

Storied Objects

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Abstract

This thesis project addresses questions concerning the significance of the title of an artwork (as a category of literature), and the art object, as vehicles for provoking thought, feeling, and imagination. The title of each work—both deceptively simple and provocatively complex—functions as an important mediator between the objects and the viewer, thus revealing the work’s context, history and ultimately establishing its singularity. A central research question is: How does the title—understood as a literary text as applied to sculpture—interrelate and contrast with orthodoxies of meaning, rationality, and signification? Drawing upon literary theory, the project makes explicit a conception of titles as works of literature, formulating and developing categories of the *narrative-title* and *event-title* in order to engage deeply with issues of the title and its reception, including questions of reading, writing, affect, and meaning. Using a pataphysical approach, each chapter discusses how artworks—specifically, the literary title—question and complicate conventions of the operation of language and textual meaning. In this way, the thesis explores how the title depends upon the limits and shifting interplay between categories: truth and falsehood, non-fiction and fiction, determined meaning and meaning that is more ambiguous. Among other approaches, the thesis examines a history of the concept of the title as applied to sculpture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries asking questions about how titles have been used to enable a wide array of durations and meanings to emerge and, subsequently, affect how we perceive content in the titled object. Importantly, this thesis project suggests that the viewer who experiences the force produced by an irreducibly ambiguous title is constituted as becoming-being; bestowed ethically with a vitality of ongoing work.

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Introduction

Storied Objects is an art project comprising two distinct, but related, groups of work, *Narrative Titles* and *Event Titles*. The artworks comprising each of these two groups have different and distinct literary emphases but are united by a single formal framework: all artworks within the project combine a title and a familiar object. The title of each work—both deceptively simple and provocatively complex—functions as an important mediator between the objects and the viewer, thus revealing the work's meaning, history and ultimately establishing its singularity. This thesis project involves the production of titled objects to explore how the shaping of language can affect the interpretation and perception of content in an artwork.

Throughout the project, I have extended my definition of the title as a theoretical category to include the title/literature as an amalgamated category of practice where each element crosses generic boundaries and, in particular, the boundary between simple communication and works of indeterminacy. Importantly, my focus is on practice-led research resulting in *title-object* configurations and exhibitions. This is accompanied by the exegesis which documents the practical outcomes and positions the titled objects into relevant artistic and theoretical contexts, which includes poststructuralist analyses of literature and language. Drawing upon literary theory, the exegesis makes explicit a conception of titles as works of literature. Here, the exegesis formulates and develops the categories narrative-titles and event-titles in order to engage deeply with issues of the title and its reception, including questions of reading, writing, meaning, and affect. In turn, this exegetical work of categorisation has an effect on practice, challenging me to develop new titles enabling extended readings (for the viewer) and reconciling new theoretical knowledge. This project is founded upon my conviction that writing about art (the exegesis) is an indispensable activity related to my mode of art practice. Simply put, the writing of this exegesis has assisted the development of my practical work. The development of the title can be seen in its variety of explicit or implicit linguistic constructs: puns, irony, fiction, symbolism, anecdotes, etymologies, conundrums, information, truth, falsehood, and humour. Throughout, this exegesis emphasises that the title is always dependent on the limits and shifting interplay between categories: truth and falsehood, determined meaning and meaning that is more ambiguous.

This exegesis addresses questions concerning the significance of the title as name (identity marker, supplement), as a category of literature and as a vehicle for provoking thought, feeling and imagination. The research asks the following main questions: what is the history of the concept of the title as applied to sculpture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Who has deployed the performance of the title in sculpture, and how has it been deployed?¹ How can the title be used to enable a variety of durations and meanings to emerge and, subsequently, affect how we perceive content in a titled object? In addition: Can the use of philosophical and theoretical frameworks make sense of heterogeneous experiences and literary devices within titled objects?



Pearce, L. (2012). *First You Think Your Fortune's Lovely* [Sculpture]. Auckland: RM Gallery.

The stimulus for this project emerged within earlier stages of practice. Previously, the work comprised unusual combinations of objects and materials with a particular focus upon the 'performance' of things. Here by using the term performance, I mean to highlight the vitality or visual and conceptual suggestiveness of material things. For example, my artwork *First You Think Your Fortune's Lovely* (2012) is a work comprising eight glass

¹ By using the term performance, I wish to emphasise that the title opens up the operations of language and meaning. Here, the play of language elicits or produces a wide array of effects and responses rather than determining referential meaning.

tumblers and five sheets of cartridge paper lined up and leaning towards a glass bookend. Noticeably, the work displays an exploration of the interplay of weight, gravity and balance that is familiar to all structures. The objects suggest a game of dominoes but instead of tiles set in motion there is stillness. In this title, the term ‘first’ suggests the initial stage of something before it changes. In this sense, the title’s suggestion of an impending, sequential process relates to the visual ‘domino effect’ of the tumblers and paper. However, the title opens up seemingly irresolvable questions like; what is a fortune and how might it be lovely? How might one’s fortune change from moment to moment? In this sense, the title is fundamentally ambiguous; it neither narrates a story (narrative-title) nor ‘explains’ the artwork (event-title). It seemingly yields an unlimited number of interpretations. During this thesis project, I found myself increasingly drawn to the role of the title in relation to objects (shifting my focus from objects to language). Concurrently, I also became interested in identifying and formulating two types of titles in my project: the narrative-title and the event-title. In the four years prior to my candidature, the titles of my artworks sat indeterminately between the narrative-title and the event-title. These earlier titles mostly deflected readerly attention away from their objects to ideas and concepts seemingly unrelated to the work. In contrast, this project’s titles have a more pointed relationship to their objects, while still maintaining an ambiguity of meaning.

These reflections on my artworks raised a series of questions. If an artwork is a site wherein a wide range of meanings are possible, then what is happening? Underpinning this question is the tension between two aspects of art viewing: a tendency towards explanation or theoretical evaluation that must somehow coexist with the unsayable: even if the artwork eludes a single, authoritative interpretation, many things can be said about and around it. This question developed clarity through the research process to emerge as the following: Is there some power of articulation that is inherent to the title of an artwork? To what extent might a title be an agent in bringing about a forceful, affective interruption within art viewing, thereby forcing the viewer to reconsider cultural norms and modes of behaviour? With these questions in mind, my project addresses the issue of the title and reading the title in a way that takes seriously the three traditional foci of interpretation, the author, the text, and the reader in a broadly pragmatic approach to understanding the title in this project.

Chapter One discusses the relationship of my art practice to pataphysics as a ‘philosophy,’ using the literary writings of its inventor Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) as a means to consider this project’s methodology, or, more accurately, attitude or sensibility. Simply put, pataphysics is a singular shaping of language that rehabilitates particularities or exceptions. Jarry’s oeuvre reflects the principles of pataphysics: it exceeds literature while nonetheless remaining literature. Here, I aim to explore and reflect on the ways in which the relationship between pataphysics and science² is conceived, problematised, and illuminated in visual art practice. Pataphysics is the science of the exception, establishing the scientific laws that govern the particular (thus, contradicting the law of generality). Thus, pataphysics is a playful, even implausible, challenge to science, logic, and Western metaphysics in a scientific guise. A pataphysical approach is supported within this exegesis, each chapter discusses how artworks—specifically, the literary ‘title’—complicate and question orthodoxies of rationality and signification. Titles unsettle notions of certainty and exactitude. They resist the notion of their own essence to which we can give a stable and determinate meaning. Here, titles operate and depend upon the diverse logics at work in language (propositions, narratives, anecdotes, analogies, puns, irony, absurdity, and unreliability) to complicate meaning, intention, and signification. Each title, like the pataphysical text, is fundamentally and uniquely itself. However, the title can never be autonomous: each is always, and inescapably, tied to the object whose singularity it performs and revives. Importantly, this project departs from our ordinary ways of knowing, through an affective swerve rather than a complete break from general knowledge, for thinking and language are always dependent on common agreements of terms, concepts and categories.

Chapter Two discusses the dual nature of titles in this thesis project as at once deceptively simple and irreducibly complex. These titles, conceived as literature, complicate audience interpretation in relation to our search for significance. This ambiguous title provides the basis for an extended understanding of pataphysics. In a manner consonant with pataphysics, the title—as both experimental and explanatory—depends upon the interplay of denotation and connotation in order to pressure recognition as it questions and complicates knowledge and truth and calls for meanings and realities still to come. The ‘particularity’ of the title corresponds with pataphysics, which explores

² By ‘science,’ I mean systemised knowledge in general, which includes but is not limited to a scientific process to establish the validity and reliability of relations, as knowledge.

how exceptions that technical disciplines consider external to a system are actually internal. In his work, Jarry produced a satirical counter-discourse to the human inclination toward exactitude and certainty, an oeuvre that depends upon the dynamic interplay of denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (subjective meaning).

In addition, we will discuss the title as a form of ‘paratext,’ which implies a new relationship with artworks and with the problem of reading in general. Put simply, through Gérard Genette’s concept of paratext, the title is no longer construed simply as separate and distinct from the work but rather moves in an indeterminable zone where a work and what lies outside it cannot be clearly differentiated. If so, then it follows that the title requires interpretation on an equal footing with the work itself, especially in the context of visual art, in which the paratext includes not simply the title but also the ‘texts’ (exhibition text, reviews, commentaries) that contextualise an artwork and become coextensive with it. In addition, I use the concept of paratext to demonstrate the fluid and ambivalent relationship between title and work in a move away from the privileged concept of the autonomous *visual* artwork, as will be discussed in John C. Welchman’s study of the art title in relation to modern art history and theory. The title as a form of paratext further complicates our understanding of this project’s artworks, the title in particular, that it is not only both denotative and connotative but also fundamentally permeable.

The first mode of titling discussed in this exegesis is the *narrative-title*. Discussed in Chapter Three, the narrative-title consists in the fragment of a story, which invites the viewer into an interpretive process. While the narrative-title only tangentially relates to the object, sense can only begin to be made of the object by turning to the title. What I am calling the narrative-title would be a title that assumes the form of narrative and the strategies of storytelling, but that in so doing, would simultaneously—and self-consciously—question their codes and conventions. Chapter Three explores the question of narrative in titles through selected texts by contemporary philosophers Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Jacques Derrida; artworks by Jason Dodge, Claire Fontaine, Dane Mitchell, Nina Canell and Robyn Watkins, Robert Barry, Jonathan Monk, and Marcel Duchamp; and writings on affect by Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth, and Brian Massumi. Chapter Three considers how the narrative-title contrasts with socially engaged art practice (a sort of creative activism with hopes for practical transformation). We will demonstrate that unlike socially engaged art practice, the

narrative-title begins from the starting point of focusing on the status of narrative as a form of representation. Whereas, to all appearances, much art practice regards artworks as vehicles to *reliably* and *authentically* foreground ‘real world’ social issues, I regard narrative-titles as a platform for raising questions about art interpretation through narrative-based artworks which subvert the rigid distinction between true and false, real and imagined. In this regard, my project highlights the ambiguities or a certain latitude of interpretation always at play in narrative. As such, it attends to the instabilities of narrative-titles by reflections on readerly processes of rupture and entanglement. Narrative-titles introduce some degree of epistemological uncertainty concerning the truth or reliability of how and what the artwork appears to signify.

Discussed in Chapter Four, the *event-title* takes the form of a title and an object with a specific focus on the contextual relation of text to object. The title puts forward a proposition in the guise of factual, explanatory prose, often employing scientific or technical references. This proposition, or, rather, playfully ambiguous statement, somehow contextualises an object. Simply put, ambiguity emerges through a title—a shaping of language—that allows a seemingly unlimited number of interpretations. In this regard, the project relates the title to literature in terms of its ambiguity, which serves to destabilise any supposed assumptions we may have about notions of certainty and exactitude.

Furthermore, Chapter Four considers the role of reading in art encounter and relates it to the problem of interpretation and the notion of the title as a contextual marker of the object. This consideration draws upon selected texts by contemporary philosophers Deleuze, Guattari (both separately), Deleuze and Guattari, and Jacques Derrida; artworks by Alejandro Cesarco, Pamela Rosencrantz, and Dave McKenzie, among artworks by other artists; writings on literature by Derek Aldridge and Jeremy Fernando, and writings on art by Simon O’Sullivan, Maja Zehfuss, and Stephen Zepke. We consider the title as opened by, and opening, a sense of reading as an affective event or rupture of habitual modes of thinking and feeling, and the ethics of such an experience. Here, reading as an art encounter suspends all legible representation, to become an affective, durational event in which new movements of thought and sensation can emerge. We consider how such an encounter might include an ethics of reading understood as a responsibility to bringing an ‘otherness’ into existence and to being changed in the process. The ethical obligation

within this project calls the viewer to change what they think in order to protect and learn from the otherness and particularity of the title.

It is well worth noting that narrative-titles and event-titles overlap in interpretation. These categories are not wholly distinct from one another. The narrative-title places emphasis on storytelling in relation to the interpretive uncertainties of literature. The event-title (as a proposition) is more descriptive or explanatory (i.e., this title contextualises an object in space) but nonetheless complicates modes of signification or ‘objects of recognition.’ Each term requires boundaries in order for definition as a concept and yet is possible only on the condition of its fluidity and permeability. The project’s titles always imply a sort of writing unfolding in a threshold. In Chapter Three, we consider an affect theory of art and literature in order to understand the narrative-title as an affective relational encounter. In Chapter Four, I emphasise an ethics of reading and the concept of duration in relation to the event-title. Yet, I have to admit that the distinction between these different theoretical concerns as rather artificial. It is understood that affect, duration, and an ethics of reading is at play in both the event-title and the narrative-title. Indeed, affect itself involves the duration of forces or intensities. While clearly, narrative is based on a temporal structure (duration); it involves a sequence of events in chronological time. I nonetheless chose to discuss duration in the event-title because I wanted to consider by means of this term (event-title) an event or *experiential encounter* unique to such titles and to the spectator, an encounter that confirms its value. The event-title is not an object containing a meaning but an experience with duration that unfolds in the viewer’s perceptual relation to the work. In this respect, the event has porous, extensible and deformable boundaries; its intensity characterised by the dynamics of interaction and change. The event-title as a playful subversion of orthodoxies of knowledge and truth has a tendency toward ‘crisis,’ in its presentation lies the potential for rupture and entanglement: a charged, dynamic, and ambiguous *liminality* that forces a change in one’s preconceptions and habits as well as the fluid, inherently unstable but also generative activity of linguistic invention. Here, this philosophical concept of event involves an affective intensity or duration that is different to a conventional notion of narrative duration as a sequence of events in chronological time. In this sense, the event-title can be understood to suggest the notion of the world’s mutability because it indicates an otherness that cannot be appropriated by the viewer.

Why do I discuss an ethics of reading in relation to the event-title? Simply put, an ethics of reading is a responsibility to bringing ‘otherness’ into existence and to undergoing change in the process. As discussed in Chapter Four, literature is understood as an ethical event that values the capability of the literary work to lure the committed reader into an encounter with ‘otherness’—something coming into being, an encroachment upon the various cultural norms that comprise an individual’s perspective. The event-title’s playful questioning and complication of general knowledge and truth creates openings that allow ‘otherness’ to appear in a breach of the viewer’s preconceptions and habits. In reading the event-title, the viewer might undergo a change; she might apprehend and even make room for this otherness.

I wish to note that not all of my artworks will be explicitly discussed when they appear in this exegesis. I have included additional images to leaven the exegesis: to remind the reader that this is a project about practice, to give a sense of the scope of the project, and to demonstrate a developed project.

Chapter One: Pataphysical Attitudes and Methods of Approach



Pearce, L. (2016). *Three hundred thousand hours of light* (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs) [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

My artwork *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)*, exhibited in ST PAUL Street Gallery in Auckland, is an artwork which combines a title and an object in an effort to playfully disrupt sense and logic and elicit unexpected, associative meaning. In this work, twenty new, packaged PHILLIPS fluorescent tube light bulbs sit in two adjacent branded cardboard boxes. At first blush, the work seems to function as a simple statement or plain demonstration of an established fact. The title could be understood as an explanation, based on the givenness of a shared language, a key to understanding the artwork. However, in an attentive reading, the title opens up the gaps and fissures of meaning that are always inherent in communication. Here, reading is not a heterogeneous practice because the title contains some strange, unlimited ‘meaning,’ but because its meanings must be produced repeatedly across time and context. Here, reading can have disruptive and liberating potential: when the reader attempts not merely to fix the literal meaning of the work, but also to pay attention to where an artwork might lead her through far-reaching and even unlikely associations.

Here, I attempt to explain something about my practice in terms of my understanding of the work of art as process. The process of creating the work *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)* involved continuous exchange between the action of physical-material assemblage and alteration, and that ecology of complex interaction that constitutes the process of perception; as these two action-experiences (one primarily external to the artist’s body, the other primarily internal) constitute a feedback loop. All action, including that of memory, inform all actions continuously, until the physical-material work ceases for a duration that eventuates in a prolonged stasis in the physical-material state of the ‘thing’ that constitutes the work of art. In this situation, I continue to do the *work* of art, internally (as perceptual processing) until it becomes clear to me that there is a sufficiency in what I am seeing and experiencing, and that impetus for further physical-material manipulation is attenuating just as this sense of sufficiency is emerging. This is a process, with duration as its essence. It is the transferring of work impetus towards that work which is done internally (by the artist in becoming spectator); the work of interacting between sensation, affective responding, and conceptual connection (implication). This is the work being done in the reception of the work-of-art. It is what the work offers to the spectator, and it is the spectator’s right to do that work. At some indeterminate duration where I realise this transference has been happening, for me, and that the impetus of work to be done has

shifted a balance from artist towards spectator, I sense that the work of the artist has been done, at least provisionally. As I become a spectator of my own work, the transformation becomes sustained in duration and I deem the *work* of material art-making to be over, and that work-of-art to be finished. Beyond that, *work* continues without end, as the work-of-art unfolds.

This, put simply, is my methodology. It is systematic in ways that remain contingent, inventive, and interactive; incorporating but not reducible to a logic of cause and effect. While my creative process uses instrumental logic to imagine, plan and establish impetus, and as a basis for communication, (signification), it does not hold to this. Such linkages loosen, expand and proliferate as other logics emerge and enfold during the creative process. The work thus informs itself with new experience as much as it is informed by past experience, and as it is also informed by imagination, chance, and change. The dynamic ecology of such interactive possibilities constitutes a vitality, duration being its essence. It is a process; it takes time. Much of the process does not involve manipulating a thing or physical site.

It is worth giving examples of factors that inform my work; its ecology and my intuition that I use continuously in the extended and fluid process of decision-making as I work. Here, I hope to ground the previously discussed principles of perception as something specific. Importantly, my consideration or perception of an artwork occurs over duration. My perception of an artwork such as *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)* takes time, and this perception of the work over time grasps it within spatial relations. The amount of (measured) time spent actually making changes to the work was minimal. For example, changes to the work included an arranging activity, resulting in an orderly and equivalent structure associated with Minimalism. As I paused, there were different pulls, constraints and freedoms that transformed the artwork and propelled it into life. In the making of any artwork, there is a large amount of time spent in the interim as I look, read, reflect, imagine, and gather impetus to either act or not. In this context, not acting becomes active art making. In an exhibition context, my perception of the work discussed above includes the gesture of placement of the boxes of tube lights; how it balances reference to past physical action, the immediacy of phenomenal presence (in the perceptual processing of the present); and a sense of latency suggested by imagining how this balance may change in the future as

present perceptions and imaginings are continuously relegated to those proliferating, accumulating, interacting, retrograde narratives. This contributing factor of perception expands continuously, potentially infinitely. This example conveys some idea of the depth and reach and dynamic complexity of the ecology that feeds my intuition, perception, and decision-making. The dynamic complexity of the action-experiences constituting the artwork creates the tension between harmony (relatively stable, familiar) and dissonance (with the active tension of ‘displacement’ from ideal, familiar order).

In addition, my readings of *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)* change over time, and this understanding of the work in time emerges in forces of language. At first, reading the title may seem unproblematic, a matter of interpreting shared codes or signs. However, the narrative-title does *not* have a fixed meaning based in an authorial origin. Instead, it is experienced as an affective force, rather than a signification. It ignores, or plays with conventional expectations concerning coherent thematic unity based on a logic of cause and effect (a narrative beginning, middle and end). In this sense, meaning can proliferate in a disorderly or complexly ordered manner. For instance, depending on the context of its exhibition, the title provokes a range of possible personal and cultural readings. Here, the title is another factor in the ecology that informs decision-making. In the relation between text and readers contexts, the reader produces meaning(s)—in the reception of the work, as the process of experiencing and in the unfolding of connections, and in each instance of its ‘reading’. Here, the nuanced logic of artistic process accommodates the systems of signification and communication. The process of communication stabilises over time to produce the effect of fixity, boundary and surface.

However, there is always a slippage of meaning; it is operative at all times within my artworks. The title is not a thing, but a latency. Meaning is promiscuous, slipping and shifting in the experience of viewing. My concern is to think about how narrative and language in artworks involve flows or forces that enter relations with other forces. Consequently, we may use the term ‘affect’ for the field of differential relations of multiple forces, while we can use the term ‘meaning’ for the arrangement of subsequent articulations of those forces. In this sense, the creation of the work *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)* is an ongoing process constituted of multiple processes.

My project addresses the problems of reading and writing in titles; questioning the possibility of traditional, linear reading and related concepts of theme, author, narrative, and authoritative interpretation; and disrupts the roles of reader and writer in the title. Discussed throughout the exegesis, both pataphysics and poststructuralism challenge the traditional view of narrative as a linear, coherent unity in favour of the disruptive plurality of meaning and voices.

This account of my practice as a dynamic, heterogeneous and open-ended process raises a question. What is happening if an artwork forms, deforms and reforms anew rather than signifies meaning? While considering this question, I am reminded of the perceptual instabilities described in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. In the novel, the protagonist, James Ramsay, upon seeing the lighthouse attributes it with opposing qualities of eye and beam: the Lighthouse was both "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly" and "barred with black and white... [with] windows in it...[illuminating] washing spread on the rocks to dry" (Woolf, 1972, p. 211). The narrator's following assertion that nothing is simply one thing resonates with my own fascination at the constantly shifting qualities of my own artworks. How does one reconcile this interplay between the exact and the mutable? The novel creates a twofold existence of the object, and it resists privileging one over the other, but presents them in a continuous mutual exchange. Is this merely a story, or is the relationship between objects, words, and images more mutually transformative than commonly believed? Here, in my art practice, the mutual exchange between objects, bodies, and images share in the emergence of artworks. My creative process involves a responsiveness to the potential of material productivity—a dynamic interplay of objects, words, and images. Objects, words, and images are not perceived entirely distinct from one another; rather, they intermingle and transform each other through the medium of my body. I could say that I frame images in my consciousness—as if I am excising them from duration, and capture them as they emerge. Here, artistic practice is not a matter of a prescribed procedure or technique, but is lived in the changing moment, as a connectivity of heterogeneous forces. In these terms, my art practice might be conceived as the practice of materialising possibilities. To establish the intelligibility of an artwork (beyond the ceaseless mutability of affective registers) consists in representational practices (specifically, formal and conceptual analysis).

According to the manufacturer, these fluorescent tube light bulbs have an average lifespan of 15,000 hours. Fifteen thousand hours (average lifespan of one light bulb) multiplied by 20 (number of light bulbs) equals 300,000 hours of light. Three hundred thousand hours or 34 years. Coincidentally, according to a YALE (British home security company) survey involving 2000 people over 40, “age 34 is the happiest year for people on average” (“34 – The happiest year,” 2015). In the YALE website article, managing director Nigel Fisher comments that “the study reminds us of the many treasured memories and experiences to be had at every stage of life and the foundation of many of those is a happy and secure home life” (Fisher, as cited in, “34 – The happiest year,” 2015). This paragraph begins with a comment on the average lifespan of the lightbulbs and leads to an unlikely connection with human happiness and its basis. The structure of the title acts denotatively while also generating a proliferation of meaning. Such associations may open up greater or lesser degrees of affect.

How does one read properly? Reading is not a matter of uncovering *the* meaning of a text, but of participating in the potential of meaning in a text. The title is a meaningful yet non-declarative language similar to petition and poetry. The non-declarative is not a statement about something one knows. Instead, it is neither present nor absent, true nor false—it is suggestive of a future to come. The title discussed above resists simple transparency of meaning, in favour of a potential proliferation of meaning. Ultimately, we as readers remain uncertain as to the significance of 300,000 hours of light. We remain unsure as to the accuracy or verifiability of the supposed claims of the title. And even if the title is accurate, to what purpose? If its actual meaning is held to be uncertain, then what is the title’s relation to a world of practical purposiveness? In this chapter, my engagement with pataphysics explores the complexities of the relationship between the supposed open-endedness of meaning in art and the assumed certainties of science. Importantly, I am not contending that scientists themselves make claims of absolute scientific objectivity and infallibility. However, generally speaking, I am interested in the workings of language in relation to the goal of improved understanding, which is the general objective of science and other formal systems of knowledge. In this regard, I use a form of conceptual art—a relation of title and object—to cast a playful doubt on the notions of certainty, exactitude and authenticity. Here, the title is fundamentally ambiguous in its propensity to open up a seemingly unlimited number of meanings

according to the reader. The unstable relation between the known and the not yet known in the title (as linguistic marks, signs, and meanings), such as in *Three hundred thousand hours of light*, as I construe it, accords with the play of meaning that connects the pataphysician to a world both formed and inexhaustibly rewritable.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Gómez-Egaña, P. (2013). *The Chariot of Greenwich* [Sculpture]. Berlin: Zilberman Gallery.

In this context, Pedro Gómez-Egaña's sculptural artwork *The Chariot of Greenwich* (2013) may be construed as an attempt to simultaneously demonstrate and intensify the notion of a compass as a commentary on advancements in knowledge and technology. *The Chariot of Greenwich* is a replica of the south-pointing chariot, an ancient machine supposedly invented by the Yellow Emperor, c. 2600 BC. According to legend, this chariot supports a carved figure that always points south, regardless of its movement ("The Chariot of Greenwich," n.d). In the 20th century, approximately one century after the Greenwich Meridian was established, the British engineer Sir George Lanchester manufactured his version of the Chinese invention. He proposed that the only way that the south-pointing chariot was possible was by means of differential gearing, thus noting a similarity between the Chinese mythical apparatus and British engineering, but also ignoring any significance that the device may have had as a work of the supernatural or as a symbolic tool. *The Chariot of Greenwich* is an interpretation of Lanchester's version ("The Chariot of Greenwich," n.d.).

In a model of a self-defeating system, a ‘stick and carrot’ arrangement of a pointer and clock pendulum functions in a similar way to an immobile compass needle in *The Chariot of Greenwich*. In addition, a mechanism in the chariot makes it rotate continuously. This rotation produces friction in the gearing, creating a screeching noise and depositing timber debris on the floor. Gómez-Egaña has built a chariot that sabotages its own instrumentality: it points south but is trapped in a perpetual rotation wherein this symbol of human progress forever yields itself to its own apparent disorientation. Similarly to *Three hundred thousand hours of light...*, *The Chariot of Greenwich* questions and complicates any disciplinary conception of certainty and exactitude by presenting an unruly system working against itself, exposing knowledge as highly ambiguous.

This chapter presents an overview of my art practice, demonstrating a concern first with pataphysics as a ‘philosophy’ and explaining art practice as a contribution to pataphysics. Here and throughout the exegesis, I explore and reflect on the ways in which visual art both elucidates and complicates the epistemological questions that the relationship between pataphysics and science³ raises. Initially, I outline the implications of Jarry’s pataphysical ‘method’ for art practice, notably my decision to play with ‘good sense’ and ‘common sense’ in artworks.⁴ A pataphysical methodology not only intersects with the playful artworks that I make but also informs the insights discovered through the theoretical work within this project.⁵ Contrary to the conventional view, according to Jarry, metaphysics and physics are not sciences of the general. Instead, both sciences deal with exceptions that have become familiar and ordinary through modes of categorisation (1996, p. 21-22). In his essay *Superliminal Note*, Roger Shattuck (1960/1986) explains

³ By ‘science,’ I mean systemised knowledge in general, which includes but is not limited to a scientific process to establish the validity and reliability of relations, as knowledge.

⁴ By ‘good sense’, I mean the expectation of particular results based on the relation of cause (origin) and effect (secondary) in chronological time. By ‘common sense’, I mean the classical conception of the self as a fixed, unified subject – the unity of the ‘I’ in relation to the familiar object world (giving us the conventional notion of the artist as creator/author concerned with representing reality). These definitions draw on Deleuze’s thesis in *Logic of Sense* (2004b): “good sense ... affirms a single direction; it determines this direction to go from the most to the least differentiated, from the singular to the regular, and from the remarkable to the ordinary; it orients the arrow of time from past to future.” (p. 76). Further, Deleuze (2004b) writes: “Common sense identifies and recognises, no less than good sense foresees. Subjectively, common sense subsumes under itself the various faculties of the soul, or the differentiated organs of the body, and brings them to bear upon a unity which is capable of saying “I.” ... Objectively, common sense subsumes under itself the given diversity and relates it to the unity of a particular form of object or an individualized form of a world.” (p. 78).

⁵ I acknowledge that to describe pataphysics as a ‘methodology’ is problematic, given its paradoxical status as an unsystematic system of thought and practice.

that pataphysics “relates each thing and every event not to any generality (a mere plastering over of exceptions) but to the singularity that makes it an exception” (p. 11). Pataphysics leads us beyond metaphysics, through a different kind of responsibility to language and textuality. In this regard, this project departs from our ordinary ways of knowing, through an affective swerve rather than a complete break from concepts, for thinking and language are always dependent on common agreements of terms, concepts and categories. Broadly speaking, pataphysics might be considered as a critique of the lasting influence of modernity, the period associated with the late eighteenth century Enlightenment project, which diminished the fuller understanding of knowing by emphasising pure reason and scientific objectivism in favour of more intuitive, speculative, or aesthetic ways of understanding reality.

The Enlightenment project sought to establish determinate categories that encourage binary oppositions, each involving an unspoken hierarchy, for example, the distinction between the objective and subjective, the rational and irrational, the cognitive and emotive, the secular and religious. It sought to enable individuals to liberate themselves from superstition and religious authoritarianism and submit to universal reason and science in pursuit of so-called certainty and exactitude. But these modern dichotomies do not always hold up: what do we do with the work of art? Is it objective or subjective, rational or irrational? Well, the work of art is neither. Art does not easily yield to categorisation; it eludes deterministic interpretation. Pataphysics suggests that conceptual dichotomies are porous; they bleed into one another. In other words, pataphysics seeks to restore *multiple* ways of thinking, knowing, and acting. We might consider pataphysics as a repertoire of strategies by which modern binary thinking is pressured from within. It prevents the world that emerges from solidifying and hardening, keeping it indeterminate and revisable, its gaps and fissures making space for creative, unpredictable outcomes, involving multiple ways of knowing. A pataphysical approach is supported within the exegesis, with each chapter discussing how practical work questions and complicates orthodoxies of rationality and signification. In classical semiotics, signification infers that meaning is something already given, inherent in a concept or thing. Using a pataphysical approach, this project suggests that reality and meaning do not exist of themselves, but rather that they are generated by individuals and groups in a particular place and time.

Alfred Jarry proposes a pataphysical methodology in his novel *Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll, Pataphysician*, first published, posthumously, in 1911. From the outset, it is worth acknowledging that pataphysics by its very nature defies an institutional definition: it allows no possibility of authoritative discourse. However, from *Faustroll*, it is possible to provide a basic account of what pataphysics is generally understood to mean. Pataphysics might best be understood as a rehabilitation of the idiosyncratic within the rational. In this thesis project, such novelty emerges in the title: imagination and reason always elicit and suggest one another. Jarry presents pataphysics as a way of thinking and acting, in which the realm of the imagination—which includes art—is *equivalent* with every other understanding of the world.⁶ In this regard, Jarry's pataphysics is a philosophy based in epistemic relativism. The epistemic relativist is committed to a "doctrine of equal validity", the opinion that "[t]here are many radically different, incompatible, yet, 'equally valid' ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them" (Boghossian, 2006, p. 2). *Faustroll* is an absurdist, pseudoscientific tale that rejects realistic portrayals and linear narrative. The novel describes a voyage from Paris to Paris by sea, in which one character becomes the size of a mite. Conversations occur, but one character can only say "Ha ha." The consistent theme in Jarry's novel is the elasticity of space and time. The theme is not surprising, since Jarry's pataphysics refutes the concept of a unitary and singular reality. In this novel, Jarry presents pataphysics as a 'philosophy' of conjunctions rather than oppositions. In book II, chapter 8, 'Elements of Pataphysics,' Jarry (1911/1996), in the guise of Faustroll, declares:

Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions ... pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one. (p. 21-22)

It is crucial to pataphysics that the foundation of scientific empiricism—the repeatable experiment which consistently produces a result that may be formulated into a rule or

⁶ Similar to Jarry, Deleuze and Guattari also posit a non-hierarchical view of different kinds of thought. They associate three kinds of thought with three related outcomes: the concepts of philosophy, the functions of science, and the sensations of art. These three are individual but equivalent in significance. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) write: "Thinking is thought through concepts, or functions, or sensations and no one of these thoughts is better than another, or more fully, completely, or synthetically 'thought'" (p. 198). See Andrew Hugill (2012) who writes that: "Jarry was a visual artist as well as a writer, and his involvement with the visual artists, and in particular Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, and Édouard Vuillard, of the Nabis group, did much to elaborate pataphysical ideas, which have always had a strong pictorial and representational dimension" (p. 155).

axiom—is questioned and the trouble by the pataphysical study of the particular (Jarry, 1996, p. 22).⁷ To say that this idea is complex and speculative is obvious, but it is important to, at least, indicate how pataphysics might mandate a particular approach to art practice to clarify a central concern of my project. That is, the need to question and complicate reductive modes of reading and knowing which assume the normative status of identity categories and fail thus to deal with conceptual and material complexity.

However, despite the importance of pataphysics, it is worth noting that Jarry presents a narrow view of science as if the Western scientific tradition was unchanging and that the certainty associated with a scientific theory or law eschews doubt or revision. Whereas, the experimental aspect of science explicitly or implicitly acknowledges the possibility of error. In *Bachelard: Science and Objectivity*, Mary Tiles (1984) writes: “Even at the level of measurement, there is no thought in the mind of the scientist that his instruments yield data which are in any way absolute and beyond further correction or refinement” (p. 59). In his oversimplification of science, Jarry suggests that there were no scientists willing to acknowledge that science has limits. In his book, *Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science*, Christian Bok (2002) asserts that pataphysics discloses the failure of science to be “as lucid as once thought, since science must often ignore the arbitrary, if not whimsical, status of its own axioms” (p. 4). However, it is important to consider what was happening within scientific discourse at the beginning of pataphysics, and Jarry’s interest in the scientific developments of the time. In his book *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment* (2010), Herbert Molderings points out that the scientific philosopher Henri Poincaré, in *Science and Hypothesis* (1902), discussed the possibility that physical space might have a non-Euclidean geometry. Molderings (2010) quotes Poincaré as follows: “One geometry cannot be more true than another; it can only be *more convenient*” (Poincaré, as cited in Molderings, p. 85). Contemporaneously, scientists and mathematicians such as Poincaré, Bernhard Riemann, and Felix Klein worked on revising our most fundamental understanding of the nature of reality. It is easy to see how Jarry might have been inspired by the then new non-Euclidean geometry, offering interpretations of reality in ways previously unimagined.

⁷ Of relevance here, in *The Singularity of Literature*, Derek Attridge (2017) claims that “the very term ‘experiment’ paradoxically combines the notions of a repeatable physical process and the unpredictable trying-out of new procedures” (p. 27).

Perhaps Jarry's (1911/1996) most succinct yet rather difficult definition of pataphysics reads as follows: "*Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments*" (p. 22). Pataphysics is realised in moments of conjunction between scientific and artistic practice. In his book *Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* (2002), Andrew Hugill provides the following quotation from Ruy Launoir's 1969 book *Clefs Pour La Pataphysique*, which suggests pataphysical strategies to move beyond systems of representation based upon invariable meanings and identities. I quote at length because of the importance of Launoir's commentary to my discussion:

We represent the real according to our usage of it or according to our very anthropomorphic perceptions of it. The lineaments could therefore be either the outline of these practices, or, which amounts to the same thing in the end, a sort of elementary structure—we know not what—of what is made manifest. All our ideation bears its mark, and no doubt always in exactly the same way, even those circumstances, and indeed individuals, may vary.

We cannot suppress these lineaments ... but we can at least divert our habits and free up our thinking.

We must, by considering the possible ways in which we can imaginatively extend all the aspects of an object, be able to combine them in order to obtain a new representation of a linear "something"; pataphysical freedom will be attained at the moment when we can think of objects at once as ordinary and in many other ways, being conscious only of the differences in ingenuity between these representations.

This does not exclude other interpretations: one could also say, more simply, that the pataphysician proposes to decorate with new solutions our representations of the poverty-stricken, linear, "world." (Launoir, 1969, as cited in Hugill, 2012, p. 4)

Remaining receptive, sensitive and responsive to the implications of Launoir's interpretation is one of the key intellectual tasks that this study has assigned itself. Following Launoir, we discover in pataphysics a methodology based neither on a model of scientific reasoning, nor a representational model of identity that are the foundations underpinning human-centered mastery (fixed conceptions) of a so-called concretely existing world (reality), but rather on a model of equivalence conjoining both theoretical and non-theoretical perspectives constituting a multiplicity of contingent, possible, virtual 'realities.' In dominant forms of representation (State, pragmatism, empirical and

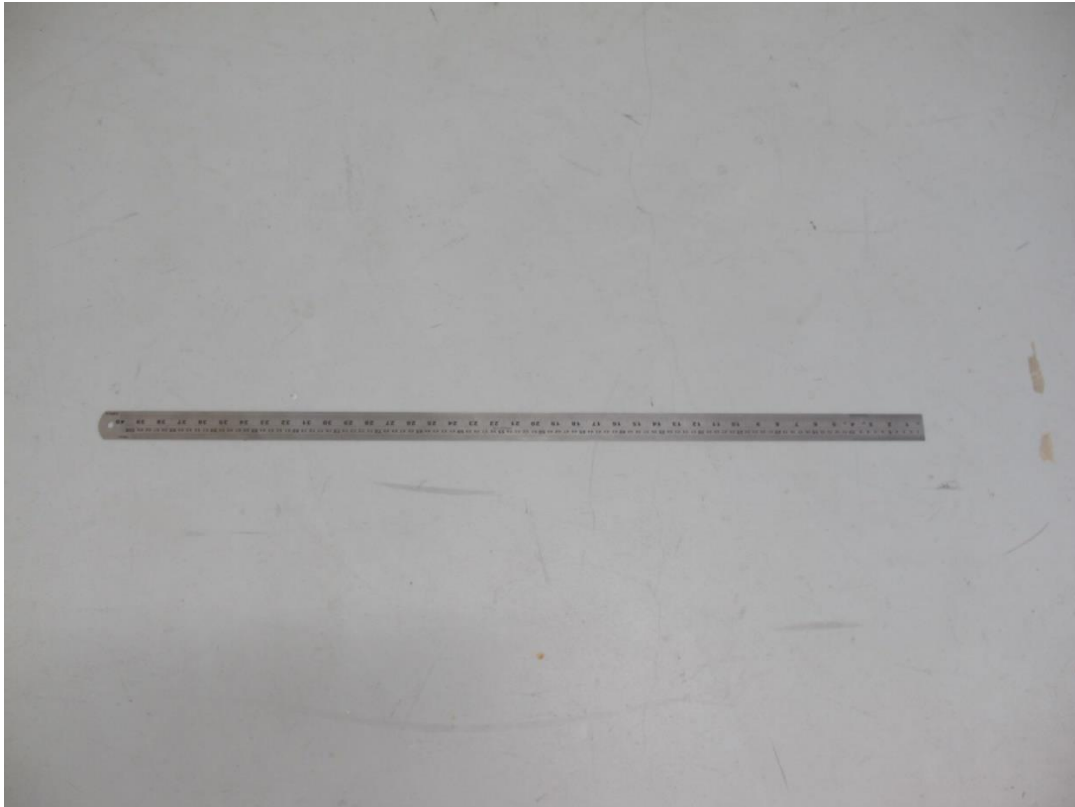
mathematical sciences), words and concepts define the being of an object, asserting a more or less unchanging identity at the expense of the possibility of a radically new conception of an object, where this implies a rupture of everyday existence and its possible future forms.

As a mode of perception and interpretation, pataphysics could be said to share resonances with the Romantic poet John Keats' notion of 'negative capability.' Negative capability is the capability to be in and with, or even cherish, uncertainty. In 1817, the Romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821) coined the term 'negative capability' in a letter to his brothers: "Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats, 1817, as cited in Moore and Strachan, 2010, p. 153). Here, Keats is not denying the necessity of facts and reason. However, as an antidote to the idea of one authoritative formula or discourse (similar to pataphysics), he does celebrate the person capable of sustaining an openness and receptivity to hitherto unanticipated possibilities. In the context of this project, by deploying what Keats termed 'negative capability,' the viewer will realise that the title does not signify the meaning of an object, instead, it frustrates 'simple' claims to meaning as a way of opening up imaginative, productive thinking.

To encourage open and experimental habits of thought, the project's titling procedure deploys a complex of literary devices: narrative, propositions, anecdotes, analogies, puns, and so on. Irony, absurdity, and unreliability abound here. This interplay of literary devices interrupts any simple connection between title and object. Reading the title opens up a dynamic network of references, associations, and responses. The use of diverse literary devices thus enables both the project and the viewer to "imaginatively extend all the aspects of an object, be able to combine them in order to obtain a new representation of a linear "something" (Launoir, 1969, as cited in Hugill, 2012, p. 4). Here, reality (a linear "something") is a *process*, and an individual's understanding of reality is always in process; something lived rather than something held. Here, the viewer's engagement with the play of language allows her to overcome the desensitisation of recognition and habit.

In pataphysical thinking, we cannot completely reject ordinary practices or the elementary structure of the world but we can at least choose to defer habitual behaviour

and free up our thinking. This is achieved in pataphysics by a recognition of the oscillation between supposed opposites: truth/fiction, exceptions/generalities, fact/falsehood, and subjective experience/objective reality—amounting to an equivalence of terms. This project aims to build upon existing artistic practice relating to pataphysics. Here, the title, both true and fictitious, is deployed as a means for questioning the notion of mutually exclusive terms and concepts.



Pearce, L. (2016). *A metric ruler points north. An instrument for measuring length is used to indicate direction* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

My artwork *A metric ruler points north. An instrument for measuring length is used to indicate direction*, exhibited in ST PAUL St Gallery, is an example of a work that is informed by a pataphysical approach. In this work, a CELCO steel metric ruler lies on the floor, pointing to the cardinal direction given in the title. Here, a measuring instrument becomes a navigational instrument. What is commonly used to measure the length, height and width of an object or the distance between two points, objects or places, is now pointing in a specific direction, suggesting a new possible use and waiting to receive with

it new significance. In this regard, the work becomes a pataphysical speculation on, and inversion of, the conventions of scientific measurement. Concurrently, the title *A metric ruler points north. An instrument for measuring length is used to indicate direction* is highly ambiguous. It conveys a bearing to an ill-defined ‘north’, an uncertain distant location. There is both a magnetic north (an unstable magnetic pole of the Earth – determined by pointing the needle of a compass towards north) and a true north (a stable and constant geographic location – which can be determined by the North Star). The title’s use of the word ‘north’ and its meaning seems ambiguous, as can be seen by the two definitions. Furthermore, the title does not indicate which end of the ruler points north, increasing the sense of uncertainty about its use and purpose. There are insufficient instructions for the ‘proper’ use of the ruler/pointer raising questions with respect to the title. The indeterminacy of the title seems to stem from a play of linguistic signs rather than a simple relation between individual signs and their basis in an unchanging reality.⁸ Therefore, this ‘useless’ reference tool can be said to operate inside a deterministic scientific model, but against the limits of this model in order to produce a liminal conceptual space that sits within the remit of pataphysics. In this regard, the artwork unfolds between meaning and non-meaning, operating in a way that appears meaningful but is fundamentally ambiguous due to the ironic treatment of two fields of scientific study: navigation and measurement (conflating different scientific principles and instruments). Therefore, this artwork suggests that there is a problem with attributing exactitude and certainty to science in any straightforward way.

The title’s problematic appeal to objective knowledge may generate new and surprising readings. Despite its easily read title, the artwork foregrounds the linguistic construction and problematic of scientific paradigms and objective knowledge. In this sense, the title could be described as both truthful and fictive. Returning to Jarry, we have already established that pataphysics does not use a scientific method to reproduce or advance scientific knowledge but instead studies the particulars and exceptions that inhere in generalities. Assuming a combinatorial play of particularity and generality, *A metric ruler points north. An instrument for measuring length is used to indicate direction* encourages us to reconsider a fundamental ambiguity between fact and non-knowledge, subjectivity and objectivity. To gain some purchase on Jarry’s whimsical science, we

⁸ Chapter Four discusses the indeterminacy of linguistic meaning with reference to Derrida’s term *différance*.

might approach this artwork as much an event (an exception which has no rule) as it is a seemingly enduring object; that is, it is something whose mode is fluid, dynamic, and irreducible to measure and calculation. Like Jarry, I am interested in measuring the rupture, however slight, that a mode of art practice delivers to notions of certainty and exactitude.

In this work, I have no interest in privileging one perspective over the other, but am more interested in offering an opportunity to the viewer to create their own system of thought and value, and then live ‘as if’ a reality conforms to it. In this sense, the viewer creates what Jarry calls an epiphenomenon. Jarry (1911/1996) writes: “An epiphenomenon is that which is superinduced upon a phenomenon” (p. 21). In this sense, the viewer generates a secondary phenomenon (a reality) that occurs alongside a dominant ideological or scientific paradigm. In pataphysics, the ambiguity of literature enables the reader to produce new modes of thought in which imaginative projection is equivalent to a so-called concrete reality. As Bök (2002) points out:

Jarry suggests through pataphysics that reality does not exist, except as the interpretive projection of a phenomenal perspective – which is to say that reality is never *as it is* but always *as if it is*. Reality is quasi, pseudo: it is more virtual than actual; it is real only to the degree to which it can seem to be real and only for so long as it can be made to stay real. (p. 8)

From such a perspective, Jarry suggests an individual agency that creates reality, who in the process of creating her own reality, confronts the conditioning of hegemonic, ideological structures. Here, pataphysical thought can be understood *as* a temporal event. The event of pataphysics occurs, but exactly where and when it occurs eludes simple articulation. Pataphysics, says Bök (2002), “narrates not *what is*, but *what might have become*. It inhabits the tense of the future perfect, of the *post modo*—a paradoxical temporality, in which what has yet to happen has already taken place” (p. 8). Bök seems to be saying that pataphysics occupies a zone both within and without a concretely existing reality, and that this occupation occurs outside chronological time. Pataphysics is not and cannot be in a particular time and place. Nevertheless, it is experienced here and now, a quiet but compelling solicitation. In this sense, pataphysics can be understood as an imagination of both the temporal and spatial. Again, the previously discussed interstitial structure of *A metric ruler points north* always suggests more possibilities to come;

meaning is never fully present, because things are always changing. Whereas social structures determine the future, pataphysics calls forth an individual (a viewer, a reader) open to a future that can never be anticipated by prescribed limits of meaning and knowledge.

The speculative aspect of this project, discernible in its artworks, is not adamantly anti-scientific, or even antirational, as it might appear. Instead, the relationship between the ambiguity of the artwork and the objective knowledge it parodies is complex. Pataphysically speaking, the project is not a simple dismissal of science, but an engagement with the openings and limits of meaning and knowledge. Artworks contest aspects of science while also depending upon empirical knowledge. They make no sense without a scientific framework. Here, the possibility of scientific knowledge implies the possibility of nonscientific thought.

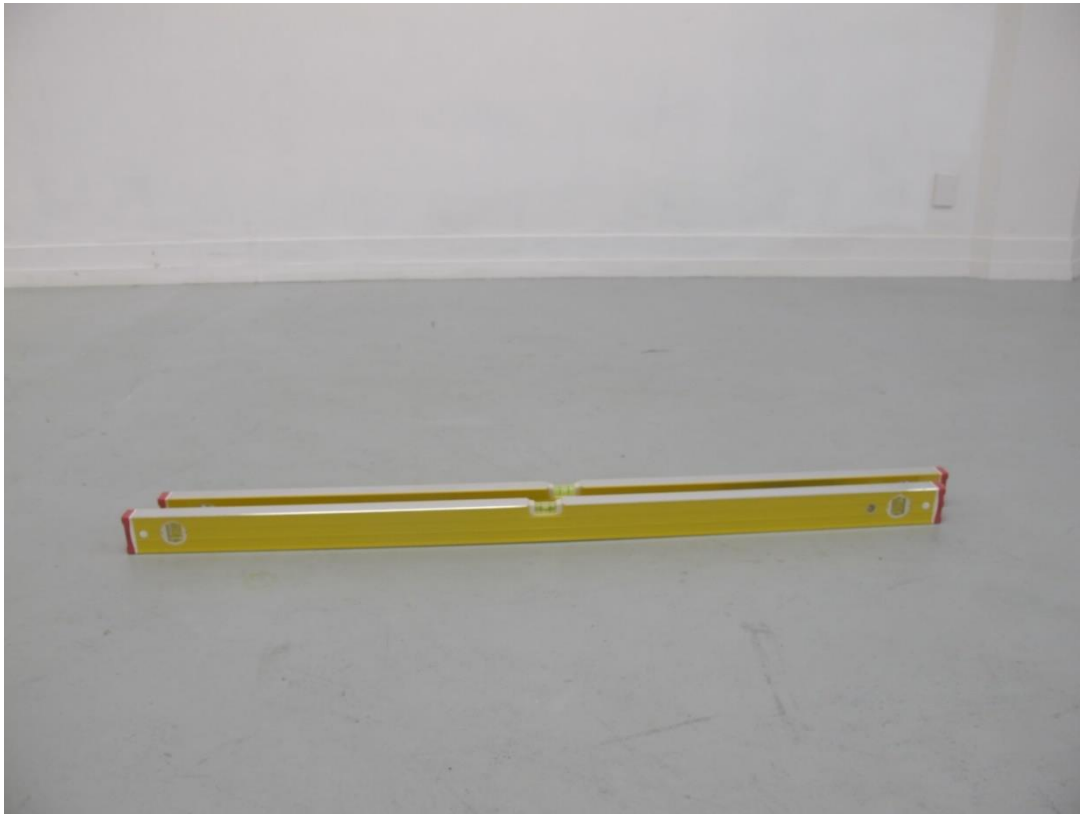
A metric ruler points north does not disavow the value of the standard metre but instead provides the opportunity to conceive it in a different way. In constructing this work, I have placed a metre ruler on the floor, shifting the use of the ruler from measuring length to indicating direction to suggest new ways of looking. Here, the ambiguity of the title could be said to correspond with what Derrida calls the ‘undecidable.’ In this regard, it is useful to consider the distinction that Derrida makes between ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘undecidability’ in relation to textual meaning. In ‘Afterword: Towards an Ethic of Discussion’ in *Limited Inc*, Derrida (1988) maintains that textual meaning is undecidable but not indeterminable:

I do not believe that I have ever spoken of “indeterminacy,” whether in regard to “meaning” or anything else. Undecidability is something else again. ... undecidability is always a *determinant* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive—syntactical and rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc.) They are *pragmatically* determined. (p. 148)

For Derrida, there is no unlimited indeterminacy of meaning or infinite ways to interpret a text. However, the meaning of a text changes in different historical and socially contingent contexts. Since its conception, the measurement of a metre has been redefined following an increasing desire for precision. In this sense, the definition of ‘metre’ has been

discursively constructed and made more precise over the past few centuries. In a break with such conventions of measurement, the shaping of language in *A metric ruler points north* opens up a textual ambiguity which is addressed within the art world as a set of institutional and discursive contexts. Following Derrida, we might acknowledge an undecidability in *A metric ruler points north*, however we cannot furnish this title with infinitely unlimited interpretations. If interpretations are undecidable, they are similarly decided within the art world as a strictly defined, discursive formation. The meaning of this artwork is determined to a certain extent by the art world as a hierarchical yet unstable discursive formation.

My interpretation of artworks in this project always risks losing its object precisely by trying to observe it—identify and explain it—too directly. To formulate an exegesis on art practice—or rather, to allow practice to occasion an exegesis—is necessarily to write indirectly and on all manner of topics, among them literature, critical theory, philosophy, and ethics. It is unavoidable that artists, critics, and students will articulate context as much as content, because the latter is contingent on the former, but these interpretive efforts must not be taken as the equivalent of the artwork itself. There is an affective force of art irreducible to its function as a cultural object. In the case of the title, it is necessary to nurture ambiguity in order to preserve artworks when they would otherwise expire through exhaustive explication. Here, pataphysics acknowledges that everything is in a perpetual state of flux. No discursive formation is stable and unchanging. In this liminal zone, Jarry suggests a plurality of worlds, as if reality were virtual. This is not to say that things lack meaning. Instead, he is both questioning our assumptions about meaning and suggesting a radical re-conception of truth that resists direct assertion.



Pearce, L. (2016). *A pair of spirit levels confirms the horizontality of the floor* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

My artwork *A pair of spirit levels confirms the horizontality of the floor*, exhibited in ST PAUL Street Gallery Three in Auckland, can be cited as another work that shares resonances with pataphysics. In this work, a pair of STABILA spirit levels lie beside one another on the gallery floor. The title *A pair of spirit levels confirms the horizontality of the floor* becomes an invitation to viewers to check the flatness of the floor, while simultaneously soliciting viewers to ponder this seemingly purposeless alignment of a pair of spirit levels. Normally, a builder will rotate a single level on a floor to check both the X and Y axis, or north/south and east/west, as well as other directions, looking for hollows or bumps on the floor surface. However, in this static installation, both spirit levels merely serve to indicate levelness on one axis because they rest in parallel lines. This configuration of spirit levels side-by-side enters into conflict with utility or good sense, because this positionality denies the viewer the opportunity to read the levels on different axes. At first blush, the title of the work falsely suggests that the reading of this pair of spirit levels is sufficient to ensure an exact, reliable measurement. This refusal of instrumental purposiveness may cause the reader boredom, irritation or intrigue. A conflict opens up in the relationship between viewer and artwork. The viewer must decide whether

to engage in a reading that includes certain difficulties and obligations. Here, there might be a slowing down of the reading. The reader might reconsider the way a surface is given and waiting for eventfulness. Might pataphysics move us towards the ground as a capaciousness, with an agency of dynamic potentialities? In addition, the reader might rethink Western time, which is quantifiable, advancing in a straight line. Here, normative beliefs and assumptions are constantly on the brink of collapsing. The outcome of such a pataphysical experiment is unforeseeable. For there to be a pataphysical event, it must ultimately resist full explication.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Duchamp, M. (1913-14). *3 Standard Stoppages* [Sculpture]. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

What follows is an analysis of Duchamp's at once pseudoscientific and artistic experiment *3 Stoppages étalon* (*3 Standard Stoppages*) of 1913–14 as an example of pataphysics in artistic practice.⁹ Jarry's writings had a significant influence on Duchamp throughout his career, such that he joined the Collège of Pataphysique in 1952. In *3 Standard Stoppages*, Duchamp explores the possibility of transforming the standard metre

⁹ Interestingly, in discussing Duchamp's interest in intellectual rather than visual experience, Dalia Judovitz (1998) writes: "This interest in research, in the effort to rethink the relationship between science and art, is visible in Duchamp's extensive notes, which were published in exact replica, starting with *The Box of 1914* (1913-14), which anticipates the project of *The Large Glass*, *The Green Box* (1934) ... Duchamp's [work] represent[s] an effort to challenge the notion of the work of art as an objective product by redefining it as a process, the embodiment of intellectual, artistic, and technical methods." (p. 79).

through a chance operation. Duchamp's idea for the production of *3 Standard Stoppages* is recorded in note form, stored in the *Box of 1914*, and reads like a hypothesis:

The Idea of the Fabrication: If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one metre on to a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* and creates a new shape of the measure of length. — 3 patterns obtained in more or less similar conditions: *considered in the relation to one another* they are an *approximate reconstitution* of the measure of length. (Duchamp, 1914, as cited in Molderings, 2010, p. 1)

To produce the artwork, Duchamp supposedly dropped three metre-long threads from a height of one metre onto three canvases, then secured these curved threads where they had randomly fallen.¹⁰ Then, he cut these canvases into rectangles and pronounced each a new standard unit of measure. He probably used tracings of his wavy lines for drawing branching lines in his 1914 painting *Network of Stoppages* (Moulderings, 2010, p. 46). In 1918, Duchamp cut wooden templates based upon the three curved lines. In 1936, Duchamp altered the display mechanism of *3 Standard Stoppages*, placing the canvases (previously hung as paintings) and wooden templates in an instrument box, like the type of display device commonly found in science museums. In this way, Duchamp further altered *3 Standard Stoppages* into quasi-scientific objects of art. From a pataphysical viewpoint, Duchamp transformed the straight line of the metre in a trial using lengths of string and, provocatively, altered this conventional unit of length into the quasi-scientific, artistic outcome of a chance operation.

In his 1964 slide lecture “Apropos of Myself,” presented at the City Art Museum of St. Louis, Missouri, Duchamp (2010) described *3 Standard Stoppages* as a pataphysical experiment partially informed by Bernhard Riemann's non-Euclidean geometry, which questions the certitude of the Euclidean axiom: A straight line is the shortest distance between two points:

This experiment was made in 1913 to imprison and preserve forms obtained through chance, through my chance. At the same time, the unit of length: one meter was changed from a straight line to a curved line without actually losing its identity [as] the meter, and

¹⁰ According to Molderings (2010), Duchamp did not use threads that were precisely one metre in length but longer threads measuring approximately 110 cm (p. 35).

yet casting a pataphysical doubt on the concept of a straight line as being the shortest route from one point to another. (Duchamp, 1964, as cited in Molderings, 2010, p. 83)

According to Molderings (2010), Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* calls into question not only Euclidean geometry but also the "determinist view that a certain process taking place under identical conditions will always have the same consequence, such that a law, that is, a prediction, can be derived from it" (p. 120). While the lengths of string were dropped following the same procedure, the chance experiment produced three singular and unique outcomes. *3 Standard Stoppages* reminds us that all units of measurement are quantities that are widely accepted because of conventions. In altering the standard metre into a series of random curves, Duchamp highlights the idea that scientific laws and classifications are only contingent and provisional to the extent of suggesting that all systems of measurement are justifiable, irrespective of their basis in radical individualism or aleatory events. The "pataphysical doubt" expressed by Duchamp's work is synonymous with the desire to complicate any conventions of science and thought, and to conceive, in his own words, "a reality which would be possible by slightly distending the laws of physics and chemistry" (Duchamp, cited in Moldering, 2010, p. 105). Duchamp's pataphysics is neither an affirmation nor rejection of scientific thinking—which would constitute binary thinking—but rather a playful and yet rigorous experiment opening up possibilities for conceiving reality differently.

Summary

In this chapter, we have considered pataphysics noting that aspects of Jarry's thought shows the potential to enrich the combinatorial logic (between the rational and the unsystematic) of art viewing we propose. Clearly, Jarry's emphasis on the notion of the singularity of each thing and every event resonates with a form of art interpretation open to the unforeseeable. Similarly, Keats' understanding of negative capability as the ability to engage in destabilising encounters without striving for tidy resolution provides a conceptual framework for art viewing. Here, art viewing occurs at the margin between certainty and uncertainty, both a necessary and challenging space for discovery in the context of art. The project suggests that an interplay between negative capability and objectivity can open a space for creative thought in the margin between ambiguity and certainty. Here, artworks suggest that human experience and the concepts and categories

with which we explain it are more uncertain and heterogeneous than instrumental rationality would suggest. Briefly stated, encounters with works of art reveal the limitations of our concepts and discourses. Therefore, art interpretation requires that viewers are open enough to accommodate and sustain arts' double movement between indeterminacy and objectivity.

My art practice involves a felt responsibility to create the conditions for new experience—in me and the viewer—and these conditions build around the experience to become new knowledge in subtle ways, that is, these conditions open up experiences that connect with, complicate and augment knowledge.

This is essentially not a representational practice. Throughout the project, there is a reciprocal interaction between practice and theory. My research is practice-led to the extent that my response to what is happening as art-making proceeds is continually invoking new possibilities and new questions. Contextual-theoretical research is brought to bear on these possibilities and questions, and the findings fold back into the practice. This is a seamless, self-sustaining feedback process—art exploration through integrating practice and theory. Practice and theory inform one another in the context of questions and possibilities continually emerging. Within this process, I would not give precedence to either practice or theory, although the overarching creative possibilities for generating new experience through art-making are what motivates and sustains my engagement with art. It is from experience that knowledge is derived, and it is the experience of encounter with my emerging work that leads me to bring knowledge to enrich that experience: to bring affect and concept to one another.

My practice-led research is *not* based in retrospective analysis used to frame what happened (in art-making; both process and outcome) but in terms of how you deal with decision-making as the work is unfolding, and where creative experimental modes prevail. My creative practice cannot be simply represented because it is complex, interactive, dynamic and indeterminate. The affective indeterminacy of practice is fundamental to my practice led research, it is not amenable to translation in terms of what we already know/understand, which is conceived (represented to consciousness and reason) in terms of language—that is, where the affective immediacy has been translated and corralled within extant representational categories. My approach is to bring practical and theoretical

research together—into a crucible of interacting forces that guide the decision-making that happens during the formation of my work.

The logics of pataphysics and post-structuralism offer structures for creative, experimental modes of art practice where deciding something (for example, choosing to make an artwork) does not mean a fixed settling on its outcome. The work does not proceed according to traditional methods of sculptural practice—a one-way relationship between artist and materials—an application of strategic actions. Instead, in everyday contexts, at some unrepresentable moment, the work emerges within a field that is a dynamic ecology of ideas, images, environment and things. This experience draws me out in a manner that seems to be beyond my efforts to control it. Here, the artwork continuously unfolds in the intensity of continuous decision-making.

The condition of the work is always emerging; it unfolds within a continuum or confluence of materialities (broadly understood as ideas, thinking, imaginings, virtual expressions, actual objects and substances). During unrepresentable moments, I decide to make a particular artwork. I might go to a store to purchase a set of fluorescent tubes (in response to an emerging idea). In this example, I eventually exhibited the work *Three hundred thousand hours of light (boxes containing twenty fluorescent tube light bulbs)* at ST Paul Gallery in 2016. In its continuous unfolding, a variation of this work *180,000 hours of light* comprised two boxes of 12 lightbulbs and was exhibited again at ST Paul Street Gallery in 2019. In each exhibition, the ‘work’ is part of and arises from an affective multiplicity (simply put, an entity comprising numerous elements in constant flux, which attains some consistency for a duration). In the heat of practice, I make decisions, not following rational thought, but as a direct and felt response to virtual images. In giving this account, I wish to draw attention to the reciprocal relationship between affect theory and my art practice. In this exegesis, I discuss affect as a dynamic principle to account for art practice as a corporeal experience beyond reasoning. Each work is part of the process of becoming and differentiation – even in exhibition, the work (as affective event) does not comprise a fixed object because each instance is characterised by differentiation. Put simply, this example conveys that the artwork is more a process or unfinished event than an object or product.

In addition, what is available in the store might change the work. After purchasing an item, it is necessary to keep the receipt because the work of art is incomplete and mutable and does not cease becoming so. Any artwork is not only the expression of virtual images and ideas but also an event that alters them. Much of my method is virtual – thought and visualised internally, often over extended duration, until some confluence of forces and contingencies trips a threshold for impetus of material exploration and actual manifestation.

The need for communication produces what is an ‘artwork’ presented to a public, fixed and secured, available for the viewer who would consume a representation of it. However, the artwork (as the *work* of the work of art) always undergoes transformations. *Campbell’s canned soup bought in repetition, several times in different places*, 2019, was an artwork exhibited in ST Paul St Gallery for my doctoral examination. This artwork was a basic system of three paper bags each containing three upright soup cans in a row. Throughout the exhibition, visitors moved various art objects around the gallery. For example, a visitor picked up one of the upright soup cans to examine it and replaced it lying on its side. My original decision to install the cans upright in paper bags corresponds to Andy Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, 1962. My decision to restore the can upright was an act of faithfulness to Warhol, Minimalism and consumerism. Minimal art’s use of serial forms and repetition puts it into dialogue with consumerism’s modes of production and display. Considered six months later, *Campbell’s canned soup bought in repetition, several times in different places* reveals the mutable nature of the work and its accessibility to the audience. Now, the artwork in storage heads towards an uncertain future; today we can know the work only from its documentation. As artworks are repeatedly transformed through the dynamic relationships between people and (non-) art objects, these gaps open up questions and spaces for creative possibilities.

There is the endless work for the spectator operating between experience and meaning; between experiencing and translating that (untranslatable) experience into terms that could allow some manner of representation, communication. So, how is the work of art balanced between experiencing and meaning making? Language (and signification) lean towards the latter. Here, my ambition is to facilitate, disrupt and recalibrate meaning. My approach to this (through the title) involves different registers of meaning – whether playful, ironic, political, neutral, experimental or combinations thereof. It is the space of

creative play, where words and objects are not, or not simply, vehicles of straightforward communication.

Why is poststructuralism useful for contextualising my art practice? Does it offer us a way to think the logic of creativity as event (a ceaseless modulation of experience)? To reiterate, my project proposes that poststructuralism offers structures for creative practice where deciding something (for example, choosing to make an artwork) does not mean a fixed settling on its outcome (or the interpretation of any outcome). And, as previously stated, through art practice, a dynamic, ongoing creative process occurs between materials, bodies, impersonal affects and images. Poststructuralism refutes any theory of language that simplistically attempts to order and rule language. Instead, it suggests that language operates on an impersonal level (an open-ended signifying process), in terms of affects (a field of interacting forces) producing an indeterminacy of meaning, and privileges a multiplicity of textual interpretations. It refutes the possibility of a fixed meaning defined within texts or, for our purposes, artworks, processes and practices. Relatedly, my art practice and its outcomes operate on an impersonal level: both always operate beyond linguistic and epistemological certainties. The artwork is an entity that continuously emerges in an interaction of forces that produce effects on one another, which cohere with one another. The artwork is in a perpetual state of flux, though it achieves some consistency for a duration. In my attempt to theorise my creative process and its outcomes, post-structuralism allows me to think through the affective flux and porousness of both making and artwork.

Chapter Two: Titles in this Project

My sculpture consists of familiar yet contingent objects, each with a *title* suggesting a particular context—an explanation or narrative—which relates to its object. The titles sometimes describe events that lie in the past and imply that the object is documentary material, functioning as evidence of the event. Alternatively, a title might describe an object's context, for example, a directional orientation; the object is pointed towards a specific location. However, from the viewer's perspective, the function of titles is uncertain; the claim of the title is not easily understood or verifiable. Moreover, a title might explain the constructional logic of its object, giving an account of how I have arranged each individual part to produce a whole. The project conceptualises the title as a literary 'text,'¹¹ sometimes conveying real world events (a 'factual' story) and because the stories are fanciful yet nonetheless possible, the viewer must contend with the problem of interpretation in relation to the title's meaning, verifiability, and contextual frameworks (authorial, cultural, and historical). Such titles question the traditional distinction between factual and fictional narrative, in which fact is assumed to be primary or fundamental, while fiction is secondary or mimetic, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. These titles question and complicate the fact/fiction dualism in order to provoke the ambiguities within the hierarchical ordering of fact and fiction, as well as other aspects of the title's function, particularly those that are indirect or implicit. Titles suggest that the opposition between fact and fiction is neither fixed nor necessary but a product of an underlying ideology that produces the title as text.

¹¹ Barthes's notion of the *text* describes a text that resists interpretation and positions the reader as an active participant in the production of textual meaning. I discuss this elsewhere.

The Status of the Title

The title of the artwork is set apart from the object by form and material; it consists of printed words on a single page. Nonetheless, the title suggests a relation with the object it names. It presents the object textually, serving as a kind of axis, in a temporal manner because the title is free-floating and material, to be read in an unfolding interaction of title and object. The title gains the attention of the reader by, in a sense, holding the promise of a single, essential ‘meaning’ or truth. While, simultaneously, continuously delaying fulfilment of that promise. The ambiguity of the title might be produced through irony, humour, paradox, or even deception.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Cullen, P. (2004). *Model for the Antigravity Room* [Installation]. Wellington: SHOW.

In this context, Paul Cullen’s exhibition title *Model for the Antigravity Room* (2004) creates a productive tension between the artwork as ‘thing’ and its title.¹² The exhibition comprised a set of chairs and tables supported off the floor and touching the

¹² Paul Cullen’s *Model for the Antigravity Room* was exhibited at SHOW, an independent artist-run space which ran from January 2004 to September 2006 in Wellington, New Zealand.

ceiling by using timber slat scaffolding. The towers are striking for their elegant yet awkward configuration—conceived of as models transcending their physical limitations. In ‘resisting’ gravity, the chairs and tables provoke a conceptual oscillation between the object as ‘equipment’ (object of recognition) and ‘thing’ (there is an excess beyond the chair’s mere function as furniture). When a chair or table is held to a ceiling, the usefulness of this furniture is suspended, such that objects are more ‘things’ than ‘equipment.’ Important to the work is the permeable interplay between conceptual dualisms, such as playful/serious, order/disorder, and rational/irrational. The technical language of the title suggests that the work is a scientific ‘trial’ version of something (the Antigravity Room), while simultaneously incorporating the playful use of furniture to arouse feelings of curiosity, wonder, or bemusement. As ‘model,’ the exhibition seems both exploratory and explanatory, a set of working models through which we may apprehend the possibility of an alternate reality (e.g., free from the law of gravity) in tension with everyday reality. Recall that pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions. Similar to Duchamp’s pataphysical *Three Standard Stoppages*, in *Model for the Antigravity Room* scientific ideas converge with ironic humour to suggest that mutually exclusive concepts (exploration/explanation, suggestion/definition, indeterminacy/causality) can be correct or somewhat correct at the same time.

The inclusion of a title suggests that whoever has given it has the authority to present the object. This statement is made on the basis that the author is either the artist or someone else acquainted with the object by virtue of having made it. Sometimes, the artist’s collaborator is also aware of information that the artwork itself prohibits, or of stories it conceals or merely suggests. In both cases, the title holds more information about the object than the reader has available, information in the title is both offered and withheld in a demonstration of authority.

Therefore, the title has particular attributes that draw upon some important conventions. From the outset, its presence indicates its necessity to be read, the title presumes a reader: if the artist were the only viewer of the object, it would be unnecessary to provide the title in an exhibition context. The title employs the object in a public exchange of ideas, a textual layering of it by the author to an actual or assumed reader. The title purports to communicate something about the object, but in its concise form it inevitably omits additional information that otherwise might be expressed. The title may account for a great

deal, but by nature it is selective about what it excludes and includes, decisions further reflective of its authority. Despite the title's imposition of a perspective on the object, paradoxically, it remains an unruly text, resistant to interpretive mastery. Here, the role of authorial intention becomes unclear. The title is no longer a direct expression of or communication from the author. The title relies on infringement. Because the title resists 'pure' or 'exact' designation, it disobeys the model of designation that has authority and reliability as its criteria. In placing excessive emphasis on the title, the project redirects it from its designative function. Instead, titles in the project hold out an impossible promise, through the inversion of everyday life, to expose the core of things.

Titles as both Literal and Suggestive

In *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (1997), art historian and critic John C. Welchman differentiates two approaches to the title. There is, on the one hand, the title that clearly and logically represents a state of affairs or universal concepts and, on the other hand, the title that suspends any straightforward signification of pre-existing concepts and meanings:

The title, of course, has always been caught up in the inevitability of its shortness and redundancy (description, denotation, repetition, or truism). In these conditions its significations have often merged with those of the stereotype or commonplace. Alternatively, it has mitigated against their scenes of reduction, aspiring to a new signifying freedom in the domain of "poetic" or mystificatory allusion. (p. 342)

In this way, the project's titling strategy constitutes a playful textual practice that concerns itself with the 'poetic,' (suggestive, ambiguous meaning), that is, the conflictual injunctions of language; a zone of denotation and connotation held uneasily together in constant tension. Here, the title questions the traditional notion of legible representation (most fundamentally, the correspondence between the signifier and the signified, and the binary oppositions of truth and falsehood, non-fiction and fiction) which aims to demonstrate the inherent instability of both language and meaning. The title is marked by an unruliness, an ambiguity that exceeds our capability to authoritatively interpret it. In a manner similar to pataphysics, the title creates a space of interpretative possibility in which all possible perspectives would be recognised as equally valid.

The title is either approached as a given or a symptom of the indeterminate relationship between the textual and the visual. The question of the title as text is often either under considered or completely overlooked because, as Welchman (1997) writes, art history and theory continues under “the still-dominant theory of modernism that insists on the autonomy and material discreteness of its visual practices” (p. 1). Welchman claims that art is irreducible to recognition and, thus, to any single interpretation of it (something excessive always overflows – an ‘extra’ quality – beyond any verbal interpretation). Since the development of art history and criticism, Welchman (1997) writes, “this ‘extra’ has been understood in many ways – as style, or color, or some aspect of the productive context of the work. But, [importantly], it also includes the title” (p. 2). Regarding literature on the visual art title, Welchman’s publication, although largely focused on visual modernism, is exceptional. In art writing, the title as a device is often taken for granted, consigned to perfunctory observations, or circumvented to focus on the assumed greater significance of the work’s visual elements or related contextual issues. This project attempts to cast fresh light on titling in visual art by foregrounding its significance in both contemporary and art historical contexts.

Welchman presents a critical history of how modern artworks obtain their titles. He examines the essential titling modes of artistic modernism and shows that titles can seldom be understood without the institutional contexts that present them to an art world public: exhibitions, criticism, and catalogues. Welchman (1997) identifies three crucial modes of titling: denotative, connotative, and untitling (including numerical and serial)¹³:

First, the continuation of broadly denotative titles, where the words are presumed to stand in direct and untroubled relation to that which is represented. Second, the set of titles that can be said to provoke connotative, allusive, or even, in Dada and Surrealism, absurd and non-consequential references to an image. And third, the conclusively modernist practice of advertising the absence of a title through the description ‘Untitled’ or through numbering or other systematic, non-referential designations. (p. 8)

According to Welchman (1997), the history of the title in modern art involves the “interplay” between “the three most significant relations between the image/object and the

¹³ According to Welchman (1997), his tripartite categorisation of titles is relevant across the historical epochs of modernism and postmodernism (p. 10).

title: denotation, connotation, and untitling” (p. 8). Here, Welchman (1997) suggests that there are no easily categorisable types of titles that operate independently from one another: “the nomination of artworks after the later nineteenth century proceeds in a series of spirals, loops, and cross-overs based on the three dominant titling modalities” (p. 21). Before continuing, it is worth pausing to reflect on Welchman’s assertion that a title comprises an interplay of categories and relations rather than a fixed, single category. Thus understood, titles exemplify the problematic nature of boundaries, and disrupt simple and direct communication. Titles employ literary devices that suspend normative interpretation of a text. In this respect, titles in this project are impossible to pin down; each title is the site of a dynamic interplay between univocal, conventional meaning and manifold, subjective interpretation. More positively, titles offer us the possibility of a re-examination of our assumptions about existential and theoretical issues, as well as social structures and institutions.

Welchman points out that the terms ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’ have particular histories in mid 20th century cultural semiotics and have also been at the centre of recent critical debate. Generally, in linguistics and semiotics, tied closely to the structuralism instigated by Ferdinand de Saussure, the term ‘denotation’ refers to the explicit or literal meaning of a word as found in a dictionary. While the term ‘connotation’ refers to the secondary or associative meaning of a word or expression in addition to its precise dictionary definition. Both linguistics and semiotics conventionally propose a categorical distinction between denotation and connotation as elements within a literary text. Both disciplines privilege denotation, the ‘correct’ element of meaning, beyond which is the rich cornucopia of connotation. Connotation is an associative element of meaning, created by placing an additional tier of meaning onto the denotation. Connotation depends upon the personal and cultural experiences of the reader. Therefore, words connote a changing and complex array of meanings for most people. Furthermore, the semiotician’s understanding of connotation is functionally similar to both figurative language and fiction, both of which are generally held to be secondary to and dependent upon the primary literal meaning of denotation and non-fiction. The semiotic theory of denotation and connotation is useful for understanding the manner in which the title creates the possibility of relating the viewer to a work whose meaning is fluid and ambivalent.

The Title and Pataphysics

But does the ambiguous title so conceived, really provide the basis for an extended understanding of pataphysics? Put simply: Within this project—in which the artwork is seen as both exploratory and explanatory—the title deploys the interplay of denotation and connotation in order to pressure the boundaries of recognition as it questions and complicates long-established concepts and sociocultural paradigms and insists on meanings and realities still to come. The anomalies of the title correspond with pataphysics, which explores how incongruities and exceptions that social structures and institutions consider external to a system are actually internal. In his work, Jarry produced a satirical counter-discourse to the human inclination toward exactitude and certainty, an oeuvre that depends upon the fluid and complex interplay between denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (culturally informed subjective meaning). Similarly, in this project, the stress upon openness and ambiguity in the title depends upon the dynamic interplay between denotation and connotation. For example, the reader's experience of intelligibility, humour or puzzlement in *A metric ruler points north. An instrument for measuring length is used to indicate direction* is mediated by a shifting variety of connecting, intersecting, and often conflicting textual meaning and cultural frameworks. Underpinning this is a pataphysical operation, an incongruous conflation of two measuring instruments: compass and ruler (a deliberate confusion of two different scientific practices and principles). Therefore, this artwork might suggest that there is a problem with attributing exactitude and certainty to science in any straightforward way. My point, in reconsidering *A metric ruler points north*, is to make explicit the connection between titles, pataphysics, and the use of denotation and connotation.

Title as Paratext

I will turn now to discuss the title as a form of 'paratext,' which implies a new relationship with artworks and with the problem of reading in general. Put simply, through Gérard Genette's concept of paratext, the title is no longer construed simply as separate and distinct from the work but rather moves in an indeterminable zone where a work and what lies outside it cannot be clearly differentiated. If so, then it follows that the title requires interpretation on an equal footing with the image/object, especially in the context of visual art, in which the paratext includes not simply the title but also the accompanying 'texts'

(exhibition statement, reviews, commentaries) that contextualise an artwork and become coextensive with it. In addition, I use the concept of paratext to articulate the fluid and dynamic interplay between title, image/object, and beyond in a move away from the privileging of the visual, as we discussed above in Welchman's comments on modern art theory and history.

In a manner similar to pataphysics, the 'paratextual' title is the case of an *exception*, a zone of variance (connotation) and alliance (denotation) all at once, and remains irreducible to any conventional category and function as a supplement, a condition of would-be neutrality, distinct from the work. In what follows, I have sought to build upon Genette's concept of paratext and claim it as applicable to the visual art title. My evaluation concludes that titles constitute exceptions to simple nominalisation or denotation; they 'happen' in a continuous flux between supposedly distinct categories, such as inside/outside and denotation/connotation that is inseparable in our experience as readers. Reading relocates the center of an artwork from its inside to its outsides, to its possible relations with other works, to a zone between words, to that common ground that holds the work in place. In this sense, this project deploys titles to question and complicate the conventional distinction between a title and what lies outside it.

The title of an artwork influences how its reader experiences an artwork. Even in the case of the descriptive neutrality of 'Untitled' or numerical and serial titles, arguably there is significance both in the supposed insufficiency of a title and in the artist relinquishing explicit editorial comment on their work.¹⁴ The tone of '*No Title*' may be construed as either neutral, assertive or even defiant. Titles reflect the artist's intentions by performing as her accomplices since they identify and contextualise the artwork and provide for its interpretation. The titles of artworks may be productively understood as a particularly interesting type of, what Genette has termed, paratext. In Genette's book *Seuils* (1987; published in 1997 in English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*), the term 'paratext' refers to all textual and non-textual materials that accompany the literary work proper. The threshold paratext comprises: (1) a peritext, including elements such as titles, book covers, introductions, footnotes, indexes, and bibliographies that accompany a book but do not fundamentally determine textual meaning, and (2) an epitext, which

¹⁴ A popular contemporary variation on 'Untitled' is the provisional 'Not Yet Titled'. For example, 'Not Yet Titled' (2015) by George Condo and '(*Not Yet Titled*) (for *Parkett no. 46*)' (1996) by Cady Noland.

consists of elements such as interviews, reviews, commentaries, and authorial and editorial correspondence, which are external to the text itself.

In the context of visual art, the peritext consists of the artist's inclusion of writings in relation to the visual artwork (titles, accompanying texts, exhibition statements). For example, Paul Cullen's *Attempts* project includes photographic and textual documentation of temporary sculptural installations. Each photograph is accompanied by a brief text including the factual details of place, month, and year as well as historical and anecdotal material. Here, Cullen's 'peritext' includes the title (*Attempts*) and the self-authored brief text. Other artists, such as Valerie Jaudin attach self-authored, long-form critical essays to their work. In their essay *Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture* (1978), Jaudin and artist Joyce Kozloff range from defending the decorative in visual arts to confronting Eurocentric, patriarchal and racist attitudes in art historical discourse (Kozlov and Jaudin, 1978, pp. 38- 42). The epitext in visual arts includes artist interviews, critical reviews, commentaries, and artist and curator discussions – external to the artwork in question. In my view, considering the titles of artworks as a type of paratext is highly relevant given the so-called 'supplementary' nature of the title in relation to the artwork. Here, I refer back to Welchman's observations concerning the mere supplementary status of the title in modern art, in order to suggest that the notion of the paratext argues for a more fluid, dynamic, and relational understanding of the title.

For Genette, the paratext is not the stable boundary, but rather the *threshold* that enables an exchange of communication between the text and that which falls outside of the text. Although a paratext, as Genette (1997) explains, is "an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)," it undoubtedly informs the interpretations of the main text (p. 2). More specifically, the paratext, Genette (1997) emphasizes, is:

always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (p. 2)

In this passage, the operation of the paratext is conceptualised in terms of a sketched ontology of the zone or threshold, which enables *transaction* but is neither inside nor outside, because they are its product. The paratext blurs the boundary. The outside merges with the inside, and vice versa. If I can take liberties with Genette on the paratext and its connection with what is not the book, I could say, in the context of this project, the paratext, as an ensemble of materials, including *the art title*, presents the art object. The art title understood as a paratext constitutes a zone of indeterminate proximity between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the art object in question. Here, I contend that the salient feature of the ‘paratextual’ title is its dynamic intertextual quality – elements from both the peritext and epitext are implicated and transformed in any reading.¹⁵ Here, the paratext offers a useful way of thinking about our readerly engagement with titles, as opposed to a traditional notion of the title as boundary marker or supplement.

While Genette’s notion of the paratext as a highly porous zone is useful for this project, it nonetheless positions the title as a supplement, what belongs to, accompanies, or contextualises the main text but is however inferior to the main text. Thus understood, the art title belongs to the image/object but does not significantly determine the work’s meaning. Following Genette (in an exercise of strict rule-following), in the context of an art exhibition, the paratext comprises: a peritext, including elements such as titles, artist statements, press releases, exhibition texts, and even the art gallery – that accompany a body of works but do not ultimately determine the artworks’ meaning. There is also an epitext, which consists of elements such as artist interviews, reviews, commentaries, and artist and curator correspondence, which are external to the exhibition. Here, the title works in tandem with a regulatory ‘ensemble of materials’, specifically the wall label and catalogue (or, of more relevance to my project, the gallery list of works – which allows for a more mobile, immediate engagement with art objects and their titles). Importantly, Genette’s conception of the title as peritext or *supplement* contrasts with my position on the equivalence of the title and the object. To reiterate, I contend for a conception of the title as literary text to counteract its normative status as supplement.

¹⁵ We discuss the title as an intertext in Chapter Three.

In its cursory treatment, each title in this project clearly and directly relates to its object. However, while the titles may appear to be simply explanatory, it is often difficult to locate a clear distinction between literal or comprehensible meaning and allusive or indirect meaning. In this sense, titling in this project is part of an art historical trajectory accelerated in Dada and Surrealist titular practice in which: “Titles took on roles and agendas, which, though often predicated on the nominal developments of the later nineteenth century, gave rise to a striking new field of signifying possibilities” (Welchman, 1997, pp. 209-210). The open-ended play of meaning—the suspension of referential meaning—contributes to the viewer’s understanding of the title. Viewers and meaning are mutually constituted in dynamic exchanges between the title and that which falls outside of the title, rather than the title understood as a supplement to an object (as a sort of main text). My titling strategy is compared and contrasted with Genette’s notion of paratext and similarly explores the title as a *threshold* between the object and the not-object. In introducing a space between the object and its so-called ‘outside,’ I mean a kind of intellectual space in which the viewer forges new and creative connections between the work and implicit contexts (e.g., authorial, generic, sociocultural, and historical contexts) as well as pragmatic contexts (the characteristics of its institutional setting, the respective nature of the artist and the viewer). Rather than merely serving a simple, self-explanatory purpose, titles are irreducibly ambiguous as a playful challenge for the viewer to ponder. The sense or role of the title cannot be exhausted within the space and time of a given reflection. In this way, each title relates to an object itself, but also to contexts beyond it, stimulating the viewer’s imagination, interpretative capabilities, and intensifying the viewer’s sense of responsibility before the artwork.

Titles as a Pataphysical Rupture in Representation

The purpose of the title is to call into question by means of playful experimentation the prevailing models of knowledge in a manner resonant with pataphysics. Recall that in the passage above I explained that titles remain insistently ambiguous as a playful challenge for the viewer to ponder. Titles function pataphysically as provocative ‘exceptions’ that question not only traditional linguistic representation, but also any discourse that operates on the assumption of certainty and exactitude. For example, in the previously discussed *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-14), the force of Duchamp’s title stems from its wry provocation of existing scientific concepts, and of scientific procedure in general. In

addition, the provocation of Duchamp's title refers us back to Launoir's claim that pataphysics seeks to overcome social and institutional constraints in terms of the polemic between 'constrained thought' and 'free thought.' Here again, we paraphrase Launoir: representation consists of a set of human-centered "practices" or a "sort of elementary structure" which tries to fix "the real" resulting in constrained thought and behaviour (Launoir, 1969, as cited in Hugill, 2012, p. 4). In order to restore pataphysical freedom, that is, multiple modes of apprehension and agency, the aporia¹⁶ and indeterminacy of the title allows the viewer to "imaginatively extend all the aspects of an object, be able to combine them in order to obtain a new representation of a linear 'something'" (Launoir, 1969, as cited in Hugill, 2012, p. 4). The accord between the known and the not yet known (a linear 'something') in pataphysics, as I construe it, stems from the relationship between the mysteries, rules, patterns, and play of textuality that binds the author and the viewer to a world both formed and almost infinitely revisable. Similarly, titles consist in this flux between textual pattern and textual irregularity. Keats' 'negative capability,' we recall, describes the negotiation of two opposing attitudes, certainty and ambiguity, at once. Here, viewers nurture a patient negative capability in their exploration of relations between knowing and not knowing. The title's deployment of ambiguity productively challenges assumptions. Ambiguous effects are made possible by the instability of denotation and connotation, that is, the unfixable, ever-changing interplay between literal meaning and suggestive meaning. In addition, the viewer's capacity to cherish uncertainty is required by the paratextual status of the title itself, as a threshold, a zone of transaction between the inside and the outside of the work. The pleasurable tension the reader might feel arises from the title's invitation, its suggestion that the reader move from the work to surrounding contexts without the ease of a conceptual unity, and its contingency in its persistent modifying of the field of interpretation.

Summary

We commenced this exegesis contending that a pataphysics of art practice is a science of exceptions or imaginary solutions, which playfully challenges the human tendency to comprehend and fix the world in terms of conceptual certainty and exactitude. Clearly,

¹⁶ I use the term 'aporia' to refer to "*Logic. Philosophy.* a difficulty encountered in establishing the theoretical truth of a proposition, created by the presence of evidence both for and against it." Aporia. (n.d.). In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/aporia>

Jarry's science challenges the dominance of a privileged point of view and his scepticism towards objective reality provide immediate points of correlation with the inconsistencies and ambiguities of the title. In addition, denotation and connotation provide names for the fundamental conceptual instability of the title. Furthermore, the notion of the paratext, an undecided threshold, further complicates the scene of interpretation between the title and object as well as the work and what is not the work.

In Chapter Three, we will consider the narrative-based title of the artwork. The narrative-title conveys a fanciful yet *possible* story and, as such, blurs the distinction between factual and fictional narrative. From the theories of poststructuralism emerges an understanding of language in which the title might be construed as, strictly speaking, neither non-fiction nor fiction, truth nor falsehood, but rather as an indeterminacy of sense; where conceptual relationality is understood not as mutually exclusive but as mutually interpenetrating, or coincidental. Poststructuralism challenges traditional understandings of language, narrative, and knowledge, as well as the role of the author and the reader. With recourse to poststructuralist theorists, my purpose here is to present a discussion of the narrative-title and its relationship with intertextuality and affect as well as to discuss how the reader might be construed as an author.

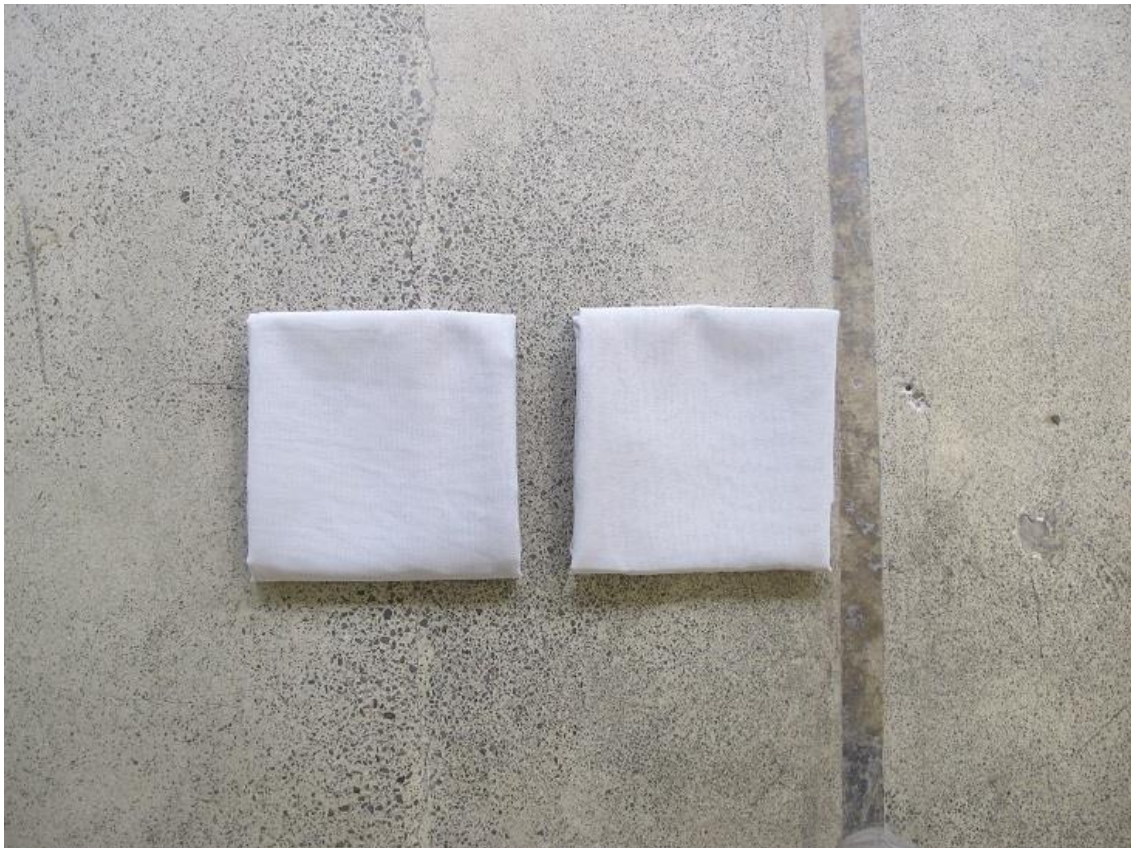
In contrast to poststructuralism, in which knowledge and identity are understood as unstable, manifold, contextualised, and constituted through language in human efforts of meaning-making, Platonic philosophy, as it is traditionally conceived, privileges truth based on a prior transcendent reality and identity as essence. Both Plato and Aristotle shared an emphasis on thinking through the questions of genre, specifically philosophy and mimetic art, in relation to the problem of truth and authenticity. We will consider the Platonic basis of the secondary status of mimesis (narrative fiction) in contrast to the primacy of truth (non-fiction), a paradigm that continues until today. Then I discuss Aristotle's conception of mimesis, a more affirmative understanding of fictional narrative unmoored from reality. In the resonance between pataphysics and poststructuralism, the narrative-title breaches conventional notions of narrative, constantly wavering between truth and falsity through a play of language without ground. It is this relationship of the narrative-title to both poststructuralism and traditional Western philosophy (philosophy that is the origin of narratology) which will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Three: The Narrative-title

In this chapter, I consider the context for a continuing project called *Narratives*. *Narratives* has a basis in the self-coined term ‘narrative-title’ and takes the form of objects with narrative-based titles that confound, and thereby question, the distinction between non-fiction and fiction. What I am calling the narrative-title is a title that assumes the form of narrative and the strategies of storytelling, but in so doing, simultaneously—and self-consciously—questions their codes and conventions. For example, the fragmentary character of the narrative-title withholds information; it remains intentionally partial or incomplete. In its lack, the truth of whatever is at issue comes into play. Furthermore, narrative-titles suggest real world events (a ‘factual’ story) and because the stories are fanciful yet nonetheless possible, the viewer must contend with the problem of interpretation in relation to the title’s meaning, verifiability, and contextual frameworks (authorial, cultural, institutional, and historical). A narrative-title, then, confirms the paradoxical logic of narrative: it constitutes both a mode of denotation (enabling reading) and provokes connotative references (preventing common agreement or understanding). The undisclosed veracity of the title enables the reader to rethink reading and interpretation, provoking a response to each story. However, the strange, recalcitrant nature of titles ensures that the reader’s conclusions will always remain in suspension, forever assumed but never definite.

The narrative-title offers a seemingly straightforward description of an act, which *suggests* an incident that pertains explicitly or implicitly to a particular object. In this regard, the project depends upon ordinary perception, in which borrowed, familiar objects are understood to be artworks. Although appearing in the guise of matter-of-fact prose, the narrative-title deploys textual ambiguity, the interplay of denotation-connotation, at the heart of language. This means that the lines of demarcation between non-fiction and fictional narrative are not well defined. This ambiguity reflects current philosophical

misgivings about the premise of traditional representation: that language might serve as a vehicle for truthful description of the ‘real’ world. Narrative-titles are usually suggestive in tone and unruly in attitude. The indeterminate narrative-title creates interpretative uncertainties about the title’s fictional or truthful relation to the world. Although the narrative-title is well known in contemporary art for relating historical narratives, it is an ambiguous text because of the interpretative difficulties it presents to readers.



Pearce, L. (2015). *Curtains de-installed in a Düsseldorf apartment during the solar eclipse of 20 March 2015* [Sculpture]. Auckland: RM Gallery.¹⁷

As we begin to explore what the story might mean, we must entertain its absence (withheld information), and the impossibility of a complete reading. It resists definite interpretation, continuously opening up a future moment of meaning. Let us now briefly look ahead within this chapter, which is where we consider the relation of the narrative-title to ‘affect.’ In his artwork *Telepathic Piece* (1969), Robert Barry stated in the

¹⁷ Note: This artwork is not discussed in the exegesis.

exhibition catalogue: “During the exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thoughts that are not applicable to language or image” (Barry, 1969, as cited in Lippard, 1973/2001, p. 98). Absence in this narrative-title plays a crucial role in the artwork. In this instance, the work lacks the traditional artwork’s subject/object dichotomy; instead, its uncertain sense of connectivity disrupts normative meaning. Here, connectivity and affect very much coincide. As we will see, affect is intensity, something that suspends meaning. In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) explain that:

...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), and those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (p. 1)

Affect as intensity provides a useful way to consider the relationship between the viewer and artwork, or even viewer and artist, as beyond a binary one. It suggests the possibility of an unfolding, embodied art encounter that moves beyond the structures of language and narrative progression, not to mention the stasis of spatial boundedness. My discussion will present conjunctions of meaning and indeterminacy surrounding *Telepathic Piece*, suggesting that this affective artwork produces a play of meaning, resisting any final interpretation of the work as either truth or falsehood—highlighting as it does the impossibility of referential verification. Furthermore, in Chapter Three we explore the implications of the ‘affective’ title for an ethics of reading. An ethical reading of the title does not reduce alterity to a category of the same (the familiar position of one’s beliefs and cultural values). Instead, it signals a sustained engagement with the title’s otherness, its new and unpredictable effects in each reading, an irreducibility that requires an ongoing return to the potential of the work.

In this way, the project’s titling strategy constitutes a subversive textual practice that concerns itself with the conflictual injunctions of language—with revealing the problematic nature of traditional representation (most fundamentally, the relation between the sign and the signified, and the binary oppositions of truth and fiction)—which aims to demonstrate the productive force of both language and meaning. The title is marked by an

unruliness, a recalcitrant character which exceeds our capacity to satisfactorily interpret it in finality.

Conventionally speaking, the narrative-title is not narrative proper. The narrative of the title is implied rather than explained. It is only one or two sentences, a concise statement. The title implies rather than *tells* a story, or, more specifically, it does not tell a story with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and conclusion; it does not impose upon the events that it suggests the formal conventions of storytelling. A strictly Aristotelian narrative organises the discontinuity of a life in an effort to produce a linear, unified story (a causal chain of events producing plot and theme), whereas, the narrative-title is both formally and conceptually ambiguous, occupying the spatiotemporal territory between beginning *and* conclusion, title *and* narrative, and, as such, questions traditional conceptions of both narrative and genre.

This blurring of conventional literary distinctions is what Barthes, in his essay *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* (1966/1977a), points to when he compares the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘sentence.’ Structurally, according to Barthes (1966/1977a) “narrative shares the characteristics of the sentence without being reducible to the simple sum of its sentences: a narrative is a long sentence, just as every constative sentence is in a way the rough outline of a short narrative” (p. 84). According to Barthes, the component parts of narrative correspond with the elements of sentence syntax. In this regard, the narrative-title as a ‘one sentence long’ story fulfils Barthes’ definition of narrative. However, both the fragmentary, discontinuous *form* and *content* of the narrative-title disrupts the reader’s expectations of narrative order (as a succession of incidents, with a beginning, middle, and end). It produces a frustrating sense of incompleteness during the act of reading. We, as readers, depend upon a meaningful unity, truth or synthesis to emerge in a story’s conclusion. Instead, the narrative-title positions the reader in a threshold experience between the episodic causality of the beginning, middle, and end of a story—a transactional, reorienting process. As threshold experience, the narrative-title demonstrates a concern for the interactions between the imagination and being.

We can learn something about the ambiguity of the narrative-title by recalling the linguistic structure of denotation and connotation. Ambiguity is an over-abundance of meaning, a proliferation of possible meanings, such that we are pulled in two or more

directions at once. Ambiguity exists between the indefinite interplay between denotation and connotation. Ambiguity is what makes artworks mean; it makes meaning conceivable. It opens towards a plurality of meanings, which is not a mere confusion but a play between denotative objectivity and connotative meaning. Here, the lure of the narrative-title lies in the unlimited possibilities of meaning that may be opened; the challenge of being made to think, in the moments before clarity and resolution, and the anticipation of unforeseen outcomes. Furthermore, we recall Genette's notion of paratext to gain further understanding of the ambiguous narrative-title. Genette suggests that the title occupies a permeable, in-between space; it is neither simply outside the artwork nor inside it. In this sense, a reading of the narrative-title is a process that negotiates thresholds, a productive cognitive space between categories (e.g., genre categories, denotation/connotation) and habits of thought. Above in addition, Barthes confirms the irreducible ambiguity of both narrative and sentence. We can infer, from what Barthes argues, that narrative internalises a sense that origins are always indeterminate and, in this way, narrative constitutes a zone in which numerous different stories may arise: the narrative-title, if you will, as a practice of multiple writings. Interpretation is less an explanation of artworks than a calling forth (a sort of writing) of artworks into existence. Similarly, the science of pataphysics exists paradoxically as an epiphenomenon. Here, literary works (as epiphenomenon) are added to a phenomenon or a reality (in pataphysical works something non-existent is granted existence).



Pearce, L. (2015). *A window is left slightly ajar. House keys, belonging to a surgeon, are attached to the gallery window with transparent tape, thus preventing him easy access to his house* [Sculpture]. Hamilton: Pilot Gallery.

My work, *A window is left slightly ajar. House keys, belonging to a surgeon, are attached to the gallery window with transparent tape, thus preventing him easy access to his house* provides an example of the narrative-title as a description of a possible yet fanciful real world story. The narrative suggests an arrangement between the artist and a surgeon wherein the surgeon has lent his keys, and consequently has access to his house, only, through a window. Presumably, the surgeon must climb through a window to enter his house then climb out again, for the duration of the exhibition. In ordinary social life, we behave following norms of conformity, practicality, and etiquette. Therefore, it is self-evident that much humour stems from irregular and irresponsible behaviour. Entering and exiting one's own house through a window, as the surgeon does, is incongruous, since it marks a break from conventional behaviour. The surgeon violates prudence, risking his own safety possibly at the expense of both his and others' well-being. With his similarity to Buster Keaton, the surgeon's clambering stunt represents a sudden tonal and generic shift: from professional seriousness through to absurdist physical humour.

This story sounds like a scene from a farce or comedy drama film. The usually careful and adroit surgeon might slip and fall from the window as in slapstick film comedy. A neighbour watching the surgeon climbing through a window might mistake him for a burglar. The demands this artwork makes upon the surgeon are also demands made upon the discourse of the medical profession beyond reproach, which thereby comes under pressure to recognise its historical foundation and contingent existence. The title's comic inversion points toward the hidden, privileged assumptions that stabilise the exaggerated status of surgeons, and the resulting power imbalance between surgeon and patient. In this comedic story, the surgeon exemplifies a tension between different ways of being: shifting between levity and gravity, believability and implausibility. In addition, this title has the feel of an anecdote, a brief, local story told over drinks within a circle of friends. Despite the implausible outlandishness of the title, it is nevertheless conceivable that the story is factual.

A window is left slightly ajar consisted of a narrative-title and a row of house keys stuck to the inside window of an art gallery. The house keys were arranged in an even, sequential fashion with sufficient space between them on the window. In this regard, this work combines the comic (the comedic narrative) with the purportedly neutral and ordered aesthetic values of conceptual art. *A window is left slightly ajar* was exhibited in a group show titled *Wearing Out* in a street-level shopfront that operated as an artist run nonprofit named Pilot Gallery. Pilot Gallery was on Ward Street, located in the commercial district of Hamilton's city centre. Ironically, during the early 20th century, Ward Street was nicknamed 'Shark's Alley' as it included many real estate agencies. Given this, in a sociopolitical reading, the surgeon's impeded access might be seen to hint at the socioeconomic issue of New Zealand housing affordability. New Zealand home ownership rates decreased in the 1990s and the early 21st century as housing prices increased and first-time buyers found it challenging to save the required deposit to enter the housing market. However, this rather staid interpretation is incommensurate with the ridiculous scenario, and is merely one of a number of possible interpretations.

On the one hand, the narrative-title is a seemingly straightforward explanation—a sort of attractor around which a narrative accumulates; on the other hand, the narrative-title is fluid, dynamic and irreducible to determinate meaning. The fecund tension between these two qualities is clear in *A window is left slightly ajar*. We might wonder how

communication would be possible without representation – without, for example, the one-to-one relation between word and meaning that facilitates communication. This linguistic convention is necessary. In practical terms, we need to trust that some efforts of communication, such as claims and propositions, relate to reality; or else, communication becomes unimaginable. Furthermore, we always exist within a conceptual framework (a shifting combination of affect and change and stable systems), of social and cultural conventions.

In this sense, the narrative-title describes a particular scenario happening in the physical world. In the case of *A window is left slightly ajar* the title directs viewers outside the gallery's walls and leads them to imagine the private life of a surgeon somewhere, without his keys, forced to enter and leave his house by climbing through an open window. The doors are locked; his keys are stuck to an art gallery window. This straightforward account of the title belies the rather complex relationship of the title to its possible meanings. Beyond any conventional narrative mimesis in the narrative-title, there is also something unstable and fundamentally ambiguous about it. In *A window is left slightly ajar*, the reliable, highly respected surgeon willingly participates in risky, foolish behaviour in the service of an art project. We soon understand that this title suspends any reassuring confirmation of established values and meaning.

This instability of meaning in the title raises the question of interpretation. And what role does language play in the interpretation of the story? One answer lies in the poststructuralist concept of intertextuality, that is, the shaping of a text's meaning by other texts, the title's involvement in a network of textual relations. Reading the title may involve extending outside visual art into other vocabularies and disciplines. Among them, news websites, government correspondence, business documents, scientific papers, philosophical treaties, and other specialised fields provide new terms and ways of learning. As previously mentioned, *A window is left slightly ajar* intertextually recalls silent film comedy, provoking laughter through an absurd slapstick scenario. In addition, the reader might discover in the title some semantic associations, beyond the level of denotative language. She might discover language from different collective practices, as well as wordplay, metaphor, and allusion resulting in irony, humour, and ambiguity. The reader might make some connections between a surgeon, a window, a house, doors, a set of keys, and an art gallery. She might discover in the title, depending on her interpretation,

wordplay and the metaphor it depends on: for example, the metaphor of ‘the human body is like a building’ has a long and widespread history (most pertinently, medieval medicine viewed the patient’s body as a building infiltrated by disease). The ironic point here is that, the surgeon’s difficulty in entering his house is strangely inverse to his unparalleled access to his patients’ bodily interior. Also, a play on a word family appears in the intimate connection between the surgeon’s lack of house keys (necessitating a delayed and difficult route to inside his house) and the surgeon’s possible use of keyhole surgery (allowing short and direct routes to perform operations)—a cool, detached humour that requires incisive interpretation.

An excess of meanings without closure is characteristic of pataphysics, as our earlier discussion of Jarry’s *Doctor Faustroll* has shown. Jarry’s stories are, similar to the work under discussion, turned toward the exception that ruptures what we expect must come next, in which all interpretations are equally valid. In this sense, pataphysics seems oriented toward absurdity. However, for Jarry, the real absurdity is the conceptual dualism underpinning much Western thought, the distinction between sense and nonsense, the real and the ideal. Rather than contrasting a real (sensible) object with an ideal (conceptual) object, Jarry proposes the spiral as a pressing figure—an indeterminate directionality rather than a synthesis of differences—that would encompass them both.¹⁸ Here, the humour of the artwork might be construed as both absurd and profound and back again. Reading the work in this way (and returning to an earlier point), we can appreciate how interpretations create the artworks they depict—in the movement between the artwork and interpretations—an example of pataphysics at its most insistent.

The narrative-title teases with the suggestion of a secret that lies beneath the surface of the text that we might be able to discern if only we had the right key to crack the code. Yet, ultimately, no one meaning is cogently legible. This continuous trembling of language undermines structural linguistics, which attempts to define the rules regarding language use. In this perturbation of language, the narrative-title is placed within a context that suggests layered readings based on word families and the logic of metaphor. In this project, the meanings of words and sentences are always in an excessive flux and play.

¹⁸ The spiral is a recurring motif in Jarry’s writing symbolising an indeterminate directionality, the possibility of both expansion and contraction, ascension and declension, of movement from both the inside out and the outside in. See Jarry, A. (1996). *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician: A Neo-Scientific Novel*. (trans. Simon Watson Taylor). Boston: Exact Change. p. 99

The Unruly Text (Beyond Discipline)

In poststructuralism, intertextuality is the interrelationship between texts; an ever-renewing process in which related texts inform, reproduce, or diverge from one another. Texts are interconnected and develop over time; they are not singular entities but depend, more or less, on other texts in terms of ideas, concepts, genre, linguistic structure, and style. The desire of the reader, to interpret the narrative-title or, indeed, any text, to uncover its stable meaning or objective truth, defers in poststructuralism to the arbitrariness of the sign (the signifier and signified) in texts, and hence, the plurality of meaning in a text. In Barthes's essay, *The Death of the Author*, he formulates the notion of a poststructuralist text. A text, Barthes (1966/1977c) claims, "is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (p. 146). If language is perceived not as a medium for the unproblematic transmission of meaning, but as an unruly producer of meaning where interpretations are continuously emergent, then the linguistic stability of the text becomes problematic. Consequently, the text no longer reflects the world but rather, demonstrates its condition as a dynamic network of meaning and utterance. Here, we can say that the narrative-title stimulates a complexity—where the free play of language proliferates—that the reader may experience as dissonance or confusion, ultimately irreducible to authorial intention or a particular set of meanings. This complexity generates the reader's continuous interpretation of the narrative-title and also the narrative-title's self-production, as it is shaped and reshaped through interpretation.

To gain purchase on the concept of intertextuality it is helpful to discuss, by way of contrast, Barthes's concept of the 'classical text'. Barthes's formulation of the classical text derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics and structuralism. Here, the 'classical text' produces the stability of an intended meaning, as ensured by the relationship between signifier (text) and signified (a meaning). In his essay *Theory of the Text*, Barthes (1973/1981) writes:

The [Saussurean] notion of text implies that the written message is articulated like the sign: on one side the signifier (the materiality of the letters and of their connection into words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters), and on the other side the signified, a meaning which is at once original, univocal, and definitive, determined by the correctness of the signs which carry it. The classical sign is a sealed unit, whose closure arrests meaning, prevents it from trembling or becoming double, or wandering. The same goes for the classical text: it closes the work, chains it to its letter, rivets it to its signified. (p. 33)

Structuralism understands the text as a specific linguistic arrangement directly conveying a meaning, embedded by its author. Against this, Barthes's poststructuralism contends that textual meaning can never be seized upon by the reader, because the operation of intertextuality always diverts the reader toward new textual associations. Barthes views this potential for multiple meanings as an emancipation of the reader; an emancipation from the traditional notion of the author as authoritative.

In intertextuality, the literary event is not only the text, but also its reader and the reader's possible and creative responses to the text. From this perspective, the possible is already extant as a possibility, whereas the creative allows for latency or the new. To consider my project in relation to intertextuality is productive, since intertextual concepts provide a means to understand the title not as a straightforward signifying device but rather as a dynamic space of relational process and practice. The intertextual works in this project expand the notion of 'text' imaginatively. Also, I suggest that one could, very loosely, speak of the physical object as a kind of text. For example, my work *Campbell's canned soup bought in repetition, several times in different places*, 2019, is intertextually related to *Items on a found grocery list bought in repetition, several times in different places*, 2014, by Jason Dodge. My work, comprising three shopping bags, each containing three Campbell's soup cans, sits on the floor in a uniform row. In terms of title, materials and presentation, this work is conceived in such a way so that the reader's prior knowledge of *Items on a found grocery list bought in repetition, several times in different places* activates relational processes and practices of interpretation and reading. Importantly, *Items on a found grocery list bought in repetition, several times in different places* is merely one example of other possible intertextual readings. Another example is the well-known *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962 by Andy Warhol. More generally, a viewer might see a correspondence between my work and other instances of art history. For example, artists

explore the idea of consumerism in multiform ways, referring to consumable items, places of consumption, and the purchasing of goods. In addition, a viewer might go beyond art contexts to consider broader issues. These might include the artwork's possible relationship to literary texts as well as social, cultural, and political contexts (all of which are a kind of text). Through intertextuality, the meaning of my titles becomes open-ended as they lose their stable intentionality in a variety of social and cultural practices. My example is intended to illustrate that the activity of the viewer (as reader) is not one of being a consumer of the artwork, but rather one of inventiveness and creating a new set of relations. Intertextuality conceives of texts not as fixed, bounded systems but as differential and historical, because they are activated by the recurrence and transformation of other texts. Hence, intertextuality offers a model for understanding the art viewer's experience of reading the title of an artwork (possibly any artwork).

The narrative-title that successfully allows its reader to access its literary play of text underscores the reader's interpretative powers within a literary network of intertextuality, enabling her to rethink conventional narrative mimesis. In this way, the title aims to reorient the reader's attention towards their own agency in what is loosely construed as authorship. Meaning is produced in the exchange between the reader and the narrative-title, and that exchange is a process of writerly production. The narrative-title functions as a transgression that displaces the author as the intentional agent of a stable, core meaning. The author does not place a meaning within the title that awaits interpretation by a reader. In this way, meaning is neither fixed nor finalised; meaning is continuously relational. The multiplicity of engagements with the narrative-title avoids the individual, comprehensive, and governing interpretation of the title, and given the outcomes of writerly production (a proliferation of signification), provides new understandings of any narrative.

The tendency of the narrative-title to function through intertextuality triggers the reader to author new interpretations or, pataphysically speaking, new particularities constituting 'virtual lineaments' or new 'realities' (the artwork is, in a sense, 'created' anew in each interpretation). However, any interpretation (as a series of cultural intertexts) risks reducing the work to a mere generality, for example, yet another example of avant-garde art. Pataphysics accounts for each thing not through recourse to a generality but to the particularity of an exception. Such a reading implicates the reader in a pataphysical

creative exercise, with each interpretation the artwork is ‘recreated.’ Using connections found within the work, we are led to other various ‘texts,’ which in turn become ‘creative solutions’ that open alternative routes of meaning. Reading is an experimental journey of references and allusions through a network of interconnected elements that join together titles and other works, an ongoing series of connections that constitutes a dialogue between the reader and the narrative-title that provides a deeper understanding of the work.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Dodge, J. (1999). *Andre Contrave, Part 2*, “*your description of an impossible scenario of how we could be together is what made me love you and broke both our hearts*” (detail) [Installation]. Stockholm: Moderna Museet Projekt.

This project understands truth and meaning as provisional, multiple, and constantly negotiated and renegotiated in the space between object, language, and the vast matrix of people and events in relation to the artwork. This titling strategy can be related to a constellation of sculptural practices that depart from the traditional concern of sculpture with the object itself: according to which the contexts of production, however storied and complex, submit to visual experience. Engagement with the problematic of titling, for

example in works by Jason Dodge, Claire Fontaine, Dane Mitchell, Nina Canell and Robyn Watkins, Robert Barry, Jonathan Monk, and Duchamp provide relevant examples of complex and ambiguous entitling in contemporary art. Jason Dodge's *Andre Contrave, Part 2*, "your description of an impossible scenario of how we could be together is what made me love you and broke both our hearts" (1999) is relevant to this discussion. Standing in relation to this title was a badminton court, alongside a room containing a pair of women's gym shoes and bag (and other related items) scattered about the floor between folding chairs and palm trees, suggesting an abandoned badminton match. On the one hand, the installation site provided a setting for the title's story where both beginning and conclusion are unknown. On the other, the work's title—encapsulating a dialogue between lovers—relates the physical space of the installation to the melodramatic tension of a doomed romance. The installation provides a site for the 'story' to be imaginatively recreated in the consciousness of the reader who reads the title. In this way, the work suggests the premise of documentary: a narrated, material re-enactment of past events, a theatrically inflected presentation of people, places, and events, to an audience.

Taken together, both the title and installation provide the crucial elements of narrative: plot, setting, and characters. On the one hand, the title suggests plot and characters, on the other; the installation 'confirms' plot, characters (objects suggesting absent bodies) and, in addition, provides a very real, physical setting for the story. The work both *shows* and *tells*, inviting the reader to interpret feelings, intentions, and events from both linguistic and physical cues. In this way, the work moves beyond the simple opposition of the 'immaterial' world of story and imagination on the one hand and the physical world of sense and reality on the other. Each informs the other, and represents and confirms itself through the other. The work calls for a response to the blurring and shifting of title and site—how one is absorbed in the other—producing an undecidable exchange between language and place, or, more broadly speaking, what might loosely be called the ideal and the real. In this sense, the work offers no reassuring resolution as to its factual or fictional status. Important in Dodge's work, is a tendency to suggest or employ 'stories' that do not adhere to a traditional narrative structure of story and plot: the content of a story and the form used to tell the story (the convention that may in turn allow for easy consumption of meanings, ideas or truths 'concealed' within the narrative). For example, the press release for Dodge's *We are the meeting* 2014 exhibition at Casey

Kaplan Gallery takes the form of a letter to Dodge seemingly from curator Loring Randolph. Here is an extract:

In the last exhibition at the gallery, you connected a copper pipe in the main space to the water supply for the gallery and ran it out into the center of the room. At the end of the pipe was something similar to a hose crank handle and a small paper tag attached to the pipe that read, "Build a great Aquarium". A few years later the gallery flooded and was destroyed. Years of work and the lives of many paintings, sculptures, documents, ephemera, prints, photographs, writing, and more were lost. These objects had so much history, and so much potential. The history of the space changed in a surge, flowing in and out, like a breath. We all think about it differently, remember it differently, and a different energy now persists. (Casey Kaplan Gallery, 2014)

Here, narrative emerges within a dynamic constellation of elements: thought, affects, texts, bodies, and actions, unfolding and enfolding in such a way to disrupt narrative conventions or clichés, rupturing the form of story beyond recognition. Ambiguity arises when we are unsure whether the 'story' is true or whether it is a work of fiction. The sustained rupture, however subtle, of the story undoes genre distinctions, such as those between fiction and non-fiction.

Narratives engages with the allegedly clear-cut distinction between factual and fictional narrative: the nature of factual narrative (with specific concern for the notion that there are facts waiting to be found and which are not established by individuals) and fictional narrative in sculptural production. Generally, this project's deployment of narrative operates to complicate the distinction between factual and fictional narrative. Titles in this project such as *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69* (2017) suggest a plausible story/premise but nevertheless seem strangely distanced from everyday reality. Titles suggest real world events (a 'factual' story) and because the stories are fanciful yet nonetheless *possible*, the viewer must contend with the problem of interpretation in relation to the title's verifiability, meaning and contexts (cultural, historical, and authorial). In my view, the sustained overlap of fact and fiction prevents the simple placement of narrative-titles into either category. The project explores how sculptural practice might involve narrative-based artworks that occupy a highly fluid position midway between fiction and non-fiction. In this way, I also explore the limits of narrative, in relation to philosophical and critical views, common in contemporary

thought, according to which the dichotomy of real and unreal is perhaps best represented along a continuum, or as more fluid, rather than as two distinct and separate categories. In this view, everyday social life is a kind of fiction, and truth is merely a cultural and social construction.

Next, I examine the philosophical context for *Narratives* by first considering the consensus view that factual and fictional narrative are oppositional concepts – the supposed foundation of Western thought. I also examine relevant aspects of sculptural practice in relation to my own work that combine narrative and objects in order to complicate the distinction between factual and fictional narrative.

Factual and Fictional Narrative

A narrative is that form of linguistic representation which purports to portray events and experiences, whether true or fictitious. Factual and fictional narrative are generally considered mutually exclusive: factual narrative tells events that actually occurred in the past, fiction narrates imaginary events, in other words, things that did not really occur. Factual narrative is a matter of evidence-based construction, while the fictional is a form of invented or imagined construction. According to this definition, factual narrative refers us to the world of our reality whereas fictional narrative refers us to an imagined or invented world. Factual narrative claims to present truthful descriptions of phenomena whereas fictional narrative makes no such claims. The account I have given so far summarises the consensus view of the clear distinction between non-fiction and fiction. In his book *Aesthetics and Literature*, David Davies (2007) elaborates the point I am making:

To read a narrative as non-fiction is to assume that the selection and temporal ordering of *all* the events making up the narrative was constrained by a desire, on the narrator's part, to be faithful to the manner in which actual events transpired. We assume that the author has included only events she believes to have occurred, narrated as occurring in the order in which she believes them to have occurred. We may term this the 'fidelity constraint'. To read the narrative as fiction, on the other hand, is to assume that the choices made in generating the narrative were not governed in the first instance by this constraint, but by some more general purpose in story-telling. (p. 46)

This consensus view maintains the clear division between factual and fictional narrative and avoids disturbing the convenience of the opposition. My *Narratives* project demonstrates that readings of works of art based on binary thinking cannot be fully attuned to the ambiguities of both the narrative-title and, more broadly, narrative and narrativity.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Fontaine, C. (2008). *Untitled (Tennis ball sculpture)* [Installation]. Toronto: Onsite [at] OCAD University.

Today, the border between factual and fictional narrative, between what is real and invented, is increasingly fluid in such genres as history writing and fiction (Matravers, 2014; Schaeffer, 2014).¹⁹ In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon has shown that history and fiction have always been highly permeable genres. Hutcheon's study focuses on the tendency in postmodern theory and art to question the disciplinary distinction between literary and historical studies today. In recent literary theory, Hutcheon (1988) asserts, history and fiction:

¹⁹ See Derek Matravers (2014) for a list of books renown for the difficulty of their classification as either fiction or as non-fiction (p. 100).

have both been seen to derive their force more from versimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (p. 105)

Postmodernist art—through copies, intertexts, satire—identifies in history and fiction a shared use of conventions of storytelling, of reference, of the linguistic construction of subjectivity, and of their status as textuality. The paradox of postmodern art is that it critiques and yet depends upon the very structures and values that it addresses (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 106). Here, Hutcheon conveys a sense of the boundary between fiction and non-fiction as historically fluid and permeable making the question of what kind of experience and value belong to the ‘true’ (empirical reality) and at what point one has moved beyond the ‘true’ delicate and debatable.

This discussion raises the question of what constitutes both the true and the real? In his essay *Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality* (2005), Hayden White asserts that historical discourse is committed to the *true*, while fiction is concerned with the *real*—which it pursues by elaborating the sphere of the possible or imaginable. As White (2005) explains very succinctly:

A simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about what happened in it at particular times, and places can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what ‘reality’ consists of. However, the rest of the real, after we have said what we can assert to be true about it, would not be anything and everything we could imagine about it. The real would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be. (p. 147)

Something similar to this, White surmises, may have motivated Aristotle to suggest the interdependence of history, poetry and philosophy in the human endeavour to represent, imagine and conceive the world in its fullness, both actual and possible (2007, p. 147). Following White, the real might be described as a reality including both the known and only lived, a dimension of experience always taking place, though it is impossible to fully articulate it. Contemporary philosophy questions the borders of both the real and the true

in order to move beyond a metaphysical or dialectical system of opposites—in a move similar to pataphysics. To reiterate, for pataphysics, reality is never fully present (there is no authoritative cognitive grasp of a mind-independent external world), except in a dynamic flow of individual perspectives which are irreducible to empirical description.

Here, I wish to distinguish my project from a domain of comparable sculptural production in which the combination of narrative and objects clearly relates to specific sociopolitical conditions, drawing viewers into acknowledging a *credible, authentic* viewpoint, one which presents the ‘truth’ or reality of issues relating to social justice and environmental and ecological justice. For example, the artist collective Claire Fontaine can be said to operate in this domain. Claire Fontaine’s *Untitled (Tennis balls sculpture)* consists of 32 tennis balls containing concealed everyday items, such as string, pencils, matches, painkillers, and cigarette filters. The work refers to an explicitly factual narrative: the way in which prisoners in Mexico obtain contraband items (hurled to them over prison walls) to be used as currency inside prisons. In such work, artists rely on the notion of news journalism, a more or less reliable form of factual narrative, as faithful to the realities of people’s lives. Art criticism contextualises Claire Fontaine’s *Untitled (Tennis balls sculpture)* as a serious critique of the prison system, where prisoners are subject to excessive forms of deprivation resulting in prison violence and abuse (Albritton, 2011; Schneider, 2018). Significant in Claire Fontaine’s oeuvre is a concern with the hidden economies that call into question the domination of capitalism and the consequential dehumanising realities of particular social and institutional contexts. In contrast to such socially engaged art practice that exposes the stark realities of social life with hopes for practical transformation, *Narratives* begins from the starting point of focusing on the status of narrative as a form of representation. Whereas, to all appearances, Claire Fontaine regards texts and artworks as vehicles to *reliably* and *authentically* foreground ‘real world’ social issues, I regard my artworks as a platform for raising questions about art interpretation through narrative-based artworks which subvert the rigid distinction between true and false, real and imagined. In this regard, my project highlights the ambiguity surrounding the intermingling of fiction and non-fiction in the narrative-title, which possibly introduces some degree of epistemological uncertainty concerning the truth or reliability of how and what the narrative-title appears to signify. However, arguably, both this project and the aforementioned socially engaged art practice do not refer to a mind-independent reality so much as critically question a social life that is

comprised of representations that overwrite immediate experience. From this perspective, an individual subject's views and actions are socially determined by ideology and representations. According to Hugill, pataphysics could be said to engage in social and political realities without making an ideal distinction between truth and falsity, in order to practice a sort of law of equivalence (2012, pp. 82-83). However, the formal establishment of pataphysics as a social authority seems antithetical to its playful pluralism.

The narrative-title abounds with the complexity and ambiguity that characterises this world. Although there are contexts that call for clarity and precision, if a story in a literary work is unequivocally clear, it is not worth picking up. Again, my project studies examples of artworks where narrative conventions are disrupted through an intentional play with the relationship between truth and fiction, the real and the simulated. To gain further understanding of the title as a complication of the true/falsehood dichotomy we recall the concept of paratext, in which the title is a shared space rather than a watertight border, which entails the indeterminacy of the threshold. We can infer from Genette's notion of paratext that titles show the way in which opposition functions and therefore destabilises the distinction between opposing concepts, such as truth/falsehood, inside/outside. Paratext as threshold, the combination of the inside and the outside, accounts for the twofold function of the title, and permits the fluid interaction between the reader and the other elements at the threshold, elements which include other texts as potential agencies. Ambiguity stems from this porosity of borders. In this sense, the narrative-title's fanciful yet plausible story draws the reader's attention to its not-fully-factual status, just as factual and fictional intertexts complicate this reading.

Between Genre Boundaries

In understanding the narrative-title as the complication of the distinction between truth and falsehood, the thinking of Derrida becomes relevant. Derrida suggests that literature operates as a singular event mediating the perception and experience of reality. In his book *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (2000), Derrida responds to Maurice Blanchot's supposedly autobiographical story *The Instant of My Death* (1994), suggesting that

literature offers an uncertain sense of truth that can be inferred from his paradoxical formula of “X without X”: a truth without truth (p. 89-91). This notion of truth is distinct from philosophical truth, a sense of truth that undermines (while not escaping) the Western conceptual framework of oppositional terms, such as truth and fiction, inside and outside. In discussing the ontology of literature, Derrida (2000) claims that: “There is no essence or substance of literature. It does not exist. It does not remain at home, *abidingly* [a demeure] in the identity of the nature or even of a historical being identical with itself” (p. 28). Here, the issue is less that literature is ‘without existence,’ but instead that literature *demonstrates* its not being a ‘determinate being’; this is that which is disclosed in literature. Literature resists generic categorisation in terms of either non-fiction or fiction. Derrida uses this singularity (or non-identity) of literature to expose how the conceptual oppositions of Western thought are not mutually exclusive, but coexist in an infinite undecidability. Here, Derrida’s notion of the singularity of literature may be construed to resonate with Jarry’s commitment to the singularity of each phenomenon that makes it an exception and therefore irreducible to any category or generality.

Elsewhere, in his 1980 essay *The Law of Genre*, Derrida notes that the term ‘genre’ indicates the establishment of a limit, depending on norms and rules (p. 56). Conventionally speaking, genre definition separates a single class of literature from other literary types; it formalises rules that enable comprehension for the reader and determine expectations (e.g., philosophy and its philosophical truth). For Derrida, the law of genre depends upon the recognisable, recurring common ‘traits’ of literary works (e.g., literary technique, style, tone, etc.) which determines membership in a class (Derrida, 1980, p. 63). Derrida (1980) insists that these traits or genre conventions determine classes of literature, such as fiction and non-fiction:

There should be a trait upon which one could rely in order to decide that a given textual event, a given ‘work,’ corresponds to a given class (genre, type, mode, form, etc.). And there should be a code enabling one to decide questions of class membership on the basis of this trait. (p. 63)

Here, Derrida explains what in a conventional schema constitutes a genre and its limits. In contrast with genre classification based on a set of identifiable and codifiable traits, Derrida (1980) introduces a law of impurity based on a “principle of contamination,”

which indicates the impossibility of any pure genre. (p. 59). Referencing mathematical set theory, Derrida (1980) claims that literary works *participate* in one or several genres, yet participation is not equated with belonging (p. 59). A literary work might exhibit its own narrative devices and therefore expose its artifice. Such an explicit demonstration highlights that all representation is stylised. For example, when a narrator self-consciously reflects on the process of narration, or comments on the story's fictional status, or when a title complicates the fiction/non-fiction dichotomy (Derrida, 1980, pp. 68-69). In another example, when a literary fiction deploys a genre term (e.g., the 'novel'); this term situates the text in the category of fiction, while remaining outside the category of fiction. Hence, the term or 'mark' of genre *participates* without belonging in the genre it designates (Derrida, 1980, p. 65). According to Derrida, this demarcating or marking is deployed by all genres, whether fictions, other literary genres or non-fiction. Here, Derrida's law of genre impurity resonates with pataphysics. Jarry's famous novel is heterogeneous, encompassing various artistic media and non-literary sources, and not limited by genre boundaries or narrative styles. In addition, Derrida's law of impurity recalls Genette's description of the paratext as an indeterminate zone, and my earlier discussion of the title as just such a device. Recall that the paratext is a threshold between the work and what is no longer the work. In both cases, the designation 'novel' and the paratext (title) participate without belonging, complicating classical literary distinctions of text and paratext, textual inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside.

So far, then, we have seen how for Derrida literary works affirm *singularity*, before the generic classifications of the literary institution. In contrast to classical literary theory, Derrida argues that each text participates without belonging in one or more genres, admitting a variety of forms, styles, tones, and techniques and therefore exposes and questions the notion of a foundational and essential truth. So in this respect it makes a great deal of sense to me to discuss the title as a work of literature, locating the title at the porous intersection of truth/falsity and the opportunity of crossing genres with other genres. We might say, following Derrida, that the title is irreducibly unruly, and therefore exposes and questions the traditional philosophical premise that limits literature (including the title) to the option of being either fiction or non-fiction. The forming of new meanings from the objects I use involves not only the normative associations of these objects but also the conceptual or narrative ways in which they can be altered. In this regard, the titling method I employ functions to question and complicate still-influential traditional

assumptions concerning narrative as either truth or falsity. In this regard, titles challenge the traditional view of narrative mimesis, the idea that literature attempts to reliably and accurately represent ‘human experience’ or ‘the world.’ In order to gain an understanding of this traditional philosophical assumption, I turn now to a discussion on the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies of representation and mimesis, which continue to influence contemporary literary theory. Both Plato and Aristotle shared an emphasis on thinking through the questions of genre, specifically philosophy and artistic mimesis, in relation to the problem of truth and falsity. This discussion is relevant given that the narrative-title, as literature, portrays a fanciful yet *possible* story and, as such, complicates the distinction between factual and fictional narrative.

Mimesis: Plato and Aristotle

In the history of Western thought, the main concept in the analysis and description of narrative fiction has been *mimesis* (imitation). In his essay ‘Fictional vs. Factual Narration’ in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (2009), the literary theorist Jean-Marie Schaeffer summarises the two most influential theories of mimesis. Both Plato in the *Republic* (Books II, III and X) and Aristotle in the *Poetics* offer their respective theories of mimesis which have informed Western understandings of non-fiction and fiction to the present time. Plato’s theory of representation is based on a hierarchical relation between imitation of eternal Ideas (perfect, idealised forms of things we see in the world) and imitation of appearances (the imperfect, physical things themselves). Here, the artistic representation of physical things, in contrast to philosophical discussion of Ideas, is understood as an imitation of appearances and, as such, is at a far remove from truth (the truth that is innate in ideas). Plato also presents a hierarchical relation between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. He distinguishes three styles of narrative: direct narrative (*diegesis*) in which the narrator speaks only as himself without impersonating another character (e.g., the dithyramb); imitation (*mimesis*) in which the narrator performs as a cast of characters in a story (e.g., comedy and drama); and a mixture of the two styles (e.g., Homeric poetry) (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 103). Plato privileges direct narrative and devalues mimesis. Mimesis is a semblance, a mere copy of someone or something, and thus it is distant from truth (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 103). Artists deceive their viewers by presenting mimetic objects (e.g., fictional narrative) as objects of knowledge. Plato’s criticism focuses on the literary

arts in particular, which are designed to draw us into an emotional state and expose us to the possible corruption of our character. In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato presents the poet as a copyist of what is already a copy: the poet makes imitations, in spoken form, of human action and its virtues of love, justice, etc., and these virtues are each merely imperfect copies of the eternal Ideas (Forms) of Love, Justice, etc. Such thinking lies behind the perennial question as to whether or not we can learn from art, as Plato implies that mimetic art—drama, fiction, visual art—is a hindrance to our understanding of human life.

Aristotle's concept of mimesis differs markedly from Plato in a number of ways. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle describes both the cognitive value of mimetic representation and the social and psychological value of art's power to stimulate and discharge intense emotions. Mimesis is a fundamental means of human learning and also a principal source of human pleasure. In addressing the distinction between fact and fiction, Aristotle focuses on mimesis as a specific mode of cognition. Aristotle ranks mimesis above history because tragic poetry (a form of fictional narrative) uncovers a higher level of generality or truth about human nature, while history reports the particular or empirical details of individual lives and past events (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 103). In Aristotle's example, fact-based history is a superficial account of the singular life of Alcibiades, whereas poetry discloses the probable or necessary actions that a person of a certain type (someone like Alcibiades) would do in a given set of circumstances (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 103). Aristotle suggests that mimetic poetry enables a higher order of cognitive process than factual narrative. In this way, for Aristotle, tragic poetry (fictional narrative) is more philosophical and of greater importance than history.

The titles in this project imply or purport to tell a story of events in the real world. The narrative-title portrays a fanciful yet *possible* story and, as such, blurs the distinction between factual and fictional narrative. It is unclear whether the narrative-title advances claims of referential truthfulness or not (I do not divulge whether or not the narrative-title is either factual or fictive). Here, we see how the narrative-title complicates the Platonic and Aristotelian distinction between factual and fictional representation. For example, it is irreducible to the Aristotelian insistence on mimetic art as the media of a higher order of truth than factual narrative. Each narrative-title is, in pataphysical terms, a sort of exception or singular event which, strictly speaking, belongs to no particular genre. It is a

particularity or an irregular occurrence which resists categorisation and generality. We might say that pataphysics' refusal to privilege either artistic or so-called factual thinking critiques or levels Aristotle's privileging of artistic representation (tragic poetry) over factual representation (history).

Each narrative-title suggests the 'backstory' of an object, without establishing any closure of meaning, without settling or determining the relation between story, object, the narrator and the reader. A question, repeatedly asked by many viewers is: Is the narrative title true? Is the story it conveys factual or fictive? In this instance, to read is to encounter the unknown element that always accompanies the singularity of literature. This *Narratives* project should be viewed as neither an affirmation nor negation of factual or fictional narrative. The approach I favor is to acknowledge my perplexity in the face of the problem of a narrative's truth or falsity. To understand the story is to cease to understand the story. In this sense, there is 'nothing' or nothing *certain* to uncover. Each story seems to reflect the paradoxes and uncertainties of, what Jarry (1911/1996) calls, "the laws governing exceptions" (p. 22). Hugill's (2012) groping towards a definition of pataphysics itself is pertinent to the interpretative possibilities of the narrative-title:

To define it is merely to indicate a possible meaning, which will always be the opposite of another equally possible meaning, which, when diurnally interpolated with the first meaning, will point toward a third meaning which will in turn elude definition because of the fourth element that is missing. (p. 1)

What this 'definition' shows is that pataphysics is not a field of absolute indeterminacy, but a field where the reader can both affirm the existence of pataphysics and simultaneously experience it as an excess, a heterogeneity that resists the idea of a single truth.



Pearce, L. (2019). *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

Briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, my artwork *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69* (2017) provides an example of the narrative-title as the suggestion of a possible yet perplexing story. This work consists of a narrative-title and a scientific 3.6 mL screw top glass vial, purportedly containing air from the former (late 1960s) Wellington study of Sir Lloyd Geering, renown as a controversial New Zealand theologian. Although the title does not mention the vial, the reader has enough information to infer the title and vial's relationship. A scientific glass vial is a variety of laboratory glassware, used to hold liquids in a scientific work. The glass vial suggests purity and accuracy. In a contemporary art context, as scientific equipment, the vial might be drawn into conversations on the boundaries of empirical knowledge and rational thought. Here, the combination of the vial and its title evokes a perplexing

backstory that supersedes any straightforward interpretation. The reader might rightly assume that I have travelled to Geering's former residence and captured air in his study. If it is difficult to believe that I have done this, it is even more difficult to understand the theme and meaning of this 'story'.

Any discussion of Geering brings to mind a notable event from his life. In 1967, Geering gave a sermon refuting the notion of an immortal soul. He wrote an article urging for a new interpretation of the resurrection. The Presbyterian Church brought charges against him for doctrinal error and disturbing the peace and unity of the church. The case was discussed at the 1967 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and quickly dismissed. To Geering, God is a symbol of our highest ideals and values – honesty, truthfulness, love for others and ourselves. During his lifetime, Geering has witnessed a significant cultural movement away from religion toward either spirituality or secularism.

An implied backstory emerges from this narrative-title conveying the barest impression of a story, concerning the making of the work, to the minds of readers. It is the act of withholding the full story, rather than the attempt to fully explicate the story, that defines the title. So while looking at the glass jar, the viewer might begin to imagine a background story, perhaps the work has emerged from a unique collaboration between Sir Lloyd Geering and myself – wherein I had a discussion with Geering (and others), chosen for his very particular celebrity and occupation, and subsequently collected air from his former study. The title of the work implies a negotiation between multiple events and things: the title and the air-filled jar, the world outside the artwork and the world of the artwork, and between the artwork and its viewer, the artist and the participants in the making of the work, the artist and the viewer, and the artist and the artwork. In this sense, the artwork continuously shifts between one time and place to another, encompassing an array of people and events.

It is difficult to draw a distinction between the world outside the artwork and the world of the artwork. In part, this is because, in the scientific view, the gaseous nature of air offers an image of an invisible form of matter in a constant state of change and movement. Air is elusive; it continually moves, modifies and flows across space and time. The conjunction of theologian and air in this artwork expands the air even further. In *The Matter of Air* (2010), Steven Connor discusses the paradoxical status of air, which while

scientific thinking tells us is an element or substance, is also, in ‘nonscientific’ thought, considered as a ‘dimension’ of the infinite, the transcendent (p. 35). He explains that contemporary issues such as air pollution and climate change produce an increasing awareness of the finitude of air. While, for some thinkers, the air stands for escape, potential, and transcendence in the poetic and philosophical imagination. For the most part, the air (material) merely shares an affinity with spirit (immaterial). However, in spiritualism and esoteric religion, the air is considered to be the realm of invisible or spectral manifestations of spirit-bodies or agencies (Connor, 2010, p. 108). Similarly, there is the notion of Romantic haze or the aura which emanates from the body of persons or entities of particular spiritual status (Connor, 2010, p. 178). In addition, in many cultures, the notion of *thought itself* has been made intelligible by ‘placing’ it in the ‘material substrate’ of air. Thought seems to require a ground or underpinning. This observation is very pertinent to the artwork under discussion. It is relevant here to quote Connor (2010) at length:

[I]n serving as the substrate of thought, the air succeeds precisely to the degree that it does not in fact function as a substance, but rather as a quasi-substance, a substance that, like thought itself, is next to nothing, not quite there. Air is a thought-form. It is a substrate for that which has no evident substrate. Air is always more or less than air: more because it is always in some measure the idea as well as the simple stuff of air, less because it is never fully present in or as itself, and so only ever air apparent. In this non-adequacy to itself, it resembles the thought it figures, and is thus at once adequate and fittingly inadequate for that figuring. For this reason the powers of air are not just imagined or imaginary; they are materializations of the power of imagination itself. (pp. 105-106).

Significant to my discussion is Connor’s observation that we tend to imagine that thought consists in a kind of gas or ether, a sort of mist or aura that while dispersing also somehow remains.

We might imagine the thoughts, beliefs and daydreams of Geering as a sort of incalculably thin substance, an indiscernible materiality. Such that this thought-substrate might shelter in itself ideas, imaginings and dreams. If we ask what thought *is*, as Connor’s proposal invites us to consider, thought is apprehended as an infra-thin

difference – an infinitesimal difference between matter and nothingness, this liminality is invisible and elusive, but otherwise distinctly present. Imagine that the thoughts of Geering might somehow remain intact within the surrounding air of his former study, like the residue of an impression. The enduring presence of Geering's thought is evoked in my attempt to capture any traces of thought that might still linger in the study where Geering often wrestled with faith and the Christian canon in his contribution to theological debate. In this regard, I attempt to stretch the viewer's imagination to simultaneously consider the work as both a physical object (viewed conventionally in the gallery), as well as being a container of thoughts as substance that somehow linger from the past. This commentary presents us with a potential way of defining and approaching invisible matter such as thought. In a similar way, the New Zealand artist Dane Mitchell is noted for presenting invisible or near-invisible phenomena framed by tangible objects such as vitrines and art spaces. For example, Mitchell's *Spoken Heredity Talisman*, 2011, is a series of hand-blown glass works formed by the artist's utterance of the names of his ancestors into the glassblower's blow pipe (Kreisler, 2011). Emphasised in these works is the act of giving visible form to otherwise intangible matter and the perceived additional effort required to engage with such phenomena as art.

However, from a conventional scientific perspective, this discussion is merely an attempt to give a non-existent mass and dimension to thought – surely, a fiction. Similarly, according to the rational science of physics, the previously discussed chance based experiment, Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* creates new units of measure in a way that fails to undermine the certainties of science – after all, one metre is a straight line. Still, there seems to be something plausible in the notion that thought lingers in the air. Here, it is useful to consider that language is the vehicle for thought. In *The German Ideology* (1846), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels observe that 'consciousness' has a material dimension in language. For Marx and Engels (1970/1846) consciousness is "not inherent, not 'pure' consciousness," but that which is "'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short of language" (pp. 50-51). Therefore, thought receives form in the materiality of air. We might consider thought as something perpetually liminal, something that is not something and yet neither is it nothing. As such, this definition returns attention to the narrative-title as a kind of paratext: a threshold, both within and outside 'the artwork', which forms a series of shifting relations (involving the artwork, reader, artist, ideologies, and broader states of

affairs). Given the permeable structure of the narrative-title, we might say then that interpretations are never finally decidable: there will always be a number of plausible interpretations. In this case, interpretations are not limited to the notion of a single truth that they articulate, but by an open yet bounded context, which makes possible numerous meanings and disallows any claim to a single true interpretation.

The narrative-title calls attention to the act of reading itself. For the reader encounters a 'story' that complicates generic description and, therefore, stands in an uncertain relation to a text which is itself at once factual and imaginary. The previous reading of my title *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69* is not an attempt to fully explicate and domesticate the story by imposing an airtight, complete interpretation – to somehow neutralise its literary unruliness. The question of what it means remains obscure and difficult and the reader is encouraged to read the narrative-title in a way that respects its singularity and associative complexity rather than submitting it to any conventions of reading based on the binary of fact and fiction. The reader must find a new way of reading the text. She must become reconciled with a narrative-title that withholds as much as it reveals. In relation to the study of the title, Deleuze's concept of the event articulates the relation between the emergence of sense, that is, meaning and the becoming of actual states of affairs. For Deleuze, the event of sense is a process such that the establishment of a concept or thing can only remain transitory. This notion of the emergence of sense allows us to understand the narrative-title in terms of a mutual tension between the title (proposition) and the object (corporeal thing).

Bordering on Sense

In contrast to traditional approaches to signification which creates the conditions of truth and falsity, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise the contingency of knowledge and point to the personal nature of meaning or sense. In his book *The Logic of Sense* (1990), Deleuze explains that sense, rather than being a signification of a corresponding state of affairs (which would secure the concepts of God, the world, and self as well as the values of true and false), is fundamentally about a personal encounter with the *expressed* of a proposition (p. 17-19). He suggests the inadequacy of denotation and signification in literature by

asserting that it is the incorporeality, complexity and irreducibility of the sense of a proposition that radically alters what is *expressed* in the process of reading (Deleuze, 1990, p. 19). For example, the expression ‘*A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering’s former Wellington study, 1966-69*’ signifies that one sees a glass vial of air that has been removed from Sir Lloyd Geering’s former Wellington study, while the *sense* of it also considers the context in which one encounters it. According to Deleuze, this context remains fundamentally indeterminate, whereas the concept of signification permits precision.

Importantly, Deleuze claims that sense is not merely the expressed of the proposition, but also the attribute of the thing. Deleuze explains that the Stoics conceived the domain of sense through the difference between bodily mixtures and incorporeal events (1990, p. 4-5). According to Deleuze, the exemplar example of an incorporeal event is a *battle*, as is found in examples of literature (1990, p. 100). As a means of elaborating sense as a process involving mixtures of bodies and an incorporeal event, Daniel W. Smith (2019), in his essay *Sense and Literality*, employs the example of ‘Battle of Waterloo,’ outlining the distinction between the physical battle and the linguistic proposition ‘Battle of Waterloo’:

We can attribute ‘Battle of Waterloo’, for instance, to a particular state of affairs, but what we find in that state of affairs are bodies mixing with one another: spears stabbing flesh, bullets flying through the air, cannons firing, bodies being ripped apart. Strictly speaking, the battle itself exists nowhere except in the expression of my proposition, which attributes ‘Battle of Waterloo’ to this mixture of bodies. More precisely, we could say that the battle itself merely ‘insists’ or ‘subsists’ in the proposition. (p. 48)

Therefore, sense is a complex concept. On the one hand, it does not exist outside of the proposition that expresses it; yet nor is it inherent within the proposition (it ‘insists’ or ‘subsists’ rather than exists). On the other hand, it is seen to correspond with a state of affairs, but it does not represent a state of affairs (Deleuze, 1990, p. 21). As Deleuze (1990)

Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition and the attribute of the state of affairs. It turns one side toward things and one side toward propositions. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of

affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things. (p. 22)

Deleuze positions the event at the edge of both words and corporeal things. Deleuze (1990) states: “Everything happens at the boundary between things and propositions,” without closure in either side of this dualistic relation (p. 8). The event of sense is not what happens but that which ‘subsists’ or ‘insists’ in what happens: “*the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs*” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 21). Instead, it is the ever-changing *emergence* of sense through language and by way of the actualisation of things. Here, meaning is not a matter of recognising a pre-existing concept or thing, but an active principle of production that occurs in an unstable interaction between words and things. For example, when the title reintroduces the idea of a place—*Sir Lloyd Geering’s former Wellington study*—naming depends upon the spatiotemporal conditions of the place, but it is also an unstable ‘image’ emerging from a variety of discourse that continuously alters the place over time. Images of the study that dislocates the study. We might say that the meaning of the artwork does not merge with the title which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs which the title indicates. Reading, then, unfolds in an interval of differentiation.

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of literature has implications for the project’s understanding of the reader of the narrative-title. Concerning the audience of literature, Robert Brinkley, in his ‘Editor’s Notes’ to Deleuze, Guattari and Brinkley’s essay *What Is A Minor Literature?* (1983), contrasts two distinct types of audience member: on the one hand, “the interpreter” (the textual critic, reviewer, theorist, and commentator) performs as “an agent of a dominant social code”, on the other hand, “the reader” performs an experimental reading that delays or escapes the restrictions of normative interpretation. Concerning the reader, Brinkley (1983) states that: “The desire to evade interpretation is not a desire to be *against* interpretation, to negate it, to do so, after all, would be to continue to exist in its terms” (p. 13). This experimental reading allows for the sense of an inventive and exploratory inquiry that might break from conventions and traditions. The reader trusts association, refuses linear order and timeless, representational truth. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Brinkley (1983) describes ‘the reader’ as a sort of nomadic cartographer, primarily engaged in experimentation not interpretation:

Reading can participate in these connections; a reader makes connections as he reads. He need not interpret and say what the text means; he can discover where passages in the text lead, with what they can be connected. The result is not an interpretation but a map, a tool with which to find a way. The map is the production of an experimental reading, the word *experiment* being used here as John Cage uses it, “not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as an act the outcome of which is unknown.” The reader becomes a nomad; to borrow a phrase from Lyotard, reading becomes “a nomadic of intensities.” As such it does not threaten minor perspectives; instead it entertains them, and minor literature works to produce a reading which will constitute its own affirmation. (p. 14)

Here, reading is not articulated within the conventions of genre or form, instead Brinkley highlights the role of affect within an experimental reading—a creativity, a force of life, forging connections between biographical, sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts. Similarly, my project is dependent upon reading as a mode of experimentation. The narrative-title involves a number of different entities, individuals, and events that can cross at any point to form a variety of possible connections. Similar to Barthes’ reader (as previously discussed), Deleuze and Guattari’s reader is an active participant rather than a passive consumer. Deleuze and Guattari affirm constantly shifting connections between the text and that which falls outside the text. Again, we might say that the viewer (as reader) of the narrative-title experiences a sort of nomadic unregulated movement within reading. Lack of permanence is a characteristic of nomad existence. The problem of the narrative-title, with its direct storytelling, teasing allusions and partial confidences all reflect my decision to call into question the distinction between factual and fictional narrative. From the title emerges new thought (outside of clear distinctions between subject/object relations), and the narrative’s capacity to indicate and suggest ontological inquiry in visual art practice. In its conceptual underpinning, my project *Narratives* calls into question the nature, function, and limits of narrative as the timeless representation of reality.

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Canell, N. and Watkins, R. (2012). *Of Air* [Sculpture]. London, England: Camden Arts Centre.

In the context of contemporary sculptural practice, Nina Canell and Robin Watkins' *Of Air* (2012) demonstrates the method of employing the narrative-title in relation to an object. Canell and Watkin's work consists of a desiccator (an airtight glass jar) containing, we are told in the materials list, 3800ml of air from the preserved St Petersburg study of Russian chemist Dimitri Mendeleev, who is recognised as the inventor of the Periodic Table of Elements in the late 1860s. The desiccator is held aloft in a Perspex box attached to a set of thin, wooden table legs. The list of materials reads: Desiccator, 3800ml of air from the preserved Saint Petersburg study of Dimitri Mendeleev, Perspex and wood. This work highlights one of the most famous examples of how some dreams have been useful in important scientific discoveries. After an uninterrupted three days and nights of work, according to the well-known story, a vision of the periodic table of elements in its completed form appeared to Mendeleev while asleep due to overtiredness. Near the brink of a breakthrough in his research, the chemist yielded to exhaustion and while dreaming envisioned the periodic table. Mendeleev's table included the known elements organised by increasing atomic weight. Remarkably,

Mendeleev also left gaps in the table for as yet undiscovered elements including their accurately predicted atomic weights.

In response to this well-known story, Canell and Watkins purportedly traveled to Saint Petersburg, Russia to collect a jar full of air from Mendeleev's study. Comparable to my work *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69*, Canell and Watkins' *Of Air* includes the use of a glass container to capture air in the former study of a famous individual, in a remote location. Similarly, also, the pair's work might suggest that some gaseous residue of thought or dream substrate might somehow remain in the atmosphere of his preserved study (Connor, 2010, pp. 21-22). The story of Mendeleev's dream points to how the eureka moment (or, less commonly, a sudden revelation in dream) sometimes occurs within the long, rational process of scientific inquiry leading to a discovery. These two ways of knowing, reason and intuition, are often seen as dichotomous, posed in terms of a scientific/unscientific binary—with the first component privileged, and the second either excluded or partially seen as inferior, dependent, or derivative. *Of Air* suggests a reconsideration of the conventionally understood distinction between reason and revelation that structures understandings of knowledge acquisition. Recall again that Brinkley's description of an *experimental reading* allows for the sense of an exploratory inquiry that cannot be assessed with regard to actual outcomes because there is no shared set of values or criteria that applies to each. In the case of *Of Air*, the reader could be said to explore the intersection of aesthetic experience and scientific thought. On the one hand, art is traditionally understood as the domain of inwardness and subjectivity and, on the other, science is often viewed as the rational and objective analysis of external things. *Of Air* may be understood to explore how these two domains overlap to suggest an overlooked mutuality in which science is attuned to intuition and art with rational processes: a zone where sense perception and contemplation become conflated.

To account for a relevant artistic genealogy, it is well worth considering particular artworks by Robert Barry and Duchamp. Barry was an early innovator of conceptual art as a movement. In mainstream accounts, conceptual art privileges ideas over the visual or formal aspects of artworks. This produces a strict opposition between the visual and the intellectual. A combination of various approaches rather than a unified movement, conceptual art took many forms, for example photography, musical scores, and

performance. Reaching public attention during the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, conceptual artists produced artworks and texts that questioned long held assumptions about what constitutes a work of art. Their main contention – that the idea underpinning the work is more important than the completed artwork – installs the hierarchy of the idea as primary and the purely visual and material aspects of art as secondary. However, it conceptual art has failed to unequivocally separate intellect from perception or ideas from objects. It has not eliminated either the aesthetic characteristics of art or the contextual significance of aesthetics, but rather prompted an examination of both (McEvelley, 1991, pp.43-45). Put simply, conceptual art establishes a self-consciousness within the viewing of art, foregrounding the way we exercise our attention. Challenging traditional aesthetic values with the use of energy, Robert Barry used radio waves, gases, and electromagnetism that he would release into the atmosphere as artistic media.

The Zone Where Body Meets Affect

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Barry, R. (1969). *Telepathic Piece* in *Simon Fraser Exhibition* [Exhibition catalogue]. Burnaby, BC: Centre for Communications and the Arts.

Particularly relevant to my previously discussed work *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69*, is Robert Barry's *Telepathic Piece* (1969), for Seth Siegelaub's *19 May – 19 June, 1969*, held between those dates at Centre for Communications and the Arts, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. A group exhibition that was held in different faculties within the University, and

whose catalogue was only accessible at the exhibition's conclusion. In the catalogue, Barry provided a brief description of the work: "[During the Exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thoughts that are not applicable to language or image.]" (Barry, 1969, as cited in Lippard, 1973/2001, p. 98). As part of the exhibition, a symposium was held by means of a teleconference during which Barry, in New York, USA, attempted his telepathic communication to an audience in Burnaby, British Columbia. Concerning *Telepathic Piece*, the exhibition catalogue further explains that, "At the conclusion of the exhibition (June 19, 1969), the information about the work of art was made known in this catalogue." In this regard, the work is indebted to textual documentation. Without its institutional textual presentation, the artwork would almost certainly be unknown to us. In an interview by Raimundas Malasauskas, Barry (2005) recollects that the thoughts comprising *Telepathic Piece* were neither words nor image, but rather "elusive feelings".²⁰ At the time of the interview, he had attempted telepathic communication over thirty years ago. Nonetheless, Barry claimed that he would instantly recognise his indescribable feelings in the event of an encounter with their continuous transmission. Considered as a radical attenuation of artistic materiality, or more specifically as a challenge to the object status of works of art, this artwork might bring us back to thinking about the notion of a gaseous residue of thought, a kind of emotional weather, which might somehow still linger in the atmosphere.

Barry's mental telepathy—a pseudoscientific and extrasensory phenomenon—recalls the science of pataphysics and, in particular, its impulse towards the equalisation of differences, so that the possible and the seemingly impossible are equally valid. Similar to pataphysical experimentation, Barry's telepathic activity explores a form of communication that is seemingly implausible, nonlinear and atemporal in character in a manner outside the established order of communication. In this sense, he participates in an imaginative shaping of the world. In *Telepathic Piece*, Barry highlights the technical cartographic impulse to define and measure, in a manner reminiscent of my artwork *A pair of spirit levels confirms the horizontality of the floor* and Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*. These works offer a speculative notion of space without confinement to metric

²⁰ Providing insight into the content of his telepathic communication, Barry describes it as "basically a feeling, a sense. It's a kind of feeling which sometimes is very difficult to put into words, because I think it's the most elusive part of our being. We have those feelings come through us and we are not exactly sure what it is – we cannot put these elusive feelings into words." See Barry, R. (2005). "Robert Barry: Telepathic Piece, 1969." [Interviewed by Raimundas Malasauskas]. Available from <https://community.livejournal.com/-arthistory/33358.html>

rule or stable coordinates. This space is a fluid, diffuse space, between the real world and imaginary worlds, a distance without measure. This exploration and speculation recalls the negative capability explained by John Keats, which consists in being in uncertainties without the unremitting search for the reason of things. In short, the art viewer might experience anew or even cherish the indeterminacy of existence, which murmurs or subsists at the surface of things.

Telepathy, mental communication by means other than sensory perception, is traditionally associated with the paranormal or science fiction. To date, serious research into telepathy has not established it as having a basis in scientific evidence. At best, we have an incomplete understanding of the extrasensory factors that might enable telepathic phenomena. A challenge that the psychological study of telepathy has to face is that the topic has long been associated with implausibility, artifice and deceit. Telepathy is generally considered disreputable and unscientific, part of a range of elusive and mysterious phenomena. Discussing the technique of his attempted telepathy (and, further constructing a narrative around the work), Barry (2005) explains that: “I just tried to get my thoughts together about what I was feeling at the time. I tried really to concentrate on what it was and for how long I could do it.... How to send things telepathically? I don’t know.” Beyond telepathy’s reputation as implausible, Barry’s account rules out the possibility of certainty regarding his attempt at telepathy and, by extension, creates a space for highly suggestive speculation on communication. Suppose we had a psychic sensitivity such that we could use it to tune into the frequencies of Barry’s transmitted feelings. If this were so, what would it mean to register the artist’s indescribable feelings, to measure with increasing sensitivity and acuity, to move to finer and finer scales of empathetic communication? Is it possible to measure almost imperceptible or indescribable emotions? What is the metric of feelings? Perhaps it is not particularly relevant whether Barry could actually do what *Telepathic Piece* says he attempted, but rather that the mere positing of the very existence of such a work of art prompts imaginative speculation about the potentiality of language, its capability to transgress the limits of the familiar and, by extension, narrative. Before pursuing my line of thought, I will consider first a particular critical reading of *Telepathic Piece* that interprets it as a form of sociopolitical commentary.

It would be possible, I suppose, to read this work in terms of what Eve Meltzer (2013), in her book *Systems We Have Loved*, calls conceptual art's desire for an "unmediated relationality" beyond language and institutions (p. 198). Here, Meltzer cites Steven Melville's catalogue essay for the 1995 exhibition *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965- 1975*, which explains the type of relation that conceptualism initially desired:

To take up Conceptualism, as an historical or critical object or as one's own practice, as a movement of sorts is to understand it as moved by a broadly political desire—a desire for a renegotiation or overcoming of a presumed gap between art and life, and a desire for a community or socius not ordered by the terms and practices that currently govern our practices. ... [T]he underlying political fantasy dreams of a telepathic community—say, a community that is not riven by the fact of beholding and so one in which work is not defined by its ability to engender an audience. (Melville, 1995, cited in Meltzer 2013, pp. 198-199)

Meltzer sees Barry's *Telepathic Piece* as an ironic expression of what Melville calls the "broadly political desire" for a new kind of art and a new kind of community (outside of language, institutions and ideology). For Barry, according to Meltzer, this 'unmediated relationality' is something "hoped for in a desperate way with failure already implicit in the hoping" (p. 199). In contrast to much critical endorsement of Barry's work as a challenge to the object status of artistic materiality, Meltzer (2013) suggests a degree of failure in *Telepathic Piece*:

Despite the implication of the work's tone and its maker's intention, what *Telepathic Piece* does not account for is that while relinquishing the mediation of ideology and its institutions, it also sacrifices the materiality of communicative exchange. By thinning the work of art, Barry attenuates the very structure of relating, ridding it of its affects. (p. 199)

According to Meltzer, the artwork is deemed affectless through its immateriality. Consequently, *Telepathic Piece* fails as a form of artistic expression. Indeed, it might even be construed as a mockery of the traditional notion of artistic expression, resisting the idea that the artwork represents emotion or material phenomena in the world. Traditionally, the concept of expression is commonly held to convey notions of "the internal made external" (Abrams, 1971, p. 22). This model suggests a strict border between an inner concealment

(contents) and the exterior manifestation (expressions) that eventuate from the artist's creative process. According to this viewpoint, from which Meltzer seems to speak, the insufficient invitation of *Telepathic Piece* is to 'feel' what Barry 'feels' and in this way to register the internal, psychological experience of another. In this view, the audience does not have a direct encounter with an individual object, image or being. As such, I suggest that *Telepathic Piece*, like literature generally, points to the inadequacy of traditional notions of expression as well as purported commonsense divisions such as subject/object, inside/outside, proximity/distance and even subject/subject, 'attempting' as it does to traverse intersubjective distance: that phenomenological gap that structures intersubjective relation. The limen of *Telepathic Piece* involves movements related to the suspension and breach of limits, which include the conventional divisions of everyday communication.

Given the indeterminate ontology of telepathy, a delayed reception of the work may involve relinquishing a notion of art as *either* material *or* immaterial, but instead may involve the reimagining of the concept of sensation itself or *affective relation*, an exposure to the conditions of creation. In the recent turn to affect, scholars resist the traditional notion of affect as subjective 'emotion,' understood as the conscious articulation of a feeling by a thinking subject. The notion of affective relation suggests a more dispersed, processual embodiment than the notion of the subject and object as unified, bounded entities. Clearly, viewing or 'reading' an artwork like *Telepathic Piece* within this framework indicates something far beyond the notion of the subject's conscious perception and intentionality. Here, affect theory offers a way to understand structures in a domain beyond the discursive. Affect or intensities move through bodies and environments moment-to-moment; they are impersonal and traverse distinctions and boundaries. In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) explain:

Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), and those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (p. 1)

Affect is the continual transformation, or modulation, that occurs when bodies combine, or touch. From this perspective, human and nonhuman bodies are no longer self-enclosed things or entities, but instead are processes involved in a world that is radically social and emergent in nature. Affect theory suggests that art encounter is experienced as always in the middle, between things, and affective before conscious recognition.

This dynamic interaction of affect contributes to this project's thinking about reading works of art. In this formulation, an affective way of reading acknowledges that the title resides on the edge of everything, including human-centred, historical literary criticism. Historical criticism has been invaluable for tracing the social and historical conditions that have informed certain literary texts and their role in conveying social meaning. However, literary texts, including titles, are also events that produce effects beyond reason and instrumental purposes, and no single discursive field can account for the variety of a text's affectivity. Affective reading is an activity that directs us beyond the text to experiment with new relational encounters. Reading engages a network of intertextual relations rather than a systematic structure based on an organising centre.

Recall that intertextuality is the interrelationship between texts; an ever-renewing process in which related texts inform, reproduce, or diverge from one another. Texts are interconnected and develop over time; they are not singular entities but depend, more or less, on other texts in terms of ideas, concepts, genre, linguistic structure, and style. Here, the unstable dynamic of intertextuality might be said to share an affinity with the paratext. Recall that for Genette, the paratext, including the title, is not the stable boundary, but rather the *threshold* which allows the exchange of communication between the text and that which falls outside of the text. Specifically, the paratext, Genette (1997) emphasises, "constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*" (p. 28).

In considering the affective dimension of *Telepathic Piece* as literary text, it is perhaps useful to think in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of literature. Literature, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) claim in their book *What is Philosophy?*, is productive; a work of literature produces certain effects: "The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion" (p. 176). To put Deleuze and Guattari's

concept simplistically, percept and affect are not perceptions or affections/emotions, but rather, they are clusters of sensation, independent from both the subject (writer/reader) and object (literary text). Deleuze and Guattari suggest a means for understanding perception and affection outside the received division between subject and object, providing a theory for appreciating the ambiguity of art encounter (and, by extension, the viewer-reader and *Telepathic Piece* assemblage).

Rather than being the work of an existent subject, literature is subject forming. The affects of literature are impersonal and pre-subjective. In their capacities to produce affects and therefore offer experiences beyond ordinary perception that works such as *Telepathic Piece*, *Of Air*, and *A sample of air from Sir Lloyd Geering's former Wellington study, 1966-69* relate to thought. In the case of *Telepathic Piece*, it is not a question of “What does it signify?”, but instead “How does it operate?” As such, *Telepathic Piece* could be said to produce certain affects and becomings, constituting the “nonhuman becomings of man” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 169). Gregg and Seigworth (2010) offer a fuller explanation of becoming:

[A]ffect is integral to a body's perceptual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, from what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter. (p. 3)

In this sense, the affective paratext of *Telepathic Piece* speaks of the thresholds of mental bodies, species bodies and nonhuman entities as contingent processes, where entities and bodies mutually absorb and change (questioning conceptual dualisms). In his book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi (2002) contends that affect always escapes capture, and its escape can manifest as, “the *perception of one's own vitality*, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as ‘freedom’)” (p. 36). In this regard, *Telepathic Piece* has continuing effects, for example, in Jonathan Monk's 2003 exhibition *During the exhibition the gallery will be open* at Jan Mot gallery in Brussels. For the exhibition, the guest curator Raimundas Malasauskas asked gallery owner Jan Mot to find an artist on his roster interested in receiving Barry's telepathic communication approximately 33 years after its initial transmission. For this exhibition, Monk attempted to receive Barry's telepathic communication. Experimenting with

telepathic reception, Monk uses Barry's *Telepathic Piece* to explore the continuing effects of Barry's telepathic communication, generating both new effects, bodily encounters, and questions.

How might we understand temporality in relation to *Telepathic Piece* considered in relation to its affective dimension? It seems unreasonable reduce *Telepathic Piece* to the rationality of chronological time (linear or narrative time), or capture it in one or more interpretations, instead, we might conceive of the work in terms of affect or intensity. Here, it is important to note that the experience of affect is not the result of inputs sent through a message sender to a receiver, as in the representational model of a linear one-way transmission of information. Massumi (2002) makes a connection between intensity and temporal suspension: "Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resignation and feedback that momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future" (p. 26). In this sense, it is difficult to explain what the affective dimension of Monk's telepathic reception might entail within a representational framework. Intensity, Massumi (2002) goes on to explain, "is like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it. It is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonance. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted objects and aims" (p 26).

Literature stems from the plane of immanence consisting of intensities of affect that subsist within bodies and states of affairs. The function of literature is to produce 'signs' (sensations) that will force the reader out of ordinary perception into the conditions of creation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 8). Affective reading disrupts ordinary perception, in which sensation is arranged into concepts. In this regard, it is the affective relation of the literary text and the process of reading which arises from the conditions of potentiality (impersonal forces/sensation). Hence, the actual is unfolded from this potentiality. Literature unleashes the potential for various outcomes in actuality.

The process of writing (and, reading, understood as a kind of writing) might best be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming. In 'Literature and Life,' in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998), Deleuze proposes that writing "is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or

vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible (p. 1). To become is neither a matter of identification nor imitation, but occurs in:

the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form. One can institute a zone of proximity with anything, on the condition that one creates the literary means for doing so. (Deleuze, 1998, p. 1-2)

Anything might be understood to include *Telepathic Piece* as an emergent writing, something arising from a field of affect that precedes and produces radically contingent bodies. Deleuze's concept of becoming questions the metaphysical conceptual dualism of 'being' and 'becoming.' Here, rather than considering ourselves, and the contents of the world, as stable and self-enclosed entities with well-defined parameters, we might accommodate the notion that we are continuously *becoming*, never settling in a stable identity. For instance, to return to *Telepathic Piece*, the expansion of human perception continues as increasingly we encounter new modes of connectivity, encompassing new forms of communication that might surround us, absorb us, and permeate us. The question is not to simply consider *Telepathic Piece* as a set of identities: an example of conceptual art, an object of study, and the reader as merely an interpreter. Rather, it is to be aware of the reality of an encounter with "[m]ovements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects... below and above the threshold of perception" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 281). In this sense, *Telepathic Piece* is characterised by a mode of becoming or relationality, freeing us from traditional notions of artistic expression and communication. It involves a zone of proximity with affects that seem to be beyond those created by humans.

In this sense, the affectivity of *Telepathic Piece* unfolds and enfolds other artists in an ongoing, collective event of art-telepathy with partially expressed and partly realised outcomes. For instance, Jonathan Monk's *Translation Piece*, 2002 includes a series of consecutive translations of Barry's *Telepathic Piece*.²¹ Consisting of eleven pages, Barry's statement ('During the Exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art,

²¹ Jonathan Monk's *Translation Piece* was first exhibited in his solo exhibition *During exhibition the gallery will be open*, 2003 at Jan Mot gallery, Brussels, Belgium.

the nature of which is a series of thoughts that are not applicable to language or image.’) travels through twenty-one languages: first, from English to French; second, from French to Dutch; and so on, until eventually returning to English. These multiple translations of Barry’s text raise the question of stability in the interpretation of meaning within time, as we commonly understand it. The affective state of Monk’s lengthy, circuitous route of translation complicates the conceptual distinction between sender/receiver, and beginning/end—while it borrows the text of *Telepathic Piece*, its strategy of delay as well as its inevitable mistranslation undermines the notion of the personal as well as communication based on sequential progress. Becomings arise through *Translation Piece* as the provocation of thought, a rupture is achieved through an uncertain language.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Duchamp, M. (1919). *Paris Air (50 cc of Paris Air)* [Sculpture]. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Originally measuring 13.3 x 6.4 cms, Marcel Duchamp’s assisted readymade titled *Air de Paris (50 cc of Paris Air)* is a work whose storied history complicates its brief instructive title. In addition to its title, *Air de Paris* is comprised of an ‘empty’ ampule with a bulbous midsection and an extended, hooked neck with an attached label printed “Sérum Physiologique” (physiological serum). Chosen as a souvenir for his patrons Walter and Louise Arensberg, the artwork was originally a serum ampule Duchamp claimed to have bought from a Parisian pharmacy. Duchamp instructed the pharmacist to empty and

then close the phial. In capturing Paris air inside, Duchamp was able to transport a sample of the air of Paris as a gift for Walter and Louise Arensberg.

However, there are aspects to Duchamp's work that cast doubt on its own verity. For example, the ampule in *Air de Paris* more closely resembles a 'holy ampulla' (an ampule used in the consecration ritual of the kings of France) than any medical phials of the 20th century ("Paris Air' or 'Holy Ampule," 2019). This discrepancy casts doubt on Duchamp's claim that he bought the phial from a pharmacist. *Air de Paris* also highlights the concept of measurement. In this way, it reminds us of Duchamp's play with the standards of metric measurement in the previously discussed *Three Standard Stoppages*. In a postcard reproduction of 1937, *Air de Paris* was described as "Ampoule contenant 50 cc d'air de Paris." This measurement was technically incorrect, as the original *Air de Paris* contained over twice this volume of air ("Paris Air' or 'Holy Ampule," 2019). Beyond this mathematical inaccuracy, the brittleness of the ampule itself enters the story. Glass is beautiful, but fragile. During a visit to the Arenbergs in 1949, Duchamp discovered that the ampule had been broken. The replacement version of *Air de Paris*, purchased in Paris by Duchamp's friend Henri-Pierre Roché, is likely to be a custom fabricated 'readymade' ("Paris Air' or 'Holy Ampule," 2019). In addition, uncertainty concerning the readymade status of the work proliferates when we consider that Duchamp authorised at least eight miniature reproductions of *Air de Paris*, casting doubt on the notion of the readymade as involving a chance encounter with a single, mass produced commodity. These contradictions and inconsistencies mean that *Air de Paris* cannot be simply read as a readymade or even a self-identical object; the work cannot easily be reduced to the notion of an origin (an original work) or interpreted in terms of a reliable, unified narrative. This rupturing of narrative coherence can be interpreted as an irreducible *interplay* of relations, and similarly to Barry's *Telepathic Piece*, functions to undermine any interpretation of the work based on the relation of the unified, essential self and object world – to reiterate, the artwork is more an *interplay* of relations than an original, individual work as such.

Summary

In reading the narrative-title, the viewer is located in an unstable interval or discrepancy between straightforward communication and indirect, even ungovernable communication.

The ‘reader’ of the title is confronted with the paradox of narrative: it is a perpetual overlap of denotation (signs representing an object or a corresponding state of affairs), and connotation (individual associations and contexts). Here, our dialogue with Jarry’s pataphysics and his account of epistemology has provided us with some important insights. According to Jarry, pataphysics implies that all interpretations (solutions) of any worldly phenomena (problems), artistic or scientific, are imaginary, and hence, equally valid in nature. Pataphysics champions the principle of equivalence: in which any interpretation is of equal value, all discourse being equivalent because ‘reality’ is non-existent. Here, it is worth contrasting Jarry’s position with that of Plato and Aristotle. As previously discussed, both Plato and Aristotle shared an emphasis on thinking through the questions of genre, specifically philosophy and artistic mimesis, in relation to the problem of interpretation. We might recall the Platonic paradigm of the secondary status of mimesis (narrative fiction) in contrast to the primacy of truth (non-fiction), a paradigm that continues until today. In contrast, Aristotle privileges artistic mimesis above history because tragic poetry (a form of fictional narrative) uncovers essential truths concealed in the phenomenal world, while history reports the particularities of individual lives and past events (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 103). In contrast to Jarry, both Plato and Aristotle privilege one genre or form of discourse as more valid or ‘truthful’ than another. Such an approach to epistemology—by its very nature implying a ‘true’ reality—is incommensurate with Jarry’s epistemology of equivalence, one that rejects universally applicable laws or principles. In this regard, pataphysics challenges the authority of a privileged perspective and fosters suspicion about the assertions of any discipline to provide the facts or the truth of being. We might say then that the narrative-title is suspicious, and perhaps we should be, of the aims and interests of any dominant discourse. I would add that the double movement in the narrative-title between clarity and opacity, denotation and connotation, truth and falsehood opens up the potentiality of thought—a mode of thought beyond the logic of categories and fixed possibilities—that allows thought to engage a singularity that is new in each work.

In this project, reading is not articulated within the conventions of genre or form, instead it turns on the role of affect within an experimental reading—a creativity, a force of life, producing emergent, unforeseen connections between biographical, sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts. The work of Deleuze moves away from a formal definition of literature toward an alternative account of sense (meaning) and literature. He

positions the event of reading at the edge of both words and corporeal things without closure in either side of this dichotomy. The event of sense is not what happens but that which ‘subsists’ or ‘insists’ in what happens: “*the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs*” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 21). Instead, it is the ever-changing *emergence* of sense through language and by way of the actualisation of things. Drawing on this account, ‘meaning’ in the narrative-title is not a matter of comprehending an established form or rhetorical mode, but an active principle of production that occurs in a dynamic interaction between titles and objects, words and things.

Reading a narrative-title involves certain requirements—to acknowledge its unruliness, to respond to its uniqueness, to resist reducing it to the conventions of form or genre even while working with it in relation to these. In seeking to outline the relation between a narrative and a sentence, Barthes analyses the syntax of narrative structure. According to Barthes, narrative is structured in sentence form and any narrative is irreducible to the whole of its sentences. Correspondingly, every sentence is the sketch of a short narrative. Similarly, the narrative-title addresses a specific incident in an individual’s or a community’s life and conveys it in only one or two sentences. In this regard, the narrative-title as a one-sentence-long story functions as an unusual example of Barthes’ structural analysis of narrative—it compresses a story into a sentence. Both the *form* and *content* of the narrative-title interrupts the reader’s habitual expectations and memories of the formal conventions of story. We, as readers, expect some semblance of truth or straightforward intelligibility to emerge in a story’s development and conclusion. Instead, the ambiguity opened up by the narrative-title locates the reader in a threshold experience between the episodic causality of the beginning, middle, and end of a narrative—an affective, transitional state of disorientation.

Chapter Four: The Event-title

In this section, I explore the relevant conceptual terrain for a continuing project called the *Event-title*. *Event-title* takes the form of a juxtaposition of an object and title with a specific focus on the contextual relation of the text to the object. In this project, I use the self-coined term *event-title* to consider the potential immanent within the contextualising title in visual art. This matter is discussed further below, in terms of ‘encounter’ and ‘reading’ as event. Yet, I have to admit that my focus upon the title over the object is an artificial distinction, since each is mutually dependent upon the existence of the other. I have done this in order to explore the role of the viewer in relation to the title, understood as both an art-event and *an act of reading*. The event-title avoids simple and straightforward meaning. In this sense, this project highlights the viewer’s *encounter* with the artwork over recognition, giving the disruptive, unpredictable effect of ‘art viewing’ a central role in its practical work, in a manner that has implications for conventional notions of meaning and time. Overall, together, the title and the object interweave one another, activate one another and are dependent on one another.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Deleuze offers an important resource in the study of the event insofar as it is understood not as a matter of fact but rather as that which subsists or insists in what happens. In this chapter, I seek to build upon the concept of the event of reading; the act of reading at the edge of both words and corporeal things without a finite determination. I explore the philosophical concept of the event through study of both Deleuze and Derrida. Simply put, the concept of the literary event involves an uncertain sense of time that undermines the representation of time in terms of space. Here, the event-title is located in the moment when a failing of recognition occurs due to rupture, a fleeting excess where there is the loss of a familiar experience and discursive paradigms seem insufficient. The singularity of the event-title is based not on our knowledge or understanding through genre specific interpretations, but rather on the inexpressible sense of a process that lacks any conventional meaning or purposiveness.

Derek Attridge's term 'the event of literature,' and therefore the practice of such a reading, are shaped by a conception of reading as involving both act (subjective action) and event ('otherness,' that is, something that happens to a reader) and, by an accompanying ethics of response. To contribute to our understanding of an ethics of response to an artwork as an 'other,' the surrealist object is considered as an irreducible singularity beyond objective knowledge. Here, the artist and critic R. Bruce Elder describes the surrealist object as a 'deferred' object such that it does not properly belong to the present (an uncertain sense of time). Elder confers on the Surrealist object the attributes of what Derrida calls *différance*.



Pearce, L. (2016). *A river stone inside a pillow* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.²²

For Derrida, *différance* rests in part on the notion that the system of language involves a perpetual differing and deferral of meaning. To think in terms of *différance*, it is necessary to think in terms of a measureless temporality beyond chronological time.

²² Note: This artwork is not discussed in the exegesis.

Furthermore, I consider how Derrida's notion of *différance* as an irreducible play of linguistic meaning relates to Jarry's pataphysics as a philosophy based on epistemic relativism. In a simplistic understanding of literary theory, pluralism is often aligned with relativism, that is, the notion that any interpretation is as valid as any other (implying a lack of interpretive principles). However, Derrida denies an absolute pluralism in which no interpretation is superior to any other. Through Derrida's discussion, we are led to think that some interpretations, in their forcefulness, are more convincing than others. Of relevance to the potential interpretive difficulties facing readers of the event-title, Derrida's viewpoint calls for the reader's careful and ethical response to texts. Here, knowledge of an artwork will always remain lacking—calling for caution in any reading. However, this insufficiency should not discourage the reader from responsible reading: a sustained reading of the text beyond the familiar codes and conventions, the cultural structures that shield the reader from disruptive, potentially transformative encounters with otherness.

Both Derrida and Jarry identify a need for critical thought, imaginary solutions and a radical methodology—modes of resistance against the constraints of unquestioned orthodoxies and authorities. However, although Jarry and Derrida employ similar critical strategies, Jarry stops short of expanding on the ethics and practice of textual interpretation. Contrary to Derrida, Jarry seems to promote an inevitable plurality—based on the notion that reality does not exist, except as a multitude of interpretations. Also, in this chapter we consider Derrida's term 'poematic;' this concept forges a comparison between the poem and the hedgehog, a timid animal rolled up into a ball for protection, yet also while crossing the road, exposed to the risk of death. Similarly, Derrida contends that while, on the one hand, the poem seeks to elude interpretation; on the other hand, it must enter critical discourse, exposed to any number of readings. Derrida's term poematic can help us rethink the event-title in its conflictual tendency toward both opacity and readability—such a vulnerability and risk is always structural to the title. As epistemologies, both Derrida and Jarry's literary theories can be viewed as operating in an analogous manner to their equivalents in visual arts. These theories offer different lenses through which to consider the storied object in contemporary visual art.

Furthermore, the uncertain sense of change brought about by the artwork interacting with its outside, a reader in a specific historical-cultural context, might be

considered in terms of previously discussed notions of affect, paratext, and intertextuality. Pataphysically speaking, the event-title, the way that it makes language work differently to disrupt conventional meanings and norms, may be construed as an ‘imaginary solution’ to the problem of the dominant Western dualism of autonomous subjects and objects.²³ Neither title nor object can exist without the other since both are interrelated, a complex entanglement ultimately complicating the received division between text and object, subject and object, reader and writer, and so on. Although the artwork is a physical iteration, the forces that constitute the work are, in fact, more fluid and immaterial. In this sense, the title is twofold—as the linguistic material fabric, but also the idea that forces near and far (and lives and places past and present) are inherent to the social fabric that constitutes the artwork in space and time as encountered and written by the viewer.

Reception as Affective Encounter

My project aims to direct an audience’s attention to their own capacity to sustain an interplay between feeling, thinking and imagining when encountering a work of art. In this regard, artworks rupture habitual ways of thinking and being. Simply put, this chapter uses the philosophical term ‘event’ to think through the relation between the viewer and the artwork as an art-event—the unfolding of affective *encounter*—involving a complication of habitual modes of thought and expression. The affective operations of art are intensive rather than linear: an accumulative excess, a complication of the linear logic of cause and effect. Useful here, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994) defines the term ‘encounter’ thus:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In

²³ Relevant here, Deleuze and Guattari also consider the Western philosophical distinction between subjects and objects as a problem. In *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari argue that Western philosophy is in collusion with the State. Official philosophy invents an illusory State. In his Translator’s Foreword to *A thousand plateaus*, Massumi (1987) explains that, for Deleuze and Guattari, official philosophy is “the discourse of sovereign judgement, of stable subjectivity legislated by ‘good’ sense, of rocklike identity, ‘universal’ truth, and (white male) justice” (p. ix).

whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. (p. 139)

Here, Deleuze makes a distinction between sense and recognition. Deleuze describes the encounter in terms of something that may be named. We might ‘perceive’ a notable philosopher or a demon. However, Deleuze claims that the encounter is somehow irreducible to recognition. For Deleuze, recognition ties an object to its identity. For example, in encountering my artwork *Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Kopua Monastery has lent the hand bell used to call the community together for the midday meal* in an exhibition space, the viewer recognises the form of a brass hand bell. However, simultaneously, she may also sense something outside the identifiable, something not previously experienced. Here, the viewer may become aware of the gaps and irregularities of language and meaning making. Ultimately, viewing requires a delicacy of thought and agility in imaginative projection.



Pearce, L. (2015). *A walking pole points toward Kūmgangsan, North Korea. A walking pole points toward Wolchulsan, South Korea* [Sculpture]. Auckland: RM Gallery.²⁴

Here, meaning is not the product of simple identity thinking (a subject/object relation), but instead involves a mutually transformative relation of forces. We return here

²⁴ Note: This artwork is not discussed in the exegesis.

to our earlier discussion of affect and art encounter to build on the considerations already introduced. To further understand affective encounter, it is important to note that for Deleuze meaning is not fixed and determinant, tidily located in bounded systems of discourse. As we shall see below, meaning is understood as a material process, a dynamic relation of forces. Hence, 'content' is conceived not as something distinct from matter (i.e., as conceptual), but produced by its dynamic, relational force. This notion of meaning allows us to more fully understand the event-title in terms of productive encounter, a meeting of artwork, artist, and viewer, each a porous locus of potential to affect and be affected. Building on Deleuze, in *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Recognition*, Simon O'Sullivan (2006) considers the importance of 'encounter' in relation to recognition for understanding the function of art in everyday life:

An object of encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs, and values are reconfirmed... an object of recognition is then precisely a *representation* of something always already in place. With such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting... is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place. With a genuine encounter... our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disturbed. We are forced to thought. (p. 1).

Therefore, art calls for a creative response to something both unruly and affirmative in challenging established beliefs, values, and understandings. O'Sullivan starts with the insight that what qualifies something to be art has more to do with what it does than what it is, more to do with its role in the world, with the functions it has, than with what it is in itself.

The event-title's complication of signification has an effect comparable to O'Sullivan's discussion of 'objects of encounter' insofar as it disrupts both direct communication and utility as normally understood, and at least momentarily disturbs our habitual mode of thinking and perceiving. I think of the event-titles as potential 'objects of encounter,' interrupting the viewer's expectations and ordinary scope and limits of knowledge, possibly creating a space in which to think life differently. In the context of my project, as the artwork engages and is engaged, the viewer may experience gaps or interruptions within the flow of perceptual coherence and consistency. Put differently, the event-title momentarily ruptures the viewer's experience of the everyday, which is always

historically determined and culturally full. Here, meaning is no longer understood to be *within* the artwork. Instead, meaning emerges from the encounter between viewer, event-title, object, and context. Here, it is worth clarifying what I mean by the term ‘meaning’ in art encounter.

Meaning as Material Processes

In order to gain a deeper insight into what kind of meaning arises in the art encounter, I want to draw attention to the distinction that Massumi, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, makes between ‘material meaning’ and ‘representational meaning’ in relation to the sign. In *A Users Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Massumi (1993) suggests that representational meaning is a mere confirmation of identity, simply denoting “logical properties or sense perceptions” (p. 10). On the contrary, ‘material meaning’ breaks from representational thought, while affirming thinking as a dynamic interrelation of affects and concepts (Massumi, 1993, p. 14). According to Massumi (1993), meaning is “a network of enveloped material processes” (p. 10). Referring to an uncertain sense of temporality, Massumi suggests that meaning also involves a contraction of both past and future, as a potentiality of material things (1993, p. 10). He describes the meeting of wood and the woodworker to explain meaning (the term ‘meaning’ understood as interchangeable with form). Massumi claims that woodworking is a complex of forces. The implication of this is that form is not static, but rather an unstable physical system. Massumi (1993) describes form as a dynamic “interaction between a multiplicity of terms,... an integration of disparate elements. It is a diagram of a process of becoming” (p. 14). For Massumi, this diagram is not understood in terms of a plan determining a future, stable iteration. Although the woodworker has some sense of a material outcome every new encounter (of a piece of wood, tools, and woodworker) produces a different assemblage of forces and velocities. For instance, each piece of wood varies in grain and durability, tools register impacts over time, and a carpenter’s concentration changes periodically. Therefore, human interactions with things involves a dynamic relation between our understanding of things in the world and the contingency of things always involved in unlimited processes of becoming.

In *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, O'Sullivan claims that Massumi's woodworking example is relevant to visual art (O'Sullivan expands Massumi's use of the term 'form' beyond the limits of prosaic carpentry to encompass aesthetic creation). Firstly, this includes the artist's encounter with her materials: "This is a confrontation between a specific artist-subjectivity and specific materials, each of which themselves are already the envelopment of a potential" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 21). Secondly, this encompasses "the 'finished' art work's encounter with a beholder who again is the envelopment of a potential, a set of capacities to affect and be affected" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 21). Furthermore, O'Sullivan (2006) tentatively offers a definition of art itself in respect to this twofold relation of both artist/materials and artwork/beholder:

In fact 'art' might be the name for both of these encounters, a meeting, or collision, between two fields of force, transitory but ultimately transformative. Both of these encounters are precisely moments of production. The encounter, between participant and artwork, is as productive, albeit in a different sense, as that between artist and material. 'Meaning' might then be thought as this productive 'event', this 'moment' of meeting, ungraspable in its moment of occurrence, but real in its effects. Following Massumi we might also use the term 'meaning' as the name for a suspension of this becoming, the 'pinning down' of a dynamic process, a kind of map, or diagram, of a procedure. (pp. 21-22)

Here, O'Sullivan offers two different definitions of 'meaning' within the context of visual art. Firstly, meaning is understood to be a state of continuous variation. We are interested in this redefinition of meaning as no longer being settled—that which is single and authoritative—but dynamic and generative, that which is continuously becoming something other than itself. Meaning in the event-title/participant encounter is not fixed but is a dynamic process of transformation. Secondly, in contrast, O'Sullivan refers to meaning in terms of an interpretation with a static state of being which presumably has assumed a more or less convincing truth-value. In the context of art, interpretation pins down the meaning of an artwork, to record the results of a material process. In comparison, we might recall Genette's definition of the dynamic paratext—in particular, the epitext: which consists of interpretive materials exterior to the work (artist statements, interviews, publicity announcements, reviews, essays by artists and critics). Thus, Genette's definition introduces an instability into any notion of a fixed interpretation. Here, art may be construed as particular conjunctions of meaning and ambiguity or

indeterminacy around each artwork, a *play* of meaning, destabilising the conceptual paradigms we want to attach to an artwork. It is in this context that my project considers art encounter as the potential for meaning. The artwork – as a network of enveloped material processes – is something which can accommodate exchange outside of established systems or calculable outcomes. The viewer is construed as one who negotiates a relationship with the ways in which meaning may emerge through time, and with those passages of time that arouse uncertainty rather than significance.



Pearce, L. (2015). *Five architects sent local newspapers by air mail to the same address* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

As stated, the literary strategies of this project are expressed in how titles and objects interact to produce a disruption of habitual modes of thought. Rather than merely expressing a clear explanation, event-titles seem partial, ambiguous and even recalcitrant, resisting an easy reading, making possible an unlimited number of interpretations. Reading suggests a dynamic, open-ended process of reconfiguration and re-authoring of the world through ideas, imaginings, and discourse. My work *Five architects sent local*

newspapers by air mail to the same address is an example of the event-title. In this work, the title explains that five architects have sent newspapers to the same address (perhaps the artist's residential address). The newspaper artefacts in exhibition suggest the presentation of evidence in support of the title. The newspapers originate from France, Germany, India, Sweden, and the USA and all are dated either 1st or 2nd January 2015. The work results from a specific request, performed by five architects in far-flung parts of the world selected because of their professions and locations. A French architect, an Indian architect, the artist in New Zealand; a title which contracts the past, and the future, are drawn in, conveyed into the material of an artwork for an uncertain purpose. Through the use of linguistic devices, as well as the 'evidentiary' newspapers, the artwork materialises the different durations and different players involved in the creation of the work. Cumulatively, the title opens up a conflict and interplay between the kernel (denotation) of a proposition and a potentiality of affects and ideas beyond the existing order of possibilities.

But how can we understand the operation of this event-title, made up of a conflicting relationship of straightforward meaning and an openness to unlimited meanings? If we can circle back for a moment, Deleuze (1994) states that the primary characteristic of the object of an encounter is that "it can only be sensed" (p. 139). The object of encounter is not an 'object' (an object is recognised, classified, and understood) but rather a play of sensation (preceding knowledge), which causes affective response. Here, we might say that the affective operation of *Five architects sent local newspapers by airmail to the same address* is not a matter of reflection upon the past; instead, it involves the difficult work of a future-oriented, concept creation. Thought reaches its utmost limit when art is the object of an encounter, which, in Deleuze's (2000) formulation in his book *Proust and Signs*, constitutes "the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself" (p. 97). The force of *Five architects sent local newspapers by airmail to the same address* is where creation plays out. In art encounter, thought, instead of involving collective agreement, incapacitates us with subtle force. In this regard, art encounter breaks from institutional methodologies regulating how thinking should be performed in terms of comparable and measurable outcomes.

The event-title construed as an object of encounter stimulates an involuntary exercise of thought, freed from habitual modes of thought. Reading here involves

something like working with and alongside the artwork, as a means to understand how and why the work operates. As Deleuze (2000) claims: “To think is always to interpret—to explicate, to develop, to decipher, to translate a sign. Translating, deciphering, developing are the form of pure creation” (p. 97). In this sense, *Five architects sent local newspapers by air mail to the same address* is less concerned with knowledge (of truth, origins, and essence) and more concerned with exploring the potentialities of a sort of ‘impersonal’ thought within encounter, which is unbound from representation but nonetheless affects and is affected by that (artwork) which it encounters. The title summons places and objects that are dispersed, fragile, furnished with memory, open to affects. There are, perhaps, hints that I am thinking about design, home, shelter and mobility. However, the viewer cannot prescribe a determinate meaning to the artwork. The artwork cannot be fixed in language and can only be alluded to indirectly through language, because it concerns the emergence of thought in a way that displaces all existing knowledge.

Deleuze’s notion of encounter as the genesis of thought suggests capacities of thought that extend beyond established concepts and categories. Here, meaning emerges within a relation of affective forces and implies transformation. This distinction between thought and knowledge is of relevance to previous discussions, especially with regard to viewing as *an act of reading*. Encounter as the genesis of thought yielding different affects and concepts suggests that reality is always provisional and revisable. Similarly, pataphysics suggests that objective reality does not ‘exist,’ but instead forms, reforms and transforms repeatedly depending on an individual perspective. In both ‘philosophies,’ things yield to contingency, paradox and ambiguity, endlessly shuttling between categorisation and the unknown or yet to be known. Pataphysics, Bok (2002) claims, relies upon a conflict and interplay between art, science and philosophy, “playfully conjugating paradoxes in order to make possible an absolute expenditure of thought without any absolute investiture in thought” (p. 10). In this regard, pataphysics models a plurality of heterogeneous processes of thought, where the human aspiration toward concepts and categorisation is shown to be limited and restrictive. Pataphysical artworks encourage experimenting with new ways of thinking, reading, and writing. The potential open-endedness of language and meaning in *Five architects sent local newspapers by air mail to the same address* encourages the agency of audiences against the passive spectatorship often set up by art institutional contexts. Crucially, the title of each work—and the continuous oscillation of descriptive and figurative language embedded in each—

functions as an important mediator between the objects and the viewer, thus alternately revealing and concealing the works' meaning, history and ultimately establishing their singularity (something irreducible to linguistic, historical-cultural, and categorical horizons).

Regarding interpretation in relation to encounter, recall that the event-title involves a dynamic interaction of a physical element (linguistic marks), signs, and meanings and complicates the distinction between denotation and connotation such that no single meaning can be isolated as stable, final, and closed to revision. Importantly, the work encourages unlimited individual response and *production* of meaning—avoiding any implication that descriptive material, title or text is directive or determinate. Here, the viewer grapples with the *function* of the artwork rather than uncovering its core, embedded meaning. Here, it is perhaps useful to recall again the idea of titles as zones of intertextuality, which further highlights the instability of meaning, its indeterminacy and contiguity through the interplay of language, reading, and writing.

My contention that the project's artworks constitute, to a significant degree, a reading practice contributes to critical perspectives on art's use of objects to perform as evidence within domains of research and inquiry. The works in this project reflect on the methods by which art objects are tasked with conveying the descriptions that accompany them. Increasingly, art audiences encounter everyday objects, as writer and curator Aram Moshayedi (2018) puts it, in “a space where language abounds and the act of looking becomes intricately tied to the act of reading” (p. 17). In this sense, objects could be said to have social and cultural lives and, as such, act and have agency.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Cesarco, A. (2000). *Index* [Sculpture]. New York: Guggenheim Museum.

Alejandro Cesarco's *Index* (2000) is useful in opening up discussion on the mediation of the viewer through titling. In a book, an index is a list of names, places, and subjects as well as their relevant page numbers. *Index* is an index for an imaginary book, containing references to European, Latin American, and North American art, architecture, film, literature, and philosophy. The references in *Index* reflect Cesarco's ambitions, influences and interests. In this regard, he uses a tool of scholarly publication design for personal purposes. The work comprises 12 framed digital chromogenic prints. It is wall-mounted in two uniform rows of six and each print measures 20 X 16 inches. (These dimensions are roughly twice the size of a non-fiction book). The design of *Index* is indebted to technical book design in its reductive formal composition and use of neutral, elegant typography. In this regard, it has much in common with language-based Conceptualism that borrows the forms and tools of bureaucracy (e.g., indices, reference publications, and information technologies) for artistic purposes.

In this context, Cesarco's title might be considered a complicating tool of mediation by means of positioning itself between an indexing system of 'real world' utility and an imaginary book suggestive of a future or imaginary world, interrupting the reception of what is encountered, introducing an irreducible ambiguity to the work.

The title *Index* is indicative of an affective paratext: the title and accompanying materials (peritext, epitext) produces a rupture that opens up reception as an affective and conceptual experience. The work itself explores reception, the boundary between writing and reading. Reading is posited as a generative, productive act; the work solicits readers to write a text. Interpretation represents the possibility of establishing an intimate relationship with a text. This is an index for a book that has not been written and probably never will be. The structure of the work suggests a certain narrative, tangential or alluded to, which has to do with how we find connections. Pataphysically speaking, *Index* exists in the imagination as much as in reality. It suggests by turns an actual reality, then an imaginary reality or its possibility, and the work we encounter is located somewhere on an unstable border between the two.

The works in this project constitute a number of objects; presented in ways that offer modes of response that, on the one hand refer to an everyday functional utility, while on the other hand suggesting other, possibly symbolic, utilities. One response returns the spectator to what they know, while the other requires the spectator's imaginative projection. It is this tension between recognition and uncertainty that ensures that reading is a continuous process. Relevant here is pataphysics, for it suggests that the dominant narrative about reality is only one of an unlimited number of imaginary solutions. In *'Pataphysics: Poetics of an Imaginative Science*, Christian Bok (2002) observes that:

Jarry suggests through 'pataphysics that reality does not exist, except as the interpretive projection of a phenomenal perspective—which is to say that reality is never *as it is* but always *as if it is*. Reality... is more virtual than actual; it is real only to the degree to which it can seem to be real and only for so long as it can be made to stay real. (p. 8)

Pataphysically speaking, the viewer's 'interpretation' or, more accurately, *experimentation* explains or envisages, in Jarry's (1911/1996) words, "the universe supplementary to... the traditional one" (p. 21-22). In exhibition contexts, the project aims to install the work in a way that is non-declarative, but which highlights the question of how we choose to live?—that is, how perception involves decision-making. Here, the work highlights spectator's own tendencies and responsibilities in choosing between instrumental perception (ordinary identification) and imaginative perception (how the encounter could become

extraordinary). In this respect, the work aims to invoke the role of individual intention and perception.

In what follows, I have attempted to develop a notion of the event-title. I wanted to consider by means of this term an event or *experiential encounter* unique to works of art and to the spectator, an encounter that confirms its value. The event-title is not an object containing a meaning but an experience with duration that unfolds in the viewer's perceptual relation to the work. In this respect, the event has permeable, extensible and deformable boundaries; its intensity characterised by the dynamics of interaction and change. Artworks have a tendency toward 'crisis,' in their presentation lies the potential for rupture and entanglement: a charged, dynamic, and ambiguous *liminality* that forces a change in one's preconceptions and habits as well as the fluid, inherently unstable but also generative activity of linguistic invention. Developing this inquiry set in motion a series of questions: if a work is not simply a set of properties but an event—involving a complex temporal structure—then how might we contextualise the work? What role does audience reception play in the 'creation' of the work? Can we identify and explain the work in a fluid and ever-changing interaction between language, object, cultural formations, reader, and author? Barthes theorises a reader who actively responds to the text by participating in the process of meaning making, rather than a reader who non-reflectively consumes literary works (Barthes, 1977b, pp. 155-164). Such literary creativity opens new possibilities for the reader (of thinking, feeling and imagining) as well as the text.

Reading With or Beyond Meaning



Pearce, L. (2016). Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Kopua Monastery has lent the hand bell used to call the community together for the midday meal [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

My artwork *Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Kopua Monastery has lent the hand bell used to call the community together for the midday meal* provides an example of the title as an event of literature. The viewer sees a handheld brass bell on the floor, almost but not quite, touching the wall. It is a visually attractive bell with a black painted wooden handle and a small hollow cup. The title purports that the bell has been borrowed from Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Southern Star Abby, a Benedictine-Cistercian Order in Central Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. Normally, a monk rings the bell to summon the community to stop their activities, and assemble for lunch in either the refectory or Guesthouse. For some viewers, the loan of the bell might raise questions concerning what arrangements the community has made in its absence. Alternatively, some may ponder the deepening of silence in a place no longer concerned with the chattering of men but the currents of silence.

The title above may be understood to foreground thinking on the difficulties of reading, how it might mediate between ideas/concepts and what is unthought. While the title might produce numerous interpretations, it can be traced back to neither an original meaning nor an authorial intention. The title might suggest notions of trust, the other, contract, sustenance, individuality and fraternity, diurnal time and sacred time and so on. Given the open-endedness of meaning, the question arises as to how we know if we are reading well, or what role interpretation plays in relation to the event-title. Within and through this tension between identification and something strange, this experience of language, the title leads the reader towards two contradictory demands. Firstly, to interpret or comprehend the work's ambiguity, to follow conventional models of interpretation of art and literature. Secondly, to address the inventiveness of the work—its irreducible ungovernability—to recognise that interpretive efforts and reference to social, cultural, and historical contexts might disclose certain features of the title but will never settle in a conclusive set of meanings or satisfy its call to an encounter with otherness (an opaque version of the familiar). Within an art encounter, sometimes the intensity of unlimited potentiality can—particularly if one is a committed viewer—become a little overwhelming. In this case, it is a reader's open, agile, and patient engagement that often proves to be the most stimulating and rewarding. Therefore, in the following section of this study, we shall explore the conflicting and transformative nature of reading, in which one is overcome by otherness, which far from confirming an existing status quo, instead has the potential effect of exposing the viewer to ways of thinking, feeling, and imagining that have hitherto been impossible within the conventional limits of knowledge.

How Does One Read Ethically?

In the context of how we encounter literary works, Derek Attridge draws upon Derrida's philosophy (Attridge, 2004, p. xx) to develop a concept of the event of literature (and art more broadly) (Attridge, 2004, pp. 2-4). In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge (2004) argues that literary creation is a unique mode of contact in which the author, who is situated in culture-specific understanding and practices, encounters 'otherness' and is required to counter the "mind's inclination toward repetition, its tendency to process any novelty it encounters in terms of the familiar" (p. 18). For Attridge, this otherness is an

opaque version of the familiar, something previously unthought and irreducibly different from human experience (2004, p. 22, 76). Following this, the ‘otherness’ of a literary work might enter and alter the cultural field (Attridge, 2004, p. 80). Literature, according to Attridge (2004), is

a handling of language whereby something we might call ‘otherness,’ or ‘alterity,’ or ‘the other,’ is made, or allowed, to impact upon the existing configurations of an individual’s mental world—which is to say, upon a particular cultural field as it is embodied in a single subjectivity (p. 26).

In this process, the writer surrenders intellectual mastery in her encounter with otherness. Therefore, writing can be considered as an “act-event”: both an act and an event. Otherness acts upon the writer. It is something that she can neither anticipate nor recognise, an event requiring a change of habitual modes of thought. Attridge (2004) remarks that:

Otherness exists only in the registering of that which resists my usual modes of understanding, and that moment of registering alterity is a moment in which I simultaneously acknowledge my failure to comprehend and find my procedures of comprehension beginning to change. (p. 27)

Similarly, a literary text exposes readers to this otherness. Like writing, Attridge (2004) claims, reading is “both something that is done intentionally by an effort of the will and something that happens without warning to a passive, though alert, consciousness” (p. 26). Creation and reception are coextensive. The compound noun ‘act-event’ of reading signals a process exterior to an active/passive dualism. However, there is no guarantee that otherness will emerge or even, that when it does, it will be consciously registered (Attridge, 2004, p. 118, 121). Such a risky and attentive reading involves an ethical responsibility, a willingness to affirm and sustain otherness or irreducible difference, “that which is coming into being.” (Attridge, 2004, p. 172). Here, the reader is solicited to suspend the desire to relate the unidentified to her “idioculture,” that is, “her particular incorporation of the cultural frameworks... she inhabits” (Attridge, 2004, p. 66).

Throughout our discussion we have noted that Attridge’s term ‘the event of literature,’ and therefore the practice of such a reading, are shaped by a conception of

reading as involving both act (subjective action) and event ('otherness,' that is, something that happens to a reader) and, by accompanying conceptions of openness and transformation. Importantly, Attridge (2004b) explains that otherness is not a prior and independent "ineffable" being but instead "arises from the possibilities and impossibilities inherent in the culture as embodied in the subject or group of subjects" (p. 40). Here, my title *Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Kopua Monastery has lent the hand bell used to call the community together for the midday meal* could be said to complicate the viewer's assumptions in relation to the encounter of the work. This work discloses 'unspoken' moments, the 'hidden life' of monastics as existing but being marginalised in the prevailing culture, and presents them while maintaining their indeterminacy. Here, the title is deployed to open up the possibilities and impossibilities inherent in the culture, one of which is the concept of God, useful at least partially but limited by a sense of its insufficiency (an inadequacy intrinsic to language).

In this way, the title opens up the zone between the sayable and the inarticulable and—most important—strives to make that space substantial and felt. Furthermore, Attridge (2004b) claims that the reader's receptivity to otherness, "a readiness to have one's purposes reshaped by the work to which one is responding" generates "large cultural shifts..., as the inventiveness of a particular work is registered by more and more participants in a particular field" (p. 40). Similarly, Deleuze's notion of the object of encounter is not characterised by being and identity but experimentation with processes of becoming. Recall again that following Deleuze, in the context of art, O'Sullivan (2006) explains that: "With a genuine encounter... our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disturbed. We are forced to thought" (p. 1). Both Derrida and Deleuze consider literature as a conduit of differential forces (independent of both subject and object), as that which produces subjective refashionings rather than reconfirming identity and presence.

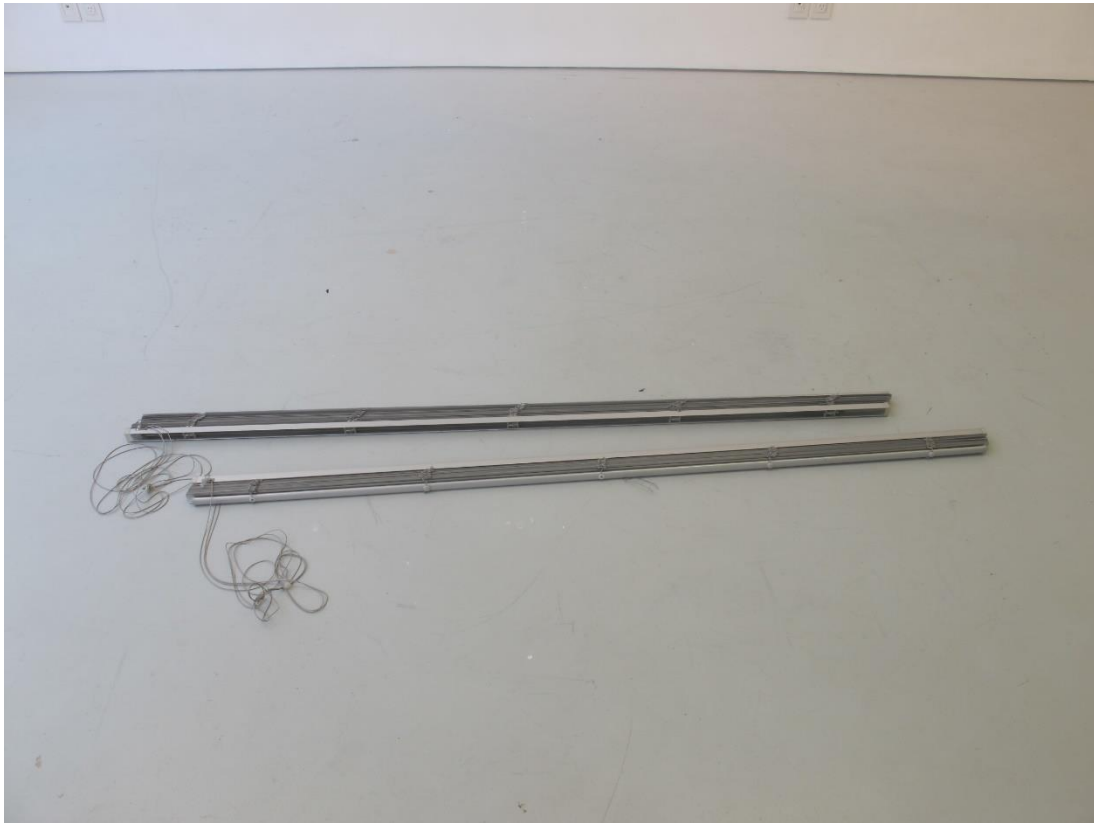
Faced with the moments of the elusive 'otherness,' how might the viewer proceed in an uncomfortable and unsettling reading? In *Reading Blindly: Literature, Otherness, and the Possibility of an Ethical Reading* (2009), Jeremy Fernando compares reading with the gambler's bluff, because to gamble is to both bluff *others* and also bluff *oneself*. Fernando (2009) explains:

A reader must posit, take a position, for that is the only way in which she can continue reading: in other words, she must choose a possibility. Not only must she bluff the text (she posits one reading only to be able to continue reading), but she must also bluff herself (if she does this with full self-reflexivity, there is no way to continue reading; in this sense, she must read *as if* there were only one possibility) in order that the reading—this negotiated game—can continue.... The moment the fact that she is only positing—or hypothesising a possibility—comes to the fore, reading itself also collapses: one cannot go on reading if one is continually reflecting on the fact that one is only positing, one is only *bluffing*. (p. 138).

To read, to risk all for its sake, is to fully commit to one interpretation for a moment. Only after taking a position can the reader return to exploring different possible interpretations. Similarly, in order to engage with an artwork, one must take a position, but one understands that any single interpretation is a trigger point for other new interpretations. In the act-event of reading, the event-title is continuously shifting, fluctuating, being reauthored. This notion suggests that a single, exhaustive explanation of the ethics of reading is untenable—every explanation would only suit a fleeting moment, a particular reading.

It is in this context that my project considers the ‘act-event’ of the event-title, referencing Attridge’s concept of the singularity of literature in the context of *reading* the title in visual art. Attridge’s (2004b) theorisation of the otherness of literature refers to “all kinds of text, not only those traditionally conceived as literary” (p. 113). Additionally, similarly to Attridge, Derrida explores what occurs when an artwork is encountered, in particular, the kinds of processes it sets off. These conceptualisations of the event of art contribute to the complexity of how art, including the act-event of writing and reading, has the capacity to engender change in viewers’ attitudes and capacities (of feeling, thinking, and imagining). Attridge sets forth a notion of ‘creative reading’ whereby *each* reading is necessarily complex and unique because both the work’s and the reader’s cultural fields are internally fractured and, to some extent, inaccessible (2004b, p. 117). I am fascinated by the idea that each work is an event both for its reader, and for myself, and that the reader performs or ‘writes’ the work into existence, differently in each reading, into the present in an accumulative manner.

Humour and Proliferating Legibility



Pearce, L. (2017). *Venetian blinds from an optometrist's office* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

An example of my interest in the potential of language, *Venetian blinds from an optometrist's office* offers a succinctly described situation for consideration—a work that inevitably stimulates a range of interpretations. In time, the title activates the contextual production of visual and linguistic meaning through a pun. In this work, a pair of tightly drawn, grey Venetian blinds lie tidily on the floor. What is noteworthy in the title is that *blind* folds more than one meaning into a word. The term ‘venetian blinds’ is the plural form of ‘venetian blind’: “A window blind consisting of horizontal slats which can be pivoted to control the amount of light that passes through it” (“Venetian blind,” n.d.). In the context of the optometrist’s office, *blind* may be seen to relate complexly to the different meanings of “a window covering” (n.), “sightless” (adj.), “something that obstructs vision” (n.), and “to make obscure or dark” (v.) In addition, *blind*, in its Old English sense, means “destitute of sight,” also “enveloped in darkness,” “unintelligent,” “confused,” and “to make cloudy, deceive” (“Blind,” n. d.).

In the title, the term ‘blinds’ may be understood as a pun. The title is a vehicle that allows the viewer to discover, within a given cultural context, the potentialities of literature. Puns are multi-referential and hence produce an instability and fluidity of meaning. They represent a playfully purposive release from conventional thought and suspend a stable, determinate meaning. Recalling again Massumi’s (1993) description of meaning as “a network of enveloped material processes,” it is implied that form is not static, but rather an unstable material system (p. 10). What is more, Massumi (1993) describes form/meaning as a dynamic “interaction between a multiplicity of terms,... an integration of disparate elements. It is a diagram of a process of becoming” (p. 14). Relatedly, the punning in *Venetian blinds from an optometrist’s office* generates relations of piled, apposable meanings, joining disparate words or concepts, and grants them a new, creative function. In this context, we recall that the term ‘art encounter’ does not refer to a matter of fact, but indicates an uncertain sense of temporality that affects the knowable present. Therefore, *Venetian blinds...* directs the reader’s attention to their own receptivity and capacity to support an interaction between feeling, thinking and imagining. Here again, Massumi’s description of meaning as an encounter between material forces transforms the notion of the viewer. Rather than the viewer who considers, the viewer is produced through art encounter. Art encounter encourages individual openness to change and temporality: a formulation and reformulation of affective and conceptual experience within an act-event of reading—avoiding any determination of final, shared meaning.

An Invitation not to Comprehension but to Participation

This is where Attridge once again becomes relevant. According to Attridge, it is the operations and inventiveness of language that makes literary works into literary events, events that occur as acts of reading. In a committed and attentive reading, says Attridge (2004b), something *happens* to the reader:

The predilections and conventions by means of which most events of comprehension occur are challenged and recast, not merely as automatic extensions but as invitations to alterity, and thus to modes of mental processing, ideas and emotions, or conceptual possibilities that had hitherto been impossible—impossible because the status quo

(cognitive, affective, ethical) depended on their exclusion.... This is what a literary work “is”: an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or act-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text. (p. 84-85)

Here, Attridge claims that literature offers expanded possibilities for thought and imagination, including (importantly) the possibility of something impossible—hitherto unforeseeable—within thought. In the context of this project, the event-title might open the viewer to conceptual and imaginative possibilities concerning actions and decisions. It might be understood to open the possibility of passage between self and ‘otherness.’ For Attridge, an event of reading is twofold: it is both comprehension of a potentially readable text and a practice of welcoming the other that breaches the limits of pre-existing knowledge or contexts. Attridge (2004b) claims that:

The coming into being of the wholly new requires some relinquishment of intellectual control, and ‘the other’ is a possible name for that to which control is ceded.... [W]hen I encounter alterity, I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other. (pp. 32-33)

According to Attridge, the reader’s responsibility is not limited to consideration of otherness but an active engagement with it that transforms the reader, experienced in an indefinite perception of something previously unthought or unwritten. In the context of art, the viewer (reader) recognises that the search for an unequivocal interpretation of the artwork is illusory. The viewer acknowledges the artwork’s ongoing irreducibility outside of a transformed subjectivity, allowing a multiplicity of future engagements with the work. The effect of linguistic inventiveness, Attridge (2004b) claims, “produces not an interpretation but something like an experience of meaning *in process*, of ‘meaning’ understood as a participle of the verb ‘to mean’ rather than as a noun—as the experience of an event, in short” (pp. 83-84). The event-title relies upon the reader’s participation in forms of affective and conceptual experience. In this regard, the inventiveness of language in visual art might provoke us out of our habitual ways of knowing and open us to the production of new subjectivity. Next, I turn again to Marcel Duchamp, a pioneer of an explicitly affective and conceptual use of objects and language. Through jokes, wit, and subversive humour (an ‘othering’ through objects and language), Duchamp’s works force us out ordinary experience and comprehension and into the event of the work of art.

As a historical precedent, in *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (1998), Dalia Judovitz argues that the legibility of Marcel Duchamp's readymades relies not merely on their visual aspects but on their linguistic properties, since their titles include puns and linguistic associations. As readymades become legible as puns, Judovitz (1998) explains, they enable the viewer "to discover mechanically the creative potential of language" (p. 10). It is here that Judovitz is in accord with Attridge's fundamental contention: that language involves immanent relations; it is less the product of individual intention than a potentiality subsisting in visual and linguistic relations. The readability of puns in art depends less on the viewer's creativity than on her ability to reproduce the puns by understanding their meanings. However, artworks do not reveal themselves for straightforward interpretation; these puns and jokes invite play and an excess of meanings. Here, Judovitz (1998) provides an excellent summary: "Unfolding Duchamp's readymades as three-dimensional puns requires concerted attention to the interplay of language and image, as each system of reference intervenes to generate or undermine the production of meaning" (p. 11). Here, Judovitz presents a perspective on artworks that does not rigidly separate objects and language, but insists on an enmeshment of both. Following Judovitz, this project maintains that the creative potential of *Venetian blinds from an optometrist's office* is not an intrinsic property of either the title or the object, but emerges from the relation between object and language. Judovitz's conception of proliferating humorous legibility might also be applied to my artwork *Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest)*. In this work, there is an affective and conceptual interplay between title and object. I will explore that relationship, and in doing so, further complicate the apparently rigid distinction between language and objects.

Representation and Its Criticism



Pearce, L. (2015). *Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest)* [Sculpture]. Auckland: RM Gallery.

The sculpture seen above consists of three upright letterbox numerals fastened together to a wall. The numerals are ordered from front to back: 7, 3, 8. The title reads: *Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest)*. The work can be construed as a wry confusion of the Platonic distinction between immaterial and unchangeable mathematical objects (e.g., numbers) and material objects (e.g., letterbox numerals). More broadly speaking, the work may be understood in terms of the semiotic theory of reference, in which a sign (e.g., numeral) signifies its referent. In this artwork, the letterbox numerals seem to function as *both* sign *and* referent. Each letterbox numeral ‘signifies’ both an immaterial number (concept) and its own materiality (the title refers to each letterbox numeral’s status as referent). The titling of the artwork focuses awareness

on the letterbox numerals as a set of individual material objects, each with its own surface, volume, weight and contour. Humour may be attributed to the artwork's treatment of each numeral as though it were merely an object, that is, like any other thingly object, such as apples, peaches or a sack of coal. Here is where this work differs from my previously discussed works. Yet, each letterbox numeral is also a *numeral*. A numeral is a *sign* or symbol. A sign is something that 'substitutes for' or re-presents something else. A numeral (e.g., seven (word), 7 (Arabic)) is a sign or symbol that stands for a number. A number is an idea or abstract object, a numeral is how we represent or express it. Simply put, according to Platonism, a number is different from an apple or a peach because it is not a material object; numbers exist independently of our thoughts but also do not exist in space and time. There is a sense in which, just as Duchamp's three-dimensional puns playfully subverts the conventions of language, *Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest)* rather drolly complicates the traditional structure of reference, based upon the notion that there are objects and the words which designate them.

At this point, I would like to highlight the contribution of poststructuralism and pataphysics (distinct and yet overlapping theories of knowledge and language) to my discussion of the location of my work in the contemporary art context. I propose that these literary theories offer related perspectives on the limitations of traditional theories of language (including structuralism) as well as relevant ways to theorise contemporary art. Both poststructuralism and pataphysics offer critiques of the notion of traditional referentiality (an individual text or artwork with a proper meaning), undermining assumptions about the ways in which people write and read works of art. Simply put, both literary theories deny the possibility of straightforward and definitive interpretation, the relation between an artwork and its meaning is never fully resolved. Instead, they both propose that every literary work is fundamentally ambiguous in the sense that it is performed in the connections and conflicts between different authorial voices. Every work of art is a contested site in so far as it communicates what cannot be understood without acknowledging the concealments and contextualisations of meaning occurring at the same time to inform the work's significance. Both poststructuralism and pataphysics challenge any single and authoritative understanding of my work and offers an account of my thinking on the operation of my artworks—as fundamentally irresolvable and ambiguous 'producers' of meaning and knowledge. Similarly, in a poststructuralist/pataphysical

reading, I propose that contemporary artworks, both historical and more recent, acquire the instability and ambiguity inherent in language, as discussed below.

In these examples of event-titles, a question arises. How do we remain open and involved in the affectivity of the artwork? How do we remain open even in the midst of explicitly ‘conceptual’ artworks, ones that seem to suppress affect in favour of an aesthetically neutral, systematic modelling of the conditions of representation? Whereas Duchamp’s three-dimensional puns engender feeling and affect, by playfully disrupting direct referentiality, this is not necessarily the case for other works that address representation. For example, in the case of Joseph Kosuth’s famous *One and Three Chairs* (1965), what might one do to overcome a canonical, prescriptive understanding of conceptual art as mainly concerned with the *idea* of an artwork and instead experience the work’s ‘otherness’ or affects? Is it possible, as Massumi, informed in part by the poststructuralism of Deleuze and Guattari, (1993) might say, to engage the form/meaning of *One and Three Chairs* as a dynamic “interaction between a multiplicity of terms,... an integration of disparate elements.... a diagram of a process of becoming” (p. 14). As previously stated, both poststructuralism and pataphysics offer a way to think through conceptual artworks, such as *One and Three Chairs*. Such a participation with an artwork occurs beyond prescriptive descriptions of works of art as merely illustrations of systems as they occur in society. Instead, my discussion of poststructuralism and pataphysics is an effort at recouping the force and irresolvable ambiguity within the title. My practice as research explores both the title and the viewer not as fixed categories but as active processes of becoming and considers the way that the viewer is constantly activated within and through language, experience, and thinking. By researching poststructuralism and pataphysics, both with an interest in disrupting sense and rationality and privileging unexpected connections, my practice as research highlights the relationship between the operation of the title and reading and a critical field of speculative thought. It also seeks to establish that engaging the title functions not only as a mode of understanding and recognition, but also as an appeal to action and feeling. My exegesis proposes that creative modes of knowing – though central to contemporary art understood as a field – are also necessary to overcoming the subjective boundaries of language and selfhood in the hopes of participating in the unknown. To return to *One and Three Chairs*, Kosuth exemplifies an artist who ascribed meaning to his artworks. In addition, another example of art as illustrative of a system is ‘institutional critique,’ an art practice that critically considers its

own exhibition in art galleries and museums and on the concept and purpose of art itself. Here, I propose that my discussion of poststructuralism and pataphysics in relation to the art title as a work of literature offers a new way to consider how works of art enable creative production of new and open-ended realities and meaning.

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Kosuth, J. (1965). *One and Three Chairs*. [Installation] New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art.

Made in the early stages of Anglo-American Conceptual art, Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) seemingly focuses an audience on the operations of language and reference. *One and Three Chairs* comprises a physical chair, a 1:1 scale photograph of that chair, and an enlarged dictionary definition of the term 'chair'. In this regard, the work presents three expressions of a chair: an actual physical chair, the linguistic sign of a chair, and a photographic image of the physical chair. On the level of mainstream accounts, for most conceptual artists, art is valuable in terms of the understanding or knowledge that artworks may engender (Zepke, 2017, pp. 239-240). Kosuth attempted to show that the importance of art is not located in visual or physical qualities but rather in the idea or concept of the work (specifically what art might say about the nature of art). In his 1969 essay *Art After Philosophy*, Kosuth (1969/1999) writes, "all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually" (p. 164). Kosuth's work poses the question of what constitutes a chair—a material object, a discrete photographic image,

or a linguistic sign? Additionally, the title *One and Three Chairs* suggests Plato's theory of Ideas; exploring how we understand the categories of reality and appearance. However, if a conceptual artwork's value is limited to its conceptuality, what is the significance of eventness or an 'otherness' in the reception of such works? Is it not possible to discover all one needs to know about a conceptual artwork simply by reading about it?

In his essay *The Animist Readymade: Towards a Vital Materialism of Conceptual Art* (2017), Stephen Zepke attends to this concern, using Guattari's philosophy in theorising a concept of conceptual artworks as bodies of sensation—according to Guattari—which unfold in art encounter where existing forms are de-categorised (deterritorialised) producing new, hitherto unknown, associations. In his essay, Zepke (2017) discusses Deleuze and Guattari's conception of Duchamp's readymade as an “expressive animal territory” existing outside subjective and objective categories, a claim which breaks from the mainstream art theoretical understanding that “concepts determine an object to be art in Duchamp” (p. 235-240). Zepke's argument is relevant to my discussion as Duchamp's readymade is considered as the forerunner of conceptual artistic practices. Zepke uses Guattari's discussion of Duchamp's *Bottlerack* as a way of understanding the readymade as not only an expression of its milieu but the milieu's simultaneous reauthoring, a sort of world creation through connotation. Zepke (2017) quotes Guattari's book *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*:

[The *Bottlerack*] functions as the trigger for a Constellation of universes of reference that set off intimate reminiscences—the cellar of a house, a certain winter, beams of light on the spiderwebs, adolescent solitude—as much as it does connotations of a cultural and economic order—the epoch in which bottles were still washed using a bottle brush.... (Guattari, 2013, as cited in Zepke, 2017, p. 246)

Here, *Bottlerack* operates twofold, firstly, contracting a personal and immediate network of sensory affects (winter, a play of light, solitude) that produces a singular and intimate experience. This existential affect expands outwards, in arousing involuntary memories and other cognitive processes, engendering “innumerable sentimental, mythical, historical and social references” (Guattari, 2013, cited in Zepke, 2017, p. 246).

In addition, Zepke explains that the boundlessness of heterogeneous durations produced by the readymade exceeds the form-content distinction underlying linguistic

representational schema, because form is no longer the expression of content but is constructed by it (Zepke, 2017, p. 247). Zepke quotes Guattari's *Chaosmosis, An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*:

'Content' is thereby understood not as something separate from matter (i.e., as conceptual), but produced by its dynamic flux and vital force. On the one hand the readymade is a process of 'existential grasping' that appropriates material in such a way as to make it open and expressive, giving it a virtual complexity of chaotic proportions, while on the other it develops this complexity within a subjectivation that 'decelerates'... and actualizes virtual complexity in an aesthetic sensation. (Guattari, 1995, cited in Zepke, 2017, p. 247)

Here, the readymade becomes a concentration of forces, a catalyst for an interplay of concepts and affect. So conceived, the event of a 'conceptual artwork' such as *One and Three Chairs* may create an open, affective and discursive readerly experience opposite the homogeneity of art history accounts. In Zepke's summary, the 'expressed' of a readymade (and, by implication, conceptual artworks) is not a matter of signification. It is a process involving a virtual or incorporeal transformation. In other words, the artwork is twofold: it involves what Deleuze calls the virtual, in relation to the actual here and now. In *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Deleuze explains that the virtual is a reality distinguished from the actual:

The virtual is fully real... 'Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract'; and symbolic without being fictional. Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object — as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension." (pp. 208-209)

Each object comprises a virtual and an actual dimension. The actual dimension of an object is available to recognition. The virtual dimension, although real, is imperceptible. Likewise, the previously discussed Deleuzian concept of sense is positioned within the virtual. Simply put, 'sense,' in dynamic tension with the actual, perpetually disrupts the actual (reality). Here, meaning cannot be adequately defined through words. In this sense, the readymade engenders affects ('virtual complexity'), particularly in terms of how the viewer forms a relationship with it. In this regard, Zepke's claim that 'content' involves a dynamic flux of matter (the 'artwork') is resonant with, as previously discussed,

Massumi's (1993) formulation that 'meaning' is "a network of enveloped material processes" (p. 10). Here, forms are not autonomous but bear affects—actual properties connected with the suggestive force of the virtual. We might say then that *One and Three Chairs*, and 'conceptual artworks' more broadly conceived, give a body to virtual affects, forming an uncommon encounter of new associations, involving materials no longer bounded and fixed. Here, 'reading' requires an openness to being moved, to be set in motion by imperceptible affects. Reading an artwork is not a matter of interpretation but of connection with forces external to the work. The connections to particular forces determine the meaning of an artwork in a particular place and time.

The Inventiveness of Literature and its Undecidable Temporality

Image removed due to copyright considerations.

Rosencrantz, P. (2007). *I almost forgot that ASICS means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano* [Sculpture]. Birsfelden, Switzerland: Salts Gallery.

Pamela Rosencrantz's work, *I almost forgot that ASICS means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano*, 2007, comprises a pair of running shoes half filled with a pale tan or 'skin tone' resin, transforming this footwear into unnatural sculptures. The title refers to the ASICS sportswear company's Latin slogan, 'A healthy soul in a healthy body.' The art critic Aoife Rosenmeyer has commented that Rosencrantz's use of resin makes the shoes unusable, suggesting uncertainty about the sportswear company's promotion of physical

and spiritual well-being through physical exercise. (Rosenmeyer, 2015). Replacing any expectation of upright human embodiment (which shoes might suggest) are resin cast forms; the hue of the fleshy, waxen resin is familiar, but the general effect is unsettling (Rosenmeyer, 2015). Here, Rosenmeyer articulates the rather disconcerting sense of an art encounter with mysterious material agencies that undermine even our most advanced ways of understanding. Concerning her practice more broadly, Rosencrantz often produces work that fuses lifestyle commodities with unlikely materials, resulting in uncanny associations.

This is an unusually personal type of title—since the first-person title implies the presence of both speaker and interlocutor—imitating ordinary conversation. Conventionally speaking, the inclusion of an “I” suggests the subjective experience of the speaker, that the artist and speaker are one, and that the reader accepts this. Here, the nature of the utterance presented in the title and our position as readers of the title is reconceived: *I am speaking to the reader*. However, outside convention, Rosencrantz’s authorial position in the title remains unclear; the title is not especially personal. As author, Rosencrantz’s utterance seems to be general, consistent with its formal, informational conclusion. More commonly, artists avoid first-person titles. Rosencrantz’s use of the expression “*I almost forgot that...*” imitates a spontaneous comment, informally phrased, provoked by an instantly remembered piece of information it records in a snippet of speech (“*ASICS means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano*”). Overall, however, this stylistic device produces a sense of contrivance (as a recorded immediate spoken utterance); the title is the result of a long development, consciously and carefully shaped by the artist.

Rosencrantz’s shift from anonymity to an identity (the nominative pronoun “I”) in “*I almost forgot that...*” imitates a colloquial and immediate form of speech, whereas “*ASICS means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano*” conveys a more formal informational sense. This juxtaposition of the ‘intimate-personal’ with the ‘formal-objective’ produces an effect; a particular and inventive shaping of language is felt and contributes to the title’s effectiveness (as mentioned above in my discussion of Attridge on the inventiveness of literature). An effectiveness based less on its informational utility than on its staging of an ambiguous personal utterance (what exactly is the title’s relation to the object?). The ambiguity of the juxtaposition functions to draw in the viewer, so she can interpret the complex style and content of the title as juxtaposed against the pair of shoes. The title and

object continuously shift the viewer between any familiarity and estrangement from the work that she may experience. By comparison,

In attempting to clarify what happens in the viewing of this artwork (and, more broadly, the event-title), I shall refer back to Attridge's idea that the inventiveness of a literary text influences an individual's experience of time. The inventiveness of the text, Attridge (2004b) claims, is the "quality of innovation which is directly sensed in the present" (p. 64). Here, the reader experiences inventiveness as an ever more intensive effect in the present, displacing the reader's ordinary sense of being-in-the-moment. As mentioned earlier, I proposed that the encounter of the event-title implicates the reader within a complex temporal relation; it might produce an interior process of temporal indeterminacy. In discussing the act-event of reading (undermining the rigid distinction between act/event, active/passive), Attridge (2004b) describes the unpredictability of reading, its simultaneous awareness of the past and openness to the future:

The undecidability between act and event that characterizes invention maps onto the temporal undecidability of reading writing: in so far as it is an act, reading responds to the *written*, performing interpretative procedures upon it (which include an awareness of the historical act carried out by an author); in so far as it is an event, reading is performed by the *writing*—indeed, it might be said that it is what the writing writes. (p. 146)

Attridge's notion of a conflated 'reading-writing' points to *response* as a form of *creation* occurring within a permeable, indeterminate boundary between past, present and future (2004b, p. 64, 146, 153). This permeability is based on the reader's ability to more or less make sense of the work in relation to the past and on her ability to sustain an openness to as yet unknown possibilities (implicit in future-directed acts of creation) (p. 35, 153). For Attridge (2004b), the effects of literature "depend not on the experience of real-time unfolding but on linearity, sequentiality and relations between words and between syntactic and semantic units" (p. 102). Here, in contrast with a chronological notion of time, Attridge (2004b) hints at an indivisible temporality, stating: "Prose literature presents particular words in a particular order, but not words occurring in a controlled experience of time" (p. 102). Here, the inventiveness of language inheres within syntax, transforming the reader's ordinary experience of linear time.

As mentioned, the title of Rosencrantz's *I almost forgot that ASICS means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano* is legible and yet also produces intensive moments of complexity, of familiarising and defamiliarising processes in its literary effects (through the previously discussed uncertain relation between words and phrases). Through the gaps and ellipses of the title, the reader may feel dispersed within nonlinear spatio-temporality. We have already seen Attridge explain that the emergence of the "wholly new" or "the other" requires some abandonment of intellectual mastery which, for the reader, involves an encounter not with the other but the transformation of the self that brings the other, transformed, into being (2004b, pp. 32-33). In this regard, the artwork invites a reading that is patient and attentive to disruptive and destabilising processes, a reading as a sort of performance, a setting-in-motion that necessitates both active participation and a relinquishment, an openness and welcoming of 'otherness.'

The Surrealist Object

Crucially, the title operates in relation to a pair of sneakers imbued with human qualities through a waxy, flesh toned resin, thus making them uncomfortably strange. This strange humanisation means that the shoes appear simultaneously inert yet somehow lively. Consequently, the work transforms items traditionally associated with athleticism and fashion into an unsettling sculpture, in a manner similar to the Surrealist object. Like Surrealism, this 'part-human' object raises questions about the human unconscious that desired objects stimulate. In this regard, the pair of shoes' function can be considered as a further displacement (alongside the displacement that the title activates) of impersonal clock time. In *DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect* (2013), artist and critic R. Bruce Elder describes the surrealist object as a 'deferred' object such that it does not properly belong to the present. The Surrealist object, Elder (2013) claims:

...is a spatial object, yet its presence, because it exceeds all concepts, is nowhere. It is both an object in space and an object whose be-ing exceeds spatial location. In its later aspect, its be-ing resembles that of a representation: like a representation, its be-ing is deferred—in order to apprehend it, a subject must refer the object to a concept or a sign. This deferral

dislodges the object from its spatial immediacy and relocates it in another place, a scene of absence. (p. 323)

The Surrealist object is both directly perceptible and at the same time opaque, strange for the viewer, since it is neither a natural nor an inanimate object of perception, but an object that cannot be objectified, a paradox. This problematisation of the status of the Surrealist object means that its presence is deferred continuously such that it requires a representation, attempts at interpretation. This sounds familiar. Elder confers on the Surrealist object the attributes of what Derrida calls *différance*. For Derrida, *différance* (to which we shall return below) rests in part on the notion that the system of language involves a perpetual differing and deferral of meaning. (Derrida, 1973). Objects, by contrast, are traditionally construed as something anchoring, present, and existent. Elder's theory of the Surrealist object can be understood as relevant to my artworks. We have already seen in our discussion of the works in this project, however they may and must be thought as outside representation, nevertheless are always implicated in and by representation. Here, it is worth noting again that interpretation involves an unlimited unfolding, for the meaning of a work of art becomes ever more complex and reformulated as the reader progresses.

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Oppenheim, M. (1936). *Object* [Sculpture]. New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art.

Like the surrealist object, Rosencrantz's uncanny sneakers could be said to perpetually shift between meaning and indeterminacy—we make sense of this part object through affective and conceptual experience. In a similar way, Meret Oppenheim's

famous Surrealist hybrid *Object* (1936) consists of an unsettling overlap of the animal and human: a white teacup, saucer, and spoon, wrapped in speckled animal fur. The cup, understood as an object of comforting domesticity, is radically altered. A repulsion might seize you at the thought of oral contact with dry fur. Since its debut, interpretations of this work have explored various sexual and psychological discourses.²⁵ Highlighted in these works is the irreducibility of the object to objective categorisation, and one's readerly responsibility to the otherness of the artwork.

Movement Flows Fast and Thick

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McKenzie, D. (2007). *Yesterday's Newspaper* [Sculpture]. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Centre.

Dave McKenzie's work *Yesterday's Newspaper*, 2007, comprises a day-old newspaper resting on a low, walnut pedestal. Each morning of the work's exhibition, a copy of the daily, local newspaper from the preceding day is displayed on the timber block. The work, it seems, functions as a potent indicator of social change. Yesterday's newspaper belongs to the past, news delivered too late. In this work, something we ordinarily reject as outdated becomes a focal point of each day, in what we call the *present*. Yet in

²⁵ See, for example, Cumin (1991) for a description of the psychologically disruptive character of Oppenheimer's *Object*. See also Hubert (1993) for a description of the sexual symbolism of Oppenheimer's *Object* (p. 39).

considering this anachronism, even today's newspaper is a material trace of the past; it struggles to keep pace with the events of the world. Increasingly, digital mediums and news sources provide a more punctual substitute for print news. Thus, in this work, time becomes conspicuous through medium. However, to engage with *Yesterday's Newspaper* simply as information is to miss it. The reader is invited to move with it, and to participate in its movement. Art encounter as an attempt to understand it is not a method to comprehend it, but rather a participation in its potentiality.

Yesterday's Newspaper serves as a platform for questions about the nature of presence in its relation to language. In my discussion above, there is a distinction made between something present (in space, in time) and something absent (past and future, elsewhere). In the present moment, the viewer sees the presentation of yesterday's newspaper, an item explicitly marked by both the past and future. This understanding implies the notion of a present-to-self consciousness in relation to a so-called living present; mathematical time understood in terms of measurable increments between past, present and future. In this context, the viewer/reader is understood as a self-present subject in relation to the external world. To extend my earlier discussions on the reader of a title, Derrida provides a complex conceptual framework to the question of the reader in relation to presence and language. For Derrida, language is an force that casts doubt on the notion of a self-present subject in relation to the 'word' as a stable, positive unit of meaning. I use Derrida's philosophy as a way to extend my consideration of the event-title as an event of language (simply put, I consider Derrida's term *différance* to be an account of an event of language). Below, I will discuss Derrida's suggestion that signification has an uncertain temporal dimension—a signifier always denotes another sign endlessly—denying the possibility of a fixed, immediate meaning and an authoritative interpretation. In this regard, if we are to understand the event-title, we must attend to its linguistic devices, through which force makes itself felt.

Différance and the Temporality of the Sign

In his 1968 essay 'Différance,' included in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1973), Derrida claims that traditional Western philosophy

privileges presence to make possible mutually exclusive conceptual oppositions such as presence/absence, speech/writing, and subject/object, (the first term is privileged) (p. 147). Metaphysics, Derrida (1973) asserts, begins “from the starting point of a being-present, one capable of being something... a *subject*, a *who*” (p. 145). This subject is a unified ground of knowledge, the self-conscious, self-present subject (Derrida, 1973, p. 146-147). “The privilege accorded to consciousness,” writes Derrida (1973), “means a privilege accorded to the present” (p. 147). In contrast, speaking about language, he argues that his self-coined term *différance* accounts for an uncertain sense of movement within signification, such that meaning is never immediately present to us. According to Derrida (1973), *différance* does not exist: “it belongs to no category of being, present or absent” and yet it is the “movement of play that ‘produces’ (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences [e.g., presence/absence], these effects of difference” (p. 141). Derrida uses the term *différance* to question the concept of presence or what we say is present (e.g., an immediacy of meaning) and its relation to time and space (Derrida, 1973, p. 147).

Through *différance*, each supposedly present sign in language signifies to the extent that it denotes another sign, and therefore is not itself present. Derrida contends that meaning is never immediately present in any word or text, but is the effect of an undecidable play of signification (1973, p. 140). To elucidate *différance*, Derrida employs the notion of the ‘trace’ to suggest that our perception of presence, everything in the present moment, is meaningful only because it is inscribed by a ‘trace’ of something other than itself. *Différance*, writes Derrida (1973):

makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present. (pp. 142-143)

The trace structurally informs not only all our discourse but also every experience because the ever-changing present is predicated on the past and the future that inscribes it and imbues it with meaning. Presence is possible only through its relation to an absent

something. With his term *différance* or trace, Derrida challenges our blind acceptance of dominant systems, through a disturbing contingency that precedes long-established meanings and radically destabilises all language and experience in a way that undermines entrenched authority (Derrida, 1973, p. 146).

My interpretation above of *Yesterday's Newspaper* oscillates between descriptive writing and analysis, reading the material production of the work in relation to conventional notions of time. This approach is characteristic of much art criticism, conforming to conventional understandings of art and society in pursuit of interpretative clarity. However, the artwork itself seems to simultaneously offer representational clarity while discounting such a possibility. While the interpretation seems plausible enough, it is perhaps too easy or tidy. A niggling question remains. My interpretation, however satisfying, seems partial and inadequate. For we have embarked on a preliminary analysis of the work and already we have summarised this symbolic meaning with its apparent coherence and finality. Bearing in mind such swiftness, let us consider Derrida's conception of language (terms, sentences) as arising from an uncertain sense of movement, becoming meaningful and losing its meaning, and in this sense should be understood as an ever-changing event. Derrida suggests a kind of erasure of habitual perception; the reader is illuminated in being denied of her readerly confidence. The reader's consciousness is constituted by continual displacement. Through *différance*, Derrida offers insight into the ambiguity of *Yesterday's Newspaper*, and the event-title, when he describes the trace of language in relation to past and future. Here, words have no definitive meaning and do not signify objects that have essential qualities. Any understanding of *Yesterday's Newspaper* may be construed as a process of coming to be, and fading from, presence.

An ethics of reading is constructed through a negotiation. Reading involves both method and ethics; the reader cannot escape their sociocultural context, but must also welcome a wholly new response to the text. Therefore, the reader negotiates paradoxically between, firstly, reading anew, that is, free from any assumptions about the title, while secondly, awareness of the impossibility of reading without any prior assumptions about the title. As previously discussed, for Attridge (2014b), the notion of the reader's idioculture suggests "the subject as a node within a set of non-continuous and heterogeneous networks. Idioculture... [names] the totality of cultural codes constituting

the subject,... as an overdetermined, self-contradictory system that manifests itself materially in a host of ways” (p. 30). However, each moment is temporal, and each reading encounter is new. Reading is temporal and singular—allowing for a potentially new reading. If reading *Yesterday’s Newspaper* is a response; then this response cannot be more than an attempt. Reading as an encounter gestures toward one of many experiences of reading. In this sense, this artwork, in *différance*, holds everything open, to demonstrate the revisability of anything that might appear determined and irrevocable.



Pearce, L. (2016). *A bullet inside a flute*. [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

Reading and Relativism: Comparisons between Derrida and Jarry

At this point it is worth considering how Derrida’s notion of signification as an irreducible play of meaning relates to Jarry’s pataphysics as a philosophy based on epistemic relativism. Does Derrida help us to understand Jarry’s conception of a world in which all beliefs, opinions, and epistemologies have equal validity? Or does Derrida’s thinking

expand the idea of equal validity? Since the publication of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's (1997) famous statement that "there is nothing outside of the text" has produced much argument (p. 158). In a simplistic understanding of literary theory, pluralism is often aligned with relativism, that is, the notion that any interpretation is as valid as any other (implying a lack of interpretive principles). However, Derrida denies an absolute pluralism in which no interpretation is superior to any other. In an interview in *The Literary Review*, Ken Newton (1980) questions Derrida:

It might be argued that deconstruction inevitably leads to pluralist interpretation and ultimately to the view that any interpretation is as good as any other. Do you believe this and how do you select some interpretations as being better than others?

Derrida responds:

I am not a pluralist, and I would never say that any interpretation is equal, but *I* do not select. The interpretations select themselves.... You know that Nietzsche insisted on the fact that the principle of differentiation was in itself selective. The eternal return of the same was not repetition, it was a selection of the more powerful forces. So I would not say that some interpretations are truer than others. I would say that some are more powerful than others. The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. (Kearns & Newton, 1980, p. 21)

Therefore, meaning is determined not by the subject, but rather a system of impersonal forces. Through Derrida's discussion, we are led to think that some interpretations, in their forcefulness, are more convincing than others. Derrida's viewpoint calls for the reader's careful and ethical interpretation of texts. Professor of Humanities Mark Taylor, wrote a New York Times article in 2004 as a tribute to Derrida. Taylor (2004) explained that Derrida's detractors argue that Derrida's followers start down a "slippery slope of skepticism and relativism that inevitably leaves us powerless to act responsibly" (A24). Against this view, Taylor (2004) contends that Derrida's philosophy:

...does not mean that we must forsake the cognitive categories and moral principles without which we cannot live: equality and justice, generosity and friendship. Rather, it is necessary to recognise the unavoidable limitations and inherent contradictions in the ideas and norms that guide our actions, and do so in a way that keeps them open to constant

questioning and continual revision. There can be no ethical action without critical reflection. (p. A24)

This ethics of reading is stimulated by a sense of indeterminacy, heeding not the conventions of Being and the same but the coming of the other. In the context of this project, we might say then that while there is no determinate meaning that can be attributed to each work; every sound interpretation offers an incomplete disclosure of it. In her chapter ‘Jacques Derrida’ in *Critical Theorists and International Relations* (2009), Maja Zehfuss argues that while Derrida does not deny the existence of the lived world, he nonetheless highlights the limitations of human comprehension of it. In this regard, Zehfuss (2009) observes that Derrida’s use of the term text is not limited to the semantic, representational, and symbolic domains:

What Derrida calls texts [also] ‘implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, ‘socio-institutional’, in short: all possible referents’ (Derrida 1988: 48). That there is nothing outside of the text means that all reality is structured by differences, just as texts are, and that we have no way of referring to this ‘real’ except through representation and interpretations. (p. 143)

There is no originary presence that linguistic representation mirrors or transmits, rather the signified referent is continuously oscillating (differentially) to defer the arrival of the signified. In *Acts of Literature* (1991), Attridge claims that there is always an ethical dimension to Derrida’s writing, evident in his respect for *otherness*, including textual otherness. Attridge (1991) writes: “This responsibility to the other is also a responsibility toward the *future*, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know” (p. 5). This responsibility accommodates the other rather than incorporating the other to the same.

Similar to Derrida’s project, pataphysics requires the careful and attentive study of literary texts and other texts, and the interpretation of their meaning. In *Pataphilology: An Irreader* (2018), Sean Gurd claims that pataphysics is a kind of philology that relies upon the greatest sensitivity to language and textuality (p. 24, 27). Gurd remarks that, for Jarry,

metaphysics and physics are not sciences of generalities, but instead, investigate exceptions that have become common (2018, p. 23). Gurd (2018) summarises pataphysics:

Whatever brings us beyond metaphysics, then, must be able to discover something vivid and compelling within the field of common exceptions: it would be our capacity to focus on the luminous detail, but also a refusal to treat that detail as just an example of some broader set or general category.... 'pataphysics is, above all, the result of a certain way of writing. (p. 23-24)

Gurd's remarks echo Attridge's summary of Derrida's ethics of reading as an acceptance of a responsibility to the other, as opposed to reducing otherness to the category of the same.

Similar to Derrida, Jarry's pataphysics attempts to go beyond reason and metaphysics. Both thinkers question the classical notion of reason in which a class of truths may be apprehended directly. In addition, similar to Derrida's writings on literature, Bök (2002) observes that pataphysical criticality evokes and celebrates "cases of exceptional singularity" (p. 3). In highlighting the ethics of its literature, Bök (2002) describes pataphysics as a Nietzschean "'gay science,' whose joie de vivre thrives wherever the tyranny of truth has increased our esteem for the lie and wherever the tyranny of reason has increased our esteem for the mad" (p. 9). Both Derrida and Jarry identify a need for critical thought, imaginary solutions and a radical methodology—modes of resistance against the constraints of unquestioned orthodoxies and authorities. However, although Jarry and Derrida employ similar critical strategies, Jarry stops short of expanding on the ethics and practice of textual interpretation. Contrary to Derrida, Jarry seems to promote an inevitable plurality. In his discussion of the Oulipo literary group, Bök (2002) quotes Oulipo²⁶ writer Jacques Bens, who considers potentiality, more than technique, as a way to conceive of the literary text, "[s]ince reality never reveals more than a part of its totality, it thereby justifies a thousand interpretations, significations, and solutions, all equally probable" (p. 159). The potentiality of literature is the space in which pataphysical practitioners pose a set of equally valid imaginary solutions to problems. Therefore, Derrida is not a pataphysician.

²⁶ The Oulipo literary writers group started as a subcommittee of the College of Pataphysics.

No Reading but in the Reading Itself



Pearce, L. (2016). *Jacinda Ardern, a politician, has lent her favourite sweater* [Sculpture]. Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery.

The most immediate peculiarity of my artwork *Jacinda Ardern, a politician, has lent her favourite sweater* is the proper name announced by its title. At the time of this writing, its protagonist is the Prime Minister of New Zealand. The work redirects the intensity of feeling surrounding celebrity possessions by relating it to an artwork and hence making possible new affective and conceptual experience. As such, the artwork displays an interest in the conventions of sculpture and the phenomenon of celebrity culture in which celebrities such as entertainers and politicians influence opinion and behaviour frequently through commodities such as clothing and other objects. The notion that celebrity possessions convey affect (sensations) and an emotional reaction from the audience has specific relevance to the reception of this work. In the case of the celebrity possession, we can see how objects and materials can be construed as active agents. For the moment, it is worth noting that intensive emotions often emerge through the affecting power of the

celebrity name. Currently, Ardern has reached celebrity status—there is high public interest in her private life as well as her public role as Prime Minister.

The title suggests that I once borrowed the Rt Hon. Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand's favourite sweater to exhibit as an artwork. With this collaboration, I participate in the social custom of borrowing and lending clothing usually only enacted within intimate friendships. In 2016, the year of the artwork's exhibition, Ardern served as the list MP for the Mount Albert electorate in Auckland. In 2017, following the artwork's exhibition, Ardern became the Leader of the Labour Party and then Prime Minister of New Zealand in 2017. Since the artwork's exhibition, Ardern has attained global celebrity status. In this sense, this event-title could be said to grant me (as author) a certain kind of status as an insider, a member of a clique, someone with privileged access to notable people and events. Clearly, the title of the artwork plays a crucial role in the network of complex affective resonances surrounding the sweater, which are also felt by the viewer. It carries affects and meanings from across artistic, social, and political fields, to produce a continuous postponement of determinate meaning that involves the status of the clothing item as well as the role of the viewing and reading methods that assist in apprehending the sweater.

What is the importance of Derrida for reading art titles today? What is the practical importance of art titles to both the individual and society? In *Che cos'è la poesia*, Derrida suggests that what he calls the 'poematic' involves an ethical experience of poetry or the poetic (1995, p. 291). Simply put, Derrida uses the term poematic to tease out the way in which the poem can be approached only if the reader acknowledges its resistance to a single, conclusive interpretation. Instead of establishing rules of ethical conduct, Derrida's notion of the poetic requires an ethical commitment and responsibility to the coming of the other (Derrida, 1995, p. 291). This otherness of poetry is the experience of the impossibility of interpretation, which is nonetheless necessary. The vulnerability of poetry in its dependence on interpretation (or translation) is characterised in the figure of the hedgehog, imminently exposed to danger while crossing a road (Derrida, 1995, p. 289). The coming of unassimilable 'otherness' within the space of Derrida's reading event is what constitutes the force of the poetic.

The contradictory status of the event-title as both opaque and transparent at once, is consonant with Derrida's concept of the poetic or 'poematic.' Derrida's (1995) figure of the hedgehog blurs the distinction between passive and active, becoming vulnerable by means of its self-defence: "Rolled up in a ball, prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted." (p. 297). Derrida's discussion of the poematic unfolds through an attempt to consecrate poetry or the poetic (experience) into something mysterious and enduring, outside Platonic and traditional metaphysical binary thought. The poematic is an experience of language involving a mutual contamination, described as a force "each time beyond the *logos* [the word, the law], a-human, barely domestic" (Derrida, 1995, p. 297). The poetic is not primarily a text for critical analysis but an encounter with language that is understood in terms of a kind of transubstantiation (p. 293). Derrida suggests that language makes its claim on the reader, as in a passion or incarnation of poetry. The poetic emerges as a possibility of reading, a certain tear or violence that both calls for and yet resists interpretation.

No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding. You will call poem a silent incantation, the aphonic wound that, of you, from you, I want to learn by heart. It thus takes place, essentially, without one's having to do it or make it: it *lets itself* be done, without activity, without work, in the most sober *pathos*, a stranger to all production, especially creation. (Derrida, 1995, p. 297)

Here, Derrida seems to address traditional ideas concerning creativity. Creativity/the poematic is neither creative works nor practice. Creativity is the *coming* of the other, that is, the principle of activity that precedes creative process and product.

The coming of "the other" – "the advent of an event" – this is *what happens*, this is the poetic which, as an irruption (of non-identity) transforms the living moment of the subject, never fully corresponding with itself (Derrida, 1995, p. 291). To make a comparison, Derrida, like Deleuze (as previously discussed in this chapter), considers force as the necessary and immanent condition that makes thinking possible. Neither Derrida's 'poematic' (beyond *the poem*) and Deleuze's object of encounter (beyond *the object of recognition*) are *works* but rather networks of forces. For both thinkers, artworks then are not simply material things but are produced out of the impersonal, differential forces that intersect and give rise to them.

Consequently, a reader that is properly called a reader is not one which *possesses* the poem, but one which is *possessed by* the poem (creativity/the poematic). This possession *by* the poematic entails the reader's relinquishing of interpretative mastery, a sort of kenosis, a risk that cannot be postponed, the same risk the poematic undertakes in the instantiation of poetry: the risk of death (Derrida, 1995, p. 289-91). This is both the necessity and impossibility of writing and reading (Derrida, 1995, p. 291). Whereas any return to the literary criticism of 'poetics' or Heidegger's concern for the "setting-forth-of-truth-in-the-work" would reaffirm the poem as object of semantic or formal identification, the poematic event is entirely unpredictable and indeterminable (Derrida, 1995, p. 297). Derrida's term poematic helps us to rethink the reader's experience of the event-title. Derrida's claim is that the poem is opposed to interpretation, it shrinks from interpretive strategies that appeal to a definitive summary; however, contrarily, the poem simultaneously insists upon interpretation. The promise of interpretation, says Derrida (1995), "always leaves something to be desired" (p. 291). The impossibility of interpretation exposes the poem to the possibility of its own demise.



Pearce, L. (2015). *Thrown numerals* [Sculpture]. Auckland: RM Gallery.²⁷

Summary

What is the relevance of Derrida's notion of the poematic to the operation of the event-title? Here, I would suggest we consider the event-title in terms of the poematic, a title that functions only insofar as it is both opaque and vulnerable, in a dependence upon a readerly responsibility. Here, interpretive problems are regarded as mainly problems *about* interpretation, or in other words, problems whose solution relies upon an ethical response to the title (recall the figure of the hedgehog; a shy, vulnerable creature). Of relevance here, in his writings, Attridge proposes an ethics of reading based upon Derrida's notion of 'ethical relationship' implying a mutual response between the self and the other. Reading is not simply an acting upon the text, it is responding, cooperating, and negotiating. As discussed earlier in this chapter, literature is understood as an ethical event that values the capability of the literary work to lure the committed reader into an encounter with 'otherness'—something coming into being, an encroachment upon the

²⁷ Note: This artwork is not discussed in the exegesis.

reader's 'idioculture,' or the various cultural norms that comprise an individual's perspective. Of particular interest in Attridge's discussion is that this event of reading necessarily involves ambiguity and an examination of the constraints and institutions that define the individual subject. So in this context, the reading event involving text and reader is a continuous process of production and re-authoring of meaning that influences the human cultural domain. Here, reading the event-title could be described as an act-event of reading. Attridge contends that readerly engagement is both an event that occurs (something happens to the reader) and an action that the reader performs, simultaneously passive *and* active. As such, the term act-event is suggestive of the unique moments of reading in which modes of activity and passivity are not clearly distinguishable. In this sense, the shaping of language in the event-title might be understood as a zone of potential, as an encounter with otherness, a continuously open conceptual and sensual space, suspending the established order of possibilities. In an ethical reading, the reader sustains the otherness of the title during her response.

Otherness in the event-title might arise from moments of irony, humour or wonder. Titles are designed to subvert or fail expectations. We have questions about these titles; they arouse our curiosity. The surgeon repeatedly climbing into his house subverts the idea that medical professionalism necessarily equals good sense and reliability. It is impossible to read the title, giving full attention to its articulation without a change, tiny perhaps yet real, occurring in the reader. To extend our discussion on wordplay in titles, recall that in Massumi's formulation of meaning as a complex of material processes, it is implied that meaning-form is not static, but rather a dynamic material system. In addition, Massumi describes a *conflation* of form and meaning (no longer understood as separate) as a volatile exchange between *a multiplicity of terms*, a combination of disparate elements. Here, the irony, punning, and wordplay in the event-title generates relations of accumulative, contradictory meanings (an otherness which ruptures meaning from within), joining disparate words or concepts, and grants them a new, creative function. The event-title, as both writing and reading, is the unfolding of the event: the investment of the reader in the event's ambiguous language and affects produces the work in the event.

In Derrida's term *différance*, each supposedly present sign in language signifies to the extent that it denotes another sign, and therefore is not itself present. As related earlier in this chapter, Derrida contends that meaning is never immediately present in any word or

text, but is the effect of an undecidable play of signification. To elucidate *différance*, Derrida employs the notion of the 'trace' to suggest that our perception of presence, everything in the present moment, is meaningful only because it is inscribed by a 'trace' of something other than itself. The trace structurally informs not only all our discourse but also every experience because the ever-changing present is predicated on the past and the future that inscribes it and imbues it with meaning. Presence is possible only through its relation to an absent something. According to Derrida, all meaning and discourse relies on an uncertain sense of temporality, without uniform structure. *Différance* helps us to rethink the reader's experience of the event-title. In *différance*, the interpretive efforts of the reader of the title occurs in the absence of the signified and referent. In the event-title, language sustains its conventional function as the vehicle of meaning, but produces meaning through *différance* rather than through reference to the object. Readers of the event-title cannot access the presence, center, theme or meaning of any object or event. Such a reading is not a matter of conventional interpretation, a process of deciphering meaning based on an established set of formal procedures. Instead, reading is an encounter that resists comprehension. Returning to the ethics of reading, the reader must respond to the coming of 'otherness' in the title without reducing this otherness into her perspective; put differently, this otherness must not become an image of herself.

Conclusion

Storied Objects ensures that we can continue reading. My thesis project suggests that the viewer who experiences the force produced by an irreducibly ambiguous title is constituted as becoming-being; bestowed with the vitality of ongoing work. This work is the *raison d'être* of the work of art, and its gift. The explorations of this practice-led PhD project have generated expanding possibilities in art practice in relation to questions of titling and the relation of viewer to artwork. The title of each work—and the indeterminacy embedded in each—functions as an important mediator between the objects and the viewer, thus revealing the works' contingency and context and ultimately establishing their singularity. During the 'reception' of the artwork, interpretation is not a consolidation but a provocation of meaning. Interpretation risks overwriting, displacing, or translating experience; being both more than and less than the experience—on the one hand, it is the experience plus its translation, and on the other, as a translation it is always less than the experience. The limits of interpretation of the title raises questions of the veracity of its meaning or definition across time and contexts. Here, my project aims to direct an audience's attention to their own capacity to sustain an interplay between feeling, thinking and imagining when encountering a work of art.

My mode of art practice is neither a mode that is orderly and predictable nor a rule-based process. Pataphysics, which I draw upon, illuminates my use of playful artistic forms imagined as staging mechanisms that serve to question a world composed of known and of fixed identities. Alfred Jarry's playful science of the particular has functioned as a context for an expanded understanding of willfully errant artworks that question any discourse that functions on the assumption of certainty and exactitude. Here, artworks playfully undermine techno-scientific methods through the creation of dubious pseudoscientific 'systems.' Pataphysically speaking, art encounter occurs in the threshold separating the title and its 'outside,' joined in a bond that is as precise, and yet as contingent as is imaginable, or beyond what is imaginable—until we do the work it is

unimaginable. An attitude of playful ambiguity privileged in *Storied Objects* is evident in works that change over time. As I have reiterated throughout this exegesis, this is not a rejection of interpretation, but an acknowledgement of its limits. In pataphysical terms, the title survives the confines of authoritative interpretation—its ‘readability’ always belies an uninterpretable excess—it is always mutable, calling for interpretation, operating against but within the ordinary world.

This project builds upon existing scholarship on titling by foregrounding its literary status in both contemporary and art historical contexts. In particular, my discussion of the title in terms of its affective and temporal ambivalence departs from the so-called ‘supplementary’ status of the title in art (Welchman, 1997, p. 1). In John C. Welchman’s discussion, the title performs a twofold function: it is a direct relational proposition denoting its object, and, it provokes indirect or connotative references to an object. Likewise, Gérard Genette’s concept of paratext is used to think beyond the notion of the title as fixed, directive and limiting. Here, the title is no longer construed simply as separate and distinct from the work but rather exists as an intensely charged limen where a work and what lies outside it cannot be clearly differentiated. The title, so conceived, is no longer distinct or simply representative, but instead assumes a much more undecidable and permeable status.

Alongside scholarship on the title, poststructuralist thinkers including Derrida, Deleuze, Barthes are discussed as highlighting notions of ‘excess’ and ‘undecidability’ in narrative and language. The referential instability of the *narrative-title* foregrounds the interpretive uncertainties of literature (and indeed, language itself) in relation to true or false. The ambiguity of the title *A window is left slightly ajar. House keys, belonging to a surgeon, are attached to the gallery window with transparent tape, thus preventing him easy access to his house* assumes the form of narrative and the strategies of storytelling, but in so doing, simultaneously—and self-consciously—raises questions about both the status and function of narrative in visual art. Derrida’s emphasis on the ‘excess’ of literature (through citation and participation) as a rupture of genre boundaries troubles the distinction between true and false in narrative. Likewise, Deleuze claims that literature is both an event and an actual entity with properties. For Deleuze, literature does not open the reader to fixed, ideal concepts or truths but to the creative potential of affective, indeterminate forces beyond categorisation. In his literary theory, Barthes’ emphasis on

the experimental or ‘writerly text’ and his placing of active participation at the centre of reading provides a corrective to the ‘readerly text’—understood to contain an author’s single, determinate meaning, easily accessible to the ‘passive’ reader. These writers have been employed to discuss the narrative-title in the context of both contemporary and historical artworks (Robert Barry, Nina Canal and Robin Watkins, Jason Dodge, Marcel Duchamp, Claire Fontaine, and Jonathan Monk). The poststructuralist thinkers have been extremely useful in contextualising the narrative-title as an experimental literature, which highlights ambiguity and fragmentation and challenges traditional notions of originality, authenticity, causality, and the logic of binary oppositions such as true and false.

Next, building upon the conception of narrative, I employ more descriptive or explanatory language in titling in order to theorise the art encounter in relation to an ethics of reading—the dislocation of ‘art viewing’ understood as both affective and ethical encounter with ‘otherness.’ The event-title *Venetian blinds from an optometrist’s office* assumes the form of a proposition and the strategies of designation (it refers to an object), but in so doing, simultaneously—and self-consciously—achieves an expressive dimension (the thought it expresses) irreducible to any straightforward descriptive or explanatory purchase. Instead of reliably guiding the viewer towards clear understanding, the expressivity of the title works to dislocate the viewer’s expectation by compounding the ambiguity of meaning. Referencing O’Sullivan’s discussion of Deleuze’s ‘object of encounter’—an incomprehensible something—a rupture of chronological order occurs that detaches art encounter from any simplified treatment of art as a representation or ‘object of recognition’ which affirms our beliefs, values, and knowledge. Further contributing to our understanding, Stephen Zepke’s emphasis on the conceptual artwork as *material flux*—a passage between chaotic sensation and an emerging coherence—disengages conceptual artworks from conventional interpretations that contextualise contemporary art merely in terms of its conceptual conditions (Zepke, 2017, p. 239-240). In discussing Deleuzian theory on notions of affectivity/conceptuality and viewing/participation, I offer a perspective on the event-title as an exploratory space, described as a productive potential within art encounter (however, these affective capacities of art always remain largely unknowable). The potentiality of art encounter exists beyond any mode of inquiry that seeks to classify an object in terms of existing categories of thought. Here, I contend that the event-title ultimately serves its function not in an affirmation of existing knowledge, but rather is invented (new concepts and ways of knowing) as participants respond to the

address of the work, activating the often unforeseeable effects of art, which, through extracted impersonal forces, has overcome final, unitary meaning.

My project contributes to a community of artistic practice, specifically contemporary art that enlists objects borrowed from everyday contexts to perform through titling (involving narratives and concepts). Inscribed with narrative histories, these modest objects can act as indicators of social change (referring to past, present and possible future modalities). For example, beneath the deadpan functionality of the title *Jacinda Ardern, a politician, has lent her favourite sweater* is a terrain of latent potential. The work registers changing political fortunes and an improbable arrangement, the aura that surrounds celebrity memorabilia, invested with enchantment, and cannot easily be summarised in words. The work is chronologically experimental, moving to and fro in time, creating a range of links, often ironic, between past and present. My borrowing of the sweater seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is wryly amusing as a result. Similarly, Dave McKenzie's work *Yesterday's Newspaper* offers a reflection on time and social change. This work refers to the temporality of news headlines, news cycles, and forms of media. In this sense, both works open up temporal flux, moving between past and future, in both directions simultaneously. Such an understanding allows these works to invoke a dynamic continuum between present and past; that activates a tension between contemporaneity and anachronism. That is, a drawing together of past with present so that the reference is no longer retrograde but vital; not then, but *now*.

My artwork *Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest)* manifests in the form of conceptual art a correspondence between objectivity and ambiguity. It is through humorous literalism that I transpose scientific language to ambiguity. Similarly, the absurd, quasi-scientific model-making in Paul Cullen's *Model for the Antigravity Room* undermines systematic and objective knowledge. In this way, these works parody the human need for certainty and universal logic. Both works have the potential to evoke laughter and thought at the same time. Although not always obvious, humour is present in various conceptually oriented art practices, including Alejandro Cesarco, Pedro Gómez-Egaña, and Marcel Duchamp. Highlighting humour (often evident in logical inconsistency) in these practices offers a corrective to an over-generalisation of conceptually orientated art as a mode of deadpan, intellectual inquiry (presented as generic, anonymous imagery). In this way, my discussion of humour in my works such as

Letterbox numerals arranged in the order of their weight (lightest to heaviest) contributes to an understanding of a community of conceptually orientated practices.

Turning to another concern, my artwork *Fr Brian Keogh, Abbott at Kopua Monastery* has lent the hand bell used to call the community together for the midday meal encourages readership in viewers toward a concern for silence and unthought. Through its reference to Kopua Abbey, the Cistercian monastery, the work evokes the rhythm of monastic prayer and meditation. It is also implicitly political – readable, unavoidably, in terms of Aotearoa New Zealand race relations, including but not limited to the relationship between Māoritanga and Christianity. In this way, the work potentially opens viewers toward a range of references (social, cultural, and historical) that engage with ideas of trust, fraternity and the sacred. At this point, we might say that both art and spirituality facilitate an engagement with the deeper questions of life, often to provide novel forms of encounter and to challenge established beliefs.

The ethical obligation within this project calls the viewer to change what they think in order to protect and learn from the singularity and otherness of the title. Confronted by the volatility of art encounter, I argue that the affective rupture of the event-title makes possible a means for an *ethics* of reading artworks— within incomprehensible moments. Derek Attridge’s understanding of ethical reading involves a relation of openness and responsibility in which the reader brings otherness into being. According to Attridge, ethical reading requires more than reconfirming Western philosophical assumptions, adherence to absolutes and certainties or reducing otherness to sameness. Instead, reading is reimagined as the creation of the other—both reader and other bring about change and undergo change. Attridge (2004) explains: “We may say that the other’s arrival destabilizes the field of the same, or that the destabilization of the field of the same occasions the arrival of the other” (p. 33). Importantly, reading is realised as a reshaping of the habitual self, as a becoming, that opens up space for the *work* that is offered or induced by the work of art.

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