

Everything moves so swiftly
Sculptural moments in the life of objects

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i Attestation of authorship

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

Lance Pearce
2012

ii Acknowledgements

I would like to both acknowledge and thank Paul Cullen, Ian Jervis, Monique Redmond, and Andy Thomson for their support and assistance throughout the duration of my research project.

iii Preface

This is a practice-based project with accompanying exegesis (constituted of 80% practical research and 20% written research).

iv Abstract

My practice-based art project explores a variety of constructional approaches specifically directed toward sculptural outcomes; the repurposing of commonplace objects to produce sculptural composites. This project speculates on the role of asignification in a sculptural object as both a deferral of representation and an enabler of human potential. Asignification, as an elision of the standardising and constraining space of representation, provides a key to rethinking the conditions of potentiality immanent to the spectator/sculpture encounter. The spectator's encounter with an asignifying sculpture exists on the cusp between a leap into the virtual and more familiar spatiotemporal vectors. And if taken, this leap allows the spectator – as in a dream – to move freely within a boundless experience of time and memory.

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to both outline and provide some reasoning for the approach taken to writing this exegesis. Normally, art is mediated to us through representation – institutional practices (philosophy, art criticism and the museum) interpret an artwork or collection in order to articulate the ‘meaning’ contained therein. These institutional practices produce cultural knowledge by determining how the art it sanctions is both interpreted and perceived. The problem of an emphasis on representation is that “art is not an object amongst others, at least, not an object of knowledge (or, not only an object of knowledge), rather, art ‘does something else’ (O’Sullivan, 2008, p. 40). This exegesis ventures to explore this *something else* – which may be described as the aesthetic effect, or in other words, the spectator’s *experience* during their encounter with art.

Asignification is a disarticulation from within to the production of meaning. The intrigue of employing asignification as a sculptural approach or strategy is its capacity for a temporary elision of all signifying conventions (representation) and the plentitude of new images and potentials which might surface through this elision. This exegesis draws upon the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Henri Bergson, and additional explicative texts in relation to asignification in art. These texts inform my own speculative discussion of asignification in relation to a spectator’s encounter with my own sculptural production. This focus on asignification relates to a broader interest in the limitations of language to adequately express thought and experience. It seems to me that the power of art is encountered beyond representation, in a fundamentally mysterious, nonlinguistic and affective dimension. Art draws us in to experiences of awe, wonder, bemusement, uncertainty and disquiet (or indeed, might leave us feeling indifferent). Certainly, art is not entirely disconnected from meaning, but its *raison d’être* is not to communicate ‘a meaning’ as such. While language is invaluable in providing structure to the flow and nature of thought, its use in representation also entails a “psychic constrain involved in the perception of meaning and the attempt to make it firm” (Rosen, 2012, para. 1). Although providing

intellectual contexts for ‘thinking’ art, institutional attempts to represent art seem to both limit and over determine its reception in the ‘making firm’ of the meaning of art. All the while, art attempts to wrest itself free from the constraints of language. The philosophical discussion of asignification suitably accords with both the dynamic of my intuitive making process (intuition and speculation based, rather than concept lead) and my thinking in regards to sculpture not as the bearer of a internal ‘meaning’ as such, but rather, as a “bloc of sensations” that bring into view percepts and affects; a quietly forceful interruption which opens an embodied spectator to the reality of the virtual (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 166-167).



Figure 1.1. *Should've Moved Mountains*, installation view at Ozlyn Project Window, Auckland, (2012) (fluorescent lights, timber) two units, each 50 x 100 x 170 mm, installed at 75 degree incline with 80 mm interval.

Asignification produces a ‘gap in time’ during the spectator’s viewing experience of a sculpture. This discontinuity occurs as a disabling of the spectator’s normal sensory-motor activity. The interruption of asignification in the spectator produces a prolongation of a nonlinguistic, affective state of encounter with a sculptural object. This shift in the spectator’s state allows for internal movement between the virtual and more familiar spatiotemporal vectors (the actual). Keith Ansell-Pearson (2002), explicating the philosopher Henri Bergson, claims that “the actuality of our psychic

states presupposes a virtual multiplicity of duration” (p. 15). To expand this, our movement *in thought* between past reminiscence and future-directed anticipation is analogous to the reality of a virtual duration containing unanticipated, limitless potential. This exegesis explores the notion that the art spectator accesses the virtual realm, which is a real zone of multiple durations and contains potentialities (new images and concepts) waiting to be brought into the actual. It is speculated that the spectator’s actualisation of the virtual is a creative act (bringing self-differentiating, new concepts to consciousness and beyond), and that this experience might *delay* a habitual search for the signified concept (external meaning) denoted by an artwork. The ‘potentials’ of the virtual are not pre-given concepts awaiting realisation (resulting in *resemblance* to what already is), but rather, things not already given to us (new concepts and images) which differentiate themselves from themselves in their actualisation (resulting in the production of genuinely new concepts) (Ansell-Pearson, 2002, p. 104-105). Always drawing us toward the possibility of genuinely creative thought within the fabric of the everyday, the event of art makes available the actualisation of potential.

2.0 Assignification and the event of art

2.1 Assignification

Assignification is an interruption from within to the production of meaning; it is a stutter within language, a circuit breaker within an electrical flow, and abstraction within art. Assignification opposes the conventional framing of art as representational. We are habituated to representational thinking – as human subjects, we rely on representation to mediate our relation to the world external to us. Simon O’Sullivan (2008) argues that representation positions art as a mirror: reflecting back “an apparently reassuring image of our own subjectivity” (p. 16). The writing of O’Sullivan reinterprets Gilles Deleuze, who calls into question the representational emphasis that traditional aesthetics places upon art, suggesting instead that art produces an intensive quality which acts directly upon the spectator’s sensory-motor responses. Elizabeth A.

Grosz (2008), also explicating Deleuze, claims that “[a]rt is the art of affect more than representation, a system of dynamized and impacting forces rather than a system of unique images that function under the regime of signs” (p.3). Asignification produces a crisis in representation. It is a constellation of ‘non-communication’ – unknown signs – beyond signification and meaning.

The intrigue of employing asignification as a sculptural approach or strategy is its capacity for elision of all signifying conventions and the plentitude of new images and potentials which might surface through this elision. However, asignification coexists with a clamor of signs that adhere from the past. This project does not imagine that it can clear itself of signs, but instead, it attempts to make a clearing within the signs. A spectator may experience this clearing as a prolonging of the ‘half-second delay’ between their reception of an artwork and their formation of an interpretation (or representation). In this instance, the spectator may experience the (extended) interval between stimulus and response as an opportunity to escape from habit, and to creatively interact with the world.

The asignifying sculpture opens a liminal space toward alternate spatiotemporal flows – the pure past and future anticipations – which is experienced by the spectator as an event of expanded perception. As Claire Colebrook (2008), following Giorgio Agamben, suggests the function of art is “the means by which the human opens to ends beyond the present, beyond what is given as one’s own” (p. 109). As such, the asignifying sculpture becomes a site where the spectator experiences movement toward unanticipated potential. However, Colebrook (2008) also states that the emergence of spectator potential through an artwork “is not something that occurs inevitably, as though potentials would always arrive at their fulfillment” (p 109).

2.2 The virtual and the actual

My project explores asignification in the context of sculpture, and its activation of an imbalance that exists on the cusp between the virtual and the actual. We might say that it is the imbalance that is the precursor to a threshold experience; the spectator’s internal passage between durations (the virtual and the actual). The state of imbalance

is the tipping point leading to a threshold experience; an event-encounter wherein the affective force of art unleashes human potential.



Figure 2.1. *Everything All The Time*, detail, (2012) (oranges, sheet glass)

If we consider my sculpture *Everything All The Time*, 2012, (oranges, sheet glass) what the spectator may sense during their encounter with the work is both a continuity and heterogeneity of fluid movement and temporalities. This movement, while related to the materiality of the sculpture itself, cannot be reduced to the physical qualities of the object alone. We might say that the sculpture registers a multiplicity of duration in terms of both its spoilage (changes to its surface, form and physicochemical properties) and in its relation to the existing contingencies of the exhibition venue. For instance, the spectator may experience an opening and unfolding of subtle visual/atmospheric ‘moments,’ in terms of: the sculpture, the daylight’s temporal framing of the work, various shadows, and even the strange luminous presence of light within shadow. Here, the outline of the sculpture becomes imprecise in relation to the contingencies of both available daylight and architectural space. The virtual seems perceptible in the temporal and qualitative aspects of both sculpture and its environs; this series of relations allows for an intuitive recognition of a multiplicity of duration (the implication of multiple durations in the simultaneity of fruit decay, change of light during the day, and grimed patina of the floor). Deleuze claims that the virtual is “a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the

virtual into which it had plunged as though into an objective dimension” (as cited in O’Sullivan, 2008, p. 103). Furthermore, our encounter with the asignifying sculpture might then “involve intuition, an intuition incarnated in materials that takes us ‘beyond’ the actual, plunges us deep into the virtual, before returning with new actualizations” (O’Sullivan, 2008, p. 105). In this sense, a sculpture does not produce concepts but rather produces an *experience* of internal movement between durations. We might say that the spectator experiences the event of art as a “collection (*ensemble*) of time relations from which the present merely flows” (Pearson, 2000, p. 171).

I aim to make sculptures that create and sustain open-ended responses. My sculptures do not begin as a ‘meaning’ that is then realized as a form. In this sense, my production is neither driven by medium specificity (where art deals with the conventions and history of a specific medium) nor by a desire to illustrate or explain a specific concept or theme. This is not to say that my production is without criticality, but that this criticality is identified in retrospect. As such, my project privileges the role of intuition and even ineffable dimensions of experience within art practice. As my project develops, I can then reflect and speculate on how my sculpture circulates and connects with particular critical issues.

2.3 Creativity and knowledge production

To begin with, the topic of asignification is the most productive way to discuss the operation of my sculptures. An asignifying state may occur as a glitch, typographical error or the monotonous sound of white noise, all forms of non-communication which interrupt the received conventions of representation. The interruptive force of asignification produces the conditions for passage into non-human durations (alternate experiences of time) – an experience constituting the aesthetic effect. According to O’Sullivan (2010), following Deleuze, the art spectator experiences the aesthetic effect as “a contraction of the past, and the future, in an event/object that has the capacity to affect or be affected” (p. 20). This notion of the aesthetic effect is not based on an affirmation of the art object as the bearer of an essence or ‘meaning’, but rather is “a relation of a non-relation between two forces acting on one another in a reciprocal and transformative relationship” (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 21). I am interested in the capacity of an asignifying sculpture (or any artwork) to allow the spectator

passage beyond a threshold, activating an enlarged perception of affects and duration. For as Deleuze (1998) claims that “[t]o enlarge perception means to render sensible, sonorous (or visible), those forces that are ordinarily imperceptible” (p. 72).



Figure 2.2. *Everything All The Time* detail, installation view at Second Storey Gallery, Auckland, (2012)
(oranges, sheet glass)

If we return to my sculpture *Everything All The Time*, 2012, what the spectator may first encounter is the object's intrinsic, and yet incongruous qualities; the orange with its appearance, its taste, its provenance and so on. Beyond this, the sense of the orange's juicy pulp interior pressed up against the brittle, unyielding transparency of the sheet glass. This apparent incongruity gives rise to an awareness of paradoxical states and mutual transformations within the work. While this sculpture coheres as a visibly stable composite, it also undergoes a process of decomposition (oranges decay). An agitation may be sensed between fixity and energy dispersal, between solid 'object-ness' and the decay of matter-energy. This description of the sculpture's materiality highlights its state as a self-enclosed and self-referential system.

This self-referential sculpture seems to resist the logic of representation, in which the signifier is a unit of meaning that designates or expresses the signified (a particular external concept or reality). In his book *Listening*, Jean Luc Nancy (2007) describes the process by which meaning is conventionally expressed or indicated (by reference to an

external ‘thing’): “Meaning consists in a reference (*renvoi*). In fact, it is made of a totality of referrals: from a sign to a thing, from a state of things to a quality, from a subject to another subject or to itself, all simultaneously” (p. 7). In order to discuss art, it (or our response to it) is generally translated into codes of representation. In contrast, the asignifying sculpture resists such translation, and eschews the conventional role of art as representing or referring to an external concept or *thing*. Instead, the asignifying artwork attempts to refer only to itself. As such, any meaning is opaque and immanent to the work.

As spectators we become accustomed to the art world’s re-presentation of art to us, by means of social, cultural and political categories. However, in viewing an asignifying sculpture we become active participants in the unfolding of an event that gives rise to previously unthought meanings. The capacity of the spectator/art encounter to produce meaning invites new ways of thinking about knowledge, and the ways in which art and knowledge can be connected together and rethought. The traditional view of knowledge entails an understanding of existential facts, truths or principles; value is placed upon verifiable and explicable concepts. The institution of art functions, albeit sometimes reflexively, within the conventions of this tradition in its representation of art (as knowledge). However, Joshua Ramey (2012) claims that “[i]f ‘knowledge’ refers to a generality of concepts, and to the stability of a rule for solutions (measuring techniques, approximation of particulars to a general standard, etc.), art does not result in what we have traditionally thought of as knowledge” (p. 147). Art does not re-present or confirm our assumptions about the world to us. Of relevance to the asignifying sculpture, Nancy (2007) claims that to understand visual art is to recognize the uniquely visual meaning; “at least it’s to strain toward such a uniqueness or toward its inaccessibility, toward the characteristic of the inappropriate” (p. 70). Elsewhere, Nancy (2010) claims that art gives form to:

a certain possibility of circulation of meaning, of significations, which would not be an attribution of meaning (as when sometimes philosophy, but more often ideology, says ‘the meaning of the world is this’, the meaning of the world is a story that goes towards a humanity, or else the meaning of the world is precisely leaving the world to go to another world, or else the meaning of the world is that there is no meaning). The meaning I’m talking about is the meaning that art shapes, the meaning that allows

for a circulation of recognitions, identifications, feelings, but without fixing them in a final signification. Never does art say to us ‘the meaning of the world, the meaning of life, is this.’ (p. 92).



Figure 2.3. *I Want You To Know* (2012) (altered drawer)

To shape meaning is to speculate on those things not already given to us by preexisting concepts waiting to be articulated or gestured toward. Within this paradigm, the affective power of art draws the spectator out of habituated patterns of thought into the conditions of creativity and new knowledge production. In this instance, knowledge is not the reiteration of given significations, but rather, the creation of new ideas (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 44). O’Sullivan (2010) claims that to experience the affective force of art “is to experientially understand the conditions and causes of specific encounters, and then to utilize one’s knowledge in organizing one’s life” (p. 44). The potential of asignification is in its capacity to produce an aesthetic effect (affective experience) in the spectator leading to creativity and the production of new knowledge. However, the outcome of this encounter is largely contingent on the type of spectator involved. As O’Sullivan (2010) states the aesthetic effect requires a

“very particular kind of beholder, for it is not everyone who ‘gets’ the meaning, ‘feels’ the effect” (p. 22).

3.0 Liminal expression, duration and potential

3.1 Liminal expression

A sculpture with its surface, mass and density is usually discussed in terms of its form and content. However, we might also consider a sculpture (and any artwork) as a site where the spectator experiences movement beyond a threshold. This sculpture as the site of a threshold creates an encounter with a usually imperceptible reality that is not the ordered, familiar world but one that holds the potential for genuinely creative encounters with the world. O’Sullivan (2008) claims that the spectator primarily encounters art as a threshold space between the virtual and the actual (p. 7).

Elsewhere, he (2011) also suggests that “[s]uch an encounter, or ‘accessing’ of the event, might involve what Henri Bergson calls attention; the suspension of normal motor activity which in itself allows other ‘planes’ of reality to become perceivable (this is an opening up to the world beyond utilitarian interests)” (p. 45). A liminal expression interrupts the spectator’s normal way of being in the world, the necessary utility of habitual behavior or typical responses. Importantly, this interruption creates a delay in the spectator between stimulus and response. This gap creates a slowness and a stillness, that in and of itself, allows for a new perspective on the world (O’Sullivan, 2011, p. 99).

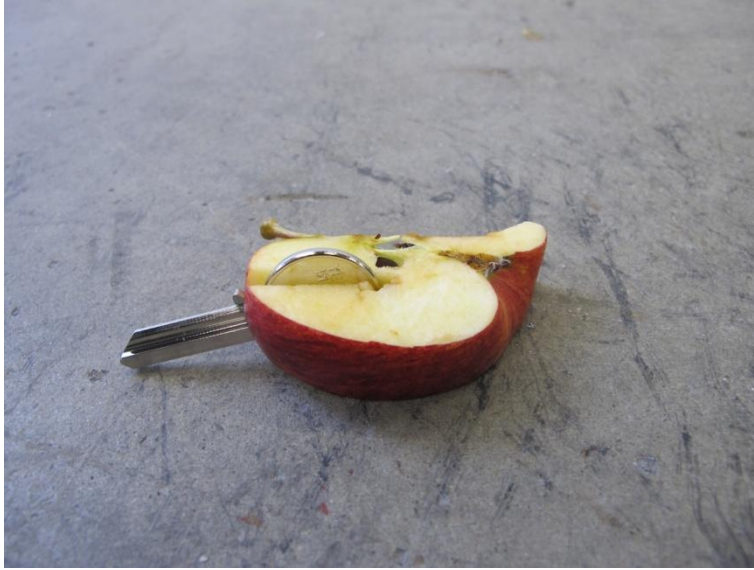


Figure 3.1. *Speaking Without Being Able To* detail (2012) (apple segments, key blanks)

3.2 Duration

The existence of a threshold creates the potential for an event of time. This event is directly related to Deleuze's (1999) notion of an event as "that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening" (p. 10). For Bergson, the act of passage into an event of time occurs in the dimension of the *virtual*, as opposed to the *actual* (which involves the present-day world of matter). G. William Barnard (2012) sketches the conditions of the virtual when he claims that for Bergson, "time is not unified; reality does not take place on a single plane. Instead there are multiple dimensions of experience, multiple levels of reality, each possessing their own unique, albeit ever-changing temporal rhythm" (p. 198). More concisely, the *virtual* is Bergson's term for the coexistence of the past in the present. Contrary to our learned knowledge, the present is not what 'is' now. The present is fractured, elusive and continually dropping from view. Similarly, the past is not what once 'was.' Instead, it provides a pool of learned knowledge that we continually draw upon and adapt for use. This prolongation of the past in the present, in effect, renders the past as coexistent with the *present*.

3.3 Potential

In Bergsonian terms, we can say that the spectator travels into the virtual (and the spectator that actualizes this virtual plane is changed in that very actualization) (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 100). The division of the present, at each successive moment, into the virtual and the actual, the past and the present allows temporal potentials to emerge; these inventions and productions arise from within the past as a supplement to the present (Grosz, 2004, p. 250). The visual artist Melanie Bonajo (2008), in an online interview on her art practice with film maker Willem Aerts, seems to locate creative potential within a threshold experience of duration: "One foot is always in the here and now and the other in infinity. In the endless possibilities you have by creating new situations, new definitions, by combining elements that normally don't collide."

For Bergson, the past is the pure-past - a *being* of memory - a virtual state of pure potentiality. In his book *The Ground of the Image*, Nancy (2000) speculates on art's relation to an ontological memory, when he claims that: "[i]f art has any relation to memory, it is to that strange memory that has never been deposited in a remembrance, which is therefore susceptible neither to forgetting nor to memory – for we have never lived it or known it – but which never leaves us: that which under the name of the beautiful or the sublime, the terrible or the graceful, the radiant or the moving, is for us, since so long ago (since always?), the "splendor of the true" (Plato), that is, both its brilliance and its flash, its lightning bolt and its secret" (p. 108). Grosz (2004), explicating Bergson, claims that the past is "the condition of innovation and the new: the new can be formed only through a kind of eruption or interruption of the present that does not come simply as a gift from the future but is a reworking of the past so that the present is different from itself, is open to an eruption" (p. 252). Each of these philosophers conceives of a dynamic potentiality within the past (virtual realm). An experience of this alternate time, called duration, activates the spectator's intuition, reorienting the spectator from a reliance on chronological time, which is delimited, to the immeasurable, qualitative aspects of human experience. In Deleuzian terms, we can say that the spectator's journey into the virtual realm allows the new – understood as the capacity to think



Figure 3.2. *Explain Away*, installation view at Second Storey Gallery, Auckland, (2012) (altered candles)

differently (genuinely creative thought) – to be actualised, as opposed to the past being merely the domain of previous experiences.

Asignifying sculpture has the capacity to transform the spectator’s perception of the world. According to Ronald Bogue (2010), Deleuze argues that thinking differently gives rise to an “alien, nonhuman (or ahuman) thinker” within thought (p. 125). To think differently is a curative mode of being necessary to overcome our contemporary dilemma – the loss of real possibility – by means of producing new ideas (Bogue, 2010, p. 125). According to Bogue (2010), Deleuze argues that:

only such a different kind of thought constitutes genuine thinking. To think differently, however, is in a sense to exceed our present thought, to go beyond what we know and hold certain. Only by injecting into thought something uncharted and incomprehensible, a pure Outside, can genuine thinking begin. (p. 125)

According to Simon O’Sullivan (2010) this is what Deleuze asserts is the significance of art, its ability to present not an “object of recognition” – through which our

knowledge, beliefs and values are revalidated – but rather, the “object of an encounter” – a difference – which provokes a reorientation of thought and our habitual subjectivities (p. 1). However, this dislocation also produces an affirmative experience, “the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently ... Life, when it truly is lived, is a history of these encounters, which will always necessarily occur beyond representation” (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 1).

4.0 Materiality

4.1 Materiality

My sculptures sometimes render explicitly visible, through inherent processes, the force of matter. The use of organic substances (fruit, margarine) within sculptural composites results in materially-active configurations. This matter-movement creates a relational effect; an activity of two things performing simultaneously or in an alliance with one another. The activity of substances enacts an internal metamorphosis within the ‘static’ form of sculpture. A sculpture comprised of organic materials – which oftentimes will quickly decompose – operates differently to the conventional ‘fixed stability’ of the art object.



Figure 4.1. *The Easy Isn't Always Easy*, detail, (2012) (newspaper, margarine)



Figure 4.2. *The Easy Isn't Always Easy* (2012) (newspaper, margarine)

If we consider my sculpture *The Easy Isn't Always Easy*, 2012, (newspaper, margarine) what the spectator may experience is a tension between process and resolution intrinsic to the object. The constituent parts of the sculpture; the soft, waxy margarine placed alongside the absorptive, permeable newspaper become a body that is an emergent comingling of matter (newspaper absorbs margarine). Within this composite, we get emergent qualities that otherwise remain dormant within each element when perceived in isolation. And yet, this particular aspect of the object's duration (action and receptivity) is but part of a continuum of material processes. Eventually, the margarine's developmental path into the newspaper stops. The described process is only one of many that the sculpture undergoes in relation to both internal and external factors.



Figure 4.3. Braun, B. *Untitled (Pullover)*, detail (2011) (airforce sweater, grass of a bird's nest)

Björn Braun's *Untitled (Pullover)*, 2011 demonstrates an interest in the conventions of sculpture and the potential of organic materials to produce tensions within an object, which are also felt by the spectator. In this artwork, the grass of a bird's nest appears to be deftly woven into the fabric of an industrially produced sweater. The temporality of the 'withering' grass contrasts with the more stable nature of fabric. And yet, we know that both these materials are subject to decomposition over time. However, a tension may be sensed in the particular temporality (briefer lifespan) of the woven grass. In projecting toward its own internal unraveling, the sculpture is in a transitional state that seems to elude representation. The sculptures discussed above register the "impersonal agency integral to materiality... a vitality distinct from human or divine purposiveness" (Bennett, 2010, p. 69). Such an artwork that incarnates the "impersonal agency" of matter moves away from a logic of signification; there seems to be no reference to an 'external meaning'. This notion invites a reconception of the word meaning. In *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi defines meaning as a "network of enveloped material processes" (as cited in O'Sullivan, 2008, p. 20). O'Sullivan (2008) paraphrases Massumi's conception of meaning: "meaning is figured as the envelopment of a potential, a contraction of the past, and the future, in an event/object that has the capacity to affect or be affected. Here it is the work of 'interpretation' to unravel these 'virtual' processes encapsulated in the object" (p. 20). In this instance, the 'sign' is relocated away from semiotic significance to the

potentiality – “the capacity to affect, or to release a force” – intrinsic to *material qualities* (Massumi, 1992, p. 10).

5.0 The new and gesture

5.1 The new

The ‘new’ is something fresh and original which has recently come or been brought into being; different from the extended duration enjoyed by the ‘current.’ Perhaps contrary to its own logic, the production of the new entails neither an erasure nor a forgetting of the past. Instead, we might think of the ‘new’ as stemming from that which already exists (preexisting elements or matter). For as O’Sullivan (2011) contends “[t]he new does not arrive from some ‘other place’ (transcendence), but is produced from the very matter of the world, after all what else is there? And where else can the new come from?” (p. 91). So that, the new emerges from *what already is*, rather than arriving through an act of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

A sculpture arrives as something new that is drawn forth from the matter of the world. The traditional approach to sculpture tends toward a primeval creative act: an artist laboriously shapes base matter into a new object. An historical narrative of sculpture depicts the sculptor as a skilful manipulator of emphatic materiality such as stone, marble or metal. Indeed, even today this kind of object receives the most coverage in today’s mainstream arts media; usually in the form of large scale, permanent sculpture as found in both corporate and public environments. My own approach to object making is different to this model of sculptural production; of a skillfully and laboriously fabricated, monumental object creation.

5.2 Gesture

Rather than emerging from the working of base matter by hand, a sculpture may be comprised of a repurposing of preexisting materials. My sculptural approach is a move

away from the more virtuoso and labored traditions of carving, modeling and casting to a more gestural arranging and modification. The emphasis lies in less labored processes of alteration, recombination and reconstruction, rather than strategies stemming from notions of radical innovation and labor-intensive mastery; such as the *tabula rasa* (cancellation and starting anew) model of modernist art. Within my sculptural approach, things are not masterfully shaped and created from base matter, but rather, familiar objects are deployed, repurposed or combined together. Within this terrain, artists, me included, no longer wipe the slate clean and start again, but instead, we accumulate objects, move them around, turn them over, and ever-so-slightly set them off-kilter. There is some resonance between how some artists today carefully scrutinize and use objects and Bruno Latour's claims concerning the contemporary significance of the word 'design.' Latour (2008) argues that there has been a general growing awareness of how issues – social, political and environmental – have become attached to our use of objects, such that “matters of fact” have now clearly become “matters of concern” (p. 2).



Figure 5.1. Dodge, J. *Bound In Silver, Left Gloves* (2007)

In Jason Dodge's recent sculptural work, such as *Bound In Silver, Left Gloves*, 2007, there is a seeming elision of clear meaning and object utility, in favor of an attentiveness to a sculpture's material qualities, its arrangement, play of color, and the relationship of surfaces and textures. In this sculpture, presumably, a stack of left handed gloves are

bound in a thin silver band. There is an evident lightness and simplicity in the combination of materials. We might say that this sculptural combine brings to mind the absence of previous owners and their personal histories. However, any clear sense of ‘meaning’ is seemingly opaque and immanent to the work. Dodge (2012) speculates, in an interview with the curator and art critic Claire Staebler, that the ambiguous nature of his artworks is reflective of the enigmatic character of even ordinary objects:

We don’t really know what most things are by looking at them. We also don’t know where they have been, or what is in them or who has touched them – as we don’t know who is heartbroken, who is carrying a weapon, how much electricity, who wore that, what country are the inhabitants connected to through that satellite dish. (p. 37)

Artists pay close attention to the way in which things become increasingly strange the longer we stare at them; the unanticipated correlations, visual incongruities, and the tiny, insubstantial subtleties that adhere within materials. There is a similarity between some artists’ fidelity to an economy of gesture and the narrative of the contemporary moment as Bruno Latour talks about it in relation to ‘design’. Latour contrasts the “hubristic dream” of modernist radical overhaul with the “modesty” of contemporary design (Latour, 2008, p. 3). Latour (2000) divides modernism and the contemporary era as “two great alternative narratives - one of emancipation, detachment, modernization, progress and mastery, and the other, completely different, of attachment, precaution, entanglement, dependence, and care” (p. 2). My production method involves a simple, gestural approach to both execution and materiality, and connects with an abnegation of material excess.

6.0 Concluding commentary

Asignification precludes representation in the work of art. This project however, does not set out to completely exclude of art’s signifying role, and does not deny the possibility of at least partial representation. It simply considers and explores an alternative theory through which to frame sculpture, which involves a reevaluation of

the experience of art. The project explores how art produces sensations, affects, and forces as its way of opening toward potential and its actualisation. The affective force experienced within art and the ‘meaning’ of art are not mutually exclusive, but are aspects of aesthetic experience that can be related to each other in a variety of ways. Working from the notion that sculpture (and again, any kind of art) might defer signification, that it might engage a spectator in the shaping of meaning, allows for the possibility that a sculpture might create the conditions for a genuine transformation of human subjectivity (a leap beyond habitual behaviour). We might say that art, through its asignification, produces an affective power that maintains its relation to the virtual realm it opens toward and from which it is derived. In this respect, art creates the setting for a movement from the linear present into a multiplicity of duration, a pure past which contains potentialities that wait to exist, in the future, as actual things. For as O’Sullivan (2008) claims, “art does not so much offer up a set of knowledges as set up the conditions, the contours, for future knowledges to come. It is in this sense also that art involves the posing of new questions and as such will always make demands on any already existing audience” (p. 146). The art spectator engages not with representations of worn-out concepts and ideologies, but rather, in a creative act; the actualisation of the virtual, or the production of new concepts from within a domain of pure potential. My project now presses on towards the next uniquely mysterious encounter.



Figure 6.1. *The Golden Vanity* (2011) (timber, foam, coins)



Figure 6.2. *Too Long In This Condition* detail (2011) (horn, timber, hardware)



Figure 6.3. Installation view at Window Gallery, The University of Auckland (2011)



Figure 6.4. *The Sun Highlights The Lack In Each* detail (2011) (pillow, timber)



Figure 6.5. *The Sun Highlights The Lack In Each* detail (2011) (pillow, timber)



Figure 6.6. *The Sun Highlights The Lack In Each* (2011) (pillows, timber)



Figure 6.7. *Til Suns In Your Eye* (2011) (butter, glass tumbler)



Figure 6.8. *First You Think Your Fortune's Lovely* (2011) (paper, glass tumblers, glass corner)



Figure 6.9. Having Things On One's Own Terms (2012) (Fluorescent tube producing light inside a wall cavity)



Figure 6.10. It Will Have To Wait (2012) (Altered candles)

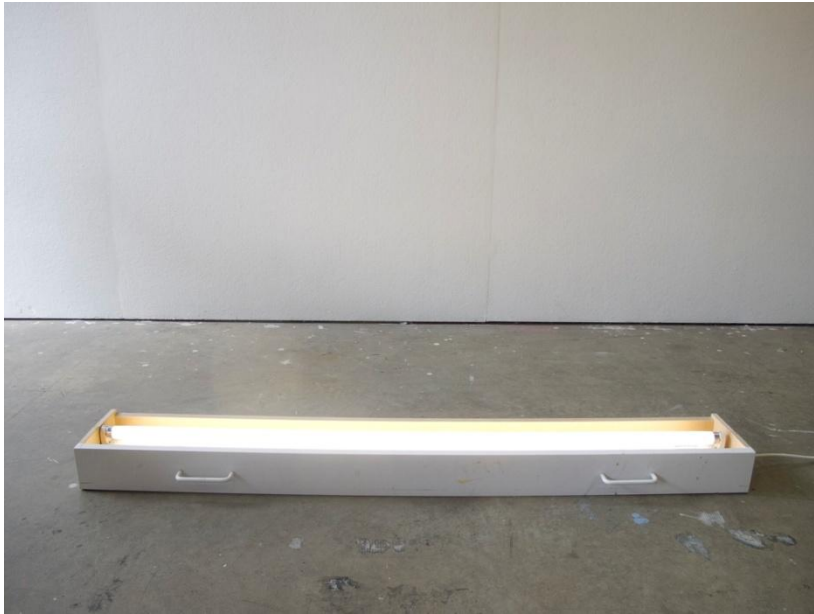


Figure 6.11. *No One Fed Me, So I Stayed* (2012) (Fluorescent tube, altered drawer)



Figure 6.12. *Free Rein* detail (2012) (Tennis balls, sheet glass)

7.0 Final Exhibition

The following images show work presented in exhibition at AUT in November 2012. Included in this exhibition were *Should've Moved Mountains*, *It Will Have To Wait* and *Free Rein*.

Criteria for inclusion in the exhibition were based around how each work operates individually and in relation to the other exhibited sculptures. The arrangement and spacing of the works was designed to facilitate the viewer's intimate access to both the varied compositional and material characteristics of each work. For example, a variation in modes of presentation was evident within the exhibition: in the pedestal based *It Will Have To Wait*, the wall prop of *Should've Moved Mountains*, and the below eye level, floor-based *Free Rein* (Figure.7.0). Considerable space was allowed around each work, so the approaching spectator might first experience the works as a collective, but then shift into contemplation of each singular sculpture.

My inclusion of these particular works reflects an element held in common by each sculpture – which I identify as the significance of light within each work. For example, the importance of light is evident in the candles constituting *It Will Have To Wait* and the fluorescent tube used in *Should've Moved Mountains*. Although less apparent, the significance of light is visible in the reflective quality of the sheet glass present in *Free Rein* (which the viewer activates by both moving around and viewing the work). My intention - in foregrounding light - was to provide the spectator with a subtle and unifying element through which they might consider the exhibition as a cohesive display of individual works.



Figure 7.0. *Installation shot at AUT exhibition* (November 2012)



Figure 7.1. *Free Rein detail* (2012) (Tennis balls, sheet glass)



Figure 7.2. *It Will Have To Wait* (2012) (Altered candles)



Figure 7.3. *Should've Moved Mountains* (2012) (Fluorescent lights, timber)

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