

Slow Seeing

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ABSTRACT

Slow Seeing is an exhibition of paintings, prints, collages and a video work that together reflect the procedural occurrences of a form of slow seeing. A proposition in discovering the iterative potentials of a process made knowable through the direct engagement and manipulation of materials and different modes of making. As an exhibition, *Slow Seeing* is a translation of an idea and a work from one medium to another, as an exploration and consideration of process, material and perception.

Slow Seeing is an experience offered to the viewer in deciphering the imprinted, residual relationships between the works in the exhibition. Requests to move, pause, relook and ruminate are hoped to be imbued upon the viewer as an embodiment of slow seeing.

Slow Seeing is a description of a methodological mode of working, through thinking and discovering the latent potentials in thoughts already thought, materials and experiences alike.

Dedicated to my mom, whose perspective on the world is a constant reminder of the importance of compassion, empathy and simplicity, whose love and support is insurmountable.

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PREFACE

This paper contains both written and visual essay formats. The visual essays are interspersed throughout the division of the written chapters in order to offer a consideration of the visual references that together bring about my sensibility. The images are collections of moments that struck me for reasons both known and unknown that requested an investment and place in my mind. There are understandably many more moments that possessed the same amount of visual or experiential potency but which were not captured in a photograph, leaving these moments to solely remain with me (though their existence can be hinted at and imagined through a consideration of the type of imagery that is included). Each image is a personal photograph that I have taken dating from 2010 to present. Rather than describe the variety and significance of the selected images, I would prefer to allow the authority of each image to be determined for itself based on the reader's interpretation and consideration of the relationship the image has to my exhibited work. The images are solely intended for those who will be in discussion with me about my thesis work during the time of its exhibition. Therefore, none of the visual essays are included in the version of my thesis paper submitted and maintained within York University's library domain. The reasons for this are many, but to name just a few: the images are not ever meant to exist as being accessible online, not to be scrolled through but rather held and read. As these are a personal selection of images, to an extent, so too are the intended readers of the images. The compiled images are complementary essays to the entirety of this paper; both visual and written essays exist individually but are offered jointly solely for the purposes of and on the occasion of my thesis defence.

About the exhibition

The use of the term slow seeing is adopted from László Moholy-Nagy's description of eight varieties of photographic vision. Within Moholy-Nagy's descriptors of photographic vision, slow seeing is that of prolonged exposure time¹. Though I do not use it in reference to photographic means, I adopt it in reference to a broader sentiment as a particular mode of being, an embodiment of slow seeing.

¹ László Moholy-Nagy, "From Pigment to Light, 1936" in *Photography in Print* (1988): 346.

Slow Seeing: a methodology

My methodology has come to be known to me as one of slow seeing; slow seeing as applicable to both my practice and navigation through daily life. Prior to this conclusion, it was considered as one of sensitivity, revision, reflection and rumination². But are these elements not necessarily included in the notion of slow seeing as well? I believe they are. As a way of realizing after the fact, of circular reflection, of close attention and awareness of temporal circumstances, I would like to propose slow seeing as a means of methodology and sensibility.

Within my practice and consideration of my work, sensibility goes hand-in-hand with a consideration of one's methodology, with both being broader structures or frameworks in which practices unfold. Sensibility can be considered as both aesthetic and moral, as a particular inclination towards certain things, beings and environments, but also as a certain ethic of living. Sensibility is distinct but can also be considered quite broadly, as simply being a demarcation of that which appeals to you and that which does not. Naming such and the reasons as to why something appeals to you, or how the development of one's sensibility comes about are what become the more difficult tasks rather than the understanding of a possessed sensibility. In many ways, my practice is a visualization and consideration of my sensibility and how it manifests itself. As a material practice, the work demonstrates a particular aesthetic and material sensibility, while as a concept, an inclination towards more ephemeral sensibilities that are possessed in subtleties and quietude.

In considering my relationship to my work, it is not as though the work reflects me outwardly or that aesthetically I "suit" my work, but rather that the structure and process of making the work are reflective of the way that I live my life. Propensities which I choose to embrace in my work rather than work in

² In April 2015, I wrote a paper for my methodologies class outlining and dissecting these qualities as the constellation of my working methodology. The "prior" that I speak of is referring to this one year distance that I have had since considering "sensitivity, revision, reflection and rumination" as my methodology.

opposition to. By that, I mean that the methodology that I employ within my work can extend more broadly to encompass other facets of life, and vice versa. Engaging in frequent reflection on progression, documentation by way of writing and imaging, working within a set of parameters, envisioning outcomes, negotiating and editing, and a sense of relation to the singular and the multiple, are some means by which I understand the existence of my work as functioning in parallel to tacit tendencies within myself. My methodology encompasses practice-based research that emerges through considerations of the intricacies of perceptual awareness, haptic engagement and a focus on materiality, while equally being one that is invested in being observational, sensitive, open-ended and evolving.

Observational Inquiries

Methods within my practice include both salient, observable modes of working that can be deciphered through the work, while also including less visible, though equally important measures, such as note-taking and observational writing. I aim to consider observation as a strategy that is both innate as well as cultivated. Observing, as considered by way of being attentive to details, affects, contexts and thoughts. Observing differs from perceptual awareness, from my perspective, in that perceptual awareness concerns the physiological properties of our senses and relation to stimuli, rather than the emotional, affective relations that we have to other material encounters (human and non-human) and to ourselves. Not that I believe perception to be solely physiologically based, but that I am distinguishing between observation and perception in this way for the purpose of differentiating them within a description of my methodology. Some of the attributes that I classify as observational, which I consider myself as employing as methods are forms of revisiting, revision, rumination, and reflection.

When I say that my methodology is one that reflects both my work as well as the way that I live my life, I consider observation as one of the main properties that addresses this statement. Observations come by way of being attentive to the

material agency³ of things, the affective potentials and encounters with other human and non-human bodies, and the ability to reflect on those observations intimately and persistently. In considering affect, I refer both to Jane Bennett's description of material vibrancy, equating affect with materiality⁴, as well as Brian Massumi's notion of affect as the "excluded middle"⁵, that which evades conscious description and naming, affect as the unqualified and unqualifiable. Recognizing that affect functions along a continuum that both evades as well as allows our awareness of the relational interactions between ourselves and other matter and that things come into consciousness as they pass the dynamic threshold⁶, allows for an understanding that an awareness of affect can only be attempted and not wholly realized. Whereas some elements within my visual essay are affective by way of understanding them as evoking particular emotive states (those that have crossed the dynamic threshold and become known as nameable sentiments), others remain more peculiar and affective in gentler, more subtle ways.

In terms of my practice and my life, revisiting goes hand-in-hand with a discussion of writing and documentation of material processes. The handwritten material that I have act as an irreplaceable chronology of my practice, allowing me the ability to go back and revisit, through the accessibility and presence of these materials. Similarly, the presence and access to in-progress images and documentation allows for a facility in revisiting intermediate stages of development that hold potential to be redeveloped further, stages which could easily fall out of memory and awareness. When revisiting my past notebooks, there are personal projects, ideas, notes from various speakers and lectures etc. and thoughts that relate to both my work at the time, as well as to thoughts that have persisted and continue to be explored and developed within my practice.

³ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), ix.

⁴ *Ibid.* xiii.

⁵ Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect" in *Cultural Critique, The Politics of Systems and Environments* No. 31, Part 11 (University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 85.

⁶ *Ibid.* 99

This ability to reflect upon my work through the material presence of revisiting notebooks is in some ways both a method and a practice. Method and practice are distinguished from each other in this sense, with method being a strategy, and practice being a tendency and material entity. Meaningful insights may come by way of understanding more thoroughly and deeply quotes and references that now hold new meaning to me, now having the knowledge to engage with the reference points in different ways through the accumulation of new epistemologies and forms of comprehension. The significance of revisiting, reflecting and ruminating upon thoughts already thought is recognized in my practice as a generative, circular way of working, of thinking backwards to move forwards.

Sensitivity as Method

Through a sensitivity to materials and contexts, to subtleties and their affective potentials, to sensitivity of vision, perception and reception, from bodily encounters to intimate modes of creation, from peripheral considerations and thoughts of the unseen, my work attempts to employ sensitivity as method. In considering sensitivity, I mean to accentuate its relation to perception, of perceiving, of practicing the importance of attentiveness. Bennett's approach to her entire philosophy of "a political ecology of things" is paramount to a consideration and adoption of sensitivity as method. If sensitivity is able to be claimed as method, Bennett is someone who I would consider as aptly adopting sensitivity as a mode of existence and advocating for a heightened sensitivity through a non-anthropocentric mentality. Sensitivity extends beyond the frameworks of observational attentiveness and affective relations, to also include an attentiveness to the responsiveness of the materials that I use in my work. Being sensitive to the limits and reflexes of the work allows the materials that I work with to possess their own position of authority, to allow for a form of material negotiation and dialogue to unfold throughout the process of making. In this way, though I do not particularly use or enjoy the term "touchy", it could be utilized here in both its relation to sensitivity as emotive and cognitive as well as to being

tactile and material. Within the context of a consideration of the philosophies of new materialism, I consider my practice as operating within its frameworks through a focus on an interest in material agency, non-hierarchical relations within material and immaterial properties and an awareness of the interrelatedness and interconnected orientation of all things both human and non-human, animate and inanimate.

Sensitivity, affect, and perception interest me also in part due to their concentration on the ways in which bodies navigate through space, interact with other bodies and non-bodies, and how the unnamable, the unseen and the indefinable are imperative to all. In *Surface – Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, Giuliana Bruno discusses the intimacy of surface encounters. Bruno's consideration of surface encounters extends broadly, to consider the body / skin and the face as primary surfaces in communication. Extending to also include transient public spaces, as well as a renewed consideration of the significance of the surface encounters of the screen in terms of its place in both architecture and film. Bruno's reconsideration and theorization of the significance of the screen has aided in my thoughts of conceptualizing of my paintings as screens, and as material fabrics whose perforations lend to their flux between two- and three-dimensional forms. One of Bruno's descriptions of the potentials of a screen is, "though superficially flat, such a screen has volume, for the flickering light that activates it gives it depth, dimension and plasticity"⁷. The ability for light to activate a "superficially flat" surface in this way, is something that I engage with by way of considerations of sensitivity, attempting to understand a work through its alterations throughout the course of a day and how light alters its surfaces and ultimately its reading; where a painting has the ability to become a marker of time, a reflection of weather and atmosphere, a vessel to witness the passage of the day.

⁷ Giuliana Bruno, "Light Spaces, Screen Surfaces: On the Fabric of Projection" in *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): 60.

In considering sensitivity, there also comes intimacy. To be sensitive with something is to be intimate with it in some degree. In relation to my work, I consider the intimate, physical contact that I have with the materials through the close interaction through both the processes of making as well as through sharing space and time with them in the studio. Softness and imperfection, light and shadow, and subtleties of movement and questions of perception are also potentials held and engaged with through a focus on sensitivity, where supposed binaries breakdown and questions can be insinuated between the dialectic of the visible and the invisible. Within my work, the areas of grey and in-betweenness can be honed as a form of substance and basis for the development of both my sensibility and practice. Grey as a suspension, “no longer white but not yet black; hardly alive but not yet dead; drifting slowly away from existence towards extinction”⁸, according to David Batchelor’s estimates, grey is the colour of in-between, the most tentative of colours⁹. I would consider many of the works within the exhibition as being somewhat tentative, demonstrating an uncertainty, as being both *this* and *that*.

⁸ David Batchelor, *The Luminous and the Grey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014): 64.

⁹ *Ibid.* 74.

Slow Seeing: as phenomenology

Only when beginning to conceive of the visual essays that would accompany this paper did I realize how rooted in phenomenology my practice is. When taking the time to assemble and reflect upon the visual material that holds sway in my mind, only then did I realize the significance of a phenomenological dialogue within my practice. Here, phenomenology is considered as the culmination of that which is thought to have affected me in particular ways, a phenomenological practice of an accumulation of these moments as recorded in the visual essays, and reflected upon in the written essays; a poetic phenomenology rather than an analytic phenomenology, an approach or attempt at deciphering a visualization of affect or affective potentialities. In grasping with the notion of phenomenology, I appreciate the understanding that “the subject is enigmatic for phenomenology. It is known only reflexively which phenomena and how these phenomena are made present to it”¹⁰. In this way, phenomenology seems to be fitting towards a deeper understanding and conception of a method of slow seeing.

The series of work that began with *Prismatic Spring* are paintings that reflect upon the experience of colour, movement and the recollection of a particular experience, which these works hope to approach through an abstracted representation. The experience that I am referring to is that of viewing the rippling colours and depths of hot springs, an experience of encountering an impactful natural phenomenon. Rather than describe such an experience in all of its force, I would rather attempt to describe the experience that I hope to convey to a viewer through the *Prismatic Spring* series. In viewing the work, several different scenarios are possible. The viewer is able to oscillate perspectively between foreground and background, negative and positive ground, perceiving of the work as both a continuous, uninterrupted surface as well as one with physical depth, allowing for an uncertainty and unrest within the work. Not necessarily a trick of the eye or an illusory gesture, but rather a space of flux and negotiation between

¹⁰ Don Ihde, *Experimental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (First Paragon Books Printing, 1977): 23.

what is being viewed, an oscillation between transparency and translucency, of the simultaneity of depth and surface, of vision in motion¹¹. The striation of the lines, flickering between the perception of such as light, shadow and physical material, simultaneously offers a dialogue of responsiveness in the work towards the viewer. This uncertainty, inconclusiveness and possibility to change based upon the viewer's relationship to the work, is something that I hope allows this body of work to affect the viewer in such a way that the work can request a place in one's mind, as a lingering thought or perception that can be recalled for later reflection. My hope for these works is that they might be able to approach an affective relationship and response for a viewer, in much the same way that the images in the visual essays have affected me and lead to the development of this body of work.

The phenomenological potential within my work lies within its ability to offer subtly different experiences for the viewer based upon its particular contexts. Ideally, the context in which the paintings should be viewed is in a room with indirect sunlight altering the amount of light filtered through the work and the variations in shadow that alter throughout the course of the day within the work. Though this situation is not possible within the gallery context of *Slow Seeing* at Gales Gallery, I believe a phenomenological consideration of the work can still be approached. Rather than being considered through the work's mutability in character based on light, a phenomenological consideration of the exhibition might be approached through the viewer's navigation within the space and consideration of the way in which artificial light has been directed towards particular works within the exhibition and how this affects their reading. Through time spent deciphering the relationship between the works, which might in some ways be quite direct and others more oblique, the viewer might come to know the exhibition as an exercise in slow seeing. Through focusing initially on the

¹¹ Referring to László Moholy-Nagy's project of *Vision in Motion*, he lists on page 153:

"*Vision in motion* is seeing while moving."

"*Vision in motion* is simultaneous grasp... seeing, feeling and thinking in relationship and not as a series of isolated phenomena. It instantaneously integrates and transmutes single elements into a coherent whole."

perception of the exhibition and the sensory information available, one might be able to attune their focus towards seeing similarity in difference and difference in similarity.

As a phenomenological practice in paying attention to the transformative potential of things that might ostensibly be considered as the same, of attuning oneself to the potentials of ubiquity and difference in sameness, my practice attempts to visualize the significance of these possibilities. Though the experiences of perhaps mundane occurrences (light filtering into a room, of shadows gradually growing stronger, of rain altering a surface, of clouds on various days, of depths and darkneses of cavernous areas, of cavities and other sensuous seductions), are often generalized as being supposedly the same, a focus on their individual significances will demonstrate that they are inherently not. The process of viewing difference in sameness and sameness in difference is perhaps characteristic of the “differencing / relating” in which something can be simultaneously different as well as related, as observed in Luke Howard’s classification of cloud types¹². I understand my practice as a visualization of *simultaneity*. What I hope of my work is that it is able to offer the viewer an opportunity to immerse themselves in sensuous qualities of the visual and perceptual, not understood as devoid of intellect, though chiefly of an evolving, experiential encounter which leads further towards a conceptual consideration of the intra-active relationships exhibited within the work¹³.

¹² Henri Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously: The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought* (Floris Books, 2012): 20.

¹³ Intra-active, used in consideration of Karen Barad’s theories of intra-active potentialities of matter and agential realism, rather than ‘interactive’ where each entity possesses their own individualistic set of potentials, intra-active emphasizes a codependence of emergent possibilities and potentialities. “Intra-actions are practices of making a difference, of cutting together-apart, entangling-differentiating (one move) in the making of phenomena. Phenomena-entanglements of matter/ing across spacetimes – are not in the world, but *of* the world.” (See: Karen Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice*): 7- 8.

Colour

Within my practice, colour operates in various ways, some which are intuitive, others circumstantial, while others perhaps more intentionally operative. Though within all of these circumstances, colour generally operates along lines of neutrality, punctuated by complementary moments of either saturation or subtlety. There are defaults that I rely on, that I feel comfortable with, that operate along the lines of intuition, while others that have become more purposeful in their attempts to suggest a certain effect/affect in their usages operating along lines of more purposeful intentionality. Circumstantial colours are those that have the ability to be changed based on installation environments (colours that are not materially attached to the work itself), while also being those that are generated through circumstantial relations / interactions (such as the colours that filter in and out of each other in the video work and those that are moments of captured light (as colour) in the collage works). The effect of inbetweenness in the work, from being an object or experience of *simultaneity*, is something that is again considered and reflected upon through the use of colour, allowing one colour to simultaneously evoke innumerable readings¹⁴.

With surface colour applied to the reverse side of the canvas, my paintings employ luminous colour as a device that enhances the works mutability and relation to the qualities and aesthetics of subtlety and the unknown, responding to external architectures and installation environments. Luminous colour acts as sensation and sensuality, a visualization of an attempt at approaching a sense of a poetic phenomenology. Where colour properties of luminosity - of impermanence based on the conditions of lighting, of the experience of the colour as detached from the physical surface in which it emanates from - allows colour the ability to grow and fade, to come and go. Luminous colour operates as a sort of translucency, as a property that can be reminiscent of looking in the depths of waters, of the obscured colour of holes and deep crevices, where these areas of material absences take on the combination of colours of their

¹⁴ Joseph Albers, *The Interaction of Colour* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2009): 1.

neighbouring proximities. One of the reasons why natural light is the preferred situation in which to view the works is to allow a temporal, durational consideration of the work to emerge and to allow the opportunity for the luminosity of colour to grow and fade at the whim of external forces.

Slow Seeing: in light (and water)

In considering my source imagery and references in building my practice, the significance of light and water are paramount, if not directly through representation, certainly indirectly as conception, not only as source imagery, but also conceptually as omnipotent elements that possess within them a multitude of mysterious potential. This power of mystery that light and water possess can often be found visualized and signified in science fiction literature and film. The white light that represents the sentient, alien being in Arthur C. Clarke's novel *2001 a Space Odyssey*, the expression of intellect and emotional awareness visualized as water in Tarkovsky's film *Solaris*, the importance of the illusory ability of the walls that shine light in Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *City of Illusions*, and the enveloping, dark alien water of Jonathan Glazer's film *Under the Skin*, to mention but a few. Novels and films such as these are equally as important to my visual and theoretical references that together develop the constellation that is my methodology, sensibility and working process which lead to the work itself. The transformative and affective potential that resides in the mystery of light and water is something that I hope to approach through my visual practice as an artist. Evoking a character similar to not only the sensuous but also conceptual notion of the hidden, concealed and unknown potentials that lay within the depths of water and light. "*Sea and sky, "the extraterrestrial commons", are the twin sublimities that ring the human estate"*¹⁵.

Within my practice, I hope to explore both light's physical properties (lumen) and our perception of such (lux). In Martin Jay's description of the differentiation between lumen and lux, lumen is distinguished from lux in its association to the logic and laws of geometric rays, while lux is associated with the experience of human sight¹⁶. Within Descartes' theory of 'lumen naturale', lumen is associated with the light of the mind and in direct connection with God as the source of the

¹⁵ John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015): 167.

¹⁶ Barbara Bolt, "Shedding Light for the Matter," *Hypatia* 15 (2), (2000): 203.

light, while lux is related to the “vagaries of the senses”¹⁷. In both cases, lumen can be understood as being perhaps more inline with optics, the physical properties of light, while lux in relation to considerations of psychological differences of vision. Through these examples, we can understand lumen as being both the light of the mind, as well as the operative of the logic of geometric rays, complicating a clear distinction and resolute understanding of such. The fact that light has been discovered to behave both like a wave and a particle simultaneously, demonstrates the complications in considering stark contrasts within the consideration of light. These wavering distinctions of light are what Barbara Bolt refers to as the fuzziness that can allow for “an operation of a different register than the light/dark binary”¹⁸. It is along this line of consideration that my practice engages with light, where these forms of fuzziness and blurred boundaries can be embraced as productive modes of operating. In considering Derrida’s notion that “natural light is never subjected to radical doubt but rather is the medium in which doubt unfolds”¹⁹, is again evoking the sense of mystery that is imbued within light. This idea of doubt unfolding through an intersection or interaction with natural light is one that I hope to evoke within my practice, to allow the work an amount of agency to be responsive to its particular context. Light can be considered and understood as both a truth-telling medium that illuminates the mind towards pure reason (a Platonic considerations of light), but it can also be deceptive and misleading, invoking doubt and questioning. What interests me in a consideration and study of light is this notion of it being a medium in which doubt unfolds and where questions arise through considerations of subtleties and thoughts of the unseen. I am interested in exploring and considering light as a compositional property within my practice, as that which can elicit varied considerations of my work - where light can fold and unfold within the work.

¹⁷ Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau Ponty* (1st edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 1998): 4.

¹⁸ Barbara Bolt, “Shedding Light for the Matter,” *Hypatia* 15 (2), (2000): 205.

¹⁹ Cathryn Vasseleu, 1998. *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau Ponty*. (1st edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 1998): 4.

Though natural light is the preferred context and referential source of the work, artificial light, as a companion, is nonetheless implicated in the process of making, exhibiting and contextualizing of such, inherent in all of the work. Aside from more fundamental and practical uses of artificial light in the production of the work (primarily in the production of the prints, video and collage work – though understandably implicated in all of the work), artificial light is more of an operative tool that allows light to be frozen or paused in the experience of the work. While artificial light is able to be fluid, malleable, mutable, within its consideration as a way of making the work, artificial light could be considered to natural light as surface colour is to luminescent colour, with one being more static and still, and the other more gradual and circumstantial within the context of experiencing the work. Of course, it cannot be neglected that artificial light is a necessary condition of experiencing work and life, though even in its inception and introduction into society, it resided more so along the lines of magic, rather than mystery²⁰. As Scott McQuire describes in *Immaterial Architectures: Urban Space and Electric Light*, as electricity began to enter into everyday life and culture, so too came the descriptors of “*electrifying performances*”, “*feeling the electricity in the air*”, descriptors of the “*electrifying*” associations of one’s personality, I align myself and my practice more so along the lines of precautionary thoughts of illumination rather than celebratory. More sympathetic to Jun’ichiro Tanizaki’s sentiments of the “*evils of excessive illumination*”, I can understand this as extending more broadly and culturally beyond solely considerations of electricity and artificial light. “*So benumbed are we nowadays by electric lights that we have become utterly insensitive to the evils of excessive illumination*”²¹.

²⁰ Reporting from the Chicago world fair in 1894, *Cosmopolitan* describes: “... it is as if the earth and sky were transformed by the immeasurable wands of colossal magicians and the superb dome of the structure that is the central jewel of the display is glowing as if bound with wreaths of stars. It is electricity!” (Scott McQuire, *Immaterial Architecture*, 129). Though this may not be the case currently and that the magic may be lost, the association between electricity and magic remains closer than to that of mystery in my considerations of the difference between artificial and natural light.

²¹ Jun’ichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (Lette Books, Inc., 1991): 53.

Water

While looking above might be conducive to heliotropic fascinations with the light of the sun, looking below, towards the depths, darkneses and unknowns of deep waters is emblematic of looking towards voids, cavities and “empty” spaces as inciting particular forms of contemplation of mystery and the unknown. Though necessarily not distinctly defined as light from above and water from below, water is only aligned with darkness in order to allow a consideration of depths and darkened areas to be considered. Water, in all of its forms, ubiquity and mutability, the ultimate source of everything, water possesses mystery in its being. Though water does not necessarily equate to a consideration of darkness, it relates to Françoise Laurelle’s considerations of blackness for me: “*Black is without opposite: even light, which tries to turn it into its opposite, fails in the face of the rigor of its secret. Only the secret sees into the secret, like Black in Black*”²². The consideration of a rigor of its secret is the continual fascination that water possesses, secret not in its classification as ontologically unknowable, but in its withholding, concealed nature.

For Bachelard, water possesses a feminine character, “as the spring of being, motherhood”, as the element that symbolizes “powers that are more hidden, simple and simplifying”²³. Perhaps water’s *being* can be considered as more hidden, through its malleable nature, as the ultimate metamorphoses, while perhaps also understood as simple or simplifying, there is a complexity and depth to this consideration of simplicity. While understandably, water, light, darkness and the universe are all rife with metaphors as they are human constants and timeless phenomena, water is perhaps more unique in its central relation to the earth. Though while it is in, of and as the earth, it is perhaps the most mysterious of all things on earth. Within my practice, I hope to allude to a

²² Françoise Laurelle, “On The Black Universe: In the Human Foundations of Colour” (Originally published in 1988 and transcribed from the event Dark Nights of the Universe held at Recess Activities in New York, April 2012): 4

²³ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (The Pegasus Foundation, Dallas, 1983): 5.

consideration of water's being.

(Im)material Understanding

"Shall we utter some words about nothingness? What is there to say? How to begin? How can anything be said about nothing without violating its very nature, perhaps even its conditions of possibility? Isn't any utterance about nothingness already a performative breach of that which one means to address? Have we not already said too much simply in pronouncing its name?"

Perhaps we should let the emptiness speak for itself." - Karen Barad

In many ways, I agree with the sentiment and desire of wanting to let the emptiness or nothingness speak for itself, though I will conduct the "performative breach" in attempting to consider nothingness in terms of questions of immateriality. What consists of being immaterial? Perhaps concepts of absences, voids, emotions, thoughts, dreams, affects, percepts, ideas of nothingness and so on, but where do shadows fall within the lines of this distinction? Immateriality as not only that which is not physical material, but that which is considered nearer to irrelevance, unimportance, being peripheral; shadows often falling closer towards the lines of immateriality than materiality in this regard, shadows falling in the shadows of the distinction between light and dark, visible and invisible. Similar to luminescent colour, shadows exist vicariously through the presence of other material entities and properties. While considering light as a compositional property within my work, as that which can alter and elicit varied considerations of the work, shadows are inherently implicated within this exploration of my practice. Shadows as a characterization of "transparent black"²⁴, with slightly altered colours and characters, residing along the lines of haptically confused considerations, what does it feel like to touch a hole or a shadow, fog or the sky? In many ways, we learn a material understanding through touch, but how do we gain an immaterial understanding? In their haptically uncertain, immaterial nature, absences, voids, and thoughts of nothingness, possess within their mere inability to be touched their seductive power and prowess.

²⁴ Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (Oxford University Press, 2008): 4.

Created through voids, the collages and video work exist through the (material) “absences” of the paintings, with a focus on the potentials of absences and immateriality made material, I understand absences as generative potentials in my work, rather than in their more colloquial associations to both material and symbolic loss. The dialectic between immateriality and materiality is one way in which many of the works in the exhibition exist. Though in their exhibition and creation, are material and immaterial properties existing as co-dependents or is immateriality reliant upon materiality to make itself known? While my practice exists as a variety of physical entities, many of my interests lie in the character of those that are not physical objects or materially specific entities, such as shadows, holes, the sky, mist, fog, light, depths and distances.

Slow Seeing: as modes of making

When I first began cutting into the canvas surface of my paintings during the final year of my undergraduate degree, I was recalling a sentiment offered during a critique in my sculpture class and trying to bridge a relationship between the way that works were both critiqued and conceived of in sculpture and painting classes (applying advice, techniques and dialogues from one class to the other). Where some experiments and works failed, others succeeded in the sense that they incited further opportunities to explore a concept and material practice further. Specifically, this came by way of conceiving of a painting as having the ability to be viewed from multiple perspectives, to have the ability to *breath*, to not have a defined orientation, and other qualities more inherent to the way that I was invested in discussing, conceiving of and creating sculptural works. In considering the plurality of the mediums that I have engaged with within the exhibition, each maintains its presentation in more or less a standard form in terms of its historical tradition²⁵, while also being in direct relation to the medium of painting. The exhibition is attempting to further reveal the agency within the material of painting, its perhaps more dormant potentialities and possible reconfigurations. As a form of unconcealment, the *essence* of the paintings are explored through various actions and modes of working with the medium to reveal itself through various modes of being. Unconcealment and essence are here understood through Heidegger's consideration of such as a disclosure (or revealing) of the possibilities of comportment of an entity, where the disclosing of such may lead towards the ability to approach the truth of an entity. As "*possibilities for different experiences of entities and different actions with entities, for different goals to be pursued, or forms of life to be lived. These possibilities are the possibilities opened up by the understanding of being and essences.*"²⁶. In this way, I understand my relationship towards working with the

²⁵ I.e. paintings are made of canvas and stretcher and hung on the wall, videos are projected, prints are on paper etc. the mode of exhibition and realization of the work do not complicate the reading of the work as being identifiable as video, painting, print, or collage.

²⁶ Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011): 14.

material of painting as an attempt at approaching a form or practice of unconcealment. Understanding the notion and practice of unconcealment as an operation and exploration of an entity through a consideration of the “space of possibilities”²⁷. By no means a comprehensive exploration of such, this exhibition attempts to engage in modes of making that contain a process of inquiry and material negotiation throughout. As Richard Sennett describes in *The Craftsman*, the tendency for habit to “establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding”²⁸ is where this work is currently situated, of having resolved certain “problems” in terms of the more traditional conception of the way that painting was originally taught and conceived in my mind, towards a more fertile mode of problem finding.

Within the exhibition *Slow Seeing*, I have attempted to translate one medium into another, to use remnants and by products as beginnings for new works and to use light and the medium of painting in varied ways in order to approach a more thorough understanding of the inherent potentials that lie within. As a product of an economy of making, an evolving and differentiating practice, the exhibition could be considered as “the process by which one and the same organ presents itself to us in manifold form”²⁹. The current exhibition comes from a lineage of my own work, where the work is literally built and conceived of from previous works, where one work informs another either directly or indirectly. Where recension is implicit within the manifestation of each work, my practice is one of an open-ended process. Considering recension as an appropriate analogy for my working process, where a continued series of revisions does not necessarily alter the original idea, but creates something different.

In considering painting as a structure, a tool that can be used, my work evolves

²⁷ Ibid. 14.

²⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008): 9.

²⁹ This quote comes from Goethe’s *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. Aligning the development of my practice with that of the growth and development of a plant species is something that I believe is fitting in terms of my propositions of slow seeing (as methodology and phenomenology). Henri Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously: The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought* (Floris Books, 2012): 66.

out of a consideration of the perforated surface of the paintings. Each painting begins with a more precise, linear and geometric mapping of different compositions created through the sole use of circles and lines (and more recently, slight variations of such), than the end product might suggest. Through the hand-cut nature of the works, the imperfections of the lines, the translation from a hardedge, geometric beginning to an organic, imperfect ending is one that allows the work to possess an amount of sympathy, and reaction from the material. As seemingly opposed and fundamental beginnings to other forms, circles and lines have been an ongoing motif within my practice to allow the compositions to be sparse and again, possess a certain economy in their making. From the paintings, come the collages.

Through happenstance, I was given an overhead projector during my first year of this graduate program. The appearance of this apparatus within my studio allowed me to understand my work and its potential in ways that I had not previously conceived of prior to its introduction into my studio. I had often witnessed and been aware of the subtle variations in light on my work, and the considerably different encounters and affects that this change creates. Though even with this awareness, I had not previously thought of creating works through the direct manipulation of light within the work. I had previously thought only of using lighting techniques to shine light through the work while on the wall, but in fear of engaging with too theatrical a reference, I refrained. Through the introduction of this tool in my studio, it allowed me to explore another use-value of my paintings, expanding upon their consideration as a screen, or filter for light. The collages are created through holding a painting underneath the overhead projector and photographing different scenarios of light filtering through the canvas, creating gentle speckles of light on the wall. From these photographs of the moments of projected light, I hand-cut the contours of the light from the image to create the pieces for the collages. In this way, the collages engage with notions of three-dimensionality, surface, filtration, depth, and light in different, but related ways to the paintings. Where the paintings might request a closer inspection, a navigation of the work, the collages and uncut photographs (created

in the same manner as the starting points of the collages) offer more contemplative areas for pause throughout the navigation of the exhibition.

Similarly to the collages, the video work came about through the introduction of the overhead projector. Using the paintings to slowly cascade from side to side and from above to below within the available space of the overhead projector, the video works allowed me an opportunity to explore my paintings in relation to early abstract film of the 1920's. Works of Walter Ruttmann and Oskar Fischinger in particular, that had previously deeply struck me and that I wanted to engage with further, but didn't quite yet know how to in relation to my practice. The handmade, rigorous quality of the work, the ostensibly simple narratives – yet layered complexities and the excitement of experimentation within these early abstract films were and remain to be inspiring. Within the work of not only Ruttmann and Fischinger, but other artists exploring visual music at the time³⁰, the work's relationship to abstract painting is something that I believe my exhibition indirectly approaches as well. Through the paintings' perforated surfaces, a relation to early cinematic experiences can be hinted at, of moving colour, form and surfaces. Likewise in the video, the direct relationship between cinematic qualities and painting is used in a different manner than early abstract filmmakers, but the relationship to the medium, the simplicity in form and colour, and the hand-craftsmanship remains consistent. Though my work does not bear direct relation to music, as many of these early abstract films did, through their conceptualization of visual music, there is a rhythmic association nonetheless. I would like to believe that my works are able to also “perform in liquid time”³¹.

The collection of paintings and wall works hung adjacent to the video are a series that incorporate as their foundation a collection of wall works that are generated from a previous series of paintings. These paintings were a series of all-white works that were used as stencils to create the wall paintings that act as the

³⁰ Also the work of Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling are inspirational, though above all, Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus I, II, III and IV* are by far the most lasting of all these works in my mind.

³¹ William Moritz, *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger* (Indiana University Press, 2004): vii.

mapping for the placement of the works that are on display in the exhibition. This series, allows for a previous body of work to be re-envisioned as the starting point for the installation of the exhibited work. Where heights, patterns and placement are determined based on the initial installation of the white series, which remains visible only through its traces, its marks left on the wall³². This wall of the exhibition is one which recalls a previous series, allowing it to be present through a tracing of its absences³³. The canvases included in the exhibited series are those which were used to create the video work. Allowing for a mutability in display, this wall is one which is not permanently fixed throughout the exhibition. Rearrangements are possible, though not necessarily encouraged in a participatory fashion, but rather on a contextual basis depending on the particular circumstances that arise within the space. Due to their less precious nature, as already having been used as tools to create the video work, their small scale and accessibility in handling, these works allow themselves a more maneuverable ability within the exhibition. Similar to the nature of the visual essays, these materials and possibilities exist within the exhibition, but are considered as important footnotes, or discursive elements rather than necessary foundations of viewing the exhibition.

More broadly, as a condition of the various modes of making, my work emphasizes and embraces the organic irregularities of the handmade. After experiencing enough occurrences to say with certainty, that there seems to be a natural inclination to ask why the works are not made mechanically, (through laser or waterjet cutting, a specific die to punch out shapes more accurately, a stiffer, firmer material to avoid curling etc.), the answer seems to lie in an appreciation for simple nuances and imperfections. The areas and moments of unpredictability that accompany the handmade or handcrafted (from handwriting to hand-cutting), allow for a form of gradual improvement and understanding of a

³² The white series is first hung in a linear manner along with wall, the works are of different dimensions and are thus determining the height at which the exhibited series will hang. Each painting from the white series is then used as a stencil to create a wall work that corresponds to the placement of each work, which the exhibited series is then hung on top of.

³³ The negative spaces in the paintings which become the basis for the marks left on the wall.

material and material practice through repetition (not to exclude industrial labour from also participating in this, but rather to address the affective difference of the end result). The translation of the beginning sketch of the composition to the realized work, brings hard geometry to a soft abstraction, from precision to a more nuanced form, from something frozen to something more fluid.

after thoughts: as *Slow Seeing*

Though all of the topics of consideration in this paper have been quite broad and far reaching, (considerations of affect, phenomenology, colour, light, water, material and immaterial properties, greyness, sensitivity), I hope that their culmination helps to define what interests me in my work and why I continue to explore these ideas through my practice and how through these considerations the work might hold meaning to other beings.

The visual essays have acted as descriptive tools of defining a visualization of my sensibility and methodology, of documenting work in progress, of a selection of work that I view by other artists, of moments and entities in either routine and occasional environments and happenstance occurrences, as a visualization of *images of intimacy* (to use one of Bachelard's terms).

While I may have considered Heidegger's notion of unconcealment in relation to the way in which I "use" or interact with certain materials and practices, I also understand unconcealment as again related to one's sensibility. Through understanding that individual world-making exists in reference to one's relationship to the things, people, practices and modes of being that are cultivated through a distinction between those that endure and those that are less essential to one's being, unconcealment can be considered as a demonstrable and evolving form of personal awareness and comprehension. A sensibility is enduring and essential, translatable and personal, a practice that exists in both material and immaterial forms, as a way of navigating through life. Similarly, Sennett defines technique as a cultural issue, as a "technique for conducting a particular way of life"³⁴. Ultimately, I consider my practice as an extension of my "technique" of living.

³⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008): 8.

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