

*Potentialities of the Enigmatic Art-object*

*Kelsey Stankovich*

An exegesis submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art and Design (MA&D)

2013

School of Art and Design



## **Table of Contents**

<b>Attestation of Authorship</b>	p.4
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	p.5
<b>Abstract</b>	p.6
<b>1. Introduction</b>	p.8
<b>2. The Potentiality of Impotentiality</b>	p.10
2.1 The Potentiality of the Enigma	
2.2 Speechlessness and Gesture	
2.3 The Motion of Absence	
2.4 The Amorphous	
<b>3. Consumption and Production</b>	p.18
3.1 Operating Organs	
3.2 Modes of Operation	
3.3 Consumption and Production	
3.4 The Part-Object/Subject	
3.5 Reception and Transmission	
<b>4. Transitional Modes and Spaces</b>	p.30
4.1 Action—Perception	
4.2 Actual as Virtual as Actual	
4.3 In Transit	
4.4 Intensely Still	
4.5 In Waiting	
4.6 Iteration, Intervals, Glitches	
<b>5. In-Conclusion</b>	p.42
<b>Image Gallery</b>	p.43
<b>Bibliography of References</b>	p.46
<b>List of Figures</b>	p.47
<b>Appendix</b>	p.50

***Attestation of Authorship***

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, 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 accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed: 

30 September 2013

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thanks to the friends and family members that have supported me over the last two years, your invaluable company keeps me smiling. A very special thanks to Joe, who always encourages me to do my best and is especially good at carrying heavy materials. Thanks to Chris Braddock, Andy Thomson and Ian Jervis, who are enthusiastic, motivating and committed tutors. And lastly, a big thanks to my fellow students, especially Harriet who has been the best studio buddy I could ask for.

### ***Abstract***

This project explores the idea of the enigma in relation to the art-object; the enigmatic art-object. The enigma opens up questions rather than gives answers and as such remains inconclusive. Because of its indefinable nature the enigmatic art-object embodies multiple modes of absence. These absences are discussed in relation to the idea of potential, which is considered as a faculty or force that gestures forth participation. Thus, this absent presence becomes the fuel for a multitude of operations that play out potentiality in an encounter between viewer and art-object. This project examines how the enigmatic art-object might enable this force and become an abundant source of fuel that remains mobile and productive.



Figure 1. *Untitled*, fabric, wire, tinfoil, plaster bandage and paint, size variable, March 2013.

## Introduction

This project is based around the idea of the enigma in relation to the art-object; the enigmatic art-object. An enigma is something that is indefinable and elusive; it opens up questions rather than gives answers. Because of its inconclusive nature, the enigmatic art-object becomes a vessel of potential; it remains in a constant state of unrest and is always in motion. This project stems from a desire for the art-object to be experienced somehow beyond the boundaries of meaning and representation. As such it would be contradictory to try and 'explain' the practical component of my research as this might begin to shut down the enigma. In his book *Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Giorgio Agamben says: "the more the speaker tries to express himself in words, the more he makes himself incomprehensible" (1999, p.71). Of course the problem here is that the institution desires just that: a written explanation of the project. As a way of overcoming this issue I have employed certain methods, which are as follows: The images of my artworks are presented in a way that positions them in relation to the text of the exegesis (or text in relation to image) without directly referencing each other. The written component of this exegesis consists of a series of reflections on enigma that rove across a range of concerns such as; potentiality, speechlessness, absence, formlessness, part-objects/subjects, consumption and production, perception, transition, stillness, leftovers and intervals. Each part is an intrinsic component to the essay overall, but as a way of trying to keep with the inconclusive and ambiguous nature of the enigma I have chosen not to provide the reader with any definitive links between these parts. This method is employed in the hope that it will keep the dialogue relatively open and allow the reader to form his or her own connections. In return I have analyzed other artist's works in relation to these concerns in the hope that this will provide a broader understanding of how these ideas and methods might manifest within my practice-based project without providing any definitive conclusions.



Figure 2. *Untitled*, wire, tinfoil and plaster bandage, approx. 25cm x 50cm x 30cm, March 2013.

## **2. The Potential of Impotentiality**

### **2.1. The Potentiality of the Enigma**

The force of the enigmatic art-object is held in its ability to continue questioning; its inconclusiveness. It is this potential that gives the object its life, its energy and its force. Agamben explains that potentiality is “*the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence; that is what we call ‘faculty’ or ‘power’” (p.179). In this sense, absence is not absent; its presence is potential. Agamben says: “When we do not see (that is, when our vision is potential), we nevertheless distinguish darkness from light; *we see darkness*” (p.181). From this perspective, I argue that we may see the art-object but we may not be able to define it; we see absence (we see potential), but we do not see what is absent as this would only exhaust the art-object of its potential. This could be considered a different way of seeing. It is not that we are unable to see; it is that there is always the potential of what we might not see. The enigmatic art-object cannot be defined and as such remains in an amorphous state of inconclusiveness. The absence of definition, conclusion and meaning inherent to the enigmatic art-object operates as the presence of potential. Thus, absence is not a reductive quality but a productive quality.

In order for the enigmatic art-object to have potentiality it must be capable of impotentiality. Agamben explains: “Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential” (p.182). Agamben goes on to explain: “To be free is... *to be capable of one’s own impotentiality*, to be in relation to ones own privation” (p.183). In order for the art-object to be capable of potential it must be capable of not being and not doing. The art-object is but an amalgamation of components, a configuration of possibilities. The more the art-object tries to be or do and the more we try to see what is absent, the narrower its potential becomes. As a consequence of its redundancy, the enigmatic art-object is nothing but this sensibility of potential and thus it transmits a sense of livelihood and productivity; anticipation is the affect of potentiality (the art-object).



Figure 3. *Pause*, upholstery fabric, paint, stuffing and cotton thread, April 2013.

## **2.2. Speechlessness and Gesture**

Sensation could be considered as the affect of potentiality; it is a feeling that the art-object emits directly onto the nervous system. Agamben explains: “if thought were not capable both of thought and of the absence of thought [*anoia*, thoughtlessness], it would never be able to know the formless [*amorphon*]” (p.181). Sensation is the experience of the potentiality inherent in the formlessness, or absence inherent in the enigmatic art-object. We cannot think the art-objects potentiality; in doing so we would be thinking what the art-object is not, and in effect exhausting its potential. Therefore potentiality exists as an absence of thought and in presence of that absence is sensation. This affect is apparent in the experience of speechlessness. Agamben explains that when experiencing an enigmatic object or situation “the more the speaker tries to express himself in words, the more he makes himself incomprehensible” (p.71). But this absence in language does not mean that there is not some sort of recognition or understanding of the situation. He goes on to explain: “there is a gesture that felicitously establishes itself in this emptiness of language and, without filling it, makes it into humankind’s most proper dwelling” (p.78-79). Speechlessness becomes a gesture that initiates something more than language, namely, sensation. For example, the simple gesture of open arms from a loved one means much more than words can describe. It is in the act of trying to put this sensation into words that we realize that we cannot: the absence of speech becomes apparent through the presence of speech.

## **2.3. The Motion of Absence**

In the book *The Body as Language* Lea Vergine explains: “We encounter new spaces where absence asserts itself” (1974, p.271). Absence “asserts itself” by posing the question: what is absent? The potentiality of the enigma is activated by bringing attention to what the art-object is not, as it moves tentatively in the delicate space that lies between potentiality and impotentiality (between what it is not and what it could be). Therefore the art-object is never fixed and always remains in motion. In his book *OUT OF ACTIONS: between performance and the object, 1949-1979*, Hubert Klocker says: “The focus then shifts from the self-contained and autonomous artwork towards an emphasis on process and motion in art” (1998, p.160). Klocker describes this unrest as an “agitation”, which “is dependent on the interaction arising from openness of communication and simultaneous enigma” (p.159). This interaction highlights the art-objects performative nature, as it invites participation and interpretation through the openness initiated by potentiality, which in turn is initiated by the enigma.

This image has been removed by the author of this exegesis for copyright reasons.

Consider the work *Paßstück* (2004) by Franz West; there is tubular shape, which could be a handle that also looks like a stick, with a curiously crimped loop of wire attached to it. Absence “asserts itself” by signaling the relation to the hand by the referencing of a handle. Is it some kind of tool? Attention to the careful consideration of aesthetic concerns (the crimped wire, the curious use of colour and attentive installation methods) stops us from concluding that the object is purely functional. The choice of materials also seems particularly important here; they are malleable and provisional. If we were to handle this object it would distort and transform, it is not strong enough to be considered as a functional object. So we turn our attention to the works formal and aesthetic concerns; considered within this mode the object and its carefully considered surrounds become pictorial in quality. The enigma arises as the artwork navigates the transitional and inconclusive space between categories like object and image, functional and aesthetic: thus there is no answering the enigma. We operate in a mode of disorder as we continuously question and reflect. The absence of definition and conclusion is a faculty that gestures a participation in the playing out of potentiality.



Figure 5. *White mass*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, April 2013.

#### **2.4. The Amorphous**

In their book *Formless: A Users Guide*, Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss write, “the formless has only an operational existence” (1997, p.18). They further explain that this operation is “a procedure to strip away categories and to undo the very terms of meaning/being” (p.155). In this context, form is not excluded from the formless object; that would be impossible. Rather, specific shapes, colours, sizes and textures that have the potential to relate to *many* forms are used so that the art-object references *no form in particular*. In other words, the art-object becomes a complex conglomeration of references that we use to draw connections with other things, memories and experiences. Form is unidentifiable, it is not absent; its presence is the potential for form. It is not that we do not see form; it is that we see the potentiality for form—the formless art-object promises to be many things and always fails to be one thing. Therefore, formlessness is a procedure that realizes that there is no one thing that the object is aspiring to be and as such it operates beyond representation. We realize that we cannot *read* the object, and instead we *experience* the object through sensation; we *feel* the potentiality of the art-objects livelihood. As Bois and Krauss explain: “Once the unified visual field is agitated by a shake-up that irremediably punctures the screen of its formality and populates it with organs, there is a ‘pulsation’ ” (p.32).



Figure 6. *Between wall and floor*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, July 2013.

### **3. Consumption and Production**

#### **3.1. Operating Organs**

In the book *Bachelors* Rosalind Krauss discusses the suggestive nature of the part-object in relation to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea of what they call "the desiring machines"(1999, p.63). Krauss describes the part-objects as "desiring organs on the one hand and yielding or withholding objects of desire on the other" (p.55). This could be understood in relation to the enigmatic art-object as its absences infer that it is not whole. The part-object is insubstantial in that it does not expose any definitive intentions and as such could be seen to be redundant. Ironically it is this impotentiality or redundancy that signals the objects potentiality. "Organs" are parts that constantly perform procedures in order for those procedures to carry out other procedures. For example, the heart pumps blood, which is sent through the veins to deliver oxygen to the brain, this allows us to walk, and the heart rate to rise, pumping more blood and more oxygen to the brain, etc, etc. "Desire" is the faculty behind the continuation or extension of these procedures; it is the yearning of life in relation to motion and production. By initiating absence, the part-object gestures potential and as such it is a "withholding" object of desire, for it is desirable to pursue the ambiguous or to finish what has been started. But the part-object, with its enigmatic attributes does not allow this kind of fulfilment; it is nothing but this continuous flow of potential. The enigma cannot be concluded; rather, its faculty lies within this desire for motion and its resulting operations. In this way, the sensation of potential could be related similarly to the sensation of desire: desire is the yearning for something that has not yet been attained, which is to say that it is the sensation of the potential for attainment. In the space of absence (or insubstantiality) comes the presence of desire (potential), and as such the part-object is "an *operation* (which is to say, neither a theme, nor a substance, nor a concept)" (p.15).

At this stage we may question what the relevance of this operation may be, what is the function of this operation? Deleuze and Guattari explain it as "a sequence of connections between the parts of a machine... the particular part object changing its very nature in the course of its function: from reception machine at one point of connection to transmission machine at the other" (p.156). Perhaps this operation's relevance lies in its ability to remain open and inclusive; and thus invites us into a conversation: its relevancy is in the gesture of participation. It is important to note that the part-object does not require the viewers participation in order to operate (or to transmit)—if our eyes were removed our bodies would still operate, albeit slightly differently. The part-object is an operation in motion and therefore it is not a product (it is not an answer or definition). Therefore there is no 'right' way to interact with the part-object because there is no formula that can be used to produce an answer. We might react to the objects materiality, its representational qualities, the way it makes us feel, its relation to the history of sculpture, or painting. Whether we choose react to the object or not we are beings with perceptions and sensations and thus we are participating in an act of reception and transmission just by being with the object.



Figure 7. Duchamp, M. (1954). [Photograph of] *Wedge of Chastity*. Bronze and Plastic, 63 x 87 x 42mm. Courtesy of Tate.

### **3.2 Modes of Operation**

In the chapter *Duchamp: By hand, even* from her book *Part Object Part Sculpture*, Helen Molesworth looks into the methodologies behind the part-object by examining Marcel Duchamp's *Wedge of Chastity* (1954). The work brings together contradicting material and relational qualities: the pink and fleshy is placed in contrast with the hard and metallic, sharp edge with soft, lumpy with smooth. The two parts are "in the process of accepting 'the difference between difference and similarity' " (p.198). The two parts literally fit together; there is a metallic casing and a fleshy filling. This curious amalgamation signals an intentionality that remains hidden. The object is seemingly functional (the parts can be separated) but they also seem as though they don't quite fit. What function, if any, would these parts perform? And if they do not have a function what is Duchamp's reasoning for gesturing towards this possibility?

The handmade aesthetic becomes important here. Molesworth explains that the handmade is employed to "ensure that the objects—part object, part sculpture—continue to have a kind of actuality, that they don't become 'symbolic' of something else" (p.198). When we make with our hands there is only so much control that we can have over the materials that we are using. Therefore, when utilizing a handmade approach the art-object cannot be planned or designed. The maker cannot accurately predict the outcome of the handmade part-object and as such even if any representational intentions existed they soon become muddled. The handmade in its unpredictable nature becomes a mode of making that transmits an absence of desire (or intention) that consequently operates as the presence of the potential for intention. In other words, we cannot decipher between what the artist desired and what the materials and methods determined; we can only consider them as potentialities. By utilizing these methodologies Duchamp's *Wedge of Chastity* straddles the categories of aesthetic and functional, actual and symbolic, art and non-art. By amalgamating all of these differentiating aspects and methods we are gestured to question these collaborations. Absence here has nothing to do with a lack or withholding of content or information, rather, there is an absence of contextualization or intention or desire, which is the presence of these potentialities. By holding on to that delicate absence in the space between things, the part-object resists any distinct conclusion. The object is potential, and as such it transmits the sensation of desire, as it remains within a constant state of unrest, energetic and open.



Figure 8. *Untitled*, felt, acrylic plastic, stuffing and cotton string, size variable, May 2013.

### 3.3. Consumption and Production

In his book *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*, Stephen Zepke utilizes the idea of the artwork as machine, he says, the artwork is an “unfolding of complexity, a fractal engineering inseparable from life, a blooming of multiplicity” (2005, p.1). It is in this way that the artwork generates its first principle: “it is real and not a representation” (p.1). It is through the artwork's productive nature that it gains stature as an entity that is ‘real’; it is a thing that moves and changes. He goes on to explain: “The abstract machine is the vital mechanism of a world always emerging anew, it is the mechanism of creation operating at the level of the real” (p.2). The world, and its inhabitants are in a constant state of change between reception and transmission. Each process produces a product that is an intrinsic component of another process. Our bodies are machines that consume food to produce energy, which can be used to carry out a multitude of other procedures. The idea of the artwork as “machine” can be related to this idea; as long as it is in this world it will be a contributor to this production. The enigmatic part-object is a machine made up of a complex collaboration of parts; textures, form, colour, space, size etc that work together to contextualize and de-contextualize one another. When the viewer encounters the artwork another machine is activated; the artwork produces qualities that affect the viewer. These affects become a part of another machine in which they are used to develop perceptions of the artwork. Because our perceptions are only a process of the encounter between viewer and part-object they can never answer the enigma, they only produce more questions by adding to the already complex part-object. Zepke explains: “these questions are the necessary conditions for any construction, for their answers will be the components of new machines that will themselves depart, to test out new directions” (p.1). And thus the artwork gains its stature as something that is “real”; it produces a product that produces a product that produces a product and so on, and as such it contributes to the development of much larger mechanisms. The artwork's force is its participation in a continuous process of change, development and transformation.

This could be related back to Krauss' idea of the part-object, in which it is both object and mechanism. In order to remain productive machines need fuel; just like the body, the artwork is not an object that can survive on its own, and neither is it an object that relies entirely on its relationship with other parts and machines. The artwork is part of an operation that we are also a part of; production is a universal quality that provides a way of connecting with and understanding things. Thus we experience the artwork as something that is “real” rather than a “representation”. Zepke explains that this experience is a sensation that is “nothing but the temporary conditions from which an abstract machine departs” (p.3-4). The qualities of the enigmatic part-object allow an openness that gives space for the possibility of this departure. Movements, change, transition, are necessary qualities of the “real”, therefore: “An abstract machine determines the real conditions of experience, conditions neither subjective nor objective” (p.4). Because it is always moving our experience of the artwork can be neither subjective nor objective and thus it “involves a redefinition of experience by which its objective and subjective conditions are dissolved in the real, the reality of the world as it becomes nothing else than itself” (p.4).



Figure 9. *Parts (installation)*, felt, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cardboard, fabric, plaster, June 2013.

### **3.4. The Part-Object/Subject**

In the book *Parables for the Virtual, Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi uses the example of a soccer match to describe the way in which the ball becomes part-subject and the player becomes part-object. The field is the space that maps out the event and, as such, is a space of potential: we could relate this idea to the installation space. In Massumi's soccer match the ball is the subject of the play, or as he explains: "To be more precise, the subject of the play is the displacements of the ball and the continual modifications of the field of potential those displacements effect" (2002, p.73). For this reason the artwork (the ball) is part-subject, because it "catalyzes the play as a whole but is not itself a whole" (p.73). When translated into an art context this would be similar to saying that the artwork determines the art encounter but is not the art encounter itself, and its *displacements* are the catalysts for potential movements within the encounter. This is important in relation to installation methods; the idea of *displacement* could be related to the failure in that in certain installations the artwork fails to be presented in such a way that is satisfactory. In other words, we may feel as though the artwork has been not been placed. The displaced artwork is *en route* to its destination and, as such, embodies the same potential that the soccer ball does in the event of play; a multiplicity of potential movements. Massumi explains: "Since the ball is nothing without the continuum of potential it doubles, since its effect is dependent on the physical presence of a multiplicity of other bodies and objects of various kinds" (p.73). The artwork is nothing without potential, like the soccer ball its effect is dependent on the "physical presence of a multiplicity of other bodies and objects of various kinds".



Figure 10. *Amalgamation*, felt, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, size variable, June 2013.

So what of the player of the match, or the viewer of the artwork? Massumi explains that: “If the ball is part-subject, each player is part-object. The ball does not address the player as a whole. It addresses the player’s eyes, ears, and touch through separate sensory channels” (p.73-74). Neither do we address the artwork as a whole; if we were to focus on one element of it then we would miss something essential. Massumi explains: “Any player that is conscious of himself as he kicks, misses. Self-consciousness is a negative condition of the play” (p.74). When we try to think the artwork—when we are subjective—we dismiss other aspects that are inherent to the artwork. When we keep ourselves open to multiple trajectories of experience we obtain *sensations* from the artwork. There is more in the sensation of something than in the idea, or thought of it. This is because sensations are a conglomeration of ideas, language and memories, all of which somehow relate to and contextualize the present experience.

We react to the ball, to the artwork, in effect of sensation. “Sensation is the mode in which the potential is present in the perceiving body. The player does not play on the ground. He looks past it and past the ball to the field of potential—which is insubstantial, real but abstract” (p.75). This could be related back to Agamben’s idea that “faculty” exists in “*non-Being*, the presence of an absence”; in this case there is an absence of self-consciousness, which is the presence of sensation. When we encounter the artwork we encounter potential by bringing with us “shards of intentions and conscious memories, most presently bearing on pregame strategy—shimmers of reflection and language” (p.75). As such, the player/viewer is part-object as she contributes herself as a part of the operation of potential that navigates the game, or the art encounter. Thus: “The field of potential is the *effect* of the contingent intermixing of elements, but it is logically and ontologically distinct from them” (p.75).

This image has been removed by the author of this exegesis for copyright reasons.

### **3.5. Reception and Transmission**

Consider the work *Air and Stone* (1966) by Lygia Clark; the stone sits on top of a plastic pouch filled with air, which when manipulated mimes “a giving birth” (Krauss, 1997, p.160). Clarks’ works use the gesture of participation to engage the viewer in an experience that is physically felt, but it is not only the physically acting participant that has this experience. As the viewer of this scenario we fill in gaps with our material knowledge, we imagine the texture of the plastic, the weight of the stone, and the action required in order to activate the birthing of the stone. There is a process of reception and transmission taking place, both literally: through physical participation, and virtually (in being with the object we are participating with the object because we are bodies with thoughts and senses).

We feel the object even though we are not physically touching it. Potential draws out this participation both physically and virtually: we see the potential for the performance before it happens. The hand squeezes the pouch of air, which receives the force that is transmitted to the stone, forcing it upwards. At the same time, the plastic, air and stone transmit sensations onto the receiving hand. In the virtual act of participation a similar process occurs: through perception the body imagines what it would feel like to touch the soft plastic pouch and feel the weight of the stone. The part-object/subject transmits its potentiality onto the receiving body, which transmits those potentialities back onto the receiving part-object, in effect performing the encounter. Body and object communicate as parts within the same operation; the object becomes prosthesis of the body as the body becomes prosthesis of the object: as in Massumi’s soccer match, the object becomes subject and subject becomes object. Through the absence of performance the part-object/subject gestures an initiation of participation that draws out its potentiality.



Figure 12. *Gaps*, plastic drop sheet, paint, stuffing, fabric, sand, sawdust, approximately 180cm x 180cm x 15cm, August 2013.

## **4. Transitional Modes and Spaces**

### **4.1. Action—Perception**

Perception is the act of realizing or becoming aware of something in such a way through the senses. Therefore perception is often thought of as a subjective experience; the perceived thing as mediated through the perceiver. However, Massumi offers an alternative way of considering perception, he explains: “The properties of the perceived thing are properties of the action, more than of the thing itself” (p.90). Massumi is suggesting that perception is in the action of the encounter between things and is not held within the perceiver. He explains that the properties of perception are “tokens of the perceiver’s and the perceived’s concrete inclusion in each other’s world. The perception lies *between* the perceiver and the perceived” (p.90). Massumi describes this as the space in which “action” and “anticipation” is activated — where the act of perception (the act of receiving, analysing and transmitting) meets anticipation (an awareness of the potentiality for multiple perceptions) (p.91). Anticipation “extends the actual moment beyond itself, superposing one moment upon the next, in a way that is not just thought but also bodily felt as a yearning, tending, or tropism” (p.91).

Anticipation is interesting in relation to the “desire” of the part-object. Here, it is the anticipation of the action of extension that activates “a yearning”. Massumi is suggesting, as Krauss has also done, that the body yearns for participation, and this desire is considered to be a kind of bodily need. Massumi suggests that this desire loops back onto itself to create sensation. He says: “Sensation is the registering of the multiplicity of potential connections in the singularity of a connection actually underway” (p.92-93). In the action of perception there is a point in which it is realized that there are many possible perceptions, which acts as a way of dissolving subjective notions and opens up the potential for sensation. There is a realization of the potential for the thing (the part-object) to become more than what is possible within perception, it is “the singular point where what infolds is also unfolding” (p.94). This could be related back to Zepke’s idea of the artwork as machine, which he describes as an “unfolding of complexity, a fractal engineering inseparable from life, a blooming of multiplicity”.



Figure 13. Fabienne Lasserre, *Actant 10* (2012), steel, linen, acrylic polymer, 83 x 81 x 65 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Diet, Miami.

## 4.2 Actual as Virtual as Actual

Perception is an operation of the part-object/subject and its potentiality. In the action of perception certain aspects of the part-object are extracted and extended through potentiality. We take an aspect of the actual object and extended it into the virtual, into the realm of potential. When the affect of sensation as “the multiplicity of potential connections in the singularity of a connection actually underway” is realized, there is a return back to the actual from the virtual to the real part-object/subject. Zepke explains this operation as “as mechanism of creation operating at the level of the real”.

Consider the work *Actant 10* (2012) by Fabienne Lasserre. Perhaps it is more relevant to talk about what this object is not. It is not a hula-hoop, nor a creeping vine, it is not a painting, nor a sculpture, it is not functional but it is not just a thing to look at. It is not a wormy creature that is biting its own tail while it leans half-heartedly against the wall. It is none of these things, yet it is an amalgamation of the sensations of all of these things. It is only through the action of extension, the act of trying to define through representation, that we come to see the work as a thing that does not represent something else. The work consists of many points of reference that individually provoke many different responses, but it is the “multiplicity of connections” which is unsettling. Transmissions projected from artwork and viewer collide and amalgamate to produce more elements, more questions. What is required is a return to sensation, we must remember what Massumi states: “Any player that is conscious of himself as he kicks, misses. Self-consciousness is a negative condition of the play” (2002, p.74). When we experience the artwork through sensation, we let go of our subjective positioning and our self-consciousness. In turn we allow ourselves to experience the artwork in multiple ways (as an amalgamation of physical and mental reactions), thus, obtaining a broader sense of the artwork rather than a specific idea.

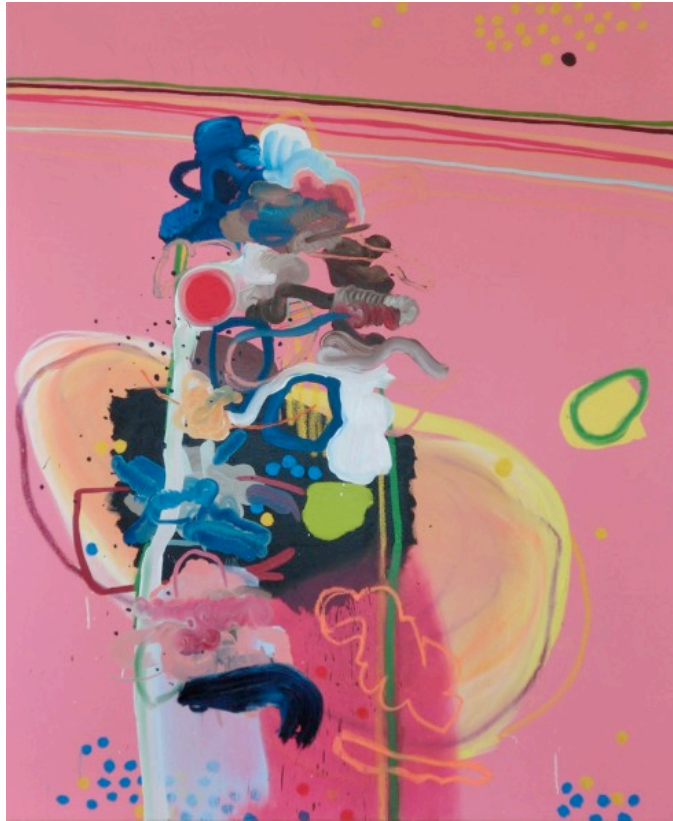


Figure 14. Lefort, J. *You You You* (2012), oil on canvas, 66" x 54". Courtesy of the artist.

### **4.3 In Transit**

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari investigate the idea of smooth space and striated space and how these two different spaces are constantly in transition. It is described that smooth space “is in principle infinite, open and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor centre; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation” (p.475-476). Striated space “is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms...” (p.478). It is interesting to relate the idea of smooth and striated space to the dynamics of the part-object/subject. The part-object/subject could be considered to be an amalgamation of the smooth and the striated. Striated elements give us the starting points for the action of perception while the smooth operates as the space of potentiality where these points collide and multiply.

Consider the painting *You You You* (2012) by Jennifer Lefort. The work is in transition between something that is recognisable and something completely unrecognisable. There is an ambiguous coagulation of marks, which is forming itself into some kind of abominable creature that has slugged its way out of the swamp into candyfloss land. There are certain elements that tell me; figure, landscape, eye and tongue, however, this is only apparent for a fleeting moment. The blue and yellow spots in the painting deter me from this path, blurring the boundary between figure and foreground. The painting in this moment is a unique coagulation of marks and colours. There is a constant flicking back and forth between what I think I see and what know I cannot see. Just as something starts to emerge it is pulled back into the realm of the enigmatic and the cycle continues. The painting embodies differentiating elements: those that are fixed and those that are variable. When posited together they bounce off one another, creating an open and transitional dialogue.



Figure 15. *Two (one)*, plastic drop sheet, paint, stuffing, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 165cm x 165cm x 25cm, August 2013.

#### **4.5. Intensely Still**

There is a certain stillness that is acquired within the notion of potentiality; at the start of a soccer game, the ball placed mid-field, the players are frozen as they ready themselves for the flurry of potential movements that might ensue. In the chapter *Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover* from the book *Part Object Part Sculpture*, Briony Fer explains: “In the most interesting still-life painting, the spaces between things, rather than the things themselves, trigger an extreme mobility” (2005, p.223). Stillness; the absence of movement is the presence of potential movement; a mode of anticipation that captures us in the moment. This effect grows to envelop us, we are also still, we do not want to miss out on the slightest movement. When at home one day I encountered a frog sitting dead still in front of the garage door. The frog was neither dead nor alive. It sat upright, poised as if about to leap, but was so still it was as if it had been frozen. The frog and I were captured in this moment; unexpectedly caught out by each other, intensely aware of the potential for movement. There was an overwhelming sense of anticipation held in the stillness of the situation. Fer continues on her trajectory by adding: “It often happens that the ‘stiller’ the still life, the more mobile the *psychic* effect in the imagination” (p.223). The combination of the unexpected paired with an intense stillness set up the grounds for the “*psychic* effect” I experienced. I started to question the frog’s agenda: why would a frog be in the middle of such an exposed area? What was it doing before I discovered it? In the back of my mind I knew that these thoughts were not rational, I had gone beyond what Massumi describes as the negative condition of self-consciousness and into the realm of sensation. In this moment of stillness came the presence of potential movement — I sensed that the frog had the potential to be and do so much more than what was possible.



Figure 16. *Forced conversation*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 200cm x 25cm x 18cm, August 2013.

#### **4.6. In Waiting**

In keeping with the theme of redundancy, Fer relates sculpture to leftovers in her essay. The part-object, in its stillness, in its absence and in its partialness could be seen to be leftover. But this does not ground them solely within relation to the past, Fer explains that they are “both working parts and leftovers of other works” (p.227). They oscillate between what they are (the actual) and their potential (the virtual). Unable to be located in relation to time, they are left “in limbo” (p.225). Fer explains that leftovers are placeholders that “stand not what for once has been but what will be. They suggest forever fluctuating possibilities” (p.228). Leftovers do not reference that which they were, they are only this potential and as such they are so much more; becoming parts in their own right. Fer explains: “If memories are stirred by some objects, they are quickly cancelled by being dislodged from the circuits they normally inhabit. They leapfrog from one to another, temporary residents in a different space” (p.231). Leftovers, like the part-object/subject are amalgamations of many things, which resemble nothing. They are a multiplicity of parts, which “do not add up to a whole so much as circulate in perpetual motion” (p.228).

The idea of the leftover is interesting in relation to possible installation methods. The part-object/subject could be considered as leftover as it signals an absence of something that once was or will be. The part-object/subject is somewhat functional and minimal, a part of a larger work perhaps. The way in which works might be placed could also activate the sense of the leftover. For example, it would be difficult to consider artworks as leftovers if they were hung in the middle of the gallery as they would command aesthetic attention and become locatable within a more familiar art conversation. But this is not so with the part-object/subject, as Massumi would say they are “displaced”; they cannot be located within any one particular conversation. There seems to be some kind of aesthetic intention behind their placing, but they sit up against walls and in corners out of the way of foot traffic as if in transition between spaces. The part-object/subject waits for activation.



Figure 17. *In Transit*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 70cm x 80cm x 25cm, August 2013.

#### **4.7. Iteration, Intervals, Glitches**

As process is a condition of the enigmatic art-object then it is interesting to think about the role that iteration plays in relation to the idea of the interval. We know by experience that repeated actions do not always turn out the same; machines do not always produce the same product. There is a moment within a process where something slips slightly out of sync and alters the procedure. In his book *Bergsonism* Deleuze explains that the cause of this slippage is the held in the interval, he explains this relationship through the example of the human brain: “the brain complicates the relationship between a received movement (excitation) and an executed movement (response). Between the two it establishes an interval” (p.24).

To relate this idea back to the artwork these intervals are inevitable in the multiplying processes of reception and transmission that are taking place. What is interesting is that these intervals only occur when this process is in motion; the interval occurs *between* the point of departure and the point of arrival and as such it operates as an amorphous space of anticipation and potential; there must be production in order for this interval to occur. The interval could be thought of as the moment in which a product is in the process of transition between one machine and the next: between artwork and viewer perhaps. The interval is not an absence of movement but the presence of the potential for movement. The interval is the moment of transition when we are going but we do not know where, and as such it becomes a moment of freedom where we are not bound by certain expectations or destinations; all we have is potentiality.



Figure 18. *In-fold*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 80cm x 80cm x 20cm, August 2013.

## **5. In-conclusion**

Ironically, and as stated in the introduction, there can be no conclusion to the discussion about the enigmatic part-object/subject. The enigmatic part-object/subject might be seen as an amalgamation of different modes of absence that hold potential. In other words the part-object/subject could be considered as potential non-being. This potential fuels other procedures. How that fuel affects us depends on a multitude of internal and external factors that become part of a complex process that we cannot begin to predict. This research has not been conducted in order to *determine* those indeterminable, future orientated machines, but to explore the ways in which the part-object/subject might become an abundant source of fuel for a multitude of machines. Thus, a faculty of absent presence remains heterogeneous, open to transition and transformation; malleable, indefinable and mobile.

**Image Gallery**

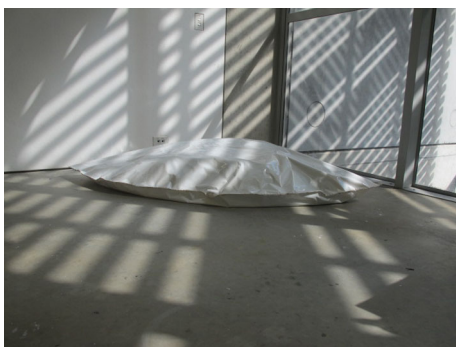
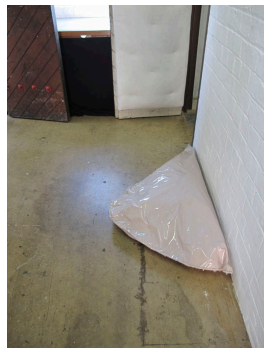


Figure 19.

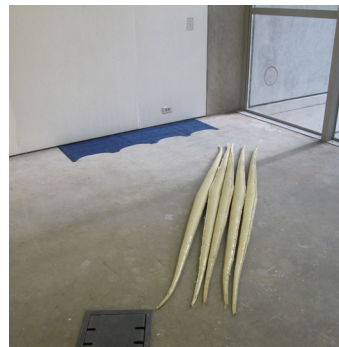
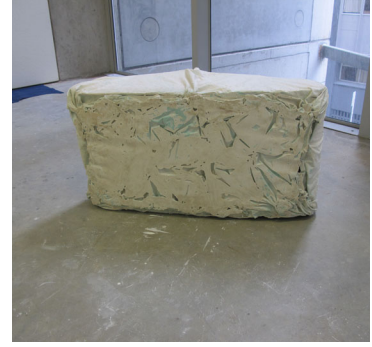


Figure 20.



Figure.21

### **Bibliography of References**

Agamben, G. (1999). *Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy*. California: Stanford University Press.

Bois, Y. & Krauss, R. (1997). *Formless, A Users Guide*. New York: Zone Books

Deleuze, G. (1966). *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2004). 1440: The Smooth and the Striated. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: New York: Continuum

Fer, B. (2005). The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover. *Part Object Part Sculpture*. Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts & The Ohio State University

Klocker, H. (1998). Gesture and the Object: Liberation as Aktion: A European Component of Performative Art. *OUT OF ACTIONS: between performance and the object, 1949-1979*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Krauss, R. (1999). *Bachelors*. United States of America: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. USA: Duke University Press.

Molesworth, H. (2005). Duchamp: By hand, even. *Part Object Part Sculpture*. Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts & The Ohio State University

Vergine, Lea. (1974) *The Body as Language ("Body-art" and performance)*. Milan: Giampaolo Prearo Editore

Zepke, S. (2005). *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Delueze and Guattari*. New York: Routledge

## List of Figures

Figure 1. *Untitled*, fabric, wire, tinfoil, plaster bandage and paint, size variable, March 2013.

Figure 2. *Untitled*, wire, tinfoil and plaster bandage, approx. 25cm x 50cm x 30cm, March 2013.

Figure 3. *Pause*, upholstering fabric, paint, stuffing and cotton thread, presented as part of group show *Yellowed* at Artstation, April 2013.

Figure 4. West, F. (2004). *Paßstück*. Plaster, gauze, cardboard, wire, 26 x 14 x 8-1/4 inches. Retrieved from: <http://jameskelly.com/wesf/wesf34.html> on 10/08/2012.

Figure 5. *White mass*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, presented as part of group show *Yellowed* at Artstation, April 2013.

Figure 6. *Between wall and floor*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, July 2013.

Figure 7. Duchamp, M. (1954). [Photograph of] *Wedge of Chastity*. Bronze and Plastic, 63 x 87 x 42mm. Courtesy of Tate. Retrieved from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-wedge-of-chastity-t07281> on 10/08/2012.

Figure 8. *Untitled*, felt, acrylic plastic, stuffing and cotton string, size variable, May 2013.

Figure 9. *Parts (installation)*, felt, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cardboard, fabric, plaster, June 2013

Figure 10. *Amalgamation*, felt, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing and cotton string, size variable, June 2013.

Figure 11. Clark, L. (1966). *Stone and Air*, mixed media. Retrieved from: <http://ggeeoorrgg.net/lygia-clark/> on 5/07/2012.

Figure 12. *Gaps*, plastic drop sheet, paint, stuffing, fabric, sand, sawdust, approximately 180cm x 180cm x 15cm, presented as part of group show *Gum* at St Paul Street Gallery Three, August 2013.

Figure 13. Lasserre, F. *Actant 10* (2012), steel, linen, acrylic polymer, 83 x 81 x 65 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Diet, Miami. Retrieved from: [http://www.fabiennelasserre.com/works.php?p=1\\_recent\\_projects&t=01\\_the\\_us&i=21](http://www.fabiennelasserre.com/works.php?p=1_recent_projects&t=01_the_us&i=21) on 30/09/2013.

Figure 14. Lefort, J. *You You You* (2012), oil on canvas, 66" x 54". Courtesy of the artist. Retrieved from: <http://parisianlaundry.com/en/artists/jenniferlefort/you-you-you> on 30/09/2013.

Figure 15. *Two (one)*, plastic drop sheet, paint, stuffing, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 165cm x 165cm x 25cm, presented as part of group show *Gum* at St Paul Street Gallery Three August 2013.

Figure 16. *Forced conversation*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 200cm x 25cm x 18cm, presented as part of group show *Along the Transect Line* at St Paul Street Gallery Three, August 2013.

Figure 17. *In Transit*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 70cm x 80cm x 25cm, presented as part of group show *Along the Transect Line* at St Paul Street Gallery Three, August 2013.

Figure 18. *In-fold*, acrylic plastic, paint, stuffing, cotton string, fabric, sand and sawdust, approximately 80cm x 80cm x 20cm, presented as part of group show *Along the Transect Line* at St Paul Street Gallery Three, August 2013.

Figure 19. Documentation images, mixed media, March, April and May 2013.

Figure 20. Documentation images, mixed media, May, June and July 2013.

Figure 21. Documentation images, mixed media, July and August 2013.

Figure 22. Documentation of final exhibition, mixed media, November 2013.

Figure 23. Documentation of final exhibition, mixed media, November, 2013.

Figure 24. Documentation of final exhibition, mixed media, November, 2013.

Figure 25. Documentation of final exhibition, mixed media, November, 2013.



## ***Appendix***

The space for the final exhibition was chosen for its transitional nature. The works trailed from the level one foyer of AUT's WM building and in to St Paul St Gallery One where they occupied an entrance/hallway type area. This lead into the main space of the gallery, in which works occupied the area surrounding a concrete pillar. During the installation I thought about the way that people drop things off when they enter a room (a bag or a jacket for instance). We tend to place these objects near corners and up against walls in an attempt to avoid visually and physically interrupting the space. As these objects will be moved sooner rather than later, they avoid claiming a space of their own, preferring to remain slightly at odds with their temporary location.

Not unexpectedly, during the opening night of the exhibition my works were stood on multiple times. I think that this was due to the fact that the works occupied spaces that people also tend to occupy. Interestingly, the works near the pillar were stood on the most. I can only guess that this was because the pillar acted as a sort of beacon, a comfortable place to position oneself next to in order to observe the space without interrupting it or getting in the way.

The final exhibition included a slight shift in my making and thinking. In previous work the sense of temporality and transition was mainly achieved through installation methods, whereas in the final exhibition this sense was also embedded in the objects themselves. For example, the two works near the pillar inside the main space of the gallery seemed as though they might be in the process of completion and as such they embodied the potential to change. During the exhibition I often got questioned about the materials the objects were made out of. As a result of this intrigue I found that people would often touch the objects in order to satisfy this curiosity. I think these two factors (the sense of potential incompleteness and the intrigue initiated by the qualities of the materials and processes used) worked to successfully enhance the enigmatic nature of the works.

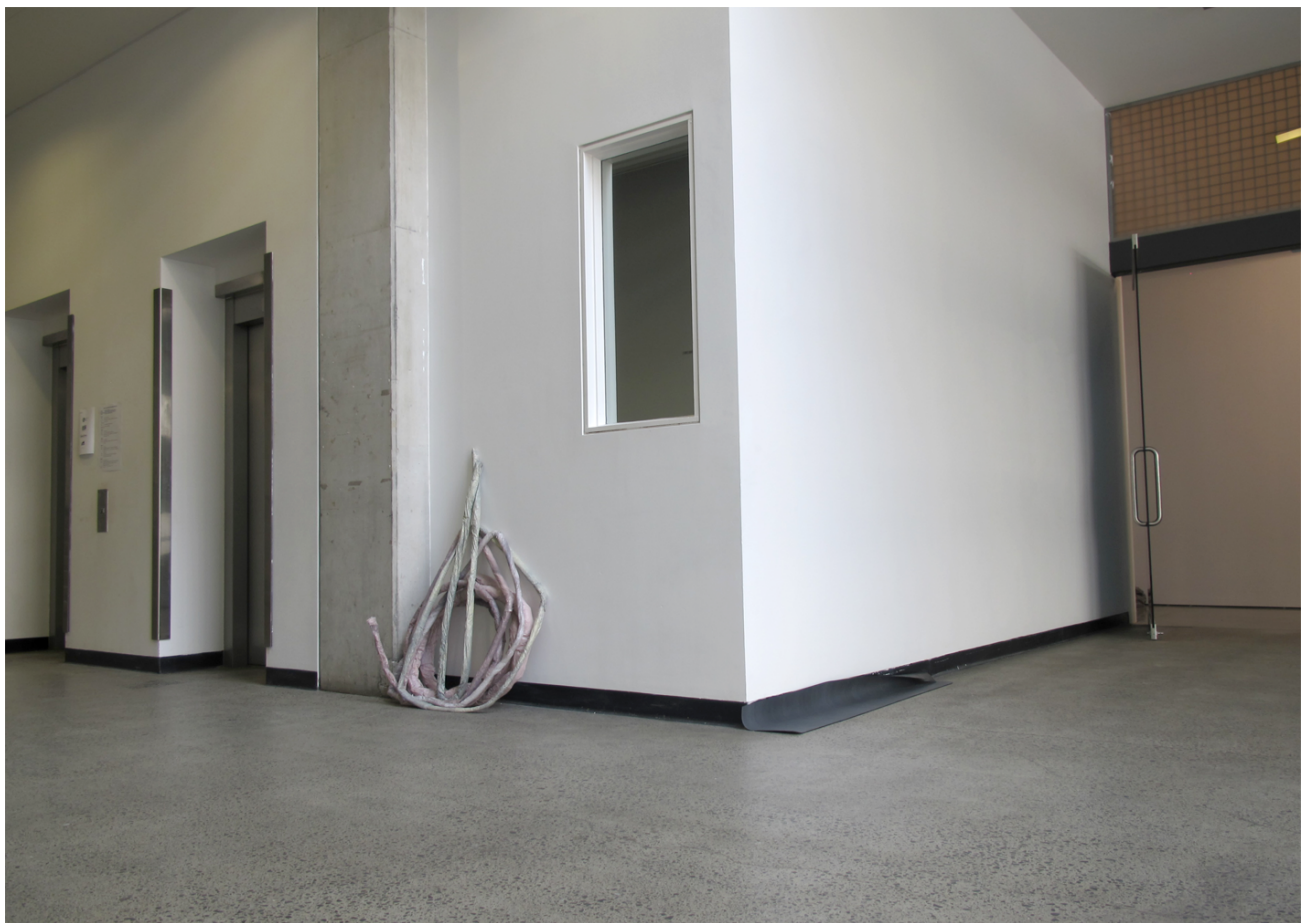
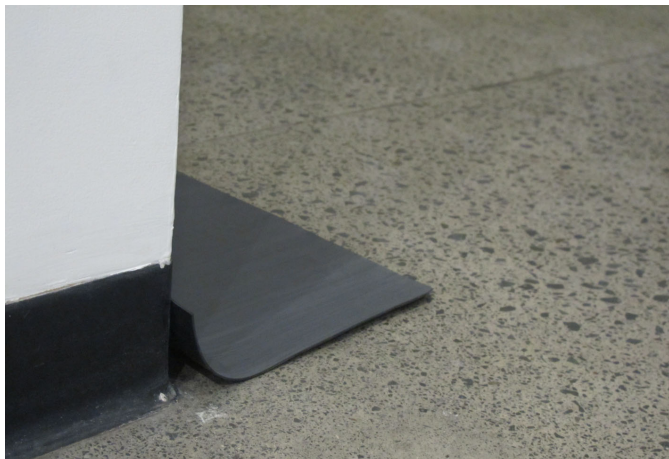
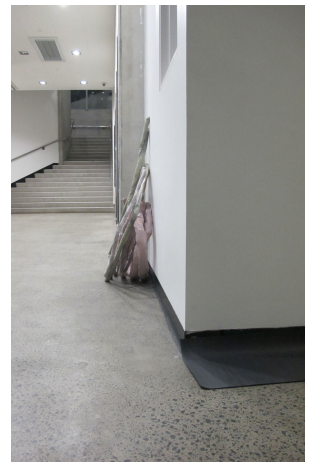


Figure 22.



Figure 23.



Figure 24.



Figure 25.