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Examining Aesthetic Subjectivity in Embodied Environments

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Declaration of Originality

I, Rebecca Nevin Berger hereby declare that the thesis presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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Abstract

This inquiry has been concerned with identifying aesthetic languages that make visible relationships and processes that connect body and world beyond the surface of the skin. It hypothesised that aesthetic language provides a material connection which co-enables this exchange. Examining the aesthetic dimension of the embodiment-environment intersection, this inquiry reasoned, could make tangible the material continuum generated through transient processes of living. The key sites of the home and the landscape framed the scope of this research.

The methodology used to undertake this research combined multi-artform practice spanning sculpture, video, installation, and drawing, visual diary-led observation and critical reflection, theoretical research, and critical engagement with the work of other artists and practitioners working in two- and three-dimensions.

An examination of subjectivity and of aesthetics as an intersection of body and world centres this research. A new materialist perspective provides a logic and drive for scrutinising this intersection. New materialism unsettles traditional assumptions about the passivity of matter. It provides a framework for re-imagining the materiality of the world and the position of human subjectivity within it: a re-imagining, this research contends, that the current ecological crisis demands.

The notion of aesthetics used in this inquiry is an embodied aesthetics that refers to the meaningful sensuousness that adheres and orients the body in the world. Ideas from John Dewey and the field of everyday aesthetics informed critical engagement in this embodied aesthetics through creative practice. This approach enabled a dialogue between special aesthetic experiences, everyday aesthetics, and habitual perception to emerge in the research.

This research used aesthetics to examine how spaces are demarcated and different experiences enabled. Over time, the home as it is situated within the landscape became analogous for the body's intertwining with the environment. In this context, the material passage of water through the home provided a powerful and instructive embodiment of this intertwining, revealing both the demarcation and the continuity of disparate spaces.

The final body of artwork is an installation that integrates the key aesthetic languages developed through this inquiry to form a three-dimensional river that is animated with the everyday sounds of water and the textures of domestic warmth. It is titled *Oikos*, the Greek root for ecology. 'Oikos' means 'whole house and dwelling

place'. The artwork reflects the multi-layering of aesthetic relationships through which our bodies fuse with this world.

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List of Exhibited Works

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Introduction

This exegesis is an account of practice-led research undertaken through my PhD Candidature in the ANU Sculpture Workshop. The final body of artwork is an installation comprising a soundscape and a series of small, mixed media boxes incorporated into a network of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plumbing pipe, which takes the sculptural form of an imagined river. This artwork was produced in response to questions concerning the materiality of the aesthetic, of subjectivity, of space, and the materiality of the connections between them.

This inquiry has been concerned with identifying aesthetic languages that make visible relationships and processes connecting body and world beyond the surface of the skin. The key sites of the home and the landscape have framed the scope of this research. Through this research, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. Can the aesthetic enable us to imagine continuity between our body and the environment?
2. What is the nature of this aesthetic continuity?
3. How does creative practice interact with this aesthetic dimension? What are the roles of image making, space making, materials and aesthetic language in generating relationships between subject and environment?
4. And, finally, what do the answers to these questions mean for how we understand our relationship to the world around us?

Why Aesthetics and Subjectivity?

Through this research, I sought to examine concerns that grew from my nagging preoccupation with overcoming the hierarchical binaries critiqued by post-structuralist and feminist thinkers. In particular, their deconstruction and decentring of subjectivity left me asking, as an artist, woman and mother: what, then, is subjectivity? I sought to trace a mode of subjectivity that transgressed mind-body substance dualism and the separation of interiority from exteriority in order to repair a perceived discontinuity between human and environment.

Within my studio practice, I had observed how handling aesthetic language through creative practice enabled me to scrutinise, articulate, and adapt my orientation in the world. I experienced this process as a dissolution of the subject-object binary. This binary has been characterised best by Barbara Bolt, who describes art making as a co-collaboration rather than a form-matter synthesis. Instead of a relation wherein a human subject exerts mastery over inert matter, Bolt argues, art making enables

reciprocal exchange as materials, subject, and world co-produce each other.¹ I hypothesised that aesthetic language provides a material connection co-enabling this exchange. Examining the aesthetic dimension of the embodiment-environment intersection, I reasoned, could make tangible the material continuum generated through transient processes of living.

This research sits within the project of new materialism which, according to Noorie Neumark, has been unfolding across the arts, philosophy, culture and media studies, science studies, and feminism since the late 1990s.² Bolt explains that new materialism challenges the anthropocentric narrative underpinning the traditional Western view of humans-in-the-world.³ New materialism works with the understanding that all entities and processes of the world, including humans, “are composed of—or are reducible to—matter, material forces or physical processes”.⁴ Crucially, this reckoning with the material basis of all things does not reduce the world to inert, dead, dumb, matter. Rather, it challenges us to reconfigure our understanding of and relation to matter. “New materialism rethinks subjectivity beyond the unitary, self-interested, individualist, human subject”, beckoning us to attend to what Neumark calls the “voices beyond the human, the literal voices of things and nature”.⁵ This new materialist imperative foregrounds the significance of the aesthetic and subjectivity in this research.

Examining my connection to the environment revealed a tension which I recognised as an embodied response to the current global ecological crisis. Like new materialist scholars Bolt and Jane Bennett, I contend that reconfiguring our concept and enactment of subjectivity is critical to the remediation of this crisis.⁶ Bennett argues that the new self that needs to emerge in this process is one with an expanded self-interest. She asserts that we must condition ourselves to the vibrant materiality of the world in order to attain this expanded self-interest.⁷

Why advocate the vitality of matter? My hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalised matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying

¹ Barbara Bolt, “Towards a ‘New Materialism’ Through the Arts”, in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a ‘New Materialism’ Through the Arts*, ed. Barbara Bolt (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013), 1-14).

² Noorie Neumark, *Voice Tracks: Attuning to Voice in Media and the Arts* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2017).

³ Bolt, “Towards a ‘New Materialism’”.

⁴ G. J. Stack, in “Towards a ‘New Materialism’ Through the Arts”, in Barbara Bolt (ed.), *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a ‘New Materialism’ Through the Arts* (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013), 1–14), 2.

⁵ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 3

⁶ Bolt, “Towards a New Materialism”; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London, England: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (whether by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or feeling) a fuller range of non-human power that circulates around and within human bodies.⁸

The aesthetic is central to this research project. Through the aesthetic, we are able to detect—to see, hear, smell, taste, or feel—the vibrant materiality of the world. Examining the aesthetic dimension of the overlap between body and world can enable us to expand the boundary of our self-interest. Critical dialogue between habitual perception, everyday aesthetics, and special aesthetic experiences has been important to this research. This is because where we locate and how we define the aesthetic inform our perception of the world’s materiality.

Challenging the Kantian mode that led the aesthetic to be conflated with beauty and fine art, John Dewey proposed an account of aesthetic experience that integrates the emotional, intellectual and practical⁹—that is, the emotional phase binds parts together into a single whole. ‘Intellectual’ simply names the fact that the experience has meaning, while ‘practical’ indicates that the organism is interacting with events and objects that surround it.¹⁰

Dewey’s aesthetic experience stands out from the flow of ordinary experience. His experience is demarcated through its unification and harmonious culmination.¹¹ It is a distinctly felt, unified, and meaningful perception in response to an experience, encounter or object.¹² Rejecting the contingency of disinterested contemplation, these special experiences can include fine art as well as things such as eating a meal, listening to hip hop music, or solving a math problem.¹³

The notion of ‘everyday aesthetics’ developed through this research primarily draws on the work of Yuriko Saito and Katya Mandoki. Saito defines the aesthetic as “any reactions we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomena, or activity”.¹⁴ She includes aesthetic experiences that stand out from the flow of ordinary experience, as well as pleasant and unpleasant experiences, and

⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

⁹ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

¹¹ Ibid; Richard Shusterman, “Aesthetic experience: From analysis to Eros”, in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman (New York: Routledge, 2008), 79–97.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid; Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*.

¹⁴ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 10.

aesthetic reactions that are incomplete, “seemingly insignificant, and sometimes almost automatic responses we form in our everyday life”.¹⁵

My awareness of aesthetics originated in observing how colour, shape, texture, tone, sound, and other traits correlated internal states with external phenomena through the aesthetic markers of creative practice. Aesthetic language is not restricted to a single mode or media. It is precisely the heterogeneity of the aesthetic as it emerges in varied interactions with materials, bodies, and meaning that has made it an attractive research focus. The aesthetic allows us to recognise the processes and interchanges between things. This recognition, Bennett insists, is critical if we are to attend better to the continuum of things.¹⁶

Michel Foucault’s concept of the aesthetics of existence provided my starting point for thinking about the body as a research site. Foucault’s idea of aesthetics is non-universalising and can be used, he argues, to practice ethical reflexivity through which to cultivate one’s life as an oeuvre.¹⁷ This intensification of the relationship to oneself produces self-knowledge and self-mastery, which track and transform the subject’s specificity. The notion that knowledge specific to the intersection of body and world is traceable in aesthetically-formed body tissue is supported by Terry Eagleton’s description of the root word for aesthetics (‘aesthesia’):

The whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought... that territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together—the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces.¹⁸

Mandoki explains that the aesthetic is entwined with and dependent upon perception. It is primarily concerned, she contends, with our openness towards life.¹⁹ In this research, I assert that aesthetic experience, reactions, and perceptions are bound to processes of embodied consciousness. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio explains that survival of our organism requires the generation of maps relative to our environment. In this intrinsically embodied process, representations form in the brain as it interprets

¹⁵ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House Inc., 1985); Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Estelle Barrett, “Experiential Learning in Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge”, *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 6, no. 2 (2007): 115.

¹⁹ Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2007).

chemical and neural signals that are stimulated by sensory organs and calibrated by motor actions.²⁰

These embodied representations formed the basis for the aesthetic language system used in this practice-led research. Here, the aesthetic refers to meaningful sensuousness formed by and informing one's embodied specificity. On these grounds, I contend that subjectivity can be understood as an aesthetic subjectivity embedded in and emergent from its environment. This practice-led research sought to examine the materiality of this aesthetic subjectivity.

Methodology

Estelle Barrett argues that a situated inquiry enables continuity between problem, investigation, and solution.²¹ This situated inquiry emerged in the tension between the environment and me. I began by examining my relation to North East Victorian valleys settled by my Anglo-Celtic ancestors in the 1860s. In 1936, these valleys were flooded by the damming of the Murray and Mitta Mitta Rivers.²² Taking into account post-Colonial discourse and anthropocentric anxiety, this terrain of my childhood appeared apt for critique. Over the first year of research, however, that terrain proved too vast geographically and theoretically. My embodied evaluations did not convert easily to artwork, and I surrendered my direct dialogue with this theme at the year's end. However, like the submerged rivers coursing under the surface of that manmade lake, my embodied tension (and the water courses that adhered to it) swirled beneath my studio inquiry until the final stages of my research.

A situated inquiry, explains Barrett, is conducted within the specific context from which its initial question emerged.²³ I hypothesized that the traditional elevation of aesthetics above the realm of ordinary life had co-generated my problematic tension and distorted continuity between human and environment. This influenced the selection of my second key site of inquiry: the everyday world of my home.

My methodology combined several interdependent approaches. The first approach involved critical reflection on the key environments so as to observe transient processes informing experience within them. To this end, I used a visual diary, photography, written reflections, and video. The second approach involved studio

²⁰ Antonio Damasio, "Interview with Antonio Damasio", interview by David Hirschman. *The Big Think Inc.*, August 10, 2010, video, <http://bigthink.com/videos/big-think-interview-with-antonio-damasio>.

²¹ Barret, "Experiential Learning".

²² "Hume Dam", Goulburn-Murray Water, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://www.g-mwater.com.au/water-resources/catchments/storages/murray/humedam>.

²³ Barrett, "Experiential Learning".

inquiry across drawing, painting, mixed media sculpture, video, sound, and installation to develop aesthetic languages encapsulating the transient intertwining of body and space. The third approach was critical engagement with key artworks and artists. This included field research to the United States and Japan in 2014 to visit sites by Frank Lloyd Wright, Chiharu Shiota, James Turrell, Pipilotti Rist, and Shinro Ohtake. The fourth approach was theoretical research, which contextualised significant materials, concepts, and practices in my inquiry.

In combination, these approaches led me to develop and narrow the scope of my inquiry, as well as identify key aesthetic languages specific to my research questions.

Specific conditions situating this inquiry informed my methodology. The bulk of this research has been carried out from my home. I live in the small regional Victorian city of Warrnambool, a nine-hour drive from the ANU Sculpture Workshop and three hours from Melbourne. Accordingly, this practice has taken place in relative isolation from the arts and academic communities found in metropolitan Australia. Therefore, it has been important that I undertake this research with relative self-sufficiency and transportability.

My parental responsibilities also informed my methodology. My home has been my primary research site and studio. Within this space, my subjectivity was entwined with other peoples'. My mental schema was filled with my research questions as well as the array of thoughts attached to caring for three young children. At points, particularly during close observation of my domestic space, there was pronounced tension between these observations and my research. Through continued inquiry, however, I recognised how immersion within this everyday familial world was advantageous to my examination of the body's entanglement in space. In response, I scaled my practice-led inquiry, its methodology, and the work produced to these conditions. I have worked primarily at my kitchen table in ways that can be set up and put away quickly. This has made my work small, light and portable: characteristics that I have embraced throughout my research as a way of tracing the aesthetics of everyday life more intimately. The full materiality of the final artwork exemplifies this logic of practice.

Our everyday world is made-up of many different sensory materials and relations. Working across and combining diverse mediums was critical to engaging with this diversity. Mediums utilised included discarded domestic objects, paint and pencil, plaster, town planning maps, acrylic sheeting, fabric, and aerial video footage. Further, observing the aesthetic dimension of the subject-environment interplay demonstrated how assemblages of materials, bodies, and practices enable meaning to emerge through

spatial relations. This observation informed my decision to use installation as a framework for my multi-art form practice.

I have contextualised my research primarily by examining how installation artists spatially manipulate materials to generate particular experiences. I have also engaged with artists such as Eugene von Geurard, and Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski to examine how images mediate our relationships with space. Clare Bishop explains that installation art activates the viewer as an embodied subject through direct interaction with materials and spatial configurations.²⁴ Barbara Bolt insists that images are not merely static illustrations but possess a productive performativity that exerts influence on the material world.²⁵ Working between these two- and three-dimensional approaches advanced my understanding of the role of the aesthetic in mediating body and world. As my inquiry progressed, interplay between these approaches enabled me to frame my concerns with the landscape through the spatial lens of my home.

Originally, this research was titled: *Activating Aesthetic Subjectivity in Embodied Environments*. The shift from *activating* to *examining* follows shifts in the dialogue within this inquiry between everyday aesthetics and special aesthetic experiences. Activating aesthetic awareness through special aesthetic experiences can attune us compellingly to the vibrancy of matter. However, the materiality of the world remains enchanted whether we activate our perception of it or not. Bennett argues that “the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of human uniqueness... of escape from matter, or mastery of nature.”²⁶ Overemphasis on special aesthetic experiences risks reinforcing Kant’s transcendentalism, elevating the aesthetic into the disembodied realm of spirit and entrenching materialist disenchantment further.²⁷ For these reasons, examining the ordinary experiences of aesthetic subjectivity in its embodied environments became a fundamental strategy for this inquiry. Rather than inducing “lofty intellectual, emotional, or spiritual enlightenment,” Saito explains, everyday aesthetics induce responses and reactions that prompt us towards specific, often mundane, actions.²⁸ My practice-led research traced and scrutinised these everyday actions in order to examine the inherent vibrancy of the ordinary world.

²⁴ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005).

²⁵ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2004).

²⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, ix.

²⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*; Elizabeth Grosz, “Crossing Boundaries”, in *The In(ter)vention of Feminist Knowledges*, ed. Barbara Caine (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 92–106.

²⁸ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 48.

The new materialist project I undertook began with distinct and unanswered questions: the object of my inquiry (that is, aesthetic subjectivity) was not yet given. The space between Chapter 1 and the conclusion of Chapter 5 of this exegesis tracks my process of teasing out the nature of aesthetic continuity of body and world; how it can be material; how it connects; and through which material/s. This journey required me to grapple with the common senses of my perception, and in particular with what Bennett describes as “a partition of the sensible”.²⁹ In processes of ordinary living, it is easy to imagine a world made up of individual discrete objects, separated first by physical boundaries, and then via sensible partition in which non-living, non-human matter appears dumb, passive, and without agency: dead dull matter in contrast to vital human life.³⁰ This exegesis, therefore, records processes of searching between body and world not only for continuums, but for answers to the questions of how and why perception turns inward to the isolated ordinariness of self-interest. Throughout this account, I have attempted to be generous to that common-sense starting point as a subject looking out from its individual body.

Bolt contends that, within creative arts research, praxical engagement with tools, materials, methods, and ideas takes primacy over theoretical-cognitive engagement in the production of new knowledge.³¹ This material specificity makes practice-led research compatible with Foucault’s aesthetics of existence. Directing the artistic processes of making and responding towards an intensification of the relationship to oneself localises inquiry within an intimate flux that dissolves distinction between subject-object and interiority-exteriority. This flux is enabled by an aesthetic field persisting beyond the partition of the sensible. Attuning to the affects and aversions perceived via this flux enables one to tease out the topography of this field of relations. Within this inquiry, attuning occurred in a slow and laborious process that Neumark describes as “situated listening”.³² For me, this listening entailed embodied observation in unison with the handling of materials, spaces, and ideas. Repeated iterations spanning literal years enabled what Neumark calls “carnal knowledge” to be generated by examining the minute detail of everyday life.³³

²⁹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, I.

³⁰ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

³¹ Barbara Bolt, “The Magic is in Handling”, in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007), 27–34.

³² Noorie Neumark, *Voice Tracks: Attuning to Voice in Media and the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 2.

³³ *Ibid*, 2.

For this reason, I used the strategy of diarising to plot the most significant evolutions within these iterations throughout this exegesis. The ‘carnal knowledge’ accumulated through this inquiry formed the aesthetic subject through which the final research thesis, the installation *Oikos*, co-emerged, giving transient solid form to the riddle of aesthetic materiality. Using art as an inquiry method situates creative practice between the everyday and special experience: rather than elevating the everyday, the goal here is to integrate into the everyday processes of critical aesthetic reflection, cultural and self-critique, meaning-making, aesthetic pleasure, and creativity. In the process, it is intended that perception of and participation in the world’s innate aesthetic flux will become more commonplace.

Challenges

This research was redesigned at the end of its first year. Initially, this research was to include a participatory art component at a small country primary school along with a central focus on my ancestral landscape. During my Thesis Proposal Review, it was determined that the logistical, ethical, and methodological parameters of this approach were beyond the scope of this research. Instead, I narrowed my research focus and relocated it within my home. This new direction brought new challenges. Using this family space as a research site required me to consider ethical concerns and seek ethics clearance from the ANU Ethics Board. This clearance was granted. As described earlier, the other challenges associated with working within this environment were incorporated into my research methodology.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, “Situating the Research in the Home”, provides an account of my domestic observations. Through these observations, I gradually adapted an approach for tracing the aesthetic overlap of body and space and undertook preliminary research into materials and themes. This open-ended period of research generated a body of photography and detailed visual diary which laid a foundation of carnal knowledge and aesthetic language from which later research would draw. Chapter 2, “Situating the House in the Research”, describes an important shift in my practice-led inquiry, wherein I trained my focus to the exterior of the house and its intersection with the surrounding landscape.

A drawing series executed on discarded town planning maps, called *Making Spaces*, drove the insights discussed in this chapter. A number of artists working directly in the urban and suburban landscape contextualise this examination of the landscape as a meaningful terrain. Chapter 3, “The Emergence of Water”, tracks the

concentration of my research focus around the theme of water. In this stage of the research process, I observed the flow of water through my home and critiqued its insistence as a theme in my artworks. This observation led to a productive inquiry that revealed how materials, bodies, space, culture, and practices can become aesthetically encoded. This engagement enabled a methodological shift from smaller sculptural studies to larger scale public installations and foregrounded encounters with key sites during international field research.

Chapter 4, “Mapping the Outside In”, interrogates two multi-artform installations and an experimental video intervention, and subsequent video work, to outline the confluence of two-dimensional image making and three-dimensional space making practices in generating embodied experiences. This chapter is contextualised by a discussion of contemporary and colonial image making practices, and the contrasting installation practices of James Turrell and Chiharu Shiota. Chapter 5, “Oikos, the River Dreaming in my House”, narrates the process of distillation through which I used a number of studio-based strategies to consolidate the distinct streams of my inquiry into a coherent and final installation work. This final artwork took an unexpected form and playfully synthesised core concepts and methodologies.

Chapter 1: Situating the Research in the Home

Introduction

Through my original focus on the landscape, I sought to critique my sense of disjuncture from the natural environment. I hypothesised that participatory and public art investigations would enable me to intervene directly in this shared environment and its field of social relations. At first glance, the private world of the home is the antithesis of public space and the landscape more generally. For this reason, shifting my inquiry from the landscape and participatory art into the home's interior via solo studio practice created conceptual challenges.

Art's separation from the everyday stems from the system of hierarchical dualisms that reinforce the separation of Western civilisation from nature.³⁴ Art practice in the public realm can contravene this separation by embedding artistic thinking in spaces and processes of daily life. The type of subjectivity associated with participatory art, like installation practice more generally, decenters Cartesian subjectivity and its substance dualism.³⁵ Participatory art subverts the primacy of the author and positions aesthetic practice within a field of social relations rather than rarefied objects. Furthermore, participatory art insists that art not only articulate a set of issues, but that it should engage actively in their definition, reinterpretation, and remediation.³⁶ The gradual development of a dialogue combining the aesthetics of John Dewey and the everyday aesthetics described by Yuriko Saito and Katya Mandoki would relocate these critiques within the redefined terrain of my inquiry.

I undertook fourteen months of first-person observation of my domestic space. This research was driven by creating a visual diary which involved taking many photographs, making collages and sketches, collecting two-dimensional artefacts, and writing reflections on embodied experience in my domestic space.

To begin, I sought to answer two questions: Does my body overlap with space? And, is there an aesthetic dimension to this overlap?

In a common-sense way, my body is a distinct entity within its physical environment. The surface of my skin creates a tangible boundary between my internal tissues, organs, and nervous system and the world exterior to it. However, my body is in constant flux with its physical environment: inhaling and exhaling air, consuming water

³⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*; Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*.

³⁵ Bishop, *Installation Art*; Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Plaisance, France: Les presses du reel, 2002).

³⁶ Grant Kester, "Dialogical Aesthetic: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art", *Variant* 9 (Winter 1999/2000), <http://www.variant.org.uk/9texts/KesterSupplement.html>.

and food, excreting waste, and expending energy through movement or by generating warmth. As a complex organism with consciousness, communion with my environment extends through my sensory perception of the world, communication with other subjects, encounters with objects, language and cultural forms, apprehension of future possibilities and recollection of past experiences. In these ways, it is possible to imagine how the tactile boundary of the skin, though visually solid, is not an impermeable shield enclosing subjectivity. I sought to develop aesthetic languages that would enable me to make tangible these material yet transient continuums.

Developing a Framework for Practice

Prior to commencing this research, I had worked across multiple artforms in my practice. This approach involved creatively investigating how a given material generated affect and expressed meaning. Sometimes existing meaning could be employed or re-contextualised. Sometimes meaning emerged through representation, such as a visual or audio image that represented a particular concept or indexed a particular moment or set of relationships. Often, technical handling of materials through making artworks acted as a processing system that organised new understanding. My multi-artform practice utilised these approaches to collage diverse aesthetic languages in order to generate and explore relationships between them. Adapting my existing studio logic to the specific concerns of this practice-led inquiry took time.

The first parameter I set at this revised stage was the research location: my residential home in Warrnambool, South West Victoria. I share my house with my husband and our three children, who were aged around four, seven and ten during this period. Ours is a three-bedroom house that we have rented through my husband's employer since 2004. The house is a single dwelling on a single block surrounded by a high fence. It is situated a few hundred meters from the Lady Bay foreshore. To fully withdraw my focus from the landscape, I concentrated my inquiry on the home's interior.

I resisted projecting particular outcomes or imagined forms onto my inquiry, instead seeking aesthetic languages and themes that emerged through interacting with the environment. This open-endedness was not always easy to maintain. Nonetheless, it was critical for two reasons: first, it would ensure that the aesthetic languages were particular to my body's intersection with its environment. Second, it would reconfigure the subject-object relationship described by Barbara Bolt³⁷—that is, decentering the

³⁷ Bolt, "Towards a 'New Materialism'".

primacy of subjective agency by locating the creative process within a field of interactions between materials, world, and body.

This studio-based test site, my domestic home, further developed the parameters for my practice-led inquiry. It operated almost like installation or participatory art, in that relations between factors were formed, then observed, negotiated and selected to demarcate a space in which the specific aesthetic language functioned. Later in my research, I recognised the congruence between this strategy and the notions of assemblage theory and intra-action discussed by new materialists.

I saw this period of domestic observation as a process of situated listening that was attuned both to the research site and to the development of a methodology for examining it. Borrowing from Jane Bennett's idea of alchemical hearing and overhearing, Noorie Neumark's account of one's artistic process as a type of situated listening helps to describe my process:

With alchemical hearing and overhearing, inadvertent material seeps in as you hear things simultaneously, superimposed—transforming the whole of what you are hearing. In short, alchemical overhearing is a listening to the knowledge that something already has.³⁸

I listened to my home and my practice through my camera lens, my visual diary, and the different materials I handled. I trained my aesthetic 'ear' to the 'sounds' of the body's overlap with space. Through this listening, I overheard the fullness of the space around me. That space called to me to track and trace it, and through this process, my position within it transformed.

Domestic Studies: Photography

I began my research by drawing a graphite map of my home's floorplan in my visual diary (Fig. 1). Using an eraser, I marked the main pathways through which bodies, air and daylight move through the house. Next, I photographed the home's interior, starting at the front door and finishing in the laundry (Fig. 2 and 3). Previously, I had used photography only for documentation or to create source images, never formally using it as an artistic medium in its own right.

³⁸ Noorie Neumark, *Voice Tracks: Attuning to Voice in Media and the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 18.

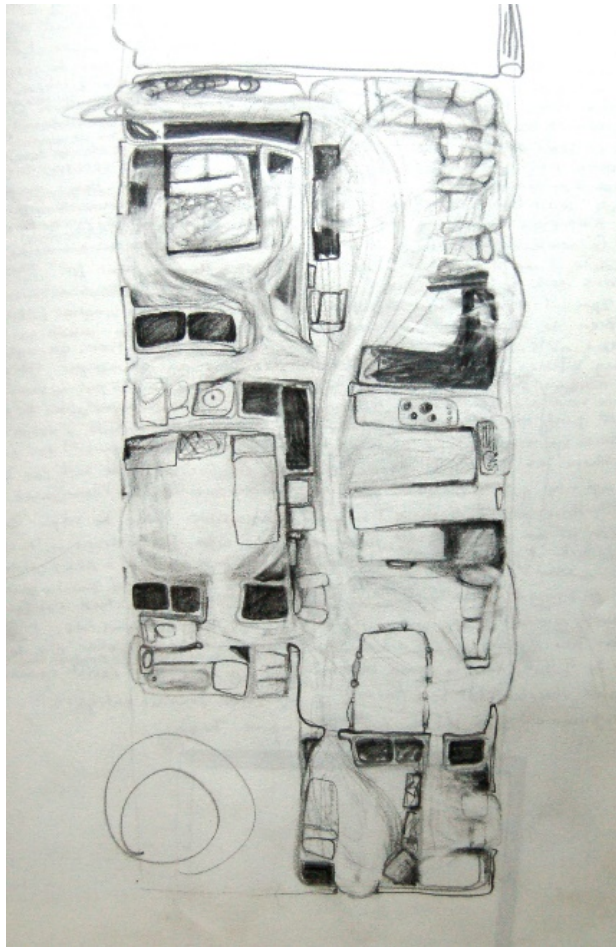


Fig. 1. Extract from visual diary:
floor plan (2013).

Here, I was concerned to record a sense of lived space. I took photographs from various positions to capture the spatial dimensions one might see as they moved around unselfconsciously. I looked for evidence of the subject's overlap with the space by focusing on particular objects or scenes indexing habituation.

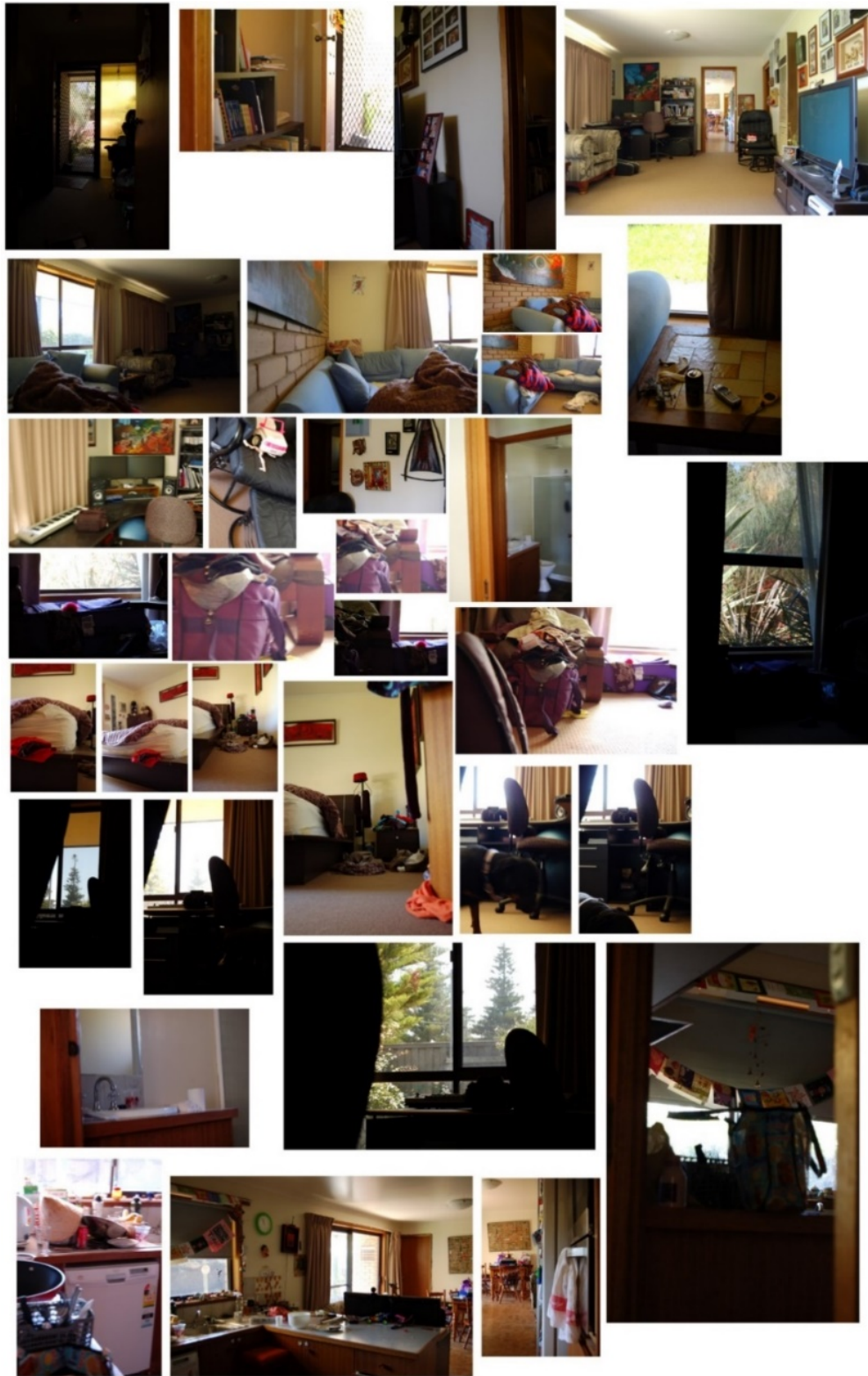


Fig. 1. Extract from visual diary: photo map a) (2013).



Fig. 2. Extract from visual diary: photo map b) (2013).

This photographic approach enabled an objective distance between the space and me. I did not want to project meaning onto the space. Rather, I sought to find out how it

could be more than a physical vessel. This distance was also important because in these early stages it was difficult to suspend familiarity with my home.

In wanting to repatriate art to everyday life, Dewey elucidates the value of aesthetic experience. Interpreting Dewey's concept, Richard Shusterman describes a spontaneous and meaningfully ordered sensory response that overwhelms embodied perception and enables new insight to be apprehended.³⁹ Such aesthetic experiences are fragile and transient events which disrupt and supplement life's regular momentum.⁴⁰ Both Dewey and Shusterman argue that aesthetic experience provides the intrinsic value within art's reception and production.⁴¹ Artist Liza McCosh argues that aesthetic experience performs a critical role within practice-led research.⁴² In her account, new knowledge generated in studio inquiry often is accompanied not only by a sense of the sublime: it actually originates through intense aesthetic interaction between embodied artist, world, and practice. I was unsure how close observation of my already familiar domestic environment could break with the ordinariness of that setting, yielding an insightful aesthetic experience into the aesthetic continuum between body and environment.

A dialogue between Dewey's idea of special aesthetic experiences and my approach to the inquiry site began. The home was the background site from which special aesthetic experiences might emerge. For this reason, my existence in my home could very well be informed by changes in perspective made by such experiences. However, I was not sure how to look at my space. I was not sure what to look for: the space was ordinary, it was immediate, it surrounded me and, in doing so, it felt strangely invisible. Was it even an aesthetic space?

Over the coming weeks, I used spontaneous embodied response to guide the scenes I photographed. I saw these photographs as unselfconscious markers of my interaction with the home. These were organised in my visual diary according to the rooms they focused on (Fig. 4 and 5). I notated interactions tied to the scenes as well as reflections on the meanings each space held and the origins of items within them.

I was intrigued that the different spatial-temporal lineages of objects within the home acted to weave multiple spaces together. However, I did not feel that the individual photographs adequately captured this multi-dimensionality. The singular eye

³⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

⁴⁰ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Liza McCosh, "The Sublime: Process and Mediation", in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts* (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013), 127–138.

of the camera did not seem to pierce the veneer of the space's visible and measurable surfaces. I felt frustrated that subjective immersion in the space seemed lost as the 'embodied sight' became a 'digital slither', a representation somehow flattened through the fixing of its momentary perspective.



Fig. 4. Extract from visual diary (2013).

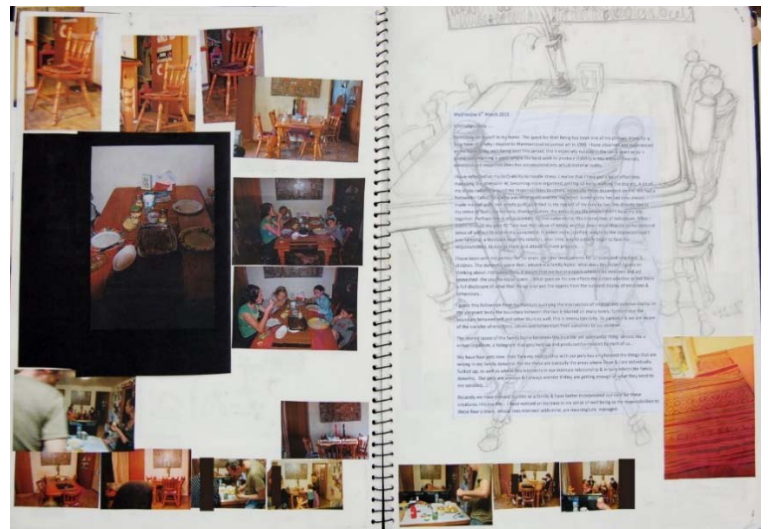


Fig. 3. Extract from visual diary (2013).

In response to this frustration, I took serial shots of sites such as our en suite basin, kitchen table, and bedroom (Fig. 5, 6, 7, and 8). I reasoned that documenting the traces of familial interactions and other activities could capture the continuous fluidity of the site's temporal continuum, its lived fullness, perhaps even its intersubjective heat. Rather than discerning the overlap of subject and environment through these photographs, I observed a continuous 'making' of spaces generated through repeated activity. My concern with capturing the subject's overlap with its environment became secondary to wanting to understand how we make spaces, and how our demarcation and experience of interior space is tied up in this process.

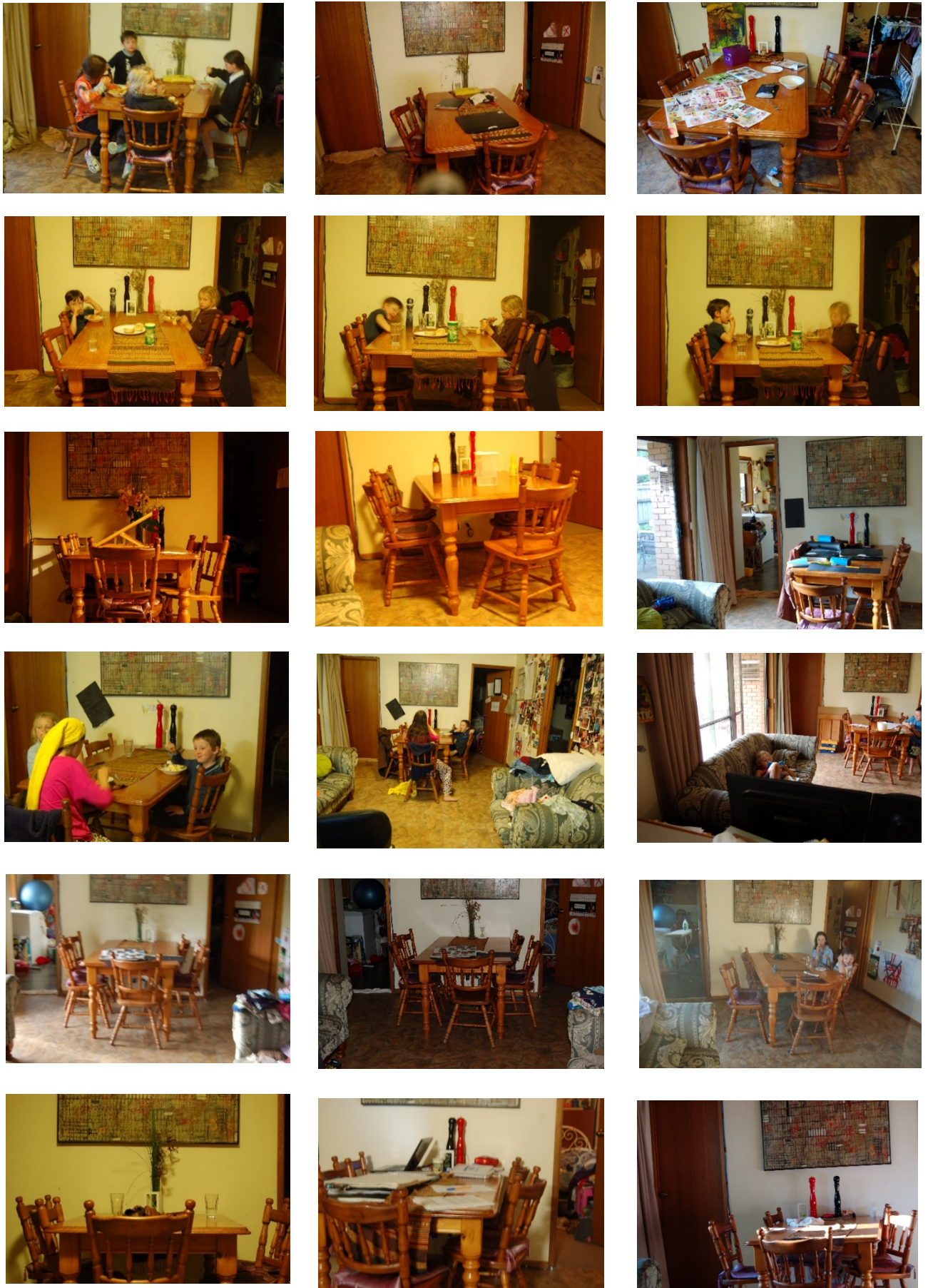


Fig. 4. Photographic observations: kitchen table (2013).

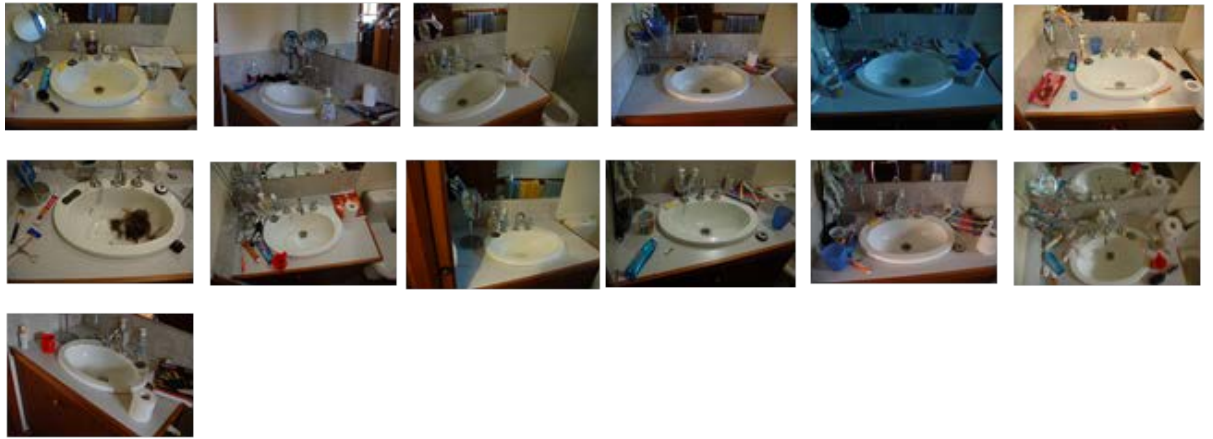


Fig. 7. Photographic observations: en suite basin (2013).



Fig. 8. Extract from visual diary (2013).

The gradual development of my photographic approach mirrored my understanding of the presence and function of the aesthetic in ordinary life. In the next section, I return to the topic of my photographic inquiry after outlining some of the preliminary artworks and concerns that co-emerged in this period.

Domestic Studies: Small Artworks

Observing the continuous ‘making’ of domestic space revealed how the home is both made around and makes the body of the subject within it. Foucault describes a subject that is produced through power relations which are mediated through normative processes and discourse.⁴³ The different spaces of the home organise, segregate, and

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); McLaren, *Feminism*.

normalise given behaviours and bodily functions. Locating my inquiry in the embodied specificity of my private home disclosed the contingency of its interior world upon power relations and discourse exterior to it. Through examining the theme of the house in contemporary art, Gill Perry outlines how the private home interplays in the field of human interactions: “Our relationships with “home” and its material correlate, the house, can reveal complex global geographies in which established categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class and social status can overlap and interact.”⁴⁴

Katya Mandoki contends that reality can be understood as a semiotic intersubjective network.⁴⁵ Our position within this network, building on Antonio Damasio’s theory of neural-physical mapping, is embodied and calibrated to our organism’s needs.⁴⁶ Rather than an enclosed private universe, I saw my embodied subjectivity, within this practice-led research, as being in flux with a complex interplay of biology and culture mediated through the everyday world.

Estelle Barrett argues that creative practice-led research enables practitioners to draw upon personal experience to critique and remodel knowledge, meaning and social relations.⁴⁷ This formulation of new knowledge emerges through personal experience, embedding it the context in which it arose: “Learning takes place through action and intentional, explicit reflection on that action.”⁴⁸ In practice-led inquiry, action is embodied in studio processes, while explicit reflection is guided by continuous attention to and revision of the research questions.

Through my studio process, I sought to investigate the aesthetic interplay of body and space and, increasingly, the processes through which this interplay generates shared ‘interior’ space. Nesting this self-reflective inquiry in the domestic context concentrated my attention on the operation of these interplays in daily life. I felt this preferable to a more detached philosophical approach which risked disavowing the carnal nuances informing the relationship.

Visual diary-led observations illuminated the continuous flow of material goods required to maintain life in my house. Clearly, consumption of materials was critical to making the home’s interior space. This revealed a significant form of interaction with my environment beyond the house.

⁴⁴ Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (London, England: Reaktion Books, 2013), 10.

⁴⁵ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

⁴⁶ Antoni Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999); Damasio, “Interview”.

⁴⁷ Barrett, “Experiential Learning”.

⁴⁸ Barrett, “Experiential Learning”, 119.

I experimented with materials including disposable laundry scoops, spent milk cartons, plastic shopping bags, and broken or discarded kitchen objects (Fig. 9 and 10). I also used plaster bandage, oil and acrylic paint, drawing, and digital prints. I sought materials that provoked creative response. I also sought reclaimed and/or non-toxic materials that were by nature suitable to use at the kitchen table. I was careful to avoid unnecessary waste. My sense of anxiety about anthropogenic destruction of Earth's biosphere informed my consideration of which materials to use. Closely examining the material extension of my body into its environment made the (supply) chain of consequences attached to my studio process more material.



Fig. 9. Mixed media studies (2013).



Fig. 10. Mixed media studies (2013).

Negotiating an ethical and creatively productive studio practice was an ongoing challenge. Over time, I recognised these concerns as intrinsic to the tension and literal connection between the world and my body. This recognition led to other questions: how effective was reducing my use of plastic or synthetic materials in my studio if my household still consumed these materials in large amounts? How effective was reducing studio waste if household waste output remained unchanged? In turn, these questions led to other questions around the separation of art and life: should art be an idealised exemplar or utopian proposition? Does such art amount to an empty gesture if it is incongruent with the lived reality of the artist? Conversely, how can an attempt to critique the division of body and environment be taken seriously if it ignores these material entanglements?

Ultimately, few of the studies produced using these materials would stimulate my desire enough to pursue this approach further. My inquiry grew from my anthropogenic anxiety, and I would remain attentive to the ecological ethics of my materials. However, I concluded that neutralising the ecological impact of the research was not my primary goal. My goal was to use creative practice to investigate the aesthetic overlap of body and environment. Recording, rather than correcting, the tensions evoked in materials that consumed the landscape was part of tracing that aesthetic connection.

Within the temporal constraints of my research, I privileged the decisive attributes of the creative desire that arose through aesthetic experience. I saw this as an embodied marker that would emerge in response to materials and forms, events in my imagination, and the synthesis of new ideas. This process amounted to what Karen Barad might call an intra-action, in which the specificity of the relationship between things shapes the ontology of the individual things and the assemblages they form.⁴⁹



Fig. 11. *Ocean Basket* (2013).

My first sculptural study during this time, *Ocean Basket* (Fig. 11), emerged this way. Using plaster bandage, I created a partial plaster cast of my washing basket. Inspecting the dried form as it sat on my washing machine, I spontaneously imagined its unfinished base morphing into a dispersing wave. This felt exciting; it energised me: *it was desire*. I worked quickly to extend the form, stopping only once I had a sense that it was visually balanced. I considered how the basket contains and traverses space, carrying clean and dirty as well as wet and dry clothes and, in the process, enabling the

⁴⁹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (London: Duke University, 2007).

renewal of domestic environment. What was most significant, however, was that this artwork marked the emergence of an aesthetic language specific to the context of the inquiry.

Interdisciplinary arts researcher Danielle Boutet contends that the microcosm of the artist's practice can reveal something of the macrocosm in which it is situated. She draws on Gregory Bateson to examine how artists use metaphor to investigate the world and produce knowledge:

The creations of the mind are metaphors of that mind. The creations of nature are metaphors of nature. Studying the creations of a mind can inform us on the nature of that mind. And since that mind is a creation of the world... then knowing the mind through its creations can inform us on the world.⁵⁰

Insisting that aesthetic language emerge through the intra-action of my situated inquiry generated a metaphorically rich aesthetic language in the form of water. In contrast to the built house within which this aesthetic language emerged, water would become an unforeseen driver of this practice-led research.

The creative desire that sought this material representation of water is located within Dewey's definition of aesthetic experience. It is not always gratified through conclusion in an all-encompassing, unified 'special' aesthetic experience. It is an embodied proposition seeking its counterpart: the particular combination of visual forms, colours, interplay of objects and concepts in particular arrangements. Fulfilment of such desire appears to be the experience of the sublime reported by McCosh that accompanies revelations within the studio. For me, the aesthetic experience of this desire indicates the value of particular lines of inquiry. Pursuit of its fulfilment drives my studio process.

Looking to Other Artists to Form Aesthetic Languages

These virtues of shelter are so simple, so deeply rooted in our unconscious that they may be recaptured through mere mention, rather than through minute description... Over-picturesqueness in a house can conceal its intimacy. This is true in life. But it is truer still in daydreams. For the real houses of memory, the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description. To describe them would be like showing them to visitors... All we communicate to others is an

⁵⁰ Danielle Boutet, "Metaphors of the Mind", presented at the International Conference on the Image, Los Angeles: University of California, December 2-3, 2010.

orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively.⁵¹

While tracking the overlap of body and home, the visual dominance of built architecture frequently jarred me. In contemplating space and how we make spaces, I observed that the solid planes of walls, ceilings, and floors demarcated and contained the home's interior, yet simultaneously felt secondary to it. In discussing the work of James Turrell, Gernot Bohme describes several understandings of space. One of these is mathematical space.⁵² Mathematical space is measurable and remains unchanged whether the room is lit or darkened, occupied or emptied. Mathematical space is fixed, nominal space. The built structures of the home seemed visually incongruent to my lived experience within them. Instead, I found a language for this incongruence embodied in the transient warmth between its dimensions: that of the heater, of clothes against skin, of interactions shared with family, in disarmed muscles, in the colour of light that filled the lounge room in the evening, and in emotional heat that pours freely out. The overlap between my body and the home was subjective and transient. How could I recreate this overlap in visible forms that did not appear merely as solid, fixed objects placed in the empty distance between mathematically stable, solid walls?

I found an example in images of *Himalaya's Sister's Living Room* (2000) (Fig. 12) by Pipilotti Rist: a psychedelic home setting combining kitsch 1950s furniture with domestic debris and partitioned by large photo collaged panels of other imagined rooms.⁵³ Videos were projected onto dining settings, dressers, and other furniture, adding a plethora of perspectives that draw the eye. Individual lamps and different-coloured zone lighting created vivid contrasts within the work. These luminous sites echoed the way consciousness saturates space and attributes significance to some areas more than others. What I had felt unable to convey in singular photographs, Rist had communicated by illuminating objects with imagery that emitted coloured light throughout the space and so blurred the mathematical boundaries between things. *Himalaya's Sister's Living Room* presents a subversive, and possibly nostalgic, take on Western life at the twentieth century's end.⁵⁴ Of interest to me was the multidimensionality generated in the images, almost as though the setting's interior had been turned outwards. It seemed Rist too had grappled with the tension between the

⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 12–13.

⁵² Gernot Bohme, "The Phenomenology of Light", in *James Turrell: Geometry of Light*, ed. Ursula Sinnreich, 69–81 (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz).

⁵⁴ Mark Stevens, "It's all in the Rist", retrieved November 30, 2004, <http://nymetro.com/nymetro/arts/art/reviews/3061/>.

lived and the represented. In her own words: “rooms touch you more, from bone to flesh to hair to ears to legs, than a projection or a picture”.⁵⁵



Fig. 12. Pipilotti Rist, *Himalaya's Sister's Living Room* (2000).

The work of Chiharu Shiota indicated other approaches for demonstrating subjective immersion in space (Fig. 13). Shiota's installations are filled with a sense of melancholy and longing. She uses materials in repetition and excess to saturate and engulf the physical dimensions of a space. I was intrigued by images of rooms filled with webs of black thread methodically woven to create a visual and tactile haze. Shiota's work deals with memory and loss.⁵⁶ Objects taken from daily life, such as suitcases, books, or shoes are incorporated into many of her environments. Encasing these objects in her textile webs constrains viewer perspective and proximity: the items remain just out of reach physically and visually, evoking the frustration of static memory. These threads provide a visual metaphor that traces the moments of movement that criss-cross and evaporate in lived space.

⁵⁵ Pipilotti Rist, *Himalaya's Sister's Living Room*, antenna audio guide, May 2000. New York: Luhring Augustine Gallery.

⁵⁶ Chiharu Shiota, *Chiharu Shiota* (London, England: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011).



Fig. 13. Chiharu Shiota, *After the Dream* (2011).

Rist and Shiota create externalised accounts of interior worlds. They immerse viewers in metaphorically-encoded materials and media that simulate sensory experiences congruent with the artist's experiential concerns. Dewey argues that artists impart into artworks knowledge garnered through everyday living.⁵⁷ According to Barrett, this knowledge originates in experience and is invested into the artwork through the handling of materials.⁵⁸ Congruence between the material's qualities and the artist's concerns create an aesthetic conduit through which these concerns can be externalised, critiqued, and reworked. The shared parameters of human embodiment mean that even uniquely subjective experiences share common feelings and meanings which can be evoked through encounters with aesthetic objects produced through these artistic processes.

⁵⁷ Barret, "Experiential Learning".

⁵⁸ Ibid.



Fig. 14. *Memory Flesh Series* (2013).

I operated my inquiry as an intra-action between objects, spaces, decoratively sensuous materials, haptic experimentation, my research questions, and my imagination. Such intra-action produced the *Memory Flesh Series* of sculptural studies, which became the starting point for another aesthetic language. I covered three salt and pepper shakers with pieces of floral and gingham fabric, as well as calico painted in oil and acrylic to represent flesh. The covered surfaces express how embodiment colours and appropriates objects and space, allowing subjectivity to spill out into its surrounding environment. The use of reclaimed domestic objects, floral patterns and fabric, and the painted representation of flesh became important aesthetic languages for describing embodied immersion within shared spaces. The home itself, and the objects within it, also began to signify the relationship between body and space.

Light, Warmth, Bodies and Space

Working within my family home meant it was often impractical to act immediately on artworks when ideas emerged. The portability, general unobtrusiveness, and immediacy of the camera, however, provided a means to record scenes as bodily response was evoked by situated listening. I photographed my space obsessively and unselfconsciously through this time. As with the alchemical overhearing described by Bennett and Neumark, an increasingly tangible sense of aesthetic continuum between self and space emerged through this process.⁵⁹ This was especially embodied in the memory of the morning light and its congruence with the home's interiority, of old tungsten light, and flannel pyjamas against skin (Fig. 15–19).

⁵⁹ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*.



Fig. 15. Photographic observations: morning light (2013).

Figures 16 and 17 are centred in my kitchen. In this space I wipe benches, I cut meat and vegetables, I make coffee, I pack lunch boxes, I stand with varicose veins aching, I look out from over the bench and intervene in my children's behaviour, plead with them to finish their meals, rant at them to get their shoes on and pack their school bags. During this period, I was acutely aware of the morning light, the rise of the sun or rather the rotation of the earth: the ever-moving arrow of time. A flat white silhouette of a plywood tricycle rests against the window in front of one of my children's kindergarten artworks—a simple crepe paper collage, whose colours amplify the morning light. The tricycle silhouette was drawn from a now broken one my husband and I had bought for our children. It predates this inquiry. Its display, as with other artworks made within this inquiry, punctuate my domestic interior with a reflective focal point. The silhouette always evoked my childhood memories. This scene, swollen in morning light, drew those memories into my contemporary dealings with my own children: always aware, so often too aware, of the influence of childhood, with its harsh discipline and hidden intergenerational threads, upon the formation of the self. This awareness attuned a tension to this fleeting mundane: that we will not always be together, they will grow, I will age, we will move away from each other and one day our atoms will disperse, just as the universe eventually will too. But for now, we are in a

hurry to get out the door, I am impatient, they are rude and grumpy and there is too much noise, and could you just speak nicely to each other!

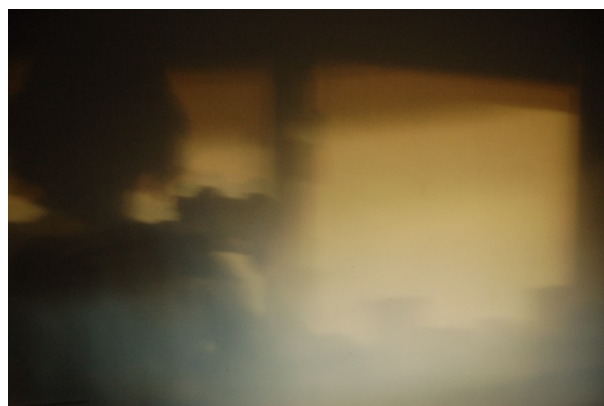


Fig. 16. Photographic observations: morning light (2013). **Fig. 17.** Photographic observations: morning light (2013).

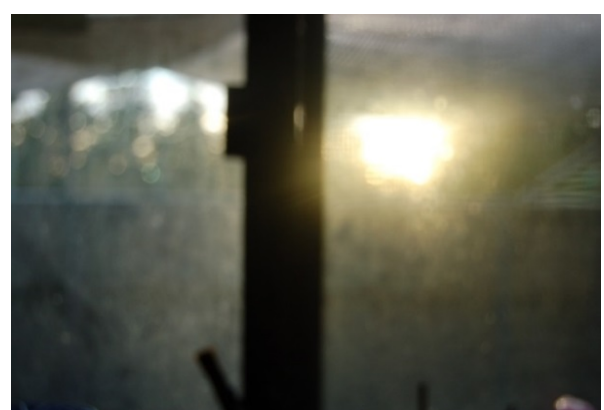


Fig. 18. Photographic observations: morning light (2013). **Fig. 19.** Photographic observations: morning light (2013).

Situating my inquiry in my domestic home had not yet produced any sublime aesthetic revelations. However, it had revealed continual aesthetic interplays, like the one described above, that wove affective significance through my ordinary dealings and provided the brief impulses to capture photographs such as these.

Yuriko Saito argues that despite its traditional neglect, a rich and diverse dimension of aesthetics is integrated into everyday life. Unlike the special experiences privileged by Dewey, these experiences are continuous with ordinary consciousness.⁶⁰ Saito contends that, whether we consciously recognise it or not, our opinions, decisions and our actions are informed by reactions to these aesthetics.⁶¹ Saito provides examples focusing on appearance-based judgments such as whether to get a new hairstyle, choosing a paint colour for one's house, or opposing the construction of a wind farm.

⁶⁰ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Saito's emphasis on the visual, however, links into my initial frustration with photography. In grappling with the aesthetic dimension of my ordinary world, I wanted to delve beneath this visual layer: to find out how habituated space became more than measurable space. How did it become an interiority, a space intimately entangled with my mortal body, in which objects were not just dead and dumb?

Shifts in my photographic style enabled me to pierce through the mathematical account of space that had frustrated my earlier research. To record the light most closely to its hue in the space, I resisted using a flash. Taken quickly, and without a tripod, the longer exposure time meant that images sometimes blurred. These photographs capture the warmth of that light, in some cases allowing the singular fixed frame to be temporally extended. Other photos that I found successful were those capturing the enfolding of spaces or subjects through reflections or shadows that contravene the scene's singular spatial boundaries. These images seem to trace the everyday aesthetics smeared throughout the interior world of my home.



Fig. 20. Photographic observations: domestic motion (2013).

Conclusion

The close photographic and visual diary-led observations and creation of preliminary artworks described in this chapter generated a deep carnal knowledge of the subjective interior of the home and approaches for representing it visually. Much as if a real interior had been extracted from parameters enclosing it, this material, rich as it was, lacked the structure required to form a body of artwork that adequately resolved

the insights its production generated. I continued to photograph my home for many more months. However, this body of artwork receded into the background as new bodies of work formed to examine other lines of inquiry that emerged from the domestic observations.

Ideas regarding space making outlined during this chapter were developed through the *Making Spaces* drawing series discussed in the following chapter. This body of work returns to the exterior world, examining the built structure of the house as it intersects with the landscape. The interplay between the landscape and the house in generating the home's interior was examined in detail through the focus on the theme of water to be discussed in Chapter 3.

This research project evolved through spiralling iterations which overlapped and backtracked, enabling artworks, aesthetic languages and meanings to be revisited and reactivated. It was this backtracking and overlapping that enabled the early period of aesthetic research recorded in this chapter to become integral to the inquiry's trajectory.

In spite of attempts to secure my focus to the interior of the home, the landscape still drew my gaze at points during the domestic observations described in this chapter. Artefacts from one such encounter provided the eventual catalyst that enabled the conclusion of the body of work discussed through this first chapter.

Noticing pink light in the sky early one morning, I excitedly took my camera and headed to a beach nearby. I captured multiple photos as the sky grew bright: the light was pink then golden, the water and clouds saturated in colour. The beautiful scene invigorated me. I compiled digital thumbnails of the images and stuck them into my visual diary (Fig. 21): a two-page spread of morning light among the pages of domestic observations.

Over the course of my research, I thought many times of those photographs and the feelings of warmth they stirred in me: a sense of connection to the planet, to the sun, to beauty, of comfort and love.



Fig. 21. Extract from visual diary: sunrise (2013).

Over time, I realised other feelings were continuous with those evoked by these sunrise images: the feeling of home, its interior world, and connection to my family. I used this as an aesthetic code to review the hundreds of other photographs I had taken. I looked for those that stimulated this same response to light.

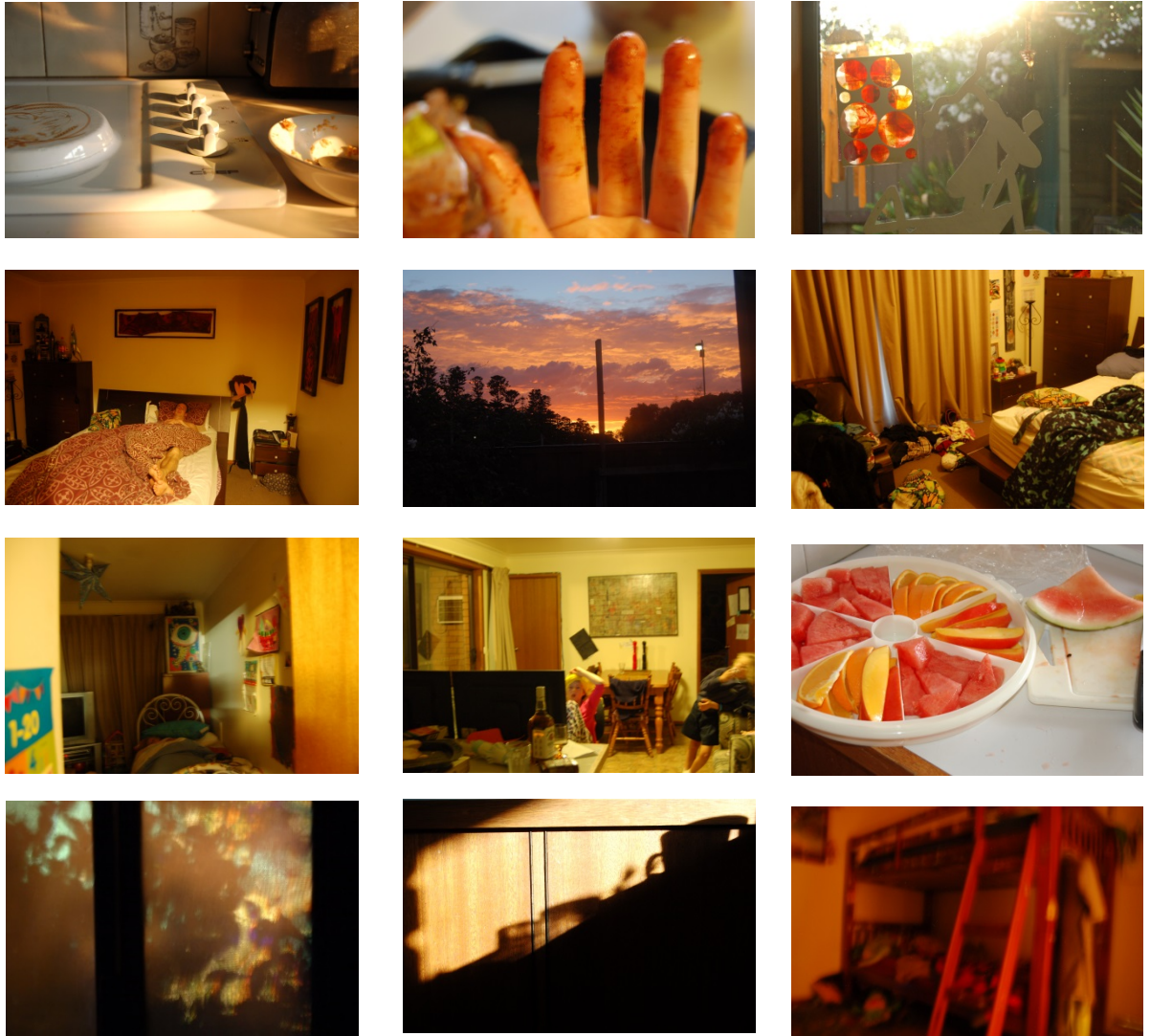


Fig. 22. Photographic observations: interior warmth (2013).

Collating these photographs gave me a set of images of my domestic environment that most captured my subjective immersion within it (Fig. 22). I felt strong and immediate connections between these images and the aesthetics that I had developed in the *Memory Flesh Series*. These feelings initiated *Warm Space House Series I*, a study combining the two strands of practice by affixing the photographs to small boxes, which I covered in pink, patterned fabric. The fabric was selected to extend the aesthetic felt in the photo series and *Memory Flesh Series*. The process of folding cloth around the small structures brought three-dimensionality to the two-dimensional photographs. In this way, the process took on connotations of domestic space making.

These connotations would become integral processes and concepts in the later works *Warm Safe Home #1* and *#2*, and *Warm Space House Series 2*, and the final artwork *Oikos*.



Fig. 23. *Warm Space House Series 1* (2015).

The practice-led formulation of *Warm Space Houses Series 1* (Fig. 23) was a creative insight accompanied by the type of special aesthetic experience described by Dewey. The conditions that generated it, however, were developed through tracing the subtler influence of ordinary aesthetics outlined by Saito. Ultimately, the dialogue between these two positions provided the overarching framework for my continuing inquiry. This indicated a shift enabling me to explore more explicitly a field of predominantly spatial relations through scrutinising the aesthetics of ordinary life. Eventually, reflection on the aesthetic distinctions demarcating epic scenes such as sunrises from the spaces of the everyday would catalyse the formation of the final artwork in this inquiry.

Chapter 2: Situating the House in the Research

Introduction

The built structure of the house encloses the body and protects it from weather and other creatures. The solid walls of the house obscure the outside world and shield the house's inhabitants from public scrutiny. The opaque boundary between the interior home and the exterior house echoes the division between the subject and the natural environment. Through this practice-led research, the domestic home became analogous for the individual body and its contingency on a field of social and physical relations.

Developing approaches for examining and articulating the aesthetic dimension of my domestic interior took time. During this period, I made other, less overtly aesthetic observations about the relationship between body and space. I photographed, mapped, and observed the movement of bodies, goods, food, waste, and fresh and dirty water through my home. In this process, I came to see the house as an open system: constantly taking in and excreting material from the outside world to generate its interiority (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. Extract from visual diary: resource flow (2013).

I recognised similarity between the house and the body, in that both were organisms of sorts: whereas biological metabolism drove my own organism, it was me, and the other occupants of the house, who drove the home's metabolism.

An organism is an open system “in which material continually enters from, and leaves into, the outside environment”.⁶² This process enables the organism to renew itself and maintain the relative stability of its internal environment. Organisms entwine in ecosystems, which Fritjo Capra describes as “feeding networks”.⁶³ In this way, the metabolisms of individual organisms are materially continuous with the flow of food and energy through the whole system.

This description of continual exchange between organism and environment became an important metaphor for imagining the extension of embodied subjectivity into the interior of the home. I recognised this extension as a making or construction of space that paired the body to its environment. I recognised a comparable process pairing the house and the landscape.

In this chapter I discuss the drawing series *Making Spaces* (2013), which reoriented my view of the external environment through the lens of my home. The material and theoretical breadth of the landscape had overwhelmed my earlier inquiry. In contrast, examining the landscape against the position of my house within it, and the landscape’s entwinement in the ‘feeding network’ of my house, provided a crucial breakthrough in my research.

This drawing series enabled me to identify and critique an aesthetic disconnect between the interior world of my home and the landscape. This would become instructive to my ongoing critique of the division between subject and environment. The evolution of this drawing series revealed how different meanings demarcate spaces and inform the experiences had within them.

Anne Whiston Spirn’s proposition that landscapes have a language was integral to this phase of my research.⁶⁴ Whiston Spirn argues that within the English language, ‘landscape’ has come to mean a kind of static picture or scene. She explains that the terms ‘environment’ and ‘place’ have been used as substitutes for the word ‘landscape’. However, those two terms “are abstract, disembodied, sacrificing meaning, concealing tensions and conflicts, ignoring the assumptions *landscape* reveals”.⁶⁵ Whiston Spirn insists that the older, deeper meaning of ‘the landscape’ should be revived: “*Landscape* connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and aesthetic, the

⁶² Ludwig von Bertalanffy, cited in Capra Fritjo, *The Web of Life* (Glasgow, Scotland: Flamingo, 1997), 48.

⁶³ Fritjo. *The Web*, 35

⁶⁴ Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

embeddedness in culture. The language of landscape recovers the dynamic connection between place and those who dwell there.”⁶⁶

In addition, I contextualised my inquiry with Janet Laurence’s and Fiona Foley’s *Edge of the Trees* (1994) and Ian Strange’s life scale interventions with the suburban Australian home. Doing so allowed me to advance a notion that the home exists in material continuum with the meaningful terrain of its landscape. This approach also enabled me to critique the effect of standardised and familiar urban spaces in reinforcing a partition of the sensible that diffuses the vibrancy of this meaning.

Scrutinising my home’s insertion in the landscape deepened my understanding of how aesthetic characteristics generate experiences that prompt particular actions and inform perception. Exploring parallels between the body and home’s continual exchange with their ‘feeding networks’ revealed a fundamental space making process inherent to both. Examining the perceptions and practices interacting with these subjects’ foundational space-making drives revealed a complex intertwining of body and world, produced through attentive regulation of this same intertwining. The notion that a foundational space-making practice is inherent in the subject’s relation with its environment became an instrumental concept for this research.

Making Spaces and the Aesthetic Disjuncture

After weeks of intent focus on my home’s interior and growing frustration at the visual solidity of its walls, I broke with my confinement and took my camera out of the house. Photographing as I went, I walked to the end of my street and crossed the mouth of the Merri River by footbridge. I briefly stood atop the sand stone cliffs and then turned back home. I continued to photograph as I returned to the end of my street. Looking at the urban terrain, I thought about how less than 230 years ago it had been the domain of the Gunditjmarra. I wondered how their own cultural approach had shaped the land and its ecology.⁶⁷ The concrete footpaths and gutters, the re-directed river mouth, the bitumen roads, Norfolk pines, the powerlines, apartments, the army barracks, and civic spaces: all were recent constructions overlaid on the land in concert with European occupation of it.

As I returned to my home, I photographed structures on its exterior that connected it to its external landscape: the mail box, front gate, front door, electricity main, hot water service, front path, garbage and recycling bins, back gate, gas meter,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Warrnambool and District Historical Society, “Warrnambool and District Historical Society”, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.warrnamboolhistory.org.au/warrnambool-history/history/>.

water mains tap, laundry drain, air conditioner, gutter, and television antenna. These many fissures permeated my home, leaking the house into its external environment.



Fig. 25. Photographic observations: exterior house (2013).



Fig. 26. Photographic observations: exterior house (2013).

I found myself, once again, experiencing a sense of visual jarring: this time, by the brute utilitarianism of the objects that punctured my home's exterior. I recognised that these devices delivered essential resources into my home, but I felt no affection for or connection to them.

I decided to use the afternoon's photographs as the basis for a series of drawings (Fig. 27–32). My husband had recently brought home two folders filled with now redundant town planning maps discarded by his local government employer. I felt an aesthetic affinity between the industrial forms of the essential service hardware and the diagraphical town planning maps.

These drawings were done carefully and slowly. At this stage of my research, I was concerned not to embellish my works unnecessarily. The goal was careful, precise

recording of the physical attributes of the objects. In this way, the drawings echo depersonalised maps, representing the landscape with precise attention to its scale, property boundaries, exploitable attributes, and associated regulatory overlays.

I drew each object from photographs twice before drafting it onto the map. This allowed me to familiarise myself with the object's dimensions, features, colour, and texture. I chose maps from areas of Warrnambool that I was familiar with, including the area in which my children attended school and day-care, as well as another map covering the area surrounding my home.

On reflection, I was grappling with the apparent aesthetic disconnect of these visual elements from their environments: the maps do little to evoke the lived landscapes they prescribe. Nor do the utilitarian objects evoke the flesh-felt comforts they enable.



Fig. 27. *Making Spaces #1: Warm Safe Home* (2013).



Fig. 28. *Making Spaces #2: Bathe* (2013).



Fig. 29. *Making Spaces #3: Whiter Whites* (2013).



Fig. 30. *Making Spaces #4: At Ease* (2013).



Fig. 31. *Making Spaces #5: Sense of Self* (2013).



Fig. 32. *Making Spaces #6: Clean Clear Kitchen* (2013).

In conjunction with their titles, these drawings were an attempt to fashion some kind of conduit between the subjective sense of domestic interiority and the material processes that enable it; spatial realms that I found difficult to connect. The title *Warm Safe House*, for instance, links the personal, embodied warmth of being at home with the depersonalised resources and infrastructure generating that experience: the utilitarian gas meter. The meter acts as the interchange between the innocuous domestic heater and the industrialised gas infrastructure. Otherwise, the meter is divorced aesthetically from the cosy interior space it co-produces.

Gaston Bachelard claims that when imagining the dialectics of inside space and outside space, our first tendency is to make the inside concrete and the outside vast.⁶⁸ However, Bachelard warns, these boundaries are not stable. Instead, like all categories, they are just a human value: “They are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides.”⁶⁹

Without offering a resolution to this instability, these drawings captured a disjuncture at the membrane of my house. This separation reflected the disjuncture I felt between the world and me. These drawings speak to my frustration at the visual dominance of mathematical space and my difficulty in making tangible the intimate, subjective space within it.

On the other hand, these drawings highlight how a sense of separation is formed between the environment and self. These drawings were, perhaps, my first visual

⁶⁸ Bachelard, *The Poetics*.

⁶⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics*, 218.

articulation of the problem of the partition of the sensible. A warm aesthetic, such as the one developed and described in the previous chapter, is easier to identify as an aesthetic. It is also easier to ascribe to the body. The colours of sunrise, the warmth of a fire, the feeling of flannelette against skin: all are invested hedonically, easing their association with the traditional eighteenth century conception of aesthetics which privileges the pleasurable.⁷⁰

The gas meter and the map also evoke their own aesthetic response. However, that response is not one that reflects the warmth of the body. Rather, it is one of utilitarian austerity, reflecting the rationalising processes of industrialisation and the scientific age. Yet crucially, these brute fissures connect my home, its interior and its shell, to the landscape. They are points of material continuum between my house and the ‘feeding network’ it depends upon.

Embedded Meaning



Fig. 33. *Making Spaces #7 Studies* (2013).

The disjuncture expressed through these drawings ruptured spontaneously in the seventh iteration. For this drawing, I returned my gaze to the interior of my house. I photographed my en suite basin and set about drafting it again; this time, with a third preliminary sketch. While drawing this image, I felt compelled to break with the restrained and precise technique I had used on the previous six drawings. With a quick gestural movement, I drew a wave breaching the edge of the basin.

⁷⁰ Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Taste, Food and the Limits of Pleasure”, in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman, *Aesthetic Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 127–142.



Fig. 34. *Making Spaces #7: Hand Wash* (2013).

I responded to the drawn wave with excitement. The image was a literal breakthrough that had displaced the restraint of my objective drawing process with an eruption of creative desire. For a second time, the symbolic form of water flowed from the intra-action of research site, artist's body, materials, processes, and logic.

I drafted the final image onto a planning map of my own neighbourhood, Warrnambool's Lady Bay area. The drawing's perspective is exaggerated, tilting the far edge of the basin up. Clear water runs vertically towards the drain from a sleek chrome tap. The terrain recorded on the map beneath appears to be sliding down the same drain. A stylised wave in blue acrylic wash and pencil pushes up from the basin, reaching out to the viewer from the drawing's foreground.

Sometime after the work's completion, I recognised distinctions embedded in the types of water I had drawn. The tap water is clear like the treated water that comes into my house by the mains water supply; the wave is coloured with the same hues that I would find near my home where the Southern Ocean crashes against sandstone cliffs.

Reflecting on this drawing indicated how meanings invested into different spaces enable different experiences. The colour difference in the two types of water distinguished the 'constructed' domestic home and the 'natural' environment. Each indicated a different relationship between the environment and me. Each relationship depended on how each space was demarcated. The sense of self relative to the domesticated water is enclosed by the four walls of home: it is ordinary, comfortable and familiar, tied to completing domestic chores, obligated to routine; it is predictable

and exists in mundane time. The sense of self relative to the crashing wave is expansive and surrounded by sky: it is idealised, elemental, full of potential and change, and connected to deep time.

Katya Mandoki says the aesthetic is concerned with subjectivity's openness to the world: the quality of our attachment or detachment to it, whether we are repelled towards or from the things we perceive.⁷¹ The aesthetic emerges through integration of our faculties. As Estelle Barrett explains, aesthetic experience arises from sensory response to an encounter that is then qualified with emotion, after which cognitive process inscribes the experience with meaning.⁷² Antonio Damasio tells us that feelings are somatic markers of our body's relationship to a given perception.⁷³ These somatic markers provide crucial information relative to our organism's most advantageous course of action: for instance, whether we should move towards or from the object of our perception.

Generally, our perceptions of spaces are built up over time. The feelings we generate towards a particular space are not a purely objective perception. Instead, they are coloured by what that space means for our body's position within it relative to previous experience, including learnt beliefs and potential future actions. Information about what is most beneficial to our organism extends beyond fight or flight responses of towards or away: we are receptive to myriad markers that provide the rich perceptual text from which to calibrate our body state within a given space.⁷⁴ Critically assessing our aesthetic responses to different environments can reveal the different meanings invested in them and the scales with which we value them.

The tap water and wave in *Making Spaces #7: Hand Wash* were clearly distinct. On one hand, this was another iteration of the disjuncture between the home's interior and the external landscape, recorded in earlier *Making Spaces* drawings. However, *Making Spaces #7: Hand Wash* implied more detail regarding the value-laden distinctions that inform our culture's organisation and demarcation of spaces. The clear water descending into the drain drew out ideas of clean and dirty spaces. Crossing the dark threshold of the drain reduced the stream's instrumental value, its utility via removal of raw pollution from the home contaminating it beyond use. The juxtaposition of the wave contrasted ideas of the natural against the domestic. However, it also suggested a rupture in their division. Visually linking the clear mains water to the

⁷¹ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

⁷² Barret, "Experiential Learning".

⁷³ Damasio, *The Feeling*.

⁷⁴ Damasio, "Interview".

ocean, wherein it would eventually flow, indicated water's passage through the home and the landscape. This depiction affirmed continuum between the interior space of the home and its geographical exterior.

The *Making Spaces* drawing series revealed the role of the aesthetic in generating disjuncture between spaces. Analysis of the aesthetics embodied in the water drawn in *Making Spaces #7: Hand Wash* indicated how such disjuncture could be critiqued and subverted.

Edge of the Trees and the House as a Meaningful Artefact in the Urban Landscape

I had spent the previous year, 2012, examining my relationship to the Australian landscape. In the process, my perception of the urban environment had changed irrevocably. It had become impossible not to see the urban environment as a concrete corset constraining the land beneath it. The vast majority of Australia's urban environment was built after the Second World War.⁷⁵ However, the homogeneity and inevitability of urban Australia's concrete paths and gutters—its roads, and right-angled structures—make it appear as permanent as it is immediate. I observed confluence between the town planning maps and the meaningful position of my house within this landscape.

Whiston Spirn explains that competing ideologies often determine how landscapes are formed. The tensions between these positions linger in the terrain and inform our experiences of them.⁷⁶ The contemporary Australian landscape is inscribed by the language of colonisation and Western economics, which together displaced the Indigenous cultures that preceded the Australian nation-state. Edward Relph explains that modern, technologically advanced societies “possess space by building and organise it mainly in terms of material objects and functions”.⁷⁷ For Aboriginal people, alternatively, “space is full of significance, and the landscape... is a record of the mythical history in which rocks and trees for us are experienced as ancestors and spirits by the aboriginals”.⁷⁸ New materialism works to reactivate awareness of the landscape's inherent material vibrancy. In contrast, the pre-existing Country of the first Australians

⁷⁵ Andrew Barnes (ed.), *Catalyst*, “The Anthropocene: A New Age of Humans”, November 15, 2016 (Australia: Australian Broadcasting Corporation).

⁷⁶ Whiston Spirn, *The Language*.

⁷⁷ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (place of publication: Pion Limited, 1976), 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* The amended version of this exegesis made reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I have chosen to remove reference to Torres Strait Islander people as upon reflection this sits outside the frame of my research and is not included in the original Edward Relph passage I quote

“is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness and a will toward life”.⁷⁹

Upon this politicised ground, the ordinariness of the house makes it almost invisible philosophically. Yet, as a primary nexus between the individual and the external world, the house operates as a totalising force upon the landscape itself.



Fig. 35. Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence, *Edge of the Trees* (1994).

Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence’s *Edge of the Trees* was instrumental in situating my home in relation to this contemporary Australian ground. Positioned in the Museum of Sydney forecourt, the work uses site-specific materials to activate the memory of the site. *Edge of the Trees* reconstructs a forest of sorts, using trees originally felled in the area at the time of European colonisation. Locks of hair, coloured pigments, and shell fish fill glass windows pressed into these timber poles. The names of the Sydney area’s twenty-nine Indigenous clans correspond to the work’s twenty-nine poles. The poles are inscribed with signatures from members of the First Fleet, as well as the names of local plant species in both Latin and Eora language.⁸⁰ The sound of Koori voices calling out the names of locales now lost to urban sprawl echo through the reimagined forest. The continued passage of the words into silence creates the sense of an ungraspable past lingering just beyond the air.



Fig. 36. Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence, *Edge of the Trees* (1994).

⁷⁹ Deborah Rose Bird, cited in Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 3.

⁸⁰ Museum of Sydney, “Exhibitions: Edge of the Trees”, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/exhibitions/edge-trees>.

Looking up towards the sky through *Edge of the Trees* contrasts it with the urban environment towering beside it. *Edge of the Trees* activates one's awareness of historical, cultural, and botanical lineages otherwise obscured by the site's contemporary form.

The Museum of Sydney stands on the former site of First Government House, the home and office of Australia's first nine governors.⁸¹ Anna MacDonald describes the everyday items preserved within the museum from that original house: "mundane objects like broken plates, china dolls, garden tools, medicine bottles, cutlery, pieces of fabric, buttons and spectacles... evidence of lived place".⁸² First Government House was the first permanent architecture built in the colony. It was a place from which to administer governance, as well as a place of meeting across cultures, gender, and class.⁸³ It was also a dwelling: a place where people slept, babies nursed, and linen was washed.

Edge of the Trees generates a crossing point or intersection by mapping the site's temporal lineages in three dimensions. It activates a field wherein the space as it was just prior to the erection of that first European house is almost knowable again. From this point of first contact, the terrain was seized, and built structures continued to multiply, affixing the coloniser's worldview to the land. Eventually, even First Government House would be lost beneath the built urban organism it seeded.⁸⁴ The contemporary urban landscape in which my home is situated is continuous with this project that purposefully shaped Australia's terrain.

The town planning maps I handled intimately through my *Making Spaces* drawing series were clearly implicated in this purposeful shaping of place. The maps demarcated zones as 'residential', 'business', 'industrial', 'rural', 'public', and 'special purpose'. Interacting with these were planning maps that charted overlays: 'heritage', 'inundation', 'development' or 'significant landscape'.

On the one hand a map is an image: it is a representation distinct from the territory it charts. On the other hand, a map mediates bodies, society, and the physical world. Barbara Bolt argues that images have a productive performativity: they record

⁸¹ Anna MacDonald, "Creating a Sense of Place: *Edge of the Trees* at the Museum of Sydney", *Melbourne Historical Journal* 27, no. 1 (1999).

⁸² *Ibid*, 72.

⁸³ MacDonald, "Creating". MacDonald explains that First Government House was a place of exchange across cultures, class, and gender in a footnote describing different relationships between Governor Phillip and three Aborigine men Bennelong, Coleby, and Arabanoo. She describes how 'dinner guests, regardless of rank, had to bring their own bread during periods of food shortage', and how a drawing room was added to the house at one stage as a place for women's conversation, 71-72.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

and prescribe, actively shaping the world and those that engage with the image in question.⁸⁵ The town planning maps were part of a systematic regulation of land which determined its occupation and use. Intrinsic to the nominalist worldview, maps are instruments through which a network of power is adhered to the landscape.

Landscapes, as Whiston Spirn explains, are not authored solely by their human inhabitants:

Mountains, gardens, and cities are shaped by volcanoes, and rain, plants and animals, human hands and minds... All living things share the same space, all make landscape, and all landscapes, wild or domesticated have coauthors, are all phenomena of nature and culture.⁸⁶

The multiple agencies of landscape act as assemblages in which vital materials enliven space and entangle with human and non-human bodies. Jane Bennett describes assemblages as living, throbbing confederations whose effects are generated as emergent properties.⁸⁷ Within this inquiry, I scrutinised the aesthetic network of meaning emergent from the assemblage comprising my house and the multi-layered landscape it is situated in.

Initially, the map on which I had drawn *Making Spaces #7: Hand Wash* was significant to me as it traced the landscape in which the primary research site of my home was situated: Warrnambool's Lady Bay foreshore area. The afternoon that I had left my home to photograph my neighbourhood, the homogeneity and immediacy of the built environment dominated my vision. Further examination, however, revealed deeper temporalities entangled in the materiality of the landscape construed beneath.

Layered within the ancient sandstone cliffs embracing Lady Bay are remnants of fire places and shell fish harvests confirming the six thousand year presence of Gundjimarra culture.⁸⁸ Further geological evidence indicates that this ecosystem nourished the Gundjimarra for more than 35,000 years, with recent findings suggesting human presence as far back as eighty thousand years.⁸⁹ The bay's geology reveals a landscape emergent from the ebbing and flowing of water: rising and sinking sea levels, fresh water and sediment from inland discharged via river mouths.⁹⁰ Colonial era

⁸⁵ Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*.

⁸⁶ Whiston Spirn, *The Language*, 17–18.

⁸⁷ Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*.

⁸⁸ Ian McNiven in *The Point Ritchie Story* (Warrnambool City Council), video, <http://www.moyjil.com.au/point-ritchie-story>.

⁸⁹ John Sherwood in *The Point Ritchie Story* (Warrnambool City Council), video, <http://www.moyjil.com.au/point-ritchie-story>.

⁹⁰ McNiven, *The Point Ritchie Story*; Derek Walter, "South West Victoria Geological History" (public lecture, South West TAFE, Great South Coast Leadership Group, February 12, 2016).

shipwrecks are embedded in this interstitial terrain, including one just meters from my house—a house built upon land ‘reclaimed’ from tidal sands just last century. Recorded in the map of the Lady Bay foreshore is the sharp line of the Warrnambool Breakwater. Built in the nineteenth century to protect the settlers’ prosperous harbour, the structure embodies the belief that natural forces could be controlled by engineering.⁹¹ Juxtaposed within the broader assemblage of this ancient and fluid landscape, the Breakwater is visually and culturally continuous with a built environment that stubbornly insists relationships in space can be fixed: that human subject can exert mastery over matter.

Observing the angular form of my house upon the standardised streetscape jarred my vision as my earlier domestic photographs had. The house’s mathematical dimensions made it seem a blunt, inert object sitting passively upon the landscape. The overwhelming urban ordinariness of the house made it seem discontinuous with the terrain activated by *Edge of the Trees*. However, deeper examination of the materiality of the house’s neighbourhood revealed the temporal and spatial continuity of the house with the politicised surrounds of *Edge of the Trees*.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following artwork: Strange, Ian. *Landed*, 2014. Installation, dimensions variable. Adelaide, 2014 Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. It can be viewed by visiting the following link:
<http://ianstrange.com/works/landed-2014/gallery/>

Fig. 37. Ian Strange, *Landed* (2014).

In *Landed* (2014) and *Shadow* (2015–16), New York-based Australian artist Ian Strange critiques the post-colonial suburban Australian landscape.⁹² Installed in front of the Art Gallery of South Australia, *Landed* was a life scale, architecturally accurate sculpture fabricating the appearance that a three bedroom weatherboard house had

⁹¹ Heritage Council Victoria, “Warrnambool Breakwater, Viaduct and Harbour”, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/1619>.

⁹² The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Screen Australia, and Screenwest, *Art Bites*, “Home: The Art of Ian Strange”, Series 1, Episode 5 (Australia, February 2017), <http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/art-bites-home-the-art-of-ian-strange/AC1525W005S00#playing>.

fallen from the sky and smashed through the gallery forecourt. Painted entirely black, the familiar innocuous form of the house took on an alien character. The later series *Shadow* underscored the incongruity of the modern house upon the Australian landscape. *Shadow* intervened directly in suburban streets, painting entire red brick homes black to obscure their individual features, reducing them so that “people see the image, and the icon... the totality of the home”.⁹³ My inquiry drew me to Strange’s work because his alien houses encapsulated how the meaning and effects of suburban terrains are diffused by everyday immersion in them.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following artwork: Strange, Ian. *One Hundred and Ten Watkins*, 2015–16. Archival digital print.

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. It can be viewed by visiting the following link: <http://ianstrange.com/works/shadow-2016/gallery/>

Fig. 38. Ian Strange, *One Hundred and Ten Watkins* (2015–16).

Our bodies respond to the materials and composition of installation works like *Edge of the Trees*, *Landed*, and *Shadow*. In the same way, the body responds to the materials and meanings embedded in the urban landscape. Even when we do not perceive the full histories of places, their effects remain meaningful through the relationships they adhere to land, and through our affective responses to their material forms.

The exterior of my house exists in easy continuum with the urban language of foot paths and gutters. This space has been mathematically processed and standardised, as evident in the town planning maps that demarcate it. This standardisation camouflages our homes, obscuring their self-centred interiors. Individual intimacy within our own dwellings disarms our sense of their collective significance. However, it is precisely this benign self-centredness replicated on a massive scale that makes our homes a totalising force upon the landscape.

⁹³ Ibid.

Entropy and Apathy, Making Spaces

I had expected that sensory immersion would be the primary basis for aesthetic continuity between body and environment. Increasingly, I found that physical action also connected them.

Months of domestic observations revealed the continual embodied movement required to renew and maintain my home. Constant cleaning, tidying, purchasing and restocking goods, disposing of waste materials and other actions were required to generate the stability and amenity of the home. Completed late in my year of domestic observations, *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy* (Fig. 39) captured these observations.

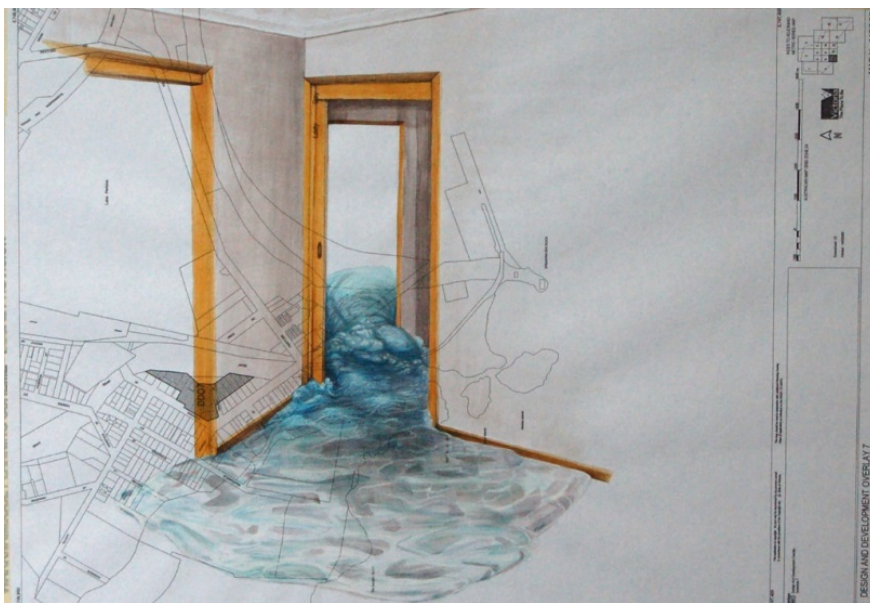


Fig. 39. *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy* (2013).

This final drawing in the *Making Spaces* series also uses a map of the Lady Bay foreshore. Sketched on it in acrylic wash and pencil are three doorways where the entry to my en suite and bedroom, and my kitchen meet the corner of my lounge room. Charging through the en suite door is a wild surging wave. The interplay between the angular doorways and the organic, gushing wave spoke not only of the demarcation between the natural and domestic. In addition, it referenced the interplay of natural and cultural space making practices.

By the time I made *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy*, water had developed deeper meaning within my inquiry. In this drawing, the perpetual motion of the surging wave represented the ever-moving forward motion of time. This depiction drew on observations of the nearby ocean, whose ebb and flow echoed the continual movement between order and disorder within my home. Like the concrete breakwater,

the built structure of the house represented figurative and literal attempts to fix order in place; to stave off the entropy that all systems of the universe are subject to.⁹⁴

Entropy is a measure of the disorder that accumulates in a closed physical system.⁹⁵ Disorder increases with the passage of time, ultimately causing the system to cease functioning. As biological organisms we are open systems that continually draw from our feeding networks to defer entropy.⁹⁶ Internal stability, or homeostasis, is generated through regulating flow and change within the human organism.⁹⁷ I found a confluence in the self-regulating processes that renew our organisms and the interplay of flow and change required to renew the interiors of our homes. I came to see this interplay as a foundational space making practice vital to the materiality our homes and our bodies.

Through my inquiry, I observed how aesthetics emerge from practices that manage entropy and renewal. This observation led me to the close examination of water and its role in cleaning practices discussed in the following chapter. In the context of the house and its relationship to the landscape, I was interested in how our perception of our embodied environment is construed through the practices we perform to maintain the home's stability.

The predictability of domestic goods and practices, and repeated contact with the same domestic interior create a sense of fixity.

Along with other commitments, my PhD obligations took me away from home for days and weeks at a time. Upon returning, I observed a sense of ease, as though time's forward motion slowed within my home. Routine and familiarity produced this feeling: the same morning alarm, walking the same circuit through the same daily tasks such as waking my children, ironing clothes, and preparing lunch boxes. In addition, household chores of cleaning and replenishing stores were repetitive rather than innovative: dishes, bathrooms, and clothes were washed in similar ways to restore materials to the same states. Like items were used to restock groceries to regular locations in fridges and cupboards. These actions varied slightly day to day but took place in the same predictable embodied landscape: day after day, geometrically similar memories stacking upon each other, creating a sense of spatial-temporal constancy that seemed to insulate the body from external change.

⁹⁴ Capra, *The Web*.

⁹⁵ Joanne Baker, *50 Physics Ideas You Really Need to Know* (London, England: Quercus Publishing, 2007).

⁹⁶ Capra, *The Web*.

⁹⁷ Capra, *The Web*.

Paradoxically, I found that the effects and processes of maintaining the stable fixity of one's home also create an anaesthetisation of one's senses.

Habituation lulls our senses into the nominal worldview, wherein things are interpreted in terms of existing meaning and engaged primarily for utility. John Dewey's critique of 'recognition' demonstrates how the nominal world view stifles perception. With recognition, Dewey argues, we draw on pre-existing schema as the cue for bare identification.⁹⁸ Rather than developing a full perception in which vivid consciousness of the thing is aroused, our perception "is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose".⁹⁹ Ross Gibson's description clarifies how the nominal worldview flattens our perception of reality:

[The nominal worldview] ... where reality is presumed to be composed of a set of permanently pre-defined objects filed in designated places along a great chain of being... With a nominalist approach... the setting down of the written language... presupposes an inert and massy kind of world, a world that is solid if not stolid. A world that is mostly inanimate. A world of objects with no breath. A world stoked with dead dumb objects available to subjects.¹⁰⁰

The familiarity of urban and domestic spaces along with the predictability of daily routine often foreclose the possibility of arousing the vivid consciousness Dewey describes. Ian Strange asserts that his objective for intervening in our ordinary perception of Australian suburbia is to provoke us to question its long-established structures.¹⁰¹ Strange is attempting to arouse us to the meaning that is active yet overlooked due to our daily immersion in its ordinariness: a meaning that is also obscured by the sheer repetitive effort required to simply maintain domestic stasis.

Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy distilled a visual language describing the house as a figurative and literal device that fixed a relation between embodied subject and environment. On the one hand, the angular, standardising language of the built form describes utilitarian shaping of a landscape in which the world appears as a dead dumb object that is available for human use. On the other hand, the colour of the house's timber door frames evokes the transient warmth generated as we continually attend to and mend the spaces around us. These shifts in the aesthetics of our everyday

⁹⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

⁹⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Ross Gibson, *26 Views of the Starburst World* (Crawley, WA: The University of Western Australia, 2012), 112–113.

¹⁰¹ The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Screen Australia, and Screenwest, *Art Bites*.

environment prompt our subjectivities to extend towards or retract away from the spaces we encounter. In the habits of daily perception, these responses become routine.

Conclusion

Examining the home as a metaphor for the body revealed that aesthetics can both enable and foreclose perception of continuity across spaces and materials. The aesthetic is agnostic. It emerges in the intra-actions of bodies, materials, and contextually specific spatial arrangements. Aesthetic characteristics are specific to and convey information about the assemblages they emerge from. Critically assessing one's aesthetic affinity or aversion to a given space can reveal power relations and values invested therein. Overt aesthetic contrast, such as the qualitative distinction between clean mains water and water flowing through sewerage pipe, can affirm material disjuncture. Conversely, careful aesthetic consideration can tease out intrinsic or underlying affinities between seemingly disparate forms: the cold grey gas meter and warm air blown from a heater, or a hand basin and the swirling blue ocean.

The practice of making and responding to artworks described in this chapter transformed my understanding of the built structure of the house. Through critiquing habitual perception, I recognised that rather than being an innocuous, inert form, the house was a material inscription on the spatial-temporal landscape. It is held in place by, and conversely holds in place, patterns of movement and meaning made by bodies, resources, and culture. Urban spaces and streetscapes are aesthetic and are layered with meaning that informs our experience within them. Everyday immersion in their standardised features and routines can obscure awareness of this significance and reify the partition of the sensible.

Within this research, the house became a conceptual framework for imagining the complex processes through which subjectivity and environment entwine. Scrutinising these processes, through the lens of the home, revealed similarity in the way resources are drawn from the landscape to furnish and regulate the interior spaces of both home and body. This flow of resources to, from, and through body and home can be seen as an ecosystem. Ecosystems coalesce through organised exchange across naturally occurring and human systems. These systems of exchange are material and inscribe the landscape with patterns of movement, production, and consumption. The house is an interface through which resources drawn from the environment are organised around the self-interests of its occupants. In this way, the house as it exists in urban sprawl can be seen as a material agent contributing to the purposeful shaping of the landscape beyond its property boundary. Overtime, I would come to see the home

not just as a metaphor for the body but as an actant intra-acting within the assemblage of body and world.

Examining the ordinary practices attached to this flow of resources revealed regulation of entropy as its primary drive. This finding led me to conclude that regulating entropy through transiently creating order is a fundamental activity, generating spatial relationships that transiently adhere organisms to their material environments. This responsive process is contingent on embodied evaluation of the everyday aesthetics of one's ordinary world. In the following chapter, I interrogate this space-making practice by examining the flow of water through the domestic space. This provides a case study into the emergence of the aesthetic from the intra-actions of materials, spaces, cultural practices, and embodiment.

Chapter 3: The Emergence of Water

Introduction

The theme of water emerged within my studio inquiry as I examined my body's intersection with my home. The word theme accounts for the way that whilst its outward expression in art forms varied, a continuity of meaning and sensuousness ran through this concept of water: an embodied aesthetic expressed as a theme within my studio research. In describing my initial approach to these domestic observations in Chapter 1, I explained the importance of allowing aesthetic languages and themes to arise through interactions between materials, body, and world in ways specific to this intersection. I hypothesised that this approach would allow my research to progress through reciprocal exchange, wherein the agency of other materials, spaces, and contexts would drive the process, along with my own creativity. In this chapter, I discuss six artworks that generated a productive dialogue with the medium of water. I have named this chapter "The Emergence of Water" in order to give voice to the vital materialist experience of water as something bigger than this practice: something unruly and unpredictable that pushed itself into my inquiry and demanded to be heard. The six artworks include three small sculptural studies, two drawings, and a public installation exhibited at The Artery Warrnambool.

John Dewey criticises the compartmental conception that sets fine art apart from the realm of everyday life. Dewey argues that this segregation affects the processes of living by producing an artificial, yet naturalised, disjuncture between ordinary life and aesthetic experience.¹⁰² Yuriko Saito contends that everyday life is fertile with aesthetic encounters that often go unremarked. Our reactions to such encounters, Saito asserts, often prompt us towards certain courses of action.¹⁰³ During my domestic observations, I had aesthetic reactions to particular aspects of my domestic space. These aesthetic reactions prompted particular actions: making artworks, honing my observations, or seeking out work by other artists. Incorporating creative practice into my interrogation of my everyday world gradually allowed me to permeate the partition of the sensible that is at the heart of Dewey's critique.

Water first emerged as a symbolic form in my inquiry in the early artworks *Ocean Basket* and *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin*. The vivid excitement generated through creating the wave forms in both of these artworks encouraged me to pursue this theme further. I begin this chapter by discussing a series of small sculptures I created, as

¹⁰² Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

¹⁰³ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

well as the two water-themed drawings introduced in the previous chapter. Combined with my visual diary-led domestic observations, these artworks led me to examine the role of water in cleaning and renewing both the body and the interior of the home.

Observations by artist Marily Cintra transformed my scrutiny of the flow of water through my home. Through this change in my perception, I came to recognise how natural resources are appropriated for human use in ways that obscure their relationship to the natural systems that govern them. Through continued practice-led research, I came to see this appropriation as an artificial disjuncture generated, at least in part, by the processes of habituation and space making that produce aesthetically encoded subjective worlds.

In addition to the theme of water, this body of artwork is characterised by being built upon or around utilitarian objects. This approach allowed for an exploration of these objects as more than the contained parameters of their visual surfaces. In describing practices of situated listening, Noorie Neumark uses the concept of “over-hearing”, wherein additional noise, frequencies, or voices overlap with the focal object of listening.¹⁰⁴ In photographing my domestic interior, my attention frequently fixed on the extraneous temporal and spatial realities entwined in the discrete objects in my home. While I marvelled at these insinuated genealogies, a tangible grasp upon them evaded my studio processes. In this body of research, narrowing my focus to a given object and using water as a thematic device more deliberately produced a shape and contour to that which might be ‘overheard’. With repeated iterations, this process wore a path through which to plot and critique the intertwining of subject and environment, as well as a means to trace the materiality of ordinary space as more than inert, dumb matter.

This line of inquiry led to a shift in the scale of my artwork through the installation *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014). This more complex three-dimensional and multi-medium artwork enabled me to formulate critical observations concerning the confluence of cultural beliefs, cleaning practices and water sources used to mediate entropy and renewal in everyday life. This artwork was crucial in establishing the aesthetic as a marker of embodied continuum that extends historically as much as it does physically. Dewey argues that the aesthetic is denoted by the interwoven unity of its constituent parts.¹⁰⁵ Examining embodied and waterborne cleaning practices enabled

¹⁰⁴ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

me to scrutinise the constitute parts integrated in the sensibility of cleanliness. In turn, this inquiry revealed a complex aesthetic overlapping of body and environment.

This relationship between water, aesthetics, and renewal also informed the selection of the first three field research sites discussed in this exegesis: Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* (1935), Piplotti Rist's *You Renew You* (2004), and Shinro Ohtake's *Naoshima Bath* (2009). Detailed examination of these sites, relative to the themes developed through the practice-led interrogation of the medium of water, concludes this chapter.

Studying Domestic Water

The *Cloud Bottles* series (2013) (Fig. 40 and 41) is a collection of cast and actual three litre milk bottles with cloud formations protruding from them. At first, modelling cloud formations simply allowed me to haptically channel carnal knowledge that accumulated within my inquiry. Nurturing this thematic thread aided in developing the aesthetic language of water. Clouds are not water in its liquid form, nor is milk water in its pure form. Even so, I felt *Cloud Bottles* were continuous with the delinquent forms that emerged in the artworks *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin* and *Ocean Basket* (Fig. 42).



Fig. 40. *Cloud Bottle Series* (2013).

I experimented with a number of approaches to making the *Cloud Bottles*, including building cloud shapes directly onto spent milk bottles using paper, tape, plaster, and acrylic paint.



Fig. 41. *Cloud Bottle Series* (2013).



Fig. 42. *Ocean Basket* (2013); *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin* (2013).

One day we'll all be Water (2013) (Fig. 44) was a plastic spray bottle with a sculptural wave wrapped around its base. *Ocean Pot* (2013) (Fig. 43) was a cooking pot containing a fleshy sculptural water form that 'leaked' through a split on the pot's side and extended out to form a wave and a series of clouds. These artworks followed from *Cloud Bottles*. I used the same combination of materials to build the sculptural forms, adding a wire armature to support the forms extruding from *Ocean Pot*. The purpose of these sculptural studies was to develop an aesthetic language to be used in my studio inquiry.



Fig. 43. *Ocean Pot* (2013).



Fig. 44. *One day we'll all be Water* (2013).

Each object on which the artworks were based centred on the human body in both design and purpose. Each object's period of utility had expired: the milk bottles were empty, the spray bottle broke on its first use, and the second-hand pot was split. These containers were nexuses for disparate materials, spaces, processes, and interactions. They could be seen as points within complex assemblages. Climatic conditions, photosynthesis, bovine metabolism, industrial farming practices, and global milk prices intersected with the familial interactions of my morning routine via the milk bottle. A multitude of other spaces were drawn into the pot via the food, gas, electricity, and water expended through the many meals cooked within it. The spray bottle emerged from the global supply chain that stocks Western bargain shops with cheaply made goods. It briefly held homemade cleaning solution and ideals about cleanliness.

As utilitarian objects, these genealogies generally dissolved into the background of daily life: it is the coffee, the meal, and the clean bench tops that are savoured, rather than the phenomenological lineages of the milk bottle, pot, or spray bottle. This disconnect affirms a partition of the sensible through which the materiality of the object is reduced to inert matter, its value determined only by its usefulness to the human subject. I observed this process replicated in spaces within my home: resources drawn from the exterior world into spaces constructed around the needs of the body. Marked

out by its dependence on water, the shower became a site through which to critique this observation further.

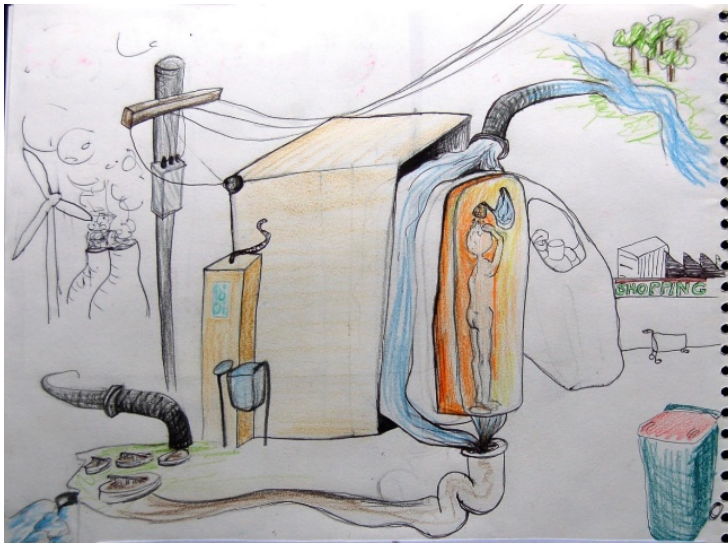


Fig. 45. Extract from visual diary: shower nexus map (2013).

I illustrated the shower's interfolding of multiple spaces in a journal drawing and created a photo collage of its interior (Fig. 45 and 46). I considered the intimacy of showering: the singular attentiveness to the naked self in the flow of warm water within the sheltered interior of the cubicle. Encasing this subjective intimacy was a nexus of what Jane Bennett would call "acants". Bennett uses this term to describe sources of action that encompass human and non-human agency:¹⁰⁶ for example, water from an unseen ecosystem soaking the body briefly before flowing to the sewerage treatment plant and onto eventual dispersal in the ocean;¹⁰⁷ the power grid, the gas mains, the hot water service, the manufacture and retail of personal detergents and their associated disposal through waste water and garbage collection. Despite the private enclosure felt while showering, the space itself proved utterly permeated by spaces external to it.

Artist Marily Cintra was an important influence on my conceptualisation of water as a means to imagine the home's intermingling with the landscape. I encountered Cintra's work in a series featuring Indigenous rainmakers and a video of a participatory performance in the *Talking Water* (2013) group exhibition at CraftACT.¹⁰⁸ The works were artefacts from Cintra's 2012 residency, when she lived close to the Gudgenby River in Namadgi National Park. Cintra's residency built on her previous practice,

¹⁰⁶ Bennet, *Vibrant Water*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Utility Journalist, "Warrnambool's multi-million dollar sewage treatment plant upgrade", *Utility Magazine*, March 22, 2017, <https://utilitymagazine.com.au/warrnambools-new-multi-million-dollar-sewage-treatment-plant/>; Wannon Water, "Water sources & supply systems", accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.wannonwater.com.au/about-water/water-supply/water-sources-supply-systems.aspx>.

¹⁰⁸ CraftACT, *Marily Cintra. arts-in-residence 2013 Talking Water*, Canberra, ACT: CraftACT, Craft + Design Centre Gallery, 2013.

through which she had cultivated a special relationship with the Gudgenby and Murrumbidgee Rivers.¹⁰⁹ Cintra argues that, in spite of the fundamental role water plays in mankind's physical and cultural sustenance, we have collectively grown distant from its sources.¹¹⁰ Cintra used her *Talking Water* residency to critique the Gudgenby's domestication from its original "wild and free" state.¹¹¹ Her catalogue statement poses the question: "do we realise that when we open a tap in Canberra we are diverting the river into our homes?"¹¹²

Cintra's statement of the Murrumbidgee's domestication, taken from an earlier exhibition, provides an allegory for all rivers that have been appropriated for human use: "The Murrumbidgee River serpentine through the dry land, often only a small trickle on its sandy bed, other times a raging torrent that sweeps clean everything in its path. The river diverts with painful generosity to dams, home showers, dishwashers and suburban gardens."¹¹³

I began to see the stylised iterations of water emerging in my studio inquiry as representative of the river diverted through my home. This recognition built on the aesthetic disjuncture between the two types of water illustrated in *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin*, described in Chapter 2. This disjuncture, I will argue, was telling of a disjuncture within subjectivity. Close examination of my domestic shower enabled me to critique the embodied aesthetic experience of this disjuncture.

Shower Diary

Generally speaking, showers are architecturally modest: fixtures, tiles and screens differ in aesthetic appeal, but the structure remains a small, enclosed waterproof box through which clean, treated and heated water enters via a shower head and exits through a drain in the floor. The shower's primary function is to clean the human body. Invented in the 1920s, the free-standing shower stall was at first a design luxury.¹¹⁴ It became a permanent fixture in ordinary Western homes only after the second World War. However, the shower is now so embedded in everyday life that its necessity appears natural.¹¹⁵ While the shower appears as one of the most utilitarian spaces in the house, it is rarely just for utilitarian reasons that we shower.

¹⁰⁹ CraftACT, *Marilyn Cintra*.

¹¹⁰ Marilyn Cintra, "Message in a Bottle/Garrafa de Naufrago", accessed November 21, 2013, <http://www.ecologyarthouse.com.au/>.

¹¹¹ CraftACT, *Marilyn Cintra*.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 21.

¹¹³ Cintra, "Message".

¹¹⁴ Peter Timms, *Private Lives: Australians at Home Since Federation* (Carlton, VIC: Miegunyah Press, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Katherine Ashenburg, *The Dirt on Clean* (New York: North Point Press, 2007); Timms, *Private Lives*.

Speaking informally to friends and family indicated that psychological and aesthetic dimensions were fundamental aspects of showering: for example, using a morning shower to wake up, to ‘wash away’ an unpleasant experience, or to designate a line between one’s work day and home life. I discussed with my research supervisors the possibility of undertaking qualitative research into the shower practices of multiple participants. Ultimately, I concluded that the required ethics and research design might stall and detract from my practice-led methodology. Instead, I kept my own shower diary from May 23 to June 20, 2013.

My initial interest in this topic had emerged several months earlier while cleaning the shower in my home. It occurred to me that examining the shower might provide an insight into the generation of interior space—an insight that might also speak to the formation of subjectivity. My photo collage attempted to capture this creation of interiority. However, the results lacked the depth I sought.



Fig. 46. Extract from visual diary: shower’s interior (2013).

Changing tact, I used questions about installation practice to structure my approach to diarising. Through this process, showering created a means to imagine the materiality of space making. This conceptualisation then informed my installation practice and, ultimately, my understanding of how space making practices demarcate subjectivity.

Reviewing my shower diary indicates that showering was primarily a pleasant experience for me, one that brought comfort and created transformation. I showered for

three main reasons: occasionally for genuine necessity due to being dirty, sometimes to take a mental break and invigorate myself, but predominantly to maintain daily routine, whether I was especially dirty or not. Essential material qualities underwrote my typical experience of showering: the temperature, texture, pressure and speed of the water; the water's continuous downward motion, which created a sense of 'washing away my day'; dirt, dead skin cells and other bodily refuse leaving my body space via the drain. At its optimum, immersing my body in this stream—along with the privacy I felt in the bathroom—would allow my muscles, breathing and thoughts to relax.

The enclosed privacy of the space was instrumental to my inquiry. As noted by Kyro Selket, the effect of doors in segregating public and private worlds is powerful in organising perception.¹¹⁶ In my shower, I was beyond the threshold of the outside world. The closed bathroom door shielded me from my family, and the shower screen framed my awareness closely around my body.

Showering embodied the hallmarks of Dewey's aesthetic experience, defined as an integration of multiple and varied parts made cohesive through a unity of doing and undergoing.¹¹⁷ Body, shower, and the sensibility of becoming clean intra-act, generating the pervading unity of the experience as a transient space that extends subjectivity while localising it closely around its own specificity.

The shower became metaphoric of subjective interiority. Its seclusion from other spaces and the enclosed sensory immersion drew my focus inwards. As I washed, my focus drifted from physical actions as I mentally sorted the day's interactions, new ideas and future strategies. This shift in my mindset reflected the philosophical differences between objective and subjective senses. Sight and hearing, explains Carolyn Korsmeyer, are considered objective senses: the distance between the object of perception and the sensory organ draws attention away from the body and towards the object.¹¹⁸ Taste and smell anchor perception in the subjective body. Touch straddles objective and subjective domains, as it contributes "to the cognition of the exterior object" while being a source of aesthetic pleasure that draws one's awareness into the body.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Kyro Selket, "Bring Home the Dead: Purity and Filth in Contemporary Funeral Homes" in *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*, ed. Rosie Cox and Ben Campkin (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.), 49–59.

¹¹⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

¹¹⁸ Korsmeyer, "Taste".

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 130.

Proximity of the water's white noise to the ears and the shower screen to the eyes reduced my perceptual field. Steam, heat, soap scents, and scrubbing occupied the haptic and olfactory senses. The shower space localised sensory attention in the body and issued no sensory prompt to consider the painful generosity of the river diverted through the shower head.

This description indicates why we attend to our subjective concerns more readily when we are in our domestic spaces. Like the milk bottle and the shower, the home is designed to fit around the body. It adheres to us, it focuses us inward and towards the activity it enables, rather than to the source of the resources we use.

Regulating Entropy and Transience through Housekeeping

As discussed in Chapter 2, I observed the instrumentality of water in cleaning home and body while the fluidity of water symbolised the change driving the need for such renewal. *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin* plotted the demarcation of spaces that is enabled by water's mutability. *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy* contrasted the raw forces of natural systems against human practices seeking fixity.

Yuriko Saito reasons that all material existence is subject to impermanence.¹²⁰ From the most perishable foods to the most durable steel, everything wears down, runs out or changes form with the passage of time. Our collective awareness of this transience drives us to reckon with the meaning of our existence:

It is the starting point of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. It is the premise of Western philosophy and religious traditions, giving rise to human yearning for some thing or some sphere that is permanent and unchanging, such as the Platonic world of forms and the Judeo-Christian afterlife.¹²¹

In our mundane lives, we recognise this transience as material forms pass their optimal state and decline into states of "mess, disorder, filth, and agedness".¹²² Saito argues that we seek to erase or counteract these effects by cleaning, tidying, and repairing: core activities in what traditionally has been called home making. In these ways, we obscure and delay the appearance of decay and change.

Like the perpetual movement of the wave in *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy*, the continuous accumulation of entropy is the material process driving the impermanence Saito describes. Transience prompts us to make meaning and to generate the stability of our interior worlds. With its physical solidity and routines of habituation,

¹²⁰ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 149.

¹²² *Ibid*.

the house resists the fluidity of transience and fulfils that “human yearning for some thing or some sphere that is permanent and unchanging”.¹²³



Fig. 47. *Making Spaces #8: Entropy and Apathy* (2013).

In Chapter 2, I identified interplay between entropy and renewal, or conversely transience and routine, as integral drivers in generating aesthetic continuity between body and environment. These dynamics continually attend to and mend the spaces around us we weave ourselves into the world. These practices are affectively meaningful. However, our sense of this significance is disarmed through the predictability of routine: reoccurring domestic objects and surfaces lose phenomenological depth and become predictable signifiers in the chain of habituation.

The economy and routine of perception, explains Katya Mandoki, creates a quasi-automatic recognition of objects in which they are decoded according to the context in which they appear.¹²⁴ Our reactions to objects may be primarily aesthetic, as Saito contends. Nonetheless, our perception tunes to each object’s utility to our given interaction, not to the object’s intrinsic reality. When we feel the immediate warmth of water against our skin, habitual perception recognises its source as the showerhead, not the river depicted in Cintra’s work.

Hand Basin Sound Space

The processes described in this chapter depict a listening with one’s whole body in order to sense and assess affect generated between self and space. This situated listening entailed slow, spiralling observation of ordinary practices. It was extended and supplemented through art making and contextual reading. Critical reflection on the emergence of water through these processes indicated a complex interplay of beliefs, values, practices, and materials camouflaged in the aesthetic fabric of everyday life. I

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

became confident that I had generated carnal knowledge that could be transmitted aesthetically through artwork. A methodological shift to creating larger scale public artworks enabled me to enact this transaction. The first of these was *Hand Basin Sound Space* (Fig. 48–51). This multi-artform installation embodied deeper scrutiny of the tip of an assemblage which was revealed when the intra-action of water, cleaning, home, and body disrupted my habitual perception. Reading about the history of Western cleaning practices informed this breakthrough.



Fig. 48. *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014).

While confined to post-surgery bed-rest, I read Katherine Ashenburg’s account of the cultural construction of Western cleanliness: *The Dirt on Clean*. In spite of its seamless intertwining in our contemporary lives, the daily use of water in our personal and domestic hygiene practices is a relatively recent cultural modification. Sixteenth century Christian Europe was decidedly averse to immersion in water: instead, it was believed that clean fabric would extract dirt from one’s body.¹²⁵ Only in the nineteenth century were Western hygiene practices reinvented to incorporate clean water and soap. Health and hygiene manuals drove this cultural change.¹²⁶ Emanating from a predominantly Christian middle-class, these manuals invariably conflated cleanliness with morality.

Lying in bed reading Ashenburg’s account heightened my bodily awareness. Recuperating from surgery had inhibited me from showering for three days. I had transgressed a social line. As William M Handy advised his early twentieth century readers in *The Science of Culture*, “without a daily bath ‘no one can be really clean, nor either feel or express Culture’”.¹²⁷ In Handy’s instructions, I recognized a tone that

¹²⁵ Ashenburg, *The Dirt*.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 248.

echoed the way my mother had disciplined me. In contrast to the refreshed transformation recorded in my shower diary, my subjectivity here felt dulled and dank. Cultural norms written in dead skin cells became a meaningful sensuousness.

Mandoki argues that when the significance of an object or encounter exceeds the symbolic form of its known meaning, it transcends semiotic recognition and is experienced via aesthesis. The object or encounter is uncovered from the quasi-automatic processes of habitual perception, Mandoki contends. Its sensory detail, now perceived more acutely, enables discovery of the unexpected.¹²⁸ Scrutinising the embodied dirtiness of my unwashed body broke the continuum of habitual perception and revealed an aesthetic sensibility of cleanliness activated by water: like a finger tracing instruction marks impressed on my body.

Examining the entanglement of water in cleaning practices revealed the aesthetic appropriation of the diverted river. Cintra argues that “fresh water is about fertility, cleansing, and healing”.¹²⁹ The meaning water takes on as it is turned inward to service our subjectivities builds on these inherent qualities. With the river flowing through my house, I wash and hydrate my body and cleanse my domestic space. At the same time, I activate aesthetic sensibilities continuous with my intergenerational heritage. In these waterborne practices, I recognised the interplay of entropy and renewal earlier identified as key drivers in domestic space making. More than that, the discovery was in what was overheard while listening to my body’s interaction with water. That cultural beliefs could be suspended in water and activated as water touched my skin meant water as a materiality was not inert.

Like the other sculptural artworks discussed in this chapter, *Hand Basin Sound Space* began with a defunct domestic object. I acquired the basin in our main bathroom after it became corroded by rust and was replaced (Fig. 49).

I wanted to convey the multi-dimensionality of water’s materiality, which I had come to perceive through my practice-led research. I could imagine the basin suspended in a mirrored cube, ethereally elevating the rusted object to honor the essence of its original utility.

Using the dimensions of the bathroom bench as a guide, I built a timber frame and had mirror cut to clad it. I replaced the original taps with chrome ones similar to those recorded in the drawing of its twin en suite basin in *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin*. ‘Flowing’ from the tap, and embracing the back edge of the basin, were watery

¹²⁸ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹²⁹ Cintra, “Message”.

plaster forms, which I painted silvery green-orange-grey to evoke the dreamlike sense of history and sensibility aesthetically suspended in the water.



Fig. 49. *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014).

I felt strongly about introducing dynamism and multi-dimensionality to the physicality of the work. I did this through incorporating a multi-channel soundscape. I began with a spoken word piece that reflected on self-care and renewal. I then combined acoustic guitar, the sounds of teeth brushing, hand washing, and a crashing ocean wave. I incorporated two sets of speakers into the installation, allowing me to play spatially with the two tracks (Fig. 50). The first set of speakers was mounted within the drain and inside the plaster form embracing the basin. These speakers played the bathroom samples, spoken word, and guitar. The second track incorporated the ocean wave and guitar. It played from speakers positioned in either corner of the gallery space.



Fig. 50. *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014).

Using sound in this way was an important breakthrough in my inquiry. The interplay between the speaker's proximity, varying volumes, and audio content filled the space while enabling it to expand and contract. I found that this approach activated the sculptural work by engaging one's aural perception in the shifting acoustic depth.

Through critiquing the installation, I identified the spoken word and guitar as too literal and theatrical. Instead, I found that the familiar bathroom sounds—the teeth brushing, hand-washing, and tap running—evoked self-care associations more intuitively. So many times, I had heard the shower, washing machine, kitchen sink, and bathroom basin resonate with the sounds of cleaning and renewal that enabled historical

sensibilities to be inscribed anew in skin and space. In this way, sound provided an aesthetic language that made tangible the aesthetic entwining of body and space.

Neumark borrows from Anna Gibb to describe transmission of affect through mimetic communication: “‘affect contagion’ through mimesis attends to all the senses, modes, and movements involved... in a way that resonates with voice and its vitality”.¹³⁰ The transmission of affect across corporealities, including human and nonhuman, “provoke mimetic responses in us”.¹³¹ Neumark is particularly focused on the voice in her discussion of attunement and mimetic contagion. My focus is how ordinary aesthetics embedded in the fabric of our everyday attune us to complex assemblages of material beliefs and practices: for instance, how interaction with the medium of water through cleaning attunes one to cultural norms originating in bodies and spaces long since subsumed in history’s past.

In lived reality, explains Paul Crowther, significant moments unfold within a mutually dependent continuum. The work of art, he argues, provides us with “a symbolic expression of experiential completeness” through which these episodes can be encountered independent of this embodied chronology.¹³² A qualitative transformation occurs through the making of the artwork in its given medium, enabling the experience to exist in a new way. In this way, the work becomes an extension of the original experience while being physically distinct from it. It becomes, according to Crowther, a sharable source for aesthetic ideas, in which the artist’s concerns are “negotiated in allusive rather than explicit terms”.¹³³

I saw *Hand Basin Sound Space* as a way to extend and extract this peculiar overhearing of the enchantment of water and flesh by seemingly invisible material forces. That the artwork can operate, as Crowther insists, as a sharable source of aesthetic ideas depends on the “affect contagion” outlined by Neumark.¹³⁴ It is this aesthetic transfer, be it between sound and ear or water and skin, that meaningfully adheres a person to their surrounding space. As my critical examination of cleaning practices revealed, it is not just special aesthetic experience that mimic affects familiar to our bodies. Seemingly mundane, brute, and utilitarian interactions also evoke embodied sentiments.

¹³⁰ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 6.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Crowther, “The Aesthetic”, 39.

¹³³ Crowther, “The Aesthetic”, 41.

¹³⁴ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 6.



Fig. 51. *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014).

Observing domestic space making and the cultural construction of cleanliness in the context of my unclean body emphasized the centrality of entropy and renewal in these practices.

Saito explains that our negative perceptions of filth, decay, and mess draw on utilitarian reasoning: “Dirty dishes, bathrooms, and clothes harm us because of their unhygienic conditions. A disorganized room... makes finding things and accomplishing various tasks more difficult...”.¹³⁵

We perceive the disorder of the body and of spaces within the home as a meaningful sensuousness that indicates the transience of an optimal state. This evaluation is embodied and often generates an urge to remediate these conditions. As Saito argues, however, these aesthetic evaluations and reactions often go unremarked.¹³⁶

I found similarity in the way the aesthetic dimension of utilitarian activities was overlooked, as well as in the division between art and the everyday. With this similarity in mind, I selected field research sites in which embodied participation in ordinary activity was augmented by aesthetic design: *You Renew You*, *Naoshima Bath*, and *Fallingwater*. Each site was set, respectively, within a toilet, a bathhouse, and a home.

¹³⁵ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 159.

¹³⁶ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

You Renew You

In cladding the sculptural form in *Hand Basin Sound Space* with mirror, I drew on its self-centring connotations: that is, the concentration of attention and natural resources into the subjective space of the self. I found this same inward focus both scrutinised and celebrated by *You Renew You*. The work is made in pairs installed in the male and female toilets at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, on the Western edge of Japan (Fig. 52). Music and the sound of Pipilotti Rist singing with birds filled the bathroom. Recessed into the wall opposite the toilet was an altar. Three clear quartz crystals are at the front of the space, while a mirror sits against the wall. In between, a circular acrylic screen plays a hyper-colour video with human stool, close-ups of cells, and Japanese and English words giving thanks to “hair, slime”, and “skin scales”. *You Renew You* connects conversion of food to cells, excretion of waste, and our cleansing rituals with the bathroom space.¹³⁷ It celebrates our organism’s self-renewal and ritualises our body’s dance with entropy and regeneration.

My field research itinerary provided examples of how aesthetics could be manipulated to produce embodied experiences connecting body and space. As captured through my drawing *Making Spaces #7: Hand Basin*, I found that the values inscribed into spaces influenced the experiences generated within them.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following artwork: Rist, Pipilotti. *You Renew You*, 2004. Installation, H30 x W30 x D30 cm. Kanazawa, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (21CMCA).

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. It can be viewed by visiting the following link:

http://jmapps.ne.jp/kanazawa21_2/det.html?data_id=154

Fig. 52. Pipilotti Rist, *You Renew You* (2004).

Time spent scrutinising my domestic bathroom, as well as observations of public restrooms during my travels, informed my examination of *You Renew You*. Like the

¹³⁷ 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, “Collection: Permanent Exhibits: *You Renew You*”, accessed March 21, 2014, https://www.kanazawa21.jp/data_list.php?g=30&d=9&lng=e.

shower space, the public bathroom provides a door between the outside world and our bodies. Within is a refuge in which to relieve bladder and bowels, wash hands, and examine ourselves in the mirror. Restrooms, especially public ones, prompt us to restrict our movements to control contamination: we limit the amount and body parts with which we touch surfaces, while the smell accumulated from others further heightens the instinct to restrict contact. This dynamic is not unlike the bodily control we exercise in churches or art galleries. In those spaces, however, it is the sacredness of the space that we wish to spare from the contamination of our bodies.

The West traditionally relegates the sacred to churches: the furore raised by Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* demonstrated the disjuncture between our cultural ideas of the most revered and the gross materiality of our brute bodies.¹³⁸ This denial of the body is deeply rooted in Western thought. The religiosity of early European Christians saw them utterly dismiss bodily cleanliness, privileging instead the purity of their souls.¹³⁹ This approach reflects the hierarchical binarisation in traditional Western thought, which has elevated mind, culture, and spirit above the body, nature, and matter.¹⁴⁰

Dewey argues that the privileging of the fine arts above everyday life was part of a systematic disavowal of the increasingly exploited material world. He contends that the same conditions that create the gulf between “producer and consumer in modern society operate to also create a chasm between ordinary and aesthetic experience”.¹⁴¹ When engaged via their utilitarian value, things in the world become dead, dumb objects: we overlook their aesthetic dimension, engaging with them in terms of bare identification. Instead, our attention is occupied by the activity these objects enable.

Clean water is a utilitarian material supplied into our bathroom spaces to enable hygiene. Since the nineteenth century Cholera outbreak in London and the germ theory that followed, the West has created increasingly sophisticated boundaries between sanitary and unsanitary spaces, encrypted by beliefs about cleanliness and contamination, moral and social dignity.¹⁴² However, despite the purification we achieve in these spaces, we rarely perceive them as sacred. By incorporating an altar, Rist raises the status of both the restroom and the body. *You Renew You* challenges

¹³⁸ Angelique Chrisafis, “Attack on ‘blasphemous’ art work dices debate on role of religion in France”, *The Guardian*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/18/andres-serrano-piss-christ-destroyed-christian-protesters>.

¹³⁹ Ashenburg, *The Dirt on Clean*.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, “Crossing Boundaries”, in *The In(ter)vention of Feminist Knowledges*, ed. Barbara Caine (Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 92–106.

¹⁴¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 10.

¹⁴² Selket, “Bring Home”.

traditional hierarchical binaries by making sacred both the clean and dirty dimensions of our purification through water. In enabling the hygienic conditions that relieve us of our refuse and spare us from disease, utilitarian water saves us, redeems and renews us as a disembodied deity might.

You Renew You informed my thinking about domestic space making and its continuity with cultural belief systems. Saito asserts that examining our everyday aesthetic responses can reveal beliefs and assumptions that have substantial effects on our lives and the world we share.¹⁴³ Art can illuminate the meaningful sensuousness that is entwined (yet often overlooked) within the utilitarian spaces and practices of the everyday. The bathroom is designed to separate us safely from our waste. In *You Renew You*, Rist reframes the intertwining of subject and bathroom. Her playful video makes visible internal processes of renewal through which we manage the entropy of our bodies: the clean water renews and purifies us just as our internal organs do, and we transcend death for a little while longer. Cleanliness is synonymous with an absence of decay.

Naoshima Bath

My interrogation of the convergence of aesthetics and utility via cleaning practices continued at the *Naoshima Bath* on Japan's Naoshima Island. Created by Shinro Ohtake, *Naoshima Bath* fuses a kitsch Japanese scrapbook aesthetic with the traditional Japanese bathhouse format. Surrounded by lush tropical plants, the building architecturally collages brightly coloured materials, including part of an aeroplane, assorted tiles, and concrete (Fig. 53). Found materials such Turkish tiles, pop culture images, Japanese scrolls, and seductive pictures of women intersperse with custom tiles and plumbing fittings made by the artist to furnish its interior (Fig. 54). An elephant statue atop a high wall divides gendered bathing halls, each abutted by a greenhouse. *Naoshima Bath* is a clear light filled space, with a colour splattered ceiling that is translucent during sunlight hours.

¹⁴³ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following artwork: Ohtake, Shinro. *Naoshima Bath*, 2009. Building. Naoshima Island, Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

This image has been removed for copyright reasons.

Fig. 53. Shinro Ohtake, *Naoshima Bath* (2009).

Public bathhouses were the primary place for people in Japan to wash until most homes were with their own bath in the modernisation that followed the Second World War.¹⁴⁴ Public bathhouses remain common in Japan. However, Ohtake's interpretation is conscious of the novelty of public bathhouses to international visitors to this art-devoted island. *Naoshima Bath* was designed both as a place of rejuvenation for locals and a site for cultural exchange.¹⁴⁵ For five days during my field research, I exchanged the privacy of my Western hygiene regime for a public one at *Naoshima Bath*.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following artwork: Ohtake, Shinro. *Naoshima Bath*, 2009. Building. Naoshima Island, Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. Images of this artwork can be viewed by visiting the following link: <http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/naoshimasento.html>

Fig. 54. Shinro Ohtake, *Naoshima Bath* (2009).

Here, cleaning the body was separated from the aesthetic pleasure of bathing. A series of cleaning stations along either side of the bath enable one to fully clean and rinse themselves prior to entering the bath. Unlike the enclosed privacy of my home

¹⁴⁴ Japan Guide, "Public Baths", accessed March 21, 2014, <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2074.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Benesse Art Site Naoshima, "*Naoshima Bath*", accessed March 21, 2014, <http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/naoshimasento.html>.

shower, my scrutiny of my body here was subtle, yet conscious of the gaze of other bathers. I could not risk contaminating the shared bath water. Rather than wandering to my internal world, my attention stayed with the surface of my skin as I scrubbed it.

The language barrier limited my ability to socialize. However, I savored the sensuous experience of soaking my clean body in the clear hot water as gentle, sweet music filled the steamy air. Upon leaving the bathhouse, I felt an amplified mindfulness of my own body: this time, brought about by public, rather than private, attention to my own hygiene.

Olafur Eliasson argues that it is not hard to garner our participation: we participate in ordinary activities like shopping, showering, and making meals every day.¹⁴⁶ What we require, Eliasson argues, is the prompt to evaluate this participation: to ask what it means for our place in the world.

Despite cultural nuances distinguishing Australian and Japanese approaches to cleaning, cleanliness for both cultures retains social ramifications that attach contamination with exclusion and purification with inclusion. What differed, in this novel setting, was the elevation of the ritual through performing it publicly in a space that exaggerated its aesthetic dimension.

Ohtake's bathhouse confirmed Dewey's assertion of the indigeneity of the aesthetic to the practical world, and advanced observations I had made through *You Renew You*.¹⁴⁷ *Naoshima Bath* demonstrated how function offers an intrinsic aesthetic that can be augmented. The bathhouse aesthetic was activated in continuity with its utilitarian purpose. This enriched the experience of renewal generated within its walls and shortened the imagined chasm between the ordinary and the aesthetic.

Fallingwater

Fallingwater (Fig. 55) constructs a poetic intersection of the intrinsic and utilitarian qualities of water. Frank Lloyd Wright was commissioned by the Kaufmann family to design this elaborate weekend retreat in 1935.¹⁴⁸ Wright convinced the wealthy Pennsylvanian family that, rather than building adjacent to Bear Run Waterfall, they should build directly atop the waterfall, so as "to live with the waterfall... as an

¹⁴⁶ Olafur Eliasson, *Olafur Eliasson* (Cologne, France: Walter König, 2008).

¹⁴⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

¹⁴⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, "Fallingwater", accessed May 27, 2017, http://franklloydwright.org/site/fallingwater/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=ppc; Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, "The Kaufmanns & Fallingwater", accessed May 13, 2014, <https://www.fallingwater.org/history/about-fallingwater/>.

integral part of [their] lives”.¹⁴⁹ In this way, a more passive, picturesque relationship with the water course was subverted.

Combining four main materials of concrete, steel, stone, and glass, the large home is built directly onto the rocky outcrop from which Bear Run cascades. The long cantilevered balconies echo the natural rocky terraces and create deep shadows that anchor the building. Their concrete faces are painted yellow, like the leaves that surround the home in autumn. Large windows mirror and reflect the surrounding forest. Inside the house is a spatial dynamic of compression and release: entrances and hallways are small, narrow, dark, and generally stone lined. This cavern-like enclosure embraces while also pushing one out into the open plan living room, or towards big light filled windows and balconies. A glass enclosed hatch in the lounge room is opened during warmer weather, allowing air cooled from the passing stream to rise up and infuse the home. The soothing sound of water radiates up from beneath the home and can be heard at different intensities through the whole house.

The original unpublished version of this thesis included a photograph of the following site: Lloyd Wright, Frank. Fallingwater, 1935. Building. Pennsylvania, United States of America

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. Images of this building can be viewed by visiting the following link: <https://fallingwater.org/>

Fig. 55. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Fallingwater* (1935).

Wright’s skilful demarcation of space organises one’s perception through *Fallingwater*. This is akin to Crowther’s description of the artificial unity of the

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *Fallingwater*.

artwork, in which traits are exaggerated and omitted to produce a more complete experience.¹⁵⁰ Traffic noise and other buildings are obscured. The industrialised world enabling the wealth, engineering, and materials that produced the home is also absent from this vision. *Fallingwater* frames an idealised view of nature that emphasises water's intrinsic qualities of renewal. Continuous repairs of the home due to water damage and mould, along with an account of a 1960s flash flood, indicate a less celebrated dimension of water's intrinsic qualities.¹⁵¹ For Edgar Kaufmann Jr, however, this segmentation of space was an immersive mirage in which one could renew a connection with the natural world while imagining that the urbanised one did not exist.¹⁵²

Fallingwater was my first official stop on my field research. I arrived tense and anxious after twenty-three hours of traveling, a night spent at a poorly chosen airport motel, and the confusion of driving on the opposite side of the road. I took three tours of the home's interior and wandered the grounds over two days.

The *Making Spaces* drawing series and my evaluation of Ian Strange's suburban home interventions, outlined in Chapter 2, revealed how habituation within the built structure of the home can obscure connection with the landscape. *Fallingwater*, in contrast, activated its intersection so that the interior cocoon of the home drew the landscape into the experience of subjectivity generated within it. In the particular logic of the setting of *Fallingwater*, agency is distributed throughout the assemblage of landscape, glass, stone, trees, air, body, gravity, shadow, light, and water. As the home's windows and balconies opened to the forest, I felt myself connect to this lush, live space. As the dark corridors and deep shadows anchored the home to the ground, I too felt grounded by their weight. The constant white noise of the waterfall further married my senses to the site. My anxiety surrendered. I became enlivened.

Through this practice-led research, I identified the regulation of entropy and order as foundational space making practices. *Fallingwater* encodes these practices elaborately and aesthetically. Edgar Kaufmann Jr believed the relationship between *Fallingwater* and the waterfall awoke "dormant sensibilities" and imbued the home with the language of the changing seasons, of fluidity and renewal.¹⁵³ This echoes our body's dance with entropy and offers rhythm to this continuous flow and change. Lines

¹⁵⁰ Crowther, "The Aesthetic".

¹⁵¹ Edgar Kaufmann Jr, *Fallingwater: A Frank Lloyd Wright Country House* (New York: Cross River Press, 1986).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Kaufmann Jr, *Fallingwater*, 54.

demarcating clean and dirty, purity and contamination are less rigid in natural ecosystems: one organism's decay is another's sustenance. Perpetual movement, in asymmetrical spiraling from imbalance to balance and back again, enables exchange and transition. Our built environments are fixed in concrete, changing little from season to season. This fixedness generates an artificial stasis that lulls our senses into the economy of recognition critiqued by Manoki and Dewey. *Fallingwater* exaggerates the aesthetic dimension of this dance with renewal, arousing vivid consciousness of these processes. In this way, this built space activates a vital materiality that enables aesthetic contagion: the agency of the site fosters a new self-of self-interest.

Conclusion

Creating sculptural studies, drawings, and an installation developed the theme of water within my studio inquiry and enabled me to critique its appropriation for domestic use. This provided the basis for continued observation through diarising and critical reflection, which illuminated how water is aesthetically encoded as it flows through the home. This finding affirmed the role of the aesthetic in demarcating interior spaces and obscuring relationships to natural systems. Later in my research, these insights would enable me to develop Saito's critique of special aesthetic spaces and their debasing of other aesthetic spaces.¹⁵⁴ These ideas would crystallise through my final installation work *Oikos*, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Close scrutiny of water-based cleaning practices enabled me to critique the naturalization of domestic space making practices. In turn, this critique revealed how foundational space making practices that moderate our organism's entropy and renewal become embellished with culturally contingent notions of cleanliness and contamination: or, put differently, how cultural notions are inherently contaminated by these 'natural processes'. Critical reflection on these observations revealed an assemblage of water, body, home, and world generated through the sensibility of cleanliness. This entanglement of body, beliefs, materials, and practice, I contend, constitutes a complex aesthetic intertwining of body and environment. Processing these ideas through the installation *Hand Basin Sound Space* enabled the recorded sounds of domestic water to emerge as an aesthetic language for this intersection.

My examinations of *You Renew You*, *Naoshima Bath*, and *Fallingwater* demonstrated how aesthetic practices can attune to utilitarian frameworks to enrich and extend our interactions with everyday processes and environments. In addition, these

¹⁵⁴ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

works exemplify how aesthetic approaches can be used to intervene in the physical and aesthetic dislocations of our built environments to activate aesthetic awareness of our continuity with natural processes, the landscape, and even the aesthetics of the everyday. Reevaluating our cynicism of the utilitarian is critical in remediating the partition of the sensible.

As living organisms, humans will continue to busy ourselves doing the things required to defer entropy and regenerate our internal order. Therefore, we will continue to relate to the world in terms of its use value to us. As Bennett argues, what is needed is a concept of self that extends our scope of self-interest beyond the localised and immediate spaces of our bodies, and into the networks of assemblages through which our subjectivities emerge.

In the following chapter, I discuss two installations and a video work, developing the idea that artwork acts to organise and frame experiences and spatial relationships. These artworks provide a framework through which to map a critique of my embodied position within the socio-historical landscape through the structure of the home. I also conclude my discussion of my field research, evaluating the different approaches of James Turrell and Chiharu Shiota in the context of questions about art and the everyday that arose through creating the artworks to be discussed in this coming chapter.

Chapter 4: Mapping the Outside In

Introduction

This chapter charts a period of practice-led research concerned with the role of image making in orienting the human organism in the world. I examined confluences between image-making and space-making to investigate how embodied processes generate transient spaces that connect subjectivity through complex ecologies. The following discussion considers the materiality of these processes and what this materiality reveals about subject and world.

During the first year of research for this project, I sought an embodied aesthetic that would express links between landscape and subject. However, I found it difficult to capture this aesthetic in artwork. Instead, through studio research focused on the interior of the home, I developed aesthetic languages to describe the interplay of body and environment. Through this process, the home became a lens through which to look at the landscape again.

In re-examining my position within the landscape, I asked: if my subjectivity overlaps with its environment, where does this overlapping start and finish? I was particularly interested in tracing the materiality of this apparently virtual continuum. Examining the role of images in scaffolding an understanding of and relationship to one's surrounding environment provided a logic for pursuing these concerns in my inquiry. Incorporating three-dimensional space-making practices into this dialogue allowed me to test ideas regarding the aesthetic entanglement of body, space, and image.

In this chapter, I discuss two installations and a video work which examined and critiqued the intertwining of house, landscape, and body. The first work discussed, *Standing in this River on its way out to the Sea* (2015), extends the theme of water developed through *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014) and the field research discussed in Chapter 3. I introduce this discussion by outlining ideas from neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. Damasio's description of embodied mapping is integral to the understanding of art-making that underpins this research. Neural images of embodied mapping are not strictly pictorial. However, it is this underlying propensity to generate and respond to representations that predisposes our bodies to the agency images. Contextualising Damasio's notion of embodied mapping with *Standing in this River* enables me to establish a framework for understanding embodied space-making.

I then enter a longer discussion of the installation *Inside Out* (2014) and the related video work *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* (2013–14). *Inside Out* was

critical in consolidating my inquiry. It brought together multiple tangents of my studio research, including ideas developed through the *Making Spaces* (2013) drawing series, themes developed through creative exploration of water, as well as my examination of the landscape. Through the course of creating and reflecting upon *Inside Out* and the aerial video *Gaia is Symbiosis*, I engaged with a diverse array of artworks. These included installations by James Turrell and Chiharu Shiota, colonial landscape paintings by Eugene von Guerard, and photo-video installations by Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski. This critical engagement enabled me to consider emergent concerns in my research, including the distinction between art and the everyday, the socio-historical positioning of my subjectivity within the Australian landscape, and the effect of different spaces on generating different experiences of subjectivity.

Artworks fabricate a microcosm through which we can better understand our body's interaction with the materiality of the world. In this way artworks can, to borrow the words of Norie Neumark, reveal the entanglement of our bodily states with the bodily states of media. This entanglement, she argues, is captured by Jussi Parikka's notion of 'medianature', which describes the transmission and processing of 'culture' through and in materials.¹⁵⁵ To apprehend this new materialist phenomena properly, argues Parikka, we must develop "elaborated ways to understand how perception, action, politics, meanings... are embedded not only in human and animal bodies, but also much more ephemeral, but as real, things- even non-solid things".¹⁵⁶ In making and responding to the artworks discussed in this chapter, I endeavoured to tease out the ephemeral and non-solid things that adhere the materiality of my body to the materiality of the world.

Through this inquiry, I have developed an understanding of how aesthetic images calibrate our embodied perception. This understanding allows me to argue that the aesthetic provides a conduit between body and environment, through which meaningful relationships are mediated and experienced.

Embodied Mapping and Space Making

According to Damasio, a brain enables an organism to make neural representations of potential actions relative to certain situations.¹⁵⁷ Through the mind, those neural representations evolve into maps, which are arranged as perceptions. These

¹⁵⁵ Jussi Parikka, cited in Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 125.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Damasio, "Interview".

maps portray the structure and state of the body and enable the brain to construct a corrective action that is an adequate response to the perceived situation.¹⁵⁸

This corrective action serves homeostasis: Embodied regulation enabling the organism to defer entropy and maintain internal constancy despite continuous fluctuations in exterior environment and metabolic consumption of resources.¹⁵⁹

The function of homeostasis operates the same way for a single cell organism or for multi-cell organisms like humans, it is “a way of creating a response for what is a detected imbalance.”¹⁶⁰ Thirst, for instance, stimulates corrective action in response to neural representation of imbalance.¹⁶¹ In organisms like humans, that feeling translates into complex concepts and language, generating complex maps that coordinate corrective actions.¹⁶² For example, responding to thirst in the urban environment activates multiple spatial maps layered with social and semantic networks. Aesthetic preference also encodes these maps: for instance, will water, juice, or coffee best sate my thirst?

These neural maps can be understood as assemblages. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jane Bennett describes assemblages as ad hoc groupings of diverse elements that generate collective agency and effect.¹⁶³ Embodied mapping processes intra-act with external and internal stimuli, forming assemblages across multi-faceted environments. These relational networks are often ephemeral, virtual, and superficially intangible. However, as embodied processes, they are inherently physical. This demonstrates a vibrancy of flesh that disturbs the substance dualism—the partition of the sensible—that persists within our common sense.

Neural body images serve the renewal processes discussed in earlier chapters. In those chapters, I argued that embodied mediation of entropy and renewal is a foundational space-making practice that generates material flux of body and environment. Contemplating the resources required to renew the home’s internal stasis, along with the practices and infrastructure enabling their acquisition and organisation, indicates the complex mapping systems we share. These embodied systems become socially encoded, so that materials transferred from one environment to another also carry beliefs and practices connecting us to our culture’s past, present, and future. In

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Capra, *The Web*, 24, 47-49.

¹⁶⁰ Damasio, “Interview”.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*.

this way, embodied maps are extensions of material assemblages stretching subjectivity beyond its visceral boundary.

Through studio inquiry, I recognised how artworks augment embodied mapping. They can make tangible components of embodied perception, revealing latent values and assumptions that inform a given experience and subsequent set of actions.

In creating *Standing in this River on its way out to the Sea* (Fig. 56 and 57), I sought to draw on the viewer's embodied experience with their own shower to prompt consideration of a shower's complex ecology: the weather, watershed, industrial extraction and storage, the network of pipes, regulations, and chemistry enabling the diversion of water through our homes. The term 'ecology' was important to my research during this stage and foregrounds my understanding of assemblages. 'Ecology' denotes a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and positions human, non-human, and non-living systems in a shared network.

An organically curved sculpture made using wire armature and a plaster and recycled paper compound centred *Standing in this River*. At its top were a series of cloud formations that morphed into a fluid, fleshy wave. Its smooth surface was painted with purple and orange hues for the clouds, and layers of acrylic glaze primarily combining blues and greens like those in the nearby sea for the wave.

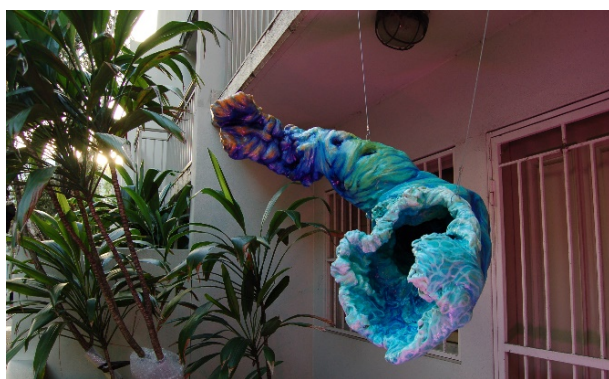


Fig. 56. *Standing in this River on its way out to the Sea* (2015).

The wave opened into a circular barrel at its bottom, revealing a hollow funnel ascending back into the form. A speaker mounted within this cavity played an audio recording of me showering. That sound was overtaken at regular intervals by the sound of an ocean wave. *Standing in this River* was exhibited during the 2015 BEAMS Festival in Chippendale, Sydney, where it was suspended in the front courtyard of a terrace house. I placed a towel and bathmat at the courtyard gate to demarcate a bathroom-like space. The artwork was further integrated into the space by a colour-

cycling light. The unexpected sound of the shower and crashing wave seemed to draw viewers closely to the piece.

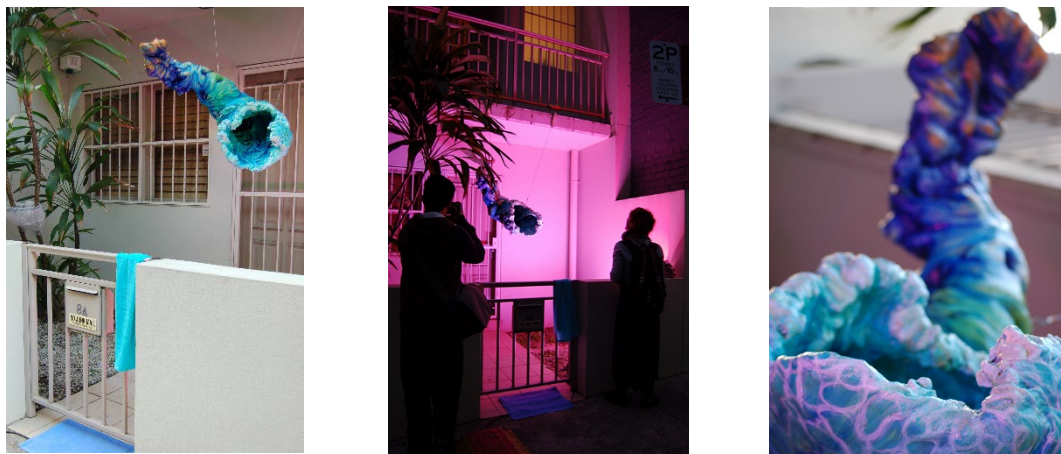


Fig. 57. *Standing in this River on its way out to the Sea* (2015).

Claire Bishop explains that the spectator is intrinsic to installation art. The spectator's sensory participation within the space, Bishop contends, engages them as a spatial and temporal subject.¹⁶⁴ Through spectatorship, the space is activated: the viewer's embodied perceptions, beliefs, and social relations intertwine with the installation work, generating a meaningful, sensory encounter. In this way, the viewer becomes part of the assemblage, or ecology, of art.

Incorporating the ubiquitous shower sound into *Standing in this River* was critical in activating viewer response. This sound provides sensory stimuli linked to embodied maps associated with this daily hygiene ritual.

The significance of the spaces referred to by this installation emerged in my research through *Making Space #7: Hand Basin*. Presenting this shower homage outside on the streetscape inverted the privacy of the home's interior and attempted to make visible otherwise obscured, yet material, relations between natural world and home.

Contemplating Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience through my shower diary had revealed a transient integration of subject and space generated through the lived experience of showering. Reflecting on *Standing in this River* linked Damasio's notion of embodied mapping with this generation of transient, subjective space.

Lived experiences, explains Crowther, are serial: the past informs present perception just as present experiences rewrite the meaning of past ones.¹⁶⁵ Culmination and final unity occur only through death, when the series can no longer be added to. The

¹⁶⁴ Bishop, *Installation Art*.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Crowther, "The Aesthetic: From Experience to Art", in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman (New York: Routledge, 2008), 31–44.

artwork, Crowther explains, fabricates individual experience into a more complete form independent of embodied chronology.¹⁶⁶ In this process, aspects of the original experience are exaggerated or idealised, understated or omitted.¹⁶⁷ This organisation of perception, I contend, operates not only in the work of art but also in ordinary experiences structured within distinct spaces: for example, when we step inside the shower cubicle or enter architecture like *Fallingwater*.

Damasio explains that perception can be controlled through discerning what things you pay attention to and filtering out extraneous stimuli.¹⁶⁸ Shifting my research methodology to life scale installation enabled me to test and extend observations regarding embodied perception and space making. I used installation to organise the aesthetic languages developed through studio inquiry into the intersection of body and environment. These languages had emerged from embodied process. Spatially reconfiguring them in three dimensions revealed interplays, latent values and meanings. This process of space making organised my perception, creating a proxy bio-feedback that indicated where attention should be directed within the research.

Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space: Mapping the Outside In



Fig. 58. *Inside Out* (2014).

Inside Out was exhibited in a gallery space converted from a former family home at Scope Galleries Warrnambool (Fig. 58 and 53). This installation combined my

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Crowther, “The Aesthetic”.

¹⁶⁸ Damasio, “Interview”.

aerial video work *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* with a domestic setting that continued my exploration of water. Building on earlier techniques, I used plaster to create a series of water-like sculptural forms draped over my clothes horse and ironing board. Using acrylic paint and polymer varnish, I painted each form using different brush strokes and different combinations of blue to suggest the aesthetic encoding of water. I used the recorded sound of my washing machine to link the spinning landscape captured in the video, which was projected onto the gallery wall.

Gaia is Symbiosis marked an important rupture in my approach to this research. It critiques my position within the post-colonial Australian landscape in the context of the Anthropocene (Fig. 59 and 63)¹⁶⁹. In spite of this apparent conceptual incongruence, I recognised that the subjectivities and their related spatial territories implied by both home and landscape entangle and co-produce each other.

The home's interior fabricates a spatial unity that disarms our senses and reassures us that the world around us is stable. Yuriko Saito asserts that the aesthetics of everyday life prompt actions that have important consequences.¹⁷⁰ These actions have meaning and entwine in ecologies or networks of power that extend beyond the house. Creating *Gaia is Symbiosis* was an intervention through which I broke with the visual confines of my home to activate and make visible these networks.

I used a GoPro Camera mounted on a balsawood frame to capture this footage. Attached to the GoPro was a helium filled weather balloon and a parachute, a GPS tracker, and an audio beeper. It was launched from a school oval an hour's drive inland from my home in mid-December 2013. As expected, the change in atmospheric pressure caused the helium to expand, bursting the weather balloon somewhere between 65,000 and 80,000 feet. Following the predicted flight path, and aided by a parachute, the camera landed intact near Lake Bolac.

¹⁶⁹ My use of the term post-colonial is not to be confused with an idea that Australia has been decolonised. It is used in connection to a field of theory that has been used to critique the practices and effects of colonisation since the 1970s, in particular following the writing of Edward Said. Just as post-modernism exists relative to and in critique of modernism, post-colonial theory exists relative to and in critique of colonisation. European colonisation largely displaced indigenous land management and disrupted pre-1788 ecosystems through agriculture, mining and other modes of resource acquisition. In this way, colonisation caused irreparable changes to the Australian continent. Within my research I have developed the argument that the landscape is a meaningful terrain, the phrase "the post-colonial Australian landscape" is in keeping with this argument. I contend that the Australian landscape *is* post-colonial firstly in that it exists in the aftermath of colonisation, and secondly in that understanding how colonisation has changed our continent's composition prompts one to "read" the landscape in critique of these colonial practices and their on-going effects.

¹⁷⁰ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.



Fig. 59. *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* (2013–14).

The film records an expanding landscape that spins with the camera's ascent. First, the township of Macarthur and then the volcanic geography of Mount Eccles are made visible, followed by the blue of the ocean. The patchwork of farmland, tree plantations, wind farms, occasional townships and areas of national and state park grows continuously over the film's hour-long duration. The contrast between land and sea is mesmerising. The contour of the coastline orients one's vantage: a dark patch between Port Fairy and Warrnambool's Lady Bay could only be the extinct volcano Tower Hill.

The spinning slows as the camera reaches the upper altitudes. A large dark horseshoe shape indicates the Grampian Ranges on the terrain far below. In the other direction, stretching towards the sea, another dark area identifies the Otway Ranges; beyond it, brown smudged air pinpoints Melbourne. The vast landscape is a mosaic of yellow, orange, and brown rectangles: mathematically processed and demarcated according to use value. Almost every bit has been altered by human hands, machinery, and agriculture. In the unedited video, the high-pitched beep of the audio beacon marries with the haunting sound made by the expanding balloon as it wrestles with the sky. The camera's fish eye lens exaggerates and bends the white bow of the horizon. At an altitude above sixty thousand feet, the camera captures the contrast between the dark, cold presence of empty space and the light infused atmosphere of Earth. It is a view of utter emptiness and of everything all at once. The Earth's curve, unity, and boundary are pronounced.

I borrowed the phrase “Gaia is symbiosis as seen from space” from a student of microbiologist Dr Lynn Margulis.¹⁷¹ The phrase characterises my goal in making this image: to imagine the planetary continuum attached to the fragment of earth where I live. This artwork organised observations and ideas regarding the material intra-action of images and world.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I realised that uncertainty and anxiety about the origin of materials were integral to contemporary connection to the environment. Within the aerial video, I found an image of the impossible breadth of this problematic supply chain: a landscape carved up to service the renewal of the interior worlds of our homes, cities, and bodies.

A need to process the recent and massive shift in collective perception of our position within the world also drove the creation of *Gaia is Symbiosis*. As Bennett notes, by the end of the twentieth century, globalisation had commenced in earnest, and mankind’s shared “theatre of operations” had expanded.¹⁷² A century earlier, subjective distances were vast and subjectivity local, maps were exacted by the embodied hands and eyes of cartographers, and the god’s eye-view satellite had not yet encircled the globe. In the current epoch, we find ourselves increasingly dislocated from the human-nature interactions which traditionally yielded our everyday resources. On the other hand, we are increasingly entangled—whether cosmically, pharmacologically, or biotechnologically—with non-human nature.¹⁷³ Our worldview has decentred rapidly, and images have been active in the new configuration of space in which we find ourselves.

Imag(e)ining the World

Contemporary photo-video works by Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, along with Eugene von Guerard’s colonial landscape paintings, contextualised my examination of the confluence of image making and space making.

In *Incompatible Elements* (2010–2013), Cmielewski and Starrs stitch together high resolution satellite images to recreate four distinct topographies from Australia, India, and New Zealand (Fig. 60).¹⁷⁴ The video frame constructed by the artists

¹⁷¹ Wikipedia, “Gaia Hypothesis”, accessed 17 November, 2017, <https://courses.seas.harvard.edu/climate/eli/Courses/EPS281r/Sources/Gaia/Gaia-hypothesis-wikipedia.pdf>.

¹⁷² Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.

¹⁷³ Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*.

¹⁷⁴ Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs, “Artists’ Roundtable: Art in the Era of Climate Change”, in *The Cultural History of Climate Change*, ed. Thomas H Ford (Canberra, ACT: The Australian National University, 2012).

gradually pans across these scenes, revealing in exquisite detail both the ecosystem's natural features and the impacts of human activity upon them.¹⁷⁵ Cmielewski and Starrs slow down the way we view these now-ubiquitous images of our planet.¹⁷⁶



Fig. 60. Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, *and the river was dust* (2010–13).

Cmielewski and Starrs reinterpret images originally generated for government monitoring, mapping, and planning.¹⁷⁷ While not representing a specifically Australian topography, their work *Puwai Rangī Papa* (2010–2013) (Fig. 61) most activated my anxiety about the landscape. *Puwai Rangī Papa* centres on Mount Taranaki, a dominant presence in the geography, weather systems, and Maori culture of the North Island of New Zealand.¹⁷⁸ The camera pan begins above Mount Taranaki, its circular tree line following the cone shaped mountain's topography and marking the border between National Park and surrounding agricultural land. The contrast is stark.

Neumark insists that Indigenous understandings of Country outpace and pre-date new materialist programs.¹⁷⁹ She draws on Deborah Bird Rose's elucidation of Aboriginal people's understanding that: "Country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy... Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Articulate, "Josephine Starrs & Leon Cmielewski's 'and the earth sighed' opens Friday 7 October", accessed July 17, 2017, <http://articulate497.blogspot.com.au/2016/10/josephine-starrs-leon-cmielewskis-and.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Janine Randerson, "Critical Flows: Climates & Peoples", *Real Time* 104 (August–September 2011), <http://www.realttimearts.net/article/104/10393>.

¹⁷⁷ Cmielewski and Starrs, "Artists' Roundtable"; Randerson, "Critical Flows".

¹⁷⁸ Randerson, "Critical Flows".

¹⁷⁹ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*. I incorporate material from Neumark which describes Indigenous understandings of Country, which European Australian culture describes as landscape, into my discussion of the Cmielewski's and Starrs' work *Puwai Rangī Papa*; I make a slight alteration to my use of Bill Gamage's ideas on pp. 94 to link these sections of text.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3. The amended version of this exegesis made reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I have removed the reference to Torres Strait Islander people as this sits outside the frame of my research and is not included in the original Deborah Bird passage I quote.

The satellite images stitched together to create *Puwai Rangi Papa* have been used to monitor increasing erosion of the mountain. Locals invited the artists to make a work addressing that “in Maori terms the ‘maurii’ (life-force) is being eroded by the changing climate along with its iconic physical form”.¹⁸¹ These reinterpreted images give visual voice to the terrifying extent to which the mountain has been consumed.

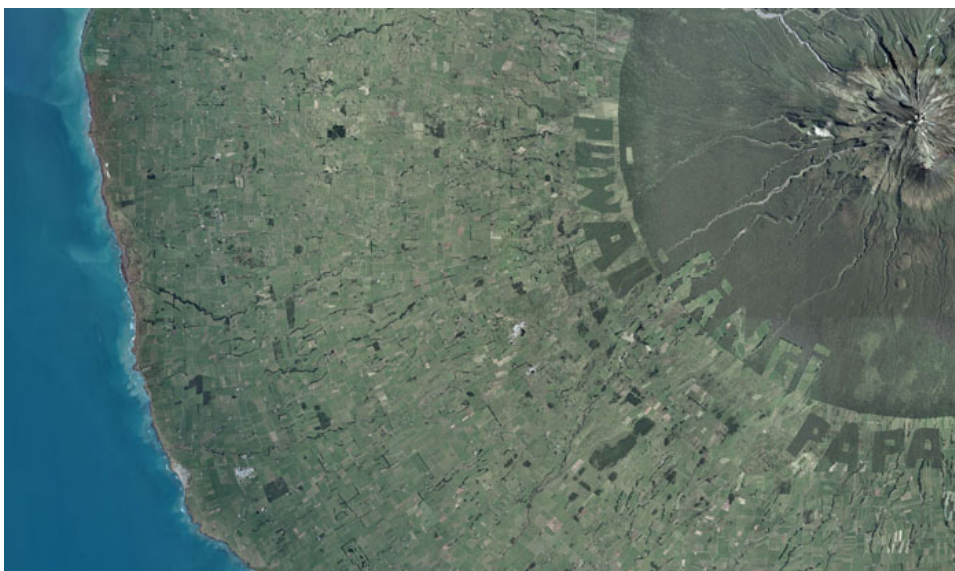


Fig. 61. Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, *Puwai Rangi Papa* (2010–13).

Images assist us to comprehend our insertion within broader existential space that otherwise exceeds our bodies’ visual grasp.¹⁸² As Donna Haraway insists, these perspectives are always partial and mediated by specificities in which they are formed.¹⁸³ Starrs and Cmielewski use exaggeration and omission to provoke us to really see the effect of our actions upon the planet. These ‘god’s eye-view’ images, however, obscure the sources of much of this activity: the body and the domestic. It is, after all, the aggregate of our collective activities in embodied, ordinary spaces that bring about the Anthropocene.

¹⁸¹ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 3.

¹⁸² Damasio, “Interview”; Relph, *Place*.

¹⁸³ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (Autumn 1988), 575–599.



Fig. 62. Eugene von Guerard, *Moroit (Tower Hill)* (1855).

Puwai Rangī Papa records competing worldviews that played out on a similar time scale in Australia. Rather than a living, breathing Country, European colonisers saw an inert, dead, dumb land awaiting industrious activation. Bill Gammage distils this contrast: where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people saw country rich in lore and Law, he explains, the invaders saw land rich in resources and profit.¹⁸⁴ One cared for the local fragment, the other was a fragment of an export economy, inspired and trammelled from overseas.¹⁸⁵

As a descendant of 1860s immigrants to Australia, Eugene von Guerard's *Moroit (Tower Hill)* (1855) (Fig. 62) vectors my subjective position within the Australian landscape. In conjunction with my aerial video, *Moroit (Tower Hill)* enables me to plot my socio-historical lineage within the terrain as it transitioned from local fragment to a fragment of an export economy.

Moroit (Tower Hill) figures the newly colonised continent to the European gaze while recording a critically unique and fleeting moment in its memory. It afforded me a kind of mythological origin story for my subjectivity's intertwining with this Australian landscape: the pristine Eden disrupted and built over by my culture's worldview. Guerard captured the volcanic crater of the hill, its lakes and mounds replete with rich ecological diversity, its traditional custodians in situ, steam boats and farmers only just encroaching. Within decades, as recorded by Daniel Clarke's *View of Warrnambool (Tower Hill)* (1867), the site would suffer rapid degradation that would see it deforested,

¹⁸⁴ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

quarried, its lakes turn saline, and the Gundjitrara, the crater's traditional custodians, dispossessed.¹⁸⁶

Within my practice-led inquiry, *Gaia is Symbiosis* converses with *Moroit* (*Tower Hill*) and Starrs and Cmielewski's photo studies. The image making techniques I used are specific to my own historical period. They enable a visual record of the collective space making that has extended outwards, consuming more and more Country since that first permanent European dwelling, First Government House, was erected in Sydney Cove in 1788.¹⁸⁷

The final minutes of my video capture a god's eye-view image that frames the Earth, or Gaia, as a spherical unity suspended in a vast cosmos (Fig. 63). Contemplating Earth's edge against space from such an expanded perspective seems to make nonsense of the embodied entanglements collectively distracting us from our dire ecological predicament.

Using the Home as the Lens to Frame Art in the Everyday

During my visual diary-led observations of my home, I awoke most mornings with awe and anxiety. As my feet hit the floor, I was overwhelmed to be standing on a massive, lava-filled rock, orbiting in an infinite vacuum of space around an unfathomably huge ball of burning hydrogen. Simultaneously, my body would bristle with awareness of the trajectory of ecological collapse set in motion by my culture's particular way of valuing landscape. Yet, in spite of this awful urgency, I would continue my ordinary routine with my hands and feet bound to practices of domestic habituation.

My installation *Inside Out* plotted the conflicting subjectivities operating in this experience. The work of James Turrell and Chiharu Shiota was crucial in developing the conceptual concerns invested in this. Shiota's and Turrell's works radically shape the viewer's embodied experience of space in different ways. In response, I reconsidered space in my own work: in particular, how demarcation of art and everyday spaces related to difficulty reconciling the dimensions of my subjectivity, which was framed, conversely, by the landscape and by the home.

During field research to America and Japan, I visited six of James Turrell's works. Two were of particular influence: *Pleaidēs* (1983), at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, and *Open Field* (2000), at Chichu Museum on Naoshima Island.

¹⁸⁶ Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne, VIC: Miegunyah Press, 2000); Daniel Clarke, *View of Warrnambool (Tower Hill)*, 1867, Oil on Cardboard, 47.1 × 60.6 cm, Melbourne, VIC, National Gallery of Victoria, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/4738/>.

¹⁸⁷ MacDonald, *Creating*.

Pleides is dark space in which an almost imperceptible blue light emanates. Sitting within this space disrupted the sense distinguishing my actual and imagined vision, as well as impeding my ability to differentiate the tactile boundary of my body from the dark space surrounding me. *Open Field* immersed me in light. I entered a rectangular room illuminated by blue light with two orange planes at either end. The planes of orange light could be perceived both as solid screens or vast fields. Both perceptions generated distinct experiences from a feeling of enclosure to one of expansion.

I visited Shiota's *Trace of Memory* (2013) at Pittsburgh's Mattress Factory. The installation comprised black woollen thread woven throughout a three-storey former family home, creating cocoon-like corridors linking doorways and generating a sense of black mist that prevented one from touching the full depth of the space and the objects encased within.

Movement within Turrell's spaces was also restricted. Although Turrell insists that he is "dealing with no image, and no focus or particular place to look", cues left by the artist indicate where one should rest, be it on a chair or before a given boundary.¹⁸⁸ In this way, Turrell directs attention by immersing the viewer in spatial scenarios in which particular visual perceptions become likely.

Immersion in Shiota's world depended not on a particular vantage but rather on moving through the whole space. Meghan Olson argues that Shiota has "honed a powerful sensitivity to how our bodies move through space and the potential of spatial ensnarement".¹⁸⁹ Walking through her cavernous webbing generated a sense of both being embraced and oppressed. I had the sense that I was breathing the space in at the same time as being inhaled by it.

In both works, the artist's choice of materials further distinguishes the aesthetic experiences generated. Turrell's carefully controlled architecture conceals globes, projectors, and mechanics. This approach plunges the viewer into an embodied philosophical questioning of the nature of perception without extraneous distractions.¹⁹⁰ Turrell's vast visual planes are otherworldly. Within them, my awareness retracted to the space immediately surrounding me: not to the natural world, my family life or future

¹⁸⁸ James Turrell, cited in Nat Trotman, "Eye in the Sky", in *James Turrell*, ed. Carmen Gimenez (New York: Guggenheim, 2013), 27–45.

¹⁸⁹ Art Hopper, "Reviews: Chiharu Shiota: Traces of Memory @ the Mattress Factory", October 30, 2013, <http://arthopper.org/chiharu-shiota-traces-of-memory-the-mattress-factory/>.

¹⁹⁰ Arthur Zajonc, "Liberating Light: Contemplative and Scientific Encounter", in *James Turrell*, ed. Carmen Gimenez (New York: Guggenheim, 2013), 45–57.

obligations. Instead, I became focused on the feeling of my own body making sense of space.

Shiota, however, actively insinuates the body and the ordinary world. The domestic setting of *Trace of Memory* immediately evoked the familial and the personal. The black wool felt visceral: both warm and haunting. The overlapping of its straight lines created organic shapes. The thread's frayed edges caught the light and echoed frayed nerves. Woven within Shiota's schema were artefacts of the ordinary world past and present: the fireplace, a desk, suitcases, a bed, and an old pedal-driven sewing machine. Rather than obscuring the ordinary world, Shiota was augmenting it.

Dewey contends that component parts unite within an aesthetic experience to integrate one's faculties within a singular experience.¹⁹¹ Only in later reflection, he asserts, might we identify distinctive traits ordering the experience, such as more intellectual or practical characteristics. Reflecting on my experience revealed distinctions that weighted both artist's spaces differently. These feelings related to tensions observed in my relationship to the environment.

Turrell's work prompts us to consider our broader material reality by teaching us that we are literally touched by light and space.¹⁹² A similar philosophical agenda operated in *Gaia is Symbiosis* (Fig. 59 and 63). I created this video to expand perception of the landscape and imagine the breadth of ecological and socio-historical space I was continuous with. Both this work and Turrell's, however, prompted in me contemplative responses distinct from ordinary perception.

Traditionally, aesthetic theory has conflated art with this contemplative approach.¹⁹³ Katya Mandoki argues that emphasis on the contemplative in aesthetic theory has led to the disqualification of the everyday realm, "because it cannot figure out what could be worth contemplating in the plain and ordinary".¹⁹⁴ The hierarchical distinction between art and the everyday is linked to the dichotomised thinking that has structured Western thought since Plato's annunciation of ideal forms.¹⁹⁵ This demarcation is spatial and material. It is weighted so that the work done in the city's centre is valued more than work completed in the domestic buildings of suburbia or in rural regions. However, in the mundane space of my home, I undertook research that

¹⁹¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

¹⁹² Trotman, "Eye in the Sky".

¹⁹³ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹⁹⁴ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹⁹⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*; Elizabeth Grosz, "Women, Chora, Dwelling", in *Interiors*, ed. Johanna Burton (New York: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2012), 288-299.

produced knowledge about how our space making practices determine the shape and trajectory of much of the shared environment.

Light and space touch our bodies in the everyday world just as much as they do in the spaces Turrell creates. The cosmological, ecological, and socio-historical space of the planet co-exists with the interior space of the home, which is embedded within this landscape. As the house wraps around the body, however, its solid walls and its routines of habituation turn attention inward: hungry children or wet washing become more prominent stimuli, engulfing our bodies, and at least our partial perceptions, in the obligations of the everyday.

Mapping the Outside In

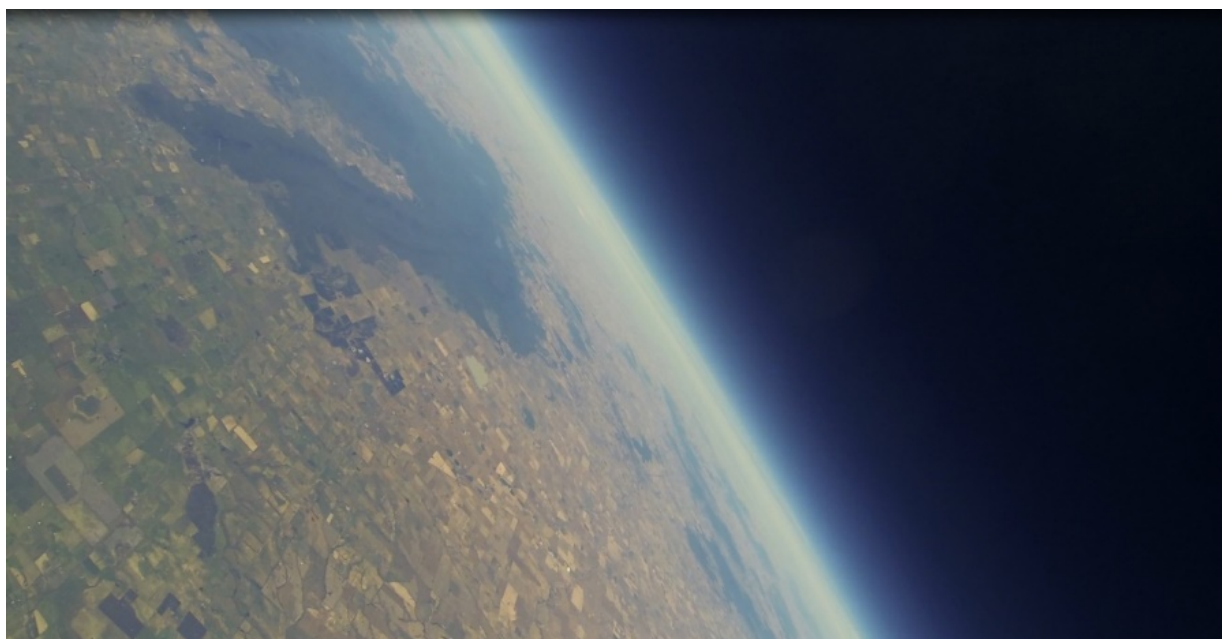


Fig. 63. *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* (2013–14).

While formulating *Inside Out*, I realised the importance of borrowing artefacts from ordinary life, as Shiota had done in *After the Dream*. Contrasting a laundry setting with *Gaia is Symbiosis* juxtaposed the perspective of domestic space making alongside the god's-eye view. The god's eye-view grasped with *Gaia is Symbiosis* calls forth a particular contemplative, deep-ecological subjectivity. In the same way, the indexes of my laundry activate another subjectivity: one that is entangled with a familial network across which affect contagion spreads like a virus, and within which my time is not my own, nor the surface of my skin my boundary.

Sculptural water forms hung on *Inside Out*'s clothes horse continue the dialogue with water-based cleaning practices. Another sculpture, draped on the ironing board, was partially ironed to suggest the standardisation these practices produce. 'Doing the washing' is a complex space making activity regulating entropy in the home.

Continuous transformation of dirty clothing into clean is integral to renewing the home's order. Should the system congest, school and work uniforms remain unclean, and wet or soiled fabric may become permanently stained or mouldy. While ensuring hygiene and preservation of garments, these practices also communicate social status and continue tradition. Initially, only the wealthy could afford to distance themselves from dirt. Since then, clean clothing has signified social status.¹⁹⁶ Women traditionally have been custodians of cleanliness and its associated values: following from her own upbringing, it was my primarily mother and my sisters who washed, folded, ironed, and sewed; it is the mother who is seen as an unfit parent if her child arrives at school in filthy or torn clothes. The laundry is another aesthetic nexus through which materials, bodies, and spaces take on meaningful sensuousness.



Fig. 64. *Inside Out* (2014).

Sound was critical in connecting the visual and spatial dimensions in *Inside Out*. The eerie sound of the audio beaker and stretching balloon recorded in the original video evoked the unease felt those mornings as my feet hit the floor. Incorporating this sound in the final installation, however, would have further drawn one's attention from

¹⁹⁶ Rosie Cox, "Home: Domestic Dirt and Cleaning, Introduction", in *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*, ed. Rosie Cox and Ben Campkin, (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.), 11–14.

the domestic and into the contemplative novelty of the stratosphere. I had previously recorded audio of my washing machine in response to my preoccupation with waterborne renewal. The machine's predictable rhythm of filling, agitating, spinning, and pumping was increasingly disrupted by the off-kilter thumping of its barrel going out of balance. The thudding would increase in volume and vigour until violently warbling towards irreparable disequilibrium. It would then abruptly shut down in a tirade of beeps that signalled for me to rearrange its contents.

Non-human voices, argues Neumark, call out to us, telling us about themselves and the world.¹⁹⁷ The disjointed warbling of my washing machine tugged at my body, stimulating affect contagion that acted like an aesthetic radar. This sound called to tension in my body and alerted me to corresponding tension in the world.

The video work I edited for *Inside Out* begins in the final moments of *Gaia is Symbiosis*, where the planet gently rocks and slowly spins in the frame. The screen then turns momentarily black before the scene returns with the sound of my washing machine filling. I reversed, slowed and overlapped the original footage so that the audio progresses through the washing cycle as the god's-eye view is drawn towards the ground. The film reveals first a planet, then a geography, a landscape, and finally a township and houses. The whirring, banging noise married seamlessly with the video's incessant spinning, grounding it in the home re-imagined by the installation space. In the jolting sound of the out of balance machine, I overheard a voicing of the impending entropy of the very processes that regulate entropy within the domestic organism.

During the exhibition of *Inside Out*, I recognised a continued dialogue with Guerard's *Moroit (Tower Hill)*. Critical reflection on this work illuminated the performativity of art in imagining subject and world.

Moroit (Tower Hill) was crafted to understand the landscape. Guided by the teachings of Alexander von Humboldt, forefather of ecological science, Guerard sought to capture the individual contrast and collective unity of biological, geological, and meteorological systems.¹⁹⁸ In this visual examination, Guerard's image becomes as much an imagining as a record: a process of directing perception that uses line, colour, contrast, and composition to frame the observed, to omit and exaggerate in order to create the constructed unity of the examined as a picture.

¹⁹⁷ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*.

¹⁹⁸ Ruth Pullin, *Nature Revealed* (Melbourne, VIC: The Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria), 2011.

Terry Smith asserts that aestheticisation was a visual regime of colonisation that figured new lands through existing artistic modes.¹⁹⁹ Sumanthis Ramaswamy contends that empire's images are not merely reflections of the worlds they describe, but rather are "objects of knowledge in and of themselves... world making and world disclosing".²⁰⁰ Guerard's image is part of the conquering apparatus of empire ordering colonised lands around a pre-existing worldview. Images contributed to the complex and shared embodied mapping systems that organised collective perspective and grafted European cultural practices onto this continent. This material process is an assemblage of pigments, brush strokes, bodies, cultural beliefs, systems of knowledge and of seeing, Country, and landscape.

Barbara Bolt argues that the logic of studio practice transforms materials, artist, and world.²⁰¹ In this productive performativity, she contends, images do not merely illustrate but actively reveal and shape. Karen Barad alerts us to the ontological contingency of such processes.²⁰² The apparatus of inquiry, she insists, cannot be separated from that which the inquiry makes known. As a result, the distinction between the subject and object of knowledge is blurred, with both co-emerging and entangled in the intra-action of the material practices enacted.²⁰³ Mediating perception through images entangles us in apparatuses of seeing, subsuming embodied subjectivity in an assemblage which in turn intra-acts and calls forth a contingent variation of subjectivity.

The single point perspective of *Moroit (Tower Hill)* activates the Western construct of the rational, universal subject. Framed around this perspective is a picturesque nature, its complexity ordered and knowable.

Calibrating my spinning visual critique of the landscape through the lens of the home in *Inside Out* activated a sense of subjectivity decentred and pulled across multiple spatial-temporal dimensions through mutual dependency on other bodies and spaces. Damasio's account of embodied mapping contextualises this:

The outside world comes into your mind via your body. The body is constantly being the broker, it's in-between... the brain through its mind operation creates

¹⁹⁹ Terry Smith, "Visual Regimes of Colonization: European and Aboriginal Seeing in Australia", in *Empires of Vision: A Reader*, ed. Martin Ramaswamy and Sumathi Jay (Durham: Duke University Press), 268.

²⁰⁰ Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Work of Vision in the Age of European Empires", in *Empires of Vision: A Reader*, ed. Ramaswamy Martin and Sumathi Jay (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 12.

²⁰¹ Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*.

²⁰² Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

maps of its own organism, some of which are so complex they will actually be mapping the outside world that is peripheral to that organism.²⁰⁴

The body is a broker through which the meaningful sensuousness of neural maps plots potential courses of action. Embodied subjectivity is centred in and emerges from this continual and overlapping process of map making. These maps extend into the physical world, competing and rubbing against each other as they pull the body in different directions. In the same way, the thudding washing machine activates potential corrective actions in the form of chores while the spinning visual geography of *Gaia is Symbiosis* draws my attention to my grave ecological concerns and awe-filled cosmic wonder.

Inside Out was a space making exercise that combined two- and three-dimensional art making practices to organise and frame my observations. It is a socio-historical specific record of my embodied position in the world. Simultaneously, this record enabled new ways for me to imagine this relationship. In this way, this process augmented embodied mapping. It revealed my entanglement with vast assemblages and oriented the ongoing direction of my inquiry.

Conclusion

The installations discussed in this chapter organised aesthetic languages produced through this inquiry to trace my body-environment overlap. The conceptually complex nature of the aesthetics framed in *Inside Out* required disparate elements to be critiqued and resolved to create a cohesive installation. Relationships formed between component parts through space making, revealing a new mode for describing a multiplicity of subjectivity and space observed in my research. Critically examining this practice-led research reveals a continuity between embodied neural maps and vast assemblages spanning other bodies, beings, spaces and times which can be revealed through the aesthetic language of creative practice. Not only does this continuity disclose continuum of body and environment: in addition, it creates access to the contents and entanglements of assemblages that intra-act to co-form the world. This access extends the network of self-interest. Hence, it is critical in developing the expanded self-interest that, as Bennett contends, mankind will require in order to respond to the planet's ecological crisis.²⁰⁵

Critical reflection on artworks discussed in this chapter brought into focus the distinction between art and the everyday. These distinctions are continuous with the

²⁰⁴ Damasio, "Interview".

²⁰⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

aesthetic demarcation of space observed throughout my research. They also raise questions regarding art's relation to the everyday. I suggest that art can provide a means to critique and plot the perceptions that affect everyday perception without necessarily occupying focal attention. Perception can also be controlled, explains Damasio, by "offline" deliberation, which shifts one's focus from exterior to interior perception.²⁰⁶ Deliberation facilitates higher-order reasoning, allowing critical consideration of complex conceptual concerns and influencing one's longer term perception of and overarching response to the world.²⁰⁷ Installation art engages perception of the exterior world to prompt such deliberation. Perhaps demarcation of art spaces from ordinary environments replicates 'offline' conditions and enables habitual perception to yield to deliberative perception. Perhaps this demarcation exists in art objects themselves, their meaningfully sensuous materials activating complex conceptual concerns, and prompting deliberation even when—like the plywood tricycle against my kitchen window—these objects are within the realm of the ordinary.

Working through two- and three-dimensional processes in the creation of this body of work allowed me to see the interplay and commonality of image making and space making. I identified aesthetics as the conduit between these modes of perceiving and interacting in the world through our shared embodied mapping systems. Mandoki's description of the corporeal aesthetic allows me to build on these ideas: "If reality can be understood as a semiotic intersubjective network that we share with others, aesthetics is the cohesive structure that allows us to adhere to it, somewhat like the sticky filaments of spider cobwebs for insects to adhere to."²⁰⁸

Aesthetics emerge between body and materials. Just like water, and concrete streetscapes, and warm flannel against skin, images have aesthetics that inform our disposition to the world. In the following chapter, I build on the idea that installation practice works through this embodied aesthetic to enact a critically reflective space making process. Through this process, relationships, meanings, and experiences can be generated. The artworks discussed in the coming chapter consolidate the multiple lines of inquiry developed through this research and ultimately facilitated the creation of the final installation work, *Oikos*.

²⁰⁶ Damasio, "Interview".

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 67. Mandoki explains that the term semiotic is a derivative of semiosis and refers to the process of signs. It is distinct from semiotics which refers to the study of signs, 48.

Chapter 5: *Oikos*, the River Dreaming in My House

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the body of artwork that consolidated aesthetic languages and themes developed in artworks over the course of this research. Initially, I had hypothesised that examining the aesthetic dimension of the subject's intersection with its environment could reveal a material continuum generated through transient processes of living. I made a number of distinct bodies of artwork to test this hypothesis. My overarching research framework was to create a single installation that articulated the body-environment continuum. This objective required me to refine and integrate themes developed in earlier individual bodies of work. John Dewey's elucidation of aesthetic experience describes the logic that scaffolds this consolidation process: "Between the poles of aimlessness and mechanical efficiency, there lie those courses of action in which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating toward an end that is felt as an accomplishment of a process."²⁰⁹

The following account outlines the events and artworks that consolidated the key theoretical and practical themes of this research and ultimately generated the final artwork *Oikos* (2017–18). The methodology I used for this consolidation process entailed critical reflection on individual threads of my inquiry in context of each other. Katya Mandoki describes aesthetics as the sticky filaments that connect us to the intersubjective network of meanings and practices we share.²¹⁰ Scrutinising the sticky aesthetic filaments that emerged between my artworks enabled me to plot the space between their network of meanings and practice. This situated listening indicated which lines of inquiry should be retained. Developing these separate lines into a cohesive installation required further studio work in conjunction with analysis of the socio-cultural meaning emergent within the artworks and across their relationships. At certain points, an embodied aesthetic response to the assemblage of artworks and their contexts would indicate the next course of action. Ultimately, such an experience provided the basis for the final work, *Oikos*, which distilled the themes of water, landscape, domestic space making, interior warmth, entropy and renewal into a single installation.

Installation Test Space was a crucial step in this consolidation process.

Installation Test Space used installation practice to look for confluences in the separate

²⁰⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 39.

²¹⁰ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

themes in my studio research. It occurred over four days at Scope Galleries Warrnambool and was not exhibited publicly.



Fig. 65. *Installation Test Space* (2015).



I used the theme of the home's interior as an organising framework for *Installation Test Space*. I covered the floor in town planning maps and then arranged domestic bric-a-brac, lamps, and the following artworks on top of these items: *Hand Basin Sound Space* (2014), *Warm Safe House Series 1* (2015), and *Communion* (2014–17). I then projected *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* (2014) through the installation. I sought to make tangible the fullness of domestic space and subjectivity's immersion and intertwining within it. Instead, I found four salient themes requiring further development before they could integrate with each other more fluidly. These themes were embodied within *Communion*, *Warm Space House Series 1*, and in the individual audio and video components of *Gaia is Symbiosis*.



Fig. 66. *Communion* study, *Installation Test Space* (2015).

Communion is a water-themed study made on a dinner setting. First, I arranged copies of Lady Bay Foreshore town planning maps on the gallery floor, so the map's contours formed a spiral. Next, I positioned the individual pieces of *Communion* in another spiral on top. This playful response to congruent forms began an open-ended

process through which meaning embodied by water in my inquiry transferred into other materials being used in my research.

Warm Space House Series 1 took the form of fabric and photo covered boxes and was incorporated in *Installation Test Space* in a line arcing across the floor. These small studies emerged through re-evaluating photographs and themes developed through my earlier domestic observations. The homely warmth these works brought to the installation was compelling and prompted me to continue this line of practice-led inquiry.



Fig. 67. *Warm Space House Series 1* study, *Installation Test Space* (2015).



Fig. 68. *Warm Space House Series 1* study, *Installation Test Space* (2015).

The audio and video elements of *Gaia is Symbiosis* brought a dynamism to *Installation Test Space*. I observed how both the washing machine soundscape and the moving and shifting light of the aerial footage interacted with the other artworks and activated the space in different ways. Following *Installation Test Space*, I experimented with different approaches to presenting *Gaia is Symbiosis*. Over time, I came to treat the audio and video as distinct elements that contained different conceptual concerns and generated individual spatial effects.

Using creative practice to track and hone the themes, ideas, materials and approaches in *Communion*, *Warm Space House Series 1*, and *Gaia is Symbiosis* enabled

the conditions through which *Oikos* would emerge. Accordingly, I discuss the key developments in each of these bodies of artwork before providing an account of the creation of *Oikos*.

Communion

Water had become significant within my inquiry. I sought an aesthetic form that described the intrinsic fluidity and mutability of water, as well as its ecological lineages, its role in demarcating clean space from dirty, and in carrying cultural sensibilities. I experimented with different materials and approaches by combining different painting techniques with plaster and textile studies (Fig. 69). However, I felt that these visual forms did not yet convey the complexity water embodied in my research.



Fig. 69. Water studies (2014–15).

Communion grew from previous examinations of water made through *Hand Basin Sound Space*, *Standing in this River on its way out to the Sea* (2015), and *Inside Out*. *Communion* sought to extend the meaning of water in my research to convey the transmission of aesthetic sensibilities through familial interaction. The work was created in response to a second-hand dinner set comprising four dinner plates, four bread and butter plates, and a single bowl. The set was identical to one my mother had wanted when I was a child. She could only afford the serving bowls, and these were saved for special occasions.

Communion was made by arranging the dinner set to form a spiral in which water forms, made from plaster, appeared to reach from one plate to the next (Fig. 70). The spiral began with the single bowl and continued with each dinner plate paired with a bread and butter plate, the sculptural forms graduating in size as the spiral extended. I painted the water forms the same blue as that on the plate's trim. The setting's floral motif provided the basis for a floral design painted onto the plaster forms in white acrylic glaze to mimic sea foam.



Fig. 70. *Communion* (2014–17).

Floral patterns were first used in my studio inquiry in *Ocean Basket* and the *Memory Flesh* series discussed in Chapter 1. In *Communion*, floral patterns were used to address my frustration with the opaqueness of the plaster. In addition, the patterns described how domestic practices encoded water aesthetically.

Within my inquiry, this particular pattern embodied the aesthetic sensibility activated by my earlier scrutiny of water’s role in cleaning practices. The soft hues of its flowers implied a dainty, romantic femininity, an idealised maternal mother nature, and family life. My personal relationship with water symbolised sensibilities regarding cleanliness and manners transferred through my maternal lineage: moral ideals of femininity conflating the cleanliness of my body and my home to my social acceptability as a person, woman, and mother.

Katya Mandoki uses the example of the infant latching-on to its mother’s nipple as an allegory for a corporeal aesthetics: “the term latching-on implies fascination, seduction, impetus, nutrition, and appetite”.²¹¹ Rather than a contemplative attitude, Mandoki views latching-on as an activity that seeks communion between body and world. Multiple generations of family commune through shared meals: family members draw food from the environment into their bodies; they follow codes of behaviour and impart values through these shared interactions. These interactions enable the exchange and absorption of aesthetic sensibilities, adhering embodied subjects to each other and to the world they share. This connection forms an aesthetic overlapping of body and environment.

Transferring Meaning

²¹¹ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

Through making *Installation Test Space*, I found confluence between the spiralling interchange of the dinner plates in *Communion* and the contours of Lady Bay drafted on the town planning maps. Earlier examination of this terrain through my *Making Spaces Drawing Series* revealed how this bay, upon whose edge my house sat, was marked by a long history of human communion. I investigated ways to link these spiralling forms visually: the ebb and flow of both the shoreline and domestic housekeeping; the historical sustenance provided by the bay and the sustenance suggested by the diner setting. I experimented with tracing images from the maps before deciding to work directly with the maps themselves.

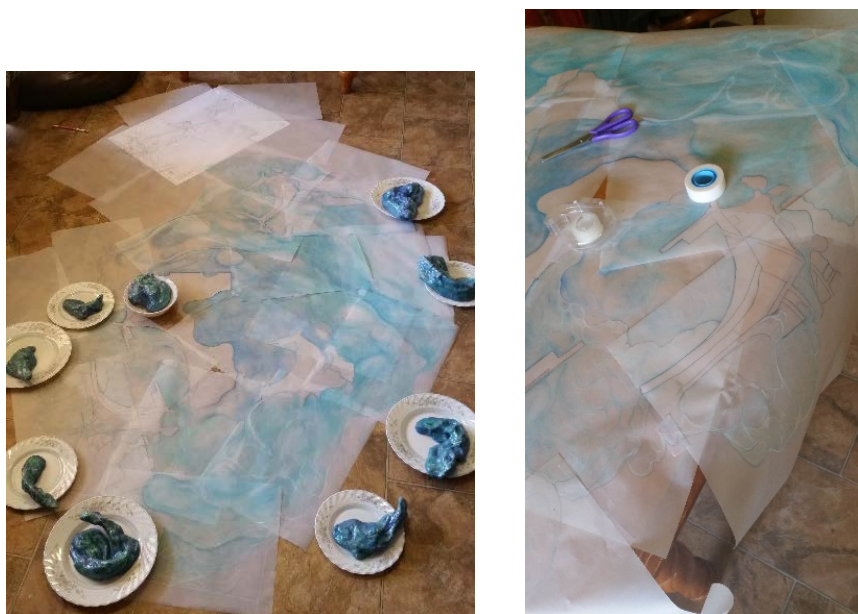


Fig. 71. *Communion* (2014-17); *Trace Lady Bay* (2015).

Revisiting aesthetic languages that emerged during my domestic observations enabled me to integrate the maps as a more sculptural material in my inquiry. This decision allowed me to integrate into the core of my inquiry understanding produced via handling the town planning maps in the *Making Spaces* (2013) drawing series and examining image making through *Gaia is Symbiosis*. In this way, the town planning maps embodied the material effect of images on human and non-human bodies and landscapes. Barbara Bolt explains that Cartesian representation is used to create representations such as maps. Drawing on Bruno Latour, Bolt argues that this representation transforms physical objects into data which is then used, in the original's absence, to make decisions that affect the original.²¹² I painted town planning maps in the red, fleshy coloured palette (Fig. 72) I had first used in the *Memory Flesh* series

²¹² Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*.

(2013) (Fig. 14). My intention was to represent the physical entanglements obscured from, yet purposefully formed by, the stark white diagraphical maps.



Fig. 72. Town planning map studies (2014–17).



Fig. 73. *Communion* (2014–17).

I could imagine *Communion* on a dining table encased in these fleshy maps. I painted a series of Lady Bay maps with red and vermillion acrylic glaze through which the ink of the maps remained visible (Fig. 73 and 74). I carefully collaged these images onto a second-hand, circular table, recreating the spiral I had worked with in *Installation Test Space*.



Fig. 74. Aesthetic language studies (2017).

During this time, my husband and I replaced our aging dining chairs. I incorporated the old chairs with the table used in *Communion*. Once again using aesthetic textures from the *Memory Flesh* series, I stitched pink, spotted flannelette around sections of the chairs while painting other sections in red flesh tones (Fig. 74). The fabric puckered and pulled like skin as I stitched. This observation led me to consider how the embodied subjectivities of my children had been shaped through our mealtime interactions. Faith Wilding's *Crocheted Environment (Womb Room)* (1972) informed this process (Fig. 75). Exhibited as part of *Womanhouse* (1972), *Womb Room* was crocheted using white yarn.²¹³ The organic textile structure formed a room that could be entered by viewers. It subverted the rigid, angular structure of the built architecture of the home while critiquing women's containment within the home.²¹⁴ I could imagine how the warm embrace created by Wilding's subtle, sagging, soft, knitted structure articulated subjective immersion and entanglement in lived space. My engagement with *Womb Room* demonstrated that even imagining a work of art could activate affect contagion. Furthermore, I came to see that such affect conveys a semantic dimension, enabling transfer of complex concepts. This is the felt knowledge of art.

Contemplating Wilding's artwork, while transforming my dining chairs, revealed that encasing these domestic objects in fabric and flesh was an inversion of the social, emotional, embodied structures lining the home's interior. I was making visible

²¹³ Perry, *Playing at Home*.

²¹⁴ Faith Wilding, "By Our Own Hands", accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.womanhouse.net/related-content/2016/1/24/by-our-own-hands>.

the transient, aesthetic sensibilities that animated the mathematical dimensions of the world I occupied.

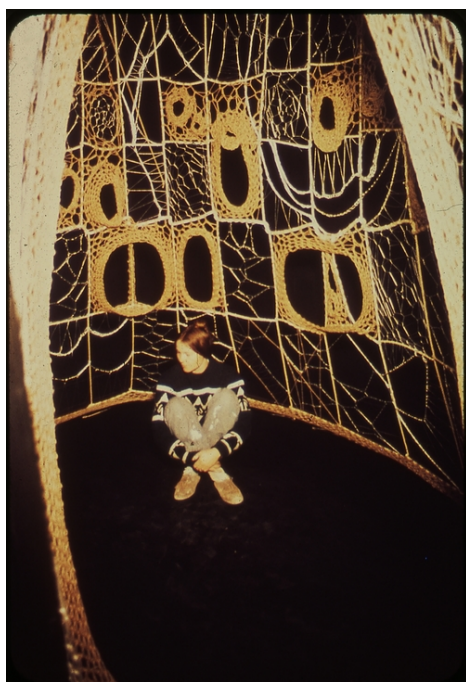


Fig. 75. Faith Wilding, *Crocheted Environment/ Womb Room* (1972).

Through this process, aesthetic sensibilities of cleanliness and domestic space making practices embodied in my inquiry by water transferred into the painted maps and patterned fabrics. Rather than seeing this transfer as a fragmentation of my existing aesthetic language, I recognised how these sensibilities, first identified through critical engagement with water, were in fact integrated within many different materials, spaces, and structures within our everyday environments. Through this transfer, however, *Communion* and its table setting became somewhat redundant. My frustration with the visual forms devised to represent water remained unresolved and I surrendered this line of studio inquiry. Even so, water itself would remain an instructive concept.

Warm Space House Series 1 (2015) foregrounded this shift. These studies were created through evaluating the body of aesthetic material generated to articulate the experience of immersion within the home's interior during my earlier domestic observations. Identifying aesthetic similarities across the photographs and materials used in the *Memory Flesh* series and *Ocean Basket* organised this material. When incorporated into *Installation Test Space*, the colours, textures, and images within *Warm Space House Series 1* grounded the home's internal warmth within the larger body of artwork.

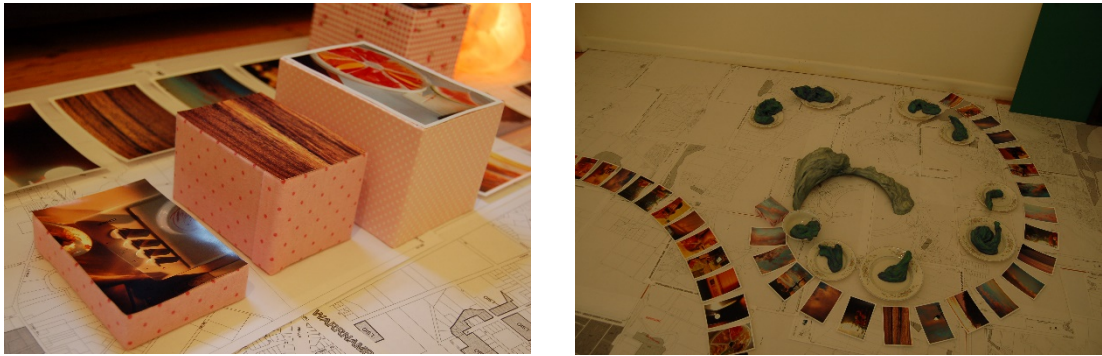


Fig. 76. *Warm Space House Series 1 study, Installation Test Space* (2015).

I distilled these aesthetic sensibilities further in *Warm Safe Home #1* and *Warm Safe Home #2* (2015) (Fig. 77). These studies are a pair of hollow boxes made from plywood. Deep yellow, transparent acrylic sheet is set within the front face, with a piece of clear light diffuser at the rear. On one box, fabric wraps the outside and a flesh-like map lines its interior. The combination is reversed on the other. Painted on the yellow acrylic window of both is a small gas meter similar to the one recorded in the drawing *Making Spaces #1: Warm Safe Home*.

The angular structure of the box itself played with the concept of space making that emerged throughout my inquiry. The boxes omitted some materials from my inquiry while emphasising and exaggerating others in such a way that the inquiry focus shifted relative to them. This instigated further theoretical research that brought clarity to the final work and the research process as a whole.



Fig. 77. *Warm Safe Home #1* (2015); *Warm Safe Home #2* (2015).

Investigating water-based cleaning practices revealed culturally specific sensibilities that inform the interior spaces of our homes. I recognised these sensibilities embodied in patterns on fabrics and domestic items that evoked a traditional feminine ideal. Eighteenth century middle class ideals, explains Karen Reiger, combined with

nineteenth century health and housing reforms to drive the systematic modernisation of Australian households from the turn of the twentieth century.²¹⁵ On the one hand, Reiger argues, women were to generate the emotional warmth and tranquillity of the home. On the other hand, women were to become masters of the household economy, efficiently managing the home's resources and hygiene through constant physical labour. These conflicting space making practices were observed and critiqued throughout my research, and had now been collaged and framed together in *Warm Safe Home #1* and *#2*.

In our nomadic past, argues Anni Albers, the soft flexible qualities of fabrics, and skins, provided the fundamental materials for our mobile shelters.²¹⁶ As our living structures became more permanent, more durable, solid materials were required. Fabrics were instead used to furnish the interiors of our dwellings. Here, Albers insists, fabric reflects the warmth of our bodies: insulating windows, absorbing sound, warming floors, and providing the embrace of our beds. In these ways, fabric can be seen almost like a skin, or perhaps more a membrane: one that enables sticky aesthetic filaments to adhere our bodies more easily to the mathematical spaces that encase us. Chiharu Shiota and Faith Wilding invert the architecture of the home by emphasising the textured visuality of fabric and the associations woven within it. Shiota and Wilding make visible those formations that otherwise evaporate in space, aesthetically mapping the instructive sensibilities that mediate our interior experiences. *Warm Safe Home #1* and *#2* acted as an aesthetic biopsy of the invisible dimensions I had examined and indicated the materials from which the final cast of this form would be made.

The Whole House

German biologist Ernst Haeckel devised the term 'ecology' from the Latin root 'oikos'.²¹⁷ Oikos means 'the whole house' and describes the interaction of component parts in the creation of a cohesive whole.²¹⁸ I named my final artwork *Oikos* as the term captured the shared, complex ecology of home and landscape, as well as the search for aesthetic integration that drove my practice-led inquiry.

The synthesis of the key inquiry concepts, meanings, and observations into a single aesthetic form occurred spontaneously one evening in the final year of research. I

²¹⁵ Karen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing Australian Domestic Life* (Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²¹⁶ Anni Albers, "Habitation is a Habit", in *Interiors*, ed. Johanna Burton (New York: Annandale on Hudson, 2012), 44–53.

²¹⁷ Samie Al-Achrafi, "Oikos: The Origins of Economic Thought", accessed November 11, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/samie-alachrafi/oikos-the-origins-of-econ_b_8520644.html.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

had been contemplating what demarcated a sunrise from a domestic interior as I read a passage in Yuriko Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics*. Saito critiques "scenic aesthetics" in which "naturally beautiful" landscapes such as mountainous wildernesses are protected, while terrains such as plains and wetlands or swamps are deemed less valuable, if not ugly, and therefore are seen as ripe for human exploitation.²¹⁹ For the first time in a long while, I considered the submerged rivers in the valleys of my childhood. As I did, the image of a long stream comprising many *Warm Safe Home* boxes emerged in my imagination: a river diverted and inverted to generate the interior world of our homes.

As with other Western cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the separation of clean and waste water in Australia's urbanisation was a liability that ultimately drove innovation in public health and infrastructure.²²⁰ As Peter Simms explains, "not until the cities were ringed by dams feeding a maze of underground pipes did Australian householders secure a clean, reliable water supply".²²¹ The Australian dam building project began in the mid-nineteenth century. These dams provided clean water, enabling the uptake of new hygiene standards and the wholesale modernisation of the Australian home described by Reiger. This development would also see domestic bathrooms eventually normalised within each home.

The rivers dammed within my childhood valley formed a body of water in which the aesthetic sensibilities, so informative to my inquiry, would be suspended as their waters were diverted through hundreds of thousands of homes downstream along the Murray River. This intervention would also forever change the fluidity of water's movement across this continent.

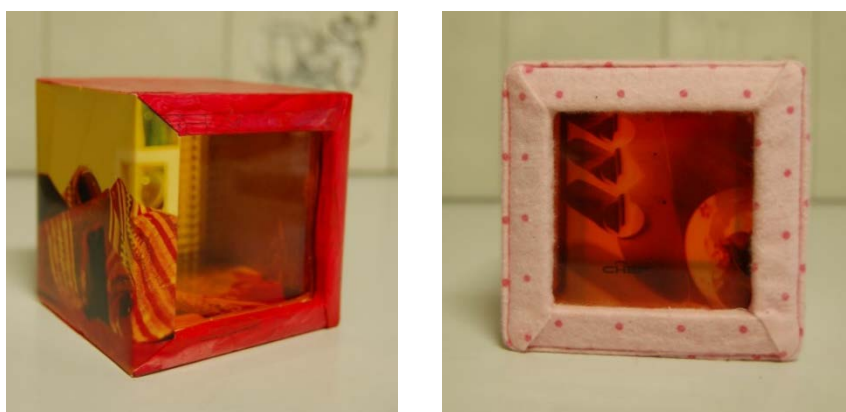


Fig. 78. *Warm Space House Series 2* (2017–18).

²¹⁹ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 61–62.

²²⁰ Timms, *Private Lives*.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 181.

The creation of *Oikos* would require a new body of artwork. Further distilling the aesthetic languages embodied in *Warm Space House Series 1*, and *Warm Safe Home #1* and *#2*, I created almost ninety multi-medium boxes in *Warm Space House Series 2* (Fig. 78–83).

The boxes range in size from seven to twelve cent square meters. Their windows are predominately made of orange acrylic sheet and light diffuser, with transparent photographs on acetate mounted in some boxes. Covering the boxes is a combination of fabric, flesh-like maps, and photographs from the sunrise and domestic observation series. Each box is an individual space making exercise: components have been selected to amplify aesthetic continuity between each material and represent embodied maps that form between subject and world. Painted onto the windows of about thirty of the boxes are utilitarian objects: milk cartons, gas meters, irons, clothes baskets, bath towels, kitchen taps, and plastic shopping bags. The purpose of these icons is to juxtapose the lived depth imagined within the boxes against the notion of habitual perception that I had critiqued earlier through my domestic observations.



Fig. 79. *Warm Space House Series 2* (2017–18).

Making Space

Dewey emphasises culmination as an ordering agent that generates the final unity of an aesthetic experience.²²² In this research, the final exhibition ordered the constituent parts of the inquiry. This approach required a final resolution of concerns within the artwork. It also required a shift from thinking about how the aesthetic forms generate knowledge within the parameters of studio research to how they might convey this knowledge to the viewer.

I made a number of attempts to integrate *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* with *Warm Space House Series 2*. This included projecting *Gaia is Symbiosis* through the boxes as well as projecting it onto mirrors to fragment and displace the footage around the boxes (Fig. 80). However, I found that doing this created a secondary visual element that split one's focus within the work. Introducing the mirrors also brought a spectrum of new meanings, which I felt could fragment the aesthetic languages distilled in the concept of the river.

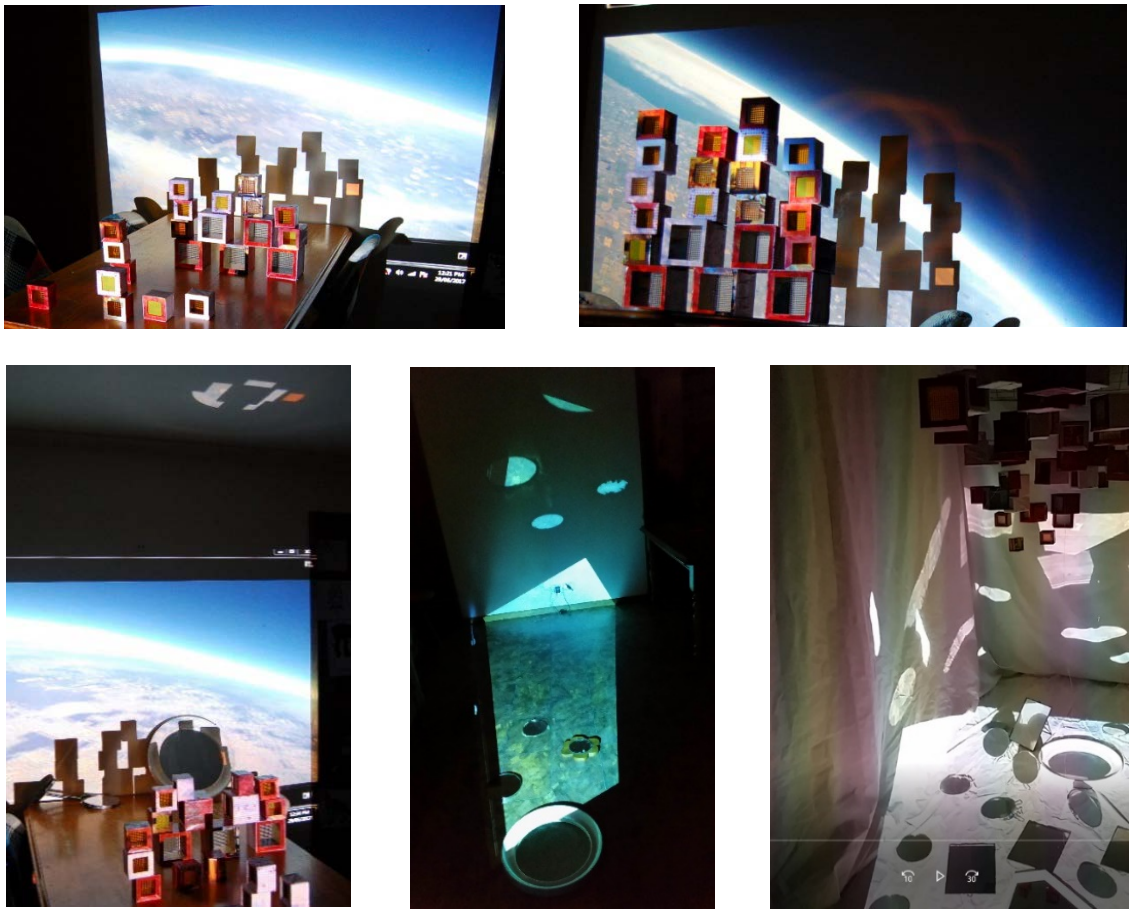


Fig. 80. *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space studies* (2013–14).

²²² Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

Oikos: The Dream of the River

The position of *Gaia is Symbiosis as seen from Space* in my final installation was resolved through critical evaluation during the first public test of *Oikos* at the Warrnambool Art Gallery in February 2018. I recognised that a transfer of meaning had occurred from the video into this later installation. Handling the video through filming, editing, and re-presenting it in different settings enabled me to process the position of my subjectivity as a descendant of nineteenth century Anglo-Celtic immigrants within Australia's landscape. My deepening of the concept of 'the river' and decision to include the dammed rivers from my ancestral valley transferred these socio-historical contexts into this new aesthetic form. Observations regarding the supply chain of resources used to renew the home, made through this video, also became embodied in the concept of the 'diverted river'. When projected in *Inside Out* and *Installation Test Space*, the spinning video footage established a sense of the multiplicity of subjectivity. Experimenting with mirrors to fragment and displace the video was an attempt to communicate this multiplicity. However, I conceded that the multiple boxes from which the body of the river was composed conceptualised this feeling more succinctly. I surrendered the video from the ongoing studio inquiry.

Critical evaluation extended to the audio component of *Gaia is Symbiosis*. I observed that rather than competing, the sound of the out of balance washing machine integrated with the visual forms from *Warm Space House Series 2*. The ubiquitous sound embodied those space making practices through which the entropy and order of the home is managed. Conversely, its discordant mechanical banging embodied the brute nature of domestic labour omitted from the eighteenth century feminine ideal. And finally, the soundscape further evolved the aesthetic language of water. Rather than a reimagined interpretation like my painted sculptural forms, the sound recording was indexical of water. This enabled it to convey more clearly the aesthetisation of materials that occurs through our embodied interaction with them.

I experimented with a number of ways presenting *Warm Space House Series 2*, including suspending the boxes using fishing line (Fig. 81). While this approach enabled me to create visual fluidity across the series of boxes, the already small boxes seemed diminished as they floated in the air.



Fig. 81. *Warm Space House Series 2* (2017-18); *Oikos* (2017).

The test installation at the Warrnambool Art Gallery resolved my final approach (Fig. 85–83). I considered presenting the boxes on different surfaces, including trestle tables, light boxes, and on ironing boards. Each surface brought connotations that changed how the boxes would be received by the viewer. In addition, arranging the square boxes on flat, vertical surfaces would impede how the whole form could embody the fluidity of the river.

Mounting the individual boxes on stilts made from PVC pipe of varying lengths offered an interim solution. Inserted vertically in two plyboard plinths, I staggered the heights of the stilts to create lines that undulated like river currents. I organised the boxes on the pipes according to their colours and materials, creating visual streams that connected the individual pieces. The audio sound track paired with the prototype river successfully. A single spotlight directed diagonally through the ensemble demonstrated how the acrylic windows and light diffuser would activate in the gallery setting.

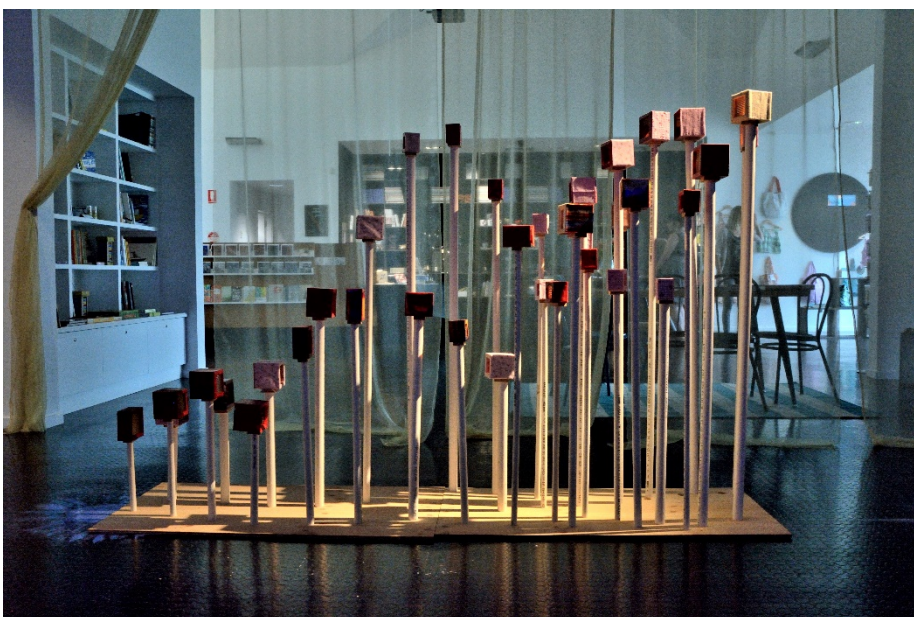


Fig. 82. *Oikos* test installation (2018).

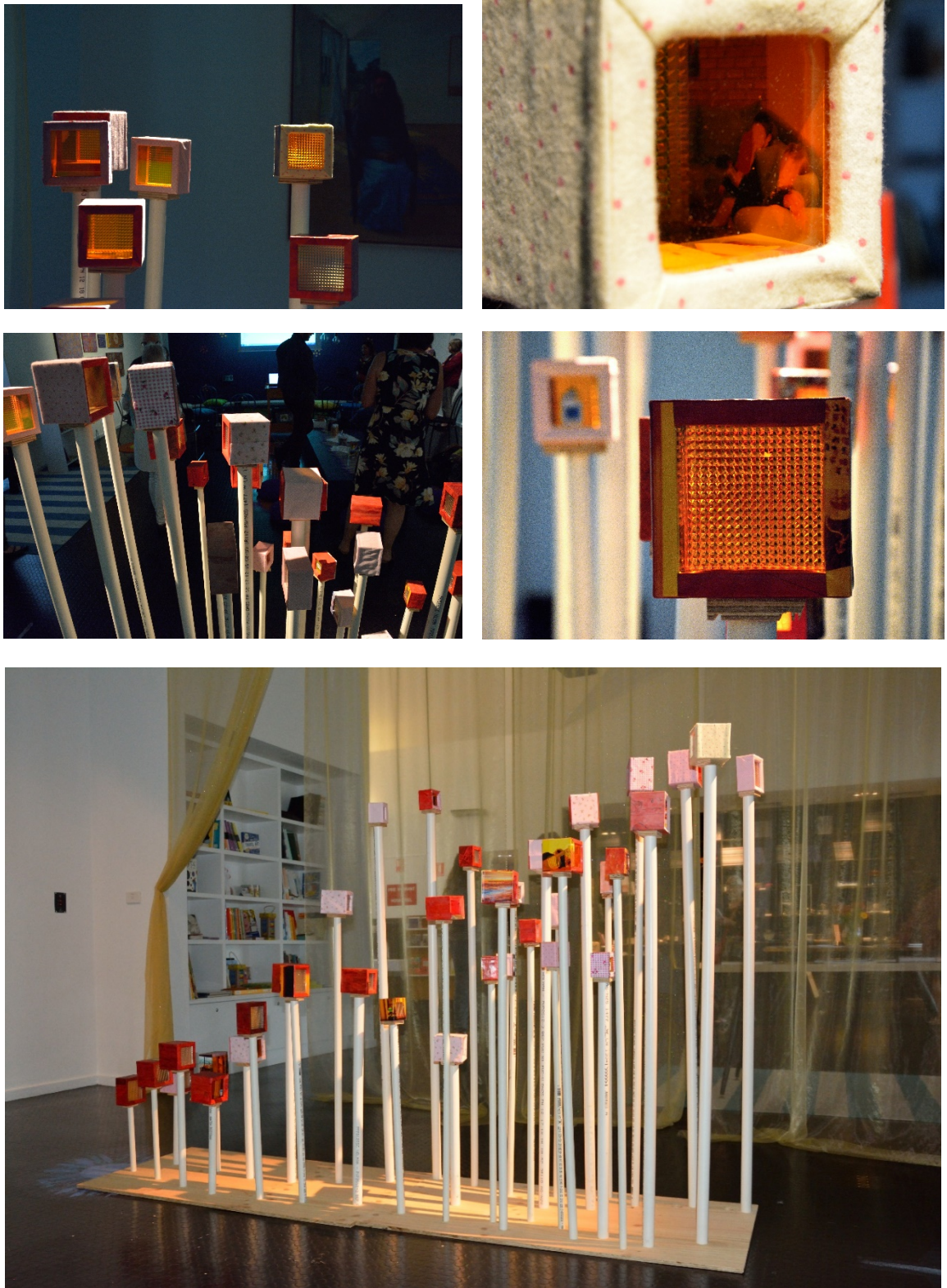


Fig. 83. *Oikos* test installation (2018).

The use of PVC pipes was an important breakthrough in augmenting the artwork's visual form and its meaning. The PVC pipe anchors the boxes to the floor using materials that anchor the home to the watercourse. The PVC pipe is aesthetically distinct from the warm fleshy materials and tones of the boxes. This distinction builds

on the observation that aesthetics themselves inform the perceived disjuncture between the interior of the home and the landscape that feeds it.

Contemplating the function and qualities of the PVC pipes prompted another evolution in the work's form. I decided that the three-dimensional river should be created by weaving and joining the pipework together, with *Warm Space House Series 2* mounted throughout this structure.

Late one night during the final stages of writing this exegesis, the concept for the river's final form coalesced as I contemplated which water course *Oikos* should embody. The water diverted through my home is obscured from its source. This water is piped from the Gellibrand River, one hundred kilometres away in the Otway Ranges. Considering this distance as I sat in my lounge room, I envisaged a river in the visual periphery of my imagination. There, behind closed eyes and just off to the right, was a form that had rested quietly in the imagined space of my home since the early stages of my domestic observations.

In her *Talking Water* residency, Marily Cintra asked: "where does the river dream?"²²³ When I had thought about a river being diverted through my home, I pre-reflectively imagined that its entry point would be my kitchen tap. As these thoughts unfolded, I imagined the river surging and twisting from the kitchen tap to my en suite door. There it was: the river that had run through my research. I had found it dreaming in my home.



Fig. 84. *Oikos* study (2018).

²²³ Marily Cintra, cited in Maurice O’Riordan, “*Talking Water: Artist in Residence*”, accessed April 12 2013, <https://craftact.org.au/blogs/past-exhibitions/talking-water-artist-in-residence>.

In these few moments of vivid imagination, I committed to constructing the river within this domestic space. The following day, I mapped a preliminary watercourse with individual boxes from *Warm Space House Series 2* and the PVC pipes used in the *Oikos* test installation (Fig. 84 and 85). I recognised that the work needed to be life scale for it to translate in the final exhibition space. The highest point, about 170 centimetres, would be its ‘source’ at the kitchen tap. This height would reduce to ground level by the ‘river mouth’ at my en suite doorway. I approximated the total pipe layout and estimated how many fixtures the organic, fluid form would require, such as elbow joints, s-bends, and t-joints. I placed an order with a national supplier and awaited the freight’s arrival.



Fig. 85. *Oikos* study (2018).

The freight arrived three and a half weeks late. This gave me just two weeks to completely construct the form, disassemble it, load it into my car, drive nine hours to Canberra and reassemble it in time for my thesis examination.

The magnitude of the task and uncertainty of the steps required, the submission deadline and the geographical distance to the ANU School of Art Gallery thrust me into an all-consuming vortex, wherein my overarching strategy had to become a deep surrender to the creative process. The mantra “connect deeply with this” emerged in my mind during key points in this studio work. This perspective heightened my focus, attuning me to the specificity of each stage of the process. I experienced this clarity as a synchronistic process, in which I was one participant in a collaborative assemblage of artworks, plumbing pipes and fittings, built architecture, domestic space, the research process, university procedures, meal preparation, hardware stores, school pick-ups, family interactions, my town’s water system, natural water courses, a table saw, dust masks, measuring tape, pencils, time, and delayed freight.

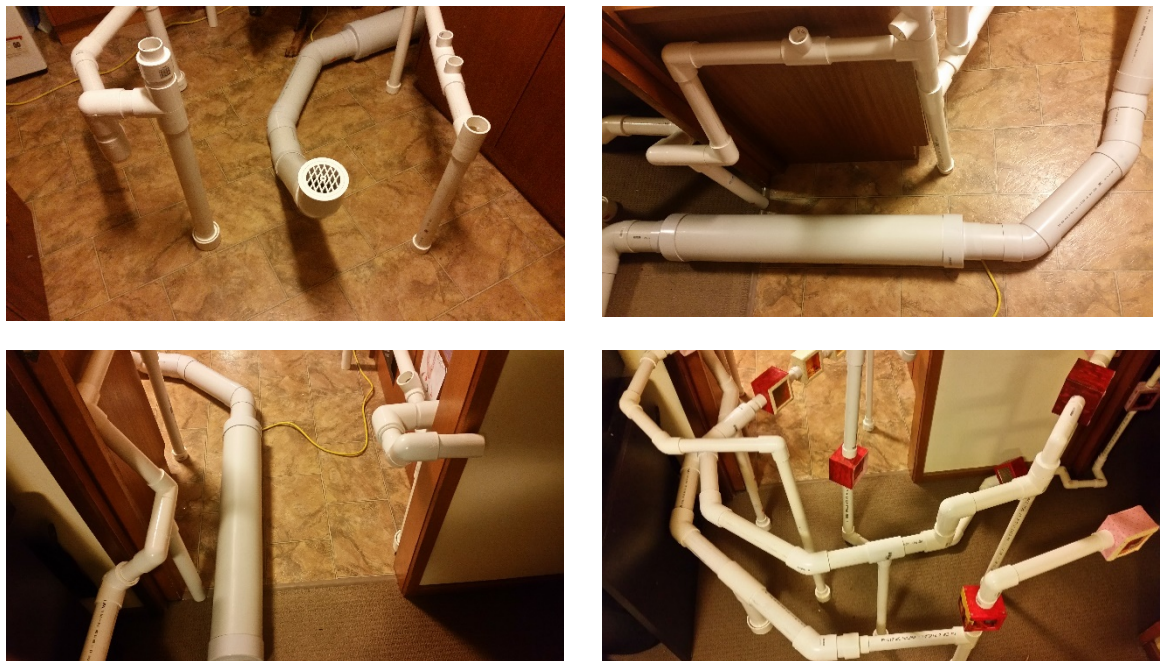


Fig. 86. *Oikos* construction (2018).

Constructing *Oikos* was a piece-by-piece assemblage of pipes, fixtures, and boxes, in which my whole body engaged in deliberation and action. In this way, I ‘felt’ the river out. Standing in the space, my body sensed which combinations of pipe formations and *Warm Space Home* boxes could become individual streams emerging from and contributing to the fluidity of the whole sculptural form.



Fig. 87. *Oikos* construction (2018).

In the Introduction to this exegesis, I explained that my research was shaped by the parameters in which it was conducted. Creating this three-dimensional, imagined and inverted river within the mathematical dimensions between my kitchen and my en suite literally embodies this logic. Constructing this complex artwork in this central family space required me to work within the individual and shared schedules of other family members. Building the form in sub-sections enabled fluidity of movement

through this space to be mostly maintained. Sections were built in local clusters, which I carefully numbered and photographed to ensure accurate reassembly. The continuous arranging, building and disassembling within the space generated a visual and spatial ephemerality that shifted my understanding. The aim of this work was to create a tangible, solid account of body and environment continuum. However, the process of translating this into visual language produced an equally significant account of the materiality of transient, physical process. Just as each section of pipework responded and adhered to the negative space traced by the overarching shape, so to the ephemeral tracks made by footsteps, hands, and aesthetic pipework layered memories of the fleeting temporality of these processes upon the space.

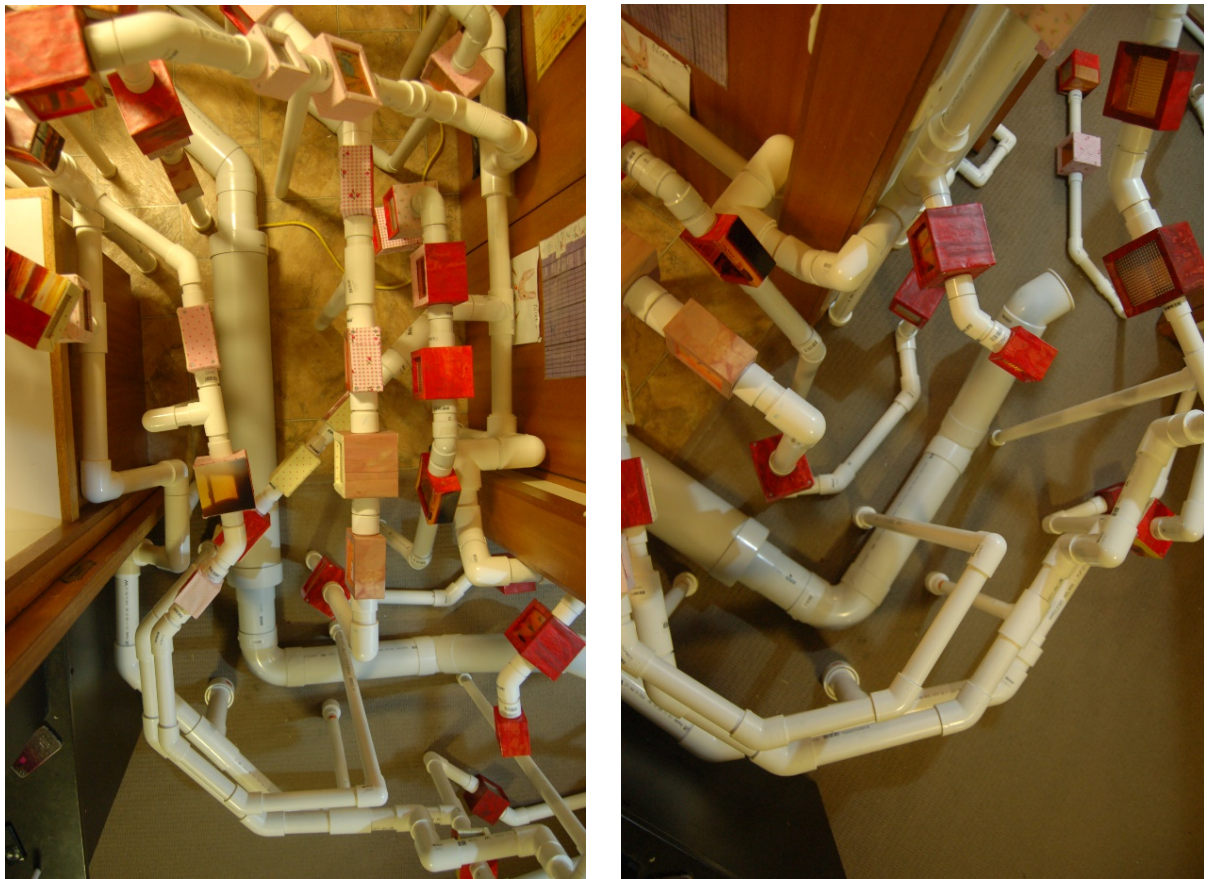


Fig. 88. *Oikos* construction (2018).



Fig. 89. *Oikos* construction (2018).

Oikos is a three-dimensional aesthetic mould of the complex intertwining of body and world observed in my inquiry. *Oikos* first emerged in my mind's eye as a river inverted to furnish the interior warmth of our homes. This inversion is the perceptual twist that uncovers the lie of our separation from the world exterior to our bodies. Karen Barad elucidates a material intimacy between bodies and space that further unsettles this perceptual trick. Matter, time, and space are intrinsically entangled, Barad argues, in the on-going intra-activity of the world through which bodies, boundaries, properties, and spacetime are endlessly reconfigured.²²⁴ Despite the tangible illusion of stasis formed by the boundary of our skin and the walls of our homes, we are continuous with the world. In Barad's words: "embodiment is a matter of not being specifically situated in the world, but rather being of the world in its dynamic specificity."²²⁵

²²⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 376.



Fig. 90. *Oikos* (2018).

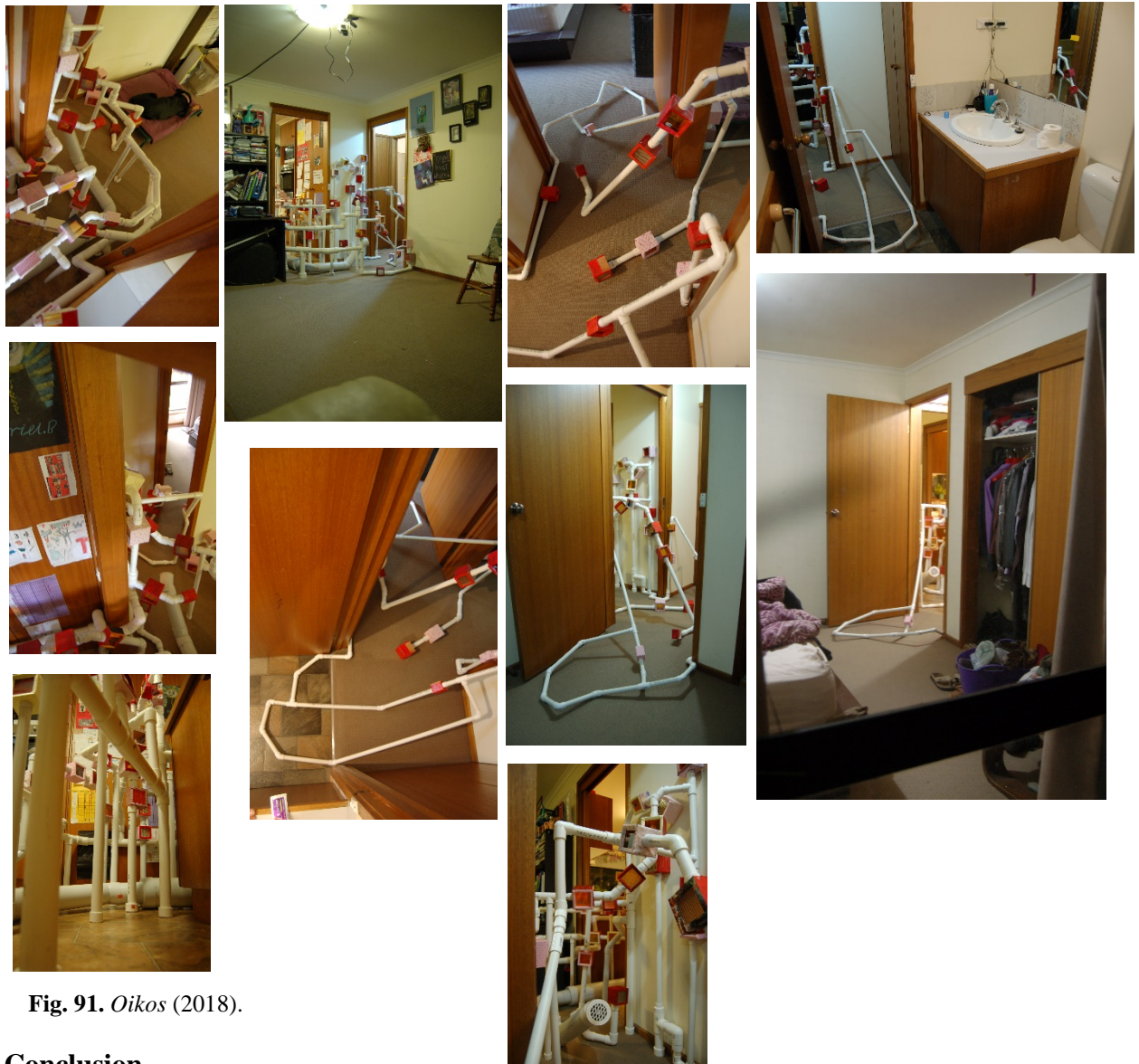


Fig. 91. *Oikos* (2018).

Conclusion

Oikos demonstrated the material conditions that contoured and shaped this practice-led inquiry. The aesthetic languages that emerged over the course of this research mapped the transient spaces generated between the body and the different structures that frame it. The final artwork emerged through these contexts. *Oikos* makes tangible the home's relationship with the natural systems which furnish its interior yet are obscured by the space making practices generating that same interior. *Oikos* enabled a productive shift in my inquiry. In the process, the intra-action of materials, site, and body were made tangible by the completed artwork and the process of creating it within the everyday space it corresponds to.

Within an ecosystem, the metabolisms of individual organisms are continuous with the flow of food and energy through the whole system.²²⁶ Mandoki's notion of the

²²⁶ Capra, *The Web of Life*.

aesthetics of latching-on offers a way to conceptualise the sustenance and nourishment we extract from our aesthetic interactions. My practice-led examination of embodied environments through this research has led me to conclude that subjectivity has an aesthetic metabolism: a significantly affectionate sensory processing system that calibrates and fuses our bodies to the world. I have used my multi-artform practice to scrutinise and trace the sticky aesthetic filaments that extend between my body and the environments I inhabit. *Oikos* is a cast mould of those aesthetic filaments as they have been formed by the mathematical dimensions of my home relative to the critique of embodied space undertaken within it.

Through this inquiry, I worked across image making and space making processes. Observing my domestic space in situ with the landscape, through the lens of these processes, revealed how moderation of entropy and renewal is a foundational space making activity. Through practice-led critique of everyday activities used to regulate this interplay, I identified how materials and practices become aesthetically encoded. This coding generates the internal stability of the home while lining the home with the instructive sensibilities that mediate our interior experiences.

Constructing *Oikos* to my home's dimensions transiently blocked entrances between my kitchen, lounge, bedroom, and en suite. This obstruction restricted the movement of the embodied subjects whose aesthetic entanglements in this space regulate entropy within it. The concept of 'infrathin' foregrounds the significance of this intervention. The infrathin, explains Norie Neumark, is a "productively useless and a uselessly productive figure" that evokes our deeper deliberation.²²⁷ Lining the floor in the centre of *Oikos* is a thick grey storm water pipe with the irregular thudding of the washing machine soundscape emanating from it. *Oikos* was assembled in its entirety and in situ on the final afternoon of construction. In the process, our major domestic junction was rendered useless for several hours: an inverted, waterless river forming an impasse through its representation of fluidity and its aural expression of entropy. The uselessness of the infrathin makes use and exchange value redundant. Instead, Neumark argues, a value emerges that can enable the conditions of another way of perceiving, in which a thing's dynamic entanglements and processes become materially tangible.²²⁸

Even as energy and food circulate continuously through an ecosystem, some energy always dissipates in the form of warmth.²²⁹ Heat relates to entropy and indicates

²²⁷ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 161.

²²⁸ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*.

²²⁹ Capra, *The Web*.

the amount of disorder and net energy loss in a system.²³⁰ Heat can transfer only from a warmer object to a cooler one. This transmission of warmth is a reaching from one thing to another, a material continuity through space. *Oikos* embodies the effort, beliefs, and resources invested to defer entropy. The sound of my washing machine radiating from *Okois* evokes deep dread at the ultimate inevitability of entropy. However, using art to observe and critique entropy within my everyday environment has enabled another perception to emerge. It seems that as warmth emanates from a given system or object, that warmth fuses with temporal-space. Perhaps the transient warmth I observed within the home is a product of the entropy we so seek to delay. Perhaps entropy is a material trace of temporal participation: a warmth that stretches out and fuses our subjectivities to the world, like the webbing that Shiota weaves through space.

The final form that *Oikos* took in the ANU School of Art Gallery was a reassembled iteration of the cast made within my home. Without the embrace of its built architecture, *Oikos* revealed the memory of the home imprinted upon its parameters. Twenty-one photographs of the imagined river in its domestic habitat were presented alongside the form, allowing viewers to imagine the process of its emergence.

²³⁰ Baker, *50 Physics Ideas*.

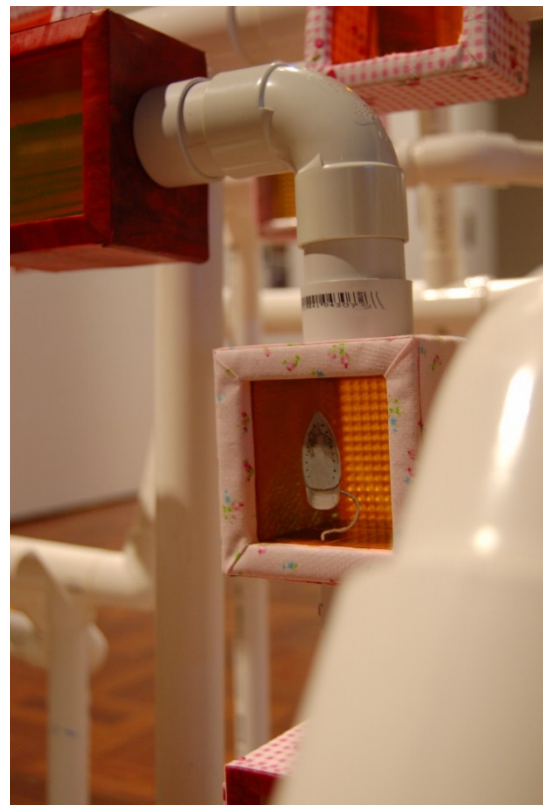
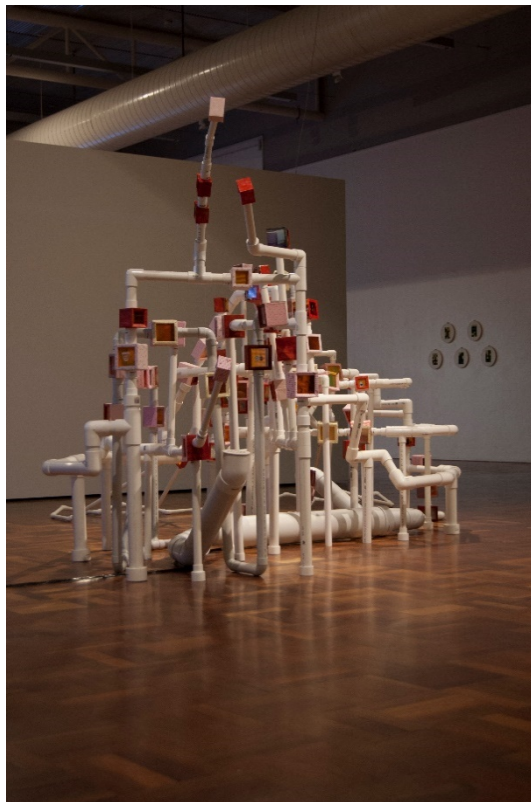


Fig. 92. *Oikos* (2018).

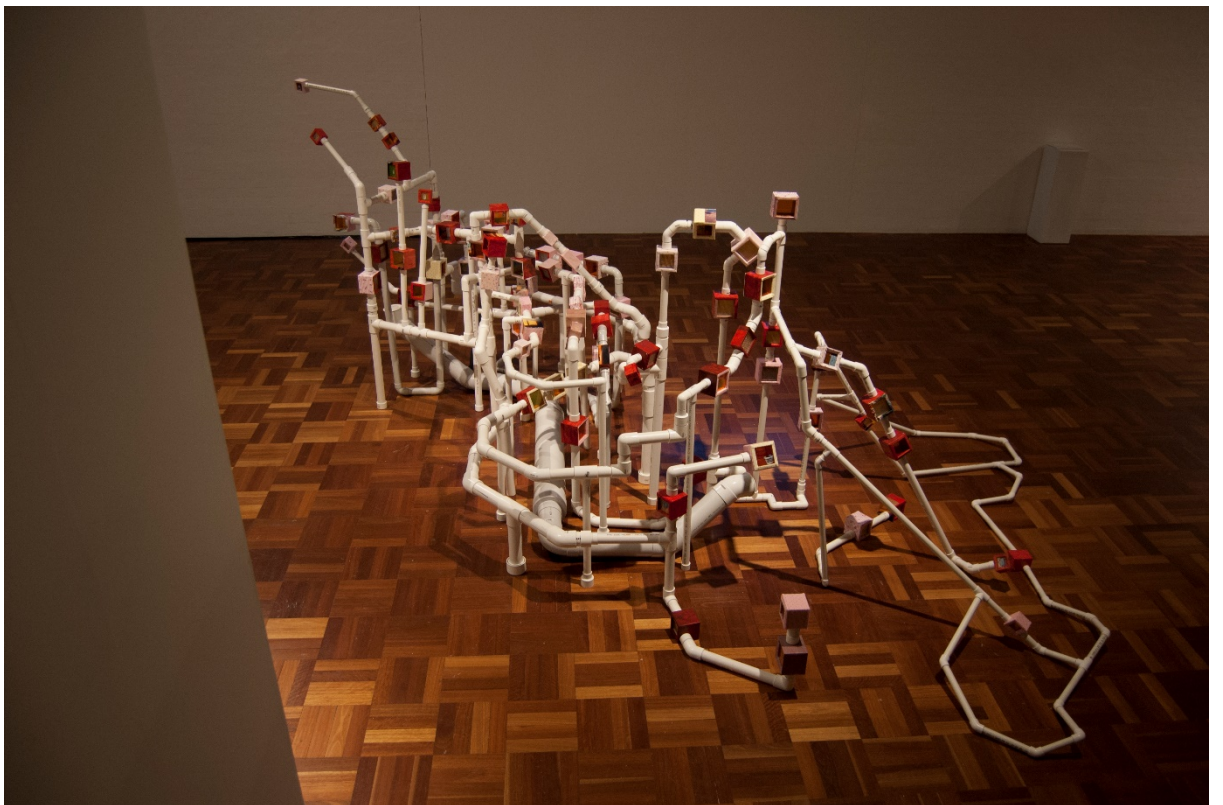


Fig. 93. *Oikos* (2018).

Conclusion

I undertook this practice-led research to scrutinise and make tangible the aesthetic dimension that extends through the intersection of body and environment. To do this, I examined my experience of the home and the landscape. During studio inquiry, I developed, tested, and revised aesthetic languages to embody the continuity that I observed. Through these processes, I found an active entwining of aesthetics in the body's perception and response to space. This feedback process forms a continuum between body and environment. While transient and subjective, this continuum is a physical process that is generated through embodied interaction with material space. In this way, the aesthetic provides a means to understand and imagine continuity between body and world: a continuity that otherwise appears immaterial.

Situating my inquiry within my home revealed how repeated contact with the surfaces of the everyday can obscure awareness of our automatic, embodied aesthetic responses to ordinary materials. This lack of awareness reinforces a partition of the sensible, diffusing the vibrancy inherent in all matter. Using everyday aesthetics as the basis for this inquiry, however, required sustained examination of my environment in such a way that the aesthetics of this mundane milieu became individually observable. Through studio-led inquiry, I observed that the physical form of the house, along with its streetscape, generated a meaningful sensuousness. This sensuousness is intrinsic to the material components of the house. In addition, it is perceivable by the body. Furthermore, I found that everyday practices, like cleaning one's body, were also aesthetically encoded in continuum with the materials appropriated to enable them. Through examining and handling different materials, and material practices, within this inquiry, I came to see that the everyday world is not just filled with inert, dead, dumb, objects. Instead, these materials and processes have innate properties, histories and lineages. Their intrinsic qualities can enable utilitarian and perceptual value that entangles them with human meaning and affect. In this way, different material encounters can activate instructive sensibilities that contour subjectivity and its interaction with the world. This finding formed the basis upon which different materials were able to embody complex concepts in my inquiry.

Through my research, I sought to understand the relationship between creative practice and aesthetics. Critical reflection revealed how art making can make tangible components of embodied maps that connect the individual with vast assemblages of diverse actants extending well beyond the body. Creative practice is an intra-action through which particular feelings, insights, and urges emerge within the artist's body.

This co-collaborative process is metered by attuning to the aesthetic feedback of the intra-acting assemblage. In turn, the spiralling iterations of creative practice gradually reveal more and more facets of the nature of the given assemblage. Desire for the allusive grasp of that nature orients the creative process. Aesthetics are generated through the intra-action of bodies and material encounters. Materials used in my multi-artform inquiry were selected relative to key environments. The approaches used to manipulate these forms evolved in response to the art objects produced and the continued development of my understanding of these environments. Theoretical research enabled me to inquire more deeply into the stories of individual materials, practices, and environments. As I processed this information, it would adhere to the imagery of the relevant materials, practices, and environments within my mind, creating continuity between concepts, context, and forms. In these ways, the materials and artworks from my studio inquiry became meaningful objects and felt substances within my imagination. Handling materials physically and mentally enabled meanings to emerge and morph, and concepts to develop. This weaving of internal and external perception, and of practice and theory, demonstrates an aesthetic continuity of embodied consciousness and world.

Expounding the medium of voice, Noorie Newmark builds a case for the new materialist vibrancy of the world: “Voice calls out... not a call constructed by a listener, human or otherwise, but a call from... upon... to... that effects and affects. It is a call of vitality, of life... that produces bodies, rather than representing them.”²³¹

Newmark talks about creative practice as a way to tease out the voices of assemblages.²³² *Oikos* is one such new materialist voicing: the complexity of the assemblage that I was attempting to coalesce into solid form. I ‘felt out’ the final sculptural form of the river using my whole body. In the same way, the research process as a whole enacted a ‘feeling out’ that gradually intuited the form of an imagined river as the figurative tip of an entangled iceberg of histories, moral codes, social norms, ecologies, watercourses, spaces, bodies, skin, soap, plaster, paint, and transience.

Scrutinising key environments as I pursued my own installation practice and examined installations by others revealed how space making extends from physical structures to transient practices and embodied routine. I observed that literal and figurative space making processes generate body-environment continuum through structuring relationships between them. Critiquing the role of images, such as Eugene

²³¹ Neumark, *Voice Tracks*, 38.

²³² Neumark, *Voice Tracks*.

von Guerard's *Tower Hill*, in relation to these observations confirmed how images also mediate interactions within space. I identified commonalities between image making and installation: both processes frame component parts selectively to orient perspective and inform embodied disposition. Furthermore, the aesthetic basis through which we interact with and perceive materials, be they videos or ironing boards, provides a common agent across two- and three-dimensional art making processes. Through my research, I recognised that our interaction with and perception of materials also provide common ground between art and the everyday.

It is because the intrinsic properties of materials can generate affect and be invested with value and meaning that they are able to operate as art objects. These same factors enable a toilet to be encoded differently to an altar. This research identified how aesthetics demarcate different spaces. Yuriko Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics*²³³ provided a framework to critique different aesthetics through making artwork. This framework situated my inquiry between the space of art and the everyday. I looked for ways to integrate the processes of art with the processes of ordinary life. Art practice can scrutinise assumptions inscribed in space while enabling aesthetic interventions, such as Piploitti Rist's *You Renew You*, that rework and augment these inscriptions. Such approaches to aesthetics subvert the rarefied, contemplative aesthetics promulgated by Kant. Furthermore, such aesthetic encounters, whether in an art installation in a gallery or in one's kitchen, can prompt a suspension of habitual perception to enable deliberation of complex concepts. This affirms Dewey's notion that aesthetic experience can emerge through active participation in the world, reorienting one's perception of that world significantly.²³⁴

This research grew from critiquing the sense of tension between my body and the environment. I found this tension repeated in my inquiry through my frustration at the visual dominance of mathematical space in my home's interior and the surrounding urban environment. Critiquing this frustration led me to identify how habitual perception of these seemingly stable, standardised environments, in coincidence with mundane routine, can dull phenomenological depth: we don't so much open out to these spaces as contain our subjectivities within them. Deliberation on these observations broke with this habitual perception at various points, prompting me to sense these ordinary environments more deeply as a world that strikes my body on its sensory surfaces.

²³³ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

²³⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

Gaston Bachelard notes that “a house is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyse rationally.”²³⁵ However, Bachelard elaborates, the lived house is transposed to the human plane whenever it “is considered a place of cheer and intimacy.”²³⁶ In this fullness, the primacy of the home’s rational geometry yields to the home’s dream world. In seeking to plot the interaction of this geometry and its dream, I gradually disrupted the sensible partition of my common sense. In fact, my aversion to the mathematical, the utilitarian, and the standardised fixed in place my perception of inert, dead, matter.

This practice-led inquiry enacted a weaving of interior and exterior perceptions through which the world was aesthetically mapped into my body. Through this process, I found that my tension within the world was continuous with this relationship, rather than being a dislocation within it. I came to see it as a corrective response, like those described by Damasio, in which felt images of body states are generated relative to perceived imbalance. Jane Bennett suggests that a discursive shift from “environmentalism” to “vital materialism” may better orient us toward sustainability.²³⁷ Whereas an environmentalist is a self who lives on earth, vital materialists, Bennett insists, “are selves who live as earth, who are more alert to the capacities and limitations—the ‘jizz’—of the various materials they are”.²³⁸ My persistent sense of dread is aesthetically continuous with the discordant banging of my out-of-balance washing machine: there is impending entropy in the systems that generate the order of our interior worlds. Can we collectively call forth the sense of a new self-interest and co-collaborate consciously within this biosphere?²³⁹ Or, are we destined to experience the best-understood and first fully documented extinction event on Earth?

The final question listed in my Introduction asked what the outcomes of this research could mean for our understanding of our position in the world. Through this research, I identified numerous aesthetic maps that plotted my embodied subjectivity across the multiple spatial temporal layers of this vast world. I felt friction as these maps rubbed together, pulling my body in multiple directions. Through repeated observation of this experience, I began to sense this feeling as electricity: warmth emanating not just from my body but transmitted through the aesthetic sinew between me and the world. What if the Maori worldview, recorded in *Puwai Rangi Papa* (2010–

²³⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics*, 48.

²³⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics*, 48.

²³⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 111.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

2013), is a legitimate way to imagine the world? What if there is a life force in the physical forms of the world? What if dismissing the perception of the world as a dead, dumb object enables us to reconnect with this life force, to stretch out our sticky aesthetic filaments and nourish the intangible metabolism that enables us to feel the world around us more acutely?

Earlier in this exegesis, I described creative desire as an embodied proposition seeking out its counterpart. Organising the concepts and concerns recorded in this document, along with assembling the unexpected form of *Oikos* in three dimensions, generated the complex counterpart to the creative desire that has driven this research journey. Another artist will understand the experience of vital inevitability of the creative process: an immovable, irrefutable, and strangely contradictory sense that it could have culminated only in the particular form and succession of processes that it did. Where Neumark talks of voice, I talk of the aesthetic. The aesthetic is the conduit through which the speaking happens, via any sensory channel. It emanates from the materiality of the given phenomena: the assemblage of interest obscured by the veil of vision. Like warmth reaching from a hot object to a cooler one, the aesthetic is a material force that stretches between things—often, things that occupy disparate temporalities and spaces. Karen Barad reminds us that we cannot separate the processes of knowing from the thing that has come to be known.²⁴⁰ The thing that has come to be known through this practice-led research is so vast that it spans centuries and geographies. It is ephemeral and transparent. Yet, it conditions my movements and contours entire river systems. It is so massive that it coexists across multiple timeframes and bodies but resists the simple solidity of measurability: “Objectivity is a matter of accountability for what materialises, for what comes to be. It matters which cuts are enacted: different cuts enact different material becomings.”²⁴¹

Through this research, it is my body that has become ontologically entangled in the object of my inquiry. I have activated the sense of my aesthetic continuum with the world beyond the surface of my skin. This world is neither mute nor passive: it is alive and vibrant and listening, perhaps even more eagerly than me.

²⁴⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 361.

²⁴¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 361.

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