect wore off over time it remains a powerful memory and certainly informs my ‘seeing’ to this day. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, these experiences may be permanent or durational, invoking lasting change or leaving indelible memories.

Turrell explains the nature of the experience of art as follows:

""The more you have extraordinary experience in flight, the more you recognise the difficulty in passing on the experience to others. Your experience becomes such that it is almost too difficult to talk about it. It seems useless to try to transmit the experience. It would be easier to send others on the flight itself. The idea of the Bodhisattva, one who comes back and entices others to the journey, is to some degree the task of the artist. It is a different role from that of one who is there when you get there."

The James Turrell Museum at Colomé also owns a Dark Space work, in which the participant is guided into a completely blackened space and encouraged to sit for as long as they choose. This effect is simultaneously comforting and disorienting. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, the first sound I heard was the increasingly loud beating of my

---

heart, first in a panic reaction to the unfamiliar surrounding and eventually, as time wore on, it grew into a sort of lamentation for the sorrows of the world. After five to ten minutes, lights began to appear on the far wall, although it was impossible to discern if this was part of the exhibition or Turrell exploiting the phenomenon of ‘dark light’ (‘Eigenlicht’), the adaptive seeing of black-grey that humans undergo in completely darkened spaces. Without a doubt there are mystical aspects of to these works. Turrell defines it as the “experience of wordless thought”\textsuperscript{152}, the experience is beyond thinking in language, and I refer again here to my previous comments on linguistics, neopragmatism and pragmatism in Chapter Four.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure19.jpg}
\caption{James Turrell, Seen Unseen, 2017, perceptual cell, constructed environment, lights, MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, 2017, photograph of the installation by the author, non-commercial purposes or academic use only.}
\end{figure}

I contrast this with my experience of Turrell’s Perceptual Cell work entitled ‘Unseen Seen’ (2017). The collector David Walsh says about Pharos: “It is also a congenial trap for the contemporary art sceptic, and a refresher course in being a child. Whereas Mona is intended to be an antidote to closed-mindedness, Pharos is open-heart surgery.”\textsuperscript{153}


I would preface my observations about this work by mentioning that I am severely claustrophobic, this work is built specifically for one or two people at a time, and the work is contained in an extremely enclosed space (see Figure 19). This would have heightened my feelings of stress and displacement and quite likely increased my susceptibility to heightened valence states while viewing the work. The work was durational, lasting approximately fifteen minutes.

“The Perceptual Cell works are noted for their mind-blowing properties. One critic has already claimed he had a mental orgasm in the chamber. It would be nice to scoff but I feel that downplays the power of this mind-expanding work of art.”154 The work has been described as a “hallucinatory artwork crossed with a neurological experiment. Flashes of the experience and the wonder it inspires have been coming back to me in the days since I stepped inside”155. My experience of the work was one of heightened anxiety. My companions who also experienced the work reported artefacts in their field of vision of varying duration. I cannot say that the work altered the way that I see, since perhaps that is my default setting for ‘seeing’ regardless. The work did materially alter the way I felt, and here I refer back to two of the qualities I have highlighted in this group of works, enfoldment and envelopment, in this case in rapidly shifting light. That sensation has been both long-lasting and indelibly imprinted in the neural circuitry that processes such emotions.

Many of the works under consideration in the field I am defining fit the definition of ‘slow art’156, described by Arden Reed as works defined by their requirements for time and attention. The author describes his visit to Turrell’s Roden Crater as follows: “The time I spent at Roden Crater…changed my sense of living on this earth. Nothing less than that”157. The demands of both duration and attention, combined with envelopment, are


157 Ibid., 3.
features of the works in the field I am defining. The question remains, are we simply triggering a primal reaction to enfoldment? Yes, we are, but while it has its place and due weight must be given to its importance, it is far from the sole quality operative in the formation of the experience. Turrell’s work fits comfortably with the other works under consideration, and within the framework I have constructed of a notional “envelopment-enfoldment” as a mode of communion. His work is more than that, though, and what this project is defines are some of those qualities of materiality and environment that give rise to that transcendental state, that sense that the work of art has changed something of what it means for us to live in the world.

6.2 Olafur Eliasson

I am discussing two works by Olafur Eliasson, ‘The Weather Project’ (2003) and ‘Model for a Timeless Garden’ (2011). ‘The Weather Project’ was a site-specific installation, designed for the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern as part of the Unilever Series in 2003. The far wall of the Turbine Hall was covered in a semicircular screen backlit by 200 monofrequency lights, with a mirrored ceiling, and this trompe-l’oeil produced the effect of a ‘circular’ glowing orange-yellow globe, not unlike the sun. The air was sprayed with a fine mist to produce an atmospheric density and enhance the beams of light.

The Turbine Hall was transformed by the work from an industrial concrete brutalist environment into something altogether softer, more ethereal, a revisioning transformation into a cathedral-like cloister with a glowing ‘sun’ in place of a rose window. The sensation was one of majesty and awe, of heat and light, of a microclimate that produced not only clouds but rain. Participants lay on the floor and waved their arms in narcissistic self-regard, peering from the floor of the Turbine Hall into the distance at their own reflections in a ‘sky’ of mirrored ceiling.
Eliasson’s work relates to that of both Robert Irwin and James Turrell in the shared sense of ‘seeing yourself seeing’, or in Eliasson’s case “seeing yourself sensing”\(^\text{158}\). Although without an obvious soundtrack, the environment was almost wholly immersive, a work fully engaged with art as experience, enveloping, sensing, as we received the work through the the surface of the body, the skin, eyes, inhaled it.

It produced shifting microclimates and at one point apparently rain within the Tate Turbine Hall as well, and proved to be a complex, experiential work with mystical overtones. It is germane to this research in that it projected the future of what an artificial immersive environment might become, and what could be a more wholly encompassing subject than the weather? One of the research questions asked by Eliasson of the Tate staff, in advance of the construction of the work was “Has the weather ever changed the course of your life dramatically?”\(^\text{159}\). The popularity of the work, with one million visitors in the first two

---


months ("This exceptional figure comes at the end of a successful year for Tate."\(^{160}\)) and two million over the course of the exhibition, would seem to point to what this viewer experienced: a demonstrable effect on mood, a change of perception accompanied by a discernible elevation of spirit, with sublime overtones tinged with just a hint of malaise.

I am also looking at Eliasson’s ‘Model for a Timeless Garden’ (2011), an installation work comprising water in the form of fountains, and illuminated by a strobe light flashing intermittently in a completely darkened space. The work was shown as part of ‘Light Show’ at the Hayward Gallery in 2013. The effect of the work is a full-on assault on the senses, the strobe lights disorienting and freezing the images of the flowing water on the eye, the force of the flashing lights feeling almost like a body blow. This is accompanied by the sensation of water and mist in the air, touching the skin, reaching out to caress the body, the work striking and stroking the viewer almost simultaneously.

The humidity and droplets of water are breathed into the body, the work entering the self as an organism and uniting the viewer with the object, conjoining on a cellular level,

---

imprinting embodied memory. It is a wholly encompassing work, engaging the eye with an assault of light and darkness, images frozen on the retina, the ear with the sounds of the running fountains, the surface of the skin and the sense of smell with the ozone in the air.

Adrian Searle, writing in *The Guardian*, described the work as follows:

“At the end comes a room of yammering strobe lights, illuminating a long wide shelf. Water spouts from the shelf in sprightly arcs and churning gouts, filigree fountains and chugging spume, all immobilised in the flickering strobes. The water seems solid, its droplets and globules caught and hanging in the otherwise darkened room. The effect of Ólafur Eliasson’s ‘Model for a Timeless Garden’ (2011) is pure magic, simple yet infinitely complex. Suddenly I am caught in the light along with the water, transfixed, supremely aware not just of light but of time and my presence in the world.”

Between the strobing light, the atmosphere, the droplets playing on the surface of the skin, the work brought into sharp focus Jones’s (2006) neurasthenic fragmentation, the separation of the senses that she identifies as the product of modernity while at the same time acknowledging the potential for the experience of the transcendental within such fragmentation. As with so many of these artworks, it does not photograph well, and the beauty and power of the work lies in the experience itself and is challenged in the retelling.

---


6.3 Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman’s ‘Raw Materials’ (viewed November 2004) was a multi-channel audio installation, purpose-built for the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern as part of Unilever Series in 2004. It comprised thirty six electrostatic speakers with four speakers suspended from the ceiling, creating an encompassing environment of directional sound. A line or word of text was channelled through each speaker, and the phrases looped at varying rates. The Turbine Hall is an exceptionally reverberative and particular acoustical space, and Raw Materials employed flat panel electrostatic speakers to produce very directional and targeted streams of sound. It is impossible to know how much this was the artist’s intention and how many of these decisions were dictated by the need for the content to be audible within the hall.

Figure 22 Bruce Nauman, Raw Materials, 2004, installation, electrostatic speakers. Tate Modern, Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, London, England, copyright The Guardian-Artnet, used for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

My observation was that this was more of a participatory work than most, in that the consumer had the opportunity to play a more active role in the consumption of the work, varying the balance between the unique left and right streams of audio by adjusting their position within the hall (a perfect balance would have meant walking in a straight line through the centre of the Turbine Hall). The work was viewed under crowded conditions and the nature of the reverberation in the hall meant that the conversations of the viewers became intermingled with the audio streams and often it was difficult to tell them apart. This had the effect of blurring the lines between the audience and the installation, or of allowing a viewer to further contribute to the work, especially as the content was exclusively spoken word with a great deal of repetition.
I found the work intriguing, inciting intellectual curiosity and a playful fascination without inspiring emotion. Clearly there were other people who were deeply moved by the piece. One can’t help but speculate as to what the experience of the work might have been like in a darkened, dead space. What the work brings to mind in retrospect is the physicality of the sound, striking the surfaces of the skin and passing through the body. There cannot help but be a physical reaction to sound, regardless of content. ‘Raw Materials’ (2004) exemplifies both the strengths and limits of channel based audio, limits of which this research explores through the deployment of emergent audio technology.

6.4 Anthony McCall

Historically, one might also look at ‘precursor’ works, early works significant to the field, such as Anthony McCall’s ‘Line Describing A Cone’ (1973), viewed November 2004. The work is an early British variation on the California Light and Space movement light experiments, comprising a film of a drawn line evolving into a circle, creating a beam or ‘cone’ of light. The work is dependent on dust or haze within the viewing space in order to be seen. I have experienced the work and there is a sense of playfulness that arises form interacting with the beam, a chance to influence the work but only in real-time, which produces a fleeting, temporal, poignant sensation. There is no permanent mark left, the work lives on only in the subjective experience of the participant, reacting to and playing with the beam of light and the other viewer-participants who may be doing the same within the enclosed projection space.

McCall describes the work as follows:

“The proportions of this projection vary, but the scale is large. The base of the cone, an emerging circle of light projected onto the wall, is tall enough, at between eight and eleven feet, to fully incorporate several spectators, and the length of the beam may be anything from thirty to sixty feet. This three-dimensional object, like sculpture, calls for a

---


mobile, participating spectator, and, like film, it takes time. To fully see the emerging form it is necessary to move around and through it, to look at it from the inside and from the outside.  

The aesthetic qualities of the work produce a sense of the metaphysical, the slipping in and out of the ‘stream’ of light, the metaphorical playing with a substance that can been seen, felt on the surface of the body and the skin, interfered with, but yet not ‘touched’ in the sense of being ‘held’. Beams of light speak to religious iconography, the delivery of enlightenment, visits from the disembodied or the beyond, floating between this world and the next, appearing in streams of revelatory particles to illuminate cognition and then vanishing in a haze of heat and dust. The emotional qualities of the work bring to mind later transcendental works in light and space, although more often than not I find that art movements are informed by a Zeitgeist in which a number of people explore similar ideas at the same time, regardless of their geographical location.

---

There has certainly been a resurgence of interest in the work of Anthony McCall, with a host of prestigious solo and group exhibitions dating largely from the turn of the century\textsuperscript{166}. After a long period in the wilderness, his time would appear to have come. I draw a parallel here between McCall’s works and the rise in popularity of light and space works such as James Turrell’s, and experiential works such as Yayoi Kusama’s ‘Infinity Rooms’, Teamlab’s immersive installation works, and the experiential works of artists such as Ryoji Ikeda. Clearly there is an audience for the embodied experience of the transcendental, or at the very least the search for the same.

6.5 Bill Viola

Bill Viola’s works appear to embrace similar themes and qualities to the ones I am considering. His subject matter has always contained strong elements of religiosity, including references to the numinous and the sacred. I find the inclusion of Bill Viola’s works valuable for his use of slow motion in inciting heightened perceptions of truth (in


Figure 24 Anthony McCall, Line Describing A Cone, 1973, film, 16 mm, projection, Tate Gallery collection, copyright Tate Gallery, reproduction allowed for non-commercial purposes only.
fact, Rogers argues that slow motion affects perceptual meaning, to heighten truth as well as to deceive\textsuperscript{167} but problematic for a number of reasons which I will outline below. To begin with, I would like to divide Viola’s works into two categories: those in which he or his subjects perform as ‘themselves’, and those mostly later works in which he employs actors.

The problem with the use of actors emulating emotion, be it in real time or slow motion, is very similar to one of the problems of metamodernism. Is adopting a pose, or acting an emotion, as meaningful as the real thing? My experience of seeing ‘The Passions’\textsuperscript{168} in the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery (viewed October 2003), in which actors produce performative renderings of heightened states of emotion, left me curiously cold and uninvolved. I could speak to the environment, the cool reflective surfaces and hard stone of the gallery, or the slickness of the presentation, but while those factors were present I’m not convinced they played a part. My problem lies with the content, the staged quasi-religiousness of it all. Acting an emotion is not the same as experiencing it and while we made be moved by certain types of representation, say, in the story line of a film, the sense of being manipulated and the artificiality of the performance rang hollow.

Acting an emotion or writing about a belief system is not the same as feeling and believing. Some of these arguments have been made before, in respect of works like ‘I’m Too Sad to Tell You’ (1970-71) by Bas Jan Ader, for example. We are expected to empathise with the production on screen, where no empathy is possible as a result of the heightened artificiality of it all. Contrary to what some may believe, people aren’t stupid, don’t care to be lectured, and can feel what’s real and what’s not and respond accordingly. My sentiments were shared by the reviewer in the Guardian, who wrote: “Viola’s wallnotes, evincing his own religious views and spiritual beliefs, give me the jitters. I also find his writings and the essays in the catalogue…difficult to sympathise with. Viola and his friends lather on a goo of world religion and a pot-pourri of thought-for-the-day bons mots that I really don’t want to hear about….Beckett, let’s not forget, also made films and groundbreaking video works (for German TV). He was a great artist as well as playwright.


and novelist. His work said more about life and art and death than Viola ever has. And he never told anyone what to think or feel, much less what - if anything - to believe"169 or alternately the “pretentious New Age twaddle”170 described in The Telegraph. It is rare in the UK that the left-wing news agrees with the right-wing broadsheet, so perhaps there is something in the critique after all.

The second, earlier body of works rings more true. I was deeply moved by ‘Five Angels for the Millennium’ (2001). Viola’s work is notable for its use of slow motion and this plays into my theories surrounding the use of slow motion in the production of transcendental (and lesserly meditative) states within immersive works of art. But I am uncomfortable with what I feel is the unattributed debt that Viola’s works owe to the Japanese post-war tradition of butoh (see Figure 25). While Viola has marginally acknowledged that he is aware of butoh the timeline in the production of these images makes me uncomfortable, particularly

---


when it comes to the use of the figure, and the materiality of sand and water. A study of
the relationship between video art and butoh has been tabled for future research.
I have also had a chance to view Viola's work ‘Martyrs’ on June 23 2015. ‘Martyrs’ is a site-
specific installation, comprising four seven minute and fifteen second loops of individuals
experiencing the mortifications of the flesh through earth, air, fire and water. Seated on a
plinth designed by Norman Foster, it is the first moving image artwork to be displayed in a
British cathedral, and is owned by the Tate on permanent loan to St Paul’s Cathedral,
London171.

The work appears to play with ideas seen in ‘The Crossing’ (1996) viewed August 2003, as
well as ‘The Passions’ (2000), viewed October 2003. ‘The Crossing’ is a double-sided
projection which presents moving images of a figure variously being consumed by fire on
the one side, and water on the other side. The more traditional nature of the setting of

171 Nicholas Wroe, "Interview: Bill Viola "People Thought I Was An Idiot And That Video Would Never Last”",
‘Martyrs’ (2014), and the classical presentation of the images, places a distance between the viewer and the work which is difficult to overcome. I can’t help but wonder how much more effective this work would have been with each of the images projected full height on the four walls of a blacked-out space.

The work is consumed in much the same way as a traditional altarpiece, and while feeling an appreciation for the beauty of the aesthetic surfaces of the work, I am still uncomfortable with the sources and references, which now appear to be recycled. I found it difficult to make a visceral connection with the piece but this may well be a result of the crowds and lack of privacy, which reinforces this project’s research observation that conversion experiences are more likely to occur where the viewer feels some sense of privacy, an aloneness with their emotions, which may be achieved as part of a crowd in a darkened space but not in the South Quire Aisle of St. Paul’s Cathedral at midday.

There may be an argument for including butoh as an art form in the context of this discussion. But as it is a performative art form with a whole host of modalities, I would propose it as a subject for further study.

6.6 Pipilotti Rist


Rist is a Swiss video/installation artist focussing primarily on the videoing and filming of organic materials in heightened, saturated colour. Her organic materials are handled in a sensual, earthy way. In her work ‘Pixelwald/Motherboard (Pixel Forest Mutterplatte)’ 2016, a work intended to represent the fracturing of a screen into its constituent pixels, she continues to use of the organic form and her ‘pixels’ are hand-formed with a craftsmanlike quality. This creates a degree of textual dissonance in the reading as pixels are normally square (or sometimes rectangular) but never ‘organic’ in form. Rather than passing ‘through’ a screen, the visitor may feel more inclined to align the sensation with being inside, say, a slightly hyperactive Christmas tree. The work is luminous, the visitors are engaged, but the production does not meet the textual brief. Rist projects her moving
image works in every possible way, on the floor, on floating screens, against walls and ceilings. She has the viewer peering, sitting down, standing up, lying down, an embodied consumption of the moving image. The pinhole/keyhole works of organic material floating against deep space (‘Sleeping Pollen’ 2014) are reminiscent of the work of Makoto Azuma’s ‘Exobiotanica’ also dated 2014. Did Azuma decide to launch flowers into space having seen Rist’s work? The synchronicities speak to a Zeitgeist moment, where two artists placed at significant geographical and cultural distance have the same ideas at the same time. Azuma is concerned with the materiality of the event, while Rist is more bound up by the idea as interpreted through digital imaging techniques.

Rist’s lovely saturated colours and interesting display ideas (projectors mounted in floating ‘balls’ suspended from the ceiling) are let down by her Continental European taste in music. The sound of Chris Isaak’s ‘Wicked Game’ (1990), sung with an ironic postmodernist twist with a looped playback is both annoying and inescapable. One almost wishes that that level of interpretation had been discretionary, and could have been made available to
the viewing public through the use of a Bluetooth virtual private network. Certainly there is something to be said about the use of lyrics in music accompanying video installations, and the rather porous interface between fine art and the more exploitative commercial art of the music video, and certainly Rist’s image of entwined bodies are reminiscent of Nils-Udo’s cover artwork for Peter Gabriel’s ‘Ovo’ (2000). When do moving images accompanying a song become a ‘music video’, and is the distinction solely based on the cultural signifiers and status of the environment in which the work is presented? This is a question left asked and unanswered in that somewhat uncomfortable space between commerce and high art, and places a somewhat regrettable distance between the viewer and the work. The potential for a metaphysical or emotional transport is there, with a few alterations, and the work fits within the parameters of this discussion.

6.7 Other Works in the Field

Transformational life experiences may be transcendental, cathartic, epiphanic, incorporating a sense of awe and the release of powerful emotion, including feelings of communion, often subsuming the viewer in a sense of universality. The character and personality traits that an individual brings to the experience of the encompassing

---

Figure 28 Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirrored Room–The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*, 2013, built environment, mirrors, lights, The Broad, Los Angeles copyright The Broad licensed under fair use for education purposes only by kind permission.
aesthetic environment influences the quality of their experience of the work. Viewer/participants who are more likely to appreciate ‘difficult’ art (in this study, characterised as ‘abstract art’) are defined by the ‘openness to experience’ trait\textsuperscript{172}.

The experiences under discussion are egalitarian, and part of the attraction and popularity of environments and works of art that inspire these states is their democratic and impartial availability to the educated and uneducated alike. The experience does not discriminate on the grounds of prior knowledge, and in this manner bears similarities to emotional arousal in response to music.

Some works that invoke Kuspit’s (2009) ‘abstract, sublime landscape’ include works coming out of Japan such as Yayoi Kusama ‘Infinity Rooms’ (see Figure 28), a group of works which allow for a single viewer in isolation in a simulation of ‘infinite’ space. The popularity of these works is such that people will queue for many hours in order to have

the opportunity of spending forty-five seconds in the room. As Kusama says “By obliterating one's individual self, one returns to the infinite universe”\textsuperscript{173}. The experience of spending time in the space has been likened to a time span which felt like “eternity”, “heaven” and “ethereal”\textsuperscript{174}. But what is singularly remarkable is the amount of time that people are prepared to invest, in exchange for a few seconds of ‘heaven’, and this draws me back to my argument about the power of these types of artworks and the properties they share. These enveloping environments produce a state of lucid dreaming, not unlike Turrell’s ‘Perceptual Cell’ which I discussed in Section 6.1 of this chapter.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Figure 30 Ryoji Ikeda, Spectra, 2000, Ryoji Ikeda Spectra shoots a pillar of light into the London Sky to commemorate the centenary of World War One copyright Tom Thorpe Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. Used for non-commercial or academic purposes only.

Teamlab’s immersive interactive works (see Figure 29), which now have a permanent base in the MORI Museum in Tokyo, and feature a group of artworks that form "one borderless


world"\textsuperscript{175}, as seen in their installation for the Triennial at the NGV National Gallery of Victoria in 2018. These represent the current trend in ‘ultratechnologist’\textsuperscript{176} experiential artworks.

Aside from these more still or meditative environments, there is also the use of high-intensity sensory whole-body assaults employing bright directional light and surround sound, as seen in the work of Ryoji Ikeda. “Ikeda's work bridges the worlds of art and music and challenges fundamental preconceptions of both through the intensity of his installations”\textsuperscript{177}. He employs interactive film flicker, light flicker, loud sudden sharp noise to great effect, as seen in his work ‘Test Pattern No. 12’ (2017) (viewed November 14


Ikeda's work invokes Prinz's (2012) notions of threat and stress as well as Persinger's (1983) temporal lobe microseizure theory in the construction of heightened aesthetic experiences. His illuminated artworks such as ‘Spectra’ (Figure 30) also bring to mind the light works of Anthony McCall as seen earlier in this text.

In Chapter Six, I have identified a group of artworks that have some reputation or history for inspiring the transcendent state in relation to aesthetics, many of which I have close first-hand experience. As a group, they help us to confirm the construction of this affect, and further identify how these experiences might be enjoined. They are notable for their accessibility, that democratic and egalitarian capacity to inspire feeling without any requisite prior knowledge. In Chapter Seven, I will discuss the group of research artworks I have produced that explore the tropes outlined in the previous chapters, with a view to consciously employing and testing the strategies outlined herein.
Intermission

Interior of a car, outside Big Sky, Montana, USA, midday, June 2018.

A woman is sitting in the driver’s seat.

“Where do I go from here?” she asks to no one in particular.

“Forward” comes the answer, from the highway and pines and darkening landscape “forward is the only way”.

![Images of a car interior and landscape views from June 2018.](image-url)
Chapter Seven | Works
Chapter Seven | Works

7.1 Introduction

The artworks in this project have been divided into groups or categories, in order to research the qualities and methods that incite the experience, which have thus far only been proposed in theory. I begin by looking at strategies in audio, followed by time-based slow motion works. I then lead into location works, which incorporate aspects of the conclusions arrived at from the audio and time-based research works, but are more mature and have been expanded to include the natural world, grand vista, accommodation, and beauty. The purpose of this chapter is to research and confirm or deny the theoretical findings elucidated in the dissertation, and produce substantive works that further the research proposals as detailed herein. It is important to note that this is practice-based research and the effects of and relative success of the work can only be determined by the embodied experience of the work.

In the video works, I am working across the tonal ranges of spectral colour, with works emphasising different sets of ranges and frequencies. These ranges are divided into tonal classifications: cool (emphasising turquoise, cyan, blue, indigo, and violet overtones in the histogram); warm (emphasising red, carmine, yellow, canary yellow, chartreuse etc in the histogram); and more aesthetic classifications such ‘naturalistic’ (balanced blues, greens, greys, blacks and whites) as well as ‘oppressive’ (brown, muted shades, fog, haze). These designations feature in the ‘Location Works’ series.

In February 2015 I ran audio spotlight field and environmental tests. These ultrasonic speakers are sometimes called ‘voice of god’ speakers, because of their targeted beam and long throw. ‘Voice of god’ audio produces the illusory sense of a voice or sound appearing out of nowhere, received as in a visitation in the desert, devoid of obvious source. The speakers produce a narrow, highly directional beam, not dissimilar to a highly focussed beam of light. In an enclosed space, it was found that the beam reflects off hard surfaces, which divert the stream. The beam is not laser-like but rather produces a circumference of sound which does not appear to disperse at distance but rather retains a focus. In this test, a single speaker fixed to a heavyweight tripod in the open air was found to produce a beam that was audible, within a ‘spotlight’ circumference of less than a
meter, to a distance of up to 50 meters. This may be exceptionally effective in a hall of mirrors, and has been set aside as a subject for further research.

The beam is discrete (“in audio/sound terms discrete refers to multichannel audio or soundtrack being stored with each individual channel isolated from the other tracks…this is contrasted with matrixed audio where multichannels are blended”\(^{178}\) and unique (a singular, “tight, narrow beam of sound that can be controlled with the same precision as light”\(^{179}\)). It was found that when two speakers are employed and the beams are set to intersect, both are audible in equal measure but only at the coincident point (the origin where the x-axis and y-axis meet) and the effect is additive. The research concluded that in order to retain directionality the speakers are probably best employed in an enclosed area with soft or sound absorbing surfaces.


---

**Figure 34** Sadia Sadia, *Enveloping Field* Audio Tests, 2015, audio software tests, surround sound, delayed and processed voice recordings, Millside, Real World Studios, Wiltshire, UK, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy


The work comprises thirty audio track readings by the artist of discrete poems from the artist's monograph 'Notes To An Unknown Lover'. The voices have been manipulated in two ways. In the first instance, they have been grouped into a circle through a surround system and equalised, and this circle with the positions of the voices is spinning slowly. This is one path.

In the second path, the voices have been processed with a time-based effect that randomly chops up and delays the words. These are then positioned into a 'circle' but that circle is then being spun through a spiral independently, that is the circle is spinning but it is also being driven through a spiral shape, creating seemingly random positions. The 'circle' of affected voices is being moved in unison in space.

I have introduced live microphones into the space that pick up the conversations or comments of the viewers or participants. This audio is then delayed so that it is noticeable and so that it will not feed back, and incorporates these live interactive elements. The point of all this shifting audio is to create and ever changing relationship between the audio elements that produces the sensation of being wholly immersed in a fluctuating environment. The work was constructed in Digital Performer configured for 5.1 output.

A high-speed footage with accompanying soundtrack test, produced between May-September 2015, intended to function as a meditative work and as an experiment in time-based ‘communion mode’ aesthetics. The footage was shot at 1500 fps and slowed down by a factor of ten for a frame rate of 15000 fps played back at 25fps. This produces a ten minute long work representing one second in time. It is accompanied by the sound of a ticking clock. Each tick represents everything that is viewed on screen over ten minutes, and the ticking clock is interrupted by gaps of random lengths, generated by a random dice roller. These random pauses serve to return the viewer to time-consciousness, and affect the encoding of time perception which produces an increased attention to time. An “increased attention to time generates the same pattern of results as increased clock speed. This makes it difficult to separate clock speed changes from changes in attention allocation when working with processes that can affect both mechanisms, such as emotions.”\(^{180}\) The encoding of clock speed is dependent on valence, arousal, and

---


Figure 35 Sadia Sadia, *One Second*, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here*: File provided for preservation copy
attention allocation. This work successfully plays with these constructs, variably speeding up and slowing down the encoding of time.

![Figure 36 Sadia Sadia, One Second Tests I, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack, unresolved work in progress, copyright of the artist.](image1)

The centrally place hand in the triptych (Figure 35) is a reference to Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘St John the Baptist’, and the water is a coded reference to that work as well. These images exist as part of our collective unconscious store of imagery, and have the power to trigger associations other than those of which we may be ordinarily aware. These associations trigger both the valence and arousal elements of the work, whether consciously or unconsciously.

![Figure 37 Sadia Sadia, One Second Tests II, 2015, high-speed footage, audio soundtrack. Work in progress, copyright of the artist.](image2)

Water has been a theme throughout much of my body of work. Among other tropes, I employ it as a metaphor for the infinite and the collective unconscious, as a substance that is neither owned nor held but passed fleetingly from one human being to the next.

---

I have done this in previous works including ‘The Memory of Water (Part I)’ 2004 and ‘All Time and Space Fold Into the Infinite Present’ 2014, the latter work focusing on consciousness and memory. I use the triptych format a great deal, partially because I find it satisfying but also because it invokes the numinous. This plays into my strategy and again I refer here to our notional cultural reading of the triptych format as a signifier of an intention towards the sacred. The work is designed to create an enveloping, hypnotic, meditative work within the framework of the experience described herein, one that can be tested by the viewer. While works can be viewed online and extrapolated this does not represent the experience in an encompassing space.
7.5 Sadia, S., STEEP. 2016. Video, single channel installation, fourteen minutes twelve seconds, stereo, full HD, loop. Millside, Real World Studios, Wiltshire, UK.

Video running at 25% audio slowed down to 25% of real time.

Figure 38 Sadia Sadia, STEEP, 2016, video, single channel installation, fourteen minutes twelve seconds, stereo, full HD, loop, copyright of the artist.

Please see the upload here: File provided for preservation copy

‘STEPP’ is a slow-motion moving image work, a stereo single-channel installation, shot on video, and intended to be run as a loop. The scenario comprises a kettle, a teabag holder, a porcelain cup and a tea caddy. The items are either glass, white porcelain, stainless steel, or a combination of these materials. The video has been processed as a negative, and the audio soundtrack has been recorded and slowed down to produce audio that synchronises with the slow-motion video. This process has produced artefacts within the audio soundtrack, which may be heard in the audio soundtrack accompanying the video.

The work engages with a handful of notions: the first, the transcendent quality inherent in the simplicity of everyday movements and activities, and secondly, the use of slow motion,
internalised clock-speeds and attention allocation as a device to drop the individual into the ‘moment’ and establish a heightened consciousness of everyday movement combined with a deeper emotional engagement with what those motions might actually mean. This plays into the purpose of my research, which is to determine whether or not it is possible for an artist to incite a transcendental state in the viewer or participant, through the volitional exercise of a number of creative strategies that have been outlined in theory but not tested in creative practice. Firstly, it points to the relevance of the transcendent moment in the everyday, asking us to examine ‘rote’ activities to seek out the inner truth of the moment. This is does by experimenting with and employing the psychocinematic device of slow-motion, which has the effect of altering both the reality of the activity (it could be said that very act of filming was a gesture towards relational aesthetics, with shades of Rirkrit Tiravanija) and our perception of it. The object of the film is to bring the viewer to a ‘Level III’ experience, or at least place them in readiness for it. The sequencing of works within an exhibition or projection cycle will have an impact on the affect of the viewer, with ‘precursor’ works preparing the viewer, even at times through stress or accommodation, for what is to come in the finale.

The film experiments with three states: first, it invites the viewer to enter a meditative state by engaging with ‘slowness’ as a device (there are no interruptions nor playing with clock-speed encoding, the time is set and the viewer has the opportunity to relax into the work); secondly, it invites the viewer to internalise the transcendent moment within everyday life; and thirdly, it asks us to exercise those qualities of ‘openness to experience’ which are the harbinger of the mental preparedness required to enter the experience. As such, in an exhibition scenario or projection cycle, it would ideally serve as a ‘gateway’ or ‘precursor’ work, slowing down and opening up the participant, viewer or gallery attendee to the next set of works within an installation or show. The title also speaks to this function, ‘steep’ defined as that which is precipitous or requires ascent (the effort of preparation) as a subtext and a double entendre in the context of this work.


7.6 Sadia, S., *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, full HD. Filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia. Recovered original high speed footage, stereo soundtrack, full HD. The work was originally filmed at 1500fps. It was slowed down by a factor of two to run at 3000fps. Aspect ratio tests are of 5:4 and 4:3. The master ratio aspect is 4:3 and runs at 3000fps, which is the successful iteration of the work.

Master: 3000fps (50% of 1500fps original take) audio slowed by a factor of 25 (3mins=70mins).

A three channel installation in ultra slow-motion which can also be exhibited as a single-channel installation with the three panels in triptych formation but displayed as single-channel video. The work is of the dancer Wakako Asano, formerly of Graeme Murphy’s Sydney Dance Company, jumping in ultra slow motion and rising and falling through the picture plane. The tempo of the work imbues it with a heightened sense of truth\(^{184}\), and

---

the combination of the tempo of the images, the cultural construction of the triptych, and the repetitive nature of the soundtrack all qualify as modifiers for an emotional state and drivers for a receptive mind. The ideal gallery installation is one that affords the viewer an element of solitude by virtue of the lighting or space itself.

This is a deeply personal work. The work was created under conditions of stress and the role of stress in the readiness of the viewer to enter into a heightened emotional state has been discussed in earlier chapters. It is possible that the viewer might relate to the unseen or unspoken sense of stress in the performer or artist. The sense of an ending and of a beginning permeates the work. With all the signifiers of beauty at its disposal, the great beauty of the dancer and her body, the white silk, the tactile, almost viscous sense of the air and the space through which she is moving, all these qualities speak to beauty and its function as an elicitor of awe and wonder.

Aspect ratio test 4:3 (1500fps, original speed, no audio)

Figure 40 Sadia Sadia, *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*, 2017, aspect ratio test, 4:3, filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy
The triptych format, a format originally employed in altar paintings, speaks to the subtext of this work as mystical, the trinity referring to the divine and reinforcing the quality of the content. Nothing is left to chance other than the jump, the rising, the falling, as we all rise and fall and fall to rise again. Wakako is beautiful, flawless in this timeless space, imbued with the other-worldliness of heightened reality and meaning, enhanced through the qualities of high-speed footage.

Aspect ratio test 5:4 (1500fps, original speed, no audio)

Figure 41 Sadia Sadia, *The Descent (Wakako Falling)*, 2017, aspect ratio test, 5:4, filmed at Sydney Gate, Sydney, Australia, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here*: File provided for preservation copy

The ultra slow motion footage invokes the heightened sense of truth as well as referring to the qualities in Keltner, Haidt (2003) but with one distinction: this is the only work in which the ability of the performer features as an elicitor of awe. This is a film of a performance, which in itself was the interpretation of the artist-directors’ brief, and is the only work in this series in which the performative plays such a crucial role. An aptitude such as the one displayed by one of Australia’s singular, evocative, and accomplished dancers, is an eliciting factor. This quality, combined with beauty and slow-motion, produces arguably one of the most successful works in this series.

Both versions: Centre panel running at 15%, left hand panel running at 7%, right hand panel running at 12% (reversed). Frames removed where pan stalled. Moving mask over lens flare (to remove ugly and annoying lens flare). Final Cut Pro X bleach bypass setting on central panel.

Sadia, S., Mt. Wellington I. 2017. Three channel video installation, full HD, stereo. Filmed on location at Mt. Wellington, Tasmania, Australia in February 2017. Version 1: naturalistic soundtrack (wasteland and distant cityscape), left and right hand panel processed with extremes on the exposure, shades reduced, highs lifted in the histogram and a bit of desaturation.

Please see the upload here: File provided for preservation copy


Please see the upload here: File provided for preservation copy
Video work which investigates the construction of awe through practice, based on the ‘A prototype approach to awe and related states’ (see Figure 17). A tonally ‘cool’ iteration.

In Figure 17, Keltner and Haidt (2003) define one of the physical elicitors of awe as a ‘grand vista’, which includes the central features of vastness, alongside the peripheral of ‘flavouring’ feature of beauty. These qualities of the construction of awe, as triggers for the ‘state’ “rob the mind of its capacity to rationally understand the experience. Instead, the experience controls us, overwhelms us; it undermines our power and threatens our sense of self-preservation. And yet it is a pleasurable experience if one is just distant enough not to feel raw terror”185.

The distancing security of the gallery would mitigate any sense of raw terror, as the viewer negotiates the experience through multiple layers of media and interpretation. While worth mentioning, it is unlikely that the tangential feature of ‘threat’ would translate through the work since most viewers would be consuming the work in a place of relative calm and safety. The elevated platforms and cold high gusting winds experienced by the artist, the threat implicit in the risks taken by the filmmaker and crew might be implied but are not written on the surface of the work.

As the artist, my sense is that the results are mixed, in that the some of the emotional tropes operant within the footage do not fully read on the surface of the work. Having been shot in an area of such scenic beauty, there is no doubt that the images are beautiful. This raises the question of ‘accommodation’, the need for the individual to ‘accommodate’ information not previously known, or to adapt to the unknown, as a precursor to extremes of valence and/or arousal. The viewer’s empathetic response to ‘threat’ and the effect of colour on the requirement for ‘accommodation’ is a factor in the emotional reading of Richard Mosse’s work, who films under extreme conditions in the Congo on 16 mm colour infrared film186. If the work is predictable or anticipated, that eliminates some of the qualifiers for awe. If the element of ‘threat’ is removed, that diminishes the heightened


emotional state that might allow the artist to exploit such a misattribution of arousal. The quality of ‘accommodation’ can require a sense of other-worldliness, a forced adaption to an unexpected event, which in a gallery installation would need to be achieved through the physical properties of the environment.

Figure 43 Sadia Sadia, Mt Wellington, Centre Panel Bleach Bypass Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 44 Sadia Sadia, Mt Wellington, Desaturated Contrast Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.
Figure 45 Sadia Sadia, Mt Wellington, FCP ‘Dream’ Test, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 46 Sadia Sadia, Mt Wellington, Naturalistic ‘Silver’ Test I, 2017, copyright of the artist.

Figure 47 Sadia Sadia, Mt Wellington, Naturalistic ‘Silver’ Test II, 2017, copyright of the artist.
7.8 Sadia, S., *Apostle Sea I-IV*. 2017. Video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash. Filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, in March 2017. Tonally ‘cool’ works. An early video research work investigating the conditions that make the experience possible, in this case a combination of the qualities of slow motion, ‘vista’ in the distance view, the naturalistic choice of subject matter, and ‘accommodation’ in what was deemed to be the final satisfactory test brought about by rotating the image 90 degrees.

The work brings to mind some of the sea, water or ocean images of Hiroshi Sugimoto. The significant difference between this work and Sugimoto’s is that this work is ‘alive’. The art historian and critic David Raskin (2015) identifies Sugimoto’s work as ‘dead’\(^\text{187}\), images

---

\(^{187}\) David Raskin, Mohn Family Professor of Contemporary Art History and Professor of Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, ‘*Hiroshi Sugimoto’s Inhuman Photographs*’, 2015, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGMCGdf6VU. Lecture on May 8 2015 at the University of Tasmania.
devoid of humanity, in some cases reproductions of reproductions. ‘Apostle Sea’ is very much ‘alive’, in that image moves gently but perceptibly, and the life-force of the ocean can be felt. The work also bears a direct relationship to my artworks ‘All Time and Space Fold Into The Infinite Present (Cataract Gorge)’, discussed in Chapter Three, in its strategies: the manipulation of time, the subject matter, the gesture towards transcendence, the slowness of both works and the similar demands place on the viewer to engage with the work with both a speculative and meditative aspect.

Seen horizontally, the image would be familiar, easy to assimilate even though the work has been slowed down from the original by 50%. But by rotating the work, the viewer is required to reconsider the image, even maybe pausing for a few beats to take in what the image represents, and then adjusting perception to factor in the motion of the work. The iteration of ‘accommodation’ (as seen in Figure 48), the notion of having to adapt to
something unusual or outside one’s experience¹⁸⁸, and the work is suitable for inclusion for qualitative testing. Please see below for a further discussion of the process by which these results were achieved.

**Sadia, S., Apostle Sea I. 2017.** Video, single channel, full HD. Filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017. *Unsuccessful test, running at roughly 6fps with interpolation (25% of real time). The work has not been illustrated here as the ultra slow motion is only visible by viewing the video. The link is enclosed below.*

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

The slow motion test at 25% (running at one-quarter speed) was deemed too slow, the motion in the waves virtually imperceptible.

**Sadia, S., Apostle Sea II. 2017.** Video, single channel, full HD. Filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017. *Unsuccessful test, horizontal split screen, running at 50fps.*

---

The horizontal split screen iteration was dismissed as too readily identifiable as a special effect. Viewers have become inured to special effects, particularly through the consumption of high-end blockbuster filmmaking, and easily recognisable special effects no longer induce awe, wonder or even the quizzical questioning of what the subject might be. They are generally perceptually written off as digital manipulations and, not unlike an overdose of sweets, palates have become jaded and we are inured to them. This is among the motivations for retaining a naturalistic approach to the works.


![Figure 51 Sadia Sadia, Apostle Sea Test III, 2017, video, single channel, full HD, stereo seawash, filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017, triple vertical test with digital manipulation, copyright of the artist.](image-url)

The triple vertical hang iteration was dismissed on aesthetic grounds, although with more distance between the images and on a set of three screens it will be effective in a formalised gallery setting. The triple vertical formation is difficult to read, the motion in the
images challenging to detect, and unless displayed in a gallery in monumental proportions, the piece feels ‘busy’ and does not read as intended. That is not to say it is wholly unsuccessful, simply that it does not fulfil the requirements for the brief which requires an adaption for testing to available venues, equipment, and modes of projection and exhibition. For these reasons alone, the work has been set aside as impossible to examine under current conditions.

Sadia, S., Apostle Sea IV. 2017. Video, single channel, full HD. Filmed on location, Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, March 2017. Successful test, running at 50 (50% of real time). See illustration, Figure 48.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

Seen horizontally, the image would be familiar, easy to assimilate even though the work has been slowed down from the original by 50%. The rotation through 90 degrees to produce the vertical hang ‘split-screen’ image forces the viewer to reconsider what they might be viewing, and requires adaptation in order to assimilate the image. This is among the tropes I have discussed earlier. There continues to be motion in the image, significantly slowed down but yet perceptible, and this motion can be read through the surface of the picture plane. In a prepared viewer, this can produce a gently hypnotic state which may serve as a contributory factor towards a heightened affect response. The final iteration, judged to be successful, incorporates the moving image at 50% of the original film speed, with the movement of the ocean gentle but still visible and felt, and with accommodation required on the part of the viewer by the use of the device of rotating the screen through 90 degrees.
7.9 Sadia, S., *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD. Filmed on location at dawn, Keyes View, Joshua Tree National Park, California, US in April 2017. A tonally ‘warm’ iteration.

Figure 52 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, 2017, three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD, filmed on location at dawn, Keyes View, Joshua Tree National Park, California in April 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

The work incorporates the qualities of slow motion and vista in the naturalistic mode, and includes a soundtrack that, while not Foley (audio replacement), is an atmospheric reproduction of what the environmental sound felt like on location. Shot on a Canon 5D Mk III running at 25fps. There are several stages to creating these works in this format. Each panel was framed, speed adjusted, colour corrected, and then each of these elements placed in a composite where final adjustments are made.

The centre panel running at 7%, the left hand side cloud panel is running at 15%, and the right hand side cloud panel right running at 6%. The right hand side cloud panel is flipped for symmetry. The audio from the camera was not usable due to high winds overloading the onboard microphone. The replacement soundtrack comprises distant city skyline with
echo delays and filter, as well as blustery wind tuned down one octave with echo delays and reverberation, filters and compression. Intermittent additional industrial wasteland sample fades in and out for colour and change.

The Joshua Tree landscape itself is imbued with a sense of timelessness and mysticism. This may be partially as a result of its bohemian cultural iconography, but there is also a sense that more often than not accompanies the desert landscape. Mysticism and the desert have been bedfellows since the earliest days of Christianity, and invoking the desert speaks not only to the aesthetic but evokes the spiritual as well. This is landscape, desert and atmosphere in slow pan. The work is accessible through the exercise of patience, which requires an act of volition on the part of the viewer. Much of the work under consideration requires some effort on the part of the viewer or participant to meet it at least part of the way. The strongest of the works in the field are so overwhelmingly inciting that the enhanced cognitive and emotional effects are felt with little or no requirement to engage in an exercise of will on the part of the viewer, barring the need to place themselves in front of the work.
Figure 53 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, tests I-III, 2017, unsuccessful test, copyright of the artist.
Figure 54 Sadia Sadia, *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*, tests IV-V, 2017, unsuccessful test, copyright of the artist.
7.10 Sadia, S., *all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD. Filmed on location on the northeastern side of the Salton Sea, Coachella Valley, California, US in April 2017. A tonally and atmospherically ‘oppressive’ iteration.

![Image of the Salton Sea](image-link)

Figure 55 Sadia Sadia, *all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)*, 2017, three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD, filmed on location on the northeastern side of the Salton Sea, Coachella Valley, California in April 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

Shot at 25fps on a Canon 5D Mk III Central panel running somewhere between 5-10%

The left sea panel (Panel 1) was reversed to give symmetry. Centre panel running at 15% changing to 6% to compensate for speed of pan. Sea Panels running at 10% left panel flipped. The soundtrack comprises the audio of a distant city skyline with industrial wasteland, a gentle sea wash diffused by echo delays, a US diesel train whistle, and a US freight train with a siren passing in the desert. This was true to the environment, but replacement audio was required as a result of microphone overload/distortion as a result of wind.
There is a sense of threat and unease that runs through the work, not just beauty, a subtext that arises from the degradation of the environment that is marginally noticeable around the edges of the images. It translates through the work and is both perceptible and felt on a subliminal level. The sense of threat plays into our reading of the ‘transcendent’ or ‘epiphanic’ state as one that is heightened or initiated by stress. The centre panel is essentially naturalistic as filmed, with minor adjustments to contrast and saturation. The side panels are cropped. The footage is also essentially naturalistic with minor adjustments to the highlights.


Figure 56 Sadia Sadia, all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea), 2017, location shots, copyright of the artist.

“…and every fallen leaf sings on / your shore” - ‘The Sacred Ground’, from ‘Notes to an Unknown Lover’

---

Figure 57 Sadia Sadia, *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*, 2017, three channel video installation, full HD, stereo or surround sound, filmed on location at Box Hill, Wiltshire, United Kingdom in November 2017, master, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here*: File provided for preservation copy

A mature work indicating the progression and development of the ideas explored in the previous location works produced in 2017. Dawn shoot over the Bybrook Valley from Box Hill.

Centre panel comprises a landscape shot with sky overlay at 58% transparency (centre panel comprises landscape with sky overlay, left and right are true as filmed). The work

---

should be mounted in a rectangular room, with two thin lines of diffused light running
down either side of the room, fog in the room, the temperature dropped, and the floor
raked at an angle to provide the element of accommodation in the enhancing of emotional arousal. One of the primary challenges of this work was organising the location shoot to capture a very specific set of atmospheric conditions. I wanted to move towards ethereal, other-worldly qualities, while at the same time remaining rooted in the natural world. The images in the three panels are as filmed with no special effects, although the central panel comprises two images, the primary ‘underlayer’ of the original filmed work and a second transparent layer of the sky. While the overlay does not materially alter the original footage in the central panel, the semi-transparent overlay heightens the ethereal quality of the material. The overlay is comprised of sky filmed in the same location and at the same time, and has been treated sparingly, and I felt that this was in keeping with the integrity of the moment.

Figure 58 Sadia Sadia, *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*, 2017, location shot, documentation, copyright of the artist.
The work was filmed in an English county thought to have been permanently inhabited since 8820 BC\textsuperscript{191}, generating a sense of embodied timelessness within the land’s carved memories. The land bears the scars and marks of thousands of years of human passage and habitation, and yet appears to be relatively unspoilt, and this sense of depth permeates the work in a gesture towards transcendence. This produces a gentle cognitive dissonance, that reaches through the picture plane to capture the viewer and invites them to consider their position in respect of time, immortality, and ritual through an ageless landscape.

The work in a minor way references the Teutonic Romanticism of Caspar David Friedrich’s ‘Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog’ (1817), with the Box Valley standing in for the Elbe Sandstone Mountains in Saxony and the Kaiserkrone. Without wanting to prejudge or assume knowledge of the future, the work feels like it may be among the last of the landscape triptychs, pulling together as it does ideas developed and evolved through the group of ‘transcendent’ triptych-based landscape works.

Figure 59 Sadia Sadia, every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill), 2017, location shot, documentation, copyright of the artist.

I have been making work for such a long time that I feel instinctively that I know when things are ‘right’, and this relates to the comments made by McNiff (1998) in Chapter Four about the intuitive nature of artists’ knowledge and working practices in which he asserts that “within the arts, tacit or unspoken knowledge permeates virtually every thing we do”\(^{192}\). This ‘knowing’ is of course the culmination of many years’ worth of thinking and working, accumulating knowledge that I have come to take for granted. But of course there is a process, and teasing out and analysing the means by which I arrive at a decision, in order to produce research whose methods might be shared, has proved to be both more thought-provoking and demanding than anticipated. The writing becomes the embodiment of the ‘knowing’, the analysis becomes the objectification of the subjective, the very act of reflexive examination forcing the elusive qualities that can only be perceived out of the corner of one’s eye to vanish when confronted with the direct gaze. The trick has become not to ‘look’ directly, but to be present in the moment to feel the presence of that which exists only in peripheral vision. The examination of the phenomena is elusive and processed through all the surfaces of the body, in a wholly embodied reading of the work as an emotional state.


1) Banff original master version, static centre channel with left and right pans. Audio: Blustery wind + hillside. Static centre channel with moving clouds.

Figure 60 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming *(The Sacred Ground)*, 2018, version I, original, static centre channel with left and right pans, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

(over)
2) Static with mirror image L+R channels. Audio: external day beach steady ocean waves on rocks water lapping close no people + beach waters edge from rocks evening. Although there is motion in the image, the camera does not move.

Figure 61 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, version II, static with mirror image L+R channels, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

(over)
3) Pan 1, pan is from left to right. Audio: Jordan desert wind light gust very quiet daytime + airtone in a desert with birds and wind.

![Figure 62 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, version III, pan 1, pan is from left to right, copyright of the artist.](image)

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

(over)
4) Pan 2, pan is from right to left. Audio: New York city skyline evening + ambient city skyline.

Figure 63 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, version IV. Pan 2, pan is from right to left, copyright of the artist.

*Please see the upload here:* File provided for preservation copy

There is a rationale, a continuity and a visible progression in the research works for this study. I opened by testing the enveloping properties of audio, as well as the ‘voice of god’ properties of audio reaching a participant across an extended distance and seemingly invisibly.

The results of that research led me to experiment with the addition of slow-motion visuals, durational ‘slow art’ that requires effort, will and patience on the part of the viewer. The
viewer must meet the work at the very least halfway, and the effort this required goes in some way towards defining the value of the reward as a pleasurable if not heightened emotional state. I experimented with both relational aesthetics (‘STEEP’(2016)) and the figurative (‘The Descent (Wakako Falling)’(2017)), with the ultra-slow motion figurative work provoking the strongest reactions. My sense was that something was still missing, some ineffable piece of puzzle. This led me to landscape.

The first landscape research work were the two version of the ‘Mt Wellington’ (2017) works, which succeeded and failed in equal measure. The work succeeded in the capture of grand vista but somehow failed to connect closely with the viewer. The next move was towards the timelessness of water and the incorporation of accommodation into those works. These succeeded more fully where the grand vista works had failed, and led to the conclusion that some element of accommodation might well be needed in the provocation of the state. The following two landscape works ‘but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)’ (2017) and ‘all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)’ (2017) both explore aspects of the metaphysical, with the Salton Sea as the more demanding work as it explores the edges of detritus and decay.

The final two works presented as part of this study show the most complete resolution of these ideas. The penultimate Box Hill work incorporates most of the elements significant to inspiring the transcendent state, through the use of naturalism, slow motion, surround audio (actual or under emulation), and atmospheric grand vista. But the Box Hill research work is a calm, meditative work. There is no terror, no threat, no supernatural force. As a researcher, and given the ground outlined in this dissertation, I felt the lack of these qualities and the need to seek them out with a view to interrogate my thesis. Some of these qualities, what Keltner and Haidt (2003) refer to as ‘awe-inducing grandeur’ and the ‘heightened attention towards the powerful’ are “biologically based action tendencies at the core of the experience of awe”193. While incorporating the thinking gone into the earlier pieces, the work required resolution through the capture of these elements.

Why a mountain range? Mountains have the effect of inspiring sensations of threat, fear, awe in the face of grandeur, as I have shown, all triggers for the experience of the transcendent state. “This is due to their sheer vastness, their capacity to strike terror by exposing us as tiny and vulnerable, and to the difficulty experienced by the mind in grasping their full dimension, thereby giving a hint of infinity”\textsuperscript{194}. The work was filmed in Banff National Park, on Treaty Seven lands held sacred by Canada's First Nations\textsuperscript{195}.

The interpretation of these works, and their effectiveness, is of course a subjective one. In Chapter Four I discussed the validity of qualitative subjective experience as a form of empirical data-gathering, especially in relation to the problematic relationship between empiricism and affect. For the purposes of this research, ‘and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground)’ (2018) is the culmination of this experimental train of thought and the final effort in this group of works. The results of these efforts are brought together in the following concluding chapter.


Production + Location

Figure 64 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, production stills I-III, copyright of the artist.
Figure 65 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, location still, copyright of the artist.

Figure 66 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground), 2018, location still, copyright of the artist.
Figure 67 Sadia Sadia, and falling, fulling blooming (*The Sacred Ground*), 2018, production stills IV-VI, copyright of the artist.
Chapter Eight | Conclusion
Chapter Eight | Conclusion

8.1 Conclusion

The research concludes by finding a relationship between the transcendental and the hypnotic powers of slow motion and draws a parallel thread through to the classical values of vastness, majesty, beauty, threat, and accommodation as formal qualities of the initiating factors of the transcendent state within the aesthetic encompassing environment. Many of the works produced provide portals that lead both inwards and outwards, inviting the viewer into a metaphysical journey that simultaneously draws them more deeply into themselves as well as into the material world. In my research, the imagery of the material world incorporates qualities that incite a shift in the consciousness of viewer, leading them to an embodied experience of those qualities that manifests as a form of transcendence in varying degrees.

All interpretations of works could be seen as reflections of the soul; all emotional responses to works are incited by the construction of an inner reality, which forms part of a greater whole. Here I refer back to Alan Watts’s notion of ‘connectedness’\textsuperscript{196} and Coomaraswamy’s samvega as the ‘recognition of eternal truth’\textsuperscript{197}. The research concludes that when the perfect confluence of internal state on the part of the viewer meets a work modelled to incite the ‘state’, the ‘event’ takes place, the ‘Level III’, the flow, the peak, the revelation, the universal insight, the eternal glimpse into the infinite present. The research finds that work may be volitionally modelled to encourage the experience of the transcendent ‘state’.

While aesthetic qualities can be modelled to encourage the 'state', for the event to occur, the subject must be prepared, through circumstance or more likely the unforeseen events that govern daily life. It is difficult although not impossible to place one’s self in a state of readiness through the exercise of will alone, as most people do not choose to place themselves under the stress or create the stressful life situations likely to incite such a

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
state. Those who adopt these strategies through the exercise of will or manipulation, will find the presence of triggering factors more likely to induce a sense of transcendence where purely time based, surround, immersive, or meditative works may not.

The research concludes that not only does the phenomenon exist, as reported in literature, it can be incited and excited through aesthetic strategies. These strategies include: the manipulation of time (slow motion and ultra-slow motion); the use of grand vista; the use of accommodation (the accommodation of the individual to unexpected stimuli, the presence of the ‘Unknown’) which may be mobilised in combination with the aesthetic use of stress or threat. The research indicates that there are specific drivers for profound valence and arousal states within immersive works of art. I have established that this connection is not a matter of chance or accident. Some of these drivers have their foundations in a more historical mid-to-late 20th Century psychological analysis, and others are based in more recent discoveries in the areas of cognitive psychology and the neuroscience of aesthetic experience. Between these two they form a shifting paradigm that continues to rapidly evolve. This research makes these connections, many for the first time.

The project identifies the current means of cultural production in film and audio as inciting an existential and cognitive fatigue in the viewer or audience that is ultimately self-defeating for the artist. This theory draws an equivalence between audio processing techniques and film editing and digital manipulation processes, and proposes a unifying, global theory of the competitive ‘loudness’ movement. The answer lies in overcoming sensory overload through the reintroduction of dynamics, allowing for slowness, stillness and space, to give the viewer room to breathe, to connect with their emotions on the most profound levels, and to form aesthetic judgments based on these connections. These qualities were explored and qualitatively tested in the accompanying artworks.

All human beings are capable of profound or peak experiences, which may be psychological or physical in nature. These transcendent states may be triggered by a wide variety of causes. The key drivers of the state include: a) the readiness of the individual to enter into a transcendent state, qualified by ‘openness to experience’; b) the state of mind
of the individual before experiencing the work, qualified by stress, anxiety, tension and crises including life crises; c) the physical susceptibility of the viewer or participant to temporal lobe microseizures, which have been argued to be universal and where we may all sit on a continuum.

The research shows that the search for the transcendental embodied experience within the installation environment forms a significant contemporary movement in our times. My conclusion is that the experience of profound affect within encompassing artworks are not simply the result of artists capturing ‘lightning in a bottle’, and many artists employ these strategies whether they realise it or not. It does not diminish the work to demystify the process, nor to outline processes by which deeply felt connections are enhanced. The mystical transcendent oneness-state does not disappear by virtue of being looked at or more deeply understood, and the sacred ground on which we stand is no less sacred for being mapped. Artists continue to work with more acute understandings of how to drive, inspire and deeply move their viewers, and the techniques researched in this project will become more sophisticated as our understanding grows of the relationship between emotion, neural processes, aesthetics, and the self. This work is making a contribution to this emergent field of research by identifying, correlating and drawing connections between the materiality and qualities of works, and embodied experience with encompassing artworks, that change what it means for us to live in the world. The importance of the work and the significance of the works I am presenting can be found in the production of a fresh set of connections and relationships that inform the discipline and lead to further discourse.

Further Research

Future research projects that inspire further study and investigation:

1) empirical study of emotion recognition in untethered subjects;

2) cognitive and existential fatigue; age-related cognitive fatigue in relation to film and audio production techniques;
3) VR virtual reality vestibular cognitive dissonance; realistic ‘front-image’ sonic imaging; spatial, durational and embodiment cognitive dissonances in the production of the transcendent experience.
Bibliography


Brown, Mark. "Britain's Oldest Settlement Is Amesbury Not Thatcham, Say Scientists: Archaeologists Discover Wiltshire Site Is Forerunner To Stonehenge And


LeDoux, Joseph E. Personal correspondence with the author, 2017.


Sadia, Sadia. *all that is solid melts into air (Salton Sea)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD. Salton Sea, Coachella Valley, California.


Sadia, Sadia. *and falling, fulling blooming (The Sacred Ground) I-IV*. 2018. Three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD. Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta, Canada.


Sadia, Sadia. *but that is a heaven in itself those eyes (Joshua Tree)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, surround audio, full HD.


Sadia, Sadia. *every fallen leaf sings on your shore (Box Hill)*. 2017. Three channel video installation, full HD, stereo or surround sound. Box Hill, Wiltshire, UK.


Viola, Bill. Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water). 2014. High-definition video polyptych on four plasma displays, colour, 1400 x 3380 x 100 mm. South Quire Aisle, St Paul's Cathedral, London.


