

The Framing of Objects and Phenomena: The disruption of ordinary perception by the limitation of perceptual clues.

Katie Theunissen

An exegesis submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Art and Design
October 2010

Primary Supervisor: Paul Cullen

Table of Contents:

Abstract:	6
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
Chapter 2: Phenomena and Perception.....	18
Chapter 3: Circles, spheres and form.....	24
Chapter 4: Metaphor.....	31
Chapter 5: Space and time.....	34
Conclusion:	36
Bibliography:	43

List of figures

Figure 1: Katie Theunissen. Hanging Form, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 5:00 minutes

Figure 2: Katie Theunissen. Icicle Tree, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 4:00 minutes

Figure 3: Katie Theunissen. Stocks, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 15:00 minutes

Figure 4: *Figure 4:* Katie Theunissen. White Form, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes

Figure 5: *Figure 5:* Katie Theunissen. Statue in smoke, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes

Figure 6: Katie Theunissen. Sea Legs, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 00:30 minutes

Figure 7: Katie Theunissen. Stumps, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 6:00 minutes

Figure 8: Katie Theunissen. Feeding Tube: Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 9:00 minutes

Figure 9: Katie Theunissen. Key Hole, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 00:45 minutes

Figure 10: Katie Theunissen. Disc, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 4:00 minutes

Figure 11: Katie Theunissen. Pond Arm, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 2'55

Figure 12: Katie Theunissen. Dead Forest, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes

Figure 13: Katie Theunissen. Soft Form, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:55 minutes

Figure 14: Katie Theunissen. Suckling, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:33 minutes

Figure 15: Katie Theunissen. Pyre, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:15 minutes

Figure 16: Katie Theunissen. Crater, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes

Figure 17: Richard Serra. *Double Torqued Ellipse 1997*. *Advanced Construction Studio*. Retrieved from <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/course/48-305A/sketch.html> on the 25/9/2010

Figure 18: Olafur Eliasson. *Beauty 1993*. New City Art. Retrieved from <http://art.newcity.com/2009/05/04/review-olafur-eliassonmuseum-of-contemporary-art/> on the 23/9/2010

Figure 19: Katie Theunissen. Sun, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:10 minutes

Figure 20: Katie Theunissen. White Form, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes

Figure 21: Katie Theunissen. Blue Entrance, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:25 minutes

Figure 22: Katie Theunissen. Speeding through Space, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:58 minutes

Figure 23: Anish Kapoor. *Sky Mirror 2006*. Picasa Web. Retrieved from <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/V1LSZZ6by3k0ODSHw5irwQ> on the 20/9/2010.

Figure 24: Katie Theunissen. Snow dough rain, continuous looped, clip duration 2'45

Figure 25: Katie Theunissen. Slit, continuous looped, clip duration 3:20 minutes

Figure 26: Katie Theunissen. White Form, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes

Figure 27: Katie Theunissen. Secret Entry, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes

Figure 28: Katie Theunissen. The Beginning, continuous looped, clip duration 8:35 minutes

Figure 29: Katie Theunissen. Snow dough rain, continuous looped, clip duration 2:45

Attestation of Authorship:

I hereby acknowledge 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 acknowledgements), 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.

Katie Theunissen

Abstract

This project explores the idea that perception is inherently opaque, ambiguous and can never be fully comprehended. Through the process of creating sets and manipulating commonplace objects and phenomena in front of the camera, I invite the viewer to meditate upon scenes that play with notions of perception. The materials undergo a transformation, where they may transcend familiar properties and specific contexts.

Although the viewers have information that enables them to recognise the materiality of the scene, careful framing isolates the objects and phenomena from the contexts against which they would ordinarily be viewed. Feelings of fascination for these disembodied, timeless objects may allow the viewer to inhabit this world.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge the help and guidance of my supervisors Paul Cullen and Nova Paul.

The Framing of Objects and Phenomena: The disruption of ordinary perception by the limitation of perceptual clues.

'I think it's my role as an artist to bring to expression, it's not my role to be expressive. I've got nothing in particular to say, I don't have any messages to give anyone. But it is my role to bring expression, lets say, to define means that allow phenomenological and other perceptions which one might use, one might work with, and then move towards a poetic existence'

- Anish Kapoor (Bhabha, 1998)

In this video project I aim to find expression in commonplace objects and phenomena. By carefully framing scenes in the camera I isolate these objects and phenomena from the contexts against which they would ordinarily be viewed.

Each of the looped video works constituting my project has been shot using unremarkable materials framed in such a way as to produce ambiguity and uncertainty; as much through what is excluded from the frame as through what is included. Careful framing places phenomena and objects centre stage while limiting perceptual clues that would allow a viewer to establish a sense of scale, site, or materiality and to make sense of what he or she is seeing. Sensory cues enable us to identify experiences, facilitate memory, and to pin down and comprehend what we see. My strategy has been to limit these cues to an ambiguous visual spatial field juxtaposed with a sound track chosen to increase the sense of perceptual disorientation experienced.

I will make connections between my work and Merleau-Ponty's theories about the nature of human perception that he understood as something inherently ambiguous and enigmatic. Perception will be explored in relation to the 'lived body' and the awareness of our physical selves in the world. Perception can shift when certain constraints are imposed. The awareness of our physical distance

from an object can be made ambiguous through the constraints of the frame. Because these usual points of reference for the lived body are denied in my videos, openings for new perceptions are created. The way I install my work allows the viewer to linger in the space, and it becomes an immersive corporeal experience. I will discuss the work of Richard Serra, where the material nature of his sculptural forms unsettle and disorient the body in its surroundings.

I use phenomena like fire, wind and water in my staged scenes. I will discuss Gaston Bachelard's interest in the elements in reference to the metaphysics of the human imagination and reverie, the creative daydream. Water, in Bachelard's view, is symbolically connected with the human psyche and can bring about a state of reverie in a viewer. Bachelard's writing on material elements is closely related with Merleau-Ponty's notion about the corporeal body in the 'chiasm' of space. Alchemy and the transmutation of base materials that were important to Jung and Bachelard will be discussed, with reference to dreams and the unconscious mind.

A circular form appears in many of my video pieces, and I will make reference in my discussion of this form to Plato, Jung, Zen Buddhism and Peter Sloterdijk, and its use in the sculptures of Anish Kapoor.

I will consider the role of Metaphor, as my work may often stand for a something that may not be expressed in the everyday, where the invisible is rendered visible and vice versa.

Looping extends time in my videos. There is no beginning or end, and instead each work is experienced as timeless and continuous. The Deleuzian 'time image' is relevant here as there is an absence of narrative in the works, and the unidentifiable context deterritorializes the image.

Figure 1: Katie Theunissen. Hanging Form, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 5:00 minutes



Figure 2: Katie Theunissen. Icicle Tree, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 4:00 minutes



Figure 3: Katie Theunissen. Stocks, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 15:00 minutes



Figure 4: Katie Theunissen. White Form, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes



Figure 5: Katie Theunissen. Statue in smoke, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes



Figure 6: Katie Theunissen. Sea Legs, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 00:30 minutes



Figure 7: Katie Theunissen. Stumps, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 6:00 minutes



Figure 8: Katie Theunissen. Feeding Tube: Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 9:00 minutes



Figure 9: Katie Theunissen. Key Hole, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 00:45 minutes

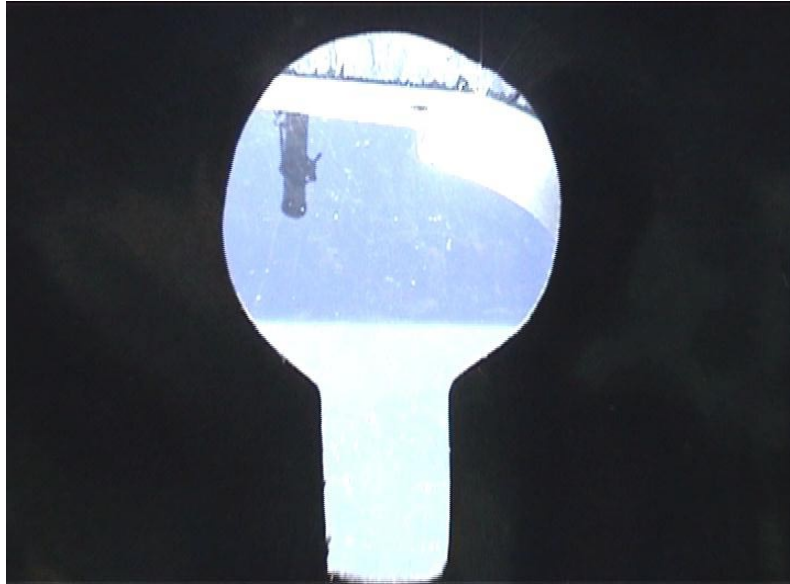


Figure 10: Katie Theunissen. Disc, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 4:00 minutes



Figure 11: Katie Theunissen. Pond Arm, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 2'55



Figure 12: Katie Theunissen. Dead Forest, Still from developmental video experiment, clip duration 2:00 minutes



Figure 13: Katie Theunissen. Soft Form, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:55 minutes



Figure 14: Katie Theunissen. Suckling, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:33 minutes



Figure 15: Katie Theunissen. Pyre, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:15 minutes



Figure 16: Katie Theunissen. Cold Hole, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes



Phenomena and Perception

In his work the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty studies the essence of consciousness and the nature of human perception. He says our perception cannot be adequately understood by the philosophical tradition because of its tendency to drift between two flawed and unsatisfactory alternatives: empiricism and, what he called, intellectualism. He regarded perception as something that is not pre-given or quantifiable but inherently ambiguous, because the meanings we derive from the world only come as a result of our subjective experience of it. The way in which the 'lived body' acts in its surroundings determines how we perceive it: one knows an object exists because one can feel, touch, see or hear it, and this will always be from an 'embodied' perspective. A video artist's experience, like that of a painter, may be compared to the 'continued birth of the world' (Weate, 2003, p.4), as it is witnessed in a continued process of newness.

My videos are framed to exclude the visual clues that are usually present when the 'lived body' experiences an object or landscape. When a viewer perceives an object this does not take place in isolation, rather the object is experienced in context as part of a complex sensual field. Nothing can exist in a vacuum and things can only be perceived in relation to other things. Spatial points are external to each other and visual fields are made up of numerous views that cannot be completely isolated. According to Merleau-Ponty 'Perception is not merely a 'visual sensation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), there is no pure impression of a singular thing because it is inconceivable to experience something in pure isolation. In my works, the usual reference points that surround an object are severely reduced, enabling meaning to be derived from an individual's unique experience. In a landscape all that is perceived or experienced happens in a wider context. In my video works I reduce this context by isolating phenomena and excluding perceptual clues that would allow a viewer to establish a sense of scale, site, or materiality and to make sense of what he or she is seeing. However, we can never experience something as 'pure perception' because of our experience and memories in the world. Merleau-Ponty reiterates this when he points out that 'our relationship with things is not a distant one: each speaks to our body and to the

way we live. They are clothed in human characteristics (whether docile, soft, hostile or resistant) and conversely they dwell within us as emblems of forms of life we either love or hate. (2004 p. 63)

In his sculptures Richard Serra deals with the experience of the 'lived body' in its surroundings. The spaces his immense steel sheeted sculptures create do not centre and orientate the body in space. They are not anchored in landscape and instead they cut off, extend, heighten, and overwhelm, so the viewer loses the ability to fix his location in space. The sensations experienced in his work reflect Merleau-Ponty's lived body in the 'chiasm' of space. His use of space intensifies our thought processes as he explores our spatial awareness, as well as duration and movement. Serra's works encourage a state of prolonged observation and the work unfolds while we walk through it. We interact very differently with the sculpture *Double Torqued Ellipses* 1997 than we would with an object from the everyday. We become aware of the weighty materiality of the surface of the undulating steel mass as we brush past it. We can almost feel with our bodies its weight, temperature, texture and volume. Because one's space is severed from its everyday understanding in this sculpture space, new and multiplying ways of thinking and seeing bring forth a heightened self-awareness. The viewer may become aware of his or her own corporeality in space. Each viewer has an embodied perspective as they move around the space, and awareness of sensations and relationships with the world around them are increased. *Double Torqued Ellipses* takes you on a journey beyond where physical sensations take over and one experiences with the entire 'lived body'.



Figure 17: Richard Serra, *Double Torqued Ellipse* 1997.

Merleau-Ponty describes flesh as a 'chiasm', representing an interlacing structure, which makes connections between all beings. Serra's work makes one aware of the physical body in the 'chiasm' of space, where there is a continuous relationship between subject and object. The idea of 'chiasm' connects to French Philosopher Gaston Bachelard's interest in the elements where the tissue of experiences is seen in the elements. Fire, wind, earth and water, through various processes carry their own inevitable future, their own demise and transformation. Like Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard attempted to break away from the Cartesian idea of the separation or dualism of mind and body, making consciousness a deeper encounter with essence of being in the world. Flesh ceases to be familiar and rather becomes a complex tissue of experiences, ever evolving. 'It is continually in process, continually alive and dying, made up of flows and vapors, presenting

itself to everyday perception as an illusion of substance and a deception of material stability.' (Macke, 2005 p. 390).

Bachelard notes that dreams are dependent on the four fundamental elements: wind, fire, earth and water. These components of the universe can compose poetic gestures or images that may be artificial, natural, or imaginatively feasible yet scientifically impossible. Alchemy is an age-old spiritual discipline that fostered the first murmurings of scientific thinking. It was a discipline dedicated to the search for a higher state of the soul and enlightenment through the transmutation of base materials such as sulphur, mercury, salt, and lead. Merleau-Ponty's idea of the flesh can be compared with alchemy. Matter that is not completely solid, like clay or mud, could be compared with the flesh. Although bones and teeth are dissimilar to skin and flesh, they are given meaning by the flow of our blood and the flesh that surrounds them. As well as this, the body can be subject to external influences like fire, which can warm or burn the flesh. The active body can come to understand itself through its exchanges with things in the world, which cause it to liquefy, soften, perspire, saturate, quench, or lubricate.

Interactions between objects and elements form the basis of my set up scenes; the surface of water moves with the wind and water flows over the submerged disc. In Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*, water is connected to reverie: a body of water, like the sea, has an oneiric quality which allows us to see the surface and into the depths beyond. There is a feeling of melancholy that is experienced in the presence of still water. On water's surface, people experience the hypnotic effects of a mirror of their face. Water can bring about a contemplative self-awareness as it reveals and reflects our gaze. 'To see' is to go beyond narcissistic contemplation of our own reflection, to a reflection of the cosmos. As Bachelard said 'The lake is a large tranquil eye' (Bachelard, 1971, p.77), and as one contemplates the surface of water, with currents and reflected light, and the depths below, the viewer might be swept into a state of reverie, in which the image is affected by memory and experience.

Bachelard described the experience of daydreaming or reverie as an 'intimate immensity' (Bachelard, 1994 p.193) and this description can be applied to the work of Danish born artist Olafur Eliasson. In his large-scale projects he sets up various scenarios that replicate phenomenological processes of the physical world. He describes himself as a 'phenomenon producer' (Stafford, p.132), as he creates phenomena that are 'internalized' in the gallery space. Eliasson urges us to explore the nature of our cognitive processes by technologically extending our human faculties. Eliasson places strong emphasis on sensory experience and in the interactive nature of his works, his viewers are immersed in dreamlike environments. Instead of just experiencing each work with the eye we may experience with our entire 'lived' body where the intangible may become tangible as we reconfigure our body in space. In a comparable manner I want my installation to be immersive experience comprising of sounds and image. In Eliasson's work 'Beauty' rainbow effects are created by passing a spotlight through a fine spray of mist. Viewers may become entranced by the space and run their hands through the mist, and the gentle spray of water creates the sound of soft rain as droplets gather and fall to the ground. Eliasson's work provokes the idea that 'between thinking and doing is experienced' (Eliasson, 2009). One may linger in the installation for a long period and there may be an extension of the viewer's self-awareness of his or her own body in space and time.

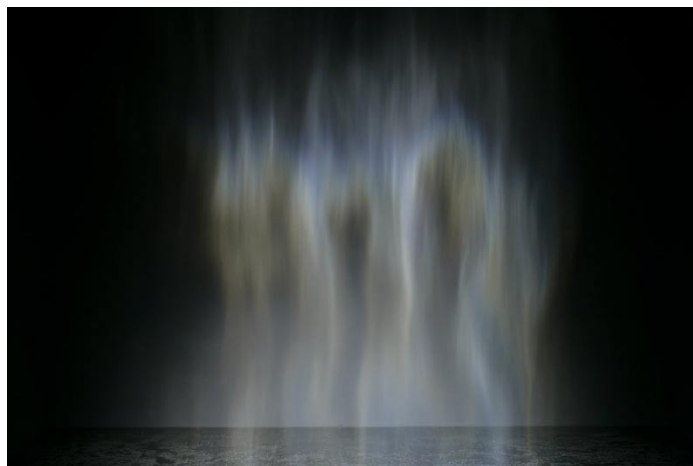


Figure 18: Olafur Eliasson, Beauty 1993

Jung saw in alchemy the potential for what Bachelard referred to as 'reverie' where people experimented with different materials while their thoughts turned into daydreams and there was a fusion of the spirit and matter. Alchemists transferred their inner processes into experiments so their work became an unconscious process. Jung was interested in alchemical stages, which he saw as comparable to the process of attaining individuation and the transformation of the personality. He viewed the methods and symbols of alchemists as revealing not so much chemical experimentation but psychological exploration. An artist, like an alchemist, changes the surface as if the act of creation were a cosmic truth engaging the elements of wind, water and fire.

The Latin word for soul is 'anima'. The principles of the anima and the animus, according to Jung, are archetypes that exist in the collective unconscious and represent the feminine and masculine sides of humans' unconscious. Jung believed that in the bounding together of the tranquil feminine and the masculine a kind of alchemical marriage would occur through creativity, resulting in expressions of the internal self and the individual. The alchemist's anima does not settle for expressing itself in everyday exaltations about life. Alchemy works in an animated, projective manner, which experiments with itself and multiplies itself and, through it, animated participation becoming a spiritual endeavor. Bachelard saw the connection between human beings and the anima as a 'reverie of intimacy - an intimacy which is always human' (Bachelard, 1994, p.185) opening up for the one who enters the mysteries of matter. The 'alchemical' process could be seen as similar to the shifting and fluctuating relationship that can develop between the viewer and a mysterious internal form shown on the projector's screen, as well as in the artist's process of experimenting, controlling and combining matter.

Circle, spheres, form.

Plato focused on the ideal form of the circle or mandala, which he saw as the rational, eternal, and changeless form of the cosmos. In his view we base everyday reality on the imitation of it, but that in the physical world it cannot exist. The true mandala in Platonic thought is therefore a mental image that cannot be experienced in reality. Every shape could be seen as a version of an ideal and the replica is imperfect. The quality of the imperfect circle adds to the feeling of a performed ritual, looking as if they have been cut out by hand. Plato's notion of an ideal universal form was a precursor to Carl Jung's theories of the collective human experience and the archetype.

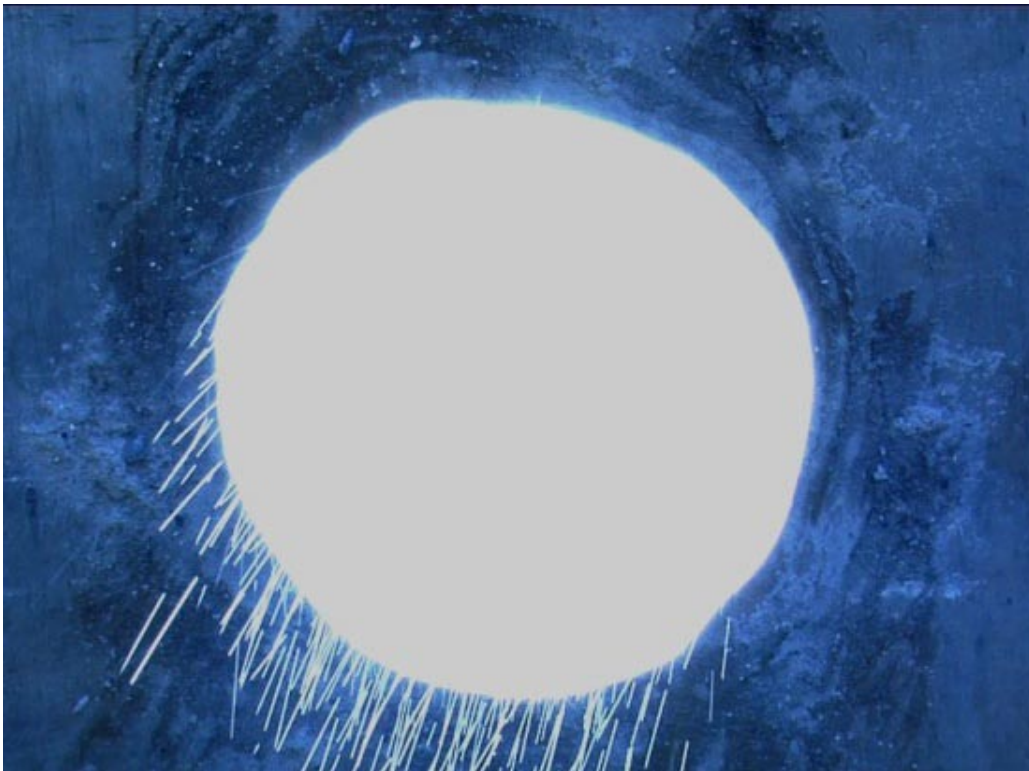


Figure 19: Katie Theunissen. Sun, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:10 minutes



Figure 20: Katie Theunissen. White Form, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes



Figure 21: Katie Theunissen. Blue Entrance, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:25 minutes

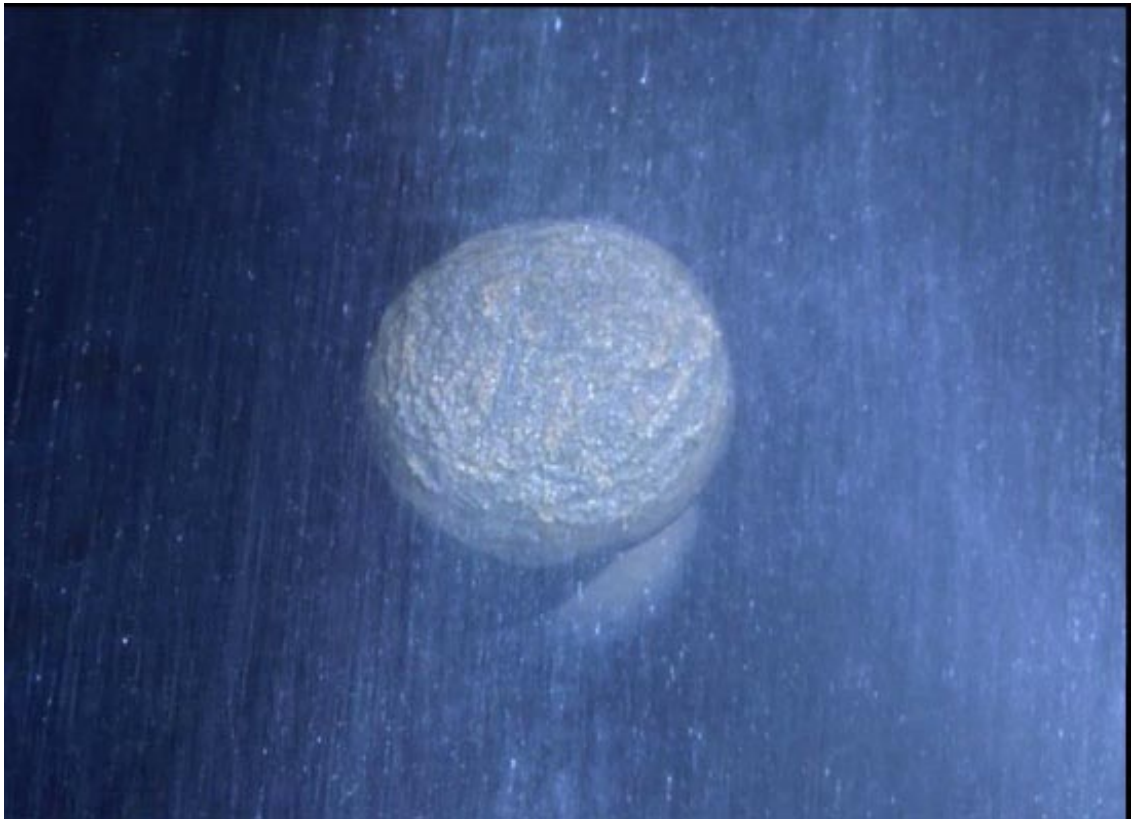


Figure 22: Katie Theunissen. Speeding through Space, Still from developmental video experiment, continuous looped, clip duration 00:58 minutes

The circle is attributed high significance in Jungian thought as a spiritual archetype of the unconscious being. The circular shape or mandala is sometimes thought to originate from dreams and visions, which tend to appear across cultures. The Jungian exploration of the unconscious has been examined in such films as the science fiction *Dark City* (1998) directed by Alex Proyas. The round swimming pool that appears in the film holds a deep significance and performs the function of protecting the character Murdoch from the attack of the life-sucking strangers. As the strangers circle the swimming pool they cannot cross the barrier as water wards them off. In his role as the psychopopos (or the guider of the souls), Murdoch can move between the conscious and unconscious. Water acts as a foundation of life and as a symbol of both nature and an invisible, concealed life as the swimming pool and falling rain repels the enemy, who seeks to suck the life out of the humans it has captured. (Alister, 2001, p.104)

In theories concerning the archetype there is an acknowledgment that the personal, cultural, and historical plays a role in the derivation of meaning. An archetypal form like the circle connects with mankind's perception of the world and allows for an interweaving which presents an endless field of possible qualities. Despite the differences between Jung's ideas about the collective human experience and Merleau-Ponty's theories about the living, breathing all perceiving subject of the 'lived body', both could be seen to act within 'interwoven chiasm'. The subject becomes an integral part of the 'chiasm', which does not exist without everything around it; the subject is not the origin, as reality does not stem from it. The body is a field of different consciousnesses all working together in the world 'from the mutual reference and intertwining of all forms of perception' (Leder, 1990, p. 63). There is an immediate connection to the everyday as the living body's many fields of consciousness engage sensuously with the world as part of a fully corporeal life, as well as connecting collectively to time and place.

'Zen' is a term derived from Buddhist tradition, emphasizing experiential enlightenment through contemplation and meditation. In Zen symbolism, the *enso* is a circle drawn by a calligrapher and it signifies completeness and enlightenment. The enso can encapsulate such Zen ideas as nothingness, the full moon, the human form, and a wheel turning. The Zen calligrapher paints the enso in a state of meditation, staring at the blank page, drawing without thought, and making an expressive mark the emptiness of the paper, one which cannot be reworked. The representation of the circle as the moment of illumination is created when the mind is free. I have employed the circle in my work as a central motif in the form of the looped video sequence, a hidden circular form that produces a timeless quality and a meditative response in the viewer.

Anish Kapoor's playful and thoughtful approach to art explores the enigmatic nature of being, where his sculptures penetrate physical and cognitive space and they too lend themselves to open-ended readings. A state of reverie is induced by his use of specific colours, materials and forms, and one's sense of time may become elongated when in contact with them. What his tactile and reflective forms signify is his interest in what lies below each material, which is like a living tissue and we are affected by it in various ways. 'Material is not just the physical part of the work, there is something emotional about it, something to do with perception', said Kapoor. His sculptures reflect the changeable powers and hidden energy that exists within the material itself. As well as his interest in materiality, Kapoor uses the repeating forms of voids, circles and other geometric shapes, which all effect the viewer on different levels, transforming the visible to the invisible and opening up for moments of insight while experiencing his art. His interest in 'non- object' or 'non-material' means that the object goes beyond its object-hood and a material is transformed in some way, so that it may appear to be something different. The monumental solid steel surface of his sculpture the *Sky Mirror* 2006 is filled with air and illusion. It turns the world upside down and acts like variation on landscape painting where it moves and holds a mirror up to the world, reflecting images endlessly in a warped circular dish, holding shards of

buildings, bush and sky floating upon the surface of steel. This sculpture becomes a 'non-object' because not only is it a monumental sculpture, it also becomes part of its surroundings, as it constantly fluctuates from day to night. It could be perceived as a gateway into the heavens, or a hole into another place and time, mirroring another world. The void shape commonly used by Kapoor animates the material and the object with something 'other', and it differs from one work to the next. The shape becomes a kind of sign, a kind of invention by the material and the exploration of space. His voids could speak of emptiness. The rectangular, dark blue of *My Body Your Body* with a centralized void which recesses into the wall of the gallery could be an opening or deceptive emptiness. It leaves an elusive trace on the viewer, and it speaks of something absent, a meeting place of the invisible and the visible, taking one into another world which engages both the bodily responses and the internal world of the spirit.



Figure 23: Anish Kapoor, *Sky Mirror*, 2006

Peter Sloterdijk explores the sphere and the concept that its co-isolation is fundamental to the universe. Foam, which is made up of spherical forms, is a kind of naturally forming tensegrity where each bubble of liquid foam freely moves past the others. The bubbles hardly touch but together they are a self-supporting structure which gives rise to beautiful, formal shapes. They are wholly outlined by the concept of co-isolation despite the fact that the foam bubbles inhabit space together as one mass; each piece is completely isolated from the rest. Socially we are incomplete and separate, despite how close and similar we are to each other. Human beings naturally need isolation where excessive communication dominates. Heidegger called people in an unconcealed and open state in the world, 'ecstatic'. For Sloterdijk, beings are exposed and vulnerable and need support. They cannot be completely open because they can only survive with some kind of 'spatial immune system' that enables them to give being-outside an endurable form that makes up for their ecstatic nature. (Sloterdijk, 2009) In my video works, a centralized circular form exists on its own, isolated from its environment because of severe cropping of the image, but it is also part of a universe beyond the frame. Each circle exists in a state of co-isolation, and each individual will experience it in relation to his or her own embodied universe.

Metaphor

We consciously and unconsciously perceive our environment by the processing of stimuli, and this shapes our perception. In language, a percept is a perceived form of an ambiguous stimulus without a clear source that can bring about more than one percept. The lack of stimulus can also create multiple percepts. The structure of a unit of meaning, a concept, mirrors the structure of our percepts. The metaphor is the connection of percepts to concepts, which creates connection to forge abstract thoughts and multiple perceptions. The perceptual experience of walking to a specific destination is an experiential sequence involving embodied percepts that structure experience and provide a framework for conceptual ideas. (Conferencereport, 2009) The metaphysical understanding is that the role of language gives names to things that already pre-exist in themselves. Names give

essence to objects around the metaphor and also functions as a metaphysical construct as it 'constitutes the counterpart of an assertion of truth that is based on the possibility of relating things to words in a direct way. (Vanzago, 2005, p 467)

A visual metaphor is like the verbal one in the way that meaning appears through a complex set of systems that exist in the subject matter. Water plays an important part in my video installation *Snow Dough Rain*. A body of water moves in a circular hole as rain sprinkles on the surface from the unseen sky. I am interested in water for the possibilities it offers as metaphor. It can act as a metaphor for memory, moods, feelings and desires. Visual metaphors are implied through the relationships between the formal structures and subject matter in the work.



Figure 24: Katie Theunissen. Snow dough rain, continuous looped, clip duration 2'45

Metaphor is used to communicate something that otherwise cannot be adequately expressed, to add another facet to an object, thought or idea. Merleau-Ponty used metaphor as a way of thinking and as an opening through which the ontology of flesh and the lived body could be properly understood. The metaphor has an ontological function, something that is connected to the 'unpresentable' or the 'invisible'. Something visible constitutes what Merleau-Ponty called flesh, the 'chair' of the world. He saw flesh or body as part of the 'chiasm' that is not in opposition to the mind or to the world, but rather an element like water, air or fire and part of the world as a whole. Every part of the world lives in the invisible, and visibility is revealed through it. The invisible is something that cannot be disconnected or totally pure, it cannot be uprooted from the relationship to the visible as it gives the visible meaning, it is in the 'heart' of the visible. Merleau-Ponty thought that the metaphor reveals the 'flesh' of the world, allowing one to see differently. When coming across a metaphor it is revealed that the 'thing' described is new and yet already known. (Vanzago, 2005, p. 468)

The creative process of painting points towards a notion of creative freedom. The artists can engage with the 'other' by moving between the visible and the invisible, slowly bringing the other to life (Jeremy, 2003). Merleau-Ponty used the Metaphor as a way of thinking, not simply representing previously given objects but rather presenting objects, uncovering them from concealment and making them seen, where they are still somewhat indeterminate and cannot be 'seen in their totality' (Vanzago, p. 470). What one viewer might find in an artwork, another may not, but will perceive something else. 'Metaphors are the original, the literal meanings, and being can be given only as a never present, and yet always present, unpresentable presence, whose absence is constantly metaphorized in perception' (Vanzago, p. 473). Once the invisible 'other' materializes in the work of art, it is available to the viewer who is willing to be led into its space.

Merleau-Ponty said, 'We must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon. It is in this atmosphere that quality arises. Its meaning is an equivocal meaning; we are concerned with an expressive value rather than with logical signification' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 7). Water, light, smoke and steam create equivocal meanings because they can transform surfaces and objects, or render the visible invisible. There is a division into parts in the inhabited world of medium, substances and surfaces. The landscape is the surface that physically supports life, on which action takes place. The weather is like a substance - more or less solid – that acts on that surface. At the interface between is the medium like air, and substances like water press against surfaces. These are where energy is reflected or absorbed, where sensations are passed through, where vaporization or dispersion into the medium occurs and what our haptic forms experience. In my videos the medium of water and with its reflective properties have ambiguous readings. The water that covers the circular shape in my video could be on a flat reflective surface, or there could be a deep hole below the reflection, so equivocal meanings are created.

Space and time

In this project space and time become concepts that should be discussed with reference to how each of them have become isolated, recorded, fragmented and disposable in modern societies where technologies of communication dominate. Artists who employ digital video can reflect upon this to produce works that pursue the temporal extendedness of fragmented, isolated and recorded time. The loop lengthens the duration of short scenes, which leads to an extension of time. Footage is repeated in seamless loops, as there are no visible cuts and the duration of a moment of experience is extended. There is no action in the videos to move the viewer forward; instead there is the movement of passing yet continuous time. In another way the images become timeless as our idea of time involves change and action. This lack of action in a work may increase the spectator's cognitive or sensory experience so that they might free themselves from the habit of viewing objects as they usually see them. Time can become the

material and it has the ability to alter our perception of the whole. The works are about the act of viewing, and the time it takes. They bring forth a temporal self-consciousness that exists in space.

Through the passing of time, a video image displays the action of movement. The objects filmed in my videos function without narrative. Moving images in these works are connected to the 'time image'. The time image, according to Gilles Deleuze is something that goes beyond the 'movement image'. The movement image is a connected series of events, broken into different scenes to form a narrative that holds the viewer in a 'suspension of disbelief'. With the time image, the viewer is encouraged to make personal associations with the work and his or her own memories, as what they see before them is new and may be unrecognisable.

The camera has the ability to frame a portion of the world and the artists may choose to detach the shot from its surrounding context. This carves out a block of 'spacetime' where there is less content within a frame, less information provided, making a rarified rather than a saturated image. The elements enclosed by the frame are distinct parts, but they are also components of a composition. The frame includes and excludes, determining what will be visible and what will be 'out-of-field', beyond the framed image. Deleuze considered that the out-of-field referred 'to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present'. (Deleuze, 1983 p. 17) All that the camera does not frame, and any sound that is not directly linked to the image, constitutes the larger set, or a 'plane of genuinely unlimited content', and this is ambiguous, as everyone's perception of what happens beyond the frame will differ. My work has been framed to take it away from an identifiable context, it has been removed from its territory, and in other words it has been deterritorialized. (Deleuze, 1983, pg 16)

Sound has the ability to create an experience of perceptual disorientation. Sounds that exist in nature, like rain, wind, lightening and the crash of waves are imbedded in the human psyche and could be thought of as archetypal. The sounds in my works reflect these archetypes, or subtle movements of nature, but

they are at the same time hard to orientate because, like the images, they are detached from an identifiable environment and are faint, fragmented and elusive. In the context of a video and sound installation, viewers immerse themselves in the experience of the work. The sounds in the videos may lead the viewer into a state of reverie as the slow visual and aural movements lead their senses.

Summary Statement

My objective has been to disrupt the expectations of ordinary perception and to bring expression to the simple objects and phenomena I have made the subject of my videos. I have set up scenarios in which I could control, and produce, such effects as wind or rain on water. Using my camera to frame and edit these scenarios, I have isolated these phenomena from their surroundings. In the resulting videos these phenomena are viewed alone and separated from a wider context in which they would normally be seen and understood.

Figures 25-29: Stills from final installation, November 2010



Figure 25: Katie Theunissen. Slit, continuous looped, clip duration 3:20 minutes



Figure 26: Katie Theunissen. White Form, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes



Figure 27: Katie Theunissen. Secret Entry, continuous looped, clip duration 00:35 minutes



Figure 28: Katie Theunissen. The Beginning, continuous looped, clip duration 8:35 minutes



Figure 29: Katie Theunissen. Snow dough rain, continuous looped, clip duration 2:45

References :

- Alister, I. & Hauke, C (Eds.) (2001). *Jung and Film*. East Sussex: Psychology Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1971). *The Poetics of Reverie*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1994) *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Conferencereport (July 11, 2009) *Metaphor and the Phenomenology of the Senses* [video file] retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/user/conferencereport#p/search/26/jlP-5zoL648>
- Eliasson, O. (2009). (Video file) *Olafur Eliasson: Playing with space and light*. Retrieved from <http://www.ted.com> on the 15/7/2010
- Leder, D. (1990) *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press
- Macke. Frank, J. (2005). *Body, liquidity, and Flesh: Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and the Elements of Interpersonal Communication*. Embree, L. & Nenon, T. Phenomenology 2005: Zeta Books
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *The Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Sloterdijk, P (2009) *Beyond Entropy: When Energy Become Form. Spheres Theory: Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space*. Retrieved from <http://beyondentropy.aaschool.ac.uk/?p=689>
- Stafford, M. B (2007) *Echo Objects: the cognitive work of images*. University of Chicago Press
- Vanzago, L. (2005) *The Invisible and the Unpresentable. The Role of Metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's Last Writings*. *Analecta Husserliana*. 88(5)
- Weate, J. (2003) *Changing the Joke: Invisibility in Merleau-Ponty and Ellison*. *Philosophia Africana*. 6 (1)

Bibliography

- Alister, I. & Hauke, C (Eds.) (2001). *Jung and Film*. East Sussex: Psychology Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1983). *Water and Dreams: An essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Indiana University: Pegasis Foundation
- Bachelard, G. (1971). *The Poetics of Reverie*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1994) *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Bhabha, H. (1998). *Anish Kapoor – Making emptiness*. Retrieved from Anish Kapoor website: <http://www.anishkapoor.com/writing/homibhabha.htm> on the 25/7/2010
- Bogue, R. (2003). *Deleuze on Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Deleuze, G. (1983). *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. France: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Eliasson, O. (2009). (Video file) *Olafur Eliasson: Playing with space and light*. Retrieved from <http://www.ted.com> on the 15/7/2010
- Kaye, Nick. (2007). *Multi-media: video-Installation-performance*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Leder, D. (1990) *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press
- Macke, Frank, J. (2005). *Body, liquidity, and Flesh: Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and the Elements of Interpersonal Communication*. Embree, L. & Nenon, T. Phenomenology 2005: Zeta Books
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *The Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004) *The World of Perception*. New York: Routledge
- Shaw, S. (2008). *Film Consciousness. From Phenomenology to Deleuze*. North Carolina: McFarland and Company
- Sloterdijk, P (2009) *Beyond Entropy: When Energy Become Form. Spheres Theory: Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space*. Retrieved from <http://beyondentropy.aaschool.ac.uk>.

Stafford, M. B (2007) *Echo Objects: the cognitive work of images*: University of Chicago Press

Ross, C. (2006). *The Temporalities of Video Extended: Extendedness Revisited*. Volume 65 College Art Association. Retrieved from www.jstor.org

Vanzago, L. (2005) *The Invisible and the Unpresentable. The Role of Metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's Last Writings*. *Analecta Husserliana*. 88(5)

Weate, J. (2003) *Changing the Joke: Invisibility in Merleau-Ponty and Ellison*. *Philosophia Africana*. 6 (1)